

Participation, Identity, Planning, Entrepreneurship

Preliminary reflections on the PIPE Project and on the meeting in Turi, Estonia, 29-31 January 2004

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Introduction

The PIPE Project Manager invited me to attend the workshop as a first step to undertaking the evaluation for the project. Before attending the meeting I had received some briefing about PIPE from the Project Manager, and I had been able to explore materials on the PIPE Website. In particular I was given a copy of the Methodology Guidelines agreed by the partners at Rovaniemi in November 2002. I am familiar with the Interreg 3B programme. I had some involvement as a researcher and teacher in the Interreg 2C project 'Quality by Identity', from which the themes of place identity and youth participation, and the partners from Ostfold County and Vastra Gotaland have continued into PIPE.

I listened to the various presentations and activities on the afternoon of 29 January. On the morning of 30 January I attended the meeting of the co-ordinators. I also worked by with Project Co-ordinator and with Ms. Zilinskaita on the design of the evaluative questionnaire that she had produced. On the afternoon of 30 January I was able to do a short walk round Turi meeting up with some of the student groups who were doing their fieldwork. On the evening I gave a short address to the whole meeting, outlining my impressions and linking PIPE into developing European networking. At the request of one of the co-ordinators, I have now written out a version of these unscripted comments, and these are attached as an appendix to this report. On 31 January I sat in on the group discussions within each of the four working groups of students, observing the way that each was moderated. I did a little bit of teaching myself in the group looking at town planning and design. I was also able throughout the whole event to talk informally with co-ordinators and with students. I consider that in a relatively short space of time I was able to get a good impression of what the PIPE project is trying to achieve, what it has already done and is planning to do (most notably the EXPO in May 2004), and how it operates in practice.

Aims and relevance

The scope and ambition of the project is substantial. In geographical terms it involves nine regional partners from seven countries. More specifically it includes partners from the periphery of Europe's periphery – Finnmark, Rovaniemi and Murmansk in the north and towns in the Baltic republics that are some distance from the capital city. This geography must impose extra challenges and costs, and the success in creating the project through a mix of support from the partners, Interreg, Phare and the Barents Foundation is itself an achievement. More fundamentally, building networks such as this one is vital to the vision of a polycentric Europe as set out in the European Spatial Development Perspective, and to the aims for territorial cohesion as

included in the recent Convention and in the Third Cohesion Report. In addition the emphasis within the project on the development of entrepreneurship amongst youth in these small, peripheral communities is a way of translating aspects of the Lisbon Strategy into practical actions.

The breadth of the project is a notable feature. It encompasses actions in and linkages between spatial planning, community development, youth participation, entrepreneurship and place identity. There are no less than eight 'central objectives' set out in the Methodology Guidelines. It would probably not be reasonable to expect more than a loose degree of integration at any one time and for any student group. However, the 'Expected Outcome' declared in the Methodology Guidelines is more than that. It talks of the results being 'the development of attractive, active and sustainable local communities and regions' and stimulating 'young and educated people to live, work and invest in regions outside the metropolitan areas' (page 5). In reality, of course, PIPE is not the only factor likely to influence the development trajectory of the partner regions during and after the life of the project. Similarly, PIPE's influences the decisions of its youth members about where to live and work will not be knowable for several years. There are thus some limits to the empirical testing of PIPE's intended overall outcomes. It will be more feasible to ask whether in each region, and in the project as a whole, there has developed a coherent narrative that connects spatial planning, youth participation, community development, entrepreneurship and identity; and whether this is embedded in PIPE activity and understood by the groups that are targeted through PIPE.

Methodology

There is a clear methodology in PIPE, though again it is so ambitious that evaluation may need to be selective if it is to be manageable. The section on 'Expected Outcome' (page 5) says that 'The heavy focus on identity will raise the awareness among young people, the authorities and citizens about the strengths, values and opportunities of the region they live in and stimulate their participation in community life'. Even allowing for the fact that PIPE is operating in small towns where local news is likely to gain more prominence than in a large city, it is difficult to see how the success of PIPE in stimulating the citizens in general can be judged robustly. At best, parents of young 'PIPERs' might be reached and the impact of PIPE on their identity with and involvement in community life might be explored. However, it seems reasonable to concentrate on the young participants themselves and on those members of authority (e.g. local politicians, administrators and teachers) who have had direct contact with PIPE. The risk is that this approach will overstate PIPE's real impacts – for example, officials in touch with PIPE may be fired by its ideas but then be blocked by other officials within authorities. Awareness of this risk can be factored into the evaluation. One important feature of PIPE is that it adopts this cross-cutting problem-based approach, linking things like planning and entrepreneurship that are often separated by disciplines and administrative structures. Attention needs to be paid to the benefits and obstacles to this approach.

A key element of the methodology in PIPE is the creation, adoption and implementation of a local action plan in each case area. Again implementation may be difficult to measure within the limited time frame available, but the content and status of these documents will be an important part of the evaluation. In particular the

embedding of PIPE ideas into the schools and into the practices of local councils is very important to the maturation of PIPE's ambitions.

In summary, as a preliminary reflection, key concerns in an evaluation of PIPE should be on:

- Is there a trans-national knowledge network developing around these peripheral regions? How extensive and robust is it, and what are the key nodes? How might it be sustained and developed after PIPE's funding ends?
- Within PIPE is there a coherent narrative that connects spatial planning, youth participation, community development, entrepreneurship and identity? Is this narrative embedded in PIPE activity and understood by the groups that are targeted through PIPE?
- How has PIPE impacted on the young people participating and on members of authorities who have had contact with PIPE and PIPers?
- What is in each action plan produced through the project? Has the action plan been adopted and embedded in the practices in the schools and authorities? (*Note that if any of these action plans are not in English then some help will be necessary to analyse the content of these plans*).
- What are the lessons from PIPE in terms of delivering problem-based learning and more traditional teaching methods in relation to European concerns for competitiveness and territorial cohesion?

Some comments on the meeting in Turi.

The meeting was above all marked by the very real sense of welcome and friendship extended from the hosts in Turi, and by the energy and enthusiasm of the youths taking part. It was also clear that the co-ordinators, teachers and management team (including some of the youths in steering roles) have developed a camaraderie and good working relations. It is also clear that the project has been very successful in motivating females to take an active part – amongst the students they outnumbered the men comfortably, and there was a good gender balance amongst co-ordinators who are important as role models.

The introductory session on 29 January, including the welcome from the mayor, set the context for Turi. The pack given to participants included a quite detailed 4-page analysis of the town and vision to 2010. I did not take part in the briefings of the students in their four project groups on 29 January, but I wonder whether enough use was made of this document, as nobody seemed to be using it on 31 January when I went round the groups.

Inevitably there are limitations in doing short, intensive studies of a strange town in multi-national teams and then being asked to come forward with ideas and recommendations. These are especially evident when the town in question is blanketed in snow that made many of Turi's assets as the 'Spring Capital' literally invisible. The real benefit lies in the process of learning and sharing and gaining confidence. While I did not see the final presentations by the four groups I was able to observe each group in action. How engaged did the students appear to be? How interactive was the group? How did the moderator handle a teaching situation – e.g. was there a clear structure, awareness of aims and learning outcomes, highlighting and repetition of key points and skills, attention to individual needs while steering the group as a whole? From the samples I saw, the quality was a bit mixed. Some

moderators were able to get their students working in sub-groups of 2 or 3 and were providing them with tuition. Others had established a successful, guided dialogue with their group ('I want you to tell me 3 things that we could do...') Others were trying to lead a group of a dozen or so and finding it harder to get responses.

I felt that, perhaps, an opportunity had been missed to brief the moderators and get them together as a team to identify key transferable skills that they would develop with their students. One example might be the use of the standard analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that would have fitted well with tasks and that could have given links to teaching in schools and contributed to PIPE students building a portfolio of skills developed through PIPE. Such a portfolio could then be used in relation to seeking employment or entry to higher education.

On the Saturday morning the youths and the co-ordinators and moderators were asked to spend a few minutes filling in the evaluation questionnaires that had been designed by Ms. Zilinskaita, and discussed with the Project manager and myself on the Thursday evening. In this way it was possible to do a pilot for the survey and this should ensure that the final survey is robust and manageable. The impression I gained while helping to distribute and collect the questionnaires was that the respondents gave the questions some thought, but had no problems understanding or completing them. Again this was a positive signal.

The participation of the Mayor of Turi and other Council members at the session on the afternoon of 31 January when the four student groups presented their findings and recommendations for Turi was an excellent example of support and dissemination of findings.

Conclusions

PIPE is a brave and bustling project. It is contributing to the building of a new Europe across national boundaries and to creating a new outlook and vision for the next generation of Europeans, while also trying to re-energise the practices of existing local administrations. Its achievements and limitations should be assessed, shared and built upon. The need to develop new skills, regional awareness and confidence in the young people in small towns on the edge of Europe is one of the challenges created by accession and the growth of the Union. That need will not end with PIPE, but PIPE is actively addressing it.