



Bi-Lateral Cooperation between Hungary and Poland

Case Study

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Executive Summary

Hungary and Poland have a long tradition of networking and cooperating together and the development of National Rural Networks in both countries has created a vehicle to continue this historic relationship. The two countries signed a joint cooperation agreement in September 2010 agreeing to work together to promote cooperation and disseminate best practice on a range of selected themes. The NSUs and MAs from both countries have met regularly and a broad range of organisations have come together through a series of events organised by the NRNs.

The stakeholders involved believe that networking bi-laterally has helped strengthen the existing networks and built new relationships between the two countries. This has encouraged the development of a similar agreement between Hungary and Slovakia. These cooperative activities emerged as a result of the strong informal ties between the people involved as well as similarities in NRN priorities. The somewhat bureaucratic processes utilised during the operation of the MAs have however created a few obstacles to the delivery of effective networking. The Polish NSU has recently undergone major structural changes and the intensiveness of the bi-lateral networking and joint actions has decreased.

Methodology

This case study has been compiled through the use of available literature, telephone-interviews and correspondence with the people involved in networking.

Background

Despite not being neighbouring countries Hungary and Poland have a longstanding tradition of bi-lateral networking and strategic cooperation which dates back to the middle ages. Their monarchic dynasties were once connected through marriage and Hungarian nobleman Stefan Batory was elected to become the Polish king in the XVIth century. In more recent times Poles supported Hungarians against communist repression during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Launching the NRNs in both countries has offered another opportunity to continue these ties in a new context; consequently in September 2010 they signed a joint cooperation agreement.

Participants of networking

Hungarian Polish networking was originally initiated by the NSUs who now support a range of network stakeholders including MAs, farmers' organisations, NGOs – especially those representing rural youth, LAGs, researchers and farm advisory services. The NSUs and MAs are the key stakeholders in the process and have facilitated networking between members.

Objectives

The general objectives of this bi-lateral cooperation are networking, learning and facilitating exchanges between HU and PL network members. Specifically they are focused upon:

- Promoting the co-operation projects of HU and PL LAGs;
- Developing co-operation between farmer and young farmer organisations;
- Facilitating the dissemination of best practice in production and marketing of local products;
- Disseminating best practice in production and usage of renewable and sustainable energy;
- Exchanging and disseminating professional methodologies for small rural settlements and increasing the capacity of rural communities to develop project applications;
- Exchanging and disseminating good practice in renewal and maintenance of rural public services in small settlements;
- Identifying and disseminating good practice gained from SME development projects in small settlements.

The catalyst for Hungary to cooperate with the Polish NRN was linked with the key priority of the development of international relations in its newly reorganised structure.

Process and main activities

The cooperation was initiated by signing an official agreement between the two General Secretaries of the respective HU and PL agricultural ministries in September 2010 during the annual Hungarian Rural Day. The document offers a set of objectives and a bi-lateral cooperation framework that has no determined expiry date. According to the agreement joint professional forums and studies have been planned by the two NRNs. A detailed action plan has also been agreed which outlines common undertakings in the form of various events.

To date the following official bi-lateral meetings have taken place between NSUs and MAs:

- September 2010: Signing of the bi-lateral agreement between NRNs
- December 2010: Meeting in Warsaw to discuss the potential for cooperation in relation to the Leader approach, support for young farmers, renewable energy sources in rural areas and marketing regional and local products.
- February 2011: Meeting in Warsaw devoted to strengthening bi-lateral contacts and agreeing common initiatives.
- June 2011: Meeting in Poland focused on preparing the event held in the European Parliament.

As well as these structured meetings representatives of the networks have had the opportunity to meet during ENRD and other related thematic events. The NRNs have also organised a series of events involving actors from different sectors from both countries, dealing with the themes that were listed under the objectives of the agreement. Most commonly these have been conferences, study trips and a fair. During these activities there was considerable focus on creating direct contact opportunities in formal and informal networking settings. The preparatory work on the content of these events was supported by the working groups dealing with the relevant thematic topic and consisting of different actors from both countries.

Resources

It is difficult to estimate the exact costs of networking between the countries as it involves numerous stakeholders and communication channels. The following examples may however illustrate the spending of the HU NRN on selected activities:

- Visit of the HU delegation in Warsaw: 417 210 HUF
- Participation of the HU delegation in the Agrotavel Fair 373 530 HUF
- Study tour of the HU delegation to Poland 1 726 505 HUF

'Added value' of networking

Representatives of both networks state that this kind of cooperation helps strengthen the existing networks and builds new relationships between the two countries. The cooperation is not solely based on the exchange between NSUs but also involves a wide range of actors from the public, private and civic sectors and therefore also covers a number of the specialist topics they deal with.

Because of the regular networking and exchanges between countries a range of activities have been jointly organised, some of which are laid out below:

- **October 2010: Study trip by a Polish delegation to the Hatvan micro-region.** This visit brought together Hungarian and Polish LAGs and included a conference on the measures of the Hungarian RDP, the history of LAGs, and the tasks of the Hungarian NRN.
- **March 2011: Conference 'CAP beyond 2013: Young Farmers in the Central-European Region'.** Held in Lajozsmizse, Hungary the conference highlighted the Polish-Hungarian international cooperation and was organised jointly with AGRYA.
- **April 2011: AGROTRAVEL - the 3rd International Rural Tourism and Agrotourism Fair.** Hungary was the official partner country for this event held in Kielce, Poland. Polish organisers arranged a stand for the Hungarian exhibitors to showcase Hungarian agrotourism services, handicrafts and local products.
- **April 2011: Conference on Renewable Energy Resources.** This event was held in Miskolc, Hungary and focused on the exchange of experiences and knowledge in the field of renewable energy, including a study visit to a model biogas plant organised by the Hungarian Forest Research Institute.
- **April 2011: Conference on renewable energy sources** in Hajduszoboszlo, Hungary.
- **November 2011: Youth in the Countryside conference.** This Budapest located event brought together representatives of rural youth organisations and networks from HU, PL and several other countries.
- **December 2011: Conference "What does the countryside mean to me?"** in Budapest, Hungary. The event focused on summarising the main achievements of the HU NRN. Polish guests from different institutions were invited to contribute to the topic of developing agrotourism.
- **February 2012: Conference "The future of small farms in the EU".** The participants agreed the basis of a common viewpoint on the future of the CAP with special emphasis on small farms.

According to the NRNs these events and meetings offered a space for the participating stakeholders to make both formal and informal contacts, to find new information, share their experiences, identify best practices and define a common strategic approach to tackle identified issues. In particular the emphasis has been put on formulation of a common strategic position with regard to the future CAP.

This bi-lateral cooperation also became an inspiration for a similar agreement between the Hungarian and Slovak NRNs which was signed in March 2012. Slovak representatives had participated in some of the bi-lateral activities between Hungary and Poland such as the study trips for LAGs with the intention that it may result in expanding the cooperation to all four Visegrad Countries.

What supports networking?

Embedded largely in the historical context, the cooperation between Hungarian and Polish networks emerged as a result of the strong informal ties between the people involved¹ within the new institutional framework offered by the NRNs. Other supporting factors are the similarity in NRN priorities in both countries. An additional joint context emerged in the rotating Hungarian and Polish Presidencies of the Council of the European Union in 2011 and the shared strategic views on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy.

What networking obstacles exist?

The divergent operational models of the NSUs and MAs have been identified as the main factor hindering effective networking. The contacts between the HU and PL NSUs have mostly been based on informal relationships and voluntary activities. In comparison the MAs have established and formalised structures and are characterised by bureaucratic processes.

The relative dependence of the NSU on the MA and therefore its bureaucratic processes slows down the process of decision making and the flexibility of networking between both countries. The requirement for official communication such as formal letters, invitations etc. has been particularly problematic. It is possible this was the main reason why both NSUs failed to organise the conference in the European Parliament during the rotation of the presidency in July 2011.

After the end of the Polish presidency the intensiveness of the bi-lateral networking and joint actions decreased. The Polish NSU has undergone major structural changes recently and during the transition period the focus has shifted to priorities outside the cooperation with Hungary.

¹ The cooperation between particular people and institutions had been existed prior to establishment of the NRNs.