

LOCAL

PARTNERSHIPS IN EUROPE



AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Third Local Report Enschede, The Netherlands

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THE COPENHAGEN CENTRE

List of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Description of the partnership project <i>ACE – Activiteiten Centrum Enschede Noord</i>	2
2.1. Context	2
2.2. Purpose	3
2.3. Participants	4
2.4. Organisation	5
2.5. Outcomes	5
3. Analysis of the partnership experience	6
3.1. Process development	7
3.2. Cross sector collaboration/ partnership outcomes	9
3.3. Internalising new knowledge into partner organisations	9
3.4. Transfer of experience to a wider audience	11
4. Reflections	12
Annex: List of interviewees	13

1. Introduction

More than ever partnership is being promoted as the development approach of our time. The EU Social Funds increasingly relies on joint problem-solving approaches, where a broad variety of stakeholders take active part. And more recently, on a global level, the Johannesburg Summit in the summer of 2002 underlined the growing demand for cross-sector solutions to help fight poverty and environmental degradation.

Throughout Europe various forms of partnership experimentation have already taken place in recent years. Accordingly, it has been affirmed that partnerships between different segments of society can give access to their respective, unique comparative advantages. At the same time, however, it has become obvious that a more detailed and thorough understanding is required if partnership success is to be guaranteed. And if the partnership trend, as referred to by some, should become more than simply rhetoric, there is a need to investigate and disseminate concrete lessons learned. This is the exact motivation behind the present study.

The action-research project Local Partnerships in Europe (LPE) is coming to an end in March 2003. Since early 2000 a team of researchers have been studying a variety of local cross-sector partnerships in six different countries (Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Germany), in order to improve the understanding of partnership as an innovative form of collaboration in the combat of social exclusion.

The design of the research has allowed for repetitions accumulation of data and participants reflections throughout a two-year lifecycle of the partnership projects. This longitudinal perspective on partnership development offers unique and valuable insights about partnership processes and dynamics.

The present report is the final in a series of three reports from Enschede, The Netherlands.

The First Local Report from Enschede, The Netherlands (based on research conducted in November 2000) focused on the start-up phase and the early functioning of the partnership.

The Second Local Report from Enschede (based on research conducted in November 2001) took a closer look at the different kinds of results obtained. Also more room was given for reflections about the dynamics of the ACE partnership; how, in concrete terms, has cooperation with representatives from different sectors been finding its form.

The present Third Local Report from Enschede (based on research conducted in October 2002) will draw a line from the second local report to the present situation. It will look into, if and how partnership experiences have been internalised into the participating organisations, and to what extent the ACE experience has produces *partnership learning* for the participants.

The report is partly based on written material, but primarily on focus group discussions with partnership representatives, as well as individual interviews with more senior level officials from the participating organisations, or other relevant external respondents. All interviews are conducted in October 2002.¹

¹ The methodology of the LPE action-research (available on www.copenhagencentre.org) builds on concepts deriving from the report *Partnership Alchemy – New Social Partnerships in Europe*, Jane Nelson & Simon Zadek for The Copenhagen Centre, 2000. Hence, presentations of research results are in all LPE-reports structured according to *dynamic pathways* proposed as a methodological tool of analysis (e.g. communication, leadership etc. which are highlighted in the text in chapter 3). Central to the Partnership Alchemy report is also

Local reports from all participating countries will form the basis of a concluding publication on European partnership experiences, to be published early 2003.

2. Description of the partnership project ACE – *Activiteiten Centrum Enschede Noord*

The partnership formed around the project ACE consists of public social and labour market authorities, various local businesses and two ethnic minority organisations. The project has several activities which all aim at reducing unemployment, enhancing entrepreneurships and improving economic development in Enschede Noord.

ACE emerged as a concrete result of an initiative by the national business network 'Platform for Urban Renewal' (OPS), which in the late nineties addressed municipalities in a number of the larger cities in The Netherlands, to offer their assistance in fighting social and labour market exclusion. The OPS initiative, with ten business members across The Netherlands, hold a dual ambition, namely to generate opportunities and profit for the businesses while supporting municipalities in their efforts to revive deprived areas.

With its 130.000 inhabitants, Enschede is among the 15 largest cities in The Netherlands, situated in the eastern part of the country close to the German border. On the basis of a development plan and a subsequent implementation plan, worked out in 1999-2000 by the municipality of Enschede and OPS business representatives, ACE was established in Enschede Noord in 2000 to address concrete, social challenges in partnership between public authorities, private businesses and civil society organisations

Funding for ACE project activities is derived exclusively from public sources. These funds are administered by the Enschede Noord District Manager on behalf of the local district authorities, who subcontracts businesses and NGOs to deliver specific services.

A more comprehensive description of ACE and its context is given in the two earlier local reports.² The following paragraphs will provide a condensed overview of key events and developments since the partnerships' establishment and – of course – with a particular focus on the period since the second research visit in November 2001.

2.1. Context

On a number of parameters the city of Enschede has performed less well than other Dutch cities in the last decade: Education levels are notably lower, as are income generation, employment rates, and even life expectancy. A particular challenge, which ACE addresses, is the fact that Enschede Noord houses a higher percentage of ethnic minorities than the national average. This is one of the reasons that ACE involves two minority organisations.

The city is administratively divided into 4 districts, the northern one Enschede Noord being characterised by a substantial contingent of ethnic minorities – approximately 25% of the population

the concept of *New Social Partnerships*: 'People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies'

² For detailed descriptions please see *First Local Report, Enschede, The Netherlands*, TCC 2001, Sven-Aage Westphalen and *Second Local Report, Enschede, The Netherlands*, TCC 2001, Flemming Schultz, respectively.

in the district belongs to an ethnic minority, predominantly Turkish or Moroccan, many of whom are unemployed or in other ways marginalized.

A fifth district was split up and divided into the remaining four by the end of 2001. This put an increased pressure on Enschede Noord, as the new neighbourhood is a deprived one with high unemployment rates.

Recent elections in The Netherlands replaced the Social Democrat government with the present centre-right government, which has announced substantial changes in welfare service provisions and benefit levels. This is expected to influence the future funding of some of ACEs activities – for instance the duration of labour market reintegration and reactivation courses might be reduced according to cut in public funding possibilities. Similarly, the government has announced new and tighter funding schemes for subsidised jobs.³

In May 2000 a firework factory exploded in the midst of a mixed enterprise and housing complex in Enschede Noord. The explosion affected more than 500 small and medium sized enterprises and approximately 1.500 households. Most buildings in the area were burnt or shattered leaving businesses and families without housing. The area is currently being rebuilt with substantial governmental funding. The impact has of course been tremendous in the Enschede Noord district with some 30.000 inhabitants, but as the process of recovering has taken shape, it has been realised that the situation also holds opportunities to restructure economic, social, cultural and physical conditions in Enschede Noord as a whole. A close collaboration between the Enschede Noord District Management and the intermediary rebuilding office 'Projectbureau Wederopbouw' has been established to – on the one hand – create links between the 'new' neighbourhood and the surrounding 'old' Enschede Noord and to possibly merge ACE activities with those connected to the rebuilding process.

2.2. Purpose

Activiteiten Centrum Enschede Noord targets two different objectives:

- *To reduce unemployment.*

While the general work force participation amounts to 64% of the population on a national scale, this figure is for Enschede only 56%. In the present situation where unemployment rates are remarkably low 4.9% for Enschede Noord compared to 5.6 for Enschede in total there is a pressure to increase work force participation, and to minimise barriers to re-integration and long-term unemployment. This development has led ACE projects and its participants to target some of the weakest groups on the labour market - known in the Dutch context as 'Group 4' – which consists of people with severe difficulties of social, mental and physical kinds.

Besides ACE addresses people without any employment experience at all – first time integration into the labour market: housewives, unregistered immigrants and others who do not receive social benefits and are not registered as job seekers.

- *To encourage and support entrepreneurship.*

Employment rates among ethnic minorities are particularly low, in Enschede like in other places. ACE aims at stimulating entrepreneurship with a particular focus on the Turkish and the Moroccan minority groups. The project involves the two community-based minority organisations and two professional

³ New national elections have been announced in January 2003, delaying, postponing or perhaps even cancelling implementation of the present governments decisions.

business advice agencies that are contracted by the district management to jointly identify, motivate and support potential business starters.

Economic development in Enschede Noord

The above mentioned ACE activities merge very well with municipal policy objectives on infrastructure development such as renewal of old housing areas, facilitation of small and medium sized businesses, handicrafts and retailers. This is the case in the district in general and for the fireworks explosion site in particular.

The District Manager is – as previously mentioned – involved in the rebuilding process, where employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are core elements in the effort to stimulate the areas' economic development. So, while there are no formal links between ACE and the Projectbureau Wederopbouw, there is clearly a wide range of common interests.

These purposes have remained basically unchanged since the establishing of ACE. However, there has been a widening of the scope in terms of target groups, and the challenges posed by the fireworks explosion has of course set a somewhat different agenda for the neighbourhood.

2.3. Participants

Public sector organisations in ACE:

Activiteiten Centrum Enschede Noord is financed, managed and driven primarily by public sector organisations in Enschede Noord. These consist of the general district management body, and the Social Affairs Unit (DMO), including WSA – a section responsible for social activation and labour market reintegration. The BMD – maintenance unit for roads and parks - employs a number of people targeted by ACE activities and for this reason BMD is included in the core group of partnership participants.

- Enschede Noord - Local District Management Unit
- Enschede Noord – DMO (Social Affairs Unit)
- Enschede Noord – BMD (Road & Park Maintenance Services)

Civil society organisations

Two civil society organisations are involved in ACE as providers of key resources, namely access and contact to the target groups of unemployed ethnic minorities – possibly those with an entrepreneurial potential, but not exclusively. The two organisations are brokers for the commercial businesses working to bring minorities in contact with the know-how and advice that may turn entrepreneurial visions and ideas into realities.

- ENDER- the Turkish community organisation
- SMEN – the Moroccan community organisation

A community centre – Het Kompas - has ceased its contribution to ACE. Due to a combination of managerial and economical challenges, the centre was unable fulfil its contracts with the district management.

Private businesses:

A number of private companies are contracted by the district management to deliver those services, which make up ACE's activities. This includes identification of potential entrepreneurs, motivation of unemployed to re-enter the labour market, designing of individual re-integration plans, training and supervision.

- Activa – Job placement and entrepreneurship agency
- Randstad – job placement and activation agency
- Surplus – entrepreneurships advisor
- Rabobank – commercial bank
- KLIQ – social and labour market activation consultancy agency

2.4. Organisation

ACE is not organised around a legally binding body consisting of various partners – it is not formally an organisation or an association. As described in the earlier local reports ACE is to be considered rather as *a de facto partnership between a group of able players*. Each partner is attached to the other partners via their contract with the district management to deliver certain services.

As the contracts are called in open tenders on market conditions, theoretically partners may change over time. Practically, however, there has been very little substitution though ACEs life span.

A structure of a Steering Committee, and two working groups were established early in ACEs history.

- Steering Committee members are the District Manager, the head of WSA, and representatives from Randstad and Rabobank.
- Social Affairs working group consists of public sector representatives only: DMO and WSA
- Economic Affairs working group has seen two new members since the researcher last visited Enschede. Besides the District Manager, DMO, BMD and two entrepreneurs ‘in process’ the community-based organisations ENDER and SMEN now each have a seat in the group.

The Committee and the working groups function as fora for discussion and information sharing, and are not procured with a mandate for decision-making.

2.5. Outcomes

Project results

Because of the splitting up of one district in Enschede it is difficult to compare unemployment figures precisely. However, recent figures points to a significant reduction in the number of unemployed. In February 2002, 1002 persons were registered as unemployed. In September 2002 the number had dropped to 894 persons, of whom 233 were in a so-called ‘trajectory’ – an labour market integration programme facilitated by an ACE partner – Randstad, Activa or Surplus.

The district managements’ contracts with these three companies have been renewed regularly as have the contracts with ENDER and SMEN.

As for the entrepreneurship part of ACE figures are a quite impressive. In 2002 ACE has been in contact with 47 people with the purpose of motivating them to start new businesses.

- 21 of them are still preparing the start of their business by following courses, writing business plans, exploring the market, etc.
- 20 of them have started a business
- 15 of the starters are successful
- 4 of the starters are not doing well.
- 1 of the starters failed
- 3 people found a job instead of starting a business

- 3 people failed and receive social welfare

Partnership results

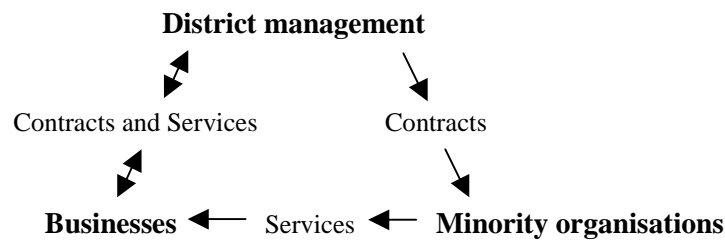
ACE has moved from an original partnership vision, through a pragmatic implementation phase, to a more integrated partnership approach and clear cross sector collaboration. When ACE was established in 2000, the tri-sector cooperation was a key feature of the partnership model, but as described in the second local report about ACE most partnership participants found that in 2001 this vision had not yet been realised to its full potential.

Many interviewees felt that there was a lack of a general platform where all participants could meet to discuss and share experiences, information and develop new visions about future ACE undertakings.

Since then, this platform has to some extent been established qua the Economic Affairs working group, where entrepreneurs meet NGOS, and the public sector. ACE still has not got a unifying forum with total representation – perhaps because such a forum is not necessary for carrying out the partnerships project activities.

In the day-to-day management of ACE project activities there is close contact between the businesses and the two minority organisation, and between the businesses and the municipality. The organisations involved in this triangular circuit constitutes *the de facto partnership of able players*.

Fig. 1. Workflow in ACE.



3. Analysis of the partnership experience

Through its 'lifespan' ACE has seen a solid shift in the group of partners actively involved. However, a core group of partnership participants have been involved from the beginning and remain central as driving forces in ACE. This chapter looks at the kinds of development that have shaped ACE into its present state and the roles played by the various partners in this.

Also, this chapter will give an analysis of the partners separate experiences of being parts of ACE - or more precisely: To what extent have expectations and goals of the various partners been met in the time span of this research programme.

3.1. Process development

Purpose and scope: A shared agenda?

As described above, public sector representatives are strongly seated in the steering committee and in the two working groups that constitute the formal framework for ACE: the district manager plays a pivotal role in keeping track of ACE's activities.

Businesses are involved according to their services' relevance for the overall project aims of ACE – aims that fundamentally are defined and formulated by the public sector. This fact should be seen on the background of the original business initiative that led to the establishing of ACE. In its original design, ACE was basically a public sector project, which - by deliberate and intensive use of private and civil society organisations - should bring together local resources to solve concrete social problems. In this light ACE has maintained a steady course though its lifetime, with a remarkable commitment on behalf of all partners involved.

While the district management employs business and NGO resources to the fulfilment of policy objective, the business side creates a profit while simultaneously contributing to a more inclusive and socially coherent society – or at least neighbourhood.

Hence, for Randstad, Surplus and Activa this is not to be considered clear-cut corporate social responsibility – rather it is their core line of business. An exception to this conclusion is for Randstad that they have developed new ways of addressing the ACE target groups – people who were not traditionally part of the company's target group. Rabobank has not yet been actively contributing to project activities but would also stay within its traditional business sphere, i.e. financial services like advice and loans. One aspect that would nevertheless take a certain amount of commitment would be the establishing of a micro-lending scheme that would be applicable and attractive to small-scale business starters under ACE's auspices. Such a scheme, however, has not yet been developed but according to the bank's representative it would be a good idea: 'We have to find different methods to reach out for our target groups and find new ways to help them' he says, adding that is not likely that the economic prospect for the coming years will allow for much uncovered expenses in this respect. H

The two community-based organisations SMEN and ENDER remain actively engaged in their ACE activities. They are by nature involved because of ACE's focus on those communities they represent. The tasks and roles of the NGOs are clearly in line with their main *raison d'être*, namely the improvement of living conditions for their members in Enschede.

The ACE focuses on ethnic minorities – which in the beginning included only the Turkish population – has been slightly diluted since other groups have come in focus alongside the ethnic ones. However, this has not diminished the level of funding or project activity targeting the minorities specifically, and neither SMEN nor ENDER representatives see any competition or threats within ACE on this account.

So, while ACE's scope and purpose basically have remained stable since its beginning, there have been adjustments and amendments which should be ascribed not to a collective decision on behalf of the partnership, but on behalf of the public authorities. In this sense ACE's purpose is predominantly a public sector one, but widely subscribed to by all partners.

Communication and the need for transparency

One may argue that communication is of particular importance in a partnership where no formal platform for joint decision-making is established. Interviewees widely expressed this view during the second research visit. Accordingly, things have changed on a number of counts.

Communication flaws have been considerably improved since ACE's beginning. Where news, experiences and other information were spread informally via day-to-day contacts, now two

formalised channels of information have been set up. One is a permanent column in the municipality's monthly newsletter, where ACE achievements, and other project related stories are shared with the outside community. The second is information e-mail sent out regularly to ACE partners and other involved in the activities.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the organisational structure has now changed to include also the two community-based organisations, so that they are now more closely linked to the other partners in ACE. This improves and increases transparency in the organisation, a fact that is acknowledged by all partners.

Also, a brochure about ACE in Arabic and one in Turkish has been distributed through the community organisation. This is very helpful according to the SMEN and ENDER representatives, though they stress the need for adaptive approaches to communication with their members. For instance, the ENDER representative mentions that 'mouth-to-mouth information is essential for Turkish people – and just as important as printed propaganda'.

In a less formal level partners do of course have contacts in the every day project activities. In these relation ideas are shared and discussed in bilateral dialogue between the partners. Particularly, the district manager plays a leading role in binding ACE together in this respect. His efforts to maintain regular contacts with all persons involved in ACE activities opens up for at different kind of dialogue, where partners may propose changes, voice concerns give suggestions, share know-how, news and other kinds of information

Leadership

Leadership has remained basically unchanged in ACE. Resting predominantly with the district manager, there is a general agreement among the partnership participants that his leadership and commitment is indeed a strengthening factor for the partnership. A suggestion that this may nevertheless be a hindrance for the partners to become more involved or engaged or to develop a greater sense of ownership, is widely dismissed by all respondents.

Since the funding for ACE is provided exclusively by the public municipal authorities there are legal bindings as to how these resources can be administered - and by who. This, of course makes the district manager a pivotal person in ACE as he by nature must act in accordance with public regulations about *transparency and accountability*

The strong and clear leadership assumed by one single individual; the district manager, has a reinforcing effect. When management, coordination, initiatives and dynamism are concentrated with one person, these qualities exercised tends to diminish motivation for others to become involved. While the prevailing impression is that all partners are satisfied with the present leadership and the priorities it makes, there are, however also indications that decision-making and project planning would gain from a more open and inclusive debate among all partners. But as mentioned such a forum is has not been fully established. The business side points to the need for coverage of time allocated to meetings and to the planning of them as a reason for their reluctance to take lead in setting up a forum.

The question remains if ACE in fact is perfectly well off without any such re-distribution of power, without negotiated decision-making processes and without shared economical responsibilities? Firstly, it would probably not be possible to distribute leadership for legal, administrative reasons. The district manager is in charge of the districts' public funding, and as mentioned, there have been only few indications that other sectors would step in with resources of their own to sustain a partnership platform outside public auspices.

Secondly, ACE is just as much a business relationship as it is a partnership. The district management establishes the partnership as a job activation supply chain system; NGOs are contracted to assist businesses that are contracted to deliver a series of social services for the public authorities. This ‘business relationship’ interpretation of ACE adds an important element to the ‘traditional’ version of partnership logics, but obviously without compromising a core aspect of cross-sector collaboration, namely the pooling and employment of otherwise isolated and uncoordinated resources.

3.2. Cross sector collaboration/ partnership outcomes

When OPS, the national business network, and representatives from the municipality council in Enschede produced the development plan for Enschede and the subsequent implementation plan for Enschede Noord there was an a partnership vision about a joint effort on behalf of all three sectors in society; public, private and civil society.

As implementation took root it became clear that working in partnership takes time and that resources need to be allocated to meetings, strategy development, communication, exchange of knowledge, advice, and other activities. The implementation phase soon also revealed, that sub-projects under the ACE heading might very well go on without developing or ‘living’ the partnership they sprang from.

According to interviewees this was indeed the case in ACE at the time of the second research visit in November 2001. A strong focus on pragmatics, on project implementation and on meeting targets and objectives prevailed, whereas the partnership aspect was put in the background.

However, as figures, statistics and interviews during all three research phases show, this fact has not posed serious problems for ACE. What has been of importance in ACE, when it comes to delivering concrete, tangible results, seems to be the pooling of competences: The community-based organisations’ access to and knowledge about the core target groups, the businesses know-how and professional approach to delivering job provision service and entrepreneurial advice, and last but certainly not least, the public sectors’ general know-how and resources especially in administrative matters.

Also there is a clear division of tasks to be performed, which has made possible an efficient employment of resources on behalf of all partners, and still ensuring that each participating organisation can trust that its separate objectives be fulfilled, be they political, commercial, social or cultural.

3.3. Internalising new knowledge into partner organisations

Cross sector collaboration is almost by nature a unique construction of a relationship between a unique set of partners. Each bring with them their own particular, localised culture, resources, know-how and understanding of the partnership and its context, and for that reason alone the experiences that the partnership participants take with them in the process is unique as well.

Nevertheless, these experiences can hold many interesting aspects of learning for other partnership planners or practitioners. Also, partnership participants may be brokers of partnership information for their own organisation – they may bring back cross-sector collaboration know-how into their mother organisations, enabling a wider group of people to gain from the learning obtained in the partnership.

This is the case for ACE as well:

Some of the participating organisations in ACE are branches of affiliates of mother-organisations, which are of considerably sizes in terms of employees and geographical scope. Randstad, for instance, is represented in 15 countries with 1,689 branches and more than 13.000 staff employees in Europe and North America. Another example is Rabobank, with its approximately 150 foreign offices and some 50.000 employees worldwide.

The branches, or local offices involved in ACE are of course of a more limited size, but their affiliations to large national and even multi-national organisations is important to have in mind when discussing these partners' participation, their experiences and the relevance these experiences may be seen to have by the mother-organisations.

The same thing could be said about the *public sector organisations* involved in ACE: The hierarchical structure of public organisations reaches from local to national level, but in practice there are often solid fences around each unit in any organisation .

It could be argued that within a municipality with many different public administrative bodies, each of these sub-units would *per se* be interested in sharing information and exchanging knowledge based on real-life experiences. But this sense of commonality is not always clear-cut. When it comes to funding issues, units within the same organisation often find themselves to be competitors rather than co-operators. This phenomenon is of course also seen in private companies as well as in civil society organisations.

Public sector representatives in Enschede Noord are very active in explaining and exemplifying ACEs activities to colleagues and administrative units in the other districts in Enschede and at municipality level. One reason is to ensure attention, political good will and to secure future funding of activities. But interviewees also state that there is a general interest in the experience and the learning that ACE practitioners can offer to colleagues, superiors and other organisations in similar functions.

As for *the private sector*, the business representatives are as explicitly optimistic about their efforts or ability to bring partnership learning back home into the mother organisations. Rather, their activities in ACE are seen as a mix between - on the one hand - soft core community work and - on the other hand - a necessary means of staying in close contact with a key customer; the municipality.

At one point, though, are business representatives very positive about an explicit partnership experience. The cooperation with the community-based organisations SMEN and ENDER has been very fruitful and inspiring for Surplus and Activa in particular. It is generally assumed that this will influence these Enschede branches' contact with other civil society organisations, should such occur in the future.

The two *minority organisations* are not affiliated with other branches or main organisations. They are stand-alone associations, the Turkish one being well established and much larger than the Moroccan one. Representatives from both organisations claim that their relationship with the municipal authorities has improved since - and because of - their involvement in ACE as active partners. The organisations also hope that their positive experiences will help community members to feel more comfortable and secure in their future contacts with the authorities.

New knowledge is not always recognised as such. It may be considered irrelevant or may simply pass un-noticed. In the case of ACE this can be the case to a certain level, particularly as some participants may not have regarded themselves as partnership participants until they became objects of a partnership study. Obviously, this is a reason for considering what kinds of lessons learned ACE would provide its practitioners and partners with.

Partnership learning is not necessarily the most important added value for ACE participants, which reflects well the general focus on project activities rather than partnership activities. Whatever knowledge, however, a partner possesses, a general rule, it seems, is that the more an organisation is involved in partnership activities, the easier it becomes to bring back learning and experiences into the mother organisation.

3.4. Transfer of experience to a wider audience

From a public policy perspective ACE reflects an important change in labour market legislation within recent years. Through a series of legislative measures job provision has become a privatised function in the sense that public authorities must now buy this service on market conditions in open tenders. This has on the one hand led to at considerable restructuring of public authority organisations responsible for these services, and on the other hand, made way for a large number of private – some even former publicly owned, now privatised – companies.

In ACE this is exactly what is taking place: Enschede Noord District management buys job training and matching services from Randstad, Activa, KLIQ and Surplus – with the know-how and insights of SMEN and ENDER added as an extra resource.

So, in this context ACE does not represent a new or groundbreaking approach to solving problems of unemployment or social marginalisation among ethnic minorities or other excluded groups of the population. Nor does the inclusion of private businesses create a lot of attention, as it is basically seen as mere compliance with national legislation – except from the degree of corporate social responsibility found in ACE. Without any exception public sector representatives express only moderate expectation towards the business sides' motives and willingness to include social concerns in their strategies and day-to-day operations. Rather, non-ACE public sector representatives voice an anticipation that the private sector is basically not interested in assuming any social responsibility unless there are direct and obvious added values to be gained.

To what extent ACE is a best practise example of corporate social responsibility is hard to tell. Randstad and Rabobank express severe reservations as to involving their representatives in ACE beyond those hours that are explicitly paid for in the contracts with the District management. All businesses in ACE highlight the pressure that planning and project management activities put on the overall profitability of their involvement in ACE.

One particular aspect of ACE that goes far beyond compliance with existing rules and regulation is the inclusion of the two community-based organisations SMEN and ENDER. Their presence makes in ACE differentiates it from mainstream labour market activation projects and is a very clear example of how civil society organisation can bring in important resources to the benefit of all partners around the table – and to the society at large.

Surprisingly, however, this feature has not received the attention one would expect. One reason could be that, generally, NGO are not regarded as powerful players in labour market or employment policy discussions. But as mentioned the main point of interest is the business social commitment – perhaps at the cost of interest towards the NGOs.

These interviewees also took interest in the strong social aspect inherent in ACE activities. In this respect ACE is being considered a best practice example of how to catalyse development and to merge social policy objectives with labour market demands.

On an international scale, there has been much interest in the Dutch labour market model – not in the NGO element, but in the privatisation parts. The Danish government has been studying it closely and even copied central elements in its own labour market reform launched in May 2002: A key feature is a gradual development towards a privatisation of job provision services.

4. Reflections

Activiteiten Centrum Enschede Noord has performed very well since its establishment. As mentioned, its' partners constitutes a group of able players, a group of skilled and focussed organisations with a clear commitment to their individual objectives and to that of ACE.

ACE is a different kind of partnership than those five others studied in the present LPE action research project. There is no formal agreement between the partners as to a common purpose, or modes of operations, mutual obligations etc. Neither is there a common platform where all partners meet on equal footing to discuss developments and to jointly plan future activities.

Nevertheless, ACE is an interesting example of what can be achieved when sectors join forces – even on a contractual basis. The idea that originally sparked the tri-partite partnership in Enschede was not based on traditional partnership values of embedding, sustainability and transparency. Rather, the focus was – and is - on concrete project implementation, meeting policy objectives and fulfilling individual partners aims for the benefit also of society at large. The business relationship-like approach that characterises ACE seems to be very well applicable, though it may be argued that it also closes off for some of the potentials that partnerships may hold for its participants and for society at large.

The high concentration of leadership with the public sector, i.e. the district manager, and the little formal room for shared decision-making does challenge the traditional perceptions of what a partnership may look like.

From a partnership perspective – which may not necessarily be the same as the ACE participants' perspectives – the question remains whether ACE will enhance and facilitate those particular partnership characteristics that have not yet been unfolded as described above – or if the partners will continue to maintain a project focus rather than a partnership focus, which at the end of the day may be the right way forward for ACE.

The researcher would like to extend the warmest thanks to those involved in the Activiteiten Centrum Enschede for their time and commitment in the Local Partnerships in Europe research project. It has been a pleasure to be able to follow ACE over the last two years. Also thank you to the external interviewees who in this last local report on the ACE has contributed with their perspectives and insights.

Annex: List of interviewees

Attendees at Enschede workshop:

Anton de Vries, Randstad Rentree

Arianne Meijer, Projectbureau Wederopbouw

Barsaum Can, Enschede Centraal Administration

Frans Scholten, Enschede Noord, DMO

Gerard Kok, Rabobank, Enschede Noord

Jan Breteler, Ambré

Jan Bron, Enschede Noord, District Management

Joop Wikkerink, Activa

Mehmet Sarioglu, ENDER

Mr. Jaba, SMEN

Piet Van Veen, Surplus

Additional interviews were made with:

Ben Pleij, Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

Cees Pegman, Enschede Centraal Administration

Marieke van Ginkel, Ministry of Economic Affairs

Robert Baveld, Enschede Oost, District Management

Robin Mulder, Activa

Jan Bron, Enschede Noord, District Management

The Copenhagen Centre (TCC)

The Copenhagen Centre – New Partnerships for Social Responsibility (TCC) is an autonomous international organisation established by the Danish Government in 1998, following the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development and the 1997 Copenhagen conference “New Partnerships for Social Cohesion”

Focusing on social cohesion, TCC strives to promote new voluntary social partnerships between business, governments and civil society in order to provide opportunities for the less privileged to be self-supporting, active and productive citizens. TCC serves as an intermediary for governments, businesses, social partners, NGOs and civil society.

TCC’s core tasks are to conduct surveys, organise and facilitate networks and dialogue, publish reports, conduct seminars, workshops and conferences, thereby stimulating and supporting an international exchange of experience in the field of new social partnerships.

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