Company for Good Services

Evaluation of Action 1 of EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Poland 2004-2006

FINAL REPORT

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There is no doubt that evaluation of Action 1 of EQUAL Programme was not an easy task. The project that seeks innovative and untypical solutions by definition is a challenge not only for those, who implement it, but also for evaluators, who try to form opinions about the effects of actions that are hardy comparable with any other activity. Therefore you will not find too many strong opinions or clear judgements in our report. The following text is rather a „story of a certain programme" told with a view to understanding arguments of various parties in the context of multi-faceted reality they operate in. Instead of formulating controversial conclusions we prefer to present arguments for and against the good judgement of a given fact, and leave the final assessment to our readers.

Taking into consideration the wide scope of our analysis, we had little time to collect, order and analyse thoroughly the whole accessible material. We have done our best to avoid inconsistencies or mistakes. If, despite these efforts, the report contains some shortcomings and imperfections, we can only hope for your understanding and constructive criticism of this study.

Wishing you pleasant and interesting reading,

the Authors

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Glossary of abbreviations:

DP Administrator	One of the partners who co-ordinates the work performed in the partnership and is responsible for its financial servicing. In this report the term "Administrator" is used interchangeably with the term "project leader"
ECDB	EQUAL Common Data Base – an EU database that collects data on national partnerships and facilitates transnational cooperation
EDU	An abbreviation used in diagrams: "EDU" ("schools") – educational institutions
ESF	European Social Fund, one of the Structural Funds, created to support social policies of the Community.
PA	Payment Authority. In EQUAL CI the payment authority is the Finance Ministry.
EQUAL CI	The EQUAL Community Initiative
MA	Managing Authority. In the case in EQUAL CI, the Managing Authority is the Department of ESF Management in the Ministry of Economy and Labour.
NSS	National Support Structure. In EQUAL CI the National Support Structure is the "Support Fund".
FM	The Ministry of Finance
MoEL	Ministry of Economy and Labour
NGO	An abbreviation used in diagrams: "NGO" – non-governmental organisations
PA	An abbreviation used in diagrams: "PA" – public administration units
TCP	Transnational Cooperation Partnership
DP	Development Partnership
OCCP	Office of Competition and Consumer Protection
PPO	Public Procurement Office

1   Summary

This report presents results of the evaluation of Action 1 of EQUAL Community Initiative, implemented in Poland between May 2004 and June 2005.

This stage of the programme was expected to result in the establishment and consolidation of permanent and effective Development Partnerships and in development of their strategies, including transnational cooperation.

Since the call for projects and the selection process have already been evaluated as a separate study, we focused in this report on issues connected with the establishment of national and transnational partnerships, including creation of strategies and preparation of applications for Action 2.

This evaluation report presents an assessment of methods of implementing Action 1 on the basis of two criteria:

Effectiveness criterion (weight 0.6)	-	What has been done and when (in quantitive and qualitative terms)?
Efficiency criterion (weight 0.4)	-	How the activities have been carried out and how the programme resources have been used ?

To answer these questions, evaluate the criteria and formulate an opinion on the quality of Action 1 implementation, we ordered our evaluation process according to the EQUAL Initiative implementation level: national level (MA, NSS) and project level (Partnership level). We specified two main aspects (dimensions) of action and issues connected with them on both levels (in accordance with evaluation questions listed in the enquiry).

Scope of evaluation process

Partnership Level

1. Institutional Dimension	1.1 Description of institutional framework of partnerships
	1.2 Partnership organisation process
	1.3 Transnational Partnership organisation process
	1.4 Partnership Management
2. Substantive dimension	2.1 Creation of DP Strategy
	2.2 EQUAL CI partnership projects

National Level

3. Programme management dimension	3.1 Issues connected with a system creating conditions for programme implementation
	3.2 Issues connected with ways of programme implementation within the existing system
4. Partnership support by central level institutions	4.1 Scope of assistance offered to Partnerships
	4.2 Services for partnerships

For each of the evaluation issues we have used quantity indicators facilitating the assessment and specified information sources and tools of data collection and analysis (see Appendix 1: Evaluation Procedure).

We have chosen evaluation tools and defined the sequence of their use with a view to presenting both quantity and quality aspects of the programme. Our approach was finally based on four techniques of data collection and analysis:

- Analysis of documents and administrative data of the programme
- Structured individual interviews
- Case Studies
- Phone calls and/or e-mail survey

Research methodology used in this study is described in detail in Chapter 2.5. The procedure of choosing a sample for case studies, selected projects evaluation reports and questionnaires are all presented in Appendices 2 – 5.

The evaluation process has been divided into four stages:

Stage 1 – Preliminary – analysis of documents, methodology, choosing a sample (11 – 22 July)

Stage 2 – Case Studies (25 July – 10 August)

Stage 3 – Survey among the DP representatives (12 – 26 August)

Stage 4 – Preparation and presentation of Final Report (28 August – 12 September)

Due to an ambitious scope of evaluation tasks and difficulties on the way (form holiday season to a computer failure), the completion of this report took two weeks longer than expected. The draft version of the report was finally submitted to the Ministry of Economy and Labour on 29 September 2005.

8 projects were analysed as case studies (reports are presented in Appendix 6), and 73 partnerships (68% of all DPs) participated in the survey conducted in August. As a result, the team of evaluators have managed to collect a rich and varied material for the analysis of mechanisms operating on the level of individual projects and to formulate general conclusions about the whole programme.

The report composition reflects the adopted approach to evaluation:

Chapter 2 describes EQUAL CI and presents research methodology in detail.

The next chapters cover the results of the programme analysis on the level of partnerships (chapters 3 and 4) and on the national level (chapters 5 and 6).

Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of the programme, whereas the final part of this report presents conclusions and recommendations of the team of evaluators.

Action 1 Evaluation

In terms of effectiveness, the programme has scored 3.75 points (with scale 1 – 5). The score can be described as "fairly good" and results from very good opinions of the evaluators on quantity progress and somewhat more critical comments about the substantive dimension of project development.

Fairly good effectiveness score is contrasted with a much worse one for the efficiency of programme implementation – 2.83 points (with scale 1 – 5). The score can be described as "hardly satisfactory". The unusually low score results from a negative evaluators' opinion on the way in which the formal and legal basis for programme was prepared. Consequently, there were substantial delays in Action 1 implementation vis-à-vis its timetable as well as problems with project financing. This, in evaluators' opinions, translated into slower consolidation of partnerships and a lower quality of the substantive dimension of projects.

We compared the two scores and granted more weight to the effectiveness criteria (0.6), bearing in mind the experimental character of the evaluated programme. In these kinds of projects it is more important to achieve their goals than to achieve them in a simple and cost-effective way.

Hence the implementation of Action 1 of EQUAL CI eventually scored 3.38 points (satisfactory). The final score is a satisfactory, although it indicates a lot of room for possible and necessary improvement.

To sum up, while the decision to conduct an experiment such as EQUAL CI has already been made, we may conclude that this stage of experiment has rather been successful, in spite of many defects and gaps in the management system, and the transfer to the next stage is justified. Now the final success of the programme depends solely on whether we will be able to draw the right conclusions and improve the faulty elements in the system. Despite implementation problems and defects in management that have already been identified, the EQUAL Programme in Poland has still many chances to be successful in the end.

Evaluators listed the following key achievements of the Programme:
- creation of partnerships with varied structures according to the plan
- achievement of the planned scope of quantitative results (DP agreements, TCA's, applications for Action 2)
- stimulating programme participants to grater activity and initiative-taking and focusing their efforts on the problems of exclusion and inequalities on the labour market.
- development of partnership between economy sectors and institutions to solve their common problems
- starting a partnership support system

Key problems encountered in Action 1 are the following:
- issues connected with preparation of the programme implementation system (national level – e.g. problems with "securities" and VAT)
- considerable delays in signing agreements with NSS and long periods of processing DP's claims for payment
- limited progress in project development in its substantive dimension
- fairly superficial approach of DPs to mainstreaming
- a lot of conflicts among partners, showing lack of teamwork skills, limited management skills and difficult communication in some DPs.
- lack of appropriate risk analysis and pro-active management of potential dangers on the programme level as a whole
- superficial transnational cooperation, which so far has failed to translate into specific strategies of partnership activity.
- programme monitoring and reporting system not adjusted to a specific nature of EQUAL CI ("process-" rather than "result - oriented")

Main recommendations:
- placing more emphasis on issues related to durability of model solutions proposed by DPs
- introducing mechanisms of risk analysis and management on the MA level, based on systematic monitoring of factors that potentially threaten the completion of programme objectives on time
- creating a team of experts within the NSS, who could support DPs in organising and managing partnership work
- improving communication between DPs and NSS/MA (establishment of a standing coordinating group, made up of representatives of the most active partnerships, MA, NSS, Monotoring Committee and project supervisors)
- raising requirements for approving partnerships to Action 2 and giving up projects that offer no chance of developing and disseminating valuable solutions
- development of a system enabling a substantive dialogue on the solutions offered by partnerships ("sectoral" experts in NSS, National Thematic Networks)

- creating a professional, indicator-based and result – oriented monitoring system of the programme as quickly as possible

2   Introduction

2.1   The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme

2.1.1   Programme objectives

The EQUAL Community Initiative is one of the main instruments of the European Union structural policy that is aimed at achieving goals of the European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion (EES), financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

General objective:

The EQUAL Community Initiative should make a substantial contribution in the achievement of the main EES objective, which is: "creation of new, better jobs and ensuring that no one is denied access to them".

Direct programme objective:

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned general objective as well as the nature of the Initiative described below, ***the direct objective of the programme is promoting innovative solutions leading to the elimination of inequalities and discrimination on the labour market***.

Detailed Programme objectives:

Detailed objectives can be derived from five Thematic fields chosen for implementation in Poland in 2004-2006:

Theme A:	Developing mechanisms of equalisation of employment opportunities for social groups experiencing inequalities that result from the lack of qualifications and low level of education, and ensuring their participation in the development of an IT society.
Theme D:	Supporting the creation of a Polish model of social economy through participation in formulating the role and tasks of social economy, in making local labour and services markets more attractive, as well as complementing and strengthening national policy measures.
Theme F:	Facilitating and supporting the introduction of new technologies and innovative information and communication solutions to raise competitiveness of enterprises and awareness of employers about the necessity to organise training for the staff and management.
Theme G:	Developing model solutions that allow employees to reconciliate professional and family life, including: support for the development of institutions providing care to children and dependent persons, assistance in raising qualifications, and promotion of flexible forms of employment and work organisation.
Theme I:	Improvement of a system of institutional care over asylum seekers, development of analyses and research aimed at diagnosing and projecting refugee influx, and social education on cultural coexistence.

2.1.2   Programme description

EQUAL is a programme different from typical measures financed by the European Social Fund – the so called "ESF mainstream programmes". Its specific character is connected both with its objectives and the approach to its implementation. Peculiarity of the programme understood in this way is manifested in a set of Main Principles being a foundation of the EQUAL programme implementation. Below is the description of these Principles and their implications for methods of programme management and evaluation.

Innovation:

The aim of the programme is to search, develop, and disseminate <u>new methods</u> of fighting discrimination and inequality on the labour market. Therefore, EQUAL is like an "employment policy laboratory" and serves the purpose of "testing and promoting new, innovative ways of fighting discrimination and inequality on the labour market".

The expected „innovative" element in the creation of tools implies a necessity to take into account a number of risks deriving from attempts to tackle difficult problems that have not been solved yet and the use of innovative, novel solutions. One of the consequences of the "experimental" character of the EQUAL initiative is a necessity to take up a flexible approach to risk management, and to place more emphasis on process analysis, not just on the quantitative measurement of the products, in the evaluation of EQUAL effectiveness.

Thematic approach:

To avoid excessive distribution of the Initiative's financial resources and to enable cooperation and comparison between the member states, a closed set of thematic fields has been defined to categorise applications for the EQUAL financing. As a result of wide-range consultations with potential programme partners in Poland, the EQUAL measures concentrate on the Thematic fields described above.

Mainstreaming:

One of the reasons to limit the number of thematic fields supported by EQUAL is a need to concentrate resources on the chosen segments of the labour market. In this way there is a greater chance to include innovative solutions developed during the programme in the set of techniques used in the ESF mainstream programmes. Mainstreaming, understood as (a) planned focusing of the EQUAL initiative on issues complementary to other policies and programmes; (b) systematic comparative analysis of created solutions that leads to the selection of optimal tools; (c) dissemination of EQUAL experience among people and institutions active on the labour market; (d) Including programme results in the employment policy and the practice of "mainstream programmes", is one of the main EQUAL principles that fulfils the assumption of the experimental character of the programme ("employment policy laboratory").

Application of thematic approach and mainstream principles in EQUAL has obviously significant implications on the ways of managing the programme (selection of applications and project implementation are based on thematic fields and connected with the chosen "mainstream programmes"; cooperation and exchange of experience between partnerships on the national and transnational level takes place within a Theme – thematic networking) and on the selection of an appropriate approach to programme evaluation (checking if a project scope matches with the chosen Theme; analysis of methods of distributing programme financial resources among different thematic fields; measuring how innovative and useful the created tools are compared with the instruments used so far).

Transnational co-operation:

As a Community initiative, EQUAL aims at reviving cooperation and exchange of experience between the EU member states. It is assumed that active cooperation of organisations working on the labour market problems in various countries will create more opportunities to use various experience in the best possible way and will lead to the creation of interesting and effective solutions available to all the Community countries.

To achieve effective „transnational cooperation" all the countries that are participating must adopt the basic principles and common standards of operation and work out a common agenda. The same applies to the method of evaluating progress in programme implementation. It should facilitate comparisons and stimulate the flow of information and experience.

Partnership:

The EQUAL initiative is based on the key concept of „partnership". In accordance with this principle, involvement of institutions representing different sectors, looking at the labour market from various points of view and devoting their resources and specific experience in the creation of innovative solutions constitutes a basis for the design and implementation of projects. „Partnership" understood in this way allows organisations that have not yet cooperated with each other to build a common strategy for action and develop a new "integrated" approach to solving multifaceted problems on the labour market. In this respect the partnership principle is regarded in EQUAL as one of the most important sources of innovation.

„Partnership" means building an institutional framework for the programme on the basis of equality and mutual confidence of all the parties involved. It also means the parties' mutual respect, acceptance and a focus on what they have in common rather on how they are different. "Partnership" understood in this way should be manifested at all levels of implementing the initiative (the member states' cooperation at the community level, a special role of the Monitoring Committee and its relations with the Management Authority at the national level; participation of all the partners and beneficiaries' representatives – "Empowerment" – in management at the level of DPs). Such partnership should also play an important role in choosing a methodology of programme evaluation ("participant" evaluation).

To sum up our description of the nature of EQUAL CI, expressed in the form of the Main Principles, it is necessary to emphasise a specific bidimensional character of the programme.

Substantive dimension ("tool" dimension)

On the one hand we have a substance-tool dimension, deriving from the principles of "thematic approach", "innovation", and "mainstreaming". The above-mentioned principles define areas of intervention and potential influence of the programme and also define innovative character of tools, whose testing, dissemination and inclusion in the "mainstream programmes" is the programme direct objective. In this respect the EQUAL Main Principles provide information about WHAT SHOULD BE DONE as part of the programme implementation.

Functional dimension ("Institutional" dimension)

On the other hand we have a functional-institutional dimension, deriving from the adoption of principles of "trans-national cooperation", "partnership", and "empowerment". These principles define a specific approach to the implementation of the initiative, which provides for pooling the resources and experience of many countries, institutions and persons in search for new, better solutions for the most difficult problems connected with equal access to the labour market. In this respect the EQUAL Main Principles provide information on HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME.

In accordance with the spirit of the programme documents, both substantive (tool) and functional (institutional) dimensions should support each other and organise the space where specific measures are taken up and implemented. Therefore, each project supported by the Initiative should:

- Relate to problems considered as priorities in a given country and create for them innovative solutions, complementary to the techniques already used.
- To this end – it should be based on an optimal (efficient, stable, partner-like) institutional framework.
- As a result, each project should lead to an increase in effectiveness and efficiency of "ESF mainstream programmes" and result in a reduction of discrimination and inequalities on the labour market.

The two dimensions described above are complemented by the so called „horizontal issues". They indicate specific issues related to the Community priorities, which should, if possible, be taken into consideration in all EU programmes.

- helping the human traffic victims,
- local development understood as equalising development opportunities and increasing socio-economic cohesion,
- equal opportunities for men and women,
- development of IT society,
- sustainable development.

The third of the horizontal issues listed above (equal access to labour markets for men and women) is particularly important in designing and implementing measures undertaken as part of the EQUAL initiative.

2.1.3 *Budget and organisation of program implementation*

A total of more then EUR 178,5 million (including almost 144 million from the ESF, the remaining part from national co-financement) is allocated for the EQUAL Initiative implementation (until 2008).

Each of the projects financed within the EQUAL CI is to be implemented in three stages (Actions):

- planning and establishing a partnership (Action 1),

- implementing partnership and thematic cooperation (Action 2),

- mainstreaming and dissemination of good practices (Action 3).

2.2 Object of evaluation

The object of the evaluation are methods of implementing Action 1 since the beginning of the programme till June 2005.

The objective of Action 1 has been the establishment and consolidation of permanent and effective Development Partnerships and development of their strategies involving transnational cooperation.

In compliance with the original timetable, the task can be divided into three stages:

Stage 1:	Organisation and definition of principles and mechanisms of action at the national level. Call for projects Creating initiating groups interested in the establishment of Partnerships and preparing project proposals	till June 2004
Stage 2:	Recruitment, assessment and selection of applications Signing agreements for Action 1 implementation	June – December 2004
Stage 3:	Specifying the final shape of Partnerships and preparing an implementation strategy for given projects Signing agreements of Development Partnership and Transnational Partnership and preparing applications for Action 2	December 2004 – May 2005

As it turned out, the actual dynamic of implementation of individual stages was substantially different from that of the original timetable. The process of signing agreements with NSS (stage 2) lasted till early May 2005, and the deadline for Action 1 implementation has been postponed till the end of June 2005 in a great majority of Partnerships.

Since the recruitment and application selection process has already been evaluated as a separate project[1], this report focuses on the process of signing by the Partnerships agreements for Action 1 implementation with NSS (end of Stage 2) and on Stage 3. The report makes references to experience from Stage 1 and the selection procedure whenever it was necessary to go back to the moment of establishing initiating groups or formulating project proposals in order to understand the nature of the phenomena under study and evaluate the final results of the programme.

2.3   Objectives and projected methods of application of evaluation results

In accordance with the evaluation requirements, the aim of this evaluation is to assess the implementation of Action 1.

The opinion on the quality of Action 1 implementation was mainly based on two criteria:

- Effectiveness criteria: what has been done and when (in terms if quantity and quality)?

- Efficiency criteria: how the work was performed and the programme financial resources used

It follows that the evaluation should produce a well-justified, document-based opinion, which relates to the effectiveness and efficiency of establishing and consolidating Partnerships and to the developed strategy of Partnership actions, with the context of transnational cooperation taken into consideration.

> *"The main objective of this evaluation is to assess the implementation of Action 1. The evaluation should therefore determine how Development Partnerships and Transnational Cooperation Partnerships were established and how they formulated their action plans. EQUAL Community Initiative management system, the speed of implementing the programme and the existing monitoring system were also taken into account during the evaluation".*
>
> *EQUAL Action 1 evaluation requirements, point 4, p. 7-8*

Owing to a specific character of the evaluation (ongoing assessment), its results will be used first and foremost by the parties involved in the programme: MA, NSS, MC and individual Partnerships. However, we also assume that the basic conclusions from the study will be made public.

2.4   Aims of the evaluation process:

It seems that the more "open" and "novel" an evaluation object is, the greater the role of evaluation and evaluators becomes. Lack of clear, reliable success indicators and the necessity to interpret concepts and terms that form a basis of the evaluated project simultaneously is a big challenge for those who carry out the project and those who evaluate it. This, however, creates a unique opportunity for a creative dialogue among the participants of the evaluation process. Although such dialogues are often difficult and stir up heated disputes, they usually result in better understanding of the evaluated programme and the nature of goals we are trying to achieve. In keeping with this, we have taken an open approach to the evaluation that rather resembles our common learning then to automatic verification of numbers and ratios.

In the context of "bidimensional" structure of EQUAL CI (substantive-tool dimension vs. functional-institutional dimension) the evaluation methodology takes into account both aspects of programme implementation.

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[1] Jaszczołt, K., Ciężka, B., Potkański, T. (2005) *Evaluation of recruitment, assessment and selection of applications for EQUAL Community Initiative in Poland*. Warsaw: Company for Good Services

A particular feature of this evaluation is its location at a specific point in the multiannual programme implementation process. In this respect, Action 1 evaluation should refer to the earlier evaluation of the selection process, and form a basis for future programme evaluatiion (including final evaluation) at the same time. It seems that the ability to create a permanent and reliable system of monitoring a programme such as EQUAL depends of whether and to what extent it is possible to develop tools of measuring progress in "partnership consolidation" (institutional aspect) and in "the creation of useful, innovative solutions" (tools aspect). We have seen this challenge in defining our approach to Action 1 evaluation and will try, if possible, to take it into consideration in our evaluation.

2.5 Methodology of evaluation:

2.5.1 Structure of the evaluation process and evaluation questions

In order to answer evaluation questions, asses the criteria and formulate an opinion on the quality of Action 1 performance, we divided the evaluation process according to the level at which the EQUAL Initiative is implemented: the national level (MA, NNS, MC) and project level (Partnership level).

Both levels are further divided into the main aspects (dimensions) of action and detailed evaluation issues (in accordance with questions listed in the evaluation competition requirements). For each subject we have specified separate sets of indicators facilitating evaluation, defined sources of data and tools of collection and analysis of the necessary information. In this way we have created an evaluation process that shows how the accessible data were used to analyse selected evaluation issues and assess the two basic dimensions of program implementation by using the effectiveness and efficiency criteria.

Partnership level: Institutional vs. Substantive (tools) level

The two different approaches to the creation of individual Development Partnerships were already present at the stage of preparing and selecting applications. Some of the applicant organisations focused on quality issues and the innovative character of institutional structures created by participants of initiating groups. Ideas concerning specific tools were at the time of secondary importance and were expected to be a natural consequence of productive cooperation within a group of organisations.

Other actors participating in the creation and selection of applications saw the specific nature of Partnerships in terms of the type and character of the submitted project.

> *"... we are dealing here with a very important issue, which relates to the very nature of EQUAL and affects the approach to application selection. What is more important: an „idea" for a new tool that somebody wants to prepare or an innovative institutional framework, in which public organisations, NGOs and private firms unite to find a solution to a problem? If the idea is more important, then application evaluation process should definitely include questions about how specific and mature a given idea for a new tool really is. However, if we conclude that specific ideas about action result from cooperation between entities that have not cooperated before, then more weight should be placed on the institutional criteria of evaluating partnerships – who wants to cooperate and how. In that case a general presentation of tools that are to appear as a result of a common project seems to be the right choice."*
>
> *(Final Report on the evaluation of recruitment, assessment and selection of applications…CGS, Warsaw 2005, p.14)*

In that case it was assumed that an idea for an innovative and promising tool is the most important, while the selection of organisations that should develop this tool is secondary to the very concept of the project.

The evaluation of the application selection stage shows that the second, "tools" orientation prevailed. For this reason the partnerships that presented an attractive, convincing idea for the creation of a specific tool were more likely to be selected. With due respect to such an approach, the evaluators also pointed out the necessity to monitor both dimensions in the next stages of programme implementation.

As a consequence of such recommendations and the earlier analysis of the EQUAL CI Main Principles we propose to recognise the institutional aspect and the tools aspect as separate and to analyse them individually.

National level: Programme management vs. Partnership support

The Department for the European Social Fund (ESF) Management in the Ministry of Economy and Labour is responsible for the management and overall implementation of the programme. As the Managing Authority, the Ministry is responsible for carrying out the programme on time, achieving planned results and using available financial resources efficiently. Implementation of an appropriate programme monitoring system is necessary to verify the progress of programme implementation and to assess its final results.

The role of an Implementing Authority belongs to the National Support Structure (NSS). The "Cooperation Fund" that renders its services to both the Managing Authority and Development Partnerships fulfils the function of NSS in the EQUAL CI.

While the Department for the ESF Management in the MoEL plays the leading role in managing the programme, the NSS is responsible for providing technical assistance to the EQUAL CI. The Managing Authority itself can be a beneficiary of some of the consultation and training services. Nevertheless Development Partnerships remain the NSS's main clients. They seek help at different stages of programme implementation: during preparation and submission of applications, in search for partners at home and abroad and during work on the strategy, action plan, etc.

A general conclusion-making process for this evaluation is described below, whereas a complete version of Evaluation Procedure is presented in Appendix No 1.

Evaluation Procedure (short version)

PARTNERSHIP LEVEL

Evaluation issues	Evaluation questions
1. Institutional Dimension	
1.1 Description of partnerships' institutional framework	1.1.1 What institutions participate in national and international partnerships, what kind of institutions and sectors do they represent (their differences accounting for geographical and sectoral character of Partnerships)?
	1.1.2 To what extent are the Partnership institutions key partners in terms of planned project objectives?
1.2 Development Partnership Organisation Process	1.2.1 How were Development Partnerships established? What factors were decisive for the final shape of a Partnership?
	1.2.2 Was there a big turnover of institutions interested in the project while a Partnership was being created? (how big was it?) How did the turnover influence the effectiveness of partnership establishment process?
	1.2.3 What factors facilitated and what impeded the creation of Development Partnerships and Transnational Partnerships?
1.3 Transnational Partnership organisation process	1.3.1 How were Transnational Partnerships created?
	1.3.2 To what extent did partnerships use earlier contacts and cooperation at the European level?
	1.3.3 To what extent did international cooperation have an impact on an organisation of work in a Partnership, on undertaken actions and achieved results?
1.4 Partnership Management	1.4.1 To what extent is project implementation in a Partnership seen by the leader and Partners as a facilitating or impeding factor in the achievement of the stated objectives?

Evaluation issues	Evaluation questions
	1.4.2 What is the actual contribution of partners in project implementation (e.g. methods of involving ultimate beneficiaries in project implementation, methods of establishing the flow of information between the leader and Partners)?
	1.4.3 What management problems did the partnerships have during Action 1 and how did they solve them?
	1.4.4 Analysis of management systems in partnerships
2. Substantive dimension	
2.1 Creation of DP Strategy	2.1.1 How did Partnerships formulate the main project objectives and the strategy of their achievement?
	2.1.2 How do the institutions making up a Development Partnership and Transnational Partnership participate in testing and implementing innovative solutions? What is the role of individual Partners in this process?
	2.1.3 How far are Development Partnerships into the completion of their projects?
	2.1.4 How do Partnerships plan their work in national thematic networks? Did Partnerships create principles of disseminating the results of Action 2?
2.2 EQUAL CI partnership projects	2.2.1 Project description
	2.2.2 Did Development Partnerships document the innovative character of projects they are carrying out? How did they do it?
	2.2.3 Potential of projects for the "mainstreaming" purposes

NATIONAL LEVEL

Evaluation issues	Evaluation questions
3. Programme Management	
3.1 Issues connected with the system creating conditions for programme implementation	3.1.1 How were the formal legal conditions of programme implementation prepared?
	3.1.2 Were the roles of participants in the programme management process defined? What was the role of a Managing Authority in the process of creating and consolidating Partnerships?
	3.1.3 Were the rules of programme implementation (particularly methods of setting up partnerships) correct?
3.2 Issues connected with methods of programme implementation within the existing system	3.2.1 Is the pace of Programme implementation in accordance with the adopted timetable?
	3.2.2 How did the preparation (and negotiation) of agreements with Development Partnerships proceed?
	3.2.3 What is the Partnerships' opinion on the usefulness (advantages, costs) of the adopted programme reporting system?
	3.2.4 How do Partnerships evaluate the quality of the programme information policy?
	3.2.5 How do Partnerships view the quality of programme management?
4. Partnership support by the central level institutions	
4.1 Scope of assistance offered to Partnerships	4.1.1 What was the scope of assistance offered to Partnerships by NSS (MA)?
4.2 Services for partnerships	4.2.1 To what extent were Development Partnerships supported by the NSS in establishing and implementing national and transnational cooperation?
	4.2.2 To what extent were partnerships supported in creating an internal structure of management mechanisms?
	4.2.3 How do the representatives of Partnerships assess the quality of consultation and training services offered?
	4.2.4 What was the scope of the information and publicity measures?
	4.2.5 Did Partnerships receive support in the creation of internal monitoring and project progress evaluation system?
	4.2.6 How does the National Support Structure fulfil its function of rendering technical assistance to Partnerships?

Programme Evaluation

With the help of an analysis carried out in accordance with the above we have evaluated the programme in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency. The final evaluation of the quality of performing Action 1 of the EQUAL CI in Poland is a function of the adopted evaluation criteria.

2.5.2   Tools of data collection and analysis

The work performed in Action 1 of the EQUAL CI and evaluation questions we are challenging have a predominantly qualitative nature and relate to the measures taken by individual Partnerships. We have chosen evaluation tools and defined the sequence of their use with a view to presenting both quantity and quality aspects of the programme. Our approach was finally based on four techniques of data collection and analysis:

- Analysis of documents and administrative data of the programme
- Structured individual interviews
- Case Studies
- Phone calls and/or e-mail survey

Below is a short description of our approach and scope of evaluation work performed with the use of specific instruments.

Analysis if documents and administrative data of the programme

Besides the basic programming documents (European Commission Communication, Community Initiative Programme, Programme Complement) we have analysed operational documents created in the course of programme implementation at the level of the programme as a whole (minutes from the meetings of the Monitoring Committee, Agreement between MA and NSS, NSS periodical reports, management and control guidelines, programme strategies relating to monitoring and evaluation, information and publicity, mainstreaming etc.) and detailed documents of 8 partnerships selected for the evaluation as case studies (Applications for partial financing of Action 1 and Action 2, the agreement withNSS, DP agreements and TCAs, beneficiary's claims for payment, notes taken during meetings of the Managing Group, correspondence with NSS). We have also examined data on financial management given to us (MA internal auditor's report, electronic files: "Contracting status", "Control plan", "Budget use" etc.). In an effort to achieve results comparable to those in other countries, we have used EQUAL CI mid-term evaluation reports when drafting our evaluation tools.

Structured individual interviews:

In-depth interviews were conducted in two stages. At the beginning of the evaluation process we arranged meetings with the representatives of MA, MC, NSS and selected Partners. The primary aim of these interviews was to enquire the needs of the evaluation recipients and to make the method of selecting and analysing cases for the second, case-study stage of evaluation process more precise and adjusted to the situation.

The second round of interviews was conducted towards the end of the evaluation process, when the initial case studies results and survey results among DP representatives were already known. Representatives of MC, MA and NSS and selected Partnerships were asked to comment on their observations made during the analysis. During the evaluation process an opportunity has arisen to make an interview with the experts from the Polish Mediation Centre, who were commissioned by the NSS to help partnerships solve the most difficult conflicts. Although this meeting was not originally planned, we were happy to seize the opportunity in order to confront our observations with the opinions of professional mediators.

Interviews – Plan and Execution

Institution	Planned interviews		Conducted interviews	
	Introductory stage	Final stage	Introductory stage	Final stage
Managing Authority	2 people	3 people	2 people	2 people
National Support Structure	2 people	3 people	4 people	3 people
Monitoring Committee	2 people	2 people	1 person	1 person
Development Partnerships	2 people	-	2 people	1 person
Polish Mediation Centre	-	-	-	2 people
Total:	**8 interviews**	**8 interviews**	**9 interviews**	**8 interviews**

The interviews carried out were of an in-depth and open character, but they were based on the Evaluation Procedure and questionnaire used in case studies. The interviews were conducted by the team of evaluators in person.

Case Studies

Due to very limited financial resources allocated for the evaluation, we were forced to reduce the number of the evaluated projects to 8. As the sample was small and evaluation at this stage served the purpose of getting acquainted with the programme, cases for the study were chosen deliberately.

We were looking for a group of Partnerships that meet the following two conditions:

- the structure of the sample should reflect the main parameters of the project population under study so that analysis results are representative of all projects and no essential group of projects is left out.
- projects selected for analysis should differ with respect to those features that could influence the selection of approach to the establishment of partnerships – so that different methods of establishing and consolidating DPs are presented.

In accordance with these rules we have adopted the following criteria for selecting the cases for study:

- Thematic field within which the project is being implemented (Themes A to I)
- Type of institution which fulfils the role of a lead partner (public or private sector, NGOs)
- Partnership location (ratio between the Mazowieckie Voivodship and other regions)
- Size of Partnership (number of partners and total budget)
- Efficiency of performing tasks in Action 1 (negotiating Action 1 budget, use of allocated resources, opinions of Project supervisors and Theme Managers in NSS)

Following the application of a detailed procedure of case selection, we have eventually chosen 8 projects: two projects from Theme A, D, and F each and one from G and I each. A detailed description of the sample selection process is included in Appendix 2

List of Partnerships selected as Case Studies

No	Project number	Theme	Name of Development Partnership	Name of applicant institution	type of organisation	Location	Size of grant	Action 1 Application Evaluation	Comments
2	A0283d2	A	Second chance	Powiśle Social Fund	NGO	Warsaw	3 284 200	92,5	
1	A0340d2	A	Entering, retaining and returning to labour market of people after mental disorders	Poviat Governor's Office in Suwałki	PA	Suwałki	7 764 683	83,5	
3	D0190d2	D	Leader's cyber-hand – Supporting leaders of social changes in Poland.	TRATWA Centre of Catastrophes and Natural Disasters. .	NGO	Wroclaw	4 853 037	76,5	
4	D0202d2	D	Partnership in the Valley of Three Rivers	Town of Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki	PA	Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki.	9 820 524	80,5	Change of Leader and Coordinator
6	F0059d2	F	e-Dialogue Platform	Nowoczesne Technologie Informatyczne Sp. z o.o.	company	Warsaw	6 287 790	74	Change of Coordinator
5	F0086d2	F	Unemployment prevention system in underdeveloped areas	College of Management and Public Administration	EDU	Zamość	11 080 300	77	Change of Coordinator
7	G0588d2	G	@lterEgo	Polish Committee of Social Assistance (Regional Board in Lublin)	NGO	Lublin	9 877 600	93	Change of Leader and Coordinator
8	I0079d2	I	@lterCamp	Polish Red Cross	NGO	Warsaw	6 604 800	95	Change of Coordinator

Evaluation analysis of each case consisted of a sequence of evaluating tasks such as:

- Analysis of project documents
- Visit in the Partnership's seat
- Individual talks with the DP Coordinator and the representatives of two partners
- Analysis of collected data and writing a case study report

The selected Partnerships were evaluated on the basis of a special procedure written specifically for evaluation purposes and defining the evaluator's tasks. Correct evaluation of a project ended in writing a Project Evaluation Sheet – a form of case study report. Both documents (case evaluation procedure and project evaluation sheet) are included in Appendix No 3.

Phone calls and/or e-mail survey:

The survey was conducted between 12 and 26 August and consisted of two fill-in forms: "Questionnaire" and "Data Table" prepared on the basis of experience from the case study analysis. In this respect the survey is complementary to the Project Evaluation Sheet.

An idea to conduct a survey stems from a desire to make some more general observations during the project evaluation with the help of qualitative methods (talks, case studies). Owing to such an approach we can assess whether the situations we witnessed visiting the reduced number of partnerships are isolated or a more common practice occurring in most DPs.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 4) consisted of qualitative questions mainly, which allowed respondents to express and justify their opinions on the selected aspects of programme implementation.

The Data Table (see Appendix 5) could only be filled in with specific information relating to different aspects of programme implementation in terms of quantity (e.g. the date of submitting the claim for payment or receiving the money on the bank account, number of people working on the project, calculated percentage of time spent on administrative processing compared with measures related to the substantive dimension of project etc.).

Collecting such „hard data" was necessary because of a limited access to information that NSS could offer at the time (the analysis of Action 2 applications had just started and it was expected that up-to-date data would be gathered during the evaluation of DPAs and TCAs). In these circumstances a survey was an opportunity to obtain first-hand information necessary to calculate basic evaluation indicators (cf. Appendix 1, "Evaluation Procedure").

Both the Questionnaire and Data Table have a form of an interactive computer application, sent and received by e-mail. The survey was filled in an electronic format (choosing an answer from a list of defined options, with an opportunity to add a comment). Respondents were asked to fill in the documents on a computer screen and send them back as an attachment via e-mail.

The survey was not easy and it usually took one hour to complete it correctly. We received 73 answers within 2 – 3 weeks (return rate was 68%) and consider it a big success, in view of the fact that there where mistakes in some e-mails sent by NSS, the holiday season was at its peak, and the NSS unexpectedly sent another, "competitive" survey on training needs at the same time.

2.5.3   Organisation of evaluation process

The general approach to evaluation process resulted from the character of the chosen evaluation tools and their interrelation and interdependence. In accordance with the above, we can divide the process into four stages:

Stage 1 – introductory stage (11 –22 July)

In the introductory stage we analysed documents and data as well as the first group of individual in-depth interviews with the representatives of MA, MC, NSS and DP.

As a result, we became acquainted with the documents describing the programme, created evaluation tools and adjusted them to the needs of the evaluation recipients. Detailed development of case study evaluation procedure, selection of a project sample, reading documents and arranging the first visits in Partnerships proved particularly important.

Stage 2 – Case Studies (25 July – 10 August)

We visited Partnerships in late July and early August.

Evaluation of 8 different cases allowed Evaluators to learn the mechanisms of organising a DP and identify key factors influencing the effectiveness of project initiation. This stage ended in writing a final version of the questionnaire for the e-mail survey.

Stage 3 – Survey among DP representatives

The survey was completed by 26th August, although we kept receiving individual surveys for the next two weeks. The last questionnaire was sent on 9th September. During the survey we sent the Partnerships letters reminding them about the ongoing evaluation project twice. After the survey was completed we proceeded to analysing the collected data. We analysed the quantitative data as well as answers to qualitative questions and respondents' comments at the same time.

Stage 4 – Preparation and presentation of Final Report

In this stage we compared results from the completed evaluation tasks (document analysis, case studies, surveys and quantitative evaluation) and presented them to people and institutions involved in programme implementation, asking for their opinions.

The result of stage 4 is this report – an attempt to process a very rich material around selected evaluation issues, evaluation questions and indicators described in Evaluation Procedure (see Appendix 1).

2.5.4   Evaluation limitations

The biggest challenge we faced was the scarcity of information to be obtained from the National Support Structure at the beginning of evaluation process. The timing was unfortunate, as the evaluation of Action 1 took place when the process of submitting applications for Action 2 had just ended. Development Partnership Agreements that documented partnerships' work on institutional development and the attached Strategies – a result of many months of work on the substantive aspect of a partnership had been submitted separately, when the process of their analysis and evaluation was just beginning. A lot of Partnerships have failed to send the Final Reports on Action 1 implementation, and we did not receive a similar, NSS report until 8 September.

Having obtained a set of data on Partnerships from the stage of selecting applications for Action 1, Action 2 application register, NSS Control Plan and "Contracting status as of 15 July 2005", we managed to choose a sample for case studies with great difficulty. Talks with Theme Managers and Project Supervisors in NSS turned out to be very helpful. However, even the greatest knowledge about individual projects will not be the same as schedules laying out information on all projects according to selected Themes (e.g. according to the number of DP partners).

Lack of enough monitoring data made us decide to extend the survey to include the "Data Table". We were able to complete the quantity evaluation in the scope as planned before only after we had received information directly from the Partnerships. It should be remembered, however, that evaluation (especially one lasting two months) is not an appropriate to create a monitoring database, nor is a survey the best tool to serve that purpose. In spite of using electronic formats that standardise answers and substantially reduce the number of mistakes, we have failed to avoid many inconsistencies in our respondents' answers. Although a time-consuming data-purification process has been performed (unification of formats, correcting obvious mistakes, comparing data put in by Partnerships with different materials), the data are still not completely reliable.

As approval for Action 2 is conducted on a competition basis, we could analyse applications for Action 2 with enclosed DPAs and TCAs as well as Partnership Strategies only in NSS seat. As we were pressed for time due to evaluation timetable imposed on us, it was not possible to conduct an in-depth analysis of basic documents that constitute the real accomplishment of Action 1. Such a limitation probably affected the quality of the evaluating programme results, especially in its substantive aspect (analysis of ideas for tools that Partnerships intend to create in Action 2).

The third limitation that results from the two above and also relates to the ambitious scope of evaluation tasks completed and to the ongoing holiday season, is a very short time allocated for completing the evaluation. Although we managed to collect a very rich material and prepare a detailed outline of the evaluation process, we had very little time to analyse data and prepare a report, which may have had a negative impact on the quality of this report.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, we believe that information and data collected in the process constitute sufficient and reliable material that allows for evaluating Action 1 of the EQUAL CI in Poland. We accept full responsibility for opinions and conclusions presented in this report. and ask for your understanding in case of any inconsistencies or shortcomings you may find in this report.

3   Analysis of Partnerships' development in institutional dimension

According to programming documents, the EQUAL Community Initiative is a "research platform" aiming at developing and disseminating new methods of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality related to labour market owing to transnational cooperation.

In this context, the objective of Action 1 is to create or consolidate permanent and effective Development Partnerships (DPs). Partnership should be based on a jointly developed strategy which assumes cooperation with similar initiatives operating in other European countries.

In Action 1, the basic task for each initiative team was to create Development Partnerships. EQUAL programming documents define them as: strategic agreement of institutions representing different sectors and having different experience. The institutions are joined by a common vision of creating innovative solutions for complex problems that cause social and vocational exclusion.

Evaluation of Action 1 of EQUAL Community Initiative is in fact an attempt to find the answer whether such Partnerships have been created. What organisations and in what institutional framework did they decide to cooperate? Was the will of joint action formalised as a Development Partnership Agreement (DPA)? Is the agreement based on a convincing strategy that sets out common objectives, roles and tasks for individual partners? Were effective and efficient management mechanisms and procedures created allowing for integration of efforts of different entities that had not cooperated before?

While assessing the programme, the role of institutions managing EQUAL CI on the national level is of significant importance. That is why, in our analysis, we will also try to find answer to the following questions: Was formal and legal framework, in which the programme was implemented, adequately prepared? Were fundamental problems related to the whole EQUAL CI solved fast and effectively? What was the value of assistance provided for partnerships by National Support Structure?

There are many questions which are sometimes intriguing, because of the experimental character of the undertaking under assessment. Let us start our analysis from the beginning. Firstly, we would like to present the characteristics of sources of information and data, which are the basis of this analysis. Next, we shall answer evaluation questions, starting from description of type of institutions taking part in the programme.

Structure of survey's respondents

Due to the fact that we were provided with a very limited scope of overall data on Partnerships, the basic source of information about projects, to which we are referring in the subsequent part of the report, are results of email survey carried out within evaluation process. As mentioned before, "Questionnaire" and "Data Table" forms were filled in by 68% of Partnerships. Undoubtedly, the size of the sample is enough to verify the hypotheses which was set out in reports of in-depth analysis of 8 cases (Case Studies are presented in Appendix no 6), and possibly to generalise conclusions.
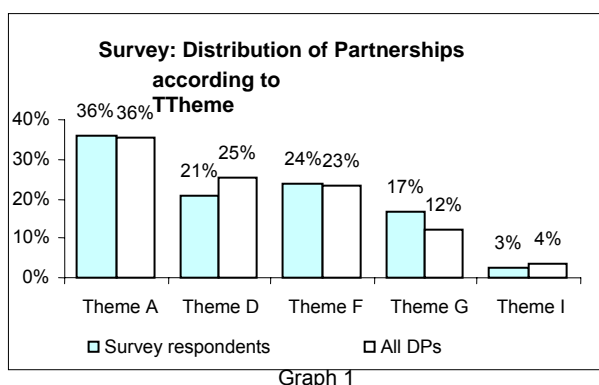
Graph 1

Let us look at the characteristics of Partnerships that filled out the survey. As shown in Graph 1, the structure of the sample is a quite accurate picture of the whole population of DPs. One difference which is worth pinpointing is a slightly smaller share of projects from Theme D and analogical "over-participation" of partnerships from Theme G. In general, however, the results of the survey should be reliable from the point of view of project break down according to Themes.

Due to a small number of projects from Theme I (only 2 partnerships from this group took part in the survey), in projects presented below, according to Theme, we will only provide average values for four other Themes.
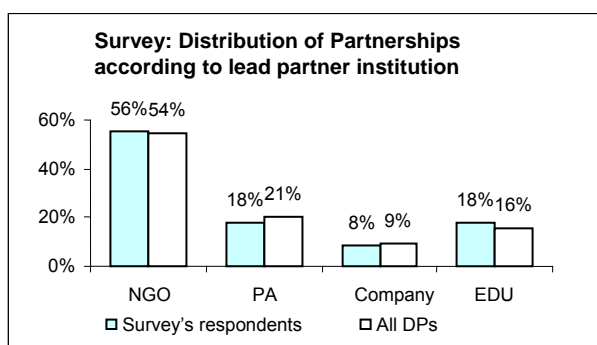
Graph 2

Characteristics in terms of a type of the lead partner institution is satisfactory. Similarly, as in surveyed population, there are about 55% of non-governmental organisations and almost 20% of administration units and educational institutions. In the sample, private companies are represented by 6 projects which constitute about 8% of respondents.

It seems that, also from the point of view of lead partner institution, the survey should present reliable situation of all partnerships.

Description of projects surveyed with the use of case study

While the survey is a basic source of quantitative data and allows for evaluation of scale of identified phenomena, interviews and research of 8 projects with the use of case study were a basic source of qualitative data. Before we turn to further analysis, we would like to present a short description of Partnerships (full texts of reports from case studies can be found in Appendix no 6).

1. "Second chance" (AO283) – PLN 3.28 M

The project was implemented in Powiśle district in Warsaw by PFS (Powiśle Social Fund) in cooperation with 2 partners. It is addressed to people from poorer urban areas with a high level of poverty and social problems.

The aim of the project is to elaborate and test a model of local system of social and vocational reintegration. The model aims to improve possibilities for going out of social isolation and return to labour market for people who face exclusion because of increasing poverty and distance between them and more successful layers of the society.

The planned model consists of three elements: (a) System of support for young people and adults through individualised, professional psychological and social assistance, activities upgrading professional qualifications and job placement; (b) System of preventive actions and care of children from communities where unemployment and social inactivity are "hereditary"; (c) System of training for social services preparing future social workers for community work with people from target groups.

2. "Access and return to the labour market for persons recovering from mental illness" (A0340) -PLN 7.76 M

The project is implemented by Suwałki Poviat and 12 institutions from public and non-governmental sector. The Partnership aims to develop a system of assistance for people who suffered from mental disorders in returning and remaining in the labour market.

So far, individual institutions (psychiatric hospital, clinics, support centre, labour office) have partially tried to take actions within their competences. These, however, were not always integrated undertakings. However, it is difficult to call these actions "systemic" and they are not regarded as such by final beneficiaries. The authors of the project are sure that only coordinated cooperation, close division of tasks and supervising beneficiaries (guidance) by individual institutions can be effective and beneficial.

Including into DPs institutions from other poviats gives a chance for fast dissemination of tested solutions in a "vertical" system. At the same time, competent supervision (monitoring and evaluation) of Warsaw head office of State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons guarantees the use of applications from the projects while shaping national policy in terms of this target group. Cooperation of partners on such scale is an innovative phenomenon in the poviat, voivodship and the whole Poland.

3. "Leader's cyber-hand –Supporting leaders of social changes in Poland" (D0190) – PLN 4.85 M

The project is implemented by TRATWA - Centre for Catastrophes and Natural Disasters and 6 national partners from dolnośląskie non-governmental organisations, media, catholic communities and public sector. The project is addressed to young, educated people, including graduates, who are ready to enter the labour market in the third sector.

The most important aim of the project is a broadly understood promotion of third sector activities in society, in particular in dolnośląskie region. Specific aims of the partnership are the following: preparing a group of about 100 future social leaders (through different forms of training, as well as mentoring by experienced non-governmental leaders) and ensuring institutionalised provision of new staff to third sector organisations in Lower Silesia through creation of Non-Governmental Career Centre (support in finding jobs in existing organisations or setting up new ones).

The presented actions, by including a great number of important partners in the region, are a chance to create model solutions in the region, which will be adopted by existing institutions and other regions after completion of the project. Part of internships for beneficiaries will take place in NGOs abroad - at transnational partners of the project.

4. "Partnership in the Valley of Three Rivers" (DO202) – PLN 9.82 M

The project is implemented by the city Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki and 9 institutions (majority of public institutions) and is addressed to different target groups. (a) young people, (b) pre-retirement age people, (c) women, (d) chronically ill people, (e) the disabled, (f) the addicts, (g) people from rural or suburban areas.

The objective of the partnership is the use of social economy's instruments in order to stimulate the development of services sector. This should result in the decrease of structural unemployment in suburban areas. Partial objectives include: (a) creation of lasting basis for economic development on the basis of tourism sector; (b) elaboration and testing of different model organisations from social economy's sector (creation of social capital), (c) creation of "cooperation network" between communities in the region; (d) dissemination of different concepts of local development (foreign and domestic).

In order to implement the objectives, the following actions will be undertaken: (a) research on beneficiaries (formulating assumptions, strategies and action plans), (b) creating Regional Tourism Chamber (developing regional tourism products), (c) training young people on social economy/tourism management, (d) implementing programme of grants and loans for starting business activity, (e) business training for adults, (f) financing bottom-up initiatives (social activation, development of social and local infrastructure), (g) co-financing significant investments in the tourism sector, (h) supporting organisation of cultural-tourism events, (i) disseminating results and exchange of experience.

5. "E-Dialogue Platform" (FO059) – PLN 6.29 M

The project is implemented by the company - Nowoczesne Technologie Informatyczne (NTI) in cooperation with 5 institutional partners. The Project is addressed to Small and Medium Enterprises which do not have adequate tools and knowledge, manage human resources in a traditional, non-optimal way (achieving lower work efficiency and lower market competitiveness).

The objective is to overcome problems related to human resources management in SMEs through developing, testing and providing SMEs sector with a system of professional software and software-based training package related to human resources management. The software will be provided through the Internet to a group of 1000 SMEs from the whole country. At the same time, 2000 beneficiaries will be trained (1000 representatives from management staff and 1000 employees).

The authors expect that dissemination of the system in the whole country will contribute to the increase in effectiveness of activities and competitiveness, and as a result - increased sale and employment in SMEs sector. This will contribute to upgrading qualifications of people responsible for personnel policy and will stimulate the development of training and skills of employees in this sector.

6. "Unemployment prevention system in underdeveloped areas" (F0086) – PLN 11.1 M

The project is implemented by Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Administracji w Zamościu (College of Management and Public Administration in Zamość, WSZiA) together with 17 institutional partners from the whole country. The project is implemented in two voivodships: Lubelskie and Podkarpackie. The beneficiaries of the project are two groups: small and medium enterprises operating in the region and their employees who are at risk of losing job in the case of enterprise's bankruptcy.

The objective of the project is creation and testing of a system which prevents lay offs in companies which are at risk of going bankrupt. The system consists of two major components: (a) diagnostic - analysis based on econometric models aimed at identifying factors influencing company's condition (on the micro, mezo and macro level) and providing entrepreneurs with a computer model. The model, after entering data set, will enable to assess the condition and development perspectives of the company together with recommendations. (b) integrated system of advisory-training support for companies with problems which would like to undergo restructuring.

Within the project, Internet e-learning platform is being prepared as well as team of advisors whose task will be supporting SMEs and their employees during corrective measures. The system will be used in 200 companies. It is assumed that testing on such scale will allow for verification of tool's efficiency preventing SMEs bankruptcy and adjusting employees' qualifications to the requirements of modern economy.

7. "@IterEgo" (G0588) – PLN 9.88 M

The project is implemented by the Polish Committee of Social Assistance (Regional Board in Lublin) together with 7 institutional partners (including media, university, national offices and non-governmental organisations). The project is implemented in lubelskie region and is addressed to the unemployed in productive age, lonely parents (or taking after dependent persons).

Partnership aims at liquidating barriers (physical and psychical) related to entering into labour market of the above-mentioned target groups through comprehensive programme of assistance. It would lead to starting work by beneficiaries in the form of "flexible employment".

The programme consists of a number of elements: (a) measures aiming at social activation of people in the programme (belief in one's strength); (b) system of training and vocational courses (new qualifications, necessary to perform tele-work); (c) Creation of Work Promotion Centre (CPP) (laboratory on effectiveness of flexible forms of employment; (d) creation of Rehabilitation and Integration Tutelary Center at CPP (free of charge care over beneficiaries of the programme). It is anticipated that 50 to 55 people will gain new qualifications, whereas 10 to 20 people should find permanent job in different forms of "flexible" employment.

8. „@Iter Camp - Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum-Seekers" (I0079)- PLN 6.6 M

The project is implemented by the Polish Red Cross (PCK) together with 6 national partners of social and national character (including Polish Scouting Association). It is addressed to people seeking asylum, mainly in Zgierz.

The project aims at supporting social and vocational integration of a target group, first of all through (a) preparing immigrants to entering into Polish society and local labour market immediately after receiving the status of asylum-seeker or "tolerated residence", (b) promoting values of multi-cultural society among citizens, (c) preventing intolerance.

Main activities are the following: (a) developing training, counselling services and direct "mentoring" directed at individual beneficiaries, (b) improving standards of PCK reception centre for refugees in Zgierz and making it exemplary in Poland; (c) training for local social care institutions on immigrant integration and; (d) carrying out comprehensive research on the problem of migration and refugees, including local community in Zgierz; (e) carrying out comprehensive programme of communication with the public in order to shape social awareness in terms of functioning of multi-cultural society and intolerance prevention; (f) developing monitoring and evaluation tools for Partnership's activities.

3.1   Characteristics of institutional framework of Partnerships

In this chapter, we will analyse the structure of partnerships, both in terms of Themes and type (regional/sectoral) as well as kind of lead partner institution. We will also take a look at the type and role of institutions which participate in DPs selected for case studies. We will also identify factors that influenced the number of entities participating in partnerships.

We will try to find answer to the following evaluation questions:

3.1.1 What institutions participate in national and transnational partnerships, what kind of institutions and what sectors they represent (among all, differences resulting from geographical or sectoral character of Partnerships)?

3.1.2 To what degree institutions that participate in Partnerships are key partners from the point of view of anticipated objectives of the project?

3.1.1 What institutions participate in national and transnational partnerships, what kind of institutions and what sectors do they represent?

Partnerships' structure

In order to achieve anticipated objective of Action 1, Managing Authority in June 2004 announced a call for projects for organisations and institutions interested in participating in EQUAL CI.

As a result of intense information and publicity campaign, 751 project applications were submitted. After a multistage evaluation process, described in the Report on recruitment, evaluation and selection of applications for EQUAL Community Initiative[2], 107 projects were selected (14.2% out of 751).

In November and December 2004, authors of accepted applications were informed about the positive decision – then they started implementing Action 1.
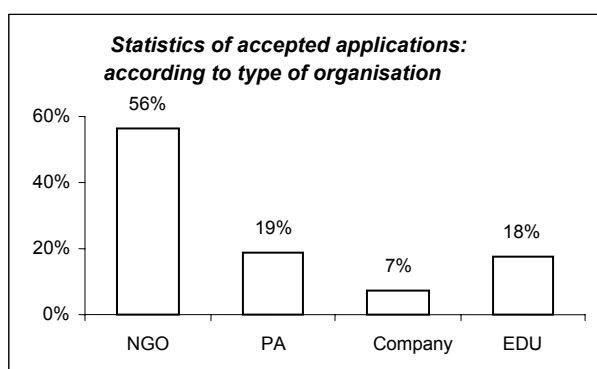
Graph 3
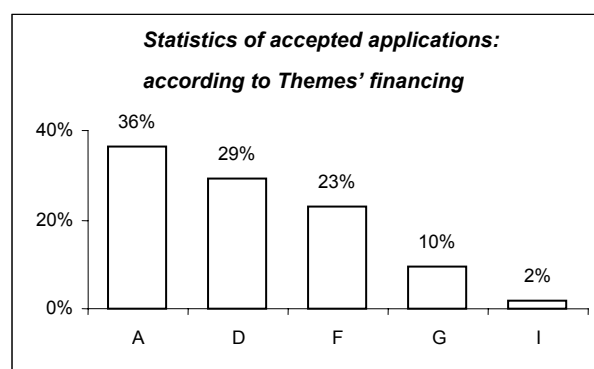
Graph 4

Looking at the number of applications accepted for financing within EQUAL CI, we can see that a great majority of projects were those initiated by non-governmental organisations (56% of financing). The remaining 44% of the programme budget was allocated for support of applications submitted by public administration units (19%), educational institutions (18%) and private companies (7%). As shown in Graph 5, the participation of individual types of organisations among partnership initiators in different Themes was significantly varied.
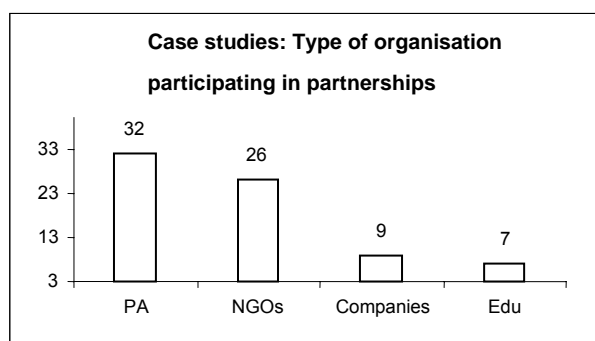
Graph 5
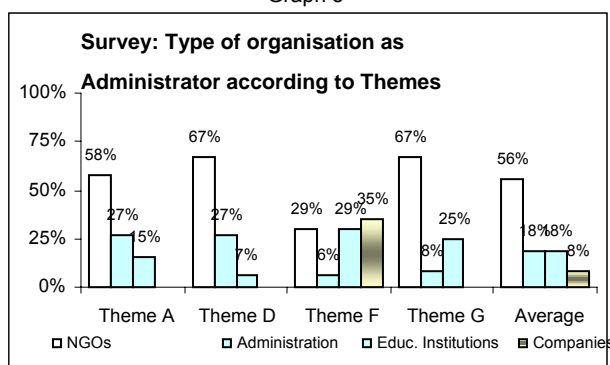
While in Themes A, D and G there is a visible domination of non-governmental organisations, in Theme F private companies are dominant. This is the only area where surveyed representatives of private sector are DP's Administrators. What is interesting is scarce participation of educational and research institutions among project leaders in Theme D. It seems that social economy constitutes a great challenge for researchers and their active participation in this kind of projects would be extremely valuable.

Worth pinpointing is also scarce representation of public administration units among organisations initiating projects in Theme G (only 1 out of 12 DPs surveyed) and lack of initiative among private companies in this Theme.

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[2] Jaszczołt, K., Ciężka, B., Potkański, T. op. cit.

Organisations participating in partnerships (case studies)

In the survey, we did not ask for detailed characteristics of all institutions involved in the project (this task would take too much space in the questionnaire and would be time-consuming for respondents). So, the knowledge we possess in this respect is only based on the analysis of 8 cases researched thoroughly.

Case studies: Type of organisation participating in partnerships

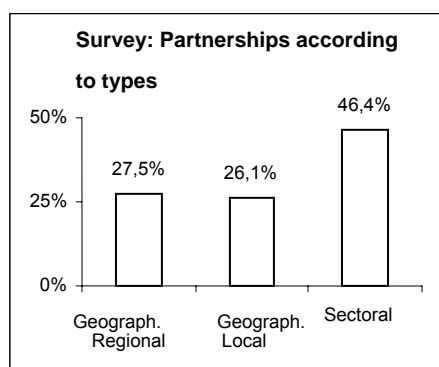|	
33	32
23	26
13	9
3	7
	PA NGOs Companies Edu

Graph 6

It turns out that among 74 of partners participating in 8 projects we analysed, as many as 32 (43%) are units from public finance sector. NGOs, which constitute over a half of DP leaders, constitute only 35% among partnership institutions. Similar effect can be observed in the case of educational and training organisations (9.5% in comparison to 16% among leaders). The situation is different when it comes to private companies. They rarely are DP administrators (9%), however they constitute 12% among group of partners.

Of course, the data presented have been taken from only 8 projects selected for case studies. That is why, they are not representative for the whole population of DPs. It seems that this aspect should be taken into account in the next quantitative studies. However, intuition suggests some interesting explanation for the observed phenomenon.

Firstly, NGOs are much more experienced beneficiaries of assistance programmes than administration or private companies. It is not surprising that NGOs, much often than other institutions, were project initiators. Similar situation can be observed among educational organisations. If they participate in the project, it is usually as active entity, often as a leader.

It is not surprising that a great number of partners were public administration units. Very often representatives of other sectors were looking for contact with administration, if not to gain access to data or information, then to make their offer more credible as more "public", coordinated with currently implemented policy and possessing adequate potential within mainstreaming. We should note that administration representatives did not usually avoid such contacts. Sometimes it was from very noble and substantive reasons – ability to gain additional tools for executing public mission. Other time the reason was less noble - ability to demonstrate (at low cost, if the project was prepared by someone else), its activeness and openness to social initiatives. There were cases when public institution, having realized the scale of activities to be performed in relation to participation in the project, quickly withdrew from cooperation.

Greater participation of private companies can be probably linked to their role as potential supplier of specialist services. In studied partnerships, we came across several times (D0190, G0588) a situation when an initiative team found that it would be much easier to carry out promotional campaign if there was a company from the media sector in a group of partners. Similarly, in other project, cooperation was offered to an IT company (F0086) or a unit with office space (D0190).

Survey: Partnerships according to types

50%	46,4%
25%	27,5% 26,1%
0%	
	Geograph. Regional Geograph. Local Sectoral

Graph 7

Analysis of these cases also provides some insight into the scale of activity of institutions participating in EQUAL. If we take a look at project distribution from the point of view of type of partnership, we will see that although a majority of initiatives are geographical (over half of projects is trying to solve problems described as local and regional), then as much as 46% of partnerships declare undertaking issues of sectoral character. Among organisations participating in 8 studied projects, only 3 entities were acting on a national scale. In comparison, there were 6 institutions acting on a local level, whereas on a regional level there were 7 active entities.

It means that creating national solutions of systemic character is usually initiated by, or it requires participation of local/regional organisations. However, in order to solve local problems, support from entities acting on a national scale was rare.

Projects studied with the use of Case Study - Partners 1

Short name of DP	Project number	Organisation type	DP type	Size	Number of partners	Distribution of partners according to sectors			
						PA	NGOs	Compa nies	Edu
PFS	A0283d2	NGO	GL	Small	3	0	**2**	0	1
Suwałki	A0340d2	PA	GR	Medium	13	**10**	3	0	0
Tratwa	D0190d2	NGO	GR	Medium	7	1	**3**	2	1
Three Rivers	D0202d2	PA	GL	Medium	11	**8**	2	0	1
E-Dialoge	F0059d2	Company	S	Medium	6	1	**4**	1	0
WSZiA	F0086d2	EDU	GR	Large	18	**7**	6	3	2
@lterEgo	G0588d2	NGO	GL	Medium	8	2	2	**3**	1
@lterCamp	I0079d2	NGO	S	Medium	8	3	**4**	0	1
Sum		8	8	8	74	32	26	9	7
Participation		NGO - 4 (50%) PA - 2 (25%) Edu - 1(12.5%) Company - 1 (12.5%)	GL - 3 (38%) GR - 3 (38%) S - 2 (25%)	Small - 1 (12.5%) Medium - 6 (75%) Large - 1 (12.5%)	Mean: 9.25	43%	35%	12%	9%

How initiative teams were created

Graph 8

**Survey: How did you find key partners?**
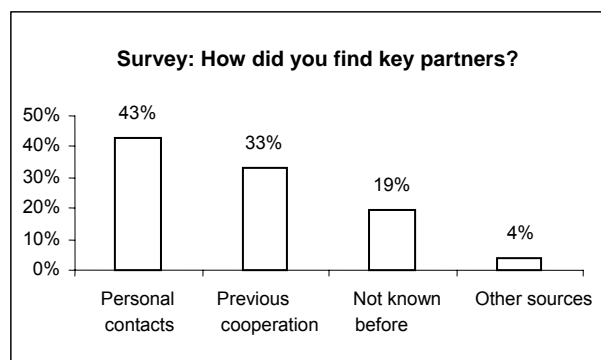
One of the factors that was decisive for project success seems to be the way of creation and composition of initiative team. The respondents, when asked about how they found key partners, clearly indicated a significant role of previous experience with cooperating organisations and their representatives. We will present it later while discussing the mechanism of partnerships' creation. It is worth highlighting that projects based on personal contacts constitute over 40%, whereas initiatives relying on previous cooperation experience – 33% of DPs.

Analysis of number of partners

Last element which is worth mentioning at this stage of analysis is the number of partners. As shown in Graph 9, among surveyed DPs there is a great majority of projects implemented by fewer than 10 organisations (79%).

Graph 9

Survey: Number of national partners
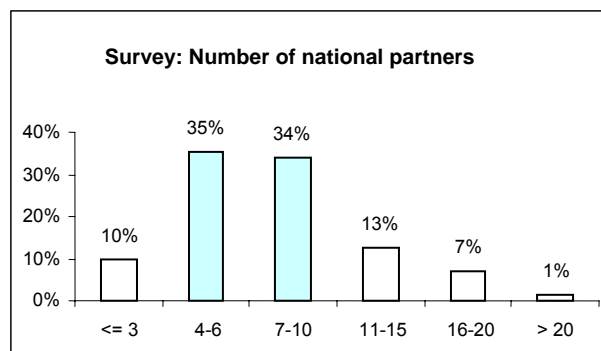
With a mean at the level of 8.3, cases of participation of more than 10 institutions should be regarded as rare, whereas projects implemented by more than 20 partners as exceptional. Why is it the case if Programme Complement assumed that average size of DPs would be 10 national partners? It seems that choices made in this respect were influenced by several factors. One of them was undoubtedly the areaTheme of the project.

Theme of the project vs number of partners (case studies)

As shown in case studies, whenever project initiators try to develop systemic solutions (A0340; D0202, I0079), a need arises to involve all parties which participate in the process or represent interests of active entities in a given sector. The applied criteria of "representativeness" usually results in a large number of partners and not always in precise division of responsibilities. Other project initiators were driven by creation of specific tools for a well-defined problem of a precisely specified target group. Initiators of those undertakings mainly think of who is really necessary for creation and testing of planned solution and, driven by works efficiency they avoid excessive extending of institutional framework of a DP.

3 out of 8 surveyed partnerships implement projects which aim at a development of a system which would integrate actions of many institutions and would give chance for comprehensive solution of problems of target groups. (Suwałki – system of assistance for people after chronic mental illnesses, Three Rivers – system of cooperation of public, private and non-governmental entities aiming at economic activation of the region through development of social economy; @lterCamp – developing systemic solution within social-vocational integration of asylum-seekers). Average number of partners in this group is almost 11 institutions.

In other cases, partnerships mainly think about tools (PFS – local model for social-vocational activation; Tratwa – School for social leaders; E-dialogue – tool available on-line for human resources management in SMEs; WSZiA – diagnostic computer application, available through the Internet, for companies facing bankruptcy, @lterEgo – e-Centre for the unemployed lonely parents). There is an average number of 8 partners in this group. This value would be 6 if we excluded untypical undertaking of College of Management and Public Administration in Zamość (the project requires very extensive statistical studies and close contacts with entities operating on a labour market).

Projects studied with the use of Case Study - Partners 2

Project number	Short name of DP	Distribution of partners according to scale of activity			Previous experience	Change in the number of partners			Impact	Product type
		Local	Regional	National		+	-	Net		
PFS	A0283d2	Yes			Frequent cooperation between partners	1	1	0	No impact	N
Suwałki	A0340d2		Yes		Little experience	1	1	0	No impact	S
Tratwa	D0190d2		Yes		Little experience	2	0	2	No impact	N
Three Rivers	D0202d2	Yes	Yes		Frequent cooperation between partners	4	1	3	Yes, positive impact	S
E-Dialoge	F0059d2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Lack of common experience	4	1	3	Yes, positive impact	N
WSZiA	F0086d2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Little experience	0	3	-3	No influence	N
@lterEgo	G0588d2	Yes	Yes		Frequent cooperation between partners	0	2	-2	Yes, positive impact	N
@lterCamp	I0079d2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Little experience	1	1	0	Yes, negative impact	S
Sum		6	7	3	Cooperated - 3 (38%)				Positive - 3	Tool – 5
Participation/Mean		38%	44%	19%	Little experience - 4 (50%) Lack of common experience - 1 (13%)	1.6	1.3	0.4	Negative - 1 No impact - 4	System - 3

Approach to "partnership" vs number of partners

Another element which was of great importance for the selection of a number of institutions invited to cooperation was how project initiators perceived the idea of "partnership".

In chapter 3.2 of Programme Complement we can find basic conditions to be fulfilled by "Development Partnership".

- partners should be united with one objective, consistent with programme thematic field
- DP's structure should take into account specificity of the Theme related with the project
- in order to create and test new solutions, <u>the greatest possible participation of different types of organisations and representatives of final beneficiaries should be ensured</u>
- partnership should develop common strategy as well as action and financial plan, taking into account all partners roles
- Each partnership should sign at least one transnational co-operation agreement (TCA)[3]

On the basis of the above description, and assumptions adopted in Programme Complement which specify that the average number of partners should be about 10 institutions, we can conclude that the scale of project innovation is in some way dependent on the number and variety of entities participating in DPs. At the beginning, a team of evaluators adopted an assumption that the growth in the number of partners is a good indicator for partnership development in institutional dimension.

> *"Partnership principle in EQUAL Initiative understanding is understood as taking actions on the basis of joint strategy and development of integrated approach to multidimensional problems. In such partnership, individual partners should take efforts and resources for the purpose of finding innovative solutions for common objectives and jointly defined problems".*
>
> *(EQUAL CIP, Warsaw, April 2004*

As shown by case studies, approach of partnership initiators was not uniform in this respect. Some of our respondents who generally accept a great potential of partnership approach, draw attention to a number of risks and limitations related to including into the project too many partners.

Among all, the following thesis was put forward: "*a chance for significant innovation through increasing the number of partners and involving partners which did not have previous experience, poses a significant threat of decrease in effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Fundamental objectives of the programme can be achieved much faster by limiting composition of DPs to a group of institutions which are really necessary to perform planned scope of activities - preferably these which are joined by trust and earlier common experience*" (from interviews with DP representatives).

So, we can look at the number of institutions represented in partnership from two opposite perspectives:

One perspective assumes that the greater number of partners, the grater project effectiveness and innovation, with a small impact on effectiveness of measure.

The other approach questions this approach: "more partners that did not know each other before means potential threat to effectiveness (because personnel and competence conflicts may dominate actions of DP), lower effectiveness (managing ten different institutions is obviously more difficult and more time-consuming than managing five institutions) and disputable benefits within innovation (well selected, efficient group of specialists who know a given sector is able to quickly assess current situation and needs and take innovative actions wherever they are mostly needed and possible to achieve)".

It is difficult not to agree with some arguments put forward by opponents of "partnership at all cost":

"*Creating relations between institutions that have not cooperated before is not a simple and short process. The basis for cooperation of institutions are always relations between specific people and they need time to understand and trust each other*" (from interviews with DP representatives)

---

[3] Compare: Regulation by the Minister of Economy and Labour of 21 September 2004 on approving the Operational Programme – EQUAL Community Initiative Porgramme for Poland 2004-2006, Journal of Laws. No. 214, item 2172.

"It is wrong to artificially force cooperation between many entities which do not have much in common. Cooperation develops correctly if it is based on conscious and common interests of all parties" (from interviews with representatives of DPs)

We also have to remember that apart from the above-mentioned substantive arguments, there are less noble but strong factors for adopting more conservative approach while recruiting partners. As we know, including another partner in the project means lower budget to be divided and lower influence of present partners on decisions taken by DP. Undoubtedly, these reasons totally contradict the idea of "partnership" included in programming documentation and point that some participants of the programme have no idea about its main concept. The fact that this is the case is testified by numerous conflicts that were identified at the level of DP in Action 1.
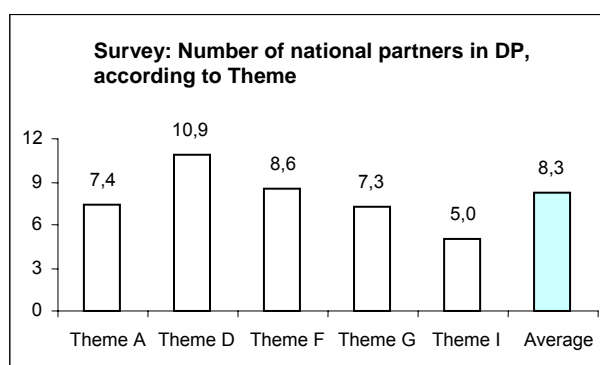
Graph 10
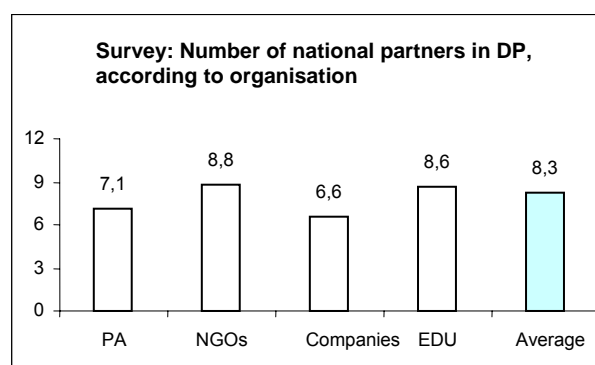
Graph 11

The question if and to what extent the number of partners significantly influenced effectiveness, efficiency and innovation of partnership operation will be discussed at the next stage. Now, we should draw the attention to the distribution of average number of partners in individual Themes and type of organisation as an Administrator. High indicator value in Theme D was achieved in relation to one project: "Toward the Polish model of social economy – we are building the new Lisków" (D0344) where as many as 41 partners cooperate with one another. Generally, we can say that that the number of organisations in partnerships of TTheme D and F is slightly greater than in other Themes. However, the differences are not that significant and it is difficult to put forward any conclusions.

Slightly more convincing is observation made on the basis of analysis of Graph 11. It shows that NGOs and educational institutions usually demonstrated greater openness to new partners than administration units and companies. One of the reasons for inactivity of administrative units may be generally lower activness of these entities in comparison with NGOs. In the case of companies, however, we may see, as often observed in Theme F, focus of partnerships on developing specific tools (as we said earlier, it does not contribute to excessive extending of institutional structure), additionally strengthened by economic factors (fewer partners, greater budget to be allocated). These are only digressions which we are not able to support with documentation due to the limited information in this respect.

3.1.2 To what degree institutions that participate in Partnerships are key partners from the point of view of anticipated objectives of the project?

This question was put in an unfortunate way (no definition of "key partner"; doubts concerning possibilities of changing the extent of a given feature) and caused us many problems. Obviously, we looked in detail at organisations participating in 8 surveyed projects. In the case of partnership G0588 we found out that the organisation which at the beginning was a project leader did not provide day-to-day assistance to the unemployed and single parents. It had, however, a lot of experience in the area of vocational trainings which is undoubtedly related to the Themearea of the project. However, both in this project and in the remaining 7 studies, there were entities that were specialists in the area which the project concerned.

Lead, key and supporting partners

Of course, the question may be interpreted broader: "What percentage of institutions included in the partnerships was directly involved in substantive activities related to strategy development?" As mentioned before, it happened very often that individual institutions were invited to cooperate. Their role could be described as supporting. Their task is not only to work on the essence of DP's product but also to provide supporting services – organising promotion campaign, providing software, access to current statistical data and office, etc.

Graph 12

Survey: What % of partners participated in research and DP's works on strategy
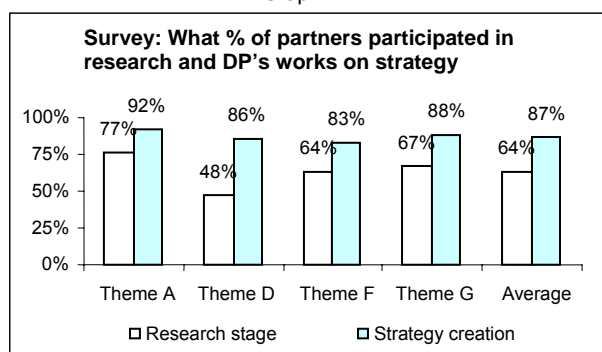
In order to research the scale of this phenomenon, we asked the respondents how many partners actively participated in the research stage, and how many took active part in strategy development. Summary of the answers is presented in Graph 12. We can see that while slightly more than half of partners took part in the research stage, a vast majority of organisations took part in developing the strategy. The best projects in this respect are those from Theme A.

In some projects we ca clearly distinguish three groups of organisations. Accordingly, there is a heart of the partnership, composed of one, two or three institutions which were the actual project initiators and which now have the greatest influence on project implementation. In some cases, this composition was formalised in the form of "Presidium" (F0086) or similar.

The second group are partners invited to participate in the project because of their key importance to implementation of the anticipated undertaking. Depending on the type of the project, these can be units of public administration (labour offices, family assistance centres, local or central government offices) or other entities on condition that they possess valuable resources from the point of view of the needs of the project.

The third group consists of supporting organisations mentioned earlier. Their role in the project is closely specified and not necessarily directly connected with substantive aspect of the undertaking.

It seems that the respondents who participated in the following stages of Action 1 could follow similar logic while answering the questions. So, usually entities that belonged to the heart of the partnership were engaged in the research. Firstly, research activities meant costs which were difficult to incur if it was not known when financing from the National Support Structure would be received. So, it was undertaken by institutions that felt most responsible for the project and were the authors of its primary concept. Of course, there were selected organisations in this group that took part in the research, especially if the added value contributed by them was related to access to data, knowledge of the needs of final beneficiaries or unique research potential.

The period of strategy development was usually when formal agreement was signed for Action 1. Partnership Administrator had resources from advance payment and was looking for opportunities to quickly fulfil requirements related to Action 1. As a result, the number of organisations increased and included mainly institutions from the second group. Their participation in substantive activities was even more valuable because it served as a preparation for the process of consulting Development Partnership Agreement.

The role of the third group of institutions was similar to that of external service providers. It seems that they were not prevented by anyone from participation in substantive activities of the partnership. However, very often they are not directly interested. Their participation in the Partnership is limited to the provision of a given service in a specified time. So, if an average of only 87% of partners took part in the stage of strategy development, the remaining 13% are usually institutions which do not treat the project as Partnership but as a new, interesting form of sale of their products or services.

We also see some kind of diversification when it comes to projects undertaken under different Themes. It seems that a group of institutions forming "close management" and "substantive base" of a partnership is relatively smaller in TThemes D and F where "tool" approach and sub-contracting is prevailing. The situation is different in Theme A. Here, almost 80% of partners took part in activities related to research of beneficiaries whereas an average of 92% of DP's participants took part in strategy development.

Summary of issues related to "Characteristics of institutional framework of partnerships"

Effectiveness:

Programme Complement assumed creation of 120 partnerships. It was anticipated that an average number of 10 partners would participate in DP. In reality, 107 partnerships were created, whereas an average number of partners was 8.3.

DPs' break down according to Thematic field, type of partnership (geographical/sectoral) and type of lead partner institutions shows great diversification of projects in relation to structure and TThemes and is in line with planned assumptions.

Usually, partnerships include organisations from three sectors of diversified scale of activity (local, regional and national). Although it is not always the case, we can generally state that the programme fulfilled the demand for "ensuring as diversified as possible participation of different types of organisations" in partnerships.

According to the results of the analysis, there is a potential link between the type of the product to be used by DP (tool or system) and number of organisations invited to participate in the partnership.

On the basis of information gathered, we calculated that "key partners", from the point of view of project objectives, constitute an average of 64 to 87% of all organisations participating in a standard partnership. It seems that it is the key partners that should be taken into consideration while analysing the scale of implementing "partnership" principle.

Efficiency:

It was assumed that increasing the number of organisations in the partnership cannot be treated as a value in itself and a simple indicator of potential of "effectiveness and innovation of the project". According to some respondents, optimum number of partners depends on the type of a given project, whereas exceeding this number may cause significant decrease in effectiveness of DP's operation.

Inviting to the partnership institutions that do not take direct part in substantive activities, but which have to fulfil technical and supporting functions, can be interpreted in the context of effectiveness criterion (easier access of DP to essential services).

3.2   Process of Partnerships' organisation

In this chapter, we will take a look at the process of creation of institutional structure of Development Partnerships.

Step by step, we will analyse the influence of a clear vision of the target product, possessed by DP at the very beginning. We will also discuss what was the scale of changes in DP membership and their significance for the development of partnership. In the last section of the chapter, we will take a look at the number of meetings held by all partners and we will discuss obstacles limiting the effectiveness of programme operation. The analysis should enable to provide answers to the following evaluation questions:

3.2.1 How were Development Partnerships set up? What factors influenced the final shape of the partnership?

3.2.2 If and to what extent on the stage of partnership creation, the turnover of institutions that were interested in project participation took place and how it influenced the effectiveness of the process of partnership creation?

3.2.3 What were the greatest facilitations and obstacles in DPs and Transnational co-operation partnerships (TCP) creation?

3.2.1   How were Development Partnerships set up? What factors influenced the final shape of the partnership?

<u>*"Product"-orientation vs. "institutional framework"- orientation*</u>

In the report on selection of applications for EQUAL, we indicated that one the vital features which distinguish the certain group of projects is the advancement of conceptual works on partnership's target product. While some applications were based on a well-thought, clear vision of a tool or system, other applications seemed prepared in an attractive way. However, these were only promises to fulfil a part or all programme objectives.

At that time, we assumed that submitting an application which does not have a clearly-defined product concept was valid and possible to be accepted by Committee for Project Assessment and Managing Authority. The basis of such flexible approach was, as implied in programming documents, a value related to the creation of institutional framework with a potential necessary to create innovative solutions.

While creating a survey questionnaire for evaluation of Action 1 implementation, we asked partnerships' representatives straightforward questions: "Which of the following factors was more motivating to submit an application to EQUAL:
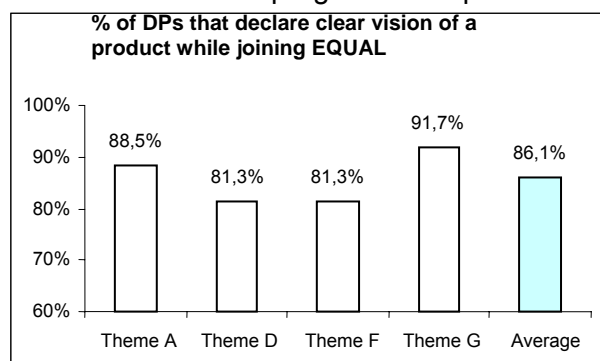
- The fact that you had a clear idea for an innoative tool or system and hope for its implementation,

- Willingness to cooperate with new partners in order to prepare innovative solutions?

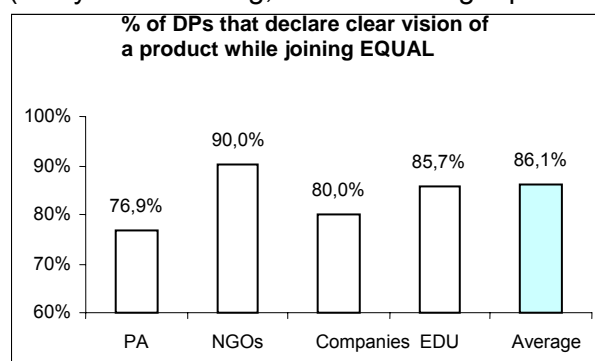**Motivation factors for filing application to EQUAL**
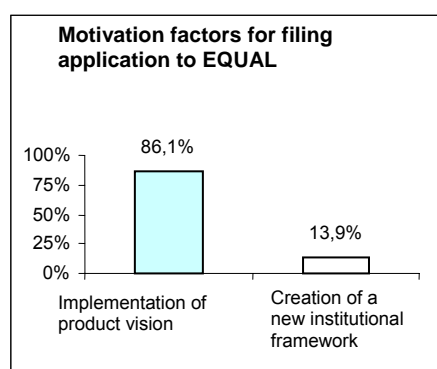
Graph 13

As shown in Graph, 86% respondents declared that they had an clear idea for system or tool they wanted to develop from the very beginning. Of course, the image we obtain from answers, provided they were true, does not always give a credible picture of reality. We can see, however, that at least 15 partnerships participated in EQUAL CI with a view of "inventing" their product during the implementation of Action 1. In this way especially administration units and private companies running partnerships in Themes D and F defined their situation.

We also discussed this issue in interviews with project supervisors in NSS. According to our interviewees, the fact of having an clear idea for the product of partnership was very favourable to the effectiveness and efficiency of activities design during Action 1. Partnerships which were joining EQUAL with a vague vision of their ultimate outcome were more prone to negative effects related to the overall programme implementation (delays in financing, formal and legal problems,

% of DPs that declare clear vision of a product while joining EQUAL	% of DPs that declare clear vision of a product while joining EQUAL
Theme A: 88,5% / Theme D: 81,3% / Theme F: 81,3% / Theme G: 91,7% / Average: 86,1%	PA: 76,9% / NGOs: 90,0% / Companies: 80,0% / EDU: 85,7% / Average: 86,1%

etc.).

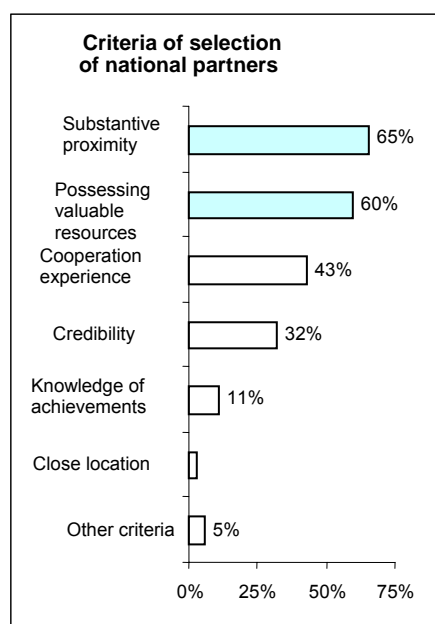Graph 14   Graph 15

It was due to the fact that difficult conditions for DP's operation in Action 1 overlapped with natural problem related to the necessity of defining innovative idea under great time pressure, administrative burden, lack of financing and group of institutions which did not have previous experience in cooperation.

Research of selected cases confirms that the projects based on detailed concept of a target product could usually differentiate between organisational and substantive issues and focus on the latter. If we know what we want to do, it is easier to divide tasks and roles. Functions taken by individual institutions naturally stem from their input into the process of product creation. Discussion on budget breakdown takes place in the context of exact tasks which can be evaluated from the point of view time consumption and necessary investments. All this, helps Partners to specify more easily optimum structure of a DP and avoid unproductive conflicts and disputes.

Criteria for selection of national partners

In order to identify the factors which influenced the final shape of partnership, we asked the respondents (usually representatives of project initiator groups) what criteria they followed in the selection of national partners.

It turns out that in most cases, the deciding factor was substantive experience of the organisation in the area of the project, and the fact that it possessed resources which increase the chance of obtaining planned results.

**Criteria of selection
of national partners**

Substantive proximity — 65%
Possessing valuable resources — 60%
Cooperation experience — 43%
Credibility — 32%
Knowledge of achievements — 11%
Close location —
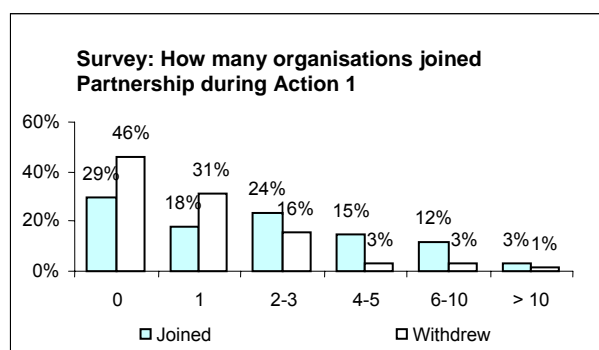Other criteria — 5%

Graph 16

Not accidentally public administration institutions were invited as they can provide necessary data or help in future dissemination of achievements of the partnership. Representatives of groups that should be represented in the process of comprehensive systemic solutions were searched for systematically. It was a deliberate search for institutions whose services would be essential and cheaper as well as would allow for avoiding time-consuming tendering procedure. Organisations whose input would duplicate resources of existing partners were avoided.

The above-mentioned actions should be regarded as highly rational and compliant with programme assumptions. We are satisfied with the frequent application of criteria which stemmed from the nature of a given project than those gained from previous experience in cooperation. It means that the leaders would be ready to take risk of cooperation with an unknown institution if it gave greater chance for better quality of the solution to be created.
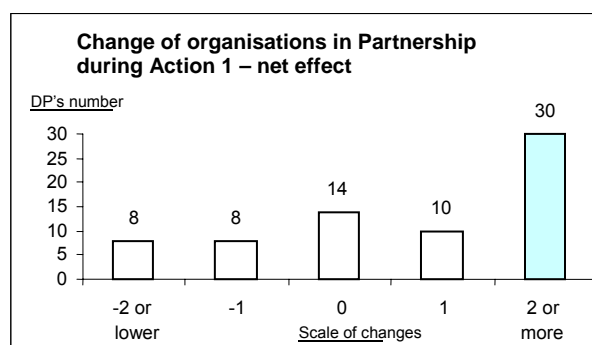
An alternative approach, which fortunately was not often the case, would be closing in a circle of "friends", although sub-optimal from the point of view of the project needs, would give greater sense of security and would be "easier" in relation to management.

3.2.2 Was there a rotation of institutions that were interested in project participation and to what extent it influenced the stage of partnership creation process and its effectiveness?

Scale of changes in DP's membership

Survey: How many organisations joined Partnership during Action 1

0 — 29% / 46%
1 — 18% / 31%
2-3 — 24% / 16%
4-5 — 15% / 3%
6-10 — 12% / 3%
> 10 — 3% / 1%

☐ Joined   ☐ Withdrew

Graph 17

Change of organisations in Partnership during Action 1 – net effect

DP's number

-2 or lower — 8
-1 — 8
0 — 14
1 — 10
2 or more — 30

Scale of changes

Graph 18

Data collected in the survey, enable us to assess the scale of rotation of institutions taking part in partnerships. As shown in Graph 17, in the case of over half projects in Action 1, one of the partners withdrew from the partnership. In a vast majority of cases, one or two organisations left the partnership. Usually, in place of withdrawing institutions, new ones were invited to the project. Final balance of these changes in the whole programme is positive. Average value of "withdrawal" indicator is 1.2 and is easily compensated with positive transfers. "|nflow" value was calculated on the level of 3.1.

Although average net effect is positive (1.8-1.9), it is worth highlighting that in the case of as many as 16 partnerships (almost 23%) the number of partners has decreased. As shown in Graph 18, if it was not due to Theme D and the DP comprising over 40 institutions, the average growth could be as little as 1.3. If we assume that one of the measures for the process of institutional development of partnerships is an expected increase in the number of partners, the achieved values raise some doubts.

Influence of changes in partnership composition on effectiveness of DP's operation (case studies)

Does the number of partners' growth, calculated arithmetically, is a real indicator of strengthening DP? Maybe we should think about rationalising rather than maximising the number of partners.
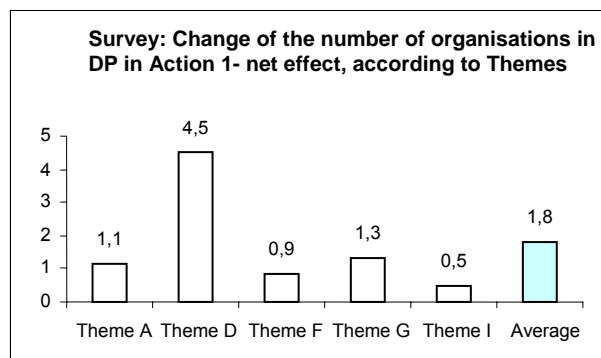

Graph 19
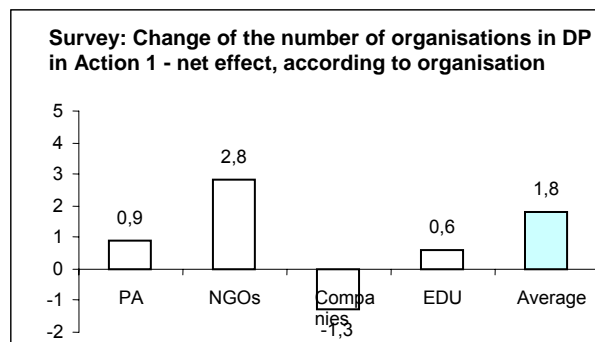
Graph 20

This thesis is supported by observations made when working on case studies. In the case of 8 DPs, net effect of change of DP's composition turned out to be positive in three cases. In two other cases, the number of partners is lower than in the application for Action 1. Although the average value of changes is only +0.4, detailed analysis shows that changing partnership structure, in the case of @lterEgo (changing Administrator, withdrawal of 2 institutions) had positive influence on the pace of DP's integration: works on DP strategy were intensified, project target group was finally agreed and competence and personnel conflicts were solved.

In the case of the project undertaken by College of Management and Public Administration in Zamość, as many as three organisations withdrew from the partnership (statistical offices). However, according to Project Manager, it did not have negative consequences (reasons for withdrawal from DP were related to formal and legal issues, whereas ex-partners declare readiness for further project support).

In comparison, in another project where the balance calculated arithmetically is zero, the institution essential from the point of view of the project needs (school for social workers) was replaced with a young organisation with resources that were already present in the partnership. Another partnership with a clear positive value of net turnover indicator lost one of its key partners and this loss cannot be compensated for new institutions that joined it during Action 1.
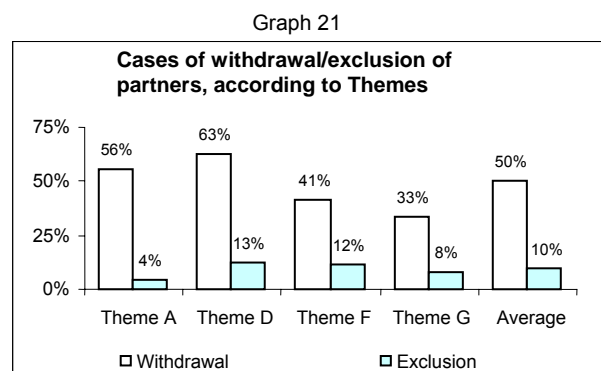
Graph 21
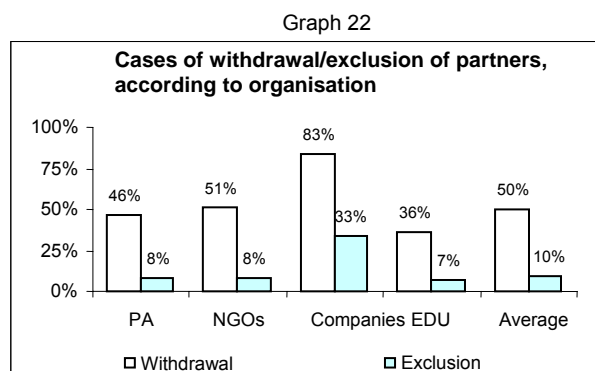
Graph 22

So, it seems that changing DP structure is a natural effect of project maturity and regardless of directions of changes made, it can have either a negative or positive influence on partnerships.

To sum up the discussion presented in this part, it is worth highlighting that cases of withdrawing or excluding partners, in greatest part refer to private companies (in 5 out of 6 DP of this type at least one organisation withdrew from the project; in two cases the partner was excluded). Case study does not provide information sufficient for interpretation of this regularity. Comments presented in the survey indicate that usually the cause for withdrawal/exclusion of a given organisation was its inactivity and lack of interest in the project. In 3 out of 7 cases of exclusion, the reason was a conflict between Administrator and partner (*"they did not understand key EQUAL principles"* and *"they did not accept their role in the project"*, etc.). These situations were not related to DPs coordinated by private companies.

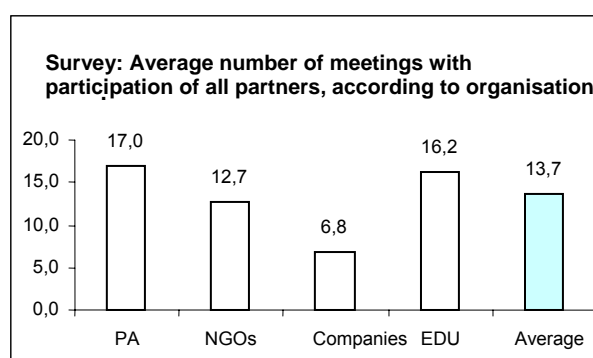### *Number of meetings vs "partnership" intensity*

Intensity of the process of partnership creation - its more or less participatory formula of activity can be reflected in the number of meetings held with all partners. Graphs 23 and 24 show an average number of meetings for individual Themes and types of lead partner institutions. As shown, joint meetings were most eagerly organised in Themes A and G. The meetings were mostly initiated by public administration units and educational institutions. Significantly fewer tendencies to participatory, "disputable" formula of activities was observed among companies and non-governmental organisations. We can assume that it is related to more frequent approach in this kind of partnerships: emphasis on a clear outcome and preference to management style which clearly specifies roles and responsibilities of project participants. So, if we know who should do it and when it should be done, then "why waste time for unnecessary discussions?".

Apart from this positive "pro-efficient" interpretation, there is also another explanation to this: Projects based on a very precise idea for creation of a specific tool usually have its author – someone who "invented" the project and invited other institutions to cooperate in its implementation. This situation implies a very strong position of the Leader and makes other participants subcontractors of specific tasks. It seems that this arrangement can often be found in the case of strong NGOs which have an undisputable reputation in the areas they operate in. So, a small number of meetings could indicate little "partnership" approach to project implementation. Unfortunately, we are not able to assess the scale of this phenomenon on the basis of information we gathered.

Regardless of observed differences, it seems that if the meetings were held on average once or twice a month, we can talk about intense cooperation of partners.
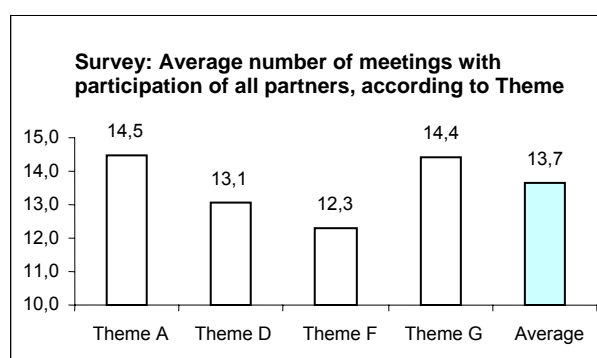
Graph 23

Graph 24

We were quite surprised with the fact that the number of meetings declared by Partnerships in the survey is almost half lower than it would appear from quarterly reports (average number of meetings for the whole programme is as high as 21.8). One explanation of the difference is the fact that the questionnaire clearly required to provide the number of meetings "with participation of all partners" whereas quarterly report form does not specify the kind of meetings held.

3.2.3   *What were the greatest aids and obstacles in DPs and Transnational Co-operation Partnerships (TCP) creation?*

Survey: Obstacles limiting effectiveness and innovation of partnerships' operation

Obstacle	Value
Legal obstacles	53
Administrative burden	46
Beneficiaries' inactivity	20
Little institutional potential	14
Not adjusted management systems	12
No data about the market	12
No knowledge about solutions	6
Inability to work in teams	3
No willingness of cooperation	3
Defective DP's structure	2
Little research potential	1
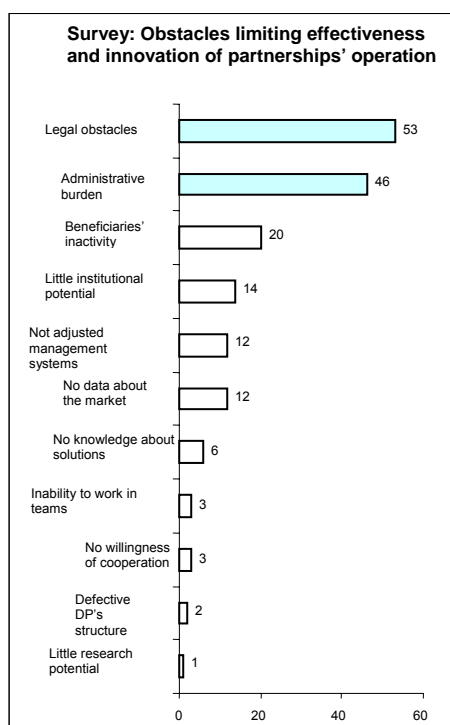
Graph 25

We asked the respondents to choose from the list of 11 potential obstacles no more than 3 factors, which according to them were the greatest danger for effective project implementation.

Most often, respondents indicated problems related to legal conditions for project implementation. By choosing this answer, partnerships' representatives thought both about sectoral regulations which could have negative influence on stability of developed solutions (e.g. lack of regulations within social economy) and issues related to programme implementation itself (e.g. ambiguity related to the way how tax on goods and services will be calculated).

According to respondents, the second problem in this respect, which limits innovative actions of partnerships, is excessive bureaucratic system for EQUAL CI implementation. Numerous responsibilities regarding substantial and financial reporting cause a lot of administrative burden and distract project promoters focus on substantive activities.

The third obstacle is a concern whether final beneficiaries would have enough interest and would be active enough to use tools created for them. While the first two problems are related to programme efficiency, the third one is of great importance for the effectiveness of actions undertaken.

Summary of issues related to "Process of Partnerships' organisation"

Effectiveness:

It seems that the fact of having an clear vision of the product was favourable both for effectiveness and efficiency of activities undertaken under Action 1 (it was easier to specify what should be done by who and to avoid a trap of "substitute problems", e.g. competence and personnel problems). A vast majority of partnerships (86%) claim that they had an clear idea for target DP's product from the very beginning.

According to respondents, the most often criteria used for the selection of partners were those directly related to the Theme of implemented project (experience and resources). It would be a positive indication of partnership quality as a community of entities that join their forces in order to solve a given problem.

In Action 1, a small increase in the number of partnership participants was observed (average +1.8 organisations per DP). In one fourth of the projects, the effect of changes in DP composition was a decrease in the overall number of partners. If we treat the growth of the number of partners as indicator of development of institutional framework of partnership, the effects of Action 1 should be regarded as slightly lower than expected.

> *On the other hand, detailed analysis of selected projects shows that changing DP structure is a natural effect of partnerships' "maturity". However, the direct link between the growth of the number of partners and partnership development was not confirmed (cases of the change in the number of partners had either a negative or positive influence on the efficiency of operations, regardless of the fact whether the number of partners was increasing of decreasing).*
>
> *Anxiety concerning the demand for partnerships' products is surprising and shows that there is an immediate need to intensify research of target recipients.*
>
> *Efficiency:*
>
> *"Product-orientation" of partnerships was favourable to effective organisation in the initial period of DP's operation.*
>
> *One of the indicators showing the scale in which the principle of "partnership" was implemented can be the number of "meetings of all partners". In Action 1, we observed significant differences among partnerships in this respect, depending on the type of lead partner institution. For example, private companies organised almost three times fewer meetings than public administration units and educational institutions. Frequent meetings undoubtedly show high participation of partners in project management. We do not know, however, how this participation translates into effectiveness of DP's operation.*
>
> *The most common obstacles that limited the effectiveness of partnership operation are formal and legal conditions (e.g. VAT) and administrative burdens (e.g. conditions for payment settlement or documentation necessary for signing financial agreement). Both factors are related with one another in terms of the way the system is prepared and implemented.*

3.3   Process of Transnational Partnerships' organisation

> In this section of the report, we will discuss the process of establishing transnational cooperation. We will present respondents' opinions on obstacles they faced while searching foreign partners. We will also present data about the number of visits and signed TCAs. We will discuss methods and criteria applied by Polish partnerships while looking for adequate partners for their projects. We will end with a review of approaches to transnational partnership management and we will try to find answer to question of influence of transnational cooperation on strategies prepared by DPs. During our analysis we will try to find answers to the following evaluation questions:
>
> *3.3.1 How were Transnational Partnerships set up?*
>
> *3.3.2 To what extent partnerships used previous contacts and cooperation on the European level?*
>
> *3.3.3 To what extent transnational cooperation influenced the way Partnerships organised their work and actions as well as achieved results?*

3.3.1   How were Transnational Partnerships set up?

Initiating transnational cooperation was one of the areas which relatively rarely aroused controversy among Partnerships. For every third respondent the possibility to establish transnational cooperation was one of the main advantages of the programme. At the same time, issues related to the creation of a transnational partnership are not usually mentioned as factors which are regarded as disadvantages of EQUAL CI.

In narrative commentaries to questions directly related with transnational cooperation, the respondents pointed to many issues which caused management problems and could have negative influence on efficiency of the process itself.

Problems in the process of establishing a TCP

Firstly, as stated in the Final Report on Theme A, it was as early as at the stage of introducing description of Polish partnerships to EQUAL Common Database (ECDB), that problems aroused with using RIFE application that supported this process. "Beneficiaries reported problems in access to ECDB, and after entering data by NSS they revealed numerous errors in the final version of information available on the Commission website". In some cases (e.g. @lterEgo) it resulted in considerable problems in establishing first contacts with potential foreign partners.

One of the common problems was an obstacle related to financing transnational cooperation. Delays in signing agreement for implementation of Action 1 caused no access to advance payment. So, a DP where the process of signing agreement with NSS was prolonging (as we know it was the case of many partnerships), the costs of possible trips and meeting had to be covered by the Administrator. In the case of smaller organisations, it was a considerable obstacle.

Lack of signed agreement with NSS not only caused problems in financing current costs of establishing transnational contacts. If the partnership had not have adequate legal authorisation ("limitations in terms of undertaking external obligations"), the process of negotiating the shape of TCAs itself must have been less effective.

Without doubt, the weakness of the system where TCP was established, was the lack of coordination of agenda for Programme implementation on the European level and differences in approach of different countries to issues related to the size and eligibility of costs for transnational cooperation.

> *"It was also difficult to understand that there were significant differences in acceptable percentage values of resources for transnational operations in different countries and different deadlines for signing agreements"*
>
> *"…rules for eligibility of expenditure were different from those used in other EQUAL countries where they were more flexible"*
>
> *(comments to surveys)*

Due to the fact that some countries chose the deadline of completing this stage of the programme earlier than Poland, establishing transnational cooperation was taking place under great time pressure. According to some respondents, it could lead to signing accidental agreements with entities about which the partnership had little knowledge. At the same time some TCPs regret that in this way they lost the possibility to establish cooperation with very attractive transnational partners.

In relation to that, one of the respondents suggests that the formula of TCP operation, similarly as in the case of national partnerships, will evolve considerably and a possibility for further verification should be created. The above-mentioned obstacles should be regarded as suggestions on "how it could be improved". They do not change the overall positive evaluation which stems from all remarks and comments gathered at the stage of case studies and the survey.

> *"Rules and conditions of transnational partnerships' organisation are clear and did not cause difficulties in establishing cooperation. Their advantage was flexibility of establishing cooperation with partner from different TTheme".*
>
> *"There was enough time provided for finding Partners if the Partnership started exact searching early enough".*
>
> *(commentaries to question 11 in the Questionnaire)*

Transnational visits

As shown in Graph 26 and 27, the way of establishing international contacts was bilateral. From the data presented by partnerships it is clear that much more often it was Polish DPs which went abroad than potential foreign partners were coming to Poland (proportion 2.2/0.8). Of course, this is understandable if TCP consisted of representatives from a number of countries which shared responsibility for organisation preliminary meetings.
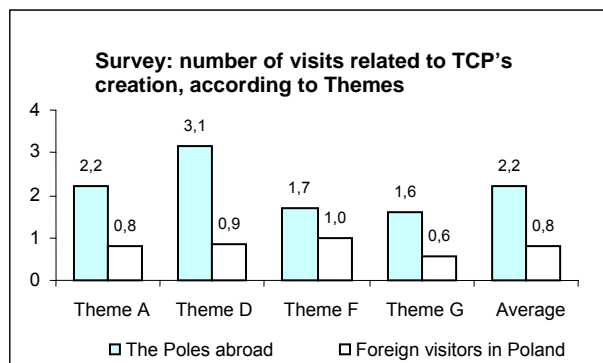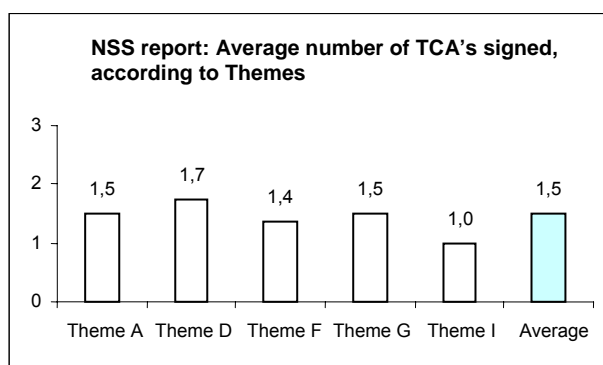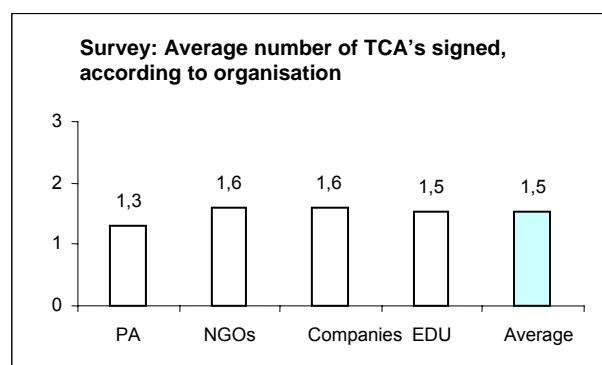

Graph 26
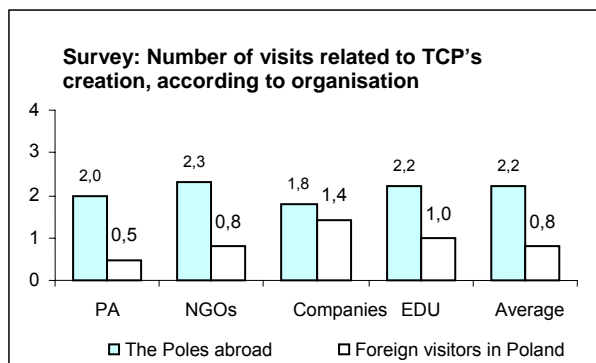
Graph 27

Partnerships from Theme D were the ones that went abroad most often. It can be associated with the specificity of social economy sector. In Poland it is a new thing whereas other European countries have considerable theoretical and practical achievements in this respect.

Partnerships run by private companies organised trips relatively less often. However, they are leaders in terms of organisation of meetings with international organisations in Poland. In our opinion, this undoubtedly interesting effect suggests high effectiveness of this group of partnerships that avoided too many trips. They were, however, efficient and interested (result of promotion?) in relative frequent receiving of organisations from other countries.

Number of signed TCAs

Graph 28

Graph 29

On the basis of data from NSS Final Reports (Graph 28) presenting the state of all Partnerships as of 30.06.2005, we can conclude that with the average for the whole programme at the level of 1.4, the greatest number of TCAs were signed by entities from TTheme D. This information would be consistent with the number of foreign visits presented above. It is worth highlighting that in Themes F and G where DPs had seldom foreign visits, a similar number of TCAs was signed as in other Themes. This is confirmed in Graph 29 which presents data from surveys. We can see that private companies are leaders in terms of the number of established transnational partnerships, although they had a small number of trips.

Survey: Number of Transnational co-operation agreements (TCA) signed

Graph 30

Survey: Number of foreign partners
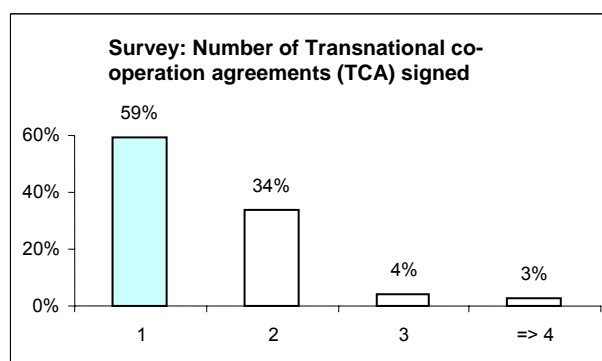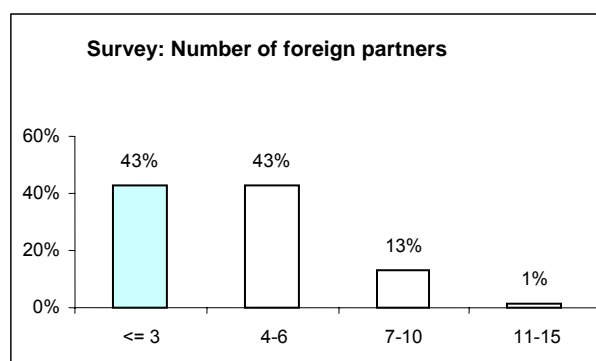
Graph 31

Finally, 3 out of 5 surveyed DPs signed one transnational agreement. The remaining 34% - signed two agreements. It is rare that more agreements were signed. There is an average number of 3.1 of transnational partners for each TCP.

The data presented show that partnerships generally followed the guidelines of NSS, specified in a document "What to remember while creating transnational partnership": *"Experience from 1st round of EQUAL shows that one national partnership should not sign more than one Transnational cooperation agreements because it is much easier to monitor implementation of one agreement than several agreements. (...) The optimal number of partners in transnational partnership is three partnerships from three different countries".*

3.3.2 To what extent partnerships used previous contacts and cooperation on European level?

Survey: How did you find foreign partners?
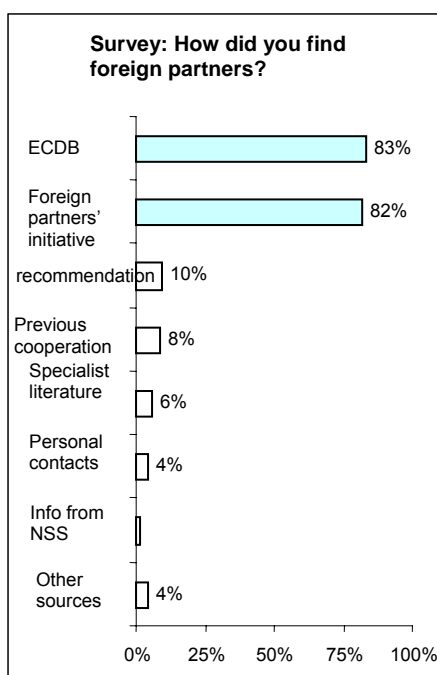
Graph 32

Methods of searching for foreign partners

Opinions presented by respondents in terms of approach to searching for foreign partners may be more interesting than quantitative analysis.

Among possible sources of information on potential partners there are two major ones: ECDB and contacts initiated by interested foreign organisations.

It is rare that personal contacts or previous cooperation experience were used. Only one out of ten partnerships used recommendations of third parties, including possible advisory services from the NSS.

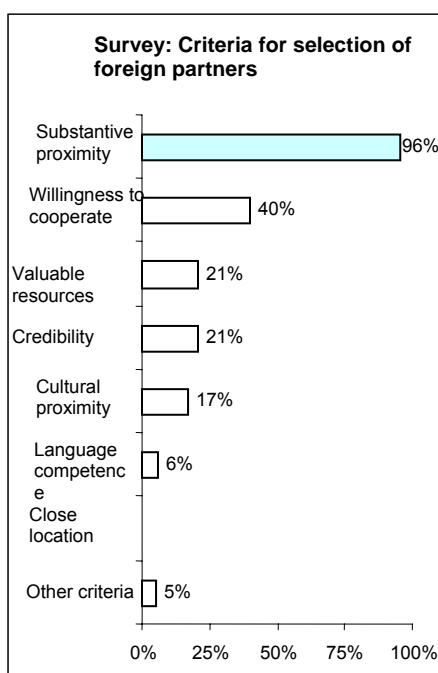In general, the system based on ECDB and pressure of agenda, turned out to be highly effective and did not require considerable interference of programme managing institutions on the national level.

As shown in NSS reports, during "last chance" meeting partners were sought for only a couple of DPs (e.g. in Theme A – for 5 out of 38 DPs) that did not find adequate partners before the end of April.

The results of the survey are discussed according to the statement made by partnerships' representatives that were surveyed in case studies. Most of them think that creation of ECDB turned out to be a great success, in spite of the fact that many descriptions were too general and even confusing. Other respondents claim that in fact they did not have any chance to search on their own because they had a lot of offers from foreign partnerships.

It does not mean, however, that the approach to the selection of adequate candidates to TCP was spontaneous and wrongly motivated. According to suggestions of NSS, partnerships usually appointed a person or a working group that were responsible for establishing transnational cooperation and selection criteria. Then, they applied them by browsing the database or analysing offers sent.

Graph 33

Survey: Criteria for selection of foreign partners

| Criteria	%
Substantive proximity	96%
Willingness to cooperate	40%
Valuable resources	21%
Credibility	21%
Cultural proximity	17%
Language competence	6%
Close location	
Other criteria	5%

Criteria for selection of foreign partners

Most often, the most important factor was experience of a potential partner in the area to which the project related. It does not seem, however, that Polish organisations, possessing limited time and only general information could carry out in-depth analysis in this respect. Very often, they were driven by the fact that the scope of the project was similar to the actions of a national organisation.

The second factor was the level of willingness to establish cooperation demonstrated by foreign organisation. This criterion is obvious as it is difficult to cooperate when there is no interest of joint action of the other party.

It was less frequent, than it was in the case of searching for national partners, that resources of the candidate transnational partner (which were essential from the point of view of a product created by DP) were taken into account (access to data, know how, personnel and financial resources). . It is possible that usefulness of this criterion was small because of limited access to more detailed knowledge allowing for verification of the potential of a given transnational partner.

It is worth highlighting that there were few indications as to the importance of possible language barriers and quite high level of factors related to "social-cultural proximity".

Survey: Way of coordination of TCPs

No coordinator: 29,2%
With coordinator: 70,8%
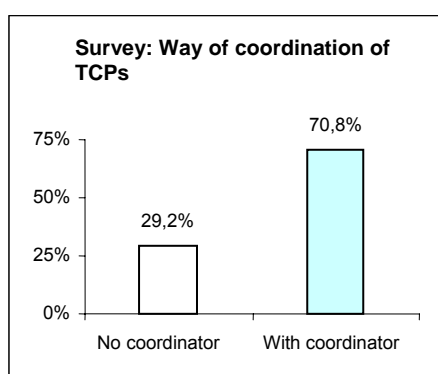
Graph 34

Approaches to managing TCP's activities

Among established TCPs, the most dominant are those whose members decided to appoint an organisation to perform the role of a formal coordinator of joint activities. The most frequent are the following two models: either coordination was given to organisation which had experience from 1. round of EQUAL, or it was a rotative formula where all national partnerships were in turn responsible for coordinating TCP's activities.

In terms of a group of TCPs that decided to operate without formal appointing of institutions responsible for organisation of the whole process, we can often find at least secretariat or office appointed in the most experienced organisation (or run in turn by partners) and joint coordination groups whose meetings are held periodically.

Graph 35

Survey: Method of cooperation within TCP
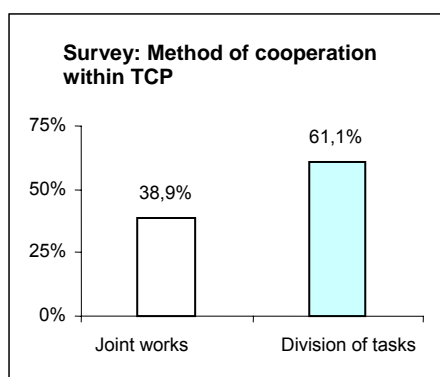
As far as substantive activities are concerned, the dominant model is a division of tasks between TCP's participants. Achievements of individual projects will be successively presented in an assembly of the whole transnational partnership.

An interesting solution, used by some TCPs is appointing working groups, composed of representatives of different DPs. The groups, appointed on the level of individual tasks or whole issues undertaken by a DP that are precisely aimed at exact substantive issues, seem favourable to sustaining good working relations.

3.3.3 To what extent transnational cooperation influenced the way Partnerships organised their work and actions as well as achieved results?

Taking into account the late stage of signing TCAs and early stage of cooperation with transnational partners, it does not seem that actual experience within TCP could be used for strategy development and adjusting activities of a national DP.

However, after analysing a couple of projects we can see that establishing contacts with foreign partners could result in revising Polish DP work agenda.

For example, promoters of the project "Second Chance" were very sceptical about the possibility to use direct foreign contacts. In a situation where relations with beneficiaries are of individual character and are based on mutual confidence of advisor and his client, it is really difficult to find a place for a representative of foreign nation and his interpreter. However, first meeting with German organisation showed that while Polish DP possesses extensive experience in terms of social activation of people from excluded communities, the German partner has a lot of achievement in the field of vocational mobilisation of excluded communities. The result of the meeting was in this case introduction into the DP's Strategy the concept of "friendly employment" as a form of support for beneficiaries of "Second Chance" on the labour market.

It seems that we have to postpone providing full answer on the role and influence of transnational cooperation on national partnership cooperation for at least a couple of months. First contacts were established under great time pressure, so it is difficult to get to know one another and specify possible areas of cooperation in such conditions.

Summary of issues related to transnational cooperation

Effectiveness:

Average Polish partnerships signed 1.5 of TCAs (59% - one agreement and 34% two agreements) and established cooperation with 4-5 foreign partners. For this purpose about 2 foreign visits were held, at the same time once hosting foreign partners in our country. Achieved results are compliant with planned values and let us assume that this element of the programme, at least in terms of quantity, has been executed according to expectations.

When establishing transnational cooperation, DPs were mainly using ECDB. While choosing partners, the main criterion used was "substantive proximity" (Theme of the project) which should be a factor favourable to effective and efficient cooperation.

Due to preliminary character of international contacts, significant time-pressure in the second quarter and problems with financing Polish partnerships, previous contacts with foreign partners had little influence on the shape of created strategies.

> *Efficiency:*
>
> *Without doubt, ECDB that functioned on European level, turned out to be great success. It was used both by Polish and foreign partnerships.*
>
> *Most TCPs (71%) decided to entrust one of the partners with coordinating joint undertaking and chose a type of cooperation that was based on the division of tasks between partnerships from different countries. In our opinion, adopted solutions are favourable to efficiency of TCP's operation.*
>
> *During establishing transnational cooperation, partnerships faced a couple of obstacles: problems with entering data to ECDB, different agenda of Action 1 in various countries, different approaches of national programmes to the issue of eligibility of expenditures for transnational cooperation, lack of funds for financing transnational cooperation resulting from delays in signing agreements with NSS.*

3.4   Management of Development Partnership

> In this chapter, we will analyse the issues related to the way of organisation of work in national partnerships and management styles used in DPs. We will try to check to what extent the belief of effectiveness of "partnership approach", manifested through introducing decentralised (collective) organisational solutions into the system, brings about greater participation of partners into the decision-making process and increases their participation in project implementation.
>
> In the final section of this chapter, we will summarise the results of analysis of applied management solutions with information on the type and scale of the conflicts which aroused in surveyed projects.
>
> The analysis should, among all, enable to provide answers to the following evaluation questions:
>
> *3.4.1 To what extent the implementation of the project in the Partnership with other institutions is perceived by leaders and Partners as facilitation or difficulty in achieving planned objectives.*
>
> *3.4.2 What is the real participation of partners in project implementation (e.g. way of including final beneficiaries into project implementation, way of organising information flow between leader and Partners)?*
>
> *3.4.3 What management problems were faced by partnerships during Action 1 and how were they solved?*
>
> *3.4.4 Analysis of management systems in partnerships.*

The answer to the question whether the project is managed according to the principle of partnership is not easy at all. It is due to at least two reasons. Firstly, programming documents and NSS guidelines covering the way of implementation of the Partnership principle are not fully coherent and direct. Secondly, as shown in practice, regardless of formal mechanisms used, the way of Administrator's conduct may be subjectively perceived by partners as more or less "democratic" or "open". So, there are DPs that potentially guarantee equality all participants of the process but are still regarded as failing to fulfil the partnership principle. What is interesting is the fact that there are DPs where management style is hierarchical and still partnership relations are being developed.

So, we should look at this area of the programme in two dimensions. Firstly, we will present values of indicators which relate to subjective opinions of the respondents who are in greater part representatives of Administrator and his point of view. Secondly, we will analyse quantitative indicators which present the situation of individual partnerships in a more objective way. Finally, we will try to check in which partnerships the greatest number of management conflicts was found and what was their character.

3.4.1   To what extent is the implementation of the project in the Partnership with other institutions perceived by leaders and Partners as a facilitation or difficulty in achieving planned objectives?

Respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of "partnership approach" in project management
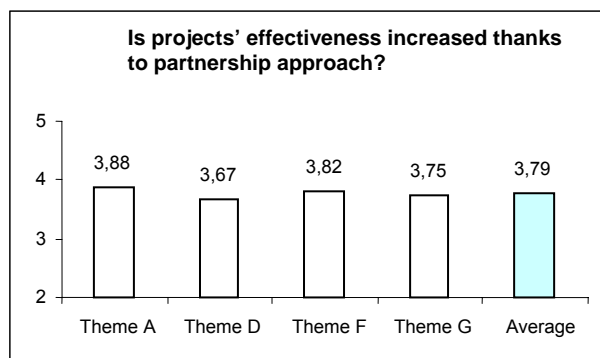
Graph 36
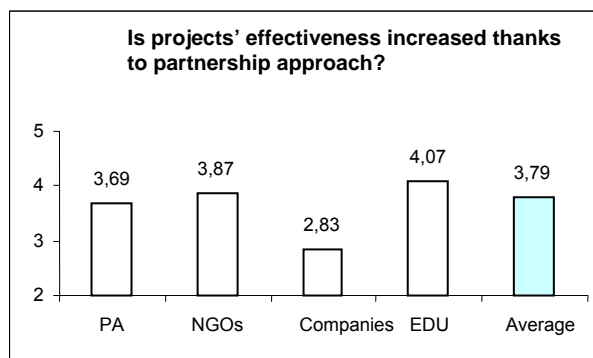
Graph 37

69% of respondents when asked: "Is the use of partnership rules favourable to higher work effectiveness?" answered yes. Only 10% said no. From 1-5 scale, it gave an average result at the level of 3.79 which can be interpreted as "rather yes". The greatest number of supporters of partnership approach to management can be found among leaders in Theme A. The fewest number in Theme D. Supporters of partnership approach, according to the type of organisation, can be found among representatives of educational institutions and NGOs. It is uncommon for companies to support this idea. It seems that private sector prefers to use tested management methods which are based on a clear division of roles, tasks and responsibilities.

Management styles used in partnerships.

In the questionnaire, we asked representatives of institutions acting as Administrators to define management style used in their partnerships.
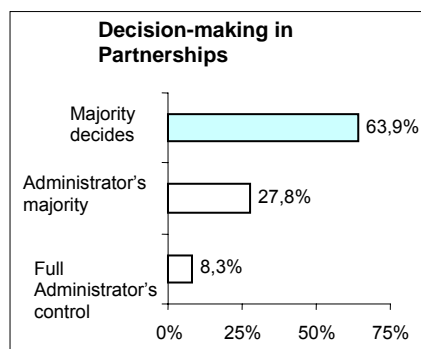
Graph 38
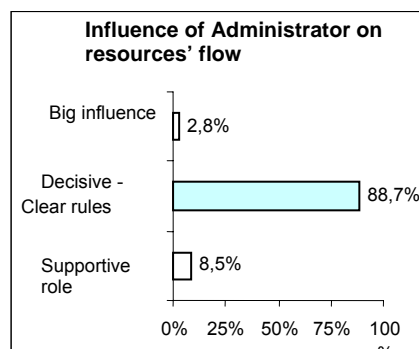
Graph 39

The respondents had to specify the degree of centralisation step by step: (a) decision-making process, (b) rules for flow of financial resources and (c) formula of carrying our substantive works on DP's product. The respondents could choose one of three or four options.

Organisation of works on DP's product

Joint working group — 58,3%
Coordinated by Administrator — 36,1%
Executed by Administrator — 4,2%
Other — 1,4%

0%   25%   50%   75%

Graph 40

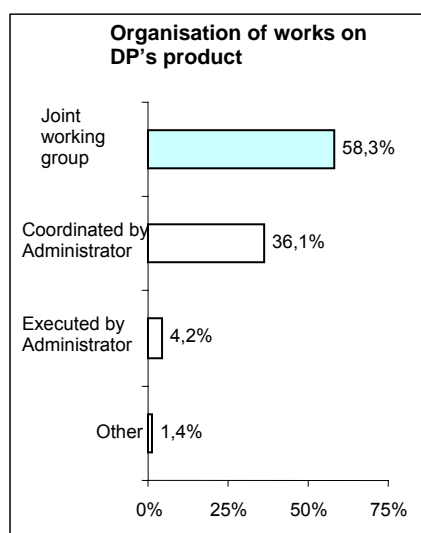The subsequent options represented a different level of increasing or decreasing "democracy" of a given function.
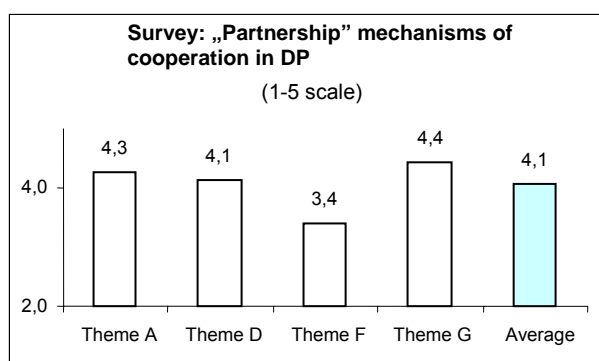
As shown in Graph 38, a vast majority of respondents (64%) claim that in their DPs, the decision are taken on the basis of equality of parties. However, almost 28% of respondents say that the position of partners and Administrator is not equal, whereas 8% openly states that implementation of the project takes place under full control of DP's leader.

In terms of solutions related to internal rules of financial resources flow, there is a vast majority of opinions which state that the role of Administrator is dominant in this respect. Only slightly below 9% of respondents claim that the role of the leader was only that of a "paying institution".
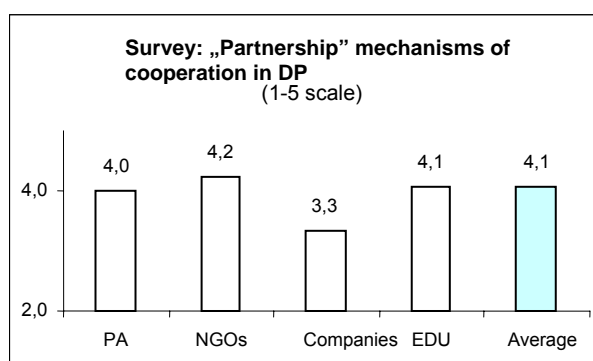
A more diversified picture is visible in the summary of answers to the question on the way of organisation of substantive activities. 58% of partnerships manage this process jointly - through an especially appointed working group - in other cases activities related to product preparation are coordinated by Administrator. In three projects (out of 71 which provided answer to this question) the role of Administrator is so strong that it is similar to the type of relation "main contractor-subcontractors" rather than any kind of partnership.

Case studies showed that there are very different styles of management that can be used in individual partnerships. Out of 8 cases analysed, in three partnerships the decision-making process and work organisation related to product are of collective character. Two other projects, which were recognised by evaluators as examples of very effective and efficient implementation of Action 1, are managed in a centralised way (Administrator has a guaranteed strong management role whereas the basis of operation is a precise division of tasks and responsibilities). Other partnership make use of the mixed formula.

Let us take a look at achieved results of the survey according to Themes and type of lead partner institution. For this purpose we used classification by points. The higher the answer in "partnership" hierarchy of the respondent in each of the three surveyed Themes (decision-making procedures, financial management and work organisation in terms of product) the more points was awarded to a DP. So, if in a given project in each three areas there is a full control of administrator, the calculated "partnership indicator" will be 0. If, on the other hand, in one of the surveyed element, partnership goes up one point, indicator will also increase by 1 point. The maximum number of points to get is 6 (there are 3 options of answers for each element. The answers are given 0, 1 or 2 points respectively). The final score is awarded in scale from 1-5, however the maximum score "5" is awarded to partnership which scored at least 5 points.

Survey: „Partnership" mechanisms of cooperation in DP

(1-5 scale)

Theme A — 4,3
Theme D — 4,1
Theme F — 3,4
Theme G — 4,4
Average — 4,1

Graph 41

Survey: „Partnership" mechanisms of cooperation in DP

(1-5 scale)

PA — 4,0
NGOs — 4,2
Companies — 3,3
EDU — 4,1
Average — 4,1

Graph 42

The results of translating descriptive answers into points are presented in Graphs 41 and 42. According to the surveyed representatives of DPs, the greatest level of management mechanisms which support "partnership" can be found in Themes G and A, particularly in projects managed by NGOs. The least scope of partnership measured in this way can be found in Theme F, in particular in management mechanisms used by private companies.

Partial Summary

Declared and used management style

On the basis of opinions of organisations acting as Administrators, we can conclude that the majority of project leaders in EQUAL (about 70%) regards the value of partnership approach as a basis for effective DP's management.

A great majority of respondents (about 30%) has, however, more diversified opinions in this respect and treats "partnership" as a mean rather than objective of operation. The result of such approach is a management style, quite often found in DP, which in the decision-making process and way of organisation of substantive activities uses elements of centralised model based on strong leadership and precise division of responsibilities and rights.

Almost 64% of respondents claim that their partnership guarantees equal voting right in the decision-making process to all participants. Administrator's advantage in this respect can be found in 28% DPs. According to respondents, every ten partnership (8%) is fully controlled by Administrator.

Respondents agree that when it comes to the internal system of financing of DP, it is under full responsibility of Administrator (90% of cases) which has a decisive say in this respect.

In terms of organisation of substantive activities, in 4-5% of partnerships we can find "consortium" model where project leader fulfils de facto the role of "main contractor", whereas the partners are "sub-contractors".

In terms of measures, the greatest belief in positive influence of partnership on the effectiveness of actions can be found among representatives of projects from Themes A and F. While in Theme A this belief is visible in applied management solutions, Theme F does not confirm these beliefs. The situation is different in Themes D and G. Although "pro-partnership" management solutions are used here quite often, project leaders are far from being enthusiastic in terms of evaluation of effectiveness of partnership approach.

Comparing answers according to the type of organisation, we can see that private companies, both on the level of declarations and the level of actually selected solutions, are not active supporters of the partnership principle. The situation looks different when it comes to NGOs and educational institutions. Their representatives believe in the partnership principle and they are active practitioners of this idea.

3.4.2   *What is the real participation of partners in project implementation (e.g. way of including final beneficiaries into project implementation, way of organising information flow between leader and Partners)?*

We will start our analysis of indicators describing these elements of partnership operation that show the degree of "democracy" of management methods applied, by looking at the composition of project's Management Group.

Participation of partners in DP's Steering Group.

Percentage of partners in DP's Management Group
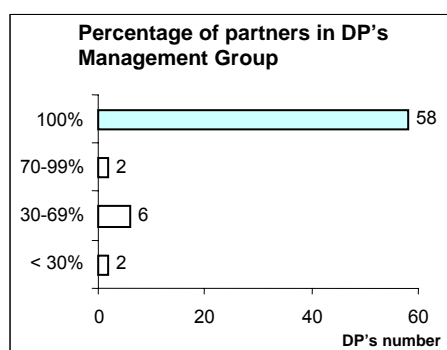
Graph 43

In 85% of surveyed DPs, all partners have representatives in Management Group/Steering Group. In 2 out of 68 partnerships (3%) that provided answer to this question, the body taking most decisions on behalf of DP is controlled by small percentage (<30%) of partners. Less that 100% of participation of partners in Management Group can be found in the case of large partnerships where the necessity to appoint some kind of "Management Board" or "Presidium" is a natural requirement for the effectiveness of DP's operation. There are cases, however, where centralised management system is not a necessity but simply stems from Administrator's preferences.

Major problem in the interpretation of this indicator was the fact the Steering Group had a different scope of competences and different decision-making procedures. For example, we came across a situation where Management Group had only an advisory function over presidium made up of a small number of partners. In other DP, participation in Management Group is guaranteed to all partners but the Administrator stipulated in the agreement that in the case of lack of consensus, the decision is taken only by the Project Manager (sic!). There are also less drastic solutions – e.g. Administrator has 2 votes whereas the remaining partners have only one vote. So, the very fact of presence of all partners in the Steering Group does not always guarantee equal rights in terms of decisions concerning the future of the partnership.

Graph 44

Administrator's participation in the budget of Action 2
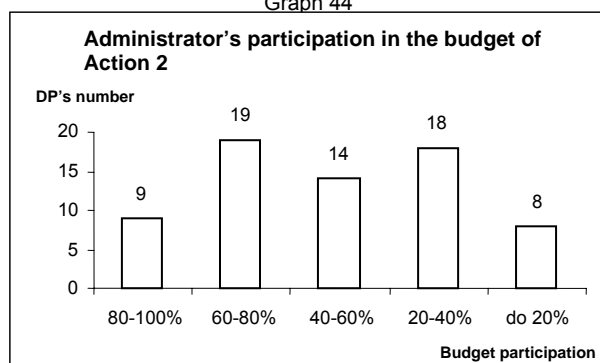
Administrator's participation in the budget of Action 2

In our opinion, the indicator describing the participation of the Administrator in the submitted budget for Action 2 shows the level of direct control of the leader over the project.

The average value of all surveyed projects was 51%. However, there are significant differences in terms of Theme (from 37% in Theme F to 69% in Theme I) and the type of lead partner institution (from 36% of companies to 54% of NGOs).

The situation in which the Administrator decides about the way of spending over 80% of resources marginalises the role of the remaining entities as real partners having influence on DP's operation. This can be observed in 9 cases (5 in Theme A, 3 in Theme D and 1 in Theme G). However, it is difficult to interpret due to very limited data in this respect.

Graph 45

Survey: Average planned Administrator's participation in the budget of Action 2

Graph 46

Survey: Average planned Administrator's participation in the budget of Action 2
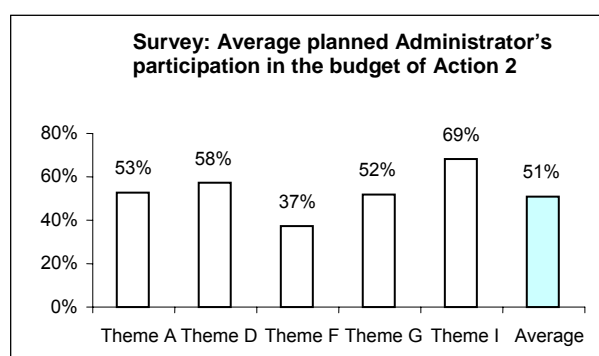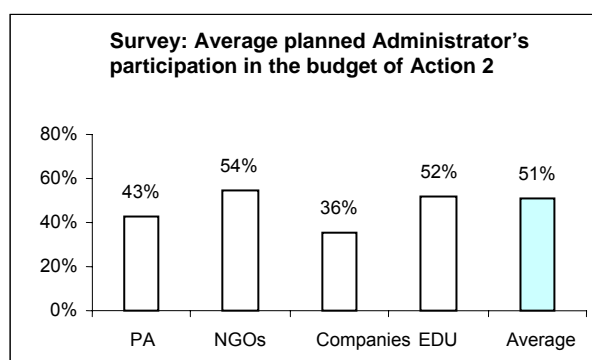
The indicator "Administrator's participation in the budget of Action 2" should be interpreted with much caution. It happens that in the leader's budget there are hidden resources for investment or for next partners who are to be invited to participate in the project in the future.

Partners' participation in works on DP's strategy
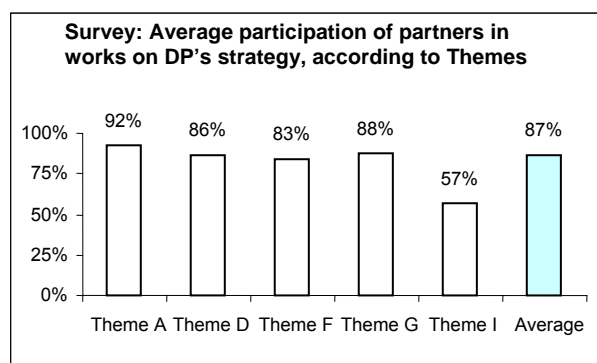
Graph 47
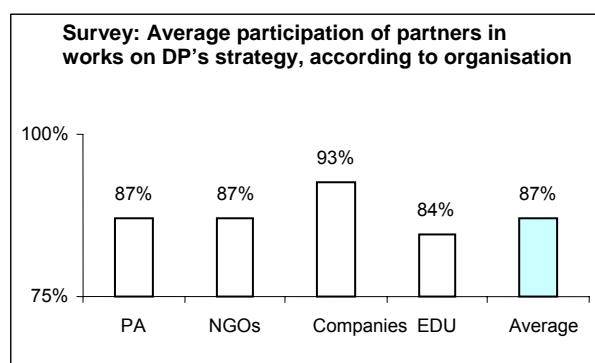
Graph 48

Another indicator which gives us information about the real scope of the "partnership" in the project is "average percentage participation of partners in works on DP's strategy". As shown in Graphs 47 and 48, the average value of indicator for the whole programme is 87%. As we said earlier, the remaining 13% are probably "supporting" organisations which were not always interested in active participation in works on the concept of DP and which limited their actions to provision of particular products and services in a specified time.

It is worth highlighting that our knowledge on the scope of participation of partners in strategy design is based on Administrator's opinion. Evaluation did not cover regular survey of partners' opinion.

Including beneficiaries in project implementation

Probably one of the most important indicators that helps to assess the level of "partnership" on the level of individual projects is openness of DP to representatives of target groups. The basis for incorporating empowerment into Basic Principles of EQUAL was a conviction that those who personally face exclusion can help in looking for effective solutions allowing target groups to return to the labour market. At the same time, the fact that they are treated subjectively, like partners, is favourable to the process of social and vocational reintegration.

In applications to Action 1, all project initiators declared that they would create a system which would guarantee participation of representatives of target groups in partnerships' operations. While looking at how these declarations have been achieved in practice, we asked the respondents about the scale of participation of final beneficiaries in DP's operations. The respondents had to fill out check list by ticking these forms of cooperation with final beneficiaries that were used in the project.

We adopted the following steps of possible participation of representatives of a target group in partnerships' operations:

1. Beneficiaries are service recipients (no empowerment)
2. Beneficiaries are consulted in order to identify preferences and needs of the project's clients
3. Beneficiaries assess the quality of services provided by project promoters
4. Beneficiaries are engaged in the process of project implementation (they are executors of selected tasks)
5. Beneficiaries (their representatives) participated in the activities of a working group that prepared DP's strategy
6. Beneficiaries participate in project management (they have representatives in DP's Steering Committee)

Survey. Scale of final beneficiaries' participation in DP's works

Service recipients	100%
Are consulted	85%
Assess	72%
Participate in strategy	56%
Execute tasks	54%
Co-manage	44%
Other forms	10%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%
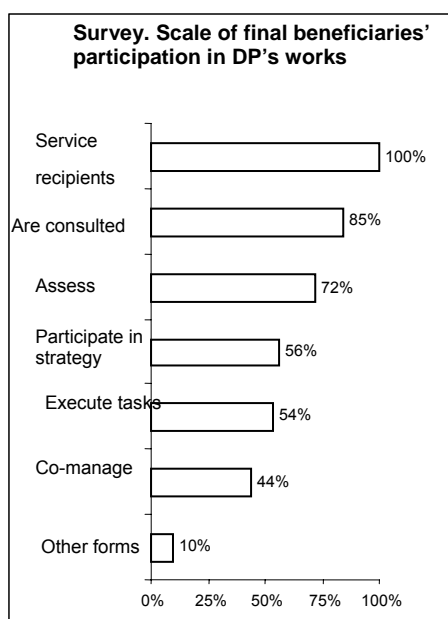
Graph 49

As shown in Graph 49, while in all projects beneficiaries are "beneficiaries" - that is service recipients, when their participation was becoming more and more sophisticated, the number of cases successively decreased.

While asking recipients about the scale and character of needs is well established practice, the legitimacy of the question about the quality of service provided is recognised only by 7 out of 10 surveyed partnerships.

More than a half of DPs allowed representatives of beneficiaries for direct participation in activities of working group responsible for strategy preparation. Although the scale of including final beneficiaries in strategic activities is not impressive, it is still a big and positive surprise. While studying cases, only 3 out of 8 partnerships analysed in this respect (38%) could provide documents for participation of beneficiaries' representatives in the process of strategy creation.

According to the survey, DPs very often (more than half cases) plan to use ultimate beneficiaries as contractors of selected project tasks. In-depth analysis of cases shows that forms of implementation are very varied: from occasional participation of organisation and carrying out of plenary events (e.g. "Second Chance") to employing beneficiaries in created institutions (e.g. @IterEgo). In the second case, some beneficiaries would be changed from "service recipients" into "service providers", serving as a support for the next beneficiaries. Of course, we can talk about this kind of situation in the context of implementation of project tasks by beneficiaries (support for other representatives of a target group), and not creation of permanent workplaces for part of programme participants.

According to respondents, the most difficult is to fulfil the declaration of including beneficiaries into the process of current management. Firstly, we are at the initial, conceptual stage of project implementation, so in most cases recruitment of beneficiaries has not been carried out yet. Of course, it excludes their direct participation in activities of Management Group. If, despite that, in 4 out of 10 surveys, respondents declare participation of ultimate beneficiaries in project management, then they might be referring to their plans for Action 2, or they are thinking about direct participation of beneficiaries - through community organisations that represent them and which already participate in DP.

Of course, taking into account specificity of part of the projects which are addressed to particularly difficult target groups (e.g. people after mental illness), we should not expect that 100% of projects will ensure participation of representatives of target group in formal management structures of DP. It seems that the so-far level of indicator achieved is too low.

"Emphasising the role of final beneficiaries in the process of project management seems exaggerated. Previous experience of partners shows that representatives of ultimate beneficiaries are rather inactive and take too much for granted. So, while beneficiaries' opinions may be a valuable clue for optimising methods of project implementation, their direct participation in management groups seems pointless."

(from commentaries to Surveys)

In order to express the scale of "including beneficiaries" in the process of project management, we adopted a point system while analysing submitted answers. According to the adopted formula, DP received one point for each level of participation of representatives of a target group. So, if in partnership x, beneficiaries apart from benefiting from project services, were consulted in order to assess their needs and preferences, such DP received 2 points. If in other project, surveys of target groups were not conducted, but participation of their representatives in assessing services was expected or some members were offered to co-provide parts of services (e.g. trained beneficiaries become trainer and provide training for next recipients), then such project was granted 3 points. DP could receive a maximum number of 5 points provided that it executed at least 5 out 6 possible forms of inclusion of ultimate beneficiaries in project activities.

Survey: Scale of beneficiaries' participation in DP's works (1-5 scale)

Theme A	Theme D	Theme F	Theme G	Theme I	Average
4,0	3,8	3,7	4,3	3,0	3,9

Graph 50

Survey: Scale of beneficiaries' participation in DP's works (1-5 scale)

PA	NGOs	Companies	EDU	Average
3,6	3,9	4,3	4,1	3,9
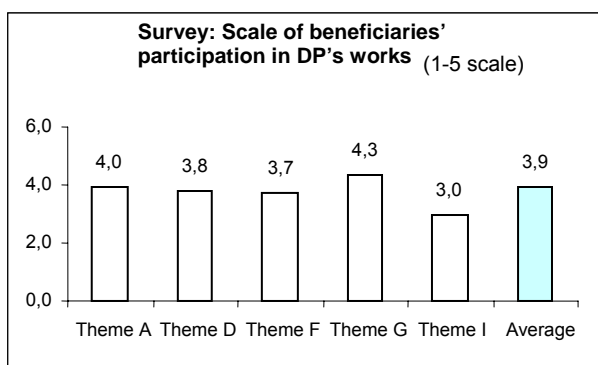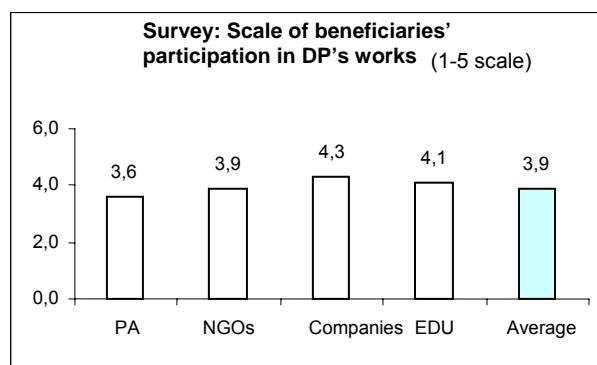
Graph 51

The results of this formula are presented in Graphs 50 and 51. It turns out that the rule of "including ultimate beneficiaries" in project activities is best executed in Themes G and A. What is interesting, among DP leaders, the greatest openness to the customer are demonstrated by companies, whereas the least open are public administration units and NGOs. Material gathered does not allow for in-depth analysis of observed differences. It seems that this may be partly due to the belief of some partners (NGO, PA) that they know so well this sector in which the project is implemented as well as the need and preferences of its target group that they do not have to build complicated formal solutions to show that their undertaking is consistent with the Theme.

In turn, greater participation of companies in this respect may be explained differently: Firstly, they do not feel too sure as executors of public assistance programmes, so including representatives of recipients in DP's structure, in some way legitimises their efforts. Secondly, they believe, what is natural for private sector, that preparing any product is meaningful only if it satisfies real needs of a target group. Only then there will be people who will want to get it.

In the presented results we may find confirmation of assumption that laid basis for rule of partnership, promoted in EQUAL CI – joining efforts of different sectors in search for solutions for problems on the labour market creates a new quality resulting from different perspectives, experience and form of actions.

Information flow between leader and Partners

Survey: What tools are used in communication between partners?

Tool	Percentage
E-mail	100%
Phone / fax	99%
Meetings - often	63%
www	57%
Meetings - rare	38%
Interactive www	19%
Other	16%
Information newsletter	6%
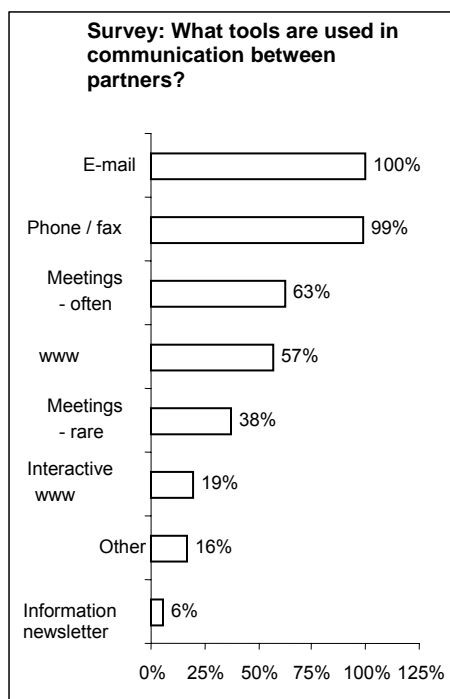
Graph 52

The area which shows a lot about the way and quality of project management is communication between people and institutions involved in its implementation.

According to specialists that were commissioned two times by the NSS to provide mediation services for partnerships in conflict (Polish Mediation Centre), a very frequent source or at least conflict catalyst is lack of effective flow of information between partners.

Most conflicts, at the initial stage, stems from contradictory interests, misunderstanding or different interpretation of programming regulations. As such, they are relatively easy to explain and solve.

If there is lack of communication between partners, the problem does not disappear but become more serious. The conflict, which initially could be solved with the use of rational arguments and compromise is changed into personnel conflict. Here emotions are dominant, and neither of parties, even if it wants to, cannot withdraw without "losing face".

In fact, the symptom of conflict analysed in one of the partnership was a total lack of communication between Administrator and other partners. The situation lasted from December 2004 to February 2005 and it provided fuel for mutual suspicions and accusations. As a result, it was too much and the Administrator was changed.

In order to assess internal information policy of partnerships, we asked respondents what form of communication they use. The answers indicate that apart from traditional telecommunication techniques (phone, fax), the basic channel of information in EQUAL is electronic mail. This tool is used by all DPs which took part in the survey. (We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that in the remaining DPs there are partnerships that do not use this form of communication).

"System of communication and full information, adopted at the beginning, high number of direct meetings and discussions of all Partners, achieving consensus and Steering Group as an opinion forming body, representing all Partners would ensure stable and friendly atmosphere favourable to peaceful management of project implementation".

(Commentaries from surveys)

Indirect proof that confirms this result is a high level of return of surveys which were submitted and returned with the use of email. It would mean that application of state-of-the-art information techniques and data transmission (website, applications generators, electronic reporting etc.) in programme management should not be a problem of competence to the partnerships. In fact, according to NSS reports, problems with IT solutions at the stage of submitting applications to the programme were no due to lack of skills on the part of DP, but rather due to defective structure of the software applied or incorrect way of its implementation.

Equally popular and probably the most important, from the point of view of effectiveness, form of communication were direct meetings of partners. In the survey we focused on meetings of "all partners", with division into two opposite types: "often" (once a month or more) and "rare" (rarer than once a month). It turned out that each partnership uses this kind of communication, whereas proportion of DPs that meet more often and rarer is like 62 to 38.

Survey: Number of meetings with participation of all partners

DP's number
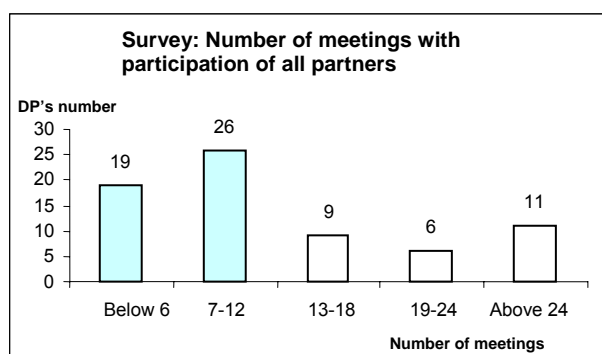
Graph 53

Opinions presented in survey's questionnaire can be easily verified by summarising them with the number of meetings presented in Data Table. If we assume that the period of project implementation was about 6 months, it will turn out that 27% of surveyed partnerships organised meetings of all partners once a month or rarer. The next 37% of DPs held meetings with all partners at least once, but no more than twice a month. What is interesting, 15% of partnerships declare that they had at least 24 meetings.

It would mean that either Management Group held meetings in the same DP once a week, or apart from Management Group, there were also Working Groups that gathered all partners.

The average number of meeting of partners for the whole programme was 13.7, so on average twice a month. We positively interpret the average values of those indicators. For the whole programme, they prove good communication, great intensity of activities and actual participation of partners.

As much as 57% of partnerships claim that they have a website where interested parties may access information about the project implementation. One third of websites is interactive and according to respondents allows for bilateral communication. If this is true, and there are no reasons to suspect that it is not the case, then it is a very powerful tool for promoting the programme and idea that it is to be spread.

The least frequent used communication tool in EQUAL projects was "information newsletter", regular issuing of publication that promoted DP's progress was declared by only 4 partnerships (6% of all respondents).

Item "other forms of communication" was marked by 12 respondents, additionally indicating informal contacts, bilateral meetings of partners, regular meetings of working group coordinators as well as intranet and internet discussion groups. In one case, as an example of internal communication, one of the respondents indicated the fact of sending periodic reports of project implementation to all partners.

Partial Summary

Actual participation of partners in project implementation (indicator analysis)

Average participation of partners in Steering Group is almost 93%. *In 10 surveyed projects the value of indicator is lower than 100%. We suggest analysing them in detail. We also think that the scope of competence and rules for operation of Steering Group should be analysed (e.g. procedures of operation in the case of conflict). According to our understanding of programming documents, the body of all partners should act as a "parliament" of DP and should be able to supervise managing authorities (Project Manager, Presidium) and take decisions of strategic importance.*

Average participation of Administrator in proposed budget of Action 2 is at the level of 51%. *This is of course much lower value than 12.5% that would result from equal division of resources between all partners (average number of national partners is 8.3). Taking into account a double role of institution as a project leader (Administrator, and at the same time one of the partners), its budget should be enough to cover costs of DP's management and expenses related to substantive activities which are under responsibility of the leader. In other words, If well justified, we can also understand granting Administrator even 50-60% of the whole budget. However, if Administrator's participation exceeds this level, the inevitable question is what is the role of partners and meaning of partnership as such. It seems that in the projects where Administrator has ¾ of the budget (or more), it has in fact full control over the project, whereas other organisations are marginalised and their role is that of a typical subcontractor.*

> *Indicator "average percentage participation of partners in works on DP's strategy" turned out to be at the level of 87%, which is lower than expected 100%, but still a satisfactory value.*
>
> *Indicator (point) "including beneficiaries to project implementation" reached a value of 3.9 points.* It would be an exaggeration to anticipate that in each project the beneficiaries are included in partnership's operations in each possible way. A standard way should be to include them at least in the evaluation of service quality. It would also be extremely useful to guarantee presence of institutions or persons representing "beneficiaries' point of view" during debates of a Steering Group.
>
> *In our opinion*, <u>internal communication</u> *between partners is correct and we do not have any doubts in this respect at current stage. However, we have to remember that the last two months of the quarter were very intense in terms of meetings because of final works on the strategy. It would be good if also during the next months, the average number of meetings per month was at the level of >1.5. In order to guarantee the minimum level of knowledge about the progress of the project among all partners a new custom could be made widespread, mainly, that the copy of a periodic report submitted to the NSS was also sent to all partners.*

3.4.3 What management problems were faced by partnerships during Action 1 and how were they solved?

The last element of management system analysis on the level of DP is presentation of survey results in terms of number and nature of problems experienced by partnership during Action 1.
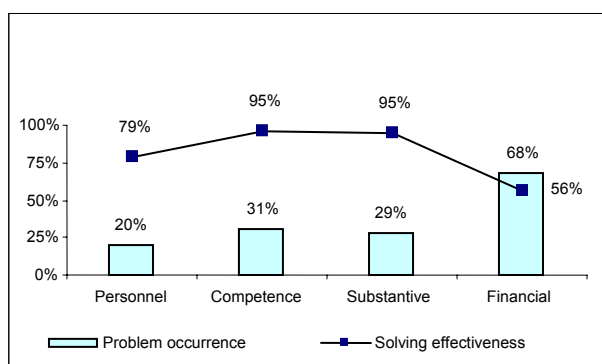
Graph 54

The most common obstacle for partnerships were problems related to financing of activities, caused by delayed signing of agreement with NSS and long procedure of claim for payment verification. Delays between NSS and DPAdministrator caused long periods of payment settlement applied by DPs in relation to partners and external service providers.

The second group of problems were those related to competence ambiguities between institutions involved in the project.

We have to mention that the reasons of these disputes were different. Sometimes the problem were Administrators' practices that were not democratic. In some situations it was partners who did not accept the role specified in the project and tried to achieve their own goals. In some cases it was related to the specificity of operation of local government units which tried to subordinate the objectives of partnership to their own mission.

Substantive disputes were relatively uncommon which is not a positive indicator of substantive debates carried out internally by partnerships. In their commentaries, the respondents described two cases. One of them was related to differences in opinion on the selection of a target group, whereas the other one related to the nature of the project (research or assistance).

In one out of five DPs, personnel conflicts aroused. According to respondents, their reason mainly stemmed from misunderstanding of the idea of partnership or lack of approval for position of representatives of involved organisations in the project.

Partnerships were most effective in terms of solving substantive and competence disputes. The problems were usually solved by discussion and negotiation, whereas a favourable factor was progress of works on strategy and preparation of a DPA.

Personnel conflicts were even worse. They had emotional background and very often they resulted in partner's withdrawal or change of administrator (according to data received from NSS, during Action 1 there were 12 cases of change of project leader. Coordinator of DP's activities was changed as many as 51 times).

We can talk about some kind of helplessness of partnerships when it comes to problems caused by lack of financing. If the act of singing the agreement with NSS was prolonging, the only effective way was to find external sources (loan, financing activities by Administrator). However, this could only be done by bigger organisations which had credit capacity or free resources.
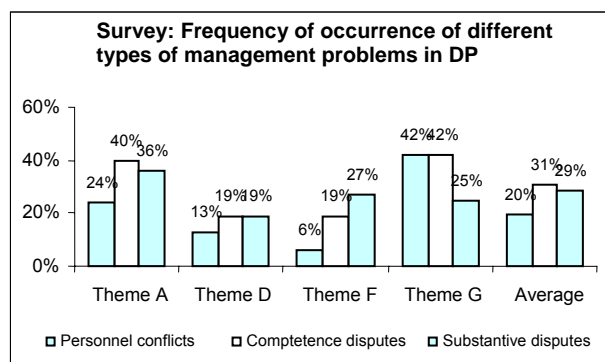
Graph 55

Graph 56

Graph 55 presents frequency of occurrence of different types of disputes in four Themes, according to types of lead partner institution. For reasons of Graph's clarity, we deliberat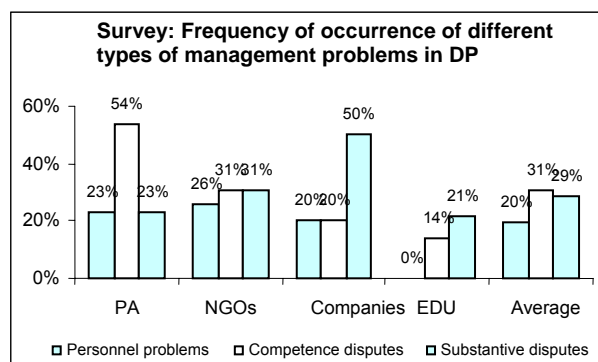ely omitted disputes related to financing, which were dominant in all Themes, regardless of which organisation was Administrator.

While in Themes A and D the structure problems is compliant with the one observed on the level of the whole programme (competence-substantive-personnel), in Theme F we can find more substantive disputes, and in Theme G there are relatively more personnel conflicts.

According to the type of organisations, substantive disputes were dominant in projects executed by educational institutions and private companies. Their role in DP's managed by NGOs is also significant. In the case of public administration units, what is characteristic is a large number of disputes of competence character. It is worth highlighting that in partnerships coordinated by educational institutions, there were no instances of personnel conflicts.

3.4.4 Analysis of management systems in partnerships

Summary of three parts of analysis leads to many interesting conclusions.

Respondents' beliefs:

The greatest number of supporters of partnership idea (convinced about a positive influence of partnership approach on effectiveness of actions) can be found in Themes A and F, especially among representatives of NGOs and educational institutions.

Persons involved in the implementation of actions within Themes D and G as well as representatives of private companies are more sceptical as to practical benefits of partnerships.

Management styles:

The greatest number of elements which are favourable to partnership were used in management mechanisms in Theme A (more supporters of partnership concept) but also in Themes D and G (where respondents have relatively lower belief in the effectiveness of approach based on partnership). "Participatory" management solutions are preferred by NGOs and educational institutions.

The situation was different in Theme F, where despite general belief in the effectiveness of partnership approach, management solutions with higher degree of centralisation were implemented. This situation is mainly observed in projects coordinated by private companies.

Level of actual implementation of partnership (on the basis of indicators):

Regardless of leader's beliefs and accepted management style, indicators describing the level of actual implementation of partnership (participation of Administrator in budget of Action 2, % of partners who engaged in works on strategy, the scope of including beneficiaries in DP's operation) reached the highest value in Themes A, G and F, particularly in project executed by private companies.

The lowest values of indicators describing the actual level of partnership approach occurrence were observed in Theme D and projects managed by NGOs.

Educational institutions, in spite of their strong belief in the effectiveness of partnership and high level of elements of joint formula in management mechanisms, achieved mixed effects in terms of actual participation of partners in project implementation.

Summary of results of management systems analysis in DP, according to measures

Measure	Belief in partnership effectiveness	Partnership elements in management systems	Administrator's participation in A2 budget	Partners' participation in works on strategy	Level of beneficiaries' participation	Total Indicators	Small scale of problems and conflicts
Theme A	+	+		+	+	++	-
Theme D	-	+	-			-	
Theme F	+	-	+			+	+
Theme G	-	+		+	+	++	-
Theme I			-			-	

Summary of results of management systems analysis in DP, according to lead partner institution in DP

Organisation type	Belief in partnership effectiveness	Level of partnership elements in management mechanism	Administrator's participation in A2 budget	Partners' participation in works on strategy	Level of beneficiaries' participation	Total Indicators	Small scale of problems and conflicts
Administration Units			+			+	-
NGOs.	+	+	-		-	- -	
Private companies	-	-	+	+	+	+++	+
Educational Institutions	+	+		-	+	+/-	+

Management efficiency:

According to Themes:

If we assume that the measure of management efficiency is frequency and nature of conflicts which aroused during implementation of Action 1, then it will turn out that the least effective management was found in Theme A (although there is a large number of supporters of partnership idea, high level of "pro-partnership" management mechanisms and high level of actual participation of partners in project management) and in Theme G (where there are few enthusiasts of partnership as an effective method of operation, but there is high level of "pro-partnership" management mechanisms and high level of actual participation of partners in project management).

In comparison, the most effective management (least number could be found in Theme F, where project leaders, less frequent than in other Themes, introduced solutions and mechanisms favourable to participatory management style. What is interesting is the fact that more centralised management mechanisms were accompanied by quite strong belief in effectiveness of approach based on partnership and high level of actual participation of partners in project management.

According to organisation type:

Management problems were usually faced by DPs managed by public administration units, which were not significantly different from average in terms of opinions on effectiveness of partnership approach, frequency of usage of more "democratic" solutions and indices's value indicating at actual participation of partners in project management (except for low participation of Administrator in Action 2). The problems were mainly related to competence issue and unclear status of public administration units in EQUAL CI.

The second group of institutions where management conflicts were frequent are NGOs characterised by strong belief in the effectiveness of partnership concept, frequent use of "democratic" solutions and high level of actual participation of partners in project management.

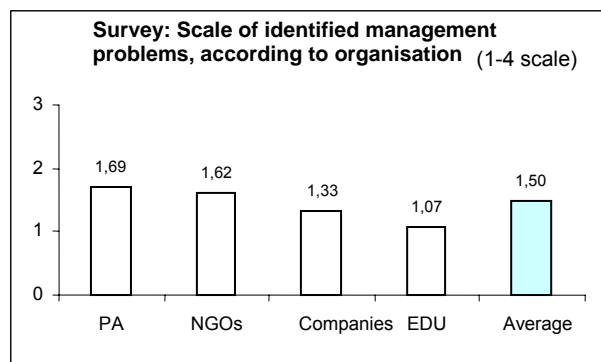Educational institutions and private companies turned out to be very effective in management (few conflicts). There is a significant difference between these institutions, although they both believe in partnership as an approach that increases effectiveness of operation. Private companies very often used more centralised management procedures. Despite that, they achieved high values of participation indices of partners in all surveyed aspects. In comparison, educational institutions, although consistent with introducing "open", "participatory" management mechanisms, achieved worse effects in terms of actual participation of partners in project implementation.

Survey: Scale of identified management problems, according to Theme (1-4 scale)

Theme	Value
Theme A	1,80
Theme D	1,38
Theme F	1,00
Theme G	1,67
Average	1,50

Graph 57

Survey: Scale of identified management problems, according to organisation (1-4 scale)

Organisation	Value
PA	1,69
NGOs	1,62
Companies	1,33
EDU	1,07
Average	1,50
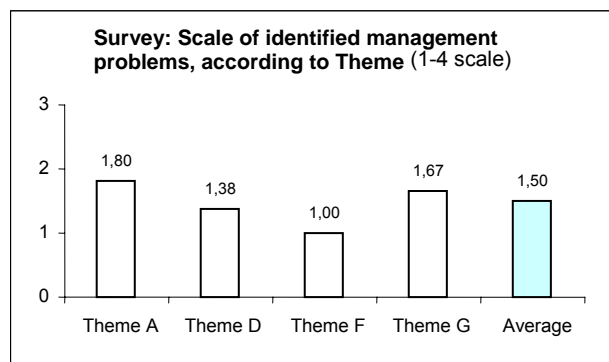
Graph 58

Summary of issues related to DP's management

Most of EQUAL leaders (about 70%) regards the value of partnership approach as a basis for effective DP's management. Other respondents treat "partnership" more as means rather than objective of operation. They quite often make use of elements of centralised model based on strong leadership and precise division of responsibilities and rights in their decision-making process and way of organisation of substantive activities.

In terms of measures, the greatest belief in positive influence of partnership on the effectiveness of actions can be found among representatives of projects from Themes A and F.

In Theme A, this belief is visible in applied management solutions.

However, in Theme F the implemented, more centralised decision-making systems are not quite compliant with the declared approach of "partnership" concept.

In Themes D and G, the number of respondents who believe in the effectiveness of use of partnership concept in management is much lower. Despite that, actually executed management models often refer to solutions which are based on joint form of decision-making process.

Comparing answers according to type of organisation, we can see that private companies, both on the level of declarations and the level of actual selected solutions, are not strong supporters of partnership concept. The situations looks different when it comes to NGOs and educational institutions. Their representatives believe in partnership and they are active practitioners of this idea.

Effectiveness:

Strengths:

Almost 64% of respondents claim that their partnership guarantees equal voting right in the decision-making process to all participants (in terms of strategic decisions related to DP as a whole). Administrator's advantage in this respect can be found in 28% DPs. Almost every ten partnership (8%) has a management system which guarantees the Administrator full control over decisions of strategic character.

Similar situation can be observed in results of analysis of organisation of work in terms of partnership product (substantive actions) – the model based on joint working group (58%) is predominant, in 37% of DPs, Administrator fulfils the role of coordinator, whereas in remaining cases (4-5%) a formula which is actually applied is "main contractor-subcontractors".

Average values of indicators describing the participation of partners in project implementation in the whole programme are without reservations (except for two aspects: "Administrator's participation in A2 budget" and "scale of including ultimate beneficiaries", described below).

- *Average participation of partners in Steering Group is almost 93%. In 10 surveyed projects, the value of indicator "participation of partners in Steering Group" is lower than 100%. (We suggest detailed analysis of such cases).*

- *Indicator "average percentage participation of partners in works on DP's strategy" turned out to be at the level of 87%, which in our opinion is a satisfactory value.*

An example of effects achieved by private companies (more centralised management procedures with a high value of indicators describing actual participation of partners in project management) seems to suggest that "partnership" may be also effectively executed if project leader's level of control over decision-making process, financial flows and substantive activities implementation is formally higher.

Weaknesses

Respondents agree that when it comes to the internal system of financing of DP, it is under full responsibility of Administrator which has a decisive vote in this respect (90% of cases).

From the point of view of quantitative indicators describing participation of partners in project implementation, two issues are somewhat doubtful:

- *Average participation of Administrator in proposed budget of Action 2 is at the level of 51%. If well justified, we can also understand granting Administrator with 50-60% of the whole budget. However, in 14 projects (21% of surveyed DPs) the participation of Administrator in the budget of Action 2 exceeds 75%, which raises question about the role of partners and the meaning of partnership itself (full control of administrator over project, marginalisation of other partners)*

- *Indicator (point) "including beneficiaries to project implementation" reached a value of 3.9 points, which, in our opinion, leaves a lot of room for improving DP's operation in this respect (We suggest accepting a rule of participation of ultimate beneficiaries in evaluation of the quality of DP's services and guaranteeing presence of representatives of ultimate beneficiaries in ultimate debates of Steering Group).*

As illustrated by educational institutions, introducing elements of "democracy" in management procedures, although favourable to actual participation of partners in project implementation, does not guarantee this effect automatically.

Efficiency:

The following analysis seems to suggest that there is a reverse relationship between the scale of use of "participatory" DP's management mechanisms and management efficiency, measured as a number and type of conflicts found in the projects. In other words, the more open "pro-partnership" management system (decision-making procedure, finance management, way of substantive works organisation) the greater probability of occurrence of conflicts and problems at the stage of project implementation.

4. Substantive Analysis of Partnerships Development

4.1. Development of DPs Strategy

Along with the already discussed process of the development of the institutional arrangement, the partnerships began to work on the product (tool, system) concept. The development and testing of the product (tool, system) is to be the main outcome of each project financed in EQUAL CI. Within the evaluation, as far as our limited time-frames and budgets allowed, we also attempted to study this crucial aspect of DP operation.

Further on we endeavour to (1) describe the process of strategy development (who, when and to what extent worked on the substantive aspect of a project); (2) assess the progress of works on the development of the detailed model of a DP's product; (3) analyse the issues touched upon by the partnerships and what we can expect on the basis of the available knowledge on EQUAL projects at the end of them (innovation, DP product potential for mainstreaming purposes).

We will tackle the following evaluation questions:

4.1.1 How did the Partnerships establish the main objectives of the project and the strategy of their accomplishment?

4.1.2 How did the institutions involved in the Development Partnership and the Transnational Cooperation Partnership participate in testing and implementation of innovative solutions? What role do particular Partners play in this process?

4.1.3 What is the progress of activities on the projects implemented by the Development Partnerships?

4.1.4 How do Partnerships plan activities in National Thematic Networks? Did Partnerships establish the rules for the dissemination of Action 2 product?

According to the Programme Complement, one of the basic effects of the partnership development process should be "the establishment of a common strategy with a view to accomplish the intended goal"[4]. Unlike the documents describing the DP structure and the cooperation rules for institutions involved in a project (e.g. bilateral agreements, DP Agreement), the common strategy sorts out the substantive aspect of the partnership. Thus, it indicates WHAT, WHY and HOW the work is to be done so that the project outcome can be the establishment, testing and inclusion, in the national and community policies, of new solutions eradicating or limiting inequality and exclusion on the labour market. Thus, we expected that one of the major aspects of the partnership consolidation in Action 1 will be a further development and improvement of the model outcomes on which the partnerships intend to work in Action 2.

We will begin our analysis with the study of the works on development of partnerships strategies.

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[4] cf. Regulation by the Minister of Economy and Labour of 21 September 2004 on the adoption of the Complement to the Operational Programme - EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Poland 2004-2006, Journal of Laws No. 214, item 2172, Chapter 3.2.

4.1.1. How did the Partnerships establish the main objectives of the project and the strategy of their accomplishment?

Time-frame of works on the partnership strategy

Case studies

In the sample of 8 partnerships under scrutiny, the works on the establishment of a strategic document usually commenced towards the end of the first quarter of 2005 and in the second quarter of 2005. Only in 4 cases, the development of the strategy was preceded with any research. Thus, it is difficult to defend the thesis that the relatively late start of works on the strategy was a result of waiting for the results of the analysis of ultimate beneficiaries needs (in two cases under study – A0283 i D0190 – the time of the launch of the strategic analysis is early – in February or at the beginning of March 2005). It seems that, for the majority of partnerships, the first quarter of 2005 was the time of the emergence of the institutional structure, the organisation of the project office and sorting out administrative, formal and financial issues related to the negotiations of agreements.

The time-frame of works on the strategies differed to a large extent: 1 up to 1.5 months for "E-Dialogue" and "Partnership in the Valley of Three Rivers", up to almost 6 months for the project implemented by the Suwałki County. On average, we may assume that the development of the Strategy was a matter of ca. 2.5 months.

Survey analysis
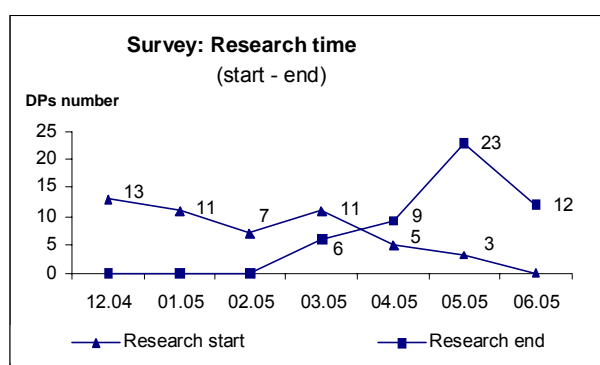
Graph 59

50 out of 73 surveyed partnerships declare that prior to the strategy development they did some research of a more or less extensive nature. Graph 59 presents the progress of this programme stage. As presented in the Graph, 13 DPs launched the analysis of ultimate beneficiaries as early as in December. 62% of partnerships from the group which performed research commenced it by the end of February. The second group of research projects was launched in March, and the latest process analyses were commenced as late as in April and May.

The first reports on the research were developed in March and April 2005, however, the majority of analyses (70%) were ready as late as in May and June.

Graph 60

On average, the time-frame of this stage of Action 1 was ca. 15 weeks, i.e. nearly 4 months, i.e. almost one month longer than the phase of developing the strategy document. For comparison purposes, the time needed to agree the final Development Partnership Agreements is only 1.5 months.

For all measures, except for D, the research phase was the most time-consuming element of the partnerships' substantive activities.

The untypical distribution of work in Theme D can be attributed to only one partnership (D0690) "UL Social Cooperative", which reported in the questionnaire that it commenced its activities as early as in June 2004.
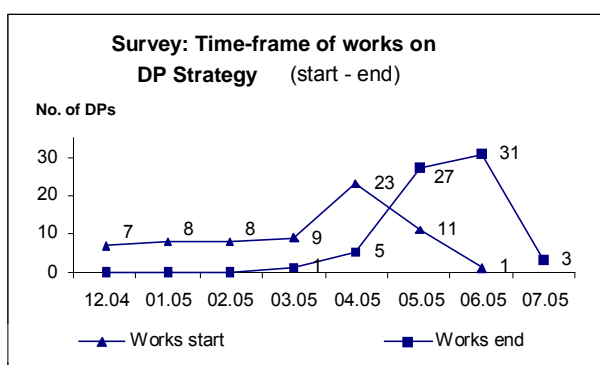
Graph 61
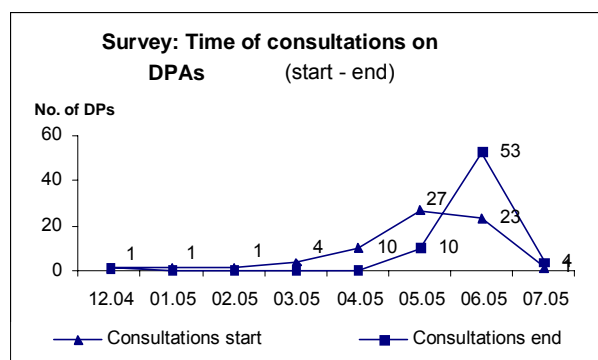
Graph 62

As Graphs 61-62 illustrate, works on the strategy were usually launched without waiting for the end of research. By the end of March, the development process of the strategy document was initiated in 48% of DPs and 34% of DPs launched the same in April. By the end of May, only 50% of all projects developed strategies. In other cases, the final versions of the document were agreed simultaneously with works on Development Partnership Agreement. Three DPs finished the strategic planning phase as late as in July.

The financial aspect of works on the partnerships strategies:

The capital expenditure on research is the second aspect, apart from time, in terms of which we can discuss the scale of research implemented by the partnerships.

As presented in Graph 63, only 53% of DPs (36 out of 68 replies) made any capital expenditure on research.

Graph 63

If it is true that as many as 68% of partnerships did research in Action 1 (50 out of 73 respondents provided the research dates), it means that ca. 15% of all DPs performed the analyses without any costs or financed t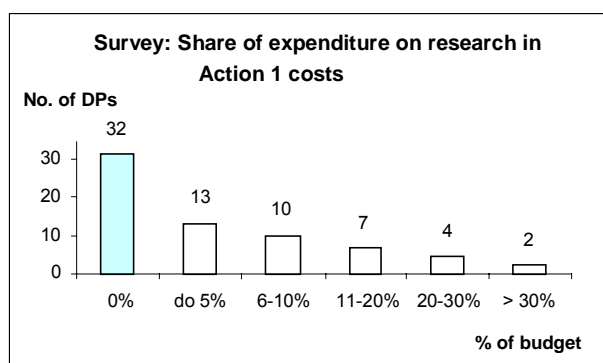hem with own resources. As we cannot see any reason why partnerships should avoid reporting to the NSS costs of actual analytical activities, we assume that at least part of the respondents exaggerated a bit in their declarations on undertaking research under Action 1.

Naturally, this misunderstanding might have been the result of the absence of a precise definition of the term „research" in the questionnaire. It probably resulted in the assumption that any contacts with potential beneficiaries are some sort of "research".

With the total capital expenditure on Action 1 at the level of PLN 17.2 m (mid-July figures), the expenditure on research added up to ca. PLN 1.4 m, i.e. about 8.4% of all costs of Action 1.

Average cost of the implementation of Action 1 per project amounted to ca. PLN 252,000, and average capital expenditure on research were at the level of ca. PLN 21,000 (average figures were calculated for 68 partnerships, which disclosed their financial figures in the questionnaire).

When considering only the partnerships, which actually did the research, their average cost added up to ca. PLN 38,000, which on average accounted for 10.7% of the budget of DPs for Action 1.

Survey: Average share of research costs in Action 1 by themes

	10,1%	12,4%	11,9%	8,8%	10,7%

Theme A   Theme D   Theme F   Theme G On average

Graph 64

Survey: Average share of research costs in Action 1 by organizations types

	9.7%	10.9%	8.3%	12.6%	10.7%

PA   NGOs   Comp.   EDU   Average
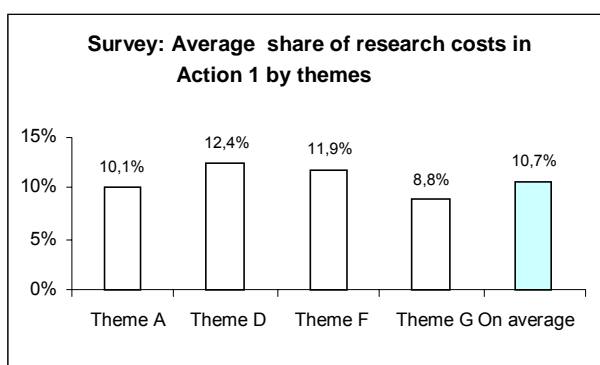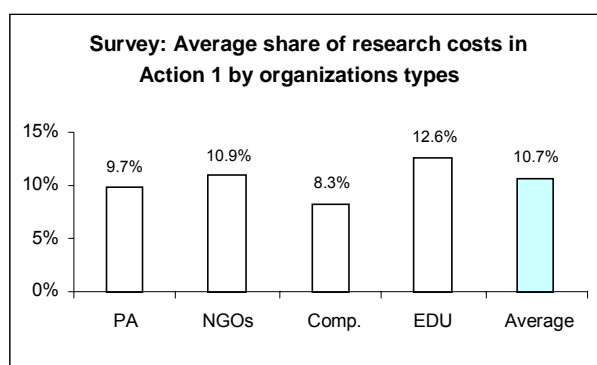
Graph 65

As presented in Graphs 64 and 65, in terms of financial figures, relatively the biggest resources were engaged in the research in Themes D and F, especially in these projects where an educational institution was a leader.

The smallest expenditure was made in the case of Themes A and G. Private companies and local authorities were the most economical in this respect.

The description of the strategy development process in projects under scrutiny (case study)

Project number	DP abbreviated name	Start date for strategy development	Time-frame of strategy development	No. of people involved in strategy development	Participation of key partners	% of partners involved in strategy development	The impact of foreign partners upon the strategy
A0283d2	PFS	2005-02-01	89	8	100%	100%	Slight
A0340d2	Suwałki	2004-12-23	178	18	77%	100%	No impact
D0190d2	Tratwa	2005-03-01	69	10	86%	100%	No impact
D0202d2	3 Rzeki (3 Rivers)	2005-05-10	48	6	55%	27%	Slight
F0059d2	E-Dialog	2005-04-15	35	5	50%	50%	Slight
F0086d2	WSZiA	2005-03-24	52	15	17%	17%	Substantial
G0588d2	@lterEgo	2005-05-05	52	15	100%	100%	Slight
I0079d2	@lterCamp	2005-05-01	50	12	100%	100%	No impact

ANALYSIS	Q4 2004	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	No impact
	1	72	11	73%	74%	3
	Q1 2005					Slight
	3					4
	Q21 2005					Substantial
	4					1

64

4.1.2. How did the institutions involved in the Development Partnership and the Transnational Cooperation Partnership participate in testing and implementation of innovative solutions? What is the role of particular Partners in this process?

Case studies

In 5 out of 8 cases, the majority of partners participated actively in the analysis process. In the remaining three cases, a few organisations were held responsible for the strategy development; these organisations were directly originating from the project-initiating group and play the role of key partners in the project.

In the case of "E-Dialog", the lower ratio is a result of the extension of the partnership in May with three additional organisations. Naturally, as they joined DPs late, they were not able to participate in earlier works on the first draft of the strategy.

In other two projects, the restriction on the number of organisations involved in the development of the strategy document was related to the large number of institutions participating in the project. In such undertakings, the participants are usually divided into the leading group and the group of institutions, which contribute to selected process elements. In this context, it is not surprising that, with the limited time-frame for the Strategy development, partnerships adopted the attitude which involved a fast preparation of the draft version of the document by a small team designed for this purpose and further reaching of the final version within the framework of the DPA negotiations.

However, it should be noted that in the case of Powiat Suwalski project, despite the substantial number of partners (13), all partners were committed to the strategy development process. This was noticed by the Evaluator, who assessed the very process of strategic analysis in this case of "exemplary".

> „The process was very, very „inclusive"; sometimes it was evaluated (internal evaluation) as too engaging for partners, but it was an opinion of only 2-3 institutions out of 13, the others were satisfied with such a scope of their inclusion in the DP works preparation. (source: The Report on 'Powiat Suwalski' Project)

Questionnaires study
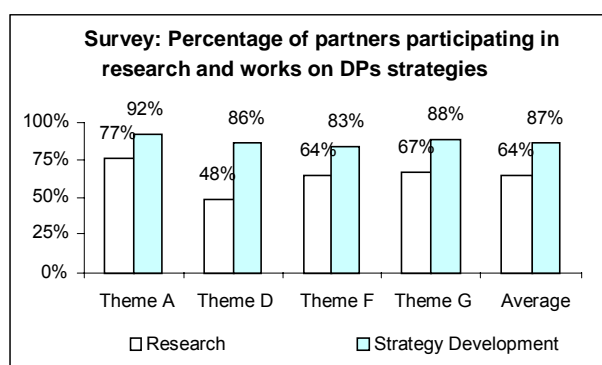
Graph 66

The answers given by almost 70 partnerships show that, in the whole programme, the participation of partners in the works on the strategy amounted to 87% as compared to 64% participation in the research phase.

As commented in the section describing the partnership structure, among the entities participating in the partnerships activities, we distinguished three types of participants:

Lead partners   They originate from the initiating group, exert the most significant impact upon the DP activities, and assume responsibility and the largest burden related to the project implementation.

Key partner	In this group, apart from the above-mentioned „lead partners", there are also the institutions which were invited to participate in the project, due to their potential, significant contribution to the implementation of the intended undertaking. Generally, these are entities which have appropriate expertise or resources, in view of the project requirements.
Supporting partner	Plays the role similar to the external service providers. Sometimes, they are not involved directly in the substantive aspect of the project and their participation is limited to the provision of a specific service or product at a given time. It seems that this group of partners should be analysed in more detail in one of further evaluations.

Roughly, we may assume that mainly Lead Partners and Key Partners were involved in research, as they had access to data, expertise and knowledge on the needs of ultimate beneficiaries or a unique research potential. On the one hand, it was related to the limited resources in the first quarter of 2005, and on the other hand, to a substantial significance of research for the future DP Strategy.

Generally, other Key Partners and certain Supporting Partners joined the process of strategy development. However, the scale of the actual participation of the entities in the strategic analyses depended, to a large extent, on the budget, time-frame and management style preferred by the Leader and other Lead Partners.

It seems that, although in the first quarter of 2005, the barrier hindering the very initiating and any possible "participation" in the strategic analysis process could lie in the problems with the access to financial resources, in the second quarter of 2005, the main hindrance was associated with limited time for DPs to develop the Strategy and negotiate DPAs.

In 7 out of 8 projects under study, the representatives of the partnerships declared that the establishment of transnational co-operation did not affect, to any larger extent, the substantive activities in Action 1 and did not result in any substantial outcomes related to the model of the project undertaken by DP. It seems that the only explanation for the situation is not only the relatively early phase of DP establishment (it is merely relations establishment rather than substantive activities), but also the generally limited focus of substantive activities in Action 1. A question arises to what extent the project concepts presented in Action 1 application was developed in the last 6 months. This issue will be elaborated further on.

4.1.3. What is the progress of activities on the projects implemented by the Development Partnerships?

The answer to such a question may be twofold. The first of them involves the calculation of simple quantitative effects, describing the actual progress of works on DP outcomes. The other, even more important aspect is the quality of DPs Strategies and the nature of outcomes on which the partnerships intend to work in Action 2.
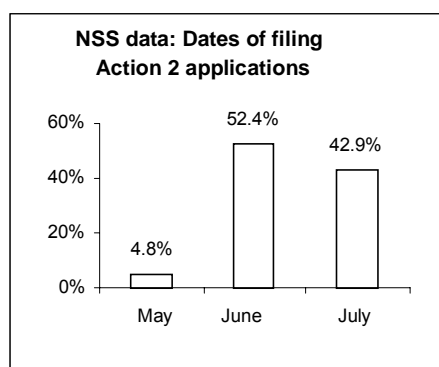
Graph 67

Progress of substantive activities in quantitative terms

Let us begin with the first issue. According to the information obtained from NSS, by the end of July 2005, 60 partnerships (5 in May) submitted the applications for Action 2. By the extended deadline, i.e. July 7, another 37 DPs submitted their applications and 8 were submitted still after that date.

By mid-July, NSS received the total number of 105 Action 2 applications. The applicants attached the following documents to the applications: DPAs signed by all partners, which contained DP Strategies, and TCAs (150 in total).

It means that as a result of the implementation of Action 1, at least 98% of partnerships developed the Strategy following a few months of substantive activities by a DP.

The Strategies were prepared in the model suggested by NSS. Thus, we can assume optimistically that each of the 150 DPAs contains the majority of the required strategy components: the discussion and diagnosis of the target group, the description of targets and the overall attitude towards their implementation, detailed plan of activities for Action 2 presenting the role and the level of commitment of each partner, the budget, risk analysis, the attitude towards the dissemination of any potential outcome, etc.

Thus, if we assume that this sort of quantitative information is sufficient, the status of activities on DP projects must be regarded as advanced. It is true that the majority of partnerships delayed Action 1 completion, but a few weeks more is a small problem in the light of the fact that over 98% of DPs developed definite concepts of work over innovative tools and systems, resulting from the in-depth analysis of the market.

Due to the limited time and budget of our research, we were not able to perform any detailed analysis of a larger number of DP strategic documents and perform in-depth studies on substantive issues touched upon by partnerships. In the qualitative analysis presented below, we generally apply knowledge obtained in the course of case studies analysis and the opinions of the partnerships expressed in the questionnaires.

The analysis of the strategy quality in projects under study with the "case study" method.

The contents of DPAs and partnership strategic documents are now being scrutinized in the process of Action 2 applications examination. Our subjective opinions on 7 cases studied by us are presented in the table on page 71.

We have already commented on an indicator which is a good illustration of the progress of activities on DP projects: whether and to what extent during Action 1, a partnership did any research and analysis. Without this sort of action, it is hard to imagine further substantive development of the concept presented in Action 1 application (although the organisational and management aspect of the undertaking can be improved). As we mentioned before, the information disclosed in the questionnaires show that ca. 53% of all partnerships incurred expenditure on research. The outcomes of the project analysis based on case studies corroborate this conclusion. Only in 4 out of 7 partnerships did research in such terms, the promoters disposed of time and money to perform analysis and studies.

The process of the strategic analysis of the area which is to be the subject of the intervention, i.e. the diagnosis of problems and relations between them, the selection and justification of targets, the outline of the overall approach aiming at the change of the situation seemed convincing to us in two cases ("Suwałki" and "WSZiA"). In other projects, the situation of the target group and proposed approach were also presented, however, either the problems diagnosis seems to be a bit superficial (either quantitative analysis or the description of the problems structure are not present), or the justification for undertaking proposed action is poor.

Only in two cases ("E-Dialog" and "WSZiA"), we decided to present a positive evaluation of the partnerships approach to the progress monitoring indicators. However, even in these cases, despite the development of the logical matrix, the measurement of the final outcomes (impact) seems to be a substantial problem. The authors of the next three projects at least tried to specify progress metrics in quantitative terms. In the last two projects, the approach to the indicators is not sufficient and this element of the strategy must be supplemented.

In our opinion, the situation in terms of defining the qualitative outcomes of the project is not optimistic. It seems that only in one project ("Tratwa"), the authors of the strategy decided to specify precisely the number of people who, as a result of the participation in the programme will find employment. In three cases, the quantitative outcomes were specified only for some components ("Suwałki"), or in an imprecise manner hindering their verification ("Druga Szansa", "@lterEgo"). The authors of the other projects assumed that at this stage, the quantitative specification of outcomes is simply not possible. Although we agree that any estimates of the impact of the project outcome not in place yet are generally subject to a high risk, we believe that the adoption of any assumptions in this respect ("what the outcomes should be like so that we can say that the system is efficient?") is necessary as a reference point for further evaluation.

The action plan was the component of the strategy which was the focus of both the instructions and the forms of NSS as well as in the documentation prepared by the partners. Despite the objections referring to the too general character of certain provisions, we can assume that the operational planning does not constitute any problem in the projects under study.

In the case of two projects, the evaluators formed objections to the quality of the risk analysis (the omission of the risk factors material in their opinion). In two other cases, the analysis presented in the strategic document was very superficial. This component was not objected in three projects.

The summary of this simplified and probably subjective analysis is the score assessment of the projects under study in the scale from 1 to 5. The average score was 3.57. This figure is a good illustration of our general impression after reading seven analysed strategic documents. (Due to the time limitations of the project and problems with the access to applications for Action 2, the evaluators did not manage to analyse the strategy for "Partnership for the Valley in Three Rivers" project).

The evaluation of the quality of DP Strategies in the partnerships studied with the "case study" method

| Project number | DP abbreviated name | Research | Strategy quality | | | | | | |
			Strategic analysis	Indicators quality	Quantitative outcomes	Plan	Risk analysis	Dissemination strategy	Overall score
A0283d2	PFS	+	+ / -	+ / -	+ / -	+	+	++	4
A0340d2	Suwałki	-	+	+ / -	+ / -	+	+ / -	+	4
D0190d2	Tratwa	+	+ / -	-	+	+	+ / -	+	3.5
D0202d2	3 Rzeki (3 Rivers)								
F0059d2	E-Dialog	-	+ / -	+	-	+	+	++	3.5
F0086d2	WSZiA	+	+	+	-	+	+	++	4.5
G0588d2	@lterEgo	+	+ / -	+ / -	+ / -	+	-	+	3
I0079d2	@lterCamp	-	+ / -	-	-	+	-	+	2.5

ANALYSIS	Plus	Plus	Plus	Plus	Plus	Plus	Plus	No. of scores
	4	2	2	1	7	3	7	7
	Minus	Minus	Minus	Minus	Minus	Minus	Minus	Mean
	3	0	2	3	0	2	0	3.57
	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	
	0	5	3	3	0	2	0	

4.1.4. How do Partnerships plan activities in the National Thematic Networks? Did Partnerships establish the rules for the dissemination of Action 2 outcomes?

The issue of the approach of partnerships to the participation in National Thematic Networks appears to be premature in the context of the scope of substantive activities implemented in Action 1.

In April 2005, preparations to launch National Thematic Networks in Poland were commenced. Decision was made on the establishement of 5 NTNs, one for each Themes of EQUAL IC.

The outline of the rules and regulations was developed on the basis of which NTNs will operate; they contain in particular the basic criteria and selection rules for NTN members. NSS appointed Secretaries responsible for the operation of particular NTNs. The Secretaries forwarded a request to DP to designate candidates for NTNs. On the basis of the candidate documents, preliminary lists of NSS members were prepared, which following consultations with MA will be presented on EQUAL MC (source: NSS Reports for Action 1*)*

Under the analysis, the partnerships managed to develop their strategies and negotiate DPAs and TCAs in the "last minute". In many cases, the models presented in Action 1 applications were developed only in organisational and management terms, without additional research and taking advantage of the opportunities resulting from the cooperation with foreign partners only to a slight extent. As a result, it is hard to expect from the projects implementators to present specific ideas for cooperation with National Thematic Networks.

All in all, the initiative in this respect is on the side of the institution managing the programme at the national level. In April, National Thematic Network developed its rules and regulations and Secretaries were appointed for 5 Thematic Networks. However, as the obligations of DPs related to the organisation of the projects and the completion of the main tasks to be implemented in Action 1 seemed to be substantial, MA-NSS decided to postpone the launching of National Thematic Networks for the third quarter of 2005. As a result, our respondents at the level of partnerships, when asked about National Thematic Networks, expressed their opinions that as a rule they are not familiar with the system operation now or their knowledge is 'vague'.

The problems related to the activities on the dissemination strategy were of a similar nature as mentioned above for the establishment of National Thematic Networks, i.e. time shortages, administrative obligations and problematic financing. If the thesis on the slight progress of the programme in substantive terms is true, it means that in the majority of cases, the process of partnerships consolidation around the detailed outcome concept to be implemented in Action 2 has not been finished yet. In this context, we are not surprised that although all studied strategies put forward the assumptions of the dissemination strategy, in the majority of cases they are quite scarce. On the whole, they are limited to the declaration of the will to disseminate the project outcomes and enlisting the standard tools to be used in this sort of action (trainings, publications, seminars, the Internet, etc.). Among the 7 analysed strategy documents, in three of them we encountered more specific ideas ("Druga Szansa" [Second Chance], "WSZiA" and "E-Dialog"), however, even in them we can only see the outline of the dissemination strategy and not the actual strategic plan.

The summary of the issues related to the establishment of DP strategy

Effectiveness

Only 53% of partnerships in Action 1 managed to do any research, and the total costs of the research accounted for 8.4% of all capital expenditure made by DPs. Among those DPs, which performed the analyses of the project subject-matter, the average resources spent on research amounted to ca. PLN 38,000, which accounts for ca. 10.7% of their budgets in Action 1. In the context of the significance of the consolidation of partnerships, with the assumed targets of Action 1, around the establishment by partners of the common project implementation strategy, the figures on the DPs capital expenditure on research do not seem to be satisfactory.

As a result of the delays in signing NSS agreements, in half of the partnerships, the substantive activities started as late as towards the end of April (compare the schedule of works on the strategy) and lasted only two months. It seems that the substantial time pressure in this situation is not beneficial for the partnerships to undertake in-depth and wide-scale substantive activities.

The strategy was developed mainly by Lead Partners (the initiating group) and the majority of the remaining Key Partners. It seems that the Supporting Partners were not so eager to become involved in substantive activities. The actual commitment of entities in the process of the strategic analysis was dependent on the time and budget available for partnerships (that is typically on how fast DP is able to sign the agreement with NSS) and on the management style implemented by the Leader and other Lead Partners.

The average score for all 7 strategies is 3.57 in the scale 1-5. Thus, in descriptive terms, it is "merely satisfactory". The following factors were decisive for the relatively low average mark for the strategies: certain number of partnerships did not do research; the low quality of monitoring indicators; no estimates of anticipated quantitative outcomes; and relatively poor risk analysis.

Although, in April, NSS rules and regulations were prepared and Secretaries for 5 National Thematic Networks were appointed, however, as the obligations of DPs in the second quarter of 2005 (projects organisation, signing agreements with NSS, financial problems) were substantial, MA-NSS decided to postpone the launching of National Thematic Networks for the third quarter of 2005.

Efficiency

On average, the research lasted 4 months, works on the strategy lasted 3 months and DPAs were negotiated for 1.5 months. The figures do not result in any objections, although we believe that the length of particular phases declared by the partnerships was inversely proportional to their intensity. It was related to substantial delays in signing agreements with NSS and the necessity to perform a number of activities of administrative and organisational nature in the first quarter of 2005.

Although in the first quarter of 2005. the barrier hindering the very initiating and the degree of partners' commitment in the strategic analysis process lied in the problems with the access to financial resources, in the second quarter of 2005, the main hindrance was associated with limited time for DPs to develop the Strategy and negotiate DPA.

4.2. Partnership projects in EQUAL CI

In this chapter, we will attempt to analyse the outcomes on which the partnerships work in EQUAL. We will characterize them one by one in terms of target groups, the type of outcomes (tools/system) and the form of the services provided for the ultimate beneficiaries. In the second part of this analysis, we will ponder on the innovation and potential lying in the EQUAL outcomes in terms of "mainstreaming". The analysis will enable us to address the following evaluation questions and issues:

4.2.1 The characteristics of the projects

4.2.2 If and how was the innovative nature of the project implemented by the Development Partnership documented? 4.2.3 The project potential in "mainstreaming" terms.

4.2.1. The characteristics of the projects

As the analysis of all strategies attached to the Action 2 applications was not possible, we only have limited knowledge on the substantive scope of the DP projects. In the questionnaire, we addressed the representatives of the partnerships with the request to formulate their definitions of "innovative product / service to be the main outcome of the Partnership operation."

Target groups

in %
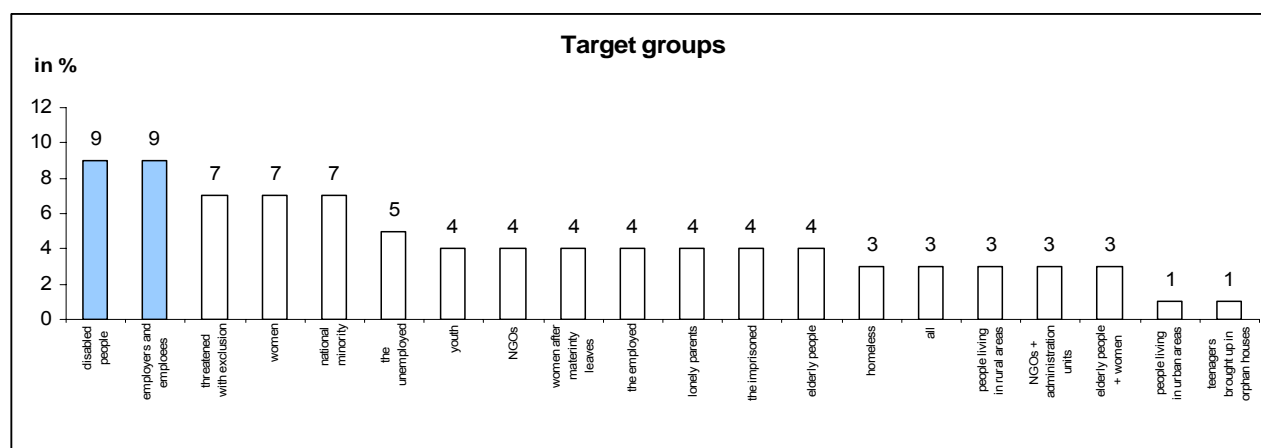
Graph 68

On the basis of the descriptions presented by respondents, we grouped the projects according to the type of the target group at which the product is addressed.
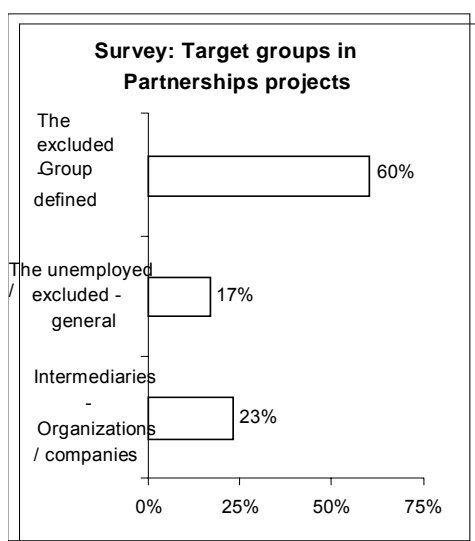
**Survey: Target groups in Partnerships projects**

Graph 69

As Graph 68 illustrates, in the first phase we distinguished 20 various beneficiaries groups; the disabled together with employers and employees (companies) are the major groups.

Further on, we sorted out the projects dividing them into three categories presented in Graph 69.

40 out of 66 projects (60%) aim at the establishment of solutions targeted at people threatened by a specific type of exclusion. Further 11 partnerships (17%) intend to work on the product which is to counteract the inequality on the labour market, but they fail to define the beneficiaries group in more specific terms. Finally, 15 projects (23%) are targeted at institutions (organisations, companies) and only via them at excluded persons.

Survey: Type of the exclusion of DP ultimate beneficiaries
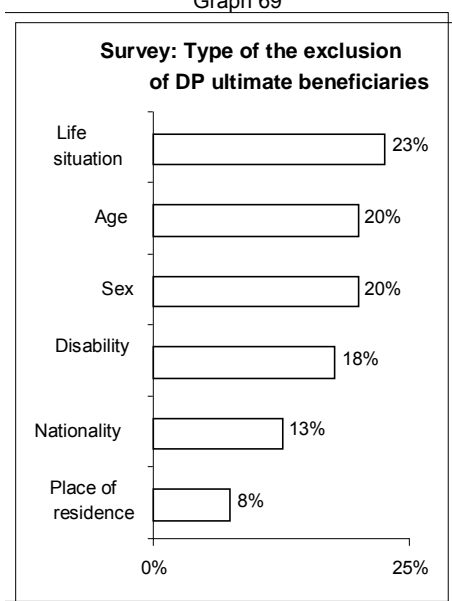
Graph 70

Among 40 partnerships that specified in the questionnaires who is the planned project beneficiary, 9 DPs intend to develop solutions targeted at persons excluded due to the specific situation in life (single loan mothers or fathers, caretakers for dependents, former prisoners, the homeless, children brought up in children's homes). 8 projects touched upon the subject matter of persons discriminated due to their age (the elderly or the youth). The same number of DPs focuses on the problems of mothers returning to work after maternity leaves or women in general. 7 projects dealt with solutions which would help the disabled to return to the labour market. 5 partnerships addresses their actions at national minorities, and 3 projects are targeted at those whose limited access to the labour market is associated with their place of residence (residents of rural areas and industrial estates).

71

As we emphasized in the introductory part of the report, one of the material features which helped us differentiate between various models of partnerships operation is a specific idea on the product to be the outcome of the programme. Thus, from this perspective, the distribution of the projects from the point of view of the product to be prepared by a partnership seems interesting.

We distinguished four types of products:

Survey: Types of products developed by Partnerships

Tools for human resources development	51%
Systemic solutions	25%
Institutional solutions	14%
Integrated tool & systemic solutions	11%

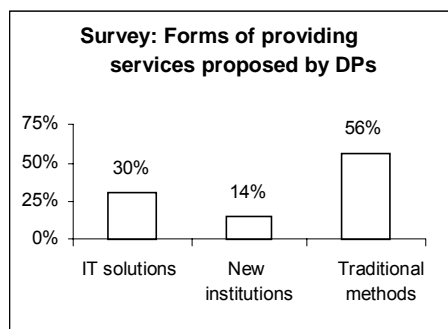0%   25%   50%   75%
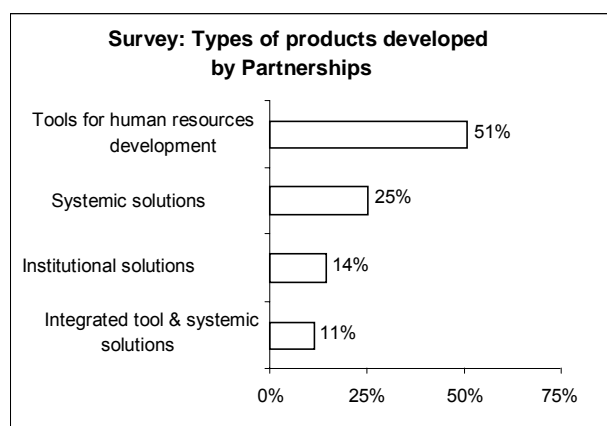
Graph 71

1. The major number of the projects (33) aim at developing specific tools: internet platform, training, action procedure or model, etc.
2. The other group are system-building solutions (16) whose authors intend to develop an all-encompassing solution for a problem or change the conditions of entering the labour market for the representatives of a given target group.

On the whole, the projects stipulate the establishment of the system (trainings, support, etc.) or a strategy, meaning the cooperation of a number of institutions or exerting an impact upon various elements affecting a given issue (legal and administrative conditions, social attitudes, tools, etc.).

3. The third type of products we distinguished are innovations of the institutional nature (9). The solutions proposed by the partnerships are mainly related to the establishment of new or the restructuring of the existing institutional entities (activity centres, social cooperatives, etc.).
4. The last group are projects aiming at the development of tools, but in the context of initiating wider-scale changes of the system-related nature (7). As the name suggests, the products of this type integrate the features of group 1 and group 2.

Survey: Forms of providing services proposed by DPs

IT solutions	New institutions	Traditional methods
30%	14%	56%

Graph 72

As the graph illustrates, the services provided to beneficiaries will be offered in various forms.

The major forms are solutions related to already existing methods (trainings, advisory services, action promoting, childcare and caretaker services), however the techniques using the state-of-the-art IT solutions (e-learning, teleworking) or of institutional nature (assistance centres, social cooperatives, etc.) are also proposed.

4.2.2. Whether and how was the innovative nature of the project implemented by the Development Partnership documented?

The main objective of EQUAL Initiative is the development of a number of innovative solutions which would counteract the inequality and the exclusion from the labour market in a more effective manner. If so, one of the key aspects of the assessment of the substantive action of partnerships is the analysis of the innovation of the products developed by DPs. Due to our limitations (time and budget) and assuming that the projects authors know their ideas best, we decided to employ the self-evaluation method.

The evaluation of the DPs products innovation

Naturally, in case of self-evaluation, the problem of reliability and comparability of outcomes is questionable. To ensure the minimum level of approach standardization, we proposed, in the questionnaire for the partnerships, the model of evaluation approach which assumes answering a number of close-end questions. Further questions were related to various aspects of the potential innovation of DP product:

Spatial aspect:	Is the product / service innovative on the: (a) European; (b) national; (c) regional; (d) or local scale?
Substantive aspect:	What is the nature of the product in the context of needs to be satisfied: (a) a totally new product; (b) redevelopment of an existing product / service; (c) taking on a solution applied by others?
Method / form of providing services:	Does, in terms of the method the benefit is provided to the partnership beneficiaries, it: (a) apply a new novel method / technology of providing services; (b) adapt an already existing method applied in another area / sector to the product needs; (c) employ a slightly altered but traditional / typical methods applied in this sector?
Beneficiary / customer	Is the product targeted at the group which: (a) has not taken advantage of state aid programmes yet; (b) was a beneficiary of state aid of a different type (e.g. they obtained financial aid and now they are to be trained); (c) was a beneficiary of similar but not identical services?
The context of the services:	Is the product delivered: (a) along with other services which results in the synergy effect and enhances their effectiveness; (b) independently of other forms of aid provided to beneficiaries?

The responses to the survey were further translated into scores and evaluated in the scale of 1 to 5. The final score was expressed in descriptive terms (from 'Very high innovation level' to 'Very low innovation level'). The method of the evaluation of the product innovation has been presented in the table below. On the other hand, Graphs 73-80 present the outcomes of the analysis.

The method of the evaluation of the DPs products innovation

Evaluation criteria	Score				
	Max. score	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
Level	4	Local	Regional	National	European
Product	4	Development of an own product	Adaptation of an external product		New product
Method	3	The alteration of an existing method	Adaptation of an "external method".	New method	
Beneficiaries	3	Took advantage of similar services	Took advantage of other aid	Did not take advantage of state aid	
Context	1	No impact on other services	Enhances other services		
Total	15				

The rules of calculating the total score of DPs product innovation

Score	Grade	Descriptive evaluation
From 14 to 15 points	5	Very high innovation level
From 11 to 13 points	4	High innovation level
From 8 to 10 points	3	Average innovation level
From 6 to 7 points	2	Low innovation level
Up to 5 point	1	Very low innovation level

DP product innovation level analysis:
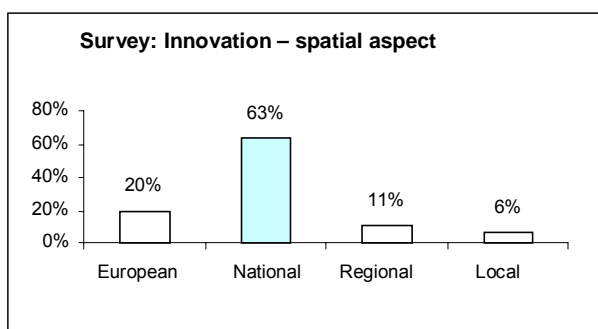
Graph 73

Graph 74

45 out of 71 products were assessed by respondents as innovations at the national level. Every fifth product (14) is to be innovative at the European level.

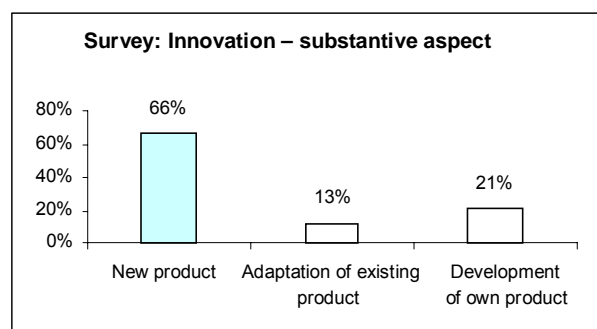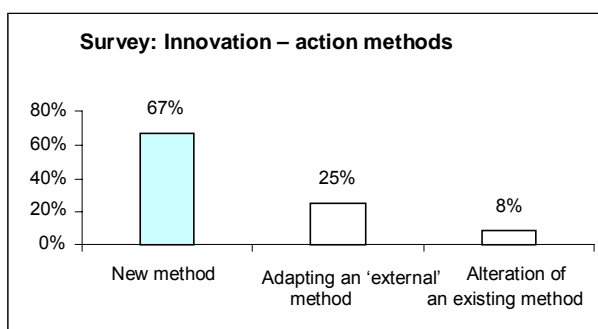The bulk of partnerships (47) declared that the tools provided by them will make services for beneficiaries innovative, related to the needs not satisfied before. The remaining DPs focus on the development of own product (15) or adjusting solutions applied by other entities to the beneficiaries' needs (9).

Graph 75
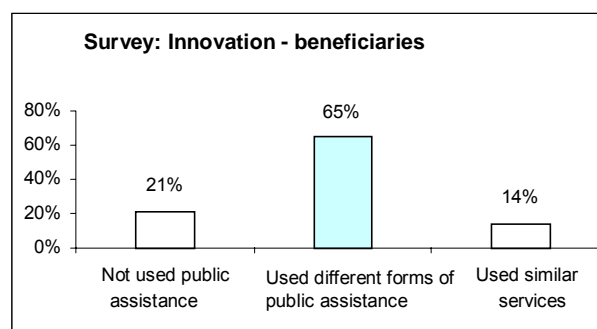
Graph 76

68 partnerships claims that the method to be applied in order to provide services to beneficiaries is unique and does not constitute any adaptation or alteration of the forms employed earlier. Only 18 respondents admitted that they borrowed their ideas on how to provide services from another sector, and 6 partnerships declared that they would use more traditional forms of aid.

It should be noted here that the outcomes of the self-evaluation are not identical with the conclusions of our analysis of product descriptions presented by respondents in the survey (56% of projects take advantage of already applied methods). The explanation of these discrepancies (for ca. 16 DPs) is either the excessive conservative approach of evaluators interpreting the descriptions or the disproportionate optimism of persons performing the self-evaluation.

One in five projects is, in the respondents' opinion, addressed at such target groups which earlier were not taking advantage of any state aid schemes. However, more frequently, beneficiaries received assistance but of a different type (e.g. only passive forms of assistance were present).

74

In Graph 77, we presented average scores given by respondents in each of the innovation aspects analysed. As particular aspects were evaluated in different scales, the mere listing of average scores would be misleading ('2' denotes something else in the scale 1-2 than in the scale of 1-4). Therefore, for comparison purposes, we expressed average scores as the percentage of the maximum score in a given category.
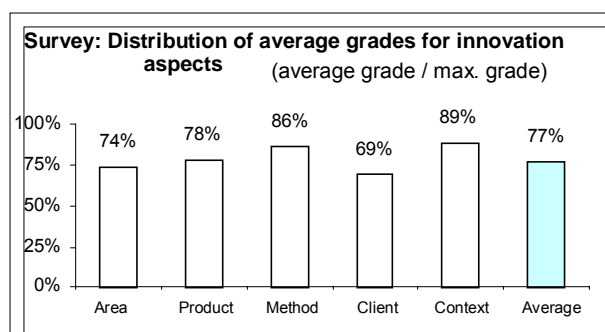
Graph 77

The best average was recorded for DPs products related to the impact of a new tool upon the context of other public assistance schemes addressed at the target group. For 63 out of 71 analysed solutions, respondents declared that one of the effects would be the enhancement of the impact of other public assistance forms provided to beneficiaries.

The basis for these opinions was the conviction that the proposed tools will result in promoting action among the target group members, which will translate into their more significant participation in other aid schemes.

Respondents' opinions on innovation of proposed methods of providing services to beneficiaries were equally common and positive. The average score here was 2.58 in the scale 1-3.

The average score for innovation in terms of the selection of the DP products beneficiaries is substantially lower as compared to the maximum score. As we mentioned before, this category is dominated by projects targeted at people who took advantage of public assistance aid before, but of a "different nature". The "new" target groups, not subject to earlier public assistance schemes were chosen by ca. 20% partnerships.
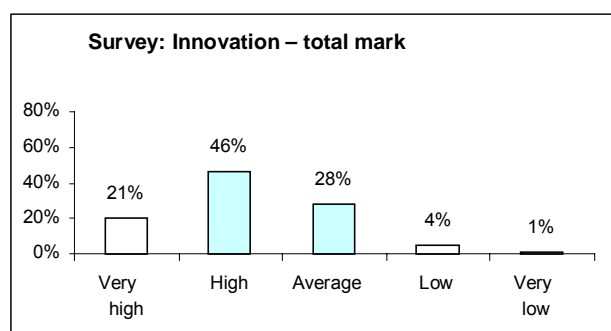
Graph 78

Let us analyse individual projects. According to the methodology presented above, we evaluated each innovation aspect of a given product one by one and further summed up the total score for a given project. The major group (46%) are solutions, which scored 11-13 points out of the maximum score of 15 points. It means they are at a 'high innovation level'. Along with the products scoring higher than 13 points ("Very high innovation level") they account for 67% of all projects.

For comparison purposes, the tools that scored less than 8 points („Low innovation level" or „Very low innovation level"), account for only 5% of all products. About one-fourth of all projects were evaluated as being at "an average innovation level",

Average scores for innovation for the whole programme (the result of seeking the mean value for individual products) was 3.81 points in the scale from 1 to 5.
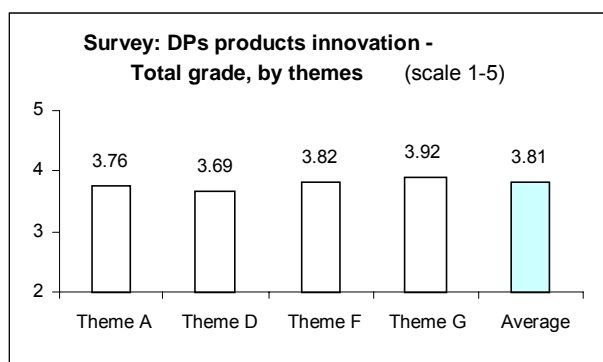
Graph 79
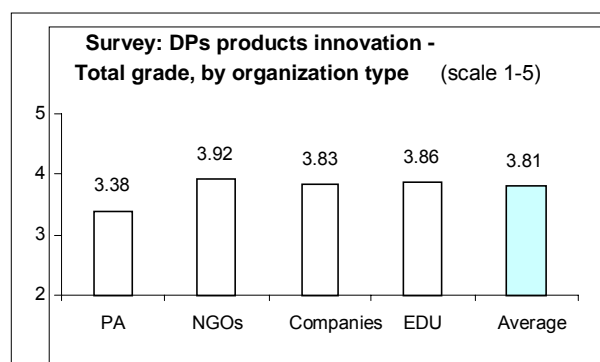
Graph 80

Graphs 79-80 illustrate the distribution of average innovation scores of DPs products according to measure and type of organisation being the Administrator.

The partnerships operating in Theme F and DPs run by non-governmental organisations and private companies believe their products are highly innovative.

Respondents operating in Themes A and D express such opinions less reluctantly. Public administration authorities are particularly weary of positive opinions on the innovation of their products.

The low total score for innovation in Theme D is associated with the relatively substantial share of partnerships (3 out of 16) which declare that their project is oriented on the development of the already existing tool; such development is not related to the application of radically new methods of providing services.

On the other hand, the scores for public administration units below average are typically a result of a more prudent evaluation of innovation in the spatial aspect, for the beneficiaries and in view of the impact of the solution upon other public assistance programmes. Thus, perhaps, the problem here does not lie in the lower level of innovation in such partnerships, but in greater knowledge on which groups, to what extent and how take advantage of social assistance programmes.

Summing up the outcomes of the self-evaluation, we should claim that the programme outline formed after the assessment, being the source of innovative tools counteracting the exclusion and inequality, is fairly optimistic. 66% of partnerships believe that their ideas are related to totally new products (i.e. such products which satisfy the needs not perceived before). 67% of the projects intend to develop new methods not applied before. 63% of the projects were deemed to be innovative at the national level and further 20% - at the European level.

The outcomes seem to be fairly good, however, we should remember that they are based on the opinions of the authors of evaluated projects (self-evaluation). It should be noted here also that at present the programme is in its initial, conceptual phase and we deal with declarations rather than facts. Thus, we should treat these declarations as commitments of people who will implement the projects. Further evaluations referring to actual experience will make it possible to verify whether and to what extent, the preliminary, optimistic assumptions proved real.

4.2.3. The project potential in "mainstreaming" terms.

The innovation of solutions discussed above, on which the partnerships intend to work, is obviously an important element influencing the assessment of the programme accomplishments in substantive terms. However, the analysis of EQUAL objectives shows that the product innovation is a pre-requisite, but not the sufficient condition of the final success of the programme. To accomplish the EQUAL objectives, the products developed by the partnerships should be not only innovative but also useful for the progress of the now implemented social policy.

If the innovative solutions are to bring about anticipated result, they must be reflected in the programmes implemented on a larger scale. "Mainstreaming" is the key to this process, where it is understood as the dissemination of already tested DP products in the vertical direction (assuming developed models by subsequent entities acting for the benefit of a similar target group) and in the horizontal direction ("inclusion" of pilot solutions in the policies and programmes implemented at the regional, national or European level).

To face up to these assumptions, we decided to check to what extent such products developed by partnerships can be translated into long-term effects applicable to larger groups of beneficiaries. For this reason, we created the term of "the product potential for mainstreaming purposes". The analytical model assumes that there are a number of factors which exert an impact upon the value of a DP product being solutions which may be disseminated and applied on a wider scale (be the subject of further replications).

The method of evaluating the DP product potential for mainstreaming purposes

Innovation

'Innovation' is the first variable discussed before. Thus, we can assume that the potential value of DP product for 'mainstreaming' purposes depends on the level of innovation and creative character of the solution prepared by DP.

Expenses

Expenses are another factor. A product may be highly innovative, attractive and tempting, but very costly. Everyone would like to buy the latest Mercedes model, with all sorts of technical advancements, a dynamic motor and stylish interior. The problem is that the social policy can afford Fiat 126P and not Mercedes. Thus, we assume that the DP product potential for mainstreaming purposes is proportional to the cost of a given product.

Time-frame

The factors which limit our actions are not only money, but often insufficient time challenging many worthy undertakings. Certain projects can be implemented in 2 months, other take years to come into existence, before first outcomes can be seen. As everybody, particularly persons making decisions on social policy, would like to perceive the outcomes of their investments as soon as possible, we assume that the 'mainstreaming potential' becomes larger as the time needed to launch a new system / tool is shorter (launching means the time when first beneficiaries obtain the first benefits).

Simplicity of replication

'Simplicity of replication' is a focal factor which makes certain solutions, although attractive in theory, remain 'on paper' and other projects, not so innovative, but uncomplicated become more popular. Thus, we assume that greater potential lies in those products which are relatively easy to use, as:

- they do not require the assistance of experts with rare, specialist expertise (lawyers, psychologists, IT specialists, etc.);
- they are not associated with the purchase and implementation of new, rarely applied technological solutions;
- they do not depend on the training and consulting services, particularly if such assistance is not easily available.

Market size

The last factor we considered is the estimated size of the target group of beneficiaries who might take advantage of the dissemination of tools and systems. We assumed that the larger the group of potential beneficiaries, the greater probability of the application of a given product on a wider scale.

Also, in this part of the analysis, we apply the knowledge of persons who developed the products and know them better than anyone else. The respondents were asked to provide answers to a number of questions on other factors which may impact the „simplicity of replication" aspect of a DP product. As in the case of innovation, closed-end questions were asked, and the respondents were deprived of the possibility of choosing the option which would reflect their situation best. Detailed method of the assessment of „product potential for mainstreaming purposes" has been presented in the table on the next page. Further on, we present the opinions presented in this respect by the respondents.

The method of evaluating the DP product potential for mainstreaming purposes

Evaluation criteria	Max. score	Score				
		1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 point
Innovation	5	Low innovation level	Low	Average	High	Very high
Replication costs	5	Over 1 m	100-1000 thousand PLN	20-100 thousand PLN	10-20 thousand PLN	1-10 thousand PLN
Replication time	5	A few years	1 year	½ year	A few months	A few weeks
Experts	1	N/A				
Equipment	1	N/A				
Training & consulting support	3	Required – access problematic	Required – available services	Support not required		
Market size	5	1-10 thousand PLN	10-20 thousand PLN	20-100 thousand PLN	100-1000 thousand PLN	Over 1 m
Total	25					

The rules of calculating the total score of DPs product potential for mainstreaming purposes

Score	Grade	Descriptive evaluation
From 21 to 25 points	5	Very high potential
From 16 to 20 points	4	High potential
From 11 to 15 points	3	Average potential
From 6 to 10 points	2	Low potential
Up to 5 point	1	Very low potential

The analysis the DP product potential for 'mainstreaming' purposes
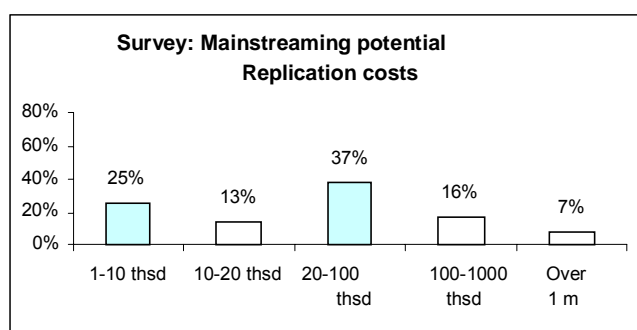
Graph 81
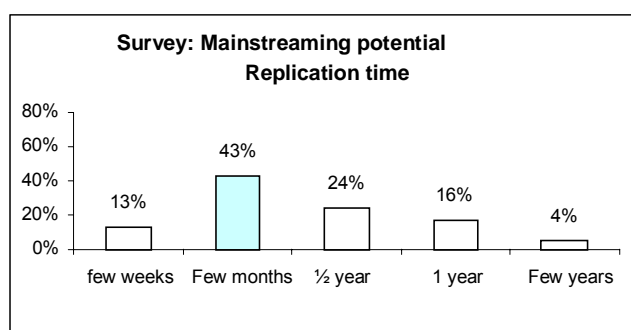
Graph 82

Estimated capital expenditure that institutions interested in replication of the developed products will have to made, comply with the figures on the type of developed solutions. As mentioned above, the analysis of the descriptions presented by respondents of the survey shows that ca. 51% products are specific tools supporting the development of human resources and the further 11% are integrated solutions incorporating both tools and systems.

All in all, also in this aspect of the self-evaluation, the partnerships show a lot of optimism. The resources needed to set up the initial versions of the developed products were estimated, elsewhere in the questionnaire, at the average level of PLN 2.3 m. Thus, if further replications of tested solutions cost from PLN 20,000 to 100,000, the costs reduction would be even 100-fold.

Obviously, the respondents assumed that replication is performed just after the completion of Action 3, where each solution is thoroughly studied and high quality tools supporting the adaptation (procedures, manuals, computer software, etc.) are in place. Nevertheless, the expectations in terms of outcomes are high. It seems that a number of respondents, when answering the question, had in mind tools which have been applied for years now on a highly competitive market. We fear that similar outcomes in terms of EQUAL products will be ready later then just after the end of Action 3.

The time required for the replication of DP products was estimated, by 80% of the respondents, as not longer than half a year. Solutions whose implementation is longer account for ca. 20%. This figure covers 11 products for which the time-frame of implementation was estimated as "ca. 1 year" and 3 products must be adapted for many years.
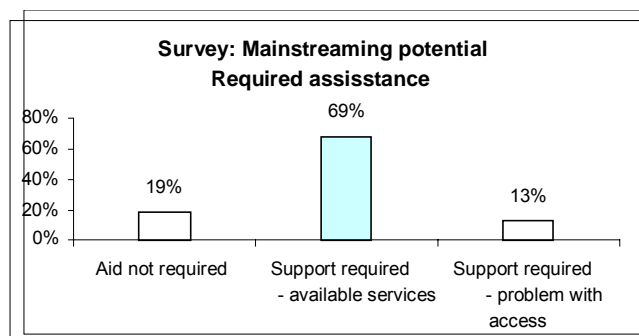
Graph 83
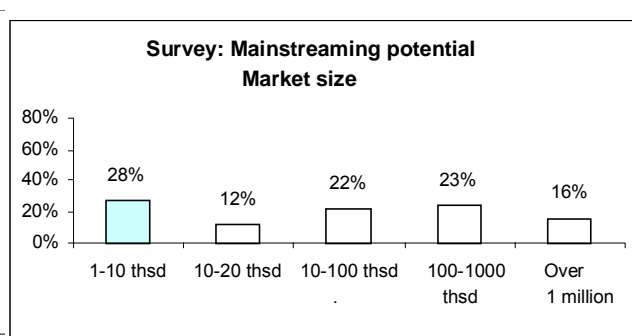
Graph 84

80% of solutions developed within the programme will be difficult to adapt without external training & consulting support. At the same time, the majority of partnerships (69%) declare that their tools refer to skills which can be easily found on the present market of training and consulting services. Only 9 products are based on unique knowledge and expertise which would have to be made available by the authors of the prototypical solution.

40% of DP products are addressed at precisely defined and small, at the national level, target groups. Solutions which, as a result of the dissemination, may be translated into benefits for thousands or millions of citizens also account for ca. 40%. The information seems to conform to the earlier analysis of target groups based on the product descriptions presented in the survey. It must be noted that systemic and integrated system & tools-based solutions account in total for ca. 36% of all products.
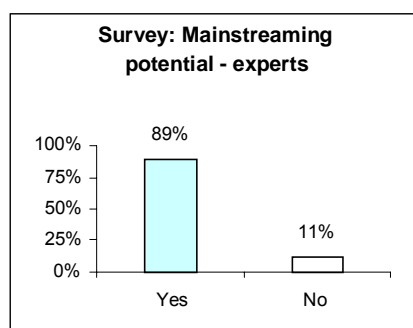
Graph 85
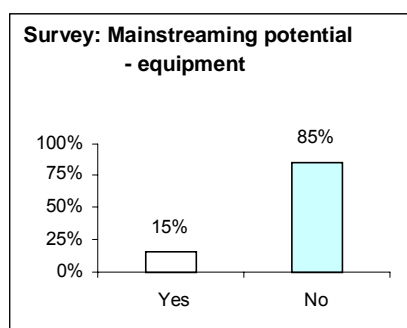
Graph 86

As Graphs 85-86 illustrate, the adaptation, by subsequent interested institutions, of the majority of products (85%) developed in the programme will not require the purchase of sophisticated technological solutions.

However, the tools will be problematic from the point of view of the qualifications of the staff within an organisation interested in replication stage. Cases studies, however, demonstrate that in the majority of cases, it is not about some abstract knowledge but practical expertise on the service market related to the product. For instance, it is hard to imagine that the system promoting social activity is easily adapted by an institution which does not have any specialists experienced in social work with necessary psychological education.

Survey: Mainstreaming potential Total grade
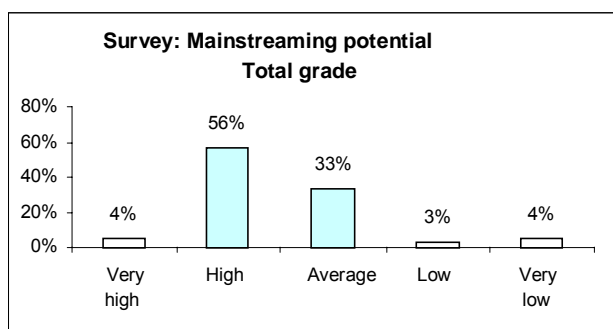
Graph 87

The total score for the programme potential for mainstreaming purposes (i.e. the average value of scores for individual products) was 3.53 points in the scale from 1 to 5. In colloquial terms, it means "satisfactory, but not good enough". Thus, even if respondents are optimistic in estimating the costs of replicating the partnerships products, the outcome is far from being perfect.

Survey: Distribution of average grade for mainstreaming potential   (average / max. value)
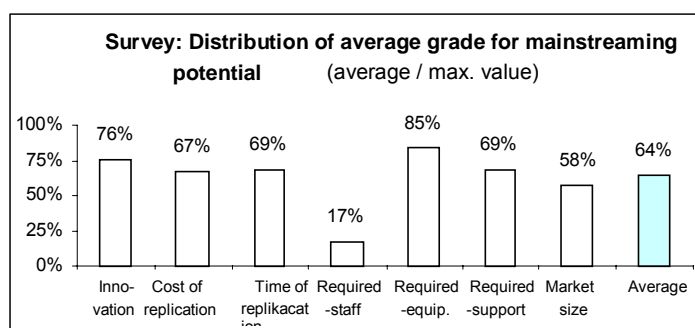
Graph 88

Let us examine the overall scores for the potential of disseminating the products, according to the applied criteria. Graph 88 presents the relation between the accomplished scores to the maximum value in a given category. The systems under study scored the lowest in terms of the required access to highly qualified staff and in the "market size" category.

In turn, the factors that affected the total score were as follows: „limited requirements for the equipment and technology" and „innovation". The evaluation of the "cost" and "replication time" were also positive, although the estimates of the costs of the adaptation of solutions bring about certain methodological doubts.

Survey: Mainstreaming potential for DPs products – Total grade by themes   (scale 1-5)

Graph 89

Survey: Mainstreaming potential of DP products – Total grade, by types of organizations   (scale 1-5)
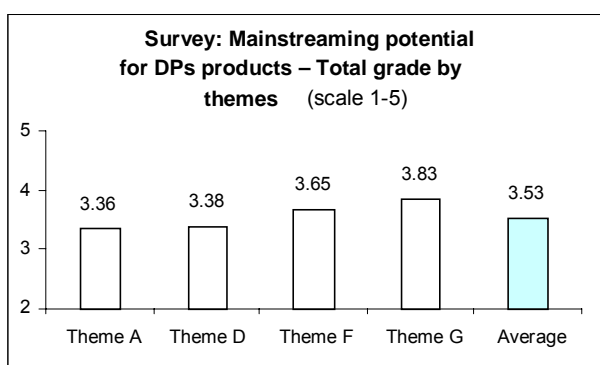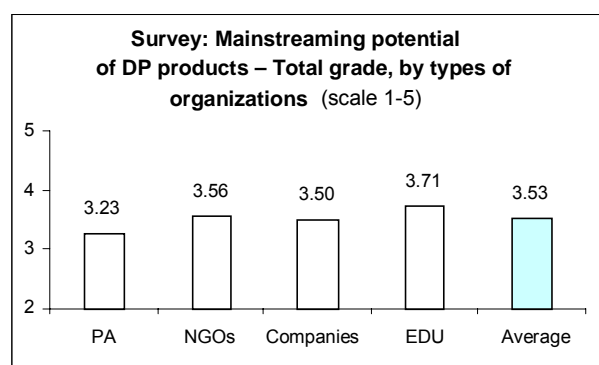
Graph 90

When analysing the „potential for mainstreaming" for measures, we see that the products developed under Theme G and F seem to be promising. A lower score in Theme A is associated with less optimistic estimates of costs and time needed to replicate the products, as well as excessive requirements related to the qualifications of the staff of the institution implementing the replication. On the other hand, the score in Theme D, except for the cost criterion, is also related to the smaller average size of the target group at which the DP tools are addressed.

From the perspective of the type of the organisation playing the role of a DP leader, better marks were given to those partnerships which are run by educational institutions. Less encouraging marks were given to projects managed by public administration agencies. In this case, the relatively low marks were the result of the lower score for innovation, replications costs and requirements for the training & consulting support in the adaptation process.

To sum up, we can claim that the assessment of the potential for mainstreaming purposes is lower than the innovation evaluation presented above. In short, it seems that the projects undertaken by partnerships are more innovative rather than useful from the point of view of the fundamental programme objective.

It seems comforting that although it is difficult to change the fundamental project concept so that it can be more innovative, one can do a lot to make the proposed solutions more long-lasting and attractive for other institutions, interested in their adaptation or inclusion under nationwide programmes.

Undoubtedly, considering the partnerships products in the context of their future dissemination is one of those programme areas which should be dealt with special attention. When examining the selected cases, a few times we found out that the issue of developed system durability is totally disregarded. The stipulation that in an experimental programme, capital expenditure made on the establishment of models of new solutions is not the focal criterion of assessment is generally true. However, it does not mean that the target adaptation costs and the costs of the maintenance of tools which are to be the outcome of the experiment can be ignored.Thus, creating new and indispensable things is not enough. The availability of the programme outcomes to future beneficiaries should also be taken into consideration.

We do not want to hide that also the way of monitoring the potential value of the programme as the source of effective, innovative solutions is problematic and must be improved in further evaluation projects.

The main issue is the reliability of data which, to a large extent, are based on subjective opinions and as such are not proper tools for comparisons.

The approach implied in the analysis is based on the self-evaluation and should be first applied and improved at the level of individual partnerships and by National Thematic Networks. The parties implementing the projects are the first who need a tool for the analysis of the potential of a new solution and initiate changes enhancing the product utility for the general public.

The tool efficiency in producing anticipated changes on the labour market should also be integrated with the model. It is a common knowledge that the decision on the adaptation of a given solution depends not only on its innovation, cost and simple application. Perhaps, the crucial factor is the effectiveness of the proposed system. In our study, we devoted a separate chapter to the issue of effectiveness. However, due to the incompleteness and limited reliability of the collected information, we decided to fully integrate this criterion with the model of the assessment of the "potential for mainstreaming purposes".

The summary of the issues related to the DP products analysis

Effectiveness

The descriptions of products presented in the survey imply that the projects implemented by the partnerships comply with the Themes of EQUAL CI.

At least 62% of products are "tool-based" solutions. The fact that the implementing parties are able to define specific effects of the project (training scheme, procedure, website, etc.) is an indicator of good "specific character" of the concepts of these DPs. This observation is valuable in so far as earlier we expressed doubts regarding the number of partnerships which joined the programme without a specific idea for a product.

Only in 60% of described products, we were able to identify a specific target group of ultimate beneficiaries at which the product is addressed. The remaining products are either addressed generally at "the unemployed" or "the excluded" or at institutions (mainly non-governmental organisations and companies) which are intermediaries in the process of the transfer of benefits to ultimate beneficiaries. As our knowledge on the details of partnership strategies is limited, we are not able to state whether the problem defining target groups of beneficiaries is associated with the short description in the questionnaire or points to the fact that these issues were not detailed to a sufficient degree in the strategies.

The product descriptions suggest that 44% of DPs plan to provide services, applying innovative forms and methods.

67% of products analysed in terms of their innovation were evaluated as being at the "high innovation level" (46%) or at the "very high innovation level" (21%). 28% of products were marked as being at "average innovation level" and the remaining 5% as being at "the low innovation level". The average mark for the whole programme in terms of innovation was 3.81 points (in the scale from 1 to 5). In colloquial terms it means „quite good". Although the score is not perfect, it is the basis of some sort of optimism. However, on the other hand, it should be noted that it is the result of "self-evaluation" which in addition was performed prior to the commencement of the actual project implementation.

The total score of the programme potential for mainstreaming purposes (i.e. the average of scores for individual products) was 3.53 points in the scale from 1 to 5. In colloquial terms it means "satisfactory but not good enough". Nearly 60% of products were assessed as presenting high (56%) or very high (4%) replication potential. 7% of projects were deemed as being useful to a small extent in this respect.

The analysis of the products shows that part of the projects is more innovative than useful for mainstreaming purposes. This issue should be examined in detail, as changes of partnerships parameters (costs reductions, adaptation to the needs of additional target groups, etc.) at an early stage of the project implementation may result in a substantial increase in the final product potential for further replications.

Efficiency:

The estimates of „the replication costs" for the products presented by the respondents were very promising. The comparison of the costs incurred in the programme for the development of tools and of the price of a ready product for another institution interested in the adaptation points out to a nearly 20-fold costs cuts. If we assume that the optimism of promoters is justified (still we doubt it), it seems that the investment in the replication of products at the level of 5% of EQUAL budget would make it possible to recover the capital expenditure made on the programme implementation ("recovery of capital expenditure" means the financial value of the utility that the entities servicing the labour market could gain, while using the tools developed during the programme). To simplify things, we claim that EQUAL will be profitable if at least one of 20 developed products is used on a wider scale.

By analogy, in terms of time-frames, it seems that average replication time-frame will be six times shorter than time spent on the preparation of a prototypical solution (for 80% of the products, the adaptation time was estimated as less than 6 months; the expected time-frame for EQUAL implementation is 3 years). It means that an institution adapting a product developed in the programme could save a lot of time which it, without EQUAL, had to spend on the independent development of the tool.

5 Analysis of the management system of the EQUAL Initiative at the national level

In order to analyse the EQUAL CI management system at the national level we should begin with distinguishing two groups of issues to be analysed. The first group contains all the issues related to the establishment and subsequent adjustments of the formal and legal framework for programme implementation; the second one comprises the issues connected with the very implementation of the adopted principles. This is an important distinction because the first group of issues (system establishemnt) was the sole responsibility of the Managing Authority, while the implementation of the prepared solutions was assigned, for the most part, to the National Support Structure.

5.1 Issues related to the system organising the environment for programme implementation

> In this section of our report we would like to consider the quality of the system which served as a context for programme implementation. Firstly, we are going to present opinions of partnerships concerning the environment in which they had to implement their projects. We will also analyse key problems which occurred at the national level and which were connected with the preparation of the EQUAL formal and legal framework. Secondly, we are going to discuss the relationship between the MA and the NSS and the way it is perceived by partnerships. In the final part of this chapter we are going to analyse organisational principles for development partnerships proposed in the programme.
>
> We are going to look for answers to the following evaluation questions:
>
> *5.1.1 How was the formal and legal environment for programme implementation prepared?*
>
> *5.1.2 Were the roles of participants in the programme management process defined? What was the role of the Managing Authority in the process of supporting the formation and consolidation of partnerships?*
>
> *5.1.3 Were the prepared principles for programme implementation, and partnerships' organisational principles in particular, correct?*

5.1.1 How was the formal and legal environment for programme implementation prepared?

According to the provisions of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme, the Managing Authority is solely responsible for programme management.

The interviews with representatives of the MA, NSS and partnerships indicate that the area where the MA's uses its competencies and responsibilities to the full is the preparation of system solutions which should enable all players to carry out the EQUAL mission in the most effective way.

> *"The EQUAL MA is responsible for the management and implementation of EQUAL at the national level. Its responsibility consists in performing duties assigned to it in the regulation so as to ensure correct and efficient implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative"*
>
> *(EQUAL ICP, Warsaw, April 2004, pp. 151-152)*

This is so for at least two reasons. First, no other programme actor has the necessary capacity to establish fundamental parameters for the implementation of the EQUAL CI. Second, the Department of European Social Fund Management in the MoEL which plays the role of the MA is a central government unit and, as such, can influence decisions of other government bodies responsible for the formal and legal environment of programme implementation (the Ministry of Finance, Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, Office of Public Procurement, etc.).

Partnerships' opinions on the formal and legal environment of the programme

The vast majority of survey respondents, when asked about the biggest obstacle to programme implementation, pointed to "legal barriers" (74%) and "administrative burdens" (64%).

Three main issues were raised: (1) lack of a clear and precise legal base for programme implementation; (2) continually changing rules and working principles; (3) delayed reaction of the Managing Authority to new problems.

Survey: Evaluation of the preparation of the formal and legal system
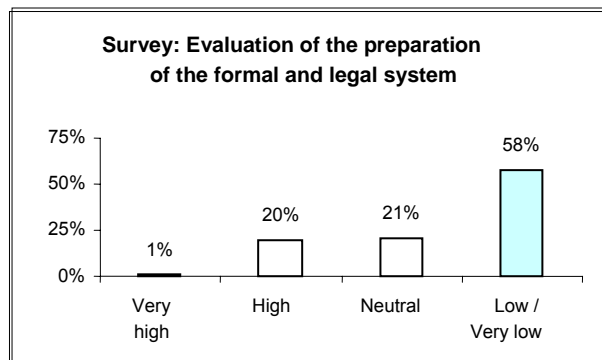
"*no clear and precise formal and legal rules, unclear guidelines, procedural ambiguities*"

"*Some rules changed continually, some issues were suspended until new arrangements can be put in place*"

"*Except the sluggish cost settlement system the whole system seems well-organised, first of all because the programme is new and no-one has any previous experience with it.*"

(from the comments to surveys)

Graph 91

The graph 91 shows what project promoters think of the formal and legal system within which they have to operate.

As it can be seen, positive opinions on its preparation were expressed by only 1 out of 5 respondents. The same number of respondents adopted a neutral attitude. Almost 60% of the respondents were of negative or very negative opinion about it.

It seems that the preparation of the programme implementation environment is the lowest rated aspect of the EQUAL CI.

Survey: Average scores of preparation of the formal and legal system

Graph 93

Survey: Average scores of preparation of the formal and legal system
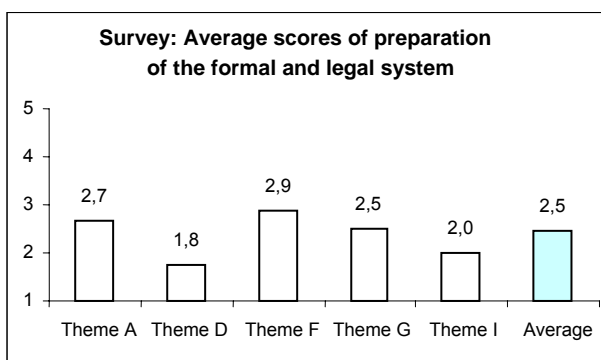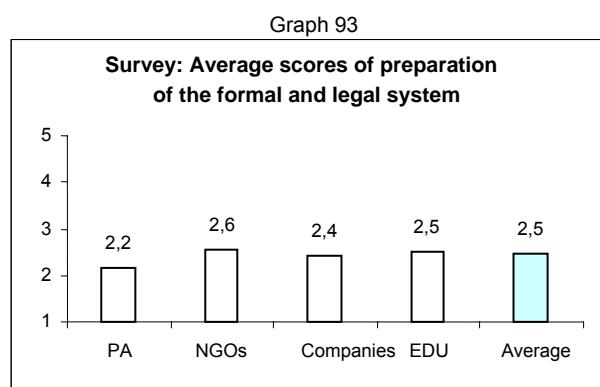
Graph 92

This situation requires further analysis and at least an attempt to explaining it. What are the reasons behind the problems? Could they have been avoided or could their negative effects have been minimised?

Analysis of key problems in the programme management at the national level

Let us now look at the three problems which, according to our respondents, were the most serious difficulties in Action 1:

- the issue of securities and security-related delays in concluding Action 1 agreements
- the issue of long waiting time for payment
- the issue of VAT
- frequent changes of rules and principles

Securities

Problem description

One of the effects of adjusting regulations to requirements which must be met due to the implementation of Structural Funds in Poland is the new requirement for the beneficiary of public resources to provide "performance security". The reason for introducing this requirement (and many others) was not so much the need for facilitating programme implementation as, otherwise justified, concern that public money might be wasted. It should be pointed out that this regulation is in itself nothing pleasant and, from the point of view of project promoters only, it does not make their work easier; on the contrary, it involves extra work and requires spending a part of project budget on something not directly related to the project.

During the programme it turned out that fulfilment of this requirement was not only a big organisational and financial burden, but also, for smaller organisations without the necessary credibility, a virtually impossible task.

Chronology of events

The issue of securities was raised in the summer 2004. It was treated as a potential problem mostly by representatives of non-governmental organisations. In July 2004 the MA checked in financial institutions whether the service of providing performance securities was available on the market. The results were encouraging.

The securities turned out to be a big problem in November, after the first group of projects had been selected. The MoEL staff claim that the MA had not known before the number of institutions which would have to use the securities. It turned out in December that most of the partnerships had serious difficulties meeting that requirement.

The MA, seeing the big scale of the problem and a threat to the whole programme it involved, decided to amend quickly the agreement template. The partnerships, advised of the liberalisation of the security requirement planned for January, suspended their negotiations with the NSS. Many of them simply waited for the new regulations and did not even try to negotiate budgets or gather documents necessary for concluding the agreement at that time.

Unfortunately, the process of amendment, despite MA's intense efforts, took 3 months. The new agreement template was issued on 10 March. Although most partnerships concluded agreements in the following weeks, some (international organisations, entities subordinate to public administration bodies) had to tackle new problems. As a result, the last agreements were still being negotiated in June.

Analysis

If we assume that the evaluation criteria for the operation of a project managing body are: (a) the time of problem identification; (b) the ability to take adequate measures to solve a problem; (c) the correct execution of a particular sequence of remedial actions, and (d) the effectiveness in solving the initial problem, our analysis is as follows:

Problem identification

In this context, it would seem that the time of problem identification is not satisfactory. We cannot say that the MA did nothing when it received the first signals of the potential problem in July. However, we cannot also regard MA's superficial analysis of the banks' offer as satisfactory.

It sounds unconvincing that the MA was unable to foresee the scale of the problem before the completion of the project selection procedure. A large number of non-governmental organisations in the group of 751 institutions which applied for funds under Action 1 indicated the potentially large number of such entities among competition winners. Handling the issue as late as in December is, admittedly, understandable, but given the intensity and length of the project selection procedure it seems that the MA underestimated the scale of the problem and reacted to the actual situation too late.

Reaction

The decision to solve the problem by means of an amendment appears to be generally correct. If we agree that the role of the MA is to consider not only the next month but also a longer time perspective, an attempt to adjust regulations was highly advisable, especially in the light of the approaching launch of Action 2. However, the situation at the end of December required taking much more urgent steps. Could anything else have been done? With our limited knowledge we cannot give a clear answer. As far as we know, the MA analysed alternative solutions. For example, talks with the BISE bank (Bank for Social and Economic Initiatives) and other banks were initiated about the possibility of preparing a unified product available also to smaller organisations. Unfortunately, the results of the talks were not encouraging. Therefore, it seems that the late undertaking of remedial actions did not leave much time for the search for ideal solutions.

Intervention

Knowing the great commitment of MA's management and staff we do not doubt they did their best to make sure that the initiated legislative process would take as short as possible. Nevertheless, those partnerships which had a chance to conclude the agreement in its initial form should have been encouraged to do so. The expectation that the regulation could be amended within 3-4 weeks was unjustified in the light of previous experience with new regulations, in particular with those which required the approval of two ministers. In view of that, informing partnerships of the initiated steps without warning them that the process might take a few months turned out to be a communication error.

Result

The problem was finally solved but the costs were high: programme implementation was delayed, funds were unavailable to numerous DPs, and, as a result, the progress of substantive activities was insufficient.

Summary

It should be stressed that the core of the problem and difficulties with finding an effective solution resulted mainly from the failure to notice the importance of the problem at the stage when it still might have been solved quickly and creatively. We understand that the MA and NSS were really preoccupied with project selection issues in the second half of the year. However, the involvement of all available resources in current issues made it difficult for the organisations to take long-term proactive steps and forced the MA to tackle the problems which occurred in December 2004.

Payments

Problem description

Long verification of claims for payment was the second most important problem for the majority of partnerships. The problem relates more to the efficiency of management than to formal and legal environment of the programme. Still, at least some of its elements are connected with the adopted system solutions.

The analysis of this problem should begin with clarifying what "a long verification of application" actually means. It is a standard in the market of consultancy services to pay contractor's invoices within 30 days of the date of receipt by a customer. The period may of course be longer or shorter, depending on the situation, but still the 30-day payment period can be our point of reference.

According to the model form of the Agreement for Co-financing under Action 1 used in the EQUAL CI, "the Managing Authority shall transfer intermediate payments to the Beneficiary's bank account (...) within 45 calendar days of the day of approval of the Beneficiary's claim for payment by the National Support Structure." This provision contains two alarming elements.

The first concerns the adoption of a 45-day period for application analysis at the level of the Managing Authority. Given the fact that the Managing Authority receives an application which is already verified by the NSS, the length of the period seems unjustified.

The second issue is the procedure of "approval of the application by the NSS". According to the provisions of the Agreement for Co-financing, the NSS has 21 days to approve a claim for payment or to determine it is not valid and indicate time and manner of correcting the irregularities found[5]. There were, however, cases submitting successive application versions repeatedly rejected by the NSS. Each time the 21-day period started again at the moment of submitting a new version of the corrected application. As a result, the whole approval process might have lasted even several months. Although it is obvious that only a correct and well documented application can serve as a basis for payment, it seems difficult to accept that a partnership is forced to function for several months with no access to funds.

We do not suggest any ideas how to solve the problem, but advise the NSS and MA to analyse thoroughly this element of the procedure. They should definitely strive to eliminate situations when a list of irregularities extends during the approval process (it happened several times that successive lists of irregularities included errors which had not been mentioned by the NSS before). Another way of shortening the period of application approval could be excluding from an application highly questionable expenses and including them in another application. This way a partnership would win some time to complete the missing documentation without blocking the settlement of unquestionable expenses.

The analysis of 18 applications for intermediate payment carried out by the MA shows that the average time from the application approval by the NSS was 13.5 days in March and about 17 days in the period from April to June. The sample of about 20 applications may not be representative (the report for the second quarter of 2005 includes about 80 applications of this type), but still it shows there is a big time margin between the average and the contractual 45-day period.

Why should we think, then, that there is a problem here? The problem is that the presented analysis results do not cover everything that happens from the point of submitting the first application version to the point of its final approval by the NSS after numerous corrections and final submission to the Managing Authority.

Graph 94
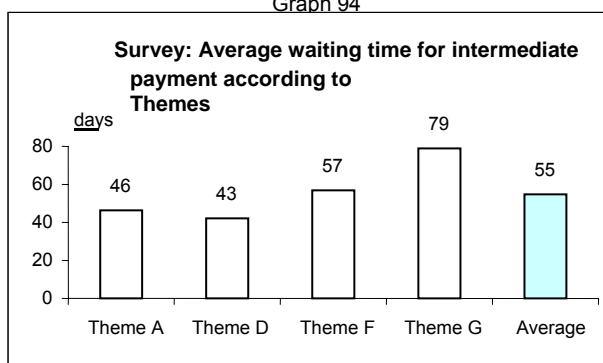
Graph 95
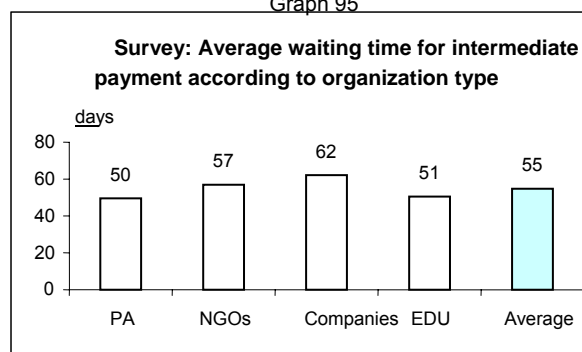
53 out of 73 respondent partnerships in our survey carried out at the end of August claimed to have applied to the NSS for intermediate payment (we asked about the first version of their applications). 13 applications were submitted as early as right after 30 June 2005. At the time of the survey, only 32 partnerships had monies they had applied for on their accounts. We analysed all applications which resulted in money transfers and applications submitted before 30 June and still not granted support at the time of the survey (where we decided to count the waiting period from the submission date to 15 August). The average waiting time for the funds was 55 days. The partnership holding a record of 141 days claims it submitted its application on 24 March and had not received funds up to the date of the survey. The waiting period was over 45 days in 61% of the cases (27 out of 44) and over 66 days in 27% of the cases (12 out of 44).

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[5] Agreement for Co-financing under Action 1, §9

If this is true, it means that an average partnership has to undertake numerous actions, prepare a claim for payment and submit it to the NSS only to keep completing the missing documents and wait for the funds to be transferred for almost two months. Given the fact that for about a half of partnerships the effective time for Action 1 implementation was about 3 months (65% DPs concluded agreements with the NSS in March or later), the average waiting time for payment was definitely a long one.

If the verification of Action 1 payment claim took indeed too long, we should ask what steps the MA took to solve the problem.

Analysis

Problem identification

Interviews show that before June 2005 the issue of time for payment was not fully diagnosed as a problem. The MA did receive alarming signals from partnerships. It suspected that something might fail to "work as it should", so it carried out two analyses of the time neede to process beneficiaries' claims for payment. Unfortunately, the analyses did not cover the time of verification of applications by the NSS.

Reaction

Despite reassuring results of the analysis of processing time (13, 5 and 17 days, with the limit of 45 days), the MA prepared in the last few months the following set of actions aimed at simplifying and shortening application and payment processing under Action 2:

- enabling partnerships to submit claims for payment more often

- allowing DPs to submit applications for new payments as early as at the point of spending 70% (instead of 80%) of the funds granted before

- negotiating with the Ministry of Finance the new regulation on reporting and financial control which would provide for the possibility of verifying claims on the basis of a sample analysis only instead of the analysis of all accounting documents,

- rearranging operations of the analysis and money transfer processes so that funds could be transferred right after the approval of beneficiaries' claims by the NSS,

- assigning the function of making payments to the National Economy Bank (BGK) bank, which would shorten the process of application verification at the level of the MA.

Intervention

The intervention is in progress and the presented description of the steps taken suggests that the planned changes will be far-reaching. If we understand it correctly, the proposed regulation on reporting and settlement control has already been discussed with the Ministry of Finance and there is a fair chance that the new legislation will come into effect as soon as of November this year.

Results

The problem has not been solved yet, but the steps taken to solve it give a chance of considerable improvement in the area of payments.

Summary

We do appreciate the comprehensive approach to this issue which is promising for a considerable improvement of the situation. What worries us, however, is a relatively late identification of this issue as problematic. It seems that the analysis of payment times could and should have covered also this part of the verification process which takes place at the NSS level. One extenuating circumstance may be the peculiar dynamics of the Action 1 implementation process. Since agreements with the NSS were concluded late, the problem with intermediate payments occurred for most partnerships as late as at the end of the second quarter this year.

VAT problem

Problem description

The third major problem identified in Action 1 was the issue of VAT in cash flows between the administrator and partners. It turned out that the Treasury treated the flows as sales of services and added VAT to their value.

Partnership representatives asked how it was possible that such a discrepancy between the MoEL and the MF, a discrepancy crucial from the point of view of programme objectives, was not noticed and solved beforehand. As the interviews with MA representatives suggest, the issue is even more surprising given the fact that its internal analysis carried out by the MoEL clearly indicated that no such problem should arise in the first place. Partnerships should be treated as co-executors of a common project rather than as a consortium-type entity whose administrator is a contractor and partners are subcontractors.

List of events

The first signs of the problem appeared, according to the MA, in March 2005, but the Managing Authority expected the issue to be clarified in the administrative and financial manual for partnerships which was being prepared at that time.

Unfortunately, its release was seriously delayed. Meanwhile, doubts on the part of the Ministry of Finance were so serious that both the first letter concerning this issue sent to the MF in May, and the next one of June, piloted by Ministers Szczepański and Stec, failed to settle the issue decisively and unambiguously.

> *"... there was a problem of badly prepared regulations governing the programme. They were not always consistent with the provisions of such documents as the National Development Plan. Another problem was a complete omission of the issues of fund flows from the Structural Funds in the tax law. These issues were regulated for pre-accession programmes but the solutions used at that time were not adopted. Numerous VAT law provisions adjusting the Polish legislation to the Sixth Directive were omitted. The notion of a "group taxpayer", for example, was one of the most serious gaps. It turned out that the grant was not a grant for everybody but for the administrator only. The other partners do not receive grants but "sell their services", so VAT must be added to their value. The result was a difficulty with settlements within partnerships and accusations of unfair treatment of partners. The budget for partners suddenly turns out to be 22% smaller under the new act (in force from the beginning of the year). (Interview - NSS)*

Analysis

Problem identification

It follows from the comments of MA representatives that at the beginning of the programme an internal analysis of the partnerships' tax situation was carried out. As it was concluded from the analysis that partners would not have to pay VAT, the issue was considered solved.

Reaction

We do not disapprove the scope or intensity of efforts of the MA and the NSS from May onwards (clarification of the issue with the Ministry of Finance). We do, however, object to a long delay in sending the relevant letter to the MF. The administrative and financial manual for partnerships would not have solved the problem which consists not in better or worse application of the existing law, but in the lack of relevant legislation (e.g. the equivalent of a "group taxpayer"). Therefore the selected problem-solving methods (or at least the preliminary measures) raise some doubts.

Intervention

We were not able to analyse arguments used in negotiations with the Ministry of Finance in detail. We know, however, that the enquiry was based on a thorough analysis of the problem, and that the letter contained a 10-page explaination supporting the presented thesis. Finally, the reaction of the finance department showed understanding of at least some MoEL's arguments even though no clear interpretation favourable for the programme has been expressed yet. A significant change in the MF's attitude could be noticed in the period from June to May 2005, which was definitely a result of the MA's activities.

Result

The great resolution and commitment of the MA and NSS in explaining the VAT issue may deserve credit, but the problem can hardly be called a solved one. In the current state of affairs, the final decision on how to treat the administrator – partner relationship must be taken individually in each case by a competent Tax Office. Thus it is possible that at least some partnerships will have to tackle this problem also during the implementation of Action 2.

<u>*Summary*</u>

If our criteria (the time of problem identification, adequate measures, correct intervention and effectiveness) were used, it would turn out that, again, the source of problems was inability to foresee potential difficulties well in advance. Counteracting the existing situation comes too late and resembles rather extinguishing fire than methodical management. Obviously, the time pressure involved significantly limited available options and made the development of effective solutions even more difficult.

The above discussion on the basic problems of programme management at the national level could be summarised in the form of a table:

Problem	Identification	Reaction	Intervention	Result	Score (scale 1-5)
Securities	-	+ / -	-	+	2.5
Payments	-	+	+	-	3.0
VAT	-	+ / -	+	-	2.5
Total score	**-3**	**+1**	**+1**	**-1**	

The biggest difficulty with all the three problems was a slow identification of potential threats. The MA dealt much better with selecting the adequate remedial actions and implementing the necessary steps. Unfortunately, as a result of the tactical error, or rather the communication error, made in the case of securities, DPs decided to wait for regulation amendment. The results of interventions depended largely on the time when the problem appeared and the time of initiating a search for solutions.

The last problem we would like to consider is not connected with any specific event or situation but rather with a general approach to programme management. We mean the issue of instability of rules and principles applied during the programme, mentioned by most partnerships.

Instability of rules and principles applied:

Let us begin with a simple saying that each project is implemented within the framework of some legal system and in specific structural environment. No matter how fair and innovative concept we are going to implement, we will be restricted by the current tax law, accounting regulations and public procurement legislation.

> *The fundamental problem of project implementation under EQUAL IC is the "moving goalposts" problem – changes of procedural and formal requirements communicated after the initial requirements have been met. Some typical examples include changing the format of agreement appendices after DP agreements have been signed or the new provision on state aid introduced a few days before the deadline for submitting the agreements to the NSS), missing DP agreement checklists (evaluation criteria) at the time of agreement preparation*
> *(Opinions from the surveys)*

Therefore, the first step of an institution which undertakes to implement a programme is usually the "placement" of its undertaking in the framework set by the general, common structure of laws and regulations.

Thus, when we ask whether a programme has been well prepared in its formal and legal aspects, we ask whether its implementer has made every effort to "do a good job" and adjust programme implementation rules to the regulations in force.

Before the Structural Funds we usually had to deal with programmes which, irrespective of the scale of funding, worked on the assumption that "the law is as it is", and there was no point in considering legal changes in the limited time that the promoter had at its disposal. In other words, the role of an institution that managed a programme consisted of developing programme rules in such a way that they did not clash with the regulations in force, whatever they were like. If a legal barrier of whatever kind was encountered, the usual strategy was simply to withdraw and look for another way to achieve one's goals. The result was that in most projects we usually dealt with inflexible formal and legal environment, which may have been unfavourable but had one important advantage: it was relatively stable.

From this point of view, the Structural Funds are completely different. Owing to the large amount of allocated funds from the European Union and their importance for the country's structural development as a whole, it was decided for the first time that not only programme implementation rules should be adjusted to regulations, but also vice versa, that is, the formal and legal system should be amended so that it creates favourable environment for the implementation of programme objectives.

Although such issues are out of the scope of this study, it should be remembered that the general context of the implementation of Structural Funds in Poland profoundly influences the implementation environment for all the structural programmes, including EQUAL CI. One consequence of the above situation is a very tempting possibility of amending those regulations which hinder programme implementation. On the other hand, legal changes, though likely to bring about advantages in the long run, are also bound to cause a sense of unstable principles and rules which organise the programme environment in the short run.

MA and NSS representatives specified the following reasons for the changes made:

- In most cases (50%) the system was modified to meet the needs of DPs which signalled problems. One example of such a situation was the issue of securities. A similar case was that of the verification procedures for claims for payment. (Seeing that partnerships often make numerous small errors in their claims, the MA initially agreed to accept documents corrected manually by NSS employees. When it turned out that this practice, although very convenient for the DPs, raised numerous formal doubts, the MA quit it. This was, however, perceived as an unfavourable change of rules.) Such noble attempts at system improvement were made by the MA before. Let us remind the process of *assessment and selection of*

applications commented in detail in the previous report[6].

- Quite often (30%) adjustments had to be made to correct erroneous assumptions and mistakes.

- The third group pf changes (20%) included modifications triggered by external factors independent of programme managers (such as changes in legislation or interpretations concerning the whole system of Structural Funds).

It is hard to say whether changes should or should not be made. A failure to make a change would often have more negative consequences than confusion resulting from the change. Numerous changes in the interpretation of eligibility rules could serve as an example. It would be difficult not to agree with the argument that, on the whole, it is better to devote more time to negotiating a budget than to incur costs and risk they would not be classified as eligible costs. Obviously, it would be best to resolve all doubts at the very beginning rather than look for solutions to current problems during the programme. Nevertheless, a lot of issues "nobody thought about in advance" will always come up during the implementation of such an complex undertaking as Structural Funds.

> *"More clarity of the adopted principles and structures of operational and financial management would be advisable. Unfortunately, solutions were developed after problems occurred, not in advance."*
>
> *"The Polish legal system was not prepared for the programme. The answers of the NSS and MA were very delayed. Some issues (e.g. the VAT issue) have not been unambiguously settled yet."*
>
> *(from the comments to surveys)*

5.1.2   Were the roles of participants in the programme management process defined? What was the role of the Managing Authority in the process of supporting the formation and consolidation of partnerships?

Opinions of partnership representatives	*Opinions of the NSS and the MA*
"The NSS, as a dependent body, tried to execute MA's decisions literally, which led to the 'helpless clerk syndrome'." *"In the current management system where the NSS has to consult all its decisions with the MA, the NSS becomes an inefficient participant of the management process and just another element of the communication chain with no decision-making capacity."*	*"The underlying principle is that a partnership contacts directly the NSS, and we try to stick to this principle. We have no direct contacts with DPs. This is the role of a supervisor in substantive matters. So this is the filter through which we are perceived by partnerships."* *"It often happens that NSS representatives ask us about issues solved a long time ago and whose explanations are available on the NSS webpage." (MA representative)*

Clarity of roles and relationships between the MA and the NSS is negatively perceived by 38% of the partnerships. It results from two issues:

1   The role of project supervisor as an intermediary between a DP and the NSS/MA
2   The procedure of verifying claims for payment

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[6] Jaszczołt, K., Ciężka, B., Potkański, T. (2005) *Evaluation of recruitment, assessment and selection of applications for EQUAL Community Initiative in Poland*. Warsaw: Company for Good Services

Survey: Evaluation of management solutions at the national level (roles and mutual MA – NSS relations)

Very high	High	Neutral	Low / Very low
1%	27%	34%	38%
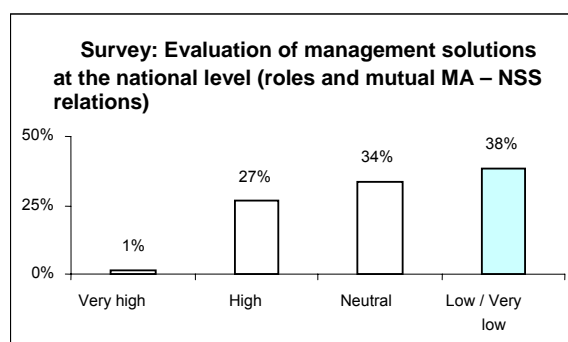
Graph 96

The role of project supervisor

The project supervisor plays a key role in the existing system. From the point of view of the Managing Authority, the assistant should be a competent partner for a DP. He/she should be able to answer most questions and solve most problems in relations between a DP and the NSS/MA.

5.1.3   Were the prepared principles for programme implementation, and partnerships' organisational principles in particular, correct?

Positive partnerships' opinions	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"The assumptions are correct; they teach how to share responsibilities for decisions, they widen and complement knowledge of individual partners, they stress the equality aspect. On the other hand, the administrator can take a decision in a situation when agreement cannot be reached and thus make it possible for a project to continue."	*"With the administrator's leading role in management and settlement of funds the entity responsible for these processes can be appointed and the required results can be more easily achieved. Nevertheless, the things required from the administrator often contradict the expectation that the principle of partnership should be followed."*
"The requirement of 3 sectors' representation leads to the exchange of experience and guarantees good results; the time for partnership creation was long enough; the partnership principle promotes the establishment of relationships and co-operation also in other areas."	*"Too big financial responsibility has been transferred to the administrator; there is no responsibility sharing in proportion to the budget amount."*

According to many respondents from DPs, the MA and the NSS, the very fact of partnership creation is one of the key successes of Action 1. Moreover, it is stressed that co-operation under EQUAL is of a completely different type than the commonly practiced co-operation of various institutions. Therefore, during the interviews, we tried to find out what made the "partnership" promoted under the programme so much unique.

The distinguishing features of an ideal partnership mentioned by our respondents included:

- A common vision of tool / system which the partners want to construct together (or at least a concern about a given target group shared by DP members and the will to find the best way to satisfy its needs)
- Problem-solving approach, that is, a search for practical and effective tools
- Interdependence of partners expressed in the saying that "we would not manage it on our own" or in the conviction that joint efforts of several institutions will lead to the development of better and more comprehensive solutions
- The "will to participate" or "full commitment" of co-operating entities
- Mutual confidence (which is, according to many, the very basic condition)
- Substantive competencies in the area covered by the project and in subjects for which particular partners are responsible
- Managerial skills to divide and co-ordinate work appropriately
- Communication skills to guarantee appropriate flow of information and inclusion of all DP members in the process
- Benefits which can satisfy particular, and often different, interests of individual partners

The order of the above mentioned features is random. Thus, if we were asked what kind of partnership organisation is promoted in the programme we would stress the big role of mutual confidence on the one hand, and the leader's managerial skills with the expected partners' benefits on the other hand.

When we began evaluating the programme, we made a working assumption that the partnership idea was a kind of utopia assuming total equality and community of values between partners. Yet it soon turned out that the partnership had much less to do with "common feeling" and "total equality" and more to do with good organisation, responsibility and interplay of interests in the positive meaning of the phrase.

Survey: Evaluation of partnership formation principles in EQUAL IC

	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Not sure	No / Definitely not
	35%	53%	6%	7%

Graph 99

Respondents' opinions on the principles underlying the functioning of partnerships are far from being over-enthusiastic. Although most of them (88%) express positive opinions, more moderate views prevail. It turned out that the partnership functions a bit like a democracy. It is definitely not an ideal system; nor does it guarantee justice for all. If it is based, however, on the good will of all parties and effective principles of co-operation, it enables its members to achieve their goals and solve problems creatively.

The source of the most serious problems in the implementation of the partnership principle is a paradox which stems from the programme management conditions. Namely, the administrator is held responsible for funds entrusted to a partnership and at the same time he is expected to "ensure equal participation of partners in decision making and task performance"[7]. It seems that the source of conflict in many of the so-called "difficult partnerships" was neither an intention to misuse the funds nor the authoritarian leader's approach, but a real difficulty with finding a formula which would reconcile the two conflicting expectations.

The difference between those DPs that were successful in Action 1 and those that engaged in mutual accusations and internal conflicts had as much to do with mutual confidence (or its lack) as with the ability to divide tasks and organise work in such a way that every participant plays and understands his/her role in the whole process. The key to success, or at least the necessary requirement, was in most cases effective communication between partners. A partnership whose members did not meet or engage in open dialogue had to encounter conflicts and problems sooner or later.

Summary of issues related to the system organising the environment for programme implementation

Effectiveness

Implementation of the vast majority of tasks planned under Action 1 in spite of serious difficulties and considerable delays is a vast success for both partnerships and institutions managing the programme at the national level. It was possible thanks to great determination of all process participants (the MA, the NSS, partnerships).
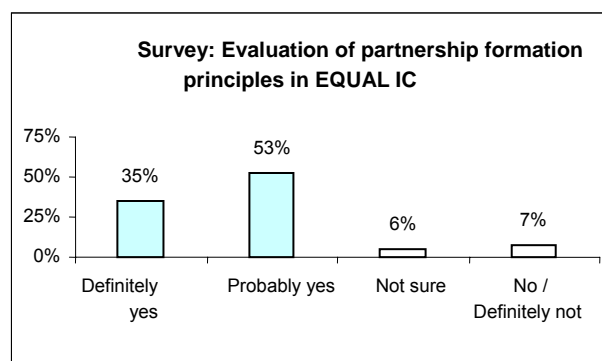
According to many respondents from DPs, the MA and the NSS, the very fact of establishing partnerships is one of the key successes of Action 1. As many as 88% respondents gave positive opinions on the principles of partnership organisation outlined in the programme.

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[7] "Administrative and Financial Manual for Development Partnerships", Chapter 2.2, Tasks of the DP Administrator, p. 13

Efficiency

60% of the surveyed partnerships felt negatively about the preparation of the system for programme implementation (average score 2.5 on the rating scale from 1 to 5). The formal and legal environment as well as administrative burdens were the most frequently mentioned barriers limiting the effectiveness of partnerships' operations (74% and 64% of the indicated factors).

A significant delay in concluding agreements with the NSS resulted from too conservative security requirements. The scale of delays was big enough to constitute a big risk from the point of view of Action 1 objectives.

Due to difficulties with verification of cost eligibility and the complexity of the multistage system of verifying applications, the average waiting time for intermediate payments was as long as 55 days. It was a source of serious administrative burdens in partnerships.

Late conclusion of agreements with the NSS plus the long payment time caused serious financial problems for project promoters. Many partnerships had difficulties with remunerating people employed on the project and were forced to use loans to finance their current activities.

The unclear VAT situation (with partners treated by some Tax Offices as service providers rather than executors of a common subsidised project) led to conflicts between partners and the administrator. Despite intense efforts on the part of the MA the tax situation of partnerships has not been clarified yet.

Evidently, not all solutions and procedures had been well thought-out and prepared in detail before the programme was launched. Some of the subsequent problems were due to an oversight or erroneous assumptions (securities), others were connected with changes of external conditions (VAT).

Operations of the Managing Authority usually resulted from a very positive motivation, that is, striving for system improvement of solution of serious problems encountered during programme implementation. It should be appreciated as it shows great commitment of the MA's Management.

There are no major objections to the execution of interventions by the MA. Its actions were usually adequate, characterised by resoluteness and obstinacy in striving to achieve their aims.

Unfortunately, the MA's initiatives were usually late reactions to the ongoing situation rather than results of prior risk analysis and proactive risk prevention. The MA was often caught unprepared by problems and its attempts to solve them immediately were not always successful.

Frequent changes of rules show faults in the preparation to the Initiative launch and expose instability of the whole system of Structural Funds in the first programming period.

The system of programme management at the national level (relations between the MA and the NSS) was evaluated negatively by 38% of the respondents (only 28% of positive scores; average 2.77 on the scale from 1 to 5). The main reason for the low score was a conviction of inefficient programme management by the two-level system (NSS – MA). The symptom of system deficiency is, in the opinion of the respondents, the overly elaborate procedure for verifying claims for payment and the unclear position of project supervisors who lack up-to-date information and are not ready to make decisions.

The source of the most serious difficulties with the implementation of the partnership concept was the paradox following from programme management conditions, namely, the administrator's responsibility for funds and equality of partners in decision making and task performance. It was possible to overcome this fault of the system thanks to mutual confidence, open dialogue and good work organisation.

5.2   Programme implementation within the existing system

This chapter aims to analyse the management of the programme implementation process at the national level. We are going to discuss here, in turn, issues of keeping deadlines, administrative burdens, reporting, and information policy of the programme. At the end of the chapter we are going to present partnerships' opinions on the quality of EQUAL CI management at the national level.

We will try to answer the following evaluation questions:

5.2.1 Is the programme implemented on schedule?

5.2.2 How were the agreements with development partnerships prepared (negotiated)?

5.2.3 How do partnerships perceive usefulness (costs and benefits) of the adopted programme reporting system?

5.2.4 How do partnerships evaluate the quality of programme information policy?

5.2.5 How do partnerships perceive the quality of programme management?

5.2.1   Is the programme implemented on schedule?

Positive partnerships' opinions	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"…the advantage of the MA / NSS is decisions to extend deadlines for settlements, reports, etc." *"Our generally good perception is the result of an objective assessment of efforts made especially by the NSS to reduce delays in funding. We had no major difficulties with understanding and applying rules and guidelines of the MA and NSS while working on project implementation."*	*"The biggest problems were connected with a significant delay in the conclusion of agreement for co-financing under Action 1 and long waiting time for funds, which made task performance impossible."* *"The MA and NSS very quickly started working on solutions to partnerships' problems with programme implementation, but it took them too much time to develop the solutions."*

Unfortunately, we cannot answer affirmatively. According to the initial programme implementation schedule, the process of selecting applications should have finished and Action 1 should have been launched in October 2004.

Planned schedule of EQUAL implementation	
(on the basis of MC minutes of 25.05.04 and the Directory for the Applicants)	
Launch of the second round of EQUAL IC	early 2004
Call for projects	07.06.2004
Deadline for submitting applications	13.08.2004
Selection of applications	09.2004
Launch of Action 1	10.2004
Launch of transnational co-operation	01.2005
End of Action 1	31.05.2005
Start of project implementations by DPs	01.06.2005
End of Actions 2 and 3	08.2008

As we know, the process of evaluation and selection of projects took two months longer than planned. We described the reasons for it in detail in a report on the evaluation of that programme stage. We also explained reasons for the delay and accepted reasons justifying that decision.

Unfortunately, the course of implementation of Action 1 also significantly differed from the plan. Since the problems with securities occurred and the new agreement template was still not ready, first partnerships concluded their Action 1 agreements as late as in mid January. 44% of partnerships did it in the second quarter of 2005. A few partnerships signed Action 1 agreements after 31 May, that is, after the planned closing date for that programme stage.

As agreement conclusion was a prerequisite for granting funds, it may be concluded that the effective time for the implementation of Action 1 for half of the partnerships was shortened to 3 months, even including the prolongation of Action 1 until the end of June.

The table below shows the timescale of Action 1 implementation just as it was presented in the NSS periodic reports.

IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURE 1 OF EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE IN POLAND
(on the basis of NSS reports)

Actions	2004							2005					
	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02	03	04	05	06
Information campaign in the media													
Call for projects	7/06												
Creation of initiative teams for EQUAL applications			751										
Promotion and publicity strategy			31/08										
Training of SPA (Subcommittee for Project Assessment) experts													
Formal assessment					27/10								
Substantive assessment						5/11							
Selection of applications						95	12						
Sending to DPs information on agreements with the NSS						107							
Entering data of partnerships into the ECDB													
Appointing project supervisors in the NSS													
Negotiating and approving budgets							3		94				38
Concluding A1 implementation agreements										54			50
Verification of TCA agreements													167
Submission of applications for the first payment									39				65
Submission of applications for intermediate payments										5			78
Drafting checks schedule (with report templates)													
Control visits										7			13
Intervention visits										2			4
Mediation meetings													2
Procedure for DPA and A2 application assessment													
Action 2 applications													60
Training courses for DPs													
Survey assessing training needs													
Training schedule for 2005													
All training courses													11
Project Cycle Management training (+ experts on duty)												8	
Training on self-evaluation in DPs											1		
Training on VAT and other financial issues											1		
Training on state aid issues													1
DPs' training schedule for Q3 and Q4													
Conferences													
EQUAL CI opening conference	31/05												
Information meeting for DPs						22/11							
"Last chance meeting" in Prague											28/04		
EQUAL MC meetings	25/05		31/08			15/11	17/12 20/12			10/03			16/06

Figures in the table denote exact event dates (if they were given in reports) or quantitative information about progress in the given periods of time. Unfortunately, the reports contain some data which are not fully consistent. For example, in the fourth quarter no DP-NSS agreement was signed, 54 agreements are mentioned at the end of the first quarter of 2005, and 50 other agreements at the end of the second quarter. It would mean that 104 instead of 107 agreements were signed until the end of June 2005. Next, if we sum up all "negotiated agreements", we have 138 instead of 107 documents. It is not always specified whether a given value is accumulated or concerns only a particular reporting period.

Examples of tasks which were carried out later than initially planned

Task	Plan	Execution
Launch of Action 1	10.2004[8]	The last Action 1 agreement with the NSS was concluded on 24.06.05
End of Action 1	31.05.2005[9]	In Q2 DPs were allowed to extend Action 1 until the end of June 2005[10]

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[8] On the basis of MC Minutes of 24.05.2004 and the Manual for Applicants
[9] On the basis of MC Minutes of 24.05.2004 and the Manual for Applicants

Task	Plan	Execution
Submission of A2 applications	End of May 2005	60 DPs submitted A2 applications to 30.06[11]
Project management guide	Q4 2004[12]	30.06.05 - "ready for printing"[13]
Financial management guide	Q4 2004[14]	30.06.05 - "signal and working version"[15]
PCM training	Q4 2004[16]	From 07.03.05 to 11.05.2005[17]
Financial management training for DPs	Q4 2004[18]	17.05.2005
Procedure of selecting DPs for Action 2	Q1 2005[19]	Q2 2005[20]
Launch of NTN	Q1 2005[21]	04.05.05 – secretaries appointed; launch postponed until Q3 2005
Support for partnerships to carry out self-assessment	Q1 2005[22]	16.05.05 Assessment training planned for Q3 2005

5.2.2   How were the agreements with development partnerships prepared (negotiated)?

Partnerships' opinions – "The biggest disadvantages of the programme" *"Long waiting time for the conclusion of A1 agreements with the NSS, which resulted in the necessity to perform tasks without the approved budget or schedule"* *"Long waiting time for the conclusion of Action 1 agreements significantly decreased effectiveness and efficiency of activities."* *Opinion of MA's representative* *"I disagree that the eligibility manual was distributed too late. It was put on the website in late November / early December, which may have delayed negotiations by max. 2-3 weeks."*	*From the NSS Final Reports on Action 1* *"The analysis and verification of budgets was significantly hindered by a common conviction on the part of beneficiaries that application approval equalled approval of budget in the shape presented in the application. Therefore, beneficiaries were not flexible in making suggested corrections in the budgets and some planned budget items lacked necessary justification."* *"Rules for budget analysis and cost eligibility criteria were neither clear nor transparent from the very beginning, and the eligibility manual was prepared and distributed relatively late, which delayed budget negotiations."*

According to both parties, the process of negotiating and concluding Action 1 agreements was extremely tiring and time-consuming. First of all, partnerships did not really want to start negotiations. They were convinced there were no reasons to question their proposed budgets given the fact that a budget constituted an integral part of the application selected in the call for projects. Fortunately, the argument that budgets were not taken into consideration during the selection process finally prevailed, but the procedure of agreement preparation encountered its first obstacles at the very beginning.

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[10] See the NSS Final Report on A1 - Theme F
[11] See the NSS reports for Q2 2005
[12] See the NSS reports for Q2 and Q3 2004
[13] See the Final NSS Reports on Action 1
[14] See the NSS reports for Q2 and Q3 2004
[15] See the Final NSS Reports on Action 1
[16] See the NSS reports for Q2 and Q3 2004
[17] See the Final NSS Reports on Action 1
[18] See the NSS reports for Q2 and Q3 2004
[19] See the NSS reports for Q4 2004
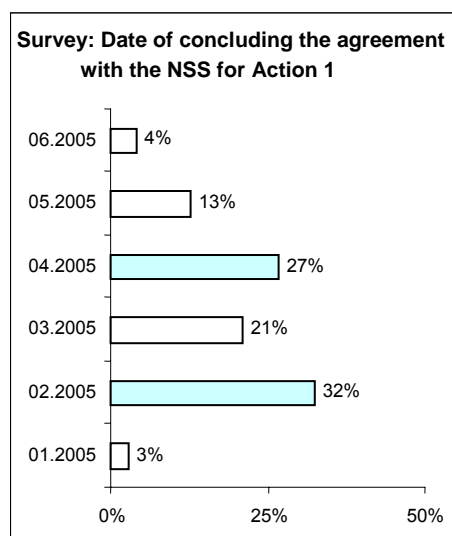[20] See the Final NSS Reports on Action 1
[21] See the NSS reports for Q4 2004
[22] See the NSS reports for Q4 2004

Also the stage of collecting documents necessary for agreement conclusion was not an easy one. Partnerships often submitted incorrect or incorrectly completed documents. Communication was a problem, too. The following statements are frequent in NSS reports from this period (put in the chapter on the encountered difficulties):

"Difficult contact or bad communication with a beneficiary: long waiting time for the first budget proposals or for replies to NSS comments on budgets, delays in sending documents necessary for agreement conclusion" (From the NSS Final Reports on A 1)

There was the securities issue and the related change of the agreement template (regulation changing the agreement template came into force on 10 March 2005). When it seemed that the difficulties were finally overcome, two other problems occurred: one with international organisations (and their operation under Polish law) and the other with entities subordinate to public administration bodies (where it was not clear who should sign the agreement and secure its performance).

Survey: Date of concluding the agreement with the NSS for Action 1

Month	Percentage
06.2005	4%
05.2005	13%
04.2005	27%
03.2005	21%
02.2005	32%
01.2005	3%

Graph 101

"A problem occurred in relation to international organisations and restrictions contained in provisions of the agreement for co-financing under Action 1 (§ 31). They specify that the national law must be followed in case of disputes. The international organisations were exempt from this duty under previous arrangements with the Polish government." (From the NSS Final Reports on A 1)

The result of these problems was extension of the agreement conclusion process over the whole duration of Action 1. As it can be seen from Graph 101, only 3% of agreements were concluded in January. Budget negotiations were concluded and agreements were signed in February with those partnerships which provided securities (or which did not have to meet this requirement, that is, the administration units).

More partnerships started concluding agreements when the regulation amendment entered into force. The process was not, however, particularly dynamic at the beginning and reached its peak as late as in April. The remaining DPs concluded their agreements in May and June. These included international organisations and entities subordinate to public administration bodies.

5.2.3　How do partnerships perceive usefulness (costs and benefits) of the adopted programme reporting system?

Partnerships' opinions

"It seems that the relation of time spent on administration to time spent on product development should be at least 30% to 70%. However, the above formal and legal difficulties as well as technical and organisational problems led to the situation where far too much time had to be devoted to administrative work."

"Substantive reporting did not account for much of that time (the reports were actually too general for such complex projects). At the same time, financial reports were too detailed and administrative issues were not settled at all, which meant working in constant uncertainty."

"Due to the numerous reporting duties and the constantly changing guidelines for reports, agreements, applications, etc. reporting, rather than substantive work, constituted a large share of partnerships' activities."

A single favourable opinion cannot be found among the partnerships' answers to survey questions concerning the reporting system and, generally, concerning the administrative aspect of the programme. The "administrative and formal issues" were usually understood by the respondents as all the matters connected with agreement securities, budget negotiations, claims for payment and reporting, that is, all the elements which led to delays in programme implementation and distracted the partnerships from substantive issues.
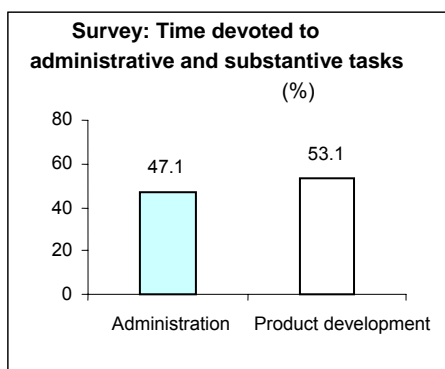
Graph 102

As one of the respondents expressed it, such duties should take no more than 30% of work time. As Graph 102 shows, they were very absorbing and took almost 50%. What is more, a lot of DPs, when asked about the ratio of time spent on administrative tasks to the time spent on substantive tasks, referred not only to the efforts of people whose remuneration was covered though EQUAL, but also to the whole team participating in project implementation. Our interlocutors from two partnerships examined in case studies were of the opinion that the proportion of time spent on administration would reach 80% if only the employees remunerated from programme funds were considered.

In other words, no serious substantive work could have been initiated.

As for the report forms themselves, representatives of partnerships as well as of the Managing Authority pointed out that the template used in standard sectoral operational programmes on human resourceswas completely unsuitable for reporting the progress of undertakings whose objectives were not quantitative results (number of meetings, number of trained people, number of employed people, etc.) but innovative solutions. In such programmes reports should predominantly deal with qualitative information describing the progress of development activities and the value added generated by the developed tools.

Also the form of claim for payment was imposed on all operational programmes by the Ministry of Finance and failed to reflect the specific characteristics of EQUAL.

We agree that the used report format does not give the idea of the substantive progress of the programme. We suggest that, with the support of thematic networks, activities on creating a tool for assessing DPs' substantive progress should be initiated as soon as possible.
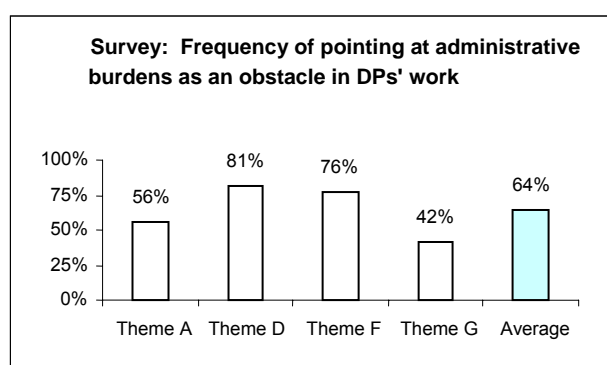
Graph 103
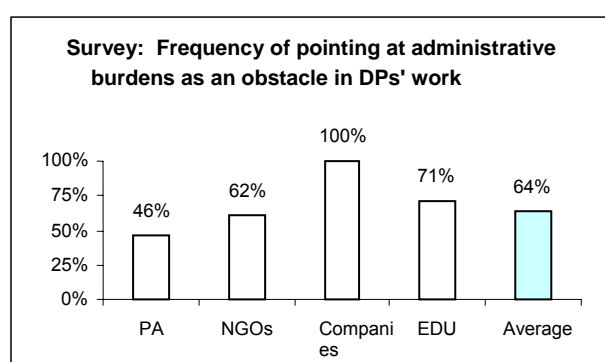
Graph 104

DPs' comments show that the programme, which is promoted as a flexible and innovation-oriented one, should not be burdened with excessive formal requirements, especially with those followed literally without individual treatment of particular projects or without considering their specific characteristics. A NSS representative challenges this view. In his opinion, it is the substantive issues that show the open, flexible formula of the programme. The tasks which cannot be financed under Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development or other typical programmes can be implemented under EQUAL. However, one should not expect that using lofty and innovative ideas can exempt anybody from the usual duties of reporting substantive and financial progress.

As is usually the case, both sides of the argument have a point and the truth lies in between. It would be difficult not to agree with the opinion that spending public money implies following some rules and being supervised by authorised institutions. It is also true that the scope of issues to be reported, determined by the format of interim reports, does not appear excessive or particularly complicated. It also seems obvious that it is justified for the institutions which grant funds to set the rules of expenditure settlement, just as it is natural for the beneficiaries of financial aid to follow these rules.

Nonetheless, we should not forget that with the current administrative and formal requirements most DPs worked with no access to EQUAL funds for a few months and were in fact forced to credit the programme from their own funds or loans taken out from commercial banks. Surely this was not right and the resentment of beneficiaries is fully justified (which is also admitted by the NSS).

The only conclusion that can be drawn is a decision to simplify the rules of programme implementation so as to maintain the basic requirements for the spending of public funds but also to provide the necessary room for the implementation of EQUAL's fundamental objectives. It can be concluded from information obtained from the MA and NSS that the institutions responsible for programme management at the national level share the opinion of overregulated implementation of Structural Funds and EQUAL itself. They are preparing a set of solutions which are going to shorten the time of making payments.

5.2.4 How do partnerships assess the quality of programme information policy?

Positive partnerships' opinions	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"We rate highly the flow of information, the quality of tools used for it (the website, website updates, training and working materials, the interpretation of problems reported by partnerships). We also rate positively individual consultations with NSS employees and promotion campaign of the programme." *"In our opinion the most efficient form of information flow was the training courses organised by the NSS and information put on the website."* *"All our questions addressed to the project supervisor, except our e-mail enquiries, were answered."*	*"More attention should be paid to the forms of communication with a partnership. The main form is now telephone calls, which may, because of their nature, be regarded as unofficial and indecisive. Besides, all the new requirements of the NSS are communicated by means of a relevant note on NSS websites in the "What's new?" ("Aktualności") section only. E-mails are not sent to partnerships; direct contact with project teams is not made."* *"The information from the NSS is not reliable, up-to-date or confirmed by the MA."*

We wrote before about the role of communication at the partnerships' level as the factor which helped overcome potential conflicts resulting from structural conditions of DPs' activity (administrator – partners relations). According to representatives of the Managing Authority, the information flow between the MA, NSS and DPs is just equally important. If we assume that most of the changes made over the duration of Action 1 were well-grounded and motivated, then the form of communicating the necessity to make the changes was indeed of utmost importance.

In an interview with one of the best project supervisors (according to partnerships) we asked about the qualities of a good supervisor. What should he/she be like? How should he/she treat his/her role in order to perform his/duties well? The quality which our interlocutor put first without hesitation was the ability to communicate directly with partnerships' representatives. In her opinion, one of the most important responsibilities of an supervisor is to "explain" to the DP representatives what is expeced to do and why it is so. Contacts with project promoters should be based on close (preferably personal) relationship and in-depth knowlegde about the project and should be caracterised by a lot of empathy. Undoubtedly a person who learns that he/she has to rewrite another document needs a word of consolation to make this bitter news easier to bear and make sure that it is not pointless, after all.

Unfortunately, numerous partnerships express dissatisfaction with the fact that, in their case, contacts with the NSS had a somewhat formal character and that the only way they were able to find out about the changes was while using the programme's website.

> *"Beneficiaries did not care to give detailed and up-to-date contact details, so keeping in touch with them, especially in the first stage of co-operation, required extra effort"*
>
> *(From the NSS reports)*

Generally speaking, information was not an asset of Action 1. Project promoters complain about late preparation of manuals, frequent changes of documentation requirements, numerous updated versions of document templates and generally about the sense of being lost in the exceptionally unstable environment of programme implementation.

5.2.5 How do partnerships perceive the quality of programme management?

> Partnerships' opinions
>
> *"The NSS should foresee problems that partnerships may have to tackle. Unfortunately, it is just the opposite: the NSS is unable to foresee problems which may be encountered by a partnership during project implementation. As a result, it does not react on time to new situations, which leads to delays in programme implementation."*
>
> *"One of the fundamental principles of project management, that is, risk forecasting, was not followed."*
>
> *"This kind of evaluation is extremely difficult in the light of the evident good will of all players and evident objective barriers at the level of people, structures, communication and management traditions. In one word – we are all learning."*

The overall score for programme management at the national level is 2.75 on the rating scale from 1 to 5, which is a bit below "neutral". It could also be expressed as "unsatisfactory". The overall score includes 39% of negative scores (including 8% "very low" scores) and, on the other extreme, 22% of positive scores (including 0% "very high" scores).

Interestingly enough, when we look at narrative comments to the scores, we will notice only 3 clearly positive comments and 3 mixed comments, with the vast majority of opinions (32) clearly critical.

General evaluation of the quality of programme management

Graph 105
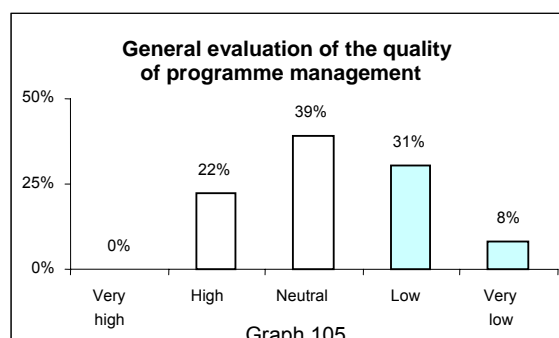
The slightly negative scores together with very negative descriptive comments prove that there is really a lot of frustration and resentment among partnerships and that the feelings must somehow come out and find the right form of expression. At the same time, when it comes to selecting one out of five scores (from "very high" to "very low"), the respondents make an effort to speak more objectively and very often grant the "neutral" score (39%).

The best comment on this situation was expressed by one of the respondents (already quoted above): *"This kind of evaluation is extremely difficult in the light of the evident good will of all players and evident objective barriers at the level of people, structures, communication and management traditions. In one word – we are all learning."*

This is not the first time in this EQUAL evaluation that we have tried to point to the educational value of experience of the people and institutions involved in the programme. A representative of one of the partnerships commented on it mockingly during an interview: "It may be true that we are all learning, but the staff of the Ministry and NSS learn with their jobs and salaries guaranteed, while we have to take out loans just to survive." I should point out that the comment, though ironic, was not spiteful. The speaker intended to appeal for more imagination and to suggest that sometimes the national institutions managing the programme (with payment delays, with many unnecessary formal requirements, with frequent changes in programme implementation resulting in extra work for small project teams), seem somewhat unconcerned and unpreoccupied while smaller organisations participating in the programme encounter seriuos problems.
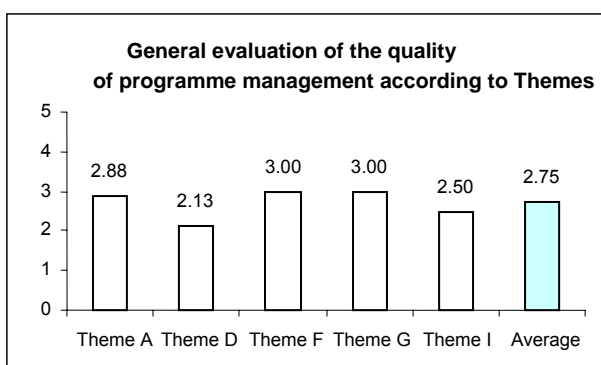
Graph 106
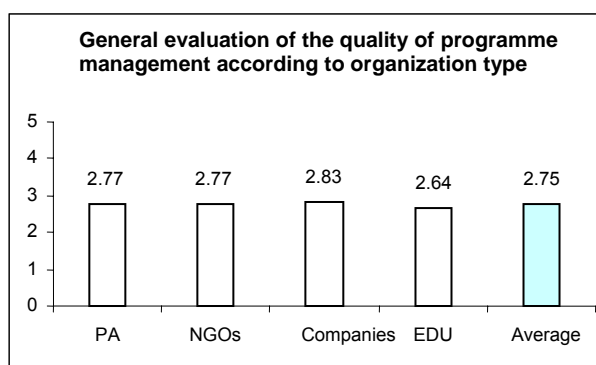
Graph 107

Graphs nos. 106 and 107 show significant differences in the evaluation of programme management by DPs operating in different Themes. The two particularly striking scores are the low score in Theme D and the score slightly above the average in partnerships managed by private companies.

Summary of issues connected with the course of programme implementation:

Efficiency

There were numerous delays in the implementation of work plan for Action 2 (conclusion of agreements, postponing the end of Action 1, delayed training courses and manuals, NTN launch postponed to the third quarter of 2005).

According to the NSS, problems which occurred during agreement preparation and application settlement resulted largely from attitudes of the partnerships, which delayed information transfer, sent documents too late or experienced internal problems (such as the lack of efficient internal decision-making systems).

As a result of the recorded delays in the execution of successive tasks and the prolonged handling of claims for payment, most respondents were critical about keeping deadlines by the MA and NSS in implementing the programme and about fulfiling their obligations vis-a-vis partnerships (58% of negative answers).

Most of the interlocutors, in partnerships as well as in the NSS and MA, agreed that the system was "overregulated" and that the formal and administrative requirements were excessive.

The formal and administrative duties took almost 50% of the partnerships' time for the implementation of Action 1 (or even more, according to some partnerships). It led to significantly restricted possibilities of undertaking substantive work.

According to many partnerships, but also in the opinion of the MA and NSS, the interim report form

did not suit the character of tasks performed under the programme, as it was designed to measure the process rather than the results. There is a big disproportion between the simple requirements of substantive reporting compared to the excessive and too detailed financial reporting.

Information was not the strong suit of Action 1. Project promoters complain about late preparation of manuals, frequent changes of documentation requirements, numerous updated versions of document templates and generally about the sense of being lost in the exceptionally unstable environment of programme implementation.

The overall score for programme management at the national level is 2.75 on the rating scale from 1 to 5, which equals "unsatisfactory". This score includes 39% of negative scores and 22% of positive scores.

6   Partnership support by central-level institutions

6.1   Scope of assistance provided to Partnerships

In this part of the report we will try to define in quantitative terms the scope of assistance provided to partnerships by the NSS. Thus we will try to answer the following evaluation question:

6.1.1 What was the scale of assistance provided to Partnerships by the NSS (MA)?

6.1.1   *What was the scale of assistance provided to Partnerships by the NSS (MA)?*

The substantive scope of support provided to Partnerships by the NSS was related to:

- process of selecting Action 1 applications (see the first report on EQUAL evaluation by Company for Good Services)
- preparation of thenegotiation stage for Action 1 agreements
- creation of national and transnational co-operation partnerships
- programme implementation (management and financial issues, evaluation, state aid, etc.)
- preparation of Action 2 applications

The three goals, that the NSS adopted when organising the technical assistance programme for partnerships, were the following:

- Ensuring comprehensive assistance by means of a training system corresponding to the needs of Partnerships and adjusted to the stage-specific requirements of the programme implementation.

- Expert consultation assistance available in a convenient form for Partnerships,

- Elaboration of a series of publications prepared and issued especially for the EQUAL CI.

Training:

The Training Plan prepared on the basis of the training needs' research formed the basis for training activity within Action 1. Representatives of a vast majority of Partnerships confirmed that the NSS carried out consultations concerning this matter towards the end of 2004 and early in 2005.

According to the NSS Final Report on Action 1, a total of 11 training sessions for Partnerships were organised within the framework of training activities:

- Training series supporting the partnership formation and preparing for applying for co-financing under Action 2 and 3 (PCM) – eight tree-day training sessions from 07.03 to 11.05.2005.
- Training for DPs on self-evaluation in DP – 16.05.2005.
- Training for DPs on VAT and other financial issues relevant for DP operation – 17.05.2005.
- Training for DPs on state aid issues in the EQUAL CI implementation – 21.06.2005.

The total number of participants in all training courses is unknown. It is known, however, that there were about 600 participants in the largest training undertaken (8 three-day training sessions on project management using the PCM method).

In the final stage of Action 1 both the thematic scope and training schedule for partnerships for Q3 and Q4 of this year were developed. During evaluation studies the NSS carried out another survey aimed at identifying the training needs of partnerships.

Advisory:

Advisory assistance was provided to partnerships in two ways.

First of all, the project supervisor can be considered as an advisor, who, apart from monitoring the partnership, supported it with his knowledge on programme implementation procedures. Project supervisors were appointed already in December 2004. At that time DPs also received information on principles of co-operation with the supervisors.

Another form of assistance was the expert assistance and consultation during the preparation of Action 2 application. The consultation covered the topics of project definition and planning, and was related to the PCM training conducted earlier. As stated in the NSS Report:

„Experts were available under a special phone line during weekly duty hours, they also answered questions e-mailed to equalpcm@cofund.org.pl. A few dozens of Partnerships took the opportunity to consult the experts in May and June. Answers to questions asked during training and expert duty hours, as well as other clarifications are put on the EQUAL CI website".

Publications:

According to the NSS Report, 7 publications were elaborated under Action 1, yet most of them were available towards the end of June only in a trial or ready-to-print version.

Only in the case of two following items the publication and distribution process was completed: :
- "107 Development Partnerships in Poland"
- "Guide to transnational co-operation 2004-2008"

Five other books were at different stages of the editing process on 30 June:
- "Gender mainstreaming" – EQUAL CI guide – being prepared for print.
- „Guide to Partnership formation within the framework of the EQUAL Community Initiative" – being prepared for print.
- "Project Cycle Management – methodology guide for Development Partnerships" – being prepared for print.
- "Administrative and financial manual for EQUAL CI Development Partnerships" – editing, supervision over elaboration and preparation for print; publication of the signal and working version
- "Guide to self-evaluation for Development Partnerships" – editing.

A concept of the „EQUAL Newsletter" was also developed, materials to be included in the first issue were collected.

Apart from advisory assistance, training and publications, the NSS supported partnerships through the programme website, where materials and guides were posted along with up-to-date information concerning the programme.

In order to facilitate transnational co-operation, the MA has developed a Polish version of the Equal Common Data Base – ECDB, and the NSS has provided Polish partnerships with passwords and log-ins in order to enter detailed descriptions to the database. Partnerships browsed the ECDB individually then, searching for foreign partnerships in order to form transnational co-operation partnerships. Within the ECDB framework, the initiators of transnational co-operation partnerships posted transnational co-operation agreement drafts via the ETCIM (Equal Transnational Co-operation Internet Module), which were then evaluated by the NSS and approved by the MAs from all countries represented by national partnerships.

6.2   Services for partnerships

> In this part of the analysis we will try to evaluate the services provided to partnerships by the NSS. We will go step by step through possible support areas: from assistance in establishing national/transnational co-operation and formation of DP structure and management systems, through training and advisory services, information and publicity measures, through self-evaluation and monitoring systems. In the end of the analysis we will present a general opinion of respondents in terms of the quality of support provided through the NSS. Sample evaluation questions were the following:
>
> *6.2.1 To what an extent has the NSS supported Development Partnerships in establishing and maintaining national and transnational co-operation?*
>
> *6.2.2 To what an extent were partnerships supported in the formation of internal structure and management mechanisms?*
>
> *6.2.3 How do Partnership representatives evaluate the quality of advisory and training services provided?*
>
> *6.2.4 What was the scope of the information and publicity measures taken?*
>
> *6.2.5 Have Partnerships received support in the formation of the internal project progress monitoring and evaluation system (developing indicators and monitoring plans)?*
>
> *6.2.6 In what way has the National Support Structure preformed its tasks in terms of providing technical assistance to Partnerships?*

6.2.1   To what an extent has the NSS supported Development Partnerships in establishing and maintaining national and transnational co-operation?

Positive partnerships' opinions	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"We had a feeling that we had to rely on ourselves, yet we had very useful tools at our disposal, namely the ECDB and the '107 Development Partnerships' guide"	*From our point of view, the NSS activities were not so much needed. The publication of the list of national partnerships by the NSS had no impact whatsoever on our selection of national partners.*
„The most crucial elements that facilitated establishing contacts and information flow between national partners were direct meetings held during training and conferences organised by the NSS. The website also played a very important role here."	*The only prominent element in this respect was the NSS website, yet the partner-search section appeared to be dead.*
"Owing to the contacts in the ECDB we have found most of our transnational partners (or let them found us). The only drawback is that the partnership descriptions in the database lack a sufficient level of detail."	*Partnerships had actually very little chances for establishing co-operation and exchanging experience. These were rather individual initiatives of Partnerships than inspired by the goal-oriented NSS support. EQUAL discussion group has only emerged in the final stage of Action 1.*

In terms of assistance in organising national partnerships (partner search), the NSS support was little and unnecessary, according to many respondents. Organisations interested in co-operation met already in summer 2004 (prior to application submission), based on their knowledge of the local sector and market, earlier experience with co-operation or personal contacts. The average rate of this aspect of the NSS activity was 3.31 in the scale from 1 to 5.

Evaluation of the NSS as regards facilitating contacts with national partners

Very high 7% High 43% Neutral 29% Low / Very low 21%

Graph 108

Evaluation of the NSS as regards facilitating contacts with foreign partners

Very high 13% High 38% Neutral 37% Low / Very low 13%
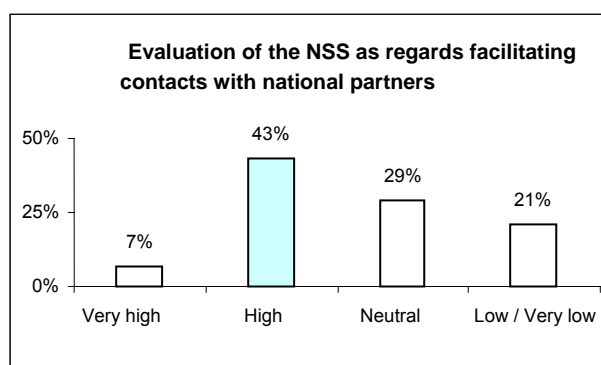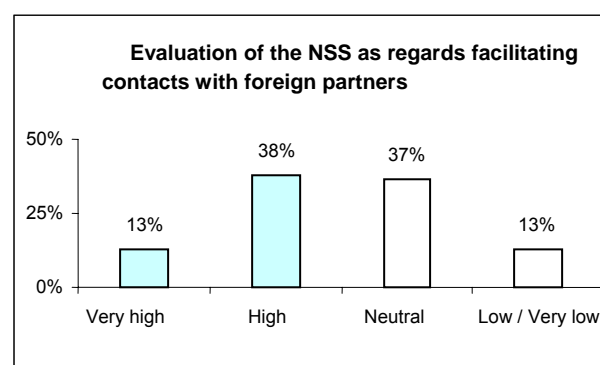
Graph 109

The foreign partner search was also usually carried out without any direct NSS support. The most important tool used by most partnerships was the EQUAL Common Database. The evaluation of this tool is very positive. Given the fact that the NSS supported partnerships in entering data to ECDB and provided access to this database via its own website, the evaluation of the NSS activities is higher here (average of 3.46 in the scale from 1 to 5)

6.2.2 To what an extent were partnerships supported in terms of the formation of internal structure and management mechanisms?

| *Positive partnerships' opinions*	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"We evaluate the NSS support provided here very well. The guidelines on organisational structure formation put on the NSS website in the form of materials, publications and expert studies were especially helpful." *"Support in terms of the organisational structure was available, yet some changes aimed at streamlining the whole process would be a good idea, for example more detailed and precise advisory remarks and guidelines".* *"The training and conferences organised have streamlined the Administrator's activities and provided a tool for partnership management and its structure creation".*	*"Apart form the guide on the NSS website, we have not received any support regarding this matter. A sample DP Agreement was posted on the NSS website very late, and what is more, it was not stated clearly whether it was the binding version or not. The issue of management structure was not touched upon by the project supervisor".* *„We have not received any support in this respect. The training on management was theoretical in nature, just like a manual. And the problems consisted of making the manual ideas operational".*

Partnership opinions concerning the NSS role in the DP management structure formation were usually quite critical.

Evaluation of the NSS as regards assistance in the formation of organisational structure
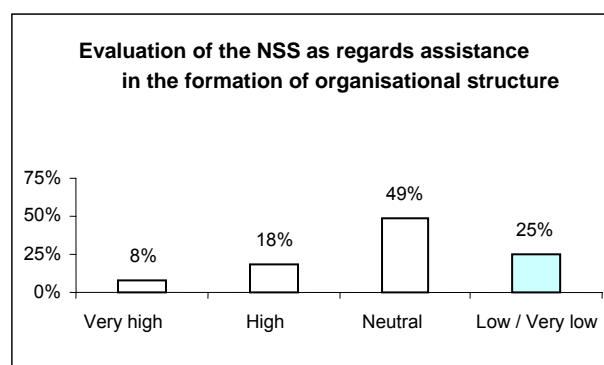
Graph 110

The prevailing perception is that the NSS limited its activities to one theoretical training session and publication of guides, which were , however, available too late. It seems that the NSS, unwilling to become involved in internal disputes of partnerships, has abandoned this issue completely. When looking back from today's perspective this NSS approach seems unjustified. The source of a number of conflicts on the DP level were either the divergent interpretations of programming documents or low management skills; in such cases the NSS support could have made a big difference.

6.2.3 How do Partnership representatives evaluate the quality of advisory and training services provided?

| *Positive partnerships' opinions*	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"We received substantive assistance and support from the project supervisor throughout Action 1" *„The NSS organised a system of training, which was helpful in partnership formation. The NSS publications have also played a role here. Yet there were too few training sessions devoted to financial aspects. Apart from training, one could also count on the assistant's advise."* *The proposed training system has facilitated partnership consolidation to a great extent".*	*"Many measures were taken up with a few months' delay (e.g. training on project management aspects should have been organised at the very beginning of Action 1; guides and guidelines were provided towards the end of Action 1, at present we are receiving information on changes in the cost eligibility manual and we have already submitted the Action 2 application!"* *"Our project supervisor failed to provide assistance and did not provide us with up-to-date (or any) information necessary for proper project implementation. We have not received any answers in writing we asked for"*

The evaluation of training services is "good", yet not "very good". The average general score of training was 4.13 (in the scale from 1 to 5), which corresponds to a „four with a small plus". We carried out training evaluations where general score was at the level of 4.5 or higher many times.
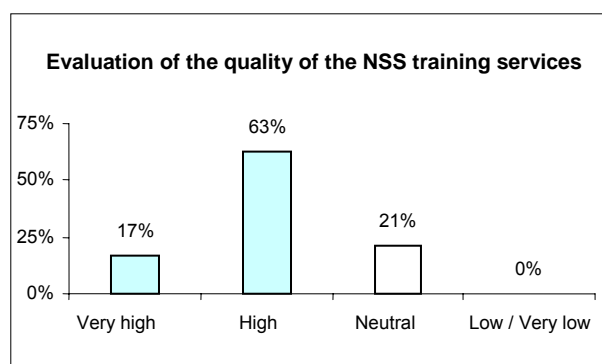
Graph 111

As the aforementioned comments suggest, the most appraised benefit of the training programme was the opportunity of establishing contacts and exchanging experience between partnerships. At the same time, the greatest drawback of this form of support was the fact that – from the point of view of programme dynamics – the training courses were launched too late. There were also remarks that the number of training courses on financial aspects was insufficient and the course topics were not well-connected.
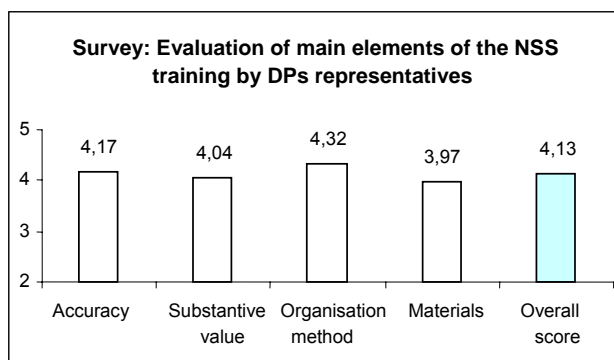
Graph 112

If we take a look at the basic elements that influence the general training quality, it was the quality of training materials and substantive value of training that was most doubtful (scores around 4). The logistics and organisational aspects were evaluated much higher by the respondents.

Suitability of course topics was evaluated at a level close to the average score - 4.17.
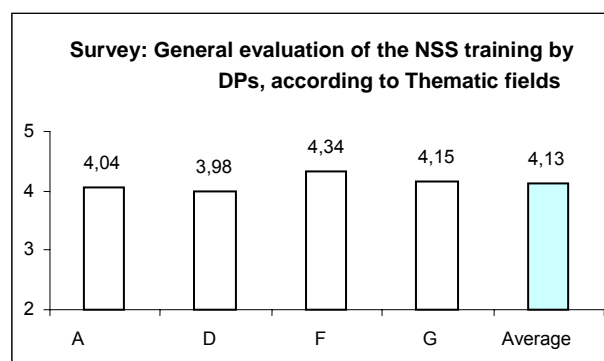
Graph 113
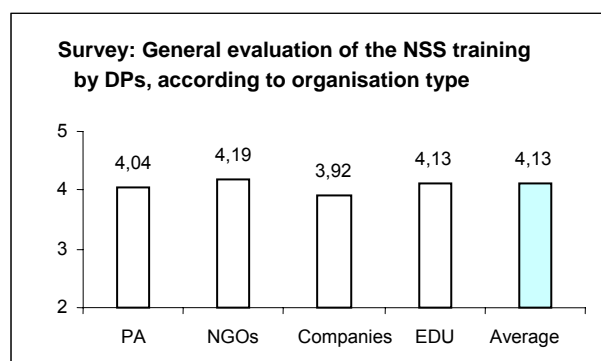
Graph 114

The NSS training activities were most appreciated among NGOs representatives, while companies were the least enthusiastic here. In terms of the thematic arrangement, partnerships implementing projects in Theme F were most satisfied, while those implementing projects under Theme D were least satisfied.

Evaluation of the quality of advisory services for partnerships (47% of DPs used them)

Very high	28%
High	41%
Neutral	28%
Low / Very low	3%
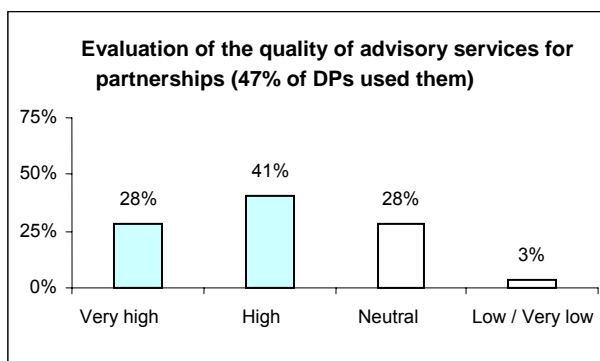
Graph 115

The average score for advisory services was 3.94, which corresponds to "four". Yet, despite relatively low average, the distribution of responses proves that almost 70% of respondents evaluate the quality of advisory services positively.

Partnerships under Theme F clearly benefited most from advisory services. DPs operating in Theme A are on the opposite side in this respect.

Almost all education institutions were satisfied with their contacts with the advisor. Yet, leaders from the public administration sector tend to evaluate them critically. This situation may result from greater experience of schools and private companies with external expert services.

Survey: Evaluation of the quality of advisory services for partnerships, according to Thematic fields

| A	D	F	G	Average
3,44	3,83	4,36	3,80	3,94

Graph 116

Survey: Evaluation of the quality of advisory services for partnerships, according to organisation type

PA	NGOs	Companies	EDU	Average
3,20	3,95	4,00	4,50	3,94
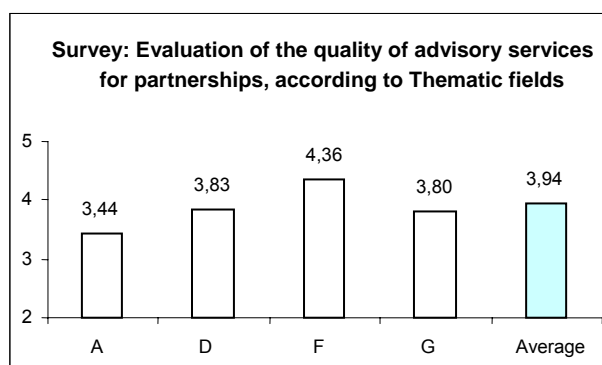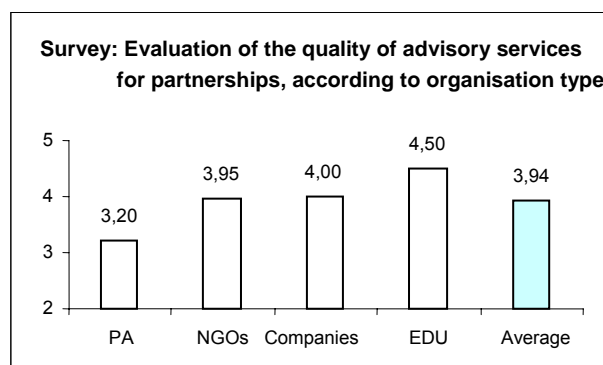
Graph 117

According to comments, most respondents associate advisory services with the work of project supervisors. The Project supervisor played a key role in Action 1 when it comes to relations between the partnership and the NSS and Managing Authority. According to the underlying assumptions, the supervisor should perform two functions: monitor partnership activities (administrative and management function) and support them in information and substantive aspects (advisory function).

Evaluation of the current partnership assistance (Project supervisor in the NSS)

Readiness & willingness to help	4,32
Response time	3,83
Substantive qualifications	3,82
Reliability	3,77
Creativity and effectiveness	3,59
Overall score Of the Project Assistant	3,89

2   3   4   5
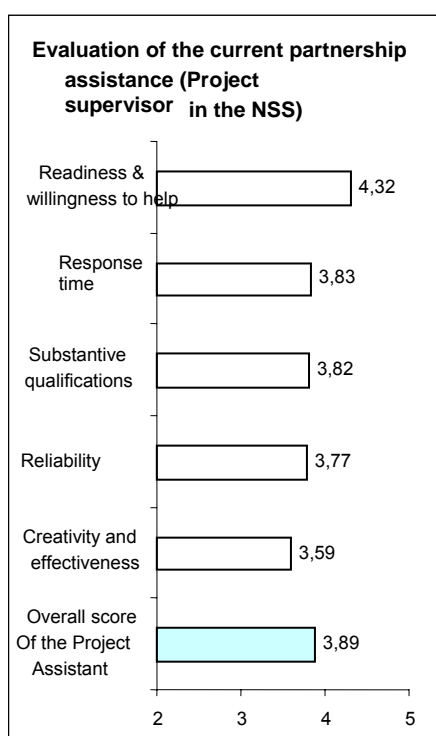
Graph 118

Even though not all project supervisors have managed to meet the expectations, and even though there were certain difficulties in the early stages resulting from the fact that supervisors had too many projects assigned, and even though many partnerships felt uncomfortable having the supervisor changed two or even three times when additional persons were employed and assigned to projects – still, the employed solution was evaluated positively in the most part.

Even in cases where thesupervisor lacked in-depth knowledge about the programme or acted only as an intermediary between the NSS/MA and the partnership, he was still performing a very important function, being a person who knows the project and provides all possible support to its promoters. It appears that this kind of psychological support was crucial during Action 1, when there were many problematic matters which brought frustration and discouragement.

Obviously, the well functioning system implies that the project supervisor is more than just a „psychotherapist". This opinion presented in the survey was common formany respondents. The „readiness and willingness to help" were evaluated very high, while low efficiency and credibility of supervisors with regard to solving problems in partnerships were criticized.

6.2.4   What was the scope of the information and publicity measures taken?

Apart from the information and publicity campaign held in the middle of last year in relation to the call for proposals to Action 1, the NSS has not been involved in any information and publicity measures lately. The NSS reports mention only a partnership conference organised in Warsaw on November 24th. There were about 200 participants, mainly representatives of partnerships whose applications have been approved for Action 1. The meeting was devoted to a discussion about the procedure of preparing an agreement to be concluded with the NSS.

At the end of January 2005 a training course for all partnerships was held in Jahranka. Yet, we do not know of any details concerning this event (organiser, duration, thematic scope, etc.).

At the end of April the NSS participated in a "last chance" meeting, aimed at finding foreign partners for those DPs, which did not manage to establish transnational co-operation themselves.

6.2.5   Have Partnerships received support in the formation of the internal project progress monitoring and evaluation system (developing indicators and monitoring plans)?

The NSS organised a "self-evaluation" training in May. We have not come across any facts that would prove the NSS involvement in the creation of monitoring systems at the level of individual partnerships. The quality of indicators used in the analysed strategies leaves a lot of room for improvement and shows that a lot of work needs to be done in this area. For obvious reasons, it should be initiated as soon as possible – in the early stage of Action 2.

6.2.6   In what way has the National Support Structure performed its tasks in terms of providing technical assistance to Partnerships?

Positive partnerships' opinions	*Negative partnerships' opinions*
"We evaluate the NSS support very good. The guidelines on creating organisational structure put on the NSS website in the form of materials, publications and expert studies were especially helpful." Also the training courses, the direct contact option and ongoing consultations proved valuable." *"Even though we were actually all learning the roles and tasks under the EQUAL programme during its implementation, the deliverables have been achieved. Our DP is much more satisfied with the co-operation with the NSS than it was at the beginning."*	*"We have a feeling that the substantive support concerning partnership organisation is insufficient and there is no opportunity of consulting the substantive Project content with experts."* *"Having the experience of the past Action 1 in mind, we think that the contacts with the Implementing Authority should be more partner-like. "* *„There are very few forms of direct support, such as permanent contacts, visits of the NSS in the Partnerships, few training courses and the website is quite poor as for such a significant Initiative; the discussion group and the forum were also introduced only recently."*

Summing up what has been said so far in respect of partnership support by the National Support Structure, we should recall that the assistance provided to partnerships is three-fold, namely in the form of training, advisory services and publications.

Graph 119
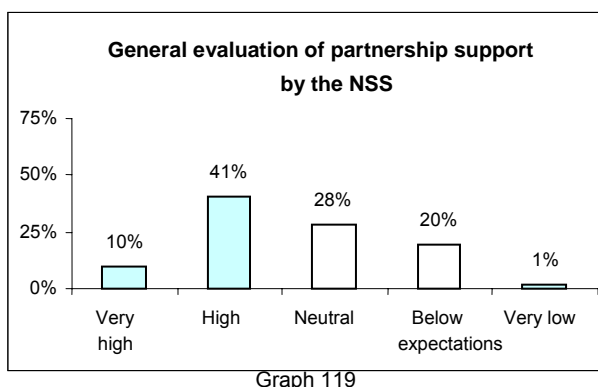
General evaluation of assistance provided to partnerships by the NSS resulted in the 3.38 score given by DPs representatives - "three with a small plus". This score is much lower than partial scores of the training quality (4.13), advisory (3.94) and co-operation with the Project supervisor (3.89).

One possible explanation for this lower general score can be the fact that at least part of the responsibility for programme management on the state level was transferred to the NSS.

As stated before, this aspect was evaluated by the DPs only to 2.75 points in the scale from 1 to 5.

As shown in graphs 120 and 121, the role of the NSS was perceived in various ways, depending on the thematic field and the type of the lead partner institution. The NSS support was best evaluated by the public administration entities and schools. The lowest score was assigned to the NSS by representatives of the private sector and partnerships involved in Theme D in general.

Graph 120

Graph 121
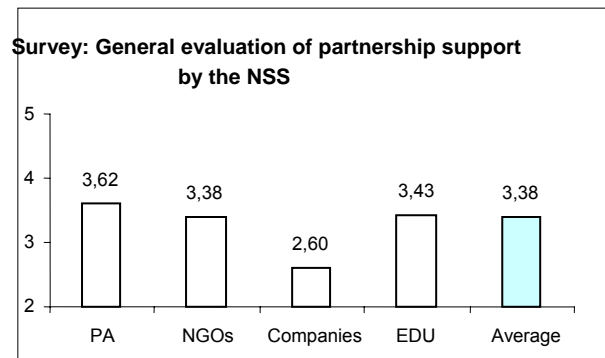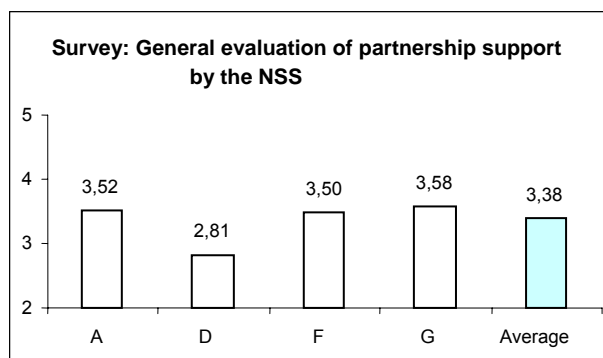
Summary of issues related to services provided to partnerships:

Effectiveness

The scale of conducted training (11 courses for 700-800 participants) appears significant, yet according to many respondents there were not enough training sessions (e.g. there were requests for more training on financial aspects)

In the overwhelming majority of cases, advisory support was reduced to assistance provided to the partnership by the project supervisor. Unfortunately, his support was focused on organisational, administrative and management issues. Some DPs regretted not having the opportunity to consult with substantive sectoral experts. An exception here were consultation sessions organised along with PCM training. A few dozens of partnerships are said to have participated in these sessions. Yet there were no comments in this respect in the surveys submitted by respondents.

Seven publications were elaborated under Action 1, yet most of them were available towards the end of June only in a trial or ready-to-print version. We have come across positive comments concerning the publications helpful for partner search. What was criticized on the other hand was the fact that the administrative and financial manual and PCM guide were issued so late.

Most respondents greatly appreciated the useful programme website, which was one of the basic sources of information about the EQUAL CI for most of them.

The score for the partner-search support was 3.31 (national partners) and 3.46 (foreign partners).

The NSS support in the formation of the organisational system and management mechanisms in the DP was usually evaluated negatively. The prevailing perception is that the NSS limited its activities to one theoretical training session and publication of the guide, which was available too late, however.

The evaluation of training services is "good", yet not "very good". The average general score of training was 4.13 (in the scale from 1 to 5), which corresponds to a „four with a small plus".

The average score for advisory services was 3.94, which corresponds to "four". Yet, despite relatively low average, the distribution of responses proves that almost 70% of respondents have evaluated the quality of advisory services positively.

The score for co-operation with the project supervisor was 3.89. The readiness and willingness to help presented by the project supervisors was most appreciated. Yet, effectiveness and creativity of persons who performed this function was given a lower score.

Apart from a one-day „self-evaluation" training course, we have not come across any facts that would prove the NSS involvement in creation of monitoring systems at the level of individual partnerships.

7   Programme effectiveness evaluation

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
1. Institutional dimension	
1.1 Description of the institutional framework of partnerships	
The Programme Complements provide for establishing 120 partnerships. An average of 10 partners per DP was also assumed. In reality, 107 partnerships have been created, and the average number of partners amounted to 8.3.	**+**
Distribution of projects in different thematic fields, partnership types (geographic/sectoral) and the type of lead partner institution proves that projects are differentiated in terms of structure and topic, which is in accordance with the assumptions made.	**+**
Partnerships are usually formed by organisations from three sectors and with different operating scale (local, regional and national). Even though this principle is not observed in each case, we may state that in general the programme has met its objective of "ensuring widest possible participation of different types of organisations" in partnerships.	**+**
1.1 Overall Score	**4**
Comment The basic scope of effects related to the formation of partnerships with differentiated institutional make-up, where the institutions represent various sectors and organisation types has been achieved. The score is lowered due to a smaller than assumed number of partnerships and a smaller than planned average number of partners in a DP.	
1.2 Partnership organisation process	
A vast majority of partnerships subject to research (86%) claim that from the onset they had a very clear idea of the goal DP product.	**+**
According to the respondents, the partner-selection criteria used most often were these directly related to the thematic field of the implemented project (experience and resources). It speaks well of the quality of the partnership, which is a union of entities who join their efforts in order to solve a specific problem.	**+**
A little increase in the number of partnership participants (on average +1.8 organisation per DP) was observed in Action 1. For 25% of projects, changes in the DP make-up resulted in a decrease of the total number of partners. If, according to the programming documents, an increase in the number of partners can be treated as an indicator of the development of the institutional framework of the partnership, the effects of Action 1 should be considered slightly below the expectations.	**-**
1.2 Overall Score	**4**
Comment: When forming initiative teams, the decisive partner selection criteria were personal contacts or experience from earlier co-operation, while the subsequent partners were searched according to the needs related to the planned project. Despite a small increase in the number of partners during Action 1, we assess the process of DP organisation as rational and well-done.	
1.3 Transnational Co-operation Partnership organisation process	
Polish partnerships have concluded on average 1.5 TCAs (59% one agreement, 34% two agreements), and entered into co-operation with 4-5 foreign partners. To this end about 2 foreign visits were organised, and once foreign partners visited Poland. The deliverables comply with the planned numbers and allow for assuming that this programme element - at least in the quantitative sense, has been carried out according to the expectations.	**+**
When selecting partners, the "substantive proximity" criterion (project topic) was mostly used, which should facilitate effective and efficient co-operation.	**+**
Given the initial nature of international relations, big time pressure in Q2 and difficulties with financing Polish partnerships, the contacts with foreign partners did not have any significant influence on the shape of developed strategies.	**-**
1.3 Overall Score	**4,5**
Comment: Given difficult conditions, in which the task of transnational co-operation was carried out, it was performed both effectively and efficiently. Yet the drawback is that the impact of the established co-operation on the strategy and substantive concept of partnership operation was negligible.	
1.4 Partnership management	
Almost 64% respondents are of the opinion that their partnership guarantees equal say in the decision-making process to all participants (in terms of strategic decisions concerning the DP as a whole). In 28% of DPs the administrator has a greater say in this respect. Nearly one in ten partnerships (8%) has a management system, which guarantees that the Administrator has full control over strategic decisions.	**+**
A similar distribution can be observed in the results of the analysis of the work organisation for the partnership product (substantive activities) – a model based on a joint working group prevails (58%), in 37% of DPs the Administrator performs the role of a coordinator, and in the remaining cases (4-5%) the "main contractor - subcontractors" formula is actually used.	**+**

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
The average participation of partners in the Steering Group is nearly 93%. In ten surveyed projects the value of the "partner participation in the Steering Group" indicator is lower than 100%. (We suggest a careful analysis of such cases).	+
The „average percentage partner participation in the works on the DP strategy" indicator is at the level of 87%, which we consider a satisfactory result.	+
The respondents are unanimous when it comes to the fact that the Administrator takes full responsibility over the internal financing system of the DP, and has a decisive say (and actually has in 90% of cases).	-
The average participation of the Administrator in the proposed budget of Action 2 is at the level of 51%. With a good justification, assigning 50-60% of the budget to the Administrator can be an acceptable situation. Yet, in 14 projects (215 of DPs surveyed) the participation of the Administrator in the budget of Action 2 exceeds 75%, which prompts questions concerning the role of partners and the meaning behind partnership as such.	-
The "beneficiary inclusion into project implementation" rate is 3.9, which leaves a lot of room for improvement in terms of DP activity in this respect.	-
1.4 Overall Score	**3,5**
Comment: The experience of DPs concerning the formation of an effective and "partner-like" project management structure are mixed. In most cases either the system is not centralised enough or the whole mechanism is not working well. Another issue of concern is the high participation rate of the Administrator in the budget and little progress in including (at least in the inclusion plans) ultimate beneficiaries' representatives in project implementation.	
1. Overall Score of the partnership development in the institutional dimension	**4**
Comment: In general the progress in terms of the formation of institutional framework of partnerships should be evaluated positively. The DP population corresponds to the assumptions behind the programme in terms of description (institution type, project topic, partnership type, etc.). DPS were created rationally, in the context of subject of the product which is to be the project deliverable. We have no reason to believe that a smaller than planned number of partners and a little increase of this number during Action 1 will have negative consequences for the project innovation and effectiveness. Establishing transnational co-operation was least problematic for partnerships. The biggest problems have emerged in the sphere of DP management system development. Cases where structural solutions indicate that one entity dominates need closer inspection.	

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
2. Substantive dimension	
2.1 DP strategy development	
Till the end of July 98% of partnerships have submitted with the NSS their Action 2 applications together with the DP strategy attached.	+
Only 53% of partnerships managed to carry out any research during Action 1, and the total cost of the performed research activities constitutes about 8.4% of the total expenditure incurred by the DPs. Given the importance the Action 1 objectives attach to partnership consolidation for the purpose of creating a joint project implementation strategy, the amounts of expenditure allocated by DPs to research activities seem unsatisfactory.	-
In the wake of delays in concluding agreements with the NSS, half of the partnerships embarked "for good" on substantive activities towards the end of April (cf. time schedule of the strategy preparation phase), and these activities lasted only two months. It seems that big time pressure does not facilitate in-depth or wide-scope substantive activities.	-
Concerns regarding the demand for partnership products came as a surprise and as such they point to the necessity of fast intensification of the target group research.	-
The average score of the seven analysed strategies was 3.57 in the scale from 1 to 5, which can be described as „four minus". The following factors had greatest impact on the relatively low average score: some partnerships failed to conduct research, monitoring indicators were of poor quality, there were no estimates concerning the expected quantitative project results, and the risk analysis was relatively poor.	+ / -
Even though NTN by-laws were prepared already in April, and the Secretaries for 5 Thematic Networks have been appointed, given the great work-load of the DP in Q2 (resulting from project organisation, concluding agreements with the NSS and difficulties with payments), NSS-MA have decided to postpone the TNT launching until Q3 of 2005.	-
2.1 Overall Score	**3**
Comment: In terms of works on strategy development, apart from the very fact that the strategies were eventually developed (with a delay), we are not able to provide any arguments that would justify a high score of this programme aspect. Only few DPs	

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
carried out research, the substantive activities were done under a time pressure, and the strategic documents we have analysed reveal a number of weaknesses.	
2.2 Partnership products in EQUAL CI	
The product descriptions provided in the survey show that the projects implemented by partnerships in general comply with the EQUAL CI topics.	**+**
At least 62% of products are "tool" solutions. The fact that the project promoter is able to define a specific project result (training programme, model of procedure, website, etc.) emphasizes the "tangibility" of concepts of these DPs.	**+**
The average score of the whole programme in terms of innovation was 3.81 (in the scale from 1 to 5), which corresponds to a "weak four". Even though it is not an ideal score, it is optimistic. On the other hand, one should bear in mind that it is a "self-evaluation" performed even before the implementation of the project started.	**+**
The overall score of the programme potential for mainstreaming purposes (i.e. the average of ratings given to individual products) was 3.53 in the scale from 1 to 5, which corresponds to a "good three plus".	**+ / -**
2.2 Overall Score	**4**
Comment: The conducted project analysis was very superficial, and it was based on partnership self-evaluation when investigating innovation and mainstreaming potential. The information gathered shows that projects taken up by DPs are promising.	
2. Overall Score of the partnership development in the substantive dimension	**3,5**
Comment: The evaluation of the institutional dimension of the partnership operation is ambiguous. The analysis of the strategy development process reveals poor quality of both strategic documents and of the whole process they result from. On the other hand, opinions about the DP products presented in the survey by project promoters are mostly optimistic. The matter requires monitoring on the following project stages. For the time being the score we assign is 3.5.	

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
3. Programme Management	
3.1 Issues related to the system organising programme implementation conditions	
The fact that despite serious difficulties and significant delays a vast majority of tasks within Action 1 were carried out is a big success both of partnerships and institutions that manage the programme at the national level. It was possible mostly owing to great determination of all process participants (MA, NSS, Partnerships).	**+**
According to many respondents – DP representatives as well as MA and NSS employees, the very fact of establishing "partnerships" is one of the key successes of Action 1. The partnership organisation principles put forward in the programme were evaluated positively by 88% of respondents.	**+**
3.1 Overall Score	**3,5**
Comment: Following the evaluation of the programme management at the national level in the light of results achieved, we are willing to give a good score here. Despite numerous difficulties during the Action 1 implementation, the works have actually been carried out in their full scope, at least in the qualitative sense. Obviously, we have serious reservations concerning the quality of products of this programme phase. One must not also forget that the implementation time for Action 1 was extended by one month. Taking this into account we assign score 4.	
3.2 Issues related to the method of programme implementation within the framework of the existing system	
Partnerships have evaluated the quality of programme management at a national level negatively – the score was 2.75.	**-**
Comment: The score given by the partnerships includes the management effectiveness and efficiency elements. Since our evaluation methodology treats these two aspects separately, the effectiveness score is higher than it would otherwise result from transferring the DP score.	
3. Overall score of the programme management effectiveness	**3,5**
Comment: The assumed quantitative results of the programme planned for Action 1 have been achieved. Yet, there were many problems along the way, and these must have had an impact on the quality of the activities conducted.	

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
4. Partnership support by central-level institutions	
4.1 Scope of assistance provided to Partnerships	
The scale of conducted training (11 courses for 700-800 participants) appears significant, yet according to many respondents there were not enough training sessions (e.g. there were requests for more training on financial aspects)	**+**
In the overwhelming majority of cases, advisory support was reduced to assistance provided to the partnership by the Project supervisor. Unfortunately, his support was focused on organisational, administrative and management issues. Some DPs regretted not having the opportunity to consult with substantive sectoral experts.	**+ / -**
Seven publications were elaborated under Action 1, yet most of them were available towards the end of June only in a trial or ready-to-print version.	**-**
Most respondents greatly appreciated the useful programme website, which was one of the basic sources of information about EQUAL CI for most of them.	**+**
4.1 Overall Score	**4**
Comment: Despite certain difficulties and delays, the partnership support system was launched and indeed provides useful services to DPs. The score is lower due to delays in launching training and publications, as well as the limited scope of advisory support.	
4.2 Services for partnerships	
The score for the partner-search support was 3.31 (national partners) and 3.46 (foreign partners).	**-**
The NSS support in the formation of the organisational system and management mechanisms in the DP was usually evaluated negatively. The prevailing perception is that the NSS limited its activities to one theoretical training session and publication of the guide, which was available too late, however.	**-**
The evaluation of training services is "good", yet not "very good". The average general score of training was 4.13 (in the scale from 1 to 5), which corresponds to a „four with a small plus".	**+**
The average score for advisory services was 3.94, which corresponds to "four". Yet, despite a relatively low average, the distribution of responses proves that almost 70% of respondents have evaluated the quality of advisory services positively.	**+**
The score for co-operation with the project supervisor was 3.89. The readiness and willingness to help shown by the PAs was most appreciated. Yet, effectiveness and creativity of persons who performed this function was given a lower score.	**+**
Apart from a one-day „self-evaluation" training, we have not come across any facts that would prove the NSS involvement in the formation of monitoring systems at the level of individual partnerships.	**-**
Undoubtedly, frequent changes of assistants responsible for specific projects were a negative factor in Action 1. We understand that it was a temporary situation resulting from the process of rationalising the number of projects per one PA.	**-**
4.2 Overall Score of the partnership support	**4**
Comment: Certain inconsistency can be spotted in the partnership approach to the NSS services' evaluation: Specific elements of the support system are evaluated with 4, while the general score for the NSS support was much lower (3.88 in the scale from 1 to 5). A possible explanation for this lower general score can be the fact that at least part of the responsibility for programme management on the state level was transferred to the NSS.	

Effectiveness Evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
1. Overall Score of the partnership development in the institutional dimension	4
2. Overall Score of the partnership development in the substantive dimension	3,5
3. Overall score of the programme management effectiveness	3,5
4.2 Overall Score of the partnership support	4
EFFECTIVENESS CRITERION – OVERALL SCORE	**3,75**

8   Programme efficiency evaluation

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
1. Institutional dimension	
1.1 Description of the institutional framework of partnerships	
1.2 Partnership organisation process	
1.3 Transnational Co-operation Partnership organisation process	
Undoubtedly, the ECDB has turned out to be a big success, as both Polish and foreign partnerships used it	**+**
Most DPs (71%) decided to entrust the function of the coordinator of the joint undertaking with one of the partners, and chose a co-operation model based on the division of tasks between partnerships from different countries. We believe that the adopted solutions facilitate the efficiency of the DP operation	**+**
When establishing transnational co-operation, the partnerships had a few problems, namely: difficulties in entering data to the ECDB, divergent Action 1 schedules in different countries, discrepancies in national programmes' approaches to the eligibility of transnational co-operation costs, shortage of funds for financing transnational co-operation resulting from delays in concluding agreements with the NSS.	**-**
1.3 Overall Score	**3,5**
Comment The process of establishing transnational co-operation was carried out under a strong time pressure, and with a limited access to funds. Apart from the undeniable success of the EDCB, one should bear in mind that some partnerships have been created via the Internet, without any direct contacts. The solutions employed for DP management reveal great maturity of partners and bode well for the future. Hence we have some very positive elements along with problems indicating difficulties with management efficiency. We give 3.5 score, convinced that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones.	
1.4 Partnership management	
The analysis carried out in 3.4 chapter 3.4 seems to suggest that there is a reverse dependence between the scale of using "participation" mechanisms of DP management and management efficiency, measured by the number and type of conflicts that occur in projects. In other words, the more open and "pro-partner" the management system (decision-making procedure, finance management, method of organising substantive activities), the greater the probability of conflicts and problems in the stage of project implementation.	**+ / -**
The source of the greatest problems in the partnership concept implementation is the paradox resulting from the programme management conditions (the Administrator's responsibility for financial resources and the requirement of equal participation of partners in the decision-making and task implementation).	**-**
There were many conflicts within partnerships, resulting from the inability to elaborate and implement efficient DP management mechanisms.	**-**
1.4 Overall Score	**3**
Comment Partnership organisation was a difficult process. Instances of insufficient communication and conflicts between partners were frequently reported. It seems that many partners found it problematic to understand the assumptions behind partner-like approach, especially in the context of provisions on full responsibility of the Administrator. On the other hand, there were examples of very smooth initial DP organisation phase.	
1. Overall Score of the partnership development in the institutional dimension	**3**
Comment: The process of the development of institutional framework of partnerships proceeded in the background of general problems related to programme management (delays in agreement conclusions, lack of funding, etc.). It must have had an impact on the DP willingness to include more organisations in the partnership. The challenges of partnership-level management also caused many problems.	

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
2. Substantive dimension	
2.1 DP strategy development	
While in Q1 the barrier that hampered the initiation and large scale of partners' involvement in the process of strategic analysis were the problems with access to the financial resources, in Q2 the main obstacle was the limited time the DP had for strategy development and negotiation of the partnership agreement.	**-**
The analysed strategies devote very little attention to the issue of future operation costs of the developed systems. It puts the sustainability of the developed solutions at risk.	**-**
2.1 Overall Score	**2**
Comment	

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
The conditions, in which the programme was implemented adversely affected both the quality of substantive activities undertaken by the partners and the pace of consolidation of the institutional framework.	
2.2 Partnership projects in EQUAL CI	
The estimated "replication costs" of partnership products presented by the respondents are very promising. A comparison of costs incurred by the programme on account of developing tools with the prices of a ready-made product for another institution interested in adaptation shows a cost reduction by 20 times.	**+**
An average replication will last six times shorter that the time devoted to the preparation of a prototypical solution (80% of products were assessed as suitable for adaptation within a period shorter than half a year).	**+**
2.2 Overall Score	**4**
Comment The DP product assumptions presented by the respondents seem to be very effective. We are not in possession of any materials that would allow for the verification of reliability of these assumptions. However, conclusions from the analysis of a few strategic documents advise extreme caution.	
2. Overall Score of the partnership development in the substantive dimension	**3**
Comment: Contradictory conclusions result from the evaluation of solutions described in the analysed strategic documents and declarations presented by the survey respondents.	

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
3. Programme Management	
3.1 Issues related to the system organising programme implementation conditions	
60% of researched partnerships evaluate negatively the way of preparation of the system, in which the programme is implemented (average score of 2.5 in the scale from 1 to 5).	**-**
As a result of too conservative formulation of requirements regarding the securities, there were substantive delays in concluding contracts with the NSS. The scale of delays was so big, that it created significant risk from the point of view of Action 1 objectives.	**-**
Given the serious problems with the verification of cost eligibility and the extensive, multi-level application verification system, the average waiting time to have an indirect payment effected was 55 days and as such has become the source of significant administrative work loads at the partnership level.	**-**
The unclear situation concerning the VAT (partners are treated by the Tax Office as service providers and not as contractors of a joint, grant-funded project) brought about conflicts between partners and the Administrator. Despite intensive actions taken up by the MA, the tax situation of partnerships has not been clarified yet.	**-**
Frequent changes of operation principles in the programme reveal the lack of in-process preparations for launching the Initiative as well as instability of the whole Structural Funds system in the first period of its operation.	**-**
The activities of the Managing Authority were usually positively motivated by the desire to improve the system or solve serious problems that have emerged. This fact needs to be appreciated, because it proves great involvement of the MA Management	**+**
There are no reservations concerning the MA interventions in the executive aspects. These activities have mostly been properly selected and characterized by determination and goal-orientedness.	**+**
Unfortunately, the MA initiatives were usually late and did not result from a prior risk analysis and a pro-active hazard-prevention, but took the form of mere responses to facts. The MA was often surprised with the encountered problems, and the attempts to solve the latter "on the run" not always gave the expected results.	**-**
The programme management system at the national level (MA and NSS relations) was negatively evaluated by 38% of the respondents (only 28% of positive ratings, the average of 2.77 in the 1-5 scale). The main reason behind the low score is the conviction of some partnerships that a two-level (NSS-MA) programme management is not effective.	**-**
3.1 Overall Score	**2**
Comment The scale of problems that have emerged under the Action 1 implementation in terms of the very system structure and the formal and legal conditions do not allow for a positive evaluation of this aspect. We are positive that both the MA and NSS have shown great involvement in solving problems that followed. These efforts brought results on the operation efficiency side. Yet, it does not change the fact that the management system was not effective and failed to facilitate the implementation of the programme mission.	
3.2 Issues related to the method of programme implementation within the framework of the existing system	
There was a number of delays in the work schedule implementation under Action 2 (agreement conclusion, postponing the Activity 2 deadline, delayed training courses and guides, postponing the launching of the NTN for	**-**

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
a while)	
The result of the reported delays in the implementation of the following tasks and long claim for payment processing times are the negative opinions expressed by the respondents in reference to the keeping deadlines by the MA-NSS when it comes to programme implementation and fulfilling obligations towards partnerships (58% of negative opinions)	-
The formal and administrative obligations consumed almost 50% of time of the partnerships (or even more, according to some opinions) devoted to Action 1 implementation. It substantively reduced the chances of taking up intensive substantive activities. Most respondents, both at the partnership and the NSS and MA level agree with the thesis on "system over-regulation" and excessive formal and administrative requirements	-
According to partnerships' representatives and the MA and NSS, the periodical report form is not adjusted to the nature of activities carried out under the programme (it is more process- than result-oriented in measurement). There is a huge discrepancy between the modest requirements of the substantive reporting and an extensive and very detailed financial reporting.	-
Information was not the strong advantage of Action 1. Project promoters complain that the guides were prepared late, documentation requirements were frequently changed, there were new document template versions introduced every now and then, and that there was a general sense of perplexity given the very unstable conditions of programme implementation.	-
The general score of the quality of the programme management at the national level is 2.75 (in the scale from 1 to 5), which can be described as „three minus". Such a score is a result of 39% of negative ratings and 22% of positive ratings.	-
3.2 Overall Score	**3**
Comment Most problems resulted rather from the bad system design than the decisions taken in the implementation phase. Programme management in these conditions consisted in "minimizing the losses" and making attempts at overcoming the barriers that appeared "impossible to remove"	
3. Overall score of the programme management	**2,5**
Comment The conclusions from the conducted analysis of management problems at the national level indicate that the MA made active efforts aimed at solving the most burning problems. Such activities resulted for example in solving the security issue and taking up other critical issues (VAT, payments). A whole range of decisions was taken, owing to which it was possible to save the programme in danger. Also the determination and ability to deal with nearly hopeless situations should be appreciated.	

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
4. Partnership support by central-level institutions	
4.1 Scope of assistance provided to Partnerships	
4.2 Services for partnerships	
Comment We did not have any data at our disposal that would allow for the verification of the efficiency of services provided to partnerships by the NSS.	

Efficiency evaluation	Score (1- 5 Scale)
1. Overall Score of the partnership development in the institutional dimension	**3**
2. Overall Score of the partnership development in the substantive dimension	**3**
3. Overall score of the programme management	**2,5**
4. Overall Score of the partnership support	
EFFICIENCY CRITERION – OVERALL SCORE	**2,83**

EFFECTIVENESS CRITERION (weight 0.6)	3,75
EFFICIENCY CRITERION (weight 0.4)	2,83
OVERALL PROGRAMME SCORE	**3,38**

9   Conclusions

The conducted analysis proves that EQUAL is by no means a simple programme, both in terms of the understanding of its essence and its proper implementation, as well as in relation to programme evaluation. How can one sum up in one sentence an undertaking, which on one hand achieves nearly 100% of the assumed quantitative results, and on the other – experience serious problems related to keeping deadlines or funding of activities? How can one juxtapose the great involvement of hundreds of persons and organisations, which struggle for the final success at different Initiative levels and encounter many limitations, both internal and external? How can one separate matters related to the imperfect nature of the system, in which EQUAL is implemented (general conditions of implementing Structural Funds in Poland) from the imperfections of the implementation process itself, if both elements are closely connected and interrelated?

We have adopted an open attitude in approaching these problems. We tried to understand first, and pronounce judgments afterwards.

In terms of effectiveness, the programme scored 3.75 (in the scale from 1 to 5). It corresponds to a descriptive rate of "four minus", which results from very positive opinions of the evaluators concerning the quantitative progress, and slightly more critical remarks in terms of the project development in the substantive dimension.

The good effectiveness score remains in contrast to the efficiency rating of programme implementation - 2.83 (in the scale from 1 to 5). It corresponds to a descriptive rate of "three minus". The below-neutral rating of this criterion was first and foremost affected by the negative opinion of the evaluators concerning the method of preparation of the formal and legal framework on which the programme was implemented. As a result, significant delays occured in the adopted Action 1 schedule, along with problems with project funding. According to the evaluators, it was reflected in a slower consolidation of partnerships and a decreased substantive quality of projects.

When juxtaposing the ratings of both aspects, we assigned greater weight to the effectiveness criterion (0.6). It is related to the experimental nature of the researched programme. In undertakings of this type it is the extent to which the assumed objectives are met that matters more than the simplicity of approach or cost reduction.

The final result of the analysis conducted this way was the overall score of Action 1 performance agreed to reach 3.4 points (in the scale from 1 to 5). It means that despite different problems that have emerged during Action 1, we believe that positive elements outweigh the negative ones, and they support continuation of the programme.

On the other hand, the overall score of Action 1 is far from being perfect, and it cannot be summarized with an optimistic formula of "it is ok". On the contrary, there is a number of issues we evaluate critically and suggest that the Managing Authority, the NSS and partnerships pay closer attention to (see chapter 10 "Recommendations"). Yet, we would like to state clearly that our criticism should be seen in the broader context of the problems experienced by most European programmes, which not necessarily have to face so many challenges typical for pro-innovative activities. In this context, EQUAL is not far from the average, and in certain aspects (e.g. "participants' involvement", "partner approach") it could be considered one of the leading programmes in the process of supporting structural changes in Poland.

A justification for our evaluation is the list of key achievements and problems identified during the conducted analyses and research and presented below.

9.1   Key achievements of Action 1 of the EQUAL CI

The greatest success of Action 1 is reflected in achieving a situation where 100% of partnerships have developed strategies, concluded DPAs and TCAa and submitted Action 2 applications. This achievement gains significance if we realise that the programme is being implemented in very unfavourable conditions, and the management solutions, both on the

project level and the national level are just being created and thus show a number of weaknesses.

First experience on partnership creation is, in our opinion, an asset of the programme though. The number and structure of the established DPs is consistent with the assumptions from programming documents, and the institutional framework at the project level makes good basis for generating new interesting solutions. In this context, one can be happy to see the vary rational, product-oriented approach of the initiative team members towards the selection of new partners, both under national and transnational co-operation.

A significant output of the programme, which may prove valuable in the following Actions, is the stimulation of intense activity of persons and institutions representing all the three sectors, and re-directing this activity towards issues connected with difficult areas of the labour market, which have been neglected so far.

Our interlocutors have usually pointed to the great educational role of their experience. And indeed, both successes and numerous problems and conflicts constitute an ample source of observations and guidelines concerning the method of implementing development-oriented and pro-innovative programmes. It should be mentioned here that this comment applies both to partnerships and central-level institutions.

Among the important benefits of EQUAL Action 1 one cannot overlook the very issue of "partnership". The last year was especially fruitful as for making a theoretical concept the formula of actual co-operation. Entities that have not yet had the chance to implement an undertaking jointly, gathered a lot of experience in terms of programming, negotiations and organisation of project activities.

The support system for partnerships launched under Action 1 can be considered as a significant advantage. Most participants evaluate the quality of training services positively, along with the usefulness of information put on the programme website and the role performed by Project supervisors, or at least a potential for this role. Even though the solutions adopted in this respect were undoubtedly reflected in the effectiveness and efficiency of activities under Action 1, many mechanisms still require corrections and improvements:

- greater suitability of training sessions and availability of publications when it is relevant to the partnerships' needs and actual implementation stage,
- better access of partnerships to advisory services, especially in terms of "sectoral" experts ready to assist in the process of substantive "crystallisation" of project concepts,
- improving the management usefulness, along with the monitoring and evaluation system and project progress reporting.

EQUAL is not just a success story. The list of problems is long and concernsfirst of all the management efficiency.

9.2   Issues that require immediate attention of the programme managerss:

The biggest problem experienced during Action 1 were issues related to the very organisation of the system in which the programme is implemented. An over-conservative approach to securities, exaggerated administrative and documentation requirements, unsolved VAT-related issues, and unsolved problems concerning the eligibility and two-level management structure (MA-NSS). All this, combined with a strict approach to formal matters, generated a huge administrative work-load and caused delays in carrying out tasks, as well as made access to funding difficult for partnerships.

Significant delays in concluding agreements with the NSS and an ineffective, multi-level system of claim for paymentverification were the source of partnership problems with funding of project

activities. If we add considerable time pressure to this picture, we realise that this situation adversely affected the quality of substantive activities carried out by partnerships:

- Only half of all DPs have conducted any beneficiary research.
- The lack of detailed knowledge concerning the scale and nature of problems to be tackled was an obstacle in the selection of progress monitoring indicators and estimating the expected quantitative project results.
- Postponing the date of launching National Thematic Networks to the third quarter of 2005 reduced the chances for substantive dialogue between projects' promoters and made access to sectoral experts impossible.

These are just a few circumstances revealing the weakness of Action 1 in the substantive dimension. Therefore, while being happy with the performance of quantitative assumptions for Action 1, we should bear in mind that in many cases the process of partnership consolidation based on specific project concepts has only been initiated. There is a lot of room for improvement in the initial stage of Action 2.

We were under the impression that many promoters have found it problematic to understand the basic goal, which is "testing, disseminating and including innovative solutions into the ESF mainstream". Partnership first and foremost think of developing interesting products. The DP strategies only occasionally mention concerns for sustainability and "replication cost" of the developed tools and systems. One of the consequences of the above-mentionedis higher evaluation of the DP products than DP potential (usefulness) for mainstreaming purposes.

Numerous conflicts within partnerships prove that team-work skills are low, management is weak and there are problems with organising appropriate information flow between the partners. Unfortunately, also the institutions that manage the programme at the national level can be blamed here. General principles of DP operation contain significant inconsistencies and weaknesses (e.g. the Administrator's liability versus partners' rights, different tax status of the leader and other partners, etc.). At the same time, partnership-support activities concerning creation of an organisational structure and DP management mechanisms were limited in scope and carried out late.

As the research showed, the basic weakness of the Managing Authority was the lack of proper risk analysis and pro-active management of potential hazards at the level of the programme as a whole (the NSS carried out risk analysis at the level of individual projects – "Checks Schedule"). As a result, corrective measures were mostly taken too late, when the only possibility left was to "reduce the losses". Attempts at solving problems already during Action 1 resulted in continuous system corrections, which given the bad communication with partnerships, were perceived by the latter as "changing of the rules in the middle of the game". Undoubtedly, a extenuating circumstance in this context was the scale of problems with which a small team managing the Initiative in the Ministry of Economy and Labour had to face. One must not underestimate the great effort that was put into solving problems, the number of which was sufficient to make a few larger and more experienced institutions busy. In such a situation „going to defence" and focusing on the most urgent current problems ("crisis management" instead of a far-reaching "strategic management') is a natural response of persons bearing the huge burden of responsibility for the whole undertaking.

The transnational co-operation under Action 1 – despite being initiated in the sense of concluding agreements with DPs – was very often superficial in nature and did not contribute to the development of substantive strategies of partnership activities. One of the most important reasons for this situations was a poor coordination of this element at the European level, which was expressed in different programme implementation schedule and different approach to cost eligibility in Member States.

The reporting regulations used in the programme are based on solutions adopted in the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development and other typical operational programmes. As a result, reports submitted by the DPs are more focused on process

description than on the attempt to measure progress in view of the assumed EQUAL CI results. All this makes the monitoring system and the reporting based on it useless for management purposes, both at the project and programme level.

9.3   General opinion:

Modern social problems are multi-dimensional. Solving them requires the ability to create a coalition of institutions that complement each other and together have a sufficient potential for taking up such challenges. Nowadays, and especially in the future, the effectiveness of solving social problems in the state, region or a town will depend oninter-institutional co-operation skills.

We perceive the EQUAL CI as a conscious investment of public resources into development of co-operation principles between various organisations ready to join their resources in order to solve complex social problems. Without such a focused public investment, the present situation, where there are individual public administration units and NGOs operating in this field, mostly competing with one another, would have to prevail. Private companies are in most cases not interested in taking up activities in the sphere of social policy, because they perceive them as little cost-effective.

The conducted research proves that EQUAL is a true laboratory of different forms of co-operation between entities from different sectors and with different experience. In a sense, the programme success will depend on the ability to generalize individual experience of particular institutions – so-called co-operation models. Yet, in order to disseminate them, one needs tangible and positive partnership results. Therefore, the social usefulness of this programme will depend to the same degree on whether a significant number of projects generate positive experience (tangible results), whether they will be replicable (cost) and finally – whether they can be convincingly documented, described and disseminated.

Since the decision to carry out the EQUAL CI experiment in Poland has already been taken, we can state today – despite numerous weakness and gaps in the management system – that this stage of the experiment has been a success and it is justified to proceed to the next stage. Now the programme success will hinge upon whether one can draw conclusions and improve those system elements that do not operate the way they should. Despite the implementation difficulties and management imperfections identified, the EQUAL programme in Poland has still chances to be a final success in this context.

10   Recommendations:

10.1 Sustainability of EQUAL products

Problem:

One of the weaknesses of the analysed strategies was the relatively low attention paid to the issues related to sustainability of the developed solutions. It seems that the conducted analysis of innovation and "mainstreaming potential" confirms the thesis that partnerships are so absorbed with innovation and usefulness of their solutions for the target group that they do not have time to consider the simple issue of costs of the developed solutions.

The "sustainability" issue should be understood in the broad sense here: (1) as a question about the source of funding for the operational costs of the system developed under the programme; (2) as a question about the "replication cost", i.e. the expenditure that another institution interested in adapting the model solution would have to incur.

Recommendation:

We suggest placing greater emphasis on the cost-effectiveness analysis of the model solutions put forward by the partnerships.

This aspect should be included in the monitoring carried out by project supervisors and in the following programme progress evaluations.

We recommend placing on the partnerships a requirement of preparing a "business plan" for the operation of the developed tool after funding from the programme resources is over. The first version of such a plan should be elaborated as soon as possible, in the stage where still the assumptions of the developed product can be easily adjusted. Then, such a plan should be updated, and the approval of its final version should be a pre-requisite for project settlement.

10.2 Pro-active management at programme level

Problem:

According to the conducted analysis of problems that have emerged during programme management at the national level the key to appropriate response to emerging hazards is early problem identification and having a plan for responding to its negative effects. We understand that the MA and NSS are under constant pressure of current and urgent matters, yet the only way of switching from the "crisis management" formula (fire extinguishing) to strategic management is to take over the initiative and take action before the problem appears, and not just merely respond to problems that have already occurred.

Recommendation:

We suggest implementing risk analysis and risk management mechanisms at the MA level as soon as possible. Potential threats should be systematically identified and evaluated in view of probability of their occurrence. If a problem is evaluated as relevant and probable, alternative strategies of procedure should be developed, with the aim of preventing the crisis situation or managing it once it appears. A precondition for effectiveness of such management is a systematic monitoring of potential risk factors.

10.3 DP support in terms of improving internal management systems

Problem:

During Action 1 a number of partnerships have experienced conflicts stemming from improper definition of the organisational structure and DP management mechanisms. The passive attitude of assuming that the way a partnership organises itself remains within its sole discretion was a mistake. We understand the attitude assuming that the NSS remains neutral in conflicts emerging within DPs. Yet, engaging in conflicts is very much different from providing

partnerships with knowledge and skills that could clarify the misunderstandings before they become problems of personal nature, for example.

Recommendation:

We suggest creating a team of experts within the NSS (rather access to external experts than new full-time posts), which could support DPs in matters related to the organisation and management of partnerships' activities. An appropriate basis for this type of advisory services should be a guide devoted to DP management and practical knowledge accumulated during the programme. An optimum solution would of course be the provision of this type if services by project supervisors. One of the possible ways of handling it could be creating such team of experts with the most experienced supervisors.

10.4 Stability of the programme implementation system and communication

Problem:

Frequent changes of the programme implementation principles are reported by the partnerships as one of the biggest problems experienced during Action 1. The MA's impact on these changes is limited, as they result from external factors or errors (the latter need to be reduced of course). System adjustments resulting from the drive to improve it remain an open issue. We recommend great caution and restraint in this respect. As it was proved in practice, profits from introducing improvements can be lower than costs related to changing the whole system into a different mode of procedure. The key to success appears to be improved communication between the MA and partnerships. We were under the impression that at least some changes have been introduced without proper explaination why those adjustemets were necessary or beneficial.

Recommendation:

We support the idea of creating additional information channels, such as discussion forums or regular meetings of partnerships with the MA. One of the options could be the establishment of a permanent coordination group, which could be composed of representatives of active partnerships, MA, NSS, MC and project supervisors. Regular meetings of this group would be a chance to discuss problems and agree the scope of necessary adjustments in the implementation system. The benefits resulting from better information flow and an improved perception of the MA as an institution open to dialogue with project promoters would also be significant.

The element that definitely requires improvement is the way partnerships learn about the changes and new requirements. If, for example, a certain document template is changed or another fact takes place that requires a DP to change or adjust its activities or procedures, the obligation of those who are introducing the new solution should be to reach directly the interested parties and (a) provide unambiguous information concerning the scope of changes and (b) clarify the reason for introducing the change. Putting only such information on the website (without sending any information to DPs) or assuming that supervisors would handle it is simply not enough.

10.5 Principles of partnership selection to Action 2

Problem:

One of the factors that significantly influence the MA decisions from the very beginning is the concern for utilizing the available EU funds. We understand this point of view and agree with it in principle. Yet, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that this type of policy making should not be implemented „at all cost" (we are not saying that it is the case, yet we see such a threat). EQUAL is not a programme for every organisation. It is a typical undertaking addressed to leaders, and not outsiders. To those, who are able to draw from their own experience and skills, to make good use of this extraordinary public money in order to develop new solutions and point out new directions and prospects. We suggest enhancing substantive requirements

(not to be confused with another administrative obligations) placed upon organisations that participate in the programme instead of bringing the requirements down to the level of those who cannot handle the situation. Even if the result of this "over-protective" policy towards partnerships would be a 100% utilisation of programme resources, one should bear in mind that considerable management costs will be involved (e.g. employing more supervisors) and the motivation of the other programme participants will drop.

Recommendation:

We suggest taking a firm stance in the process of selecting partnerships for Action 2. One should expect that the leaders performance will be above average, and not that it will merely reach the required minimum.

10.6 Substantive partner for the DP

Problem:

A few times we have come across the opinion that the partnership had no opportunity to consult the strategy with sectoral experts, even though such consultations would surely enhance the product quality. This matter should be seen in the broad context, namely it results from the lack of a person who would perform the role of a substantive partner for partnerships in the present programme management system. There is the project assistance of course. Yet, in many cases it is a person who lacks proper knowledge and experience in the project-specific area. As a result, the relations between the project supervisor and the partnership tend to be limited to matters related either to management or fulfilment of administrative obligations.

Recommendation:

We suggest considering a development of the reference system (as far as we know, such a role is currently performed by Ms. Możdżyńska), which would allow for using a team of specialists in substantive project-specific areas. These experts could be involved in the NTN activities later on, yet already now, in the stage of project concept formation, their contribution would be extremely helpful.

10.7 Monitoring and evaluation

Problem:

When starting the evaluation we hoped that there would be a possibility to use monitoring data that describe both the entities participating in the programme and the progress they make. We have already mentioned problems related to accessing such information in the previous report. Unfortunately, we have to conclude that the situation became even worse in the last half a year. Project supervisors have the best information concerning partnerships, yet their knowledge is not recorded systematically in the form of tables and summaries. The most common practice is that the quantitative report is made-to-order, and is not based on the information from the monitoring system updated systematically. The situation with financial data seems to be better, yet it leaves a lot of room for improvement as well. At the same time we evaluate very low both the scope and quality of information concerning the substantive partnership progress.

Recommendation:

We suggest creating a professional, indicator-based programme monitoring system as soon as possible. Systematic recording and analysis of project progress within the programme worth of a few hundred million PLN is a prerequisite for effective management and also a formal requirement related to the utilisation of EU funds.

11   Appendices:

1. Evaluation Process Diagram
2. Sample selection procedure
3. „Case study" analysis protocol
4. Survey questionnaire
5. Data Table
6. Case studies' reports