Evaluation of Competition-Based Models in Regional Policy - the Case of the Regional Programme for Rural Areas in Schleswig-Holstein (Objective 5b)

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1 Introduction

In the 90s, regional policy in Europe and Germany is challenged by a series of events and socioeconomic trends which have changed the Community while at the same time opening up new prospects1. On one hand, they are determined by an increasing differentiation of regional problems which are connected with German unification and the integration of middle and eastern European countries. Besides typical underdeveloped rural areas and regions seriously affected by industrial decline there are arising new problems for instance in border regions or in areas weakened by the decline of defence industries and installations. But also among the classical problem regions there are much more different problem situations concerning the degree of industrialization and sectoral differentiation of monostructures as in the past.

On the other hand, increasing differentiation in the development of enterprises connected with the technological and organisational change in the national economy has taken effect as a new challenge for regional policy. They are noticeable in a strengthening internationalisation of production and sales of more and more economic sectors and lead to much more differentiation in the demands of enterprises on the regions according to the sector and type of enterprise as before.

From a point of view of regional science, the differentiation of regional problems as well as the locational demands of enterprises make it necessary to include the regions more and more in regional policy2. This applies especially because in the regions the concrete deficits and the demand for promotion is recognised directly and because in the regions new demands on the instruments of regional policy make itself felt firstly.

In the past decade, also in practical policy have been many discussions to adjust regional policy according to the recent socio-economic trends. Central themes are the strengthening of the regional endogenous potential and regionalization of regional policy. Early examples in Germany are the regional conferences in North Rhine Westphalia. More recent, such activities can be found in the new German Länder, for example in Saxony-Anhalt. Central point is the development of regional development strategies by local actors. Projects derived out of these conceptions can be considered preferentially for promotion measures3. Thus the regional preferences are included indirectly in regional policy.

Another way to strengthen the regional participation has been followed in Schleswig-Holstein. In 1989 the government of Schleswig-Holstein has designed two regional programmes for underdeveloped rural

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areas at the Western Coast and in the Schleswig Region. These programmes introduced the participation of the regional authorities in the project selection process. In 1995 they have been combined within one single Regional Programme. Other regions have become eligible for the new programme. Based on the experience of the first regional programmes, it has a further-developed Schleswig-Holstein wide competition-based model of project selection with a strong participatory approach. Such comparable approaches can also be found in Lower Austria4.

Commissioned by the Schleswig-Holstein Ministry for Economic Affairs (Dr. Haass), the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) Berlin developed an evaluation design covering ex-ante evaluation, monitoring and ex-post evaluation of this programme5. On the basis of this design, the DIW completed an interim evaluation in summer 1997. The programme is cofinanced by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) within the framework of Objective 5b. Therefore, an ex-post evaluation of the ERDF-projects within this programme is forming part of the intermediate evaluation of the Objective-5b-Programme in Schleswig-Holstein6.

Output of this evaluation task has been three reports: an evaluation design covering ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post evaluation, an interim evaluation of the Regional Programme (1994-1996) and an interim evaluation of the ERDF-projects within this programme.

The regionalization of regional policy in general and especially in such a competition-based model puts new high demands on the evaluator. In this participatory context evaluation of projects is a complex issue. The evaluation has to take into account external requirements of the Länder government and the EU on evaluation and recommendations should be acceptable for the actors, technically easy and implementable.

In a first step the evaluation concepts and methodologies as well as the indicators used so far in Schleswig-Holstein have been analyzed on the basis of a desk study, of interviews with relevant actors and the participation of the evaluator as an observer at the different stages of project selection. This analysis covered ex-ante and ex-post evaluation as well as monitoring. As the Regional Programme with its competition-based model of project selection has a very special approach we looked for similar examples of programmes throughout Europe for comparison. As the different evaluation methods currently used in Europe differ in terms of their usability under different conditions, their coverage of effects measured, their costs and prerequisites concerning the data, they have been proved against the background of the specific programme. The methodologies analyzed cover the full range between micro-approaches, statistical approaches, multipliers and coefficient methods and econometric models.

Whereas new models for the ex-ante evaluation of projects and the monitoring had to be developed, for the ex-post evaluation an adapted multi-indicator microapproach on the basis of surveys and case studies has been suggested and used at the final stage of the project. Such micro-approaches are usually applied if different effects have to be disentangled on a disaggregated level as it is the case here.

Firstly, this paper gives an overview of the importance of the different types of evaluation and their importance for competition-based models of regional policy. Than the regulation of the Regional Programme and its project selection procedure used so far in this participatory context are described. Although this procedure seems to be effective some problems have been identified. As the project selection procedure is crucial for the success of the programme this paper is focusing on the proposals towards ex-ante evaluation of projects, i.e. the project selection procedure. The last paragraph is dedicated to the implementation of the recommendations.

2 Different Types of Evaluation and Competition-Based Models

In recent years evaluation research has experienced a strong push. At the same time a further differentiation of methodologies can be realised. Evaluation is possible in different stages: before the start of intervention (ex-ante), on-going and after the finishing of measures (ex-post). Decisive for this differentiation is the position of the evaluator in time. Another differentiation by the object of evaluation considers the different aggregations at which the measures can be analysed. They include the intervention as a whole (macro level) or the particular projects of a programme (micro level). At macro level the whole structure of the programme and its regulations are evaluated, at micro level it is the success of the individual project or measure.

The importance of the particular type of evaluation defined by stadium and object can be different according to type of intervention or measure. Within regional policy three main types of intervention can be distinguished: criteria selection, lump sum and competition-based models. The first model is traditionally the most important one. Funds are allocated at a project which meets the criteria which have been developed before by the body responsible for the programme. Within the second type the beneficiary gets a lump sum and is selecting projects totally by his own. Competition-based models have elements of both models. Local authorities are responsible for the development of project ideas and project implementation. The single projects from different regions/authorities are competing with each other at interregional level. The projects with the highest possible contribution to the objectives of the programme are selected. The Regional Programme in Schleswig-Holstein can be clearly assigned to this group.

Such a competition-based model of regional policy as the Regional Programme in Schleswig-Holstein puts specific demands on the importance of the different types of evaluation (cf. fig. 1). Crucial for the success or failure of the programme is the "right" project selection. Especially high demands have to be put on the ex-ante evaluation of projects. Evaluation has to be aimed at the potential contribution of the
projects to the objectives of the programme. A confrontation with the costs should allow at least rough estimations of the cost-benefit-relation. This means at the side of the programme management that a clear and understandable definition of objectives of the programme has to be formulated. This is important for all stages of evaluation. An estimation of the contribution of the projects requires a derivation of suitable indicators. These indicators can be qualitative or quantitative. In the on-going evaluation (monitoring) of competition-based models it is necessary to get information about the suitability of the programme structure. Thus the missing of objectives can be avoided. It is necessary to prepare information about the granting, about the stadium of project realisation and the immediate output. At ex-post evaluation of competition-based models the individual projects are in the focus of interest. Thus it will be possible to improve the precision of the project selection procedure by confrontation of the ex-ante estimation with the results really achieved.

3 The Regional Programme

The Regional Programme is financing municipal and regional projects in the field of economy-related infrastructure, e.g. industrial sites, but also projects in the field of training and tourism. The list of projects co-financed so far ranges from industrial sites, sewage plants, docks, footpaths, training facilities, museums, etc. "Regional guiding projects" with effects in many areas and model character have priority. The main objective of the programme is job creation and the improvement of qualification. Besides this, it has many different aims: the promotion of the rural structural change, the improvement of technology transfer, research and development, regional marketing, information and communication, conservation and protection of the environment.

Apart from these multidimensional objectives and the variety of projects the Regional Programme has another speciality: The projects are chosen by a Schleswig-Holstein-wide competition of projects with a strong participatory approach. The participatory approach is meant to introduce and foster regional networks and dialogue processes between economic and social actors in the regions. In the gist of it, this new institutional arrangement is meant to complement the traditional top down policy making style in regional policy by bottom up processes hinging on the participation of social and economic actors, regional and local authorities.

Applications by local authorities and private investors for funding from the Regional Programme have to be approved in three stages. First, they are discussed (and need to be approved) by a Regional Advisory Board in each of the four regions, which puts the projects on a regional priority list. The Regional Advisory Boards are composed of representatives of almost all regional economic and social actors, e.g. politicians, district administrators, representatives of chambers of industry and commerce, job centres, etc. The Schleswig-Holstein Ministry for Economic Affairs in co-operation with other ministries evaluates the projects concerning their general applicability for the Regional Programme. On the basis of the regional priority lists and project information sheets, an Interministerial Working Group - a body consisting of representatives of almost every Land ministry and the Regional Advisory Boards -
selects the projects finally. Representatives of the Regional Advisory Boards are taking part in this Interministerial Working Group, but they have only an advisory vote. Fig. 2 and 3 explain the overall procedure and the timetable used so far.

This specific project selecting procedure of the Regional Programme in Schleswig-Holstein has almost no examples. Success or failure of the programme is depending on an efficient ex-ante evaluation of projects. Although the procedure used so far seems to be effective, some problems have been identified:

i) The very complex objectives of the programme require a multiple evaluation of all projects by the relevant actors which is almost not possible so far based on the provided project information.

ii) Not all dimensions of the complex system of objectives are equally included in the evaluation of projects.

iii) Concerning the derivation of projects out of the different objectives the procedure is not transparent enough.

iv) The high political priority of the regional vote is taken into account only indirectly.

v) Criteria for the identification of prioritised "regional guiding projects", i.e. projects with effects in many areas, are not clearly defined.

To get a clear and concise picture of the outcome of the Regional Programme and this way also an idea of the precision of the project selection procedure, DIW carried out an interim ex-post evaluation of the Programme. From 1994 until 1996, 58 projects have been financed by the Regional Programme with about 87 Mill. DM. The investment volume was about 156 Mill. DM.

The ex-post evaluation came to the result, that the orientation of the programme towards infrastructure meets the basic weaknesses of the rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. This is supported by results of empirical analyses of causes for economic and social differences among regions. This is valid not only for economy-related infrastructure but also for "soft" household-oriented infrastructure (training facilities, museums, etc.) which fulfil an important function for regional specialisation. The variety of possible projects makes it possible to choose such projects that fit into the regional strengths and weaknesses.

The data of grants and payments show a good acceptance of the programme by regional actors. Industrial sites and other projects of economy-related infrastructure have a reasonable preponderance (more than 80 per cent of the funds allocated). Thus the given target of programme management to lay the focal point in this field has been met. There is the danger, that by a too strong control of the project selection process the region's way to soft projects is bared. The emphasis on economy-related projects should be maintained but the room for manoeuvre of soft projects (e.g. tourism, training facilities, technology transfer, etc.) should be increased. Decisive for the selection of a particular project should be their suitability into the regional development strategy.
According to the objectives of the programme regulation the employment and qualification effect moved into the focus of the evaluation. Quantitative estimations of the employment effect of the programme have been possible only in some fields, but the qualitative analysis comes to a general positive assessment of the programme, although the qualification target has been missed by the given project structure. Thus the most important factor for the overall efficiency of the programme is the project selection procedure.

4 Recommendations

DIW developed an evaluation design for each stage of the evaluation process. As the choice of projects is crucial for success or failure of the whole programme, the paper is focusing on the ex-ante evaluation of projects, i.e. the project selecting procedure of the programme. As the current regulations of the Regional Programme are valid until 1999, the recommendations of the evaluator have been developed for the time until 1999 and for a revised edition of the programme after 1999. The task was to improve the information basis of all actors, to increase transparency and to improve the influence of the regions within the project selection. Additionally, the efficiency of the selection procedure is depending from a real competition between the projects. It is necessary to attract actively interesting projects for the Regional Programme by a direct appeal of potential partners. The supply of projects is depending on the fact that the procedure is regarded as fair.

A first group of recommendations - mainly concerning the improvement of the information basis - is immediately implementable. A first step is the improvement of the project information sheet as the basis for the decision. Apart from a minimum information about the project, details of the job creation (newly established and maintained jobs) and the qualification effect as well as an evaluation of the regional importance should be included there. As far as possible, the job creation of standard projects, such as industrial sites, should be quantified, for other projects it should be at least qualitatively described. The description of the regional importance should refer to the relationship of the project towards the regional economic situation and the according regional development strategy. Bases for regional development strategies are first SWOT-Analyses provided by the evaluator which have to be completed and evaluated by the regional actors now. In the meantime some regions have started a process of developing their own regional development strategy. The suitability of the projects of the Regional Programme in these regional development strategies will be the evaluation basis for the regional priority lists.

But these short-range improvements do not solve the basic problems of the ex-ante evaluation of projects. Within the existing project selection procedure, each actor has to evaluate each project concerning its contribution to a complicated system of many objectives - also of those he is not specialised in. Indicators do not exist, job creation and general "regional sensefulness" are the only criteria that count. This is one of the crucial problems. Basic hypothesis of the newly developed procedure is that if each actor only evaluates the objective he is best qualified for will bring the best
evaluation results. The same is true for the regional representatives who will evaluate the projects according to their better knowledge of the region and suitability of the projects into regional development strategies.

Therefore DIW developed a special procedure for the ex-ante evaluation of projects within the framework of the existing participatory context. The aim of the so-called "Expert Opinion Matrix" is transparency within the evaluation of projects concerning their contribution to a complex system of objectives.

The objectives can be derived from the programme planning documents. In the "Expert Opinion Matrix" each objective is named. Thus the equal consideration of all aim dimensions will be secured. Within this procedure it is possible to picture the importance of the different aims by setting the weights accordingly. This is more or less a political question. The weights have to be fixed for a certain period. According to its high political priority, the regional vote is gaining importance as it is included directly in the evaluation process, having equal rights.

The Land government would be responsible to decide the question who will evaluate which aim. The responsible person will get the task to develop a priority list concerning this particular objective and covering all projects. For instance, the Ministry for the Protection of the Environment will be responsible for the contribution of each project to the conservation / protection of the environment dimension. Now every actor will evaluate only this dimension of objectives he is best qualified for.

Each Regional Advisory Board is developing their regional priority list as before, but now these priority lists will have equal rights in the selection procedure as the other expert objective dimensions. The position of a particular project on the regional priority list - i.e. its regional suitability - will be directly part of the overall evaluation of the project.

Of course, the ex-ante evaluation of each project even only concerning one objective will be a difficult task. As the contribution of each project is seldom really clear, a rough division of the effect will be possible and sufficient:

- no contribution
- some contribution
- high contribution
- very high contribution

The Ministry for Economic Affairs is collecting the different expert and regional evaluations and assembles them in the "Expert Opinion Matrix". Thus all opinions are brought together in a transparent way. Each objective dimension is forming a column, each project has a row (see fig. 4). In each field the evaluation of the contribution of the project to this particular objective (see above) can be read. Now it is possible to weigh the different projects with one another and to develop an overall priority list.
Apart from such a free procedure using the matrix only for information and transparency reasons, it is also possible to establish an overall priority list by a more formal procedure. The contribution of each project could be scored. No contribution rates zero points, a very high contribution scores 3 points. Together with the weights a "formal" priority list can be build. Fig. 5 shows an example with 10 projects from one region. Independent from the used formal or informal procedure, the overall priority list will be discussed at the meeting of the Interministerial Working Group. On the basis of this discussion the projects are selected finally.

5 Outlook

The competition-based model of regional policy such as the Regional Programme in Schleswig-Holstein puts new high demands on the evaluator. This applies especially to the ex-ante evaluation of projects. If the regionalization of regional policy and the participation of regional actors have to be realized beyond the formulation of non-committal objectives, complex evaluation procedures are not avoidable. The Regional Programme in Schleswig-Holstein shows that such a competition-based model can be a practicable way to strengthen the direct regional participation in regional policy. The problems within the project selection procedure used so far seem to be solvable.

The evaluation reports have been finished in a difficult time as the budget of Regional Programme was heavily under political pressure. Even the immediate cut of expenditures for this programme has been discussed. The evaluation report has been presented at the Project Steering Committee, the Monitoring Committee (Objective 5b), the Interministerial Working Group and at the Regional Advisory Boards throughout Schleswig-Holstein. Because of the political discussions about the general future of the Regional Programme it has found great resonance and acknowledgement. The European Commission has assessed that the evaluation of the 5b-Programme is of high quality and fits the terms of reference. Within the Land and the regions it was very important to have an independent view on the programme. Apart from this, this was the first ex-post evaluation of the Regional Programme at all. The evaluation result has surely made a contribution that the Regional Programme is said to be "rescued" now at least until 1999.

As a proof that being considered useful, most of the short-range recommendations have been widely discussed among the regional authorities in order to develop the Regional Programme. First steps to improve the information basis of all actors involved have already been taken. The project information sheet has been improved thus including more realistic information about the effects expected covering all objective dimensions of the programme. The job creation effect is at least qualitatively described if not quantified. Most of the regions started a moderated process in order to develop their specific regional development concept based on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses provided by the evaluator. They will form the basis for the assessment of the regional suitability of projects in the future.

Apart from the heavy discussions about the future of the Regional Programme in the short run new concepts for the time after 1999 are about to be developed now. It is discussed that most of the other
promotion measures of Schleswig-Holstein will be rearranged below the roof of the Regional Programme. Then the regulation and project selection procedure of the Regional Programme will apply to all these programs. Thus the improvement of the project selection procedure, i.e. the ex-ante evaluation of projects as recommended here via the „expert opinion matrix“, will gain importance and it is sure that the proposal will have to be adopted according to the new objectives and project types.
Fig. 1: Importance of the evaluation types within competition-based models
Fig. 2: Procedure of the Regional Programme

1. Application
   Consultation and Assistance during the whole Process

2. Refering of the Project Proposal

3. Request for expert assessment

4. Expert assessment

5. Information about first expert evaluation and project assistance

6. Submission of the project proposal for regional priority setting

7. Submission of the Regional Priority List

7a. Decision Proposal

8. Project selection and release of funds

Responsible Departments at the Ministries

Coordination Unit at Economic Ministry

Regional Offices

Interministerial Working Group

Regional Advisory Boards
## Fig. 3: Timetable of the Regional Programme

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
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<td><strong>Presentation of Project Proposals at the Regional Offices (for funding in the following year)</strong></td>
<td>First evaluation of the proposals and referring to the Coordination Unit at the Economic Ministry</td>
<td>First assessment by the responsible experts</td>
<td>Development of Regional Priority Lists by the Regional Advisory Boards</td>
<td>Selection of projects by the Interministerial Working Group</td>
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**Fig. 4: Expert Opinion Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Regional Priority</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Equal Opportunities</th>
<th>Rural Structural change</th>
<th>Technology Transfer</th>
<th>R&amp;D</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Information/Communication</th>
<th>Protection of the Environment</th>
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¹) Contribution: some / high / very high / no contribution.
### Fig. 5: Example for an Expert Opinion Matrix with 10 Projects from one Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Regional Priority</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Equal Opportunities</th>
<th>Rural Structural Change</th>
<th>Technology Transfer</th>
<th>R &amp; D</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Information/Communication</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Weights (per cent) | 20 | 20 | 20 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

1) These projects are scored with zero points by the other Regional Advisory Boards.

The higher the overall score the higher priority. Projects with no contribution zero points. 1 point: some contribution; 2 points: high contribution; 3 points: very high contribution.