

Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy: Regional and Local Players Need to Step Up Their Involvement



By **Alexander Heichlinger**, **Seppo Määttä** and **Martin Unfried***

How should regional and local actors in Europe be involved in delivering the revised Lisbon strategy? This is a question of importance not only for the development of good multi-level governance in the European Union but also for the effective implementation of European policies. This report summarises some of the discussion of this question which took place at the International Conference¹ on the Lisbon strategy on growth and employment from the regional and local viewpoint. This conference, which brought together around 80 high-level civil servants and practitioners, politicians and academics, was jointly organised by EIPA and the European Centre for the Regions (EIPA-ECR) in April 2005 in Barcelona. The authors have summarised some "Key Messages" which were stated by speakers and participants. These are reproduced at the end of this article.

The conference was held in anticipation of the deadline which was agreed – 15 October 2005 – for designing the national reform programmes which are to be at the heart of the revised "Lisbon Strategy".² The Lisbon European Council of March 2000 adopted a ten-year strategy intended to make the European Union "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment". Halfway to 2010 more and more ambitious intentions have been stated, but without an equal amount of achievements. Due to the strong expansion of objectives, targets and procedures, the Lisbon agenda somewhat lost its core focus during the first five years by becoming more like an "anything goes" strategy without clear ownership or accountable strategy-makers.

Following the Kok Report of November 2004, the emphasis has been placed on national capitals to deliver the necessary reform packages. One of the main proposals for more effective delivery was a renewed partnership among key stakeholders, allowing for the diversity of situations and policy priorities at national level. This means, among other things, that national administrations need to strengthen their capacity to identify, to develop and to implement innovative practices in policy-making, regulation, management and service delivery.³ A good quality public administration is a critical catalyst, facilitator and partner

for well-functioning society, competitive regulatory and innovative environment, good quality service provision and solid public finances. The role of regional and local actors has also been given particular emphasis.

The Role of Sub-State Actors in Delivering the Revised Lisbon Strategy⁴

The key mechanism proposed by the European Union to implement the Lisbon agenda was a "new and open method of coordination based on the benchmarking of national initiatives to reach the targets set out in the various policy areas and corresponding action plans". This implies a limited set of Community legal actions and an emphasis on the responsibility of Member States at national level. There are some references to other stakeholders (social and parliamentary partners, local and regional bodies) when outlining the governance structure in the new "Integrated guidelines for growth and jobs 2005-2008". Yet no concrete guideline or steering mechanism is put forward concerning the participation of the regional and local levels in preparing the national plans. This is all the more striking since many of the policy areas involved (such as employment, social policy, public health and education) are precisely spheres of regional competence in many countries.

The concern of sub-state actors goes even further. Many regional and local authorities are normally consulted in the national coordination process concerning EU decision-making, but only with regard to legislation. As the open method of coordination does not result in direct EU legislation, they suddenly faced a problem because the method short-cuts this process. In areas of strong regional and local responsibility, the normal consultation procedure with national governments disappeared. As a result, curious situations developed where action plans that affect the regional sphere of authority were being drawn up without consulting them at any moment.

To give an example, in Denmark in 2001 such a problem emerged during a meeting with the Committee on EU Affairs of the national parliament. As a direct result of this meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had set up a

contact committee on the Lisbon Strategy and the open method of coordination. The committee, which comprises representatives from the local and regional government associations, the social partners and other interest organisations, meets twice a year to discuss and coordinate questions related to the Lisbon Strategy. Minutes from these meetings are generally forwarded as official consultation notes to the national parliamentary EU committee, which then decides on the national mandates to be given in all matters related to the European Union. Danish regions are satisfied to be involved in the contact committee, which gives them a good opportunity to follow the overall work carried out in relation to the Lisbon Strategy. However, they would prefer to participate more directly in the work, and especially in the areas falling directly under their regional competences.

Another example is public health policy. European cooperation tends to concentrate on identifying and sharing the Member States' expertise and best practice on health. However, public health is not always only a national matter (in Spain, for example, a large area of competences lies within the responsibilities of the Autonomous Communities). And with the establishment of the single market and increased patient mobility, cooperation between European health-care systems at all levels (both national and territorial) will become increasingly important.

The open method of coordination could be a successful instrument for most of the policy areas covered in the Lisbon strategy. It may even be the only instrument available. Yet greater attention must be paid to the interaction between the various levels of government involved and to the development of administrative mechanisms that enable effective participation by local and regional authorities in

applying the strategy.

Structured procedures are required for consultation on the National Lisbon Programmes. Since local and regional structures and competences vary from country to country it is impossible to set up standard procedures and prescriptions. It should nevertheless be compulsory for each national government to consult the authorities and/or organisations at local and regional level affected by actions before these actions are finally decided upon. Furthermore, a sufficient time frame to coordinate and/or to have a political dimension in the discussions of the regional and local members is required.

Of course, it is also up to the local and regional bodies to provide both human and financial resources in line with their aspirations and responsibilities. They should actively offer their extensive local and regional knowledge to support the drafting and implementing of National Action Plans.

Policies and Practices at Regional Level

Several cases were presented at the conference which illustrated the special contribution which can be made at regional level to achieving the Lisbon objectives. The following three examples relate respectively to three policy priorities which are carried out at the regional and local level and which are very closely related to the success of the strategy: environmental sustainability and the need for an integrated view on sustainable planning, the knowledge and information society and the catalyst role of eGovernance, and education and employment policies for growth and jobs.⁵

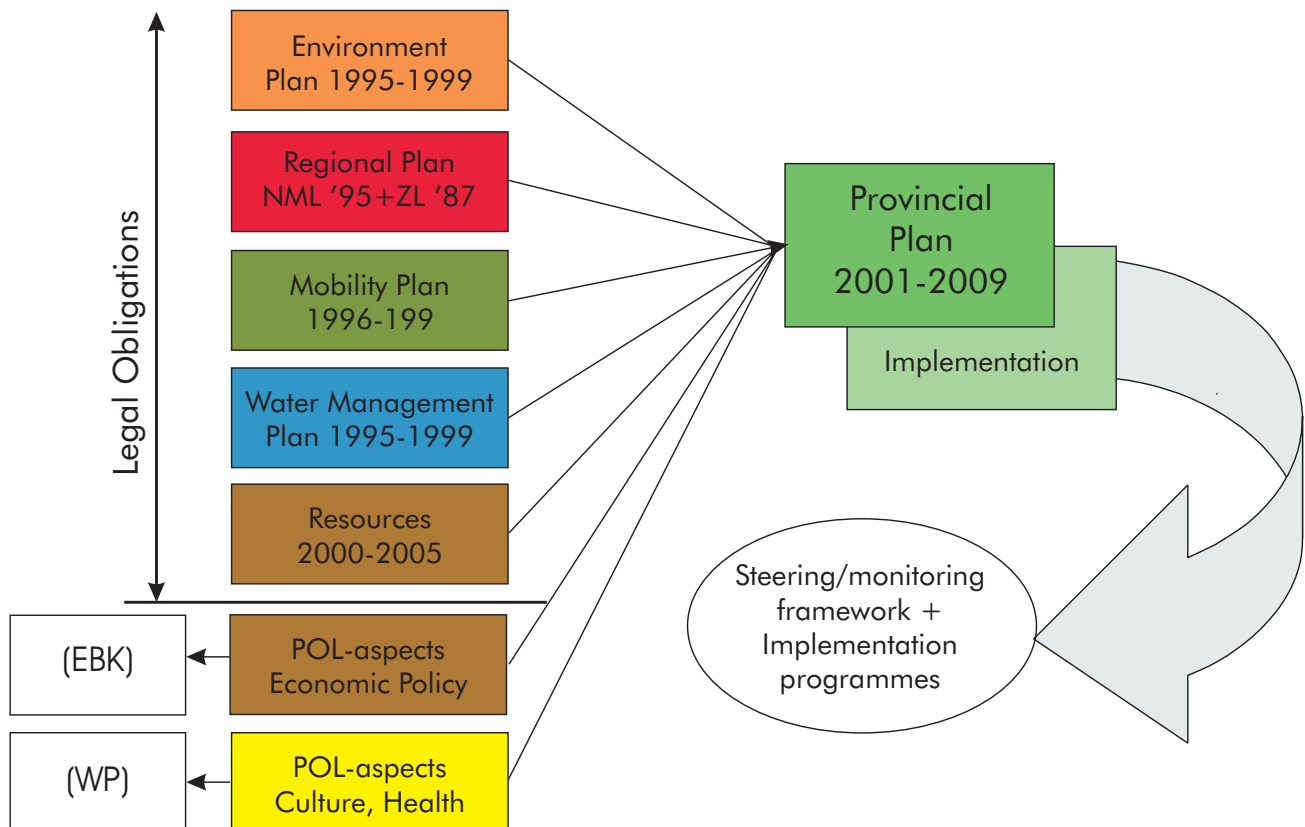


Figure 1: The integrated plan of Limburg

A computer for all

The project intends to create 80 spaces, around the Region, fully equipped with multimedia computers, printers and Internet access. These places will be situated in public areas so that they might be accessible to all.



Figure 2:
Implementing the Lisbon strategy in the Region of Madeira (Caires Raul, Region of Madeira)

The environmental dimension of sustainable development: the case of integrative planning for sustainability in the Province of Limburg

Although it is widely lamented by representatives of the regions that the regional level has not been more extensively involved in the reshaping of the Lisbon strategy,⁶ the regional level is increasingly perceived as having an important role to play in sustainability and its environmental dimension.⁷ Several regional networks are currently working on the topic.⁸ One example is the European Sustainable Regions Network that has been established under the "Innovative Action Programme" run by the European Commission's DG REGIO. The network released a report in 2004 on its two years work with workshops, case studies and field visits.⁹ In the context of the network it has been shown that many regions have established their own strategies in the field of sustainable development. However, most strategies are barely linked to national or EU strategy, or to Lisbon.¹⁰ They tend to be "add-on" strategies, that is, horizontal planning policy documents which do not substitute other planning schemes (economic development plans, transport plans, environment plans) in a legal sense. In this context, a rather unique example is found in the pilot scheme of the Dutch region of Limburg, where different previously-existing planning schemes were integrated into one new plan on sustainable development of the region. Limburg's integrative plan (POL) thus has a legal meaning and has triggered a process which urged the different sectors affected to find compromises on the different policies.

The innovative element of this plan is that there is no other sustainable development strategy, or employment or growth strategies. The big picture is covered by a single document. The reason for doing this has been the demand for more transparency by politicians of the province, since the multitude of plans had led to much complexity for politicians who had to judge the quality of hundreds of pages of different planning schemes.¹¹ A first revision of the plan in 2003/2004 has led to some first experiences on the method of integrative planning in Limburg. The making of the plan was a unique exercise in interdepartmental coordination and stakeholder involvement. This has

triggered better internal communication in the regional administration.¹² It was, for instance, possible to agree on big projects where money was also invested. The projects in the field of environmental sustainability were very much dedicated to the broader theme of sustainability and businesses (energy efficiency in industry, a sustainability award for companies, an intensive search for renewable energy locations in the province). A rather weak point has been that implementation of other detailed sectoral policies has been done in similar ways as in previous years.¹³ To improve this, the follow-up work for 2007 will concentrate on joint implementation of policies. A first step in this direction is a sustainable development programme for 2005-2007 that is described as an integrated action programme. It outlines practical implementation steps and direct allocation of tasks to the different departments.¹⁴ There are some disadvantages of such a framework. The general objectives are relatively modest due to early interventions by some sectors.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the rather clear meaning of the plan is an advantage and Limburg's example appears to be an attractive example of regional governance.

Knowledge and information society: eGovernance in Madeira

The Lisbon Strategy attributes central importance to the EU's becoming a knowledge-based economy and society.¹⁶ Regional and local actors are closest to the citizen and therefore uniquely place to promote this goal.¹⁷

The initiative "A computer for all"¹⁸ in Madeira is to stimulate an increase in the use of new technologies. The 80 information spaces established around all parishes also provide the opportunity to deliver basic training on the use of new technologies. All non-profit organisations considered of social interest were eligible to acquire such a status. In parallel, another project was carried out with a specific emphasis on Madeira's households, intended to increase, through financial support, the number of fully-fledged multimedia terminals in households with lesser resources and to promote their competences in its usage. 50% of the set target has been achieved so far. By 2006 all 10,000 computers will have been received by the family households

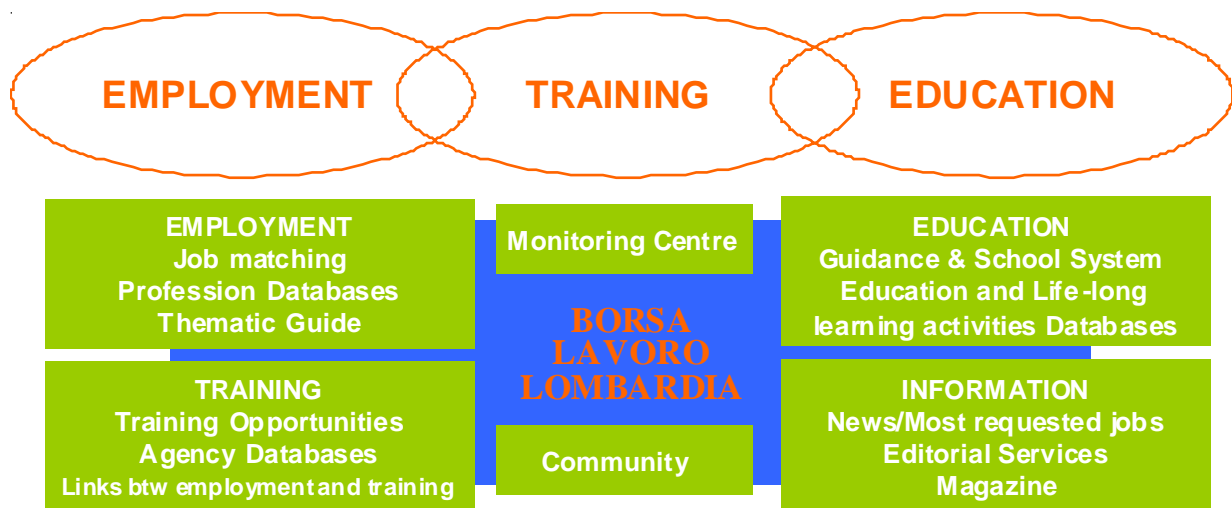


Figure 3:
The "Labour Stock Exchange" of the Lombardy Region (Renzo Ruffini, Region of Lombardy)

which also will have benefited from the accompanying training.

Education and employment: life-long learning and the Borsa Lavoro Lombardia

Within the framework of the European Employment Strategy, Member States are committed to foster the three overarching and interrelated objectives of full employment, quality and productivity at work, and social cohesion and inclusion. The 2010 objective of achieving a 12.5% rate of adult participation in lifelong learning is a part of the Lisbon strategy.¹⁹ Life-long learning implies a new approach towards all learning systems: education, vocational training and employment. The core element of this approach is the people who wish to foster their knowledge and skills. To implement life-long learning strategies there is a need to improve, increase and moreover make every learning opportunity accessible to citizens.

The Lisbon strategy has been the key reference point for the action plan for the Lombardy region in Italy in this respect. The plan includes increasing quality and quantity of life-long learning activities (voucher, framework programme, elearning programme, individual courses, recognition of qualification, post-graduate and master's

courses) and making all stake-holders involved in education, training and labour policies work together following common methods and standards within a shared system of accreditation. In order to implement the action plan, the region has created a network which is supported by technological tools, mainly by a web portal named *Borsa Lavoro Lombardia* (Labour Stock Exchange).²⁰ The network is based on integrated services for education, training and employment aiming to the development of human capital throughout life.

Carpe Diem Regional and Local Players?

The revised Lisbon strategy aims to step up the pace of agreed reforms by proposing a stronger partnership with the Member States and social partners to increase their involvement in and commitment to the process. The cases described in this report show the existing linkages between the overall Lisbon strategy and the concrete actions at the regional and local levels. However, it can be argued that these actions would have been taken also without the Lisbon strategy. Hence, as much as the regional actors need to prove their value-added to the Lisbon strategy, the strategy needs to prove its contribution and relevance to the regional actors. ::

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL ACTORS

(Barcelona Conference Conclusions, 28-29 April 2005)

1. In addition to the various stakeholders, already the formulation of the national Lisbon strategies should directly involve regional and local authorities responsible for the implementation and the communication of the strategic objectives for
 - creating and exploiting regional and local partnerships for life-long learning, research and development;
 - bridging the gaps between people looking for a job and education and companies looking for skilled workforce;
 - facilitating and implementing the use of information and communication technology;
 - facilitating and implementing the principles and practices on the sustainable use of environmental resources;
 - improving the regional and the interregional infrastructure.
2. The revision of the EU Sustainable development strategy should be used to develop a common understanding of 'sustainable growth' as a leading principle of Lisbon.
3. The forthcoming European structural policy (incl. the structural funds) should be based on a genuine strategic approach accompanied with a more decentralised governance model and a truly strategy-based allocation of the available funds.
4. National, regions and local actors need to apply a more proactive approach for aligning and integrating the present priorities and resources with the Lisbon strategy. In particular, there is a need to strengthen the quality and the innovativeness of the national and regional policymaking.
5. The roles and the responsibilities of the public authorities in designing and delivering the Lisbon strategy on the national and regional levels should be emphasised (as a policymaker and a regulator, a service provider, a major purchaser, investor and employer).
6. European regions need the Lisbon strategy, but the Lisbon strategy also needs regions and local actors, who are continuously facing the everyday life of the citizens and the companies.

NOTES

- * Senior Lecturers and Finnish National Seconded – EIPA Maastricht and Barcelona, respectively.
- ¹ For further details on programme, objectives and speakers, please consult our website www.eipa.nl.
 - ² Council of the European Union. Presidency Conclusions, 22.-23.3.2005; See also Commission of the European Communities (2005), *Working together for growth and jobs. Next steps in implementing the revised Lisbon strategy*. Brussels, 29.4.2005, SEC (2005) 622/2.
 - ³ See European Public Administration Network, *Lisbon ad hoc group (2005), The EPAN Contribution to the success of the Lisbon Strategy. Final report*, 10.5.2005. The structure of the European Public Administration Network (EPAN) is headed by the ministers responsible for public administration and civil service. The core of the network consists of the directors general of public administration, four working groups on Innovative Public Services Group, Human Resources Working Group, eGovernment Working Group and Directors and Experts for Better Regulation. See more www.eupan.org/index.asp
 - ⁴ The following paragraphs are largely based on the texts and presentations of Mrs Annelise Korreborg, Senior Expert at the Danish Regions, Copenhagen, and Mr Lauri Lamminmäki, Brussels Representative of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, combined with the reflections and experiences of the authors of this report.
 - ⁵ For the discussion of the following cases, the authors summarised information that was presented in Barcelona by Martin Unfried (EIPA), Caires Raul (Region of Madeira) and Renzo Ruffini (Region of Lombardy).
 - ⁶ See: Unfried, Martin (2003), *European Governance and Sustainable Development: The Current Debate and the Challenges for the Regions*, Policy Paper for the European Regional Sustainable Development Network, presented in Bologna 20 October 2003. The author took part in many regional conferences on the topic where this was very often stated.
 - ⁷ See for instance: Lafferty, William M. and Michael Noradoslawsky, *Regional Sustainable Development in Europe*. Prosus, 2003.
 - ⁸ Inter alia the ENCORE Network (The Environment Conference of the Regions), the Sustainable European Regions Network, ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives). In a broader sense also the special Lisbon Regions Network launched in May 2010 is dealing with climate change and eco-efficient innovations (see Lisbon Action Plan, Framework analysis for regional and local authorities).
 - ⁹ *Cohesive Thinking – Towards a Sustainable Future*, Report of the Sustainable European Regions Network, 2004.
 - ¹⁰ Unfried, Martin, *Sustainable Development at the Regional Level in the EU. A Structure to the Different Debates of the Network*. Study written for the Sustainable European Regions Network, 2004.

- ¹¹ Given the different strategies and programmes at the EU level, the demand for more clarity of strategic documents seems to be also evident.
- ¹² See the presentation of Paul Levels, Province of Limburg: "General Approach and State of the Art on Integrated Planning of the Province of Limburg." Given at a Seminar of the Sustainable European Regions Network in Maastricht, 2-3 February 2004.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ As a result of the review there is a Programme on Sustainable Development for 2005-2007 concentrating on implementation measures and responsibilities. See: Duurzaam duurt het langst. Prgramma Duurzaam Limburg 2005-2007, published by the Province of Limburg, 2005.
- ¹⁵ See also the presentation of Paul Levels, Province of Limburg.
- ¹⁶ See for further details eGovernment Communication, COM(2003)567, September 2003.
- ¹⁷ See further, for instance, "eGovernment in Europe's Regions: Approaches and Progress in IST Strategy, Organisation and Services, and the Role of Regional Actors", Alexander Heichlinger, EIPA 2004.
- ¹⁸ www.madeiratecnpolo.pt
- ¹⁹ See Communication from the Commission. Education & Training 2010. The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms. COM(2003) 685 final. Brussels, 11.11.2003. See also Commission Staff Working paper. Progress Towards The Common Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and benchmarks. SEC (2004) 73. Brussels 21.1.2004.
- ²⁰ See www.borsalavorolombardia.net (in Italian).

RELATED ACTIVITIES AT EIPA

3 November 2005, Brussels (BE)

EIPA-ECR 2005 Round Table "Sectoral Policies and European Territories: Moving from Strategic Guidelines to Programming".

Jointly organised by EIPA-ECR Barcelona, UNIONCAMERE (Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture), and the Conference of the Presidents of the Italian Autonomous Regions and Provinces
0560901 No fee involved.

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14-15 November 2005, Maastricht (NL)

Conference "Europe at Crossroads:
Deliverable Lisbon Strategy for Sustainable Growth".
0524201 Conference fee: €695.

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8-9 December 2005, Maastricht (NL)

Seminar "EU Policy Coordination after Enlargement:
Managing EU Dossiers at Regional Level".
Jointly organised by EIPA Maastricht and
EIPA-ECR Barcelona.
0510501 Seminar fee: €650.
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The Lisbon strategy and the public administration, European Public Administration Network, Lisbon ad hoc group, 2004-2005.

EIPA acted as an expert member of the Lisbon ad hoc group in analysing the role of the public administration in the context of the Lisbon strategy. See more on the report "The European Public Administration Network (EPAN) Contribution to the success of the Lisbon Strategy.

Final report 10.5.2005, www.eupan.org/index.asp.

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June 2005-June 2007, Maastricht (NL) and Barcelona (ES)
Project ALSO "Achievement of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategy Objectives by INTERREG", financed by the Community Initiative Programme INTERACT and lead by the Region of Marche (IT), EIPA and the ULB – Université Libre de Bruxelles as scientific partners; other regional partners: Regional Council of Southwest Finland (FI), Ita-Usima Region (FI), Klaipeda RDA (LT), Hiiu-maa County Government (EE), Slivuppo Marche (IT), Emilia Romagna RDA (IT), A Del-Alfoldi RHT (HU), Central European Initiative (IT), Lorraine Region (FR), Cambridgeshire County Council (UK), Arco Latino (ES) and the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development.

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