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## Developments in Portuguese Local Governance

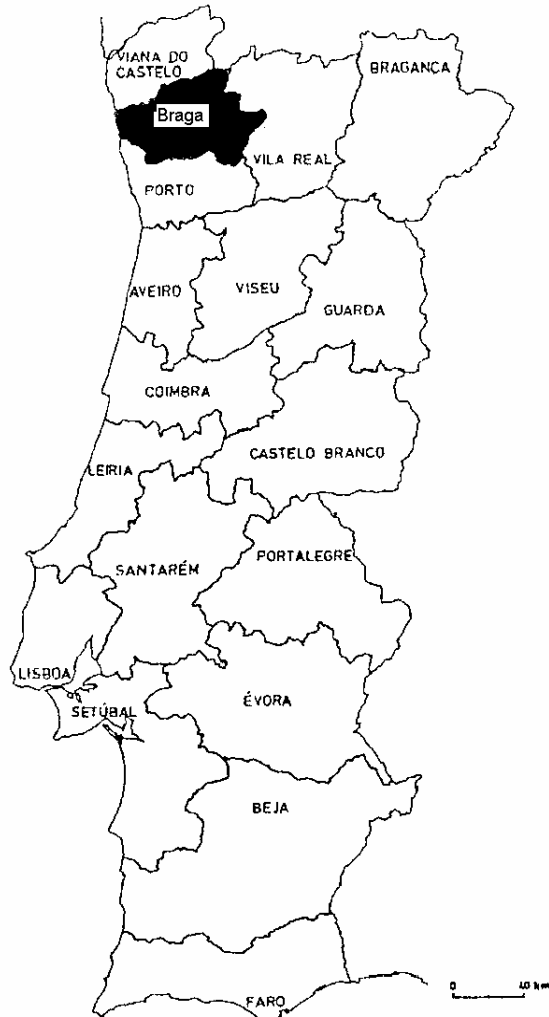
### Introduction

This chapter gives account of a recently local public sector initiative promoted by the Civil Governor of the District of Braga aimed to improve interorganisational relationships and the co-operation between local actors. Despite the fact that this initiative is not so elaborated as the Italian experience (see Zuffada, Caperchione and Vandelli, 2002) there are similarities in the development of local partnerships. The initiative was an attempt to revitalise the role of Civil Governor at local level, and also a response to the challenge of Regional Development Policy established by the central government which aimed to reduce regional asymmetries, deconcentrate public services and decentralise responsibilities to local government.

In recent decades the establishment of administrative regions in Portugal has been in the political agenda. In 1976 the new Constitution established the abolition of intermediate administrative units – the District – and the representatives of central government in those territorial areas – the Civil Governors (a position similar to the French Prefect). The reformers envisaged a new regional map and the Constitution established that ‘Administrative Regions’ would replace the District and regional authorities would replace the Civil Governor. The ‘Administrative Regions’ would develop three general functions: deliver public services in the regional area, co-ordinate municipality activities and formulate regional plans. However, the process of regionalisation and the creation of administrative regions have always been delayed.

The decision of creating a regional political-administrative organization has been postponed by politicians. Overtime there was the erosion of the responsibilities of Civil Governors whose statutory powers were drastically reduced. The Constitution established that the District will persist until the creation of Administrative Regions (art. 291 of the Constitution) which means that it is a temporary territorial division. The Civil Governors become merely a delegate of central government with powers limited to the representation of central Government at district level, law and public order issues, co-ordination of some public services and civil protection. On the other hand, the traditional control and supervision of Civil Governors over local authorities has been reduced as local government grows in democratic legitimacy and power.

**Figure 1 - Map of Portugal**



The district of Braga is located in the Littoral North of Portugal. Its area comprehends 14 Municipalities, with 790 520 inhabitants in 1998, which represents 8.34% of the domestic population. The economic and social life is structured around four main urban centres: the cities of Barcelos, Braga, Famalicão and Guimarães. For local development issues there are three main areas: the Cávado Valley, the Ave Valley and two municipalities from the Tamega Valley.

Acting according to its own political agenda the Civil Governor created a sort of informal governance structure to improve interorganizational cooperation and the dialogue between local actors. It was as well a response to the domestic regional policy decided by central government that development should be implemented through projects and programmes which join different areas and promote horizontal co-ordination of public policy. This is a trend reported in other experiences which shows that the inter-organizational cooperation and the creation of partnerships are

not spontaneous unless other institutions take the initiative (see Varone, Jacob and Targe, 2002 and also Zuffada, Caperchione and Vandelli, 2002).

This governance structure was open to all local actors which wanted to contribute to district development. The initiative started with the creation of the Prodisbraga which aimed to develop a strategic plan for regional development, the creation of a consultative council to contribute to policy co-ordination and the Gaddisbraga which is a network of organizations to share information about EU and domestic programs for regional developments.

Recent literature of administrative reform shows a growing interest about network approach to local governance (Goss, 2001; Bogason, 2000). This chapter shows how and why local actors want to cooperate and how these structures work. The analysis draws upon face-to-face interviews of participants in the informal governance structures created by the Civil Governor at the District of Braga.

## **Local Governance and Networks**

Local governance stresses the increasing complexity of interactions between actors which are involved in policy implementation. Recent approaches to administrative reform show the importance of co-operation in an arena in which participants increased in the last decades as a consequence of the blurring of boundaries between public and private sectors. A new approach to governance emerged in the last years through the externalisation of public services and the co-operation of a multiplicity of actors. New and innovative ways to organize and provide public services give rise to a variety of organizational forms. Moreover, multi-level governance is changing the relationships between several levels of government. The coordination between various levels of government through networks of layers is increasing in order to improve policy formulation and implementation. According to Rhodes the new forms of governance are 'self-organising interorganisational networks' (1996:666) that deal with the needs for co-operation of interdependent actors for policy implementation. The concept of network becomes important to understand interorganizational relationships, the interactions between different stakeholders and multi-level governance. The literature of managing networks includes strategies to improve co-operation between actors in order to achieve shared targets. Management in networks is about creating strategic consensus for joint action within a given setting. It includes strategies to improve co-operation between actors in order to achieve co-ordination (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997:167). Hence, co-ordination of services through a more co-operative and collaborative network of relationships between government agencies and private organizations has become a preferred strategy for many public administrators.

In the same way, the European Commission suggests, in its white paper about "Governance in Europe", the opening of policy process and the delivering of EU policies for all those involved, asking for the effort of other institutions, central government, regions, cities, and civil society (Commission of the European Communities, 2001) stressing the idea of networking arrangements. The EU report

about multi-level governance points out the interest to interlink different levels of decision making to allow “more effectiveness, coherence and transparency in the whole system of public policy-making, as well as broader participation by the various actors concerned” (Working Group 4c, 2001:8). The report suggests the need to increase dialogue between levels of government, involve local actors and establish partnerships in the implementation of policies. Particularly, it stresses the need for cooperation as a working method for promoting links between the various actors and “bring together on an equal footing before decisions are taken” on sub-national, national and European levels.

The management of networks is an important aspect of multi-level governance and strategy development in order to achieve policy outcomes. This does not mean that local governance is equivalent to networking. Network management is a critical issue in local governance (Bovaird, Löffler and Diez, 2001), but there are other governance mechanisms which are important as well: hierarchies and markets (see Larmour, 1997 and Rhodes, 1996).

The idea of multi-level governance and the idea of interorganisational network of public and private actors, who are jointly engaged in policy implementation, are useful to understand the experience implemented by the Civil Governor in the district of Braga in order to improve multi-level governance and the interorganisational relationships between local actors from the public, the private and the third sector. The co-ordination of public services at district level through hierarchy has been replaced by more horizontal structures through which the Civil Governor tried to develop a more co-operative and collaborative relationship between them.

### **Redefining the Role of Districts as Intermediate Level**

The Portuguese administrative organization at territorial level is constituted by eighteen districts (see figure 1) which have some regional scope similar to the French prefectural system, under the rules of the Civil Governor. The district is a kind of above-municipality Administrative division aimed to support the municipalities and to control public services. The Civil Governor, like the French Prefect, is appointed by central government, being its representative in the district and the “eyes and the ears” of central government. During the dictatorship, they had strong and authoritarian powers in controlling the legality of actions of public services and local government through the tutelage. The country was ruled by an autocratic regime which developed a strong formal and hierarchic administrative system. For instance, there was a hierarchical subordination from the Mayors belonging to the districts to their Civil Governors which had the power to dissolve local authorities, if it had been demonstrated they had behaved illegally, failed to fulfil their administrative tasks, or refused to carry out decisions made at higher levels. In addition, they had the power to inspect and scrutinise City Halls and public services and control civic associations and corporations. They also had police powers and were responsible to maintain public order (CAREAT, 1998). Therefore, Civil Governors had an

authoritarian role at district level developed through the hierarchical structure. They ruled through a hierarchical set of controls, answering directly to the Minister of Interior.

The change of regime in 1974 and the new Constitution established the creation of Administrative Regions and the replacement of Civil Governors for new representatives at regional level. However, regionalist pressures were not strong, except for the island of Azores and Madeira for reasons of physical distance. The 1976's Constitution institutionalizes these regional entities as Autonomous Regions with devolved powers. In the mainland, however, Administrative Regions were not implemented and that hampered attaining the target of decentralization. But the centralized nature of Portuguese Administrative system claims for a profound reform of its structure. Indeed, in 1979 there were 84.3% of civil servants working in central government and only 15.7% in local government (CICTRA, 1987). This figure changed slightly over time. Twenty years later, in 1999, there were 79.3% of civil servants working in central government and 20.7% in local government (IGBDRHAP, 2001). Moreover, the powers of Civil Governors were reduced as local governments grew in democratic legitimacy and strengthened their powers. Their powers were reduced to public order and civil protection.

There is a gap in Portuguese politics between central government and local government which needs to be filled up by an intermediate level with democratic legitimacy. The current regional institutions – the Commissions of Regional Coordination (CCR – *Comissões de Coordenação Regional*), that are formally public services reporting to central government for regional planning and development, lack political legitimacy to manage regional problems (Pereira, 1992). In a certain way this gap is being overtaken by the establishment of associations of municipalities and agencies for regional development.

The pressures to decentralise and establish regional administration increased in the 90's. The commitment of the Government for deconcentration and decentralization was, apparently, an important issue in administrative reform. It becomes an issue of the electoral manifesto of the elected party, the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista* – PS), in 1995. However, the result of a national referendum to decide about the geographic configuration of regions proposed by Government in 1998 was a set back in this process. The majority of voters said 'No' to the regions and the Government had to withdraw from this aim and find an alternative to regionalisation. The revitalisation of Civil Governors at District level and the redefinition of their role was an expedient for Central Government to pursue the target of deconcentration. A new statute (Decree-law 213/2001) enlarged the responsibilities of Civil Governors. In addition to the power mentioned above, they are responsible for disclosing information about public policies, to give financial support to district NGOs working in social action, culture and leisure, and to promote co-operation and articulation among public services. In what concerns the relationship with citizens, they disclose information about public services, guide them to appropriate services, follow up issues which involve several organisations, promote and ensure that each service articulates their actions. In short, the new statute envisages a role which is closer to enabling the co-operation among public service and promote the dialogue among them.

## **Incentives from the EU and Central Government in Portugal to Change Governance Relationships at the Local Level**

The central government programme for regional development required changes in policy implementation in order to meet the requirement of EU structural funds. The new approach to the implementation of the *Quadro Comunitário de Apoio III-QCA III* (Community Support Framework) emphasises the decentralization and an integrative approach to projects through cooperation between level of government and the public and private sector. The Commission established that the choice of projects and their management are solely the responsibility of the national and regional authorities giving more capacity for regional and local authorities to intervene and to decide about its details and the involvement of actors from the economic and social affairs. According to John (2001) the Commission is pushing reforms which change multi-level governance with local authorities playing a greater role in the negotiations for the Operational Programmes and allowing a more strategic interaction. It claims that the networks that join levels of government within nation-states become more complex as a result of the Europeanization. The EU structural funds induces changes in the formulation and implementation of programmes and projects

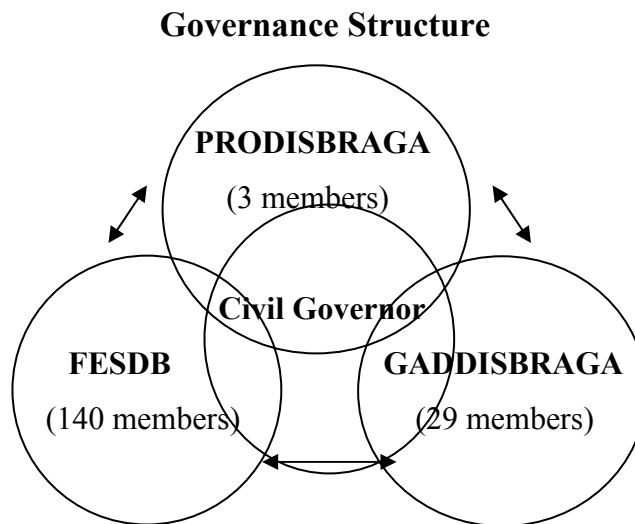
Following the recommendations of EU structural funds, the Government was apparently committed to start a new approach by promoting the coordination and cooperation between local actors. The strategic programme of the XIII Constitutional Government points out the importance of an integrated approach to regional development. It established three strategic axes concerning regional development:

- a) Correct regional asymmetry in order to promote a harmonious regional development;
- b) Reform deconcentrated public services;
- c) Decentralize powers and responsibilities to municipalities, associations of municipalities and metropolitan areas.

The government envisaged as well the revitalisation of the role of Civil Governors, at district level, to promote the dialogue and articulation between local actors and to formulate the planning of public investment in the districts. In the case of the district of Braga there are four main cities which are urban polar points of development. The cities belong to two hydrographical areas: the Cávado Valley and the Ave Valley. In the Northeast, two municipalities – Cabeceiras de Bastos and Celorico de Bastos – constitute a third area. Between these three areas the dialogue is low, the common needs are hardly discussed between them and joint projects are not usual, a situation which the Civil Governor tried to change by creating a new governance structure.

### *The Civil Governor in the District of Braga as a governance activator*

Co-operation among field services and local actors is traditionally low in Portuguese Administration. Fragmentation and lack of appropriately co-ordinated services are widely considered to be costly problems impeding effective and efficient public service provision. The formal and hierarchical nature of Portuguese administration reinforces these characteristics and hampers the lateral communication and the establishment of innovative organizational forms (Rocha, 2001, Araújo, 1999). To overtake these problems and to strengthen the formulation and implementation of local policies, the Civil Governor of the District of Braga envisaged a governance structure which comprehends three main structures interconnected by a strategic centre which was coordinated by him.



Source: Araújo and Sá, 2002

**PRODISBRAGA** – Governmental Programme for the District of Braga (*Programa do Governo no Distrito de Braga*)

**FESDB** – Economic and Social Fórum for the District of Braga (*Fórum Económico e Social do Distrito de Braga*)

**GADDISBRAGA** – Office for District Development Support (*Gabinete de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento do Distrito de Braga*)

The above structure was implemented according to the local dynamic among actors and results from the direct involvement of the deputy Civil Governor which worked as an anchor and a leader, being an active supporter of these structures. He worked in direct articulation with the Civil Governor, but with powers delegated by him to the management and governance of this structure.

The deputy Civil Governor, Mr Manuel Ferreira, was appointed in November 1999 by the Ministry of Internal Administration, after the Socialist Party won the elections and ran for its second mandate in government. He is a dynamic person with a large experience as a local politician and as a leader of non profit organisation

where he developed skills as innovator and networker enabling the interactions between multiple stakeholders. In his professional background he worked in the private sector, he was elected President of a Parish (*Presidente de Junta de Freguesia*)<sup>1</sup>, he was elected Mayor of a municipality, administrator of the Association of Municipalities of the Ave Valley, co-ordinator of the development Programme for the Ave Valley (*ProAve*), a programme for regional Development which was financed by EU structural funds. As he points out, his “experience about the different levels of government give a better understanding of the need of integration”. Hence he was well positioned and had the conditions to put forward the intention of central government and start an integrated approach to local development through the involvement of all stakeholders. Indeed, the interviewees point out the role performed by Mr. Manuel Ferreira in promoting the dialogue and enabling the interactions between all local actors involved in the FESDB and the GaddisBraga. The interviewees stress that he personally made informal contacts to invite local personalities to join this initiative and to set up the governance structure.

There was a new approach from the deputy Civil Governor which aimed to change the traditional formal role and to introduce a new attitude and behaviour, being a partner in the search for solutions through the co-operation between Central Government, Local Government and private organisations from the district of Braga. This initiative tried to generate a new approach to local interorganizational relationships which is more consultative and collaborative. Hierarchical control has been replaced by a continuing process of negotiating and articulating among different interests. The interviewees agree that it was the Civil Governor that had an active role in promoting the co-operation to propose an informal structure to support and improve relationships between local actors. In the same way the Danish case reported in this book shows the importance of charisma and leadership to initiate and strengthen the network and to bring in play stakeholders (Damgaard and Ernst, 2002).

### *The PRODISBRAGA*

To implement the objectives of the Government programme for regional development and its Regional Development Programme (PDR), it was established the PRODISBRAGA (Governmental Programme in the District of Braga). This initiative aimed to join the associations which represent all the municipalities of the district and the Civil Governor in order to develop an integrated approach to regional development. “This structure aimed to convene the efforts of associations of municipalities and motivate them for joint action building up an integrated plan of development” (Interview, 2001/10/18). The PRODISBRAGA articulates the plans for development of each association of municipality with the central government plan through an inventory of all investments needed for the district to promote regional development in order to formulate and negotiate with central government a Programme for the Integrated Development of the District of Braga. According to the participants having an integrated plan gives them more power to negotiate domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Parish (*Freguesia*) is the smallest territorial administrative division.



and EU funds with central government. Interviewees agree that there is a need to motivate stakeholders to develop a strategy for co-operation which promotes district development and benefits from the EU structural funds.

#### **Objectives of the Integrated Plan for District Development**

- Develop road infrastructure to promote accessibility.
- Promote training to increase professional integration of unemployed people.
- Attract new companies to invest in the district.
- Create a network of third sector organizations working in social areas.
- Develop a digital web of information to link stakeholders.

There were meetings to join the representatives of the associations of municipalities to discuss and identify common objectives and projects from their development programmes in order to set the integrated programme for the district. From each plan established in the associations they look for common objectives and initiatives in order to integrate in a single plan. In addition, they look for other joint initiatives which they could apply to EU funds. The participants agreed about the objectives and it was proposed to ask for technical advice to a task force of experts for additional studies for the strategic plan of the district. Working in close cooperation with the PRODISBRAGA were two structures with complementary roles. The FESDB which brought together all the local actors to enable the debate between them and worked as a kind of consultative assembly. It contributed with consensual ideas or proposals about regional development to include in the integrated plan. According to the deputy Civil Governor this was the way to overtake divergence about regional development which existed between the three areas which are part of the district. The other structure, the GADDISBRAGA, aimed to support the implementation of initiatives enabling the creation of partnerships. Together they fill up a gap which existed in the governance structure of the district.

#### *The Economic and Social Forum for the District of Braga (FESDB)*

Working close with this initiative was the Economic and Social Forum for the District of Braga (Fórum Económico e Social do Distrito de Braga-FESDB). The FESDB was a structure created to enable local actors – public and private organisations and NGOs –, anchored in a ‘loosely formal’ structure, to promote the dialogue and debate, the participation and interaction among local actors and to contribute with their ideas and suggestions for joint initiatives which could be integrated in the plan. According to an interviewee “the FESDB intended to fill the

absence of a regional government, assuring the presence of every local actor in the debate about district development. The FESDB gave more legitimacy to the Civil Governor and reinforced its influence in the relationships with central government” (2001/10/18). This initiative was similar to those created by central government for the regions NUTS II which had a similar objective. It is a consultative body which was an important source to debate local issues and to find ways to promote development and to solve shared problems. It produces opinions about several issues with impact in the district development and was a source of information and suggestions for the definition of initiatives which could be added to the integrated plan for regional development.

The FESDB worked in plenary sessions which met regularly. To work on the issues discussed in the plenary session there were working groups, organised according to the issues previously identified by plenary. The working groups were responsible for proposing initiatives in areas to which they were created. At the time there were five working groups: regional development, administrative reform, welfare and volunteer services, ICT and e-Government and training and employment. For certain complex issues there were specialised groups. For instances, there were groups to deal with issues like drugs dependence and the integration of small ethnic groups. A more ambitious project discussed in the FESDB was the development, with the co-operation with the National Association of Parish, of single windows in all the parishes of the district.

The studies made in these specialized groups and discussed in plenary meetings included issues like: Innovation and Administrative Modernization; Employment, training and development and Integration of ethnic groups. This was an important source of information that contributed for the district integrated plan. The FESDB allowed the discussion of those problems to be shared by the local actor and it helped the PRODISBRAGA to establish the strategic objectives. But according to some interviewees, above all, it was the first time that local actors from different areas of the district could meet all together in a more informal setting. This was an opportunity “to break some of the ice” which exists between them and to spread the ‘ferment’ of co-operation (Interview, 2001/10/23). These interactions were important to identify common problems and needs which create the conditions for the establishment of partnerships through joint projects and opened and expanded their span of interests. To enable the partnerships and to avoid the overlap of initiatives it was set up a structure which helped the elaboration of integrated project for district development. It helped in the implementation of the integrated plan for the district and the synergies arising in the interactions established in the FESDB.

### *The GADDISBRAGA*

The Gaddisbraga had a more operative nature and aimed to create the conditions for policy implementation through public and private sectors’ joint projects. The Gaddisbraga was a network of local actors which included several targets like:

- ✓ Organise and share information and experience about national programmes' funds for public investment and EU structural funds to promote regional development;
- ✓ Facilitate and promote interorganisational co-operation and the creating of partnerships through joint projects and programmes;
- ✓ Organise and gather information and transfer it to the PRODISBRAGA working as a feedback;
- ✓ Give technical assistance to the activities which are within the Gaddisbraga proposals and aimed to apply to national and EU structural funds;
- ✓ Contribute to the strategic development of the district;
- ✓ Promote the creation of other initiatives in social areas.

It aimed particularly to articulate the implementation of national, regional and local projects and look for ways of co-operation among local actors with a more operative orientation. The Gaddisbraga had a small staff made available by the Civil Governor and the associations for regional development working as a collector and disseminator of information about EU programmes and funds to its members and helped with the technical issues of these programmes.

This arrangement depended on the voluntary compromise and the co-operation between local actors. Participation is not formally structured through the establishment of clearly defined units. An interviewee points out that everyone who was in the Gaddisbraga was firstly for its own convenience, and then for what was important to implement in the district (Interviewee, 2001/10/18). Another interviewee pointed out that it was a way to articulate initiatives which promote the integrated development (2001/10/15). It worked close to the Proddisbraga and the FESDB creating the conditions to elaborate and submit joint projects. There were meetings among participants, but the interactions and joint initiatives happened mainly from the informal contacts which are building between them. They admit that they 'have a long way to go' (Interviewee, 2001/10/23) to improve the cooperation and 'the contacts between them are still random, according to the opportunities not according to a plan' (Interviewee, 2001/10/15).

The analysis shows that there was a network with two layers of participants in the Gaddisbraga. An inner group which was in the forefront of this process, that was committed to the success, and had a role of leadership. A second group which sees the Gaddisbraga as an opportunity to enhance their activities and to look for opportunities to participate in projects together with other partners. In overall they agree that "these structures let them have a deeper knowledge of the district and its territory" (interview, 2001/10/18). There is a shared opinion that they need to have the conditions to organise and promote articulated initiatives, through joint projects in order to have an integrated development of the district. They try to develop such projects looking at other experiences and learning from them. According to the participants, sharing this information and knowledge is only possible through

structures that promote and articulate the dialogue between organisations engaged in public programmes. They admit that Gaddisbraga was the structure which promotes the dialogue between local actors and fills up a gap at district level concerning the co-operation between local actors from the public and the private sector. There is among participants a shared idea that this kind of work within the Gaddisbraga was important because they could benefit from learning from others. They admit that it is very important to listen to other organisations to identify a global programme to help the management of interconnected areas. (2000/10/24).

From the joint projects developed in the Gaddisbraga the social area was a priority. To promote the integration of poor groups and social development it was established a partnership between the Agency for Regional Development of the Cávado Valley, the Civil Government of the District of Braga and the Catholic University through the project 'FINDES'. The project aimed to intervene in two main areas: a) to produce a diagnostic of the social infrastructures in the Cávado Valley, to identify the needs in infrastructures and to promote the interaction between those who intervene in the social area, b) to promote training courses about local social development for young people looking for the first job. The project was directed to the development of an information system to support the public authorities and local actors working in the social area and to organize a network of NGO to improve the cooperation among them in such areas. Another project in partnership with four stakeholders, the 'Portugal 2001-A new life opportunity' initiative, aimed to deal with the issue of immigrants from east and to articulate their flux from the countries or regions they come from and the demand for labour force in the Portuguese industries. This initiative tries the integration of immigrants from east countries providing information about Portugal and how to deal with legal issues, to learn about the Portuguese culture and way of life.

### **The motivation for cooperation**

Local dynamic towards co-operation and the search of joint projects was not strong before this governance structure and particularly before the creation of Gaddisbraga. This experience shows it was emerging a new way of interorganizational relationship. Participants admit that consensus became an important issue in their functioning because the formulation of programmes required that they had 'work with' not 'work against'. They realised the advantages of such kind of co-ordination and articulation compared with the traditional and formal way of doing things which was the basis of the previous relationships between them. The centralised, formalised and top down administrative process had given place to more loosely coupled forms which included hierarchic and non hierarchic structures. The emerging governance structure stresses the role of Civil Governor as enabling the co-operation and articulation among local actors. The emphasis on horizontal structures and more flexible forms of relationships to promote the interaction stresses a different approach in the management of interorganisational relationships at district level. An

interviewee points out that it is important to “motivate organisations from the district in a mutual cooperation strategy with interest for district development, and benefit from EU structural funds” (Interview, 2001/10/18).

However, the data suggests that there is a lack of coherence between the three structures. For instances, the initiatives developed in the GADDISBRAGA were not the result of the implementation of the plan established in the PRODISBRAGA. Co-operation is not just the result of a deliberate option from participants to be engaged in a common initiative. Some interviewees point out that the decision to have joint projects depends on the announcement of funds available for regional development (Interview, 2001/10/18). The decision to co-operate and the areas where it happens were contingent from the structural funds available for regional development and the initiatives promoted by Central Government. It is clear that coupling efforts was a condition to get funds to the district. Interaction between actors in Gaddisbraga depends on the advantages and the opportunity which results from such effort. Indeed, it is the announcement of a EU or national programme that influences the decision to co-operate. For instances, there are areas where it is difficult to have joint initiatives because there are not EU structural funds or national funds. Therefore, co-operation and the area where it happens depend on:

- the availability of funds from a national or a EU programme;
- the possibility to submit joint projects;
- the requirement of horizontal public policy co-ordination.

Moreover, each participant just knows the projects in which they were engaged. When asked about areas where there are joint initiatives, interviewees could not identify those areas. Members tend to join together according to the projects they want to implement. According to an interviewee (2001/10/23) it was the personal relationships which were determinant in the interorganisational cooperation. There is not an integrative approach to local policies between participants and the cooperation between stakeholders is directed by the affinity between them and not by a clear direction of the strategic plan.

## **Conclusion**

This case shows the importance of enabling interactions of local actors and opening channels of dialogue and cooperation to improve local governance. Local actors are learning how to cooperate and learning the benefits of that cooperation for district development. Cooperation was enhanced by the leadership role performed by key actors which promoted the interactions between organizations, and the incentives available for participants with the new institutional context of regional development. The main impact of the three initiatives on the policies and practices of local authorities are:

- a) Stakeholders in the district meet together, for the first time, to think and discuss strategically about the problems of the district and ways to solve them;
- b) Development of an integrated plan for development which regards the district as a whole not each area alone;
- c) The initiative helped breaking barriers between them, improving the dialogue and sharing experiences;
- d) Learning that there is another way of doing things where the cooperation and collaboration is a critical issue;

This experience, however, was not replicated in other Civil Governments. Usually each Civil Government works in an insular approach to issues and the way they manage them. Being the representative of central government they tend to confine their role to formal issues according to their statute. The innovation made in the district of Braga goes against this traditional role of Civil Governors and the way they traditionally perform their job. In fact this initiative overtakes the competencies of Civil Governors and has no legal support, which means that this initiative was not a formal structure. In the eyes of the law it does not exist. It was the way the Civil Governor and particularly the Deputy Civil Governor envisaged their role in the district development which explains the initiative and the innovations introduced. This explains why the initiative finished when the ruling party changed after the elections of March 2002, and the Socialist Party dropped from the Government and the Social Democrats (*Partido Social Democrata-PSD*) took power and a new Civil Governor was appointed. The change of Civil Governors represents the end of the initiatives started previously. This is a trend in Portuguese politics which crosses all levels of government (Araújo, 2002). However, despite these changes, the seeds of a new way doing things are spread and this will have influence in the relationships between stakeholders.

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