

EQUAL and ESF Article 6:
Innovative and socially responsible
Restructuring



European Social Fund



European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

**EQUAL AND ESF ARTICLE 6: A TEST BED FOR
INNOVATIVE AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE RESTRUCTURING**



EQUAL

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

Article 6 Innovative Measures

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“For me, taking part in the activities of the EQUAL project has been a big step forward – a door wide open. When my company closed down, I found out about the range of training opportunities on offer, as well as advice on how to find a new job which could drastically improve my chances of finding work. This support really helped me in this terrible time. After a few weeks, I felt stronger and much more ready to face new employers. I am now working in a completely new sector, but using the skills I gained in my previous job.” - a beneficiary of the EQUAL DECRIRE project in Walloon Belgium

As reflected in the words of this project beneficiary, businesses are not only having to adapt to economic change in today’s increasingly global and competitive market place, but these cases of change also entail human and social consequences. Moreover, as well as involving difficulty, they have the potential to bring about new prospects and opportunity. It is these social and economic consequences, these opportunities and difficulties that are the subject of increasing debate in relation to the challenges of restructuring across the European Union (EU) today.

The paper seeks to contribute to the above debate by presenting the successes and insights of the European Social Fund (ESF) EQUAL and Article 6 programmes in relation to restructuring. It has been prepared by GHK Consulting Ltd¹, the contracted experts for the Adaptability pillar of the EQUAL programme. It will be of particular interest to European, national and regional organisations involved in formulating policy and/or devising initiatives in support of innovative and socially responsible restructuring, especially within the framework of the new ESF (2007 – 2013).

EQUAL and Article 6 finance projects that are highly **innovative, partnership-based and transnational**. Moreover, EQUAL places an emphasis on social inclusion, which is particularly pertinent to discussions around socially responsible restructuring. Thanks to these (and other) features, EQUAL and Article 6 have developed rich insights and experiences that could help to inform the development of effective policy and initiatives – at both European, national and regional level – with regards to the anticipation and management of change. And these insights and experiences are even more relevant given the specific references to innovation, partnership working and transnational cooperation within the new ESF Regulation (2007 – 2013).

The paper presents the results of EQUAL and Article 6 projects according to five restructuring-related themes. These themes have been chosen to broadly mirror the proposed agenda for the European Commission’s Restructuring Forum meeting on 4 and 5 December 2006. Each of these themes is explored from two angles:

- Firstly, there is a description of the **new and effective solutions** developed by the projects, that is the new tools, decisions and approaches that have proved particularly successful and demonstrated good practice.
- Secondly, these solutions and the associated experiences are ‘translated’ into a series of **policy messages**, that is recommendations for policy makers (at all levels) drawn directly from the experiences of the projects on the ground.

A summary of the ‘new and effective solutions’ and ‘policy messages’ are presented in the table below.

¹ For further information on GHK Consulting Ltd’ preparation of this paper and/or the EQUAL programme, please contact: Helen Tubb: Helen.Tubb@ghkint.com or Sophie Servagnat: Sophie.Servagnat@ghkint.com.

New and effective solutions	Policy messages
Instruments: support systems and structures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reconversion and redeployment structures ○ Knowledge management and learning ○ Proactive and multi-dimensional company support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Help to resource more permanent reconversion and redeployment structures as part of a wider and longer-term restructuring strategy ○ Support the development of mobile and well-resourced provision for reconversion and redeployment of laid off workers ○ Support the development of dynamic systems to capture and manage knowledge, as well as promote learning ○ Address the problems that many employers, particularly Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), face in accessing and making full use of reconversion and redeployment services ○ Look at company support in a more creative and multi-dimensional way
Instruments: direct support for individuals	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexible and accessible training ○ Development of soft skills ○ Validation and transfer of personal capital ○ Empowerment and bottom-up approaches ○ Targeted support for older workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support and promote the development of soft skills as a critical component to more technical skills training ○ Foster the principle of empowerment within the design, delivery and evaluation of support measures ○ Target support at the most vulnerable people in restructuring situations, especially older workers ○ Establish processes and systems for the validation and certification of skills as a 'passport' into the employment market during restructuring
Reconversion strategies and coordination of instruments	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-depth research and analysis ○ Forecasting and observatory activities ○ Identification of positive and inspiring examples ○ Regional planning and strategy development ○ Structures and tools for on-going review, consultation and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support the development of more structures and tools to get all stakeholders' opinions about the future of the region and get them involved in the subsequent regional development process ○ Help to promote and disseminate the opportunities posed by restructuring as opposed to the threats and risks ○ Make provision for longer-term forecasting and planning via the establishment of observatories, particularly at the regional and sectoral level ○ Support more regular and effective evaluation of restructuring measures

New and effective solutions	Policy messages
Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inclusive and diverse partnership-working ○ Clear, stable and open partnership structures ○ Animation and personal interaction ○ Definition, allocation and support of partner roles ○ Social dialogue ○ Engagement of employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on and promote the involvement of all stakeholders in restructuring at the territorial, sectoral and corporate levels ○ Provide adequate resources for the establishment and management of partnerships ○ Support the capacity-building of partners, especially for those organisations that have traditionally been outside or disengaged from the restructuring debate ○ Focus on identifying and engaging dynamic people to manage and animate the partnership, and ensuring that they have adequate resources and backing to undertake this 'animation' role <p>Establish organisations whose sole remit is to promote and coordinate inter-regional and transnational partnership working</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Added value of transnational cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Should emphasise the public authority's role for setting up and leading partnerships ○ Should be encouraged to participate in partnerships outside of their traditional role
SMEs and restructuring	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SME networks and clusters ○ Management training and support ○ Dissemination and awareness-raising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote and support the provision of combined SME services, tailored to the needs of individual SMEs, or groups of SMEs from particular sectors and/or localities ○ Support structures that give time and space for communication and relationship-building so as to generate trust and dialogue between SMEs, as well as between SMEs and other intermediaries ○ Seek to modernise training services and foster more innovative and flexible training provision ○ Be formulated and disseminated in a way that is clearer, simpler and far more user-friendly for SMEs

Looking across the five themes, two overall conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, EQUAL and Article 6 projects have managed to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of restructuring thanks to their scope for experimentation and innovation. The second conclusion, echoed by every project consulted, is the value and importance of partnership in addressing the challenges of restructuring. Multi-stakeholder approaches are absolutely essential in finding effective and sustainable solutions to economic change.

A very important practical message for partnership in relation to restructuring is that strong processes and structures are needed for the partners to work together effectively. This practical message gives rise to one final policy recommendation that can be drawn from this paper:

Policies should put partnership-based approaches at the forefront of any measures to address the challenges of restructuring, and these approaches must be adequately resourced. If policies do not allow sufficient time and resources for the proper planning and management of partnerships, then there is a risk that not all of the restructuring stakeholders will be fully engaged, and ultimately the solutions will not be as effective and long-lasting.

Even though EQUAL and Article 6 will cease to exist after 2008, there is plenty of scope to implement the recommendations in this paper with ESF support under the 2007-2013 programming period. As one of five general priorities for all Member States, the ESF Regulation mentions the need for assistance in 'increasing the adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs with a view to improving the anticipation and positive management of economic change'². Some Member States may well be prepared to make the recommendations of this paper part of their mainstream policies – with or without ESF support. The ESF Regulation gives a helping hand for this endeavour by saying that 'in implementing the objectives and priorities...the ESF shall support the promotion and mainstreaming of innovative activities in the Member States.' And finally, the promotion of partnerships and transnational cooperation are horizontal objectives of the ESF Regulation. The specific recommendations, as well as the concluding recommendation of this paper are therefore particularly pertinent for those responsible for planning and managing ESF programmes. In conclusion, there is a real opportunity to continue the rich legacy of EQUAL and Article 6 into the future programming period...an opportunity that clearly should not be missed!

² Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999. *Official Journal of the European Union*. 31.7.2006

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction: Why EQUAL and ESF Article 6?	11
2. Instruments: Support structures and systems.....	12
2.1. New and effective solutions	12
2.2. Policy messages	14
3. Instruments: direct support for individuals	15
3.1. New and effective solutions	15
3.2. Policy messages	18
4. Reconversion strategies and coordination of instruments.....	19
4.1. New and effective solutions	19
4.2. Policy messages	22
5. Partnerships	22
5.1. New and effective solutions	22
5.2. Policy messages	27
6. SMEs and restructuring.....	28
6.1. New and effective solutions	28
6.2. Policy messages	30
7. Conclusions: What next?	31
Annex 1: Case studies from EQUAL and ESF Article 6	33
Annex 2: Further examples from EQUAL and ESF Article 6	101
Annex 3: Methodology.....	109

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY EQUAL AND ESF ARTICLE 6?

Businesses are not only having to adapt to economic change in today's increasingly global and competitive market place, but these cases of change also entail human and social consequences. Moreover, as well as involving difficulty, they have the potential to bring about new prospects and opportunity. It is these social and economic consequences, these opportunities and difficulties that are the subject of increasing debate in relation to the challenges of restructuring across the European Union (EU) today.

This paper seeks to contribute to the above debate by presenting the successes and insights of the European Social Fund (ESF) EQUAL and Article 6 programmes in relation to restructuring. It has been prepared by GHK Consulting Ltd³, the contracted experts for the Adaptability pillar of the EQUAL programme. It will be of particular interest to European, national and regional organisations involved in formulating policy and/or devising initiatives in support of innovative and socially responsible restructuring, especially within the framework of the new ESF (2007 – 2013).

But why look at EQUAL and Article 6? The answer is that both programmes have financed projects with particular features that have enabled them to find additional and alternative ways of addressing the challenges of restructuring.

The particular features of these programmes are:

- **Innovation** - all projects are expected to find, test, and if successful mainstream, new ways of tackling labour market problems.
- **Partnership-working** – all projects are managed and delivered by partnerships – most often multi-stakeholder partnerships – including organisations from across the public, private and/or voluntary sectors.
- **Transnational cooperation** – the partnership-working extends to the transnational level: the projects are directly linked to organisations and/or projects in other Member States with the view to fostering exchange and collaboration.⁴

EQUAL has another feature that merits attention, namely an emphasis on social inclusion. This feature lends itself particularly to dealing with issues of social responsibility in relation to restructuring.

Thanks to these (and other) features, EQUAL and Article 6 projects have developed rich insights and experiences that could help to inform the development of effective policy and initiatives – at both European, national and regional level – with regards to the anticipation and management of change. And these insights and experiences are even more relevant given the specific references to innovation, partnership working and transnational cooperation within the new ESF Regulation (2007 – 2013).

The paper presents the results of EQUAL and Article 6 under the following five themes. These themes have been chosen to broadly mirror the proposed agenda for the European Commission's Restructuring Forum meeting on 4 and 5 December 2006:

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⁴ Technically speaking, EQUAL finances 'Development Partnerships (DPs)' rather than projects. However, for ease of reference alongside Article 6, the DPs will be referred to as projects in this publication.

- **Instruments: support systems and structures**
- **Instruments: direct support for individuals**
- **Reconversion strategies and coordination of instruments**
- **Partnerships**
- **Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and restructuring**

And from two angles:

- Firstly, there is a description of the **new and effective solutions** developed by the projects, that is the new tools, decisions and approaches that have proved particularly successful and demonstrated good practice.
- Secondly, these solutions and the associated experiences are 'translated' into a series of **policy messages**, that is recommendations for policy makers (at all levels) drawn directly from the experiences of the projects on the ground.

An important and integral part of this paper is a collection of project case studies (found in Annex 1). The case studies provide more detailed information on many of the projects, and as such help to illustrate and 'bring to life' many of the points made in the paper.

2. INSTRUMENTS: SUPPORT STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

2.1. NEW AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Reconversion and redeployment structures

The development of structures and systems to assist employees faced with the prospect of redundancy has been a notable strength of the projects. The projects have designed and/or adapted models for effectively reconverting and redeploying workers as part of a wider support package for the affected company and region at large; indeed, they have been instrumental in developing and mainstreaming the '**reconversion unit**' as a **unique approach to restructuring** in Europe.

The *MEIRG* project (Great Britain (GB)) is one high-profile example. The project's innovation was that it transferred the redeployment unit model often used and set up by individual large corporates, to a wider group of companies across a whole region. This innovation was particularly beneficial to SMEs that, unlike their larger counterparts, lack the capacity and resources to offer services and options to their employees in restructuring situations: services such as careers guidance and new job training; and options such as relocation to another location or flexible working. A key success factor in MEIRG's model was that it went beyond the usual package of support. It **made the most of companies working together**, such that a new set of reconversion options and services could be offered to employees; for example, particular SMEs could pool together vacancy information or collaborate in seconding their staff. Secondly, the **redeployment unit itself was mobile** - essentially a fully resourced and satellite-linked vehicle known as 'ERIC' - and therefore able to respond quickly and flexibly to need.



The mobile redeployment unit, 'ERIC' (MEIRG project, GB).

This latter point highlights the importance of time within the reconversion model. Based on project experience, the **best time to intervene is when company restructuring is just occurring, or if possible slightly before** – the key descriptors here are 'rapid' and 'proactive'. If mobile reconversion units and stakeholder collaboration are already in place (as seen in *MEIRG* and other projects), then a swift and effective response at this point in time is possible. This type of response is highly dependent on there being **active strategies to anticipate collective redundancies**, long before they take place, as well as a **strong basis of communication and trust with the employers**. With these provisions, it is possible for 'ERIC' and other such units to be used in a proactive way, even years before the actual redundancies are planned or executed.

Another temporal issue is being able to dedicate **sufficient time to the employees concerned**. Workers can most benefit if they have plenty of opportunity to prepare, reflect on and deal with their personal situation, which means maximum support from a team of trainers and advisors.

The **direct involvement and backing of companies, social partners and other regional stakeholders** in the reconversion model is absolutely critical. This is illustrated in the *DECRIRE* project (Wallonia Belgium) which involved the two major Belgian trade unions, several sector employee organisations, a university - and the public employment service, whose insufficient involvement in reconversion initiatives had been criticised in the past. By working with these organisations, the project was able to establish a very effective reconversion model, which has since been mainstreamed into national policy.

Another notable feature of the *DECRIRE* project is the emphasis placed on the **development of sound planning and management tools**, such that the reconversion model can be understood and replicated when and where needed. These tools include a reconversion unit guide, which included information on the mandate and objectives of the unit, the roles of the partners, as well as practical checklists. The involvement of the trade unions proved especially important in developing the guide to ensure that the reconversion model took full account of social issues. In the words of one member of the project staff:

“Through this publication, we are able to introduce a clear and concise reconversion programme to companies facing bankruptcy or ceasing their activities. We can also offer timely and adequate services to those at risk of unemployment and social exclusion. The strong support of the social partners was crucial to overcome the difficulties we experienced in the past.”

Knowledge management and learning

Systems to share and manage knowledge play an important part in the restructuring picture. They help to **capitalise on and provide opportunities to learn** from the shared experiences and insights of those involved in dealing with restructuring. Moreover, by pooling this knowledge, they help to **identify gaps and overlaps in provision**, thereby making collaborative activities far more effective and efficient.

The systems can exist in several forms, involve a mix of individual/organisations and cover a range of knowledge areas. Within this range, the *NAVIGATOR* project (Greece) is an interesting example, specifically focusing on managing the formal knowledge of the employing organisation, as well as tacit knowledge of the employees concerned, in this case shipyard workers. The starting observation of the project was that a large volume of knowledge was disappearing along with the departure of older workers during restructuring. The result was an undesirable drain of essential knowledge capital from the sector. The project therefore developed an **Information Technology (IT)-based knowledge management system**, which also supported the older workers themselves acting as mentors and facilitators to pass on this knowledge to younger staff.

Another, non-IT-based system was that developed by the *LISP* project (Italy). The system called 'Change Labs' can be summarised as a process based on highly **interactive working groups** of entrepreneurs, technicians and experienced consultants. The groups focused on change management issues – each for a particular sector - and the use of experiential learning, using good practice examples and interactive methods. In addition, individuals were able to participate in more than one group, thereby fostering the cross-fertilisation of learning across sectors.

Proactive and multi-dimensional company support

An observation has been that companies lack awareness of – or in some cases, fail to admit – their problems. Their tendency is to press on with 'business as normal', regardless of changes to their commercial, regulatory and structural environment, and the impending difficulties and challenges that lie ahead. Projects have worked to address this problem in three distinct ways.

Firstly, they have ensured that any **company support structure or system is proactive in nature**, in other words, they work to anticipate and prepare for the problems foreseen on the horizon. This preventative approach is far more effective when done in direct collaboration and consultation with the company concerned, particularly with senior managers.

Secondly, the projects have clearly offered **solutions to the problem** – or at least parts of the solution. This constructive and solution-orientated approach helps to move companies away from ignoring the problem, to realising that restructuring can present opportunities, not just constraints. Another dimension to this approach is the offer of more than one solution: companies need to be presented with a **range of options and strategies** before the actual restructuring process takes place. For example, the *LISP* project (Italy) observed cases in Italy where companies would automatically delocalise, just because they were following the examples of their competitors. If presented with a deeper examination of the issues and a number of alternatives (such as skills development or a technology up-grade), these companies may have been able to remain in their local market.

And thirdly, projects have seen the benefits in **combining consultancy services with training measures**. Human resource and skills development to deal with restructuring are far more effective if they form part of a wider advisory package that gives the company an opportunity to explore and discuss – with 'external experts' - the issues that they face. This is illustrated by the *Capacity Building in the Agro-Tourism Domain* project (Italy) provides tailored training to agro-tourism businesses or agricultural enterprises wishing to switch to the tourism sector. The project aim is to update the competences and knowledge of these companies, often managed in a traditional way, offering a vast range of training in different sectors: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), marketing strategies, management and corporate social responsibility. Additionally, the project also provides consultancy services through a web-based platform (used as a help-desk), as well as direct consultancy. This double approach is believed to be more effective for little businesses facing up to new challenges and requirements.

2.2. POLICY MESSAGES

Policies should...

...help to resource more permanent reconversion and redeployment structures as part of a wider and longer-term restructuring strategy.

The establishment of a reconversion or redeployment structure should not be a one-off, reactive measure. It should form part of a longer-term strategy across a region or sector for the effective anticipation of and response to a restructuring situation. This strategy development should involve key stakeholders, especially the social partners and regional authorities.

...support the development of mobile and well-resourced provision for reconversion and redeployment of laid off workers.

Companies and their workers can benefit most from reconversion and redeployment measures if they are flexible and well resourced, thereby providing a quick and effective response at the moment of most need.

...support the development of dynamic systems to capture and manage knowledge, as well as promote learning.

The restructuring process can be significantly enhanced if it fosters knowledge-sharing and learning. This applies to individuals in terms of capitalising and transferring experience to improve their and others' employment prospects. It also concerns organisations – businesses as well as other restructuring actors – in sharing their experience and working together to build on examples of best practice.

...address the problems that many employers, particularly SMEs, face in accessing and making full use of reconversion and redeployment services.

SMEs have hitherto been neglected in the provision of support and resources to effectively reconvert and/or redeploy staff. They often lack the time, capacity and expertise to offer their workers the full range of options and services in a redundancy situation. If these constraints can be overcome – through more collective approaches, as illustrated by the *MEIRG* (GB) project – then it can significantly enhance the position of SMEs and their ability to adapt to change.

...look at company support in a more creative and multi-dimensional way.

There is no one single solution for a company to effectively anticipate, plan for and deal with economic change. A firm needs to be given the change to explore and discuss a range of restructuring services and options, as part of a more holistic and multi-faceted package of support. This package goes beyond the provision of training and skills development, and includes on-going and more integrated advisory services.

3. INSTRUMENTS: DIRECT SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS

3.1. NEW AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Flexible and accessible training

Much of the support provided to individuals affected by restructuring, particularly workers under threat of redundancy or the unemployed seeking new job opportunities, has centred on training. However, training is not automatically a solution to developing the capacity of individuals to adapt to change. Indeed, the training provision has to be designed and delivered based on **principles of flexibility and accessibility** in order to truly benefit the individuals concerned. The principles cover not only the time, place and mode of delivery, but also the course content. The **training must clearly respond and be sensitive to the needs of the individuals** - even more so because of the understandable concerns and anxieties of these people with regards to their future. In the remote Semily district of the Czech Republic, the *Facilitation of Lifelong Education*

in Rural Conditions (Czech Republic) project developed a training programme offering courses in foreign languages, ICTs and book-keeping (amongst others), all identified as being critical in strengthening small tourism businesses in the area. These courses were delivered in short modular format, offered outside of working hours, adjusted to seasonal work and family commitments, took place in local and familiar surroundings (such as schools and village halls), and were accompanied by support services in the form of childcare and loan of course materials.



A 'basic computing' course being delivered in the local hall of the remote village of Bělá (Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions project, Czech Republic)

For individuals still in employment, **on-the-job training** has come across as very popular mode of delivery, minimising disruption for both the individual and their employer. The *Route of the Professional Shipyard Worker in the Baltic Sea* project (Finland) targeting the marine technological industry illustrates this very well. Based on initial company research, it was clear to the project that the workers were not keeping up with the technological developments and safety standards in the industry. They therefore organised fire safety, IT and other types of training in the individuals' place of work, reaching in total over 1,700 workers in the industry.

A very creative approach to accessibility has been **simulation-based training**. This approach helps to make the course content more intellectually accessible in terms of being closer to 'real life' and giving practical opportunities to test out and apply one's learning. In addition, it can make the training more relevant and interesting, all of which assists in engaging and motivating the learner. All of these benefits were observed in the *Volante XXI* project (Portugal), which introduced simulation-based training for truck drivers – an innovation for training provision in the country.

Development of soft skills

Soft skills have been identified as an area requiring particular attention, particularly for people employed in heavy and traditional industries. Such skills help individuals not only to move into service orientated sectors, but can also play a part in dealing with the psychological dimension of change and uncertainty, for example, communicating one's fears and concerns, collaborating with others to find personal employment (or indeed wider business) solutions, and being open to lifelong learning. The types of soft skills courses that have proved successful include **team-building, communication and inter-personal skills, and awareness-raising of other nationalities and cultures**. The *Competencies for Labour Market* (Czech Republic) specifically targeted steel workers in their three months prior to redundancy. They developed a new programme of 'soft competency training', either stand alone or in combination with new job training. This programme was so successful that it brought about a change in the educational content of local education and training providers (towards more soft skills), supported by a new initiative to survey local employers. The *Zukunft Grenzregion Oderland NadOdrze* (*Future of the*

Oderland NadOdrze Border Region) project (Germany) provides a good illustration of efforts to **promote culture awareness and understanding as a means to exploit new economic opportunities**. The project offered courses to local entrepreneurs in the Polish language, culture and markets so that they could establish profitable links with firms and customers across the nearby Polish border. This initiative was very much about **cultural change in the region**, helping local people to overcome fears about Poland's accession to the EU, seeing cross-border collaboration as change as an opportunity – indeed a necessity for the prosperity of the region.

Validation and transfer of personal capital

A difficulty faced by a significant number of individuals is that they have years of experience, applied skills and knowledge, but this 'personal capital' has not been captured, recognised or applied in any meaningful way. Projects have especially observed this difficulty amongst older workers, long-standing employees of traditional companies or individuals working in businesses with no or limited human resource practices. Moreover, this lack of recognition is often associated with issues of low self-esteem and demotivation, which can hinder individuals' outlook and ability to act constructively in situations of restructuring. These issues have been addressed by several projects through **initiatives to harness and build on an individual's potential**. For example, the *ArtCraftMetal* project (Finland) aimed to develop the business skills of Finnish entrepreneurs, and boost their empowerment by increasing their general knowledge, as well as computer competences. The project provided training and organised seminars and workshops on different themes: marketing, web design, export business, business start-up, business management, as well as vocational training in certain arts and crafts. An interesting feature of the project was that it specifically targeted young people or women wishing to become entrepreneurs who did not have the right tools to start up their own businesses.

Projects have insisted on the importance of formally validating skills, which goes beyond the more informal recognition of an individual's value and potential. This validation process needs to involve **identifying the necessary skills sets, preparing skills descriptions, and ultimately testing and accrediting these through an independent body**. By validating skills in this way, it is possible to determine the needs – and most importantly the attributes - of workers on the job, and those made redundant and in search of employment. An example of skills validation can be found in the IMPLEMENT project (Greece). The main objective of this project was to address the consequences of restructuring for the employment of women within two sectors of the Greek economy, that of tourism and ICT. The project's approach was twofold: it aimed to reinforce the employability of unemployed women, as well as strengthen the employability of women employed in low and middle-ranking positions by helping them to move to higher posts and more effectively plan their career. The key outcome of the project was the creation of the **first pool of mentors in Greece, certified by training organisations and government bodies** (about 100 mentors). The pilot phase of the tool with 300 women has proved to be really successful! The mentees have given extremely positive feedback, and the mentors' guidance helped over 35% of the mentees to improve their job position.

Empowerment and bottom-up approaches

A critical success factor in the design and delivery of initiatives to support individuals has been the emphasis on empowerment and bottom-up approaches. Any solution will be far more relevant, beneficial and sustainable if individuals have the **opportunity to inform and shape that solution**. This point cannot be emphasised enough given the uneasy and difficult situation that individuals face when going through periods of change. Personal anxieties and fears, traditional attitudes and norms, and issues of confidence can all present challenges to supporting individuals effectively. Empowerment measures therefore help to overcome these challenges by '**coaching**', rather than forcing individuals through a change situation.

The **job-coaching model** (described above in relation to the *Alliance for Work* project) is a good example of a bottom-up approach: the target group was empowered to deliver the career orientation services, rather than leaving that function to an external provider. A wide range of other techniques have been developed and used by projects to foster empowerment. These include **written surveys, focus groups, consultation events and occasions for substantial,**

one-to-one dialogue. Across the board, the results of this type of work have **directly informed – and in some cases helped to validate - the support tools and activities** put in place by the project. This can be seen in the *InCareNet* project (Germany) which sought to address the consequences of the German health care reform; in other words, Germany changed from the old, full cost system (where one place such as a hospital did all the work) to disease-related groups (based on various actors providing particular services). This new system was supposed to foster competition between different service providers, but resulted in the fragmentation of services. Faced with this problem, *InCareNet* tried to create a bottom-up consultation process among the people working in the industry on ways to improve the system, simultaneously reducing their costs and preserving the quality of their services. This consultation resulted in the establishment of a one-shop system, in which patients are directed to the services they need, the creation of a new profession – a mobile medical assistant that works on the basis of telemedicine.

Targeted support for older workers

When restructuring occurs and people lose their jobs, the **older workers are often the most vulnerable**, both in SMEs and in larger companies. On the one hand, these workers are the ones most prone to being dismissed in cases of downscaling, and on the other hand, they are the ones with the least chance of finding a new job. This precarious situation is particularly prevalent in traditional, manufacturing sectors where the staff have worked for the same company, often in the same job, for years, with little awareness or ability to deal with the competitive world of work.

Projects have been highly effective in recognising and responding to the particular situation faced by older workers. They have done so by not only **being sensitive to the psychological, as well as skills needs** of this target group, but by also **recognising the demands and engrained prejudices** placed on this group. A fine example of this is the ‘Professional Re-integration Method’, developed by the *Alliance for Work* project (Poland). The project was targeted at the over 45s who were facing a dual problem: the constant threat of unemployment owing to major structural changes in the textile, healthcare and education sectors; and negative and often discriminatory attitudes of employers. The project therefore developed a re-integration method that involved training and supporting the over 45s to become ‘job coaches’. These coaches would then go on to provide career guidance and support services to other older workers. A real asset of this approach was that the **job coaches were able to gain new skills and confidence and at the same time help others to develop new professional pathways: a win-win situation.** As one job coach commented:

“Before I was obsessed by the fear of not being up to performing a task and losing my job. Now, I feel more motivated and confident. It’s as if I am 25 again!”

3.2. POLICY MESSAGES

Policies should...

...support and promote more flexible, accessible and creative forms of training.

It is important to design and deliver training that is responsive to the restructuring situation and the needs of the individual. This means offering training in a variety of settings, at a variety of times and in a range of formats. It also means being creative in designing training that makes the subject matter more meaningful and relevant, as illustrated in simulation-based methods.

...support and promote the development of soft skills as a critical complement to more technical skills training

The development of soft skills is an often neglected, but nevertheless important part of the equation in supporting and preparing an individual faced with a restructuring situation. Soft skills not only can aid the individual in moving into new service-related sectors (if appropriate), but also in dealing effectively with new roles, encounters and surroundings as part of their general transition.

...foster the principle of empowerment within the design, delivery and evaluation of support measures.

Bottom-up approaches play an important role in the development of any support package or service for an individual. They help to ensure the effectiveness, relevance and ultimate sustainability of the provision in contrast to more top-down interventions. They also provide an opportunity for increased dialogue and understanding between the individual and other stakeholders such as training providers and policy makers, which forms part of effective partnership-based approaches to restructuring.

...target support at the most vulnerable people in restructuring situations, especially older workers.

Special attention should be given to those most susceptible to a change situation, particularly older workers who are more prone to be made redundant, but equally, less likely to find a job. Older workers are by no means a 'lost case'. They have clear potential to adapt to change and make a positive contribution to the labour market. But they need to be supported through this process.

...establish processes and systems for the validation and certification of skills as a 'passport' into the employment market during restructuring.

Many individuals in a restructuring situation have skills and competencies that are not recognised, either by themselves, or by existing or future employers. This creates a real barrier to moving and capitalising on opportunities within the labour market. Validation process and systems are therefore essential in overcoming this barrier.

4. RECONVERSION STRATEGIES AND COORDINATION OF INSTRUMENTS

4.1. NEW AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

In-depth research and analysis

A critical starting point for any regional response to restructuring has been a **thorough investigation and analysis of the 'situation in the region'**. This has proved essential in truly understanding the social and economic characteristics of the region, and identifying the essential drivers and consequences of change that need to be addressed. Aside from critical regional intelligence, another benefit of this work has been the chance to identify – and latterly consult and collaborate with - all of the regional stakeholders in restructuring. In many ways, this research and analysis has **prompted these stakeholders to benefit from data and information that they may not previously have accessed, and think about restructuring in a new, more holistic way.**

Two approaches to research and analysis have proved particularly effective. The first entails **research into the socio-economic picture of the region**, focusing on issues and indicators that are especially pertinent to the region and often involving the help of specific scientific/academic expertise. The *GESSCANT* project (Spain) is an excellent example of this approach applied to the Cantabria region. The project partners commissioned research into the trends, risks, threats and recent changes within four critical sectors: textiles, metallurgy, automotive and retail. According to the project co-ordinator:

"Another goal of the GESSCANT's study was to find out about the extent of employment policies developed in Cantabria, to open up new areas of debate about what [they] need to do to alleviate the negative effects of the restructuring processes, and to find new and alternative measures or policies to those commonly used, in the fields of training, redistribution of working time, social and family support..."

The second approach involves **undertaking a survey** – via interviews, focus groups and questionnaires - to gather information and views from different individuals and organisations across the region. The *Facilitating of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* project (Czech Republic) conducted such a survey, in this case across 10 remote villages to find out what the problems, needs and interests of the local people were in relation to learning. The results of this survey were combined with other sources of information to make sure that training provision fully reflected the emerging economic opportunities across the region.

Another interesting example is the *ICARO* project (Spain) focusing on the automobile sector because it combined both approaches: the analysis of regional and sectoral data, and company-focused research through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, followed by a validation of the diagnosis by a group of sectoral stakeholders. The project also compared and analysed the results of this work across the three partner regions (namely Navarra, Spain, Basilicata, Italy and Setubal, Portugal) in order to identify common points and differences, and to extract a number of common conclusions to allow the development of a future strategy.

Forecasting and observatory activities

Activities to observe and forecast patterns of restructuring are. These activities go beyond on-the-spot research and analysis, and provide a **robust and regular source of information that can help to deal with restructuring in a far more proactive and pre-emptive way**. Moreover, they help to provide an **impetus and focus for developing coordinated approaches and strategies** across a range of different organisations such as public authorities, trade unions, employers and employment services. They also play an important role in fostering the idea that **restructuring is not an exceptional event, but more of a permanent phenomenon** that needs constant review and monitoring.

Projects have identified two critical elements to forecasting and observatory activities, the first of which is the **need to operate at the regional and/or sectoral level**. Many of the existing observatories draw together national data, but do not probe deeper into the situation for particular territories or types of industry. Regions and sectors have particular social, economic and environmental factors that need to be taken into account, and as such, regional and/or sectoral observatories are most definitely required. One illustration of this is the 'Sectoral Development Observatories' developed by the *GESSCANT* project (Spain). On the one hand, these observatories monitored the socio-economic evolution of specific sectors, thereby helping to forecast restructuring trends; and on the other, they acted as fora for businesses, workers and social partners to jointly develop change management plans.

The second critical element is observing the situation according to a range of **indicators, not just the business or economic ones**. It is increasingly recognised that restructuring is driven by and gives rise to a number of inter-related factors. Therefore, observatories that monitor societal, regulatory, employment, educational and demographic trends (amongst other things), alongside economic patterns, are more useful in developing the integrated responses necessary to deal with change. In addition, such observatories encourage a far more inclusive, partnership-based approach to change management (a theme discussed in the next section of this paper). The *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project (Poland), for example, developed an electronic tool called the 'e-barometer', especially conceived and designed to help and support SMEs in two disadvantaged regions. Through the portal, the project provided information on changes in macroeconomic and regional business trends so as to help entrepreneurs anticipate and adapt to restructuring. For example, SMEs had access to forecasts concerning the main macroeconomic development indicators (like GDP, CPI, exchange rates, import, export, main credit rates, incomes *etc*), as well as to information on the crucial risks affecting SMEs. Also, entrepreneurs had access to forecasts of the main indicators of regional development, as well as to results of economic research provided in both regions.

The *ICARO* project (Spain) have also worked to develop an observatory, this time called the 'Observatory for the Permanent Monitoring of Change in the Automobile Sector' and covering each of the three project regions (in Spain, Italy and Portugal). This observatory focused on collecting statistical information and the development of questionnaires targeted at companies

and other actors in the sector. Longer term, the intention is for the observatory to collect news items related to the automobile sector on a European and worldwide scale, so as to help monitor developments and trends.

Identification of positive and inspiring examples

An important feature of the above activities has been the attempt to focus on the positive, as well as the negative. Whilst any region will have problems and weaknesses in terms of its ability to adapt, it is important to **source areas of opportunity and build on positive examples for change**. The *GESSCANT* project (Spain) did just this by including the identification and assessment of good business practice within its research work. These regional, national and European case studies enabled the project to pinpoint some of the right 'ingredients' for effective company restructuring, which then formed the basis of an awareness-raising and training programme.

This positive outlook has also been prevalent in other types of work, most notably **regional dissemination and consultation activities**. Many projects have emphasised the opportunities available to the region through restructuring, backed up by sound information and evidence. This is illustrated by the *Qualitative and Dimensional Growth of Venetian Companies* project (Italy), which worked within the Venetian region, a relatively wealthy region affected by the delocalisation of production (especially on the textile and shoes sectors). The project developed case studies of companies undergoing restructuring. Some of these case studies were elaborated into 'success stories' of companies that had successfully executed changes to their organisation or production processes. These stories thereby served as leading examples for other SMEs affected by restructuring.

Regional planning and strategy development

Regional planning and strategy development have formed a very important part of project activity. Firstly, such plans and strategies have helped the region to **clearly define its restructuring agenda** - in other words, its goals, activities and commitments to proactively deal with the economic changes identified or forecast within the region; more often than not, the drafting of these documents has been directly informed by the research and analyses described above. Secondly, the plans and strategies have been an essential tool in **engaging and focusing all the regional stakeholders behind this regional agenda**. They have been a way of bringing together and 'making sense' of the differing views and interests of the stakeholders into one overall position paper. Moreover, they have provided **something 'concrete' to help champion the project**, and as a consequence have generated further interest and in some cases financial backing.

The *Regional Key Competencies* project (Denmark) provides an ideal example of regional planning and strategy development. The project undertook 20 interviews as part of a 'Regional Signal Panel' across the Ribe Danish Region. These interviews involved different regional stakeholders, including politicians, decision-makers and experts from universities. The Regional Signal Panel tool (described in Annex 1) focused very much on democratic participation and empowerment, and as such was very well received across the region.

Structures and tools for on-going review, consultation and collaboration

Significant effort has been put into developing structures and tools to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of regional initiatives to deal with restructuring. Many of the projects have recognised that the initial research and analysis, positive examples and planning are not sufficient on their own. Other mechanisms need to be put in place **to regularly review the regional picture and engage the regional stakeholders on a more permanent basis**.

ICTs have been widely utilised in the development of structures and tools. The Internet in particular has served as a useful platform to complement, disseminate and/or extend the collaborative activities across the region, as in the case of the *ICARO* project (Spain). *ICARO*

developed a web-based fora for the exchange of information and intelligence in relation to the automotive industry. This initiative is especially significant because it was open to stakeholders across three regions in Spain, Portugal and Italy, and therefore helped to foster inter-regional collaboration in relation to restructuring.

4.2. POLICY MESSAGES

Policies should...

...support the development of more structures and tools to get all stakeholders' opinions about the future of the region and get them involved in the subsequent regional development process.

It is essential to involve regional stakeholders in all stages of the restructuring process, from the initial assessment of the situation, through the design of remedial steps and measures, right up to ongoing dialogue and review. Without such engagement, there is a risk of undermining the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of regional responses to restructuring.

...help to promote and disseminate the opportunities posed by restructuring as opposed to the threats and risks.

Real benefits have been observed in selling restructuring as a positive prospect. This can be achieved by researching and analysing the economic opportunities as much as the risks for the region; identifying success stories and good practice examples, both within the region and outside; and developing regional information-sharing and dissemination activities. The following quote from a participant in the *Regional Key Competencies* project (Denmark) sums up this idea perfectly:

"It is important to express that globalisation does not mean less jobs but different jobs, and the important thing therefore is to point out these different jobs and train and educate people to work in these jobs."

...make provision for longer-term forecasting and planning via the establishment of observatories, particularly at the regional and sectoral level.

Restructuring can be a painful process, but that does not mean it should be shied away from. On the contrary, there should be increased provision for anticipating and planning for the restructuring challenges that lie ahead for the region, not just one year ahead, but on a longer term, three to five year basis. Observatories form an essential part of the anticipatory/planning approach, and are currently lacking at the regional and sectoral level. Moreover, they need to cover a range of inter-related policy areas, including social affairs, education, employment, demography, regulatory frameworks etc.

...support more regular and effective evaluation of restructuring measures.

There should be far more formal evaluation of cases of restructuring, both at the company and regional level. The findings from such evaluations are essential for learning and improvement, rather than repeating 'old mistakes'.

5. PARTNERSHIPS

5.1. NEW AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Inclusive and diverse partnership-working

If the projects have one overriding message to give, it is that **multi-stakeholder partnerships are absolutely essential in responding effectively to restructuring** – at the territorial, sectoral and corporate level. None of their activities would have been so successful and firmly embedded in the regional agenda, had they not been conceived, designed, delivered and reviewed with the support of all of the agencies and individuals concerned, including: public authorities, local businesses, social partners (both trade unions and employer representative organisations), higher and further education providers, employment services and civil society groups. In the case of many projects, these actors had not previously been involved in the restructuring debate – or at least not to the same extent – and therefore were able to give fresh insights, new perspectives, and overall a more representative picture of the restructuring issues facing people who live and work in the region. On the other side of this coin, involving new actors meant **being open to differences in opinion and culture, as well as the potential for dispute** – a sometimes uneasy, but necessary part of working in partnership. Interestingly, to address this very issue, the *GESSCANT* project (Spain) involved ORELCA, a company specialised in extrajudicial resolution of working conflicts, in the partnership. Another example of a successful multi-stakeholder partnership is the *Volante XXI* project (Portugal). Following a change in the regulatory framework for the truck driving industry, this project brought together all interested parties to build - from scratch - a training programme for drivers so that they could upskill and retain their jobs. The parties included: associations for goods and passenger transport, the transport administration agency, the two biggest transport companies in Portugal, training institutes, trade unions, universities and the public sector in the form of the Ministry of Transport.

Certain organisations have proved to be 'essential ingredients' to the partnership. Aside from the social partners, discussed below, **public authorities (particularly at the regional level) and chambers of commerce have been seen as essential** in securing the interest and commitment of local employers in the partnership; without such organisations, firms and entrepreneurs do not see the project as being relevant or 'serious' in dealing with their business problems. Certain projects have also cited the **(relative) absence of public employment services** in restructuring-related partnerships; these services have been viewed as crucial in joining up economic and employment policies. For the *Lorraine, Territoire de Compétences* project (France), the fact that the leading organisation was the Regional Council gave substantial weight and coherence to the project, and helped to convince companies that their 'validation of skills' tool would create a win-win situation for all sides of the partnership. It also ensured that the key results of the project would be mainstreamed at the political level. The other key success factor was that all stakeholders agreed to work together to find efficient solutions to the skills gap and unemployment in Lorraine. Companies, training organisations and employment agencies worked together for the first time. The result was a more global and consistent approach to the problem of unemployment in the region. The cooperative approach made it possible to create innovative tools such as the 'Passeport Compétences Emploi'. The involvement of the ANPE (National Employment Agency) was particularly helpful in that regard.

Universities also have an important role to play. Indeed, they are instrumental in transferring leading-edge knowledge to companies on the restructuring process. They are also able to engage and foster trust with employers in a way that other organisations cannot, thanks to their established and independent reputation. An example of this type of cooperation is provided by the *Professional Shipyard Worker in the Baltic Sea* project (Finland), a project working to promote the adaptability of employees in the marine technology industry. A key success factor in this project was the optimal use of the knowledge of the five project partners in their own fields of expertise. For example, the Research Centre for Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE) at the University of Turku and Turku School of Economics worked on the research tasks.

Clear, stable and open partnership structures

To help engage and manage a wide group of partners, it is important to put **clear and stable structures in place**. Although varying in size, working arrangements and remit, these structures give a firm foundation for the partners to meet and work together. In addition, they give a visible identity to the partnership and its associated activities, promoting principles of transparency and dialogue. Typical structures set up by the projects include **steering groups** focused on overall management and decision making, **executive or working groups** charged with designing and

delivering aspects of the project, and **fora** to promote consultation, sound out opinion and 'test out' new ideas. The *Alliance for Work* project (Poland) established one such forum involving 13 diverse organisations such as the main national and SME trade unions, healthcare employers, research institutes and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) dealing in women issues. Looking at the forum, one partner representative commented:

"The presence of a high number of partners can sometimes be a problem, but at the same time it constitutes something incredible: we now have, sitting round the table, people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who did not talk to each other before. Alliance for Work has 'forced' them to communicate and to find a common language."

Another solid partnership can be found in the *Always Tourism* project (Greece). The partnership had a strong sectoral focus and thus involved key actors within the Greek tourism sector. The project was led by the Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies working in collaboration with the Agency of Tourism Promotion and Culture Development Prefecture, the Greek Organism of Tourism, as well as other academic bodies such as the Hellenic Open University, the National Centre for Social Research and the University of the Aegean, Department of Business Administration. All of these partners helped to raise the awareness of relevant stakeholders towards the current restructuring problems faced by the tourism sector, as well as to engage them in the development of longer term, remedial strategies and policies.

Animation and personal interaction

Another important feature of these partnership structures is that **they are 'animated'**. This means organising regular meetings of the partnership grouping so that there is a sense of momentum and clear progress towards achieving the project goals. In cases where not all partners can commit to the same meeting agenda, **more flexible and tailored arrangements** can be introduced. For example, aside from organising all-partner meetings, the *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural conditions* project (Czech Republic) set up individual partner meetings or visits to animate the partnership on a unilateral, as well as multi-lateral, basis.

Another success factor in this project, also apparent in other projects, is the **importance of personal rapport and interaction**. Project staff have invested significant time and energy in fostering genuine relationships with the partner representatives, whether it be through making a 'friendly' telephone call, being proactive in providing support and information, or generally being enthusiastic about the endeavours of the project. This links with the **importance of having a few key figures who can champion and build support around the partnership**; these figures are often influential and well-known in their area or sector. The *MEIRG* project (GB), for instance, was able to win the support of Ivan Lewis (at the time, Economic Secretary to the Treasury in the UK), who went on to 'pull in' large corporates, financial investors and other significant players for restructuring at the national and regional levels.

Definition, allocation and support of roles

Defining and allocating roles and responsibilities across the partnership is important, not simply in terms of 'getting the work done', but maximising the strengths and contributions of each of the partners involved. Ideally, these roles and responsibilities are set out in writing as part of, for instance, a project work programme or the terms of reference for the partnership. The *NAVIGATOR* project (Greece) paid particular attention to this issue by meeting regularly with the partners, and working with them to identify and define the best role that they could play in developing the restructuring activities of the project. As a result, everyone knew what was expected of them, felt part of a bigger picture, and ultimately more motivated to collaborate with others. The training providers, for instance, were committed to leading on the development of the training schemes for shipyard workers; and the local development agencies had a specific remit to network with external parties and work to mainstream the results of the project. The role of 'task manager' was also created, whereby key members of project staff would take responsibility for particular aspects of the project (supported by schedules, methodologies etc.) and work with relevant partners in bringing these to fruition.

For some partners, they may lack the knowledge, skills or experience to fully play a part in the partnership from the beginning. This issue has been particularly observed amongst the smaller, less-well resourced organisations or those that have not previously had the opportunity to get involved in such partnerships, as in the case of the *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural conditions* project (Czech Republic). As part of a clear, bottom-up approach, this project organised **capacity-building activities** for the village mayors who were partners in the partnerships. Whilst being critical advocates for the upskilling and learning activities set up in their villages, some of these mayors were at risk of being excluded from related exchanges of information and debate because they were not sufficiently computer literate to use the project's online communication platform. The project consequently organised ICT training for this to avoid such a risk.

Social dialogue

The projects have developed a number of successful approaches to promoting and sustaining social dialogue – within the context of partnership. The key characteristic of these approaches has been the **establishment of a committee or forum for permanent dialogue between the social partners**. This characteristic can be observed in the *O2K – Open to Knowledge* project (Italy). When the project started, there was already structure for social dialogue covering the textile industry in the Biella region. However, it was clear that this 'Social Dialogue Board' lacked dynamism and was not focused on the critical issues facing textile companies in the region. The project staff therefore worked with key Board members to change the agenda by highlighting the economic and social consequences for the region if it failed to diversify and modernise business practices. According to project staff, the revived Social Dialogue Board was **especially successful because it had not formal decision-making power and was external vis-à-vis the normal negotiation formalities**. Consequently, it provided a more neutral and informal platform for discussion between the partners, and was able to examine restructuring in a more global fashion rather than via individual company cases.

The transnational dimension of social dialogue should not be neglected. On the contrary, several projects have commented on **the benefits to be gained from involving social partners in information-sharing and collaboration across national boundaries**. The Italian and Finnish partners in *NEORION II project* (Greece, under Round 1 of EQUAL) had the opportunity to present their experiences of restructuring in the shipbuilding sector at one of the project's Industrial Relations Forum meetings. The feedback from the social partners was overwhelmingly positive in terms of finding joint solutions to shared sectoral problems.

Engagement of employers

A key challenge when building partnerships is knowing how to involve businesses. Companies are not always willing to cooperate for a number of reasons, including other, seemingly more profitable priorities, and a lack of time and resources. In addition, there is a lack of cooperation culture: companies see other firms as competitors and rivals, and harbour reservations towards other, unfamiliar organisations.

Projects have been successful in overcoming these problems in a number of ways. The first relates to the use of language. Above anything else, it is important to use a **vocabulary and concepts that are not too abstract and far from the company's daily concerns**; ultimately, it is a question of communicating the commercial benefits of partnership-working in a clear, meaningful and interesting way. For instance, rather than talking about 'globalisation' and 'restructuring', the message should be about upgrading, dealing with market competition, launching new products and/or facing increased competition.

The 'time factor' also needs to be taken into account; company managers often only have five minutes to listen to what the partnership representative has to say and are very much under pressure. Therefore, there is a very narrow 'window of opportunity'. Combined with this issue is the fact that company managers may only be interested in *one* aspect of what the partnership is doing. The key to addressing these issues is **identifying clearly how the company can**

contribute – and benefit – from the partnership, making maximum and efficient use of their time.

The involvement of key organisations is also critical to ensuring the participation of companies. **Regional authorities and business associations are seen as particularly important**, firstly in giving a strong, institutional presence and backing to the partnership, and secondly in helping to foster feelings of trust. This reinforces the aforementioned idea that regional authorities have a key role to play in building partnerships.

Despite these challenges, many projects have successfully involved companies in their partnership work. The *ICARO* project (Spain), for instance, specifically adapted its language when addressing companies; for example, they avoided the word ‘outsourcing’ as this was associated with a negative image. The *REFLEX* project (Belgium) used a similar approach when dealing with the issue of ‘flexicurity’ (the reconciliation of flexibility and security). Instead of approaching companies with a pre-defined concept and set of measures, they worked with the companies, asking them what their needs were and using their inputs to define a common idea. They then spoke to the company workers to establish what their needs were and what they wanted to improve in work organisation. Thanks to this collaborative, bottom-up approach, the project was able to more effectively engage the companies and develop more innovative (employer-supported) practices to reconcile flexibility and security.

Added value of transnational cooperation

The benefits of transnational cooperation cannot be over-emphasised, particularly given the increasingly globalised nature of restructuring itself. The plus points of working transnationally, as cited by projects, include being able to share learning and experiences, compare and benchmark, identify and disseminate good practice - and not insignificantly, feel that one is not the only one dealing with the stresses and challenges of change. The *EQUAL* and *Article 6* programmes have been

An interesting case of transnational cooperation is the one found in *the Future of the Oderland NadOdrze Border Region* project (Germany). This project engaged public authorities, business representatives and other stakeholders in east Brandenburg with their counterparts in the neighbouring Polish region to *jointly* identify and exploit cross-border market opportunities. In addition, the plan was set out over a three to five year timeframe, thereby giving a much longer perspective to this inter-regional collaboration. According to the project manager, this cross-border collaboration was fundamental to maximising commercial opportunities for both the German and Polish regions, and strengthening their ability to deal with the effects of globalisation and changing trade patterns.

The *MIRE* project (France) is a truly international project, which deserves particular attention. The project’s aim was to create rules and codes of practice to encourage a socially responsible approach to restructuring. Within the framework of international cooperation, seven transversal studies were carried out, examining the actors’ views on restructuring, innovative practices, health issues etc., across various countries. The project also organised eleven international workshops on the themes of innovation in restructuring, bringing together trade unions, public agencies, territorial actors, employers etc. And mainstreaming amongst the partners of different countries has already shown successful results: a system existing in France, the ‘employers’ pool’ which can be a useful tool for anticipation, has been transferred to Belgium and Germany, where it is an innovation.

Another example can be found in the cooperation between the *NAVIGATOR* and *LIGHTHOUSE* projects (Greece and Ireland respectively). This transnational partnership was not merely limited to experience exchange, but was seen as a means to jointly develop innovation and added value in a number of thematic fields. In practice, this meant using transnational cooperation to transfer good practice in relation to organisational cultures that help to support workers, the joint development of learning tools and methodologies, as well as on the joint dissemination of common results.

5.2. POLICY MESSAGES

Policies should...

...focus on and promote the involvement of all stakeholders in restructuring at the territorial, sectoral and corporate levels.

The only effective and sustainable way of addressing today's restructuring problems is by developing shared solutions. Restructuring concerns so many different policy agendas, organisations and individuals and as such requires a multi-faceted approach, based on partnership. The stakeholders that should be engaged in any such partnership include public authorities, social partners, chambers of commerce, NGOs, etc.

...provide adequate resources for the establishment and management of partnerships.

The time and resources required to establish and manage a partnership cannot be underestimated. This means putting in place dedicated staff, setting aside opportunities for proper planning and consultation, and developing tools and materials to support partners at all stages. Without such provisions, a partnership can easily flounder, and only go reinforce pre-existing difficulties around multi-agency collaboration.

...support the capacity-building of partners, especially for those organisations that have traditionally been outside or disengaged from the restructuring debate.

It is increasingly recognised that NGOs, individual businesses, education institutions (such as universities) public authorities (especially in the new Member States) have an essential role to play in finding solutions to restructuring challenges. Their links with civil society, corporate opinion, leading-edge research and policy formulation, amongst other things, mean that they can bring new insights and ideas to the table. However, this valuable input can be undermined if they do not have the right skills and experience to fully participate in the partnership. Therefore, training and support initiatives need to be an integral part of any partnership-based endeavour.

...focus on identifying and engaging dynamic people to manage and animate the partnership, and ensuring that they have adequate resources and backing to undertake this 'animation' role.

The human factor of partnership cannot be underestimated. It does not matter how much money or capacity there is, if one or two key individuals are not engaged in the partnership and driving it forward, then the partnership will undoubtedly flounder. These individuals need to be 'charismatic', and skilled in managing the inter-personal as well as practical dynamics of the partnership.

...establish organisations whose sole remit is to promote and coordinate inter-regional and transnational partnership working.

There is a clear absence of structures to help promote the benefits, and develop and manage partnership in relation to restructuring. This absence severely undermines the ability of individuals and organisations to make the best use of partnership in dealing with restructuring across a territory or sector. The ideal structures to 'champion' partnerships are those that work on a transnational or national level, drawing together good practice, providing learning resources and opportunities, and essentially providing an environment in which partnerships can flourish.

...should emphasise the public authority's role for setting up and leading partnerships.

Public authorities – especially those at the regional level - should assume the role of setting up and managing the partnership. They should consider this role to be a priority. They are well placed to bring people together; contribute finances and other resources, and ultimately give the political backing that is essential to moving and sustaining the partnership in the longer term.

...should be encouraged to participate in partnerships outside of their traditional role.

Universities can add real value to partnerships in terms of providing expertise and 'independent' thinking, yet their traditional role does not always lend itself well to this. They therefore need to be encouraged and supported to dedicate time outside of their 'standard' academic activities and look beyond their 'core target groups'. This is partly dependent on the universities becoming more flexible and innovative in their organisational outlook, as well as feeling that they can trust the other organisations in the partnership.

6. SMEs AND RESTRUCTURING

6.1. NEW AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

The situation of SMEs in relation to restructuring deserves particular attention. In the words of Gerhard Huemer, Director of the UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises), SMEs are especially affected by restructuring.⁵ But the problem is that the debate is often focused on large enterprises because of their visibility and the emotional impact of restructuring in these companies - where thousands of workers are affected (as in the case of Renault, the car manufacturer). However, anticipating change is more difficult for SMEs as they do not have the appropriate structures or resources to retrain their staff, react quickly etc. **Raising awareness of the need for change amongst SMEs is essential to creating a new dynamic.**

SME networks and clusters

A highly successful way of engaging SMEs and helping them to overcome the difficulties and fears associated with restructuring has been the establishment of SME networks and clusters. By bringing SMEs together, often from the same sector or branch of business activity, it has been possible to **promote the exchange of knowledge and information, opportunities for collaboration and joint working**, and above all, a feeling that one is 'not alone' in dealing with the acute challenges of economic change.

Networks and clusters have proved most effective when they have had a **clearly defined aim, and been centred on a common problem and target group**. For example, the *O2K – Open to Knowledge* project (Italy) set up a network for textile artisans who were specifically identified as being 'out-of-touch' with new consumer demands in fashion. The network's aim was therefore to bring about a change in attitude and raise awareness of the risks faced - for the region as well as individual firms - if businesses failed to modernise. The networks set up under the *INOCOP* project (Portugal) had a different, but equally effective aim, which was to enable automotive component suppliers to develop, test and bring to market new innovations in their industry. Through these networks - or **Communities of Practice** as they were known - small businesses were able to pool their knowledge and resources, working directly with an external research and development laboratory, something that they would not have been able to achieve, had they worked in isolation.

Another feature of these and other examples is the emphasis placed on **self-development and empowerment**. The networks and clusters have clearly given SMEs the scope to determine their own agenda and learn from the bottom up. This approach has always been backed up by **strong and well-resourced facilitation via the project partners**, and in many cases **supported by written tools and methodologies**. A fine illustration of this is the *Munich Competent* project (Germany), which developed a networking model for organic food retailers to support the process of ownership transfer and/or address the growing competition organic supermarkets. In the words of one network participant:

⁵ A presentation made by Gerhard Huemer at the 'Innovative Approaches to the Management of Change' seminar for Article 6 (2004) project promoters on 23 October 2006 in Brussels.

“With the recent supermarket phenomenon, we are in all the same boat...The reason I got involved was because previously I found it difficult to formulate the future of my business. The network has allowed me to think about this future and now I am exploring the prospect of a third store. It has been good for me and others!”

Management training and support

A wide range of initiatives have been undertaken to develop the managerial and strategic capacity of SMEs in relation to restructuring. These initiatives have been particularly effective insofar as they have helped SMEs to **anticipate and prepare for change, as much as manage it**. The training-centred interventions are a good example of this. Rather than simply offering a standard management course, the projects have delivered **very practical and tailored training**, involving a **thorough analysis of the SMEs** concerned and the **development of tools that can be directly applied to the business**. The *Making Change a Chance* project (Finland), for instance, organised individual workshops for SME managers for design their own company development strategy based on the learning gained by attending courses on proactive leadership, internal communication skills and other subjects.

The initiatives are by no means limited to training. Indeed, **diagnostic tools** have been particularly well received by SMEs, helping them to anticipate and manage change proactively. A notable example is the ‘e-barometer’ developed by the *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project (Poland). This tool was an online portal providing regularly updated macroeconomic and regional business information, thereby enabling SMEs to forecast and adapt to changing circumstances. The ‘work capability analysis’ was another interesting case seen in the *Making Change a Chance* project (Finland). This focused very much on the **social dimension of restructuring**, involving a review of the well-being of SME workers most at risk of marginalisation, followed up by training in areas such as ergonomics, and occupational health and safety.

This and other projects have also illustrated the **value of consultation and advisory services**, particularly when they are highly tailored to the needs of the individual SME, delivered on-site and involve a high degree of face-to-face contact between the advisor and SME staff. The most important outcome of these highly personalised services seems to have been the **fostering of trust**, a critical ingredient to getting SMEs to ‘open up’, share their concerns and start looking constructively at the business challenges that they face.

The *Relanz@* project (Spain) is worth highlighting as it demonstrates well the ‘advisor role’, diagnostic services, and the tailoring of support to SME needs. This project specifically tested new ways of developing lifelong training for businesses: in-company training, e-learning, visits to successful enterprises, tutorship on the workplace, coaching, etc. In order to overcome the problem of access to information and resources for SMEs located in remote and rural areas, the project also developed Shared Resource Centres, which were places housing equipment, technical resources and specialised human resources. Interestingly, these ‘Shared Resource Centres’ proposed two new roles to support enterprises: an enterprise tutor (a person in charge of the diagnosis of the enterprises, the detection of deficiencies and the design of enterprise improvement itineraries, both individualised and grouped) and a socio-corporate mediator (a person in charge of the fulfilment of social responsibility within companies).

Dissemination and awareness-raising

Another notable area of success can be seen in measures aimed a disseminating and raising awareness amongst the SME community in relation to restructuring prospects and threats. These measures have not only served to engage SMEs in the project activities, but also built **critical relations between local business and other key stakeholders, such as public authorities, employment services and NGOs**. Typical examples include the organisation of regional events, a video illustrating the ‘situation in the region’, and case stories of ‘champion SMEs’ that have successfully dealt with restructuring issues. Across these examples, particularly the latter, is the emphasis on engaging SMEs with a strong, and above all, positive message: adaptation to change is a critical, and potentially prosperous part of business life.

The *L3CLUB* project (Italy) provides a good illustration of SME-focused dissemination and awareness-raising. The project developed a tool called the 'L3Club', which was a club of enterprises that share similarities in their organisational structure and resources. These companies met regularly to discuss common problems and possible solutions. After an initial assessment of the companies' needs, a training programme was set up for them. Amongst the issues explored during the training, we can find human resource management, relations with employment services and centres, and support to heads of internal departments. The businesses taking part in the club could thereby benefit from the help of different local actors involved in the project: local employment services, public administration bodies, trade unions, employer organisations as well as academic bodies.

6.2. POLICY MESSAGES

Policies should...

...promote and support the provision of combined SME services, tailored to the needs of individual SMEs, or groups of SMEs from particular sectors and/or localities.

Project experience has clearly demonstrated that one single intervention, such as training or a company visit, cannot succeed alone. A holistic approach that integrates different SME services and tackles the multi-dimensional problems that SMEs face have, by far, the best chance of success. Such an approach is dependent on collaboration between a range of stakeholders and providers.

...support structures that give time and space for communication and relationship building so as to generate trust and dialogue between SMEs, as well as between SMEs and other intermediaries.

For many SMEs, the prospect of change can be a scary and emotive issue. As such, an important part of the SME solution is overcoming sentiments of fear and mistrust, and creating an environment in which SMEs feel comfortable and supported in moving into 'unknown territory'. This solution is therefore highly dependent on adequate time and resources being dedicated to relationship-building, whether that be through face-to-face networks, on-site advisory services or one-to-one coaching of SME managers.

...seek to modernise training services and foster more innovative and flexible training provision.

SMEs are increasingly expected to modernise their working organisation and practices in order to survive. In addition, they are expected to do this fast, flexibly and on an ongoing basis. The concern is that training services are not following suit. They are not modernising and evolving at an adequate pace in order to respond to SME demand and therefore risk undermining the restructuring capability of SMEs.

...be formulated and disseminated in a way that is clearer, simpler and far more user-friendly for SMEs.

Difficulties in gaining information on what is going on at policy level and the complexity of the language used by policy makers constitute two major barriers for SMEs in understanding the implications of restructuring-related developments and provisions. These barriers have been particularly observed for SMEs in rural and remote areas. European, national and regional policy makers should therefore use a far more accessible language and make increasing effort to disseminate information to all stakeholders.

7. CONCLUSIONS: WHAT NEXT?

Looking across the five themes, two overall conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, EQUAL and Article 6 projects are by no means one dimensional. On the contrary, they have firmly recognised that restructuring is a complex and multi-faceted issue. Shifts in international trade patterns, consumer demand, demographics and technological capability are just some of the factors for change. And these factors (or combinations of factors) impact in a range of ways, levels and areas, from employment rates to business competitiveness, and from social cohesion to individual self-esteem. EQUAL and Article 6 projects have managed to address these inter-related factors and impacts thanks to their scope for experimentation and innovation. They have been able to analyse in far greater depth the nature of the problem – for the individual, business and/or territory concerned – and test out new ideas and approaches to tackle the problem. Moreover, they have been able to *combine* ideas and approaches, thereby giving a far better, overall solution that reflects the very complexity of the problem.

The second conclusion, echoed by every project consulted, is the value and importance of partnership in addressing the challenges of restructuring. Multi-stakeholder approaches are absolutely essential in finding effective and sustainable solutions to economic change. EQUAL and Article 6 projects have actively consulted and collaborated with public authorities, regional development agencies, SME managers, company employees social partners, higher and further education, NGOs and civil society, to name but a few. The inputs of these organisations and individuals have been overwhelmingly positive. That is not to say there have not been difficulties. Indeed, bringing different agendas and interests round one table is not always easy, and can reveal differences of opinion and conflict. But this has nevertheless been an essential part of the restructuring process.

A very important practical message for partnership in relation to restructuring is that strong processes and structures are needed for the partners to work together effectively. These include setting up partnership groupings, developing partnership plans, putting in place tools and approaches for dialogue, and engaging staff to 'drive' the partnership forward. This practical message gives rise to one final policy recommendation that can be drawn from this paper:

Policies should put partnership-based approaches at the forefront of any measures to address the challenges of restructuring, and these approaches must be adequately resourced. If policies do not allow sufficient time and resources for the proper planning and management of partnerships, then there is a risk that not all of the restructuring stakeholders will be fully engaged, and ultimately the solutions will not be as effective and long-lasting.

Even though EQUAL and Article 6 will cease to exist after 2008, there is plenty of scope to implement the recommendations in this paper with ESF support under the 2007-2013 programming period. As one of five general priorities for all Member States, the ESF Regulation mentions the need for assistance in 'increasing the adaptability of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs with a view to improving the anticipation and positive management of economic change'⁶. Some Member States may well be prepared to make the recommendations of this paper part of their mainstream policies – with or without ESF support. The ESF Regulation gives a helping hand for this endeavour by saying that 'in implementing the objectives and priorities...the ESF shall support the promotion and mainstreaming of innovative activities in the Member States.' And finally, the promotion of partnerships and transnational cooperation are horizontal objectives of the ESF Regulation. The specific recommendations, as well as the concluding recommendation of this paper are therefore particularly pertinent for those responsible for planning and managing ESF programmes. In conclusion, there is a real opportunity to continue the rich legacy of EQUAL and Article 6 into the future programming period...an opportunity that clearly should not be missed!

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999. *Official Journal of the European Union*. 31.7.2006

ANNEX 1: CASE STUDIES FROM EQUAL AND ESF ARTICLE 6

Please find below six case studies that have been specifically prepared for this paper.

LISP - LOCAL INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

The economy at large is affected by globalisation, but some sectors are more vulnerable to the pressure of international competition than others. Textile and clothing, mechanics, footwear, wood and furniture are all sectors that have to face problems related to the modernisation of production processes, the lack of human and organisational resources, or weak marketing strategies. Existing training services available for **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs) are not tailor-made and do not address the practical needs of small companies facing restructuring.

The objective of the Article 6 project *LISP (Local Initiatives and Social Partnership)* was to **provide support specifically adapted to SMEs** to improve their performance and sustain employment, in designing experimental tools for anticipating and managing change. The project, coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce of Treviso, was targeted at **entrepreneurs** and focused on five local production systems in two regions, Treviso in Italy and Alicante in Spain, both characterised by the presence of a large number of SMEs in traditional industries under the competitive pressure of low-wage countries.

The partners, including the University of Alicante, trade unions and entrepreneurs associations, were animated by a desire to explore different strategic answers to the changes affecting manufacturing. Product upgrade, flexibility, process rationalisation, customisation or new organisation models represent some of the possible **alternatives to outsourcing**. Without such actions, some parts of the **manufacturing industry** could disappear and **skills** such as embroidery or lace work could be completely lost. This valuable “know how” can be used to create new competitive advantages.

The project developed innovative tools such as the ‘District Committees’ which provided a new **space for dialogue** at the political level and succeeded in strengthening local governance. In Alicante, issues discussed included the promotion of ‘made in Spain’ footwear both at national and international level, through collaboration strategies. The University took a pro-active part in becoming ‘District manager’ and helped to formulate coherent local development policies.

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION: IS OUTSOURCING THE ONLY ANSWER?

Local production systems in Italy and Spain, particularly **textile, mechanics and furniture** production, are strongly affected by the transformations of international trade. In the Treviso region for example, the local manufacturing system is increasingly affected by the outsourcing of production to Eastern Europe and Asia. The main concerns of companies are to reduce the costs to a maximum, which usually means a disregard for the effects of outsourcing on the workforce, as well as on the local market.

In order to remain competitive, companies need to increase the flexibility of their production and services. This is a particularly **difficult challenge for SMEs** as their adaptation capacity is limited. Bigger companies, with more advanced Human Resource departments and organisational resources, handle this process more easily.

The project's starting point was the debate around very important questions: was the manufacturing industry going to survive in these regions? How could the production systems adapt to the latest changes in the market? *LISP*'s aim was to provide assistance to SMEs, with the underpinning hypothesis that, if SMEs were provided with the right tools to build up and increase their organisational capacity, they would consequently improve their services, productivity and flexibility. Only then would SMEs be more competitive and face the challenges of restructuring more easily.

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW FORMS OF LEARNING

The scientific partner of the project (Istituto Poster) first conducted research on the strength and weaknesses of each production system, on firms' strategies to answer the pressure of international competition (delocalisation abroad, technological and organisational innovation, production upgrading), to forecast different possible social economic scenarios, such as which productive segments will be able to reach a new competitive positioning.

To raise awareness amongst the social actors of the importance of change management, the project developed innovative forms of local governance through a new **consultation mechanism** with institutions, entrepreneurs and workers. These '**discussion places**' called **District Committees** (one for each production system) were composed of social partners and local government in order to discuss territorial problems and scenarios and to steer local development policies.

The other crucial tool in the project's strategy was the **highly interactive working groups** called '**Change Labs**' or **laboratories for change**, comprising entrepreneurs, technicians and experienced consultants in order to discuss practical issues concerning firms, to rethink organisational systems, to share best practice and assess the applicability of potential solutions. This interactive learning tool was at the core of *LISP*'s territorial animation, including around 15 enterprises per workshop. The idea behind this new model of **cooperation with entrepreneurs** is that support to lifelong learning should not concern only workers but also managers and entrepreneurs: it is a pre-condition to build new skills and adaptability to change.

Starting up of an experimental path of learning among firms on the management of change was very innovative in this sector. This direct approach to SMEs was key to the success of the project.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The main outcome of the project was to foster new **consultancy skills** in the companies involved, through knowledge sharing and benchmarking among firms. The feedback offered by the workshops 'Change Labs', involving a total of 150 companies and 250 managers, was successfully linked to the development of new policies. In Italy, the seven workshops that took place were also a **space for socialisation** to build trust between the companies. It helped to overcome the prevailing feeling of pessimism and opened new possibilities – i.e. encouraging textile companies to focus on high value added activities to fertilize **local competitive advantages**.

In Treviso, the *LISP* project became a **knowledge provider** within the Strategic Plan developed by the Province of Treviso and the Chamber of Commerce. Since 2004, the new local governance network has focused on the industrial competitive repositioning, employment, development, and innovation. The objective was to transfer the 'Change Labs' technical discussions to the political level to ease organization solution diffusion and implementation. An agreement on priorities proved more difficult than in Alicante because business representatives and trade unions have a strong, deep rooted role. However the Strategic Plan represented a facilitating and cohesive factor in decision processes.

In Alicante, the laboratories not only discussed practical issues concerning firms, but also tried to **implement the policy options** that emerged in the District Committees. Indeed, *LISP* in Spain set up a Committee composed of social partners and local government in order to discuss territorial problems and to steer local development policies. The University of Alicante succeeded in establishing itself as a 'District Manager'. The Committees, hosted in the University, became the meta-institutional link between the Alicante Chamber of Commerce, entrepreneurs' associations, trade unions and municipalities. Debates were never ideological but pragmatic, responsive to priorities and oriented to the development of policies, for instance about the revalorization of the shoe industry.

In both regions, the project contributed to the strengthening of the **local governance network** and helped to enhance the coherence between potential scenarios, priorities and policy-making.

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BUILDING ON SKILLS

Mature, skilled workers, who make up over 40% of the workforce, receive little training support and guidance compared to other groups in the labour market. When structural change and large-scale redundancies occur in the industry, the staff who are made redundant often leave the industry completely and migrate to less strategically important areas where they perceive there is greater job security. The **'skills flight'** problem is particularly acute in the **engineering manufacturing sector** where strategically valuable human resource and experience is dissipated into other sectors of the economy.

The **MEIRG** (*Midlands Engineering Industries Redeployment Group*) project in the UK decided to address this problem in an innovative way by transferring and adapting the **redeployment agency model** used by large corporates at the regional (East and West Midlands) and sectoral (manufacturing) level. This adaptation proved particularly beneficial to manufacturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the region who, unlike their larger counterparts, lack the capacity and resources to offer services to their employees in restructuring situations – i.e. careers guidance and new job training, and options such as relocation or flexible working. There is currently **little or no support for SMEs** (business and employees) when structural changes occur.

Bringing together strategic private and public sector actors, the project was able to win the support of Ivan Lewis, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who went on to 'pull in' large corporates, financial investors and other significant players. The project was therefore able to benefit from a **solid partnership** with enterprises (i.e. Midlands Aerospace Alliance, Rolls Royce) and trade unions (GMB, AMICUS), and from the support of central government (Department for Trade and Industry) and strategic public agencies (i.e. Learning and Skills Council, Job Centre Plus, East Midlands Development Agency), all of whom were indispensable to the success of the project.

The project's main achievement was the development of a **pragmatic method of retraining, re-skilling and up-skilling employees**. An original **'mobile resource centre'** was created in the form of a bus known as ERIC, which functioned as a redeployment unit and housed all the necessary support services. Reflecting on his experience with MEIRG, one beneficiary stated: *"MEIRG were the most useful organisation when I needed help at this critical time. I had never had a CV before but they helped me produce it and train for an interview. They rang various companies and at my first interview I got the job."* The concept underpinning the project was described by Ivan Lewis as a **'virtuous circle'** which could be applied at a national level, to produce a flexible multi-skilled workforce comfortable with rapid change.

SKILLS FLIGHT: A VICIOUS CIRCLE

Over the last ten years, there has been a **major reshaping of the manufacturing industry** in the UK. Whereas in the past there were mainly large companies, employing altogether 40,000 people, today there are mainly **SMEs**, with a staff of 100,000. And 5% of these companies now employ less than 5 people.

When large-scale redundancies occur in the manufacturing industry, the staff who are made redundant often leave the industry completely, and move to new, alternative industries/sectors where they feel more 'safe'. This leads to an increasing skills shortage in the manufacturing sector. When older workers are made redundant, they tend to seek early retirement, rather than having opportunities for maximising and/or retaining their skills in the manufacturing industry since there are no services specifically targeted at their needs. The departure of such workers

who are often experienced and skilled is a problem for the industry, again exacerbating the **skills drain** from the sector.

The manufacturing sector has historically employed people through several generations. When the older workers leave the industry, with negative experiences and sentiments, they tend to dissuade their offspring to work in the industry. Young people no longer see manufacturing as attractive. Large-scale redundancies, widely publicised by the media, act as a major disincentive.

Prior to the project, a number of **redeployment agency models existed amongst large firms**, such as Rolls Royce, Marks and Spencer, and British Aerospace. However smaller companies, lacking capacity and resources, were not able to set up and operate similar models to help their own staff. The project initiative was therefore designed to bring an end to this 'un-empowerment' and to help this disadvantaged group by giving them the opportunity to pursue their careers in a strategically important sector of the economy where their efforts can deliver maximum benefit for the entire community.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR SKILLS RETENTION

Leading-edge redeployment practices used by major blue-chip companies were made available to SMEs through an **innovative mobile support service**. The project applied the redeployment agency model regionally (East and West Midlands) and on a sectoral basis (manufacturing).

The model involved using a bus called '**ERIC**' (Engineering Research and Innovation Centre) equipped with a satellite link, and containing all the materials, resources and staff to support and counsel individuals when they are faced with the prospect of restructuring/redundancy. The types of services received on the bus included bespoke employer led training courses where demand lies within the engineering sector, training needs analysis, CV development and the use of CWEB software. This software enables employers to display the vacancies they have, and to offer recruitment opportunities to the individuals concerned. Having received the support services via ERIC, the individuals were then offered appropriate training.

The main challenge for the DP was to get employers to diversify within the engineering sector before redundancy occurs. This involved identifying skills shortages and providing bespoke learning in order for employees to stay in the engineering sector. One of the acknowledged failings of redundancy support mechanisms in the UK is that they trigger only after the employment contract is broken, by which time, damage to industry, individual and the community is at a maximum. The advantage of the project's redeployment model is that it is able to offer a **timely and rapid response**, at the time or before the redundancies are announced.

The model also offered companies **additional options** when in a restructuring situation. Companies could refer their staff to other companies in the region who might be recruiting (in a similar way that a large corporate might redeploy its staff to another department or office location). The benefit of this approach is that it helped to accommodate economic fluctuations and variations between sub-sectors, thus avoiding permanent redundancy. For example a company in one sub-sector experiencing a downturn could second staff to a company that was prospering.

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE: ENHANCING A FLEXIBLE, MULTI-SKILLED WORKFORCE READY FOR CHANGE

A great advantage of the model developed by *MEIRG* was its unusual **mobility and flexibility**: the ERIC bus could travel anywhere in the region and be on site at the company concerned. It helped overcome the problems of small companies that lack the resources to set up such a facility.

The CWEB facility shared **vacancy information** across the employer network, thereby helping to maximise job opportunities for workers faced with redundancy and giving companies a wider

recruitment pool. Overall, it created greater flexibility to handle employment changes from one company to the next.

Thanks to the project, BMI, a small company in the region, was able to retain 80% of its workforce. In total the project so far supported 360 employers; approximately 2,000 individuals post redundancy and 1,000 pre-redundancy. One employee explains: *“I had a go at producing one but MEIRG staff went through it and showed me the best way to produce a high quality one. I also received advice on interview techniques. There’s no doubt that these helped pave the way for the new job.”*

These results demonstrate the project’s success in providing a simple, practical and achievable means of reversing the vicious circle of skills flight. Clear testimony of this is that the project recently held a meeting with Tony Blair to discuss the possibility of rolling the model out nationwide. Reflecting the core principle of the project, the Prime Minister stated: *“It is vital that essential skills are not lost to our economy when industrial restructuring occurs. That’s why the work undertaken by MEIRG ensures that experience will be retained and workers redeployed across the Midlands to meet both the region’s and the country’s economic need”.*

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REGIONAL COMPETENCIES: THE KEY TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The Ribe County in Denmark has suffered from the negative changes brought about by globalisation; it has particularly been affected by the loss of manual jobs. In addition, one of the main challenges facing Ribe County is to attract and retain young talent in the region. This is seen as a major issue, with nine out of ten people who start higher education leaving the region, many of whom never return. To address these issues, the county needs to develop new strategies and find new sectors to invest in and develop. However, the key regional development actors do not have a strong history of cooperation due to their different working cultures, approaches and understandings of the problems and challenges facing the region.

The main objective of the Article 6 project *Regional Key Competencies – A way to manage structural changes* was to develop a set of practical methodologies that makes it easier for regions to **identify their key competencies** and to develop strategic plans accordingly. The project placed a specific emphasis on **collaborative working** as a means to manage structural change, as is explained by Johnny Killerup, Director of the leading partner EU Vest: *“If you want to create growth in a region like ours, you have to collaborate on a large scale – with parties from the public and the private sector.”*

In conjunction with its partners from South West England (i.e. National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) and Wallonia (Le Forem), the project developed innovative tools such as ‘Scenario Planning’ and the ‘Regional Signal Panel’, both **bottom-up approaches** aimed at gathering qualitative information about the region. The target group was indeed very broad, including a range of actors from policy makers, regional administrations, and students interested in regional development. The positive impact of the project for the Ribe County is clear: it made a breakthrough in identifying “Wellness” as a new key competence for the region.

Referring to the project, Henriette Hansen, (Project Manager EU Vest) states: *“these methods demonstrate how a region, through pro-active and future oriented thinking, broad consultation processes and more democratic bottom-up processes can identify regional key competencies and develop holistic regional development strategies”*.

COORDINATING A LARGE BODY OF ACTORS

The three regions involved in the project have been strongly affected by the changes brought about by globalisation, which has created a need to find new sectors for development. Ribe County for instance has until recently been a region with one of the highest growth rates in Denmark, but this growth has slowed down because it has not focused on sectors within the New Economy. Compared to the national level, Ribe county also has a low educational level.

One of the barriers hindering the development of regional strategies has been the differing perspectives, stakeholders and interventions of the actors across the regions. Policy areas are not joined up so that industrial policy can go hand in hand with educational policy and employment policy to create sustainable regional development. On the contrary, in practice, employment centres are very often focused on getting unemployed into work, and enterprises are viewed as branches which address the needs of a particular type of labour force. On the other hand, educational institutions focus on supplying courses within certain educational branches and sectors. Regional development agencies focus on providing concrete short-term assistance to enterprises in their development processes. The **lack of coordination** between these regional actors makes the whole task of dealing with regional change difficult.

Articulating the way forward, one partner stated: “*a broad topic such as regional competences needs a large body of actors, and self-centred thinking needs to be altered by broad conceptual thinking and a sense of the overall, global problems*”. The methodology developed by the project aims to create this **common ground of understanding** by getting the key actors to co-operate in applying the appropriate tools and analysing information so that the common interest of securing the competitiveness of the region becomes clear to everybody.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The partners developed and tested a set of methodologies and practical tools which can be applied in all regions. One such tool is the **Regional Signal Panel** (RSP), which is an innovative approach aimed at identifying regional key competencies. The idea behind RSP is to find alternative ways of gathering information about the region, instead of relying solely on statistical data. The first step is to pinpoint relevant regional actors who are capable of expressing tendencies, ideas, hopes and anxieties for the future development of the region; all of this qualitative input can then be incorporated directly into the regional development process. The individuals involved in the RSP include not only traditional experts and researchers, private and public decision makers, but also alternative experts, citizens and ‘wild cards’ (individuals who can add new and sometimes unexpected elements to the debate). RSP is indeed a truly **democratic process**. Overall, this bottom-up approach helps to bring new ideas into the political process and opens up the possibility of introducing people and views that are normally not heard.

Another interesting tool developed by the project is ‘**Scenario Planning**’: scenarios are stories that provide alternative views of how key factors and trends – most of which are observable today – might combine in the future to shape the world in which we live and work. Scenario Planning allows us to anticipate change, to understand how those changes might affect our livelihood – and to inform the choices we make about how to create and adapt to the future. It is not about predicting the future, but being prepared for the different directions it could take.

The combination of knowledge and practical experience, and the good synergy that took place between practitioners and academics, was crucial to the successful design and development of the project’s methods and tools. Once developed, the tools were piloted by different partners during a “trial” period.

Another innovative aspect of the project work is the way in which the information was structured and presented. The information was made available through a user-friendly website which was easily accessible to any citizen (students, politicians, employees etc), in order to encourage social dialogue and democratic participation. Once again, this website reflects the bottom-up philosophy of the project, a philosophy that is important if a region wants to create more decentralised and democratic tools in the regional strategic process.

GROWING NEW COMPETENCIES TOGETHER

The good news is that the project achieved more than what was originally intended. In particular, the project went on to adapt its strategy to cater for the diverse and different needs of the regions involved. In other words, the core set of methods and tools were developed so as to be easily adapted, transferable and sustainable in the different regions. All the regions involved in the project have now developed regional cultures and structures, which encourage cooperation between all actors. They have also used social dialogue as a tool to promote regional development.

The Regional Signal Panel has been tested with a variety of users in all the three regions involved in the project; it has proved popular with both the interviewers and interviewees. The interviews carried out in the Ribe County RSP confirmed that the project corresponds to a real demand from society. As a concrete result, regional **well-being** was identified as a new regional key competence and an overall important factor for regional development. “Wellness” includes individual and organisational well-being. The idea is to exploit regional resources and

competences within this sector, with a focus on research and educational activities in the area of public health, natural resources to promote 'healthy tourism', and educational activities within 'wellness' tourism.

In relation to the structural reform that Denmark is currently undergoing – whereby 14 counties will be reduced to 5 regions in 2007 and Ribe County will become part of a much bigger 'Region of South Denmark' – the project now has plans to support the strategic process aimed at identifying the future region's development potential and strategic focus. These plans clearly demonstrate the project's success in informing and playing an important part in the developing the changing face of the region.

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Regional Key Competencies – A way to manage structural changes Article 6 programme

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GIVING A CHANCE TO EVERY SINGLE ENTERPRISE

Restructuring, globalisation of markets are becoming more and more fervent topics, gaining visibility among policy makers in the Member States as well as at the European level. Who are the actors affected by these processes? What are the solutions developed to tackle the consequences of such patterns of economic change? Discussions at European, national and regional level on these issues have tried to provide answers to these central questions and, on the ground, some innovative solutions and practical measures to tackle these questions have been developed.

The '*Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas*' project, for example, has implemented an innovative system for Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based upon the prevention and anticipation of restructuring changes within the most vulnerable regions of Poland. The project's underpinning principle is that underdeveloped and loosely urbanised regions are the most vulnerable; they have weak links within the economic chain, which need special attention and targeted solutions. This is particularly true in Poland, a country where fast economic development of urbanised areas is often coupled by the decline of less urbanised ones. And in these less favoured areas, changes linked to restructuring processes and increased pressures for competitiveness constitutes major challenges for SMEs.

The *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project, managed by the College of Management and Public Administration in Zamosc, has already shown great results. It has already provided consultancy services and training courses to 50 SMEs (with the final aim being to work with 210), developed an electronic tool called the 'e-barometer' to support enterprises and set up an effective network composed of social partners at the local level. One of the strengths of this project lies within its partnership: in addition to the managing organisation, the project is composed of experienced consultants from CASE-Advisors, the College of Computer and Science in Rzeszow, as well as a considerable number of local social partners such as the Polish Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Rzeszow, and several employment agencies across the two regions. The input of these actors has been essential in gaining the confidence of the companies to join the project and responding effectively and strategically to the needs of SMEs within Poland's changing regions.

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO HELP SMEs IN UNDERDEVELOPED REGIONS

The *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project worked within two regions, Lubelskie and Podkarpackie, affected by a particularly difficult situation as far as the labour market and economic development are concerned. The economy in this area is dominated by traditional and declining branches of industry and there is a limited presence of foreign investors. The GNP of the two regions does not exceed 70% of the Polish and 25% of the European average. The majority of the population in the both regions (about 4.3 million people in total) lives in rural areas. There is a general shortage of institutions supporting businesses, providing guidance or training. Banking services are often located far from SMEs and fast Internet connections are frequently unavailable. Other problems are directly linked to the weak knowledge of employers and employees in the areas of marketing, management, Information Technologies (IT) and human resources.

In this context, the idea of the project is to prevent unemployment growth by safeguarding the existing workplaces within SMEs and increasing their competitiveness. With this aim in mind, the EQUAL DP created, developed and implemented an early warning system, which is able to identify the economic pressures threatening companies at the earliest possible stage. Furthermore, this system comprises support to vulnerable companies allowing the identification of SMEs' learning and guidance needs.

Through the provision of tailored training and counselling, the project helps employers and employees face economic changes and take appropriate and acknowledged action to avoid employment reduction. The EQUAL DP wishes to foster employers' and employees' qualifications to comply with the requirements of the knowledge economy, paying a special attention to the promotion of life long learning and the spread of IT tools among SMEs' staff.

E-BAROMETER: AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO KEEP SMEs UPDATED

The starting point for the partners was that effective support for SMEs cannot be put in place without prior research on the ground. It is for this reason that the project has, since its very beginning, conducted extensive research and analysis of the economic situation at regional and national level. The aim of the macroeconomic analysis (national and European level) is to construct a 'background' for the regional analysis that supports firms whose interest and activities go beyond the local market. The macroeconomic research is coupled by an analysis at regional level, carried out in five economic sectors which seem to be the most exposed to restructuring: industry, building, trade, services, and households. Every quarter, 650 SMEs are asked to participate in a survey: in this way, the DP partners are able to determine their current economic activity and compare it to the results of the previous period. The aim of these regular surveys is to get a clear picture of the economic situation of SMEs in Lubelskie and Podkarpackie regions and to draw a possible "change forecast" for the upcoming months.

Based on this extensive research, the project has developed an electronic tool called the 'e-barometer', especially conceived and designed to help and support SMEs in the Lubelskie and Podkarpackie regions. Through the portal, the project provides information on changes in macroeconomic and regional business trends so as to help entrepreneurs anticipate and adapt to restructuring. For example, SMEs have access to forecasts concerning the main macroeconomic development indicators (like GDP, CPI, exchange rates, import, export, main credit rates, incomes etc), as well as to information on the crucial risks affecting SMEs. Also, entrepreneurs have access to forecasts of main indicators of regional development as well as to results of economic research provided in both regions. Through the portal, companies can also undertake a self-assessment exercise which enables them to compare the financial indicators of their firm to the average financial indicators of all companies of the same sector in the region (these are data on financial and economic condition, balance sheet and profit and loss account). This benchmarking system is very precise and effective tool for entrepreneurs as it is developed upon data provided by the regional statistical offices.

Another effective approach of the project has been the establishment of regular and direct contact with every enterprise, via a team of consultants providing advice and guidance in the workplace. These consultants provide complex diagnostic analysis with the help of a special questionnaire and assess crucial weaknesses and training needs for every company. After this assessment phase, they propose special training programmes tailored to the needs of the company managers and employees. The training is then provided usually in the workplace (within an enterprise), so that both the employers and employees (when weak skills assessed) can actively participate. The most common subjects of such training are: organisation management, HR management, marketing and ICT.

PREVENTION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

The *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project has, through the creation of the e-barometer tool, set up the first regional early warning system for SMEs. This electronic tool has proved to be an extremely innovative and successful approach for SMEs in remote and poorly urbanised areas. The tool has been particularly enhanced by being coupled with a programme of training, and direct and 'human' support via consultants, all of which has delivered in the workplace: this dual, work-centred approach has increased both the effectiveness of the training, as well as the engagement of the beneficiaries.

Without any doubt, the *Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas* project has helped to raise the awareness of the most vulnerable SMEs, providing them with the right

knowledge and tools to face economic change and anticipate the negative effects of restructuring processes. It is only by introducing these prevention measures that the partners have had a chance to avoid collective redundancies and give an opportunity to SMEs to increase in their competitiveness and flexibility across the regions.

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ANTICIPATING CHANGE IN FINNISH SHIPBUILDING

The marine technology industry is undergoing a period of profound and accelerated transformation due to structural changes related to the ageing population all over Europe, increasing mobility of workers and global competition. The main aim of *The Route of the Professional Shipyard Worker in the Baltic Sea* project in this context is “to promote the adaptation of marine technology enterprises and their staff to the anticipated structural changes, to prevent discrimination, and to enhance equality.”⁷

Framed by this aim, the actions of the project partnership, led by Turku Adult Education Centre, are primarily targeted at Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) involved in the shipbuilding and offshore sectors in Finland, the Baltic Sea region and other European countries. And the success of these actions is more than apparent: the partnership originally planned to involve only 50 to 60 companies. Now, it offers services to approximately 140 companies, representing some 15,000 professionals in the marine technology industry!

WHAT ARE THE WINDS OF CHANGE?

The landscape for and profile of the shipyard worker are changing. The workforce in most European countries is ageing, posing a particular threat to ‘traditional’ industries. This includes the shipbuilding industry which expects a large proportion of its workforce to retire in the next 5 to 10 years. The situation is complicated further by relatively little interest from young people in joining the industry. Simultaneous to these developments, the opening of markets within the European Union (EU) is bringing an increasing amount of labour into Finland from Baltic Countries, Poland, Russia, Byelorussia, etc. This new multicultural dimension of working environments is something that many smaller companies are not ready to meet.

Aside from new requirements due to the increasing diversity of the workforce, the industry is facing pressures of rapidly evolving technical methods of shipbuilding, global competition and occupational safety standards. In Finland, the major shipyards and offshore companies are maintaining high standards of health and safety. However, today more and more SMEs from all over the globe are operating side by side with larger companies, and each other in the country. Therefore, there is a real need to develop common safety standards, applicable to all these actors, and to create a general awareness about these requirements.

For the project, the objective of life-long learning should be an integral part of this awareness-raising process. However, up until now, further professional education or even learning a new profession, have not been a part of the industry’s routine. Companies are increasingly feeling the need to introduce on-the-job-learning methods to increase the value, competitiveness and employability of their employees, crucial for their survival. Employees with the one-sided professional training, outdated skills, health problems, missing Information Technology (IT) skills, etc are increasing the vulnerability of their own situation and that of their profession in general. Most SMEs lack the resources and opportunities to develop their own knowledge of the standards of the evolving industry, and this is exactly where the project comes in.

⁷ From the project description in the EQUAL Common Database (ECDB).

OFFERING A GUIDE TO THE INDUSTRY

The project focused on two broad and interlinked areas - providing new information and tools for the development of (1) staff and (2) the industry:

The measures were targeted on promoting the adaptability of employees in the marine technology industry, including assistance to workers intended to preserve their employability - enhancing their individual ability to improve overall skills levels and to ensure their wellbeing in the work place. Specifically, these actions included attracting more young people to the industry, promoting general standard of health and safety, preserving the present staff, enhancing the transfer of tacit knowledge from experienced workers to new workers, improving employees' IT and professional skills with the aim of facilitating more effective work in the multi-cultural and international environments.

For the industry, the project partnership developed tools for forecasting regional employment development (South West and South of Finland) in shipbuilding and offshore industries, actions to handle possible employment crises, planning and development of these actions. It promoted equal practices in occupational health and safety, environmental, diversity and equality issues, as well as the development of electronic business in SMEs. The project also provided ground for expanding the co-operation between the shipbuilding SMEs to cover the 'new' EU Member States within the Baltic Sea region, a natural and necessary step to integrate opening labour markets.

According to Mr. Haapala, the project coordinator, one of the contributing factors to the success of the project is its focus on real, rather than, the project's perceived needs of the industry. *"Originally we asked companies what their needs were, and since then we have consistently been working on these needs - not on what we thought they needed. We have done several studies on labour skills and developed activities to improve the competitiveness of companies"* He continues by saying: *"The SMEs have generally very little resources to develop this kind of tools on their own."* Before the project, there was no organisation to offer a similar type of integrated training, as well as health and safety guidelines that would work for all, large and small companies".

Another characteristic bringing success to the project is the optimal use of the knowledge of the five project partners in their fields of expertise. For example, the Research Centre for Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE) at the University of Turku and Turku School of Economics have been working on the research tasks, both together and separately based on the project plan; Aker Finnyards has been working on safety, health and training issues; Turku Cultural Centre has been focusing on measures to address multicultural issues and training; whilst Turku Adult Education Centre has managed and coordinated the project overall.

A SUCCESS STORY

"Our success story is the 'Health, Safety and Environmental Handbook' that we are publishing," asserts Mr. Haapala: *"It started as a short booklet for immigrant workers, but soon it was found out that this kind of all-around manual was required for the whole industry. We developed the book together with 20 companies and today we have sold more than 10,000 copies in Finnish, English, Russian and Swedish languages. The Polish translation comes out soon."*

The project's most recent development, in the field of health and safety at work, is RATA, the analysing tool for controlling the safety and health hazards. This tool helps each working team, individual worker and foreman to recognise and avoid the risks in their own working fields.

In addition to the Handbook and RATA, the project has provided safety and fire safety training to more than 1000 people. The partnership is also offering training in IT skills, foreign languages; software training etc. that has been largely used by the industry of marine technology. Some 1700 people have so far been involved and could benefit from this training.

Without this training, a tool for proactive management of structural change, the Finnish shipbuilding enterprises and the industry as whole would be far less competitive. With the idea that health and safety at work, life-long learning and on-the-job training in companies should be a self-evident practices in the industry, *the Route of the Professional Shipyard Worker in the Baltic Sea* is offering challenging targets for policy makers and turning a new page in the marine technology industry.

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DRIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF THE XXI CENTURY

10th September 2006 was the final date by which the Member States had to bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with Directive [2003/59/EC](#)⁸ on the initial qualification and regular training of drivers of certain road vehicles for the carriage of goods or passengers, which will be applied in 2008 (for passengers drivers) and in 2009 (for goods transporters). Anticipating this Directive in Portugal, the *Volante XXI* project estimated that this legislation would mean the certification of some 250,000 drivers, who would have to undergo continuous training every five years. The problem was that there was no system, no structures and no organisations prepared to meet this demand.

So the project set out to fill this vacuum: *“Volante XXI was born from a ‘vision’ of what should be the reality of Logistics and Road Transport in Portugal. The strategic relevance that Logistics can assume in Portuguese society made us wonder if it could justify the creation of a Skill Centre for Logistics and Transport able to manage all the ‘production’ of skills and competencies required by enterprises.”*⁹

In addition to this overall vision, one has to consider the importance of the project’s principal target group - around 70 per cent of workers in Road Transport firms are drivers. Taking into account the scale of the transformation and the target group involved, the creation of the vocational certification system was an ideal ‘experiment’, examining new training solutions for workers in this important industry.

Volante XXI demonstrated success from the very beginning. The project managed to ensure the participation of strategic actors – ANTRAM (the National Association of Professional Hauliers) and ANTROP (the National Association of Heavy Road Passenger Transport) representing the industry, the General Direction of Fluvial and Terrestrial Transports (DGTTF, the public authority which regulates the transport sectors) as well as two large (goods and passengers) transport firms in the Partnership. This cooperation was crucial to create the necessary conditions to bring about change, to engage drivers, enterprises and public institutions, and thus to provide a guarantee of the project’s sustainability.

SECTORAL CONTEXT - FACING THE CHANGE

A very high return rate to the ‘situation assessment survey’ undertaken by the project confirmed the initial interest of firms affected by the transposition of the Directive. Almost two out ten companies surveyed were still not aware of the Directive’s content and implications. The change was a challenge to all – transport companies (both of goods and passengers), public administrations and training providers, but the group most affected were the heavy vehicle drivers, who could no longer stay in their profession without undertaking the mandatory certification. The project estimated that some 50,000 drivers would need to update their skills each year (amounting to 35 hours of training per person). In addition 20,000 people entering this profession would have to be certified (requiring 140 hours of qualification training). It was also felt that the momentum of change, brought about by the implementation of the Directive’s requirements, could entail an opportunity as well as a challenge: the chance to revive the

⁸ Directive 2003/59/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 July 2003 on the initial qualification and periodic training of drivers of certain road vehicles for the carriage of goods or passengers, amending Council Regulation (EEC) No 3820/85 and Council Directive 91/439/EEC and repealing Council Directive 76/914/EEC (Official Journal L 226 , 10/09/2003 P. 0004 – 0017)

⁹ From the project description in the EQUAL Common Database (ECDB).

Portuguese transport sector by making it more attractive at the national level and more competitive at the European level.

The project aimed to achieve these goals by introducing the concept of gender equality to the transport sector, encouraging a greater representation of women and youth in the profession, and the provision of skills that would make the Portuguese drivers more competitive internationally. The training for new skills focused among other things on the safety and efficiency of driving, promoting environmental consciousness, knowledge of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and communication skills as well as knowledge about transport industry in general and the particular setting of the enterprise within which drivers operate. All these objectives were recognized as relevant by the Community's EQUAL programme, which offered the necessary support to the project.

TAKING THE MATTER IN HAND

Establishing a nationwide framework for training of transport sector workers is a difficult process, especially if one is required to start from scratch. *"It is the role of our project to ensure, piece by piece, the country's readiness for this new situation,"* said Mr. Costa Lopes, the project representative from ANTRAM, the managing organisation. According to Mr. Lopes, one of the challenges faced by the partnership was the inherent high mobility of the workers in the sector. This mobility needed to be addressed if one was to use traditional in-room training methods. The possibility of employing alternative forms of training, like on-the-job training and self-training, are being explored even though these were not explicitly required by the Directive.

All the main project partners are continuously engaged and motivated to participate in the work of the Partnership by shared management functions. This ensures the relevance of the developed project outputs and products. Similarly, the involvement of the various stakeholders related to the nationwide training provision needed to be set in motion (23 organisations in total). This was achieved by joining them in a triannual FORUM. where all the Partners were provided with updates on the project's progress and given the opportunity to contribute their views – a dialogue that is considered crucial for the success of the project.

Due to the large number of people eligible for the training, the project had to create a time-frame for delivering this large-scale activity. It produced a system for access to the training and also developed a training manual taking into account not only the requirements of the Directive, but also the needs of companies. Considering the scale of the project, even the administrative process of delivering certificates became a challenge as nationwide structures and the necessary resources for this activity need to be put in place.

Presently, the project is working on the development of the financing scheme of the whole training and certification process. The Partnership is also consulting with the partners to validate the the content of the training to ensure its relevance and quality. Without the general consensus on the necessity of the training, it would only be perceived as an unnecessary burden.

BUILDING ON ACHIEVEMENTS WITH THE VIEW IN THE FUTURE

One thing to do is to provide training, another, not necessarily easier or less important is to ensure that the newly gained skills are actually employed and build upon. Due to the nature of their profession, the drivers have had relatively little contact with the ICTs. Once the project provided them with the deeper insight into the possibilities related to ICTs, the first thing the participants proposed was the setting up of two discussion forums – one for the divers transporting goods and another for those providing services to passengers. The aim of these online tools is to preserve and enhance the skills of the drivers gained though the training through information exchange.

The Partnership has established the Skill Centre for Logistics and Transports, including the newly acquired driving simulator, which enables training for driving skills necessary in extreme

conditions. Both the Centre and the simulator are the first of this kind in Portugal, and their arrival was much expected in the country in which Logistics and Transport play such an economically important role. The new Skills Centre now operates alongside more than 50 other training centres that have been set up in Portugal, providing 10 per cent of its total training activities to drivers (this represents approximately 3,000 people per year).

Further achievements of the Development Partnership involve the creation of a Management Model for the Initial Qualification and Continuous Training of Truck Drivers Global System, designing a financial model for this System capable of assuring its sustainability, development of training models adapted to needs of firms and drivers, training the trainers able to carry out the qualification of the drivers according to the standards laid down in the Directive, and finally starting the marketing work on changing the image of the Logistics and Transports industry in the country by increasing their perceived social value and making it more attractive to youth and women. All of these measures should be in place by October 2007, the forecasted *Volante XXI* project end date.

Having set these aims the *Volante XXI* project has still a long way to go. However the list of achievements is already remarkable, considering that the Partnership had originally started from nothing. What has already emerged is a firm basis for an effective and sustainable training initiative across the whole country.

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Please find below case studies that have been prepared by on previous occasions and are equally relevant to this paper.

RESPONDING TO INDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING BY OPENING UP ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND WOMEN

The “Technological City of Valnalon” sprang from the ashes of one of the most severe processes of industrial restructuring in Europe. Over the last twenty five years Valnalon have developed a complete “chain” of educational and training activities to forge a culture of entrepreneurship in an area that had grown used to dependence on never-ending mineral resources, big companies and help from “father” state. Through their participation in three EQUAL projects Valnalon have managed to move a series of excluded groups, like women and rural youth, closer to the “fast track” of business creation.

One of the main aims of the Lisbon Agenda is to promote a “more entrepreneurial culture and create a supportive environment for SMEs”¹⁰. This is seen as a major challenge in Spain where according to a recent study “47% of parents encourage their children to look for a job in the public sector as the best career option”¹¹. However, it is an even bigger challenge for regions like Asturias which, after nearly two hundred years of relative prosperity based on mining and steel, has lost nearly a quarter of its jobs in just two decades. The consequences are staggering. The rate of unemployment among young people is nearly 40% in the former steel industry areas like Valnalon.¹²

The Director of the Technological City of Valnalon, José Manuel Pérez, argues that to deal with this kind of situation it is important to start changing mindsets at a very early age: “to become an entrepreneur is like becoming a sportsman. If you really want to do it, you have to start when you are 5 years old”. This is exactly what they have done. Over 52,000 people of all ages have now taken part in their many programmes. Günter Verheugen, Vice President of the European Commission in charge of Enterprise and Industry, says “take note of what is happening in certain Asturian schools and institutes. If we want to create more employment, Europe needs more young people who are prepared to take risks and create their own employment.”

There are eight projects in Asturias financed by the second round of EQUAL. All are led by the Regional Government. The EQUAL project “Equality Creates Enterprise”, in which Valnalon is a partner, together with the Regional Women’s Institute, the Women’s World Bank, and several trades unions and employers federations, wants to apply 20 years of Valnalon’s experience in building entrepreneurial culture to support women set up their own business. As José Manuel Pérez says, thanks to EQUAL, Valnalon now has its “female team”.

Valnalon has also participated in two other EQUAL projects – “Empezar” and “Equal Avanza” these focus on spreading entrepreneurship culture even further - among young people living in many of the region’s remote rural areas. Through all these projects EQUAL has allowed Valnalon to adapt its highly innovatory methodology to reach groups that are not normally the beneficiaries of programmes for industrial restructuring.

¹⁰ Microeconomic guideline 10 of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs refers to the need to ‘promote a more entrepreneurial culture and create a supportive environment for SMEs’. Employment guideline 16 refers to strengthening social and territorial cohesion, while employment guideline 18 refers to inclusive labour markets.

¹¹ GEM 2000 Emprende Report

¹² Asturias lost 100,000 jobs over the last 20 years. The rate of unemployment among young people is 38.5% in the former steel industry areas and 33% for the whole region. This is creating massive outmigration among the most educated young people.

FROM COAL AND STEEL TO THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF ENTREPRENEURS

Way back in 1987, the Regional Government handed José Manuel Perez the keys of the former offices of “Duro Felguera” and asked him to find alternatives to what was previously the most important and prosperous steel factory in Spain. Valnalon, the regional government owned company directed by José Manuel, transformed part of the premises into the first business centre of the region. But what companies were going to come there?

It was clear that the business centre lacked “raw material” - but now the raw material was not to be found in the ground – it lay in the creativity of existing and future generations of Asturian people. Valnalon’s success in fashioning an entrepreneurial culture that taps this creativity is based upon a number of key lessons which have great relevance for other EU countries. These findings have been adapted through EQUAL to fit the specific needs of women and other groups.

First of all, Valnalon considers that it is important to intervene across the complete life cycle in a way which they compare to training for a “high risk sport”. The process starts with “little sportsmen and women in primary school; it is still with them when they enter the junior team in secondary school; the best ones then go to the professional team”. At every stage, the students have “specialist trainers” to support them, but success depends on their own efforts: “People come here to train. We help them to train. But it is they who are going to the Olympics” says Pericles. “The young people are always the protagonists”.

Secondly, Valnalon has imaginatively adapted their training methodology to recreate real life situations at every state of the process. For example, in primary school, Valnalon’s EME Programme¹³ transforms the entire class into a real cooperative. “The children make rules of the cooperative, they design and make the products – puppets, flower pots, hair slides, dolls as well as the marketing and publicity campaign. The great moment arrives in May, when they all get together in the marketplace of their hometown and actually sell the products. Finally, they decide themselves what to do with the benefits”.

The process is taken one step further in the next lap of the “race”. Under Valnalon’s EJE programme¹⁴ young secondary school students between 12 and 16 years old also create and manage their own cooperative but this time for international trade. They invest their own money and get in touch with other cooperatives in Spain or, even better, in other countries. For this they have a range of options in places where Valnalon has transferred its methodology: 8 other regions of Spain as well as Mexico, the United States, Canada, UK, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Belorussia. The cooperatives trade using new technology and communicating in English. There is even an agreement with the regional bank to support the cooperatives with micro-credits.

Valnalon also operates a series of programmes in Universities. The top “athletes” can perfect their business idea in Valnalon’s incubator and when they are ready, they can start to trade in Valnalon’s Business Centre, where they have 3 years to consolidate their company.

Another interesting feature of Valnalon’s approach is that they do not see entrepreneurship simply as a set of technical skills such as book-keeping and marketing which are only useful to private businesses. They see it as a much broader set of attitudes and competences like team-working, decision-making, risk-taking, innovating and so on which can be applied to all walks of life. So they argue that those who don’t go on to become professional “sportsmen and women” can practice their entrepreneurial skills as employees within private companies and in the public sector (they have coined the phrase intra-entrepreneurs) as well as within the community as social entrepreneurs.¹⁵

¹³ EME (Empresa en Mi Escuela – a company in my school). Since the start of the programme 8264 children have participated in it from 361 schools. 447 cooperatives have been created. In 2005, 1935 children took part in the programme. The methodology of the EME programme has been taken by schools in Navarra and in Canary Islands.

¹⁴ EJE : Empresa Joven Europea – Young European Enterprise

¹⁵ In the Young Social Entrepreneur programme, in Secondary school, NGOs like the Red Cross supports the school associations created by the class that works with a international cooperation project

Finally, Valnalon realises that it is not possible to change mindsets simply through innovatory educational methodologies. There is also need for far-reaching work with other stakeholders like teachers, parents and the rest of the community.

EQUALITY IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Iron, steel and mining make for an overwhelmingly male work culture and, unsurprisingly, most of the redundancies that took place in these industries in Asturias were made up of men. However, 60% of the people unemployed in the region are women. Rafael Vigil, an adviser in Valnalon's Incubator Unit recognises that there are differences between the needs of women and men entrepreneurs: "Women's projects take longer to mature. Women also stay longer in the incubator – around 1 year compared to 6 months for men".

So the Equal Project "*Equality Creates Enterprises*" builds on Valnalon's methodology to reach out and deal with the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. The project has three parts: firstly a study on the causes of discrimination against women in the Asturian job market; secondly an e-commerce platform to help the women promote and sell their products; and thirdly, a school for women entrepreneurs.

The latter is the heart and most innovative part of the project. According to Maria José Ramos, a regional minister¹⁶, "the project aims to develop a new way of intervening in the labour market from a gender perspective". The study has helped the project identify six key barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Asturias and the school based in the old steel company premises has tried to find solutions to each of them.

- *Lack of time and the burden of family responsibilities:*

The solution found by Valnalón is based upon designing a short 64 hour starter's course for women entrepreneurs - that is both flexible and mobile. Child care comes as part of the package.

The School's core team is composed of 6 women. Although they are based in Valnalón's offices they move to where the women are. They identify possible places for the course by establishing contact with local territorial agencies and organisations that already know the women. This is one of the strong points of the programme: the school reaches many women through local agencies, so these agencies do not see EQUAL as a competitor.

When they have reached enough number of women for the course (around 10-15), the school establishes personal contact with them to adjust the location, dates and timetables of the course to their needs. Women are even given the possibility of following different modules of the course in other places. Finally, quality childcare is provided in the form of the Schools "Iudoteca".

Cristina Ferrer Casas went to the territorial agency to look for information on the possibilities of work in the area. "They told me about the course in the Local Development Agency. It was well organised and there was a good balance of people on the course." She has just established her enterprise providing rural accommodations.

- *Lack of confidence and self esteem*

According to Ana Belén Díez, the Director of the school. "the women often have the basic experience and competence required for the business world but they haven't developed these into the skills required for running a business. For example sometime they know how to make something but not how to sell it." The solution adopted by the women's school is to devote the first 12 hours of the course to role playing and other activities designed to increase confidence, and self-esteem. This increases capacity of the women to identify what they already know and what they need to know to launch a business.

¹⁶ "Consejera de Presidencia". Principado de Asturias.

- *Lack of certain skills in business management and new technology*

Using Valnalon's experience, the course, builds both these aspects into a series of short highly practical modules that relate to real life.

- *Lack of adequate finance*

Monica, one of the partners of Arte y Ruta, another company in the Business Centre says that often the investment is less than one thinks. It's like buying a small car". The solution found by EQUAL to the lack of adequate finance is to bring in the Women's World Bank to provide micro-loans adapted to the needs of the women entrepreneurs.

- *Lack of support from the family*

Ana Belén Díez remarks that "when a man starts up a business the whole family usually chips in. But when a woman wants to start a business they – I suppose you know what you're doing". This is linked to the following point...

- *The dominance of a male entrepreneurial culture*

Women not only tend to get less support from their families but also from existing business networks and institutions. To overcome this, the Women's Entrepreneurship school had their activities assessed by a panel of 12 business women from different sectors. The teachers are also mainly business women themselves to make them as close and approachable to the people who attend the course. Carmen Alvarez, one of the students says "I went to the course in order to meet up with other business women".

When they have completed the course, the women can use female tutor from Valnalon's Project Incubator Unit to support the launching of their companies.

LONG JOURNEYS START WITH SMALL STEPS

The EQUAL project "Equality creates Enterprise" was only launched in the summer of 2005 so at the time of writing (Spring 2006) it was very early to judge results. Their aim is to train 480 women by 2007 and they have already had to double their initial expectations. The 95 women trained in 2005 are working on 30 business ideas and have already launched 4 companies.

But more fundamentally the goal of EQUAL, like that of Valnalón, is to change attitudes. Belén Tornero (who is this lady? Please identify her...) says that "self employment is a way of living what you really like. Before talking with Valnalón I thought that an entrepreneur was someone with a moustache and suit, someone like Onassis." She and her partner have created a company called Zeppelin, a tourist consultancy that works mainly for municipalities.

Valnalon is also partner in another EQUAL project that is applying the same methodology to reach young people in the rural world. The aim of the *EMPEZ@R* project is prepare a new brand of young entrepreneurs who can modernise the food and agricultural sectors of these areas, thereby helping to improve their image and self identity. Valnalon is in charge of training the rural business advisors.

In the project AVANZA, Valnalon also provides training to the staff of rural development agencies. This time, however, the target groups are mainly young women, adults older than 40 and entrepreneurs in small municipalities. The aim is to spread an entrepreneurial culture to the furthest corners of the region.

The credibility of Valnalon and the presence of other key institutional partners such as the Asturian Women's Institute, various Regional government organisations and the social partners also increases the chances of mainstreaming the lessons from all these initiatives. For example, Valnalón's EJE programme has already been incorporated officially into the educational curriculum in Asturias. Today 1600 students in Spain are busily involved in the programme and

have created 70 cooperatives. The programme has been translated into Basque, Catalan, English and Polish and is being used in 135 schools in 11 countries. So the prospects for spreading the lessons from EQUAL are bright.

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Programme: EQUAL

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TACKLING REDUNDANCIES - COACHING THE PLAYERS

Belgian industry has over the last thirty years undergone profound change: the structure and sectoral composition of its economic activities have been transformed. Employment in the steel, coal, textile and printing sectors experienced a massive decline, especially in the southern province of Wallonia, where machinery was outdated and ill-adapted to accommodate technological change. Companies had also increasingly to deal with the trends of globalisation and outsourcing. From 1970, many large companies closed down, leaving thousands of employees without work. Recent closures in the textile industry include the companies Textile d'Ere, Tourtex and Dunlop, that left over 500 people without a job. In most of these cases, employers were unable to meet their social responsibility towards their employees or to retaining them on the labour market.

Towards the end of the 90's, the Walloon region attempted to deal with the extremely negative effects of bankruptcies and companies ceasing their activities in Belgium. It created the PAR (Plans d'Accompagnement des Reversions), plans to guide reversion, to support employees facing or already suffering from collective redundancies. The plans included the setup of several temporary 'reversion units', managed in most cases by the social partners, addressing the needs of a specific groups of employees threatened by lay-offs. The services provided within the units included psycho-sociological support, help with social and administrative procedures, follow-up of training and integration processes, and activities geared towards professional and vocational reintegration, qualifications and employment.

In early 2000, it was clear that, despite some encouraging results, the PAR and its reversion units were certainly not a "waterproof" guarantee for successful job reinsertion or further vocational development of the unemployed. The Plans were criticised as being just a "spoonful of sugar" to make massive redundancies more "socially acceptable" rather than a means of working effectively on restructuring the economy to avoid future lay-offs and on ensuring access to employment for people left without a job. It was perceived that the reversion units had been set up in a very ad-hoc manner, often at the last moment, without strategic thinking by the partners and without a reliable method to make them succeed. The units were also criticised for the insufficient involvement of the public employment services FOREM, the Walloon office for vocational training and employment.

INTEGRATED RESOURCES CENTRE FOR LAID-OFF EMPLOYEE

In response to the critique and gaps identified in the PAR, FOREM used the EQUAL Adaptability theme to set up the DECRIRE Development Partnership (DP). DECRIRE acts as an integrated resource centre for reversion, which aims to improve the PAR. It has done so through the development of a practical tool and method which can be used to ensure a timely set up of reversion units, to manage these units on the basis of a harmonised and strategic approach that ensures maximum support to the (ex-) employees. As a fully standardised approach would not work in the different sectors and regional contexts, specific efforts have been made to make sure that the tool and method are sufficiently flexible to succeed in different circumstances.

DECRIRE is not just FOREM. In order to engage all stakeholders in the area of employment and vocational training the DP also includes two major Belgian trade unions (the FGTB – the general labour federation of Belgium and the CSC, its Christian counterpart), as well as several sector employee organisations.

DECRIRE has been a huge success. In 2003, 18 reversion units in various sectors (including the textile, construction, glass and transport sectors) were set up in the Walloon region with the

help of the new tool and method. Within these units, 4,314 workers benefited from the assistance and training and 60% to 90% of these workers found a new job

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO REINSERTION – RAPID RESPONSES TO SOCIAL THREATS

As an initial output DECRIRE published a guide to reconversion, to be used to speed up the creation and running of reconversion units. Timeliness is essential in dealing with redundancies, as people are often traumatised and at risk of exclusion and long-term unemployment if not helped immediately.

The guide talks through the overall mandate and objectives of a unit, the key partners to involve in its establishment, the potential role and functions of each of the partners, and their rights and obligations.

The guide also includes a model for managing the reconversion unit, with concrete advice on how the partners, once brought together, should go about coordinating the unit and developing a strategic work programme.

The principles of the guide are clear and easy to understand as it also includes a checklist, that “newborn” reconversion units can use to check, step-by-step, whether they had taken into account all requirements for their successful creation and operation. In addition for those who were still uncertain after having gone through the entire guide, DECRIRE also provides consultation and face-to-face support.

“Through this publication, we are able to introduce a clear and concise reconversion programme to companies facing bankruptcy or ceasing their activities. We can also offer timely and adequate services to those at risk of unemployment and social exclusion. The strong support of the social partners was crucial to overcome the difficulties we experienced in the past.” Said Anny Poncin from FOREM.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE OLD HABITS

As the first reconversion units were accused of not involving the right partners, or not engaging all partners sufficiently, DECRIRE placed a strong emphasis on getting the right actors on board to develop the guide which advised on who to involve in such units.

FOREM was the most appropriate organisation to lead the DP. As a public employment service, it has direct access to information on job and vocational training opportunities, which are essential to the success of a reconversion unit.

It was essential to involve the trade unions (FGTB and CSC) in the development of the Guide. In mass-redundancies, they are the ones who link directly with those threatened with unemployment. Their participation in developing the guide was particularly important to ensure the “human” and social dimension when advising on how to create a reconversion unit. After all, such units are not just a place to find new job or to identify training opportunities, they are first and foremost a place of solidarity and understanding. The two national trade unions were backed up with several smaller sectoral organisations defending the rights and the interests of employees and providing specific contextual perspectives when developing the guide.

In addition, the Research Centre of the Free University of Brussels ensured methodological and analytical support for building the guide, as well as the monitoring of its application.

The added value of the partnership is highlighted through the cooperation of different sectors and stakeholders: trade unions and sectoral employer organisations worked together in order to achieve common goals. The DECRIRE DP can be described as an “umbrella” organisation, which created communication and coordination channels for actors who had little previous

experience of working together, and have in the past been very reluctant to do so. EQUAL has shown them the benefits of cooperation.

HELPFUL TOOLS FOR MAINSTREAMING RE-CONVERSION

As the first results of the guide were very promising, the DECRIRE partners realised that it was essential to “spread the news” and to encourage its further use. More importantly, it was also time to make regional and local politicians aware of its success. They developed a toolkit, which includes presentations of the guide and its results and brochures summarising the content and ideas behind the guide.

But the “masterpiece” of the toolkit is the DVD, in which employees give testimonials on how the work of properly organised reconversion units have changed their lives. The DVD also includes a visit to a reconversion unit, with commentators explaining how the unit works and on which organisational and work principles it is based. One participant comments on how the reconversion unit increased his hopes for a better vocational future: “For me taking part in the activities has been a big step forward – a door wide open. When my company closed down, I found out about the range of training opportunities offered by FOREM as well as advice on how to find a new job which could drastically improve my chances of finding work. This support really helped me in this terrible time. That was great. After a few weeks, I felt stronger and much more ready to face new employers. I am now working in a completely new sector, but using the skills I gained in my previous job.”

DECRIRE then ensured the proper distribution of the toolkit, and presented it to politicians, employers, social partners and many others who could potentially benefit from the method developed by the DP.

One of the main achievements of the DP at the political level was the adoption of a Decree by the Ministry of the Region of Walloon concerning the Reconversion Support Plan. The Decree states that workers affected by a collective redundancy have the right to benefit from the coaching and support offered by reconversion units. More importantly, it also sets out the procedures for developing and running reconversion plans, which directly integrate the tools and guidance developed by the DECRIRE DP. Through this new legal instrument, reconversion can now be applied strategically and effectively on the ground. The adoption of this law is the ultimate symbol of the DECRIRE’s success, and instantly widens its impact to the whole Walloon region.

But DECRIRE is preparing to go beyond the national borders and has presented its success story on the occasion of several international events. As a result of this, DPs from Italy and France have shown a keen interest in the tool and method developed and are currently looking into the possibilities of transferring and adapting these to their own national contexts.

Development Partnership: BEfr-20 – Decrire

National partners: FOREM, CAREMPOI, CEFRET and ULB - Travail Emploi Formation

Transnational partnership: TCA 2693 *Compétences contre discriminations*

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A NEW CHAPTER IN THE BOOK INDUSTRY

New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have had a significant impact on the book industry in recent years. All aspects of the industry, from publishing and printing through to distributing and selling, have been affected by the rapid emergence of the Internet, digital media and other new technologies. The industry in Spain has been no exception to this. Businesses in the 'book capitals' of Madrid and Barcelona, as well as other parts of the country, have had to operate in this new, ICT-driven environment. Failure to anticipate and adapt to this new environment has posed a real threat for firms, their employees and the book industry as whole. Moreover, it has raised fundamental questions and concerns about the marketplace for Spanish language, education and culture.

The Spanish book industry is not alone. Indeed, their situation echoes the wider European agenda in dealing with the structural, economic, societal and cultural changes brought about by new ICTs. The relaunched Lisbon Strategy and initiatives such as the i2010 European Information Society all emphasise the pivotal role played by new ICTs in the future of the European Union (EU) as a world-leading, knowledge-based economy. An ideal illustration of how this European role has been played out in the Spanish book industry is the New Economy of Access to Information Development Partnership (DP) – known as **EN@E**.

EN@E turned a **new and dynamic chapter** in the Spanish book industry by launching a direct response to the Information Society. In the words of its Director, Jaime Brull, the DP aimed *“to give a definitive proposal to overcome the challenges which the traditional word of books has to face in the 21st Century.”* This proposal was by no means an isolated and uncoordinated initiative. On the contrary, it had the full backing and financial support (as formal partners) of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, Education and Sport, the four federations for book publishing, distribution, printing and selling, as well as the prestigious digital printing firm, Fotomecánica Rafael.

This partnership, under the leadership of EdiTrain (a guidance and support association), built a programme of research, training and support that proved ground-breaking in the Spanish book industry and beyond.

E-LEARNING AND VIRTUAL COACHING TO CLOSE THE ICT GAP

When EN@E was launched in May 2002, it devised the following scenario for itself:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| One industry | - Spanish book industry |
| One threat | - ICT gap and exclusion of employees |
| One challenge | - To narrow the gap |
| One project | - EN@E |
| One method | - E-learning and virtual coaching |
| One commitment | - To make it happen! |

This scenario held strong throughout the two and a half year lifespan of the DP, giving rise to two substantial pieces of research, an array of innovative training and guidance products, and levels of student participation and feedback well beyond those originally anticipated. Above all, the true indicator of EN@E's success is the interest and impact it has sustained a year after completion, most notably from the Spanish Ministry of Industry and the audio-visual sector.

The underpinning approach of the DP was extremely widespread as the activities of the partners included not only the conception and delivery of on-line training courses, virtual guidance services and face-to-face coaching, but also the mapping of existing needs of the sector. In respect of the latter, the initial phase of the project involved commissioning a **study** to analyse the configuration of the industry, and determine the profiles of professionals who were able to operate within a new ICT environment; these '**ICT-ready professionals**' of the future would not only be expected to use new tools, methods and software, but would also be required to adapt to new types of work organisation, structures and dynamics.

As far as the training and guidance is concerned, over an intensive period of seven months, 623 professionals completed one or more of the training packages and benefited from the associated platform services. In total, 88 courses were delivered, culminating in 18 640 learning hours. One figure of which EN@E is particularly proud is the extremely **low drop-out rate** of 12%. The overwhelmingly positive feedback of the participants themselves speaks volumes:

“An excellent programme, well organised and planned, flexible, effective and with a reliable e-learning platform... EN@E has clearly helped to fight the technological gap amongst many professionals within the publishing and printing arts industries in Spain.” Felipe Contreras from SM Editores, a publishing company

What these and other testimonies show is the extent of EN@E's achievement. As Jaime Bull summarises, *“the success of EN@E comes from different directions, but mainly from the core of the industry, its workforce, which soon realised the importance of taking part in this project and turned the ICT threat into an opportunity proving itself to be a mature industry ready to face new challenges in the future... The project finishes leaving a heritage of know-how amongst a group of professionals who understand the book sector from a multimedia point of view, looking ahead to a brighter future.”*

INNOVATING FOR A DYNAMIC E-ECONOMY

Without a doubt, a defining feature of EN@E was its **high degree of innovation**. Prior to EN@E, ICT training programmes failed to reflect the full demands a dynamic e-economy. Luis González from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports sums up the situation:

“The current training programmes ... have given priority to several target groups (i.e. women, the over 45s, disabled employees). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that these training schemes in spite of being focused on ICT programmes, have never considered either the structural changes or the future skills that will be demanded in the short and medium term. Moreover, these training programmes and sector policies have not included guidance actions towards employers and employees. Within this context emerges EN@E, a project which aims to adapt the Spanish book industry to new technologies and new forms of work organisation.”

EN@E broke new ground in designing and offering the first ever training programme associated with new ICTs for book professionals in Spain.

Sixteen **online training packages** were designed in response to the profiles (and training needs) set out in the preliminary study of the sector. Digital Animation, Digital Printing, Book Marketing on the Internet, Web-page Publishing, and Total Quality Management in the Bookshop were just some of the titles available. The high quality and relevance of these packages were guaranteed through the direct input of the partnership, industry experts, as well as an appointed multimedia/web designer. In practical terms, this was achieved by the industry experts devising the draft content and structure for the packages based on their understanding of the sector or issue, and drawing on the outcomes of the initial study. The experts then worked with relevant individuals from the partnership (for example, the Digital Animation course involved the printing

federation amongst others) to adapt, refine and enrich the packages. Fotomecánica Rafael played an important role in this development work by reviewing and validating the end products to ensure that they were suitable for the private sector.

But the training programme was not just limited to technological skills sets, such as the use of digital animation and web publishing. It was far more ambitious by addressing the wider organisational demands of the industry, such as the emergence of new job roles in Internet sales or digital printing done 'to order' rather in bulk, and for instance the closer communication required between printers and publishers because of the new choice over the final medium (traditional, online, or a combination of both). Courses addressing these types of demand included Intelligent Information Management, and Networking and Systems.

As such, EN@E recognised the changing face of the industry – from all angles - and provided a **highly integrated training response**. According to EdiTrain sources, this type of response was not only new for the book industry in Spain, but also across the wider EU. Jaime Bull explains that the "EN@E commissioned a piece of research which demonstrated that the project's products were innovative across the European Union – they were very much a first for the industry as a whole."

Apart from the content, EN@E embarked on new territory by delivering the **training on-line** and combining it with a range of **face-to-face and virtual guidance services**. The first platform meant that individuals could access the training courses online, completing various interactive tasks, answering questions and learning from information sources. Their progress through the course could be tracked by the tutors and other staff; for instance, when they last logged on, how long they spent and what elements of the course they had completed. The guidance platform enabled the individuals to interact with each other in virtual discussion fora, thereby exchanging information and support. They were also able to post questions on the site which would be answered in due course by careers advisors or technical experts.

Through the e-platforms, individuals were directed, supported and motivated through every stage of their course, plus they were helped to think and take action more broadly in relation to their careers. A critical success factor of these platforms was the proactive approach and expertise of the tutors, technicians and other staff involved. For example, if an individual had not logged on for a few days, he or she would be contacted by EN@E staff to see if they were 'okay'. Or if an individual had a question, they could post an enquiry and it was quickly routed through to an appropriate expert. There was also the possibility of face-to-face guidance sessions, of which 60 ended up taking place in Barcelona and Madrid.

The personal interaction achieved through these e-platforms and associated support and guidance services undeniably contributed to the **high participation levels and positive feedback** that EN@E achieved. This not only applies to the individuals, but also the tutors who prior to joining EN@E were somewhat unsure and sceptical of the benefits of online learning.

"The courses were very well designed and organised. We have missed a training programme like EN@E. Initiatives like EN@E are not only welcome and needed, but also essential for this industry." Juan Miguel Sánchez Gil from Espasa Calpe, a publishing firm.

EN@E proved the value of its new training 'formula' for the Spanish book industry: developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the industry; offering learning, guidance and support; and combining online, virtual and face-to-face modes of delivery.

FRESH IMPETUS TO THE PARTNERSHIP

A strength of EN@E was very much its partnership, both in terms of involving key stakeholders in the book industry, as well as harnessing a strong degree of collaboration between the four federations, the Ministry and Fotomecánica Rafael. Maybe EN@E cannot lay claim to introducing these partners for the first time as they had had prior dealings with each other in the past. However, where the project was absolutely key was in giving fresh impetus to their cooperation, and strengthening and formalising their working relations. This enabled them to undertake joint activities (for example, in jointly contributing to the training packages and e-learning platform) and have a common voice on book-related issues (for example, in presenting their concerns and views on the future needs of the book industry *in unison* to the Ministry of Industry).

How was this level of partnership-working achieved? EdiTrain identified an issue that was equally compelling for all the partners around which the project activities could be organised. The initial study and mapping exercise was a very practical way of doing this. Through the study EdiTrain was able to clearly identify the challenges and opportunities that were common to all the partners and the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration where this had not existed before. A key conclusion of the study, for instance, was that the incorporation of new technology had caused the traditional barriers between publishers, booksellers, distributors and printers to be broken down. This also gave the industry – not just one single sector – a more important role as a provider and distributor of Spanish content.

Another important feature of the partnership process was the variety and frequency of the communication. EN@E held bi-monthly face-to-face meetings, which ensured that personal contacts and interest were continually maintained. The e-platforms also housed a virtual project management and communication facility, which enabled the partners to store and access key project documents and communicate with each other outside of the meetings. In this way, EN@E struck the right balance between the more structured, face-to-face communication afforded by the meetings, and the more flexible, ad-hoc interaction via the platforms. The involvement of industry experts significantly added value to this communication and interaction. These experts (approximately three from each sector) attended the meetings, inputted to the initial study and acted in an advisory role to EdiTrain and the partners directly in developing the training packages. They provided a substantial and dedicated resource that the partners had not previously accessed (or at least not in such an all-encompassing and intensive way) and therefore helped to keep the momentum of the partnership going.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

A real testimony to the success of EN@E has been its impact a year on. Rather than the project results ending along with the EQUAL funds, they led to concrete mainstreaming opportunities in the shape of further government-backed projects and expressions of interest from other sectors.

Alongside the training activities, EN@E commissioned a piece of research on “The Influence of New Technologies in the Book Sector within the European Union.” The study undertaken by the General Office for Books of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, Education and Sport aimed to analyse the opportunities afforded by ICTs in the book industry and present a series of recommendations for the public and private sectors. These recommendations included the establishment of an inter-Ministerial working group and allocation of resources for the promotion and support of new technologies.

This study, combined with EN@E's overall achievements and partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Education and Sport, played a major part in finding routes into government. In particular, it served to **open doors to the Ministry of Industry**, a key government department in business-related policy. The Ministry of Industry showed a keen interest in the work of EN@E and as a result offered the book sector the opportunity to apply for funding under their “Plan for the Consolidation and Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises” (PCCSME) initiative.

Their application (which is now awaiting final endorsement) builds directly on EN@E, focusing on the development of guidelines for employers in implementing new ICTs. This marks a significant development in terms of influencing policy, particularly in terms of facilitating inter-Ministerial thinking. Through EQUAL, the Ministry of Industry has taken note of the DP and its outcomes and placed more emphasis and resources on this important policy area. The development and improvement of innovative practice in relation to the e-economy will from now on receive strengthened government support.

Another key development has been the interest shown by other sectors, notably audio-visual. Through the DP's networks, the Federation of Audio-Visual Production Companies learnt about the success of the project and saw its **potential in the audio-visual sector**, another business area that is very much affected by the use of ICTs. This initial expression of interest led to detailed dialogue between the Federation and EdiTrain (on behalf of EN@E) and eventually the submission of a second application for funding under the Ministry of Industry's PCCSME initiative. The application (which is also awaiting final endorsement) was based on transferring and adapting EN@E to support audio-visual professionals. Clearly, this opportunity for sectoral transferral demonstrates EN@E as being an example of innovative practice, not just for the book industry, but also beyond.

Judging by these developments, EN@E turned a new chapter in the Spanish book industry, which looks set to be a long and interesting one!

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FORGING NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Dealing with the development and knowledge transfer of ageing employees is not an easy task, but very much a necessity in today's labour market. Imagine for a moment that you are an older employee in a foundry or forging enterprise. Every day you are confronted with tough tasks that demand physical strength and vast amounts of energy. You feel that your body and energy levels are not as good as they used to be but, at the same time, you believe that you are still doing a commendable and competent job in your company. Too "old" to deal with extreme tasks but too "young" to think about retirement, this is a common condition for a large number of workers in the German Westphalia and Ruhr region.

Following the closure of the coal industry and the decline in steel production, the Westphalia and Ruhr region now presents itself as a modern business centre with a strong reputation for technological know-how. Today, the centre is characterised by a multitude of medium-sized enterprises focusing on innovative technologies and products. This picture of success is, however, the result of radical and deep-rooted structural changes that have affected the region's economy and workforce in recent years. New trends in globalisation, coupled with demographic change and the introduction of new technologies, have required foundry and forging companies to modernise and review the competence levels of their staff. This requirement has particularly impacted on older and unskilled workers who represent a significant part of the working population in such companies. Given this context, setting up new kinds of working arrangements to improve the internal mobility and increase the competences of vulnerable workers has been the only way for this kind of enterprise to survive.

The partners in the Equal Development Partnership known as 'GENERA' quickly realised that in order to meet the challenges of the coming years, foundry and forging companies needed to guarantee the personal development of their employees. Consequently, the research and consulting company Soziale Innovation, together with IG Metall, the main Trade Union for the metal sector and DGV, the German Foundry Association, set up a wide variety of services aimed at supporting the employability and adaptability of older workers, enhancing their competences and improving the cooperation between different groups of employees.

GENERA's focus was closely aligned with the strategic guidelines of the European Employment Strategy (especially point five of the guidelines). In particular, the project aimed to promote active ageing by enhancing the access of the over fifties to continuing training, setting up innovative and flexible forms of work organisation, and eliminating incentives for an early exit from the labour market.

GENERA's activities produced extremely good results, leading to a brand new way of thinking amongst employers and workers of a very traditional and engrained sector. As Cordula Sczesny, coordinator of the project and consultant at Soziale Innovation, puts it, *"the project was about changing the attitudes of employers and older workers through training opportunities and new types of work organisation within traditional companies. Whilst in the beginning scepticism dominated, in the end, older staff and managers were asking for extra training!"*

CHANGING APPROACHES AND APPEARANCES

GENERA was mainly conceived with the idea of enhancing the adaptation and employability of older workers in the foundry and forging sector by updating their skills to fit with new tasks and technologies. The recurring problem at the time was that the potential of older workers was more

often than not underestimated by employers. The senior management did not know how to take advantage of the competences and experience of their mature workforce and were often pushing them towards early retirement. Over the previous two decades, early or partial retirement had been an important instrument in German labour market policy. Generous early retirement provisions had provided an effective instrument for companies to shed older employees, with the costs being partly met through the social security system. Even where the German government had changed various legal provisions in order to stop or slow down this trend, the practice was still very much embedded in the minds of both employers and employees.

How to keep older workers in the company as long as possible? How to adapt them to new sorts of flexible production and, at the same time, stimulate and transfer their skills? Answers to these questions are not self-evident if you are dealing with them for the first time. However GENERA addressed them by devising a new and unique combination of provision for the sector. Not only did the project set up flexible training courses for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, but it also analysed the age and skills patterns of companies and designed tailor-made modules of competence transfer between different generations or different groups of employees. Moreover, it brought together different forms of working arrangement such as working in “tandem” and job-rotation. All of this helped to address the needs of the sector, companies and employees alike, as well as overcome any initial resistance to change and learning. Cordula Sczesny explains:

“Everybody says that older people are unable to learn, that it’s too late. Maybe you can’t force them to go back to school, but they can still learn within their workplace. They have to see how things work and what they have to do.”

Overall, twenty companies in the foundry and forging sector participated in the project, which led to a total of 435 employees and 100 managers participating in training courses. Furthermore, 54 unemployed and migrant workers were hired after having benefited from GENERA’s training.

Beyond the training and associated work initiatives, GENERA also developed activities to tackle the popular prejudices against the foundry and forging sector in general. Despite the efforts of associations and companies to improve the image of foundries and forges, they were still seen as representing an old and dirty sector of the steel industry. People usually thought that the associated jobs were physically demanding and technically uninteresting, and young school leavers often preferred to look towards other areas of employment. In line with this trend, foundry and forging companies had been experiencing a growing shortage of young staff whilst, on the other hand, the proportion of older employees was constantly growing. In order to tackle this trend, GENERA did not only provide training for older workers but also set up an awareness-raising campaign for school leavers to inform them about the benefits of working within the sector. After having established contacts with schools in the region, GENERA partners organised short information sessions for pupils. The message conveyed was clear: foundry and forging industries are not as bad as you imagine! These initiatives received significant praise from the audiences involved.

MOVING FROM A VISCIOUS TO A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik GmbH, a medium-sized enterprise based in the Westphalia region, was one of the companies participating in the project. The features of the company were common to the majority of foundry and forging enterprises in the area: a high proportion of older, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and a growing shortage of young and qualified employees.

Producing day after day wheel sets, wheel tyres, axles, seamless rolled rings and wheel sound absorbers is very physically demanding work and older employees often lack the energy to make heavy metal parts. However, as they have been doing the same task their whole lives, they usually lack the skills required to do other jobs and, as a result, are forced to stay where they are.

How can the company break this vicious circle and find a way to increase the mobility of the over fifties? Dietmar Halbeisen, Manager of Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik GmbH, was very concerned about this negative cycle in his company: the frustration of his older employees was growing, whilst the production chain was becoming more and more inflexible. He therefore decided to invite GENERA to set up a long-term training plan for his employees. When the idea of training courses was firstly introduced to the staff, some of them appeared to be a bit sceptical and doubtful. They couldn't really understand the purpose of such a big innovation. However, they still paid a great deal of attention to Cordula's explanations:

"They were a very attentive audience. For me, it was essential to explain to them in simple and straightforward words the necessity to getting trained, and to make clear that nobody wanted them to be fired."

A pilot group of 35 workers was firstly set up, which went through an initial skills assessment and then follow-on training. One quarter of the group had a prior education that was not related to the job they were doing, whilst 65% of them had no technical training at all. This showed that the skills and competences required for them to perform their tasks were entirely acquired through years and years of practice in the workplace!

The expertise necessary to undertake each task of the production line was firstly analysed through discussions with the employees, and was then presented in the form of a short written profile. Which equipment do you use? What are the problems that you encounter more often? How do you solve them? By answering these basic questions, older workers could decrypt their tacit knowledge and create an inventory of actions and recommendations, which could be easily used as a reference book within training sessions. This type mapping also enabled the creation of "tandems" for the transfer of know-how from experienced workers to younger staff, or between workers of different departments. The way in which the "tandem" approach operated was by pairing up more and less skilled workers on the same task or in the same workplace so that the former could transfer competences to the latter. After two to four months of working in "tandem", the less experienced worker was able to replace his or her colleague, and thereby perform several tasks in the production line – which had not been the case previously.

However, training is a long process and, in business terms, time means money. In order to enable employees to be trained without losing precious working hours, eight people were hired for a period of two years, incorporating an established process called job-rotation. While the employees acquired new competences and skills, their work was covered by the new recruits, thus enabling the continuation of production.

The creation of new synergies amongst the workforce had several positive influences, both on the staff and on the company. First of all, the employees had a far more extensive understanding of the whole production line. Where as before they had focused exclusively on their own segment, after the project they knew what their colleagues in neighbouring segments of the line were doing. This understanding enhanced the quality of everybody's work as employees were better able to anticipate and avoid faults that could hinder work along the line. Moreover, the training enhanced the mobility and flexibility of the workforce, which proved particularly positive for older members of the team.

The situation today in Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik GmbH is that employees are able to work in different segments of the production line and therefore replace their older colleagues in the most physically demanding tasks. In this situation, older workers are no longer under pressured to retire; if they don't feel comfortable with a task, they can move to other segments of the production, being replaced by younger and fresher arms.

When asked what has changed in his enterprise, Dietmar Halbeisen answered: *"GENERA has changed the mentality of the workers and the whole company's management. For the first time in*

45 years of work within this business, I have seen a real change. Before, the production was inflexible and the tasks limited. Now the employees have competences in different fields of the production line, and a regular rotation and mobility within the departments is possible. The workers are less fearful of being fired, as they're more qualified than before, whilst production has become more competitive. It is an innovative, new way of thinking about how to manage the workforce and production from a long-term perspective”.

To sum up, job rotation and training in the workplace developed new qualifications and competences, which enhanced the flexibility of the production line, which in turn increased the output and competitiveness of the companies. As such, GENERA set up a brand new virtuous circle.

A BEACON OF SUCCESS FOR OTHERS

The original character of the training and working models developed by GENERA had a positive impact on other sectors of the German steel industry as well as on other organisations. Thanks to the contributions of the project's strategic partners, as well as the distribution of several brochures and leaflets describing the tools developed, GENERA gained a high degree of visibility at regional, national and European level.

One of the strategic partners, Stahl (which groups together the Steel Institute VDEh, the German Steel Federation and other organisations and institutes of the steel industry) set up an awareness-raising campaign aimed at promoting training, tandem learning and job-rotation to steel companies. As a result, they anticipate that the adoption of GENERA's tools and approaches will benefit the wider steel industry, which shares similar characteristics to those of the foundry and forging sector.

Another positive outcome for GENERA was the visible support from the companies themselves. Company executives who participated in the project's training sessions went on to advertise and promote GENERA's activities to other colleagues. *“I was so enthusiastic about the GENERA experience that I did not miss any opportunity to tell my colleagues how good it was!”* said Dietmar Halbeisen. This use of companies to champion the project through business networking and word-of-mouth proved extremely effective in terms of dissemination. Companies were more inclined to take on new approaches and ways of working if they had been tried and tested – and most importantly endorsed – by their peers.

As far as the impact on institutions is concerned, Dietmar Halbeisen was recently involved in informing representatives from the Ministry of Economy and Labour in Berlin about the benefits of setting up innovative training plans in traditional companies. During a meeting held in June 2005 with the relevant public authorities, he presented his company's experience and showed how GENERA had changed his staff management introduced new flexible arrangements, leading to enhanced competitiveness in the marketplace. His particular speech aimed to raise the awareness of policy makers towards the needs of companies and vulnerable workers in the steel industry. His message was made clear: the restructuring of companies should not only be the concern of enterprises, but also of institutions - both at national and regional level. Company managers from different European countries also attended the meeting. They explained the experiences, successes and obstacles that they had overcome, which added value to the overall discussions and debate.

Overall, these dissemination initiatives that directly involved employers were highly instrumental in promoting GENERA as a beacon of success to a wide range of audiences: public and private, national and European.

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LEARNING IN THE MOUNTAINS OF KRAKONOŠ

According to folklore, Krakonoš has been the guardian of the mountains and the surrounding district of Semily, in the North Eastern part of the Czech Republic, for many centuries. Apart from dictating the weather, this wise old man has watched over the local people, ensuring good things happen to those who are kind, and punishing those who are bad. With such a well-known and emblematic figure, it is hardly surprising that Krakonoš has been chosen to represent Semily's EQUAL project, *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions*:

“If Krakonoš cannot come down from the mountain to a computer, why not bring the computer to him!”

This slogan captures perfectly the essence of the project: to bring learning opportunities directly to people living in remote, rural locations, people who have been severely affected by acute structural changes that have occurred across the Czech Republic in recent times.

Prior to the 1990s, Semily district was traditionally based on agriculture and the textile industry. However, since that time, the opening up of markets and increased exposure to global competition, particularly from China, has led to the rapid decline of this thriving economy. And what is now left is a region in a state of transformation, having to adapt in order to remain a prosperous place to work and live. But this transformation has not been easy: local people have lacked the skills and knowledge to take on new jobs in emerging sectors, such as tourism; younger and more qualified people have been moving to nearby towns and cities; more vulnerable and less mobile populations have been left behind or at risk of exclusion, including women with childcare responsibilities, the over 50s, people with disabilities, the low-skilled and those laid-off from work; Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have not been fully embraced owing to their high cost and accessibility; and limited public transport services and infrastructure have formed a major barrier to accessing work and learning opportunities. All of these trends put together have led a growing divide between the urban and rural areas of Semily district, and serious concerns about preserving social and cultural life in the countryside.

Facilitating of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions has been set up to help counter these worrying trends. Under the leadership of the Semily Labour Office, the project has established a partnership never seen before in the area, between local villages, and educational, political and expert organisations. Through this partnership, the project has been able to develop and test new ways of making learning an important, integral and - to come back to old Krakonoš - accessible part of rural life.

INSPIRINGLY SIMPLE

On the face of it, bringing learning to people living in rural locations may seem like a simple idea. But behind this idea lies a really inspiring approach. So, let's look in more detail at this approach.

The starting point for the project was to conduct a survey across ten villages in the Semily district. The purpose of the survey was to find out exactly what the problems, needs and interests of villagers were in relation to learning. A key message from the survey was the cost, accessibility and manageability of learning; the courses had to be free of charge, nearby and in short, convenient chunks of time if they were to be a realistic option. Aside from the learning format, the villagers also stated preferences in terms of content; many of them quoted difficulties in securing a job or running their own business because of insufficient ICT, linguistic, accountancy and technical skills.

Based on these survey results, as well as the views and insights of the project partners, *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* has now developed a training system that offers courses in foreign languages, ICT, book-keeping, welding, logging and working with a saw chain. The key features of the courses are that they:

- are delivered in a modular format, comprising short 1.5 hour lessons over several weeks, or slightly longer courses at the weekend;
- are ultra flexible, being offered–outside of working hours (in the afternoon and evening hours), and during the week or weekend;
- fit in with other work and family commitments, such as seasonal employment, school holidays and public festivities;
- take place in very close and familiar surroundings, such as the local village hall or school;
- are accompanied by support services in the form of childcare and the loan of study materials; and above all
- are free!

All of these features have proved effective in engaging local people who would not otherwise have been open to learning. As the Mayoress for Paseky nad Jiserou village recounts:

“...and so now, in the evenings, you can see students on our local roads rushing to their courses, eager to gain new knowledge and skills. Organising these courses has given an importance to the achievement of knowledge and skills that local habitants have not had before.”

Paseky nad Jiserou is not the only village to have seen the rush of newly-fledged ‘students’ on its streets. Indeed, all ten villages have witnessed an amazing level of participation. During the first semester (September 2005 to January 2006), 45 courses took place, with 692 villagers participating and a retention rate of 93%. The clear success of these courses has led to another 58 courses being organised in the second semester, and the level and choice of subjects being extended; now villagers are moving on to Advanced lessons in German or branching out into Digital Photography!

Aside from the educational benefits of the training system, it is also important to highlight the social and cultural value.

“In the courses, the local inhabitants meet other inhabitants who, despite living in the same village, they would not otherwise meet in their daily lives. And all of this is of great importance to us. Thanks to the time we spend together in learning the past tense in German, or the countable and non-countable nouns in English, or taking it in turns to use the computer mouse, new friendships emerges which can become the basis for co-operation in the village.”

Another example of this rural cohesion can be found in the village of Bělá where the Mayor, along with council members, visited every village household personally to explain the purpose and benefits of the project. And in the words of the Mayor himself:

“I have to say that ESF – EQUAL has brought excitement into our village, where during four evenings and a whole Saturday, our inhabitants are on their feet, being busy and taking part in education.”

The villagers have not been the only ones in a state of excitement. The trainers have also shown significant enthusiasm towards *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions*. Firstly, they have benefited in employment terms, receiving additional remuneration for running the courses in their ‘spare’ time. Secondly, they have established stronger links and relations with the rural areas. And finally, they have the prospect of further support and training (currently being

considered by the project), which will undoubtedly strengthen the quality of learning provision across the whole Semily district.

E-LEARNING ON THE CARDS

Apart from the above training system, *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* also has e-learning on the cards - something that not only draws on the expertise of the project partners, but also the experience from outside the Czech Republic.

Staff in VCT Turnov, one of the project partners, have taken the lead on this e-learning work. So far, this has entailed researching possible IT solutions, forming a team of e-learning tutors and developing the system (which is now available on <http://www.vctu.cz/moodle>). In terms of content, the system will in the first instance be offering two courses in English and German, as well as one on specialised computer technologies (digital photography and computer graphics). Based on the feedback of partners and the insights gained from the villagers themselves, the option of e-learning is a very attractive one. Learning in a virtual environment gives added flexibility and accessibility to those living in remote areas. That said, the social contact will not be lost: the e-learning system has been designed in a 'blended' way such that face-to-face lessons or tutorials will be combined with online study.

So where does the outside dimension come into this? Well, thanks to the partnership with EQUAL projects in France, Wales, Belgium (Walloon), *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* has been able to exchange experience and ideas on distance learning. For example, the project staff took part in a transnational workshop with the Belgian *DECLIC* project in May 2006. The workshop focused on methods and systems for the effective delivery of e-learning, and provided useful theoretical insights for the on-going development of *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions'* own e-learning system. Another positive outcome from the workshop was the decision to collaborate in the longer-term: *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* will be contributing to *DECLIC's* database on e-learning measures, methods and initiatives, a tool aimed to increase the visibility and accessibility of information on e-learning at a European level.

PARTNERS ACROSS THE REGION

Whilst the transnational partnership is clearly bearing fruit, it is important not to forget the project's domestic partnership. Indeed, this is a fine example of successful collaborative working through EQUAL. Aside from the Semily Labour Office (employment service), the partners can be briefly introduced as follows:

- Bridge to Education – a non-governmental organisation for the promotion of education and tasked with the day-to-day management of the project.
- Four educational organisations associated with the towns of Turnov, Vysoké nad Jizerou, Semily and Hejnice (respectively Harrachov). These organisations have been responsible for designing and delivering the courses across the various villages.
- Council representation from ten villages, with population sizes being as little as 200.
- Political and expert organisations, namely the Council of the Liberec Region, Euroregion NISA, the Giant Mountains National Park Administration and AIVD ČR (Association for adult education institutions).

Whilst many of these organisations have had experience of collaborating on a bilateral basis before, the project has given them the first occasion to work multilaterally. This in turn has provided a strategic and all-embracing approach to learning provision across the Semily district, and borne insights and experiences that would not have been possible if the partners had worked in isolation. Here are a few examples:

- The educational organisations are really mixed, in terms of being non-governmental, public and private. Therefore, for the first time ever, the project has been able to compare their different approaches to training, with the view to drawing the best from each.
- The village councils have been able to meet with and talk to policy makers, both at national and regional level, including with representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. So even the remotest and smallest of villages has been able to engage in national policy debate on learning and education provision for the Czech Republic.

Kateřina Baladová, from Bridge to Education, describes this approach to partnership working perfectly:

“Now all of the partners are together on the same footing. For the first time, they are able to learn from each other. This has created a common realisation that rural people need support and qualifications.”

There have been a number of practical success factors to this partnership approach. They include regular visits to meet with the village representatives in-between the partnership meetings – to maintain the personal contact and rapport. Another factor has been organising colloquia to enable all the partners to share their expectations and ideas, and ultimately come to a consensus as to what the project is seeking to achieve and the part that everyone can play in it. Capacity-building has also been a key to success. For example, several of the village mayors were not sufficiently computer literate to use the project’s online communication platform. But this was not a problem for *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* – it simply set about organising IT training for the partnership.

WHERE FROM HERE?

So where does *Facilitation of Lifelong Education in Rural Conditions* go from here? The future plans for the project are wide-ranging, including further survey and evaluative work with the villages, accreditation of some of the courses and testing of the training and e-learning system in other parts of the Czech Republic. And as for sustainability beyond the lifetime of EQUAL, things look promising: 50% of the villagers have already said they would be prepared to finance the courses themselves in the future. And if results like this continue, Krakonoš will certainly be taking keen interest in the project!

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SOCIAL+ BUSINESS = MUNICH COMPETENT

To any outsider, Munich is a prosperous city in the South of Germany. It has good employment, backed up by positive headlines from the city's employment and national vocational qualification strategy. Munich also has a healthy economy, meaning that recent economic diversification has enabled a favourable balance between traditional and new emerging sectors. But Maria Rauch, co-ordinator of the EQUAL project, *Munich Competent*, has looked a little further into this picture of Munich and tells us of a different story.

In fact, there is a real problem in Munich. Young people are not obtaining the types and levels of qualification required to match employers' needs and 20% of them are having difficulty entering the labour market. Other disadvantaged groups are also experiencing low attainment levels and problems of employment access. Moreover, much of the labour market is becoming increasingly dependent on small businesses and these businesses are not always able to adapt as quickly and as effectively as required. What is more, they do not necessarily create or retain jobs that are of benefit to all. Indeed, there is an increasing social gap and a real danger that the seemingly stable economic picture will not last if something doesn't happen!

Alongside this prospect, another picture comes to the fore: although Germany has very strong regions, it remains highly centralised in terms of its employment and social policies. In fact, Maria Rauch, has taken a look at Germany's National Action Plan (including the part specific on Bavaria), as well as at the MBQ – Munich's Policy Employment Programme, to be able to define the project München Kompetent. This has ensured the suitability and vertical coherence of the different levels of these frameworks.

It is however important to notice that the concept of 'bottom-up' is still not widespread in Germany, and the concepts of partnership, ownership or empowerment are not often used. This situation does not empower the city of Munich to take its *own* strategic approach and come up with its *own* solutions.

Faced with the above situation, the *Munich Competent* partnership, funded under EQUAL and led by Equal Munich GmbH, aims to achieve two things: assist people and companies to build their own capacity in the face of economic and social change, and demonstrate that the holistic bottom-up approach to policy development is more effective than the traditional, top-down route. Dr Anneliese Durst, Director of the Munich Department of Labour and Economic Development (RAW), explains:

"There is a need to increase partnership development, and individuals' and organisations' capacity to collaborate and learn from each other. Existing structures need to become more flexible to fit the kind of approaches that really work – that is the one that fits the individual and the organisation, not general expectations. EQUAL allows us to operate in this new way."

Not only is *Munich Competent* about building capacity and bottom-up approaches to regional policy development, but it is also about addressing the social *and* the business demands of Munich. Maria Rauch explains:

"Our objective is to ensure that jobs are created and to increase the employability of traditionally disadvantaged groups – we want to be able to better match the supply of skills with the demands of the labour market, which is why we have decided to do both. This is about the social as much as it about business, which is why supporting restructuring of SMEs is as important as getting young people into the right apprenticeship."

YOU SAID BUSINESS?

As a quick introduction, *Munich Competent* is comprised of 14 partners, including professionals in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), migration support services and various specialised learning and training organisations. Together, these partners have been developing five complementary project areas:

- A personal lifelong learning project that involves a thorough skills assessment through profiling.
- A transition-from-school-to-work project that seeks to get schools, employers and young people to work *together* to better meet each other's needs. It also aims to ensure the improved integration and orientation of young people who wish to undertake an apprenticeship. .

...and on the business side of things:

- A business start-up project called *GUIDE*, targeted at women entrepreneurs; and
- An institutional lifelong learning project for existing small businesses.

Finally, there is a coordination unit that is responsible for the facilitation of the partnership, monitoring the development of the self-organised work of the projects involved, organisation of the dissemination and publicity of the project work and results, and mainstreaming by liaising with the relevant stakeholders. This project area is focused on improving general governance.

Given that the two business-focused projects are already well advanced, they deserve a closer look...

WHAT THE PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT BUSINESS

Let's meet three young ladies who have taken part in the *GUIDE* business start-up project: Iris Barnert is a strategic consultant in inter-cultural management (InterCultConsult); Cecile Torrens-Hornak is a childcare centre manager (Zukunft Kinderkrippe); and Frauke Deutsch is a trader in silver sculptures (BullionArt). All three have very different backgrounds: Iris is a young graduate, Cecile is a mother of two and Fr Deutsch is an artist who used to work for a gallery and lost her job a year ago. But despite these differing pasts, all three women now find themselves in the same situation: they are all independent workers, managers of their own enterprise. And their reason for having this in common? EQUAL and the *GUIDE* project!

What *GUIDE* has clearly understood is that there is more to supporting entrepreneurship than telling people how to get help from mainstream services. As Iris Barnert explains:

"We already know where to get help to set up a business, that is not the problem. The issue is that setting up a business in Germany can be very expensive and very time consuming, which can be a little de-motivating. Getting the business project approved is a must, and that is quite accessible. It is everything that happens after you get the initial bank agreement that gets complicated."

Indeed, what many young entrepreneurs lack in general is a central point that provides accessible and affordable, rather than piecemeal support. Entrepreneurs need a support *infrastructure* that allows them to access guidance, legal advice, business support and open networks. And the *GUIDE* project provides just that - and more! Using a competition-based approach, *GUIDE* has already selected and accredited 226 entrepreneurial projects. Now the entrepreneurs running these projects can access: one-to-one business set-up advice and coaching; specifically developed on-line tutoring facilities; targeted thematic workshops and seminars; mentoring. In many ways, this approach reflects the process of 'business incubation' which has already proved effective in countries like the UK. And for the entrepreneurs themselves, this approach has really made a difference. As Iris Barnert comments:

"This is exactly what I need right now: everything a young entrepreneur needs is provided through one service. It is professional, individually targeted and efficient. I looked around before I found GUIDE and there was no way I could have afforded seminars and tutoring with the money I

got from the bank. This is more than helpful. EQUAL is the reason I am already where I am today.”

Most importantly, *GUIDE* has enabled women entrepreneurs to rent affordable office space, subsidised by the EQUAL partnership. Dr Bettina Wenzel from the regional entrepreneurship network explains:

“For many women, having an office is probably the most important thing, and they often don’t realise it before they have one. Being able to bring a client into an office or a meeting room has a very professional feel to it that is very important in the process of becoming an entrepreneur.”

Cecile Torrens-Horak agrees:

“I set up my business with a partner, and we both have kids. We realised that it was difficult to do business in our own environment – but where do you go? Having that office and the meeting room facility has improved our communication and we are much more productive and focused in our business since – this is a great opportunity for us!”

But being in a common office has even further advantages. As Iris Barnert explains:

“When you start your business, you are not sure about your product, but this is the time you have to start building your networks and client books. When I got into that office, I saw Cecile and Frauke phoning with clients, so I started picking up the phone with more confidence to do what every entrepreneur should be doing. It is very empowering to be surrounded by other women entrepreneurs and learning from each other that, yes, you are doing the right thing!”

And the results? Well, all the three women in that Equal office are now on their way to striking their first big deals – it is all very promising and it has been a very empowering journey for all of them in very different ways!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROBLEM IS THE FIRST STEP TO A SOLUTION

Munich Competent’s other business project looks at small businesses that are *already* well established. Under the motto ‘institutional lifelong learning’, Michaela Pichlbauer, from the Institute for Social Sciences Munich, and her colleagues have developed a series of interventions for SMEs. The first is to help single-person businesses, which opened up new markets and business opportunities years previously, to better cope with today’s market challenges. To revitalise the innovative spirit of these businesses through building networks within the neighbourhood is the guiding idea here.

The second intervention to assist SMEs is called ‘Ready for Transfer’ and aims to support businesses to better manage the process of ownership transfer (or finding alternatives to ownership transfer). Both interventions target very specific businesses in Munich, those dealing in the organic foods trade. But why organics? Germany has a very well-established base of organic food stores where people buy local products, but there is now a growing phenomenon of organic supermarkets. Small firms are therefore having trouble in responding to this competition and operating in this new business context.

As Peter Rudolf from the **Association for Research and Development in Vocational Training and Occupations –GAB Munich** points out, effectively transferring ownership is critical to the ongoing success and sustainability of any small business:

“Small businesses typically face issues in relation to the transfer of ownership, which has many different dimensions. While we know that the efficient transfer of ownership or efficient re-inventing of a business are key factors to growing and maintaining small businesses like these, we have repeatedly noticed that this is where many of them fail.”

Over-arching these SME interventions is an approach developed through the institutional lifelong learning project, that of an ‘empowering network’. By getting seven different firms into a network

structure, i.e. the project 'Ready for Transfer' has enabled the business participants to regularly discuss issues and concepts together. Thus, *Munich Competent* has, for the first time in Munich, developed structures for businesses to *self-develop* their own solutions. Let's look at the network of these seven firms, for example, which is now coming to an end and has achieved astonishing results. As Peter Rudolf explains:

"The network participants all came with very different issues and questions, but they all realised that they had all gone through each others' problems at some point in time. While some came in thinking of selling their businesses, others came in because they did not know how to expand their business."

A key learning point from the network has been that *anticipating* business changes can often go hand-in-hand with thinking about the transfer of a business. Or put differently, efficient restructuring strategies can often be an alternative to selling a business outright. The network has therefore prompted people to re-think the way they do business, considering new or alternative solutions that ultimately help business survival. For instance, one business owner was able to learn about how to anticipate local competition through the network. As a consequence, the owner switched to a modern logistics management system and was able to prevent going bust.

And another success story? Well, look no further than the organic food firm in Stemmerhof. This firm is now well established and has managed to open a second store. It is now also thinking about a third store, alongside the process of being transferred to Monika Demgen. As Monika herself recounts:

"It has been great sharing the experience with those who need advice, and it has been great to contribute to the success of other business. With the recent supermarket phenomenon, we are all in the same boat. It is the first time I have been involved in something like this. The reason I got involved was because previously I found it difficult to formulate the future of our business. The network has allowed me to think about this future and now I am exploring the prospect of a third store. It has been very good for us and others!"

Stemmerhof's owner is keen to continue the network after this one has finished, based on the idea of fortnightly breakfast sessions. Maria Rauch is clearly ecstatic with this result:

"This is exactly what we were trying to prove, and I am delighted with the result. Addressing themes that concern similar businesses together through a network is an incredible tool for problem-solving. Now we have the evidence that this is a viable approach for these small businesses in Munich!"

TWO TOP CARDS FOR THE FUTURE

It's worth pointing out at this stage that *Munich Competent* has two top cards up its sleeve! Firstly, under its predecessor project in Round 1 of EQUAL, the project understood that there is more to partnership working than having individual partners develop and provide what they already know in isolation. The true meaning of partnership is generating added value and innovation from these complementary ideas. Moreover, having key organisations in the partnership is critical to longer-term sustainability.

And this is where *Munich Competent's* first card comes in. Equal Munich GmbH benefits from being a 100% daughter company of the city's RAW – the Department of Labour and Economic Development. Furthermore, the real strategic advantage comes from Equal Munich's director being no one else than the director of RAW, Dr Anneliese Durst, who clearly thinks that '*this partnership holds the good ingredients for innovation and efficient intentions*'. Thanks to the input of Anneliese Durst and her colleagues, RAW has already integrated the results of previous projects (such as EQUAL Round 1) into its own economic and workforce initiatives in Munich. And this integration is very much set to continue with *Munich Competent*.

And the second card? Well, this comes in the form of Lydia Dietrich, Honorary City Councillor for the Red-Green Party. Lydia Dietrich has been following both rounds of EQUAL and been particularly enthusiastic about its results. Moreover, she has been actively engaged in *Munich Competent* (and the Round 1 project), particularly on the transnational work, and been very impressed by what she has seen:

“It is so encouraging to see that someone takes a look at what happens outside of our own borders. There is a need for partnerships like the ones I see under EQUAL. We need people to work together in innovative ways and to find out the different ways to tackle the issues that, clearly we have not been able to find solutions for. EQUAL allows that sort of flexibility and innovation!”

With these encouraging words, *Munich Competent* is undoubtedly destined for great things and clearly showing that, what is good for social, is undoubtedly good for business!

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A DRIVING MOTOR FOR CHANGE IN CANTABRIA

'Restructuring' is increasingly becoming the focal point for discussion, not only in Europe, but worldwide. This increased interest can be viewed as a reflection of a general concern about the state of the economy and negative social developments. But even if restructuring as a concept is gaining attention, it still remains a broad notion that is not easy to grasp for people on the ground. What are the practical consequences for companies and workers? What are the real challenges for different economic sectors, as well as labour and social relations? And, above all, what can be done to prevent and anticipate the aftermath of these changes? The EQUAL project *GESSCANT* (Adaptation and Social Management of Change in Cantabria) has been conceived especially to give clear and useful answers to these questions. It has been set up to make a visible change to labour relations in the Spanish region by fostering social dialogue and promoting the adaptability of the most vulnerable companies and workers.

GESSCANT is ground-breaking as far as both its partnership and objectives are concerned. It aims to create a territorial network by involving key partners such as the regional government (of which the Department for Work is the lead partner of the project), trade unions, employer organisations, institutions working for the regional development of Cantabria, as well as ORECLA, an organisation specialised in labour conflict mediation. All of these partners are working together with a clear target in mind: to develop new and alternative ways of anticipating structural changes that affect companies and workers in the Cantabria region. In other words: they want to make *GESSCANT* a driving motor for change!

In Spain, a number of big companies including SEAT, Iberia and Telefonica have already restructured their organisation and workforce. However, these companies have had a (relatively) wide scope for flexibility to improve production and adapt to change, thanks to their elevated resources and solid position in the market. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) live a completely different reality. They have to face the economic and social consequences of restructuring with low resources and limited means for adaptation. This clearly creates a precarious and delicate situation for employers and their employees, which includes the prospect of redundancies.

So this is where *GESSCANT* wants to focus. It wants to give the right tools to the smallest and most fragile of companies in Cantabria to help them to adapt to the latest changes: new technologies, globalisation, international competition, consumer needs and modifications in labour organisation. *GESSCANT*'s underpinning idea is simple: a company with good adaptation skills will ensure its competitiveness, maintain high levels of productivity, as well as retain a qualified workforce. Without these skills, adaptation to new economic and social changes will become a difficult process, often leading to collective and painful dismissals.

As Tristan Martinez, from the General Work Directorate (Government of Cantabria), said: "*GESSCANT is a project intended to make a real change on the ground, reducing the social consequences of restructuring processes through the common work of key partners in Cantabria. GESSCANT wants to produce a change both in the practice and in the mentality of employers and workers, and find a solution that can be effective for everyone*".

READY, STEADY, GO!

GESSCANT has chosen a comprehensive approach based on three basic steps: understanding the problem, explaining the solutions, and finally, acting on the ground. This three-step approach is clearly bringing valuable and sustainable results!

READY...

First of all, understanding the problem means asking: what does restructuring really mean? What are its real or potential consequences on the ground? Who is or will be affected? At the start of the project, the *GESSCANT* partners undertook extensive research and analysis around these questions, focussing on the trends, risks, threats and recent changes within four sectors of interest: textile, metallurgy, automotive and retail. These traditional sectors have been particularly sensitive to the challenges of modernisation, and have had little resources and skills to adapt. Moreover, the importance of these sectors within the Cantabrian economy has been great, as shown by these striking numbers: the four sectors put together account for 6.947 SMEs and a total of 27.249 workers across the region.

GESSCANT's initial research also led to the identification of examples of good business practice, not only in Spain but also across Europe. Examples of Cantabrian SMEs, companies at national level, as well as 'success stories' in five European countries (Finland, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom and France) were identified through studies and analysis carried out since from the very starting phase of the project. These examples helped to highlight the right ingredients for anticipating and managing change effectively. The case study of a Cantabrian company in the metallurgy sector, Cantarey-Reinosa, for example, showed how a medium-sized company managed to undertake a complete restructure of its workforce, work organisation, technical development and production system. The fundamental success factor in this case was the increased investment of Cantarey-Reinosa in the industrial and technological developments of the company, leading to changes in the equipment and installations, and the engagement of new personnel; today, 230 employees work within the company, 67% more than in 2002.

An important focus of *GESSCANT*'s research was on the social and gender impact of restructuring processes, as well as on the policies that are put in place to tackle these negative effects. As Sonia Cobo, co-ordinator of the project, said:

"Another goal of GESSCANT's study was to find out about the extent of employment policies developed in Cantabria, to open up new areas of debate about what we need to do to alleviate the negative effects of the restructuring processes, and to find new and alternative measures or policies to those commonly used, in the fields of training, redistribution of working time, social and family support..."

STEADY...

After having understood the scale of the problem and identified helpful solutions, it is of vital importance to explain this to the actors deployed on the ground. With this in mind, several information and training sessions have been organised by the EQUAL project to reach the maximum number of SMEs and workers affected by restructuring in Cantabria.

The first training seminar called 'Corporate restructuring processes in the EU: anticipation and management of change' was organised in October 2005 in Santander, Cantabria's capital. The seminar was delivered by the European Foundation of Living and Working Conditions, a key institution involved in monitoring restructuring and change across Europe. The aim of the seminar was to give the *GESSCANT* partners (only) the necessary practical and theoretical knowledge on restructuring processes and change management strategies, all indispensable information to successfully run the project. The seminar was also intended to start up a debate and thinking around the new tools and methods that could be used for socially responsible change management in Cantabria.

Other seminars were organised by *GESSCANT*, this time open to the wider public: companies, workers, trade unions, employer organisations and regional administrative bodies (actors that will be presented later on). The subjects covered were wide-spread and focused on restructuring from all angles: negotiation tools, reorganising staff, good practice in different sectors, gender considerations, as well as advanced management models. The message that *GESSCANT* wanted to spread was clear: in order to adapt to the new requirements of the economy, and moreover, to do this successfully, companies have to engage themselves more by adopting new technologies, fostering a high quality of production, putting in place effective human resource

practices and encouraging corporate social responsibility. If there is this engagement, restructuring will no longer be seen as a threat, but as a win-win situation for both employers and employees.

As Asun Buil, from the ORECLA foundation put it:

“The seminars organised by GESSCANT are an important tool to foster not only change management knowledge, but also to start up a constructive dialogue between social partners, companies and workers. The aim of these training sessions is to provide key players within the Cantabria region with all the anticipatory mechanisms and instruments to tackle jointly the social and economic problems triggered by restructuring processes.”

GO!

Understanding the problem and explaining the possible solutions constitutes a big step towards changing traditional mentalities and putting in place constructive mechanisms for the anticipation of change, but what about the tangible action on the ground? To address this question, GESSCANT has an original and ground-breaking initiative in mind: setting up and developing four Sectoral Development Observatories at regional level acting as ‘supervision points’ or ‘sectoral watchers’ (one for each of the sectors addressed in GESSCANT’s research). The Observatories will be designed as bodies where social and economic data are used to develop change management plans and preventive strategies. In other words, the centres are intended to act as collectors of information such as trends, drivers for change, different structural and macroeconomic indicators, statistics on workers affected by redundancies, as well as examples of innovative business practice. The goal of this work is twofold: on the one hand, monitoring the social and economic evolution of the sectors, and on the other, designing development plans which will help SMEs to prevent the negative consequences of restructuring. The Observatories are very much intended to act as sectoral forums, getting workers, companies and representatives of sectors to work together leading to optimal solutions for everybody.

So far, thanks to EQUAL, GESSCANT has set up an original, effective and wide-spread strategy aimed at raising the awareness of workers and companies in Cantabria towards a concept that is becoming more and more important, that of restructuring.

CONSENSUS: THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE

“Social dialogue is essential if we want to make a real change within the region, but that dialogue has to start already within the partnership” said José Antonio Velasco, from the CCOO trade union.

Reflecting these words, GESSCANT is a sort of mini ‘social forum’ for the region. And this can be seen by the impressive array of partners involved. These partners have been working regularly together, participating in the project steering committee and sharing responsibility for organising the training sessions. So now let’s have a look at the different partners in detail. What are their competences and what added value do they bring to the partnership?

The participation of different departments of the regional government has given a territorial dimension to the EQUAL partnership. What is more, it has created a direct impact at institutional level. Four departments of the regional government are participating in GESSCANT, namely the departments for work (the lead partner of GESSCANT), industry, local employment services and gender. Each of these departments has brought different types of knowledge and experience, and integrated different institutional perspectives into the project. Cantabria is an autonomous community, which means that the regional governmental authorities have important responsibilities in the management of labour issues and industrial policies. The authorities also take charge of the promotion of employment, occupational training, the authorisation of proceedings in the case of collective redundancies, as well as the establishment of funds for the development and modernisation of companies. Clearly, with such responsibilities, the

participation of these governmental bodies in the project is critical insofar as they act as mediators between companies and workers dealing with close downs and relocations.

GESSCANT's aim is not only to ensure direct institutional impact, but also an effective social dialogue. That's why the project has involved the main and most representative trade unions and employer organisations in Cantabria (UGT, the general trade union of workers, CCOO, the trade union of working commissions, and CEOE-CEPYME, the main employer organisation in the region). By working directly with enterprises and workers affected by restructuring processes, these actors have gained extensive experience in finding original and alternative solutions to dealing with organisational changes (using human resources and training, for example). This experience is of fundamental importance for the EQUAL project for two major reasons: the establishment of direct contact with the beneficiaries and the implementation of a social dialogue within *GESSCANT*.

SODERCAN and ORECLA are also participating in the project. The former is the Regional Development Agency in Cantabria, while the latter is a company specialised in extrajudicial resolution of working conflicts. The participation of these experienced has given further benefits to the project as far as knowledge of labour and industrial relations in Cantabria is concerned.

What are the aim of the partners and the added value of this new collaboration?

For Ignacio Abaitua, representative of SODERCAN:

"The added value of GESSCANT is the collaboration of the most important social actors in Cantabria within a new context, that of a European project. This has to be seen as an additional communication channel, going beyond the formal and institutional one, bringing direct and tangible benefits to those who really need it: SMEs and workers threatened by restructuring processes."

José Antonio Alonso, manager of ORECLA, puts the stress on what, in his eyes, is the key to a successful social dialogue:

"The added value of GESSCANT can be found in the underpinning consensus of different partners among a common goal. Each partner has different know-how to share and also different communication channels to explore. Without consensus among the partners, we would not be able to reach our main objective: finding a path that leads to a common solution for both companies and workers in Cantabria."

Overall, *GESSCANT* can be seen as a source of good ideas and original solutions for the adaptability of SMEs and workers facing restructuring. It is a source based on a rock-solid partnership: all the actors involved in the project come from different backgrounds, have different methods and skills for effectively addressing social and industrial changes within Cantabria. The consensus among the partners is firm and concrete and this will, without a doubt, ensure the attainment of successful and sustainable results in the future!

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BECAUSE EVEN SMALL BUSINESSES DESERVE A CHANCE FOR CHANGE...

Opening the pages of the “Pirkanmaan Historia”, a book on the history of Tampere, we read: *“The history of Tampere spans almost 10,000 years. Much has happened during this time, both major changes and unexpected events. Still, the evolution of the region has been part of a natural process, easy to understand: there is a background for every event. Today, Tampere is a prosperous and highly developed region, one that is ready to carry on the process, sometimes changing course but never stopping”*. This is how Tampere, the third biggest city of Finland and the second largest regional centre behind Helsinki, is seen by its inhabitants: an attractive city with plenty of drive, a place for new ideas!

During the mid-19th century, the Finlayson cotton mill was built alongside the Tammerkoski Rapids and a whole industrial community grew up around it. The community constituted the heart of the Finnish cotton industry, exporting the majority of its output to nearby Russia. Tampere also became the leading centre for the Finnish bricks and mortar industry, and a major centre for commerce and transportation. This prosperous heavy industry and textile sector began to quieten down though during the 1960s, when production started moving away from the area. And by the 70s and 80s, they had completely come to a halt due to structural change. But Tampere did not give up. Today, the old factories form a busy and bustling part of the city as most of them have since been adapted and created new business areas. Today, traditional heavy industries have taken on new technologies and businesses models, leading to strong, internationally competitive areas of competence. The best-known of these is the Finnish brand, Nokia, which has settled in the Tampere region, merging local, traditional industries with new information technologies.

But even if the bigger companies like Nokia have managed to adapt to change, it has been a tougher challenge for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Without large resources behind them, these smaller businesses have often struggled to respond to the new requirements of a changing marketplace and have been fearful of the competition posed by bigger companies. Given this situation, the *Making a Change a Chance* project, has quite rightly chosen to focus on SMEs as part of the EQUAL initiative.

Making a Change a Chance, managed by the Institute for Extension Studies at the University of Tampere, together with the Federation of Enterprises in the Tampere Region and Finn-Medi Research Ltd., has been working to develop the readiness and flexibility of SMEs to respond to changes in the Finnish economy through innovative and comprehensive approaches. Three sub-projects have been especially designed by the project to improve the adaptability of firms by raising the skills and “readiness for change” of their most vulnerable workers.

These sub-projects are therefore particularly well aligned with the European Employment Guidelines insofar as they wish to foster the synergies between quality at work, productivity and employment. Furthermore, they are working to develop active and preventive labour market measures, including the early identification of needs, guidance and training as part of personalised action plans, as well as providing services to support the inclusion and adaptability of enterprises and their workforce.

As Minna Miettinen, project manager of *Making a Change a Chance*, puts it: *“We hope that SMEs will be able to create their own business strategy and maintain their personnel. We give them the opportunity to be more flexible, have new skills. We give them a chance to meet with other companies so that they can create a network and tackle together common problems. In other words, we hope that SMEs participating in this project will have a better future!”*

BUILDING A NEW APPROACH ON SOLID FOUNDATIONS: THREE IDEAS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMEs

An interesting aspect of *Making a Change a Chance* is that it has evolved from and built upon a Round 1 project, albeit with some changes to the partnership structure and objectives. The *four-way model*, 4T project, was also managed by the Institute for Extension Studies at the University of Tampere, and was the biggest EQUAL project in Finland under the Adaptability theme at the time. The project's aims were broadly similar to *Making a Change a Chance*: helping SMEs to develop their own business competences in a comprehensive way, maintain their competitiveness, and adapt to the demands of the new economy.

However, the innovation of *Making a Change a Chance* in comparison with *four-way model*, 4T can be seen in the originality of its structure. Three sub-projects - *Learn, Adapt and Renew, Work Capability* and *Contact* - have been especially designed to give an all-embracing service to SMEs facing structural change. Each sub-project has its own specific features, and emphasises and addresses different competences within SMEs, namely their competence to operate, renew, make plans and work together. This tripartite approach enables the specific know-how of each project partner to be exploited as they are each responsible for the implementation of a specific sub-project.

"The innovation of the project is that the partners work both separately and together. In this way, we are able to reach more SMEs and enhance the impact of the project. This is the secret of our strength!" says Anneli Sorkio, project assistant for *Making a Change a Chance*

Thanks to the two rounds of the EQUAL Initiative, *Making a Change a Chance* has been able to take advantage of the experience of its predecessor. This combination of continuity and innovation has therefore ensured a kind of "intra-Round mainstreaming", which has brought clear benefits to all those involved.

LEARNING HOW TO ADAPT AND RENEW YOUR COMPANY

The Institute of Extension Studies at the University of Tampere has been responsible for *Learn, Adapt and Renew*, a sub-project aimed at improving the professional skills, motivation and management knowledge of service-sector SMEs. The Institute has been a leading academy for adult education since its foundation in 1970 and therefore well placed to lead this sub-project. This lead role has entailed providing training to SMEs to help them in setting up an effective management plan and a valid strategy to address critical changes in the economy. One group of eight SMEs has so far been trained since September 2005, with the total target being 20.

The training itself has consisted in 10 one-day courses and seminars focusing on different topics, spread over one year. Among the widespread list of subjects covered, there has been managerial support, proactive leadership, tacit knowledge transfer, and internal communication skills. One day has also been dedicated to individual workshops whereby each company can set up its own and personalised development strategy, and review, together with the trainers, what they have learned during the previous sessions.

One of the participating companies has been Hakasen Leipomo, a 55-year old bakery. Hakasen Leipomo had extensive experience of conducting business prior to the training, but in the words of its manager, Marketta Hakanen:

"Even a bakery has to face the tumult of environmental change, and concentrate more and more on introducing new business systems, operations and strategies". She admits that *"when we started, these issues were not really talked about, nor was there any knowledge or awareness about Information Technologies...Keeping up with international competition requires continuous updating of know-how and increasing specialisation. For this reason, this sort of development project provides the ideal support for the development of our business"*.

A WELLNESS CHAIN TO IMPROVE WELL-BEING AT WORK

The second sub-project developed by *Making a Change a Chance* has been called *Work Capability* and been led by Finn-Medi Research Ltd., an organisation offering expertise and services in the field of health technology. While *Learn, Adapt and Renew* has focused more on developing a strategic plan for SMEs, this sub-project has concentrated more on workers with three distinguishing features: being at risk of marginalisation, with reduced work capability or strong rehabilitation needs. Overall, *Work Capability* has been conceived as a “package of services” that can be provided to companies who wish to maintain the functional capability of their staff and improve the well-being of their employees at work.

Before starting the training, an assessment of the specific training needs of each SME is undertaken via a questionnaire. The questionnaire is filled in by each of the employees who are asked whether they agree or disagree with statements relating to their perception of the workplace; for example, “I have lately enjoyed coming to work”, “I get on well with my boss and colleagues” or “My workplace is well organised and it does not cause any physical problems”. The questionnaire is especially designed to give an all-encompassing picture of the employees’ well-being at work and to point out any potential problems.

A total of 15 enterprises have been involved in *Work Capability*, receiving tailor-made training on subjects such as ergonomics, occupational health, health-related fitness and occupational safety. But more than this: *Work Capability* has also offered services *within* the workplace such as workplace adaptations and health-enhancing physical activities for employees, based on collaboration between the employee and a physiotherapist.

Ilkka Saarnio, project manager of *Work Capability*, highlights that: “*Health and Safety is becoming more of an issue in Finland. More and more companies are thinking about this topic and becoming more aware of the problems that employees, especially the older ones, can encounter in the workplace. What we do is try to develop a new approach to well-being at work that can be seen as a model or a service for SMEs. We want to put in place a wellness chain, a sustainable process that will bring benefits to companies even after EQUAL*”.

TAKING CARE OF THE SMALLEST ONES

Last but not least comes *Contact*. This sub-project, managed by the Federation of Enterprises in the Tampere Region, has been particularly conceived to help the smallest and most at-risk companies in the area. Micro-enterprises have been a particular target group for this sub-project for several reasons. Firstly, these firms usually don’t have time to think about developing opportunities, secondly they are not familiar with how to develop their business services, and thirdly, they are not used to asking for help - as their concept of consultancy is generally an old-fashioned one. *Contact* has therefore developed a delivery method that responds exactly to this “micro-enterprise profile”, a method that consists of training that is tailor-made, bite-sized (ranging from half a day to a few days of consultation per company), easy to start with, and finally cheap.

After the first contact with the enterprise, a short but intense training plan is set up. Informed by this plan, the subjects are made as near to “reality” as possible, responding to the actual needs of the companies; marketing, time-management, electronic invoicing and taxation are among the most common of these subjects.

MAKING THE CHANGE VISIBLE AND MEMORABLE

Making a Change a Chance partners are not only busy with developing their sub-projects, but are also heavily focused on disseminating the outcomes of their work. And to this end, they have developed an impressive mainstreaming plan, a plan that also conveys the number three! Three, as in the number of audiences that *Making a Change a Chance* is trying to reach: one, all the project partners, two, the final beneficiaries, and three, the social actors and policy makers interested in the project’s outcomes.

Across these three audiences and underpinned by the plan, the project has been extremely active and inventive in making its results visible. The “professional steering group” is one good example of this. This group has comprised key project representatives, as well as experts from different business sectors and SME staff. This combination of group members has meant that the current situation in the region and the future needs of SMEs can be debated, discussed and ultimately linked. What is more, by posing critical questions, the links can draw directly on the experience of EQUAL, questions such as: What will SMEs need in the future? What kind of products and actions will the project have to design to fulfil these needs? What kind of actions can policy makers offer to companies? Answers to these questions not only help to highlight potential mainstreaming opportunities for the project, but they also provide a positive environment for the experts to offer guidance and advice directly to the SMEs that are present in the group meetings.

Talking of SMEs, the Federation of Enterprises is by far the best actor to reach this target group. And it has done so by, for example, organising an annual entrepreneur event called “Karonkka”. The event brings together more than 3,000 of the Federation’s members from across Tampere region and has the “Entrepreneur of the Year” award ceremony as its centrepiece. At the last event, the biggest held in Scandinavia, *Making a Change a Chance* did not go unnoticed. It set up a stand brimming with information on on-going training, brochures and other dissemination materials to promote the wide range of activities and services provided by the project.

But the project’s promotional activities have not stopped there. Aside from events, the project has also reached SMEs through the publication of newsletters, brochures, newspapers and a wide set of gadgets including notebooks, pencils and candies. A magazine called *Muutos Voimaksi* (*Making a Change a Chance* in Finnish) has been published twice and distributed to all the enterprises participating in the different sub-projects. Information on both EQUAL and the project has also been published in the Federation of Finnish Enterprises’ newspaper “Pirkanmaan Yrittäjä” (Entrepreneurs in the Tampere Region). Pirkanmaan Yrittäjä is by far the largest Finnish newspaper focusing on entrepreneurship. It is not just mailed to the members of the Federation, but also 155,000 copies go to every household in Tampere and the surrounding municipalities, 11 times a year.

All of the above illustrates how well the project has been communicating with partners and its SME target group, but what about the public at large? This public has by no means been forgotten, in fact *Making a Change a Chance* has already organised two *Non-stop Days*, kind of thematic seminars targeted at wider audiences. The themes of these *Non-stop Days* have been directly linked to the four SME competences on which the project is based, namely competences in: devising strategies, adapting new skills, operating day-to-day business, and working together inside and between companies.

The first *Non-stop Day*, held in November 2005 in Tampere, was called “Know and Succeed - a good manager supports training” and focused on modern models of leadership based on the development of the knowledge and skills of staff. An excellent way of illustrating these models – and of course promoting the Day – was by inviting a famous Finnish ice hockey coach, Mr. Juhani Tamminen, to share his experience of teamwork.

Teamwork of another kind has come in the form of participation in the European Commission’s showcase event: Employment Week. All of project staff and partners pulled together to have a stand at the event, which provided a great opportunity to meet policy makers and practitioners at European, national, regional and local levels, as well as to build relationships with peers and potential partners.

So where have all of these promotional materials, group meetings, events and gadgets been leading? The goal of this all-embracing and integrated communication approach is clear, as Minna Miettinen says: “*We want people to remember our project!*” A project therefore that is both visible and memorable!

As a whole, the partners of *Making a Change a Chance* have designed and put in place an integrated and innovative approach to supporting the adaptability of companies in Finland. The

project is undoubtedly a success bringing constructive and concrete solutions to tackle the needs of SMEs, and raise the skills and well-being of their most vulnerable workers. This innovative approach is coupled with an extremely effective mainstreaming strategy supporting the participation of all the partners and ensuring the visibility of the EQUAL initiative around the country.

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COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS: CLARE LIFE LONG LEARNING NETWORK

Defining and providing a full and varied Life Long Learning (LLL) curriculum is a challenge in all areas of the European Union. Doing this in a rural area with a wide range of fragmented and small-scale providers is even more difficult – yet this is exactly the challenge the *Clare Life Long Learning Network* has been set up to address. In order to meet this challenge, the project has used a combination of traditional and innovative methods, bringing providers and learners together to improve LLL in County Clare. This is very much in line with the emphasis on partnership in LLL policy at European level.

County Clare is a predominantly rural area on the West coast of Ireland. As with much of the rest of Ireland, the local economy is undergoing a significant transformation, moving away from agriculture and manufacturing toward a knowledge-based economy; areas of significant employment growth include professional services, tourism and commerce. Ennis, the County's major centre, is known as Ireland's 'Information Age Town' and has developed a high-specification ICT infrastructure to cover the whole town.

The key issue relating to this restructuring is the need to ensure that all people are in a position to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the knowledge economy. The EQUAL programme's emphasis on LLL is critical to addressing this issue and the *Clare Life Long Learning Network* is exploring the role of learning in helping vulnerable and excluded groups to play a full role in the labour market and to develop personally and socially.

The premise of the project is that increased collaboration between LLL providers will lead to an improved and more appropriate learning offer, which will provide benefits to learners across the County. By bringing providers together in a strategic network, the project is aiming to reduce duplication, increase quality and improve joint working. Working with existing providers is central to the approach of the project, as Seamus Bane, Project Coordinator, says:

"We aren't here to re-invent the wheel!"

This strategic approach is especially important given that much of County Clare is rural. This has provided the project with two crucial motivations: to reduce duplication and ensure that the limited resources available are used to maximum effect; and to develop innovative ICT-based tools to help address barriers presented by space and time!

The main aspects of the DP can be summarised as:

- *Partnership*, which has been fundamental to the work of the project;
- *Innovative use of ICT*; specifically the website, database and e-learning; and
- *Empowerment* through the bottom-up development of a LLL strategy for the county.

Each aspect is discussed in detail below.

PARTNERSHIP AS A PRODUCT

Partnership is absolutely central to EQUAL and a key part of the stated aim of the *Clare Life Long Learning Network* is to:

"...enable a wide variety of community groups, voluntary organisations and state agencies to collaborate in the provision of a continuum of lifelong learning opportunities for learners in all parts of County Clare..."

In fact, establishing a functional network of providers is the main product of the project! Teresa Larkin from the Clare Youth Service believes that this means that any work done will be sustained into the future:

"We have been brought together and the knowledge, partnerships and cooperation will remain long after EQUAL has gone."

The project has indeed brought together a wide range of partners, building upon and adding to more ad hoc pre-existing networks in a systematic fashion. Overall, there are some 80 groups and organisations in the *Clare Lifelong Learning Network*, including representatives from the public sector - such as the Community Education Service; the Back To Education Initiative; Clare Reading & Writing Scheme; Department of Social & Family Affairs; and the Clare County Development Board – and the voluntary and community sector, e.g.: Brothers of Charity Clare; Clare Youth Service; Clare Family Learning Centre; and the Congress Information & Opportunities Centre.

The partnership has been organised around five area-based networks and has four cross-cutting thematic sub-groups:

- Learning Network Steering Group - responsible for activity in relation to the development of provider collaboration and partnership development.
- ICT Steering Group - responsible for activity in relation to the development of ICT capacity to support lifelong learning.
- Lifelong Learning Curriculum Steering Group - responsible for all activity in relation to the development of an appropriate curriculum of lifelong learning opportunities.
- Equality & Access Steering Group - responsible for all activity in relation to addressing issues of equality and access to lifelong learning opportunities.

Increasing the capacity of partner organisations is necessary to achieving the overall goal of improving LLL provision in the County; it is also important for the network that individual organisations benefit from involvement. To this end, the project has provided training and support in areas of growing significance to the sector; for example:

- Equality & Diversity Awareness Training has been devised and offered to all members of the project. Not only is this at the heart of EQUAL, but it is also a growing issue for providers as the make up of Irish society continues to change and become more multi-cultural. This training has been devised using input from a carefully devised and supported Learner Forum, which has a variety of functions, one of which is provide a sounding board for project development.
- Peer support and training for partners who need to comply with nationally specified Quality Assurance standards. Again, this is central to improving the capacity of individual providers - particularly small organisations and the voluntary sector - helping them to meet challenges facing the sector as well as ensuring quality for learners across the County.
- Training to support effective partnership working is being devised following a specific piece of research, which looked at different organisations' approaches to partnership working. Specific points of good practice and means of addressing barriers have been identified and are built upon in the training programme, which is currently being rolled out (and should improve the functioning of the Network itself!).

THE PERKS OF PARTNERSHIP

The emphasis of EQUAL on collaboration and partnership has already delivered benefits in Clare – to LLL provision in the County; to organisations involved and to individual learners. Mike Ryan from the Back To Education Initiative is very clear about the benefits to involvement in the Network,

"It's not a competition that we're in, we're about cooperation and collaboration...as a provider we benefit from the Network, and if we benefit, then so do our learners."

So far there have been several benefits from the increased levels of partnership working within the *Clare Lifelong Learning Network*; these include:

- New courses are being offered in rural areas because providers are able to coordinate their provision and resources, for example combining different partners' facilities, tutors and learning materials. The database developed by the project (discussed below) has been a useful tool in providing evidence to reduce duplication or offer new courses.
- Because providers are coordinating their efforts in rural areas and have reduced the gaps in provision, learners now have better routes for progression from entry level, right through to higher education.
- Providers have access to one another and are able to share expertise and local knowledge. One area where this has been particularly important has been the sharing of approaches to working with specific target groups, such as travellers or people with learning difficulties.
- Providers have increased knowledge in terms of which organisation can best support their learners. For example, the Clare Youth Service was recently able to negotiate a supported work placement for a young woman with learning difficulties; this was possible because of the relationships formed through the Network with the employment service.
- Individual tutors have been brought together to share approaches, good practice and even worksheets! This has improved the process of cross-mediation of students' work and should lead to a more consistent offer across the County. This is important for learners - who will have more appropriate routes of progression - and also employers, who have a better knowledge of what is meant by a particular level of qualification.

Smaller organisations have benefited from the Network's approach to tackling issues of relevance to the sector. For example, Teresa Larkin is clear about the impact the work on Quality Assurance has had on smaller organisations; because of the project:

"...no-body is left working on these things alone in their office!"

TRANSCENDING SPACE AND TIME

As noted above, *Clare Life Long Learning Network* is – in the spirit of EQUAL - making innovative use of ICT to enhance the other areas of activity and to overcome the challenges presented by working in rural areas

There are three main strands to this work:

1) THE WEBSITE

The site - www.clarelearningnetwork.org - has several interesting features, including:

- Details of all courses run by all providers in County Clare, where learners can search by location, subject, course level and timing;
- Listings for all providers, including a brief outline of the organisation, their courses and contact details;
- An online forum for tutors. This area of the site provides a space for tutors to exchange ideas and good practice. This was developed as tutors of LLL courses are typically paid an hourly rate – this makes it difficult in establishing networks as it is not often that there are resources available to pay tutors for time spent networking; this is particularly a problem in rural areas, where travel times are often prohibitively long.

There is also an online forum for learners, where learners can support one another through the learning process and can exchange ideas and experiences. There are a growing number of learners accessing the forum and the fact that access to this support is not bound by time or distance is valued by its users.

The forum has been incorporated into an Active Citizenship module, which has been developed by the project and aims to improve the participation of learners in community activity and the planning of lifelong learning provision in the County; 45 people have been through the course and the hook of an interesting subject matter, combined with an online forum, has proved attractive to learners. This is echoed by Helen Skerritt, who followed the module:

"I feel like I want to get more involved in my community and more involved in learning."

Fellow learner, Margaret Donovan, agrees:

"The more I get, the more I want - I've got a daughter who's nine years old; I want to be able to show her how she can become a future leader in her community"

The peer support aspect of the forum has been important to the learners on the Active Citizenship module, as this quote taken from one of the postings shows:

"If a person tries and doesn't succeed in all they were trying to do they can sometimes feel a bit down about it, but when someone is willing to learn from their efforts or to recognise possible mistakes they made, then that person is learning and in my opinion succeeding."

2) THE DATABASE

The database brings together management information held by over 40 providers in the County. It contains details for each adult learner in the County, including their location, subject area and level of course.

The database has enabled providers to track the progress of learners from course to course and level to level. Collecting this information has had several important benefits, for example:

- It shows specific areas and subjects where learners are not progressing to further learning;
- It has provided evidence of need for providers looking to expand their offer;
- It has highlighted areas where there is poor uptake of learning and where providers can concentrate their efforts.

Each of these benefits is crucial to providing a better LLL offer in rural areas, and the database has already attracted attention from organisations working in other rural areas and from planning authorities at national level.

3) E-LEARNING

e-learning has also been provided at five centres, and has been used particularly to address the challenges faced by learners in rural areas; as Breda O Driscoll, one of the project staff, says:

"You just need to be creative - everywhere has a primary school and every primary school has broadband."

Within the project, the view is that ICT is just a tool and use of a computer should not be viewed as an end in itself. The aim is to demystify ICT for key target groups and to equip learners with the skills needed to support their own learning. The development of learning skills has therefore gone hand-in-hand with development of ICT skills. Again, the project has used research to establish the needs of learners in order to provide the right kind of support from tutors.

BUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Creating and sustaining the Network has obviously been a major achievement and the benefits of working in this way are clear. However, the *Clare Life Long Learning Network* is also trying to formally change the way in which LLL is delivered in the County.

Producing a County-wide Life Long Learning Strategy has been the main tool for making this change and the approach adopted in producing the Strategy has been highly successful. This approach has been very much in the spirit of EQUAL and has been deliberately empowering, bottom-up and participatory. The strategy has drawn on the participation of over eighty stakeholders through a series of fifteen workshops as well as local plans produced by the five area networks within the project. The workshops invited participants to raise issues of concern to them, before the issues were grouped together under common themes and prioritised – using a voting system that gives all participants an equal say in this process.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this participatory approach to producing the Strategy; Seamus Bane's view is that:

"This is one of those times when the process you go through is probably more important than the products you end up with."

The introduction to the Strategy, written by Sean Conlan, captures the importance of the process:

"If the planning process teaches us anything it is that wisdom and commitment emerge from the group and that no one individual, however experienced, carries a monopoly of knowledge."

As Seamus Bane notes, whilst the Strategy itself is undoubtedly important, many of the benefits have arisen from the way in which it was put together. The fact that individual providers have been given a chance to think about issues outside of their everyday work has had an important effect; as has the opportunity to reflect on and debate the thinking behind LLL. The Strategy has also shown crucial links to other areas of policy, such as transport and childcare, which will enable a more joined up response to the challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

When asked about the impact of the Strategy, Sean Conlan cites the increased coordination of providers' efforts, before reflecting that:

"I've worked in this area for 20 years without this sort of strategic plan! Putting this together has been a remarkable achievement."

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

The work of the Network has clearly gone well so far and early results suggest continued success for the future. People involved in the Network credit the EQUAL programme with the speed and efficiency with which these results have been achieved; as Seamus Bane says:

"EQUAL has given us space and time to think - this has allowed us to innovate and improve."

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JOB COACHING: A BRAND NEW SMILE FOR THE OVER 45S

Łódź, the second largest city in Poland, welcomes visitors with its grey and old buildings, and 'melancholy' mood. This is the picture of a city, as well as a whole region, that is no longer booming, but rather is struggling with the consequences of recent economic and structural change. Before 1990, Łódź's economy was mainly known for its renowned textile industry, an industry that emerged during the nineteenth century owing to the favourable chemical composition of its water. However, due to the shift in production to Asian countries, the textile industry in the area declined dramatically during 1990 and 1991 - and now no major textile company survives in Łódź today. Aside from textiles, other vital sectors of the local economy such as healthcare and education are also undergoing profound structural change. The introduction of new technologies and increasing professional requirements, amongst other things, mean that these sectors are having to rapidly adapt in order to survive. And in this situation, survival means trying to balance the demands of a new, free-market economy with its potentially detrimental social cost!

The recent closure of textile companies and the redundancies in the healthcare and education sectors have left thousands and thousands of workers without a job. Those who have not retired or moved to the capital or abroad have been forced to change their vocation, find a new job and adapt to new economic demands. Many of them, especially the most vulnerable, are still not managing to integrate into this new environment, which has pushed the unemployment rate sky-high. Among the most vulnerable, the over 45s are struggling with an exceptionally difficult situation: they are not only dealing with the constant threat of unemployment, but are also facing the negative and often discriminatory attitude of employers, which includes cases of bullying. With poor IT and language skills and often a distrust of others, the over 45s do not know how to protect themselves and usually feel inclined to give up at the first sign of an obstacle.

Thanks to the EQUAL initiative, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Poland has set up the *Alliance for Work* project to address the precarious position of the Łódź region and particularly the plight of older workers who reside there. UNDP works in collaboration with an impressive number of partners deployed on the ground, including trade unions, employer representatives, community organisations and research bodies. Many of these partners have never worked together before, which marks a major breakthrough for partnership-based employment measures aimed at older workers.

Alliance for Work's aim is closely aligned with the strategic guidelines of the European Employment Strategy, especially guideline number 18 which focuses on promoting a lifecycle approach to work and supporting active ageing. The project works to increase labour market participation by using the potential of the over 45s in a 'jobcoaching' capacity, as well as by improving the employment potential of older workers through up-skilling and training. But most of all, the project aims to change psychological and cultural attitudes, both those of older workers vis-à-vis their own professional worth, as well as those of employers and trade unions in relation to employing and managing a more mature workforce. Kamila Jezowska, coordinator and designer for EQUAL *Alliance for Work*, is extremely happy with the partnership's early and visibly promising results:

"I've designed this project with my parents in mind. And now I'm glad to see that this brand new approach has already brought a smile to the faces of people that had lost hope in their future."

A FRESH LOOK AT PROFESSIONAL REINTEGRATION

So what is the concrete action of the partnership? What is *Alliance for Work* exactly proposing to do to keep older workers in employment?

The EQUAL partnership strives to adapt a professional reintegration method already developed and used (with considerable success) in Holland to the Polish socio-economic context. This method – known as the ‘jobcoaching system’ - is founded on the interaction between an adviser/trainer, called a ‘jobcoach’, and a beneficiary. The interaction allows the jobcoach to determine the needs of the beneficiary in terms of job or training opportunities, as well as career orientation. It also allows the beneficiary to find ways of matching their needs to the demands of potential employers, thereby developing their vocational pathway with a greater sense of empowerment and motivation.

In Poland, this coaching role is currently undertaken by so-called ‘professional advisors’, civil servants working within regional and communal bodies or schools. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of such advisors has rapidly shown its limits: each professional advisor works with something like 5,000 clients, which means that they can dedicate no more than 20 minutes per person a year! EQUAL *Alliance for Work* seeks to address this problem by replacing the traditional professional advisors with new jobcoaches, people who are specially trained and have the time to help older workers in finding new professional pathways by raising their skills and self-esteem.

The innovation of the jobcoaching role is two-fold. Firstly, jobcoaches are recruited among less skilled, over 45 workers at risk of unemployment, working within the healthcare sector, light industry and NGOs. This requirement enhances the jobcoach’s understanding of the final beneficiaries that they support and enables them to put in place peer-centred learning strategies. Secondly, as each jobcoach has a limited number of beneficiaries (30 to 60 maximum), personalised career plans can be adapted to each beneficiary’s special and diversified needs. It goes without saying that these innovations constitute a big step towards a successful guidance and supporting system for the project.

Since its start, *Alliance to Work* has already successfully trained 32 people to become jobcoaches. Some of these trainees have agreed with their employers to take on this role within their company full-time, whilst others have become jobcoaches as a new part-time profession. During the nine day training session, the trainees received both soft and hard training, and were prepared generally to take on their new profession. The soft training covered the provision of psychological guidance to help remove the mental barriers that usually hold older workers back from undertaking new work experiences or from acquiring new skills. This training ended in self-evaluation and communication exercises. The hard training, on the other hand, included ICT and other professional courses. There were also classes on how to use flexible forms of work, a particularly interesting solution to enhance the employability of older workers. As the partners themselves said, the first training session for jobcoaches produced excellent results for the trainees:

“The first day, the participants were a bit reluctant, while at the end of the training period, the new jobcoaches were motivated and impatient to begin their new job.”

The whole jobcoaching system is only starting, but the partners have already set their sights on high results: by the end of the project, a total of 440 over 45s in the healthcare sector, light industry and NGOs will benefit from the new professional reintegration method. On top of that, 30 employers in the region will receive tailored, soft training and awareness-raising. Whilst this activity has not yet started, the partners hope to improve the employers’ understanding of age management issues and highlight the importance of having at least one part or full-time jobcoach within their company. Overall, this constitutes an original, comprehensive approach to improving the adaptability of older workers in Poland, leading to true support for workers threatened by unemployment.

ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

The underpinning rationale for the development of EQUAL *Alliance for Work* was that an increase in the empowerment and employability of the over 45s would not be possible without the mobilisation and cooperation of the stakeholders acting on the ground. That is why a striking

feature of *Alliance for Work* is the high number of partners involved: thirteen members coming from extremely different backgrounds, all bringing together their personal experiences and know-how to reach a common goal.

Alongside UNDP, *Alliance for Work* draws on the expertise and input of OPZZ, the main Polish Trade Union; FNSZZ, the Trade Union for SMEs; healthcare employers; employer organisations such as the Craft Chamber; non-governmental organisations (NGO) working with women; training organisations; and last but not least, research bodies such as the Textile Institute and Łódź University. These partners are now all working together to create an embracing network that is able to reach workers over the age of 45 across the whole region.

This partnership has given rise to a number of innovations and benefits. First of all, the presence of such a diverse range of partners has created a new multi-dimensional forum for communication. This forum is particularly important and striking in Poland given that it is a country that does not have a long history of social collaboration and dialogue compared with its counterparts in Western Europe.

One of the key steps in animating the forum - before starting any activities on the ground – was to discuss the benefits of keeping the over 45s in employment with employers and trade union representatives. What emerged from these initial discussions was that discriminatory practices towards the over 45s were often linked to the common belief that recruiting new staff is more 'convenient' than investing in older workers. In addition, employers held a negative stereotype of older workers as being unwilling to learn, which made them more reluctant to invest in new training. Against this backdrop, the purpose of *Alliance for Work* was to raise employers' awareness to the fact that investing in older workers would not only help this specific target group, but would also increase the productivity and competitiveness of the companies themselves. The main message to spread among employers was therefore: investing in older workers means investing in your own company!

The value of dialogue in identifying and responding to messages such as these – particularly when these messages relate to problems of attitude and cultural change - is priceless. As Leszek Michno from the Pinel Foundation (who was responsible for training and professional reintegration for people excluded from the labour market) puts it:

"The presence of a high number of partners can sometimes be a problem, but at the same time it constitutes something incredible: we now have, sitting around the same table, people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who did not talk to each other before. Alliance for Work has forced them to communicate and to find a common language."

A second benefit of the diverse partnership has been the project's direct impact on the beneficiaries, as well as its increased visibility at national and regional level. Every *Alliance for Work* partner operates within its own particular systems and circles, and consequently is able to disseminate the results of the project to wider audiences. The all-Poland Trade Union – OPZZ, for example, is particularly well placed to reach public authorities at national level thanks to its involvement in the tripartite Commission (trade unions, employers association and government representative). The trade union is also able to provide competent staff who can organise training in mediation and negotiation for companies that face restructuring. Another example is that of the two NGOs involved in the project (the Centre for Women Rights and the League of Polish Women) that have very strong links with smaller, local organisations in the Łódź region. These contacts enable the participation of a higher number of local bodies in the project in order to reach the most isolated locations and thereby assist the largest number of (older) women. Furthermore, these NGOs have daily, direct contact with the beneficiaries and can help them to face problems of discrimination through the provision of legal and psychological advice. Janina Miziołek, from the League of Polish Women, loves talking about her 'girls' and about how the project has changed their lives.

"Alliance for Work", she says, "is about reaching the potential that everyone has but which is often unseen and unrecognised. Everyday I see women who have lost hope asking for help, work

and support. The EQUAL partnership finally brings real answers and opportunities for change as it brings hope.”

EMPOWERMENT IS THE ANSWER

The jobcoaching method developed by EQUAL *Alliance for work* particularly targets the healthcare sector, which is a very delicate branch of the regional economy undergoing tough structural change. The sector is striving to adapt to new technological advances, finding ways of enhancing productivity and competitiveness, and raising skills levels amongst the workforce. Given that 50% of its workforce is aged over 45, the involvement of healthcare actors in the partnership is very important. Consequently, three hospitals are actually participating in the project, putting forward a total of 250 final beneficiaries.

12 nurses from the Karol Jonscher hospital in Łódź have already benefited from participation in the project. They have all received the support and guidance of a jobcoach, leading to the development of a tailor-made career development plan. As IT skills are now very much in demand in the sector, the first thing for the nurses to do was to familiarise themselves with the use of computers and informatics. Therefore for one week, the nurses received IT training, learned to fill in tables with inmates’ data, document patients’ histories and generate basic statistics.

“I didn’t believe I could learn so much in a week” said one of the nurses, *“now I feel more secure, I don’t fear the competition of the younger ones and, above all, I know that I’m no longer alone.”*

This seems to be a common feeling among the group. As another nurse put it:

“Before I was obsessed by the fear of not being up to performing a task and loosing my job. Now I feel more motivated and confident. It’s as if I’m 25 again!”

This vision is shared also by the director of the hospital:

“Older workers are often scared to lose their job, they strive to adapt to the new requirements and they fear the younger, skilled staff. They need to overcome their fears and acquire self-confidence. Alliance for Work has shown that they can still learn and beat the competition!”

Essentially, *Alliance for Work* is not only about overcoming fears and increasing self-esteem, but it is also about surmounting a traditional mindset, inherited from the old, communist regime. Andrzej Niderla, from the OPZZ Trade Union explains:

“The over 45s lived in a time when everything was owned by the State and everybody had a job. Unemployment is a new concept for older workers. That’s why, if they lose their job, they don’t know what to do, they normally sit and wait for things to change. In this situation, it is very important that somebody helps them to discover their own personal worth, to prove that they can still learn and work.”

Through the EQUAL Initiative, *Alliance for Work* has developed a new idea that has already changed the lives of many by bringing hope and breaking prejudices and negative attitudes. It is this innovative idea, combined with a strong spirit of partnership, that is set to make the project a successful and sustainable model for improving the employment prospects of older workers in Poland in the long-term.

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THE PORTUGUESE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY MOVING UP A GEAR

Globalisation of markets, delocalisation of production, technological innovation and international competition: these may be difficult and general terms, but they represent a reality for a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the automotive industry in Portugal today.

Why are we talking about the plight of the automotive sector if, at a first glance, it seems to be a vital and dynamic branch of the economy? As a matter of fact, in Portugal the industry currently generates more than 4,000 million Euro per year and employs more than 40,000 workers in about 180 companies. Moreover, the automotive component industry continues to attract a large number of investors and the sector is strongly supported by funds from both the Portuguese government and European Union. With more than 80% of vehicle production sold to other European countries, the automotive industry is Portugal's biggest export sector, thus playing a strategic role in the economy and representing 7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

However, this is only the good side of the coin. In reality, the sector is not as booming as it used to be, and the smallest and most vulnerable enterprises and their workers face today a precarious and uncertain situation. In fact, the surge in international competition has entailed a clear shift in automotive production to Eastern European countries, and to Asia. This shift abroad of whole assembly lines affects other smaller and more dependent actors of the supply chain: as in a type of cascade, it touches on the first, second and third-tier suppliers. Most of the Portuguese component suppliers – those who produce small parts such as engine components, moulds, tools, electronics, plastic parts, seats, and climate control systems - are located in the lower levels of the supply chain. These SMEs – or 'component manufacturers' or 'manufacturing assemblers' as they are technically called - all have low levels of productivity compared to other European companies and increasingly have workers with outdated skills. They therefore need to develop and improve their capacity and skills, particularly in the areas of product development and technological innovation, in order to remain competitive in the market, raise the flexibility of their production and adapt to new economic requirements. All of this is believed to 'protect' these component SMEs – and most importantly their vulnerable workers who would otherwise be at risk of redundancy - by reducing their dependency on the central assembly line and decreasing the impact of any eventual shift in production abroad.

Against this background, the EQUAL partnership *INOCOP*, led by Global Change (a consultancy with extensive experience in working with enterprises, in cooperation with a wide range of partners working in the industrial sector in Portugal) was created with the aim of supporting component SMEs and their most vulnerable workers within the automotive sector. The overriding belief of the *INOCOP* partners was that the implementation of Research and Development (R&D) plans in automotive component manufacturers would enable these companies to introduce technical improvements and would give them a greater vocation for the development and engineering of more advanced products, thereby allowing the whole automotive sector to be more cohesive and competitive. Moreover, this emphasis on R&D and technological innovation would provide a clear area and impetus for upskilling SME workers in the sector, thereby improving their employment prospects.

"Changes in the economy generate problems for most SMEs in the automotive sector. This is due to the fact that bigger companies, big centres of production, are leaving the country. To solve this problem we have to establish a strong network that will support and help these SMEs and their workers. And to help them, we also have to develop R&D and inter-sectoral cooperation. Only in this way can we have a chance of seeing competitive products in a competitive and vigorous sector". Such a statement summarises the common feeling among the partners.

UNITY IS STRENGTH!

In order to overcome the challenges posed by increased international competition and the threat of production transfer, the partners of *INOCOP* have come up with a very simple but innovative idea based on a basic principle: unity is strength! They have in fact understood that cooperation between different business sectors and clusters within the automotive industry, mainly those relating to textiles, metal, electronic components, and moulds and plastics, constitutes the essential path that leads to the development and consolidation of the competitiveness of the sector.

As Pedro Miguel das Neves of Global Change puts it: *"We know that, together, SMEs can find effective solutions and innovative products to tackle the rigidity of the sector. Our goal is to bring together different companies operating in different branches so as to develop inter-sectoral cooperation and generate benefits for all workers within the automotive industry"*.

But how can various actors be brought together to establish sustainable cooperation? The partners of *INOCOP* have come up with an original and innovative idea: adopting and developing inter-sectoral Communities of Practice (CoPs). A CoP is a model based on different social learning processes and, at the same time, a new idea. It is neither a workshop, nor a group of professionals, it is not merely a network, nor an association. A CoP is a new approach to knowledge management based upon a basic, but strong principle: learning is *social* and comes largely from our experience of participating in daily life. The simplest way to illustrate this principle is to think of a group of people having a common interest in a particular subject or problem, and collaborating over an extended period of time to share ideas, find solutions, and build innovation. The *INOCOP* partners have rapidly understood that this original CoP model can be of great help if adapted to the automotive sector. They have therefore developed this model by establishing different CoPs, each of which involves staff from automotive SMEs to come up with new business creations or ideas.

But how exactly have these Communities been established? The *INOCOP* partners originally developed and sent a questionnaire to more than 100 automotive companies. The questionnaire aimed to classify the activities, products, knowledge areas and most frequent problems of those concerned. The answers gathered enabled the identification of common criteria for the development of a number of CoPs, the idea being that SMEs with sectoral affinities and/or the same problems could be grouped together within the same Community.

The creation of new business products through the CoP presumes that newborn ideas run through, what is known as, an 'innovation funnel', a procedure developed within each CoP emulating the production process of the automotive sector itself. This means that every product or idea goes through different steps, from its very conception, development and analysis to its implementation and launch on the market. This CoP "funnel" can be divided into three main phases, each one involving different actors and activities. The first step involves the staff of the SMEs working in different branches of the automotive sector. At this stage, workers from different companies share their knowledge and identify potential ideas or solutions that could bring an innovation to the sector (for example, the introduction of new materials, improvement of a process or introduction of ICT in the production chain). The second step involves representatives of SMEs, as well as external experts in the field, as well as members of the project. Thanks to their advice and help, the product is further developed and its feasibility is tested. During this phase in fact, SME staff and experts produce and develop together a 'prototype' aimed at testing and exploring both its potential and impact on the ground. The third and last stage of the CoP is the phase of validation, production and launch of the product. Apart from the experts, this step entails the participation of SME managers who have to decide if the idea is going to be adopted by the company and launched on the market. In this respect, the CoPs can be seen as 'factories' or 'laboratories' of new business products!

Through the whole CoP process, the role of the *INOCOP* partners is that of back-up, support and facilitation within the different CoPs. As Sandra Almeida, from the Managing Authority says:

“The project’s aim is to trigger a new dynamic. It is then up to the workers and managers themselves to design and develop their own products”.

Even if the full added value of this innovative model has not yet been fully materialised (owing to the relatively early stage of the project), the CoPs can already be seen as spaces where learning, empowerment, cooperation and innovation are stimulated through the participation in a collective process. What is even more important is that the CoPs stimulate forms of self-organisation and management, and create trust among the partners involved. As Pedro Miguel das Neves says:

“For people to cooperate firstly we need trust. In the present situation there is none, companies are merely concerned with their own business. Instead, the model that we are developing, thanks to EQUAL, focuses on interactions and one’s ability to develop activities and projects through cooperation between companies. The CoPs bind people together and facilitate relationship and trust. This dynamic is meant to overcome the inherent problems within a slow-moving traditional sector and help SMEs and their workers move towards a fast-moving and flexible economy”.

A KEY TO OPEN EVERY DOOR

As the partners have declared, the goal of the *INOCOP* project has been very ambitious, not only as it has aimed to develop an original concept and trigger a new dynamic, but also because it has targeted the vast majority of SMEs in the Portuguese automotive sector. Reaching such a vast audience would not have been possible without an extensive and broad partnership with complementary skills and competences linked to the sector.

Together with Global Change, the managing partner, the EQUAL partnership embraces a vast range of actors. Each of them has special competences and qualifications in different, but interconnected sectors of Portuguese business life: INETI a public centre, part of the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, is the largest R&D laboratory in Portugal; CENTIMFE and CITEVE are technological centres supporting the mouldings, plastic and textile sectors; ADETTI and IESE are both institutes for the development of communication and information technologies and socio-economic studies; while AFIA is the Portuguese Association of Automotive Suppliers linking and representing automotive suppliers, both at the national and international level.

The partners’ aim has been to design and realize R&D activities for SMEs, providing expertise and advice, sharing know-how directly with the companies involved in the project through the medium of the CoPs. The partners have given a range of inputs. They have been facilitators of a CoP, assuming the role of proxies or informers between the participating SMEs and the external world (institutions, experts and policy makers). Moreover, the *INOCOP* members have played an important role in the second phase of the Community process, that of developing a product prototype. At this stage, the input of the technological centres and institutes, in particular, has been of vital importance in assessing the feasibility of the business product and enhancing the effectiveness and originality of the developed idea.

Global Change and INETI have also elaborated a written methodology for the integration of knowledge generated in each CoP into organisational business practice and processes. This methodology explains in detail how to decrease obstacles, and increase trust and connectivity in order to implement new products and improve the performance of SMEs. It also highlights how existing tacit knowledge can be made explicit through the implementation of Communities, and how knowledge generated within the context of the CoPs can be incorporated into organisational business practice and processes. In other words, the tool explains every step to undertake and the right procedure to adopt to put into practice a new business product. This tool has proved extremely helpful for future mainstreaming opportunities, as the partners explain here:

“This written methodology is a tool that could perfectly apply to other sectors of the industry, especially those composed by different branches”.

Last but not least, the partners of *INOCOP* have worked to build a network, bringing expertise and assistance to the Portuguese automotive industry. This has been done in two ways. Firstly,

by involving key players within the sector, thematic experts, industry representatives, as well as policy makers (from ADI, the Governmental Organisation for Innovation and the Excellence Centre for the Automotive Industry). These are not involved in CoPs, but work together within a “High-level Advisory Board”, a body especially designed to foster the management and increase the impact of the project. Secondly, the partners are currently developing an Internet platform, which will comprise an extensive database with information on the automotive companies, research centres, academic institutes and consultancies. This tool is being developed in order to support the virtual functioning of the CoPs and is believed to be particularly helpful for SMEs looking for support or cooperation opportunities.

The experience of the partners working within *INOCOP* has been an essential asset to reach a maximum number of companies within the automotive sector. As Joaquina Barrulas from INETI puts it:

“The fundamental strength of our project stays in its structure: we are all different in our nature but somewhat complementary”.

In conclusion, the partners of *INOCOP* are now well placed to strengthen cooperation between automotive SMEs by developing a new dynamic and opening new doors through an exciting CoP model. This model now also means that vulnerable automotive workers have an increased opportunity to develop new business insights and skills, and ultimately to become more adaptive within their workplace. Everything is clearly in gear. It’s now just a question of stepping on the accelerator...

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ANNEX 2: FURTHER EXAMPLES FROM EQUAL AND ESF ARTICLE 6

A full list of restructuring-related EQUAL and Article 6 projects is presented below. This list includes the case study projects presented in Annex 1, as well as other projects that have contributed substantial material to this paper.

It must be emphasised that these projects have not been the only source of information. As outlined in Annex 3, this paper has drawn on a much wider source of project and programme information, as well as consultation with relevant European and national stakeholders for both EQUAL and Article 6.

Information on all aspects of EQUAL and Article 6 can be found on the programme websites. EQUAL: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm and Article 6: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/article_6_en.html.

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
Article 6	LISP - Local initiatives and social partnership: the management of change in local productive systems	Camera di Commercio Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura di Treviso	Italy	Federico Callegari tel.: 00390422595111	Federico.callegari@tv.camcom.it	Camera di Commercio Industria, Artigianato, Agricoltura, Piazza Borsa 3 31100 Treviso Italia	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project
EQUAL	Midlands Engineering Industries Redeployment Group Ltd (MEIRG)	Midlands Engineering Industries Redeployment Group Ltd	UK-GB	Derges Phil tel.: 00441332244058	phil.derges@rolls-royce.com	Midlands Engineering Industries Redeployment Group Ltd 1 Royal Standard Place NG1 6FZ Nottingham United Kingdom	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project
Article 6	Regional Key Competencies – A way to manage structural changes	EU Vest	Denmark	Henriette Hansen tel.: 004536973500	hha@euvest.com	Niels Bohrs Vej 6 6700 Esbjerg Denmark	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project
EQUAL	System przeciwdziałania powstawaniu bezrobocia na terenach słabo zurbanizowanych (Unemployment Prevention System in Underdeveloped Areas)	Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Administracji z siedzibą w Zamościu	Poland	Jerzy Kowalczyk tel.: 0048846382639	jerzykow@o2.pl	College of Management and Public Administration Akademicka Street 4 22-400 Zamość Poland	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project
EQUAL	The Route of the Professional Shipyard Worker in the Baltic Sea	Turku Adult Education Centre	Finland	Ismo Haapala tel.: 0035824119 503	Ismo.Haapala@tu.akk.fi	Turku Adult Education Centre Kärsämäentie 11 20360 Turku	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
						Finland	
EQUAL	Volante XXI	Associação Nacional de Transportadores Públicos Rodoviários de Mercadorias	Portugal	Francisco Costa Lopes tel.: 00351218544100	costa.lopes@antram.pt	Associação Nacional de Transportadores Públicos Rodoviários de Mercadorias Rua Conselheiro Lopo Vaz Lote A/B - Escritório A P-1800-142-LISBOA Lisboa Portugal	See Annex 1 for a Case Study on this project
EQUAL	Equality Creates Enterprise (LICEA - la Igualdad Crea Empresas en Asturias)	Principado de Asturias	Spain	Marta M. Rodríguez Díaz, Jose Manuel Pérez tel.: 0034985692227	igualdad2@principast.es ; valnalon@valnalon.com	Principado de Asturias Plaza de España, nº 5, 4ª Planta 33007 Oviedo Spain	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/entrep-06-es-valnalon_en.cfm
EQUAL	DECRIRE	Le FOREM	Belgium fr	Anny Poncin tel.: 003271206111	anny.poncin@forem.be	FOREM Conseil Boulevard Tirou 104 6000 Charleroi Belgium	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/etg3-suc-decrite-tackling.pdf
EQUAL	Nueva economía de acceso a la información (EN@E)	ADREN@E	Spain	Jaime Brull tel.: 0034915914256	jbrull@delibros.com	ADREN@E AGM - C/Rufino González 23, bis. 2ª planta. Nº 2 28037 Madrid Spain	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/etg3-suc-enaef.pdf
EQUAL	GENERA - Die Jungen und die Alten: Belegschaftsintegratio	Soziale Innovation GmbH	Germany	Cordula Sczesny tel.: 004923188086480	sczesny@soziale-innovation.de	Soziale Innovation Research & Consult GmbH	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/etg3-suc-

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
	n als Gemeinschaftsauf					Deutsche Str. 10 44339 Dortmund Germany	genera.pdf
EQUAL	Facilitation of lifelong education in rural conditions	Úřad práce v Semilech	Czech Republic	Kateřina Baladová, Tomáš Hájek tel.: 00420481311698	hajek@krakonos.com baladova@krakonos.com	Most ke Vzdělání o.s. (Bridge to Education) Office no. 209 Bítouchovská 1 513 01 Semily Czech Republic	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-cz-facilit_en.cfm
EQUAL	MünchenKompetent-Kompetenzentwicklung im Großraum München	equalmünchen GmbH	Germany	Maria João Rauch tel.: 00498923322007	rauch@equal-muenchen.de	Coordination Equal München GmbH Herzog-Wilhelm-Straße 15 D- 80331 München Germany	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-de-munch_en.cfm
EQUAL	"Adaptación y Gestión Social del Cambio en Cantabria", GESSCANT	Gobierno de Cantabria - DG de Trabajo	Spain	Sonia Cobo tel.: 0034942364145	equal@orecla.com	ORECLA Foundation Pasaje de Pena 4 Santander 39008 Spain	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-es-gesscant_en.cfm
EQUAL	Muutos voimaksi - Making a change a chance	Institute for Extension Studies, University of Tampere	Finland	Anneli Sorkio tel. 00358335517796	anneli.sorkio@uta.fi	Institute for Extension Studies Yliopistonkatu 56 University of Tampere FIN-33014 Tampere Finland	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-fi_en.cfm
EQUAL	Clare Life Long Learning Network	Co. Clare VEC Adult Education Service - Community Education Section	Ireland	Seamus Bane tel.: 00353656843490	admin@clarelearningsnetwork.org	Co. Clare VEC Adult & Community Education Service, Unit 10A Carmody St	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-ie-clare_en.cfm

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
						Business Park, Carmody St Ennis Ireland	
EQUAL	Sojusz dla pracy (Alliance for Work)	United Nations Development Programme	Poland	Kamila Jeżowska tel.: 0048225768191	kamila.jezowska@undp.org.pl	United Nations Development Programme Niepodległości 186 00-608 Warszawa Poland	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-pl-alliance_en.cfm
EQUAL	InoCoP - Inovação e Melhoria da Performance no Cluster Automóvel	Global Change - Consultores Internacionais Associados Lda	Portugal	Pedro Miguel das Neves tel.: 00351218521257	pdasneves@globalchange.pt	Global Change - Consultores Internacionais Associados Lda Edifício Lisboa Oriente Avenida Infante D. Henrique, 333H, Esc. 24 Lisboa 1800-297 Portugal	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/practical-examples/adapt-06-pt-inocop_en.cfm
EQUAL	Always Tourism	Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies	Greece	Anna Anyfanth tel.: 00302109223522	hatta@hatta.gr	Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies ΙΩΣΗΦ ΡΟΓΩΝ 11 117 43 ΑΘΗΝΑ Greece	No case study available
EQUAL	ArtCraftMetal	Turku Polytechnic, Continuing Education and Services	Finland	Katri Salonen tel.: 00358105535678	katri.salonen@turkuamk.fi	Turku Polytechnic, Continuing Education and Services Kaskenkatu 5 20700 Turku	No case study available

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
						Finland	
EQUAL	Capacity Building nel campo dell Agriturismo - C.B.A.	Centro Sviluppo Commercio e Turismo	Italy	Giovanna De Vita tel.: 0039824314131	ascescot@hotmail.com	Centro Sviluppo Commercio e Turismo (CE.S.CO.T. Campania) Via G. Rummo, 5 82100 Benevento Italy	No case study available
EQUAL	Competencies for Labour Market	RPIC-ViP s.r.o.	Czech Republic	Zdeněk Karásek tel.: 00420596616795	karasek@rpic-vip.cz	RPIC-ViP s.r.o. Výstavní 2224 709 00 Ostrava Czech Republic	No case study available
EQUAL	Crescita qualitativa e dimensionale delle imprese venete (Qualitative and Dimensional Growth of Venetian Companies)	Confindustria Veneto Siav Spa	Italy	Gabriella Bettiol tel.: 0039 0412917941	gabriella.bettiol@siaav.net	Confindustria Veneto Siav Spa Via Torino 151/c 30172 Mestre Italy	No case study available
Article 6	I-CAR-O: "Innovative Regional Strategies for the Sustainability of Employment in the European Automobile Industry"	Government of Navarre Department of Industry and Technology, Commerce and Trade	Spain	Mr. César Usoz tel.: 00 34 848 42 79 22	cusoz@cein.es	Parque Tomas Caballero 1-1º E-31005 Pamplona (Navarre) Spain http://icaro-project.blogspot.com	No case study available
Article 6	IMPLEMENT - An Integrated Mentoring Plan For the Local Effective	Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Greece	Eleni Foti tel.: 00302103382245	helfoti@acci.gr	7-9 Akademias str. 106 71 Athens Greece	No case study available

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
	Management of Employment						
EQUAL	L3 CLUB lifelong Learning Club	Citta' Studi S.p.a.	Italy	Federico Malavasi tel.: 0039 0138551016	Federico.Malavasi@cittastudi.org	(Citta' Studi) Corso G. Pella 2 13900 Biella Italy	No case study available
EQUAL	Lorraine, territoire de compétences	Conseil Régional de Lorraine (Regional Council)	France	Doan Tran tel.: 0033387336444	doan.tran@cr-lorraine.fr	Conseil Régional de Lorraine Place Gabriel Hocquard 57036 Metz France	No case study available
Article 6	M.I.R.E. "Monitoring Innovative Restructuring in Europe"	Syndex sa	France	Frédéric Bruggeman tel.: 0033144791507	f.bruggeman@syndex.fr	27 rue des Petites Ecuries 75010 Paris France	No case study available
EQUAL	Netzwerk Pflege und Integrierte Versorgung (InCareNet)	No leading organisation	Germany	Matthias Winter tel.: 0049404320128	mnwinter@isa-consult.de	ISA CONSULT GmbH Westring 26a 44787 Bochum Germany	No case study available
Article 6	O2K - Open to Knowledge Social Dialogue as an asset for Industrial clusters towards the knowledge economy	Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato Agricoltura (CCIAA) di Biella	Italy	Marco Ricchetti tel.: 00390153599311	marco.ricchetti@hermeslab.com	Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato Agricoltura Via Aldo Moro 15 Biella 13900 Italy	No case study available
Article 6	RE-FLEX	Centre Coordonné de l'Enfance asbl	Belgium fr	Reine Marcelis tel.: 003271308011	rmarcelis@ccenfan.be	Rue Grégoire Supart 15 B-6200 Châtelet Belgium	No case study available

EQUAL or Article 6	Name of the DP/Project	Managing organisation (MO)	Member State	Contact person	E-mail of the contact	Address of the contact	Reference/Link to the case study
EQUAL	Relanz@	AYTO. de el Provencio	Spain	Maria Martínez tel.: 0034967165023	AYTOPROVENCIO1@terra.es	AYTO. de el Provencio Plaza de los Alcaldes, 1 16670 El Provencio Spain	No case study available
EQUAL	Zukunft Grenzregion Oderland – Neumark (<i>Future of the Oderland NadOdrze Border Region</i>)	Deutsch-Polnische RegionalEntwicklung EWIV	Germany	Heike-Doreen Ehling tel.: 00493345249388	finanzen@depore.de	Deutsch-Polnische RegionalEntwicklung EWIV (DePoRE) Dorfstraße 56 16259 Neulewin Germany	No case study available
EQUAL	ΠΛΩ-ηγός (NAVIGATOR) “Management of Change in the Shipbuilding sector through the Development of the Workforce”	Syros Shipbuilding - Industrial Enterprises SA	Greece	Gregory Andronikos tel.: 00302281082555	neorkek@otenet.gr	Neoriou str. 1 Hermoupolis Syros 84100 Greece	No case study available

ANNEX 3: METHODOLOGY

This annex outlines the methodology used by GHK Consulting Ltd in preparing this paper (including the case studies). The main stages of the research and methods used to gather and analyse the information for this paper were as follows:

INITIATION DESK RESEARCH

Elaboration of the five main themes

Following consultations with the European Commission's EQUAL and Article 6 Units, the research work, the Policy Paper and the proposed recommendations are structured around five broad themes which mirror the proposed agenda of the four *Interactive sessions* of the European Commission's Restructuring Forum meeting on 4 and 5 December 2006:

- 1st - Instruments: effectiveness and pertinence
- 2nd - Re-conversion strategies and instruments' coordination
- 3rd - Partnerships and territorial dialogue
- 4th - Competitiveness centres, SME and territories¹⁷

This thematic outline is broadly preserved in this paper, except for a further division of the first theme into two headlines:

- Instruments: support systems and structures
- Instruments: direct support for individuals

Research and analysis of EQUAL projects

The main EQUAL projects dealing with restructuring were identified through an in-depth review of the project descriptions published on the EQUAL Common Database (ECDB), as well as previous research material and project visits.

Research and analysis of Article 6 projects

The research and analysis sample was the 36 Article 6 projects funded under the theme of 'Management of Restructuring' during 2004 and 2005. The information of the projects was gathered and analysed from the following information sources:

- Article 6 website (and publications therein);
- Project application forms;
- Project status, progress and final reports; and
- External evaluation report of the 2004 Article 6 projects.

WIDER CONSULTATION

Along with the Initial Desk Research, a number of wider consultation activities were undertaken, namely:

¹⁷ These themes are further explained and defined in the document "*Restructuring' Forum – 3rd Session: How dynamic regions face restructuring, the role of the European Social Fund and of the other Structural Funds*".

- A 'thematic survey' of the EQUAL Managing Authorities (MAs) and/or National Support Structures, representatives of the European Thematic Groups and restructuring-related National Thematic Networks. The survey comprised a questionnaire asking recipients to identify and provide information on suitable restructuring-related projects.
- Interview with the external evaluator of the Article 6 programme.
- Consultation with representatives of the EQUAL and Article 6 Units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.
- Attendance at the Restructuring Forum meeting on 18 July 2006.
- Attendance at the Adaptability Peer Review event organised by the Polish EQUAL Managing Authority on 3 and 4 October 2006.
- Attendance at the 'Innovative Approaches to the Management of Change' seminars organised by the Article 6 Unit of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities on 24 and 25 October 2006.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

The output of the research and ongoing consultation was a summary of the key features of each project, and from these a selection of six Articles 6 and 16 EQUAL projects for a telephone interview. The purpose of the telephone interviews was to explore in greater depth the experiences and good practice of the projects in relation to restructuring. They also helped to identify and start formulating 'policy messages' for the paper.

Based on the telephone interviews, two Article 6 and four EQUAL projects were selected for a further round of data collection necessary for the development of case studies. These six projects were also invited to the thematic workshop, described below.

INITIAL DRAFTING OF THE PAPER AND RESTRUCTURING WORKSHOP

A first draft of the paper was prepared and discussed at a 'Restructuring Workshop' organised by GHK Consulting Ltd and hosted by the EQUAL and Article 6 Units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities on 25 October 2006. The aim of the workshop was to exchange experiences and ideas in relation to restructuring with the view to refining and elaborating the paper. The workshop was attended by:

- Representatives of the six case study projects;
- Representatives from the EQUAL, Article 6 and Restructuring Units of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; and
- Representatives from the Committee of the Regions and Flemish Belgian European Social Fund Agency.

REFINEMENT OF THE PAPER AND FURTHER CONSULTATION

The paper was elaborated and refined based on the comments made in the Restructuring Workshop. It was then circulated to a wider audience as part of a further consultation exercise:

- Representatives of the 22 interviewed projects;
- EQUAL Managing Authorities (MAs) and/or National Support Structures, representatives of the European Thematic Groups and restructuring-related National Thematic Networks; and

- Attendees at the Restructuring Workshop.

The paper was finalised and published based on the comments received during this final round of consultation.