Aid policy, aid projects and aid practitioners. The role of agency, actors and interfaces in 'pro-poor development' projects in post-apartheid South Africa and post-communist Baltic States

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Aid Policy, Aid Projects and Aid Practitioners

The role of agency, actors and interfaces in ‘pro-poor development’ projects in post-apartheid South Africa and post-communist Baltic States
Aid Policy, Aid Projects and Aid Practitioners

The role of agency, actors and interfaces in ‘pro-poor development’ projects in post-apartheid South Africa and post-communist Baltic States

Submitted by Peter Gerard McAlinden

Primary Supervisor: Professor Chris Curtin
National University of Ireland Galway

February 2018
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I hereby certify that this thesis is all my own work and that I have not obtained a degree in this University, or elsewhere, on the basis of this work.

Peter Gerard McAlinden

13th February 2018
Acknowledgements

Where the motivation for this doctoral thesis came from is just as locked into lifeworld as the intentions, the accidents, the encounters and the consequences that I try to explore in the following pages. To be more precise in terms of timing, the initial stimulus, over and above a more general sense of ‘wouldn’t it be nice’ came from a conversation between Professor Chris Curtin and myself as we travelled to Kosovo in 2008 or 2009 to deliver training to students on a Masters local development programme which the National University of Ireland Galway was co-managing with the University of Pristina. I was working on a short term contract from NUIG at the time. Chris and I had known one another since NUIG School of Sociology and Politics had accredited the training component for Rural Development Specialists in the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme. On the flight to Pristina that day, recalling the earlier project, I mentioned how, as far as I was aware, at least two doctoral dissertations had been written on that subject, adding that maybe I should think of doing one myself. ‘So, what’s stopping you?’ was the response. And the journey began. Not quite at the pace or within the timeframe we discussed over the following days.

Going further back, my interest in the subject matter itself – the idea of local development, self-help and working together for a collective benefit – I attribute to the people of my home town of Newry¹, resilient, self-reliant, optimistic, cooperative and ‘for the town’, virtues held dear by my parents, Eddie and Anne McAlinden, handed on through their lived example. An early interest in learning is also closely linked to some of the teachers and educators I had the good fortune to come into contact with all those years ago in the Abbey CBS Primary, Brother Lynch for the 11+ and for respect and fellowship; in ‘the Abbey Grammar’, Brother Linus Magee for ‘A’ level English and for the beauty, the colour and the freedom of words – Brendan Cassidy for French literature exploring the juxtaposition of the closed-in, draped world of the provincial bourgeois with the lonely spaces of L’Etranger and finally, Jimmy Haffey, our street-wise, border-wise, student-wise teacher of geography (and sometimes history). All have left us now and this small acknowledgement of their gifts to me can mean nothing to them – but it does to me. Years later, my tutor in the Open University was Dr Pat Jess, now retired, to whom I am indebted for re-awakening the love of learning as a welcome anti-dote to much of the ‘noise’ in my life at the time – and a pathway to ‘better and brighter places’.

Fast forwarding the timeline once again to the initial flush of enthusiasm for this latest learning encounter, in 2009, my part-time engagement (50%) on the Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape seemed to offer just the vehicle for an interactionist account of an international development intervention. When I informed colleagues within the project team, including the company director, partners in the administration and other key stakeholders in the wider project

¹ It is a city now – but the Newry I grew up in, was still a town – big enough to be ever interesting and small enough to be always homely and welcoming.
environment, their response was universally positive, albeit in a few cases couched in a mild bemusement – ‘why?’ And politely unspoken ‘At this stage in your career?’ All were generous and open in according time for interview and sharing insights and perspectives, for which I am deeply grateful. I have changed the names of all involved to enable me to explore their (our) actions, interactions and lifeworlds at one remove from the influence of personality and identity.

By the time I started out on this journey, the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme was already consigned to the DFID and Baltic States’ archives – and to the CVs of all of us who had worked on the programme. There was never a question of an ethnographic account based on the active observations of a participant. Nevertheless, I had copies of all our progress reports, extensive notes and documents created during the intervention and many deeply etched memories of an experience that marked me much more than I marked it. As the years go on, I remain in infrequent contact with some of the principals involved – just a skype or phone call away. We have talked about ‘the thesis’ and I have taken heart from the encouragement of the three Country Team Leaders and the Partnership Adviser. In several cases, one or other has provided valuable insights into some of the instances featured throughout the dissertation. I have spared them from the full account. As in South African case, I have once again changed the identities of the actors involved.

In the course of my reflections on the BRPP, I was greatly assisted by having access to some of the work of two social scientists who prepared their respective doctoral thesis on the actions and outcomes of the programme. I owe a considerable debt to both Aine Macken-Walsh and Aet Annist for their insights, observations and analysis, sometimes challenging to my comfort zone but which invariably caused me to rethink, recast and re-examine previously held half-conclusions.

This PhD project was shelved for several years when the pattern of work commitments made it more difficult than ever to continue preparing the thesis. Confidence waned, motivation slipped and clarity of purpose faded. By 2016, it all seemed like a withered good intention, weighing less heavy as the months wore on and to be quietly forgotten. That this did not happen, is because of the ‘can-do’ spirit and motivating influence of several people. My colleague of many years and numerous projects, Sally Kelly took on the role of ‘task manager’ and in August 2016 prepared a timetable for the completion of the work – just as in the production of the scores of reports, proposals and policy papers we have prepared individually and jointly since the late 1990s. It began to seem manageable again. Over the following long months, as chapters came one by one to conclusion, and shared for commentary, I benefitted every time from her questions and wise counsel as a seasoned practitioner. That I am at this point today, preparing to submit final copy for evaluation, owes so much to her.

When I met Chris Curtin again in late spring 2016, much had changed since the days of the project in Pristina. He did not mince his words – yes, you can – but you must commit. You must take it on as you would a project. While conditional, his offer of
support was never for a moment half-hearted. There was a job to be done and let’s get on with it! I will be forever grateful for his constructive criticism, advice, guidance and support over the months. The thesis progressed, sometimes sideways and often entangled in the briars of confusion – but with the benefit of his wise mentorship, I managed in the end to produce. Thank you.

To my family, Denis and Myriam, Léa and Martin, Marian and Elizabeth, my lovely nieces and nephews, for their gentle encouragement and especially to Christine for putting up with me during this last year out of our life, always ready to listen and to disentangle the confusion of ideas, thoughts, emotions and fears – moments of solidarity that enabled me to recommit and see this project through to the end of the road.

Gerry McAlinden
Bun an tSleibhe
South Commons
Carlingford
22nd August 2017
Glossary

ANC  African National Congress
ASGISA  Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
BRPP  Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme
CAP  Common Agricultural Policy
CARDS  Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (EU)
CEE  Central and Eastern Europe
CF  Community Facilitator (Baltics)
CFO  Chief Financial Officer (Eastern Cape)
CIDA  Canadian International Development Agency
CMR  Complete Member Researcher
COGTA  Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (South Africa)
CPA  Community Problem Analysis
CSEE-KHF  Central and South East Europe – Know-How Fund
CTL  Country Team Leader (Baltics)
CTT  Central Task Team (Eastern Cape)
CV  Curriculum Vitae
DANI  Department of Agriculture (Northern Ireland)
DANIDA  Danish International Development Agency
DARD  Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (NI)
DEAET  Department of Environmental Affairs, Economy and Tourism (Eastern Cape)
DECSA  Delegation of the European Commission in South Africa
DHLG&TA  Department of Housing, Local Government and Traditional Affairs (Eastern Cape)
DoARD  Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Eastern Cape)
DBSA  Development Bank of Southern Africa
DCI  Development Cooperation Instrument
DED  Department of Economic Development (Northern Ireland)
DEDEA  Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (Eastern Cape)
DEVCO  Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development
DFAT  Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DFID  Department for International Development
DG VI/Agri  Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DLGTA  Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs (Eastern Cape)
DNA  Deoxyribonucleic acid
DPLG  Department of Local Government (now COGTA - South Africa)
DSD  Department of Social Development (Eastern Cape)
DST  District Support Team (Eastern Cape)
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<td>European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund – Guidance Section</td>
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<td>Eastern Cape</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>European Community</td>
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<td>ECDC</td>
<td>Eastern Cape Development Corporation</td>
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<td>ECSECC</td>
<td>Eastern Cape Social and Economic Consultative Committee</td>
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<td>EDF</td>
<td>European Development Fund</td>
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<td>EU PRAG</td>
<td>EU Procedures and practical guide</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
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<td>GOSA</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>German Technical Development Agency</td>
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<td>IBRFP</td>
<td>‘Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project’ (D.Mosse)</td>
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<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>IPCU</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>Inception Report</td>
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<td>ISPA</td>
<td>Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession</td>
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<td>an Indian fertiliser cooperative – DFID partner agency for the IBRFD</td>
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<td>Kwa Zulu Natal</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>MAFF</td>
<td>Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (UK)</td>
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<td>MBA</td>
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<td>Millenium Development Goals</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland Civil Service</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust</td>
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<td>NPC</td>
<td>National Planning Commission (South Africa)</td>
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<td>NUIG</td>
<td>National University of Ireland Galway</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<td>Provincial Industrial Development Programme (Eastern Cape)</td>
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<td>RPP</td>
<td>Rural Partnership Programme (same as BRPP)</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<td>SAPARD</td>
<td>Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development</td>
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<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sustainable Livelihoods Approach</td>
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<td>STAR</td>
<td>Committee on Agricultural Structures and Rural Development</td>
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<td>STE</td>
<td>Short-Term Expert</td>
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<td>TM</td>
<td>Task Manager (working in Delegation)</td>
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<td>VFM</td>
<td>Value for money</td>
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<td>UFH</td>
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<td>Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<td>WWDP</td>
<td>West Waterford Development Partnership</td>
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Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?
I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.
You cannot improve it.
If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
If you try to hold it, you will lose it.

So sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind;
Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily;
Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;
Sometimes one is up and sometimes down.

Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses and complacency.

Lao Tzu (Tao Teh Ching) verse 29
Translated Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English
Abstract

The dissertation is about understanding the role of agency in the production of the unintended outcomes of international development interventions ‘designed’ to eliminate rural poverty and underdevelopment. It takes as its focus, its unifying theme and its principal actor, the collective of ‘the project team’ and the specific of ‘the project worker’. The study seeks to explore, from an actor perspective, what actually happens when a team of development consultants, including myself, undertakes an external intervention with the explicit aim of providing technical assistance to address rural poverty and social exclusion. From a standpoint informed largely by an analytical autobiographical approach, it follows the project worker and team’s interaction with the development community and its agents around the definition of purpose, goal and form of two projects, in post-soviet Baltic States and post-apartheid South Africa. Beyond the inevitable ambiguity of project aims and logic, this account attempts to look inside the black-box of project implementation. We set out to investigate how ideas, relationships and power interact, how project teams engage with national, regional and local administrations to deliver to target communities and how project practitioners and ‘beneficiaries’ create room for manoeuvre and interpret policy in the practice at the interface. In doing so, we seek to understand better how ‘successful’ projects are socially produced and depend on building sufficiently broad communities of believers in the compelling narrative of the idea with power, although in the longer term exposed to the vagaries of policy shifts within the international donor community.
Preface

Aid Policy, Aid Practice and Aid Practitioners

The dissertation is essentially about understanding the role of agency in the production of the unintended outcomes of international development interventions ‘designed’ to eliminate rural poverty and underdevelopment. But not in any general sense. It takes as its focus, its unifying theme and its principal actor, the collective of ‘the project team’ and the specific of ‘the project worker’, operating in the private sector. The study seeks to explore, as far as possible from an actor perspective, what actually happens when a team of ‘international development’ consultants, of which I am a member, undertakes an external intervention. The interventions in question have the explicit aim of providing technical assistance to address rural poverty and social exclusion – interacting with the development community and its agents around the definition of purpose, goal and form – working alongside national, regional and local administrations to deliver to target communities – and performing as a group of development professionals bound together for the duration of the project.

In a typical Aidland\(^2\) bureaucratic (as well as naïve and linear) view of the world, the (Western) international development community identifies and prioritises a seemingly endless flow of development needs in conjunction with counterparts in the recipient countries. Although the countries which feature throughout this thesis are very far from the “Third World” subjects on which Ferguson bases his Anti-Politics Machine critique, and the interventions I make my case around were more to provide technical assistance for policy change in the context of major political (and economic) transition, the characteristics he attributes to the development industry generally ring true. In Ferguson’s words “one seems to find … a common discourse and the same way of defining ‘problems’, a common pool of ‘experts’ and a common stock of expertise”\(^3\). The donor agency packages the development project (context, rationale, intervention logic, goal, purpose, results, activities, indicators and resources (human, material and organisational)). Development companies tender. Following competitive bidding (understanding and rationale, organisation and method, quality of team, price), the winning contractor (and selected team) is mandated to deliver the project. The project team enters the field and implements the project, the ‘benefits’ of which are enjoyed by the intended target recipients/‘beneficiaries’.

Yet, the reality is that of an uncertain and very unclear “relationship between policy prescription and development outcomes … the gap between policy and practice is constantly negotiated away”\(^4\). What happens on the ground, it is suggested, bears little resemblance with the starting assertions in the official glossy packs and yet practice and policy are bound together in a narrative that preserves the coherence of the “official model”\(^5\). There are those who go so far as to argue that “again and

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again development projects … are launched and again and again they fail”6. Even projects that are intended to “empower” and capacitate poor local communities to adopt, with external support, sustainable livelihoods and that are based on techniques of participation (such as PRA) in reality not only fail but “naturalise poverty” and tend to “subjugate, silence or erase the local”7.

Between what Mosse characterises, on the one hand, as the rational planning model and on the other, the domination/resistance framework, there is a world in which development projects, delivered by project teams, continue to impinge upon the lives of local communities, generating expectations, aspirations and dreams of development8 – as well as frustration, contestation and opposition in different parts of the world as described by many writers, including Long (2001). Within this reality, I want to understand better how, as a specific collective and individual actor in the project system, the contracted-out project team and project worker operate, how they influence project outcomes, “acquire reality” and define “success”9.

**Project Worker on a Journey of Ethnographic Reflection**

From the vantage point of direct experience as a project worker, development professional, journeyman consultant, contracted expert, I have worked as a member of different project teams in different contexts – geographic, socio-economic, political and cultural – over the past two decades. As a result, I have been in situations which have allowed me to observe and to experience the reality of the project team in the design, delivery and interpretation of the intervention which I believe I can relate back to the literature of the sociology and ethnography of development.

The study attempts therefore to look from a range of perspectives, including self-critical auto-ethnographical, made possible by my involvement in several fairly significant (for me) development projects10 – from interviews with other stakeholders, recorded and recollected conversations and diary notes of exchanges and events, from document review and insights garnered from a sometimes introspective participant observer (or “observant participant”11) viewpoint. It is structured around three levels of interaction across the project life cycle of both projects:

1. The participation of contracted development workers and the project team in shaping and constructing the intervention – in a context of contested understanding of the problem, confusion, ambiguity and little consensus around the prescription;

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10 I spent three years working full-time on the Baltics programme and two and half years part time (50%) in the Eastern Cape.  
2. The interaction within the project team, its members and intermediaries (project class) in preparation for implementation and how this contributed to the emerging shape of outcomes and the attribution of benefits;

3. The interfaces between the project team, its members and ‘intermediaries’ with stakeholders at point of delivery both among beneficiary groups and in the host administrations - and the effect of those exchanges on project outcomes.

My interest in understanding the policy making process with its interaction between “ideas with power and social practice … hidden transcripts … (and) powerful metaphors”\(^1\) predates the two main cases (Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme and Support to LED in the Eastern Cape Programme) and is buried in early political activism informed or other by a roughly hewn home-grown Marxist-Leninist analysis acquired in backrooms and the streets of Newry in the 1970s. More consciously, in later years, as a participant in the context of an externally driven initiative to introduce a new pro-poor policy (and practice) to rural development in Northern Ireland (see Chapter One), I began to discern more fully the “complex agency of actors involved”, their competing interests, perspectives and the lifeworlds shaping outcomes in relation to intended policy change and ‘the way we do things round here’. However, it was only through the prism, acquired through much later acquaintance, of an agency, actor orientation and interactionist perspective, that I came to have the instruments of analysis that enabled me to begin to understand “(t)he double effect of ordering and disjuncture, unity and fragmentation” that underpin “the social processes”\(^1\)\(^3\) of the development project.

Chapter One, therefore, serves as a baseplate for the main enquiry by attempting an interactionist account and analysis of the battles for ideas around the introduction of the EU Leader programme to Northern Ireland in the early 1990s. It draws on quite a different world to the two contracted-out experiences which will form the main part of the enquiry and thesis from Chapter Two onwards. It is a world – or to be more exact, a ‘moment in time’ in policy development from which the ‘project worker’ is usually absent. The case in point is populated by a small group of Northern Ireland government and European Commission ‘policy managers’ interacting with another small group of ‘policy shapers’, Northern Irish civil society and rural development activists. The action takes place around different conceptions and ‘texts’ of a new policy approach to tackle rural poverty and regenerate rural areas at a time when the policy is the project. Across these interfaces, we attempt to depict what Mosse calls “an ethnography of one moment in the public policy process (cf Wood 1998)”\(^1\)\(^4\). Later, in Chapter Four, we turn our attention ‘upwards’ towards similar policy setting processes which defined the purpose, set the direction and shaped the broad parameters of both case study projects. In both case-study contexts, however, we are constrained to reading between the lines of policy papers and drawing on the accounts of other project workers. The reflective insights into the ‘Belfast encounters’ provide me, as a


participating player, a first hand, “lived experience”\textsuperscript{15}, through which to understand better some of the social life of a policy text and the interplay between ideas, social relationships, professional interests, lifeworlds and livelihoods in framing policy.

CHAPTER 1 Early Interfaces

Imagining Rural Development

An Evening in a Backroom in the Belfast Europa
1.0 Introduction

My involvement with ‘development’ issues did not begin in the exchanges in the backroom of the Belfast Europa described below. I had previously had, as part of my job as a civil servant in Northern Ireland, to ‘oversee’ the financial management practices in community led youth training workshops ‘contracted’ by the government to provide training and work experience for unemployed young people in the region. That experience, while often fraught and contentious, had nevertheless reinforced an early conviction that organised community activists had the capability and commitment to tackle problems in the region that government, on its own, simply did not have the means to address. Later, when travelling to Brussels for interview for the position of national expert and prepping on policy texts for the newly reformed EU Structural Funds, the repeated emphasis upon ‘the local’ in those documents tended to ‘validate’ that belief in community-led action, now raised to the level of ‘official’ policy. That the supranational institution of the European Commission could articulate and prioritise ‘local development’ was something of a ‘new dawn’ for me. Coming from the policy confines of direct rule in Northern Ireland, where policy tended to follow the latest ‘big thing’ from a weary Conservative government in Westminster and Whitehall, it was exciting and potentially mildly subversive.

In the pages that follow, I look back on a significant, if relatively short, moment in an early part of my career path as a development worker. The episode in the Europa - and over the months leading up to and following - sits outside the main focus of the thesis, which is on two international development/technical assistance interventions. Yet the three experiences cannot rightly be separated. They are part of a lifeworld, a journey marked as much by continuity as discontinuity. The Belfast encounter represents a point of departure for a reflective expedition into the two later projects which dominated my first decade of the millennium in very different parts of a changing world. In the second part of the chapter (1.2) the focus shifts from a domain in which civil servants interact (mainly) with civil servants. The subsequent narrative briefly introduces a new “social arena” in which the private sector – development company and contracted-in development workers – play a prominent role frequently alongside civil servants and final beneficiaries. As such, the subject matter is less familiar or present in the literature of development sociology, yet concerns an increasingly significant channel for aid delivery globally. The role of agency in the person of the professional project worker and team, is, as we shall see over the course of the dissertation, just as central and critical to our understanding of how such projects work. It is through observing and analysing “the complex interlocking of actors’ projects and practices”, including my own, “and their intended and unintended outcomes” that we can begin to appreciate “the constraining and enabling frameworks of social action” as lived through the cycle of two development interventions. Also in Part 2, I shall introduce and discuss the methodological approach adopted.

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Part One - Transacting Policy Change

1.1 An Evening at the Belfast Europa

It did not take much to imagine the meeting room at the back of the Belfast Europa Hotel as a battlefield of sorts that evening in late autumn 1989. The windows were boarded with a mix of plywood and hardboard and the jagged rims of plate-glass were all that remained of the windows blown out by the latest IRA bomb blast several days previously. Dampness seeped through the carpet floor-covering below the opening where rain had come in before hotel staff had the time to put the boarding in place. The image of the scene in my memory is illuminated by single narrow fluorescent strip providing the thin yellow lighting that threw as much shadow as clarity on the small group of rural development activists gathered around the single table in the middle of the room. In the centre, a woman was drawing and simultaneously presenting a set of plans for the group, most of whom seemed familiar with the ideas and proposals which they illustrated.

I had been working at the European Commission, seconded by the Northern Ireland Civil Service as a National Expert to DG VI (Agriculture and Rural Development) since earlier that year. The period marked the first months of the introduction of the reformed Structural Funds. Northern Ireland, like Ireland, had been designated Objective 1 region/member state in the case of the Republic of Ireland. As a result of the sweeping changes in the requirements underpinning the new Funds, the Commission services responsible for EU social and economic cohesion policy, including the Structures Directorate in DG Agri, had recruited scores of ‘national experts’, seconded from administrations across all the regions designated under the Structural Funds regulations. The thinking behind the reform had drawn on a vision of Europe where regions were ‘empowered’ to take decisions concerning their social and economic development. This was accompanied by a shift away from the notion of regional convergence as the outcome of infrastructure investment to a new school of thought that stressed the need to “unlock the endogenous potential and create sustainable growth” by taking an “integrated approach”. At the heart of the new approach was a tension between the “integrationists” who “advocated for a strong role for the Commission, next to the member states and the regions and a second group favouring a more moderating role for the Commission with the member states being the policy drivers”.

My ‘clandestine’ presence in the Europa that evening was tellingly indicative of the relationships that were developing between member state, their regional administrations, civil society partners and the Delors Commission keen to promote “empowered regions” in a new “Europe of the Regions” and very much the flag-bearer of the integrated approach. My job over the following period was to deliver the space for an EU funded “bottom-up” rural development intervention in the region. It was a performance target for the Structures Unit in DG VI (Agri) to be able

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18 The reformed Structural Funds demanded a greater effort on the part of member states and regions in programming, managing, monitoring and evaluating and controlling finances.

to report (to STAR Committee)\textsuperscript{20} at least one additional (and innovative) feature in the Northern Ireland Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy over the next years\textsuperscript{21}. It was clear to me that the success of my tenure as National Expert there was conditional upon securing agreement from the different stakeholders for such a package.

Before departing on mission to Belfast, my Head of Unit and a \textit{fonctionnaire} colleague in DG Agri were both emphatic that in addition to dealing with senior managers in the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland (DANI) (official counterparts) on their plans for Structural Funds support, I should make direct contact with the non-government activists involved with the EC funded Rural Action Project\textsuperscript{22} \textit{without} DANI being present. In the Brussels office, we were aware of an emerging debate on the potential for a more ‘bottom-up’ approach to rural development in the region – but were convinced that the Department, which was seen as hostile to the Commission driven initiative and resistant to change, was intent on smothering any such discourse. From my own experience, I had recently been chastened by the chilly reception when I met with a group of policy and middle managers at DANI Headquarters in Dundonald to outline some of the ideas circulating in the Commission and Brussels following the recent publication of the White Paper on the Future of Rural Society\textsuperscript{23}. The fact that I was a recent EC recruit, from another NI Department (Economic Development), who appeared to be ‘going native’ and knew little about agriculture policy in the region, seemed, to me, to sharpen their scepticism.

\subsection*{1.1.1 Drivers for change}

Back in DG Agri, the sometimes larger than life German Head of Unit, ‘Adalbert Weber’\textsuperscript{24} had visibly entered into the spirit and ambition of the reformed Structural Funds. He was enthusiastic, emphatic though not always strategic in the promotion of ‘new ideas and innovative approaches’ to the development of rural areas. The propagation of ‘eucalyptus’ was one such often proclaimed idea. Frequently, he would lecture the Objective 1 team in his heavily Bavarian accented, stilted French (then the working language of DG VI) on the virtues of eucalyptus as a potential saviour of rural Europe. “La cultivation de l’eucalyptus a un potentiel inestimable pour la diversification de l’´economie rurale”. Many of us in his team, including officials and national experts, frequently joked among ourselves that it was more likely to lead to the “desertification de l’´economie rurale”. But never to his face, partly out of deference to his domineering personality, partly because we were all, to varying degrees, struggling to understand ‘the integrated approach to rural development’. Yet, however idiosyncratic his ideas for saving Europe’s rural places might have been, he was – and we were - also very conscious of senior

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Committee on Agricultural Structures and Rural Development (STAR) https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/committees/star_en
\item \textsuperscript{21} The Commission’s assessment of the Northern Ireland draft Operational Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development 1989-93 was that it was very conservative and “more of the same” with no new measures for the additional support offered by the Structural Funds in this Objective I region.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Funded under the 3\textsuperscript{rd} (and last) EU Combat Poverty Programme (1989-1994).
\item \textsuperscript{23} The Future of Rural Society – Com (88) 501 – Commission Communication transmitted to the Council and to the European Parliament 29\textsuperscript{th} July 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Pseudonyms attributed throughout other than when indicated otherwise.
\end{itemize}
management’s interest in joining DG Agri to the cause of ‘rural development’, then high on the Delors Commission agenda. Much of the development discourse at the time was informed by experiences from the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes in France and to a lesser extent, in the Integrated Rural Development concept in both Ireland and Scotland (see O’Reilly 2012:133-134). Work had just started in the Direction to prepare early drafts of the first Leader Community Initiative concept. ‘Change’ was very much in the air! At the same time, member states were submitting draft national and regional development plans for appraisal by the Commission, that is by unit officials and national experts like me. In that context, ‘additionality’ was good and when accompanied by ‘innovation’ was even better. Northern Ireland’s plans for using EAGGF-G and Structural Funds were, in the eyes of the appraisers, neither ‘additional’ nor ‘innovative’ but rather a repetition of the same policies as before. Our Head of Unit was strongly of the view that he might as well be dealing with the irredentist Eurosceptic MAFF in London as with the civil servants from DANI in Belfast in so far as any potential for a meaningful effort to promote integrated rural development was concerned.

My immediate boss was a long serving Irish DG Agri official dealing with agricultural and rural development issues in Ireland and other Northern European countries, including the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. ‘Brian Nobel’ came originally from Donegal. He was very familiar with the situation in both parts of Ireland, particularly in relation to agriculture and rural development. Brian was equally frustrated with the apparent lack of engagement on the part of DANI. Like most of us, he was still coming to terms with the new, complex but potentially, as we saw it, enabling regulations that underpinned the reform of the Funds. A day after my arrival in the Unit in Brussels earlier that year, he had presented me with an armful of grey recycled copies of the entire body of regulations. “That’s your Bible”, he muttered – “make sure that you can cite chapter and verse before you venture out”. My induction to the reformed Structural Funds, the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund – Guidance, integrated rural development, endogenous development, even concepts like technical assistance.

1.1.2 Proposition for change

One of the more obscure provisions in those regulations, which our Head of Unit, certainly seemed to know by heart, related to a Budget line intriguingly known as ‘544’. What made it so special was that it sat outside the main EAGGF-Guidance Fund and was to be used as a special technical assistance line to support innovative or experimental actions. In the case of Northern Ireland, Budget line 544, as far as both Mr Weber and Brian were concerned, offered the last real hope of achieving any glimmer of innovation or fresh thinking in their rural development plan. Given the perceived lack of ambition in draft plans from the Northern Irish administration,

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25 EU Cohesion Policy 1988-2008 – Investing in Europe’s Future – InfoRegio Panorama No 26 – 2008:28 “A new school of thought, however, was convinced that only an integrated approach would be able to unlock the endogenous local potential and create sustainable growth. This development concept was tested for the first time by the IMPs and involved predominately local instead of national stakeholders.” Jérôme Vignon.

the added attraction in drawing on the special budget line was that it could allow the Commission to take the initiative in launching an action with relatively little up-front commitment from the member state. The conditions for ‘544’ allowed the Commission to finance approved projects, in exceptional cases, up to 100%. However, the norm for an Objective 1 region would be 75% of total budget costs. The bottom-line, from the DG Agri point of view, was that Budget line 544 could provide an additional source of funding – outside those already earmarked by the NI/UK authorities to finance more conventional measures – to support more innovative and experimental action in the region.

Briefly stated, the proposition that I was to test was whether the activists and institutions involved in supporting five locally based rural projects in Northern Ireland, collectively known as the Rural Action Project (RAP)\textsuperscript{27}, could put together a workable project proposal for a bottom-up approach to rural development. If the ideas that we knew to be filtering out from the nascent debate around non-farm based rural development could be coalesced into a realistic proposal, the Commission would use the flexibility provided by Budget line 544 to offer financial and practical support for a pilot project. But there was a real concern, not without some substance as it later turned out, that DANI would make every effort to “nip it in the bud”. It was crucial, therefore, to work behind closed doors with the RAP team, encourage them to develop and bring forward such a plan. This would then be channelled informally to DG Agri where it could be pre-assessed before a possible offer of support to the regional authorities.

### 1.1.3 Reformers for the status-quo

The players on the DANI side were no less colourful or committed to their cause. The team fronting the Department’s negotiations around the Structural Funds package for the region was headed by ‘Fergal Barry’, a recently appointed Assistant Secretary. Fergal was one of a new emerging cohort of upwardly mobile ‘Roman Catholic’ civil servants in Northern Ireland who were beginning to break through the barriers that had kept members of that community out of the senior reaches of the NICS from the origins of the state. He was one of the first group of Community Liaison Officers who served as intermediaries between local communities and the security forces in conflict zones in the North during the 70s. His well-honed bargaining skills and considerable experience of dealing with stand-off situations had earned him the reputation of being “an operator”. Within DANI, he stood out among his senior colleagues as not coming from a farming background or professional agricultural training. Part of his earlier work with grass-roots communities in deprived areas had left him with the conviction that “chequebook development” simply didn’t work. He saw the need for change in the management of rural development. A highly ambitious civil servant with further prospects for advancement, he wanted to be in charge of whatever those changes were to be.

\textsuperscript{27} Financed under the Third EU Poverty Programme – 1989-1994.
Second in command, ‘Terry McWirther’ was a long serving DANI official who combined the urbanity of years working in the Minister’s Office with the close familiarity of the farmers’ market in his home town in County Down. Since his appointment to Senior Principal of Rural Development, Terry was known to local groups across the region as “the ‘Suit’ with the smile”. His easy, congenial manner was well matched to the early challenge of mobilisation of local groups in different communities in this deeply divided part of Europe. However, in the early 1990s, as the debate was moving on, stimulated by the reflection generated by the action research component of the RAP project, to encompass the involvement of local groups and activists in defining rural policy, Terry didn’t fully follow. Rural development, he would, in convivial surroundings, argue, was a field of public policy best left to trained and resourced professionals in a benevolent Department rather than become the matter for an ill-defined democratic decision-making process among competing interest groups. Nevertheless, committed to change!

At the top level of command in DANI, Permanent Secretary Bill Hodges28 in many ways embodied the break with the past. One of the features of his career track that distinguished Bill Hodges from all his Permanent Secretary peers at the time was that he had entered the civil service at the most junior Administrative Assistant grade and progressed all the way to the top. Bill knew the system “inside-out”, made much of the common touch combined with the mindset of a business man or politician. He was accessible where his predecessors were remote. He took part in the NI Permanent Secretaries’ weekly meeting (Monday mornings before the arrival of the Direct Rule Ministers29 on the mid-morning morning flights from London) which he described at a private briefing in Brussels some months later as the “‘real’ government of Northern Ireland”, attracting public rebuke when the comment was reported back to Belfast in a breach of Chatham House rules. From the vantage point of the weekly Permanent Secretaries’ policy coordination meeting, he was familiar with the new thinking in terms of rural and local development coming both ‘from Europe’ and from within the region itself. In his own Department’s senior managers’ meetings, both he and Fergal were reputed to be struggling with the inertia and conservatism of their dyed-in-the-wool agriculturalist colleagues. Moreover the institutional might of the Ulster Farmers’ Union seemed to hold an almost hegemonic influence over the broad (and narrow) policy intentions and directions of the Department. DANI had long been viewed as an appendage of the UFU – and seen by rural nationalists (in the Northern Ireland context) and their representatives as an essentially unionist institution.

1.1.3.1 Structural funds and additionality - the (UK) rebate and the NI block

Whatever new opportunities might be offered by Northern Ireland’s Objective 1 status (‘acquired for political reasons rather than for sake of economic backwardness’, unionist minded civil servants would often remind us), the cornerstone of Northern Ireland’s budgetary and public finance framework remained “the Block”. This referred to the allocation of central Whitehall funds

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28 Bill Hodges – 1934-2015 RIP.
29 Pre-devolved government in the region.
which were transferred annually to the region – and other parts of the UK – under what is known as the Barnett formula. At the time, this was worth some £6bn Stg net transfer to the region\textsuperscript{30} on an annual basis (compared with a Structural Funds offer of some €800m for the entire period 1989-93).

One of the five key principles\textsuperscript{31} upon which the Reform of the Structural Funds was based (and agreed by all Member States) was \textit{additionality}\textsuperscript{32}. This meant that the EC contribution to the National or Regional Development Plans, set out in a Community Support Framework, should be over and above what the state was already funding – and should not simply displace public funding to existing programmes. However, to complicate matters further, should Northern Ireland, as the UK’s first and only Objective 1 region at that time, put forward programmes that would generate Community support in excess of a threshold defined in Treasury, the EU rebate to the UK, ever linked to Margaret Thatcher’s handbag incident in Fontainbleu, could be compromised. As a result, there was an emphatic standing instruction from Whitehall – repeated as a mantra by all Northern Ireland civil servants dealing with the Structural Funds negotiations - “defend the Rebate, defend the NI Block”. The consequence of such mindset was that, even if there was a willingness to break out of the traditional policy and programme patterns, predetermined budget imperatives made change more difficult to effect. Moreover, “the Block” at that time was impervious to any systematic local public scrutiny or oversight.

\textbf{1.1.4 Dreamers and change agents}

The group of rural activists who were now mainly gathered in the hardly hospitable, but open-for-business, meeting rooms of the much bombed Europa represented a cross section of the leadership of civil society in Northern Ireland. Some of them I knew from previous times and situations, like ‘Liam Murphy’. Professionally, he was Deputy Director of Social Services in a largely rural area and also prominent in the trade union movement. In the present context, he was Chair of the Rural Action Project Board, providing a link between the civil society organisations involved and the social policy managers in the administration. Liam came from rural South Armagh where he was one of the leaders of a local cultural revival in music, song, dance, poetry and storytelling that gave lie to the media image of “bandit country”. He and I had worked intermittently together in the Newry area in the earlier to mid ’80s in local organisations, including the local branch of the Workers’ Educational Association. I had encouraged him into the Workers Party in the town while I was still part of the local leadership of that organisation. By the time of these later encounters in 1990, neither of us were members. As far as I can recollect, there was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Chantrill C – Time Series Chart of UK Public Spending – ukpublicspending.co.uk – 9th August 2017 - http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk/northern_ireland_spending_chart.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Reference to the five principles in the first regulation (89-93).
  \item \textsuperscript{32} One of the UK bottom line negotiating positions in drawing up the Regulations for the Structural Funds was that additionality be measured at member state level rather than in the context of the beneficiary region. This meant that the test of additionality was at a much higher level than directly in NI and made it possible for Operational Programmes to re-package existing schemes and measures rather than introduce new initiatives.
\end{itemize}
no indication of any carry over from the earlier involvement (pre-1983) and the relationship was always constructive and focussed.

The undisputed ideologue in the group was ‘Alice Murray’. Alice was Director of the Combat Poverty Programme\(^{33}\) and had oversight of the Rural Action Project in Northern Ireland. She was well known as a political and gender activist in the region and also highly respected on all sides for her pragmatic, problem-solving disposition. Among the group of acknowledged policy shapers in the room that evening, she had the reputation of being an effective lobbyist for social justice. Much of the thinking emerging from the debate generated by RAP activities, ostensibly the product of a well-publicised action research project within the overall design of that project, was facilitated, articulated and fine-tuned by her working with other members of the leadership group. The design she sketched out that evening, under the grey-yellow light in the back room of the Europa, was the product of many similar evening encounters and debates in local halls and meeting places across the North since the beginning of the RAP experience in 1988. Its ambition reached far beyond the project’s five pilot local actions. It very clearly set out an alternative framework for managing the rural development (as distinct from agriculture) agenda in the North. It openly subverted the DANI-UFU axis. She reported to the group that evening how these ideas were attracting interest from some unlikely quarters, in particular, from Sir Kenneth Bloomfield\(^{34}\), who was Head of the NICS at that time.

The other two members of this group of “conspirators” on the night were equally well known in civil society and rural circles in Northern Ireland. ‘Rory Sweeney’ was Director of the influential Voluntary Fund, which served as a partly state-supported fund for resourcing local and socially innovative initiatives and actions to combat poverty. It was a prime channel for new EU funding. The institution was a key counterpart for the Rural Action Project. Over the years, the Board of the Fund saw its role as much, and probably more, in reflection, research and social/socio-economic policy shaping as in fund management. Originally from Derry, Rory had a background in local community activism and brought with him a reputation for being street-wise, straight-talking and a problem fixer.

‘Seamus McDuff’ was the most avowedly “rural” of the group. He lived in rural mid-Ulster and in addition to having a small holding at the time was also a master wood carver and craftsman. From his perspective, the Belfast-based civil society organisations tended to be less attentive to the needs of rural communities and the problems they faced – and more likely to associate rural with farming. His activism

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\(^{34}\) Ken Bloomfield had been long associated with successive direct rule regimes in Stormont, and also in the Sunningdale devolution experiment (1974) about which he and many others have written. A mandarin and career civil servant, with an instinct for conservative but inclusive unionism, he seemed at the time an unlikely suspect as a supporter of the subversive potential for RAP plans to transform the governance structures for rural development in Northern Ireland. He certainly wasn’t in the room that evening – but it was clear that the encouragement he had been giving the team to continue to develop their plans and to look for support was a significant factor for DG Agri to take into account. As Head of the N.I. Permanent Secretaries Group, he would be familiar with the debate on rural development taking place in that forum over that period in time. See comment on Bill Hodges above.
in promoting the rural community movement had been influential in bringing to light the deep-rooted problems faced by rural people but more often ignored by urban policy makers and shapers – and largely neglected by those formally responsible at government level for agriculture policy and the rural economy. Among issues such as chronic but hidden rural poverty, isolation, poor mobility, ill-health, educational underachievement, one of the most critical for him was the inability of rural communities to articulate their needs. Empowering rural communities to take the initiative in seeking support to improve living and economic conditions in their areas was one of the core themes emerging from the RAP experience and was a central piece in the draft framework for rural development governance in the pencil sketch on the table before us that night.

Another “rural” member of the RAP team, although absent from the discussion that evening, was ‘Tommy Hamilton’, who combined academic work with part, (and periodically, full) -time farming. In addition to his involvement as RAP Board member, he was responsible for one of the first action research projects carried out in Northern Ireland. As such, he was closely involved in the shape of the emerging proposals for a new governance framework. He lectured at the Faculty of Agriculture, which had close links with DANI, its sponsor government department. As a result, he was also the member of the group with the closest links with senior officials in the Department of Agriculture. Later, the following year, he joined a study tour delegation, organised by our unit in Brussels, which combined both Fergal and Terry McW from the Department, my DG Agri boss, Brian and me, to see at first hand the Walloon approach to rural development and the work of the Fondation Rurale de Wallonie, already shaping the outlines of rural development policy for Northern Ireland.

1.1.4.1 A slightly subversive civil servant

My own participation in the Europa backroom meeting was hardly by chance. In fact, it was at my instigation, following, as described above, instructions from my DG Agri bosses, that the meeting was taking place “under the radar of DANI”. Despite my background as a civil servant from Northern Ireland, I felt that I had much more in common with the people around the table than with the traditional policy managers in DANI. While I might have been agonising over my lack of familiarity with rural development as a new EU policy area and feeling at times uncomfortable in open debate, I had some credentials from lived experience of local initiatives both professionally and through voluntary action before going to Brussels. In such company, my political past, although never a subject discussed, was less likely to be an obstacle to communication and relationship building. To say the mission was close to my heart is something of an understatement. This was probably one of those career moments when the professional fused with civic voluntarism and personal political outlook.

1.1.5 The proposition, the offer and the push-back
The gist of the paper which I brought back to my bosses in Brussels was a fairly fundamental restructuring of the arrangement for rural development policy development, implementation and oversight. From memory, the main elements included:

- the establishment of an elected representative Rural Development Council, bringing together farm and non-farm sectors including rural dweller groups and local authority members and officials,
- a rural development executive, answerable to the Council to promote and facilitate the development of the rural economy,
- a Rural Communities Network which would be set up to build capacity for local action at grass roots community level, and
- links with the Department of Agriculture, responsible for policy direction and guidance.

True to his word, on the basis of my de-briefing, my Head of Unit set in motion (or rather instructed me to set in motion) the course of actions that would lead to a further award of just over one million ecu (€1m Stg). The first and most critical step was ‘to nudge’ the Department of Agriculture to submit a proposal for support. How to present the offer, given that they had not been involved at all up to this point, was a first challenge. Anticipating their refusal, we agreed that I should informally let some of the key players in the RAP group know that the Commission was ready to co-finance the institution-building action. Their satisfaction was matched with the groans of disbelief from Fergal and the Department generally. “Ah Gerry, you can’t be serious! Where are we going to get the co-financing from? We don’t need this.”

And so began a minor war of attrition which marked much of the last year I was to spend in the European Commission. After their initial refusal, aware of the political consequences arising from the rural lobby should the Department be seen to refuse in excess of €1m of “new” (uncommitted) money from Brussels, DANI officials finally informed DG Agri that they had identified budget resources which could be vired to match the Commission’s offer (25%NI to 75% EC), without affecting the Whitehall transfer. But there was little if any enthusiasm for the project. As the RAP plans became more widely known through a conference and the farm sector more mobilised, the approach of the Department shifted.

1.1.6 Intervening agency, lifeworld and livelihood

In the meantime, the role of agency and “lifeworld” intervenes and becomes critical to the outcome. During this, my second, year as a national expert in the Commission, with the prospect of a third in view, I was invited back to Belfast to present myself for interview for promotion to Principal level. Much as my wife and I were enjoying living and working in Brussels, passing up an opportunity for promotion in my home administration was not an option. Shortly after the Board in

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early summer 1990, I was notified that I was “on the list” and within days my former boss, also Head of DED Personnel called to propose a Principal post in her Division – an offer not expected to be refused. The “bird in the hand versus two in the bush” logic prevailed. Nevertheless, I sought to delay my return to Belfast the end of the year, pleading essential unfinished business, which as far as our DG Agri team was concerned was very much the case. It was not a view which was shared in Belfast, where there was “a real job” waiting for me. However, it was finally agreed between both institutions that I should finish my secondment at the end of the year and take up the new appointment in January 1991.

My changed circumstances had several repercussions. In terms of practical business, I was now faced with acute time pressures to manage my different dossiers before the end of year, including the Northern Ireland rural development initiative. The new sense of certainty about my short term career path had replaced any speculative notions of extending my stay with the European Commission. I became less tuned into the coffee shop talk among national experts and temporary agents which frequently turned to the various stratagems used by “so and so” or “somebody else” to spin out their secondment long enough to take what was then an internal “concours”. Deep down, these, sometimes epic, stories of aspiring fonctionnaires clutching for patronage from senior officials left me with an uneasy sense of being on the narrow edge of national nepotism. While there were a number of serious downsides to the recall to Belfast (missing dealing with and learning more about the new Structural Funds, the international dynamic of the Commission, the material benefits, and moving away from a community, both professional and personal, into which we had had little difficulty integrating), the impending move resolved the “what next?” which was, in any event, a question lurking on the sidelines. Furthermore, it was a welcome promotion.

1.1.6.1 Compromise at the interface

Back to the interface, then. How then did the prospect of an imminent return to the Northern Ireland Civil Service affect the outcome of the offer of European Commission support for rural development in Northern Ireland? Negotiations had been ongoing between DANI and the RAP team around the substance of the proposal to be made but no agreement had been reached. The delay was beginning to jeopardize the award itself given that the procedure required within the Commission - consultation with other services, legal opinion, financial control and endless ‘paraphing’, - would require a minimum of several months. Responding to pressure from our offices, Fergal called me (June-July) to put forward a Plan B. The new proposal, which, he stated, had the support of the RAP team, would be for the Budget line 544 funding (and co-financing) to support a series of identified “bottom-up” locally driven projects in the region. Work on the governance framework was continuing and the Department would find the money to finance this project from within its own budget over the next year.

Within the DG Agri team, while there was disappointment that the offer from DANI and RAP did not have the innovative impact promised by the earlier concept, there
was something of a dilemma. Deadlines loomed, early groundwork for the award had been done with the other services and senior managers in DG Agri were on board. Could credibility be at stake? We briefly considered pulling the offer but, in the end it, it was agreed that I should launch and see through the procedure before my departure at the end of the year. To what extent was that outcome influenced by the reality of my homecoming? Fergal, with whom I had, by this stage, developed a close working relationship, had, when presenting Plan B, spoken positively of the expectations within the rural community for the new projects. The Department had already begun to plan to realign its services anticipating changes in the management and delivery of rural development in the region. Had I been won over? Despite tight timelines, the award from Budget line 544 was signed by the Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development as the year drew to a close. For my part, I returned to a part of the Northern Ireland administration that had little to do with Structural Funds or rural development.

1.1.7 Ten years on....

More than ten years later, working in parts of rural Europe that we would have had difficulty in placing on a map prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I found myself once again in a position to influence rural development policy36 and to reflect on the introduction of “local development” as part of rural policy in Northern Ireland. One of my colleagues on the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme was a member of the original Northern Ireland RAP team. In designing and implementing the approach of our new challenge in the technical assistance intervention, Tommy Hamilton (see above 1.4.1, page 10) and I had many occasions to reflect on the lessons learned from those earlier experiences and the shared “lifeworld” cast a long imprint on the shape of that project as we will read in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

1.1.7.1 Revisiting “Budget line 544”

The “Budget line 544” projects (in Northern Ireland) had come and gone. It was hard to even remember their themes or locations. DANI (now operating as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)) had indeed invested in rural development governance and established several new institutions, including the Rural Development Council and a Rural Community Network. The Department continued to appoint the Chair and Members of the Board of the RDC. Up to 2009, the main function of the RDC was as delivery agent for DARD in the context of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme37. In short, rural development policy and practice remained firmly within the control of the renamed Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – with little space for policy input from the bottom-up.

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36 Working as Team Leader in the UK DFID funded Sustainable Rural Livelihood Programme otherwise known as the Baltics Rural Partnership Programme – 2000-2004 (S-E Estonia; Latgale in Latvia and S-E Lithuania). These were described as the poorest rural regions in the three Baltic States at that time.

1.1.7.2 Rural development in Northern Ireland - whose policy is it?

From one perspective, the initiative was born out of the frustration within DG Agri at the apparent lack of new thinking in rural policy or engagement by the Northern Ireland authorities in the policy debate. The reform of the funds had placed a premium on innovation and a break with traditional policy remedies for persistent development challenges. There was undoubtedly a desire on the part of managers in DG VI/Agri to be able to point to examples of innovation, resulting from their interaction with regional and national actors. From another point of view, it was the outcome of a reflection based on the experiences of those involved in the Rural Action Project who had identified an opportunity to fundamentally transform the governance of rural development with outside support. They were actors in a well-developed network of civil society, non-government and professional bodies familiar with the discourse around de-centralised decision-making. To suggest that the Department of Agriculture was simply reacting would, however, be to misunderstand the context. There was, in fact, a serious debate taking place among policy managers concerned with rural society (including outside DANI) around potential new forms of decision-making in rural policy. The involvement of key shapers such as Ken Bloomfield as well as the openness to change of DANI bosses like Bill Hodges and Fergal Barry was testimony to that. Change on their terms, certes, but change was coming! Outside the immediate circle of actors, it would be unwise to ignore the probable role of the Ulster Farmers Union.

1.1.8 Actors, interlocking projects and emerging outcomes

Working within those different institutional circles, however, the story of agency brings more sharply into focus a set of personal interests (livelihood and lifeworld contexts) which also impinged on the outcome.

I had been on a list of UK civil servants from the Northern Ireland administration interested in a possible secondment to the European Commission and had been called for interview in Brussels in the context of the recruitment campaign in anticipation of the roll-out of the new Structural Funds in the autumn of 1988. Several weeks later, the offer of an appointment as national expert to DG Agri came as something of surprise to me, given my lack of familiarity with farm policy. I might have expected – and had hoped for – a national expert position in DG Regio or Employment, either of which would have had more in common with my career experience to date in the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland. However, in the absence of other offers, I was not for turning down the opportunity. After some weeks into the job, my sense of being an outsider among agriculturalists, agronomists and farm policy specialists from across the (twelve member state) European Union, prompted the question – why me? The response (from Unit Head and full-time fonctionnaire) was quite clear – there had been no mistake - I brought a different set of perspectives to those of the traditional DG VI (Agri) recruit. From their point of view, the value added was my potential to serve as catalyst for new ideas and new thinking. I am not sure that this gave me much comfort at the time – especially in the face of the prevailing traditional CAP
mentality among my other fonctionnaires colleagues, who, as we chatted around the coffee-tables in the café at 120 rue de la Loi,38 professed little merit in catalytic change. On the other hand, the assurance probably brought a sharper sense of purpose to my role in the Unit, and in some sense legitimised my interest in the new thinking on rural development articulated in the White Paper.39

Although I was continuing to struggle to understand the full extent of the White Paper proposals, I was probably more pre-disposed to take on its ‘new thinking’ and wider view of the rural economy than the majority of DG Agri officials and their traditional counterparts from the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. DG VI (Agri), in the early years of the reformed Structural Funds, had as its “hidden transcript”40 to inject the ideas behind the new approach into the Department’s policy frame. Having someone (me) from the (largely rural) region, who had experience in such fields as working with the unemployed, community training, labour market management, become ‘embedded’ in the Commission team as national expert was quite deliberate. The fact that I knew some of the RAP people was an added bonus, although my DG Agri bosses would not have known this at the time I was appointed.

In the same way, it is quite probable that the appointment suited the needs of the Department of Agriculture (NI). National experts are considered “fair game” to be used as “insider agents” by member state administrations in their constant struggle for intelligence and influence over Commission thinking. Like other colleagues, from most countries, I was invited by the Permanent Representation (UK Rep) to functions and lunches during which ongoing business (work within the Direction (DG Agri) and UK policy agenda) was frequently and openly discussed. It was widely rumoured (among the expert groups) that national experts who ‘did not cooperate’ would suffer consequences (never very clear) on their return to the home administration. From a DANI point of view, I was “their man”. Whatever their reaction to my subterranean work with the RAP team, when Fergal eventually lifted the phone to put forward DANI’s revised proposal, he and his colleagues knew that it was to “one who couldn’t refuse the offer”. The ambiguity in the position was fully exploited by the Department and the result achieved on this occasion was in many ways as good as it got for the policy managers there.

The European Commission, for its part, could point to consolidation of the “bottom-up” rural development model in the region and also with some justification claim to have influenced the Department to put non-farm rural development on its policy agenda. And this in a region and sector well known for its conservatism and resistance to change, a minor achievement and a performance target reached.

DANI could justifiably demonstrate to the Commission that they were taking on the new approach to rural development. Likewise, for the benefit of their rural lobby in

38 Headquarters of DG Agri.
the region, they were able to point to what, at the time, seemed to be considerable new and additional funding gained from the Commission for rural development. At the same time, the model of rural development governance was firmly within the widened policy ambit of DANI (soon to be DARD). The Minister appointed the senior positions on the new Rural Development Council. Among its peer Departments in the region, DANI had secured the mandate for what was becoming a major new and cross-cutting area of policy.

The RAP team and wider rural development lobby were in direct consultations with DANI on the new institutional arrangements for the management and oversight of rural policy. They could draw satisfaction from having broken through the fortress of ideas and practice that had hitherto constituted what seemed to be the joined-up and closed-in world of the Ulster Farmers Union and the Department. The concerns and interests of rural dwellers and communities not directly associated with agriculture had become a distinct new field of public policy. It was probably years later that some of the implications of the compromises particularly in terms of governance fully emerged. Most of the people involved in these events had by that time long since moved on.

1.1.8.1 Looking at the RAP experience through the framework of agency, interfaces and lifeworlds

This extended anecdote is drawn mainly from personal memories trawled from the perspective of a twenty year gap. The events may simply mark transient milestones at a point in time along the way of a career, easily effaced by more recent landmarks. Yet, for those involved in this micro-moment, the actions, reflections, responses and reactions shaped a policy shift which defined, for better or worse, part of the course of rural development policy in one small region of Europe over several decades.

What makes it pertinent to the discussion at hand is that the case marks a vantage point in an enquiry to understand better “how social actors (both “local” and “external”) are locked into a series of twinned battles over resources, meanings and institutional legitimacy and control”41. Its exploration illustrates some of “the networks of relations, resources and meanings at different scales of organisation” at work in the interface. Still in keeping with Long’s construct, these range from the “small-scale interactional context (personal and interpersonal), institutional domains in which actions, expectations and values are framed and contested (inter and intra-institution), to more global scenarios that shape human choices and potentialities at a distance42 but which are themselves the products of extended chains and repercussions of social action and their impacts on human and non-human components” (how these goals have been interpreted, represented and used by individual actors).43

42 In this case overarching goals such as “Europe of the regions”, reform of the Structural Funds and the defence of the UK’s rebate.
Long’s actor oriented analysis and social constructionism provide a framework for revisiting these and later events bringing together such “different scales of organisation”. Much of the work of Long and other proponents of actor oriented and discourse analysis in development sociology concerns the impact of development policy on the so-called “final beneficiaries” of the interventions. However, the conceptual scaffolding which they make available can accommodate well the middle reaches of development management, where the struggle for ideas and legitimacy between different social actors is just as intense – and potential impact on more distant (and less visible) final ‘beneficiaries’ just as real. It offers a viewpoint which allows us, like spectators in a theatre, to take in a number of plays that are being reproduced simultaneously on multiple stages – local, regional, national and supranational – where the actor and the interpersonal are central to the story line. In his exploration of the emergence and growth of local development as a new policy field in Ireland (RoI) in the late 80s early 90s, O’Reilly steps into “a looking glass world” populated by “different actors involved in different contexts but linked within the overall framework of the initiative”, each pursuing “agendas that were scarcely related to those of the other actors involved”.

From the supranational vision of a Europe where regions and their citizens might interact directly with the Community, through the interpretations which informed the policies and operations of institutions at EU, national and regional levels, to the interactions between small groups of social actors, whether senior policy managers, fonctionnaires, activists, lobbyists or national experts, to the lifeworlds and interests of individual actors – all colliding in Ferguson’s words “behind the backs or against the wills of the ‘planners’ who may seem to be running the show” to shape the outcomes at the interfaces, “never quite in the way the planners imagined”. It is by applying such an “actor oriented” approach that we intend to open up for more insightful understanding the complexity of processes that shape a “planned intervention”. These can and do range from broad strategic to individual life-world and livelihood considerations of those directly influencing actual outcomes. In the same way, while the RAP case itself may suggest an outcome closer to the State’s preferred result, the use of an “actor oriented form of analysis” makes it possible to see more clearly the fault-lines along which the social actors fronting the state might interact, among themselves and in negotiation with others. Such insights add texture and insight to more structuralist notions of “hegemony of the state” and underscore the unpredictability of the ending of the development policy and practice process. The RAP encounters can only tell part of the story – how the formal policy framework was initially put in place. They stop, or rather, my involvement with the storyline stops before the point of implementation and how policy was continually re-framed and transformed in the practice.

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44 Long refers to Warwick (1982) suggesting “that implementation should be viewed as a transactional process involving negotiations over goals and means between parties with conflicting or diverging interests”. And Batley (1983) – new forms of organisational analysis that looked at the dynamics of administrative action in policy implementation.

45 O’Reilly P – All of the People all of the Time? - Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development. - Chapter 13 Conclusion - page 516

46 As in the Delors concept of Europe of the Regions.

1.2 Part Two – Introducing a New Development Actor

1.2.1 Differences and similarities

The two case studies to which we now turn (see Chapter Three for context) relate much more to the working out of public policy into practice along the frontlines of ‘development’ and technical assistance interventions in ‘third countries’ (i.e. not EU member states48). What differentiates them even more from the Belfast interface, is the much greater presence of the private sector development actor in the shape of the for-profit development company and the contracted-in project worker. The RAP encounters involve exclusively officials from supra-state, state institutions as well as representatives from non-governmental organisations49. The international development companies who, as we shall see, provide the “ground troops” for development intervention in the cases which follow, are nowhere to be seen.

Nevertheless, the RAP story will have a continuing relevance over the course of the following chapters and particularly as we attempt to step into two quite different “arenas where battles over perceived goals, administrative competencies, resource allocation and institutional boundaries are fought out”50. The common thread remains around local development, rural development, local economic and employment development. They bring together a range of perspectives and are drawn from different functions for which I was responsible during the time. In all three, I was essentially participant – a change agent of sorts - in an external intervention, with the explicit, if not always clearly defined, role to support the introduction of new policy frameworks for the delivery of area-based development in very different administrative cultures.

1.2.2 The for-profit sector delivering pro-poor solutions

What has gone largely unnoticed by the academic community interested in development sociology has been the growth in importance of the private sector in delivering international development interventions to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. Although a somewhat recent phenomenon, some 3.5 trillion US dollars of official development assistance has been spent by developed countries on Official Development Aid (ODA) over the last fifty years. The current overall average contribution is about $130bn or 0.32% of Gross National Income51 of the twenty-nine member states of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD52. As for the future of ODA, it seems likely that “there still is no shortage of development

48 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became EU Member States on 1st May 2004.
49 Also missing from the line-up are the dedicated development institutions, such as the World Bank, GTZ, DFID, and USAID.
needs and absorptive capacity to which additional resources could be directed”53. A recent DFID report suggests that, as UK budgetary support for international development reaches 0.7% of GDP, in keeping with UN targets, there is an ever greater dependence on for-profit firms to implement many of its programmes. Approximately 20% of DFID’s bilateral aid54 is currently managed by private sector consultancies. This is far from specific to DFID. The IDC Report also shows 29% of USAID spend in 2016 and 24% of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2014/15 was delivered by private contractors. Figures for EuropeAid are not available but likely to be broadly in line.

Apthorpe, quoting Peter Walker (1995:23) remarks that international development “is one of the most un-regulated markets in the world, with few internationally agreed standards ... spend(ing) thousands of millions of dollars of other people’s money”55. The current commentary around international development funding in the United Kingdom has been prompted by strongly worded political criticism of “the appalling conduct of some contractors”56. While the Parliamentary oversight Committee is firmly of the view “that this is not representative of all of DFID suppliers”, it calls on “the sector” to undertake a “genuine rethink in terms of its approach”57. Yet, even apart from such public ‘falls from grace’, as detailed in the Committee’s report, the public discourse on international development is more generally coloured by often hostile, sensation-seeking media scrutiny and populist claims of wasteful spending of taxpayers’ money. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that when the incoming Trump administration was targeting the enticingly low-hanging fruit of the USAID budget for headline-grabbing cuts, some of his staunchest opponents were right wing republicans who feared the loss of US “soft power (which) continues to be a national security priority”58. In the circumstances, particularly since the same neo-liberal policy agendas are founded on the principle of ‘ever smaller government’, there seems every likelihood that for-profit firms will endure and grow as significant actors within the ‘development industry’. As such, they continue to provide myriad career paths from junior entry university graduates in international development to senior corporate heads from, mainly, highly capitalised and concentrated private organisations operating alongside smaller specialist consultancies.

Few academics writing in the field of development sociology have specifically addressed this segment of the industry and references are often marginal. Eyben describes the “development (as distinct from donor) community ... as not only the bilateral and multi-lateral aid agencies ... but also development consultants, those

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54 DFID also accounts for UK overseas development assistance spent through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the EU.
working for international NGOs and development studies institutes”59. She seems to be unaware of any substantial private sector presence in her sphere of influence and awareness. Others, like Rajak and Stirrat, focus mainly on professionals from international (and national) non-governmental organisations, only “finally” referring to “various commercial companies which in one way or another are active in the world of development”60. They suggest that those working in the commercial (for profit) sector, “with specialist skills, for instance, engineers or specialist accountants” move in and out through “unclear and porous boundaries ... only working for a year or so, some only for a few weeks ...”. There is little sense in the mainstream literature of any recognition of a highly structured, focussed and professional competitive sector which lives, en attente, on the pipelines of upcoming tenders for international development assignments. Yet these span many disciplines, and create opportunities for project workers of many hues, including those deemed to have the skills and aptitude for working in such ‘soft’ technical policy fields as tackling poverty and social exclusion.

1.2.3 The social world of the project team

The social world of the project team is one of unlimited complexity in terms of composition and relationships. Its sole purpose and rationale for existing is the delivery of the project purpose and results, defined in the mandate won by the development contractor, for whom repeat business is a critical part of “remaining in the game”61. The team, most of the members of which are previously unknown to each other, are individually head-hunted and matched to meet the fine-print of the person-specification in the terms of reference. Most members will cease to work professionally together from the specified end date of the intervention. The transient collective brings a complex mix of ‘lifeworlds’62 into a shared workspace for the duration, or for short period(s), during the intervention. Generally the team will comprise some international consultants, working alongside national experts and local field workers. The common working language (outside Francophone countries), is English. Project teams involve a hierarchical structure (that works or it does not) which generally includes a leader, ideas-generator/ even ideologue (in some cases), sector specialists, administrators. These are inevitably from very different backgrounds, professional, technical, cultural, with different perspectives on the purpose and operating “with considerable autonomy from one another”63.

They are not policy makers but rather technicians with skills and experience in the specific sectors and sub-fields of expertise required to do the job specified. In so doing, they may – or may not – identify in part with the grand design of the development agencies. For most, the occasion to reflect on the influence of the project team and the development worker on the design, delivery and outcomes is

limited to the contractual requirement to report and to facilitate monitoring and evaluation – all within the confines of the logic of intervention. There is little, if any, reference to the grand critique, Marxist or modernist, of international development by the academic and research community. In the ironic words of Apthorpe - “no politics, please, we’re experts”[64]. Yet, project teams and their development workers are highly influential within their project sphere, “social arena”[65], interacting with donor agencies and the development community, with national and local administrative counterparts, with beneficiaries – and crucially within the team itself. As a consequence of winning the contract/mandate/licence to deliver ‘the project’, the team, or certain members of the team, control resources. They have the power to shape the course of delivery, albeit confronted, contested, obstructed, adapted and variously subverted by the competing powers of agency – ‘above’, ‘below’ and ‘alongside’. They interpret, translate and broker the policy goals of the donor agency into plans, programmes and actions. These are intended to produce demonstrable outcomes consistent with stated objectives as set out rationally in the logical framework (logframe). However, in the emergent as opposed to the rational and prescribed ‘realities’ of international development, far removed from the ‘control room’ of donor headquarters, clarity of the defined purpose for the intervention is inevitably compromised. As Mosse, drawing on Quarles Van Ufford (1988:26) and Mintzberg, states “the operational control which bureaucracies … have over events and practices in development is always constrained and often quite limited”[66]. As Long states bluntly, “there is no straight line from policy to outcomes”[67].

This is the space that I set out to explore in an effort to understand better the role of agency in shaping development outcomes. It is an attempt to open and see inside the “implementation black box ...(for) a more insightful ethnography of development” that can allow us “to address the relationship between policy and practice”. In this we turn, in the main, to development ethnographer David Mosse, to understand better “the complexity of policy as institutional practice ... the social life of projects, organisations and professionals, the perspectives of actors themselves and the diversity of interests behind policy models”[68]. But firstly some comments on the influence of “agency” on the constant “work in progress” that is to-and-fro of project design and delivery.

1.2.4 Agency - enabling and constraining the actor’s “room for manoeuvre” in project delivery

The central actor in our cast of characters across both interventions is the “project worker” in the project team, variously myself, other project workers/colleagues and by extension some of the intermediaries recruited to further project purpose over

the period. At the heart of the account is, in the words of Long, “an actor-oriented perspective that explore(s) how social actors (both ‘local’ and ‘external’ to particular arenas) are locked into a series of intertwined battles over resources, meanings and institutional legitimacy and control”69. Agency is never equally divided – some actors have more – in the sense of what Long and Giddens describe as “knowledgability and capability”70 and these may change over the lifetime of a project as individual players and their alliances compete for influence. To understand “social action” and agency, Long, quoting Turner (1992:91) advises that we need to “go beyond a consideration of knowledgability, consciousness and intentions to embrace also ‘feelings, emotions, perceptions and identities and the continuity of agents (persons) across space and time”71. Yet, incoming project teams and their leaders can yield substantial power as a consequence of the mandate accorded in the award of project. It attributes notions of knowledge and capability, in the international development context, overlain with the assumed prestige of the external “consultant” bearing “gifts … which come from the outside and have supreme qualities which cannot be produced within the local situation itself”72.

Such presumptions can – and do - wear thin, as any experienced and alert project leader comes quickly to realise. New ideas and methods are put to the test by more sceptical team members - fellow international consultants needing to be convinced and as well as “locals” who are much more grounded in local culture, traditions, political ways and know-how “how we do things round here”. Networks and alliances are critical in this power-play – ideas on their own, as Long, Mosse and others remind us, have little lasting currency and reflect “the social dynamics”73 of the project team – and its interaction with the wider project environment. Power can be and is exercised through formal roles and titles, but it is as much through other subtler forces as, for example, leadership traits, recognised skills and experience, attitudes to authority and the alliances that coalesce around certain ideas that determine “who would attempt the overall discourse … who would contest or concede which points”74.

In the cases that follow, we refer often to the emergence of “ideas with power”75 and, in one instance, to “ideological lockdown”, drawing attention to the apparently “hegemonic” influence of the commanding logic driving the project. However, while in the time-pressured, multi-activity, multi location, project context, “there has to be a single project model … there are always several readings of it”76. Mosse, the practitioner, makes the point that, “while … (project workers)
may consent to dominant models – using the authorised scripts given them by projects – they make of them something quite different”77. Indeed, the “senior people” in the cases that follow “did not have unrestricted power over fieldworkers”78. But they could, through their “control over the interpretation of events” and the official narrative, create the illusion of coherence, aided and abetted by project workers (and other stakeholders), willing to exercise agency in colluding with that interpretation as long, as Mosse suggests, they see their “interests tied up in it”79. Project success, never guaranteed, can only really be achieved if there is a sufficient degree of interlocking interests – and if the grand narrative can continue to recruit and retain sufficient communities of shared interpretation.

1.2.5 Consultancy driven participatory development

Both of the case studies elaborated in the next chapters emphasise partnership and participation as a core design and operational concept, one more explicitly so than the other. As stated above, both emanate from the technical assistance sector of international aid (to middle and upper middle income countries, according to World Bank definitions). The primary interfaces across the project space are those connecting and dividing international development consultants and their national and local fellow team members, connecting and dividing members of shifting alliances, forged around ideas and social relationships within the team. They are also the faultlines between the project team (team members) and their counterparts in the ‘beneficiary’ administration. Finally, on occasion the interface is the point at which the project worker, including international consultant, is face-to-face with the intended final beneficiary, poor rural communities and people. Mosse argues that “the intensive use of expatriate consultants to design, instruct and guide in this kind of project was part of a new assertion of donor control that came with the 1990s emphasis on participation, poverty and equity”80. Yet despite the perception of power attaching to “the so-called expert”, Long calls into question any sense of hegemonic influence of the “discourse of experts” and stresses the importance of “alternative discourses and rationalisations” and understanding how these “multiple discourses intersect … in social practice”81.

It is precisely along these intersections, where “‘multiple realities’ made up of potentially conflicting … interests and diverse and contested bodies of knowledge”82 come into contact, that we can identify one of the contradictions in modern development policy and practice in both our cases. Partnership structures feature prominently in each, in one as an institutional destination in a consciously

participative, inclusive and empowering process. In the other, they are created as the prescribed condition for an application for grant funding. Whichever approach adopted, it is clear that the inevitable “aspects of power, authority and legitimation” that attach to international development projects mean that rules are set by outsiders. These can be well-meaning or manipulative - “more knowledgeable and powerful outsiders … nudging(ing) or inducing(ing) … powerless and less discerning local folk”83 to adopt change and new ways that have more to do with the logic of project performance than long term sustainable livelihood and wellbeing.

Yet, if a project is to be successful, deliver its planned outputs and have any chance of achieving its intended outcomes, there has to be a sufficient number of willing ‘buyers’. The international development consultant on his/her own is simply incapable of delivering that kind of success, no matter how “compelling (the) interpretation of events”. She/he depends on “enrolling a wider network of supporters” who can serve the purpose of intermediaries, as well as community of believers – and to convince the target communities that the project’s “acceptable story”84 is the way to go. Within the team, we can see the critical influence of “such mediators … as a distinct ‘project class’ … holders of intellectual power, (who are often) representatives of non-governmental organisations”85, without whom no external project team can engage with the target community – “a form of comprador class … who control communication”86.

Whatever the leverage of these in-team actors, there are few more damaging criticisms, short of fraud or failure, to be directed at a project than that it has been compromised by ‘elite capture’, as in coming under the undue influence of intermediary groups whose interests are inimical to those of the intended beneficiaries. O’Reilly’s account of the role of the “the actors who came to dominate the Board” in Waterford is such an example. His forensic analysis of how they were able to use “their experience of board room procedures … (and) “(their) existing networks of contacts to control the initial selection of members”87, is salutory. In the cases which follow, the “threat” of elite capture is weighted differently. For programme managers in the Eastern Cape, the search was actively on for “the people with the organisational skills and the networks – and they are white”88 in order to make the project, as designed, happen. On the other hand, the DFID team in the Baltics, seemed constantly preoccupied to ensure that the project team avoided the Trojan horse of self-interested group control. Yet, by the time the partnerships were in place, their broadly elite profile, mainly local business and professional interests, seemed much less a source of worry as they partnered with

the team in delivering local area strategies and fundable projects – usual suspects and acceptable elites.

1.2.6 Two Cases – an early introduction

In this short section, I briefly introduce the two main cases and make rapid reference to the lifeworld and livelihood changes brought about by my earlier decision to move from a career as a civil servant to development consultant operating in the private sector.

1.2.6.1 Delivering the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme

The DFID funded Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme (BRPP) ran from September 2000 to December 2003. It was a relatively small programme (£2.1m Stg) operating across three countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – prior to their accession to the European Union. BRPP targeted the poorest rural region in each of these\(^\text{89}\) – South-East Estonia, Latgale in Latvia and rural parts of Vilnius County close to the Belarusian border in Lithuania. The goal of the project was to promote sustainable rural livelihoods and reduce poverty and social exclusion in the most disadvantaged areas of the three Baltic States. It aimed to achieve this outcome through promoting change in rural development policy which would allow for the involvement of local people, working in partnership with national, regional and local authorities, in the identification of local needs, prioritization of local actions and management of local strategies. While the Programme had a small grant fund (£100k Stg), it was an essentially technical assistance intervention, involving three small country based teams, managed on behalf of DFID by a UK consultancy company with experience in rural development and institutional change in Eastern Europe. (See Chapter Three)

1.2.6.2 LED support in the Eastern Cape

The Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape was co-funded by the European Union, the Government of South Africa and the Provincial Government of the Eastern Cape. The six year programme finished in 2011 and had a budget of some €30m, most of which is distributed through three grant funds. A major priority for the programme was to support the Government of the Eastern Cape Province to strengthen its capacity for managing local economic development grant schemes in the province. Institutional strengthening and policy development became more important features of the programme throughout implementation. The programme was managed by a consortium of specialist consultancies, led by a UK-based company with track record in local economic development in South Africa (and other parts of the world) as well as in grant scheme management. The project team, based in the Eastern Cape, combined EU and South African experts providing technical assistance and support for the management of the grant funds.

\(^{89}\) Appendix – Terms of Reference.
1.2.7 Contracted out technical assistance

Unlike the Northern Ireland case, where the institutional interface was defined by a confrontation between different public bodies and the involvement of civil society representatives, in both of the main cases, the role of the private sector is much more to the forefront. The two programmes, while equally within the public policy domain, engaging both national and international institutions, tackling rural poverty, were designed and subsequently delivered by different for-profit companies on foot of competitive tendering processes. In this sense, both project contexts probably reflect more closely how the “development industry ... goes about its work”\(^90\). That dimension will be central, but not exclusive, to the analysis of the influence of agency and lifeworlds at the critical interfaces that have shaped those interventions and defined their impact.

My involvement in both projects – several years apart – also reflected changes in my employment status, from civil servant to private sector consultant. In that capacity, I was hired for the duration by two international development companies which had successfully tendered for the contracts. In the Baltics RPP, I was the nominated Team Leader for the winning bid. I only joined the much larger EU funded LED Support Programme to the Eastern Cape team two years after the competition and project commencement in 2005.

1.2.8 Stepping from the public to the private sector

Quite a different lifeworld from that of Northern Ireland civil servant seconded as national expert to the European Commission ten years earlier! Following my resignation from the NICs in 1997, I stepped warily into the private sector through a Northern Ireland public sector body set up to identify and pursue opportunities for “exporting” expertise and experience gained by public officials in the region. For the first few years (1997-99), I worked on a number of projects supporting Latvia’s EU accession effort, based in Riga, using the insights, experiences and networks built up during almost ten years working with the EU institutions. In many respects, the working environment and daily ‘business culture’ was so close to those I had known in a variety of contexts in Belfast and Brussels over the previous fifteen years.

There was, however, one crucial difference. Unlike mainstream public sector appointments, all projects – short, medium or longer term - have a beginning, a middle and, inevitably, a fast approaching end. The “what next/where to next?” prompt is rarely too far beyond the horizon for the independent consultant seeking to keep in touch with upcoming business opportunities. Periods of inactivity between projects can quickly use up whatever reserves are put aside during live project time. By the end of the Latvian European Integration Bureau experience in 1999, despite the afterglow of positive feedback, I was, at the age of fifty, for close to half a year, in unfamiliar space with no clear prospects for future work. While deep-down confident that opportunities would come, the odd shiver of insecurity

broke through early morning sleep more than once over the months. From the permanent, pensionable protection of the civil service to the uncertainty, anxiety – and occasional adrenalin – of the international development world. Fortunately, there were niches, networks and new “global scenarios” to explore and in which to grow – EU enlargement and the ‘reconstruction’ of post-apartheid South Africa.

1.2.9 Methodology

The idea for the thesis grew from discussions in the late 00s with the then Head of Sociology and Politics Faculty of National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) with whom I had had experience of working on the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme earlier in the decade. By that stage, my ‘career’ as an international development consultant had taken me to the Southern Hemisphere where I was involved with the Support to LED Programme. Initially the focus of the research was to be exclusively on the Eastern Cape project where I was a part-time member of the team, offering possibilities for the use of on-the-job participant observation as a useful source of data. Nevertheless, while that project was undoubtedly the catalyst for taking on the research, I felt, for a number of reasons, that I also needed to find ways to tap into previous experiences with development related situations. As I began to appreciate the potentially flexible and insightful uses to which the tools of an actor perspective might be put, it became apparent that I might usefully broaden the scope of my enquiry beyond the relatively short-term immediacy of the South African LED support programme. In particular, although the earlier Baltics experience was by then little more than a short reference in the statement of capability in my CV, the years spent on that project had left a distinct and lasting impression that beckoned me back to explore from an interactionist standpoint. Moreover, it was becoming apparent that the heart of the research question lay in the management and life story of the development intervention itself, where ‘policy’ (like partnership-based local development or Local Economic Development) provided the means to an end, rather than the subject matter (local development) itself. My input to both projects spans six years over the period 2000 to 2010, full-time in the Baltics from September 2000 to October 2003 and ten days every month in the Eastern Cape from September 2007 to March 2010.

As the focus steadied around the wider theme of development practice, I was more confident that the same actor-oriented lens could be widened to accommodate a close-up view of two quite different external development interventions. However, I was very conscious and had been advised of the challenges and complications such a dual focus would bring to the data gathering, analysis and reporting exercise. Perhaps it was the sense of trepidation in dealing with this that led in part to the delay in fully getting to grips with the thesis. Years had passed since the initial motivation and now the scope of the subject matter – my involvement in interventions to promote local development in poor rural communities - stretches back over three decades. On the other hand, the primary reason for postponing the more intensive start of the work was the need to continue working – in Sarajevo.

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between 2010 and 2011, then in Syria until that project was closed for cause of war, followed by several years in the never-ending and deadline-punctuated world of business development in the sector before another South African project (Pretoria) 2014-15.

Shelved but never abandoned – this has been a job that must be done – essentially a personal reflection on significant years in a career made accessible through the application of development sociology and “actor oriented, interface and social constructionist perspectives”. Since starting out as “international (development) consultant”, like many others, I have accumulated a track record of project experiences. Some I can put down as “good projects”, source of positive memories, working relationships and sense of accomplishment. Others have come and gone, leaving only residual impressions, while a few fall into the “best forgotten” category. What they have in common is their distinct character as “external planned development intervention”.

This notion of “lifeworld”, as discussed by Long, Schutz and others - what we carry as “lived experience” into the project space and also as the rear-mirror for interpreting past events - has very much shaped the approach and, indeed, informed my “understanding of the social life” of the projects. It is from within this “lived-in and ‘taken-for-granted’” world that I try to make sense of what is happening around me, drawing on the “personal constructs” which render meaning for me. Yet lifeworld for me – and those around me - spanned more than the memories of previous projects. In my case, lifeworld encompassed growing up in the divided society of Northern Ireland, political and community engagement and early career experiences, all of which influence in subtle and probably unseen ways the choice of subject matter and how I deal with it.

At the same time, as a practicing development worker and assignment seeker, the demands of “livelihood” are never far from view and serve as a further filter to the lens through which we perceive events, often more immediate and pressing, living in the present. Long points to “livelihood” as “impl(ying) more than making a living ... (but) encompass(ing) ways and styles of life/living ... status and a sense of identity vis-à-vis other persons”. Even, at times, in researching and drafting this dissertation, those ever present nagging considerations come knocking upon upon daily reality, in some way impinging on mindset, perspective and angle to take. Where I am conscious of this, I somehow try to make explicit and allow the reader to judge.

The ever-present dual “insider-outsider” identity, as international development consultant, undoubtedly conditions relationships and colours perspective in any external development intervention. As team member, the degree to which one can, I was able to, be “an insider” is very much related to the extent to which I was seen as member of the alliance deemed to possess what is acknowledged as the
dominant idea or “compelling interpretation of events”96, even when still “an outsider” in terms of culture, background and language. Outsider, on the other hand, was a more or less permanent state or sense of one’s place when struggling to gain traction for ideas against the current of the “single validating model”97, despite being insider within the team itself. In either of the two case studies, my primary role, function and identity was that of participant, or to use the lexique of auto-ethnography, “a complete member”98. The discipline of researcher was additional, voluntary and secondary in the case of the South African project – and was applied retrospectively, in “cold case enquiry” style, far from the arenas of action in the Baltics. In such circumstances, there is less of a sense of “emotional strain in keeping this positioning” than that encountered by Alder in her efforts to maintain an “observer as participant” role in her research into hospice care99. On the other hand, the emotional charge generated by being caught up, actively and reactively, directly and indirectly, in the exchanges and encounters along the interfaces of the LED support programme, seeps into diary entries for the period, as evidenced in the following diary extract. “Leaving the session that evening, (we leave in pairs, Silumko/Trevor and Aron and me) I feel wearied, a bit disoriented and demotivated. While I quite appreciate and enjoy the opportunity to appraise the proposals, discuss and write commentaries which can assist the applicant with their final submission, I am more and more disconcerted by the poor working relationships within the team at this level”100.

Methodologically, in many respects, the approach I have followed is close to that of “analytic ethnography” as articulated by Anderson. Although, for reasons outlined above, I am reluctant to take fully on the status of Complete Member Researcher (CMR), my position is fairly well covered by that author’s description of the “opportunistic CMR ... hav(ing) intimate familiarity through occupational ... or lifestyle participation”. To say that I was a “social scientist” with goals that lead to a secondary ... orientation”101 (i.e. social science research) would overstate the intent. Nevertheless, much of my project down-time in South Africa for a period in 2009-2010 was given to making diary notes, asking questions and coming to terms with development sociology, actor perspectives and agency. On-the-job, I was and had to be, single-minded, focussing on the encounters, events and challenges of the day. However, increasingly as the research project advanced, I was ever more conscious of what Anderson calls the “researcher’s multiple foci”, taking note of utterances and behaviour of others - and myself - that I might later gather into diary notes or questions. In the Baltics, being there on the day, every day over the three years was all about project delivery and sustaining the narrative. Later familiarity with writers like Mosse, a fellow practitioner, and his documented insights as

100 Diary note – on working with Central Task Team – see Chapters 5 and 6 - 5th September 2009.
practitioner-observer in a major rural development project in India, helped enormously in revisiting both interventions as retrospective researcher.

The second distinguishing feature of analytic autoethnography as codified by Anderson is that of "analytic reflexivity". By this he means something more than the researcher’s awareness of their effect on the research situation and suggests that this "entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others ...". Throughout the dissertation, as I have made clear above, I draw consciously and unconsciously on lifeworld, livelihood and personal constructs, using what Schwalbe, cited by Anderson, calls “my own biography" to help make sense of the events and situations I was participating in, observing and/or reporting. Indeed, over the course of the endeavour, I have no doubt but that “the autoethnographic interrogation of self and other (has) transform(ed) (my) own beliefs, actions and sense of self." In these senses, also, the methodology and the thesis fulfill another core criteria as an autoethnographic approach and account by placing the “researcher” as “a highly visible social actor within the written text”. My “own feelings and experiences” are an integral part of the plot “and considered as vital data for understanding the social world” of both projects. Furthermore, my engagement with other members of the teams at all times is never independent from the action or in anyway removed from the ongoing struggle for ideas – and the co-creation of project outcomes. It is this constant dialogue with others – donors, development company representatives, counterparts in the recipient administration and especially fellow team members – that further reinforces the analytic autoethnographic character of the account “grounded in self-experience but reach(ing) beyond it as well". Finally, in keeping with the recent analytical autoethnographic tradition, I have attempted “not only (to) truthfully render() the social world under investigation but also” to contribute to better “theoretical understanding” of the different forces at play in externally driven pro-poor local and rural development interventions.

My involvement on both projects was generally within a project team working centrally, most often with state counterparts, in the elaboration of wider strategic policy, institutional and legal frameworks. In that role, I have had less direct contact with local communities as the intended final beneficiaries of the interventions. I was engaged as an active participant – an insider, project worker, licenced change agent - in an external (international) intervention, with the explicit, if not always clearly defined, role to support the introduction of new policy frameworks for the delivery of pro-poor area-based development. For one of the two projects, Support for LED in the Eastern Cape, I was able, from time to time, to assume a voluntary (self-attributed) additional role as participant observer and somewhat self-
conscious actor, as well as team member. Such a detached yet implicated stance made it possible, to an extent, to look at the same situations as they unfold from a number of different perspectives through a more reflective and often chaotic kaleidoscopic lens. On the other hand, working within the “system model”\(^{107}\) probably “also constrained the interpretive possibilities” given my active and often partisan position in much of the team discourse and across relationships. Equally, I can readily identify with Mosse’s sense of being “at the margins of the project community”\(^{108}\), despite having a particular job to do. Moreover, being part-time, for fifty per-cent of the time, I was absent from the field and struggling to catch-up or understand the changes that had occurred in-between time. This constantly left an uncomfortable sense of partial unknowing, which is probably the case for all ethnographers.

In the Baltics, my job as Regional Team Leader involved constant travel between the three countries and work with each of the Country Team Leaders. The self-conscious participant observer was absent from these situations which were instead dominated by day-to-day interaction of protagonists brought together for one or other reason during the lifecycle of the project. As team leader, under pressure to meet targets and deadlines, I was much more focussed on the achievements of outputs, outcomes and goals – and how these would be reported - than on observing process and interaction. I should however say that the project in Estonia was host to a ‘participant observer’ PhD researcher, with whom there were many exchanges and discussions over the years and whose thesis has been referenced in this study along with that of another academic (PhD) who provides an ethnographic account of the partnership and community in one of the target areas in Lithuania in the years immediately after the programme.

One of the major challenges was how to bring the chronicles of both projects into the same analysis and account. For a start, it is not possible to retro-fit a participant observation account of the Baltics experience for obvious reasons. My participation in the project themselves is a matter for the record. What I did have was a wealth of project documentation – terms of reference, proposals, inception report, notes of meetings, progress reports, DFID reports, evaluations and media comment. With the benefit of hindsight and the insights afforded by my latter day acquaintance with development sociology, agency, interface and actor perspective, I could draw on context when recalling what, to me, seemed significant encounters marking turning points or setbacks in the course of the programme. I have, where possible, sought to include other perspectives of recalled events through correspondence and from time to time interview using skype.

As stated above, there was a more conscious effort to apply ethnographic tools to the analysis of the intended outcomes and unintended effect in the Eastern Cape context. Following my decision to embark on the research and once cleared with the development company manager, I informed colleagues of my objectives and am

\(^{107}\) Mosse D – Cultivating Development - Introduction: The Ethnography of Policy and Practice quoting Quarles van Ufford 2005:12 “where there is a necessary assumption of means-ends rationality, integration and manageability” (Mosse).

grateful for their willing involvement, often snatched conversations in corridors and meeting rooms on topical project-related issues. In addition to a series of semi-structured interviews with most key informants from within the project team, other development consultants, including those who drafted both iterations of the terms of reference and colleagues in the provincial administration, I kept a project diary as best possible, given my part-time presence. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Once again, project documentation has been plentiful and put to use in setting context. I have shared some of my conclusions with some of those with whom I have worked over these years and they are broadly in agreement with my findings.

For both accounts and indeed that of the encounters along the interfaces during the introduction of the EU pilot project for locally based rural development in Northern Ireland, I have sought to protect the identities of the direct protagonists and those who revealed personal viewpoints in the course of interviews and conversations. In all cases, I have attributed pseudonyms, although job titles and professional roles as well as names of operational units have been retained.

1.2.10 Structure of the thesis

Over the course of the next six chapters, our focus then will be on an attempt to use an actor perspective to understand better the complexity, multi-dimensionality and most-times hidden influence of agency in the design, implementation and delivery of two international development interventions in very different parts of the world, different historical and political contexts connected only by the common purpose of tackling rural poverty – and my participation in both.

In Chapter Two, I set out to connect the research and thesis with some of the literature of development sociology. The literature of development sociology has much to say on the scope for those involved in (international) development to “make room for manoeuvre” and what they do within that space. I propose to relate my observations and analysis to the work of authors, academics and practitioners, who have had something to say on project management, its design, its interpretation, its work to enrol others, its roll-out, its delivery and ultimately how it deals with and reports on success and failure. Through the work of such writers, we can venture beyond the contrived constraints of the logic of intervention, the logframe and “the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes”, to view the project, not as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but rather as the result of “an ongoing, socially constructed and negotiated process”109.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to set the scene and put into context the two main cases that form the basis for a critical reflection on the role of project workers and the project team as change agents in the delivery of external development interventions. In it, we set out briefly the critical factors – the big (policy) ideas - that brought them together in quite specific contexts and set the broad parameters

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for the outcomes of those interventions. We describe the national, regional and local environments wherein the action took place and we introduce the two projects. The Chapter also serves to present and become acquainted with the cast of actors who were the human face of the respective endeavours and who will feature in the action through the following narrative Chapters.

In Chapter Four, we take our first steps into the “implementation black box” (Mosse 2005). We shall be looking more closely at the struggle for ideas that shape the design and early direction of international development projects aimed at tackling rural poverty and social exclusion. Through reflections around and analysis of specific incidents, exchanges and debates that marked the course of both case studies, we shall seek to understand better the motivations, interests and perceptions of those most closely involved and the impact of these on project outcomes. The cast of participating actors along these interfaces is drawn mainly from the overall strategic management level, as distinct from the following two chapters, although all are part of the project class of development workers. Our starting hypothesis for this chapter is that there is an inherent ambiguity and confusion in the “master metaphors” 110 around which international development interventions are constructed. The better informed, organised and networked actors are well positioned to shape the design, seize the mandate and, at least for a time, control the official narrative. We seek to investigate how ideas with power are framed, debated and deployed to keep contending designs at bay – and how those most directly controlling the project agenda work to ensure that the project remains ‘on message’. In the chapter, we try to explore how those with the “ideas with power” 111 make the project ‘real’ in the eyes of its “interpretive community, a group of ‘believers’” 112 and act to sustain that ‘belief’ in the face of scepticism and indeed criticism and opposing narratives both inside and outside the project team.

Chapter Five focuses on the project interfaces at a more operational level, where the contests for ideas are played out within the project team and with its ‘intermediaries’ on a more or less day-to-day basis. In doing so, we seek to interrogate the assumption that delivery mechanism of external development projects favours the participation of the “project classes”, the well networked and better informed individuals and interest groups who are well placed to take advantage of the benefits of the development initiative. We attempt to reconstruct some of the critical interactions involving the project teams, their networks and, to a limited extent, the intended beneficiaries during early encounters in setting up the project. We identify and examine how the lifeworlds and lived experiences of some of the actors more closely connected (in the sense of being closer to the formal decision-making processes – or in the project’s chain of command) shape the design and functioning of the implementation mechanisms and affect the outcomes. We also attempt to understand better the relationship between the project team and the actors who serve the function of intermediary, connecting project resources to the purpose of the pro-poor project and to the target groups of

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beneficiaries. In it, we try to explore, from an actor perspective, how “the rules” are presented, interpreted, applied, manipulated, subverted and resisted by various stakeholders operating much closer to the “frontline”. We also seek to gain some insights into which interests are served, who, in the long run, benefits and who pays the costs.

We turn our attention in Chapter Six to the interactions and engagements generated through negotiating ‘the practice’ of the dominant policy model (community development, partnerships and local area strategies, grant schemes and capacity building) with other stakeholders having concern for how the project is implemented, its outcomes and impact. We step outside the inner confines of the circle of programme shapers, drivers and immediate team, including intermediaries, in an effort to explore what happens beyond the inductions, rehearsals, briefings and debates when the project moves into delivery mode and walks the talk – translates the theory into practice - along critical interfaces in project land’s operational sphere. We will endeavour to understand how project workers and project teams seek to manage those spaces and create their room for manoeuvre. The question I want to address specifically is how the project team – collectively and individually – shape the “social context” within which they are operating as they translate their “undisclosed baggage into the different interests of (the) social/institutional worlds and local politics” they encounter at the interface of delivery – and how these “get unravelled ... in ways that generate complex and unintended effects”\(^\text{113}\). Through the lens of our development policy practitioner looking-glass, we set out to observe, analyse and draw some conclusions on whether and how mandated missions and methods withstand contest and remain intact – or adapt and change - when faced with alternative and/or competing perspectives from significant interest groups and stakeholders. These include the intermediaries recruited to the realisation of the project, as well as the host administration, and to a lesser extent, given the construction of the project, in the contact zone with final beneficiaries. We are interested in understanding better how these interactions and the compromises generated affect the overall outcomes, related to starting principles and intended purpose – namely, reducing rural poverty and social exclusion.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, we draw together the findings of our main data chapters, exploring through the many and often conflicting perspectives of the project worker in the project team, the impact of agency in understanding the relationship between policy prescription, the practice of international development and its outcomes. We seek to understand better the social production of the ideas with power, how mandates are won and “master metaphors”\(^\text{114}\) are created around which coalitions of the willing and the less willing can collude, because it is in their interest to do so. Within the team, we look at the adaptations, the compromises and the contradictions involved in building “an acceptable story” and the use of sanctions, up to exclusion, in the face of persistent contest and non-compliance.


We draw on critical instances, factors and feedback at the delivery interface that serve to confirm and reaffirm direction and trajectory, or alternatively to change tack and bring about a turn-around - or simply fudge a compromise that involves sticking to the logframe and doing the ‘right thing’, muddling through – and protecting one’s room for manoeuvre.
CHAPTER 2

What the Literature Says about Agency (Project Teams and Project Workers) and Unintended Effect of International Development Interventions to Tackle Rural Poverty in Project-land

In this chapter, I set out to connect the present research and thesis concerning the influence of agency on the outcomes of two international development projects intended to address the issue of rural poverty that I have had the privilege to work on with some of the literature of development sociology. My intention is to focus primarily upon studies, such as Mosse (2005, 2013), O’Reilly (2012) and others, which have adopted an interactionist perspective or an “actor oriented approach (which) places significance on the point of intervention or the “interface” between development organisations and their clients”115. By taking an actor focus, we will attempt to understand through the working out of the ideas, attitudes, objectives, interests and critically the actions of project workers, in project teams in their many and various manifestations and their encounters with clients, colleagues, beneficiaries and other critical stakeholders, their influence on project outcomes. The purpose will be to explore in both contexts if and how the argument that, despite the formal pronouncements in programme and project texts, policy is actually made at this “‘critical interstice of power’ … through interactions between different actors who possess different forms of knowledge”116.

Much of the existing literature looks at the development world through the eyes of academic and professional studies and research. In the main, the subjects are invariably the international development agencies and their personnel or academic specialists, more interested in research and learning than the consultancy income, as well as teams and workers employed in the voluntary and not-for-profit charity sector117. What makes the present study somewhat different is that the subject is the fee-earning development professional/project worker providing specialised/specialist contracted services to for-profit international development companies, contracted by the development and donor agencies to deliver predetermined project results and outcomes. As such, it provides quite a different viewpoint on the development encounters. Given the importance of “contracted-

117 Rajak D and Stirrat J identify “a hoard of small often ephemeral non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations concentrating on small and local issues … (and) the ‘international NGOs’ working in a range of countries”. Parochial Cosmopolitanism and the Power of Nostalgia – Ch 8 Adventures in Aidland – Edited Mosse D – Berghahn – 2011:162
out” services in the international development context today, estimated, for example, to amount to 13% of total DFID spend (and 20% of its bilateral spend) in 2015/16\textsuperscript{118}, this segment of the industry, hitherto largely unobserved by academic researchers, has become one of the critical shaping factors in the delivery of what we call international development and technical assistance targeting the eradication of poverty.

\textsuperscript{118} House of Commons International Development Committee – DFID’s use of private sector contractors – HC920 – 4\textsuperscript{th} April 2017:8 The report also shows 29% of USAID spend in 2016 and 24% of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2014/15.
2.0 Introduction

Starting out on this journey of retrospection, enquiry and discovery after the events, I had little if any real acquaintance with the literature and research underpinning the growth of (international) development studies. The “nomadic” career of writers like Robert Chambers, whose experience of the world and development was steeped in a (British) colonial past, subsequently drawn by a changing world order into Western modernity and from there into the ‘liberation’ of (bottom-up) participatory methods was indeed another time, another world. My own entry to the borderlands of the development industry was largely the unintended career path that followed the acquisition of some skills and experience as a civil servant in Northern Ireland (and later in the wider European integration context) that were seen to be relevant in the delivery of technical assistance and development aid in countries deemed ‘in transition’. I was only distantly aware of the history of development studies, and their trajectory over the last forty years (in the UK) from the ‘Devonshire A’ course (for colonial officials) to contemporary development studies with their emphasis on “translocal foci such as gender analysis, rural development, impact assessment or participatory rural appraisal”\(^{119}\) towards more radical (Marxist and neo-marxist) interpretations described by Kothari. As far as I know, none of my fellow project workers over the period had taken ‘development studies’ as their course of professional learning/training. As technical ‘experts’ our job was to interpret and deliver against the pre-determined specification of the terms of reference, rather than comment on the merits or otherwise of one policy or another, although, over the ‘campfire’, we sometimes did. Drawing on personal past experience, lifeworlds and earlier ‘political education’ – some policies were ‘good’, for example, the reformed EU Structural Funds with their emphasis on ‘improved’ partnership governance and focus on lagging regions and the local – some policies were ‘bad’, such as ‘monetarism’ and small government from the Thatcher years with constant ‘market testing’ of every conceivable public function. The makings of a mindset and ‘lifeworld’, easily transported to the development interface!

Much of the early motivation in tracing my meanderings along the interfaces of the Baltics Rural Partnership Programme (BRPP) and the EU Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape was to have the evidence to demonstrate the ‘inherent superiority’ of a participatory local development model which empowered actors at local level to bargain and transact with national and other resource holders for the benefit of their local communities. Such policies, I could believe, were the logical product of ‘rational’ processes. Informed, as they must be, “by bringing more information, thought and analysis into the policy making process” they “will become more effective”\(^{120}\). Politically they connected with notions of local empowerment and autonomy and, on my rating scale, equated with ‘good policy’ as distinct from policies based on top-down remedies and ‘parachuted’ development. Nevertheless, much of my earlier experience, for example,

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'introducing' the EU Leader programme in Northern Ireland, (see Chapter One) also reinforced the understanding of "policy-making and implementation as inherently political processes involving bargaining and transaction between different interest groups"\textsuperscript{121}. It has therefore been something of a journey of discovery since undertaking this extended reflection on my experience as a project worker to see and appreciate how much of the ‘policy-making’ in both our cases can fit the description of “disjointed incrementalism” or the “science of ‘muddling through’”\textsuperscript{122}.

By taking an actor perspective, I have been able to shift the focus more fully onto how the actors, including myself, interacting along the many different frontlines or interfaces throughout the life cycle of the project, actively shape the outcomes, often in directions not scripted by the programme designers. Such an approach takes us out from the top-down determinism of rational modernity on the one hand or, on the other, from the “discursive practices” (Foucault 1972, 1981)\textsuperscript{123} that see development, in the words of Mosse, as “technical discourses that naturalise poverty, objectify the poor and depoliticise ...”\textsuperscript{124} the effects it (development) brings about (Ferguson 1994, Escobar 1995, Long 2001 and others). Rather than analyse and debate the instrumental or critical merits and demerits of one policy direction over another, the subject became much more interesting in understanding how as development actors, project workers, collectively and individually, we create our room for manoeuvre, “take account of emerging forms of interaction, procedures, practical strategies, types of discourse, cultural categories and the ‘stakeholders’ (Palumbo 1987:32) involved in specific contexts”\textsuperscript{125} to shape, reshape, give expression to, make meaningful and narrate the outcomes. By taking such an approach, we can step outside the contrived constraints of the logic of intervention, the logframe and “the execution of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes”, to view the project, not as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but rather as the result of “an ongoing, socially constructed and negotiated process”\textsuperscript{126}.

In this chapter then, I propose to relate my observations and analysis to the work of authors, academics and practitioners, who have had something to say on project management, its design, its interpretation, its work to enrol others, its roll-out, its delivery and ultimately how it deals with and reports on success and failure. First and foremost, it is the writings of Mosse that have most informed the unfolding retrospective enquiry for the simple reason that his seminal “Cultivating Development” (2005) provides an insightful model and case study of what it says it will provide – “an ethnography of aid policy and practice”. His account reaches back to the origins and gestation period of an earlier, now forgotten, “new policy representation” (“a fully participative and poverty-focussed rainfed farming project ... a mobiliser for policy change back in London”) in 1990 and takes us through the

lived experience of the IBRFP to that project’s “fall from grace” and aftermath as a result of change of policy within DFID towards the end of that decade.  

Mosse’s depiction of the Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project (IBRFP) international team as “a fairly typical aid consultancy team” however, may be truer of its day, than would be the case in international development today. Its cast of academic specialists of various hues, were more interested in research and learning than in the fee-days of the contracted-in travelling project worker. What makes the present Baltics and the South African cases different and a potentially distinctive contribution to our understanding of the practice of international development, is the focus on professional project teams contracted by private sector for-profit companies and corporations to deliver pro-poor programmes intended to reduce rural poverty and social exclusion. What makes it topical is growing public awareness of the extent of private sector involvement in the delivery of foreign aid projects and programmes which has been generated by the current controversy in the UK over the use of such contracts by DFID.

Much of the theoretical underpinning for the research draws on the actor perspectives of Long’s Development Sociology and related writings. Thanks to his work, and that of many others to whom he introduces us, development interventions only become meaningful through stripping back the myths, legends and rhetoric of development to discover and understand better what happens when project workers and their counterparts as clients, recipients and beneficiaries engage with one another at the interface to determine the outcomes of the project. His depiction of the project terrain as constituting “multiple realities … entailing different rationalities for the actors involved” which are negotiated across the countless “knowledge encounters and interactions” at every level in the social life of the development intervention. It is in such everyday contexts of “multiplicity of knowledge networks”, he suggests, drawing on the work of Box (1989:167), that the “lifeworlds … values, norms and interests” of development workers and actors (including the intended beneficiaries) “are partially sealed off from one another … and do not allow for communication and interaction between the parties”. These “knowledge repertoires … cannot be detached from the social relationships … in which such knowledge exists”.

How then do projects ever happen? Or in Long’s words “whose interpretations or models … prevail over those of other actors, and under what conditions?” Discounting systems thinking as having little understanding of “how power differences affect the interactions …”, he also dismisses the “assumption … of optimism and willing participation” of the “soft system methodology” and argues that such development encounters are “far from smooth and unproblematic”. Taking an actor perspective, he goes on to make the case for “knowledge … as a joint product of the encounter and fusion of horizons” – and exhorts the researcher to “explore the extent to which specific actors perceive themselves capable of

127 Coincidently coinciding with the unrelated ‘birth’ of the Baltics Sustainable Rural Livelihood Project.
manoeuvring within given contexts or networks and develop strategies for doing so\textsuperscript{130}. It is to such ends that our enquiry is directed.

The main focus for Ferguson’s critique is the World Bank and the major international development institutions, rather than on the role of private sector contractors and their travelling workers who were probably less in evidence at that time. Nevertheless, his “question … concerns ‘development’ as a social entity in its own right: the set of ‘development’ institutions, agencies and ideologies peculiar to our own age”\textsuperscript{131}. In doing so, he explores the role of “discourse” which for some writers\textsuperscript{132} (e.g. Heyer et al (1981) and Galli (1981)) is “simply a misrepresentation of what the ‘development’ apparatus is ‘really’ up to”. Ferguson argues that the role of “official discourse” is much more important than simply rhetoric or ‘mystification’. It also provides the “acceptable statements and utterances” that shape the mindset and “the thoughts and actions of the ‘development’ bureaucrats” which in turn lay the basis for their “emphases, interpretations, construals and fabrications which combine to produce a unique ‘development’ perspective …”\textsuperscript{133}. Where he comes closest to an actor perspective is in his acknowledgement that the development intervention is never “the simple projection of the ‘interest’ of a subject (the World Bank, Canada, Capital, Imperialism)” and must be understood in “a series of events and transformations not in the intentions guiding the actions … but in the systematic nature of the social reality which results from those actions”. Yet, however unintended the outcome may finally “turn out”, the effect of the ‘development’ project, he argues, “may very well serve power … but in a different way than any of the ‘powerful’ actors imagined”\textsuperscript{134}, in his view, by extending the bureaucratic reach of the state over ‘beneficiary’ rural communities and incorporating them into the neo-liberal global market economy.

Patrick O’Reilly’s long term study of the emergence of a local development partnership set up to tackle rural poverty in South East Ireland also provides relevant insights. It offers a reflector against which to analyse and understand better the contradictions inherent in delivering an externally driven intervention to establish bottom-up responses whether in rural Ireland, the Baltics or the former homelands of the Eastern Cape. Drawing on a very different landscape - the roll-out of a national (EU supported) policy-programme within the member state and involving primarily indigenous actors and institutions both local and national, his work, informed by Long and others, nevertheless throws light on “the minutiae of social life” of development projects and a well-rounded appreciation of the “range of actors involved working towards their own objectives”. The policy-making and operational context described by O’Reilly bears little direct resemblance to the international development world and the “social life” of expatriate (and local) project teams and project workers. Yet by adopting an approach which emphasises

“the importance of actors ... and the flow of events during which actors very literally ‘make sense’ of the world”, his analysis of the unintended effects of local development policy in Ireland lends itself to our quest to understand better the influence of agency in two development interventions taking place in very different socio-cultural circumstances. His focus on dismantling the rhetoric around bottom-up decision-making and action in the Irish local development model is also quite relevant, given its importance as the ‘ideal model’ for some of the driver-designers involved in the BRPP experience and taking into account the long shadow of lifeworld in assessing policy options in the Eastern Cape. In particular, it provides something of an additional handrail to guide a once-believer and ideologue in the “dominating knowledge (Marglin and Marglin: 1990)”\textsuperscript{135} of local empowerment and initiative towards a more reflective comprehension of how “the social world still seeps in” and eventually towards “a more modest approach to sociology in which it is assumed that the researcher knows nothing about the world in advance, everything requires explanation...”\textsuperscript{136}.

With these perspectives in mind, it is mainly to Mosse that we turn to provide a reference frame and outline structure for the remainder of this chapter, given, on the one hand, the project lifecycle chronology of his ethnography of aid policy and practice and, on the other, his consistent and coherent application of an actor perspective throughout his lived experience as a member of the IBRFP team. Within that mainframe, I will attempt to ventilate some of the arguments, propositions, counter-propositions and questions raised by other writers and researchers around the role of development workers and development teams in producing the mainly unintended effects of external aid interventions. The structure follows the logic of the three data chapters of the thesis. In the next section, we will explore what the literature says about the influence of agency as in development workers and development teams shaping outcomes and direction at design and interpretation of mandate stage of the project life cycle. From there, we turn our attention to the contest for “ideas with power” within the team as policy and practice is further laid out, discussed, debated, contested, confirmed or compromised in the ongoing acts of enrolment and persuasion. Finally, we shall see through the literature of development sociology how the team and its members fare in the efforts to deliver product and policy along the interfaces with beneficiaries.

### 2.1 Development Workers Shaping Design and Interpreting Mandate

When Mosse asserts that “aid projects satisfy the political needs of Western development agencies ... long before they meet the livelihood needs of poor people”, there is little to separate him from the views of more ‘critical’ writers such as Ferguson (1994) and Long (2001). However, Long takes a rather theoretical perspective of the various processes and ‘models’ of planning interventions, dismissing as “gross simplification” those which are “essentially linear in nature”, as he points us in the direction of a much more “complicated set of processes which

\textsuperscript{136} O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development. PhD thesis – National University of Ireland Galway – 2012:58-72
involves the re-interpretation and transformation of policy during the implementation process itself”. Ferguson, for his part, argues that how the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency “conceptualise” the development challenge in Lesotho, “shapes ... the construction of organisations, institutions and programs” ... “in such a way as to maximise the role of ‘development agencies’”.

Through such configurations, he contends, “intentional plans interact (..) with unacknowledged structures and chance events to produce unintended outcomes which turn out to be intelligible not only as the unforeseen effects of an intended strategy, but also as the unlikely instruments of an unplotted strategy”. Much of Ferguson’s analysis is based on formal plans, institutional frameworks, their organisational charts and the interaction, or in many cases, non-interaction, between senior officials in the Thaba-Tseka project team, the Lesotho administration, Canadian International Development Agency and the World Bank – and Principals and Ward Chiefs administering the rangelands where the livestock improvement, range management and livestock marketing activities were planned to take place. Project workers and project beneficiaries are present, but exist mainly in the background – due to the fact, in the words of Mosse, that “critics such as Ferguson apparently spent so little of their time talking to development workers”.

In contrast, Mosse puts “the subordinate actors in development” centre-stage. His intention is “to reinstate the complex agency of actors in development at every level ... as well as to revise the false notion of the all-powerful Western development institutions”. He sets the scene for the emergence of a new policy direction for DFID – or its predecessor in the ODA – in the wider UK and global political and institutional landscape in the late 1980s – and on the pressures on DFID “to change its way of doing business and increase the poverty-focus of its aid” (in the face of “a British public ... scandalised” by the earlier state of affairs). Through his extended ethnographic account of the experience of the IBRFP over many years, he draws our attention to “the complexity of policy as institutional practice ... (to) the social life of projects, organisations and professionals, (to) the perspectives of actors themselves and ... the diversity of interests behind policy models”. With that in mind, he offers insights to the backroom lobbying of interest groups and NGOs arguing for “alternative participative, community-based models of development” as well as the role of different, often competing groups within DFID itself, such as the Social Development Advisers, in shaping policy – and in the process, consolidating their influence around new policy directions. Rosalind Eyben’s reflection on breaking ranks within the donor collegiate in Bolivia points to

how the international aid community, focussed on “coordinating its activities in support of global targets” work towards a single shared diagnosis of the problems of poverty in any aid-recipient country”. Diagnosis, she comments, “is a social process”, passed on to newcomers through old hands and key individuals from the recipient country “who mediated the local for us”.

One of the significant outcomes of the ‘new’ development paradigm of the late 1980s was a tendency on the part of DFID and other international members of the “Washington consensus” to see “government as part of the problem”, to roll back and ‘side-line’ the state as an active partner in development. Partnership with private sector and civil society was the emerging development orthodoxy, with or without national government. In the IBRFP context described by Mosse, the new direction is reflected in the choice of the KBCL (hybrid state and private sector “agro-input manufacturing and marketing cooperative), as partner and “an organisation onto which ODA advisers could strategically inscribe their emerging agenda”. This was an enrolment, which came about “… probably because it was there ….” Yet on the question Mosse puts as to “what interests did KBCL have in a participatory poverty-focussed project? … on such matters there was (official) silence”. As a leading national commercial organisation involved in the production and marketing of fertiliser, he subsequently points out, KBCL clearly had “a fundamental organisational imperative to promote itself and enhance the emotive content of its brand name”, underlining the often hidden conditionality in partnership. O'Reilly is equally emphatic in demonstrating the “hidden transcript” guiding the corporate and political investment of Waterford in the West Waterford Development Partnership, although in that context, the state retained “substantial control at the centre”.

Mosse’s account of the “social work of policy ideas” is also useful and throws light on how project teams and development workers seek to produce “a singular knowledge system proving a coherent project analysis”. While he acknowledges Ferguson’s view of the predisposition of international donors to identify and define development problems which are amenable to that body’s “currently favoured technical solution”, he reduces such an assessment to “this simplification”. Nonetheless, he goes on to describe in his own case how the “project design narrative” prepared by the IBRFP team of consultants, of which he was a member, “added vivid landscapes of bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency” to their consensus-based definitions of the problem to be tackled. As a result, “prevailing national regimes were de-legitimised and human agency was relocated from the state to the project, its people and donor”, ultimately redefining ‘the solution’ as

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147 O'Reilly P – All of the People all of the Time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – 6.4 The Usual Suspects – PhD thesis – National University of Ireland – Galway – 2012:229-240.
one of “institutional change” and readily aligned with DFID’s new participatory farmer-first agenda.\(^{149}\)

Achieving that ‘singularity’ of understanding and purpose, however, is an ongoing process over the course of the intervention and nowhere more intense than in the early days of operation. He identifies a series of stages – not necessarily serial but certainly iterative and subject to constant revisiting – which he describes as “the social work of enrolment, persuasion, agreement and argument that lies behind the consensus and coherence demanded of project designs by the politics of aid”. Enrolment in the project design, Mosse advises, is essential “to accommodate not just our (the project team’s) personal and disciplinary differences” but to connect upwards with “the larger constituencies … who we worked so hard to enrol so as to legitimise our effort” and, wider “communities of interest”. These include, in the words of Latour (1996:42-43), the “assemblies of spokespersons who bring together, during a single meeting, around a single table different worlds”\(^{150}\).

However, by the same token, by enrolling and including, we are also excluding “other frames, perspectives and approaches – technical, commercial and political” and we become “strategic(ally) silent” over more awkward questions. As part of the enrolment process, project teams and those who have the power to interpret the mandate, to articulate and sell the “problem-solution”, seek out the “master metaphor”, (in the IBRFP context, the notion of participation) “so that we could talk to each other and to donor advisers”. A degree of ambiguity is necessary and provides essential room for manoeuvre and for compromise, he argues, as well as allowing “the multiplication of criteria of success” and accommodating future policy shifts.\(^{151}\)

Beyond enrolment, once in the field, it is the project team’s job – in most cases, the team leader and support team – to persuade significant others and project stakeholders that the intervention is worth supporting. It must be “consequential, it has to have big effects”. In persuading those who needed to be in the case of the IBRFP, Mosse records that “the design told stories that linked specific technical interventions to larger schemes of social change and visions of the future”. In an effort to persuade and “hold together internal diversity”, project teams are prone to over-ambition, aspirations couched in the technical terms of the logframe. Selling the project also involves stressing its innovative quality and how it “marks a new beginning” and critically, for DFID as a major donor, how it lends itself to replication and scaling-up. Mosse re-joins Ferguson, Long and others in pointing up in the act of persuasion, the importance of stressing “technical expertise” connected into “globally valid technical solutions” as a means “to conceal the political nature of project choices”. Projects are presented as “predictive models, in which”, he observes, “the elements are systematically and causally related and the outcomes of actions are certain (Stirrat 2000:36)”. Project management tools such


as the logframe, the intervention logic and more topically today, the theory of change convey “the rationality (and the manageability)” and predictability of the project to outside decision-makers – and over the course of the project, these provide the framework “to explicate the approach, to report achievements and to negotiate changes”.

Mosse perceptively captures the transience of that moment of agreement when the project document (terms of reference or inception report) “give stability to the cacophony of ideas and voices”. While it will serve as the basis for formal agreements between donor agency and beneficiary government – and as “the fiction of the ‘determining present’ (Alexander 2001:478) for review teams and visiting consultants – when in the real emerging world of project implementation, its utility is essentially its “recall effect” (Latour 1996:45) alongside which unexpected and unintended changes might be registered. Moreover, in Mosse’s experience, the ‘agreed’ project documents still contain sufficient ambiguity, “contradictory points of view or arguments between consultants and their collaborators, or within the consultant or donor advisory teams ... (for) further disagreements and debates ...” Nevertheless, he notes that at this early stage, the “IBRFP’s design was ambiguous enough to allow very different organisational interests to translate into the same project model and that these interests in the project were sufficiently strong to override potential conflicts”. He describes the organisational form of the project as “a hybrid compromise between diverse interests and secured on ambiguity. It contained many of the disjunctures and contradictions that shaped the design process and that would re-emerge later”.

While quite different from the artificially contained world of the international development project, O’Reilly’s account of the project team arriving into West Waterford to set up the “new programme” describes well the encounters to enrol “actors with a range of conflicting interests, different worldviews and radically different stocks of knowledge”. In particular, the appointment of the Area Based Response Partnership manager illustrates well how “lifeworlds” (Long) and “ideas with power” (Mosse), “making interim decisions” can re-interpret the mandate and shape the longer term trajectory of the programme. “The new manager’s outlook and work experience were from the business world and he was familiar, and had worked with figures involved in agribusiness in the county. He shared the view of many that the principal issue facing the area was how to promote economic growth”, rather than tackling long term unemployment which was the stated objective of the ABR programme.

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155 O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Round Up the Usual Suspects – Early days of the Partnership - PhD – National University of Ireland – 2012:240-241.
In this section of the chapter, we have drawn essentially on selected literature applying actor perspectives to the roles of the development/project worker/project team in shaping the design of the intervention, gaining control over the approved and agreed mandate and reinterpreting and redefining the accepted narrative. In the next section, we will look more closely at what has been written about how, once in place, ideas with power are promoted, maintained, emphasising the importance of social relationships over policy direction, all the time striving for a form of policy coherence that meets the “exigencies of organisation and the need to maintain relationships”156.

2.2 Contesting, Communicating and Controlling Ideas with Power Within the Project Team

Once again, it is to Mosse that we turn for the most in-depth account of the social life of the project as lived along the interfaces within the project team as mandates are defined, clarified, contested, negotiated, communicated, imposed, compromised and accommodated within “constituencies of support” comprising divergent interests and viewpoints. Our focus again is primarily on the development workers for whom “the world of development is their only source of income” as distinct from those for whom, in the words of Rajak and Stirrat, “it is combined with other professions, most notably (or notoriously?) academia”157.

Dismissing simultaneously the “once simplistic (instrumental) notion that development action is the product of policy intention” or “domination to be resisted”, Mosse also takes issue with the tendency of “interactionist approaches ...(to) often lose sight of the ‘problem of policy’ in the sense of failing to ask how ideas with power and social practice interact”158. He sets out to show how in the development (and every interactive) context, “ideas can only be fully understood in terms of the institutions and the social relationships through which they are articulated and how relationships have to be understood in terms of ideas.” Indeed, far from being static, “policy ideas provide the idiom for alliances and divisions within ... teams”.159 He uses his skills as an ethnographer and participant team member to identify and open up lines of questioning that bring us close to the daily dilemmas, contradictions, urgencies, imperatives, struggles, sense of isolation and compromises faced by the development worker and the development team throughout their involvement in project land. His detailed, insightful, lived and lively account of the many interactions along the interfaces between project team, partners, clients, beneficiaries and other stakeholders at every stage in the project cycle, is both highly familiar and relevant.

For Mosse, it is the in-built “ambiguity ... in the idea of participatory development” that created “considerable uncertainty about how to operationalise it among IBRFP

staff” in the Programme Management Unit. In a team comprising people with different ideas, approaches, training and professional backgrounds, such a lack of clarity soon led to the emergence of office politics “around competing views and approaches”. While sectioned along different lines, the main differences were between those whom, on the one hand, he describes as “technical and administrative” staff who wanted to move quickly towards implementation and, on the other, the “social science specialists” who argued against “ill-considered interventions in complex livelihood systems about which project staff knew little”. Such contrasting points of view, he maintains, “reflect deeper social divides within the project office”, also partly a consequence of the hybrid organisational form of the project (part of the project team were KBCL employees, more familiar with the “result-oriented practices of fertiliser marketing”). Visiting consultants and donor representatives added to these tensions, during the “heightened negotiations of ‘missions’”, when alliances between the like-minded were formed and reformed. How the project was finally implemented was “never independent of the politics of team relationships”. Ideas, he goes on to say “had to be forged through relationships; and those consultants who arrived late, or who did not build internal coalitions around their ideas … found their ideas, however pertinent … falling through the cracks …”\(^{160}\). Writing about international development consultants in the medical sector, Harper suggests that most “experts remain largely isolated and thus marginal in these peripheries”\(^{161}\).

At the far end of the decision-making and delivery chain in the IBRFP were the Community Organisers who were “least secure in their jobs” and understandably keen “to build alliances” with more senior members of the programme management unit and consultant teams. One of Mosse’s CO informants identifies two types of ‘project class’ fieldworker. In the first instance, the ‘street-wise bureaucrat’ who has experience from other projects, ‘has done it all’ and is more concerned to demonstrate efficiency in terms of uptake. The others were more urban, better qualified, speaking English and with “a better understanding of the (participatory) process”\(^{162}\). Individuals from both groups were competing for the “scarce resource of reputation”, in the absence of policy clarity, both groups were vulnerable and dependent on relationships and alliances\(^{162}\). Curtin and Varley identify similar differences among Forum’s paid community workers in Connemara – “the gradualist style thought in terms of building up the capacity and awareness of local actors gradually in line with participatory and emancipatory ideals … the contrasting instrumental style emphasised … the need to organise community work so as to deliver identifiable end products as soon as possible”\(^{163}\). As in Mosse’s Indian case, reporting pressures and programme deadlines created tensions between the two groups, ultimately accommodated on the basis of respective but mutual interests.


Kovách and Kučerova highlight the vital role of these frontline workers in Central and Eastern Europe during the transition years between the end of communism and accession to the EU and its market economy. They describe them as “mediators” between the external development intervention and target local communities. In their more general account of the world of the international development team, Rajak and Stirrat underline the dependency, “exacerbated by linguistic problems” of the geographically mobile international development professional on such “intermediaries … who control communication and usually produce what is expected of them”164. The notion of “project class” as articulated by Kovách and Kučerova is much wider than simply local project team members and involves all of the actors implicated in “new forms of organisation and management associated with development projects”, including in the national, regional and local administrations in the transitioning CEE states in the early part of the last decade. They also tend to use the term to distinguish the emergence of a new domestically grown development professional as distinct from the international agent165. Mosse describes the IBRFP team as “a mixture of KBCL (partner organisation) employees … NGO professionals (institutions, monitoring, gender specialists) and male and female postgraduates. This carefully selected collection of young, broadly middle-class men and women … were rapidly inducted in project principles and participatory techniques … carefully controlled by the University of Wales consultants”.166

From his perspective as consultant anthropologist working with the IBRFP team over many years, Mosse draws a distinction between the “thought-work – reflections, strategies … (and) second order rationalisations” of the consultants and advisers and the “warrior knowledge” of the frontline worker and unit manager. ‘Warriors’, he observes, “write of relationships and social encounters … fragmented knowledge falling below the threshold of ‘scienticity’” (Gibson 1986:462). “Policy knowledge” on the other hand, “the knowledge of the project’s generals and strategists” … expresses rational intention and generates explicit strategy, makes judgements of success and gives authorised meaning to events …”. Such reports had, he says, at least two functions – to represent and communicate “‘upwards’ to donor advisers, government officials, colleagues and others as well as ‘downwards’ to fieldworkers”. One could add that they served the purpose of demarcating respective areas of specialist knowledge, laying down the structures for the programme, although obstructing a more unified and coordinated view. This was the knowledge that was packaged and delivered in mission reports, progress reports, training manuals and brochures, workshops, minutes and memos. The guidelines, frameworks and models (e.g. of group development) “had more to do with (the consultant’s) efforts to assert control over project management and disorderly practice167. Interestingly, there was little internal demand (in the project hierarchy) for the knowledge that consultants thought to be important. Information

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on the capacity needs of local development groups, for example, deemed ‘critical’ by consultants, mattered less than the “physical and expenditure targets” and indicators sought after by managers, field workers – and, in the end, donor agency officials. The real value-adding work of the consultant/adviser/expert, however, was their “conceptual work, which helped … rationalise and stabilise authorised representations of events”168. However, while consultants and advisers generally failed (“they lacked the alliances and networks of influence”) to embed their respective “professional knowledge regimes” in the operational life of the project, they did succeed in “establishing the programme and disciplinary divides which structured the programme”, which, he acknowledges, “contributed to the lack of integration about which we later complained”169.

Yet despite the differences, disagreements and divisions that seem to characterise the project environment, there is “usually … in the end a shared need for an ‘acceptable story’ (Mosse 2000) … that buries contradictions in order to sustain relationships and the flow of resources”170. The ‘success’ of a project, Mosse argues, is not simply in terms of performance measures, “it is also about how particular interpretations are made and sustained locally” and how significant others in the project environment are enrolled and identify with its ‘success’. The job of the project worker, whether fieldworker, consultant, manager or indeed, official from the donor agency - in collaboration with counterparts in the host administration - was to “interpret() and present() events through the official model” in a way that supported “a coherent policy model” and connected the project outcomes to that model (Mosse 2005:162). However, maintaining such “regimes of success”, can, he argues, create a sense of “unease (and) anxiety” among project workers faced on a daily basis with the inconsistencies that underlie the project’s image of coherence and the need to accentuate the positive in dealing with beneficiaries – and with the donor organisation. For consultant and development workers dependent on their assignments for income, the ‘story of success’ becomes a bubble not to burst, as expressed in “The Economist’s Tale – A Consultant Encounters Hunger and the World Bank” related by Apthorpe (Griffiths 2003) “Careerwise, I cannot afford to upset the World Bank … I get two-thirds of my income from (it)”171.

The ambiguity inherent in the motivation and the design of the project, discussed in the first section, create the ephemeral sense of unity of purpose in the early days as the project team mobilises and before it comes to terms with the mandate. In these pages we have attempted to see into the “black box” of the development project team as it features in some of the literature to appreciate better the social life of the project. Our purpose has been to identify some of the critical factors that give rise to divisions and differences in approach to the ways in which the ‘mandate’ should be delivered. It takes account of the role of the local project worker and

relationships with internationals and donor community, including the different types of knowledge created and the alliances built around differential stances – ‘warrior’ knowledge from those closest to the interface compared with ‘consultant’ strategic. Yet, for projects to be ‘successful’ differences are ‘reconciled’ in an “acceptable story” around which the interests of all the stakeholders can cohere. In the next section, we will examine what the literature says of what happens within the project team from the actor perspective from the vantage point of the frontline – the point at which the intended deliverables are ‘delivered’, whether this be investment, advisory or technical support – to final intended beneficiaries and/or counterparts in the host administrations.

2.3 Development Workers Delivering Policy, Product and Practice Along the Interfaces

In the literature, the interplay between the “different lifeworlds and knowledge construction” (Long 2001:85) among the complex of actors involved in the international aid context is at its most pronounced along the interface between the project team and the ‘beneficiaries” of the intervention. It is at this point of delivery, where the development bureaucrats and managers, including project team leaders, “can only have a limited view of what actually happens in the field” that the development worker have “the room to create their own autonomous fields of action” (Long 2001:78), interpreting, brokering and negotiating formal project goals, through the optique of their own (often unconscious and always hidden) interests, oftentimes, merely staying in the game (Long 2001). The interface between the official policy-project model, against which he/she will eventually be accounting for activities and reporting outcomes ‘upwards’, on the one hand, and the interests (hopes and aspirations for development) and cultural orientations of intended beneficiaries, on the other, is a precarious place for development workers as the “dilemmas of Roberto” illustrate well. In Long’s analysis of the Arce and Long case (1987) the hapless Mexican extension worker “was expected to build close ties with his clients, but was formally responsible to his (programme) superiors and required to follow certain ... procedures ...”172. As he worked hard to create a relationship of trust with a highly sceptical, disabused and alienated community of small scale producers in the habit of tricking government officials, his alternative and probably equally viable proposal for investment had shifted from the intended (top-down) purpose of the programme. As a result, and no doubt, as a consequence of the power-play in his relationship within the project team – he failed to gain the support of his unit head and district manager. The price of failure in this case was to be labelled “troublemaker” (griloso) and be redeployed to a special ‘troublemakers’ unit’173 and on the part of the intended beneficiaries, resetting a worldview back into real-world focus – ‘the authorities are never to be trusted’.

Mosse’s description of the early encounters between Bhil community members and the development workers, which for (some of) them was, briefly, “the reverse

experience of what it is like to be looked at, to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknown appraisals …” 174 is not unfamiliar to project workers in any region of project (aid) land. Villagers were deeply suspicious of the “project team’s assumed informality and rhetoric of participation. However, over the course of the IBRFP, “a highly committed project team had sensitively built relationships with people in a handful of the poorest adivasi villages … slowly over the three years, they earned a remarkable degree of local trust and credibility …” 175. Throughout the period, the commitment to PRA and the pressures under which it was applied – “staff were inexperienced (and) within short timeframes” and the project still seeking to become accepted in the villages, led to many instances of recuperation by elite groups and powerful interests as well as to the exclusion of others, in particular, the silencing of women’s interests. “With hindsight, it was clear that early PRA were under the control of key village leaders”, he observes. Yet, before long, some of these early ‘supporters’ began to realise that whatever the small material rewards and benefits of participation in the programme, these “were far outweighed by the dangers (they) posed”. In particular, “those who exercised local power” felt their style of leadership to be threatened by the “young, educated, urbanite (project) workers speaking of ‘awareness raising’” 176. Part of the development experience then, Mosse points out, was learning how to cope with such obstruction and at the same time win community support for their projects. Over time, project workers began to develop “social maps” and insights “that would never have found a place among the consensual charts of the public PRA” 177. From this more informed and street-wise understanding, new approaches emerged “which left formal structures intact” and created alternative spaces for innovating, piloting and experiential learning making it possible for traditional leaders “to observe and change their attitude to the project without losing face”. In doing so, however, Mosse notes that “new patterns of brokerage and leadership emerged in some villages” as project workers shifted attention and activity towards a new class of “intermediaries or jankars (village volunteer ‘knowledgeable person’) … the young or the educated or women” 178.

Yet, despite the emphasis on participation and the enrolment of more ‘in-tune’ and pre-disposed volunteers, the IBRFP agenda itself drove delivery. Under the guise of neutral and passive facilitation, “… project workers retained the power to direct and shape”. The programme design had prioritised soil and water conservation, “yet the first thing that farmers ask for is irrigation”. In his capacity as ‘participation and social development expert’, Mosse also reflects on how he, himself, marginalised the desire of farmers for water resources, although his concerns about “inequitable benefits … local capacity …. the demands of collective management” were themselves more often also overruled in favour of soil and water conservation.

since this activity put project money ‘on the streets’, spent budgets, spread the benefits and critically “offered quicker, more dramatic and visible results”. In contrast, de Vries writes about the refusal of Andean villagers to accept a project aimed at introducing “democratic forms of government (post conflict) through participatory planning, organisational development and capacity building” in favour of government support for “tangible development structures (buildings, roads, markets)”. Instead of “letting the promise of development be banalised by neoliberal discourses of responsible citizenship … they pressed claims on the state to restitute lands and build the infrastructure they had been promised”. However, Mosse argues that over time the real achievement of the IBRFP ‘participatory planning process’ was that it had become “a process through which Bhil farmers acquired a new kind of planning knowledge and learned how to manipulate it”. Unlike Arce and Long’s case of the Mexican extension worker, IBRFP project team members and villagers, including a wider cross-section of the communities, were able to build a degree of shared trust and brokering ability to enable them “to collude in translating idiosyncratic local interests into legitimate demands”. Despite the mismatch between top-down intentions and bottom-up desires, there was, Mosse remarks, “a shared interest in a concrete plan of action that suppressed difference”. Yet, it must also be said that like any external intervention, development choices were “profoundly shaped by the (project’s) organisational systems and procedures, its budget categories, time frames and targets into which field staff had to translate local demands”.

O’Reilly’s depiction of the management of community consultations in Waterford is somewhat more critical and pessimistic. As we have seen earlier, the ‘recuperation’ of the design and interpretation of ‘local development’ mandate by significant and influential local interests, followed logically by the appointment of a manager (and team) which saw community development as inextricably linked with enterprise development, had given rise to and legitimised a mindset that saw consultation as essentially a means to “get groups which included the ‘right people’ … who would work effectively with the organisation towards the development of the area’s economy”. The enrolment of powerful local figures with an interest in particular types of development tended to confirm “local demand for enterprise development”. There was little if any discussion around the involvement of “those representing socially excluded groups”. The decisions by management to widen consultation to the entire county (rather than focus on known areas of disadvantage) and to include sectoral interests such as farm organisations and chambers of commerce further skewed the focus away from unemployment and social exclusion towards economic development. In addition, timescales were...
shortened in a climate of some pressure brought about by rumours of a submission deadline being brought forward, illustrating the shaping impact of what Long calls “strategic agency” in the ways in which people deal with and manipulate certain constraining and enabling elements to enrol others in their projects\textsuperscript{185}.

From the development worker’s point of view, there was considerable apprehension from an early stage “to ensure that the WWDP was portrayed positively ... minimising the possibility of controversy”\textsuperscript{186}. Despite some spoken concerns by the staff member responsible for community development at management changes to the overall goal, purpose and timeframe, the project team shared management’s objective in ensuring the perceived legitimacy and coherence of the project (and direction taken) through the consultation process, because to do otherwise might threaten their own interests. It is hardly surprising in the circumstances to learn that the project team sought to limit the scope for local groups to raise issues of concern, to control the consultation meetings and “avoid the possibility of meetings being disrupted or blown off-course ...”\textsuperscript{187}(O’Reilly 2012:296). At the core of their approach, was the perception of the stakeholders to be involved in the exercise as “uninformed ... disorganised and lacking know-how” in contrast with the “expertise” of the development team which had “a specific competence in development and the preparation of plans” (O’Reilly 2012:298). In their eyes, only the professional development worker had the necessary ‘distance’ from local concerns that enabled objective and effective decision-making. O’Reilly points to the use made by project staff of the local development discourse, the “ambiguity” of terms such as participation, group work and management theory which, he argues, made it possible for them to “run meetings in a highly controlled manner”. Staff decided on “the agenda, the format of questioning and the subject matter of meetings”. “Willing accomplices in their own subordination” (Burawoy 1985:23) as quoted by Long (2001:24), they may well have been, but, as O’Reilly infers, they were also accomplices in shifting the focus and legitimization of the project itself from the Area Based Response objective of tackling long-term unemployment and poverty towards economic development initiatives. In doing so, their interests, as well as those of their bosses in the partnership executive and board – and no doubt, many of the influential stakeholders involved in the consultation “process” – were served by the survival of the institution\textsuperscript{187}.

Project ‘success’ and indeed ‘failure’, however, Mosse advises, depends essentially on their ability – or otherwise – to “(socially) sustain policy models offering a significant interpretation of events”\textsuperscript{188}. However, throughout the life of the project, sustaining policy models is “always in question ... This is what makes it a project, rather than a part of ordinary life (Mosse 1996:76)”. Whatever the contingencies, contradictions and confusions inherent in the delivery of the project, its reality has to be determined through the interpretive work of experts who discern meaning

\textsuperscript{186} O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Following the LEADER Programme - PhD – National University of Ireland – 2012:295
\textsuperscript{187} O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Following the LEADER Programme - PhD – National University of Ireland – 2012:296-303
from events by connecting them to policy ideas and texts – logframes, project documents (and vice versa). Moreover, just as the “shifting agendas, conflicts and crises facing British aid” in the years before IBRFP had given rise to “a weighty policy agenda” (Mosse 2005:24), emphasising such project features as farmer-first poverty reduction, participatory and bottom-up (driven by local concerns), so also, while that programme was in full-flow of implementation “as ‘absolutely cutting edge, the coalface … where it was all happening’, DFID’s focus shifted to “‘up-scaling’, ‘mainstreaming’, ‘fast-tracking’ and ‘replication’”, asserting the primacy of “donor policy over institutions and relations”189. Mosse’s stark account of the events, factors and interpretations triggering the ‘failure’ of IBRFP, underlines the transience of donor framework policies in the international development context as another factor for project teams and, in particular, for those responsible for ensuring project coherence over time. Taking a more positive view in retrospect, he argues that labels like “‘success’ and ‘failure’ … obscure project effects” and those ‘effects’ can make a ‘positive’ difference. Policy introduced on the back of international (or national) development initiatives, he reasons, causes resources to flow to communities that would not otherwise have received them.190 These are frequently communities for whom “economic survival has long depended on forming alliances with those with better access to resources”. Indeed, despite what he calls the projects “upwardly oriented obscuring policy vision, it may still have a positive socio-economic effect on the lives of thousands of people” although those effects are “often equivocal, unexpected, contradict legitimising policy models (or are unnoticed by them) …”191.

In this section, we have been inspired by the insights of a number of writers who have explored “social world” at the delivery interface where the lifeworld and interests of the development worker and the ‘objects’ of the intervention collide. We have seen how acts of “resistance, accommodation and strategic compliance” (Scott 1985)192 can shape the outcomes in ways that were not intended. It can be and is a “precarious belonging”193, caught between the top-down intentions of the powerful state and international development agencies on the one hand, and the desires for development on the part of local people, where the fate of the development worker depends on his/her ability to broker acceptable compromises. Equally, it constitutes a terrain where local and project interests can find common expression, fashioned and translated to meet the formal goals of the development intervention and simultaneously satisfy the more immediate needs of beneficiary and development worker alike. Nevertheless, always vulnerable and faced with the risk of failure, ridicule and loss of personal and project credibility, the development worker seeks to optimise his/her/their control over the interaction and the

193 Dunlop J – Presbyterians and the Conflict in Northern Ireland – Blackstaff Press - 1995
outcome by emphasising their professionalism as ‘development experts’ conducted “in the technical language of development”\(^{194}\).

### 2.4 Conclusions and Some Issues

The literature of development sociology has much to say on the scope for those involved in (international) development to “make room for manoeuvre” and what they do within that space. Long acknowledges the persuasiveness of Villareal’s (1994) contention that “making room for manoeuvre implies a degree of consent, a degree of negotiation and a degree of power”. However, it is never an absolute power, “but the possibility control, of prerogative, of some degree of authority and capacity for action ... gaining an edge over others and pressing it home situationally”\(^{195}\). It was as a ‘non-student’ of development studies, rather an interested journeyman development consultant, that my starting point into the literature was in part an effort to make some sense of accumulations of experience as a member of numerous project teams dispatched to ‘project land’ to design, implement, build capacity for and deliver various interventions emphasising poverty reduction, participation and partnership.

After twenty years in the sector, shepherding policy through implementation towards outcomes and evaluations, there is little in the literature of the “stages theory” of development history (Long 2001:11) that provides a theoretical reference frame for making better sense of the experience. While all of the component parts of those ‘lived’ projects easily fit “some kind of step-by-step progression”, duly chronicled, recorded and reported, the separation implied is, as Long emphasises, “a gross over-simplification of a much more complicated set of processes”\(^{196}\). Set in their wider world contexts, both case study projects, on the other hand, seem to fall within the “structural or institutionalist perspective” (Long 2001:10), instigated in the first instance by institutions and agencies that “seek to give order to the global economy”\(^{197}\). Yet the complexity of either reality cannot be grasped or contained by such an overlooking view of the ‘development’ world. While the historic politically driven movement towards European integration and access to the EU for newly independent former Soviet republics may have shaped the rationale and set the backdrop for the three Baltic interventions, such a perspective offers little insight to the “so-called less ‘powerful’ actors ... (who) can ... change the course of events”. Nor, indeed, does it throw light into the lifeworlds of project actors and the social life of the project team that ultimately “captur(es) the experience in something like its fullness” (Scott 1985:2)\(^{198}\). In broad terms, the same observations can be made in relation to the intervention for change in post-apartheid South Africa. In the circumstances, it seems natural and certainly more

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\(^{194}\) O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Following the LEADER Programme - PhD – National University of Ireland – 2012:303


rewarding to look to “those (who are) interested in depicting the ways in which people manage the dilemmas of their everyday life”199.

There is, as we have seen, little in the literature, either structural or actor oriented, specifically on project life managed by commercial, for-profit companies and delivered by mainly ‘freelance’ consultants, dependent on project contracts, despite evidence of the growing importance of this sector of the development industry. As actors in what Rajak and Stirrat describe as “a highly interdependent system where in the end most organisations (and their project teams) depend on a relatively small number of donor agencies”200, they represent a useful subject for better understanding of the pressures for conformity, the forces of resistance and scope for manoeuvre, if only “to stay in the game”, that constitute the reality of the development intervention.

Development agencies, we have seen, define and articulate development problems in terms that fit with their current policies and preferred options for intervention, driven ultimately by political needs in donor countries. In our review of the literature, we have attempted to “explore the extent to which specific actors perceive themselves capable of manoeuvring within (such) given contexts or networks and develop strategies for doing so”201. In particular, our early focus has been on how project teams and their ‘counterparts’ along the design interface interact on the basis of “intentional plans … unacknowledged structures and chance events to produce unintended outcomes”202 (Ferguson 1994: 20). In the face of diversity and conflict, ideas with power are connected into wider policy frames, couched in sufficient ambiguity and strategically silent in relation to more contentious questions to make it possible to enrol and hold together the diversity that makes the project context. The ambiguity that enables different and frequently contending interests to come together in the project as “a hybrid compromise” contains many of the disjunctures and contradictions that shaped the design process and that would re-emerge later203.

Ideas, we have learned, cannot be separated from relationships – and nor can relationships be understood outside the context of ideas. For Mosse, the divisions and clusters that make up the project team can only be understood in terms of the ideas that divide or bring together different project workers. The early fiction of coherence in design as expressed through texts, is quickly chipped away by conflicting interpretations of the job to be done and diverging approaches among different groups. Relationships between external consultants and local project workers are facilitated or made more difficult on the basis of ideas and preferred approaches to the task. We gained a sense of different types of knowledge in currency within the project environment – “warrior knowledge” for those working

directly on the ‘frontline’ which was largely to do with relationships, events and activities, while “policy knowledge” is produced by the project consultants, intended for communication upwards, affirming coherence between practice and policy, and downwards “to assert control over project management and disorderly practice”\textsuperscript{204}. Yet whatever the differences that might divide the project team, there is a shared acceptance of the need for “an acceptable story” that supports “a coherent policy model” to which project outcomes can be attributed\textsuperscript{205}, although in defending such “regimes of success” project workers can, between the ‘story’ and their reality, experience a degree of stress and anxiety. Given the somewhat precarious nature of the employment in ‘project land’, the ‘story of success’ becomes a bubble it is ‘in their interest’ not to burst.

The confrontational worlds of external development agencies (national or international) and ‘beneficiary communities’ of the intended change, is most sharply brought into focus by the experience of Mexican extension worker, Roberto, whose efforts to negotiate a line of action that might be acceptable to both sides are in the end rejected by both. The episode highlights the relative vulnerability of the project worker coping with uncertainty and the threat of rejection at the delivery interface. In dealing with the complexities and insecurities at the delivery interface, the “everyday life” of development workers is “dominated by the pragmatic motive, that is, essentially oriented to solving practical problems”\textsuperscript{206}. Project team members, beyond the view of managers and policy makers, seek to build relationships, reach accommodations and negotiate compromises with target communities - within what are understood to be the policy parameters of the project. Yet, even under the guise of participatory planning projects, the project agenda dominates, determining and shaping outcomes in terms of the “external (and superior) analysis of problems and solutions”\textsuperscript{207} and the professional expertise of development staff\textsuperscript{208}. Yet, in managing uncertainty through the life of the project, the project team must also be alert to the ever present danger of a shifting policy agenda in the faraway back offices of the donor agency that have the potential to make the intervention and its outcomes redundant and irrelevant.

What this immersion into the literature and thought processes of development sociology, the ethnography of aid interventions and lived experiences of development actors has provided has been a multi-dimensional rear-view mirror through which to make sense of a career much of which was spent along many interfaces, different but not dissimilar from those analysed by these authors. Taken together, they offer an encompassing model through which to understand the social reality of the development project and the dynamic influence of agency

\textsuperscript{204} Mosse D – Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – Consultant Knowledge – Pluto Press – 2005:149
\textsuperscript{206} Long N – Development Sociology – The Dynamics of Knowledge Interfaces – Routledge – 2001:190
\textsuperscript{207} Mosse D – Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – The Goddess of the PRA: Local Knowledge and Planning – Pluto Press – 2005:91
\textsuperscript{208} O’Reilly P – All of the people all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Following the LEADER Programme - PhD – National University of Ireland – 2012:296-303
generated by and experienced through the development project team and the project worker as they collectively and individually seek to make room for manoeuvre in the space between the development agencies and the ‘beneficiaries’ of aid.
“Intervention is not a discrete phenomenon in space and time. In practice, it has no clear beginning, demarcated by the definition of goals and means, nor a final cut-off point, the end of the project as defined in the writing of the evaluation report” (Long)209.

SETTING THE SCENE

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene and put into context the two main cases that form the basis for a critical reflection on the role of project workers and the project team as change agents in the delivery of external development interventions. In it, we set out briefly the critical factors – the big (policy) ideas - that brought them together in quite specific contexts and set the broad parameters for the outcomes of those interventions. We describe the national, regional and local environments wherein the action took place. In the final section, we introduce the two projects. The Chapter also serves to present and become acquainted with the cast of actors who were the human face in the respective endeavours and who will feature in the action through the following narrative Chapters.

In the opening chapter, I revisited some of the interfaces and battlefields for knowledge that marked the relationships between Brussels and Belfast (and London) around the introduction of participative, locally driven, Leader rural development policy in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s. I did so because the period in question marked a significant milestone in my personal professional trajectory as a policy practitioner, influencing my mindset and shaping later choices for engagement in other, at the time, unforeseen career opportunities. Reconnecting with some of the key actors taking part in those early encounters, probing possible and putative motives, including my own, has helped me to enter the world of development sociology in such a way as to try to see beyond or through or behind the looking glass\(^{210}\) of official reports and formal accounts of the negotiations. In a life-history way, that earlier trip down memory lane (Chapter One) provided a basepoint for an interactionist account of two significant subsequent projects tackling poverty through local development (local economic development, rural development) in different parts of the world, Eastern Europe and South Africa, during periods of social, economic and political transition. Both (projects) were influenced, directly or indirectly, marginally or otherwise, by the legacy of the ‘Belfast experience’.

The DFID funded Baltics Rural Partnership Programme operated in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania between 2000 and 2004, less than ten years after their declarations of independence, exiting the Soviet Union and on the threshold of European Union membership. European Union support for Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape, on the other hand, covered the years from 2005 to 2011, well past the heady days of freedom in the early 1990s but still very much cast in the shadow of the overhang of apartheid fractures in terms of unequal access to jobs, incomes, basic living conditions and poverty.

Unlike the Northern Ireland case, where the institutional interface was defined by a confrontation between different public bodies and the combined involvement of

civil society representatives, in both of the above examples, the role of the private sector is much more to the forefront. The two programmes, while equally within the public policy domain, engaging both national and international institutions, financed respectively by UK and EU taxpayers, were delivered by for-profit companies on foot of competitive tendering processes. In this sense, both project contexts probably reflect more closely how the “development industry ... goes about its work” today\(^{211}\). That dimension will be present, but not exclusive, in the analysis of the influence of agency and lifeworlds at the critical interfaces that have shaped those interventions and defined their impact.

My involvement in both projects – several years apart – also reflected changes in my employment status, from seconded civil servant (in Chapter One) to private sector freelance consultant (from here on). In the latter capacity, I was hired for the duration by two international development companies which had successfully tendered for the contracts. In both projects, I was engaged as participant – an insider, project worker, licenced change agent - in an external (international) intervention, with the explicit, if not always clearly defined, role to support the introduction of new policy frameworks for the delivery of area-based development. For one of the two projects, Support for LED in the Eastern Cape, I was able, from time to time, to assume a voluntary (self-attributed) additional role as \textit{participant observer} and somewhat self-conscious actor, as well as team member. Such a detached yet implicated stance made it possible, to an extent, to look at the same situations as they unfold from a number of different perspectives through a somewhat more reflective but more often chaotic kaleidoscopic lens. On the other hand, working within the “system model”\(^{212}\) probably “also constrained the interpretive possibilities” given my active, often partisan, position in much of the team discourse and across relationships. Equally, I can readily identify with Mosse’s sense of being “at the margins of the project community”\(^{213}\), despite having a particular job to do.

In the earlier BRPP experience, my role as team leader was to coordinate and support three country teams, international development consultants, working with national counterparts, with DFID and Embassy staff and contractor/employer. The intensity of the job left little time for on the spot observation and reflection unrelated to operational imperatives and the day-to-day power battles for ideas and direction. However, a combination of good source materials, shared recollections and actor-specific perspectives on the events themselves from members the team, along with the benefit of some distance from the interface - and an acquaintance with the ethnography of development\(^{214}\) - enables me to retrace, with more confidence, critical junctures in the course of that project that offer insights and understanding to the role of agency in shaping the agenda.


\(^{212}\) Mosse D – Cultivating Development - Introduction: The Ethnography of Policy and Practice quoting Quarles van Ufford – Pluto Press -2005:12 “where there is a necessary assumption of means-ends rationality, integration and manageability” (Mosse)


\(^{214}\) Mosse D – Cultivating Development 2- Introduction: The Ethnography of Policy and Practice - Pluto Press - 2005:6
Why two projects and what should we be learning from them?

From a research and reporting point of view, it would obviously be more straightforward and simpler to focus on a single case. However, being afforded the opportunity to undertake the thesis, it became something of an issue for me to not to take advantage of the challenge to look back on both of these professional assignments that in so many ways stand out as significant experiences in my professional career. As stated earlier, they existed in very different geographic, cultural and political circumstances. They involved different donors, each driven by their wider policy imperatives, influenced by their somewhat different approaches to project management, delivery and oversight. While nominally both were promoting local (economic) development aimed at reducing rural poverty, the strategies they adopted, on the one hand, local area partnerships and on the other, competitive grant schemes, marked them apart. Despite the very clear cultural differences, the beneficiary administrations – and wider society which they served – in both cases, were in far-reaching process of transition. From state socialism and central planning to democracy and neo-liberal markets in Eastern Europe; from state sponsored racial segregation and market inequalities to democracy and neo-liberal markets in the Eastern Cape.

This is not intended as a compare and contrast exercise nor an attempt to show one approach leading to better outcomes over the other. Nevertheless, at the start of this particular voyage of re-discovery, there may well have been a personal bias on my part in favour of participation and local area partnerships, or what Mosse calls “a theory of participation”. By this he means – and I might have claimed - that “persisting poverty and ... inappropriate and unsustainable development were the consequence of top-down planning and the non-involvement of farmers in needs identification ...”215. With the benefit of greater exposure to the literature of the sociology and anthropology of development and the cooler perspective afforded by hindsight on projects long since completed, it became more interesting and productive to take a view of outcomes (and intended outcomes) against the stated goals of both projects, and the influence of agency, in particular, the project team and team member, in arriving at those outcomes. It is through this rear-view vantage point as former member of both project teams, that I began to explore how the perennial struggle for ideas and agenda within the team can shape outcomes (and how they are perceived) both ‘top-down’ by the policy makers and ‘bottom-up’ by the target group for the intervention (i.e. the rural poor). However those final beneficiaries may re-work and manipulate project aims and objectives, rules and procedures, in keeping with their respective interests and perceptions, I want to demonstrate how these have already been fought over and adapted in different ways to suit different agendas of others at a specific level in the project delivery/implementation chain – the operational environment of the project implementation team.

In the course of this reflection, the strong motivational life-history connections between the three cases (‘Belfast’, Baltics and the Eastern Cape) became much clearer and will constitute some of the evidence upon which to draw in subsequent chapters. Briefly stated, from disillusioned ‘Marxist’ and political activist (in the 1970s and early 80s), by the 1990s I had become an ardent promoter of the ideology of “the third way” as the logic of local development in the reformed EU Structural Funds might have been described. Career and belief combined when, working with the European Commission, I was given the task of engineering an institutional framework for a “bottom-up” approach to rural development in Northern Ireland. That foundered, as we have seen in Chapter One, on the immoveable rock that is the “Northern Ireland Block” and an administration determined not to go native in Europe.

Ten years later, the unexpected opportunity to try again, in a very different space, opened with the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme. On this occasion, the experience, hard won lessons and some of the actors from the earlier time brought the intensity and zeal of the previously failed missionary to the delivery of the rural partnership model. Lauded as a significant DFID contribution to strengthening the capacity of the three Baltic States administrations (and local government) in tackling rural poverty and social exclusion, the BRPP was described by the development company’s representative during one of the closing events as “unlike any other … and probably the best project you’ll ever lead”.

Just over a year later, in 2005, when first introduced to the terms of reference for the Eastern Cape project, I could see little of the potential for a repeat performance and turned down an offer to take on the project leader role (see Chapter Four). Circumstances had, nevertheless, changed by late 2007 – different job offer – part-time appointment – empty order book! Working in the new South Africa was always an appealing prospect. However, this was to be a very different operating environment for a would-be ‘champion’ of a participative local partnership approach to rural development. Far from the ‘tabula rasa’ that (from our naïve perspective) constituted the starting point for the BRPP, the space for ideas in the already running EU support for LED programme was already well scribbled over, and ‘new approaches’ were often unwelcome additions to the melee.

So, to pull this set of connectors together, the three policy interventions constitute a significant body of personal and professional experience over two decades. While it is intended to be somewhat more than autobiographical, the perspectives gained through my participation in the events that take place around each, including critical reflection on attitude and bearing, are a part of the overall analysis and understanding of the interactions and the outcomes.

In the next sections of the Chapter, we present contextual background on the following three levels.

- The development policy and donor programme context, including background to the big policy idea and early introduction to key stakeholders;
- The national and regional (sub-national) policy and development context in the recipient countries and early introduction to key stakeholders;
- The development project context and the team.

### 3.1 Part 1 - Donor Development Policy and Programme Contexts

In this sub-section, I set out to explore some of the factors and actors that will have/may have influenced thinking, decisions and actions on the part of the principal development agencies responsible for the two interventions. These are the UK Department for International Development (Baltics Rural Partnership Programme) and the Delegation of the European Commission in South Africa (DECSA)\(^ {216}\) (EU Support for Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape). The latter body, although akin to an embassy, played a much more direct role in terms of design, implementation, oversight and evaluation of the LED support programme than the DG for International Development (DEVCO) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) desk in Brussels. However, these institutions were always within touching and shaping distance through the application of rules and interpretation of policy. Other European and international development agencies were also active in the field influencing agendas.

Much of the section is informed by document review and discourse analysis, with references, as appropriate, to insights and perspectives from some of the actors encountered.

#### 3.1.1 The politics and policies behind bringing the rural partnership programme to the Baltics

Turning firstly to the actors and factors shaping the backstory to the DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Programme in the Baltics, we explore here the changing shape of international development policy in the UK with the establishment of DFID in 1998 and its central focus on poverty reduction. The other overarching policy framework is that of the EU enlargement agenda and its impact on national policy through the national programmes for the adoption of the EU acquis\(^ {217}\).

Following the arrival of the New Labour Government in May 1997, UK international policy shifted course in several critical directions. Firstly, in reaction to highly publicised scandals in relation to UK foreign policy (Saudi arms sales, Westland helicopters to mention some), the incoming new-broom Cabinet set out to articulate and put into practice “an ethical foreign policy” among other sweeping reforms. A significant step in that direction was to take the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) out from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), to establish a new Department for International Development under the leadership of

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\(^{217}\) The **acquis** is the body of common rights and obligations that is binding on all the EU member states. [https://ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu)
a Secretary of State with a seat at Cabinet, independently from the FCO. Flagging the change in policy direction, the first article of the new International Development Act 2002 states directly and unambiguously that “The Secretary of State may provide any person or body with development assistance if he is satisfied that the provision of the assistance is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty.” Not that this represented an abrupt break with the past. Several authors, including Mosse, point out that for much of the period, other than some important changes during the Thatcher years, the essential focus of UK international development policy has been focussed on reducing poverty in the poorest countries, although this has not always been acknowledged by some commentators.

3.1.1.1 Sustainable livelihoods approach and eliminating poverty

The DFID White Paper on International Development of 1997 had committed the organisation to “the elimination of poverty and encouragement of growth that benefits the poor. We will do this through …… policies which create sustainable livelihoods for poor people ….” The Sustainable Livelihoods approach (SLA) had been attracting considerable research and discussion in the international development community since the late 1980s and particularly from the publication of the Chambers and Conway IDI paper in 1992. SLA had been taken up in policy and practice by such bodies as Oxfam, CARE and the UNDP. However, despite being a topical and priority subject for research projects within the previous ODA, SLA had “found little expression in UK policy until the 1997 change in administration.” Beyond the attraction of a new broom for a new Minister, the centrality of the new approach in the White Paper was seen to provide DFID with a coherent, comprehensive and politically attractive contribution to the OECD-DAC endorsement of the International Development Goals for 2015, the Millenium Development Goals, (MDG). In the face of other competing ideas and approaches, e.g. integrated rural development, institutional development, Sustainable Livelihoods was, Solesbury argued, “politically attractive because of …. qualities that resonated with New Labour’s philosophy” – emphasis upon asset base, dynamism of local community, self-reliance and proactivity.

Nevertheless, the holistic, people-centred ethos at the heart of the new approach did not easily square with the discipline-based approach that underpinned the institutional structure within DFID. As observed by Farrington, “the reality is that even if poor people do not live in sectors, professionals do, especially in

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218 The previous Labour Governments (1964-70 and 1974-79) had also set up separate Ministry for Overseas Development.
221 Ireton B – Britain’s International Development Policies – A History of DFID and Overseas Aid – Palgrave Macmillan -2013.
government"\(^{226}\). While this comment refers mainly to DFID’s engagement with other partners, the same may be said of the transfer of the SLA idea into organisation and practice across DFID services. Nor, indeed, was there, Solesbury later remarks, “any impetus from the top of DFID to reorganise around them”\(^{227}\). A review of thirteen DFID Country Strategy Papers conducted in the context of an OECD-DAC peer review in 1999, “also found a general problem of “the missing middle” i.e. a lack of clarification of what the intended linkages were between overall goals and DFID-supported activities”\(^{228}\). In Chapter Four, we will attempt to explore how this partial inertia and somewhat asymmetric discourse shaped and coloured the negotiations (and shaped the room for manoeuvre) between development company and project team on the one hand and DFID officials in the field around the design and approach to implementation of the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme.

### 3.1.1.2 Working to eliminate rural poverty within the enlarging EU?

In tracing the source of DFID’s “big idea” for tackling rural poverty and social exclusion in the Baltics, we need also to take into account the wider policy framework for European Union enlargement and DFID’s relationships with development partners there. The 1997 White Paper had also made quite clear that DFID would “work closely with other donors and development agencies ... to strengthen the commitment to the elimination of poverty, and mobilise the political will to achieve the international development targets”. However, that pledge is called into question in an observation of the OECD-DAC Peer Review for the UK around the same time: “…when compared to some other donors, the United Kingdom does not closely engage with other donors with a view to reinforcing shared messages”\(^{229}\). Nevertheless, in so far as DFID’s relations with other donor partners in the Baltics (and other CEE “transition” countries) was concerned, the UK took the view that since it was spending “many times more in the region through multilateral institutions”, it should seek “to ensure that they (other partners) are working effectively towards an equitable and sustainable solution”\(^{230}\) to eliminating poverty. By far the biggest partner in the circumstances, therefore, was the European Union. And consequently DFID’s main target in terms of influencing its overall policy agenda towards the elimination of poverty. However, since 1997 and the publication of Agenda 2000, the exclusive focus of EU support effort to the candidate countries was to complete the enlargement strategy.

### 3.1.1.3 Influencing the accession agenda

DFID saw its relationship with the European Commission as critical and different to its links with other bi-laterals or multi-laterals. This was not only in terms of the Blair government’s determination to put Britain back at the heart of the EU but also


\(^{228}\) OECD-DAC – Peer Review – UK - 2001 - Country Operations – Ch 6 – Country strategies and programming:62

\(^{229}\) OECD-DAC – Peer Review – UK - 2001 - Country Operations – Ch 6 – Country strategies and programming:61

- as was oft times repeated by visiting British officials - because Britain was a major financial contributor to the accession and enlargement effort. In his review of DFID (and KHF) operations in the accession countries, Faint (2004) notes that “while influencing the EC (and the World Bank) (had become) a major (DFID) objective post 1998”, there were few examples of success. He does however, suggest, that through its membership of the Management Committees in Brussels, some respondents felt that DFID did influence policy over the longer term and he points to a stronger evaluation culture and decentralised management as two improvements to the accession effort “long advocated by the UK”. The successful introduction of ‘twinning’ as a form of direct assistance to administrations in accession countries, could also be, he argues, attributed to UK ‘leadership’. Nevertheless, EU programme and project design in individual countries was heavily premised “on the content and progress of accession negotiations” and therefore less amenable to lobbying on the part of bi-lateral partners. Moreover, there was an understandable reluctance on the part of the European Commission to be too closely linked to the policy aims of any one Member State.

In each of the three Baltics capitals, therefore, and across their respective land areas, at the end of the 1990s, the biggest ‘game’ was undoubtedly the accession effort. That was driven by the programmes financed through the three pre-accession funding instruments of the European Union. These were the PHARE programme, focusing on the legal, institutional and policy frameworks supporting the adoption of the *acquis*; SAPARD, the Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development; and ISPA as Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession - designed to address environmental and transport infrastructure priorities identified in the Accession Partnerships with the 10 applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Between 2000 and 2006, the European Communities would provide some €3bn annually to the ten CEE accession states, 50% of which was allocated to the PHARE and the balance shared between ISPA and SAPARD.

The PHARE programme started life back in 1991 as the ‘Poland and Hungary for the Reconstruction of the Economy’, in response to the rapid changes at that time and quickly grew to include all the CEE states which had applied for EU membership in the early 1990s. In those years, until the launch of the European Union enlargement strategy in the context of Agenda 2000 (1997), Phare had for its primary objective “to help these countries achieve market economies based on free enterprise and private initiative”. Following the publication of Agenda 2000, the purpose of the instrument was transformed to focus on two core priorities associated with accession – institution building and investments related to the *acquis*. In budgeting terms, 30% was allocated to the first priority and approximately one third of the overall country allocation was to be used to “co-finance investment in social and economic cohesion”. These latter were to include measures similar to

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231 Faint T – Review of DFID/ODA Programmes in Accession Countries – DFID - 2004
234 Agenda 2000 – for a Stronger and Wider Union – Com (97) 2000
those supported in Member States by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). To get a sense of scale, the overall Phare budget for national programmes for 2001 for Estonia was €26.3m, for Latvia €31.4m and for Lithuania €45.5m (of which a third to socio-economic development projects) - compared with an overall DFID budget of £2.1m for the Rural Partnerships Programme in the three Baltic States over three years.

A second and possibly more important target, given its focus on the rural sector, for DFID influence in the Baltics – and other CEE accession states – was SAPARD (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development). SAPARD had two main aims:

1. Help solve priority and specific problems in agriculture and rural development;
2. Contribute to the adoption of the *acquis* in relation to the Common Agriculture Policy.

The measures provided for in the instrument could have been copied and pasted from any of the European Agriculture Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF) – Structures (as opposed to Rural Development) programmes in EU15 and included such standards as on-farm investments, aids to processing and marketing, supports to young farmers. Early beneficiaries in all of the accession counties were the suppliers of agricultural services and equipment. Between 2001 and 2002, for example, when running/walking along dirt-track lanes intersecting the cereal fields around Daugavpils in Latgale (South East Latvia), I was struck by the almost total ‘overnight’ disappearance from the same fields and farmyards of the once familiar, almost flatpack Chinese self-maintain farm machinery. Horse-drawn traffic on the narrow-cambered roads now competed with proud shiny red, green and blue state of the art tractors and other farm vehicles. The growing visibility of the sales teams and loan facilities of the multi-nationals (e.g. Massey-Ferguson, John Deere, others) in these chronically poor but potentially grant-rich rural towns and farmlands was a sure sign of the arrival of the market economy.

On the administrative side, much of the early SAPARD activity was directed at setting up and accrediting Agencies, either inside or outside Ministries of Agriculture, decentralising responsibility for programming, implementation and financial accountability. In short, it seemed clear from the get-go that there would be little emphasis in the SAPARD programme, in the early term, at least, upon the elimination of poverty or the creation of sustainable rural livelihoods for poor people in any of the three Baltic countries or other accession neighbours. Despite exhortation in the DFID Terms of Reference and repeated CSEED enquiries in early monitoring visits to the BRPP programme, contact with SAPARD was fleeting and largely inconsequential although encounters at some of the Baltics crossroads did not pass entirely unremarked by both sides over the period.

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237 In the space of one season (2002)
Economic and social cohesion in the EU = eliminating poverty?

It would be wrong to close this section on the inference that EU accession programmes were solely related to the acquis, institution building and the emergence of the market – and therefore out of harmony with the DFID goal of eliminating poverty. As we have already noted, one third of the sizeable Phare national budgets was dedicated to supporting economic and social cohesion along the lines of the EU Structural Funds. While the Regulation setting out the basis for EU Structural Funds (1999) does not explicitly mention the ‘elimination of poverty’ in its statement of objective, it affirms that “the Community shall contribute to the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, the development of employment and human resources, the protection and improvement of the environment and the elimination of inequalities, and the promotion of equality between men and women”\(^{238}\). The predominantly territorial emphasis of the Structural Funds, concentrating on so-called lagging regions, was to become a significant alternative policy reference frame throughout the implementation of the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme as it operated in the poorest rural parts of the three States. It was a familiar framework for most of the external project team (from Northern Ireland, an Objective One region), yet to be reconciled with the pro-poor focus of DFID’s Sustainable Livelihoods approach.

A pro-poor agenda for the Baltics?

UK relations with the recently independent Baltic States were, as it were, ‘resumed’ in 1991 after an absence of more than fifty years\(^ {239}\). The arrival of DFID in the late 1990s, with a re-invigorated mandate for promoting accession served to raise the UK’s European profile within national policy circles as a significant bi-lateral donor, friend and integration driver. Earlier KHF projects, more market focussed and technical, were well perceived. The shift in policy direction towards an unambiguous and full-frontal approach to poverty reduction as articulated in the Baltics Regional Strategy\(^ {240}\) and individual Country Strategies in 1998 attracted a degree of ambivalence on the part of some stakeholders. Some of these argued that “completion of the transition process and accession to the EU was likely to have a far more powerful effect on growth and poverty reduction than any specific poverty focus such as area development or targeting particular communities, (notably the Roma)”\(^ {241}\). “Back home”\(^ {242}\), the tensions generated by the new paradigm were reported by a Deputy Head of the Division dealing with Central and Eastern Europe who noted “some conflict between the objectives of transition and accession on the one hand, which were closely aligned, and poverty reduction on the other”\(^ {243}\). This lingering uncertainty – within the Division responsible for design

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239 In the case of Latvia, for example, the UK Embassy (and Know-How Fund local unit) moved back into the building it had occupied up to 1940.
241 Faint T – Review of DFID/ODA Programmes in Accession Countries – DFID - 2004
242 Eyben R – The Sociality of International Aid and Policy Convergence – Adventures in Aidland – Editor Mosse D – Berghahn 2011
243 Faint T – Review of DFID/ODA Programmes in Accession Countries – DFID - 2004
and oversight of the intervention - over the primacy of an explicitly pro-poor approach to sustainable rural livelihoods would feature regularly along the interface that was to be the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme in the years to come – as explored in Chapters Four to Six.

3.1.1.6 Oversight and monitoring

The BRPP predated the significant investment by DFID in evaluation and the increasingly central role of the Evaluation Department in the last decade. The growth in importance of ensuring “value for money” from British Aid has accompanied the UK Government’s commitment to bringing its international development aid budget up to the UN target level of 0.7% of GDP. There has been a constant need to satisfy media and public interest that the taxpayer pounds spent in international development make a difference in peoples’ lives. In the words of a more recent Secretary of State, “A clear focus on results, transparency and accountability drives everything DFID does”\(^\text{244}\).

Nevertheless, DFID has always placed considerable importance on performance measurement and monitoring the programmes which it finances. The principal vehicle for on-going monitoring – “keeping the ship on course”\(^\text{245}\) - has been the annual Outputs to Purpose Review (OPR). The OPR annually assesses progress in delivering the outputs and achieving the purpose. It seeks to estimate the likelihood that outputs and purpose will be achieved. The Review addresses key strategic issues that need attention if the activity or intervention is to achieve its purpose. In methodological terms, the process is fairly established and essentially participative. Following a review of project reports and other documentation, it involves the OPR team meeting key stakeholders within DFID local staff and Embassy (FCO) officials as well as with representatives of the contractor delivering the project including project team members. DFID’s partners in the field (country administration, other development agencies and civil society bodies working in the same sectors) are interviewed and on-site visits are arranged to meet with target beneficiary groups to observe and take views.

In the case of the Baltics Rural Partnership Programme, the Outputs to Purpose reviews were undertaken by the London-based DFID team responsible for the programme, the Central, Southern and Eastern European Development (CSEED) Unit. The OPR missions often proved to be significant and memorable occasions – in building relationships, in showcasing milestones – and in being exposed to the unexpected, often contradictory and sometimes potentially and downright embarrassing encounters that occur along the interfaces. The findings of each Outputs to Purpose Review (OPR) became the subject of a report which makes an assessment of progress and the likelihood of the intervention meeting its intended outcomes – and possible recommendations for adjustment in approach.

\(^{244}\) Secretary of State Justine Greening – Introduction – DFID Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13

\(^{245}\) DFID Guidance on Evaluation and Review for DFID Staff - 2005
3.1.1.7 The DFID actors

The Head of CSEED was in his mid-fifties, a middle-ranking civil servant (Principal grade), ‘Colin’, a Londoner, had previously worked with Overseas Development Assistance in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, transferring to DFID on its incorporation. At interview, he had struck me as being “down to earth”, more of a programme administrator than an ideologue. He seemed relaxed and familiar with his colleagues and with the UK Contract Director whose company had won the project. While over time, he came to know the BRPP core team quite well, he was still the ‘DFID-boss’ and always slightly wary of the outsider (non-civil servant, non-Brit), although this could be a perception as much in the eye of the beholder. In more informal moments, he could let it be known that he was a newcomer to the thinking behind the sustainable livelihoods and was happier to stay within the parameters of programme management – aims, objectives, measures and results – than to stray into the more theoretical constructs such as ‘partnerships’ and ‘new institutional space’. On the other hand, once confident that the BRPP team knew what it was doing, he was quite prepared to give it sufficient head-room to follow through, even when the programme was taking a shape somewhat different to what he had probably envisioned at the outset. Beneath the civil servant exterior, he was quite a colourful personality. As we got to know one another, on some of our OPR peregrinations across the flat, often snow-covered, lands of the Baltics, he would, over dinner, regale those of us there with stories of a young working class Londoner and junior civil servant on the edges of the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence.

SLA policy adviser, William had been appointed by DFID on a fixed term, part-time contract. An independent consultant with experience of working with ODA programmes in agriculture and rural development programmes tackling poverty. He was a member of the DFID interview panel, advised DFID during the discussions taking place around the Inception report and future direction of the BRPP in 2000. He took part in each of the Outputs to Purpose Review missions over the course of the Programme. A quiet and quite unassuming, courteous, even shy man, he always appeared interested and keen to understand what the programme was doing and why. His main focus was on ensuring that the BRPP remained within the DFID pro-poor and sustainable rural livelihoods framework and while he had been part of the DFID team which had accepted the partnership focus of the programme, his support for that approach was somewhat conditional and tenuous in the early years.

3.1.2 Overall context for European Union development cooperation in South Africa

Away from the cooler climes of Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea, we turn our attention to some of the factors underpinning EU support for local economic development targeting poverty and social exclusion in rural areas of the Eastern Cape in South Africa.
3.1.2.1 The EU and post-apartheid South Africa

Text Box 1 A Brief EU History of European Presence in South Africa

In the 16th century the English and the Dutch became the prominent traders and by the end of the 17th century a permanent Dutch settlement was established in today's Cape Town to provide passing ships with fresh food and drinkable water.

The settlers ("boers", mainly of Dutch origin) moved progressively towards the interior, establishing farms and raising cattle. The confrontation with the indigenous people for access to land and water resulted in their decimation and forced many into slavery.

The British took control of the Cape region at the end of the 18th century and ruled South Africa up to 1910, when the Union of South Africa was created. Rich gold and diamond mines were discovered in the second half of the 19th century.

The 20th century has seen the progressive establishment of "apartheid", the liberation struggle of the black majority and, eventually, the democratic elections of April 1994 which have opened the way to majority rule.246

According to a former EU Ambassador and Head of Delegation to South Africa, the European Union’s relationship with that country goes as far back as the European Economic Community’s conclusion of the Yaoundé Convention with eighteen African countries, supporting the Organisation of African Unity’s call for sanctions against the apartheid regime247. Government repression of the Soweto protests in 1976 led to the first EU measure against South Africa, regulating employment practices of European firms operating there. In the mid-1980s, the EU Programme for the Victims of Apartheid was established, creating close links with non-government organisations active in education, social programmes, legal aid and humanitarian development. With the demise of the former apartheid regime and advent of democracy in 1994, the EU and a number of European Union Member States had become more actively supportive partners with the South African Government.

3.1.2.2 Towards a new and cooperative relationship?

South Africa was again seen as the gateway to Africa and, in addition to development cooperation, the EU sought to build relationships around trade and political cooperation. In 1999, the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) was signed248. The European Reconstruction and Development Programme (ERDP) replaced the former support to victims of apartheid which had made available a large number of small grants to NGOs. ERDP was designed to significantly reinforce the new South African Government’s Reconstruction and

248 TDCA ratified in 2004.
The areas of cooperation reflected those of the TDCA. EU supported programmes were to “focus on the fight against poverty and take particular account of the most disadvantaged sections of the population.”

Throughout the period, promotion of pro-poor and sustainable economic growth remained overarching objectives, along with good governance and provision of basic services for the poor.

In 2007, South Africa entered a Strategic Partner Agreement with the EU (one in only ten worldwide), as a platform for political dialogue and strategic cooperation at a regional and global level. An Economic Partnership Agreement (largely trade related), under negotiations since the mid-2000s, with some of the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) members, including South Africa, was finally ratified in 2016. During the period 2007 to 2013, European Union support under the European Reconstruction and Development Programme reached almost €1bn (€980m) to finance programmes and budget support, agreed in a Country Strategy and set out in a Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for the period. Significant as it may seem in raw terms, the EU contribution to South Africa, still the largest, it is frequently pointed out that external aid overall represents only a small fraction (1.3%) of the South African budget.

The South African view on the relationship with the EU was expressed by Nelson Mandela in Durban 1998 at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, frequently reiterated in only slightly modified terms by his successors since then. The Mandela position reflects a certain sense of ‘don’t get angry, (at the injustices of the colonial past) just get even’: “South Africa sees its relations with the EU as crucial for resource flows and as platforms through which South Africa seeks to influence what remains the centre of the Euro-American dominated world system.”

An OECD-DAC peer review report on the EU driven international development bluntly states “EC development leadership views development action as an instrument of foreign policy, which includes but is not exclusively driven by poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals”. However, the European Consensus on Development (2006) opens by stating that “the primary and overarching goal of EU development cooperation is the eradication of poverty.”

The European Commission through both its external development arm (DG DEVCO) and EU Structural Funds (DG Regio) had embraced the value of participative methods and the role of local partnerships in developing lagging regions. “As early as 1984, the European Institutions took note of the potential of

251 I served as Team Leader for the EU-South Africa Policy Dialogue Programme from 2014 to 2015.
252 The DCI allocation to South Africa for the period 2014 to 2020 is €241m.
255 The European Consensus on development - OECD-DAC - Peer Review – European Union 2007:25
256 Now DG DEVCO
development processes at local level and publicly expressed the intention of promoting them”257.

3.1.2.3 EU support for local economic development

The European Commission Country Strategy Paper for South Africa 2000-2002 indicates that European support “will promote income generating activities, social development of communities and the provision of basic economic utilities through support of partnership between local authorities and all other local development actors”258. In the event, European Union investment in support of Local Economic Development in the three most deprived South African provinces (Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape), totalled €102.5m259 by 2007. This measure of assistance for local development has to be understood, from an EU point of view, in terms of these wider issues – stability, economic growth, trade, global and regional strategic partner – as well as a post-colonial sense of shared responsibility and commitment to supporting the transition from a failed and unjust political and economic system to a prosperous, sustainable and inclusive economy and society.

Other European partners were also active and influential in promoting locally based, partnership driven approaches to regenerating rural economies from the 1990s onwards. The work, in South Africa, of several international agencies and donors (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit - GTZ260), in particular, with a strong interest in local economic development, did much to stimulate debate and discussion around different forms of LED. Their South African projects drew on their own considerable international experience. At the time, GTZ propagated a more business-driven approach to LED as practiced through the PACA (Participatory Appraisal of Competitive Advantage) (Mesopartner)261 model. Other models included support for local cooperatives and small enterprises as supported by Italy, partly influenced by the post-war Italian Labour Movement interest in Local Economic Development Agencies. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was also a prominent supporter of LED. Other partners, expressing an interest in local economic development in the province were DANIDA, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium.262 Through the demonstration effect and high visibility of some of these initiatives, LED acquired profile as a critical public policy to be supported in the early years of the last decade. Although not primarily active in the sector, the DFID office in South Africa at the time also took an active part in shaping the early design of LED support programme in the Eastern Cape.263

3.1.2.4 Defining the LED mandate

257 Inventory of Community Action to Support Local Development and Employment – Commission Staff Working Paper – Commission of the European Communities – (Sec) 94 2199 - 1994 (within the EU)
260 Renamed Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in 2011
261 http://www.mesopartner.com/tools/paca/
263 Interview with drafter of first ToR – May 2011 - “DFID, they seemed to have quite a bit of influence at the time”
As described by Mosse\textsuperscript{264}, the lead-in time for projects, especially relatively largescale interventions such as the three LED programmes mentioned above, is measured in years. The pre-programming phase is fraught with flows and counter-flows over many stages of lobbying, negotiations, decision-making in the lead-up to agreement. The process in the early stages would have some similarities with the programming arrangements in place within the EU for managing policy planning and negotiations for Structural Funds.

As far back as 1995\textsuperscript{265}, the European Commission Services responsible for relations with South Africa were “preparing a Mandate for negotiations to be submitted to the Council as well as a Draft Regulation as a Legal Base for the European Programme for Reconstruction and Development (EPRD, Budget Line B 7-5070), as requested by the Development Council in November 1994”\textsuperscript{266}. Discussions around a possible LED support intervention in the Eastern Cape commenced when officials from the Delegation of the European Commission in South Africa met, in an iterative process, with South African policy makers, coordinated by National Treasury Budget Office, to frame the broad parameters of the Country Strategy in the late 1990s. By 1998-98, the political commitment to invest in local economic development in the Eastern Cape was made in the context of EU Multi-annual Indicative Programme, negotiated as part of the EU budgeting perspective for the period 2000-2006. However, by 2004, much of the day-to-day decision-making for EU assistance programmes had been devolved to in-country delegations\textsuperscript{267}. At this stage, therefore, only a small number of officials and technical advisers were involved, mainly from the South African Treasury, the EU Delegation in handling the Fund programming, with broad direction and oversight from the Commission Service in Brussels.

3.1.2.5 The EU audit culture and the long arm of PRAG

One of the critical factors shaping the design and delivery of EU funded external interventions is the predominant audit culture. The financial control regime that constituted the backdrop to the EU Support to Local Economic Development Programmes in South Africa since the late 1990s has been dominated by the far-reaching administrative reform taking place across the supranational institution that is the European Commission. It was only five years since “the forced resignation of the College of Commissioners in 1999”\textsuperscript{268}. The “crisis in legitimacy”\textsuperscript{269} that ensued had greatly affected decision-making, accountability across the organisation. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) peer review report points to “the layering of objectives and procedures” linked to the “different stages of (EU) expansion” as being the cause of the “bureaucratic complexity” associated with Community programmes. It was this criticism of Community

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{264} Mosse D – Cultivating Development – Forming a Participatory Development Project – 2005: 21
\item \textsuperscript{265} Ten years before the commencement of the Support for LED programme in the Eastern Cape.
\item \textsuperscript{268} Strategic Orientations – OECD-DAC – Peer Review of the European Union 2007
\item \textsuperscript{269} Mendez C. and Bachtler J. Administrative reform and unintended consequences: an assessment of the EU Cohesion policy ‘audit explosion’ JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY VOL. 18, ISS. 5,2011
\end{itemize}
management, it is argued, that eventually led to the downfall of the Santer Commission270.

EU Cohesion Fund commentators, Mendez and Bachtler, take a somewhat different perspective on the before-and-after of these events. Governments across Europe, they argue, had made use of audit and control as “political technology” since the 1980s. Quoting Power, they suggest that “an audit explosion” was brought on by “the erosion of societal trust and public sector managerial changes requiring stronger account-giving, verification and control”. They link the New Public Management principles associated with the administrative reform to the “performance measurement model” which seeks to improve effectiveness, efficiency and value for money. However, they go on to suggest, based on their work in support of Cohesion policy management (across the so-called ‘Cohesion States’ in the European Union), that such an approach has led to unintended and unwelcome outcomes. In many cases, they argue, those officials and administrators subject to excessive controls begin to play “elaborate games of non-compliance” and the “auditors and controllers becoming the de-facto policy makers”271.

In the case of the LED Support programme for the Eastern Cape – and both other EU funded Programmes (Limpopo and KwaZulu Natal), the most present and consulted reference document was the financial management manual known as the PRAG (Practical Guide). It provided users “with the comprehensive information necessary to undertake procurement or grant procedures from the very first steps to the eventual award, signature and implementation of contracts”272. More than that, compliance with the controls and constraints prescribed by the PRAG became a signal feature of the delivery of the Programme, often contested but never openly ‘contraried’ or contradicted. The very mention of ‘the PRAG was most times enough to silence dissent among project generators and invariably took precedence over ‘development’ discourse.

3.1.2.6 Key stakeholders – donor context

A key actor at this stage in the programming process in the Delegation is the Task Manager (almost always a locally appointed fixed contract worker (often expatriate), with a career profile broadly matched to at least some of the sectors in his/her area of responsibility). Further up the line of command, the Head of (Sector) Unit and Head of Cooperation are both EC career fonctionnaires. In some circumstances, these positions can be assumed by senior national experts from a Member State, with relevant experience in the sector. Postings for all diplomatic and cooperation/development officials are limited to four years, after which fonctionnaires move to another Delegation or return to Brussels. This results in rolling turnover at senior official level in the Delegation, particularly over the

270 Strategic Orientations – OECD-DAC – Peer Review of the European Union 2007
271 Mendez C. and Bachtler J. Administrative reform and unintended consequences: an assessment of the EU Cohesion policy ‘audit explosion’ JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY VOL. 18, ISS. 5,2011
lifespan of medium term projects, like the five-year Support to LED programme, taking into account its pre-history as well as the rolling out of the story itself.

At the time when the three EU LED support programmes in the Provinces were taking place, much of the day-to-day business of the Delegation of the European Commission in South Africa was centred on the Development Cooperation. The Head of Cooperation, during the later period of TS implementation, was a senior Irish EC career fonctionnaire, experienced in diplomacy and development, holding the rank of 1st Secretary.

His remit covered European Union cooperation programmes which were grouped under:

b) Social development – Education, Health, Governance.

An ambitious and hardworking official who had a reputation for pragmatic decision-making, speaking of budget support to South Africa, he commented, “We have taken a look at Department of Trade Industry and Department of Labour Action Plans and have selected a number of key indicators to monitor – if they can be met – we’ll allocate the funds” as well as the “big-picture” issues in development “We want to move more to ‘south-south’”. He had a fairly jaundiced view of development consultants “‘so-called experts … often arriving with broken English” and took the view that “international companies are not the way we want to go”. Following what was generally seen (by the international development community in Pretoria) as a successful stint in South Africa, he moved on promotion to an ambassadorial post elsewhere in Africa before the closure of the programme.

There was a sequence of Task Managers (TM) for the LED Support Programme over the period. During the early negotiations around the shape and design of the programme, the post was held by a UK development consultant, who, according to interview accounts by several national and provincial actors, played a key role in determining the early direction of the programme. He had strong views on the business focus of local economic development and seemed to command the attention and following from others in the development community. More about this in Chapter Four.

His successor from 2006 for several years was a Spanish expatriate, domiciled in South Africa, economist and contract worker, who remained in post only for a short time. Following her early departure, her responsibilities were taken on by yet
another Task Manager, also expatriate (from Kenya), an MBA graduate with background in business (large multi-national corporations) but little previous engagement with local economic development. She invested considerable time in understanding better the logic of LED and was known to reach out to members of the programme team for briefings on one or other aspect of policy or practice. Nevertheless, she was somewhat critical of the lack of contact “on policy issues” since her main correspondent was the Finance Manager and “always on contractual and administrative matters”. As one of the members of the Programme Steering Committee, she gained the respect from others by having read programme reports and by asking simple but well informed questions of programme and project team managers. Her comments on the quality of the reports said as much about her own expectations as about the reports themselves - “they’re full of facts but they don’t tell a story”\textsuperscript{277}. Critically, this succession of Task Managers over a crucial period in the genesis of the programme is likely to have had some influence on the Delegation’s ‘ownership’ of policy direction during the course of the programme.

3.2 Part Two - National, Regional and Local Context

In this Part, we set out the context, factors and actors, that shaped both interventions at national, regional (Provincial in South Africa) and local levels. We commence as before and chronologically with the situation in the Baltic States followed by an account of the operational environment in South Africa and the Eastern Cape.

3.2.1 Tackling rural poverty and social exclusion amidst political and market reform in the Baltic states

Less than a decade after independence from the Soviet Union, all three of the Baltic States were still in the early stages of political transition from Soviet Republics to candidate states for membership of the European Union. This involved far-reaching transformation of the systems of government from peripheral units in a centrally planned economy to sovereign administrations in a political bloc dedicated to uphold the regulation of the market. In addition to the upheaval caused by the break-up of the USSR, all three countries had, to varying degrees, experienced a series of financial, currency and banking crises in their efforts to extricate their economies from one system and adjust to another. Dismantling the structure of the communist economy led to significant unemployment as the highly specialised state sectors – specific to each nation – shut down in the face of market collapse and policy U-turns. In rural areas, collective farms were literally abandoned by those with legacy claims to farmlands in the area – or taken over by farm managers, alert to the opportunities created by the new enterprise economy. Distinctions between Russian and native language speakers\textsuperscript{278}, written into new laws, gave rise to unspoken “us and them” societies and communities.

\textsuperscript{277}Interview with DECSA Task Manager April 2010.

\textsuperscript{278} Latvia had (and still has) the most significant Russian speaking minority – approximately 33% at the time of project (and over 50% in both Riga and Daugavpils). The Russian ethnic population of Latvia in 2014 was estimated at 27% (24% in Estonia and 6% in Lithuania) according to Agnia Grigas EurActive.com – Nov 2014
The overall socio-economic policy context in the three Baltic countries at the outset of the BRPP project reflected a political and policy bias in favour of neo-liberalism and “free market” economic policies. Regional policy, in the eyes of most senior civil servants, was a means to support “winners” rather than invest in lagging regions. The benefits would trickle down to more backward regions – eventually. Official and popular opinion in the three countries – including sometimes in project circles - tended not to rate social inclusion as a development priority. There were often deep-rooted negative attitudes – (among national as well as local public officials) - towards the poorest and socially excluded groups, who were often seen as ‘responsible for their own plight’. In a context of generally low levels of employment and income, there was a widely held viewpoint that ‘everyone is poor’ and that social exclusion can almost be seen as a geographic phenomenon, with entire populations alienated and excluded from decision-making. In more divided communities, with significant ethnic minorities, often Russian (or, to an extent, Polish in Lithuania) officials and representatives from the dominant political circles had little inclination and probably less incentive to reach out to include such groups in local rural development initiatives.

Nor was there much evidence of external (donor) encouragement to shift the focus, although at national level, all three States, in common with other Central and Eastern European candidates for membership, were held to meet EU standards in terms of protection of human rights and building a pluralist/inclusive society as part of their accession path. Other donors, DFID’s predecessor, the UK Know-How Fund, for example, did not mention tackling poverty or social exclusion as an explicit objective during almost a decade since independence and the shift from state socialism. Where social issues, unemployment, social exclusion and low incomes became a concern it was in relation to the growing political reality “that the transition was creating large numbers of losers, and the effect this would have on sustaining political support for the process”\textsuperscript{279} of reform and accession to the EU.

3.2.1.1 National policy priorities

On the European Union accession front, all three countries were actively engaged in preparing for membership of the Union and were progressing far-reaching policy, legal and administrative changes. National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis were prepared to approximate their laws, systems and practices with those of EU Member States. However, at the outset of the BRPP (2000), only Estonia was scheduled to be in the first wave of new members, with both Latvia and Lithuania listed to join at a later (undetermined) date. The European enlargement strategy shifted over the course of 2000-2001, as confirmed by the decision of the European Council at Laeken in December 2001 to conclude negotiations swiftly with all three Baltic States (and others) in preparation for European Parliament elections in 2004 and big-bang membership the same year. Far removed from the modest town and community halls in the target municipalities of the DFID Sustainable Rural

Livelihoods Project – the outcome at Laeken would have a significant impact on the implementation and evolution of the intervention. All three Baltic States acceded to the European Union in May 2004.

In very immediate terms, the predominance of the accession agenda and its pervasiveness across the three administrations meant that the BRPP was competing with time pressures and trouble-shooting faced by decision-makers and managers in the target ministries. In the main, across all three States, these were the Ministries of Agriculture (and Rural Development), Finance, Social Protection/Welfare, Employment. While these were all well-established institutions, with long traditions through the Soviet period and before, it is important to bear in mind that the period was also marked a major effort on the part of the national administrations to break with the communist administrative culture, establish a native/indigenous civil service – alongside the at-anytime daunting agenda for change set out in the accession programme.

3.2.1.2 The local context

DFID’s pre-occupation with Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in the Baltics had swung the spotlight on to the sub-national and local levels of government. The regions were selected on the basis of their “rurality” (dependence on the rural economy), levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty. In all three countries, these coincided with the South Eastern border counties/districts. With the exception of Lithuania, where the target areas were relatively close to the capital, Vilnius, remoteness from the centre was a further obstacle to growth. The selection of target regions (each with a population of c150,000 inhabitants) was confirmed during an inception period and agreed with national governments, DFID and the World Bank.

The BRPP operated in three counties in Estonia - Voru, Polva and Valga - in South-East Estonia, deemed at the time to be the poorest in Estonia based on a range of socio-economic and demographic indicators. Both Valga and Voru bordered with Latvia while Polva is separated from the Russian Federation by Lake Pskov. In Latvia, the programme covered the counties of Rezekne and Balvi and rural surrounds of Daugavpils, all within the historical region of Latgale, which still has the highest concentration of unemployment and economic problems in that country and in the wider region. In addition, Daugavpils and many of the smaller towns around it, were seen by policy makers in the centre, as being pre-dominantly ethnic Russian and there was a suspicion in the “international community” that the region had been neglected partly for that reason. The rural municipalities of Ukmerge, Svencionys and Salcininkai, while located in the rich county of Vilnius, were among the poorest municipalities in Lithuania on a range of socio-economic indicators and, in the case of Salcininkai, faced some of the problems of integration of ethnic minorities. Given the changes taking place at all levels across the administrations, it is not

280 BRPP – Frequently Asked Questions
281 Historically a major Jewish settlement until 2nd WW. Significant Russian in-migration in the post war years.
282 Salcininkai is a multi-ethnic city on Lithuanian border with Belarus with the highest concentration of ethnic Polish (72%).
altogether surprising to note that local development planning was still at an “embryonic stage” if at all in the service model of local government at the time across all three countries.

3.2.1.3 Operational environment

Such was the operational environment across the three countries when the DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Project commenced in September 2000. While the major part of the work of the project took place at local (District/municipality/county) level and at rural community level, the focus and challenge remained to influence national (and EU policy) in favour of pro-poor rural development, tackling poverty and social exclusion. For that reason, BRPP operated at several different levels – local, regional, national and EU in all three countries. The BRPP developed close links with national and EU initiatives which were working at the time on rural, social and economic policy issues.
Figure 3.1  Organisational Linkage Chart – BRPP
3.2.1.4 Introducing some of the BRPP actors – national and local context

Over the life cycle of the BRPP, the project team interacted with many officials at national and local levels. In these next paragraphs we briefly introduce a small (representative) number of these who feature from time to time in later chapters and who to a certain extent seemed to influence national and local attitudes to the BRPP, pointing to the part that personality and lifeworld played in our interactions.

In Latvia, from the early months following inception, the BRPP enjoyed access to the centre of government as a result of the active support from two well-placed senior policy managers there, both women. The State Secretary for Agriculture and the Head of the State Chancellery, previously in charge of the School of Public Administration were both known to the Latvian Country Team Leader and the latter to me. Both had welcomed the initiative and encouraged further briefings as the BRPP got down to work. Over the course of the next years, both made themselves available to meet DFID officials during OPR missions and took part in several public events or delegated attendance to some of their senior officials. There is little doubt that their ‘sponsorship’ helped to reduce barriers across the administration. It also kept the pressure on the team – in Latvia and generally – to deliver results.

They differed from the older style senior civil servants who had spent much of their career within the Soviet system – and also from many of the new political leadership which was unquestioningly free market but ill-formed in EU government and governance systems. Staunchly Latvian in their outlook, of course, and as explained years later by one, they were committed to building, more or less from scratch, a new national civil and public service suited to a modern democracy and market economy, very different from the administration that had served a centrally planned economy in communist times. The DFID project, with its emphasis upon new participatory forms of decision-making, provided a low-cost and low-risk opportunity to test such approaches. Long before the EU Leader programme became a real option for Latvia, both saw the political value in the pro-poor focus of the programme in stimulating local action in the poorest parts of the lagging region of Latgale to tackle poverty and social exclusion, without having to commit scarce Ministry resources and face opposition from the increasingly organised and vocal farm sector.

The primary interlocutor at national level in Tallinn was the Deputy State Secretary responsible for rural development in the Ministry of Agriculture. He belonged to the ‘new generation’ of rapidly rising civil servants. These were, as Kovách and Kučerová suggest “often urban intellectuals with the intellectual capital and the skill to attend to the projectification of rural development”. As such, he belonged to

284 Later Minister for Agriculture; Minister for Regional Development and Local Government and finally Prime Minister (2014-2015).
285 I had also previously worked with the Head of the State Chancellery, a graduate of Harvard Business School, when she was in charge of the School of Public Administration in an earlier EU Integration project 1997-99.
the same emerging “project class” taking shape around the the new rural development (“endogenous territorial development model”)\textsuperscript{287} policies, accompanying the EU accession process. He was known to our Country Team Leader through that network. My recollection is of a ‘good listener’ who was interested in being briefed on the progress of the BRPP and willing to support from a distance.

Selling the proposition was more difficult in neighbouring Lithuania in the early stages. Although the programme’s Country Team Leader was well networked into government circles. Early meetings with ministers and senior civil servants of various political hues to present the BRPP were easily arranged. Nevertheless, the feedback, or lack of, suggested that what the project was offering did not coincide with their policy priorities or expectations. The Lithuanian Deputy Minister of Agriculture, for example, when briefed on the selected target areas, expressed surprise and suggested that had he been consulted, he would have directed the programme to more technologically advanced, progressive and prosperous parts. Halfway through the project lifecycle, in early 2002, the BRPP quarterly report had the following to say:

“It has been more difficult in Lithuania to attract any real interest from senior policy makers in the value of such a (partnership and pro-poor) dialogue. …. A fairly widespread view among senior officials is that Lithuania is not ready for such a debate “and that there are more important priorities” to address at this stage.\textsuperscript{288}

Only after a long and sometimes polarising series of discussions with a (very) young and senior civil servant in the Ministry of Finance, and lead technical member of the accession negotiations team, did we sense that the idea might have some traction. In typical ‘guardian of the exchequer’ form, he had, when previously discussing EU Regional and Cohesion Policy with me, roundly objected to the principle of public funds being invested in ‘poor and lagging regions’ with little prospect of a return\textsuperscript{289}. The notion of local actors from different backgrounds defining needs, preparing strategies and managing public resources was unfamiliar and unlikely but he was curious enough to join a later study visit to Ireland, north and south, and returned convinced enough to support an application for a Leader measure in Lithuania’s first programme as member state.

From a part of the world where change and transition seemed to be an everyday and normal occurrence to the Eastern Cape where following one major burst of change a decade earlier, there was growing concern at the failure of policies to eradicate the patterns of inequalities that persisted from another time.


\textsuperscript{288} DFID / Baltic States: Rural Partnerships Programme / Progress Report / April 2002.

\textsuperscript{289} Interestingly, this is a position which re-joins the South African National Spatial Development Perspective (see below section 2.2.3 ).
3.2.2 Supporting LED to reduce poverty in South Africa and the Eastern Cape.

3.2.2.1 The ANC and the developmental state

There was a significant shift in South African - and African National Congress - socio-economic policy over the course of the EU supported programmes for Local Economic Development. The Mbeki regime, in place since President Mandela quit the scene in 1999, was associated with the rise of the black middle class through the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment legislation and had done much to make South Africa an attractive destination for foreign direct investment. The economy grew by an average of 4.5% annually during his period in office. His “dual – first and second - economy” concept, however, and his perceived failure to improve employment prospects among the poorer and unskilled sections of the population, led to widespread popular discontent and by 2008, civil and xenophobic unrest.

Leading critics, such as the economist (and then ANC member) Ben Turok, pointed to the origins of “dualism” and “the second economy” in the apartheid era when “blacks were not allowed to set up businesses, but they found ways of self-help...”. The abandonment of the informal sector to its shoestring make-do existence by economic policy managers seemed to perpetuate that approach. The government “focus on the first economy alone will not address the massive unemployment, poverty and inequality that persist”290, Turok argued. Setting out its stall for the 2009 elections291, the ANC proclaimed that “one of the key instruments for achieving economic growth that creates decent work and sustainable livelihoods and addresses basic needs, is the building of an effective developmental state”292. Around the same time, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, emphasised that the developmental state “cannot remain just a dream ... It is an achievable endeavour”, albeit expressing the fear that “different approaches will emerge”293.

The concept of the “developmental state”, drawing example from some of the South-East Asian economies, was very much in the minds of the drafters of the 1996 Constitution, although its application was still to be worked out in practical and inter-governance terms (national, provincial and local) in South Africa. The post-apartheid South African Constitution requires the public administration to be “development oriented”294. The “developmental state” has been defined by Fritz and Menocal (2007) as a condition “when the state possesses the vision, leadership and capacity to bring about a positive transformation of society within a condensed period of time”.295 At the ANC Conference in Polokwane (Limpopo Province) in 2007, delegates resolved to build a developmental state which, “whilst acting

291 Thabo Mbeki had already lost the leadership of the ANC and had been replaced by Kgalema Motlanthe prior to the 2009 elections.
effectively to promote growth, efficiency and productivity, must be equally effective in addressing the social conditions of the masses of our people and realising economic progress for the poor.\textsuperscript{296}

### 3.2.2.2 Administering the developmental state

Predictably, the incoming Zuma-led government in 2009 laid considerable emphasis upon the role of the developmental state (see discussion below) in tackling the problems facing the majority of South Africans. Within the Presidency, a National Planning Commission was established to develop a long term vision and strategic way forward in a National Development Plan which would “rally the nation” and draw together all the State agencies in common purpose. A new Department for Small Business Development with a mission “to create a conducive environment for the development and growth of small businesses and cooperatives”\textsuperscript{297} was established along with a new Department dedicated to economic development planning. In the early design and implementation stages of the Eastern Cape programme, the central government Department with technical competence for coordinating the action of government across the three spheres (national, provincial and local) was the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) which, after the change of government, became the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, otherwise known as COGTA.

These changes arrived late in the life of the Support for LED Programme although the public debates which gave rise to their introduction were a part of the policy backdrop for some years before. I do not recall team discussion on the implications of the policy shift for the ongoing delivery of the programme, although conscious of many informal discussions with like-minded members of the team (i.e. with the Team Leader). Nevertheless, it seems clear that some of the outputs of the programme over the final years, which we shall explore in subsequent chapters, reflect a greater preoccupation with the new policy direction. Whether the ‘official’ silence reflected what Apthorpe calls the “virtual, parallel universe … (apolitical) Aidland” where the team can take refuge behind “no politics please, we are experts”\textsuperscript{298}, we shall try to explore in the following chapters.

### 3.2.2.3 LED – the developmental state and a host of perspectives

How the LED theme came to feature so prominently in policy discourse around the finalisation of the EU Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) of support for the period (2000-2007) reveals a much more animated debate involving national and international interests. South African academic, Etienne Nel, links the widespread and enthusiastic interest in local economic development to the “democratic transformation” taking place in cities, townships and rural areas across the country, in the early 1990s. He attributes the policy shift towards local development on the part of the Mandela administration post 1994 to “partly a backlash to the strictures


of apartheid and partly as a reflection of the democratic and community-based principles that were to under-gird post-apartheid South Africa".  

Yet, at the same time, development policy at all levels of government was heavily conditioned by the thinking in the National Spatial Development Perspective. This significant and overarching policy seemed to make a strong case for diverting public investment away from “the unequal and inefficient spatial arrangements” created by apartheid. In the context of the developmental state, “Government has a constitutional obligation to provide basic services (water, energy, health, educational facilities) to all citizens wherever they reside”. But equally the developmental state should concentrate productive resources “on localities of economic growth and/or economic potential”. The power behind the NSDP during the Mbeki period suggests at the least that there was a political ambivalence towards LED as a more generalised approach to employment and economic growth, especially in provinces like the Eastern Cape, so heavily scarred by the landscapes of apartheid spatial planning. In the short term, however, the most obvious consequence seemed to lead to abandoning many rural communities to their remote, inhospitable, unserviced and neglected settlements sprawling across the barren, windswept hills and wastelands where their families had been deposited by the agents of apartheid decades earlier – or tribal lands to which they had been removed by the British inspired Natives Land Act of 1913.

One of the authors of the terms of reference for the Eastern Cape project, reflecting on the interest in LED among policy managers at the time, saw “quite a strong government dimension, thinking that that really government, local government, could really do a lot to get LED going”. However, it was by several accounts a crowded, ideological and sometimes angry space in which certain donor voices predominated around definitions and approaches to Local Economic Development. “The donor community, they were quite heavily into markets and business - at that stage – you had DFID – and I recognise the innovation and creativity in thinking coming from those sources at the time – but they were – it was still that phase where – I don’t like using labels – but it was still quite neo-liberal – you know it was still quite rooted in dogma – and you know that was influencing people’s thinking in DFID, those that I had interacted with, and it also influenced the EU - even Jorg – who is very very creative and was becoming the leading LED thinker (JMS) he at that stage was still quite caught into that neo-liberal paradigm”.

In an previous influential discussion paper, the same author commented that the earlier emphasis on “community (economic) development (which) … had been the main focus of state driven LED … and in draft policy document entitled Focussing Development on the Poor … had been dropped without adequate explanation”.

A battleground to which we will return in the following chapters.

302 Interview with author of first draft ToR – May 2011.
2.2.4 The Eastern Cape – ten years after the end of the struggle

The Eastern Cape is the second largest province in South Africa, comparing in land surface to the three Baltic States combined. In 2005, just over a decade since the end of apartheid, its population was estimated to be over six million, although incomplete civil registration in remote rural areas continued to be an economic, social security, civil and human rights as well as a demographic issue. The province incorporates a patchwork of the former homelands of Transkei and Ciskei and is predominantly rural. The Eastern Cape is frequently hailed as the cradle of the fight against apartheid, being the birth place and the terrain of struggle of many of its leaders, including Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Albertine Sisulu, Steve Biko, Chris Hani to mention just some.

The province is also distinguished for the very high rate of illiteracy (almost 50% in 2005), almost 23% of the population over 20 years of age had never received any schooling and less than 7% had completed some form of higher education. The provision of basic services in 2005 was lagging behind national averages in terms of household access to networked water systems (almost half without), more than a third with no access to formal sanitation and two thirds with no electricity. It was estimated at the time that over 60% of the population lived in poverty – exacerbated by extreme levels of inequality, in the main, carried over from the inequitable policies of the apartheid regime. Unemployment across the province sat at just under 50% and in the former homelands could rise to over 75%. The scourge of HIV/AIDs, unacknowledged by national and provincial policy makers as public policy crisis, was decimating the younger age groups in rural and informal settlements – as well as in the towns. 20% of the population were estimated to be affected in 2000.

The Provincial Government and Legislature of the Eastern Cape are based in Bhisho, the former administrative capital of the bantustan of Ciskei. Under the Constitution, the Province shares responsibility with central government for economic and enterprise development and for regional planning and development, along with other policy functions. The Provincial Departments which interacted most closely with the EU LED Programme were the Office of the Premier, Provincial Treasury, Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs and the Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs. Administratively, the Province was further divided into two Metropolitan Municipalities, six District Municipalities and thirty-one local municipalities.

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304 Steve Biko’s grave is in the graveyard on the outskirts of King William’s Town and very close to the programme’s headquarters in neighbouring Bhisho.
305 EU Support for LED in the Eastern Cape – Terms of Reference for Programme Coordination Unit – page 5.
307 Now the Eastern Cape Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.
Table 3.1 District Municipalities in the Eastern Cape

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<th>District Municipality</th>
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<td>Alfred Nzo</td>
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<td>Amathole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffalo City MM</td>
<td>East London</td>
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<td>Chris Hani</td>
<td>Queenstown</td>
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<td>Joe Gqabi</td>
<td>Barkly East</td>
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<td>Nelson Mandela MM</td>
<td>Port Elizabeth</td>
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<td>OR Tambo</td>
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<td>Sarah Baartman</td>
<td>Port Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2  Organisational Linkage Chart – Support to LED in the Eastern Cape
3.2.2.5 Introducing the national and provincial government actors

One of the people most closely associated with the birth of the EU Support for LED in the Eastern Cape was the former Head of LED in the Chief Directorate for Local Economic Development in the national Department for Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) based in Johannesburg. ‘Frank Arthurs’, not a permanent civil servant, had been “invited by the ANC” to join the administration several years earlier309 working on Small, Micro and Medium Sized Enterprise policy and then later into Local Economic Development. By the end of 2009, he had re-joined the private sector as a consultant and was given a contract by the Provincial Department of Economic Development to work with me on the finalisation of a new regional and local development strategy and action plan. “He is in his own words ‘a local boy’, born and reared in East London ... He recounts how as a young member of the local Dutch Reformed church’s coloured choir, he and others refused to enter by the back door – and walked away”310. He speaks lightly of his ‘internment’ at the age of 17 in the Fort Gloucester prison which we passed in front of today.

Sizwe, the Head of LED in the Department of Economic Development in the Province, economist by training, had been with the Department since 1996 and had previously been in charge of Trade, Investment and Tourism and then Research. He had a reputation for being difficult to deal with and often came across as angry and frustrated, especially with senior managers – and others who stepped across his path (as I later learned). According to colleagues who knew him well, his family was related to the Premier of the former Transkei. “They’re quite senior in the hierarchy”.311 His status as a family member of the ‘traditional leadership’ seemed to sit uncomfortably with his middle ranking position in the Provincial administration. Thandiwe, his deputy comments that he has done “lots of good work but has not been taken seriously. He is used to getting his way – but very straight”312.

Thandiwe had been a teacher before joining the Department and straight into LED. For much of the time I was working with the central LED Unit, she was Deputy in the two-person team along with the Head of Unit. University educated, she grew up in a large township in the former Transkei, where her family ran a retail business. Belonging to the emerging black middle class in the Province, she lived in an attractive location along the coast from East London. She was a single mother of two student daughters, widowed following the death of her husband five years earlier, shot by car hijackers as he went to collect Sunday newspapers. I learned early on to appreciate her facilitation and conflict resolution skills and her calm, easy determination to arrive at workable solutions. Her diplomacy probably saved the project more than once.

In this section, we have tried to understand better the interests and factors shaping the policy environment in which both projects took place and to make initial

309 Interview with Frank Arthurs – 11th April 2010 – Furstenburg Terrace, East London.
310 Diary note – 10th November 2009 – meeting in the West Bank Golf Club, East London.
311 IV with Frank Arthurs, at the time freelance adviser working with DEDEA on strategy – 19th Mar 2010.
312 Interview with Thandiswa, Deputy Head of LED – April 2010.
acquaintance with some of the cast of actors who feature in the encounters along the interfaces analysed in the following chapters. In the next part, we turn our attention directly on the projects and project teams themselves.

3.3 Part 3 - Project Context

3.3.1 Revisiting the DFID Baltics rural partnership programme

The DFID funded Baltics States Rural Livelihoods Project ran from September 2000 to December 2003 and became known as the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (BRPP or RPP). It was a relatively small programme (£2.1m) operating across the three Baltic countries - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - prior to their accession to the European Union. The goal of the project was to promote sustainable rural livelihoods and reduce poverty and social exclusion in the most disadvantaged regions of each of the three Baltic States. It aimed to achieve this outcome through promoting change in rural development policy which would allow for the involvement of local people, working in partnership with national, regional and local authorities, in the identification of local needs, prioritization of local actions and management of local strategies.

3.3.1.1 The job to be done – Rural Livelihoods in the Baltics

The task as specified by DFID in the terms of reference for the Baltic States Rural Livelihoods Project was as follows:

Text Box 2  The Job to be done in the Baltics

Within the context of the DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach, the goal of the project is to reduce social exclusion and poverty in the Baltic States through improved rural regional development.

The purpose of the project is to enhance the capacity of local communities in project areas to improve rural livelihoods on a sustainable basis.

The outputs planned for achieving this purpose are as follows.

1. Municipalities better able to analyse local needs, plan and implement solutions through inclusive partnerships.
2. Community based projects being developed and implemented through partnerships between community groups, NGOs, municipalities and the private sector.
3. Improved local knowledge of, and increased access to, EU structural funds.
4. Improved small business advisory and support services, and local employment initiatives (improved vocational training guidance and schools/industry partnerships).
5. Strengthened local trainer capacity in participatory project planning techniques

and participatory approaches to working with communities.

6 Project achievements and approach successfully disseminated at national and regional policy levels.

A significant objective of the assignment was to facilitate and support a wider policy debate on the issues generated through the mobilisation and activation of local action groups set up in nine locations to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. How the contractor and project team, three country teams, how DFID, how the national and local authorities, interpreted, translated, adopted, adapted and reported this over the next years will be the subject of the next three chapters.

In doing so, from its inception, the programme drew considerably from the experience of EU Leader and other EU local development initiatives, especially from Northern Ireland and Ireland. The project sought to build and test a working model – systems, structures, procedures and skills – for “bottom-up-top-down” local/rural development. We shall attempt to gain insight to and understand better the dynamics within the social world of the programme/project team and their counterparts - across the interfaces intersecting geography, recent history, administrative cultures and policy fields – in importing, defining, agreeing and driving an “idea with power”315.

3.3.1.2 Keeping the project on track

The DFID effort in the Central and Eastern European accession states – transition countries – was overseen and managed directly from the Central and Southern Eastern European Division (CSEED) based in headquarters in London, though never in an interfering way. Support staff were recruited locally and worked from the DFID office in the British Embassy in the three capitals. These contract staff were responsible for ongoing liaison between the London office and the project team, keeping in touch with beneficiary groups and serving also as a link to the Embassy (FCO) staff when necessary. In many ways, they were the eyes and ears of DFID in country, although it was widely known that DFID was withdrawing from the three Baltic States by the end of the Programme, and a source of some stress for the incumbents. Of the three local staff working with the Baltics Rural Partnership Programme, only one (Estonia) established a close working relationship with the project team. Another, in Lithuania, seemed at an early stage to take cue from a senior Embassy member who found the change in approach from the ‘serious business’ of the Know-How Fund (KHF) (privatisation, banking sector) to the pro-poor distressed rural community focus of DFID and the BRPP team – “hard to explain” to their usual stakeholders. More about this in Chapter Four.

Over the lifetime of the project, DFID exercised its monitoring and oversight functions at several levels. Local staff had an ongoing monitoring role, taking part in Steering Committee meetings, attending, from time to time, planned public events

and generally keeping in touch with team members and reporting regularly to London.

As described in Part 1, the annual Outputs to Purpose Review (OPR) was the essential oversight and monitoring mechanism. The DFID central programme management team, accompanied by their external (sectoral) policy adviser, undertook annual Outputs to Purpose Review of the programme across the three countries. These tended to be quite participative and involved close interaction between the project (BRPP) team, DFID local staff and the DFID central team. The Contract Director in the company responsible for managing the implementation contract through the team on the ground also played a key role in designing the OPR programme – and taking part in the intensive cross-Baltics programme of visits, observations, shared reflections, reviews and end-of-mission dinners.

The evaluation mission was conducted by the CSEED team itself316. Findings were detailed in Completion Report towards the end of 2003. Given DFID’s exit from the Baltic States (and transition countries) by end of 2003, coinciding with the closure of the BRPP – and the obvious shift in DFID policy away from the primacy of Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods approach towards its increasing preoccupation with governance and the development-fragile and conflict affected states-security nexus (and the recent invasion of Iraq) – there is likely to have been less pressure for a conventional (and further cost) evaluation. The Completion Report (output of a DFID mission in November 2003) scored the programme, in relation to outcomes and likely impact, in the highest terms. However, to satisfy requirement, the DFID Evaluation Department commissioned a desk review (and interviews with DFID programme managers, FCO officials, EC policy managers, DFID advisers and independent contractors) of all the DFID interventions in the transition/accession states between 1993 and 2003, which, in the case of the Baltics Rural Partnership Programme, concluded summarily that the (DFID) “rural and regional projects in Poland and the Baltics were thought particularly successful ...”317.

### 3.3.1.3 Introducing the BRPP project team

The contracting company was a partnership based consultancy practice, located in the South of England and specialising in a small number of sectors including agriculture and rural development. By 2000, it had already a good working relationship with DFID, having managed a number of projects in the Know-How Fund in Russia and other Eastern European countries during the late 1990s. Operating out of smartly but simply renovated old industrial (mill) buildings, on the banks of a very rural River Thames, the company had a combination of public school confidence with a street-wise informality and professional interpersonal ease.

My first fleeting contact with the Contract Director was in the middle of the reception area in the old DFID offices in Palace Street, London, in late 1999. I had

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316 Due to the number of ‘small’ project to be evaluated, DFID decided on a once-off in-house evaluation.
been presenting, as candidate team leader, along with several colleagues, a proposal from a competitor firm for another DFID Rural Livelihood Project in Lubelskie, Poland due to start by end of that year. Surrounded by his intended team members, in that brief moment, awaiting the call into the interview room, he seemed to exude laid-back confidence which, I was sure at the time, would be his downfall. Coming away from our own very positive exchanges with the DFID selectors, I was high on a surge of confidence and expectation. Twenty-four hours later, as the silence from the Palace Street offices stretched beyond the usual delay for any good news, we began to realise that however uplifting our performance might have seemed to us, it had not been enough to lift the tender. And my accumulated hope and growing ambition ‘to bring’ integrated rural development to the east lands of Poland turned to disappointment and sense of loss, made more hollow by the lack of alternative employment prospects just then.

Early the following year, 2000, I heard from another colleague that the same individual, we will call him, George, whom she had met on assignment in Poland, had, over the course of a social encounter with other UK consultants, been seeking information about me and wanted to make contact. (“I think he’s former army, officer-type,” she said, referring to his crisp chiselled looks, slightly rural tweed and corduroy look.) When we finally spoke by phone, he made known that he had heard that I had performed well at the earlier ‘Polish’ interview in London. He seemed to be on close terms with the DFID team responsible for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Central and Eastern Europe, in part as a consequence of having won the contract for the Polish project.

George was actively preparing a proposal for an upcoming DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods project in the three Baltic States and wanted to know if I would be interested in joining the team that he was at the time recruiting. My response was a conflicted ‘no’, since I had already been approached about the same project by the Northern Irish company with which I had worked before. I was by this stage, however, of the view that we would not win against such a competitor. Over the next week or so, not taking ‘no’ for an answer, he called several times, finally offering to approach the CEO of the other firm to join in the consortium. Once a deal negotiated, we joined forces to prepare the tender for the Baltics project – and the start of a productive working relationship. As a result the Northern Irish connection was further broadened and deepened, bringing three rural development institutions as partners into the consortium. This would have a considerable longer term impact on the shape of the programme eventually delivered. More on this in Chapters Four and Five.

His deputy, ‘Robert’, also English, was a post-graduate of international development studies. Like many other development specialists, he ‘found himself’ in Central and Eastern Europe where the opportunities now were, as development aid poured in to support the transition after the demise of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. He specialised in rural development policy and had gained experience

318 Former DFID Headquarters address in London.
319 Turned out not to be the case.
of EU policies and programmes through his position as a contract worker in the Delegation of the EU in Vilnius. With that experience, he was also well informed of the development issues facing rural regions there. He had also been the successful Team Leader for the Polish rural partnership project that I had lost several months earlier.

Each of the three country teams was mobilised around a very dynamic, hard-working and ambitious Country Manager. All three women had been recruited, head-hunted, known through earlier association with the prospective contractor, during a pre-bid preparatory mission to the three Baltic States by one of the directors of that company. All three had prior experience of working in externally supported rural/agri development interventions, including variously the Know-How Fund, USAID and the European Community – and bore some of the characteristics of the “project class” described by Kovách and Kučerová.

The Estonian Team Leader, ‘Hele Pärn’, had previously worked with the Contractor and had been approached by George, whom she seemed to know quite well. She was a graduate of Tallinn University in social sciences and had very fluent English. Very much a young citizen of the newly independent Estonia, (early thirties at the start of the project) she was assertive, confident and with strong belief in her capacity to lead and to make a difference. During the Soviet period, I was to learn from her later when sharing stories of the past, she was (Young Communist) Pioneer with a strong sense of civic and social conviction. A single mother, at the start of the programme she was bringing up a seven year-old daughter and holding down a succession of short-term posts with a variety of international consultancy firms operating in and around Tallinn in the late 1990s. The proposition from George to join the team (pre-award of contract) was appealing despite the fact that the project’s expected location in the southeast region of the country would mean that, if successful, she would have to move residence, with all the disruption that implied, personally and family-wise. Nevertheless it represented an opportunity to secure a well-paid job for a thirty-six month period in contrast to the more insecure circumstances of the national expert market in the capital. When the project started in September 2000, she and her daughter moved from Tallinn to a hamlet outside Otepaa, a beautiful very rural part of Estonia – three hours by car from Tallinn. Of slight build, sort of wiry, and very youthful, she had warm, even bubbly disposition and in our early group exchanges, particularly among the three country team leaders, seemed to enjoy an easy and confident relationship with both George and Robert, (above). Yet at the same time, she could be combative and would prove herself not ready to accept handed down prescripts or instruction but when she was convinced, she became committed and put all of her energy, enthusiasm and charisma into making the changes happen.

The Country Team Leader for Latvia had come to the attention of the contractor through her reputation as a highly effective national expert who had worked in a range of international projects local government and rural projects in Latvia.

graduate of University of Latvia, in her mid-thirties, ‘Anya Ubele’ was preparing a PhD thesis which she successfully completed during the period of the project. Living and working in Riga at the outset of the programme, she secured accommodation in Daugavpils and lived much of the time there for the duration (three years). Daugavpils is almost 300 kms from Riga and close to the borders with Belarus (to north and east) and Lithuania (to south). In common with her CTL peers, she was strongly supportive of national independence and was well networked with the rising cadres of Latvian managers at different levels within the administration. On the one hand, deeply suspicious of Russian designs on Latvia – and on the other, respectful and appreciative of Russian culture. An impressively hard-working, even driven, CTL and member of the BRPP team, she could be supportive, obdurate, aggressive and antagonistic in any of that order and sometimes all at once. She did not set out to make friends, and, while always fully participative in team activities, was less at ease in social situations than either of her CTL colleagues. Focussed and determined, getting the job done was the main objective and that meant making a success of the programme in Latvia. As CTL, she was protective of her autonomy and her team when any of the STEs would be criticised by the RTL or other international team members. That solidarity got in the way of her programme management responsibility – and self-interest - at times. At a personal level, she was strongly motivated by her faith in social justice and bravely took on as single mother to foster and rear a child from an orphanage. A strong and highly conscientious leader, who was widely respected, and without whom the programme could not have succeeded in Latvia.

The Country Team Leader for Lithuania, ‘Davora Adamkiene’ was known to the development company through earlier association with Robert (who had recently been working in the EC Office in Vilnius as Task Manager for a number of EU funded rural projects). A graduate in agriculture and food sciences, she had been working on a range of internationally funded programmes, in the agri-processing/marketing sector. A very young grandmother, in her mid-forties, divorced and living independently in the city, she remained very close to her family. Well connected, socially around Vilnius and, politically, on the centre-right, she was a graduate of the Salzburg (Harvard) Summer School which she had attended during the 1980s, prior to Lithuanian independence. In common with her colleagues, she was nationalist in outlook and sought to ensure from the outset of the BRPP that the Lithuanian character of the experience would be to the fore. Outwardly very confident, and not afraid to assert her own views or to disagree with dominant concepts, she resisted the partnership model approach to the BRPP during the first six months of the project, due largely to her more pro-business outlook on rural development. Once persuaded to accept the model (as the only one on offer) – she finally signed up. During much of the first year, our relationship was often fraught, sometimes confrontational and tense, made more so by the difficulty in mobilising a team in Lithuania which understood or seemed to empathise with what the programme was trying to do. Apart from three women, a sociology doctoral student at the University of Vilnius, a statistician turned partnership facilitator and an administrator, each of the short term experts recruited to help facilitate partnership formation, or other aspect of the programme, fell by the wayside with
frequent regularity. Their claims for payment for work done went unpaid since
Davora worked essentially on the principle of payment by results and, being a
critical judge of product, no result meant no pay. At no point during this first tough
year, or later in the programme, did her determination or her work rate falter as
she travelled daily the length and breadth of Vilnius county to promote the BRPP –
made more strenuous and demanding by the fact that her team consisted of only
herself and three others, two of whom part-time. As she became more embedded
in the project, and more at ease with the partnership model, her enthusiasm and
zeal grew. A natural and lively communicator, once on message, she became a
proficient and committed performer with all three partnerships, well respected by
stakeholders across government and civil society.

3.3.2 EU support to local economic development in the Eastern Cape

The Support to LED Programme was co-funded by the European Union, the
Government of South Africa and the Provincial Government of the Eastern Cape.
The six year programme commenced in 2005 and finished in 2011. It had a budget
of some €30m, of which approximately €10m was allocated to the technical
assistance component (the team). The South African and Eastern Cape Provincial
Government contributed a further €8m over the period to support local LED
projects. Most of available resources were distributed through three grant funds.
This was the third major EU flagship programme supporting local economic
development in South Africa, following Limpopo Province and also the LED support
programme in Kwa Zulu Natal, both with equally substantial budgets. Policy
managers in central government saw opportunities in the design of the new Eastern
Cape programme, for “a number of innovative ideas, which could also benefit the
(existing) EU/LED programmes in Limpopo and in KwaZulu Natal”321. The
programme was intended to connect with the Eastern Cape’s ten year Provincial

3.3.2.1 The job to be done – LED in Eastern Cape

The overall objective of the programme in the Eastern Cape was identical to that of
both other South African LED interventions “A significant reduction in the number
of households living below the poverty line”. It was expected to contribute to the
Provincial Growth and Development Programme target of reducing “by between
60-80%” and “eliminating gender disparities” by 2014. The project purpose or
immediate objective was cited as “the creation of significant levels of sustainable
employment (including self-employment) … especially for the PDI (Previously
Disadvantaged Individuals)”323. The logframe accompanying the ToR set the bar for
jobs created at 7,500324. To achieve these outcomes, four Results were envisaged.

322 Mid-Term Review of Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape Programme 2006:5.
323 Terms of Reference for the Programme Coordination Unit 2005.
324 Final Report - International Technical Assistance Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape – November
2011:5.

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Text Box 3  The Job to be done in the Eastern Cape

1. “Local governments supported to minimise barriers to indigenous and non-indigenous enterprise establishment and growth and to optimise the assistance they provide”. To be achieved through the Local Government Support Fund;
2. “Local partnership groups supported to exploit local competitive advantage” To be achieved through the Local Competitiveness Fund;
3.1.1 “Private sector enterprises supported to undertake private investment to capitalise on local competitive advantage.” This was to be achieved through a “loan fund” (Financial Innovation Fund – Window 1);
3.1.2 “Financial institutions supported to pilot innovative means of providing sustainable access to the investment finance necessary to capitalise on local competitive advantage”. The main activities planned to achieve this result were the establishment and operation of a Financial Innovation Fund – Window 2.
4. “Experiences in LED arising from the programme disseminated locally, provincially and nationally to ensure a high multiplier effect and to contribute to policy development.”

The total EU contribution (€30m) committed was to be disbursed in two tranches, conditional on satisfactory progress and a favourable mid-term review. The Final Report for the Programme explains that no funds were spent on Result 3.1 (Financial Innovation Fund – Window 1) since the proposed measure was deleted following approval of the overall inception report (January 2006). It had been pointed out at that time that the result could not be achieved for two reasons: a) it violated the European Commission’s own procedures on loan finance and b) the South African public entity partners envisaged could not participate. Despite this agreed change, the major emphasis of the programme throughout the first phase – and over the course of the programme - was still on the establishment, operation and management of three grant funds. The fourth result – facilitating learning and effective networking in support of LED – had no specific institutional focus and much smaller financial allocation.

Halfway through the first full implementation period (there was an interim five month phase prior to arrival of the main Programme Coordination Unit – more in Chapter 4), the mid-term evaluation, critical of the overall programme design, recommended a thorough change in the approach as a base condition for moving to the second phase. Central to the concerns of the evaluation team was the predominant focus on grant scheme management and the distinct lack of emphasis on capacity building at the level of province, district, local level government and grassroots groups in community and business. More about this in subsequent chapters.

3.3.2.2 The job redefined

In making the case for the second tranche of funding in 2007, the Programme Coordination Unit (and development company) emphasised weakness in the ToR

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325 Terms of Reference for the Programme Coordination Unit 2005.
design and stressed the importance of building institutional capability to anchor the experiences of the programme. Once accepted by counterparts in the Province and nationally, the new configuration was approved by the Delegation of the European Commission in South Africa as below:\textsuperscript{327}:

Figure 3.3 The job redefined

The change in structure and orientation coincided with my arrival into the Programme Coordination Unit in late 2007 with specific responsibility for LED Policy and Institutional Development. In researching notes, conducting interviews and sourcing documents in preparation for drafting this thesis, I have to admit that I am only reading the Mid-term Evaluation a full five years after the closure of the project and more than six since my own departure. What this might reveal about, on the one hand, a distinct lack of attention on the part of the participant observer during three years in the field – and, on the other, the scant importance attached by programme managers to the most relevant background document over and above the initial terms of reference and financing agreement, considering that my appointment was a direct consequence of the critical MTE finding and recommendation, we shall seek to reflect upon in in the next chapters.

3.3.2.3 Introducing the EU support to LED in the Eastern Cape team

The development company, a UK consultancy company\textsuperscript{328} which had been very active and successful in providing technical assistance to EU accession countries

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{327 Final Report - International Technical Assistance Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape – November 2011:15.}
\footnote{328 Later incorporated into a larger PLC.}
\end{footnotes}
over the previous decade mainly in the SME, local and regional development and social policy fields. Its primary experience base was in the reconversion of the British coalmining sector in the 1980s. I had been contracted by the company to work on several projects in Poland and elsewhere in CEE during the period. They had previously tendered for and won a major LED support programme in South Africa and could build on that experience in bidding for the programme in the Eastern Cape.

Unlike in the Baltics experience, I knew the development company director in this context, ‘Derek’, quite well from earlier projects in Eastern Europe. He was an engineer by training and early career in the coal sector, highly skilled in managing and motivating people and with a strong ‘can-do’ outlook on opportunity and challenge alike. As befitted his role in the sector, his primary concern was in ‘winning business … to keep this big (and hungry) machine on the road’ and he had built a highly successful business development unit in the company – and was, himself, skilled in shaping creative winning tenders. His approach to project management was, necessarily, more light-handed, often moving from one inevitable ‘crisis’ to another, in the belief that it would be ‘sorted out’ (sometimes with the removal of the team member held responsible). He had authority and leadership and, most times, had the respect of clients (donor agencies) and team members (consultants) alike as a natural ‘fixer’.

The Programme Coordinator-Team Leader, during the period I had worked on the project, had taken on this role following the departure of the TL nominated in the tender, (see following chapters). Silumko, originally from Swaziland, where his family had been exiled as a result of displacements in the apartheid era, was well known in the Eastern Cape as an academic (Fort Hare University) and social activist (during the liberation struggle). Deeply philosophical, he had a strong sense of social justice and a belief in the transformative potential of joined-up local initiative for development. He was striking figure who exuded leadership in company and yet who seemed to hold back or step aside and inclined to defer practical decisions on project management to his de facto, deputy, the Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser (see following chapters). As he became more aware of the social inequalities replicated through some of the projects funded through the programme, he was outraged and took action to change course.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser (and de facto deputy team leader), Trevor, was white South African from the Eastern Cape. Although belonging to the family of a senior military officer from the previous regime, he had close associations with several fairly prominent (ANC) officials of the Provincial administration. Trained as economist, he had previously been engaged as a development consultant on a range of projects, including a major programme concerned with the determination of water rights for rural communities. A member of the coordination group for the preparation of the Provincial Growth and Development Plan and, as noted above, was appointed to the Interim Programme Steering Committee for the Support to
LED in the Eastern Cape where he is said to have “impressed the members”\textsuperscript{329}. He was an articulate, confident but uninspiring public speaker. In his role as M&E Adviser, he had been delegated, or had assumed, responsibility for drafting quarterly reports, presenting results to different bodies, including in particular, the Programme Steering Committee. Reports tended to become lengthy activity (to do) lists. He prepared the detailed programme estimates which set the definitive priorities underpinned by resource allocations.

The leader of the Project Generation Team, ‘David’, was an early casualty of the struggle for ideas with power within the team\textsuperscript{330}. A German economist and rural development specialist by training, he has extensive experience of local and regional economic development and private sector reform in different parts of the world. He was a member of the consultancy team providing technical assistance to the first LED programme in Northern Ireland in the mid-1990s, which focussed essentially on local government led enterprise support actions. Although I was closely involved in the origins and early implementation of that measure, our career paths did not cross at that time. However, I subsequently met him while I was team leader for the preparation of the National Strategy for Regional Development in Croatia (2004-05). At that time, he was working on another EU funded project supporting the preparation of projects in the context of the CARDS Regional Operational Programmes. His views on local development and LED were close to those sponsored by GTZ at that time (the German state development body, now Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and seen as mainly enterprise and small business development. He was known for being out-spoken and not hesitating in putting forward his opinions, particularly in relation to the economic and enterprise development direction the LED programme should be following. “I thought that it was important for the administration to understand the difference between social and economic development...... this is partly why I became a bit unpopular”\textsuperscript{331}

Another central team member who features from time to time over the next chapters is the Finance and Contracts Unit manager. Like the leader of the PGT mentioned above, Manuel was an experienced international development consultant and project worker. Of Italian origin, much of his more recent career had been as contract official in EU delegations in different countries where he had gained experience in procurement rules and procedures for grant schemes both of which were highly relevant in the present project context. A quiet, competent backroom player who respected the rules and also had quite fixed ideas on the direction of the project. He stayed with the project team from inception (2005) through to conclusion in 2011.

The Funds Adviser, Aron, who also deputised for the head of project generation team and took on that coordination role following the departure of the latter was Polish and had a background in banking and finance. He was highly skilled and

\textsuperscript{329} Interview with Frank Arthurs – former LED Manager with DPLG – April 2010.
\textsuperscript{330} His departure in last quarter of 2007 created the space for my entry to the team.
\textsuperscript{331} Interview (skype) – with former Head of PGT/RFAs 2005-2007 - May 2011.
experienced in appraising project proposals from a cost-benefit perspective and was sometimes frustrated at the lack of more stringent measures in assessing the viability of projects. When it transpired that some of funds for one of the early projects supported under the programme could not be accounted for, he was very vocal in calling for the project to be shut down and insisted that the local municipality pay back the money misappropriated. He left the project team in 2010. One of a small team of ‘independent’ evaluators differed from her peers in that she had a background in local development and had links to the ANC. Kajil was South African of Indian extraction and was periodically contracted in – following closure of calls for proposals – to undertake technical evaluation of applications for LED support and facilitate the work of the Evaluation Committee (comprising officials from the Provincial Government). Ideologically close to the Team Leader, she was critical of the types of proposal being submitted and more generally about the way projects were generated and was invited at the end of one of the funding rounds to give feedback to the members of the PGT during a team review session. This review had significant consequences in the way the last round of funding was implemented. She became a full-time member of the team for the last year supporting project implementation and training for local government officials. (see Chapter Five)

3.4 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the reader to the context in which both case study interventions took place. In it, we traced the origins of the ‘big idea’ which gave rise to two donor agencies deciding to commit substantial resources to recipient countries. We attempted to examine the overarching national and local policy and practice frameworks into which the project had to be inserted over time. Finally, we set out the basic profile of each of the projects concerned and became acquainted with the cast of actors likely to interact over the chapters to follow.
CHAPTER 4

Interface I

Shaping Design, Taking Control and Chasing Coherence:

Donors, development workers and project teams.
4.0 Introduction

In Chapter Four, we shall be looking more closely at the struggle for ideas that shape the design and early direction of international development projects aimed at tackling rural poverty and social exclusion. Through reflections around and analysis of specific incidents, exchanges and debates that marked the course of both case studies, Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme and EU Support to LED in the Eastern Cape, we shall seek to understand better the motivations, interests and perceptions of those most closely involved and the impact of these on project outcomes. The cast of participating actors along these interfaces is drawn mainly from the overall strategic management level, as distinct from the following two chapters, although all are part of the project class of development workers. Some will feature regularly throughout the life story of the two cases while others will make more time-specific appearances at critical junctures in the programmes. Chapter Five will feature interactions involving primarily team members and intermediaries in the contests around the definition, interpretation and negotiation of the mandate while Chapter Six will focus on action along the interfaces that brings the project, the project team and its intermediaries and the intended ‘beneficiaries’ – rural communities and institutional counterparts - into contact at the point of delivery.

The purpose of this Chapter therefore will be to comprehend better through an actor perspective how the goals and objectives of development projects are defined and re-defined over the course of design and early implementation. It will investigate how ideas with power are deployed to keep contending designs at bay – and how those most directly controlling the project agenda seek to ensure that the project remains ‘on message’ through steering, communicating and reporting on progress at different stages of the project cycle.

In Part One “Winning the Mandate” our focus is on the engagements between donor, beneficiary institution and development company as discerned through the perceptions and actions of their respective agents. The action takes place around the definition of job to be done as set out in the Terms of Reference, the interpretation of the ToR by international development companies and their response in the context of a competitive for-profit process. Part Two “Securing the Terrain” takes up the story beyond the award of contract and looks at the early and continuing struggle for legitimacy of ideas and approach on the part of the incoming project team, faced with the task of realising project goals and different approaches to doing so. In the final Part Three, ““Staying on Message and Delivering ‘Results’”, we examine how the dominant (winning) faction in the team works to achieve coherence in delivery across the project and translate results in terms that meet the expectations and restatable goals of the donors.

4.1 Part One - Defining the Job and Winning the Mandate

In both cases, BRPP and EU Support to LED, the project goal, purpose, objectives and results had been finalised by the donor institution, consulted and agreed, to
greater or lesser degree, with national beneficiary counterparts and subsequently introduced to the procurement pipeline before I had become involved as a development consultant. My observations below on these very early stages in the project cycle are therefore drawn from discussion with some of the players directly involved at that time (particularly in relation to the preparation for ToRs for the Eastern Cape project), document reviews and from informal conversation with more knowledgeable stakeholders at a remove from the action - and those much later on the project journey. It is pertinent to point out that, once again, in both cases, the processes surrounding the drafting of ToRs – analyses of needs, articulation of goals, objectives and emerging approaches – were fraught with contention, frustration, failure and replacement of drafter before finally emerging on Tenders Electronic Daily with invitations for expressions of interest from development companies. Both sets of ToRs remained the basepoint reference documents for their respective projects, against which outputs and results were measured, albeit in quite changed circumstances and interpretations, ensuring a somewhat virtual and paper coherence with original aims and intent.

4.1.1 Aligning DFID’s sustainable livelihoods agenda with the transition of the rural economy in post-soviet Baltic states

From earliest involvement with the DFID project in the Baltics, there was always a sense of issues underlying the preparation of the Terms of Reference that one could pick obliquely up from comments especially between visiting DFID officials and the development company representative and the very circumspect and careful way in which any proposed changes to activities or wording to significant project documents and reports might be broached. The DFID Completion Report records that “the initial prescriptive design approach caused long delays in design ... and had a negative impact on in-country stakeholders, whose confidence had to be regained”. However, it was only at the end of the programme, in the context of a CSEED workshop in Zagreb in late 2005 to mark DFID’s exit from the Balkans, in conversation over dinner with one of the consultants who had prepared the accepted final draft ToR, that I gained more of an insight to the origins of the sensitivity and some of the travails involved in drafting and agreeing a set of terms of reference for the BRPP. In the end, it took three attempts to produce an agreed text.

We have discussed in some detail in Chapter Three the wider political context surrounding DFID’s involvement with the Baltic States in the late 1990s. We have commented on the arrival of DFID itself into a changed political landscape in the UK, its commitment to the pro-poor international development agenda and adoption of the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach. We noted the UK contribution to the ongoing EU enlargement/accession process in the three countries. Initial plans for a DFID intervention were flagged in a Know-How Fund job specification for “an investigation of potential support to regional/rural development” in the Baltic States as early as March 1998. The introduction to the

332 Tenders Electronic Daily is the composite information panel for all public offers from across EU Member States.
KHF document addressed directly the policy shift within DFID: “The Department for International Development (DFID) has published “Support for Transition Countries: A New Strategy”, setting out new policy directions for the Know How Fund (KHF)”334. The core objective of the “New Strategy” was to “support programmes and projects that help to spread the benefits of transition through all levels of society and which cater specifically for the more disadvantaged sections of the population”. The emphasis was as much, if not more, on spreading the benefits of transition (from command to market economy) as on an exclusive pro-poor agenda, reflecting some of the reservations within DFID (former ODA/KHF staff) alluded to in contemporary reviews of that policy shift – and discussed in Chapter Three.

From its preliminary discussions with national authorities and other agencies active in the Baltic States, the CSEED KHF team concluded “that rural development would constitute an appropriate way of taking forward the New Strategy”. Earlier KHF support programmes through Ministries of Agriculture and Advisory Services were judged euphemistically to have “not always focussed on poorer farmers” and the objective of the new consultancy was to assess the potential for further similar support “assisting the more disadvantaged population groups”. While the exercise failed to produce an agreed ToR, due in part to an overly modest and inadequate financial commitment from DFID (£750k) for a 2-3 year programme covering three states, the findings, including better understanding of the socio-economic situation in rural areas, and an appreciation of central government policy and institutional dynamics, helped make the case for a more substantial DFID intervention.

4.1.1.1 A pro-poor approach to tackling rural poverty and social exclusion

As DFID policy heads sought to percolate new thinking around DFID’s pro-poor purpose-in-being across the organisation and into the less familiar corners of the CSEE Know-How Fund Unit, the obvious and quite dire poverty in rural areas of the Baltic States, severely affected by the collapse of the Soviet rural economy, presented a potentially worthy target for a SLA intervention. The consultancy company subsequently commissioned by DFID/CSEED in late 1998 early 1999 to carry out the needs analysis and define the job to be done were familiar with the SLA approach and had worked for DFID on similar assignments.

The detail of the observations, discussions, negotiations and debates that took place during that assignment are lost in the undocumented memories of those directly involved – and one can but speculate as to causes of its failure to deliver a project specification that DFID could agree with counterparts and adopt. There are indications of reluctance on the part of some of the beneficiary counterparts (Ministries of Agriculture, Social Welfare and centre of government) in the three countries to buy into the logic of the approach offered by the drafting team. No central government institution in any of the three states is identified as counterpart in the ToR as finally agreed. It is also quite likely that UK Embassy staff were also

334 Baltic States: Investigation of potential support to rural/ regional development – CSEED – KHF – March 1998 (In the early years following establishment of DFID, it continued to operate in CEE countries as KHF, although by end of BRPP, the DFID name had replaced its predecessor.)
closely involved in the consultation since it was established practice for the Ambassador, or representative along with local DFID staff to brief and consult with visiting DFID consultants. Later and during the course of the implementation of the programme, the tone and content of exchanges between the DFID team and one resident Ambassador and senior FCO officials, suggested a scepticism regarding the DFID pro-poor policy shift from that quarter that was only partly diplomatically disguised (see discussion in Part 3 below). However in other circumstances, Embassy staff, up to the level of Ambassador, fully engaged with the programme and visited beneficiary communities (both Estonia and Latvia) to promote the programme.

After some months and considerable expenditure, the second attempt was abandoned, team withdrawn and new consultants appointed. There was a sense that DFID credibility was on the line, partly as a result of a mismatch of agendas, partly due to time pressures on commitment, as much from Embassy officials anxious to speak about tangible British projects on the ground as from impatient local counterparts. The third consultancy team visited the region in December 1999 and was left in no doubt that its job was to move quickly beyond the analysis of needs to the definition of a straightforward, practical and implementable pro-poor rural governance and development project that left scope for interpretation, but was at the same time fully and identifiably consistent in name, shape and presentation with the DFID Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach as discussed in Chapter Three (3.1.1).

4.1.1.2 Emphasising process over prescription

In the end, predictably enough, the overall goal of the proposed intervention was to “reduce poverty and social exclusion in the Baltics States through improved regional and rural development” and its purpose defined as “to enhance the capacity of local communities in project areas to improve rural livelihoods on a sustainable basis”. The overall requirement was for “a process approach responding to local needs and circumstances, not a prescriptive one”335. Long’s “image of the more knowledgeable and powerful outsiders helping the powerless and less discerning local folk” is water-marked invisibly large across the scripts336. The ToRs are more specific, particularly in terms of the Team Leader profile, who should be “a rural/regional development specialist, with experience of participatory rural livelihoods approaches, institutional development methodologies and approaches, social exclusion and poverty analysis….”. Significantly, the budget had been increased to just over £2.1m, including a small grant fund of £300,000 to support locally generated projects to tackle poverty and social exclusion (£100,000 for each country).

It was never stated at the time that the reasons for the objections to the early iterations of the ToR related in any way to DFID’s pro-poor or SLA approach to rural development. Nevertheless, the pro-poor bias of the programme was regularly

called into question by national (and local) stakeholders in the Baltics (as well as some FCO officials) over the early years of implementation. The Lithuanian Deputy Minister of Agriculture, for example, when briefed on the selected target areas in that country, expressed surprise and suggested that had he been consulted, he would have directed the programme to more technologically advanced, progressive and prosperous parts of the country. In the same country, a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Finance, when discussing EU Regional and Cohesion Policy with me, objected to the principle of public funds, other than basic welfare, I presume, being invested in poor and lagging regions with little prospect of a return. The notion of local actors from different backgrounds defining needs, preparing strategies and managing public resources was unknown.

However, the definitive and formal title for the project remained “Baltic States Rural Livelihoods Project” and the focus remained decidedly on the poorest rural regions in each of the States. Throughout the early stages of the programme, there was a persistent worry on the part of the DFID/KHF team that the project would fail to address the needs of “the poorest”, a message constantly reinforced to the project team by the development company director, especially in preparation for DFID review missions when it was critical to demonstrate that these were indeed our target group. He frequently recounted criticisms from the CSEED office about misplaced targeting in some DFID funded projects in the transition countries due to the fact that despite the pro-poor rhetoric, the direct beneficiaries were often larger and better-off farmers and rural communities. Despite our best collective efforts and to almost comic effect, some of the early ‘participatory’ encounters with potential recipients of BRPP support must have pointed towards similar outcomes, tending to confirm the DFID group’s worst fears. On several occasions over the first year, BRPP information meetings and workshops seemed to be packed exclusively with landowners and commercial farmers, inevitably under the anxious and sceptical gaze of the DFID review team. More on these in later chapters.

4.1.1.3 Winning the BRPP mandate

Whatever the measure of ambivalence in CSEED KHF Unit surrounding the transfer from support for market reform in the transition countries to a pro-poor and sustainable livelihoods agenda, the private sector consultancy company that won the tender not only demonstrated an impressive understanding of the logic but conveyed a real sense of commitment to the principles embodied. Referring to the White Paper, the authors boldly stated “the Secretary of State required that, henceforward, all British development spending should recognise the (UK) government’s redefined thinking on international development including the key beliefs that efforts should be refocused on the elimination of poverty and encouragement of economic growth which benefits the poor……. The intervention would, they declared, “address the problems of poverty and social exclusion in the most disadvantaged areas of the three Baltic States … to improve
livelihoods on a sustainable basis of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of those communities”. The proposal spoke convincingly of the theory and practice of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and at the same time showed a comprehensive and up-to-date grasp of the context in each of the countries and regions targeted.

As mentioned in Chapter Three when introducing some of the personalities from the company, (section 3.1.3), a key factor for me in deciding to commit to this bidder was their apparent familiarity with the DFID approach and with DFID itself. They seemed to project confidence and competence as much in relation to the relevance and feasibility of the new DFID approach in the transition countries as in terms of the programme management. The company had previously won a Rural Livelihoods Project in Poland, was in the early stages of implementation there, gaining further experience and constantly in dialogue with the same (CSEED) Unit.

The eventual selection process involved team interview at DFID Head Office in London. In preparation, the core team candidates, team leader and three country leaders (CTLs), were prepped over two days by the bidding company and its Northern Ireland partner, on the DFID approach to rural development. Over the course of a long (bank holiday) weekend, we were taken through question and answer role-play up to the morning of the actual engagement with the CSEED team. My brief as team leader was to relate my Northern Irish experience of the EU Leader initiative (and knowledge of EU accession and structural funds) to the terms of reference while the three CTLs brought local knowledge and new found familiarity with participatory approaches. Confidence was high on leaving the interview room. There was a strong sense among the team (most of whom had met for the first time three days earlier), including the bidder’s representative (soon to be Contract Director) that we had been convincing in demonstrating capability in delivering a pro-poor sustainable rural livelihoods programme in the three countries. In contrast to my earlier DFID experience (see Chapter Three) that sentiment proved true and the result was confirmed the following day. The Baltics Rural partnerships Programme was on its way – even though no one knew it at the time. We shall re-visit some of the critical battle lines later in the Chapter.

Several years later, at a more southerly latitude on the globe, the articulation of an agreed set of terms of reference for the EU Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape of South Africa proved to be just as problematic.

4.1.2 Defining EU support to LED in the Eastern Cape

The policy, political and socio-economic backdrop against which the EU agreed, with the Government of South Africa, to co-finance an LED Support Programme in the Eastern Cape to the tune of €30m over a six year period from 2005 to 2011, could also be characterised as ‘transitional’. As described in Chapter Three, the

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340 According to the Financing Agreement between SA and the EU, the former was to commit €8m in co-financing. This was later reduced in subsequent Rider.
discourse around local economic development in South Africa was lively and partisan. LED had been made an obligatory function for local government, recognised in the Constitution, referenced in the White Paper for Local Government in 1998 and several LED functions were made compulsory in the 2000 Local Government Municipal Systems Act. However, for many commentators and LED practitioners, national LED policy, in the early 00s, was more or less typified by the failure of the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) Local Economic Development Fund which was dismissed as having fostered “a practice of LED that was more akin to “social work” than to building the competitive economic base of localities”.

Linked to the Government’s poverty alleviation strategy, the LEDF was judged to have generated “considerable confusion as to the meaning and activity of LED”. One South African academic commentator explained that LED was seen “quite heavily about getting projects up and going …. getting money from government …. working mainly with the community – ‘cos … this was the aftermath of apartheid, there wasn’t much business, business was mainly white …not seen as legitimate partner – and side-lined in process”. However, a former senior DPLG official and Fund manager commented later that, in many cases, local municipalities treated the Fund as “an input” or top-up, which was allocated through very small projects that had little or no relevance to the development of local economies. Such was the confusion, he recalled, that local beneficiaries of the Fund thought, by the same token, “that they were working for the municipality and, when dissatisfied with conditions, went on strike”.

4.1.2.1 LED - the developmental state and the market

There were essentially two opposing viewpoints of LED that shaped the debate in South Africa and more specifically the policy context in the Eastern Cape at the time of preparation of the terms of reference for the EU Support for LED programme there.

- LED as government driven (as in the developmental state) or
- Alternatively LED as generated by business and market oriented.

The Eastern Cape programme was one of three major LED pilot interventions co-financed by the European Union, two of which had already started and were generating experiences and learning in Limpopo and KwaZulu Natal. Limpopo had been running for several years and the KZN programme had started in 2004. Taken together, they seem to represent in some ways respective sides of the over-arching policy debate. According to the former LED Director at DPLG, the Limpopo programme was fully the responsibility of the Provincial Department of Local

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343 Interview with author of first draft of ToR 4th May 2011 ()
344 Interview with former Head of LED in DPLG 11th April 2010.
Government and Traditional Affairs, while in Kwa Zulu Natal, the Provincial Department of Economic Development took charge. It is not clear whether this was an intentional learning part of the pilot strategy, since it seems there might also have been political consideration in placing the pilot project under the Economic Development in KZN, due to the fact that Local Government function there had been allocated, under power sharing agreement, to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). In any event, the signal lesson emerging from Limpopo in 2004-2005 was that “local government was not capable of managing the programme”. Looking back on the period more than half a decade later, he recalled that “the EU was speaking to national government, ambassadors were speaking to Directors General, there was a lot of pressure to make the pilot succeed”.

The starting point for the programme in the Eastern Cape for LED policy managers, according to the same informant, was to use the opportunity to build a more integrated approach. “DPLG pushed for different institutions in the Province to be involved under coordination of the Office of the Premier” and wanted both Local Government and Economic Development to take charge of different elements of the programme, although he recognised that “people did not understand the integrated approach”. However, it should be said that DPLG had a relatively marginal role in commissioning the work to be undertaken in defining the Eastern Cape LED pilot, although it co-chaired the Steering Group to oversee the exercise. Since the bulk of the funding was provided by the EU, the Delegation in Pretoria had overall charge and, according to several accounts, took quite a hands-on approach to the task. It has not been possible to interview the Task Manager (see Chapter Three 3.2.3) responsible for initiating the assignment to prepare a set of terms of reference for the programme but due to the relative controversy surrounding the affair, it has been possible to correlate accounts from a number of participant-witnesses.

4.1.2.2 Preparing terms of reference – a fraught affair

The South African academic-consultant appointed to lead a small team of LED experts in undertaking the Eastern Cape task had previously worked on the KZN programme. He was known to the Task Manager at the EC Delegation in that context and from earlier work related to LED policy and practice through UNDP. His recollections of the experience are marked by a sense of personal and professional rejection “a very bad personal experience, the gravest most awful experience I have had as a consultant”.

What is particularly revealing and interesting in exploring this battlefield is the reported dynamic, seen from several perspectives, between the donor community and the national and provincial institutions – and within the donor community itself.

Seen from the viewpoint of the LED consultant, the critical division between the sides reflected very much the lines of the overarching policy debate, i.e. the business approach to LED versus a more government-led pro-poor programme.

345 Interview with former Head of LED in DPLG 11th April 2010.
346 Interview with author of first draft of ToR 4th May 2011.
These two positions ... both of them had elements of truth and value in them – and also both too extreme at that time – and it meant that important business actors tended to be excluded from the process and on the other side local government was playing roles that – it didn’t really make sense for them to play”. The context as he remembered it, “there were young black people coming into positions that were really difficult for them to play a very effective role in since they didn’t have the experience and training and so on – instead of – so that building that capacity to do that was really, really important ... it was kind of searching for the proper roles, constructive roles for these actors”. To make the case, he “wrote quite a lot of base papers ... which ... I was developing at that stage ... this kind of view about the roles of local government and business and how to bring this together and build the capacity and so on ... and, you know, this just didn’t go down”\textsuperscript{347}. In recalling the situation, he points to a “complicated mix of personality issues, personal issues, personal conflicts, personal misunderstandings, likes and dislikes ... and then there’s the more perhaps objective issues relating to approach ... ideology ... perception of how things should be done etc. there’s always a mix of those”. He goes on to explain that he “was not at all antagonistic to a market approach but ... felt that ... this would not work in the context without a simultaneous building of the capacity of local government to play its role really effectively”\textsuperscript{348}. The social dimension to donor coherence (and that project worker’s eventual ‘failure’) calls to mind Rosalind Eyben’s comment that in such circumstances it’s better to go on picnics than to make reality checks.\textsuperscript{349} Although the LED consultant in question was a national academic, his role, up to that point, as respected member of the advisory community for development interventions, could have been part of what Eyben calls “the social round”\textsuperscript{350}.

When he presented his mission report to a Steering Group meeting in Johannesburg after a number of weeks, he was somewhat surprised to find that the most vociferous opposition was coming from DFID. “(T)hey were pushing quite a strong market line – market-based line. They were very confident that they were cutting edge at the time – and they sort of flew into me and basically ... it was a horrible experience – I was dropped from the project”\textsuperscript{351}. A South African member of the Steering Group at the time, and later Team Leader for the Interim Programme Coordination Unit (and eventual PCU), ‘Trevor Mitchell’, commented unsympathetically later - “He was fired – had been spending too much time navel-gazing – there was no design – just some research into particular areas – but no beef”\textsuperscript{352}. Again, Eyben’s account of her own rejection by the international donor community in Bolivia is pertinent: “the greater threat ... is when a member of the donor community rejects knowledge that donor sociality needs to jointly construct with those in recipient country”\textsuperscript{353}.

\textsuperscript{347} Interview with author of first draft of ToR 4th May 2011.
\textsuperscript{348} Interview with author of first draft of ToR 4th May 2011.
\textsuperscript{351} Interview with author of first draft of ToR 4th May 2011.
\textsuperscript{352} Interview TM – 19th March 2010.
4.1.2.3 A fund-based approach

The story line is picked up at this point by, among others, the replacement English Team Leader (Andrew S.) who was asked by the (English) Framework Contractor to take over job of preparing the terms of reference. He recalled that “a vast amount of work had been done ... by a South African academic ... but he was delivering nothing”. At the European Commission Delegation in Pretoria “there was a great deal of concern ... that the project would be a complete mess and the EC would lose great face” and the (English) Task Manager there “pushed (him) to go fast (as there wasn’t much time left) but to continue the consultation process”\(^{354}\). Trevor, for one, was impressed at the speed and directness of the process – “Andrew retrofitted the programme goals and aims. He studied Limpopo and Gjima – undertook a wide-ranging consultation. AS discusses programme design – but it’s a very pressured situation – real time pressures to fit in with budget planning process”\(^{355}\). From his perspective as LED policy and programme manager in DPLG and also key member of the Steering Committee, Frank A, remarked that the replacement ToR writer “held meetings all over South Africa – KZN, Limpopo, other people. I can tell you that he had his idea in mind from the outset – three funds”\(^{356}\).

Nevertheless, the same ideological tensions persisted. Andrew remembered having “quite a hostile reception from the (South African) academics on the (steering) group”. Significantly, they were concerned to know whether “the change in TL represented a change from a social to a market approach”. Also interestingly, he chose to defend his position and bolster the case for the new economic development approach by making quite extensive reference to policy statements by other international development partners, such as International Labour Organisation, Swedish International Development Agency and the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (now GIZ), quoting the International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example “Poverty elimination is impossible unless the economy generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, job creation and sustainable livelihoods”, recalling Mosse’s comments on “consultant ‘thought work’ (to provide) ... the means to establish validating policy models”\(^{357}\). On the opposite (pro-business) side of the debate to the academics, he recalled how the DFID representative on the quality control group set up to support the Steering Committee was bringing pressure “to focus entirely on the market”\(^{358}\). Within the administration of the Eastern Cape, “there was a lot of political in-fighting”\(^{359}\) and it seems little direct influence over the final design of the programme. Trevor recalls “Comments on the design were made and taken over coffee. The design was approved”\(^{360}\). The ToR author concludes that “in the end

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\(^{354}\) Correspondence with drafter of 2nd (final) ToR – 7th May 2011.
\(^{355}\) Interview Trevor (Head IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
\(^{356}\) Interview with Frank Arthurs 11th April 2010.
\(^{357}\) Mosse D – Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice - Consultant Knowledge – Pluto Press – 2005:150
\(^{358}\) Correspondence with drafter of 2nd (final) ToR – 7th May 2011.
\(^{359}\) Interview with Head of LED in DEDEA (EC) – 9th April 2010.
\(^{360}\) Interview Trevor (Head IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
everyone seemed happy. The GoSA liked the approach and the EC then asked me to replicate the design in Limpopo and KZN.\textsuperscript{361}

What is particularly relevant in analysis of the struggle for the “idea with power”\textsuperscript{362} is the apparently unequal contest between the South African development policy community and the international donors. At national level, DPLG seem to play a connecting role, facilitating connection with the Provinces, “the provinces had a huge say in the roll-out, national could only play an advisory role”\textsuperscript{363}. In the Eastern Cape, LED policy managers seem to have been too involved in “political in-fighting” to play much part in what had become a scrum for influence between the donors and South African (mainly white) LED academic community. Within the donor community, both GTZ and DFID were at the forefront of the opposition to the emerging design that emphasised the role of the developmental state and a pro-poor approach. Interestingly, DFID is the strongest proponent of the markets approach – to the point of leading the charge to dismiss the first drafter. The role of the Delegation and Paymaster, over and above taking the formal steps involved in the appointment, dismissal and replacement appointment, is more difficult to confirm. As noted above, it has not been possible to interview or correspond with the Task Manager at the time, although one commentator, a member of the Programme Coordination Unit later observed that the Task Manager “bussed AS around – and overrode local government in a very flamboyant way, insisting on the inclusion of the Financial Innovation Fund”\textsuperscript{364}, despite no-one else asking for this. If not quite Eyben’s “single shared diagnosis of poverty”, the social processes involved at the level of donors, in seeking to shape this package of aid expenditure, point to a degree of group-think towards a uniform approach\textsuperscript{365}.

4.1.2.4 Winning the mandate

Such was the task put to potential bidders through the launch of the EC procurement process in spring 2005. The mainframe of the programme design is described in more detail in Chapter Three Section 3.3.2. At its core, were the three funds, described loosely by the former Head of LED at DPLG, as

- Local government capacity projects
- Pure commercial grant funding
- Leveraging from banks – creating environment for external people to invest.

The eventual winning tenderer already had track record in South Africa, being the development company for another LED support programme. Of the seven short-listed companies invited to tender, four were prominent UK consultancy firms.\textsuperscript{366} The Bid Preparation Team for the successful offer included two drafters with

\textsuperscript{361} Correspondence with drafter of 2\textsuperscript{nd} (final) ToR – 7\textsuperscript{th} May 2011.
\textsuperscript{362} Mosse D Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – Introduction – Pluto Press – 2005:10
\textsuperscript{363} Interview with FA 11\textsuperscript{th} April 2010.
\textsuperscript{364} Interview with David 27\textsuperscript{th} May 2011.
\textsuperscript{366} EuropeAid Invitation to Tender 120634 – Shortlist.
considerable background in local development policy, one with extensive experience of EU supported local development and social policy programmes in different parts of Europe. The other member of the drafting team was a well-networked and respected academic cum independent consultant cum policy adviser from the Eastern Cape with close but non-aligned links to the administration in the province. Given these connections, he was familiar with, while not implicated in, the struggle around the job definition for the Eastern Cape programme, although pre-disposed by political leanings towards a more pronounced role for government and a pro-poor intervention overall.

4.1.2.4.1 Preparing a winning bid .....making a silk purse ..... 

The competitive bidding process for international development contracts is a different kind of battleground to the scenes of quite direct conflict, hostility and tension that surrounded the preparation of the ToRs, but a battleground, none the less. While the stratagems of competitors – proposed team, unique selling points and costing policies, for example – may be relevant to eventual outcome, in most cases little is known about rival bids, other than, occasionally, identity of some team members. The critical interface is with the Contracting Authority (in this case, EU Delegation) and the need to ensure that the bid fully meets the requirement, is attractive and offers what can be presented and perceived as value for money, while at the same time, avoiding over-commitment. Any experienced and successful bid-writers will confirm that first and foremost it is crucial at all times to ensure that the proposal in preparation is responding to the terms of reference as presented, not as the bidder would like them to be, despite the temptation. While this may seem like common sense, it is not uncommon, particularly when working with poorly written terms of reference, for bid-writers, especially those from a more academic background, to seek to put forward an alternative ‘improved’ approach neglecting the core requirement. In the unadorned words of one highly experienced and effective practitioner of the skill “you give them what they think they want and need”. Many years later, one of the bid-writers described the ToR as “horrible.... very top-down and we hated them ..... what surprised us was the lack of insight to the poverty in the Eastern Cape and the depth of the HIV crisis there .... It reminded us of similar projects in the Balkans”. Her comment recalls Ferguson’s observation that “one reason” for the similarity of development interventions “from one country to the next ... is that they are designed ... by a relatively small interlocked network of experts”367. Nevertheless, as professional ‘script-writers’ she and her colleague “tried to turn it on its head .... but you must win the bid first, then you have the mandate to change”368.

Unsurprisingly, then, the proposal walks something of a thin and not always straight line between unreserved endorsement, careful criticism and conditionally proposed action.

**Text Box 4  What the Eastern Cape TOR said ...**

**ToR – Description of the Task**
The task of the successful contractor is to manage and operate three major grant schemes following the procedures defined in Section 6 of the EU’s ‘Practical Guide to contract procedures financed from the General Budget of the European Communities in the context of external actions (PRAG). This will entail 2 major tasks:

- The creation of awareness of the programme and the focussed stimulation of applications for support under the grant schemes (Project Generation Team)
- The management of the grant schemes to ensure that PRAG and the Government’s Public Finance Management Act (which underpins all public expenditure in South Africa) are fully respected.

The proposer’s understanding of the key outcomes are built into and across the narrative: “according to the ToR, the main objective of the technical assistance is "to support the Provincial Government to establish and manage effectively the three grant schemes supporting LED ... We see the focus of this programme as expressed in the ToR as being exactly right. It is directly addressing the need to create jobs. We believe it is also correctly focussed in aiming at the middle scale of project development.”  

At the same time, the designers draw on and demonstrate technical experience and expertise to justify stepping into the policy domain. “From our experience in managing grant funds in many different contexts across the world, we know that the design of the grants scheme, its criteria and methods of operation have a decisive influence on the outcomes achieved. Such grants can be a very powerful tool in local economic policy, and should be used to strengthen provincial objectives.”

Inevitably, thinking through the proposed rationale and strategy, some of the policy contradictions surfaced as is the case below when the authors discuss how while fully meeting programme objectives and targets, the project might miss the overarching aim of reducing rural poverty.

“Since the output indicators for the programme relate only to numbers of job and projects created, the programme could succeed against these numbers without helping the poorest. In our view this would be against the spirit of programme objectives and should be guarded against .... At its heart, this programme is about using grant funds to support LED and reduce poverty in Eastern Cape Province.”

On the other hand, to re-balance the case, when referring to the possibility of attracting grant applications from stronger, more equipped and established applicants, compared to poor community groups, the proposal states that while the programme may “not truly be adding additional benefits, although of some concern, this will not damage the achievement of outputs .... and indeed may make

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the achievement easier through attracting very strong candidates to LCF”. The programme, it goes on to say, is aimed at “the missing middle ... small to medium sized enterprises” meeting local demand for goods and services or as part of clusters serving larger companies. Nevertheless, the writers emphasise repeatedly that it is crucial in targeting the grant instruments which are “the essence of the programme” to ensure “that the benefits do not bypass the poor”. Drawing on and demonstrating local knowledge, they point to lack of emphasis on the “rural dimension” and argues tactfully that the ToR “do not fully reflect the severity of rural problems or ... the potential that can be unlocked...” before going on to suggest that their proposed approach builds in “mechanisms and structures to ensure that the programme reaches deep into rural communities”.

And so the to-and-fro of the argument being made, backed up by numerous mini-case studies of capability by the company in delivering similar grant-scheme based programmes in other parts of the world. A bid well-researched, carefully constructed and a team rooted in South Africa with a depth of European and global experience (more on the team in Part 2). A striking feature of the international aid procurement process generally is that in the time lapse between project idea, approvals, budget commitments, terms of reference and launch of tender, many different actors are involved, often new actors at different stages. This can result in a partial loss of overall sense of ownership, direction and responsibility. In the Eastern Cape instance, despite its strong influence on the shape of the project defined in the ToR, DFID had no involvement in the evaluation of tenders – nor indeed, the author of the ToR.

In this section, we have attempted to excavate some of the social processes and interactions involved in setting a project up. We turn our attention now towards gaining insights into the struggles that commence from the early days of a project to legitimate ideas with power and to enrol others to the project approach.

4.2 Part Two - Securing the Terrain

4.2.1 Early days in the Baltics

It was Monday in early September 2000 when, arriving from Riga, I stepped off the train at Daugavpils in Latgale (Latvia) to meet up again with my soon-to-be colleagues of the DFID Rural Livelihoods Project. Despite the lovely early autumn weather, I was anxious, tired and unenthusiastic at the prospect of commencing a new project in new places with new people whom I only knew from our relatively brief encounter in London the previous May – and a very brief visit to Riga to meet the local team and the UK contractor there in July. The euphoria that had surrounded the news of the award of contract in the days after the DFID interview had largely dissipated. Now it was down to making it work! What? How? I had not looked at either the ToR or the proposal since the days in May until that morning on the long slow journey from Riga. Not that I had taken much time off in the months

between since I was working as Team Leader on a one-year project in North-Eastern Poland\textsuperscript{373} - project that I was enjoying very much and felt largely in my professional comfort zone.

Other members of the Baltics team had arrived the previous day for our first inception workshop marking the formal start of the project. The Contract Director, George, and colleague, Robert\textsuperscript{374}, whom I had briefly met in London, and who had been named as key short term expert to the Baltics project to advise on accessing EU funds, were also in the board room of the Latgale Regional Development Agency, overlooking the Daugava River and old Daugavpils Fort\textsuperscript{375}. By the time I arrived, relaxed as the scene in front of me seemed to be, there was already an air of serious intent and purpose. George and Robert were facilitating a review of the terms of reference and revisiting the proposal, white board, chalk board, flip charts, papers on the floor – more or less covered with scrawled bullet points, half drawn graphics, bits of discarded text. The three Country Team Leaders, Anya, Hele and Dovana seemed fully engaged, clarifying issues, checking understanding, making suggestions. However friendly and welcoming the atmosphere, I could not help but feel that all there were expecting something from me. This despite George’s early reassurance that, as per the programme, he and Robert were taking the lead over the early days of the workshop and that I should take the time to re-immerses myself in the thinking and logic behind both the ToR and our proposed approach. I could, however, take over the facilitation and leadership role as and when I felt ready to do so.

For the remainder of the afternoon and into the next day, I took part in the discussions – engaged, yet, at the same time, detached and unable to identify with or relate to the direction the dialogue was taking. How to satisfy the DFID pro-poor objective, to make sure that the benefits of the project would go to the poorest groups in the target rural communities? – and very much to the point - how to demonstrate this to DFID? Much of the conversation turned around the management and roll-out of the small DFID (seed-fund) grant - £100,000 to each country. Both George and Robert referred repeatedly to DFID concerns that the grant funds for other DFID projects, including the Polish Rural Livelihoods Project, which Robert was leading, could be captured by elite groups to the exclusion of the poorest sections of those communities. Some of the ideas being put forward had the ring of NGO philanthropy and hand-outs but I cannot recall putting forward any coherent or thought-through alternatives.

4.2.1.1 From crisis in confidence to tentative ideas

By Tuesday afternoon, I had still not stepped forward to pick up the team leader role and was feeling increasingly uncomfortable and self-conscious that the three Country Team Leaders were looking more to George - and Robert - by this stage, in

\textsuperscript{373} Institutional Strengthening for Regional Development – Phare Programme - Warminsko-Mazurskie 2000. Coincidentally contracted by the same Framework Contractor responsible for resourcing both Team Leaders for the EU Support to LED in the Eastern Cape in 2004.

\textsuperscript{374} Robert had previously worked as contract task manager in EC Delegation in Vilnius.

\textsuperscript{375} Western part of the Tsarist military defences during and after the Napoleonic wars.
my view, a potential ‘rival’ to my absent ‘leadership’. The workshop was scheduled to run until Thursday morning, after which we would all return to our permanent locations. The pressure was on to take ownership and I was feeling isolated, estranged from the interpretations of the project that were being floated – and lacking any coherent sense of vision or ideas on how to take forward. Not for the first time since my arrival, I half contemplated resignation and an early exit from what was beginning to look like a mistake. In the circumstances, I opted to skip team dinner that evening. Instead, I spent the next hours in my bedroom of our townhouse bed-and-breakfast re-reading the terms of reference and the proposal in the light of the discussions over the last two days. I was starkly conscious that if the workshop broke up on Thursday without a shared understanding, building a unified approach across the three countries would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. The prospect of failure loomed nervously and oppressively.

My main focus was on the logic as set out in the terms of reference, however ambiguous and ambivalent this might be. The proposal only represented the ticket to the party but once there, it was the house rules that applied – and it was against these – as articulated in the ToR - that the project would be judged over time. In terms of outputs to be delivered these were described as below:

**Text Box 5  What the Baltics TOR said ...**

| Municipalities better able to analyse local needs, plan and implement solutions through inclusive partnerships. |
| Community based projects being developed and implemented through partnerships between community groups, NGOs, municipalities and the private sector. |
| Improved local knowledge of, and increased access to, EU structural funds. |
| Improved small business advisory and support services, and local employment initiatives (improved vocational training guidance and schools/industry partnerships). |
| Strengthened local trainer capacity in participatory project planning techniques and participatory approaches to working with communities. |
| Project achievements and approach successfully disseminated at national and regional policy levels. |

During the course of the evening and into the night, as ideas burned initially bright and then faded, the notion of ‘partnership’ as the essential single linking platform for the project, already embedded in different outputs in the DFID specification, began nevertheless slowly to emerge. At what point did it consolidate or did I make the connection with earlier experiences through EU Leader and its introduction to Northern Ireland, it is impossible now to say. However, as the doodles and rough diagrams took shape, see figure 4.1 below, I started to realise that I had a proposal

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376 The Intourist hotel opposite was exceptionally run-down and in need of basic investment.
to put to the other members of the team that could potentially connect all of the outputs into a more unified and integrated approach. At its core, the proposal set out to establish nine area-based partnerships, three in each country, build their capacity to formulate, agree and deliver a local area socio-economic development strategy, based on their perceptions of priority needs – and commit the small grant fund to the partnerships to allocate to locally generated projects on a pilot basis. This last element, was probably the most radical. Certainly, it would involve some changes to the tasks as specified in the terms of reference, but that was business for another day. Right then, the reassurance gained through belief in the relevance of the interpretation, calmed the nerves and brought the Sandman, if only for a few hours.

Figure 4.1 An idea with power?

4.2.1.2 Presenting ideas

In the boardroom later that morning, while still nervous and a bit apprehensive, my mood had changed totally from the previous days. I had earlier indicated to a much relieved George that I was now ready to take the lead in the session and to set out an approach which respected the ToR and would provide a unity of focus to our conception and delivery of the project. During the first session, I was given the
space to outline my proposal and the thinking behind it. From my standpoint beside
the whiteboard, I could already see a range of reactions among the team members,
from scepticism and some resistance to early indications of potential support –
crucially from George, who after some clarifying questions, seemed to like what he
was hearing – and from Anya, the Latvia Country Leader, who from the back of the
room was positive in her verbal and non-verbal feedback.

As expected, the opposition, while querying the feasibility of the partnership
approach, coalesced mainly around the suggestion that they, the partnerships,
should be responsible for disbursing the grant funds. Both the Estonian and
Lithuanian Team Leaders, Hele and Dovana respectively, were upfront and vocal in
their doubt, supported by Robert, who was of the view that financial management
principles would be compromised and DFID would inevitably object. As presented,
the approach contradicted the top-down model of centralised calls for projects
which had been discussed over previous days, which involved evaluation by
national committees set up by the project. Given the time it would take to
 capacitate the partnerships, they argued, the programme would lose the benefit of
visible “quick wins” which were seen as critical to mobilise popular support. Keen to
arrive at an agreement, George suggested as a compromise that control over part
of the grant fund would be retained at the centre in each country, delegating to
each partnership a smaller sum with which to experiment in supporting projects
generated in response to the local area strategy. With a growing sense of conviction
now, I argued that such a course would undermine the commitment to developing
the partnership as a new instrument for tackling poverty and social exclusion and
the development of local areas. It would blur the focus, make programme
management more complicated and ran the risk of defeating the overall purpose.
Timing was critical but not in the sense of speed. Properly planned and delivered,
we could, I argued, introduce all the inputs needed in a sequenced way to take
account of the progression of the partnerships towards being in a position, and
capacitated, to allocate funding to projects generated through their local area
strategies.

The debates and discussions continued throughout the day but by the closure of
the first inception workshop the following morning, I knew I had the conditional
support of one of the three Country Leaders and the Contract Director. The
challenge now was to convince the others, to operationalise the approach in a more
detailed manner – and, crucially, to sell the idea and the plan to DFID in the
inception period. For the moment, terrain secured.

4.2.1.3 The inception period

The Inception period lasted three months. Much of my time at that stage was taken
up travelling between the three countries and working side-by-side with the
Country Leaders, not always comfortably, to continue to elaborate and agree the
approach. While greatly encouraged by the increasing support for the new strategy
from the Contract Director, with whom I was in constant contact as details were
worked out, I was all the time aware that if the project was to succeed, I had to
bring the two yet-to-be-convinced and even reluctant Country Leaders on board. We ran a number of early stakeholder meetings in each country to test the ideas within the policy community nationally and in the target regions, some of which will be discussed in more detail in this and later chapters. While always very positive, hard-working and willing to lead, the Country Team Leaders seemed collectively to take the view “It’s your concept – you explain it”, as they introduced me to their networks. In the absence of any very negative feedback from the Estonian workshops, and following intense debate, clarification and practical information sharing over the weeks, I sensed more enthusiasm for the approach from Hele and was more confident that the project was good-to-go there. It took longer to reach that point in Lithuania, beyond the inception period – more of which later.

The critical test was whether we could convince the CSEED team from DFID that the proposed changes to the outputs specified in the terms of reference could improve our chances of achieving the outcomes and results they sought. In our view, these were fairly obvious – pro-poor, better access to target groups, better and more inclusive services, sustainable impact. Nevertheless, we were conscious, as is clear from accounts in Chapter Three and earlier in this Chapter, of a degree of ambivalence within the CSEED Unit towards DFID’s “new (pro-poor and participatory) strategy”, not unlike Rosalind Eyben’s “contradictions in the back-home agenda …”377. At the official level, the new language of “sustainable livelihoods” had currency and momentum. However, it was clear from more informal discussion and, indeed, from the final shape and content of the terms of reference, that they CSEED Unit had prioritised a common sense practical approach to rural development, pro-poor but more conventional than what we were now proposing.

4.2.1.3.1 Convincing the client

As part of the inception process, the three main members of the CSEED team (Colin, Eileen and policy adviser, William) accompanied by George and me, visited each of the three country projects. Round trips, by car, lasted more or less a week – days were spent meeting stakeholders often in remote villages, observing the project team’s interaction with local people and more official/protocol engagements. Some of these are described as interface cases later. Evenings provided more time for informal discussion around the proposed approach. However, at this early juncture, part way through the inception period, Colin had made it clear that the (DFID) team wanted to have a full, in-depth question and answer session with us around the proposed approach before endorsing the changes. The key encounter took place in Rezekne, once again in Latgale, on the basis of an early partial draft of the inception report.

Based on George’s ongoing conversations with the members of the DFID team, we knew that their main points of concern were the centrality of the partnership

model, the delegation of authority to the nine local area partnerships to allocate grant fund – and, as programme managers, how the changes would affect the logframe and performance/impact measurement generally. My recollection is of a somewhat formal, slightly tense inquiry-type encounter, almost a second interview, as each of them sought clarification regarding our intended approach to the delivery of the different outputs. One of their main issues was the threat of elite capture through the partnership model and how we proposed to protect against this to ensure a genuine pro-poor focus. Predictably, the decentralised grant fund model was discussed at length and, while defending the overall line that each of the partnerships would issue calls and select projects based on their local area strategies for combatting poverty and social exclusion, assurances were given by us that the actual method of disbursement, guidelines and conditions of funding would be submitted to DFID for approval well in advance. All the changes proposed would be reflected in a revised logframe as part of the inception report.

As the various points were raised and responses considered, the tenor of the exchanges lightened and we began to gain confidence that we had DFID’s albeit cautious approval to continue to the next stages of planning and operationalisation. We can only speculate today as to the value to the CSEED Unit, in 2000, being able to offer DFID line management a CEE transition country project designed around participatory planning principles. However, subsequent ratings in the course of Outputs to Purpose Reviews suggest the project had a certain topical and positive policy profile in DFID – for as long as sustainable rural livelihoods was a policy driver within Palace Street (DFID Headquarters). Much had changed in DFID’s priorities by the end of 2003 and the closure of the project. However, many of the themes discussed that evening in Rezekne became live issues along the interfaces that were the Baltics Rural Livelihoods Project, to be explored in the next chapters.

4.2.1.3.2 Ideological lock-down

Beyond the ideology of participatory planning and partnership-based local and rural development, we needed practical experience and know-how to operationalise the concept. Much had been made, in a fairly general sense, of the Northern Ireland rural development story in the proposal – and as briefly mentioned above, to good effect in the selection interview. Three of the institutions responsible for different aspects of rural development (non-farming) policy in the region\(^\text{378}\), were linked as partners to the consortium through their association with the Irish development company, although without an explicit role. One of the named ‘non-key’\(^\text{379}\) experts in the proposal, Tommy Hamilton\(^\text{380}\), was prominent in the recent delivery of local development there – and known to me from our earlier brief collaboration around the Rural Action Project in 1990 (see Chapter One). Shortly after the Daugavpils workshop, he joined the team to support the preparation of the inception report – and the detailed design of the next stages of delivery.

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\(^{378}\) Rural Development Council; Rural Community Network and the Rural College.

\(^{379}\) Not included in core team which comprised the Regional (Baltics) Team Leader (me) and three Country Team Leaders, Anya, Hele and Dovana.

\(^{380}\) See Chapter 1 – Sections 1.1.4 and 1.1.7.
Tommy’s recruitment to the BRPP core project team as Component Coordinator – Participatory Approaches to Development of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods381 - had been seen as a considerable strength in the consortium tender, offering high level experience in such areas as community development, rural planning, capacity building and EU regional funding. For my part, as overall project leader and responsible for the strategic shape or design of the intervention, I was very much counting on his vast experience and grasp of detail, practical as well as theoretical, in relation to the partnership approach and integrated rural development generally which lay at the heart of our proposed approach. Up until then, in my professional domain, I had “embraced” and promoted the concept and logic of partnerships in the broader context of policy dialogue but had been much less exposed to the practicalities of making them happen.

By the time Tommy had formally joined the project team in these early months of the project, the battle for the overall central concept (of local area partnership as unique focus) had been largely fought and tentatively won within the team, adopted by the development company management and cautiously endorsed in principle by the project sponsor. Our job – and his contribution now – was to develop a much more detailed implementation plan which would form the body of the inception report and a step-by-step framework for guiding and supporting the country teams in delivering the different elements of the programme. While the central focus was on setting up and capacitating nine local area partnerships – in itself, a daunting task in countries with little prior (or recent) history in such approaches – our interpretation and delivery of each of the outputs specified in the terms of reference had to be operationalised. There were ‘many moving parts’ – capacity building for municipalities in participatory planning; participatory approaches to community development; formation of cadres of change agents in each country (and partnership area); support to rural services and finally ensuring longer term policy impact (at national level). A busy and time-pressured programme, partly resembling Mosse’s description of framing a development project - “short time-frames, ‘frenetic working displays’, privileged transport and communications” in what he terms the “transitory knowledge building community” although generally without the “numerous expressions of deference” his team seemed to enjoy382. Once the general direction was settled, the imperative was to mobilise the technical supports and inputs that would allow phased and coordinated progress across these interlinking fronts.

4.2.1.3.3 The rural action project revisited

Our renewed collaboration, during full days, late evenings and working weekends of the inception period, had given rise to an intense and often somewhat challenging dialogue as we both, and particularly Tommy, sought to probe the principles, core philosophy and values which we were presenting as the Baltics Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Project - before he fully bought into the concept. He had recently resigned as CEO of the main stakeholder-based policy body for rural development

in Northern Ireland – and very aware of the challenges and dilemmas facing the country teams in the Baltics in seeking to deliver such an externally driven approach in the absence of any over-arching national (or EU) framework. Having experienced the relative failure of the EU-backed RAP and early partnership interventions, in the face of continuing counteraction from powerful institutions, he wondered about the extent of DFID influence and the depth of commitment of the for-profit development company responsible for delivering the outputs. On the positive side, the project offered the prospect of several years of stimulating work in countries undergoing historic changes – and, as both of us realised, it was opening up an unforeseen opportunity to revisit some of the lessons from the earlier period in Northern Ireland.

Seen from an interactionist perspective as articulated by Long, we can, to an extent, see the ways in which “actions, desires and decisions are framed ... within wider fields of action”. The case involves a series of interlocked “social fields, domains and arenas”. We can usefully apply Long’s concept of “social field” to appreciate better the relationship of the project to the wider European integration context. Likewise, the notion “domain” as constructed, can facilitate our understanding of rural development in the Baltics and elsewhere as what Long calls “clusters of values ... locus of rules”. Finally, as our enquiry takes us into the heart of the project space, the ‘arena’ is defined by de Sardan (1995:178-9), as the “social location ... in which contests over issues, resources, values and representations take place”.

One of the pivotal issues emerging from this discussion around the design, construction and roll-out of the delivery mechanism of the BRPP is the essentially closed-shop and non-participative nature of the interaction. Reflecting back personally, as team leader, on this period, it was like having a jigsaw puzzle for which only Tommy, as trusted confidante, and I had the pieces and the interference of others was not welcomed until the mainframe was largely in place. We had a model, a method and now a mandate to put the pieces together – and while ready and keen to engage in explanation and fielding questions from country team leaders and other team members – as well as counterparts and DFID sponsors – only when the design was close to completion, would we (I) be open to experimentation and local input. Deep inside, was it the buzz of the subversive act – flying in the face of what we saw as the market orthodoxies of the newly independent Baltic administrations - and the traditional CAP prescripts for rural development being promoted through SAPARD - or the sad sclerotic remains of Soviet collectivism? Whichever way, it was an ideological lockdown for the BRPP – and the neglect, as we shall see, of early critical insights into the existing development acumen in our target areas.

4.2.2 Securing the terrain in the EU support for LED in the Eastern Cape programme

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Unlike the case of the BRPP, I was not a participant in the early struggles for the way forward in delivering the early mandate that was EU Support for LED in the Eastern Cape. By all accounts gathered since, it was a messy experience marked by tensions, misunderstandings, hostility and coups.

4.2.2.1 The Meeting of the interim PCU and the programme coordination unit

In late 2005, the winning development company’s nominated team for the Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) arrived in the Province to formally commence the long awaited EU Support for LED in the Eastern Cape Programme – and to take over from an Interim PCU (IPCU) that had been in place for the previous four months. The two teams – PCU and IPCU – were expected to operate in tandem for a month-long hand-over period. The PCU members were ‘Fundiswa’ (South African team leader and ‘poverty specialist’), ‘Manuel’ (Italian origins, born in Africa, finance and contracts), ‘Aron’ (Polish, finance and banking background) and ‘David’ (German, small business development and grants specialist, leader of Project Generation Unit), had all previously met for prepping and selection interview but otherwise unknown to one another. The IPCU had a South African composition and included seven members in addition to ‘Trevor’, Interim Team Leader, several of whom remained in and around the programme over a longer period384, all established local development consultants in the Eastern Cape. According to the Director of LED in the national DPLG385, the decision to appoint the IPCU was taken to prepare the ground, carry out basic formalities, for example, registering, establishing offices etc. conducting essential research – all to “enable the main contract team to hit the ground running”386. Significantly, the IPCU had been in-situ and operating in the Province while bidding companies were still drafting proposals to respond to the ToR – its Team Leader, Trevor, had been involved in shortlisting tenderers and eventually sat in the selection panel for final award of contract.

The development company director, Derek, was present frequently during the transition period. One of the members of the incoming PCU later recalled “going in there, into their (IPCU) offices with the Contract Director – like in the first week we arrived Derek wanted to make a stand – “we’re now in charge” – he wanted to make sure that the IPCU knew that we (the PCU) were taking over now”. The Interim PCU was in itself a relatively novel feature in development programme management, existing only previously in KZN and now Eastern Cape. Unless designed as follow-on or extension projects, most interventions start when the team arrives on location and establishes contact with counterparts and task managers. In the words of the same commentator, “coming to the IPCU was different ‘cause you didn’t know what to expect – what had they done – it gave me the feeling that you were not quite sure what you could set for the agenda for the next five years or so”387.

384 Interview Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
385 Interview with FA - 11th April 2010.
386 The lengthy start-up delays in the Limpopo LED programme had created considerable frustration. The role of the IPCU in KZN in enabling a more orderly start to full-scale operations was judged to be a success. Several members of the IPCU were subsequently integrated into the main programme team.
387 Skype interview with David (former head of Project Generation Unit) – May 2011.
For his part, the leader of the IPCU saw its role as “the anchor (for the LED Support Programme) in the Provincial Government” and undertook to “introduce to people” during the hand-over month 388. They had prepared studies (value chains and comparative/competitive advantage) which “did not seem to impress” the newcomers. The PCU member responsible for leading the project generation team “thought the studies were a waste of money” 389. And the attitude of the incoming team leader was also seen as problematic. Her counterpart in the IPCU felt that “Fundiswa seemed to be resisting – you felt like asking her ‘are we boring you?’” and was frustrated enough to complain in writing on behalf of the Provincial Government to the Contract Director that “the preparatory work was not being taken seriously enough” 390.

4.2.2.2 An early casualty

Fundiswa’s days as Project Leader were probably numbered from this point onward. As described in Chapter Three, she had been highly recommended, head-hunted and recruited as Team leader as a pro-poor policy specialist. However, from the outset, distinct policy differences were opening up with some of her PCU team colleagues. The Project Generation Coordinator felt strongly enough about her “very strong poverty alleviation focus” at the selection interview to intervene to point out – to her and the evaluation committee - “well actually, this is about economic development - so we need to distinguish a little” 391, demonstrating rather publicly early divisions within the team. Also within the PCU, the Finance and Contracts Manager held a similar view “she went to some early awareness raising events in rural areas – and was promising everything. She was suggesting that the programme was about giving subsidies, handouts – there was nothing about competitiveness or sustainable projects” 392. She was, he alleged, “externalising internal conflicts”, even using her links with the Office of the Premier “to change” Trevor’s briefing reports to the Provincial Government. Her main support within the PCU during the early period, according to Trevor, came from the Local Government LED Adviser, Silumko, “probably a black and white thing”, he added 393 (both were from the Xhosa community). In the end, in her desire to control the reports and messages coming from the PCU, “she wanted to review and revise all documentation before passing on to Programme Director (Chief Financial Officer of Provincial Treasury) and from there to DECSA (Delegation of European Commission in South Africa) – it was a very long turn-around...creating a bureaucracy within a bureaucracy”, planning suffered and there were mistakes and delays 394. Her competence as a programme manager was called into question “she had trouble with the distinctions that were being made – she had no real handle on the EU side of things.... how do you do your time plans – these run-up periods – contracting

389 Skype interview with David (former head of Project Generation Unit) – May 2011.
390 Interview Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – May 2011.
391 Skype interview with David (former head of Project Generation Unit) – May 2011.
392 Interview with Manuel - 24th March 2010.
393 Interview Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
394 Interview with Manuel (Head of finance and contracts) - 24th March 2010.
periods and so on – she couldn’t do time planning” 395. It took four months to complete the first quarterly report “and there were many mistakes”, the Finance and Contracts Manager complained, “and Trevor took it away from her”, in an apparent usurpation of authority, since he was junior to her in the team (PCU) hierarchy. Within the provincial administration, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Provincial Treasury, who was briefed by the Finance and Contracts Manager, “knew that Fundiswa was not up to it … but had to be careful since she was “black and a woman” (author’s note: the CFO was also “black and a woman”) … sought to get rid of her after a few months” 396. At national level, no doubt as a result of rumours of such disquiet in the camp, the Director of LED Policy at DPLG (and main national counterpart for the programme), felt that despite her “good qualifications … she was out of her depth” and met with a delegation from the PCU, again led by Trevor, to speak about “how to deal with Fundiswa” 397.

Just months after the award of contract, this had to be an issue for the development company. During the initial hand-over period, despite his rhetoric around the PCU “taking over” and “we’re now in charge”, the Contract Director, Derek, seems to have come to more than a degree of understanding with the Interim Team Leader. In fact, within the month, he had offered him the position of Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser in the Programme Coordination Unit. They were both already of one mind, it seems, in thinking “that Fundiswa would drop the ball”. According to Trevor, the then current task manager in the Delegation agreed with the job offer and “saw merit in continuity” 398 from IPCU to PCU. As far as the Team Leader position was concerned, Fundiswa was “side-lined” into the post of “Communications and Networking” 399, (an odd location for a member of the team who had seemed so off-message in relation to the overall goal of the programme) – and Derek took over direct management of the programme for several months. The obvious alternative candidate for TL position in the longer term, well regarded, qualified and black, was the Local Government LED Adviser, Silumko. Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, Trevor, whose influence was growing within the PCU, put the proposition to the Contractor, Derek, adding “with me (Trevor) as background – that’s the way it’s been since!” 400 The appointment was ratified by the Programme Steering Committee at end of 2006.

4.2.2.3 Coming On board in the Eastern Cape

Following my arrival in the Eastern Cape, firstly as a Short Term Expert (STE) in October 2007, and later in February 2008, when confirmed as long term (part-time) LED Policy and Institutional Adviser in a partly reformulated project design, I met some of the people most actively engaged along those interfaces over the years since the project’s conception. It took much longer to intellectually engage with some of them around their perceptions, understanding, interests and motivations

395 Skype interview with David (former head of Project Generation Unit) – May 2011.
396 Interview with Manuel (Head of finance and contracts) - 24th March 2010.
397 Interview with FA 11th April 2010.
398 Interview TM (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
399 She left the programme completely sometime after this.
400 Interview TM (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
in relation to the delivery of the programme. Nevertheless, the continuing tensions within the team (and further afield among partner institutions, e.g. Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs) on the purpose, role and functioning of the EU LED Support Programme were never far below the surface. In a welcoming text following approval of my nomination as LED Policy and Institutional Adviser, Programme Coordinator and Team Leader, Silumko, hinted at the ongoing struggle for ideas and legitimacy within the Programme Coordination Unit (PCU): “Glad u on board man, we now have critical mass within PCU that believes in development.”

4.2.2.3.1 Looking back to an earlier offer

As I became more aware of the depth and extent of that struggle over the next years, I had sometimes cause to speculate if and how the situation might have been different had I said “yes” to the development company director’s (Derek) earlier proposal to nominate me for the position of Team Leader in the run up to their bid for the contract in 2005, and prior to the company’s approach to Fundiswa. Given my association with the company, background and experience in managing local, regional and rural development programmes – and my expressed interest in working in post-apartheid South Africa, the bid preparation team was of the view that my CV fitted the required Team Leader profile.

The proposition was made in a lengthy telephone conversation. Fitting with Rajak and Stirrat’s profile of the cosmopolitan, geographically mobile world of development consultants, I happened to be, coincidently, on short term mission in Vilnius and Derek was elsewhere in the world. This was a “must-win” (high priority) tender for the company and one which they had been following closely from their vantage point of their ongoing LED support project. I have the recollection that the call lasted at least a half an hour. Derek was, as usual, persuasive in his arguments – good team, strong bid, can make the job much as you would like it. For my part, however, I had been reading the terms of reference several times over the previous days and, deep down, did not think I had the profile for the Team Leader job as specified in the Terms of Reference.

Despite the attraction of the offer – prospect of five years employment – in a new South Africa - at a time when my then current project (regional development in Croatia) was closing - I could not identify with what I was reading in the Terms of Reference. The ToR seemed to suggest at best a fairly bureaucratic approach to local development – raise awareness of the grant opportunity, generate LED projects susceptible of winning support under the rules of the game and deliver according to the EU PRAG. The long lists of mandatory activities were uninspiring

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401 Text from Team Leader and Programme Coordinator – 22nd Feb 2008 – “Glad u on board man, we now have critical mass within PCU that believes in development.”
402 Bid writer Eileen recalls that local intelligence was favouring the appointment of a black South African – and the eventual selection of Fundiswa not only satisfied that unspoken “criteria”, but also ‘ticked the gender box’. Her assessment is that they would not have won the contract with a white European male in charge.
and conveyed little if any sense of a shared coherent purpose with which I could identify. The job seemed essentially to be about enterprise development, local government, financial engineering and, primarily, grant scheme management. While I could relate my experience in part to several of these fields, they were ancillary rather than a core part of what I saw as my essential areas of competence and interest. The task as described suggested little of the notion of “bottom-up” partnership-based development which I associated with the dynamic of local development. The strong emphasis upon financial institutions throughout the ToR convinced me that, despite the “head-hunter’s” insistence to the contrary, my skills and competency profile did not match the requirement. Whatever my interest in working in a development context in South Africa, I was, by this stage, satisfied that the Eastern Cape LED Support Programme would not be “the ticket” – and turned the offer down.

4.2.2.3.2 “A good team leader makes own project” – What if? Regrets?

Two years later, there I was, in a quite different capacity – inside the PCU but outside the decision-making centre. The battle to secure the terrain, establish the purpose and set the direction had been lost (for pro-poor local development) and won (for generating economic competitiveness projects, spending the funds, getting the money onto the street!), but the contradictions would not go away. Much of the next two and half years would provide real-time insights into the continuing struggle for meaning and coherence in a contested space. How I might have fared as Project Leader in such circumstances can but be idle what-if speculation. I did not know the woman but there were occasions when I could empathise very much with the isolation and precariousness of her position within a predominantly white and male team of development professionals, defending, as she was, as I expect I would have been, a pro-poor bottom-up approach, in a project context as defined in the terms of reference for the Support to LED Programme. Derek’s assertion that “a good team leader makes his/her own project” underlines such qualities as resourcefulness and can-do, the ability to interpret, translate and broker new and shared understandings of what can be achieved – and assumes a critical mass of allies at least partially recruited to the “idea” that competes for power. There were few such friends during the first years of the programme.

4.3 Part Three - Staying on Message and Controlling ‘Results’

In Part Three, we shall look again to both cases to understand better how in “project-land” the mandate is managed and moulded over time by the group with power, how recruits to the project are inducted, directed, scripted and steered – how the expectations of beneficiaries, counterparts and clients are handled – all in the context of agency, the role of individual actors and the contest of interests and ideas.

4.3.1 The BRPP experience
In Part 2 of this chapter, we revisited several critical interfaces in the BRPP experience that led to a re-interpretation of the terms of reference and the emerging dominance of a single powerful idea as shaping force behind the project. We now turn our attention to examining some of the struggles that took place over the years marking significant moments in ongoing contest for legitimacy of approach and for the value placed on programme outcomes. At the more strategic level, the agreement reached with the DFID CSEED team during the inception period, around the unifying focus on the partnership as driver of the effort to tackle poverty and social inclusion, greatly reduced the potential for conflict over the way forward. The changes were carried through into a fairly significant revision of the logframe. These included re-ordering – and a redefinition - of inputs and indicators against which progress would be measured over the life of the programme. In the circumstances, reporting became critical as were the set piece engagements around the DFID Outputs to Purpose Review (OPR) missions insofar as staying on message with the client was concerned. Managing the expectations of beneficiary stakeholders at different levels was also a critical aspect of the need for a coherent and consistent approach to communication, staying on message and delivering results. We will look at one or two instances where mixed messages from some of the intermediaries had the potential to cast the project in quite a different light. Finally, within the wider team (including part-time consultants), the then novel nature of the approach continued to challenge mainstream and conventional textbook solutions already more widely in circulation in CEE countries at the time – resulting from time to time in points of misunderstanding and conflict as the programme leaders struggled to stay on message.

4.3.1.1 Naming the programme – partnerships or sustainable livelihoods?

A minor but potential symbolically significant stumbling block for DFID in agreeing the relatively radical restructured design had to do with ensuring the primacy of DFID’s flagship Sustainable (Rural) Livelihoods policy and approach (SLA). From a programme marketing point of view, the team and the development company were keen to promote and project the notion of the local development partnership from the title outwards – short, punchy and to the point. The SLA label was more cumbersome and did little to convey that single, and in our view, powerful, message of ‘partnership’. Nevertheless, our commitment to the SLA principles was total (participation was ‘good’) and underpinned the redesign. During the first inception workshop, described in Part 2, as we sought to understand the DFID concept better, Robert had facilitated a discussion to devise a logo which could encapsulate some of the key ideas behind the SLA. In that context, we wanted to draw attention to its emphasis upon the “five types of capital assets which people may build up and/or draw upon: human, natural, financial, social and physical”404. The end result was a simple emblem which became the badge of the programme across all three Baltic State and which was often used to introduce stakeholders into the DFID approach. Its primary purpose, in the early months of the programme, accompanying a rather more wordy strapline, was to satisfy DFID and CSEED

404 Farrington J; Carney D; Ashley C; Turton C - Sustainable Livelihoods in Practice: Early Applications of Concepts in Rural Areas – June 1999 – ODI Natural Resource Perspectives.
observers that the purpose, the logic and the methods of the BRPP were unmistakably within the SLA school of development.

Figure 4.2 From sustainable livelihoods to area-based partnerships

Baltic States Rural Partnership Programme for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

4.3.1.2 Diplomacy and development

More potentially obstructive opposition and unwillingness to embrace the partnership (or indeed the SLA) approach was to be found in other less likely locations. Two of the FCO embassies (Riga and Tallinn) provided much welcome support and platforms to engage with senior policy makers and other local stakeholders, while, probably, sometimes harbouring a degree of suspended judgement towards this less familiar or predictive type of “process” intervention. However, the legation in Vilnius remained sceptical and at best passive throughout the period. During an early briefing meeting with the Head of Office there, he held court with a large, long-haired and rather striking tan cat on his lap, making no secret of his lack of expectation for the objectives of the pro-poor programme which he believed would have little impact in terms of enterprises or jobs created. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter 3, this attitude seemed to have influenced the mindset of the DFID liaison person there who offered little effective support to the team throughout the period.

However, our main concern was that the Head of Office, whom DFID were due to meet during an early Outputs to Purpose Review, could sow seeds of doubt in the thinking of the CSEED team about the overall viability of the partnership approach. It has to be said that at this stage in the life of the BRPP in Lithuania, there was less evidence of significant traction for the partnership approach, compared to the other two countries, and we could not be confident that the intervention would succeed there. It was therefore crucial that we neutralise this significant “in-house” source of scepticism. Both Colin and William were present as was project director, George. I attended as regional Team Leader. The Head of Office was once again fairly condescending and after the formal courtesies, set out promptly to convey his lack of appreciation for this DFID project – which, with its emphasis on

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405 BRPP logo for Latvia – the five capital assets from bottom left – physical, natural, financial, social and human in the centre.
406 Meeting in UK Embassy in Vilnius (Spring 2001).
partnerships and ‘the poorest of the poor’, he found complex and difficult to explain to peers and business groups. Neither Colin or William challenged or seemed likely to, probably out of deference for his rank. Instead, they looked to me, as contracted Project Leader, to answer the direct criticism. I thanked him and his staff for their support and backing for the project and set out some of the progress to date. To conclude, I acknowledged the novelty of the approach and re-assured him that “all of the people who needed to know what the programme was about were fully briefed, very supportive and fully engaged in the process”. The meeting ended shortly after and without much further questioning. Later – and beyond the reach of the embassy walls - our DFID clients expressed cheerful satisfaction at the way in which the situation had been handled. While we never managed to gain the endorsement of the representation and future relationships were limited to invitations to the calendar of formal receptions (e.g. Queen’s birthday party) – we were never aware of any further public effort to call the BRPP into question. In Latvia, the project was selected to ‘host’ a visit by a senior member of the British royal family to that country.

4.3.1.3 Meeting the stakeholders

Looking further afield, the first real test would be to see how stakeholders in the target regions would respond to the proposition. One of the early encounters between the BRPP team and local stakeholders took place in the town hall in Valga, an Estonian town sharing a border with Valka on the Latvian side. The participants (from the three target Estonian counties) were mainly local and regional government officials of varying rank, a number of whom were personally known to Hele, the Estonian Country Manager. Others included some business people and representatives from established non-government organisations, one of which was Kodokant (Village Movement) – a Swedish inspired rural women’s group. While some of the key players present, particularly those from government and development institutions, had been consulted in the preparation of the terms of reference and during the inception period, the dissemination exercise involved taking the design in a much more complete form for the first time to a wider group of stakeholders in the target areas.

The Country Manager presented the broad outlines of the project before introducing me as Team Leader and ‘ideologue’ (and the name stayed with me for the rest of the project, mainly in semi-teasing good humour) for the partnership model which she described as differing from previous capacity building or grant management interventions. Our earlier differences (see Part 1 of this chapter – battle for the BRPP, in which Hele was fairly outspoken and reluctant to accept), although now set aside following the adoption by DFID of the partnership approach as the main vehicle for delivery, added to our shared sense of uncertainty in terms of the wider stakeholder reception of the proposition. Before the meeting, she had made it clear that she did not feel confident in presenting the logic and detail of the proposal and expected that, as the external “expert” and project manager, I should take the lead, working through interpretation.
4.3.1.3.1 Getting on message

It is difficult in hindsight to make a consistently detailed assessment of the outcome of this early “knowledge encounter” with local stakeholders from one of the three of the BRPP target regions, other than as a set of interpretations and “personal constructs”\(^\text{407}\). For many, but not all, of the rural representatives present, the meeting was a first introduction to a novel non-farming approach to the development of rural areas and the rural economy generally. The area-based partnership concept had been applied in very different circumstances (in the UK, Ireland and other parts of the EU) to those existing in SE Estonia following the demise of the collective farm and now gearing up for an intensification of private sector investment,\(^\text{408}\) with the support of EU Structural Funds. From the point of view of the international project team, these early public exchanges tested both our shared initial understanding of the logic of the integrated, multi-stakeholder, place-based local development model and our confidence in its transferability. There was an expectation among those present that, as proposers and external “experts”, we had the answers – often to questions previously taken for granted and some of which we had never before had to consider given the very different starting conditions between Northern Ireland and post-communist Estonia. On the other hand, for those of us who had argued the case for the central project idea both with sponsors and within the team itself, the struggle for meaning had sharpened the sense of conviction and belief and had hardened the determination not to fall at the first front-line hurdle.

The twin themes in the project concept – its pro-poor and social inclusion focus to be delivered through an area-based partnership comprising local actors from a range of backgrounds – generated substantial comment and more than a hint of scepticism. Our promotion of such features of the approach as “voluntarism” and the personal commitment of partnership members also attracted attention. Some of the views expressed suggested an expected and familiar bias towards economic and enterprise development and using the project resources to support small businesses in the area as a means to create jobs. A few speakers pointed to the importance of tourism (as well as wood and other crafts) to the local economy, praised earlier projects which had stimulated activity in these fields and seemed somewhat dubious at the apparent lack of a more sectoral focus in the BRPP. Several speakers had doubts whether the emphasis upon partnership and collective decision-making was in tune with the new ethos of market economics in Estonia in the decade after the collapse of communism. The programme commitment to tackling poverty was considered somewhat inappropriate and mildly “offensive” or patronising by some who took the view that “there was no poverty in Estonia”\(^\text{409}\).

Responses suggested a degree of unfamiliarity with some terms such as “community” (kogukond) which had been “only used in the context of ancient


\(^{408}\) As the accession countries prepared for SAPARD (introduced as part of Agenda 2000 to help candidate countries to prepare for use of EU agricultural and rural development programmes following membership), there were early stories of farm machinery conglomerates such as John Deere and Massey Ferguson setting up branches in the regions – preparing for increased (grant-funded) sales of tractors and other machinery for newly privatised farms.

\(^{409}\) Correspondence with Hele 17th Feb 2011.
history and needed almost to be re-invented or “public involvement/participation” (kaasamine). Others were of the view that social inclusion processes were best left to the relevant state institutions, non-government organisations and church-based charities – but should not be the objective of the area-based partnership. Hele later explained some of this reluctance might be understood in the context of the resurgent protestant or Lutheran ethic of individual self-reliance generally. The Village Movement participants argued that whatever grant fund resources were available through the project these would be best managed if directed through their association.

4.3.1.3.2 Benefitting from the doubt

What united the group of participants at the Valga event, drawn from the three mainly rural border counties of Valga, Polva and Voru in the newly independent republic, was a seemingly strong common sense of national identity and equally forceful rejection of the former communist regime. However, some of the older public officials had served under the old central planning order and had seen initiatives come and go with the regularity of the five year “Russian doll” plans. Their younger, recently qualified and ambitious, colleagues, on the other hand, particularly from regional government level, were generally more eager to embrace new approaches to development planning. Among the non-government people present, the “Village Movement” delegates were active not only in promoting their recently acquired experience of rural development planning based on a Swedish model of rural parliaments but in asserting the movement’s ambition to be the “voice of rural dwellers” in Estonia. Most, however, were sceptical that a partnership, without formal legal status, could have “the authority to make a difference” in terms of its ability to tackle the socio-economic issues facing the three poorest counties in Estonia. Surprisingly, given the “rural” credentials of the Partnerships Programme, farming organisations were largely absent, mainly due to the fragmentation of such bodies at that time, but also reflecting the non-farm focus of the programme and probably a statement on the small size of the fund available, compared with what SAPARD was offering to the farming sector.

Whatever inconsistencies, contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties the participants at the Valga event may have taken away with them, there was however no explicit rejection of the overall approach. Despite the sense that “there was no enthusiasm or taking initiative” among the group, the lack of any real opposition cleared the way to move the process to the next stage which would involve the establishment of a local area partnership at County level. The inducement of a small token grant fund, however it might eventually be managed, as well as the lack of other significant development opportunities (in the non-farming sector), facilitated

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410 Correspondence with Hele 19th Feb 2011.
411 The legal status (or lack of) for the partnerships was an issue in all three countries at the outset. The BRPP took the view that 1) to wait for the initial partnerships to be legally incorporated would take too long in the course of three year experimental project, 2) while the partnership would be sole decision-maker for the allocation of funding, based on agreed local area strategies and action plans, the funds would be disbursed through the RPP as registered NGO in each country, 3) legal incorporation would follow depending on the legislation in force in each country if the experiment succeeded.
412 Note Hele – 17th Feb 2011.
a relatively positive if ambivalent outcome. One of the critical factors behind the willingness of participants to give the programme the benefit of the doubt was undoubtedly the public endorsement of the development model by Hele, Country Manager. Her support, coupled with her ability, as a “gatekeeper” to activate administrative, professional and voluntary networks was crucial in generating - and over time retaining - sufficient interest in the proposed undertaking. Despite her earlier misgivings and lack of familiarity with the concept and practice of partnership-based local development, her association with this first public presentation of the initiative in her home country had committed her to its outcomes - and as Country Manager she was determined to succeed.

Nevertheless, what had occurred in Valga and in other public places across all the project regions in the Baltics was a demonstration of the importance of gaining the buy-in of these important groups of mainly local stakeholders early in the lifecycle of the programme. A negative response would have made it much more difficult to gain acceptance at a critical stage in securing the mandate. As project leaders, we needed the endorsement, relayed back to DFID through its local (embassy) networks, as much as we needed potential candidates for the partnerships. Their enrolment, however partial or conditional, as interested actors or observers, provided the means to our end – project communities prepared to experiment with the local partnership model.

4.3.1.4 Is túis maith leath na hoibre!

In those early promotional forays into the target areas, there were for the team, and in particular for the team leader, a number of “red lines” to defend around the concept, as agreed with the project financiers – its pro-poor focus, partnership approach, integrated strategies. Notions of ‘social capital’ building, drawn from bottom-up rural development practice in Northern Ireland and wider contemporary literature, informed our thinking. Yet there was a more or less conscious effort on our part, at this early stage, and on the advice of the Country managers (in all three countries), to underplay that aspect and to emphasise the more pragmatic and tangible benefits of partnership working. From the early reactions of participants in Estonia, it was clear that some of the language used to present the initiative, in particular, phrases and concepts that carried with them associations with the development lexique of the previous state-managed economy and society, were problematic and dissonant in the context of communication, dissemination and awareness-raising. Following the workshop and these early experiences in each country, there was much discussion within the team around possible changes to the way in which the project might be presented as it moved to the partnership forming stages. We resolved to ensure that the Estonian (as well as Latvian and Lithuanian) translators and interpreters would work with the team to find a more user friendly, practical language of development which would give meaning to the bottom-up and collaborative development experience in other countries without

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415 In all three countries there was a need to develop a common set of usable terms in the national language – although Estonian commentators were particularly sensitive on these issues.
creating the cultural and emotional hang-ups which some of the more literal expressions of common terms might generate.

More generally, the success of these early encounters depended on the ability of the team to project confidence, competence and a coherent proposition. In that respect, we had two relatively strong cards to play – the EU accession game, including our (project team) understanding of how this might play out over the next years and touching these rural communities (through Leader) - and the lived experience of local development communities in Northern Ireland, of which we made much, underlining much of the commonality with the three Baltic States. Just how confident, competent and coherent the offer might have been was undoubtedly called into question as we stumbled together over contingencies of practice over the course of the programme – and commented upon by at least one close observer “despite the formal reality in the documents, in practice the KEPP (BRPP in Estonia) was from the start, not rigourously clear or regimented ... structures were created whilst figuring out how this could be done and for what purpose”\textsuperscript{416}. But that’s another story, to be picked up in subsequent chapters. At this promotional and mobilisation stage in the programme, we had interpreted, brokered, negotiated, enrolled and made what seemed to be a fairly good start. It was crucial from here onwards to remain ‘on message’ through reports and presentations.

4.3.2 The Eastern Cape LED support experience

In this section, I shall try to explore through participant observation, recorded interviews and conversations, jotted notes as well as correspondence and document review, marking some of the salient episodes of the LED support programme, how perceptions were managed – or not managed. Specifically, I want to look at how the programme divided broadly into three camps – 1) projects and grants generation and delivery – 2) LED policy and institutional capacity development and 3) programme planners, resource managers and financial control – and how for much of the life of the programme, the last mentioned, technocratic programme management coalition (Finance and Contracts Unit (FCU) and Monitoring and Evaluation M&EA) was largely influential in shaping its course. In the assessment of the Head of Finance and Contracts, “Trevor (M&EA) was the key person – providing support to the FCU, in the struggle between the regions and the centre – the FCU in the fight along with Trevor against Fundiswa and David – the Team Leader/Programme Coordinator was sort of soft – Trevor was more decisive”\textsuperscript{417}.

4.3.2.1 Good projects – not so good projects

My arrival into the PCU as LED Policy and Institutional Adviser to work with the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (DEDEA) in late


\textsuperscript{417} Interview with Manuel - 24th March 2010.
2007 marked a further change within the PCU - and signalled a sharp contradiction with the early instruction from the then Task Manager (DECSA) that “this is not about capacity building, it’s about getting the money out on the streets”. The LED Policy position was newly created, made possible by the decision of the Contracting Authority and the development company to end the contract of Leader of the Project Generation Team, which freed up technical assistance days that would allow for my involvement. His early (and unplanned) departure from the programme was prompted by conflicting views over the direction the programme was taking.

The first year of the programme had been driven by an urgency to “get the money out”. In the words of the Operations Manager, “our ‘street cred’ depended on it”, or as expressed by the Project Generation Team Leader, “we had to get them (the applications and projects) out the door”. Within the team, there had been early concern about the quality of the applications generated in the course of the first two calls, which lacked “strategic focus”. The former Head of the Interim PCU, now Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser (and effectively resource manager within the PCU) criticised the Project Generation Team and Regional Fund Advisers for failing to use the value chain and local competitiveness studies, prepared during the interim phase. These were, he affirmed, intended to inform the project identification and generation process in line with the Provincial Growth and Development Plan. The approach adopted by the PGT Leader, was, argued the M&E, “like shaking the tree … and picking up whatever falls out….. ideas for a more strategic approach died when the transition period finished …. It was all bits and pieces from there”. When confronted with this assessment, looking back several years later and away from South Africa, the former PGT Leader more or less ridiculed the studies “there was some type of value chain between wool and packaging or something but it didn’t really blow my mind in terms of what came out and how it can be used”. Others, he recalled, were “very academic … development words … telling us what poverty is … no, you have to give us some pointers”. The dilemma, from his perspective, was that “we needed a policy framework and we couldn’t find one …. the public impression that I tried to create was to get as many projects in that were useful potentially so that we had a choice”. His “biggest worry was - we would pick very bad projects and we probably picked very bad projects in the first round as one does and as you say it’s trial and error … It wasn’t just get the money out the door”.

4.3.2.2 Challenging the grant fund focus

The first significant external challenge to the exclusive grant scheme management focus of the programme came in the report from the mid-term review team in early 2007. As described in Chapter Three section 3.3.2.1, that report, while acknowledging that the glass might be seen as being “half full or half empty” in
terms of progress at date, was quite direct and unequivocal in its criticism of the demand-driven nature of the grant funds. Without significant complementary capacity building, facilitation and training for poorer communities and beneficiaries, the authors argued, such groups are effectively excluded from the benefits of the programme. Overly complex procedures and eligibility conditions further compounded the problem. The lack of resource allocated to strengthening the institutions and local stakeholders to enable them to design and deliver local economic development over the longer term, was seen to undermine the sustainability of any impact.

The reviewers placed much of the responsibility for the strategic weaknesses at the door of the early programme designers – as well the “inadequate involvement ... due to low capacity” of LED partner institutions in the Provincial Government. However, it also clearly pointed to the over emphasis, within the delivery of the programme itself, on grant scheme management, underlining the narrow approach taken by the TA team in programme implementation to date. Support to potential beneficiaries was limited to “bringing project ideas into eligible application formats” and there was a “lack of support for stakeholder consultative processes that constitute the most important element of LED”. The evaluators draw attention to the contradiction between decentralised LED and the programme’s highly centralised competitive evaluation and decision-making processes. Their core recommendation was that the second tranche of programme funding (approximately €16m), scheduled for end 2007, should be conditional on a significant change in direction agreed between senior officials from the Contracting Authority (Provincial Treasury) and the Delegation, based on “the views and strategies of key partners”. To achieve this, they recommend that a “full participatory planning process” be engaged, comprising “a strategic planning workshop”, involving senior officials from the relevant departments in the Province, “followed by detailed action plan .... easily completed within a few months”.

4.3.2.2.1 Not so! .... Refuting the critics

Coming as it did within the first full year of operation of the programme, (in early 2007) the findings and recommendations of the independent review provided an opportunity to take stock and re-focus. Since the central criticism targeted the overall programme design, agreed by DECSA, signed off by national and provincial government and specified in the procurement documents, all the key parties could be potentially embarrassed. However, even more critically, in its main recommendation, the MTE posed a clear threat to drawing down the second tranche (€16m) and obviously the continued implementation of the programme. In its response to the report, the Contracting Authority, Provincial Treasury, writing to DECSA and the European Commission, on behalf of the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, strongly refuted the findings of the report citing “factual inaccuracies, methodological weaknesses, limited differentiation between operational and

design considerations, incomplete discussion of the role of grant fund instruments within an integrated approach to LED, limited consideration of the import of implementation timelines and contractual issues, use of the Financing Proposal as a reference point rather than the Financing Agreement, inconsistencies between the body of the report and the recommendations, insufficient recognition of procedural constraints, and failure to acknowledge positive results”. The response concluded: “we hold that the programme design for the Provincial Local Economic Development Support Programme, as initially conceived by the Provincial Government of the Eastern Cape and counterparts at DECSA, remains fundamentally sound. We are of the view that this design should continue to underpin the programme as we move into its second phase”.

The tone and content of the letter bear more than the hallmark of the PCU, as technical support to the Provincial Treasury, probably serving as scribe in this instance. By undermining the quality of the report and closing down the criticisms, the writers were ensuring that the short term interests of all parties – DECSA, National and Provincial Government, the development company and all the team members - were served. In the event, the second tranche funding was released by DECSA in December 2007 and the programme continued in a formal sense as it commenced. As highlighted in Chapter Three, the objectives of the programme, previously concentrating on the three funds, were recast to include a more pronounced focus on LED policy, institutional strengthening and capacity building.

4.3.2.3 An opportunity missed?

However, despite one of the central criticisms of the mid-term review report relating to the design of the logframe, these remained unchanged for the second phase. The exclusive focus on “job creation” as Purpose, had the effect, the mid-term report authors had argued, of concentrating solely on “economic development measures” and crowding out any pro-poor analysis or consideration. Of the four Result Areas detailed in the logframe, the first three related to the establishment and operation of the three grant funds, which allowed the TA team “to define its task as running the grant schemes rather than supporting local economic development in a holistic, integrated and comprehensive approach”.

While Phase Two might have effectively commenced – the perpetuation of Results 1-3 in the logframe still emphasised the delivery of three grant funds as the primary objectives and performance targets continued to be set against these. When asked about the decision not to change the logframe as the design construct for the programme when recasting the three pillars or focus areas that now constituted the new message of the Support to LED Programme:

1. Grant funds – for practice driven experimentation and learning;

424 The latter document – Financing Agreement – is the final legal document committing EU programme funds to the agreed project and based on the approved ToR.
426 Interestingly, the Final Report does not acknowledge the MTE as source of strategic refocus.
2. Institutional capabilities – for long term efficiency and LED sustainability;

The M&E Adviser warned that “you run the risk of altering the programme to such an extent as to endanger the outcomes and change the project”. Interestingly, he added, “for the DECSA results monitoring mission, we came out with flying colours”\textsuperscript{427}.

\textbf{4.3.2.4 An occasion to rethink local economic development}

As for the related Mid-Term Review recommendation that the programme should engage a participatory process for key partners in the province to determine their “views and strategies for the next stages of the programme”\textsuperscript{428}, the responsibility for defining the terms of reference for the assignment was delegated to the PCU and specifically to the Project Generation Unit – itself the object of much of the criticism of the MTR. Remarkably, these (the ToR), agreed by DECSA, stated that the purpose of the supplementary (framework) contract was “to strengthen the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) as the leading enterprise development organisation in the Eastern Cape …. to integrate its work with that of the DEAET & DHLG&TA\textsuperscript{429} as contextualised within the emerging provincial and national LED policy framework”. In doing so, the scope of any strategic redefinition of local economic development policy in the Province – as recommended in the MTR - was effectively reduced to a review of functions within the executive agency for enterprise development in the Department of Economic Development.

The task was contracted out – by the EC Delegation - through a Framework Contract\textsuperscript{430} to an independent consortium of consultancy companies – under the supervision of the Head of the Project Generation Unit, who had been nominated as Project Manager. Reading the final report of the assignment, one cannot but feel some sympathy with the framework contract project team. Referring to the plan to organise a participative process, they report, “When it ... proved to be very difficult to get the senior officials from ECDC, DEDEA and other stakeholders to attend workshops and meetings, the Project Manager decided that the LED Team concentrated their work on DEDEA and ECDC leaving out all other stakeholders and dropping the field workshops ... the Project Manager eventually decided that these workshops could be left out altogether if information could be gathered in some other way.”\textsuperscript{431} Much of the training specified in the terms of reference bore no relationship to the needs and current capacities of the presumed target groups –

\textsuperscript{427} Interview TM (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010. (The Results Oriented Monitoring ROM is designed to provide a brief snapshot on the implementation of an intervention at a given moment – unlike the more in-depth Mid-term Review).
\textsuperscript{428} European Commission - Mid Term review of the Programme of Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape – 2007:58.
\textsuperscript{429} Department of Environmental Affairs, Economy and Tourism (DEAET) subsequently Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (DEDEA); Department of Housing, Local Government and Traditional Affairs (DHLGTA), subsequently Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs (DLGTA).
\textsuperscript{430} The terms of reference estimated 160 days in total for the three result areas and envisaged a team of five experts (Team Leader, LED specialist, Banking and Finance, Finance and Legal and policy expert. None of the person-specs reference local pro-poor development. (estimated cost €180-€200,000).
nor to the requirements of a typical local development partnership in a province afflicted historically high rates of unemployment and poverty. Result 3, for example, required the team to:

“Prepare and organise training on the basis of the completed training needs assessment: the training should cover, but not be limited to, the following areas: 1) accounting review and financial analysis including: key ratios, income statement, balance statement, cash flow statement, forecasting, sensitivity analysis, NPV, IRR, risk assessment models based on discriminant analysis; 2) assessing the quality of financial and other type of information basing on full due diligence – also basing on case study of 2-3 former project submissions to the ECDC; 3) lending to different sectors; 4) collateral and security: myth and reality and other key legal aspects of loan finance; 5) loan portfolio management: identifying risks, monitoring of individual loans, problem loans, early signs of deterioration, recovery measures, strategies for handling problem loans, non-performing loans, non-performing portfolio, provisioning policy; 6) value at risk (VaR) – estimating losses on defaulted portfolio; 7) individual loan monitoring: data collection, processing and management.”

The subject areas specified were, the report writers complain, “far too advanced for 60-80% of intended participants who did not have the pre-requisite education in accounting and finance to properly understand financial statements”, which “created a serious problem for trainers …. It would have been such a simple and easy thing to check the training needs with the three senior managers ….. one wonders why it was not done”432.

By the time this report was finalised and circulated, the Leader of the Project Generation Team had left the programme. His successor, the Funds Adviser, who had also been involved in the preparation of the terms of reference, had been asked by the Team Manager in the Delegation for advice in drafting a reply to some of the issues raised in the report. There is little sense of any further reflection or second thoughts in the advice offered to DECSA – and certainly no apology. “The Terms of Reference are clear on the scope of the assignment. The project defines 3 result areas and certain milestones to be achieved and the report should be predominantly focused on what has been done on the ground in this regard. In the meantime the report focuses on issues not DIRECTLY pertinent to the scope of work”.433 The commentary goes on to criticise the “theoretical deliberations on LED” that are “not assignment specific”. Objectively, in addition to the failure to meet with all the key stakeholders, the report itself is very poorly drafted and difficult to read. It does, however, attempt to put forward a body of principles and practices that relate to more “integrated or holistic approaches to LED” than was the case in the LED Support programme as it was being delivered. However, the final comment in the advice offered by the incumbent project team to the Commission seems to shut down any wider consideration of a change in its

established approach – “because of the poor quality of the report, it has not been forwarded to all beneficiaries”.

What seems clear, once again, is the degree to which the interests of the various stakeholders - donor agency, ‘recipient-beneficiary’ (silent on the subject and absent from the discourse) and project team – converged to close an awkward chapter and move beyond potentially de-stabilising stage in the evolution of the project. The episode tends to confirm the validity of Mosse’s proposition that “(d)evelopment interventions are not driven by policy but by the exigencies of organisations and the need to maintain relationships”. 434

4.3.2.5   Missing the MTE

Confirmation of my part-time appointment as DEDEA LED Policy and Systems Adviser came with the adoption of the Rider/Addendum and the release of the second tranche of LED support in late 2007, operational from January 2008. For the next two years, I travelled almost every month from home in Ireland to the Eastern Cape, working on average ten days for each mission. While an exceptional opportunity to work in a policy field that I had considerable experience in – and enjoyed – the part-time nature of the contract, constant absences during which the programme inevitably moved on, was always a source of some frustration, confusion and running to catch up. Moreover, in retrospect, what is especially striking about the period, is the total lack of any structured or substantive discussion within the team around the findings of the mid-term review. It was as if the evaluation had never taken place. As a significant newcomer to the team, largely but not directly, as a consequence of some of the findings of that exercise, it would have seemed normal practice that I should be briefed on the conclusions and recommendations. Yet, I was not made aware of its existence – other than hearing half spoken complaints about the project generation component – centred on one individual (then departed). Looking back today, having read the MTE for the first time in mid 2016, I can indeed be critical of my own lack of enquiry, since a simple request would have sufficed for it to be made available. However, I can only speculate in hindsight that the combination of early timeline pressures to produce a report on LED agencies in the province, a reluctance as wary newcomer to ‘rock the boat’ by asking too many questions and the total absence of discussion of the MTE episode even in informal exchanges, saw me fully absorbed and interacting on the basis of the received and on-going programme agenda. It goes without saying that I regret wholeheartedly not having had access to such a useful tool in the conduct of my own work on the programme.

4.3.2.7   Delivering the funds and staying on message

436 Between September 2007 and January 2008, I had a special assignment to prepare a report on the legal and organisational structures of LED Agencies in the Eastern Cape.
The task for the development company was unambiguously articulated in the Terms of Reference. It was “to manage and operate three major grant schemes following procedures as outlined in Section 6 of EU Practical Guide .... (PRAG)”

In the end, that was essentially what was delivered. As we have seen, there were several attempts to adjust the course of action during the life-time of the programme – some external (as in the mid-term review) some more from inside. Indeed much of the legacy of the programme hinged on several outputs, not envisaged or specified in the terms of reference, which were initiated and championed by key stakeholders and members of the team. These included building, capacitating and consolidating local coordinating structures for LED through the District Support Teams (DST) – and support to the preparation of a provincial funding measure for LED, in part based upon a more integrated approach Local and Regional Economic Development (LRED). Each case attracted and was ultimately shaped by varying degrees of support from some, opposition from others. Both featured as significant outcomes in the final report, despite being low budget inputs compared with the grant funds. However, what one can draw from the interactions and episodes described in this section is a better appreciation of how the stratagems employed by well-placed individuals within the project team are deployed – over a period of time - to resist contestation and stay on message.

4.4 Part Four - Some Conclusions and Interim Reflections

Our starting hypothesis for this chapter suggests that in the ambiguity and confusion of ideas that characterise international development interventions, the better organised and networked actor shape the design, interpret the mandate and control, at least for a time, the official narrative. We have attempted to investigate how ideas with power are framed, debated and deployed to keep contending designs at bay – and how those most directly controlling the project agenda worked to ensure that the project remained ‘on message’, making the project ‘real’ in the eyes of its “interpretive community, a group of ‘believers’” even in the face of scepticism and indeed criticism and opposing narratives both inside and outside the project team.

4.4.1 Pay the piper and call the tune!

Development (or donor-aided) projects, Mosse reminds us, originate in the “political needs of Western development agencies”. In both the cases described in the chapter, we have seen how donor agencies, including those with no formal link to the intervention, seem to have been active participants in the policy debates which informed the broad parameters of the respective projects. This was all the more pronounced in the South African case, where several non-participant agencies played a prominent and proactive role in steering the initiative firmly in the
direction of economic and enterprise development and away from any notions of state-sponsored ‘bottom-up’, socially driven versions of local development. While somewhat less confrontational or pronounced in the smaller (in financial value) Baltics project, the donor front coalesced around the EU accession agenda and preparations for membership, in which DFID sought to make relevant its Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to tackling rural poverty in the transition countries. Eyben remarks on the ‘parochialism’ of “transnational network” of the resident ‘development community’, “in the sense that it is based on a particular set of ideas as to what development is and how it should be attained” have a certain currency in both situations. Certainly, the social relationships which bind these “like-minded ‘development professionals’ together create “a political presence … with capacity to exert patronage … in and outside recipient governments” constituted a significant force in shaping the direction of the projects. By the same token, she points out, those models for development “in support of a globally established agenda” are sustained by the “sociality” of relationships with “key individuals from the recipient country … (local staff, senior officials from the host administration) with whom they share an interest to keep disbursing the money”.

The freelance development professionals recruited by the donor body to articulate the rationale and specification of the job to be done, whether academics or consultants whose livelihoods depend on “a series of (short term) contracts measured in days, weeks and occasionally months”, work under acute pressure of short deadlines and, frequently, multiple and contradictory judgements. Repeat business depends on being skilled in the arts of interpretation, brokering and negotiating in ways that maintain the coherence of the donor agenda while satisficing local interests. Preferred solutions place a premium on pragmatism and project management issues, while ideology is concealed in common sense (‘non-political’) economic development approaches. Our cases demonstrate the precarious nature of such assignments for the development worker where failure implies rejection and the potential loss of future work opportunities, while success is often the product of social relations and alliances around in-favour ideologies and the ability to master the “master metaphor”, legitimised by reference to established global policy frameworks.

Once articulated and agreed, the terms of reference become “the battleground” for development companies competing for the contract to implement the project. A similar ‘distant’ contest, played out in company offices, ensues – involving skilled writers, strategic planners and project workers in parsing, interpreting, sometimes

\*441* It must be said that our two case-study projects, as well as Mosse’s IBRFP, which has provided a conceptual and practical framework for much of our analysis and reflection, originated in the years before the Paris and Accra accords which set out to transform the political relations of the international aid community, placing the emphasis on donor support for recipient country strategies.


even challenging the assumptions and pre-scripts of the ToR, but always with a view to shaping winning ‘a solution’ which ‘gives them (the contracting authority) what they think they want’ while leaving scope and room for further negotiations and adaptation in the project field. First, win the contract/mandate – then interpret and translate.

4.4.2 Ideas with power – alliances, divisions and rejections

Contract/mandate won – let the contest continue! As Mosse, Long and other writers comment at length, the inherent ambiguity in the core project texts – the terms of reference, the logframe, the proposal – creates sufficient room for manoeuvre on the part of the different actors involved, leading to ongoing debates, discussion and potential for conflict within the team and between the team and significant others (counterparts and clients). “Development success”, he argues, is “not objectively verifiable but socially produced” (ibid). Through such an insight, we can begin to understand that it is not a question of how well articulated and argued an idea or how well-founded the approach may be, but rather the “idea with power”445 is ultimately product of the social relationships and strength of the alliances that different actors can forge in enrolling others to their vision and sense of purpose – “so sustain(ing) long chains of translation” (Latour 1996)446.

Seen from such a perspective, to suggest, as has been done, that ‘a good team leader can make the project his/her own’, lays emphasis on the ability of the team leader to work within the ambiguity to broker a sufficiently coherent and cohesive interpretation around which alliances can be forged. In our two cases, the isolation of both incoming team leaders is fairly evident. However, in the Baltics programme, starting from an idea that had wider ideological currency and established practice (as in the EU Leader partnership model), and with critical backing from key internal stakeholders, it was possible to connect institutional and personal agendas and to build networks of supporters, consolidating belief in the policy model and marginalising the opposition. In the Eastern Cape experience, on the other hand, the ‘pro-poor’ interpretation of the project aim by the incoming team leader found little favour either with stakeholder institutions or among her team colleagues, most, if not all of whom, favoured a pro-business model for LED. The stand-off seemed to lead to break-down in the level of trust and belief within the team and ultimately to the team leader’s exclusion given her failure to forge collaborative and sustaining internal or external linkages – and the inexorable build-up of pressure to advance the project and impatience to see early results (money ‘on the streets’ and projects supported). In the light of the apparent fervour around grant management as a policy for LED, among institutions and individual team members, any non-conforming team leader would have likely been just as outnumbered.

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The alliances and divisions within the teams and their wider groups of supporters reflect different and sometimes but not always competing sets of ideas on how to implement. In both contexts above, as frequently cited in the literature (c.f. Long 2001; Mosse 2005; Varley and Curtin 2006; O’Reilly 2012 and others), the dividing line, in ‘local development’ programmes, tends to be between, on the one side, those who place the emphasis on building local capacity for ‘bottom-up’ development – and those who were driven by the more pragmatic imperatives of formal implementation, activities, outputs, targets and spending. Such alignment is far from untypical as projects move from design and inception into “implementation regime and its accounting system”447 from where the social production of success depends more and more on the ability of the project team leadership to agree and sustain a coherent narrative of purpose, auto-critique and achievement over the course of the project.

4.4.3 Enrolment – getting the story right and staying on message

Once again, Mosse’s depiction of projects as places where there is “no respite from the work of creating interest and keeping alive”448 rings true in the cases studied here, and in my recollections and perceptions of the experience of constantly working to create “reliable interpretive community, a group of ‘believers’” throughout the life-cycle of both projects. In the Baltics programme, the relative ambivalence within the DFID operational unit for central and eastern Europe as to the shape of an intervention that would be coherent with the Department’s new pro-poor SLA policy, coupled with a benign disinterest on the part of national authorities, created the space for an organised idea, driven by an organised group, towards a more-or-less turn-key outcome. Nevertheless, in the early stages of the intervention, crafting language and concepts to bridge potential conceptual gaps between donor expectations and attachment to (SLA) brand - and the project ‘ideology’ was critical to brokering that space. That exercise also helped to fashion the reporting template against which the project’s future progress would be monitored – and which reflected the agreed changes to the project design and methodology.

The social production of success of any project requires a consistent and ongoing effort in relationship building with ‘critical bystanders’, which includes, as in the case of the BRPP, the diplomatic arm – or “local cell”449 of the donor agency. More importantly, ‘success’ was utterly dependent on the ability of the project team in the early stages ‘to sell’ a sufficient sense of belief in the potential of the intervention to deliver benefits and shared interests to “a widening circle of individuals and institutions”450, if only in the first instance, willing to give the benefit

of the doubt. However ambiguous, uncertain and unclear the next stages – and indeed the project outcomes – might be in the minds of the project team members, the enrolment of these critical others would depend on the project team presenting a coherent and united front.

The confusion created by an excessively narrow set of project goals and objectives in the Eastern Cape, combined with a lack of national policy guidelines, a partisan and academic debate around the meaning and shape of Local Economic Development in the post-apartheid context, ensured – at least for the initial period - that the controlling idea was grant fund management and the controlling group were the grant fund managers. During the early roll out of the grant funds, given the apparent lack of an agreed policy framework, early contradictions emerged between, on the one hand, those supporting a more ‘strategic’ approach based on value chain studies and, on the other, the project generation team, who sought to “get as many proposals in as possible, so as to have choice” (not exactly ‘shaking the tree’). While this somewhat closed debate continued within the team, a more fundamental challenge was wielded from without – on the very grant-focused design of the programme and the way in which it was implemented. What is significant about MTE criticism, over and above the substantive, is the concerted and robust manner in which all the key stakeholders implicated in the follow-through of the programme, refuted the findings (and effectively the recommendations) to ensure that the funds continued to flow and the essential design remained intact. The de facto programme leadership were able to take advantage of this complicity to control the narrative and ensure that little or no debate took place. The report was essentially sidelined. Nevertheless, some of the changes introduced, indirectly as a result, had the effect of opening up new fronts within the team and in the wider policy community. The contest with the development aims of the programme remained largely unresolved over the period.

4.4.4 Looking forward

In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the social life of the project team as it seeks to maintain policy coherence in the face of multiple and often competing interpretations and continuing ambiguities – adapting and adjusting to the continual remoulding in response to “the struggles between different individuals and social groups”451 involved in the enterprise.

CHAPTER 5

Interface II

Rehearsing and Re-interpreting Mandates – Ideas, Alliances and Relationships within the Project Team
5.0 Introduction and General Discussion

Following on from the anatomy of that phase of an intervention characterised by the struggles for ideas, direction and control that define the dominant ideology (and strategy) of a project which was the subject of Chapter Four, this chapter focuses on the interfaces at a more operational level, where the contests for choices are played out on a more or less day-to-day basis. Once again, using a range of tools – including participant observation, interviews and correspondence with key actors, document analysis and recollections – we attempt to reconstruct some of the critical interactions involving the project teams, their networks and, to a limited extent, the intended beneficiaries during early encounters in setting up the project. We identify and examine how the lifeworlds and lived experiences of some of the actors more closely connected (in the sense of being closer to the formal decision-making processes – or in the project’s chain of command) shape the design and functioning of the implementation mechanisms and affect the outcomes. We also attempt to understand better the relationship between the project team and the actors who serve the function of intermediary, connecting project resources to the purpose of the pro-poor project and to the target groups of beneficiaries. In it, we try to explore, from an actor perspective, how “the rules” are presented, interpreted, applied, manipulated, subverted and resisted by various stakeholders operating much closer to the “frontline”. We also seek to gain some insights into which interests are served, who, in the long run, benefits and who pays the costs. In so doing, we also explore whether there is any substantive difference between traditional (top-down) development interventions and more participative (bottom-up) approaches in terms of the involvement of target beneficiary groups in the delivery of the project. Looking at both cases, we want to consider how applicable in a more general sense is Raymond Apthorpe’s contention that the project staff of a (sustainable village) development project “are its principal beneficiaries”452?

In selecting from some rich seams in both projects, I have tried, as in Chapter Four and later in Chapter Six, to de-construct sets of interfaces that constitute, in different ways, what Long calls “arenas”. These mark out broadly common “social and spatial locations where actors confront each other, mobilise social relations and deploy discursive and other cultural means for the attainment of specific ends, including that of perhaps simply remaining in the game”453. The previous chapter investigated the interactions among the actors and institutions responsible for the definition of the goals, interpretation of purpose and design of the interventions. Chapter Six focuses more on the relationship between the project team and the host administrations and to a lesser extent on ‘final beneficiaries’. The context for consideration in the current section concentrates essentially on the dynamic within the teams themselves and later with their intermediaries.

I intend in the chapter to probe and understand better some of what Mosse, quoting Scott, calls the “hidden transcripts (Scott 1990b)”of some of the project

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workers, including my own, in order to “grasp the nature of agency (from below)”\textsuperscript{454} or at least from somewhere ‘off-stage’ - on the attribution of benefits from the intervention – and to gain some insight into how, as project workers, we “muddle (our) ways through difficult scenarios”\textsuperscript{455}. One former colleague, in another unrelated project, my first experience in international development\textsuperscript{456}, would often say when responding to unexpected external changes or potential issues and challenges in the project environment, half in humour, it must be said and always with a lightening effect – “let’s get to the big picture – how does this affect me?” Nevertheless, it was ever a constant reminder of the need to keep personal motivations in view. Lewis links such motivations to the complexities of professional identity underpinned by the life histories of international (and national) development workers and how these “work to construct and reproduce as well as to subvert, these ... dominant policy models”\textsuperscript{457}. More immediate pressures, including security of tenure (or lack of) in a somewhat precarious and intermittent labour market, can also colour motivations, perceptions and spoken (and unspoken) views of team members. Apthorpe comments on the WB contracted consultant who could “not afford to upset the Bank” and the attitudes of the some of the local project team who chose to stay silent on an evaluation issue rather than jeopardise their employment when “there was no other work around”\textsuperscript{458}. We shall endeavour therefore to explore how the complexities and the insecurities of different lifeworlds affect the comportment of international development workers and their national team colleagues, paying particular attention to how these can impinge on project outcomes.

Our purpose in the chapter therefore is to draw on a number of episodes along the interfaces generated through the two local development case study projects with a view to identifying and examining evidence that supports or negates the above contention\textsuperscript{459} – or alternatively which raises new perspectives, insights and further questions. The quite different ideologies (or rhetorical narratives) underpinning both initiatives – each aiming to tackle and reduce rural poverty and to create jobs – can be quite simplistically characterised here as, on the one hand, people-centred and, on the other, project-driven\textsuperscript{460}. Whereas the discourse of participation stresses the importance of sustained and longer term effort to build local capacity for “autonomous” decision making, top-down grant fund programmes are frequently, as we have seen earlier, under immediate and early pressure to gain credibility by “getting the money onto the streets”, to produce results and deliver “quick wins” on the basis of competitive selection. Yet the reality of project management would suggest that the pressure for early evidence of progress is an integral feature of any development project critical path, irrespective of the type of intervention – and part of the inevitable and constant ‘angst’ of development project management.

\textsuperscript{456} European Integration Programme in Latvia 1997-99 (EU enlargement/accession process in CEE).
\textsuperscript{459} That project workers are the project’s principal beneficiaries (Apthorpe).
\textsuperscript{460} See discussion Ch 3 page ... which deals more comprehensively with both projects and their wider environments, including the dominant policy and ideological context.
and managers. Development specialists, of whichever hue, grant-fund managers or ‘bottom-up’ enablers, tend to march to the rhythm of approaching deadlines and milestones, anticipating achievements or pre-empting delays, to be chronicled, interpreted, rationalised and set against the pre-defined measures and timelines of performance in the next report.

5.0.1 Project classes and the social life of projects

Our subject is especially the “social life” of the projects, the effect of the ongoing struggle within the project for ideas, influence and legitimacy among the different actors and groups with very different lifeworlds involved day-to-day in the implementation of the programmes, “operat(ing) with considerable autonomy from one another”461. We attempt to explore their manoeuvring and positioning relative to the project resources and influence over the direction of the intended pro-poor interventions. In particular, we will turn our attention, once again, to the development professionals, both international and national, recruited and mobilised to put into effect the various components of the programme. The chapter also looks more closely at the relationships between international, national and local team members – the project class462 and the compradores463, once again, with a view to appreciating better how these might shape perceptions of the project environment and affect its delivery. Some of these actors are already familiar to the reader. They have been centre stage in Chapter Four in setting the direction and on-going course and will again feature prominently in Chapter Six in their interactions with counterparts in the regional and local administrations.

The central permeating perspective from which the chapter, and indeed much of the dissertation, is written, is that of the ‘project team’, made up of independent contracted-in project workers, international, national and local. Many of these operate within the core delivery team itself, others, as we have seen, intervene from outside that compact, sometimes upstream in shaping direction and preparing the ground – as was the case with the ToR drafters in Chapter Four, other times downstream, as intermediaries in the delivery chain, connecting with the beneficiaries, some of whom we will encounter later in this chapter as well as in Chapter Six. All share, as members of a particular segment of the ‘project class’ linked by common purpose, a responsibility, contracted-out by the development agency, assigned to the team, for the outcomes and impact of the intervention – good, bad or merely indifferent. In structuring the chapter then, I have tried, as far as possible, to separate out the layers of actors and activities in an effort to appreciate better some of the shaping factors, complexities and relationships occurring in their separate operational spheres or “arenas”464. Yet, by the same token, the entire story line is written through with a deep sense of the

interdependency between all the actors in their various roles and spaces in producing the outcomes, unintended and otherwise.

5.0.2 Structure of the chapter

In Part One, the primary focus will be on the dynamics shaping the functioning of the Project Team, comprising that group of project workers, national and international, who have been recruited and mobilised for the duration of the intervention, or parts thereof, and who interact on a more or less day-to-day basis in the management and roll-out of the programme. It also looks at some of the challenges involved in enrolling those part-time professionals recruited to provide technical assistance to support the introduction of pro-poor development initiatives responding to local needs. In an emergent and frequently contested policy context, where direction and approach is not clear and fixed from the outset, (the real world of ‘project land’), project workers must interpret and reshape policy prescription in practice, more often “muddling through”. Project life is about making good, creating room for manoeuvre, without always being clear on what is being delivered. Whatever the ulterior motivation, the project worker must secure his/her position in team if he/she is to remain in the game.

In Part Two, we turn our attention to the ‘In-Betweeners’ – those individuals who by virtue of their positions in the relevant knowledge networks in the wider environment – local administration – business community – non-government organisations – become integrally connected with development outcomes produced by the intervention.

5.1 Part One - Innovating or Just ‘Muddling Through’?

Once again, we draw attention to the distinction between our subject cases (CEE countries in transition and post-apartheid South Africa) and those typically referenced in the development sociology literature. Most of the latter involve international development project teams in what might be described as ‘Third World’ countries where difference and deference may have been more pronounced. The logic driving the UK government intervention in the Baltics was that of EU enlargement and integration of policy frameworks and practices in rural development. In the South African case, the EU support for LED programme was part of its development cooperation with that country to address the legacy and after-effects of apartheid. Having said that, many of the characteristics of external development intervention, as we have seen and will see further - of ‘superior’ know-how looking down at ‘deficient’ ways and systems, of power and authority over the ‘powerless’, of relationships between internationals and nationals, ‘them and us’, insiders and outsiders – are in many ways comparable.

What I want to understand better through the lens of this chapter is how the project classes, whether international cosmopolitan development professionals or indigenous elites, or simply the journeyman/woman project workers, relate the aims of the intervention back to their personal constructs and lifeworlds. Mosse
suggests that “policy ideas provide the idiom for alliances and divisions within ... project teams”465. As we have begun to see in Chapter Four, the lifeworlds of individual project workers and the perceptions and worldviews they generate give rise to coalitions and camps, (e.g. in the Baltics case, the Northern Irish rural development experience – or, in the Eastern Cape, how identity and culture among team members to some extent mirrored divisions in relation to interpretations of project purpose).

5.1.1 A new type of rural development actor in post-soviet Baltic states

Much has already been said in Chapter Four about the ideological underpinning and capture of the outcomes, results and approach of the BRPP - the battles (and skirmishes) that took place along the way towards the gradual acceptance of the partnership model within the team and among significant stakeholder groups. The focus on locally based partnership structures as the primary motor for development planning and investment carried with it significant implications for the technical assistance personnel to be recruited – both international and national. The final report for the programme declares assertively:

“Integrated rural development, driven by local people working in partnerships, needs a new type of development worker with new skills, understanding, insights and empathy. These are not agronomists, economists, social workers, small and medium sized enterprise experts, town planners, local government or central government – yet many of them may well have background in any one and more of these disciplines. The new rural development worker understands the need for integrated thinking to tackle the complex and hard-to-grasp problems facing many rural partnerships. The new rural development worker understands strategic problem solving and programming, facilitates collaborative decision-making and initiative, seeks active engagement in the development process rather than merely trying to control from outside”466.

5.1.1.1 Boys and girls for the jobs!

The early dismissal of more conventional sectoral expertise which followed acceptance by DFID of the partnership-based approach in the inception months of the programme had created something of a dilemma for the contracting company. Our winning proposal had been built around a pool of experienced international development consultants with profiles to match a typical Sustainable Livelihoods Approach with its emphasis upon “a few core building blocks like enterprise development, income diversification and infrastructure, ...”467 The proposed model was essentially a small grant scheme organised through regular calls for proposals and based on community ideas for projects generated through PRA methodologies. Instead, the more ‘open-ended’ “process” approach – structured multi-stakeholder

partnerships, local area strategies to tackle rural poverty, community development facilitation – which was finally adopted during the inception period required a new type of development worker with new skills.

The logic and the substance of the Inception Report reflected closely the experiences of building partnership based local development in Northern Ireland over the previous decade. It was clear to us that if we were to target, manage, coordinate and quality control our large pool of international (mainly UK) short term experts, our future project teams should be recruited from the same school of experience. Many of the people closely involved with that distant, ‘foreign’ effort would be mobilised to share the know-how and the lessons learned with the Baltic partnerships.

While our licence to recruit opened up new and unexpected project opportunities for a number of rural development practitioners from Northern Ireland over the following three years, the hidden effect was in the withdrawal of gainful employment from project workers who had accepted conditional commitments to work on the project and had planned accordingly. Such is the insecure and intermittent career path of the freelance international development worker both long and short term – ever juggling commitments, offers and prospects in an effort to keep the pipeline and order book active with as little unintended downtime on the calendar. I had direct personal experience several years later. Having ‘signed up’ to a substantial input to a European Integration project in Kosovo, after weeks of silence my intuitive presentiment grew that there had been a change in plan. In the first week in January, I learned in the space of a phone call that a key stakeholder, with whom I had had several exchanges, in the recipient institution had asked that I be replaced. In the circumstances, at this early stage in the project, the project director, with whom I had previously worked and would do again, had little room for manoeuvre. And I had even less. Instead of going to work, I had now to look for new projects to replace eighty days that year and beyond. I understand and fully appreciate retrospectively the disappointment and deception of those who had been promised and who had looked forward to supporting rural livelihoods in the Baltics in the earlier part of the decade. Faced with such precarious futures, many project workers seek to establish close links with preferred development contractors and burnish CVs fit for many purposes.

Recruiting the new type of rural development worker domestically in the Baltics generated a different set of project management challenges in all three countries. Between the announcement of the award of contract in May 2000 and the beginning of the inception period in September that same year, each of the country team leaders had been busy recruiting local experts from across their respective networks. In the absence of any agreed or even partially defined job specifications, all three sought to draw on their previous involvement in rural development projects to identify potential short-term team members with the skills and experience likely to be required. Most of them had been working on the PHARE pre-accession programme and actions to anticipate the introduction of “Europeanised

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468 Same project director as for the South African programme.
rural territorial development system”\textsuperscript{469}. They were post graduates, sometimes from the recently established business schools, at ease in the transition to the market economy, some so confident in their intellectual contribution to that effort that they sought copyright protection on half-sketched concepts\textsuperscript{470}. As individual members of their national “project class” and related networks, they could point to successful track record, achievement and reputation among their peers. Had we adopted the original SLA project generation model, their skills set would have been quite appropriate.

5.1.1.2 Teaching new tricks

However, once the BRPP direction was settled, the next significant challenge would be to enrol these recruits into the policy and practice of the partnerships programme to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. In designing the intervention, we had anticipated this need, sought and received approval to use project resources to invest in skills building within the team – although the proposal was initially queried by DFID and the contracting company. It would normally be expected that experts taken on to provide services – and paid fees – would have the skills necessary, but in the circumstances, acknowledging the level of innovation proposed and lack of relevant ‘local’ experience in partnership based local development, approval for in-team training was granted. In addition to the succession of team workshops in the three countries over the first months, core recruits (partnership and strategic planning facilitators and those engaged to undertake action research) were invited to join the Country Team Leaders and international team in a study tour to Northern Ireland to hear and see at first hand the practice and thinking behind rural development in the region. Years later, one of the Country Team Leaders, taking stock of the experience gained, lessons learned and the relatively high number of fellow-travellers lost to the cause of the partnership programme over the three year initiative, commented wryly that “only one of the ‘core recruits’ (out of seven) who travelled with us to Belfast” was still with the BRPP at the end of 2003. Fortunately, others had joined to take their places.

It was to be expected that some of this target group of qualified and experienced free-lance consultants would be in demand for services on other projects and would move on before the end of the project – bringing, we might hope (and claim some credit for), new technical assistance skills and perspectives from the work on BRPP. However, their departure – and that of a number of others who joined subsequently and also left job unfinished - in most cases was accompanied by a sense of disillusionment and deception – on all sides. As project leaders, enrolling these mediators from the ‘project class’ into the objects and purpose of the BRPP proved more difficult than expected and frustrating. For a number of those who came, saw and departed, the process around partnership development and participatory strategic planning proved more ‘difficult’ than they felt prepared to invest in. Their ‘exposure’ to the more open-ended non-directive facilitated

\textsuperscript{469} Kovách I & Kučerová E – the Project Class in Central Europe – European Society for Rural Sociology – Blackwell – 2006.

\textsuperscript{470} Discussion on community development as factor in rural regeneration in Lithuania in 2001.
reflection in the partnerships, where there was ambiguity about who knew or ‘owned’ the ‘right’ answers, the partnership or the team, seemed to create a sense of discomfort and insecurity in relation to their perception of self as a ‘professional’. The BRPP emphasis on placing the partnership in the driving seat for every stage of the preparation of the local area strategy, seemed to raise, for a number of recruits, what Long, quoting Kronenburg (1986), calls the “dilemma of ‘empowerment’”. Many would-be project workers struggled with notions of ‘free-will’ and “emancipation” against the more regular practice of ‘doing for’ or ‘manipulating’ and manoeuvring towards the ‘right’ conclusion.

5.1.1.3 Getting on with it – when there’s nowhere else to go!

Over the course of the three years, therefore, the reality of implementation and project management in all three countries was “muddling through”. Success was far from guaranteed and as more local project workers fell by the wayside than stayed through to the end, the challenge of achievement, made more acute by diminishing resources and fast approaching deadlines, placed enormous strain on the three Country Team Leaders. In one case, when it became apparent that most of the fees days allocated to the preparation of local area strategies had been used by one part-time consultant before even the first local area strategy had been prepared, the CTL singlehandedly took on the task, over and above her project management responsibilities, to facilitate all three partnerships toward the preparation (and early implementation) of qualifying local area plans. A more than substantial accomplishment – made from “muddling through”. A second CTL had a somewhat different but none the less problematic experience in enrolling and mobilising the new rural development project workers. During the first two years, she would regularly – and in high hopes - introduce me to the most recent enthusiastic recruit – only to part company shortly after in greater frustration and sometimes acrimony due to his/her failure to deliver the service expected. She refused to pay (for services not satisfactorily rendered) and as a result had a substantial war chest of fee days from which to draw when finally she had identified and recruited the consultants with the appropriate skills sets and aptitudes for learning in the latter part of the programme – although ever at risk of simply running out of time.

5.1.1.4 Innovate ... and see how it goes!

We will return to the issue of facilitating partnership based decision-making in Part Two but for the moment these reflections help us to understand some of the contingencies, pressures and stresses that are almost an integral part of project implementation – particularly in the context of more innovating interventions. Looking back, it must seem foolhardy and indeed reckless to propose an approach to sustainable rural livelihoods that depended so heavily on competencies and an affinity with pro-poor participatory approaches when that capability and know-how was in such short supply in the public, private and academic sectors. The student anthropologist, who spent considerable time with the project in Estonia during the research phase of her PhD thesis, comments wisely of the programme design that “as additional structures were created, many (...) went through periods of remarkable uncertainty and self-doubt ... many of the concepts were not fully understood even by those involved as experts”\textsuperscript{473}. Her observation seems well founded and reflects the uneven emergence of a different approach to the development of rural communities at a time of significant transition and discontinuity in the wider project environment. The BRPP final report acknowledges the journey:

“It was not without difficulty that each of the Country Team Leaders ... built their respective teams, as we struggled, together, to share our understanding of participative strategic area-based development – and more pertinently – how to apply such an understanding in the real world. That there is today a part of the consultancy community in the three countries capable of working in this field, is largely due to their efforts”\textsuperscript{474}.

The Country Team Leaders were what Long, quoting Röling (1988:54), calls the “knowledge managers”\textsuperscript{475}. All three were masters at connecting theory and the ideology (as in the model) through to practice and practitioners in their own autonomous social worlds, "drawing upon (their) existing knowledge repertoires and absorbing new information", all the time validating, judging its acceptability, its usefulness, before disseminating their interpretation of that information. Collectively, the CTLs took a project that was in many ways “characterised by ambiguous and conflicting goals, interests and procedures and by hazy and shifting boundaries”\textsuperscript{476}. By the end of the process, we had a clearer idea of the profile of the new rural development project worker than was the case at the outset – and much of the programme’s effort was dedicated to building an administrative and consultancy community in the three countries capable of working in this field – a new project class “with all its distinguishing features”\textsuperscript{477}.

\textsuperscript{473} Annist A - Seeking Community in post-Soviet Estonian centralised villages – Chapter 4 Coming of development – rise of community – PhD dissertation – University College London – 2006:174
\textsuperscript{474} DFID - Baltic States: Rural Livelihoods Project - Final Report – November 2003:15
\textsuperscript{475} Long N. - Development Sociology - Actor Perspectives - Knowledge, Networks and Power – Routledge 2001:173
\textsuperscript{476} Long N. - Development Sociology - Actor Perspectives - Knowledge, Networks and Power – Routledge 2001:173-175
\textsuperscript{477} Kovách I & Kučerová E – the Project Class in Central Europe – European Society for Rural Sociology – Blackwell – 2006:7
5.1.2 A new type of local (rural) development actor on the frontline in post-Apartheid South Africa?

To look then more closely at the project class associated with the EU support for local economic development in the Eastern Cape, there is an predictably close – but not total – connection between the profile of project team members and the fairly prescriptive design of a top-down managerialist design of the intervention. Whether that profile amounted to an entry point or aptitude for the formation of a ‘new type of local development actor’ we shall attempt to explore in the next section. We shall try to gain some insights into and to understand better how some of those recruited under such premises “muddled through” and how these decisions might have impacted on delivering pro-poor local development.

In Chapter Four, we have seen how, despite the fairly clear-cut definition of requirement and tone of the terms of reference, recruitment and retention of key experts proved to be problematic over the course of the programme. The nominee for the team leader position was a South African ‘pro-poor policy specialist’, who after only a short time in post, was side-lined at least partly due to significant policy divergences with several key players in the project team and the dominant reaffirmation of the competitive grant-scheme management focus of the programme. One can easily imagine the tensions, frustrations and the insecurity caused by such obvious disruption in the core leadership team early in the implementation period, inevitably influencing performance in other parts of the programme.

Nevertheless, opposition to the almost exclusively ‘pro-business’ grant-scheme design of the programme grew both internally and externally, during the first years. It was the PCU in the first place, in the context of the Inception Report, which pointed out that “… the grant mechanism … (was) not ideal for meeting the needs of the weakest groups”\textsuperscript{478}. The mid-term review exercise pointed up the unsuitability of an approach based on demand-driven grant schemes when the structures, systems and capacity were patently inadequate at provincial level (policy and programmes), at municipal and local level (facilitation, coordinating, monitoring) and at community beneficiary level (writing “bankable” LED proposals). “Much more work and capacity building”, they argued, needed to be done to “identify partnerships (between private sector companies and associations, non-government organisations and local capacity building service providers) to facilitate and to support partnerships to identify and address strategic “economic gaps, linkages and opportunities”\textsuperscript{479}. While the overall report was rejected by the Provincial Government at the time, the new project leadership, as we have seen in Chapter Four, successfully motivated for the inclusion of a greater effort and investment as a programme objective - building capacity for LED at provincial, municipal (District/region) and local levels as a new programme objective.

\textsuperscript{478} A Programme Coordination Unit to manage the implementation of the Local Economic Development Support Programme in the Eastern Cape Programme - Inception Report – Inception Report – November 2005.

\textsuperscript{479} Mid-Term Review of the Programme of Support to LED in the Eastern Cape – 2007:viii.
“... the original programme design had been weak in its articulation of the institutional platform necessary to underpin ... a programme facilitated and supported by public institutions.” (Final Report 2011:14).

Even with this, the three fund pillars of the programme, now collapsed into one programme objective, continued to command the major bulk of funding available – and the technical assistance support to handle them. In effect, by 2008, the Programme Coordination Unit, including the Finance and Contracts Unit and the Project Generation Team, counted twenty four members, of whom three were administrative staff, nineteen, including one part-time international, worked more or less fully on grant competitions and supporting projects awarded – and two related to policy and institutional issues - the Programme Coordinator/Team Leader who also served as Institutional and Policy Adviser for Local Government and me as part-time (50%) LED Policy and Systems Adviser, working with DEDEA. The headcount for project support does not include three-four evaluators who were contracted in to support the provincial Evaluation Committee assess applications after each call.

5.1.2.1 On the glass-fronted frontline

Those team members working closest to the target beneficiary communities were the Regional Fund Advisers – operating from decentralised offices, often in provincial government or municipal buildings – across all six districts/regions in the province. They were recruited in early 2006 through public advertisement for an initial two year appointment in “a 5 year programme to support the implementation of the PGDP and its LED component across the province through grant schemes”. Applicant RFAs were expected to have “… ideally ... a degree in economics, business or social sciences and at least 5 years’ work experience in the management of economic, community or private sector development programmes” with specific experience in, among other aspects, “(w)orking with and managing the interface between the Programme and numerous stakeholder groups; (m)unicipalities and the IDP system; business plan development and project development”480. The image of the RFA as depicted in the advertisement is that of the young, upwardly mobile professional, (male) not at all out of place in the corridors and walkways of any of the large glass-fronted consultancy companies in South Africa’s “first world economy” – or indeed, for that matter, in the host institution, the Eastern Cape Development Corporation. How they might or might not connect with rural and township dwellers and informal market traders in some of the poorest parts of South Africa would be another question.

480 Published advertisement for Regional Fund Advisers – start of 2006.
Figure 5.1 Stairway to (local development) success?

The accompanying graphic conveys an understanding within the team, around the belief that the RFAs were about “enterprise development” and business consultancy – with little reference in the text to the socio-economic realities facing communities in remote rural parts of South Africa and the Eastern Cape. Nor is there an acknowledgement of the poverty reduction goal of the LED Support programme whatever strategies might be employed to achieve these. For his part, the Head of the Project Generation Team was of the view that “the recruitment process … generated a very interested team” and in relation to their performance “Overall I was very happy. They were a very stable team … they stayed there up until I left – no resignations and no reasons for anything of that nature”. He “liked the recruitment process”. In the event, they had “some 200 applications, maybe more … and the funny thing is the team was fully colour-coded according to South African rules – but it came out like that – they didn’t influence it. So you know, the white males and black females and all the funny points - and that came out of the process”.

Given the prevailing confusion and contestation over the meaning of LED in the Province, including within the core programme management team (in the Programme Coordination Unit), it is hardly surprising that there was little clarity within the group. The former head of Project Generation recalled “we really dropped them into the deep end for the LGSF first call … they had to understand very quickly what was going on – understand the differentiation between the different funds – which wasn’t always clear to us…”.

The core function of the RFAs, particularly during the first years of the programme, revolved around promoting awareness of the programme within the target communities, identifying likely projects to be supported and working with beneficiary groups/applicants to prepare proposals to be submitted for evaluation. According to the development company’s representative in South Africa and at the time responsible for overseeing the LED Support Programmes, “the RFAs had very uneven profiles – and

481 Following selection, the initial RFA team comprised four black and two white members, four female and two male, all South Africans.
483 Local Government Support Fund – one of the other two funds managed by the Programme alongside the Local Competitiveness Fund.
were asked to take strategic decisions and they were simply not up to it\textsuperscript{485}. A provincial government official working in the Department for Economic Development was critical of the lack of a pro-poor focus and complained that “they (RFAs) were targeting applicants who already were ‘enterprising’”\textsuperscript{486}.

Individual team members operated district centres across the province, often a day’s drive from Bhisho or East London, with substantial local autonomy and little evidence of a core methodology to facilitate a common approach to support local groups in project development other than the application format. As we have learned from the earlier MTE report, they and their managers interpreted their main task as helping applicants complete the application forms. According to the Funds’ Adviser, training for RFAs concentrated on “PCM, cost benefit analysis and feasibility analysis ... we had used "Guide to cost benefit analysis of investment projects - ERDF and ISPA\textsuperscript{487}" and "Manual for the Preparation of Industrial Feasibility Study" by UNIDO\textsuperscript{488} ... to give RFAs a glimpse of the magnitude of a challenge to develop larger projects. Of course we did not push them to use the entire approach presented in those papers but to pick major elements pertaining to particular project concept in the context of PCM Manual\textsuperscript{489}. As such, the training content for RFAs might have been partly consistent with the outcome of the struggle for primacy between the business and the pro-poor models of LED, but only partly in that it was totally inappropriate to the economic and business context of the Eastern Cape. With such skills and know-how to draw on, it seems hardly surprising that the most of the RFAs were having difficulty in generating qualifying proposals.

5.1.2.3 The ideologue and the dream maker

As I became more familiar with some of the projects, listening to presentations at Project Coordination Unit (PCU) meetings, in formal interviews and informal discussion with RFAs and through reading case files which had been submitted to the Programme for support, I began to build a profile of the typical Local Competitiveness Fund (LCF) project (or proposal) with which the Programme was dealing. Whatever the field of activity - rural tourism, fish farming, berry production, crafts works, waste recycling, goat farming and many more, the “beneficiary group” comprised a ‘partnership’ crafted for the sake of the application. The initiator was invariably an external entrepreneur, consultant, expert group or service provider specialising in one or other technology or business application – and a local target (final beneficiary) group (e.g. women, emerging farmers) and/or local community.

Sharing some of these impressions with our Team Leader/Programme Coordinator, in an early informal “corner of the table” exchange during the first LED Conference

\textsuperscript{485} Interview with company representative – Pretoria - January 2010.
\textsuperscript{486} Interview with TD – Pretoria - April 2010.
\textsuperscript{487} European Regional Development Fund and Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession.
\textsuperscript{488} UNIDO – United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.
\textsuperscript{489} Programme Funds Adviser responding to query regarding induction materials for the RFAs – 11\textsuperscript{th} May 2011.
under the auspices of the programme, I mentioned that what struck me as a ‘newcomer’ in the debate was the constant formulaic emphasis upon “the search for competitive or comparative advantage” as the starting point for LED projects. The same narrative was repeated throughout every policy document or framework that I had read up to that point and was the overriding message from the Conference podium. Far from setting the frame for a shared analysis of local needs among local stakeholders, the concept seemed to have been appropriated by grant-grabbing consultants and bureaucrats and standardised in batch applications for public support. My case basically was that in the absence of a shared understanding of the socio-economic situation, the exclusive focus on the project investment tended to put the solution before the problem.

In response, my interlocuteur, while recognising the need to build capacity for more strategic planning and prioritising at local level, cautiously defended the overall approach. He pointed out, echoing writers such as de Vries, that it was important to keep people mobilised around hope and opportunity, however modest, rather than over-emphasise the problems from the outset. I could not avoid the sense that my approach, as a newcomer to the ‘real world’ in South Africa, was perceived as being unnecessarily critical. While we were natural ‘allies’ in terms of our ‘developmental’ focus, his primary objective as recently appointed replacement team leader was to generate ‘bankable’ projects (that would qualify for funding) rather than re-open the debate around the type of LED to promote – and risk further confusion. However, over the next years, as the relationship developed, we had other opportunities to reflect on projects.

5.1.2.4 Projects or else?

Based in the project offices in the Provincial Treasury in Bhisho, I had little direct contact with the Project Generation Team other than during quarterly (usually 2 day) retreats designed as platforms for instruction, setting direction and sharing experience. These were usually designed and led by the M&E Adviser, working closely with the Team Leader/Programme Coordinator. Because of my background in local (economic) development, I was invited, in the early months following my appointment, to present to the group (usually about twenty people), most working in the six Districts (regions) across the Province as well as the Central Support Unit (Programme Coordinator, Finance and Contracts Unit, Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser).

I tip-toed around commentary on these patterns, not altogether sure of my ground. As the newcomer and late arrival to the team, I was trying to be careful not to convey a negative critique and made a point of acknowledging, being a “good programme manager”, the need “to get the money out on the street”. There was, at the time, a sense of satisfaction within the team that, after public criticism of the

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lengthy delays in first round of “calls”, the second stage had been expedited in much shorter time than before, although there was still a high rejection rate by the independent assessors and the Provincial Evaluation Committee. We had, I argued, to question the long term benefit of the type of projects being generated – in terms of sustainable jobs, increased security of economic activity – and evidence of improved economic (and job) potential of the target groups. There were obvious issues of equity, of equal opportunity, of employability to mention but some. “But we need the people with the ideas, the energy and the resources to kick start the development process”, was the broad consensus in response. The general discourse was not unlike that of Ferguson’s “‘development’ apparatus” in Lesotho or Long’s description of “target groups”, as perceived by ‘developers’ “without such inputs they are simply incapable of … solving the problematic situations they face”. My contention since joining the programme, I continued warily, was that the skills and networks for strategic planning and local development - in situations where poverty, inequality, unemployment, underemployment, social exclusion, racism, AIDS dominate the agenda – simply do not exist. To tackle that, I believed quite righteously and unselfconsciously, needed “power being injected from outside in order to shift the balance of forces towards forms of local self-determination”.

Our model of project generation, I argued, concentrated on support to outside business people with (often technically clever) investment and job creation ideas but little relationship (and less understanding or empathy) with the circumstances and needs of target communities. “We seek to provide solutions when we don’t really understand what the problems are”. It was not long before I earned the reputation “Gerry doesn’t like projects”, as the M&E Adviser, by now the clear ‘power behind the idea,’ commented in an early group encounter.

At the time, I came away from these sessions with the distinct impression that the LED I was talking about had little to do with their understanding of the subject and of little relevance to the ‘real work’ in the programme. Revisiting these situations today, I can relate to Mosse’s observation that “ideas had to be forged through relationships”. I was one of those consultants “who arrived late and who did not build internal coalitions around their ideas”. I had criticised what I understood of the current approach “as too narrow, too much focussed on straightforward enterprise development and project set-up”. I can also reflect on my efforts to influence a change in direction, my failure to appreciate fully the strength of the ‘ideology’ behind the programme choices made, the failure of others who had come before me and were now excluded (see Chapter 4) and the alliances against which I was now pitted.

It was not long before a certain feeling of exclusion set in – partly as a result of my two-weeks-on two-weeks-off pattern of participation, partly as consequence of

495 From a discussion recorded with the PGT replacement leader in September 2009.
spending much of my time working with my counterparts in the DEDEA, and partly the realisation of being increasingly at odds with and somewhat marginalised from the core decision-making circle within the PCU. By June 2008, I was commenting guidelines for a significant new institution-strengthening initiative on the part of the programme,\textsuperscript{499} which aimed to set up a District Support Team comprising local government and provincial government officials in each of the six District Municipalities.\textsuperscript{500} I had been, once again, taking up the refrain and emphasising the need to broaden the focus beyond project development or “we run the risk of placing insufficient emphasis upon the skills required at local level for more thorough situation analysis – as the base point for setting and agreeing local priorities”. In response, the M&E Adviser wrote, “I hear what Gerry is saying, but do not believe that there is a necessary contradiction between what is described as the "project-based" approach and the "more strategic approach" - or that our "focus on 'projects' obstructs a more integrated and strategic approach". What we are offering is our own experience of packaging actions in ways that will allow them to attract funding and/or other forms of support”. Concluding a further response, I returned to the critique “and to go back to the initial proposition, project development and management skills are an integral part of the LED capacity package – necessary but not sufficient. We must also address other layers of skills – and the wider systems and structures for integrated LED”.\textsuperscript{501}

Interestingly, the Programme Coordinator/Team Leader was silent during the exchange, although we had frequent discussions around projects – some of which will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Six. In these early exchanges, the M&E Adviser’s intervention had the effect of putting his stamp on an important new initiative - and driving a (temporary) wedge in thinking between the Programme Coordinator and me. In addition to his role as M&E Adviser, he had taken on responsibility for drafting reports and resource planning, assuming many of the project leadership functions and creating a certain dependency. His view carried clout. While never explicit, there was always a sense that my contribution to this and other debates was coloured by my identity and experience as European and therefore ‘less relevant’ in the South African situation. Over the next months, I was left to focus on my specific area of responsibility – support to the LED Division in DEDEA – receiving fewer invitations than before to engage in strategic reflection and planning as a member of the PCU/CSU, although this would change again when the critical issues in relation to project generation became more sharply evident. However, in the dynamic of what Mosse (2005) calls the “social life of the project”, alliances shift and agendas change as contradictions in the programme design emerge over time.

5.1.2.5 When it’s not working – it’s time to do something different

\textsuperscript{499} Designed by the Programme Coordinator and LED Policy and Institutional Development Adviser – who had previously been involved in setting up this type of structure in the education sector. \\
\textsuperscript{500} One of the more sustainable legacies of the programme – see reference to District Support team in Sarah Baartman DM http://www.cacadu.co.za/content/16. \\
\textsuperscript{501} Exchange of correspondence around Guidelines for District Support Teams – June 2008.
As the programme approached the half-way mark, there were increasing indications that the implementation strategy was in trouble and needed adjustment. As we noted at some length in Chapter Four, the external mid-term review team called into question the approach taken to project generation and, in particular, the absence of local development facilitation and diagnostic skills and called for the introduction of a more “integrated ... approach to district and local competitiveness challenges”⁵⁰². Their findings were discounted by the provincial authorities, based largely on the formalistic argument that they (the mid-term reviewers) measured performance against the older and unchanged Financing Agreement (between the EU and SA) rather than the Terms of Reference – and, as noted, the EU Del approved a second tranche of funding, subject only to a review, the results of which were also rejected by project team.

Later in 2008, one of the members of the part-time technical assessment team (advising the Evaluation Committee), the only one having – as far as I was aware - local development policy and practice experience⁵⁰³, presented detailed feedback on project proposals submitted in the previous competitive round, at the request of the Team Leader, increasingly concerned both by the poor ‘success’ rate and the quality of some of the projects in implementation (See Chapter 6). Her conclusions left little room for any doubt as to the extent of the challenge. It’s not working! Most of the proposals for which she had been the technical assessor lacked relevance in terms of the goals and purpose of the programme and the call for proposals. While they formalistically (almost ritually) professed alignment with wider policy frameworks (e.g. Provincial Growth and Development Plan), they provided little sense or understanding of local context, the problems which they were seeking to address or attempt at rationale. Driven primarily by (mainly white) service providers, few of them demonstrated any meaningful commitment to partnership with the intended beneficiary groups, confirming my earlier assessment.

The high overall rejection rate for RFA-generated proposals during successive calls, pointed to a mismatch in the quality (and types) of proposals being generated against the standards demanded by the independent evaluation process. There were considerable differences across the Province. In a diary note of conversation between members of the Central Support Team, including myself, “much of the talk centred on the varying performance of RFAs and in particular the very poor success rates (as measured in terms of proposals retained) for three of poorest of the six districts – ranging from 3% to 12%⁵⁰⁴”. From a programme manager’s point of view, the evidence was pointing to an inevitable underspend in grant funds. Such an outcome would not only be a clear indication of underperformance but could also lead to a forfeit of EU receipts for the Eastern Cape Government, unless the situation was remedied. Under such circumstances, and given the predominance of the grant funds components in the Programme’s logframe (and budget), it is hardly surprising that the ‘good RFAs’ were those with the highest ‘strike rate’ in terms of

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⁵⁰² Mid-Term Review of the Programme of Support to LED in the Eastern Cape – 2007:x.
⁵⁰³ The other two in the three person team of assessors were an engineer and a former bank official (to appraise financial proposals, I assume).
⁵⁰⁴ Diary note 16th February 2009 – travelling to Underberg – Silumko, Trevor and author.
proposals approved for funding, while those who were less successful were often stigmatised as underperforming and ‘incompetent’. Two (out of six), seen to be more successful in terms of generating winning applications in their region, were given greater autonomy and encouraged to do more. As some of these ‘winning’ projects were observed in implementation phase, however, the very unequal social dynamic observed between successful promoter and ‘beneficiary’ community members became new cause for concern.505

5.1.2.5 The turn around and changing alliances

In the face of all the indications and under increasing pressure to improve the quality of proposals and to make sure that the funds would indeed be spent, the programme leadership, (Team Leader and M&E Adviser) decided to use the upcoming quarterly general meeting of the PCU to set up a Central Task Team to take control over project generation for the final and critical call for proposals. Reflecting on this later, the M&E Adviser admitted “it was well planned and ruthless. It had to be done”506. While not involved in the planning, I was drafted into the Central Task Team (CTT), as was the reluctant Funds Advisor, who saw his position and authority as head of the project generation team being undermined. The four-person CTT was intended to provide a more thorough and structured consultation engagement for project groups than had been the case up to then. The purpose was to help applicants improve the quality of proposals, thus increasing the pass rate. Ultimately, if the plan worked, we would manage to avoid underspend and commit the funds available.

It turned out to be a very intense and physically challenging exercise – in kilometres and hours/days - over a period of several months as well as being constantly at the interface of ideas – and idea generators. The process involved an initial paper review of concepts from proposers followed by face-to-face consultations with many groups and individuals in different districts and municipalities of the Province, largely cutting out mediation on the part of the RFAs. In the end, according to the Final Report, the programme managed to commit 97% of the funds allocated to the last call – and “it was generally agreed that (the proposals ultimately presented for evaluation) were the strongest in comparison to all the other calls evaluated”507.

The coming of the CTT marked one of the critical turning points for the programme. New, quite temporary alliances were formed. There was understandably much dismay among some of the RFAs who felt their professionalism was under threat “The CTT is re-shaping LED concepts ... it’s as if we (RFAs) don’t know what LED is”, one protested508. From her point of view, the CTT ran the risk of ignoring the local dimension and local networks. Her ‘boss’, the Funds Coordinator, nominal head of the team since late 2008, who although member of the CTT, was equally despondent and felt - “no longer sure about what he should be doing in the

505 Diary note – discussion with team leader – March 2009.
506 IV with Trevor – 19th March 2010.
508 Meeting with RFA in project office in District Office – 8th Sept 2009.
programme" - increasingly marginalised and excluded from decision-making. He was critical of the initiative and argued that the CTT had simply placed itself between the project proposers and some of the RFAs. His position became even more uncomfortable as the differences in our respective approaches to proposal evaluation became more evident in the context of our collegial decision-making. He adhered to the strictest interpretation of EU PRAG – and the premium placed in initial programme design on ‘good project cycle management’, insisting on a robust cost benefit analysis/net present discount metric in measuring the worthiness for support of local development bids. In the exchanges within the CTT around the various LED proposals, his ‘blue chip’ standard invariably juxtaposed with the more rounded and qualitative assessment of the economic and social inclusion benefits applied by other members of the team, including me – often leading to pointless circular discussion.

The performance of some of the RFAs was now under the spotlight and one of the members of the CTT remarked how he had become aware of “the top-down relationships between RFAs and their client groups”. Such a view coincided with earlier comments from provincial government officials visiting projects about the somewhat ‘schoolmaster/mistress’ attitudes and manner of some of the RFAs and the very deferential posture of community members in responding to them. Yet, earlier evidence from the independent mid-term evaluation team suggested that “there was much good will towards the Programme”. However, one of their core criticisms was that locally based RFA teams spent most of their time “bringing project ideas into eligible application formats”. There had been, they argued, “a lack of support for the stakeholder consultative processes”, which, by this stage in the programme seemed to be borne out in the lack of qualifying proposals.

Part of the dilemma for the RFAs undoubtedly stems from the fundamental ambiguity and confusion around local economic development within the team as earlier encounters clearly demonstrated. The initial ToRs had specified their role as “to develop the capacity of district counterparts and manage the interface between the district and provincial parties”. Even the newspaper advertisement for RFAs had stressed networking, capacity building and strategy development. Yet, from the outset, there seems to have been a sense of urgency and pressure ‘to get the money out there’. The programme lived from one call for proposals to the other. There was a stridency in the rejoinder “this was not about capacity development nor policy development support – but offering money to test out ideas”, a message oft repeated by various programme leaders, including the M&E Adviser, in quarterly review sessions and in turn back directly to me by RFAs and others in defence of the established project model. Increasingly, as the results of calls for proposals continued to fall short of expectations, like the Community Officers in Mosse’s IBRFP, “staff faced growing pressure to meet implementation targets ... and

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509 Diary note on CTT discussion – 5th September 2009.
510 Diary note of informal discussion – 5th September 2009.
512 Diary note on CTT discussion – 5th September 2009.
disburse underspent budgets” and they responded by focussing the larger part of their support on the preparation of even more applications meeting formal (PRAG) requirements. Such a regime led to competition between RFAs in terms of the numbers of proposals submitted and as we have seen above in league tables for qualifying projects. The RFA dilemma calls to mind Long’s analysis of power processes and his advice that we should “examine, within the constraints encountered, how actors identify and create space for their own interests and for change”. Up to the point where the CTT was created and the task of supporting project proposers for the last round of funding was drawn into the centre, the RFAs, as implementers in the “project system ... operated with considerable autonomy from one another ...” and from the centre. Stories circulated about a number of the RFAs having quite ‘controlling’ relationships with their beneficiary groups, using position, access and “elements of the formal discourse of development to advance their own strategies”. In the end, as time ran out, and without the necessary background and skills in building capacity and facilitating partnerships between the LED stakeholders, as identified several years previously by the MTE team, most of the RFAs were sidelined and saw their influence locally reduced although only in the final year of implementation.

Overall, this was a stressful time for many of us working on the programme. The CTT initiative, while contributing significantly to the preparation of more fundable projects and the absorption of the bulk of funding available, led to clear divisions and loss in morale at different levels within the team and, in a number of cases, to the early – and probably unsatisfactory – departure or withdrawal from the programme by some key team members. Nevertheless, we were all members of the “project class ... competitive (more or less) in both the symbolic and the existing project economy”, committed and signed up into the project as free-lance agents. Without knowing their contractual terms, we can be satisfied that these were internationally competitive – and nationally generous. Projects such as this paid over the odds to attract local talent. Most of the team had spent approximately four years working on the programme by this stage. Most of them subsequently transited almost directly into management positions in local government, local development agencies, other development agencies, other projects or back to private sector consultancy, not unlike Rajak and Stirrat’s profile of the development professional and compradore. Involvement in the programme had ‘paid the mortgage’ during the period. They/we belonged to a labour market that was part of the global (or ‘first-world’) economy which had nothing in common with the subsistence and survival livelihoods and lifeworlds of the project’s target beneficiaries.

518 O’Reilly P – All the People all of the Time? – Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – Following the Leader programme – Identifying Participant Groups – PhD NUI Galway – 2012:294.
519 IV with Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
5.1.2.6  Counting down the days and some unfinished business

Yet, once again, it is this intermittent and uncertain employment path that also characterises the “lifeworld” of the project worker and which must influence efforts and actions just to stay in the game. As the programme moved towards its final year implementation, there were, within my own area of responsibility, several ongoing strands of work, in particular, to support the introduction of a new LED funding measure for the Department and the finalisation of a new Regional and Local Economic Development Strategy. As explained earlier, these became part of the programme offer with my appointment in 2008 but had never been incorporated into the logframe which continued to major on the management of the grant funds. One of the consequences of the unchanged design was that, as the overall balance of technical assistance days diminished, these had to be reviewed to ensure programme priorities were met over the remaining period. The review was carried out, once again, by the de-facto programme operations manager, M&E Adviser, during one of my ‘at-home’ fortnights at the end of 2008. Although rumours of the adjustments were circulating over the early months of 2009, it was only in May of that year that the FCU Manager advised me that, according to the new estimates, the number of days indicatively allocated in my contract for support to DEDEA had been reduced and “sixty-four days remained for my work”\textsuperscript{521}. The news came as a bit of shock particularly since I had been working with the Programme Coordinator/Team leader on an agreed workplan for the completion of the DEDEA tasks, which the change in plans obviously compromised. Whatever my previous fairly distant yet casual relationship with Trevor (M&E Adviser), he became suddenly strategically important – but alas, not amenable to argument as to the relative importance of this policy and institution building work in the Support to LED programme, as the following diary extracts highlight.

Text Box 6  Excerpts – Diary Notes from September and October 2009

10th Sept 2009
Bhisho – Days Again – this time ‘Trevor’
Phoned Trevor to discuss days since this is my main preoccupation with 23 days left of my time on the Programme especially in relation to the Provincial LRED Strategy.

\ldots\ He tells me that we’ll have to plan my next inputs and look at what other work will need short term days and then motivate for a short term contract for my remaining days. It’s quite clear that he’s now controlling the allocation of all consultancy days on the project. We agree to meet on morning of 6\textsuperscript{th} October.

Tuesday - 6\textsuperscript{th} October
Negotiating Time for the LRED Strategy\textsuperscript{522}
This was a meeting with Trevor and Silumko (Team Leader) to discuss how to complete work on the Provincial LRED Strategy given that my allocation of days runs out in November. Trevor and Silumko had spent close to an hour together in Silumko’s office just prior to the meeting, clearly to agree their approach to the

\textsuperscript{521} Diary note – 11\textsuperscript{th} May 2009.
\textsuperscript{522} Diary note – 6\textsuperscript{th} October 2009.
encounter. In the end, following the rather lengthy and unstructured discussion around ... projects in the pipeline, I introduced the subject of the Provincial Local and Regional Economic Development Strategy and my involvement in that process. Trevor asks how critical the Strategy is – considering how “it seems to have little effective leadership in DEDEA and may be cutting across major economic policy initiatives in the Province such as the Provincial Industrial Development Strategy and the Rural Development Strategy”. ...

... Silumko is supportive of the work being done and sees the preparation of the strategy as critical to the institutional development component of the Programme. However, in his view, it should be completed by the end of the year – or at latest by end January. (This is where the two of them have agreed on outcome of the meeting.) I make the point that the preparation of the strategy is an interactive process and that it is crucial to ensure buy-in from a range of different institutions, as reflected in the workplan. This requires time for consultation. I am clear now that they do not intend to extend my contract up to end of March 2010 which is the endpoint for the LRED workplan. Trevor asks if five days extra for December and January would be sufficient – Silumko proposes an additional 20 days up to end January – and we agree. Trevor is to write a set of ToRs and asks me to draft a “motivation” for the additional days. Silumko comments that he has done a review of his days used to date and will now be leaving the project at the end of the first quarter of 2010.

Seen from their point of view, the central programme management concern was to meet commitments as per results anticipated – and agreed with the client/donor – in the logframe. Delivering three grant schemes remained the critical measure of success or failure. In the end, I completed these ‘extra’ days and supported the Department to advance its work in relation to both outputs as far as I could, albeit with a nagging sense of ‘failure’. But then, Mosse, using Latour’s (1996:35-36) words, soberly observes: “Failure is manufactured not inherent”. It is a product, he suggests, not just of changes in what passes for policy, “but also in the alliances, the mediators, the chains of translations, interests and agendas that are tied up in a project”523.

In both instances in this part of the chapter, we have attempted to look into the inner social world of the project team comprising international and national and local project workers, full-time and part-time. In the next section, we turn to the intermediaries who are attracted, recruited and enrolled into the delivery of the project.

5.2 Part Two - “Those who are willing, able and at hand”524

In Part Two, our focus is on the ‘In-Betweeners’. These are the individuals, institutions and interest groups, who by virtue of their positions in the relevant

knowledge networks in the wider environment – local administration – business community – non-government organisations – are enrolled, join, become integrally connected with and shape development outcomes produced by the intervention, with, as Kovách and Kučerová point out, the potential “to represent their financial, political and class interests”\textsuperscript{525}. Although vital for the delivery of the project, they are not members of the project (technical assistance) team. Some of the examples in the literature, for example, the KBCL local partners with which Mosse’s team collaborated in the IBRFP project or indeed the business interests identified by O’Reilly in the Waterford Area-Based Response (to Unemployment) programme\textsuperscript{526}, refer to dominant partner status for these big-business interests. Intermediaries in such cases, as any political economy analysis will quickly reveal, can exercise considerable influence to the point of interacting as significant stakeholders directly with the national and international programme managers over the definition of policy and the manner of its implementation. In both those cases, their employees and paid contract workers fulfilled functions not unlike those of the project team members.

In our two subject cases, the intermediary partners had little (or no) direct influence over the design of the intervention although as we shall see, they had other interests at stake as the bargaining chip for their involvement. They were recruited to the “project class” by virtue of belonging to local public institutions, private organisations, known interest groups and individuals involved in business, social, cultural and sporting networks. For many, their first knowledge of the programme was through taking part, often by invitation, in the awareness raising (and enrolment) sessions (See Section 4.3.1.3), as well as through personal and business circles, in which the donor community and the project team were present and active, particularly the early months of roll-out. In the Baltics case, non-government organisations and business organisations enjoying good relations with British Embassy, (reminiscent of the “sociality” referred to by Eyben\textsuperscript{527}), were usually well informed of upcoming project activity and encouraged, where relevant, to take part, although, in my experience, never unduly so. Such “sociality” was less in evidence in the case of the EU-funded Support to LED programme. Much of the early activity for the programme team was geared to increasing visibility and broadcasting the opportunities to intermediaries and beneficiaries alike. The competitive grant scheme design of the South African project – combined with the widely held official view that poor communities in the target areas could not themselves prepare local development project proposals - ensured an in-between place for the ‘usual suspects’, business consultants, bid-writers, scientists/technologists and service providers, necessary if not necessarily appreciated by officials.

\textsuperscript{526} O’Reilly P – All of the People All of the Time: Configuration of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development - The Usual Suspects – PhD thesis - NUI-Galway – 2012:231.
In this next section, I want to draw on the experience of both interventions to understand better the role of the intermediaries as players in the delivery chain of development, their induction, motivations, as far as we can interpret them, their impact on the shape and substance of the outputs of the programme. In the case of the BRPP, we shall see how interests might be served through non-paid, non-professional participation in the pro-poor community intervention, bringing rewards of a different kind in the place of the fees to the paid consultant. Given the business focus of the grant scheme model in the South African project, the returns to intermediaries facilitating the participation of poor communities were obviously more tangible, for-profit and factored into project costs, although towards the final years of the programme, more non-profit social enterprise projects were supported.

5.2.1 Intermediaries – partnerships and the BRPP

The centre-piece of the BRPP – the locally based multi-stakeholder partnership – was deliberate, largely based on an established working model and, once approved by the donor, systematically applied over the three countries during the three years of operation. Following DFID sign-off on the Inception Report which formalised and legitimised the approach, it was my job, as principal and full-time ‘ideologue’, over the first months of the programme to take the script to the nine partnership areas, meeting local stakeholders from different sectors in events such as the Valga (Estonia) workshop described in Chapter Four. Reporting on progress during the first quarter, we noted that “there has been substantial preparatory work with the different stakeholding groups, raising awareness, drawing on experiences from rural regions in the EU, gaining the trust and confidence of the different interest groups, and building commitment”.

As the following anecdote makes clear, that effort was not always as straightforward as the narrative implies since such early encounters invariably involved all of the complexities of relationship building, presenting, clarifying, creating favourable impressions, motivating, negotiating, compromising, and above all, avoiding elite capture. An early incident in Lithuania puts into focus the risk of ‘ambush’ and recuperation by well networked groups.

5.2.1.1 A near miss?

Shortly after the approval of the inception report, and DFID’s ‘adoption’ of the local partnership model as the baseplate for the programme, we travelled with the DFID review team to one of the target municipalities to meet a representative group of local stakeholders – potential members of the partnership and potential beneficiaries. The intention was to raise awareness about the programme, answer questions, understand better local conditions and generate interest. It was early Spring 2001 and we had travelled in several cars out from Vilnius, soon leaving the motorway to take the smaller national and then local roads across flat frozen fields.

528 Three partnerships were inducted in the first quarter (one in each county) and the remaining six followed over next months.
530 On mission in country to observe early implementation of the Programme.
towards one of the towns close to the border with Belarus. The meeting took place in one of the outlying profoundly rural wards (senunija\textsuperscript{531}), a chill cold afternoon. Local participants, about 15-20, all male, middle-aged and solid, lined the walls of the timber structured, sparsely furnished functional community meeting room.

I recall being acutely conscious of the DFID observers and their silent but weighty concern, as ever, to ensure that the project was targeting “the poorest of the poor”. As each of the participants introduced himself, it quickly became obvious that the delegation present comprised most of the large farmers in the area. One after the other, unselfconsciously and as a simple matter of fact, they spoke about their individual farm holdings ranging from some 80 to 200 hectares, much of it rich tillage and pasture land\textsuperscript{532}. Some of the group, it seemed, were former farm managers having taken advantage of the disintegration of the collective farm system in the area while others had inherited/reclaimed their lands from previous generations who had been dispossessed in the early years of Soviet occupation. On the day, their common concerns related to the depressed agri-market and production conditions in Lithuania. All were keen to understand how the RPP could be of assistance to them individually and collectively in preparation for entering the much anticipated EU single market\textsuperscript{533}. They had been encouraged to take part by the Mayor, a powerful figure with whom the project team would have to work – and depend on – if the BRPP was to succeed in the municipality. In the discussion which followed, the CTL and I were at pains to not to jeopardise that relationship and yet avoid raising alarm bells within the DFID team.

At this early point in the project cycle, the DFID task managers and advisers remained to be convinced of and confident in what was regarded as non-mainstream and previously untested (by DFID) EU Leader inspired approach (the new institutional space of the area-based partnership), not quite conforming to the standard DFID Sustainable Livelihoods model. To listen to the CSEED team, much of the DFID experience with similar rural development projects was that once active in the field and faced with the realities of implementation, it would inevitably be to the “usual suspects” that the project team would turn to support delivery. In reality, far from being a skirmish, the encounter turned out to be a very civil exchange. The CTL and I were at pains to avoid rejection and yet to make clear that while the issue of rural regeneration and accessing new and traditional markets was central to the purpose of the RPP, our focus was on poorer sections of rural society and putting structures in place to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. As they became aware of the very limited resources available, some of the participants acknowledged amicably that there was indeed little of direct benefit in BRPP for them. Others, it was agreed, might have a role as members of the Salcininkai Partnership Board when this was constructed, under the auspices of the municipality, over the following months.

\textsuperscript{531} Eldership, ward or parish – the smallest administrative unit in local government in Lithuania – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipalities_of_Lithuania.

\textsuperscript{532} Compared with 3 hectare holdings allocated to rural dwellers when their collective farms were broken up in the early 1990s.

\textsuperscript{533} In early 2001, entry to the Single Market and to the CAP seemed a far-off prospect for Lithuanian farmers since the country had been assigned to the second list of entrants in Agenda 2000 published in 1997.
The incident provided an early-point reality check which helped to ground the ongoing design and quasi-theoretical discussion around pro-poor approaches between the project team and DFID in the context of the real problems faced by project teams in mobilising the intermediaries. It established a sounder base for ongoing engagement with the municipal leadership who remained committed to the process for the duration and beyond. Nevertheless, it was a timely reminder of Mosse’s (and others’) observation that “it is easier for ... elite (groups) to target the project, than for the project to target an invisible poor”\textsuperscript{534}. The encounter with the Salcininkai farmers marked the start of a long process of negotiations and compromises between the project team and prominent local stakeholders and local government leaders, punctuated by false starts, new departures, U turns, delays, disappointments and eventually the preparation of local area strategy/action plan for tackling rural poverty and social inclusion by partnerships in all nine BRPP target areas across the three countries, consistent with the “authorised model ... and project rationale”\textsuperscript{535}. All marked in one way or other by the motivations and lifeworlds of those recruited to support delivery, some of which we will revisit in Chapter Six.

5.2.1.2 Building the partnerships – “Making use of ‘people’s science’ to promote development ‘from below’”\textsuperscript{536}

While there was little formal political economy analysis informing the process of mobilising intermediaries in the case of the BRPP, the programme sought to introduce a measure of ‘democratic’ representation in selection/election of the membership of the multi-agency partnerships. Drawing on the partnership building experience in the North of Ireland in the early years of the peace process there, country teams were encouraged to organise a series of nomination workshops for the representative constituencies for each of the three partnerships in each country. The procedures were taken quite seriously by the project team and by the stakeholder organisations themselves to judge by reports of the first three partnerships established under the programme\textsuperscript{537}.

Estonia: “14 organisations received a letter requesting the nominees. The nomination process for state institutions was coordinated by the County Government whereas the municipal nominees were requested through association of municipalities. In economic interest sector, 6 organisations were invited to nominate. In the Community/voluntary sector also 6 organisations received the invitation whereas the choice was based on the results of animation meetings which identified the most deprived target groups in the County. The selection process was conducted by the project


team. This was found to be the most acceptable way for the constituency groups as the project represents neutral party.”

Latvia: “The selection of the PB was done by proposed nominees themselves and the final list, to ensure that members represent social excluded groups or are major service providers to the social excluded groups, was prepared by the CTL. The PB comprises 20 members, 5 from each stakeholder group. The first meeting of the Rezekne Partnership took place 5th April. There was a full attendance and the event received good media coverage.”

Lithuania: “To date all 37 letters of nominations have been received and the project team is in the process of selecting the partnership board, based on the guidelines for the partnership formation, which include the principle of a wide representation of different social, age, and gender groups.”

In the end, BRPP country teams with support from the Northern Irish technical assistants set up nine partnerships, three in each country, each broadly with the same composition and structure, and all with the same work plan and critical endpoint. As is clear from the extracts from the first progress reports, the Country Team Leader had substantial influence over the composition, often relying on senior officials in local and sometimes national government and other constituent organisations for advice and recommendations.

The exercise certainly throws up images of Long’s “connotation of power being injected from outside in order to shift the balance of forces towards forms of local self-determination”. In retrospect, it is hard to avoid the irony of his idea of “‘enlightened experts’ who make use of ‘people’s science’ (Richards 1985) and ‘local intermediate organisations’ (Esman and Uphoff 1984 and Korten 1987) to promote development ‘from below’”538 – which is probably exactly what we thought we were doing in 2001.

5.2.1.1  A ‘Blueprint’ for ‘Learning’

The theory was clear. The partnerships were the primary differentiating factor in the BRPP model, serving to institutionalise not only DFID’s pro-poor participatory methodologies but a new (for the three countries) structured approach for connecting representatives of all relevant stakeholders at local level, including the ‘the rural poor’ in a ‘new institutional space’. Better informed of local needs, willing to work towards agreement on local priorities for tackling poverty and social exclusion and to take collective leadership, they presented a united local front to interact with national (and eventually, EU) institutions. Yet, the responsibility for managing and facilitating the work programme of these new institutions, as yet without any legal or organisational form, (the country project team acted as secretariat to each of its three partnerships) fell to the Country Team Leaders and as we have previously seen, part-time team members, all of whom were at the early stage on the learning and experience curve for partnership development and

participatory strategy planning – and some who never got past that stage. As was the case for Mosse’s IBRFP team, it seems hardly surprising that “there was considerable uncertainty about how to operationalise it”\(^539\). It was important for the team to convince neophyte partnership members to buy into “the project as a ‘system of representations’”, confident in the purposefulness of the venture and willing to lend their belief to its anticipated success. Over time, most BRPP partnership members indeed became part of “a reliable interpretive community, a group of believers”. They were not quite “as in a magico-religious system”\(^540\) as Mosse describes the ‘IBRFP community’, but they came prepared to suspend critical judgement and doubts, based on the relations of trust that the CTLs, with the support of the international team, had been able to broker. Critical to those relationships was the confidence that the project team had the tools and the means to take them through long months of evidence gathering, collective analysis, identification of needs and definition of priorities towards a partnership consensus on worthwhile action. Over time and for each stage of the process, these tools became more refined and sophisticated and had for task to “reduce the complexity and uncertainty” and “to push practice towards standardisation”\(^541\).


The copybook approach to the preparation of the local area strategy applied in all nine cases, resulting in standard frame strategies and action plans from each, simplifying the peer review process, of which more in Chapter Six, and, we argued, facilitating exchange of experience and ideas. Whatever the assertions of geographic, historic and cultural diversity in our approach, it was clear from early on the life of the project, as evident from Chapter Four, that as far as process was concerned, it was going to be this way – or no way.

5.2.1.2 Local patriotism and public service commitment or social and moral guardianship or “intelligent self-interest”?

By the end of the fourth quarter, the project team commented on patterns in relation to partnership membership across all nine. “Those involved, come from local elite groups ... they have, in common, a strong sense of local patriotism and

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543 Local Area Strategies were prepared in Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian languages and later translated into English for review.
public service commitment”. Over the course of the programme, many became active in national policy working groups and in disseminating learning from the RPP to newly formed partnerships elsewhere. Only some, however, included members of minority groups, such as Roma community, within the Boards. Programme managers also report “often deep-rooted negative attitudes towards the poorest and socially excluded groups, who are often seen as responsible for their own plight” and some are inclined to see their contribution through the partnership as a form of what the report writer described as “workhouse welfarism”. Two years later when the Final Report was prepared, the narrative had regained its more positive tone as we could bravely declare that “the discipline of having to build and implement a local strategy based on local needs – rooted in straightforward dialogue and consultation with rural communities - over the three years did much to dispel such spurious notions ...” A fitting closing note and part of the overall narrative by this stage, it was not possible for the author to comment further, having moved on to other projects.

However, in her PhD research, conducted in Ukmerge, one of the partnership areas in Lithuania, several years after the closure of the programme, Aine Macken-Walsh questions the readiness of the partnership board members and the interests they represent “to ignite a representative and transverse inter-sectoral debate in relation to local development issues ... (l)argely due to the lack of clear and strategic development goals (economic for example) ... and the absence of a tradition of sectoral differentiation”. As a result, “different sectoral viewpoints” did not emerge and nor was there “bargaining between sectoral representatives over development issues” and outcomes. While the RPP had succeeded in bringing community groups into the development equation, “its emphasis upon participation and consultation rather than on economic interests, impacted on the development outcome” of the programme. Overall, the membership of the partnership board – state bodies, local government, private sector and community/voluntary – had a distinctly social (and cultural) hue and members and their sectoral interests were buried in a sense of “common interest” – reflecting, it must be said, the influence of political processes taking place in a small region on the western margins of Europe. Indeed, when conceptualising the local area anti-poverty planning process during the inception period, we were, if anything, disinclined to inject any sense of controversy or potential conflict into the partnership for the obvious reason that they would be harder to manage and more likely to bring unwanted publicity on the project. We probably sought out “the non-contentious actors ... compared to the more politicised actors such as unions, popular movements and political parties”.

547 Macken-Walsh A – Operationalising Governance and Rural Development: A case study of the Rural Partnership Programme (RPP) in Post-Socialist Lithuania – Teagasc Rural Economy Research Centre – ND.
In a further study of community action in Ukmerge, generated in part by the work of the RPP, although rooted in earlier pre-socialist and socialist experiences, Macken-Walsh highlighted the dominant role of local educated elites in the new community organisations, similar to the experience in the then EU 15, (Moseley 2003; Curtin and Varley 2002). However, far from any critique of “elite capture” in this instance, she notes a widespread acknowledgement locally that “the professionals were well qualified for their positions and they were expected to carry out this work” (Annist 1994), although “these skill sets were probably “more suited to organising social and cultural events” than tackling such issues as unemployment.

Macken-Walsh’s Lithuanian partnership saw its function mainly as mobilising “rural villagers … and to evaluate projects”, although these were “not subject to intervention or excessive monitoring by the RPP partnership board” (Annist 1994). The social and moral guardian role of the Estonian partnership, observed by Annist, on the other hand, was much more in evidence. The four-part composition of the partnership mirrored that of Ukmerge (and the other seven such bodies set up under the programme). Following nominations from the various sectors — local government, NGOs, entrepreneurs, unions, charities, boards— “the managers (RPP) were able to create a board that was fairly well balanced sectorally”, Annist reports. More sceptical, she dismisses the “local experience and knowledge” of members as “not that important”, suggesting that they “were not even sure how to define poverty”. The strategy prepared by the Polva Partnership Board was in “its greatest part written by (the CTL) and other programme representatives”, although partnership members had a greater say in the allocation of funding.

Still in Estonia, applications for support were assessed by an Evaluation Committee, made up of “members of the PB and representatives from other units who volunteered and did not have obvious vested interests”. However, given the lack of formal registered status for the three partnerships under Estonian law, an additional body, NGO Partnerlus, was set up and registered to fulfil this function (to act as grant beneficiary for all project grants where the recipient is not an existing government organisation). Its members, according to Annist, “comprised the more active and leading members of each PB, most of whom were either in senior positions in the county government or were successful entrepreneurs”. Although the PB had the right to decide which applications to support or not to support, in reality, the NGO Partnerlus, controlling

549 Macken-Walsh A – Community Action in post socialist Lithuania: Third sector participation in the Rural Partnerships Programme – Working Paper 06-WP-RE-20 – RERC Working Paper Series – 2006:18 (All the community organisation in the study had come into existence during the period of the RPP – formed initially to be able to apply for funding under the programme).
553 State agencies, for example, employment services were also represented.
the financial and legal aspects of the programme overall, had substantial influence over the final decisions. Members of the PB seemed to acquiesce in this arrangement who, Annist remarks, considered that the NGO Partnerlus, given “the alleged experience and status of its members ... was in a better position to judge feasibility and sustainability of projects”. The relationship between the two partnerships (and the beneficiary communities) is described by members of the NGO Partnerlus “in terms of ... parental metaphors, the NGO being the strict parent who demands compliance with the rules, fussing around with contracts and mistakes the ‘children’ have made, while the other ‘parent’, the PPB (local partnership board), responsible for teaching high values and ideals, rarely understood these difficulties and realities”. While there was no evidence that any of those involved at any level in the programme “had personal gains in mind” and all appeared very dedicated and impartial, whatever “personal interests” may have “existed ... behind the decision-making process”, these were “unlikely to be influential”.

Certainly, a significant part of the BRPP story was its ability to enrol what Mosse describes as “a widening circle of individuals and institutions”\(^{556}\) as members of the local area partnerships. It achieved this by creating a sense of belonging to something purposeful. The partnerships had by the later years of the project achieved some degree of public profile, linked to the anticipated benefits of EU accession. Their members were increasingly sought out by others for their BRPP experience and know-how, as the following press-cutting from the Latvian current affairs daily media illustrates:

“As emphasised by Mr K..., Deputy Head Rural Economy and Environmental Development Unit (Ministry of Agriculture, Department for Rural Development), the Rezekne District Partnership, Balvi District Partnership and Daugavpils District Partnership are the first partnership organizations in Latvia established and based on the principles of EU Leader methodology and other districts can apply their experience. Rural Partnership in Latgale will continue”\(^{557}\).

What seems just as plausible in assessing the existence and nature of “personal interests”, in attracting such individuals and institutions to engage with the programme as partnership members and unpaid intermediaries, however, is the attraction of association with the project’s “regime of success” and their involvement in a project that is “talked about so much”\(^{558}\). By this late stage in the project cycle, the prospects of continuing their involvement, this time in the EU Leader Programme in each of the three Baltic States following accession, as members of first generation partnerships, making decisions on the local allocations of considerably larger sums of money and influencing national rural development policy, must have seemed personally and professionally interesting enough to those


thus inclined. Indeed, part of our ‘sales pitch’ to local leaders and institutions in the early months of the BRPP, based on experience in Northern Ireland, was the prospect of just such a higher profile scenario.

Through the partnerships, intermediaries played a central role in the story of the BRPP. We pick up again on its influence on the encounters between the project team and the beneficiaries at the delivery interface in Chapter Six. For the moment, we turn once again to the South African project to explore the influence of intermediaries and their interaction with the project team for the Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape.

5.2.2 Intermediaries connecting the EU Support for LED programme to “the poorest of the poor” in the Eastern Cape?

Given my primary responsibility as LED Policy and Systems Adviser, working closely with the Department for Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, I had relatively little face to face contact with “the intermediaries”, other than through my participation in the Central Task Team referred to earlier - and more indirectly through reports, conversations and anecdotes within the team and with my colleagues in DEDEA. Some of these have been referenced already – and others will be dealt with from other perspectives in the following chapter.

The role played and the spaces occupied by the intermediary members of the ‘project class’ mobilised around the Support to LED programme in the Eastern Cape were, as we have seen in Chapter Four, predicated on its overall orientation as a business - and market-based job creation initiative. Indeed, earlier attempts to propose a more statist approach which would have emphasised the need to build structures, systems and capacity at different levels, were quite decisively rejected by the designers – “the best thing that local government can do is get out of the way – and let business get on with their stuff”\(^\text{559}\). There seemed to be a widespread consensus within the LED policy community at the time that target communities on their own were incapable of being active participants interacting with the programme. LED projects ‘needed’ to encourage the people with the networks and organisational skills (“and they are white”\(^\text{560}\)) to enrol as middlemen/women in the delivery of the programme through the competitive grant schemes, in particular, the Local Competitiveness Fund (LCF). In this section, we look at some examples of the ‘courting process’ as it evolved and changed over the final years of the programme.

5.2.2.1 Mainly white people with project ideas in search of black beneficiary community

One of the LED project managers for the Provincial Government, a middle-aged white Afrikaans consultant, well networked and successful in generating projects attracting funding, spoke, in an early conversation, openly and without any hint of

\(^\text{559}\) Interview with author of first draft of terms of reference – May 2011.

\(^\text{560}\) Interview with senior official in EC Delegation 22nd Jan 2010.
self-criticism of his approach to project generation. His job meant that he travelled extensively throughout the province, staying overnight in the often quaint hotels and guest houses in the small country towns that dot the Eastern Cape. When having dinner or drinks in the hotel bar, as he recounted, he was frequently approached by local farmers, consultants (sometimes part-time diversifying farmers) and other business people with ideas for LED projects some of which he encouraged and helped to work up to project application stage and then helped put in touch with ‘partner’ communities from the ‘historically disadvantaged’ areas, because, he states, ‘that’s my job’.

Bearing in mind the class and economic divisions (including farm ownership) persisting in these remote rural areas, the clientele in the hostelleries in question were likely to be fellow consultants, business representatives and government officials. Those lobbying support for project ideas were somehow or another ‘in the loop’, almost invariably white, and crucially were aware, however vaguely, of current grant schemes which might finance their enterprise project idea. There was a sense that they were ‘probably necessary’ drivers for development. Their motivation was ‘the business idea’ and the ‘job creation’ element was somewhat secondary, a part of the package. Some but not all had legacy links with local communities, reflecting the socio-economic and racial divides that persisted across the province. Nevertheless, in the context of what Cousins describes as the SA government’s “market-friendly orientation and a strong focus on efficiency ... (and) a new emphasis on ‘partnerships’ between established and ‘emerging’ farmers”561 such collaboration was widely encouraged. This is evident in the remarks of an ANC municipal leader in the province:

“Council appreciates the support of distinguished citizens like Mr F.... who supported the emerging farmers through lending them approximately 500 ewes of which after a period of 3 years they were able to produce about 291 lambs. ...” Joe Gqabi District Municipality State of District Address 2010

5.2.2.2 Playing by the rules?

The guidelines for Local Competitiveness Fund562 stressed, as primary condition, the importance of building community-based relationships. In many cases, particularly in the early years of the programme, as we have seen, the stimulus for the project came from outsiders, mainly, but not always, white – often from the professional LED consulting firms and service providers, commercial farmers, business and in some cases from the academic and technical community. Jacobson’s comments in relation to the introduction of the Massive Food Production Programme in the Eastern Cape – “only those groups with good networks managed to get the information and apply in time”, chime with the early experience in the LED programme. While upcoming competitions were advertised in Xhosa as well as English language, for most of the calls (four out of five?) the more detailed

562 By the time the Final Report for the Support to LED Programme was being drafted a total of sixty one local competitiveness fund projects had been awarded funding by the programme over the course of five calls for proposals.
guidelines were in English only. In most cases, the project was developed as a package by the proposers, sometimes with input from RFAs from the project team, before being presented to the ‘beneficiary’ community – not dissimilar to the model described by Jacobson “in which development is parachuted into communities without regard for the particularities of specific lived-in worlds”\textsuperscript{563}. Many project proposers saw themselves as “the people with ideas” for local development – rather than local developers with any meaningful links with local communities in the Eastern Cape\textsuperscript{564}. They were eager to promote all range of innovative, creative, often science-based, game-changing ‘solutions to rural poverty and unemployment’, as for example, the agri-science people who sought support for the introduction of a disease-resistant sweet potato variety. “But please don’t ask us to go develop a partnership with a local community. We’re ‘technical’”. In another case, an elderly Xhosa woman, member of a ‘project community’ reported how she had been approached at the last moment before submitting application by a white woman (the project promoter) whom she did not know to sign the papers as ‘partner’.

One of the earliest funded projects, establishing a goat farm in a rural township in the south of the province, was devised by a partnership which included another agri-scientific consultancy firm, a local business development consultant, the local municipality and a local cooperative specifically set up to accommodate the venture. Several years later, following discord in the community, allegations of irregularities in the purchase of the goats (which finally did not arrive) ... and action taken by the PCU and the Provincial Treasury to recover funds, the lead intermediary partner, also providing paid technical advice as service provider, sought to distance itself - “not our mess” - and walk away. Only the PCU threat of enforcing the provisions of the partnership agreement “which commits all partners to a moral and legal responsibility to take ownership”\textsuperscript{565} caused them to take responsibility and remain until a solution was put in place. LED managers from the local and the regional (District) municipality, which finally had to meet the cost of the ‘failure’, were critical of the PCU and felt that the situation was “not handled very well from the outset”. Moreover, from their point of view, the project leaders and the programme had created community division having “only involved one section of the community and excluded others”\textsuperscript{566}. For those local government officials involved, perhaps one of the lessons learned was not to believe in strangers bearing gifts, including seemingly well-resourced external interventions. In a discussion within the CTT (see above), I queried the practice of service providers doubling up as intermediary/partners in the governance structures of the project. The M&A Adviser argued that “because there is so little capacity among some of the municipalities, (and other target beneficiaries) they have allowed service providers to come in at the proposal stage ‘as partners’ – since otherwise there


\textsuperscript{564} In one case an international agri-biotech research company, on the basis of results of work on a disease-free sweet potato in Zimbabwe sought support from the programme to identify suitable ‘test sites’ (farm communities) to continue their work in the Eastern Cape.

\textsuperscript{565} Diary note – Service Providers and Partners – discussion at CTT - 2\textsuperscript{nd} September 2009.

\textsuperscript{566} Diary note – LED projects going nowhere - 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2009.
wouldn’t be any proposals”\(^{567}\) emphasising, once again, how the rules could be
tweaked to encourage business involvement. Yet, in this instance, the local
authority took on the challenge of managing the mess, coordinated with the
community and service provider and brought the project over the next years to a
more coherent conclusion and transparent accounts.

### 5.2.2.2 Networking and fish farming

The policy purpose for the Support to LED Programme was to create decent jobs for
the historically disadvantaged communities in mainly rural areas, often farm
workers displaced by the introduction of technology. In many cases, the ‘idea’
behind the project proposal came from enterprising, innovating, informed and
networked landowners or other asset holders (guest house, tourism facility etc).
Primarily, in the context of the programme as designed, they were business people
who identified an opportunity (often brought to their attention by the grant
awarding body) to attract legitimate public funding for an innovative and
potentially profitable investment, totally consistent with the logic and ethos of the
programme.

The aquaculture project in a highly arid region was led by just such a resourceful
and inventive established farming couple and their close friend, an aquaculture
technologist. The project sought to use the extensive irrigation dams and reservoirs
on the vast farms of the region for fish farming. One of the local newspapers
reported at the time that the proposal outlined plans to breed the fish centrally,
then send fingerlings to satellite sites on farms in the region where the fish can
grow to proper size. The fish farms are located in “satellite sites” in the irrigation
infrastructure of isolated farms across the wider area and serviced by the
“unemployed wives of farmworkers”. The business model was simple. Once the fish
were ready to be harvested, the partners bought back the fish from the farmers and
processed them for sale. The proposal emphasised the “livelihoods” potential
“specifically aimed at women”. Better informed than most, the project promoter,
was able to use her connections in local government to take part in a training
workshop for DEDEA staff from the region which I co-facilitated with colleagues
from DEDEA Bhisho. In my diary note for the day, I comment “Kelly’ is openly
promoting her proposal for a fish farm scheme … quickly grasps the technical
concepts within the new (DEDEA) funding instrument and is keen to apply these to
her plan for the fish farm scheme. At every breakout exercise, she leads the group
(of provincial government officials, mainly Xhosa) through the different stages of
project planning”\(^{568}\).

In one of the discussion groups, when I enquire about relationships with the
beneficiary communities, in a nothing-to-hide manner, she reports,
unselfconsciously, how she and her (Afrikaans) lawyer regularly meet the mainly
Xhosa speaking communities to set out the legal terms of the arrangement. The
handed-down unequal social relations of production remained intact and

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\(^{567}\) Diary note – Service Providers and Partners – discussion at CTT - 2\(^{nd}\) September 2009.

\(^{568}\) Diary Note – DEDEA LRED training workshop – 20\(^{th}\) May 2009.
unchallenged. Yet, it might be argued that such a project demonstrated win-win outcomes. It provided opportunities for self-employment for rural women and promotes pro-poor growth\textsuperscript{569}. The satellite farmers have gained an additional source of income. The award had created the platform that enabled the promoters to take full advantage of the publicity and exposure to establish a business from a starting idea\textsuperscript{570}. The initiative has subsequently received substantial funding from the provincial government – and still is. At its core, nevertheless, it seems to bear out Mosse’s assertion that development rarely works to counteract existing patterns of power.\textsuperscript{571}

5.2.2.3 The coming of social enterprise intermediaries

In their final report, the leaders of the LED support programme, looking back on the five year experience, candidly acknowledge “the flaw in the original design” which was built around “‘win-of-the-fittest’ logic” and which resulted in the “economically excluded” finding themselves unable to compete with “better equipped and historically privileged applicants ... or in partnerships that merely confirmed or worsened their relative weakness”\textsuperscript{572}. They point to pressures exerted from the outset by “government and partner agencies to register ‘quick wins’” although they also seem to accept that more could have been done by the project itself through “a better sequencing of actions ... to prepare potential beneficiaries to enable them to respond adequately to the opportunities on offer ...”. It was, they admit, only towards the end of the programme that “those who were most in need of the Programme funds” began to register success, measured in attracting funding, as a result of changes introduced in the last year to support mechanisms for applicants (see above on the Central Task Team). These were undoubtedly influenced by the constant frictions, skirmishes and battles along the sometimes confused interfaces within the PCU which called into question the aggressively competitive and pro-market approach which dominated in the design, start-up and early years of the programme. However, as we have seen above, the programme management imperative of absorbing the funds available was the primary motivation for change.

In their recommendations for future pro-poor LED programmes, “advancing the upliftment of the poor and facilitating their participation in the economy”\textsuperscript{573}, the authors of the final report call for a more “differentiated” two-track grant scheme which would make dedicated provision for the “historically excluded and under-capacitated”. Already, by the final year of operation, a number of the projects selected for support were driven by members of the communities themselves, ‘local heroes’ and social entrepreneurs, such as the instigators of the Sithembene traditional garment manufacturing community enterprise,\textsuperscript{574} or locally based local enterprise agencies such as the Kei Fresh Produce market (Ntinga LED Agency). The

\textsuperscript{569} Department for the Environment – 29\textsuperscript{th} March 2016.
\textsuperscript{570} A follow-up application to the LED support programme to assist with implementation was not successful.
\textsuperscript{571} Mosse D – Cultivating Development - The Ethnography of Policy and Practice – Pluto Press - 2005:19.
\textsuperscript{574} In this case, the project leader was a prominent former activist with strong leadership and public representation skills.
models adopted had much in common with some of the government initiatives to promote land reform, where much reliance is placed on the local elites as intermediaries. These are described by Moseki (Hebinck and Cousins 2013) “wield(ing) unequal power and influence” and although “privileged” in different ways (e.g. family, education, access to markets and all sorts of information) they “also mobilise opportunities that help other community members”. 575

5.2.2.4 A Contrived Dilemma?

Academia also featured as part of the intermediary class bringing development to rural communities. Some were spin-off private sector science and technology consultancies, just as profit-focussed as the entrepreneurial class of project promoters. Only in the last call for proposals, did we see the emergence of a more socially and developmentally aware university partner. The Ilima Agri-Park was designed and proposed by Fort Hare University. It was quite different from the drive for ‘quick wins and low hanging fruit’ that had dominated the early search for projects to fund. The project idea had been a slow-burning “co-production between academia, provincial government”576 with discreet advice and support from the programme team leader (a former senior faculty member of the UFH). To my surprise, when reviewing early texts, I found an early expression of the agri-park concept in the contractor’s winning proposal in 2005 as an example of the type of project that might be supported under the programme. Yet such was the dominance of the ‘enterprise model’ of LED within the project team that the model only emerged as a proposal for consideration for support during the last call in late 2009577. Even at this stage, the programme team leader (who had been involved in the preparation of the bid) was still concerned that his support for such a project would be criticised as ‘conflict of interest’. On the other hand, in the light of the poor success rates of enterprise-LED to date and need to generate ‘bankable’ projects, such opposition, we expected, was likely to be fairly muted. In our joint-role as members of the CTT, the team leader and I, at his request, met several times with the member of the faculty and driving force behind the project to offer advice and clarify issues in anticipation of a developed proposal to be submitted to independent evaluation panel. The same service was available to all project applicants. One of the RFAs in attendance with us for the first encounter dismissed the project as naïve and poorly thought out. Presentations, I recall, were confused, rambling and poorly structured but nevertheless the speaker did convey a sense of passion for the project. It was described by several speakers as potentially “catalytic” and “transformative” and, if successful, would be likely to create considerable numbers of new jobs and income earning opportunities578.

577 The project differed from other LCF proposals in that the applicant was the University as distinct from a community-based body. Within the team there was some initial opposition to the proposal, given its lack of community base despite evidence of such bodies being manipulated by intermediaries (fronting).
578 Diary note 3rd August 2009.
There was considerable persistent resistance on the part of senior members of the PCU and project generation team. While the charge of ‘conflict of interest’ was never openly levelled, opposition seemed to coalesce around what the critics saw as an ‘unequal’ partnership between a university faculty and local communities. This was, they argued, contrary to the programme guidelines. The same team members, white South African consultants and European programme managers, had frequently contested the very notion of ‘partnership’, describing it as an artificial and ‘bureaucratic’ constraint getting in the way of good business or technical solutions that the programme should be supporting. But by this stage, the specious quality of the ‘partnerships’ put together in many of the project proposals was more apparent and had already been exposed in the internal assessment referred to above in section 5.1.2 as blatantly instrumental and self-serving. The MTE report, as we have seen in Chapter Four, had criticised the lack of time and effort on the part of the RFAs to build the relations of trust that underpinned the LED process. Indeed, as we shall see further in Chapter Six, the social relationships that such arrangement seemed to engender were becoming a cause for concern for a number of us involved in the programme and in the provincial administration. The tide was turning in relation to what Long, quoting Chambers (1983) and Box (1984) calls this “clash of rationalities” against the dominance of the ‘enterprise-project’ model.

Following appraisal and evaluation, the Agri-Parks project was approved for grant support. It had as aim “to establish Agri-Parks and similar establishments as an economic development and support hub for the promotion of sustainable, low-cost, conservation agricultural production and processing that will enable small-scale rural farmers to effectively participate in public and private sector markets”. In very broad terms, it involved collaboration between the University and rural communities in the Eastern Cape (particularly around Alice). The project sought to build a value chain in the production, processing, marketing and sales into public (e.g. schools nutrition programmes) and private markets in the vegetable sector. The support package involved investment in assets and infrastructure, training and organisational development in all sectors and levels, technical assistance, know-how and technology. Agri-Parks has its critics who argue that approaches which seek “vertical integration into existing markets” invariably located in “away from where potential producers live” and work against the interests of the poorest. Although fairly widespread in South Africa today and heavily backed by the National Planning Commission (NPC), such interventions “inevitably lead, as Li (2009) and Amanor (2009) argue, to the exclusion of the very people who are targeted by such development … thus enforcing unequal development”581. It is probably too early to say – and not in the scope of this thesis - whether this assertion has foundation in evidence in the rural areas where Agri-Parks now operates. From my observations, based on meetings and site visits towards the end of the programme and several

579 Extract from diary note “… Entrepreneurs are getting frustrated and nervous and ready to walk away from all this bureaucracy” – quote from a former RFA in Social and Economic Council meeting – 18 March 2010 (author).
years later, I was struck by the fact that all of the management, scientific and technical staff I spoke with were black in contrast with the comment by a senior official in the Delegation who, when visiting projects in the Eastern Cape, “the proponent meeting you at the door was invariably of the privileged (white) community”\(^\text{582}\).

### 5.2.2.5 The many faces of the LED intermediary

To conclude this account of the role of intermediaries in the Support for LED development project, it is worth recalling the comment from Mosse on the subject of “project effects” when looked at from the perspective of the “beneficiary”. From his village level research, despite all the “relations and meanings obscured or misconceived … it (the development project) may still have a positive socio-economic effect on the lives of thousands of people”. He goes on, in the same context, to point out “the difficult fact for participatory or community driven models of development is that people become ‘empowered’ not in themselves, but through relations with outsiders”\(^\text{583}\). Given the pro-market (job creation) design of the EU Support to LED programme, it attracted the interest and attention of a wide range of intermediaries who sought to make the connection with poor communities to deliver ‘development’ because that was the deal. In a few instances, the probity and bona fides of the intermediaries were duly questioned. Some of the evidence from projects on the ground pointed to prevalence of old attitudes reflected in the stark inequalities (see Chapter Six) in rewards between, on the one hand, the visiting white coated scientists and technologists, the business consultants, leading the project and, on the other, the locally based rural community participants (and local agents). In other cases, incompetence and lack of transparency marked the relationship. Nevertheless, a number of the intermediaries brought – directly or indirectly - new skills and business opportunities, access to markets, experience in self-organisation and ultimately, for some, jobs. Over the period, the profiles of intermediaries changed marked in particular by the emergence of social entrepreneurs, community leaders and institutions committed to supporting and facilitating more transformative science and social-based enterprise.

### 5.3 Part Three - Some Conclusions and Some Key Issues

In the first part of the Chapter, we identified and examined how the lifeworlds and lived experiences of some of the actors more closely connected (in the sense of being closer to the formal decision-making processes – or in the project’s chain of command) shaped the design and functioning of the implementation mechanisms and affected the outcomes. We also attempted to understand better the relationship between the project team and the actors who serve the function of intermediary, connecting project resources to the purpose of the pro-poor project and to the target groups of beneficiaries. We have aimed to explore, from an actor perspective, how “the rules” are presented, interpreted, applied, manipulated, subverted and resisted by various stakeholders. We also sought to gain some

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\(^{582}\) Interview with senior official in EU Delegation – January 2010.

insights into which interests were served; who, in the long run, benefited and who paid the costs. In so doing, we also attempted to explore whether there is any substantive difference between traditional (top-down) development interventions and more participative (bottom-up) approaches in terms of the power relations and the rewards between team members, intermediaries and final beneficiaries.

5.3.1 Livelihoods, lifeworlds and the project worker

The cosmopolitan world of the “development nomad”\footnote{Chambers R – Critical Reflections of a Development Nomad - A Radical History of Development Studies – Edited Kothari U – Zed Books – 2005:67.} can be overstated. Our main cast of characters belong to what can loosely be described as the “project classes” who depend largely for a living on the “seemingly endless flow” of development projects contracted out by the donor agencies, competed over by the development companies and sectioned into expert positions specified in the terms of reference. For the international development worker, it can be a solitary lifestyle, moving intermittently from intense periods of project activity to stretches of unemployment and uncertainty until the next opportunity moves beyond the promise to an actual project contract. And from there, as much by accident (or vagaries of fortune) as by design, to the reality of new tasks, new relationships, new teams, new countries. It helps and reassures if the concepts and tools remain the same. The single transferrable skills-set can move easily from country to country.

My sense is that the typical contracted-out project worker,\footnote{As distinct from the NGO-humanitarian project worker.} as member of the project team – and the wider project class – whatever his/her commitment to the specific development agenda (theme), is first and foremost concerned with securing, maintaining and protecting that position, performing his/her role in ways that look good and can be connected to the perceived success of the project - from whence a surer path to the next project. Projects come and go and once completed, as far as the expert is concerned, most (finished) projects serve only as listed items in a CV demonstrating prior experience and capability in quest of future opportunity.

It helps also, in terms of livelihood to have relationships of patronage and track record with successful development companies. Development companies are agnostic when it comes to development policy. Project workers in search of more secure livelihood should also keep in mind that ‘they are technical experts, so no politics, please!’ Unless, of course, they happen to control the project agenda, in which case, they are professional programme managers rather than in any way ‘political’. In both our cases, we have seen how the project ‘ring master’ and holder of the “ideas with power”\footnote{Mosse D – Cultivating Development – Introduction: The Ethnography of Policy and Practice – Pluto Press - 2005:10.} effectively influenced appointments (and terminations) largely in line with his technical as opposed to political interpretation of the project agenda.
Every project worker brings a lifeworld into the “social arena” that is the project team, as in past experience, skills, know-how but also in Schutz’s notion of “taken for granted” world of the project worker as social actor. As Long explains, understanding the person’s lifeworld help to understand how they “manage their social relationships and how (they) problematize their situations” and provides insights into “the personal constructs with which the person categorises, codes, processes and imputes meaning to his or her experiences”. Just as the Baltics case was heavily influenced by the earlier Leader experience in Northern Ireland and by the lived personal realities of the transition towards democracy and EU membership of its senior team, so also was the Eastern Cape project team coloured by the “lived-in” worlds of its black and white South African and European members. Beyond early confrontation and contest, the BRPP team could find sufficient degree of common purpose and interlocking interests in the framework of a new approach to local development to commit to and deliver a standard approach. While the competitive grant scheme focus in the Eastern Cape persisted to the end of the programme there, it was not long after the first calls before different sets of values were being applied to the project outcomes – competition for results, frustration at the constraining rules, concern at lack of success and anger at the re-production of inequalities, broadly mirroring the social and cultural identities across the project team and in the wider project environment. Whatever the dominance of the ‘project culture’ in the programme, underpinned and reinforced by multi-annual budgets, the approach was openly contested from the outset, internally and externally. In that knowledge and confusion, the RFAs used their room for manoeuvre in their respective districts and did what they thought best to generate worthwhile ‘bankable’ projects but with less than appropriate tools for the task. The ‘project crisis’ was inevitable. The project ground was shifting, new alliances were being formed, more established networks survived and the RFAs “without supporters … were exposed and vulnerable”.

5.3.2 Project teams – new skills for new jobs – or just muddling through

A pro-poor development project should differ from ‘business-as-usual’ in the way that it seeks to bring new approaches, try new technologies, build new institutions to meet the challenge. They may be modelled on experience elsewhere – and be presented as blueprints for replication. They may have been tried again and again. Yet, projects are, as Mosse and others point out, uncertain. With all the rationality and rhetoric of planning and the science of programme cycle management, intervention logic and theories of change with their confident assertions of inputs, outputs, leading to results, then outcomes and eventually impacts, project teams struggle with the day-to-day pressures of multi-stakeholder, multi-part project delivery and uncertain futures. The more ‘technically innovating’ the initiative, the greater the dilemma for the project team managers – when the skills they need to

draw on in-country simply are not there\textsuperscript{590}. That was the case for the BRPP team, adding additional layers to the challenge of introducing ‘bottom-up’ local development planning in the three Baltic States. Over time, it was only partially resolved and largely through the determination and effort of the Country Team Leaders to succeed and their ability to “muddle through” - and deliver nine local area partnerships producing nine qualifying local area strategies for tackling rural poverty. At least one commentator pointed to their (the CTLs’) capacity to make it up and adapt, to re-interpret strategy and procedures to meet the contingencies of the day. For the part-time local team members, such fluidity and improvised novelty was frequently more than they had bargained for – and over the years, despite permanent team members’ efforts to provide training and a unified approach and toolkit for supporting local area partnerships, the turn-over in local staff was problematic, wasteful and a potential threat to the longer term success of the project.

In the South African context, the model was straightforward – successive calls for proposals, support to applicants, evaluations/awards, support to implementation. On paper, the skills were relatively unproblematic. Except that from the design stage, no one seemed to question the appropriateness of an approach that depended so heavily on outside entrepreneurs and technologists to stimulate the development initiative, trust and cooperation of rural communities so afflicted by unemployment, poverty and the long-shadow effects of the inequalities of the former apartheid system. The ‘development’ tools they had were more relevant to first world economies. Although some had backgrounds in non-government organisations working in the ‘social’ sector, the main body of RFAs were enterprise and small business development specialists who had little experience of the brokering and facilitation skills required to support local initiative in such circumstances. The predominant mindset was that of superior outsider and bearer of “presents or gifts ... which cannot be produced within the local situation itself,”\textsuperscript{591} an attitude reflected in often top-down, sometimes domineering manner observed in some of the RFA interaction with rural communities. If the challenge of supporting local economic development seemed complex, their task could be reduced to “bringing project ideas into eligible application formats”.\textsuperscript{592} Such an engagement strategy allowed the RFAs to play to their strengths and muddle through for several years until the contradictions and inadequacies were becoming too obvious in the bottom line – and in the failure to generate projects of sufficient ‘quality’ to qualify and absorb grant-fund budgets.

5.3.3 Communities of believers – or coalitions of self-interest?

Not that the more ‘participatory’ BRPP “escape(d) the managerialist and interventionist undertones inherent in the idea of ‘development’”\textsuperscript{593}, if anything, they were quite explicit, a topic to which we shall return in Chapter Six. But for the

\textsuperscript{590} Conscious of all the connotations of ‘more skilled outsider’ and ‘less skilled insider’.
\textsuperscript{592} Mid Term Review of the Support to LED Programme in the Eastern Cape – 2007.
moment, it seems relevant and timely to comment to how both projects struggled to “extend networks and enrol more and bigger people and their interests” to the future of the project. In the case of the BRPP, having avoided the threat of ‘elite capture’ by powerful outside actors whose interests were seen as inimical to the pro-poor aims of the programme, much of the early effort by the project team in the three countries was dedicated to recruiting, enrolling and mobilising stakeholders from more ‘relevant’ interest groups. Our quarterly reports chronicled progress in partnerships from curiosity to suspended scepticism to detached participation or moral guardianship – eventually to engagement, shared ownership towards what we might be inclined to read as ‘enlightened self-interest’ and a “community of believers”, as long, of course, as they perceived it to be in their interests to remain so. Just as in the IBRFP context where, as Mosse points out, “survival depended on maintaining a widening circle of individuals and institutions who would underpin the project as a ‘system of representations’”, so we sought to convince key stakeholders in the BRPP operational and policy environment of the value of the programme. From the outset, much of that ‘deal’ was built around the role of the local area partnership in the context of EU Leader and depicted scenarios that became more real as EU membership approached. Much as the rhetoric emphasised the pro-poor character of the programme, the selling point was the novelty of the ‘new institutional space’ around the partnership which ultimately created a platform for further power and influence for those who could take advantage of it – and by the same token promote the merit of the programme. As Mosse says, speaking of the early phase of the IBRFP, “this was a successful aid project because it sustained a coherent policy idea (BRPP partnerships), a model offering a significant interpretation of events”.

The selling point for the Support for LED in the Eastern Cape, on the other hand, was a grant scheme – “really offering money to test out ideas ... they warmed to that in the Province”, according to one of the senior members of the project team. Faithful to the design and convinced of the lack of organisational capability at community and even municipal level to achieve higher levels of production and income generation or even “better use of existing resources and the ‘human factor’”, the project team turned to the “people with the organisational skills and networks – and they are white” to serve as intermediaries. As a policy position, it differed little from a significant government emphasis in the rural sector on promoting partnership between established emerging farmers. There were few ‘believers’, however, in the ‘partnership’ as the base plank for the ‘local’ action and the challenge for programme managers was to sustain the project model as a “system of representation” of events. Whatever the criticisms of the MTE team

596 Interview with TM (M&E Adviser) – March 2010.
598 Comment from senior official in EC Delegation on profile of intermediaries – January 2010.
which related more to policy and practice, as the reality of the ‘social life’ of some of the projects supported under the regime became more apparent in terms of relations between intermediary and ‘beneficiary’, so concerns and criticism of the model and the approach grew within the team and among counterparts in the administration (See Chapter Six). However, the critical turning point leading to change in approach and partial change in model, came when programme managers became concerned that the intervention would fail to absorb the funds allocated.

That the interests of intermediaries (and indeed the members of the project team itself) in any project context are diverse, multifold and frequently in conflict with one another is simply a statement of the obvious. This is the world in which the project leader and project team must operate. The notion of intermediary is intrinsic to the entry strategy of any external intervention and all the more so in the case of projects aiming to strengthen local development capacity. Effective project leadership is marked by the ability to recognise and acknowledge these, to variously negotiate, accommodate, work around, contest and compromise, while all the time working within these currents to align the energies and commitment to the project goals and values. For the final word, Mosse’s analogy for the project leader seems appropriate and familiar – “master of a ship at sea subject to a cacophony of conflicting information about coordinates, readings of the weather and sightings of land, defending itself against a suspicious and mutinous crew subject to outside incitement”600.

5.3.4 Looking forward

In Chapter Six, we aim to take a closer look at the nature of the interactions between the project team (its project workers and intermediaries) and the intended beneficiaries of the intervention – both at local level in the ‘recipient’ communities and within the host administrations which are intended to ‘benefit’ from the technical assistance, ‘improved’ policies and ‘better’ practices.

CHAPTER 6

Interface III

Interpreting, Brokering and Practicing Local Development
Policy and Ideology at Point of Delivery
Chapter Four retraced some of the critical interfaces and battlefields which shaped to a considerable extent the meanings and understandings driving both case study interventions and their respective methods of delivery. Chapter Five sought to gain the measure of and to observe, as far as possible, from within, the knowledge encounters between members of the implementation team and with their close associates or intermediaries whom they seek to “enrol” in the projects, how dominance is imposed, resistance is generated, compromises are reached and interests are served. In this Chapter, we step outside the inner confines of the circle of programme shapers, drivers and immediate team, including intermediaries, in an effort to explore what happens beyond the inductions, rehearsals, briefings and debates when the project moves into delivery mode and walks the talk – translates the policy into practice - along critical interfaces in project land’s operational sphere. We will endeavour to understand how project workers and project teams manage (or do not manage) those spaces and create (or restrict) their room for manoeuvre. Through the lens of our development policy-practitioner looking-glass, we set out to observe, analyse and draw some conclusions on whether and how mandated missions and methods withstand contest and remain intact – or adapt and change - when faced with alternative and/or competing perspectives from significant interest groups and stakeholders. These include the intermediaries recruited to the realisation of the project, as well as the host administration, and to a lesser extent, given the construction of the project, in the contact zone with final beneficiaries.

The question I want to address specifically in this chapter is how the project team – collectively and individually – shape the “social context” within which they are operating as they translate their “undisclosed baggage into the different interests of (the) social/institutional worlds and local politics” they encounter at the interface of delivery – and how these “get unravelled … in ways that generate complex and unintended effects”601. Seen from that perspective, individual and team performance carried implications for individual experts, for the project team, for the development company, the donor agency, for counterparts in the administration and ultimately for beneficiaries. In common with Mosse, it was our ambition “to demonstrate professional competence and so secure an enduring relationship with the project and project agency/area”602, within a context where the potential for failure (personal, professional and in the ‘predictive’ power of the project model) was ever present and much of the effort was directed at what Long describes as “simply remaining in the game”603.

Throughout Chapter Six, then, we draw on “encounters at the interface”604 across both cases. We shall attempt to explore, analyse and draw some conclusions in

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terms of what actually transpires when the ideas, the ideologies, the methods, messages and ‘products’ created and nurtured “back home” and in the project backrooms come face to face with the expectations and aspirations of the beneficiaries, both institutional (technical assistance, policy and strategy) and community (local development actions to reduce poverty and social exclusion and to create jobs). We shall try to understand better how project team and individual project workers manage their operating environments, how they create conditions for success and how they respond to challenges and set-backs, all the while I shall seek to demonstrate how though their agency, they are influencing outcomes in unintended ways. To achieve this, I propose to look at what happened along several interfaces, alternating, as previously, between the Baltics and the Eastern Cape.

6.0.1 Structure of the chapter

In Part One our focus will be on the interface between, on the one hand, the project team workers and their intermediary partners (partnership members and project proposers) involved in delivery of project outputs and, on the other, the project’s intended final beneficiaries (‘poor’ rural communities). Working between the Baltics and the Eastern Cape, we shall attempt to see at different times and in various contexts how the project team (and its associates) engage with the target groups, how the latter respond and how the influence of agency affects the room for manoeuvre for the individual project worker and for the team.

In Part Two the subject area shifts to a consideration of the interaction between the development project team and their ‘targets’ for institutional, policy and procedural change, capacity building and strengthening within the host administrations. While not typically seen as ‘beneficiary’ in most development aid projects referenced in the literature, host administrations are very much within the change management objectives of many interventions which aim to transform existing arrangements in line with the ‘improved’ policy and practices set out in the mandate. Through the incidents and encounters selected in the chapter, drawn firstly from the Eastern European and secondly South African experiences, we will explore how contracted-in project workers bring their lifeworlds, interpret their mandate, encounter others, create their room for manoeuvre (or run out of space), build alliances and report results (of successes and failures) in institutional and policy change.

To conclude in Part Three, we seek to draw some conclusions and lessons learned at the point of ‘delivery’ in both projects. In particular, I want to understand differences, if any, in how the project team deals with the terms of engagement of participating communities and target groups in projects driven by a more participatory, inclusive approach compared with interventions largely implemented through competitive grant schemes and calls for proposals. From a programme management point of view, is there any difference between the projects in the way

‘failure’ (individual and/or collective) is handled? Looking across both projects, we aim to identify some of the critical factors that serve to confirm continuing direction and trajectory or bring about a turn-around and in some cases a fudge between the two. As we move into the sphere of development projects delivering technical assistance to counterpart institutions, we examine aspects of the ‘contract’ that brings both parties together (project team and recipient) over the course of the project – or pushes them apart. Finally, we seek to draw from the interactions observed, some insights into how an external project team attempts to gain traction for policy change and conversely how national and local politics respond to those efforts?

6.1 Part One - Delivering Pro-poor Local Development in Project-Land

Whatever the other interfaces that criss-cross project land, the point where the project meets the target community must be what Mosse describes as the “development frontier”606. The interactions that we have explored to this point have all involved the professionals – policy designers and drivers, donor agency managers and development companies, programme managers and team members, intermediaries and implementers. We have traced the storyline behind the organising proposition from its early origins and adjustments, we have followed its course through various phases of interpretation and attempts at internal resistance and re-interpretation to the point where “newly emergent forms of organisation and understanding”607 are generated. In this section, we turn our attention to the point of contact between the project worker (team member or intermediary) and the communities singled out to be the focus and the beneficiaries of these interventions.

6.1.1 Delivering local development in the Baltics

Writers such as Annist have already drawn attention to the somewhat conditional acceptance by Estonian (and possibly more generally Eastern European) communities of Western aid. She argues that provided the newcomers (aid agencies and project teams) bring resources – and new skills and “some initial tricks of the trade”608 – they (we) were welcome guests rather than as Mosse puts it “uninvited interlopers”609. Across the target regions in the three countries, communities broadly welcomed the BRPP initiative, bringing with it, as described later by a women’s group in Latgale, the prospect of the “milk cow” of external resources that, however modest, allowed them to dream610. At the outset, however, the mobilisation and participation of such groups could not be taken for granted.

610 In one of the many local closure ceremonies, I was presented with a patchwork cushion representing the “EU milk cow” by a group of women from a small rural community in Latgale expressing colourfully their expectations and satisfaction at having been awarded their first (EU) grant.
Despite the constant emphasis on tackling rural poverty and social exclusion through its dedicated effort in community development, most of the members of the core BRP Programme team – national and international – had little direct or ongoing contact with target communities. Community outreach was, however, achieved through several cohorts of unpaid Community Facilitators, recruited and trained in participatory needs assessment and community animation techniques. They were supported and led by the paid Community Development Coordinator who was also a member (part-time or full time) of the Country Team, recruited for his/her skills, qualifications experience and profile in social sciences. Through the optic of the following encounter involving one such recruit for the position of Community Development Coordinator, the project team and target community, under other watchful eyes, we can begin to discern how the project team interprets and conveys the ‘benefits’ of participation in the programme, how it perceives and reacts to the beneficiary response – and how the team and team members deal with the threat of failure.

6.1.1.1 Replacing ‘old’ with ‘new’ style professionalism\(^{611}\) in community development – an unintended live action

For members of the core BRP team in each country, visits to the “real communities”\(^{612}\) were more often like the expedition described by Mosse “on a field trail of development experience ... in the rural landscape of (Bihar)” – several cars travelling in convoy – “receptions with local dignitaries ... seated as honoured guests” and conforming to the “order and etiquette of formal development encounters”\(^{613}\). The BRP caravan of experts and consultants arrived in a tiny picturesque rural village in one of the three target local partnership areas in Lithuania. The occasion was an early DFID Outputs to Purpose Review mission, although this would not have been known by any of the participants, other than the team and the DFID officials. Our DFID/CSEED visitors wanted to have the opportunity to engage with a participating community and to hear more or less directly (through interpretation) from community members of their perceptions of need, their expectations and priorities from working with the BRPP – and to fly the British Aid flag. The village was considered by local stakeholders (municipality) to be in the ‘community-active’ category\(^{614}\) with strong social networks. Certainly to see an almost full meeting room of expectant and interested citizens – men and women of different ages - on our arrival that mid-afternoon tended to confirm that assessment, although under-employment and seasonal factors (early spring) in the local small farm economy undoubtedly also played a part.

After introductions and formalities, the visitors - DFID-CSEED, Embassy official, development company representative and project team – took our seats on the


\(^{614}\) Communities were differentiated as ‘active’ or passive based upon the evidence of associative and voluntary activity recorded in a survey undertaken during the Inception period.
“raised dais” along with local accompanying officials. The recently recruited Community Development Coordinator, sociologist by training and profession stood, as planned, to introduce the theme of the session – community participation in local development. Whether reverting to type as urban academic addressing rural dwellers - or nervous in the somewhat novel situation under the eye of international development agency bureaucrats, his posture conveyed superior ‘expertise’ and his presentation quickly veered towards lecture, loudly, in Lithuanian, already venturing proposals for “improving the local area”. It did not take long, however, or much of the whispered interpretation, to know that the monologue was going rapidly in the wrong direction (however poorly defined our expectations were). Every head in the room in front of us seemed embarrassingly fixed on the shuffling feet on the floor, a depressing silence replacing earlier animated chat.

To make matters more uncomfortable for me as team leader, the spectacle was in full view of our DFID clients, whatever about our target community. Inwardly I kicked myself for not rehearsing the presentation beforehand with this untested but highly qualified member of the team. (Always the project leader on the run and half-attending to the detail!). Our much talked-about narrative of participation was being turned on its head in front of us. Something had to be done and, at the first break in his talk-down theoretical address, I asked if I might say something and was eventually able to take the floor. One question, speaking through interpretation – “can you share with us what you like about your village – and what you would like to see improved?” The shift in mood was direct, almost immediate and visible – heads lifting, eyes connecting, hands rising, opinions and ideas about what made this very rural area a good place to live in – what the fears and concerns were - coming thick and fast. The assembly divided into smaller discussion groups, facilitated by BRPP team members. The tension eased and our community development specialist commented in a not unfriendly tone (and without irony) ‘that was a good question to ask’.

6.1.1.2 Managing the outcome and avoiding failure?

The community hall was the stage for a contest between a longstanding, local ‘elite-driven’ approach to local development and “new strategy” imported by the UK/DFID programme and its project team. We all knew that we were – the programme was – still an untested entity as far as the DFID team was concerned and under continual assessment. The community audience provided the x-factor. How they responded could affect medium term perspectives – in back offices of DFID - on the performance of the BRPP – and, to a lesser extent, in the company, on my capability as a project team leader. Not that there was any fear that DFID would withdraw funding or take overt action. Our concern was not to lose the hard-won confidence of the DFID sponsors, at this early stage in the roll-out of the Programme, in our collective ability to translate the rhetoric of the BRPP into

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616 Annist (2006) points to a sharp urban-rural divide in Estonia based on a popular urban view of rural dwellers as dependent and subsidy-seeking.
practice. To do so would make it harder for us to convince the CSEED team over the long term to support the more risk-taking, innovative aspects of the programme yet to be rolled-out. Indeed, to fall and fail at this point ran the risk of the programme’s relegation in the minds of the DFID paymasters to just ‘another livelihoods project’ - what Mosse describes as “fall from grace”,\(^{617}\) compared with the novelty interest that it had been gathering in those quarters. It would be more difficult to negotiate, gain approval or even claim credit for what we had been putting forward as ‘new institutional space’ - connecting ‘active’ communities to local partnerships combining local institutions interacting with national government to deliver local development policies and resources in the shape of locally agreed strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion. However messy and unwanted, the on-stage intervention was critical, not just in terms of ‘selling’ ‘participation’ to a target community but another opportunity to demonstrate to our DFID sponsors the programme’s commitment to the practice and its ‘obvious’ (in our eyes) applicability in this live situation.

Nevertheless, it had also highlighted project management failure in recruiting and enrolling national team members to a new approach to local development – a point made in Chapter Five. It exposed a failure to understand or come to terms with a deeply rooted culture of ‘elite responsibility’ and leadership, referred to by Macken-Walsh in her paper on partnership membership in Lithuania (2006)\(^{618}\). Over the course of the programme, the level and quality of community participation and engagement in Lithuania compared favourably with the other two countries. There was a deeper conversation to be had - around how an external intervention can co-exist and work with or set out to destroy such social capital - but which did not take place as the programme moved from one delivery milestone to the next.

6.1.1.1.1 Community of ‘believers’ – or setting own terms?

I had several occasions to revisit this community and could only be grateful, for the fact that they were as positively disposed as they turned out to be. This was indeed a community not unlike those described by Macken-Walsh as having “a different but strong heritage of collective action”\(^{619}\). Group leaders, in subsequent discussion, had clear and well defined desires and aspirations\(^{620}\) for the development of the public space in their village which they were ready to share with the project team. By the same token, they expected to have access to project resources. Was there ever a real threat of non-engagement? The subject of the initial encounter was never directly raised again, but in various settings over the remaining years, in meetings with representatives from the community and with the community itself, despite continuing levels of poverty and lack of public investment, this was a community which displayed a strong sense of pride of place and an air of competence and confidence in dealing with outsiders and bureaucrats.


Were they ‘believers’ in ‘partnership and participation’? Their engagement was, it seemed, straightforward and uncomplicated. Through their leaders/delegates, they seemed to embrace the practice (whatever about the ideology) of new participatory methods, always, no doubt, in the ‘belief’ that there would be tangible benefits in return for the community.

Once up and running, the BRPP Country Teams in all three countries, enjoyed a relatively close interpersonal (but professional) relationship (linguistically, culturally, socially) with most of their target communities. They were able to build extensive community networks and connections and communicated easily and directly in that context. The Latvian Community Coordinator, who grew up on a former collective farm, was of the view that there was little if any resistance and, probably, sufficient social capital and a latent willingness in many of the communities to take on new approaches to local development, a point later echoed in Macken-Walsh’s observations. In the circumstances, it seemed neither “unrealistic (nor) foolhardy” to encourage “people and organisations towards more ‘participatory’ and equitable modes of integration and coordination” (Long 2001). For the Northern Irish members of the team, such an approach lay at the core of our experience of better connecting top-down policy making with bottom-up expression of needs in that region and indeed elsewhere in EU15. We were, to an extent, always conscious of Long’s “paradox” in our efforts as “more knowledgeable and powerful outsiders helping the powerless and less discerning local folk” and had discussed this aspect during the inception period. Based on the Northern Irish experience and from our early contact with stakeholders and communities in the Baltics, the people here were ‘up for the game’. Our proposition – far from having “a mystifying function” (Ferguson 1994) – was simple and straight. It was to activate and demonstrate new forms of local organisation that would have the capability over time to interact more purposefully and intelligently with central (and local) government to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. We could only achieve that goal if the communities selected for the pilot were prepared to engage and play the game, not as an academic exercise in social re-engineering but as a practical, workable framework which, our model predicted, would be enable them to negotiate better access to public resources and decision-making in the future.

6.1.1.2 Facilitating ‘bottom-up’ community development

Over the programme period approximately seventy (unpaid) Community Facilitators were trained in each country, although not all of these worked on BRPP-funded projects. The majority of Facilitators were women, some of whom were social workers, primary school teachers, carers and volunteer workers, “actors known to the public authorities, who were for the most part public employees” living and working in the target villages and communities. Our offer and their motivation was pitched around having the opportunity to train, gain new

(marketable) skills and experience, in anticipation of future employment prospects. Volunteer Community Facilitators provided the main connection between the rural villages and communities, the Local Area Partnership, which had been set up in each of the three target municipalities in each country – and the programme. They had become the essential carriers of the BRPP message of bottom-up, self-help local development at the frontline of the programme and reaching out to rural communities. The contribution of this group of unpaid ‘project workers’ to the perceived success of the programme was acknowledged in the BRPP Final Report.

“We must pay tribute to the total engagement of those involved through the partnerships or as Community Facilitators in all nine partnership areas over almost three years. Many thousands of voluntary hours have been clocked up in the process, traditional views challenged, risks taken, compromises reached, disappointments taken on board, achievements assumed, lessons learned.

Our Community Facilitators made a contribution to the outcome of the local area strategies far in excess of the direct input and support they received from the project.”

6.1.1.2.1 Alone at the point of delivery

In her anthropological study of the BRPP in South East Estonia, Annist paid considerable attention to deployment of the Community Facilitators as the frontline workers into communities as “agents of change with skills to activate their communities”625. From her multi-site ethnographer perspective, she contrasts the training experience with reality in the field – two villages in one of the partnership areas - and concludes on the basis of her observation of two community youth workers626 that “when facing their own villages, people often experience failure”. In the cases presented, the CFs “felt it was their responsibility to succeed”. Unable to garner community support for their projects, the proposals were, understandably, not retained at partnership local action plan level, adding to the sense of personal failure. Annist is critical of the lack of support for those struggling to “initiate general village activities” from “the programme representatives” who seemed to “shrug off such examples as people who just could not succeed in their task”. Puzzled at the system’s inability “to recognise the difficulties of the CFs”, she wonders how “locals involved in development projects become so detached from their own cultural environment and so immersed in the development rhetoric that they no longer recognise the cultural logic of their own societies...” 627 Such an unintended outcome – not succeeding in the community development task – is, she

626 The Estonian progress report around the same period, makes reference to a group of ‘17 youth workers’ being trained in community facilitation techniques – alongside 17 ‘Community Facilitators’ as part of an initiative taken by the Polva Partnership using the Small Grants Fund – and comments that the latter were “more eager to adopt participatory approaches that the group of youth leaders” – Jan 2002. This seems to be a pre-emptory argument to bolster the case for the better use of participatory practices.
argues, the consequence of their induction into the “facilitatory mystique” or what Ferguson, quoting Williams (1981) describes as the “new strategy” (participatory planning process) which “is ‘largely rhetoric’, serving only a mystifying function”.

6.1.2.2 “Ever tried ... ever failed ... no matter ... try again ... fail again ... fail better!”

The cohort of CFs described by Macken-Walsh in another BRPP pilot region (in Lithuania) seemed to be better qualified, experienced and networked than was the case in the Estonian instance discussed above. They were “in the most part public employees”, willing to work “unpaid, often to the amazement of villagers”. Success was never a given. In one of the villages she identified, “there was an evident scepticism and lack of interest” towards the effort of the community group, supported by the BRPP, to clean up the area surrounding the living quarters. “Social events and planting flowers around here won’t do us much good”, some local respondents commented. Far from being the exception in terms of response to the efforts of Community Facilitators, this was probably closer to the rule as far as the working environment went. To quote Beckett, it was as much a case of “Ever tried ... ever failed ... no matter ... try again ... fail again ... fail better!” — or simply muddling through - in any of the pilot communities across all three countries. Nevertheless, the depiction of the marginalisation of at least one of the Community Facilitators at the delivery interface, contradicts the overall official narrative of their role and the impact.

Community Facilitator experiences at the point of delivery of the programme - working with target communities - engaging partnership members – were collated by the Community Development Coordinator. Key developments and issues were incorporated in quarterly Country Reports. By 2002, the CFs had become “the critical link between grassroots communities and the Area-based Partnership”, “they have provided vital local knowledge and insights which are not normally in the gift of the Partnerships themselves”. If these messages were intended primarily to demonstrate “upwards” to policy managers in DFID (and national authorities) that the model was working, they also tended to convey ‘downwards’ to the Community Facilitators a sense of the “legitimacy of their own roles” and their place in the programme. Towards the end of the programme, as area plans were coming to fruition and communities were bidding for project resources, there were indications that the CFs were asserting the validity and relevance of their local

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632 Community Facilitators in Latvia were encouraged to – and did - keep diaries of their work.
knowledge frequently in opposition to views held by partnership board members. One progress report comments “There is a need to identify appropriate and feasible solutions to improve the quality of communication between the Community Facilitators and Partnership Board members ... both groups work more independently with less sense of commonality of approach. In one case, a group of Community Facilitators have taken the initiative to set up a support network – an action seen by some in the partnership as ‘presumptuous’.”

But by this stage, the project model was stable and broadly accepted over substantial networks in all three countries as well as by the DFID team. In such circumstances, we could afford to raise some potentially critical issues. If anything, as Mosse observes in the IBRFP case, such shared insights “added extra endorsement to the model by demonstrating openness to criticism.” The same report comments casually that “these are very natural developments” and part of the “rich set of learning relationships ... stimulated in the course of such an interactive and participative process” – although it goes on to stress the need to strengthen linkages between the two groups over the remaining months of the project. Several years after the closure of the Programme, Macken-Walsh observes that “overall ... RPP community organisations were supported by a high participation rate of rural villagers ... evidenced by the large amount of work carried out on a voluntary basis.”

6.1.2 Delivering local development ‘partnerships’ in the Eastern Cape

There was little evidence of any “new strategy” or what Chambers called “‘new’ ... style professionalism geared to promoting participatory management and participatory research and evaluation methods” in the programme documentation for the EU support for LED in the Eastern Cape. As is clear from earlier chapters, the dominant model throughout the design, development and now into the delivery stages of the programme was much closer to what Long describes as the “‘cargo’ image of intervention” and a development context characterised by clear separation of “inside and outside (or the ‘world beyond’)”.

The concept and principle of partnership may have been a constant throughout the discourse, and a mandatory condition for applications to the LED grant scheme. Nonetheless, its use as a criterion, as we shall see, did little to address or bridge the historic inequalities that existed between target beneficiaries and the entrepreneurial grant applicants who claimed the lion’s share of the project’s funds over the first four years of the programme. Indeed, by insisting on partnership as an eligibility condition, over and above its “mystification effect”, as much for the project workers in the team as for the project proposers, themselves, and their

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would-be partners in project land, it seemed to fit more what Ferguson, calls “the world of acceptable statements and utterances” shaping the “thoughts and actions of development bureaucrats”\(^641\).

In this section, we shall see how the notion of partnership was interpreted and applied at point of delivery. We noted indeed in Chapter Five, how the concept (of partnership) was used by some as a line of defence to resist programme support for a potentially transformative proposal which lacked a ‘partnership’ governance structure\(^642\). Such was the confusion around the concept, that when faced with difficulties in generating ‘bankable’ projects, senior members of the project generation team seriously argued (unsuccessfully) to change the condition to ‘private-private partnerships’, suggesting the mandatory (if spurious) link with historically disadvantaged communities was inimical with ‘quality’ projects. Even under the prevailing interpretation of ‘community - private partnership’ the M&E Adviser explained to me during later discussion, the rules of the grant schemes allowed private consultancy companies to be joined in the project as a partner and to claim fees for their input. If they were not listed as partners, they became subject to public procurement requirements. So, most companies opted for the partner status which made them more responsible if things go wrong, but allowed them to earn fees\(^643\). We will attempt to open up insights into how, despite mounting evidence of failure at that interface, the core features of the driver policy, especially when embedded in the DNA of project cycle management and its budgetary expression, can withstand pressure for change. Indeed, it is only when these fundamentals are at risk, and especially the threat of serious financial underspend, that the pressure to change course finally took effect.

Because of the distance that separated some of us – the Programme Coordinator, the Financial Coordinator and myself as LED Policy Adviser\(^644\) - from the delivery zones and project implementation, we had little direct appreciation of what was happening in projects funded by the Programme until the last years. I had few occasions to connect directly with its target beneficiary communities. In addition to the fact that I was part-time and more or less fully occupied with my support role to the DEDEA LED Unit based in Bhisho, to travel out to communities, given the distances involved could easily take up a full day (just getting there) and often required overnight stays. Nevertheless, as the grants were awarded, monies disbursed and projects commenced, stories from the frontlines percolated back to our offices in the provincial administrative capital - from where it was possible to gain some insights into the types of local development generated and its impact on the intended beneficiaries. Seen from that vantage point, there was growing evidence to suggest that however much the principle of partnership was proclaimed, the reality within projects merely demonstrated the persistence of the vast social, cultural and economic inequalities that characterised the Eastern Cape, historically and into the second decade following the end of apartheid. A bleak


\(^{642}\) Chapter Five Section above 5.2.2.4 Ilima Agri- parks schools nutrition programme.

\(^{643}\) Diary note – discussion in CTT – September 2009.

\(^{644}\) Although the Financial Controller was more focussed on financial transparency and contractual terms that social equity and development issues.
assessment that calls to mind Mosse’s observation that “(d)evolution rarely works counter to existing patterns of power”645.

6.1.2.1 A pro-business grant scheme for community-based LED

The dominant pro-business model of LED, heavily backed by the international donor community from the outset, had prevailed over a ‘community-driven, government supported’ version, advocated by “young local government guys”. 646 ‘Job creation’ had won out over ‘developmental state welfarism’. The grant scheme approach had been “unanimously accepted by the reference group (donors, academics and provincial government)”647. Having won the tender on the basis of an offer demonstrating considerable experience in competitive grant scheme management and a strong proposal (“the winning bid was head and shoulders above all the others”648) for its efficient implementation, it seems hardly surprising that the development company – and the programme team – were committed to the logic of grant scheme management for the first years at least. The main pressure for programme managers in the early years, as stated earlier, was ‘to get the money onto the streets (accountably) and as quickly and efficiently as possible’. The former Head of Project Generation, with considerable experience in EU grant scheme management, commented “… we were told it was impossible to absorb this money in the Eastern Cape at that speed – we had contracting deadlines – there was a huge absorption issue … it’s a numbers game – if you want to spend the money – you’re under enormous pressure to spend the money”649. The Finance and Contracts Unit Leader, on the other hand, took the view that “we wanted ‘good’ applications – even if it meant spending less money, although DECSA (and other stakeholders) wanted absorption”650. If the application procedures were judged by the MTE team to be “intimidating”651, he (head of FCU) took solace in the assertion that “regardless of whatever project, there was never an association with nepotism or corruption”652.

6.1.2.2 A less positive picture

However, a less positive picture of the LED funded ‘partnerships’ was emerging from conversations with colleagues in the LED Unit in DEDEA, both of whom were members of the Evaluation Committee for the selection of projects to be supported through the programme. One of them recalled an incident when during a grant award ceremony it became embarrassingly clear that the ‘signatory’ head of the community partnership “couldn’t read or write”653 – and therefore could not have knowingly signed the partnership agreement (base condition and criterion for

646 Skype interview with first ToR designer 4th May 2011.
647 Correspondence with second and final ToR designer – 7th May 2011.
648 IV with Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – 19th March 2010.
649 Skype interview with former Head of Project Generation Team – 27th May 2011.
650 IV with Manuel - Head of finance and contracts – 24th March 2010.
651 Mid-Term Review of the Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape 2007:12.
652 IV with Manuel - Head of finance and contracts – 24th March 2010.
653 IV with Sizwe – Member of Evaluation Committee – April 2010.
application to the local competitiveness fund) - fuelling suspicion that some of the (white) project proposers were deliberately “fronting”654 the ‘partnerships’.

Similar noises were reaching the Programme Coordination Unit in Bhisho. In early 2009, more than three years into the programme, following changes in the deployment of RFAs in the Project Generation Team (see Chapter Five), the Programme Coordinator/Team Leader, in one-to-one conversation with me, shared a deep sense of concern at what he saw as blatant imbalances in some of the ‘partnerships’ that had already been funded. He was receiving more information into the business operation of the projects now directly in his line of oversight and was dismayed by what he was reading. One of the examples he cited was of a livestock improvement initiative, involving the promotion of modern stock management practices in a traditional rural community. “The white ‘partner’ (a veterinary-pharmaceutical consultancy firm based outside the Province) receives R66,000 per month through the programme while the black ‘community worker’ is paid R900 ... Maybe I should have been paying closer attention ... makes me sick in the stomach ... we don’t want to be associated with this type of project”655.

Such a project may have been at the extreme end of the spectrum but similarly constructed projects were not untypical over the first years of the programme. In the search for the “miracle seed, improved variety”656 job-creating project, the science, technology, creativity and business acumen (mainly white) were widely assumed to be the critical success factors. Successive calls for proposals did the rounds through the usual business networks, promoted locally through the Programme’s Project Generation Team in search of winning combinations. These were not always the out-of-province “grant-grabbing corporation”, such as the lead partner in the livestock enhancement project mentioned above, many were smaller local asset owners with ideas to diversify their businesses. These included craft production and retail enterprises, generally owned and managed by white business people, building out from their existing guest house or other tourism related activity, drawing on Xhosa traditions and skills. Others included promising niche businesses such as essential oils and berry farms, to mention but a few. In many such cases, the intended beneficiary community may have lived in relatively close proximity to the lead-partner and would be known to one another. In many others, the out-of-province partners had no prior relationship. Nevertheless, irrespective of the degree of familiarity between proposer and ‘beneficiary’, the relations of production in the vast majority of projects supported, remained just as skewed as they had been on the margins of the wider economy.

It hardly comes as a surprise that many of the projects supported under the grant scheme as designed and implemented over the course of the programme mirrored these top-down relations between project promoter and intended beneficiaries. The encounters described are not dissimilar to the “direct encounter between intervening parties and farmers” described by Long “and the traffic of presents and

654 Fronting means a deliberate circumvention or attempted circumvention of the B-BBEE Act and the Codes - DTI
655 Diary note – 9th March 2009.
gifts which come from the outside ... reproducing the image of an all-powerful outside and inferior inside”\textsuperscript{657}. The dominant perception within the team was of beneficiary communities lacking the skills, aptitude, organisation and initiative to undertake a project, which could only be generated and put into effect by more enterprising outsiders. One of the programme managers from the Delegation in Pretoria spoke of his observations when on field trip: “A year ago, I visited projects and small businesses supported by the programme in the Eastern Cape – the ‘proponent’ meeting you at the door (of the project) was invariably of the privileged (white) community with the hawk-eyed financial controllers and monitors (from the project team) in the accompanying group”\textsuperscript{658}.

In the next section, we will examine how change finally came to the way the programme was implemented (in terms of how projects were generated and supported). However, the shift in approach was less a consequence of mounting evidence of the type of development project being generated, nor indeed, even the critical findings of the earlier mid-term review – but for reasons which come closer to the fundamentals of successful project cycle management.

6.1.2.4 Time for change? – we are not sending money back to Brussels.

As noted in Chapters Four and Five, the ideology, design and approach to implementation was first called into question during the mid-term review in early 2007, especially in relation to the interface with the poor and marginalised target communities and their institutions in the province. It concluded “grant schemes do not support the process of essential LED stakeholder networking, trust-building and cooperation”\textsuperscript{659} before going on to recommend a fairly radical shift in direction towards a more structured pro-poor partnership-based approach. The MTR report undoubtedly contributed to a partial change in thinking and approach within the programme team/development company and among its provincial (and DECSA) stakeholders\textsuperscript{660}. Its conclusions led to some changes in the project team but the essential project design and method of delivery, as we have already remarked, remained intact. Management of the three grant schemes remained the primary and most resourced purpose of the programme – and while some resource would now be directed at policy and institutional strengthening, in financial terms this remained markedly marginal to the overall effort. Project generation continued largely as it had been driven up to that point.

Inevitable pressures were nevertheless building. The later than planned arrival of the increased grant funds, delayed in the aftermath of the MTE report, (late 2007 early 2008), set a rapid timeline running for their delivery and commitment by early 2010. Already under orders to ‘get the money out’, the last calls placed an ever increasing burden on the team to ‘spend the money’ and deliver ‘bankable’ projects. Commenting in the Final Report, the programme leadership point to the “… tight timeframes, the size of the grant fund budgets in relation to other

\textsuperscript{657} Long N – Development Sociology Actor Perspectives – Ch 2 Demythologising Planned Intervention – Routledge – 2001:33
\textsuperscript{658} IV with Head of Development Cooperation DECSA – January 2010.
\textsuperscript{659} Mid-Term Review of the Support to Local Economic Development in the Eastern Cape 2007:13.
\textsuperscript{660} Although this was not acknowledged in the Final Report of the programme.
components of the Programme logical framework, ... meant that a great deal of energy had to be devoted to the effective generation of grant applications661. However, as recounted in Chapter Five, (5.1.2.4 It’s not working), there was mounting evidence that even within the existing interpretation of the purpose of the grant schemes662, the quality of applications was poor and many were failing to secure support and funding through the programme’s independent evaluation mechanism663.

The following diary note from March 2009 conveys some of the sense of anxiety felt within the Programme Coordination Unit during that period:

Text Box 7 Diary Note – Pressure within Programme Team on last Calls for project proposals

Much of the conversation centres on a real and growing concern within the team that, as the Programme moves into the last call for proposals, not all the resources will be used up and money may have to be returned to Brussels. This would be a very negative outcome, undermining many of the other aspects of the programme. Trevor is worried as is Silumko (there’s talk of “sleepless nights”) and among the RFAs there seems to be a drop in confidence “they’re scratching the bottom of the barrel – they’ve run out of ideas”. ...

Silumko has joined the discussion at this stage. He wants to bring the RFAs together early in April. This will be the last real opportunity to rally the regional teams prior to the launch of the 2009 calls for proposals. “We need an injection of creativity!”664

6.1.2.5 Generating better – or more ‘bankable’ projects?

As we have seen in Chapter Five, the continued poor performance of the Project Generation Team eventually led to the decision in mid-2009, almost as a last resort, to centralise the support function made available to project proposers. The Central Task Team was set up primarily to improve the supply of quality projects likely to succeed at evaluation and the job creation count, against which overall progress and outcomes were to be measured.665 Rationalised in the Final Report, the CTT was also in response to the realisation that four years into the programme cycle, “... applications and awards by the PCU were still to show a tendency for the aforementioned patterns of inequality to repeat themselves in the types of grantees who became predominant beneficiaries of the Programme.”666
fundamentally, its most critical function was to deliver a sufficient flow of ‘bankable’ projects that could absorb previously unspent and newly arrived additional programme funds. If uncommitted by early 2010, these would be returned to Brussels with damaging political fallout in the Province, for the EU Delegation in South Africa – and potentially repeat-business consequences for the development company.

We have seen in Chapter Five how ideological differences surfaced within the CTT around the definition of ‘partnership’ and how a notable success was achieved against opposition from those who sought to defend the ‘enterprise’ (private sector) model of LED in the adoption of the university-led Agri-parks initiative. However, this was the exception rather than the rule. Within the CTT, the project drivers continued to be the networked and in-the-know entrepreneurs and innovators with their (potentially grant attracting) ideas usually in search of a target LED (‘previously disadvantaged’) ‘partner’ community, most times with which they had no prior relationship. Some came from outside the Eastern Cape, flying in for meetings with the CTT. In a diary note from the CTT sessions, I comment on the type of participant – all middle class, entrepreneurial (business, social and academic) and, with one exception, white:

**Text Box 8    Diary Note – Project Consultation Meeting**

| For the afternoon workshop, there were representatives from a number of different groups proposing projects. .... Those present included PJ – a prominent social activist, currently involved in a number of high-profile LED/community development actions in ORTDM; representatives from the Agri-parks (UFH) concept; scientist from a separate project to develop “disease resistant sweet potato” and several people representing an essential oils project consortium. Only one of the participants for the afternoon workshop was from the black community 667. |

Given the need to ensure a better success rate for proposals submitted, to meet the high absorption targets for these last calls and, in so doing, spend the money, much of the advice and feedback from the CTT tended to focus on technical flaws or weaknesses in the proposal, ensuring linking ‘coherence’ between rationale and proposed strategy, setting clear objectives. There were fewer questions about more ‘developmental’ aspects of the intervention which might raise concerns about the longer term effect of the project on the local community. In the case of a follow-on application for support for additional livestock improvement projects, driven by a the same private development agency mentioned above 668, for example, the proposed project design included the selection “of a secondary group of Village Link Persons (VLPs) who are suitable (my italics) farmers trained by the project to serve, post project, as micro-enterprises who sustain the project impact by providing

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668 According to nd, in the apartheid era, the same company had served as labour recruiting agency for gathering and transporting workers from the townships and informal settlements of the Transkei to the work camps of the gold and other mining companies. In terms of corporate identity, they’ve changed much since then and their CEO has a good reputation according to TM. Diary note 10th August 2009.
services and inputs that farmers need”⁶⁶⁹. What is interesting is the type of advice sought from one of the members of the CTT. The author of the proposal was well known to several members of the PCU and he felt sufficiently at ease to seek detailed, explicit advice on “tactics” when preparing the application.⁶⁷⁰ The exchanges (see below) recall the earlier criticism from the MTE team that “the predominate part of the working time of RFAs has however been spent on bringing project ideas into eligible application formats”⁶⁷¹ rather than facilitate a shared understanding of needs and capacity. This written query from a project applicant illustrates the point:

“… we have pitched 3 proposals that are in truth more similar than dissimilar on the basis that they are sufficiently distinct and important variations on the theme of roll out by DoA of core good practices from the (name) project that are a vital next step in LED. We appreciate that you can only opine on some of these questions ... If the tactic is OK we welcome any advice on how to strengthen the actual text in pursuit of it …” Written query from project applicant.

In a diary note of September 2009, I comment on the discussion that took place around the drafts: “As I might have suspected, the three proposals from the same source (…. Development) are essentially cut and paste efforts – intended for three different Districts. The drafts so poorly prepared that names of places were quite confused … our main criticism of the proposal was that it was essentially a re-run of the same project which was funded in 2007 and recently completed. It is based on identical improved-animal-health-through-access-to-health-products logic and has led to (widely quoted⁶⁷²) increased herd sizes but no market outlets. … Taking a very cynical viewpoint, (author’s viewpoint) the livestock improvement projects are basically an effort to put in place a supply network for animal medicines – using public funds”⁶⁷³. In the event, and probably unsurprisingly given what we had been learning about the winners and the losers in the earlier (supported) project (see page 13 above), none of the final applications was retained by the evaluation/selection committee.

In another application to the CTT, the organisers of a major cultural festival made much of the ‘inclusion’ of Xhosa women from a local community in the bid – as an ‘asset’. However, according to the project generation team member supporting them to prepare the proposal, the proposers were likely to resist pressure to include the Xhosa women’s group as ‘full’ partner in the established management committee. In the CTT discussion around the issue, the prestige of the traditional event, the potential jobs count and the promised prominent, if token role, of the local craftworkers, were factors put forward to justify supporting the bid-writers to prepare a proposal that ticked all the formal boxes. The potential transformation

⁶⁶⁹ Extract from project promoter’s proposal.
⁶⁷⁰ Similar support would have been provided to any of the proposers if they asked – the CTT had no role in evaluation and selection.
⁶⁷² Press and other media coverage as well as glossy brochures.
⁶⁷³ Diary note 5th September 2009.
impact of a genuine commitment to partnership - social integration, empowerment and capacity building (into management and governance levels), equality - were not taken into account. The project was judged essentially on its ‘business case’ and technical merit in the formal evaluation and received support. In the words of a wise man (also member of the CTT) “… maybe it’s also too much of a soul transformation to expect, given our yesterdays…”

In this section, we have attempted to see into the ‘black-box’ of interaction between project team (and intermediaries) and target beneficiary communities. In the next pages we turn our attention to the interaction between the project team and actors in the host administration which is the recipient of technical assistance provided by the project.

6.2 Part Two - Delivering Technical Assistance for Pro-Poor Local Development in Project Land

Both case study projects comprised a substantial technical assistance component. The term ‘technical assistance’ (TA) carries connotations of ‘inadequacy’ and a degree of ‘inferiority’, as I became aware when, in a very different context years previously, a senior official in the Department of Finance in Belfast objected vehemently to the very notion that technical assistance, an integral component of the reformed EU Structural Funds, might apply to EU-supported programmes in Northern Ireland. Seen from that defensive perspective, TA is what happens in the Third World, where as Long citing Escobar (1995:213) reminds us, “governments … are seen as ‘underdeveloped’ and treated as such”. Since neither of our study cases can be described as remotely ‘Third World’, we should understand it to be the provision of advice and support that can routinely accompany the introduction of new practices and systems across ‘First World’ administrations open to change and innovation. The support can take the form of project teams working alongside government (local, regional, national) and public agency officials, delivering a set of ToR-specified result areas, for the duration of the project. However essential and critical to the outcome, the TA interface, bringing outsider ‘expertise’ into close working quarters with officials in the targeted institutions, can often be one of the most fraught and sensitive zones in project land, as we shall see later. Right now, we turn again to the situation in the Baltics where much of the TA provided was at the request of the national authorities to suit their accession needs. We also explore an incident in which the TA provided to some of the BRPP partnerships threatened to undermine the policy model.

674 Skype comment – Silumko – 15.08.2011.
675 Of a total budget of £2.1m for BRPP, Technical assistance (i.e. the project team and related costs) accounted for £1.8m. The Eastern Cape project had a total budget of €36m of which some €10m was allocated to TA.
6.2.1 Bringing skills and know-how for partnership-based local development to the Baltics?

Just how far the design of the BRPP was influenced by what Mosse describes as the “strong view (in DFID) that governments should not be involved in rural sector activities ...” was never overtly an issue during the implementation period. That was probably for the simple reason that the programme, as we saw in Chapters Three and Four, was designed to operate outside the sphere of government. Government counterparts, usually senior officials handling policy portfolios, came into contact with the team and DFID personnel for steering committee and other fairly friction-free set briefing meetings, including Outputs to Purpose Reviews and lobbying encounters by Country Team Leaders and Regional Team Leader. At local level, the entire focus of the re-formulated partnership programme was on building pilot structures for what Mosse calls “alternative participative, community based models of development, attentive to indigenous knowledge ...”677. One of the six result areas in the logframe was ‘municipal capacity’. However, in our proposition to the DFID/CSEED team at the outset, we had re-interpreted this as training and capacity building to enable them to participate in partnership structures. In that way, we met the formal project cycle management requirement to respect the logframe, providing the cover of legitimation for the project team, development company and DFID. It also showed that the process recognised the important local leadership role ascribed to the local authority in the partnership process, bringing credibility and some form of democratic accountability to the partnership. Yet, on the other hand, much of our sub-text emphasised the primacy of the partnership and we sought in a number of cases to limit the dominant influence of local government. Over much of the period, then, the relationship between the project team and the local and national authorities was ‘neighbourly’ and mutually supportive without explicit intent for interference either way. Reports regularly recounted project activities in this field, as, for example, in the fourth quarterly report.

“... work in this area has been refocused to build capacity among all of the groups involved in the area-based partnership and working in the local development context, among which local authorities figure prominently”678.

6.2.1.1 New skills, ‘new institutional space’

There was generally among local government officials (and at national level) a broad welcome for what they saw as new skills and know-how from the EU that would help them in the future attract and make use of the substantial funds anticipated on accession. The EU Leader model, while then largely unknown in the Baltics, as presented by the largely Northern Irish project team, emphasised the importance of participatory local decision-making in the allocation of resources for development. At its core was a new relationship with national line ministries encapsulated by ‘bottom-up – top-down’ concept of development governance. As

stated earlier, we referred to this as the ‘new institutional space’, what Mosse might call a “master metaphor” and “commanding interpretation”.679

By early 2002, when it became clear that all three Baltic States were in line for accession as early as 2004, the BRPP was uniquely positioned to make itself more directly useful to national policy makers, especially to the ministries of agriculture and finance in the three capitals. Anticipating how the accession negotiations process would intensify from this point – and focussing on the EU’s structural and cohesion instruments, including, in the rural sector, the Leader programme – we offered to make available (unconditionally) expert assistance to the agriculture and rural development ministries to support the preparation of a Leader measure for inclusion in their rural development plans immediately post accession in 2004 for the period 2004 to 2006. The fifth progress report (April 2002) notes “Work has commenced in earnest to … provide practical support in the preparation of a local development measure for eventual inclusion in the Single Programming Documents currently under preparation in the three countries”. By July of that year, “the RPP project team, in response to an invitation from the national authorities, has now established a working group based within the Ministry of Agriculture in all three countries to assist in the preparation of such a measure”. Six months later, in January 2003 the BRPP reported that “The draft National Development Plans/Single Programming Documents for Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia now include provision, indicative financial provision, for a small pilot Leader measure”.

From a project management point of view, such a result fairly much represented ‘mission accomplished’, given the importance placed by DFID on having their small but catalytic projects influence wider national and EU policy frameworks. As a result of this work, the BRPP partnerships were named as pilot Leader partnerships in all three countries – and the Baltic States were in a small group of countries deemed by DG Agri have sufficient capability to undertake pilot actions680 from accession in May 2004. Most of the nine partnerships have renewed their Leader LAG contracts several times since then. The outcome was something of a vindication of the early choices and top-down ideological hegemony (challenging every contradictory word or act from team member or new recruit) exercised at every stage in the life of the project since DFID agreed to accept our “more radical partnership approach”681. Its ultimate aims were set out in the end-of-programme publication “Performing Partnerships” which candidly states that “while much of the effort was at grass roots and local level, the real impact had to be national and, we hoped, it would also have relevance at EU level”682.

6.2.1.2 Creating the ‘space’ and proving the case at grassroots level

However, “the effort at grass-roots and local level” was critical to being able to make the case – and was hard fought. Across the nine pilot partnership areas, as we

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680 Local Action Groups in most of the other accession countries were limited to support for capacity building actions for the first two years of EU membership.
681 Compared with the looser DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.
have seen in Chapter Five, work to prepare the local area strategies to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion continued during the last part of 2001 into spring 2002. While the partnership notion had attracted more curiosity than commitment or enthusiasm in the early stages, gradually it became part of the local development discourse in the pilot regions. Partnerships were formed with a modest degree of ceremony and acclamation. Part of the attraction was the offer the programme held out of a small but more or less discretionary fund for locally identified and support projects. In addition to the grant fund, our ‘contract’ with the newly formed multi-stakeholder partnerships was to provide training in participatory planning methods, facilitate the preparation of a strategic action plan to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Participation in the initiative held out the welcome prospect of raising the visibility and profile of the area, its institutions and for the local stakeholders themselves through greater engagement with national (and EU) policy makers over the course of the partnership’s work. Their side of the bargain was to take part in the facilitated analysis of findings, take decisions and prioritise within a prescribed format and context – the local area strategy model envisaged a maximum of three strategic priorities. In the fourth Progress Report, for example, we read that one of the Latvian partnerships (Rezekne) had built its local action plan on the following three pillars: 1. Community development, 2. Support for disadvantaged young people and people in the pre-pension age group. 3. Improved service provision to meet the needs of socially excluded.

For some, however, the disciplines associated with facilitated participation – especially coping with opposing viewpoints and interests – led to some early frustration. Country Team Leaders frequently reported how partnership members, impatient for action, argued that ‘since the project team and its managers knew what the outcomes should be, they ought to share these with board members and get on with delivering projects’. While this may have been a minority reaction, there can be little doubt that the scope for open-ended bottom-up decision-making was fairly restricted from the outset. The focus on core themes – tackling poverty and social exclusion, promoting inclusion – in training workshops and seminars, through detailed guidance and guidelines, set the conditions and the ‘acceptable’ boundaries of the exercise. As reported in April 2002: “... these procedures and technical arrangements will be standard for all nine partnerships, but each partnership will be expected to “customise” and make specific to the local area ...”

683, underlining just how controlled the exercise was. The relationship with the Partnership Facilitator (members of the national team) through this stage of the programme was critical to the overall success or otherwise of the BRPP. Each draft strategy was ‘peer’ reviewed by two senior international members of the project team, evaluating process and content.

6.2.1.3 Failure looms ... and passes

Towards the half-way point in the programme life cycle, all nine pilot partnerships were engaged at different stages in the preparation of their local action strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion. They were facilitated through their audits,
analyses, prioritisation, visualising, objective setting and implementation plans by
country team members recruited, trained and deployed for that purpose. It was
important for the success of the programme that each of the partnerships had a
coherent, feasible strategy and costed operational plan finalised, reviewed,
assessed and approved in sufficient time to allow them to implement, oversee
performance and monitor results before the end of the programme. External
credibility, with national and EU stakeholders, as well as with DFID, depended on
such a managed approach. We placed considerable importance on the ‘peer
review’ process. Draft strategies – at different stages of preparation – were referred
to our international Partnerships Adviser and Local Development Adviser – as semi-
external examiners.

As I prepared for a meeting with one of the Latgale partnerships in early Spring
2002, I was briefed over the phone by the BRPP Partnerships’ Adviser who advised
that both he and his fellow peer-reviewer had serious problems with the draft
strategy as it stood. Briefly stated, they were both of the view that it was a ‘cut and
paste’ effort and lacked depth in terms of the local audit or analysis – inadequate
for what was intended. The following morning, I travelled with the Country Team
Leader (CTL) to meet the Partnership Board, chaired by the Mayor, a pleasant
woman, who was both supportive and demanding in terms of results from the
exercise. Overnight I had critically read the text and fully endorsed the assessment
of the peer review team. When I made it clear to the CTL that we would not be
presenting the draft strategy at the partnership meeting, and why, the atmosphere
became strained. Later, following a shortened meeting with the partnership, we
convened as a team with the consultant (part-time) facilitator who had travelled
there from Riga that morning. He dismissed the criticism and pointed to failings in
the programme, shortage of resources, non-competitive fees, confused signals from
the team, learning as we go along, much of which was undoubtedly justified. The
CTL, who had recruited him early in the programme, was visibly angry at me and
supportive of her colleague. The bottom line was that the strategy would have to
be totally re-worked, delaying a crucial milestone.

And so the meeting ended but the hostilities generated by what Long, quoting
Turner (1957:93), calls “social drama”, endured for several weeks. When I
returned after the Easter break, the CTL informed me that the consultant facilitator
had resigned. She had committed to take on the unfinished work herself and also
to facilitate the finalisation of the strategies in the remaining two partnerships.
Which is exactly what she did over the remaining year and a half, with remarkable
determination and outstanding energy and resourcefulness but with a diminished
budget for strategy preparation since the larger part had already been spent on
consultancy fees. In the end, all three Latvian partnership strategies and action
plans were approved, Small Grants Fund allocated per procedure, order and
coherence restored in time for implementation before programme closure. A

684 None of the nine area partnerships had a legal form during the BRPP period. Once the partnership’s LAS and Operational
Plan was approved by the peer reviewers in the programme team, the development company released the grant fund to
an approved legal entity in-country (in Estonia, a new body was set up called Partnerluus) and the partnerships were
authorised to make decisions on the award of grant to selected project applications.

significant achievement, against the odds, by an exceptionally hardworking Country Team Leader, with a strong sense of personal responsibility. She had been the first of the three CTLs to ‘buy-into’ the local partnership and local area strategy model. Our shared interest and motivation in seeing the experiment through to conclusion helped resolve the conflict and produce “a measure of accommodation”, and better mutual appreciation of one another’s lifeworlds.

6.2.2 Bringing skills and know-how for local economic development to the Eastern Cape?

In this section, we set out to probe the nature of the interaction between the EU Support to LED team and their ‘targets’ for institutional, policy and procedural change, capacity building and strengthening within the Provincial administration. While initially designed, as we have seen in earlier chapters, as a resolutely grants-only management scheme with some exchange of experience and learning components – untrammelled by questions relating to capacity building or policy development - pressures arising outside (the mid-term report) and growing criticisms from some within the project team and Provincial stakeholders had forced the institutional and policy issue. Indeed, over the final three years of the programme, much of the critical interaction took place at the interface with the Provincial administration. As the focus shifted to securing a framework for managing and implementing LED beyond the closure of the support programme, the need for technical assistance to develop policy, build structures and grow capacity within the host administration was increasingly obvious. We will see how imported ideas for bottom-up approaches for tackling poverty and social exclusion fared when confronted with the political cultures, realities and interest. We will see how lifeworlds of host and project worker connect or clash, how room for manoeuvre is negotiated, mandates interpreted, alliances built and successes and failures reported.

6.2.2.1 ‘Madiba, we need to place an LED expert in DEDEA’

As we recall from Chapter Four, among the donor group there seemed to be a consensus “on reducing the role of the state”. For the early period of its existence, at least, the programme team was seen primarily as delivering another grant scheme - issuing multiple calls for proposals, generating applications for project support at local level – albeit, larger in scale and more condition-driven. There were some complaints about the strict EU procedures but in essence, it was essentially a grant scheme – which is no surprise really since this is how it had been finally designed.

By the end of the programme however, the authors of the final report, felt it appropriate to write that “the original design had unfortunately narrowly focused on a conception of institutional agency that recognised only the local sphere of

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686 Simultaneously successfully battling serious illness.
governance and public management ... “689. The context, the struggle and the realisation of the redesign has been dealt with in Chapters Four and Five. The outcome of that shift was a greater emphasis on strengthening policy and institutional capacity for LED – the very result that had been more or less emphatically written out of the accepted specification several years earlier. However, the adjustment in the programme focus opened up a sometimes contested interface between the project team and key institutional players in the province at the time.

The terms of my appointment connected me to the Economic Development Programme (LED Division) in the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs at Bhisho. My task was to provide support to the creation of a coherent policy and institutional framework for local economic development. Absent from the project operational environment over the first two years of the programme, despite having responsibility for the Provincial Government’s only ‘LED’ grant scheme, the Head of LED in DEDEA describes how one day (in mid-2007) the EU support Programme Coordinator and Team Leader came to see him – “Madiba690, we need to place an external LED expert in DEDEA”691. The dynamics and struggle for ideas set in train by that announcement constituted an ever contested, always engaged and thoroughly memorable interface joining this project worker and provincial government partners over the next years.

6.2.1.2 Fixing the provincial LED fund

A major part of my job was to support the LED Unit to put in place a more structured, objective-driven, measurable framework for the Province’s own LED grant fund. There was a worried belief among some of those responsible for delivery of LED policy in the Province that the political leadership saw in the provincial ‘programme’ something of “a slush fund” requiring “no documentation and no policy framework”692. Having sat through several Provincial economic development ‘summits’, presided over by the then Member of the Executive Council (MEC)693 (political Head of Economic Development and responsible for the Fund) and attended by senior managers from the six District municipalities694 as well as provincial government officials, I understood my colleague’s scepticism and concern. The LED Fund was but one item on the ‘summit’ agenda. When addressed, the tone of the meeting became noticeably less formal. With minimal briefing on the applications received by the Department, the MEC engaged in a bantering (‘Trumpian’, in todays’ terms) way with the representatives from the various applicant municipalities – and me as ‘outsider/elder’ - on the quality, the content and the cost of their proposals for DEDEA support. In most cases, the documentation was flimsy – in one instance a half-page request – and insufficient upon which to take any meaningful view of the project. The Chair would variously scold, praise or encourage – always in a humourous and seemingly condescending

690 Term of respect for his status as member of a traditional leadership family and clan name.
691 IV with Sizwe – 9th April 2010.
692 IV with Sizwe – 9th April 2010.
693 Member of the Executive Council of the Provincial Government.
694 At the time there were six District (regional) Municipalities and one Metropolitan Municipality (Nelson Mandela Municipality/Port Elizabeth) in the Province.
way – the impromptu bidders, in a style not unlike that suggested by Hebinck and Cousins (2013) in noticing a “homeland style of governance (being) reproduced” in the Eastern Cape. Seemingly arbitrary decisions were taken, commitments made. The public officials present tried to keep some order on proceedings, knowing that in many cases they would have to deal with the unrealistic, un-costed and un-kept promises made. In one case, the district head of Economic Development wrote to the Provincial Head of LED, referring to the situation his officials found themselves in when political pledges were not honoured. He was concerned that it was “difficult and risky” for the LED Advisors to go to these projects “as the communities are very angry about this situation”.

By this stage, however, the MEC had taken on a new portfolio, new political responsibilities and, no doubt, other opportunities for public munificence. In the case above causing the District Head of ED to write to the Department, the funds, earmarked for community projects, once transited through the local authority, had been diverted to help address the perennial municipal deficit. “....there is no trace as to where the funds were used, because when he looked at the Municipal Bank Account he found that for the past four years the District Municipality was run on a ‘DEFICIT’ inferring that LED funds had been used for other purposes.

It must be said that such public mismanagement would inevitably (and did) fall foul of South Africa’s own Public Finance Management Act. Senior managers in DEDEA and the LED Unit were deeply worried at the Department’s exposure to accusations and evidence of abuse. The Acting Head of Department, an aggressive ANC cadre brought in to ‘sort out’ the Department, in LED and other policy fields, had admitted in a meeting to not knowing “the extent of the problem out there – and that is my nightmare”. One of the tasks taken on by the EU Support to LED programme, therefore, although not part of its initial brief, was to assist the Department in constructing a funding instrument that would be less prone to such abuse and overt political patronage.

However, our work in this area did not go unnoticed. As we (DEDEA/LED Unit members and the author) began the process of rolling out training in anticipation of the new Local and Regional Economic Development grant scheme in 2009, my DEDEA colleagues informed me that there was strong criticism of the Department’s approach from some of the locally elected members arguing that “the new instrument followed too closely foreign (EU) influences”. They took the view that “LED ‘allocations’ were intended for ‘poor people’ whereas the complex conditions imposed (in the new scheme) made application very difficult for such people”. From the same diary note of 6th August 2009, “I get the impression that while the DEDEA people don’t accept the (above) argument, they are nevertheless quite sensitive to the accusation that they are introducing “foreign methods” especially when

696 Decision making was untransparent and the suspicion prevailed that allocations had a political bias.
697 Comments from Acting Head of Department DEDEA – Mar 2009.
698 Response by one of the DEDEA District Office Managers to a query re LED projects – Jan 2010.
699 Response by one of the DEDEA District Office Managers to a query re LED projects – Jan 2010.
political people make such calls”. On the other hand, they are encouraged by the fact that “several local government officials have welcomed the new measure and see it as a means to greater accountability”.

The juxtaposition between the two stances – on the political side, the arguably ‘populist’ concern for ease of access for ‘poor people’ - and from the administration, the desire for improved traceability, transparency and accountability – defined the gap within which the technical assistance project and the project worker delivered the goods. Much as we proclaimed the pro-poor benefits of a more coherent and joined-up approach to local economic development, as deliverers of EU technical assistance our bottom-line advice and support was always, unequivocally and primarily to stress the primacy of regulation and governance, in a stance worthy of Ferguson’s Anti-Politics Machine.

6.2.1.3 The teflon policy maker

The critical separation of the political and the technical (‘non-political’) space – and our role as technical assistance providers offering input at senior policy making level and proposing “apparently progressive changes” was again made clear to me around the time of the second LED conference. The new MEC had indicated that he would attend and give the keynote speech to the conference, organised in historic town of Graaf Reinet in the iconic semi-desert region of the Karoo and Camdeboo National Park – several hours drive from Government Headquarters in Bhisho. By accepting the invitation, he was already dedicating more time to the programme than any of his predecessor MECs. When the Programme Coordinator/Team Leader was asked to draft some ideas for his presentation – we both assumed (since I was also asked to work on the draft) that it represented something of a breakthrough in terms of political visibility. The MEC was known to us as belonging to the more left wing and ideological element of the ANC – a tempered and impressive public speaker at ease with policy detail. In the week leading up to the event, the drafting team worked together to prepare a text that we believed reflected the values of the programme, over and above the grant schemes, and set out our vision for a more joined-up pro-poor partnership-based approach to local economic development. The final draft was dispatched to the Director of his Cabinet in the days before the event.

On the opening evening of the somewhat disappointingly poorly attended conference, the Executive Mayor of the District Municipality, a natural comic, welcomed (or warmed up) delegates, including the MEC, with a funny take on local development, local politics and personalities. He finished by introducing the MEC himself. We waited in the body of the conference room for the first high level endorsement of our bottom-up, real partnership-based approach to LED. And we waited…. . It was clear almost from the moment he took the stand that he had

700 Comments from diary note 6th August 2009.
702 Jointly organised and co-funded by the EU Programme and Provincial partners, Treasury and Economic Development in March 2009.
moved substantially away from the text provided - in tone and content - apart from a fleeting reference to the “developmental state” and the role of government in local development. Later, in informal discussion, he thanked us for the draft and while he ‘liked the content, it was too heavy for the occasion’. The turn of events called to mind several grant award ceremonies that I had attended in the Province and where the ‘keynote’ presentations were of similar style – humourous and cheerful but with little or no policy substance. This opportunity to enrol the political leadership in the Province in our vision of a more integrated, bottom-up and pro-poor approach to local development had been missed, drawing attention yet again to the capacity of local politics to drown out the policy noise emanating from external development intervention. Echoing Mosse’s observation (quoting Booth) that the largely technocratic buy-in to the poverty reduction policy consensus does not erase national or local politics. Hickey, drawing on Ferguson, Murray Li, Green and others, suggests that the “ideal form of politics” promoted within international development, “bears little resemblance to the ways in which politics actually work in developing countries”. Well fashioned ‘foreign’ words may be ‘heavy’ but make little impact.

And so the effort continued to bring a greater local development policy perspective into the programme – specifically to interact with policy shapers within the Provincial Government administration to create a more secure and coherent policy space for local economic development. In the next section, we can appreciate better the mismatch between the international project team (or rather ‘my’) agenda and that of the Provincial Government.

6.2.1.4 Finding a policy space for local economic development

ECSECC had been a key, critical stakeholder from the outset, initially the host institution for the programme in the Province. Job creation on a grand scale was understandably the default policy position of the Director and senior team of the Council, provincial economic and social policy think-tank. Long-term unemployment in the Province stood at 27.9% in the Eastern Cape in 2009. ‘Development’ in the ECSECC discourse took the shape of initiatives such as the Mass Food Production programmes, such as the GIZ supported Sorghum production project in Komani (formerly Queenstown) or projects supported in the Provincial Industrial Development Programme (PIDS) “which had the potential to aggregate up in terms of job numbers”. Examples included the value chain suppliers to the automobile sector or the Eastern Cape Timber Industries Development Initiative under the Mbeki-championed ASGISA super programme. The ECSECC team were the policy technocrats – researchers, programme designers – within the Provincial

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703 Diary note for 18th March 2009 – 2nd LED Conference – Graaf Reinet.
706 Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council.
707 Various meetings with the Director of ECSECC.
709 Accelerated and Shared Growth Agenda for South Africa.
administration. Always welcoming, the Director and his colleagues invariably listened politely to the case I regularly made for bottom-up partnership driven local development – and then asked how many jobs could LED create? LED was perceived by them and other policy heads in the province and nationally to be more closely related to welfare than to ‘real development’. As we described in Chapter Three, it was largely within the mandate of local government and often described as the “unfunded mandate”. As such, provincial LED was supported on a fairly arbitrary basis – as we have registered above, sometimes by personality-driven local government, poorly managed, often copy-cat, unsustainable and leaving little legacy in terms of jobs, skills or employability.

Nevertheless, by late 2009, we had made some progress (at least in on paper) towards the introduction of a more structured and manageable, if not strategic, ‘Provincial’ approach to local economic development. The principles underpinning a new instrument for local and regional development (pro-poor, participatory, partnership based, social inclusion, integrated and strategic etc) had been broadly agreed at operational (middle management) level in DEDEA and inter-Departmental Working Group (DEDEA, DLGTA, DoARD and DSD). The following episode recounts an attempt by the external team to lobby the policy champions of ECSECC.

6.2.1.5 A late encounter with “the big boys”

Not long prior to my final departure from the programme, a South African colleague, with whom I had been working for several months and who would continue to support the final preparation (and launch) of the new Local and Regional Economic Development (LRED) Strategy and I were invited at very short notice (one hour) to present the main features of the new strategy to the Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Consultative Council. It was an opportunistic, “seize-the-moment” encounter, quite unplanned. All of our earlier requests and efforts to meet with the Council up to then had come to nothing. The LED Support Programme Coordinator and Team Leader, my boss, was, on the day, at the Council offices for another programme-related meeting which had been delayed, prompting him to suggest to the ECSECC members present to use the short gap in the day’s agenda to hear the DED/LRED proposition. The strategy document, never specified in the early programme documentation (tor, proposal, and inception report) had by this stage become one of the primary although unintended outputs/results of the EU funded intervention.

The following is an extract of the diary note on the unplanned engagement with the ECSECC senior managers:

Text Box 9 Diary note reflecting on presentation of LRED proposal to ECSECC managers

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710 E.g. numerous brick and block production projects, often for veterans of the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) funded by local government.
711 IV with AF 11th April 2010 – “the Office of the Premier saw LED … as trying to alleviate poverty …. Not prestige – not for the big boys!”
712 Reporting to the Office of the Premier
The meeting group assembles – not too many of the top decision makers but two whom we’ve been trying to reach, several key players who have been unavailable up to now. One is a senior ANC socio economic development adviser and the other is the ECSECC Industrial Development specialist, responsible for coordinating the Provincial Industrial Development Strategy (PIDS).

Working in tandem, South African consultant leading, we set the background and rationale for the strategy – we don’t have presentation – not enough time to prepare - working from flipchart. Anxious not to be seen to be cutting across other policy priorities – especially the PIDS, we stress that the LRED was: ‘Policy neutral’; ‘Enabling other strategies to be delivered’; ‘Top-down – bottom-up connected’; ‘Four layers of government’; ‘Partnerships’.

I work (on flipchart) model of “failed top-down only policy delivery” and emphasise the need to create local intelligence and capacity for dealing with complex problems – listeners seem engaged.

Open for questions and comments:

Industrial development adviser – ‘need for “critical mass projects rather than collection of small LED ……”’ Attitude not hostile – but not convinced! Predictable.

Senior ANC policy adviser – ‘can’t say that this is “policy neutral”’ – he suggests that LRED would be a major transformation in business of government. Seems aggressive at first.

The emphasis upon community participation – ‘wasn’t this simply pushing the problem onto the people least equipped to deal with it?’

The exchanges at the ECSECC offices that afternoon – during the final week of my participation in the EU programme - probably marked the first serious discussion with policy shapers since my arrival in the province two and half years earlier, and much more so than various briefing meetings with a succession of three MECs and similar number of Heads of Department in DED. In hindsight and with the benefit of insights gained from a greater appreciation of actor perspectives and development sociology, I see the encounter as, to paraphrase Long, something of a “confrontation … of different lifeworlds and socio-political experiences” and the contest of different worldviews on the management of public policy.

Looked at again, however, in hindsight and through the perspective of the senior ECSECC policy adviser, we had to ask again “wasn’t this simply pushing the problem onto the people least equipped to deal with it?” It was more and more obvious that ‘our’ LED partnership model underpinning the DEDEA strategy paid little or no heed to the spatial and historic dimensions of social exclusion. Indeed, ‘our’ model seemed blind to the inequalities and the burden of apartheid-era spatial arrangements on the target communities and the politics of poverty across the

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Note on Meeting in ECSECC – 18th March 2010

ANC Policy heavy-weight and adviser to MEC
Province. To tackle these, he affirmed, would require the long-term effort of the developmental state – and the active cooperation of all three spheres of government. This would involve targeted public investment and promoting strategic private sector investment rather than drip feed conditional resources to incapacitated and powerless communities. In the subsequent discussion, in the boardroom and continued in the carpark beyond the meeting, his attitude softened and we discussed at length the merits and other of building the institutional infrastructure – and the capacity - for top-down-bottom-up and local initiative within the context of the developmental state.

My own experience and lifeworld, long a personal source of motivation in different project situations - but increasingly, in this light, a blind-spot - had been called into question in the contest of ideas – but in a much more meaningful sense than any previous debate in the programme or with other stakeholders. What had seemed to us to be empowering and liberating in the LRED rhetoric in the face of the dominance of top-down decision-making and the ‘myth’ of the developmental state, was simply confronted with the reality of context in the Eastern Cape and, to an extent, at least, exposed as yet another neo-liberal stratagem. The context and tenor of the exchanges taking place in the above encounter were both constructive and productive in bringing clarity to the differing standpoints and the worldviews underpinning them, and held the promise (not for me since I was leaving the programme in the next days) of adding to the discourse around LED in the Province.

However, the clash of perspectives – between the programme team and our counterparts in the Provincial administration – that marked the opening of discussions around the Exit Strategy, was more of a dialogue of the deaf and was to have a long-term effect on the overall cohesion of that relationship.

6.2.2.6 Whose exit strategy? Living with the legacy

Planning for the departure of the EU support programme and the team had been exercising minds both within the administration and the PCU for some time – and had become a source of some tension. As early as October 2008, with just over two years before closure, I was part of the PCU senior team to meet with LED managers from the three provincial Departments with which the programme worked most closely – DEDEA, DLGTA on a daily basis and Department Agriculture and Rural Development less frequently. The purpose was to agree the programme exit strategy and how the provincial administration could sustain the legacy of the programme. Provincial Treasury was not present at the time but would exercise its influence over time. As pointed out before, the design of the programme had meant that the major share of the substantial technical assistance component (approximately €10m) was dedicated to developing calls for proposals, generating projects and supporting implementation of those in receipt of programme funding. The core programme effectively operated alongside and in parallel to the services of the Provincial administration dealing with LED. The design also envisaged that

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715 Government of South Africa - National Spatial Development Perspective.
716 Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs.
following final award of grant to successful projects – planned for end-2009 – the main thrust from there to programme closure (February 2011) would involve supporting those local groups which had been awarded funding in the last rounds to implement their projects. However, the strategy (and the budget estimates) also envisaged most of the project generation team members leaving by 2009-2010, with responsibility for project support progressively transferring to the provincial departments. The early exit strategy meeting, from the point of view of the Programme team, was a first opportunity to set out plans for the hand-over to the relevant provincial authorities. For our colleagues in the administration, the exit strategy took on another meaning.

As mentioned earlier, much of my work with the DEDEA team, since the start of the year in question, involved support for the preparation of a fundamental revision of their LED funding instrument. Our shared assessment of the state of the DEDEA Municipal Support Grant portfolio of existing projects was, to say the least, a source of considerable concern to the LED Unit and the Department generally. Faced with increasing criticism from senior DEDEA management and with the constant impending threat of a negative audit report, the DEDEA LED team were understandably reluctant to take on further responsibility for ‘someone else’s’ projects (the Programme’s). All the more so given their concerns in relation to some of these as referenced above! As mentioned in Chapter Five, both my DEDEA colleagues were members of the Evaluation Committee for selection of projects to be funded under the EU Support to LED programme and were critical of the social relations being reported from some.

Over time they began to share their misgivings in relation to the presentation of projects for grant fund support. One of them commented “The RFAs were targeting applicants who were already ‘enterprising’ – they were forced to form partnerships – so bogus – ordinary people so used in the partnerships – most were headed by whites and the blacks were employees … Look at how projects were generated – call through the media, for example – bound to have excluded potential beneficiaries … only people with access to info – including workshops – language became a real issue – in rural communities especially… ordinary people were so used”717. Her boss, the Head of the LED Unit, pointed to tensions “The Evaluation Committee was wholly black and knew little about LED in the early stages - the project team was in control of the award of grants.”718 To make matters worse, once funding was approved, provincial officials felt that they had little ongoing oversight on the EU funded projects - “the Programme Director (senior official in the Treasury) had asked the PCU Monitoring Adviser to take regional representatives (from DEDEA and DLGTA) with him on monitoring missions – but this never happened. We, in the LED Unit, had requested (M&E) reports but these were never provided”719. Looked at in hindsight, their reluctance and that of their Provincial colleagues to take on unknown potential liabilities in the exit handover can only be seen as common sense and rational.

718 IV with Sizwe (member of Evaluation Committee) – April 2010.
719 IV with Thandiwa (member of Evaluation Committee) – 12 April 2010.
6.2.2.6.1 Lifeworlds confronting

The first of a series of meetings on the exit strategy meeting commenced in October 2008. As had become the pattern, the M&E Adviser presented for the EU LED Support team. It was a relatively straightforward stage in the programming cycle – ‘here’s what we have done, here’s what we plan to do – and here’s where you take over’. It was this projected self-assurance and ‘superiority’ - “the (Programme) reports are always so positive”, one of my DEDEA colleagues confided, “that frustrated us when we were well aware of the (Programme) failings”.720 For their part, the primary objective for the Provincial departments in engaging in an exit strategy “was to verify that the projects receiving support were performing – we wanted re-assurance that the projects to be taken over were in fact working – a sort of due diligence”.721 It is important also to bear in mind that in the event of ineligible allocations or mismanaged projects, the financial controllers in the Delegation in Pretoria could eventually ask for the money to be re-funded by the provincial government, another not inconsiderable source of professional concern to the DEDEA team.

The background and mindset of the M&E Adviser, presenting the programme side, already familiar to the reader in earlier chapters, is relevant. Very much a character of the broader transition process in South Africa, he was bright, intelligent, well-spoken white graduate in his late thirties with good connections into the post-apartheid policy and political elites within the Eastern Cape. His views on the administration reflected a young professional mindset and were fairly segmented. “You have to bear in mind the new democracy context. The administration was put together from old Transkei and Ciskei administrations – old systems and hierarchy – and new demands. The senior civil servants were new cadres with ideas – middle management were from the old regime”. He spoke from time to time of his earlier work in ECSECC, where he was “working with senior management. The (EU Support to LED) programme was going more directly into departments – beyond politics to the administration’s middle management”.722 He often spoke quite disparagingly about the competence of some of the personalities facing us that day. A lifeworld and outlook, no doubt, that clearly coloured his perceptions of those facing him in the meeting – and no doubt, vice versa.

From my notes from the period, the meeting was quite a tense affair: “It was clear that some of the counterparts (Head of DEDEA LED Unit in particular) were not happy with the approach proposed. This stemmed from their sense of the Programme pushing ahead and leaving them (host administration) little space to influence the process. The PCU presentation was essentially based on the activities in the programme estimates and paid little attention to the priorities and concerns of the counterpart Departments. One of the DLGTA representatives present made

721 IV with Thandiwa (member of Evaluation Committee) – 12 April 2010.
722 IV with Trevor (Head of IPCU and M&E) – March 2010.
the telling remark that she could not find in the report “where our (DLGTA) strategic and operational priorities fit”.\footnote{Diary note written 12\textsuperscript{th} March 2009 in context of ongoing interaction around the Exit Strategy.}

Predictably, albeit in hindsight, the provincial government representatives objected, vociferously on the part of some, to the one-sided articulation of the way forward, highlighting the achievements of the programme and the unmet commitments and ‘obligations’ of the provincial partners. Following fairly chaotic discussion with little prospect of any meeting of minds, the DEDEA Head of LED Unit, speaking for the counterpart group, present or otherwise, declared that it was DEDEA’s intention to commission an external consultancy team to prepare its own exit strategy. All of us from the programme side were opposed to the idea, fearing third party intervention could only lead to further alienation, confusion and delay at this stage in the process. The meeting broke up without resolution. Over the next weeks, DEDEA became more determined than ever to follow through, with or without the cooperation of the programme team. There was a substantial risk of prolonged stand-off between both sides – and those elements of programme work which involved our interaction with counterpart Departments would be stalled – although the Programme’s grant scheme management component continued uninterrupted. More informal and low-key discussion continued, involving the DEDEA Deputy Head of LED and colleague from DLGTA and from our side the Programme Coordinator and me to agree a way forward. Plans were advanced to intensify support to DEDEA and other regional government teams delivering LED in the regions/Districts. The work programme for the LED and Institutional Adviser to DEDEA (me) was further defined and links to core Departmental objectives tightened. By the time we next met, the provincial delegates, including from the Provincial Treasury, the Programme Team Leader indicated that the PCU “would set aside its objections and cooperate fully with the consultancy once appointed”\footnote{Diary note written 12\textsuperscript{th} March 2009 in context of ongoing interaction around the Exit Strategy.}. The M&E Adviser was not present and had not been involved in any of the interim discussion.

\subsection*{6.2.2.6.2 Getting on with the Job}

In the end, the exit strategy assignment was tendered, consultancy procured, meetings arranged, questionnaires designed, completed and reviewed. Almost a year later a report issued. The Programme had moved substantially on and there had been increasingly productive interaction between those of us in the project team working with DEDEA and DLGTA on policy development and institutional strengthening. The eventual report was somewhat out of date and fairly irrelevant so many months further on. Whatever recommendations it made had little relevance or bearing on the ongoing course over the remaining months of implementation. Commenting later, a more relaxed Head of DEDEA LED remarked in correspondence with me “Regarding the (Exit) Strategy, they (the Programme team) never bothered to forward any information to the service provider. Thus, we cannot blame them (the consultant/service provider)”\footnote{Correspondence Nov-Dec 2009 on the Exit Strategy Report.}. The fire had gone out on this particular battlefield. What mattered more was that the “administration’s
middle management” had faced down the (white) dirigisme “of the new cadres with ideas” and had in the process managed to shift the overall programme agenda further to a somewhat more critical approach to the generation and selection of projects funded under the Programme.

However, the protracted incident had again turned attention onto divisions in approach within the team itself. The Programme Coordinator and Team Leader, like most of us, seemed taken aback initially at the strength of opposition to what he had seen as a first step in aligning agendas towards agreeing a shared work plan. As might be expected, he had backed the M&E Adviser, his effective deputy who, given his programming expertise was seen to be the person to lead the presentation (as was the case in other similar situations). Deeply frustrated at the insistence of the partners to commission an outside consultant to facilitate the process, he resisted the demand for several weeks, although as noted above, was finally open to persuasion and their lobby – and get back to rebuilding relationships. The M&E Adviser was busy on project monitoring duty and absent from the ongoing discussion but clearly angry at the outcome. Other members of the PCU who were in the know, the LED Funds Adviser (now head of Project Generation Team) and the Head of Finance and Contracts Unit, also present for the early confrontation, were dismissive of the stance of the Departmental partners and annoyed at the likely delays in planned roll-out. While I probably did not fully appreciate the dynamic at the time, as the only member of the PCU more or less embedded in a Provincial Department, my loyalties by this stage were somewhat split – and seen to be so. A diary note at the time suggests that my eventual support for the DEDEA position on the ‘exit strategy’ was remarked on by some “as breaking ranks ... putting the spotlight on Programme weaknesses” and for some of my team colleagues at the time, the very fact of having a relationship and any sort of understanding with ‘that mad man’, cast a shadow on my standing and reliability as a team player. For my part, however uncomfortable the relationship with DEDEA partners might be – and had been – from time to time, I had (we both had) invested considerably in building it (as the next anecdote makes clear) and there was work to be done.

6.2.2.7 A foot in the door – the provincial administrator and the international development consultant

Before concluding this discussion on the interaction between the external development team and the host administration in ‘delivering’ technical assistance and policy advice, I want to turn attention to a relatively early episode in the relationship between Sizwe, by this stage familiar to the reader as Head of LED programmes in DEDEA, and me in my role as external (and international) LED adviser to the Department. Once again, it brings into focus what Long calls “interlocking actor ‘projects’, lifeworlds and circumstances that give rise to situations where self-reflexive strategies mesh to produce a measure of

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726 Diary note written 12th March 2009 in context of ongoing interaction around the Exit Strategy.
accommodation between the actors concerned”\textsuperscript{727}. But not without initial disruption and some trauma caused by the clash of cultures and worldview!

When I began to work for the Department in January 2008, there were two fairly obvious priorities for assistance – help to clean up the Municipal Support Grant Fund (MSGF) portfolio and support the preparation of a new LED funding model, based in part on the experience of EU Support to LED Programme. A third objective was to prepare a strategic framework for LED in the province, which came on stream sometime later – and mentioned above.

Sizwe was never going to be an easy person to work with – and had a reputation for being difficult across the programme team – and indeed throughout the administration. In the words of the Deputy Head of LED, “He’s used to getting his way – likes instructing people but misunderstood – he’s very straight with his thoughts. If he feels that his ideas are not being respected then he really reacts. And he’s prone to outbursts ... I learned to manage him – early incident – locked myself in office – he came around – all apologetic – it was much better after that. But I don’t take him on directly.”\textsuperscript{728} Background and context is critical here. According to the consultant appointed (by DEDEA) to work with me on finalising the LRED Strategy, a frequent visitor to the Province who knew him well, “Sizwe’s family is related to the Premier of the former Transkei. They’re probably 3\textsuperscript{rd} level – quite senior in the hierarchy”. His status as a family member of the ‘traditional leadership’ seemed to sit uncomfortably with his middle ranking position in the Provincial administration. On the wider political front, relations between the traditional leaders and government had become “very contentious” since the decision by the ANC to withdraw grant support in 2004.\textsuperscript{729} Seemingly fearless and often angry, he rarely missed an opportunity, when speaking to his peers or his superiors – or indeed to junior officials - in the administration, in small or large committee, to castigate the political leadership and senior managers. The diary note for one such grandstanding episode in April 2009 expresses the frustration we could feel as colleagues:

“His task was to present the outline report which his Deputy and I had prepared the previous day. However, this was a ‘grandstand’ occasion – an opportunity to impress as an angry old man – portentously opening with “I was suspended in January for speaking the truth” - spent first minutes denouncing his senior management for their non-attendance. A thoroughly angry presentation in which he summarised the report into a meaningless statement.”\textsuperscript{730}

The LED Unit at the time comprised three officials, the Head of Unit, Deputy Head and Secretary. None had a background in LED policy or practice – Sizwe had started his provincial administration career as Director for Trade, Investment and Tourism,

\textsuperscript{728} IV with Thandwe – 12 April 2010.
\textsuperscript{729} IV with Frank Arthur (formerly DPLG, at the time freelance adviser working with DEDEA on strategy – 19\textsuperscript{th} Mar 2010.
\textsuperscript{730} Diary note – March 17\textsuperscript{th} 2009 – Programme Steering Committee.
which, he often claimed, he really enjoyed, before ending “by default” in 2003-04 in LED\textsuperscript{731}. Thandiwe had been a teacher before joining the Department and straight into LED. There were no national guidelines and certainly little in the shape of coherent policy framework at provincial level, other than the very poorly defined MSGF.

The part-time nature of my involvement (two-weeks a month) made for a start-stop-restart pattern to relationship-building between us. It was difficult to get a substantive policy (or other) conversation going and sustaining it through the lived routines of the programme. Weeks went by with little sense of achievement – or even a shared agenda. It was something of a relief when Sizwe invited me to prepare a paper for the LED Unit on the key elements of a new LED funding measure for the Department. He handed me some notes that he had compiled and which he suggested would be of assistance. I promised to have an initial draft back to him by the end of the week – duly worked days and evenings to prepare the note and delivered on time by e-mail the following Friday.

By Monday morning, the corridors around Sizwe’s office were unusually quiet. His door seemed determinedly shut although I knew from his secretary that he was there. Thandiwe was absent. By late morning, the presentiment was firmly anchored and I knew that there was something wrong – and I knew it was to do with the draft document. I called Thandi by phone who confirmed, rather embarrassed, without saying so much that he was indeed displeased with the draft. Now I was getting angry, aware of the work involved the previous week and somewhat taken aback at the behaviour. In the outer office, his secretary seemed more occupied than I had previously remembered and kept her head well into her computer screen, listening to classical music. I knocked the inner door. After a moment, it opened fractionally. He stared angrily out at me – one of his colleagues was also in the room. Where to start? The most obvious concern was that he would shut the door in my face. Before saying anything, I stuck my foot in the narrow space. What did he think of the draft? ‘You’re like all the others – didn’t make any use of the ideas I proposed’, he hissed in reply, ‘just regurgitate your own’. He was right – and I had known it. I had not used the references in his note in the draft concept. They had seemed to me to be an unconnected collection of statements downloaded from the internet. To my mind they reflected the confusion around LED policy in the Province, although I did not say so much there and then. Toe-to-toe, almost nose to nose we stood in the doorway for several minutes – he, as I saw it, coming across as arrogant, superior and defensive, me - furious at his dismissal of the first real piece of what I thought was productive work, uncertain and disconcerted – before parting company with mutual bad feeling.

Back in the Programme Office, I shared the experience with the Programme Coordinator and Team Leader who, knowing Sizwe’s character and reputation, was supportive and sympathised. I stayed away from DEDEA for the next days, working on other aspects of the programme, including a new Programme call for proposals. If my participation in the programme was to finish on account of the relationship

\textsuperscript{731} IV with Sizwe – April 2010.
breakdown, I was ready for that eventuality although did not welcome it. Just before my return to Ireland at the end of the week, the Deputy Head of LED called to my office in the PCU with a proposition to work together to prepare a compromise measure, combining some of the features of both approaches. Sizwe was adamant, she said, that the measure should include some of his ideas. On top of a bruised ego, the LED policy purist in me faced the prospect of working up a horrible amalgam of disparate elements that, I knew and argued, could never really work. At the same time, it was clear that this was the only way.

The rapprochement was slow and tentative but, in the end, the struggles and compromises arrived at and forgotten over the following months were very different from those that had triggered the row in the first place. A new DEDEA measure was launched, hardly elegant, but the product of hours, days, weeks and months involving the three of us, each one’s “project articulated with the other actors’ project, interests and perspective”732 – in the case of Thandiwe, meeting a critical target in job plan KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the year, Sizwe fulfilling a long-held ambition to change the way LED was administered by the Department – and putting manners on an external consultant. For my part, the shared exercise produced a tangible project output, a framework for engagement with the Department over the period – and continued involvement in the programme. The measure itself was subsequently criticised (predictably) by at least one private sector consultant working on behalf of the Eastern Cape Development Corporation as doing little for the “real economy” in the province733, marking another round in the pro-market – pro-poor argument over LED policy in the province and in South Africa generally.

What this prolonged encounter – and the exit strategy saga - demonstrate is the capacity for some degree of mutual self-regulating accommodation between the different interests of the actors involved. At the same time, they emphasise the total inadequacy of an approach based upon the straightforward projection and transfer of know-how and model from the international development repertoire – ‘rational and progressive’ – into the aspirations and vision of local actors with power. All development practice involves finding compromises that evolve from what Long (2001) describes as the “practical knowledge and organising capacities that develop among field-level practitioners and local actors” – in our present cases, the contracted-in project workers/technical assistants and Provincial government administrators. “It is the day to day decisions, routines and strategies devised for coping with uncertainties, conflicts of interest and cultural difference that make or break policy”734.

6.3 Part Three - Key Issues and Some Conclusions

733 “The DEDEA LED funding initiative seems to have added little value to growing the economy and has frequently appeared to contradict that role by undermining the activities of designated authorities like ECDC. Note on the DEDEA LED Funding instrument – May 2011 to Head of ECDC
In this chapter, we have been attempting over the course of both interventions to see and understand how the project team has used the mandate – the message, method and means – at the point of delivery and implementation. The terrain occupied is very much that space that brings the project worker in his, her different guises into direct contact with the intended beneficiaries of the donor initiative – be they the target rural recipient community – or the target government agency ‘beneficiaries’ of the programmes’ support for change. Within what Mosse calls “their everyday spheres of action autonomous from the organising policy models”735, we have revisited encounters and incidents at the interface (Long) to see to what extent the project worker/development professional/technical assistant and the project team have indeed been able to create room to manoeuvre in individual and/or collective interpretation at point of delivery. In doing so, we seek to take into account their understanding of and commitment to the common sense of project purpose, their preparedness, their capacity and the support they receive in the face of the reception and/or push-back on the part of the target ‘beneficiary’.

To conclude in Part Three, therefore, we draw some conclusions and lessons learned across the implementation phase of both projects and explore the extent to which the issues drawn affect different types of intervention differently. Through an actor perspective, we have looked at how project teams and individual project workers deal with the terms of engagement of participating communities and target groups in projects driven by a more participatory, inclusive approach compared with interventions largely implemented through competitive grant schemes and calls for proposals. Projects are precarious places and failure, however defined, is never ‘off the radar’ for programme managers and project workers alike. Indeed, success can largely be defined by the ways in which failure or the threat of failure (individual and/or collective) is handled over the course of the action. Looking across both projects, we have identified critical instances, factors and feedback at the delivery interface that serve to confirm and reaffirm direction and trajectory, or alternatively to change tack and bring about a turn-around - or simply agree to compromise that involves sticking to the logframe and doing the ‘right thing’, muddling through. As we moved into the sphere of development projects delivering technical assistance to counterpart institutions, we observed how an external project team seeks to gain traction for policy change and how wider national, local and in some cases international policy and political frameworks, well beyond the influence of the project, can either facilitate or repudiate its mission. Finally, successful outcomes, however we define, are the product of ongoing accommodation and compromise. These are “interlocking projects”, which allow for “the articulation and management of actor interests and lifeworlds ... and the resolution of conflicts”736.

6.3.1 On whose terms?

735 Mosse D Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – Introduction: The Ethnography of Policy and Practice - Pluto Press 2005:10
Early in the chapter, we have looked at a number of encounters at the interface in which members of the BRPP sought to enrol target rural communities in a then novel participatory approach to pro-poor and bottom-up local development. The community ‘decision’ to participate – or not – cannot be taken for granted – and as Long, Escobar, Mosse and others make clear, must be understood as at best “partial” and on their own terms – or at least the terms of those “who had the capital of authority”\textsuperscript{737}. The quite visible demonstration of non-engagement on the part of Lithuanian rural dwellers crowded into their village hall in the early months of the programme seemed not to be orchestrated and was obviously a spontaneous, albeit passive non-reaction to an obvious misstatement of the BRPP approach to local development. The community response – visibly withdrawing attention from the lecturing speaker - spelled a real threat to their enrolment into the programme. More importantly, left unchecked, the incident ran the risk of undermining the participatory narrative and profile of the project team as competent and skilled practitioners in community development. By halting the lecture mid-stream, we managed to regain the attention of the community members present and stimulate their interest in what the BRPP was promising to do for them.

The community in question was little different from most of the others recruited and enrolled into the world of the BRPP over the period. Most tended to look to the Programme as a welcome source of new, additional funding and technical support to define and articulate needs as project proposals. Whatever their perceptions of the “rhetoric” of the “new strategy” of participatory methods and their mystifying function (Ferguson), it is hard, at this remove, to fully gauge. The contract between the Programme and the target communities was of relatively marginal importance to their lives and livelihoods, individually and as communities. Moreover, the funding available was more or less token – for the purposes of piloting, experimenting and learning some new skills from doing. Small and micro projects were undertaken during the period, such as environmental clean ups; music-inclusion project; Roma traditional music group; business start-up courses for unemployed; community laundry business set up and run by unemployed women; training for start-up organic farmers; community savings and loan scheme; training for self-employment in the wood processing sector\textsuperscript{738}, to mention but some. When the members of one of the Latvian beneficiary communities therefore laughingly presented the programme team with the ‘milk cow’ patchwork cushion to celebrate the community’s achievement in realising a development ambition – public money for a locally-driven project – it was in part to acknowledge that the project team had kept its bargain. The money had been paid. Potentially useful technical skills, know-how and networks had been acquired through participation. They could look forward to the prospect of attracting further funding through Leader and the prospect of more to come through EU Structural Funds to undertake a growing pipeline of local development projects.

\textsuperscript{737} Mosse D Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – the Goddess and the PRA – local knowledge and planning - Pluto Press 2005:82.

By contrast, the general policy model pertaining in the Eastern Cape was built on the assumption that target beneficiary communities lacked the capacity to participate in decision-making around priorities in which to invest – and management skills required to conduct local projects. They required the assistance of more powerful outsiders (Long 2001) “the people with the organisational skills and the networks ...”739. While much of the rhetoric – and formal conditions for LED support – emphasised the importance of partnership, the relationships between “outsiders and insiders” remained starkly unequal. In many respects, and certainly from the distant perspective of the project office in Bhisho, the final beneficiary in the EU Support for LED programme was as ever little more than the “shadowy presence” (cf Mosse’s Bhil cultivators)740. Their involvement was effectively obscured by the greater effort applied by the programme team to identify, motivate and support entrepreneur project proposers to generate successful LED projects. Indeed, in the early years of implementation they (target beneficiaries) only seemed to become visible when issues began to surface in relation to what was happening in ‘project land’.

Yet even in these circumstances, ‘beneficiary’ communities were, as Long remarks, “not without power”. Indeed, the stories and insights into life in some of the funded projects came from inside - in the knowledge that these would be picked up within the administration. In the case of the livestock improvements project, information relating to the extreme imbalance in reward between outsider and insider weighed heavily in the decision not to fund repeat proposals from the same corporate in other locations. Another example of the community engaging in that project on its own terms can be seen in how the traditional farmers involved had very different views about the carrying capacity of the grazing land and the significance of herd size741 from those of the scientists and agriculturists of the development company. As animal health and quality improved so did herd size. The external technocrats failed to encourage farmers to exploit their improved product in the market much to the frustration of programme managers and policy makers, weakening their case for further public support.

To summarise, project managers need to recognise that community buy-in will always be on its own terms - quoting Mosse, “… project managers are able to exert influence only because the ideas or instructions they purvey can be translated into other people’s own intentions, goals and ambitions”742.

6.3.2 Coping with failure and the threat of failure

One of the issues that emerges from the account is how the projects dealt with failure at the point of delivery. We saw in the BRPP several instances where, in the moment of interaction with the intended beneficiaries, the project through its

frontline representative faltered. In one case, failure (or near failure) was highly public, under the stage light of the rural community hall in Lithuania and the watchful gaze of DFID, the development company and peers in the project team. Elsewhere, we have read of failure passing unobserved and unsupported in one of the project’s target villages in Estonia. At a programme management level, failure occurred on a quasi-regular basis in the project backrooms, underestimating the effort required, misreading context, applying pressures on untrained teams and deploying the unskilled, unready and unsupported. In these cases, failure and near failure was concealed in the candid and sometimes critical narrative of an experimental intervention that placed much store by action learning, operating under the Beckettian “try again, fail again – fail better” principle.

In different contexts and at many points along the way, failure beckoned in the programme’s trajectory. One of the episodes flagged in the chapter took place at a critical milestone as the first ‘generation’ of locally prepared area strategies and action plans, supported by the BRPP Partnership Facilitator, was to be presented to the partnership boards for validation. We noted how all draft strategies were reviewed by the BRPP’s internal international standard setters who were responsible for our “stabilising authoritative interpretations ... of the official project model,”743 in an effort to ensure our practice matched the rhetoric and sales pitch, as much as international good practice standard. From the outset of the BRPP, the superiority of the facilitated ‘participatory’ mode of production of the local area strategy had been the cornerstone of the “policy model”. For months, the team had been putting all its effort into assembling and activating the moving parts and processes of that model - multi-stakeholder partnership, community development facilitators, local community consultations, area audits, PRA, visioning, objective setting, action planning. Expectations of the ‘end product’ were high although most of us, except our more experienced Northern Irish practitioners and team colleagues, had never seen a ‘genuine’ Local Area Strategy before and did not quite know what to expect. The verdict from the peer reviewers, when it came, seemed to spell ‘failure’ in the interpretative power of the model. The draft strategy showed little local authenticity or advance on the ‘copy-cat’ tracts that passed for development strategies and business plans prepared in batch for local authorities by “old style professionalism”744 all over Eastern Europe at the time. The confrontation that followed between the Programme Leader (me) and the Country Team Leader, was, as we observed, harsh and hurtful and ran the risk of breaking the core participatory “interpretative community for the project” (Long) and more critically, the “relations of trust” (Mosse) within the team that had kept this ideological experiment going thus far. Only the determination of the Country Team Leader, her ability to create margin room to manoeuvre in vastly constrained resource circumstances, her brokering skills and “bonds of trust”, created and nurtured in her “strategic management of ongoing relationships”745, ensured the delivery of a coherent end product. A product probably just as “managerialist and interventionist” as the earlier effort - but better dressed in local idiom and realities!

By the second year of implementation of the grant schemes in the EU Support to LED programme in the Eastern Cape, there was growing evidence that the approach to generating projects was failing to build the “networking, trust-building and cooperation”. Instead call for proposals seemed to “encourage unilateral action by smart proposal writers, often consultants, who may disguise their selfish interests through some tactical partnering ...”\(^\text{746}\). This assessment and projection by the MTE team was corroborated in the stories from the front line recounted in this and earlier chapters, much to the discomfort of several members of the programme management team. If the overall objective of the programme was to reduce rural poverty, it clearly was not happening. Yet, as we have seen, at a significant potential turning point in the life-cycle of the programme, all the key stakeholders consorted to keep the show on the road and delivered as it had been up to then. Rather than publically call into question the way in which the Project Generation Team was delivering the grant schemes and therefore jeopardise the release of substantial second tranche funds, there was a consensus among all parties, national and provincial, the EU Delegation, the development company – and the programme team to protect the status quo. While significant changes were made to the programme objectives to include greater emphasis on institutional capacity, the delivery of three grant funds remained the backbone of the logframe, which guided the work of the majority of the members of the PCU for much of the duration.

The decision to change course in terms of the delivery of local economic development finally came about for quite different reasons but which were also largely financial, as well as reputational. We have seen how by early 2009, faced with significant impending underspends in the grant funds (as a result of failing to generate projects of sufficient quality to attract support), the decision was taken to more or less take back the mandates given to the Project Generation Team into the Central Task Team. The CTT contribution in terms of turning the threat of failure into ‘success’ is measured in the final absorption rate for the allocated funds rather than in the changed profile of projects accepted although it was also at this point that several more ‘developmental’ projects were for the first time approved.

6.3.3 Finding traction for policy change?

Delivering policy change was integral to the logic of intervention of both projects and set the context for the encounters between the technical assistance team and project worker on the one hand and the personnel of the host administration on the other. The starting premise for that relationship, as writers like Ferguson and Long point out, is the assumption that the existing policy framework (including legal and institutional) is ‘deficient’, backwards and not in line with ‘best practice’. How successful the team will be in importing and sharing new ideas and practices will depend on factors, such as the technical competence of the team members – as well as their ability in the practice of “the social work of enrolment, persuasion, agreement and argument that lies behind the consensus and coherence demanded

\(^{746}\) Mid-Term Review of the Programme of Support to LED in the Eastern Cape – DECSA – 2007:49
... by the politics of aid”. 747 ‘Success’ or ‘failure’ is primarily as perceived by host counterparts up close and in the narrow confines of the project interface.

Outside that zone, as we have seen, other shaping variables, over which the project team has little control, for example the transience of national and international aid policy frameworks, at one level – or the influence of personal lifeworlds, can either facilitate or repudiate its mission. In the case of the BRPP, the wider political and policy context – preparation for EU membership and for the introduction of EU Structural Funds – was critical to the outcome. During the first year of operation, there was, at best, a detached interest on the part of national policy makers in this small UK funded project in three backward and poor rural regions. Following confirmation in late 2001 that all three Baltic countries were on track to join the EU in 2004, the programme became uniquely positioned to serve as working pilot for a new (and unfamiliar) approach to non-farm rural development. The programme could and did offer practical experience, expertise in policy formulation, case material and local practitioners to national ministries under pressure to prepare and negotiate a Single Programming Document. Pilot measures were designed and used in the first EAGGF-funded programmes to the three new member states in 2004. The DFID team achieved an important ‘impact goal’. The BRPP team was in the right place at the right time. As Long reminds us, “other distant social worlds ... shape the strategies and actions that take place in these localised settings”. We can speculate that much of the official interest in the programme in national ministries over the last two years was directly due to the decision of the European Council in Laeken to confirm the schedule for accession for all three Baltic States in May 2004. 748 Had the accession date been delayed or indeterminate, it is more likely that the political will nationally to adopt the local development model would have been less evident and the programme’s ‘cutting edge’ blunted.

Policy alignment was much in vogue in South Africa in the late 2000s. However, Local Economic Development was described by one former policy manager as an ‘orphan policy’, an ‘unfunded mandate’, given the degree of confusion generated. On the face of it, “the Province was very enthusiastic” about the competitive grant scheme model – “money to test out ideas” in what was no doubt viewed by many as a relatively ‘policy-free’ environment – ‘it’s the way we do LED here’. While the EU Support for LED programme was viewed generally in positive terms, official attitudes among senior policy and programme managers also suggested a degree of benign detachment, verging on disinterest other than as an occasion to meet the voters. The Support to LED programme had been designed as an integral part of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (2005-2014), a connection often made by the project team in its reports and marketing material. Mosse and other writers, e.g. Green 2011, point to the importance of securing inclusion in the right “policy documents (that) ... assume status as part of the conceptual toolkit which determines the parameters of the thinkable …. 749. Every programme document

and report systematically made reference to that alignment. Indeed every project application seemed to proclaim its individual contribution to the goals of the PGDP as a standard entry. Yet regular reviews of the same policy framework over the years make scarce mention of the programme, other than as one source of funding for enterprise development, running alongside but not coordinated with “a range of players, (ECDC, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Land Bank and so on)” 750.

Despite many public pronouncements of the mission of both the South African and the Provincial Governments as “a developmental state”, there was little substantive engagement between the programme team and the political policy making class in the Province. To some extent, the reluctance to commit may have been due to the somewhat ‘lowly’ place on the government’s economic development policy hierarchy “LED is still seen as trying to alleviate poverty – not a structured process to get people to undertake sustainable economic activity … LED isn’t prestige … not for the big boys” 751. Whether this was a result of perceptions of earlier major LED programmes delivering less than anticipated, or as a result of a shift in overall policy – on the donor side towards budget sector support and on the national side to substantial ‘industrialised’ top-down programmes such as Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and massive job creation – LED attracted little effective support from political leaders in the Province. Mosse highlights this issue when he remarks that “development success depends on socially sustained interpretations which … are vulnerable to the effects of policy change” 752. Our efforts to ‘recruit’ a senior policy maker at the LED conference were politely dismissed as “too heavy”. In discussion with a well-placed and influential policy adviser in my last days on the programme, the neo-liberal logic of our model was held up to much more ‘real-world’ scrutiny and more or less pronounced ‘not-fit-for-purpose’ in the rural townships and settlements of the Eastern Cape.

On a personal reflection, when drawing on lifeworld and experience, in encounters at the development interface, there is an ever present danger of blanking out and ignoring the uniqueness of actual project context. I was able to draw on lived experiences from Northern Ireland, new forms of development governance under the reformed Structural Funds, our ‘achievements’ in the Baltics Rural Partnerships – for an ‘unshakable’ belief in the ‘unquestionable’ and ‘self-evident superiority’ of a bottom-up-top-down, partnership-based approach to tackling the wicked and hard-to-get-at problem of rural poverty and social exclusion. In the words of Long, I had all the material for “a kind of trade-in-images … to redefine the nature of state-civic society relations” 753, that, if I could sell to the policy shapers in the Eastern Cape, had the potential to make a lasting contribution to the construction of the “developmental state” in its effort to throw off the legacy of the apartheid system and inequalities of its neo-liberal successor. The dizzy level of ambition and fantasy!

751 IV with Frank Arthurs (former Head of LED at national level – LED consultant for DEDEA on LRED) – April 2010.
6.3.4 Adaptation, accommodation and compromise for ‘successful’ project outcomes

All development interventions, as Mosse reminds us, start as text drawn from theory, mission statements, civil society consultations and policy forums – striving for coherence and applicability in the field. The “notion of the ‘project cycle’ (management) ... arranges various activities ... sequentially in linear and logical order”, advises Long, quoting Clay and Schaffer 1984 and Palumbo 1987), encouraging a view of project implementation as “a form of rational problem-solving”754. In both of our case studies, as we have seen, however, it seems to have been the ‘rule of the unintended’ which applied. The outcomes produced at different stages along the way, were essentially the product of sustained struggle, ongoing contestation, recurring and sometimes lasting divisions, unforeseen external events, unplanned contradictions. Sometimes they occurred in responding to failure or the threat of failure in the ever uncertain world of projects, up to – and beyond - the point of implementation. As intentions collide with alternative realities, project teams and project workers must find appropriate ways to adapt, and “maintain relationships” while “at the same time work(ing) actively to sustain those same models – the dominant interpretation – because it is in their interest to do so”755.

CHAPTER 7

Policies and Projects for
Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion

The International Development Worker
Idealist, Duped Pawn, Autonomous Practitioner?
Building Alliances, Accommodating Interests and Muddling
Through
7.0 Introduction

We set out in Chapter One on a retrospective journey of reflection on the role of project workers and project teams in three external development projects intended to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. I wanted to explore, as far as possible from an actor perspective, what actually happens when a ‘collective’ of policy planners, development workers, intermediaries, counterparts and ‘beneficiaries’ are joined together in the shared space of project land. And through such insights I sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of the functioning of an important part of the development and technical assistance sector today.

My starting point was an ‘insider’ account of a moment in the life-story of a rural development policy in gestation. In it, I attempted to throw some light on the social production of policy, through understanding better how “people, ideas, interests, events ... are tied together by translation of one kind or another into the material and conceptual order of a successful project (Latour 2000)”756. I wanted to provide some perspectives into how the different actors, variously implicated in the development agenda, influenced or pre-disposed by their own unique lifeworlds, might have sought to interpret, legitimise, persuade, broker and enrol others in their vision for the way forward. The scenes as depicted in Chapter One represented the encounters and exchanges between three fairly compartmentalised groups of policy shapers with little prior experience of working together – and at a far remove from the rural communities which were the focus of their attention.

These were very early days for the Northern Ireland administration in negotiating directly with the European Commission as a newly designated Objective One region. Up to that point, the same administration had little experience in policy dialogue and consultation with third party interests in the region. The skills and networks of civil society groups interested in influencing social and economic policy there had been developed more in the wider European context and through involvement in programmes such as the EU Poverty Programme. For the EU officials involved, the learning curve had taken a sharp turn northwards necessitating much more improvisation than thought-out intervention. It was an “arena”757 from which development consultants were absent. Instead, the ‘man in the middle’ was a ‘detached national expert’, formerly of the Northern Irish administration, then working with DG Agri, with close links to some of the civil society actors and their movements – sometimes uncomfortably straddling all three domains – until lifeworld and livelihood collided and options crystallised.

The Belfast cameo provided a real-life case in which to see into the social dynamic around the formulation of policy. It offers a surrogate glimpse of what might have happened in the backrooms of DFID and EDF and other donor agencies when policy managers and their recipient government counterparts get together to agree

common aid policy frameworks. This is a stage in the project management lifecycle from which the professional contracted international development consultant ‘expert’ would (normally) be absent. For the major part of the dissertation, our focus was primarily on how policy, once articulated and ‘handed down’, continues to be contested, re-defined, interpreted, negotiated, manipulated, and adapted by the development worker to accommodate the needs of others and ‘to stay in the game’, to the point that its effective meaning is, as Mosse advises, more “in the practice” than in the statement. Our two main case studies take place in very different parts of the world, in different historical, political, cultural and socio-economic circumstances compared to the policy environment in Northern Ireland in the late 1980s. Yet there are important commonalities across all three – they focus on policy interventions to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion, each ‘case’ can be set against a backdrop of far-reaching transition, change and uncertainty – outside the immediate project environment as much as within. All three initiatives intended to engineer from the outside ‘new’ ways (in different ways) to “nudge or induce” local people and organisations to work together to develop solutions to persistent poverty and unemployment – and to transfer the necessary skills and capabilities they (‘beneficiaries’) are assumed to lack.

The story of the RAP, as presented here, finishes before any future project is designed let alone implemented, following the (unexpected) return of the ‘insider’ to ‘normal’ civil servant duties. The same actor, in a later livelihood context, picks the story line up as a participating development consultant at the point where the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme prepares to enter the field and then several years beyond that, on joining the LED support project in the Eastern Cape almost mid-way through implementation. The perspective also changes. No longer a public official primarily concerned with policy design and oversight, my status as a paid development professional, hired by for-profit development companies added new dimensions, uncertainties, insecurities, opportunities and advantages. It also pegged my place in the pecking order of international development, journeyman and technical assistant, necessary but not always welcomed by development agency officials, to judge by the antagonism in the words of one senior and frustrated EU official, “so-called experts ... who know nothing about what they’re supposed to be advising on”. He argued for more local know-how to counteract the dominance of the bigger development consultancies. “We want to move more to ‘south-south’ – but the EU consulting firms have a big lobby in Brussels”.

The growth in importance of the private sector in delivering international development interventions is a relatively recent phenomenon. Its importance in terms of global agendas for reducing poverty worldwide has been put in the spotlight in a recent UK House of Commons International Development Committee report, published earlier this year, on the use of private sector contractors for the

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delivery of DFID’s aid programmes. Although the report only concerns the management and delivery of DFID and UK Government programmes, its general and critical findings are more widely applicable. Its publication coincides with revelations concerning the conduct of one of DFID’s most prominent private sector contractors. It also provides evidence, as we have seen, of the increasing use of for-profit firms for the delivery of international aid. The findings point to an increase in UK budgetary support for international development to 0.7% of GDP, in keeping with UN targets. This increase in financial resource has not been matched in terms of DFID operational staffing. Some commentators suggest that the imbalance has led to even greater dependency on the private sector. In the words of one senior DFID manager “we are not equipped, in terms of staff members, to be a delivery organisation, we are a commissioning organisation.....”. However, the submissions from several top-ten service providers for DFID stress how the application of such a strategy “allows DFID to have flexibility and speed in its response, access to wide-reaching experts, drive more targeted VfM (Value for Money) and support services directly tailored to the local context ....”. Or as expressed by another “...if DFID were directly to implement its programmes, it would have to recruit an additional 25,000 to 30,000 personnel”. Approximately 20% of DFID’s bilateral aid is currently managed by private sector consultancies. This is far from specific to DFID. The IDC Report also shows 29% of USAID spend in 2016 and 24% of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2014/15 was delivered by private contractors. Figures for EuropeAid are not available but likely to be broadly in line.

In the last fifty years, some 3.5 trillion US dollars of official development assistance has been spent by developed countries on Official Development Aid (ODA). The current overall average contribution is about $130bn or 0.32% of Gross National Income of the twenty-nine member states of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. As for the future of ODA, it seems likely that “there still is no shortage of development needs and absorptive capacity to which additional resources could be directed”. In his cryptically critical observation of the international aid business, especially directed at the multi-lateral agencies, Apthorpe, quoting Peter Walker (1995:23) remarks that “it is one of the most un-regulated markets in the world, with few internationally agreed standards ... spend(ing) thousands of millions of dollars of other people’s money”. If, as has been suggested by some of the contributors to the DFID report above, as the volume of development assistance grows, so does the dependency on (and greater use of) private sector delivery agents, then we can expect that for-profit firms will

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764 DFID also accounts for UK overseas development assistance spent through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the EU.
continue to be significant actors within the development industry and therefore the object of greater scrutiny than has hitherto been the case.

Few of those writing in the field of development sociology have specifically addressed this segment of the industry and references are often marginal. Eyben describes the “development (as distinct from donor) community ... as not only the bilateral and multi-lateral aid agencies ... but also development consultants, those working for international NGOs and development studies institutes”\(^769\), and seems to be unaware of any substantial private sector presence. In their study of international development workers, focussing mainly on professionals from international (and national) non-governmental organisations, for example, Rajak and Stirrat almost casually and vaguely “finally” refer to “various commercial companies which in one way or another are active in the world of development”\(^770\), although they point out that “it is impossible to generalise for all who work in the development industry”. They seem to suggest that those working in the commercial (for profit) sector, “with specialist skills, for instance, engineers or specialist accountants” move in and out through “unclear and porous boundaries ... only working for a year or so, some only for a few weeks ...”. This seems a far cry from the highly capitalised, structured and career-rich world that we know it to be today, recruiting directly from development studies masters courses with progression paths from back-office to overseas and all the way to PLC boards. Nor does the mainstream literature seem to accommodate the notion of development ‘experts’ from the private sector working in such ‘soft’ technical policy fields as tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Much of the commentary around the direction of DFID’s international development funding has been coloured by often hostile media scrutiny and frequent claims of wasteful spending of UK taxpayers’ money, albeit just as frequently fact-checked, refuted and countered by DFID\(^771\). The current controversy has been given new energy by strongly worded political criticism of “the appalling conduct of some contractors”\(^772\). From the point of view of other commentators, such as former DFID Minister Ivan Lewis writing in the Guardian, the case also provides a pretext for “right wing Tory MPs emboldened by Brexit, who scent the blood of another of their pet hates”\(^773\) as embodied in the UK’s international development policy. The controversy calls to mind Ferguson’s reference to “newspaper articles with titles like ‘Canadian aid gone awry?’ and ‘CIDA in Africa: Goodbye $6m’”\(^774\) as far back as 1979 and his references to “rural development projects scattered liberally across Africa ... projects (which) seem to fail with almost the same astonishing regularity as they do in Lesotho”. He depressingly quotes Murray (1981:19) “the history of

development in Lesotho is one of almost unremitting failure to achieve their objectives.”

However much I might identify with some of the radical critique of the ‘development industry’, I have had no intention to follow down such a bleak and unforgiving penitents’ path. Instead, I have attempted to capture some of the experience from these two development projects (and others that I have worked on over the last twenty years) in order to throw some light on and to understand, from an active participant’s perspective, the role of the development worker and the project team in packaging, interpreting, brokering, adapting and delivering external interventions to tackle rural poverty. Looking back over the happenings of those years, the opportunities and the options, the dilemmas and deceptions, the anticipations and frustrations, the failures and the achievements, some of which are cast in critical light in the chapters of this account, I might someday idly wonder what more purposeful use I might have made of those years. That mistakes were made – many times over – and things done that would have been better left undone – I will not deny. Nevertheless, they provided the frameworks for rich collaborative relationships, sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflictual, bringing together a cast of many faces in different places united only in the ‘reality’ of the project. Once again, it is to Mosse that I turn, as often throughout this extended introspection and account, to “reinstate the complex agency of actors in development at every level and move on from the image of duped perpetrators” to focus on the development worker and project worker in the interpretation and practice of development policy at points along the delivery chain.

Reflecting on the IBRFP experience, Mosse describes how “a highly committed project team ... earned a remarkable level of local trust and credibility ... through constantly meeting, sitting, discussing ideas, conducting PRAs and CPAs, taking men and women to distant research centres and bringing government experts and administrators to their doorsteps ... exposing (counterparts and ‘beneficiaries’) to new technologies, ideas and ways of thinking ... responding flexibly to a complex social and institutional environment, learning a lot as they groped for successful interventions, sometimes drawing on ad hoc interventions based on ‘off the shelf’ development ideas or government schemes”

Even taking into account the very different circumstances encountered in our present case-study projects, there is much in Mosse’s description of the routine of project life that rhymes with the reality of the BRPP and the Support to LED in the Eastern Cape. Just as he rejects the notion of the ‘apolitical’ development worker whose job it is to ‘solve problems’, bringing unquestionably ‘superior’ Western know-how and upliftment, Mosse also walks away from the characterisation of the development workers who “fragment, subjugate, silence or erase the local, all the while whisking these political effects out of sight”.

In the real world, if one can speak of a ‘real world’ in what Apthorpe calls “Aidland”, the reality is always much more complex and can only be properly understood through making the effort to appreciate “the

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complexity of policy as institutional practice ... the social life of projects, organisations and professionals and ... the perspectives of actors themselves and ... the diversity of interests behind projects.”778 The space occupied by the development worker, distant from donor and management oversight, is sectioned by multiple interfaces along which he/she must engage with interdependent others and through compromise and accommodation to partly enrol and be partly enrolled in one another’s interlocking intentions, because it is in his/her interest to do so. Tentative and experiential as this ‘real world’ surely is, he warns us, projects do not always ‘succeed’ – they can ‘fail’. However, even in circumstances where interventions like the IBRFP are judged to ‘fail’, they “may still have a significant positive effect on the lives of many thousands (of people), albeit often in unscripted and unintended ways”779.

Mosse alerts us to the social production of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ and in particular to how hitherto ‘successful’ development projects fall foul of shifts in a fast moving, ephemeral donor policy agenda, affected by factors and influences far beyond the scope of the project. Both interventions covered by our case studies were judged to be ‘successful’, in one case, scoring ‘firsts’ against all the donor criteria. However, by the time final reports were being prepared in each situation, the donor’s global agenda had moved on from the policy focus that had underpinned the initial rationale. In the DFID case, policy attention had turned to nation-building in fragile and conflict affected states. For the European Development Fund and Development Cooperation Instrument, their new mission emphasised budget support and sector-wide approaches, abandoning earlier support for local economic development. Nevertheless, transcending in their own ways the changing nature of donor policy cycles, both projects left behind systems, structures, skills and approaches to local and rural development that, for better or otherwise, are now integral to the policy and procedural responses to rural poverty and social exclusion in all four places.

7.0.1 Structure of the chapter

For the remainder of the chapter, we shall draw together the main conclusions and issues arising through our investigation of the ways in which the project worker and the project team use their roles, resources, including experience and know-how, and the space they are afforded to give themselves room for manoeuvre to figure out, interpret, adopt and deliver policy, constantly interacting with others. Over the course of the study, we have looked in particular at three domains of interaction across the project life cycle of both projects:

1. The involvement of contracted development workers and the project team in shaping and constructing the intervention – in a context of contested understanding of the problem, confusion, ambiguity and little consensus around the prescription;

2. The interaction within the project team, its members and intermediaries (project class) in preparation for implementation and how this contributed to the emerging shape of outcomes and the attribution of benefits;
3. The interfaces between the project team, its members and ‘intermediaries’ with stakeholders at point of delivery both among beneficiary groups and in the host administrations - and the effect of those exchanges on project outcomes.

In the following sections, then, I will attempt to draw out several synthesising conclusions and reflections broadly related to our observations of the interactions and the role of agency during each of these phases in both project lifecycles. It should be understood that the divisions as such serve a presentational purpose rather than demarcate very distinctive, stand-alone aspects of either development intervention. The interfaces are different. The first involves the project worker as a project shaper interacting with other project shapers and the donor community to frame mandate in formation. The second set of interfaces are those that arise as a consequence of the different often opposing positions taken by project workers and those they enrol in their efforts within the team to work out how to implement the mandate according to their interests and perspectives. The third set of interfaces bring the project worker and intermediaries face to face with intended ‘beneficiaries’ as we attempt to understand what happens in the act of delivery of ‘aid’ and the practice of policy. None of the conclusions belong solely to one phase or another since all arise from and combine elements of the ever changing social dynamic that is ‘the project’. In the sections that follow, we relate our main conclusions to one or other of these three main phases of the project life-cycle on the understanding that they are naturally related to the data and discussion around the particular phase but can equally apply at other times and contexts throughout the intervention. For example, we deal with the conclusion relating to the importance of social relations and alliances around which ideas grow in terms of relevance and power in the section dealing with the struggles within the project team as it interprets, re-defines, affirms and contests meanings and ways in preparation for final stages of delivery Section 7.2. This could equally apply to Section 7.1 below.

7.1 Shaping and Constructing the Mandate – The Role of the Project Worker

We have argued that the ambiguity and confusion of ideas that characterise international development interventions creates opportunity for the better connected and networked actor to shape the design, interpret the mandate and control, at least for a time, the official ‘master’ narrative.

A feature of the development industry and donor community approach to project planning, apparent in both situations, is the manner in which historical time and socio-cultural space were factored out in the effort to simplify complexity and work within “the ‘project cycle’ that arranges various activities sequentially in linear and logical order (see Clay and Schaffer 1984:3-5)”780. Donors “cling to the rather mechanical or systems model of the relationship between policy implementation

and outcomes”\textsuperscript{781} as schematised in the ubiquitous “logframe”, or intervention logic, or indeed, a more ‘advanced’ theory of change. The shared lexique of strategic planning, reporting and evaluating speaks of rationale, objectives, purpose, results, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. It is the language of science, technology, objectivity - and the illusion of control. It is used by the donor agency, development company, project leader and consultant “to assert influence over project management and disorderly practice” and by the same token “to provide coherent interpretations of events for bureaucrats” and policy managers.\textsuperscript{782}

As policy mutates into practice at the interfaces, so the devices around which the intervention is framed (logframe etc) serve to demonstrate some degree of linear causality, only to be left aside until the next reporting period by busy project team members.

All international development development and technical assistance projects imply change. Even when in pursuit of the same, shared higher order objectives between donor and recipient, for example, political, economic and cultural integration into Western Europe in the case of the Baltics, the acceptance of proposed institutional change is never an inevitable outcome. In many instances, the language of international development consultancy by-passes local political processes and practices. Local ‘recruits’ are drawn from third level institutions – often international studies and language skills are especially important. Trained in ‘project cycle management’ (PCM) and “(u)sing linguistic and stylistic conventions that ‘invoke codes operating beyond the reading (Apthorpe 1996a:18)”\textsuperscript{783}, they gain new authority over – and potentially alienate - the traditional civil servants delivering day-to-day ‘out-of-date’ policies and services. Only projects which can find the means to interlock interests with those in the host administration – and find the shared language – beyond the formal parameters of logframe, objectives, results and indicators to express those common interests – can have much prospect of long-term success.

### 7.1.1 The project worker defining, defying and defending the donor agenda

The principles underlying the ‘new’ relationship between donor agencies and recipients of international aid had yet to be enunciated in the Paris (2005) and Accra (2008) accords\textsuperscript{784}, during the period in question (first decade of the current century). Both DFID and the European Union (EDF) were seen as two of the leading members of the OECD-Development Advisory Committee in terms of promoting and implementing ‘good development practice’. Yet the back-story to both projects would suggest that, while recipient governments might have been consulted on the planned intervention, the key parameters of the policy prescript were already part of the donor agency’s current stock in trade. The outcome was hardly open-ended and if there was to be ‘development’ or technical assistance provided, it would be

\textsuperscript{783} Mosse D - Cultivating Development - Framing a Participatory Development Project – Pluto Press – 2005:38.  
\textsuperscript{784} Paris Accord - Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems. (2005); Accra - Countries have more say over their development processes through wider participation in development policy formulation, (2008).
on the donor’s terms more or less unconditionally. The task for the development worker contracted to prepare the terms of reference was to make it fit with local circumstances – or, as Ferguson would suggest, to “construct” a version of those circumstances that justifies and legitimates the approach to be taken (1994).

Project script-writers (“a special kind of writing”785) are hired first and foremost as technical experts experienced in the structure and form of ‘projects’, with or without specific sectoral experience and often with little knowledge of the project location. Both interventions, as a result, were designed and largely implemented in history-free zone with less than a sketched sense of how the proposed strategy would meet the actual socio-economic, cultural and political issues affecting development in the regions.

In the Baltics case, the DFID operational team tip-toed tentatively into the field of Headquarter’s then dominant ideology of sustainable rural livelihoods approach (SLA). The challenge was to retrofit the new flagship policy with the inexorable march of market liberalism sweeping across public policy following the demise of state ‘socialism’ and collectivism in the countries concerned. After several ‘failed’ attempts and with a sufficient degree of approximation and ambiguity, a last resort short term project team produced a template providing a one-sided (DFID only) theoretical version of the ‘problem’. This was parsed, re-interpreted and re-packaged into a winning bid by another group of development workers selling DFID’s SLA product (transposed to the transition countries of Eastern Europe) back to DFID. National governments were at best a ‘silent partner’, consulted only in so far as protocol obliged.

The “naked exercise of donor power”786 was much more obvious in the context of the EU Support for LED in the Eastern Cape. In fact, the determining influences in shaping the intervention came from outside the donor agency directly concerned and financing the venture (EDF and the EC Delegation). The ‘donor position’ seemed to be driven by a desire for policy convergence within the donor community in favour of a market-led approach in the face of national government’s (much vaunted but essentially rhetorical) belief in the ‘developmental state’. Pity the development workers assigned to conceptualise and design an acceptable and coherent ‘solution’ between such opposing policies, given the strident pressure to comply and intolerance of dissension or a counter ‘statist’ model! After early efforts were harshly rejected, a final ‘acceptable’ text satisfied donor desires for a ‘business-friendly’ approach and it “offered real money to test out ideas – the province warmed to that”787. In the end, “everyone seemed happy”788. While the bid winners (development company) identified the contradiction between the policy model and the goal of tackling poverty and social exclusion, they knew better than to propose anything other than a project team to manage three competitive grant schemes. ‘Win the mandate first and then see what can be changed once in charge!’ seemed the common sense position to take.

787 Interview with Trevor (M&E Adviser) – March 2010.
788 Comment from writer of final ToR – May 2011.
The arrogance of the BRPP model was to presume that nothing comparable had gone before it when there was clearly an accumulation of organisational experience, decision-making and social capital attaching to earlier but now (sometimes consciously) forgotten periods in history. This included what Macken-Walsh describes as the “strong heritage of collective action that has its roots in a social context very different from that of models imported from EU15 democracies”789. To acknowledge such acquis could have enriched the BRPP partnership model. But then, that would be political! And we were ‘technical experts’. In the case of the South African project, the scriptwriter, a fellow development worker, charged with the task of preparing the winning bid expressed surprise at the absence of any reflection on the challenges facing rural communities in the Eastern Cape or on the appropriateness in such circumstances of the grant-scheme strategy which was the centre-plank of that intervention. But on the cusp of competitive bidding now was not the time to labour the point!

What the cases studies also demonstrated, in common with the observations of Long (2001), Mosse (2005) and others, is that however assertive donor claims for the superiority of their policy agendas, their ability to influence practice diminishes the further out from Headquarters and closer the project comes to the interfaces on the frontline. In the case of the Baltics, the CSEED Unit, while keen to be seen back home at headquarters to promote DFID’s ‘powerful’ SLA model for tackling rural poverty, were more familiar with the social and economic transition taking place in Eastern Europe. As a result, they were less committed to the blanket application of the SLA methodology and willing to compromise around the Leader-partnership model put forward by the project team, provided the project team made the ‘mood music’ (project name and ‘participatory’ narrative) and remained in tune with official policy. Probably because DFID had ‘inherited’ the Eastern European countries from the former Overseas Development Agency Know-How Fund (ODA-KHF), they were never part of DFID’s core group of ‘target countries’, for which reason, the CSEED operational unit (and others in the same part of the world) had little ‘political’ or policy currency back at Headquarters. And by the time the programme finished, as we have seen, DFID’s policy cycle had turned again towards more ‘momentous and urgent’ priorities than SLA790 with the result that, however successful the programme might have been in the field, it was of little significance in DFID’s wider scheme of things.

As far as the Support for LED in the Eastern Cape programme was concerned, DFID, as the primary ideologue in shaping the intervention, played no further role in terms of overseeing implementation. For their part, the European Commission officials directly responsible for the delivery of the programme, despite being sceptical of key aspects of its implementation, seemed content to take at face value the activity lists and narrative of progress reports as long as these related to the results set out in the contractual logframe. The contact between the Delegation and

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the project team was limited to “contractual and administrative matters” and the
task manager responsible for oversight complained that there was “little or no
dialogue with the PCU on policy matters”\textsuperscript{791}. Some of the senior members of the
project team were of the view that they “should not overdo meetings”\textsuperscript{792}. Yet, even
when confronted with the conflicting evidence from the mid-term report, donor
agency pressure for a change in approach was strangely muted, and the second
(and final) tranche of funding was approved. Senior staff seemed resigned not to
challenge the existing model - “I suppose we must accept that this is the reality of
SA fifteen years on”\textsuperscript{793}. In any event, by 2010, the donor agenda had moved on
from support to LED to sector-wide and budget support strategies – and the
programme, having “fewer and fewer pots and pans tied to its tail, it (made) a
smaller noise and awakens fewer people of less importance (Latour 1996:137)”\textsuperscript{794}.

Looking further back to the interfaces described in Chapter One between the
Northern Irish administration and the European Commission, the relationship was
markedly different to those which provide the subject matter of the two case
studies. As a region of a member state of the EU, the local administration had
considerable bargaining power in its dealings with the Commission, although the
conditionality applying to EU Structural Funds and additionally to the use of a
discretionary EU budget line provided some leverage (on the EC side) for change. In
the end, however, it was in the efforts of the project worker/development worker
(then an agent of the Commission) to defend his room for manoeuvre and close a
deal before returning to take up duties as a civil servant in the region that the space
was shaped for the compromise agreed at the time.

7.1.2 External interventions delivering cargo or ‘seepod’ – six of one or half a
dozens of the other?

Long suggests that the “biographies of particular actors contain within them specific
‘intervention’ experiences” and this includes both the “intervened” and the
“intervening parties”\textsuperscript{795}. In the case of the biography of this particular “intervening”
actor, it was clear from the outset that “socio-political experiences”, carried in from
the past, constituted a “repertoire of ‘sense-making’ filters”\textsuperscript{796} (Long) that
conditioned personal, even emotional as well professional response to both (and
other) development interventions. My activism in the early struggle for equal
citizenship in the discriminating state of Northern Ireland, my career involvement
as agent of that same state interacting with local self-help and social enterprise and
followed by several years professional engagement with a European policy
framework for capacitating and institutionalising local action groups. These were
connecting, if sometimes seemingly contradictory, chapters in lifeworld and
livelihood which shaped my initial and continuing relationship with both case study

\textsuperscript{791} Interview with Task Manager in Delegation – March 2010.
\textsuperscript{792} Interview with Head of Finance and Contracts Unit – March 2010.
\textsuperscript{793} Interview with senior official Head of Development in Delegation – January 2010.
projects and provided a lens for understanding behaviour and response patterns along different interfaces. Biography mattered!

In my search for ‘development’ opportunity, the ‘ideal’ project, then, had ‘bottom-up partnership’ written through its DNA. Partnership implied “good government”, connecting with, listening to, negotiating with and responding to local people, not as ‘objects’ of the ‘bienfaisance’ of state, but as partners in a social contract for individual and collective ‘well-being’. Not dissimilar to the view predominating in Ireland and elsewhere in the EU in the late 1980s, as expressed by O’Reilly - “Partnerships are not simply a better mechanism for delivering new development inputs; the inclusive nature of decision making in partnerships is perceived as one of those inputs”\textsuperscript{797}. As a former civil servant turned local development practitioner, the “managerialist and interventionist undertones,” associated with the endogenous model, which we had (I had) spent years implementing in the Baltics did not so much “escape”. As Long points out, the contradiction was ever “inherent” and present in our actions and rhetoric. Here we were\textsuperscript{799}, in three foreign countries, “enlightened experts”,\textsuperscript{799} unable to speak any of the ‘local’ languages, presuming to draw up and put in place “a form of local self-determination”. But, in ‘project land’, at this point in the cycle, that was ‘our mandate’ and ‘our job’ was to deliver. Besides, from our earlier careers in Northern Ireland, (Chapter One) we were familiar enough with the uneven un-thought-out outcomes of top-down policy and could easily argue away the inconsistency of introducing the ‘partnership model’ along the lines of what O’Reilly describes as “a little nurturing from the state”\textsuperscript{800} ultimately enabling local actors to interact and negotiate ‘more equally’ with the administration on basis of ‘better evidence’ of local need.

Much less stimulating in the order of project opportunities in my ‘development expert’ career-path were those projects that seemed to reflect top-down “standard policy models” based on “this separation of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’”, involving a “package from the outside … designed to stimulate the emergence of certain ‘internal’ activities geared towards … better utilisation of natural resources and the ‘human factor’”\textsuperscript{801}. All other things being equal, such opportunities for work were less likely to attract my interest. As the case in point, one look at the South African terms of reference was enough to convince me that the job was not for me - there was an emotional as well as skills disconnect. The centralised competitive grant scheme had all the features of the “‘cargo’ image of intervention” with its promise of ‘miracle’ solutions and overtones of ‘superior’ outsiders ‘mystifying’ and taking advantage of “powerless and less discerning folk”\textsuperscript{802}. Despite eventually joining the team, two years later, this was the mindset that shaped my ongoing relationship

\textsuperscript{797} O’Reilly P – All of the People, all of the Time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – 2.2 Diversity and local knowledge - PhD Thesis – NUI Galway – 2012:45.
\textsuperscript{800} O’Reilly P – All of the People, all of the Time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in the making of local development – 2.3 Cargo and Seedpods - PhD Thesis – NUI Galway – 2012:50.
with the programme and others’ perceptions of that relationship, articulated by the M&E Adviser as ‘Gerry doesn’t like projects’.

On the face of it, then, one of the case-study projects, from the outset, had a profile that chimed easily with my professional (and political) outlook, while the other was designed in a way which made it more difficult for me to engage.

7.1.2.1 BRPP and the illusion of participation

Once into the active project context in the Baltics, it took little enough time or intellectual effort for me, as project leader, to translate the terms and the proposal for the DFID project as a natural next step in the ‘unfinished business’ of introducing the EU Leader partnership in my home region. Over and above the emotional connect and sense of coherence that I had with this ‘third way’ that was neither state nor private sector, the Northern Irish experience provided a template for design and operational planning over the course of the programme, as well as ready ‘blueprint’ of experience and resource pool of expertise. This can be a very powerful set of ‘reinforcers’ particularly in the role of project leader where the room for manoeuvre is proportional to the “idea with power”. In the case concerned, there was little evidence of partnership or a participatory approach to project planning. It was more an ideological lock down until some of the international team had joined up the dots with the earlier experience, written the scripts and tested the narrative over the early encounters with donors, key stakeholders and intermediaries.

A key concern for the partnership builders in the BRPP was to avoid ‘elite capture’ by powerful outside actors whose interests were seen as inimical to the pro-poor and participatory aims of the programme. However, much of the early effort was dedicated to recruiting, enrolling and mobilising stakeholders from more ‘relevant’, willing and available participants, alternative ‘elites’. Quarterly reports chronicled perceived changes in perceptions among partnership members from curiosity to suspended scepticism to detached participation or moral guardianship and finally, in some cases, to engagement, shared ownership - towards ‘enlightened self-interest’ and a “community of believers”? From the outset, the success of the programme and the future of the nine partnerships created were closely tied to the arrival of the EU Leader programme following accession. Critical to that outcome, from the point of view of the project team, was the partnership’s ability to demonstrate the ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ of these new locally-based multi-stakeholder institutions in planning for and managing public funds - and much more immediately so than its capacity for ‘listening’ and empathising with the ‘poorest of the poor’. When, for example, failure loomed in the form of a facilitated draft strategy that was deemed by the official script-writers of the programme to be both ‘sub-standard’ and ‘off the shelf’ rather than ‘rich in local insights, understanding and innovation’, our primary concern was to protect against reputational damage in strategic and policy circles more than worry about the reaction of the local target communities, although credibility at local level was also crucial to perceptions of performance. We changed the facilitator and improved the product. Several
commentators suggest the local strategy was designed by RPP personnel in consultation with the partnership board. Indeed, one critic concluded the members of the partnership she was observing in action knew little about poverty and simply acquiesced in the production of the local area strategy by one of the team members. However motivated by the objective of reducing rural poverty and social exclusion we might have been, for programme managers, starting with me as Regional Team Leader, to paraphrase Mosse, we used the techniques of partnership as a disciplinary technology to produce ‘proper’ local intermediaries with “planning knowledge”\textsuperscript{803}. Our job had been to set up and capacitate nine local area partnerships to prepare and manage local area strategies to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion and that is what we did. Whether in doing so, we made any impression on the socio-political decision-making context and capacity locally, is called into question by Macken-Walsh in her commentary on one of the partnership areas in Lithuania\textsuperscript{804}. She argues that the composition of the board excluded “inter-sectoral debate” and avoided bargaining over developmental issues in pursuit of consensus. “The board’s function in practice is the administration of financial grants”, she concludes.

7.1.2.2 From projects for profit to projects for change

On the face of it, the underlying policy model for the Support to LED in the Eastern Cape could hardly be more different. While the rhetoric spoke of ‘partnership’, the approach depended heavily on outside entrepreneurs and technologists to stimulate the development initiative, trust and cooperation of rural communities afflicted by unemployment, poverty and the long-shadow effects of the inequalities of the former apartheid system. The ‘development’ tools they had were more relevant to first world economies (complex application forms, cost benefit analyses, net present values etc). The RFAs were enterprise and small business development specialists with little experience in brokering and facilitation required to support local initiative in such circumstances. Their target intermediary was the ideas-entrepreneur attracted by the opportunity for grant funding. Partnership with target communities was contrived and temporary, related only to the application (and eventual implementation if awarded) and did not extend to governance or shared management. The predominant mindset among team members and intermediaries was that of ‘superior’ outsider and bearer of “presents or gifts ...,”\textsuperscript{805} an attitude reflected in often top-down, sometimes domineering, ‘who-knows-best’ manner observed in some of the RFA interaction with rural communities.

In the course of our reflections, we have encountered instances where the relationships were likely to have been more ‘disempowering’ than ‘empowering’. Evidence of sharp inequalities reproduced in grant-funded projects became a source of division and tension within the team. Some team members felt “sick in


\textsuperscript{804} Macken-Walsh A – Operationalising Governance and Rural Development: A case study of the Rural Partnerships Programme in Post-Socialist Lithuania – Teagasc Rural Economy Research Centre: ND.

the stomach”\textsuperscript{806} at such an association whereas others were less ‘judgemental’ and for whom the programme was about providing “experience of packaging actions in ways that will allow them to attract funding”.\textsuperscript{807} And so the debate persisted and in the meantime the grant-fund competitions continued. Over time, however, as the flow of eligible projects dried up, there was a shift in the programme’s approach to project generation, more related to the programme managers’ existential fear of failure to absorb funds than an outcome of any struggle between different policy viewpoints within the team. Nevertheless, in the disruption, we saw the late emergence of several project proposals that exhibited alternative notions of the relationship between the project proposer and the target community. While these were still characterised by the ‘powerful outsider and weaker insider’ notion, some of the emerging ‘social enterprise’ projects, driven by privileged “local elites” who could “mobilise opportunities that help other community members”,\textsuperscript{808} differed from earlier ‘fly-in-fly-out’ interventions and seemed to hold out the potential for consolidating social capital and building local capability. One of the flagship projects supported only in the final round of applications involved the University of Fort Hare in partnership with target communities. The Agri-Park project brought the university and its resources into the economic and social life of the communities concerned and those communities into the science, technology and knowledge of the agri-parks food chain. Its value chain logic, and active involvement by local people in decision-making promised the potential for long term transformative change for those communities. Undoubtedly, once subjected to close and critical scrutiny, the developmental counter-effects of such initiatives become more obvious. A number of writers argue that the UFH Agri-Parks are “excluding the very people targeted by such development policies … thus enforcing unequal development”\textsuperscript{809}. Such a rebuttal must touch directly on the dilemma of the development worker – policy shaper or practitioner – to do or not to do! Yet, as Mosse points out, justifying to an extent the ‘interference’ - “people become ‘empowered’ not in themselves, but through relationships with outsiders; and not through the validation of their existing knowledge and actions, but by seeking out and acknowledging the superiority of knowledge technology and lifestyles construed as ‘modern’”\textsuperscript{810}.

To conclude, however, irrespective of the ideology driving both projects at the outset, the shaping forces towards the end of the programme are conditioned more by project management concerns around ensuring key deliverables and meeting the targets set in the logframe. Whether “old style or new style professionalism”, there is “no escape from the managerialist and interventionist undertones inherent in the idea of development”\textsuperscript{811}.

\textsuperscript{806} Diary note – 9th March 2009.
\textsuperscript{807} Exchange of correspondence around Guidelines for District Support Teams – June 2008.
7.2 Interpreting the Mandate – Project Worker, Project Team and Project Class

We have attempted to investigate how ideas with power are framed, debated and deployed to keep contending designs at bay. We have sought to gain insights on how those most directly controlling the project agenda work to ensure that the project remained ‘on message’. In so doing, we want to understand how they make the project ‘real’ in the eyes of a “widening circle of individuals and institutions who would underpin the project as a ‘system of representations’ ... and constitute ... a group of ‘believers’”\(^{812}\), even in the face of scepticism, criticism and opposing narratives from both inside and outside the project team.

7.2.1 Ideas with power and the power of social relationships

The ambiguities and contradictions written into the design remain embedded in the evolving plot over the life time of the project. They represent the contours of the battleground for the “ideas with power”, dictating not only the direction but also the divisions and social relationships that coalesce around the competing visions. Harking back to the Northern Ireland case discussed in the preamble (Chapter One), the ideas coalescing around alternative, more inclusive, participatory and multi-sectoral approaches to the development of rural areas, promoted in other parts of Europe, including south of the border, had mobilised an effective like-minded lobby for change in the region. Yet, despite signals of support from senior policy makers, the resistance to ‘bottom-up’ partnership-driven rural non-farm development policy muster by outside farm interests and their supporters in the Department was sufficient to limit the scope of those more open to innovation to accept the more radical proposal being put forward by the Commission and its civil society allies.

In the Eastern Cape, we have seen how even when ‘resolved’ in favour of the market approach, the incoming team leader fought a lonely battle to define a more pro-poor approach to the point where she was marginalised by her fellow team members more eager to promote economic development and to ‘get the money out there’. She was eventually excluded. Yet, despite hegemony regained, the contest continued, this time taken up by ‘outsiders’ in the mid-term evaluation team arguing for greater emphasis on building local capacity, networks and trust – essentially the “counter-model” so roundly previously rejected by the donors. Such was the consensus across the project management team on the rightness of their approach that, with the support of a provincial administration, agnostic and uninterested on the ideologies at play, more anxious not to ‘rock the boat’ and delay or disrupt the flow of resources, support was rallied and the challenge seen off with some compromises. The appointment of a policy adviser (me) may have shifted somewhat the balance of forces within the team and moved the internal discourse from its focus on ‘how we do projects?’ to an occasional ‘why do we do projects?’ But as a late-comer to the action and lacking the continuity of input to build the social relationships that might have given some traction to an alternative

line of thinking, I had the distinctly frustrating sense of seeing my ideas “falling through the cracks of the organisation”\textsuperscript{813}. It took time, a lot more evidence of ‘issues’ in project-land and several further changes in the team before any coalition of like-minded “believers in development”\textsuperscript{814} had any real opportunity to shake the dominance of the organising model. The entrenched social relationships around the local (South African) rural development business consultants had, up to the last round, been a significant factor in ensuring the hegemony of ‘that’s how we do LED here’, supported by European grant scheme managers anxious not to raise ‘political’ questions and jeopardise the absorption of funds.

In the Baltics, we observed the initial positioning of BRPP team members around alternative competing interpretations of the mandate and how to implement – based largely on previous relationships between some members of the team and the attraction of ‘quick wins’. As the newcomer, I needed the endorsement of development company representative before the proposed organising idea of ‘partnership’ could have any claim to become the “idea with power”. With that support in hand and provided we were able to project the model as a coherent representation of events to various stakeholder groups over the early months to the point that they were willing to engage, its dominance was assured. Over time, as confidence grew through multiple shared experiences in promoting the approach (handling questions), the core project team itself (Country Team Leaders and supports) increasingly identified with the partnership mechanism. From there, operating in their own autonomous spaces, the challenge was to build and sustain a “a reliable interpretative community”\textsuperscript{815} who would in turn validate the project’s predictive claims, provide context and believe in the project in each of the three countries. Unlike yet another grant scheme, the project did indeed present itself as something of a new beginning, helping to create ‘a new institutional space’ in preparation for a promised new and better future in the European Union. The team itself had become a community of ‘believers’ and potential partnership members or community development facilitators were also called on to ‘believe’. Some did – but it was largely on their terms (see below). However, such was the sense of conviction around the coherence, validity and power of the approach within the team, that those whom we sought to recruit as (part-time) team members had either ‘to believe’ or to leave, which in some contexts created a problem for the roll-out of the programme.

We can begin to understand that it is not a question of how well articulated and argued an idea or how well-founded the approach may be, but rather the “idea with power” is ultimately product of the social relationships and strength of the alliances that different actors can forge in enrolling others to their vision and sense of purpose – “so sustain(ing) long chains of translation” (Latour 1996)\textsuperscript{816}. The social production of success depends more and more on the ability of the project team

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{814}Text from Team Leader and Programme Coordinator – 22\textsuperscript{nd} Feb 2008.
\end{footnotes}
leadership to agree and sustain a coherent narrative of common purpose and shared achievement over the course of the project.

7.2.2 Project workers and projects - when livelihoods and lifeworlds collide

The interplay between livelihood considerations and influence of lifeworlds is integral to the experience of the development worker at different points in the project life-cycle and across the span of a career. Rajak and Stirrat’s image of cosmopolitan professionals “who pride themselves on their ability to adjust to new contexts, new ways of doing things …” suggests an ever-adaptable project worker, “development nomad”\(^{817}\), moving baggage-free from one experience to the next, although, they add, hinting at their isolation, “continually … on the edge, never quite part of the host country …”\(^{818}\). Apthorpe is more explicit in highlighting the vulnerability and career dependency of project workers – local as well as international – who suppress own policy-related judgement in an effort to ‘tow the donor agency line’ (or other significant stakeholder) just, as Long says “to stay in the game”. Closer to home, O’Reilly observes a similar dilemma facing the senior project worker in charge of community development in the WWRD\(^{819}\) when management decide to widen the consultation process to an extensive list of stakeholder groups. The instruction contradicted the principles and practices acquired through earlier professional development experience. Staying in the game meant buying into the new approach as the ‘only show in town’, but doing so in a way that ensured the project workers could control the interactions and look good. I need look no further than the dilemma I faced, in the somewhat ambiguous role of UK national expert with the European Commission, (Chapter One). Faced, on the one hand, with the potential for being instrumental in introducing policy change to which I was ideologically committed and, on the other, with an impending return home on promotion to civil service duties, ideological ambition was whittled down to making the case for accepting the pragmatic compromise.

Every project worker brings a lifeworld into the “social arena”\(^{820}\) that is the project team, those with power and authority and those with less – as in past experience, skills, know-how but also in Schutz’s notion of “taken for granted” world of the project worker as social actor. As Long explains, understanding the person’s lifeworld helps to understand how they “manage their social relationships and how (they) problematize their situations” and provides insights into “the personal constructs with which the person categorises, codes, processes and imputes meaning to his or her experiences”\(^{821}\). Just as the Baltics case was heavily influenced by the earlier Leader experience in Northern Ireland and by the lived personal and professional realities of the transition towards democracy and EU

\(^{819}\) O’Reilly P – All of the people, all of the time? Configurations of actors, knowledge and space in making local development Following the Leader Programme – PhD thesis – NUI – Galway 2012:294-296.
accession of its senior team, so also was the Eastern Cape project team coloured by the “lived-in” worlds of its black and white South African and European members.

Back home, away from the project interface, every project worker is faced with a dilemma arising from the need to reconcile lifeworld with livelihood. There is never a perfect fit between a project spec and the profile of the prospective expert - always an element of approximation, making fit, compromising and, in the memorable lines of the inimitable Yosser Hughes, ever on the look-out for a job in the ‘Boys from the Blackstuff’822, “I could do that”. As we have noted throughout, whatever the image of cosmopolitanism attached to the international development worker, the reality, especially for those with more specialist sectoral policy skills and experience (compared with more generalist project management, grant-scheme administration, finance and contracts) employment can be intermittent and uncertain. For free-lancers in the private sector the fallow periods between project assignments can stretch the reserves accumulated during periods earning fee-days on project work (often in remote places where per diems comfortably cover living costs). Livelihood considerations are very much to the forefront. For the development worker as actor in the international development domain, livelihood is as much about building an identity and “relationships with others whose lifeworlds and statuses may differ markedly”823. To receive an invitation to consider set of terms of reference as a potential candidate is generally a mildly identity-affirming experience for the itinerant project worker, at least an indication that he/she still has profile in the skills market and at best a potential ticket to several years’ work. All things being equal, the active project-seeking development professional, whose skills and experience are more policy (or sectorally) focussed, will scan potentially relevant ToRs with a view to assessing likely match with requirement, aims, objectives, description of assignment and expert profile. To ‘bid’ or not to ‘bid’ is a question directly linked to the self-assessed degree of ‘fit’ set against the availability of alternative offers (although success in recruitment is the product of a more complex set of factors over which he/she has little or no control).

Once recruited as a member of the project team, the degree to which the development worker must (or can) compromise and negotiate between his/her ‘approximated fit’ and the ‘idea with power’ that sets the direction for the project depends, on the one hand, on his/her position relative to the power behind the idea – and, on the other, on her/his “specific lifeworlds”824. We have seen in our cases how the mismatch between the lifeworlds of ‘experts’ and the dominant “master metaphor”825 creates a tension that can only be managed by allowing oneself to be even partially enrolled in the sense of ‘common’ purpose – or by walking away. In the South African case, the initial formally appointed team leader, who, as candidate, might have ‘ticked all the boxes’ in terms of required profile and experience, but clearly ‘misread’ the ToRs and remained sharply at odds with the

pro-business interpretation of dominant others. The distance between ‘lifeworlds’ – on the one hand, black, woman and pro-poor ngo activist – white (South African and European), male and development consultants on the other – and the depth of “social divide within the project office”, further imbalanced by unequal power relations seemed to exclude compromise and led to her more or less inevitable early departure.

To compare with my own experience then – when several years previously on reading the terms of reference, I had not pursued my application for team leader mainly due to my perception of their lack of fit with my “lived experience” of local economic development policy and practice. How two years later such misgivings were put to the side when opportunity beckoned again, albeit not for the team leader position, at a time when job offers were few and far between. Yet, however enthusiastic I was about working on a local development programme in South Africa, I did not have far to look for the contradictions that had given rise to my earlier reluctance to commit. The friction and sense of professional discomfort arising from that mismatch is documented throughout Chapter Four, Five and Six. However, by this stage, “the politics of team relationships”826 was somewhat different to earlier years and I was better placed to ‘survive’ the misfit by virtue of being part, however intermittently of ‘critical mass that believes in development”, 827 and being able to stay to some extent outside office politics and focus on the ancilliary project in DED. As a result, I could and did accommodate the partial marginalisation that was the consequence of avoiding enrolment in the mainstream orientation of the programme – although, it should also be said that the incentive of decent expert fees and conditions went some way to easing any sense of discomfort.

The influence of development worker lifeworlds in shaping and implementing the Baltics Rural Partnerships Programme has been central to our interactionist analysis of that intervention. Starting from the experiences and ‘unfinished business’ of several key members of the team, lifeworlds steeped in Northern Irish ‘politics’ and rural development made a significant and lasting imprint on the model of local development created through that intervention. Never as a one-way process however, since other interpretations and understandings, born of alternative lifeworlds, challenged the validity of those imported notions and contested the early direction of the programme. Recruited as they were from the “project classes”828 in their respective countries, all three country team leaders brought with them ‘lifeworlds’ that straddled the seismic social, economic and political transition taking place in Eastern Europe at that time. Moreover, each of them had operated as project workers in ‘western’ technical assistance interventions to promote variously small businesses, family farming and the market economy. Their full ‘enrolment’ in the BRPP project took time as they came to terms with the new approach, in turn, translating and mediating the message in keeping with local practice and cultural circumstances. Livelihood considerations and the simple need

827 Text from Team Leader and Programme Coordinator – 22nd Feb 2008.
to keep the job no doubt played a part in easing the accommodation in the early months. Many of the latecomers to the programme, however, as we have seen, found the gap between lived experience and the new ways too wide and the incentives too modest to invest in the enrolment process.

Looking back and introspectively into my own experience on both projects, I can contrast the relative power of the position of project leader in the Baltics to that of part-time consultant in the Eastern Cape, struggling to make relevant inputs into the mainstream operation (project generation). In the first case, following adoption of the “idea with power” in the early stages, reinforced by regular narrative and ‘evidence’ of something happening from the field, the team leader assumed the authority of “master of a ship at sea”\(^829\) and felt empowered to exercise significant power and influence over policy and to some extent resources. (Country Team Leaders had considerable autonomy in their respective areas.) There was a certain sense of marginalisation and consequently vulnerability more or less throughout the South African experience, never fully feeling part of the programme. It was clear from early exchanges that there was little constituency for the ideas I was putting forward (to the point that I was often angry at my own inability to put the ideas across clearly enough). However, rather than ‘keeping the high ground’, it suited me that my job kept me focussed on the Department of Economic Development, an obvious occasion where discretion had the better part of valour and enabled me to stay in the job.

### 7.3 Project Worker and Project Team at Point of Delivery Both Among Beneficiary Groups and in the Host Administrations

Our search takes us to the interfaces, away from the back rooms of policy makers, where policy meets practice and where project workers engage with the intended beneficiaries and recipients of the ‘aid’ project.

#### 7.3.1 Interlocking projects – accommodating other interests

Long’s assertion that “the struggle for space or room for manoeuvre … and the (...) transformations and ramifications it entails, can … best be captured through an interface perspective”\(^830\) has provided the lens for much of the enquiry at every stage in the design and roll-out of the two case study projects. That perspective has enabled us to appreciate the constant re-interpretations, adjustments and compromises that have moved the interventions to the point of delivery of output. Drawing on his IBRFP experience, Mosse suggests these iterative accommodations are an integral part of the “project regime” and are “as much about sustaining relationships as implementation – as much relating as doing”.\(^831\)

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Indeed, being able to negotiate these stages, making space for the interests of others while keeping the project more or less on track is critical to the survival of the project – and, as we have seen, to the team worker’s ability to stay in the game. The project’s encounters with its intended ‘final’ beneficiaries represent the point where the ‘goods’, however defined, are put on display and ‘up for sale’. Unlike earlier instances with fellow workers, managers and donor agents, who are in one way or other, to a greater or lesser degree, bound up in the future of the project, ‘final’ beneficiaries are not, yet, tied into the “project regime” and have the option, theoretically at any rate, to turn away. Incoming project teams are at pains from early in the project cycle to test the ‘saleability’ of the product with beneficiary groups and are anxious to report back evidence of relevance and ‘consumer buy-in’. Much of the early pressure driving the Support to LED in the Eastern Cape was the need to ‘get the money out there’ (in the shape of grant-funded projects responding to calls for proposals) – or in the Baltics to assess the response of target groups to the proposed partnership model and communities to the participatory approach to project planning. The emergence of sections of the provincial government administration as target recipient of technical assistance came during the course of the Eastern Cape intervention as a change to the initial design, an additional and somewhat contested interface at the point of programme delivery.

Understanding, creating and optimising one’s room for manoeuvre in brokering terms for interlocking interests is critical to ensure ‘win-win’ outcomes or at least avoid the ‘lose-lose’ consequences arising from compromises and deals that over-reach the margins of policy ambiguity and programme tolerance. We have seen in Chapter Two, the case of the Mexican extension worker, described by Arce and Long (1987)\textsuperscript{832}, whose misplaced ‘compromise offer’ to target beneficiaries led to his exclusion from the project and a further breakdown in the relationship between the project team and the target community. It is within such narrow spaces that the project worker navigates the meaning of the intervention to bridge the gap between project and beneficiary interests and lifeworlds. We learned of at least two partly comparable instances in the BRPP experience where Community Facilitators who failed to gain community backing for a particular local development project also lost the support of the area partnership and the programme team\textsuperscript{833}. In other parts of that programme, however, the frontline worker portrayed is qualified, experienced and networked, “in the most part public employees,”\textsuperscript{834} undoubtedly more skilled in the art of negotiation, enrolment and the art of the possible, even in the face of local scepticism.

The community ‘decision’ to participate – or not – cannot be taken for granted – and as Long, Mosse and others make clear, must be understood as at best “partial” and on their own terms – and more generally on the terms of those “who had the capital of authority”\textsuperscript{835}. In the case of the BRPP, most target communities tended to

\textsuperscript{835} Mosse D Cultivating Development – An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – the Goddess and the PRA – local knowledge and planning - Pluto Press 2005:82.
look to the Programme as a welcome source of new, additional funding and technical support to define and articulate needs as project proposals. Nevertheless, the contract between the Programme and the target communities was of marginal importance to their lives and livelihoods, individually and as communities. The funding available was more or less token – for the purposes of piloting, experimenting and learning some new skills from undertaking small and micro projects. Yet, when the members of one of the Latvian beneficiary communities presented the programme team with the ‘milk cow’ patchwork cushion to celebrate the community’s achievement in realising a development ambition – public money for a locally-driven project – it was in part to acknowledge that the project team had kept its bargain. The money had been paid. Potentially useful technical skills, know-how and networks had been acquired through participation. They could look forward to the prospect of attracting further funding through Leader and the prospect of more to come through EU Structural Funds to undertake a growing pipeline of local development projects.

A more substantial interlocking engagement was sought from the partnership board itself. From the outset of the programme, much of the strategic effort was directed at engaging likely stakeholders from the different sectors and recruiting them to the programme. It is clear that while the proposition was more or less standard across the nine partnership boards, the motivations and terms upon which individual members engaged were many times multiple. However, collectively, our ‘contract’ with the nine partnerships was to provide training and on-the-job experience of preparing a local area strategy and action plan to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion, support and facilitation in the preparation of such strategy and action plan, a small fund to be delegated to the partnership on presentation of an ‘acceptable’ plan to disburse according to agreed criteria. In addition, we offered access to relevant experience from a region of an EU member state, a platform for policy dialogue with relevant national policy makers – and as time went on, a working model of things to come. In return, we sought their willingness to come together at regular intervals, take training, undertake basic research with support from the project team, engage in analysis and debate within the partnership, abide by the governance rules and to communicate publically.

There was sufficient early ‘noise’ around the programme to generate curiosity, if not initially interest or commitment, over time building what Mosse calls the “regime of success”836. Moreover, the nominations and appointments process provided members an indication of one’s social standing within professional or social networks. As local action plans were prepared and community groups bid for resources, that sense of ‘authority’ could only grow. Over time, as the policy and methodology gained currency in the run-up to EU accession and the introduction of a future Leader measure, the experience gained by members was increasingly sought after nationally, further enhancing their public profile.

Engagement with the intended beneficiaries in the Eastern Cape was, for the most part, less direct since much of the contact, as we have seen, was mediated through

‘enterprising’ outsiders, including service providers. The general policy model was built on the assumption that target beneficiary communities lacked the capacity to participate in decision-making around priorities in which to invest – and management skills required to conduct local projects. They required the assistance of more powerful outsiders, “the people with the organisational skills and the networks ...”\textsuperscript{837}. The terms upon which these latter engaged were fairly much set out in the calls for proposals and later in the contractual conditions attaching to the award of grant. In their effort to encourage the involvement of such outsiders, programme managers, with the approval of the donor agency, broadened the interpretation of ‘partnership’ to include service providers alongside community members and municipalities, “since otherwise there wouldn’t be any proposals”.\textsuperscript{838}

Later, there was considerable frustration on the part of some members of the team and within the provincial administration at the blatantly unequal share of ‘benefits’ between the outside project managers and the community project workers. However, apart from one project\textsuperscript{839}, these patterns were never openly called into question, although in the final round of grant fund allocation, there was an effort (contested internally) to introduce a more developmental approach to the ‘governance’ of the LED projects supported.

Much of my participation in the South African project was closely tied into one of the institutions of the provincial administration. The Programme Coordination Unit was based in the Provincial Treasury. Over the period, I observed and actively participated in several exchanges which demonstrate the ever present potential within project land for lifeworlds to collide before broader interests can be accommodated and interlocking projects enabled\textsuperscript{840}. In one case, this was the disruption that followed initial ‘one-sided’ engagement between the programme team and senior officials in the administration on the proposed exit strategy. As the PCU team presented the strategy, one of the provincial officials present simply but bluntly drew attention to the absence of any reflection of his Department’s plans for the year. Our (project team) failure to translate our approach “into the different logic of the intentions, goals and ambitions of the many people and institutions they bring together”\textsuperscript{841}, in the course of one afternoon, led to a significant crisis and breakdown in the relationship and trust between the two groups. In another instance, the clash of cultures which occurred around the preparation of a first draft concept paper for a new departmental local development funding measure threatened for a period my own participation in the programme. Both instances highlighted the tension that almost inevitably lives within the relationship between outsider ‘technical assistance’ teams and the in-house ‘recipients’ of their know-how and assistance. At the same time, both events marked moments in the roll-out of the programme when parallel agendas and conflicting perspectives on the objectives of the intervention were brought sharply into focus. They created the space for the project team, if only to stay in the game, to re-articulate interests, re-

\textsuperscript{837} IV with Head of Development Cooperation – DECSA – Jan 2010.

\textsuperscript{838} Diary note – Service Providers and Partners – discussion at CTT - 2nd September 2009.

\textsuperscript{839} Where project funds were spent on ‘purchase’ of goats which did not arrive in the community.


negotiate ‘shared’ purpose, re-interpret mandate, but this time taking more nuanced and interlocking account of the interests and lifeworlds of the other.

While my involvement in the Northern Irish rural development case elaborated in Chapter One was long finished before any action taking place at the delivery interface, the partial accommodations arrived at between the different stakeholders in agreeing an initial policy framework suggest some degree of interlocking interests. (See Chapter One, section 1.8).

In any of the circumstances observed, programme designs are not so much compromised as “transformed in practice”. Project managers need to recognise that counterpart buy-in will always be on its own terms - quoting Mosse, “… project managers are able to exert influence only because the ideas or instructions they purvey can be translated into other people’s own intentions, goals and ambitions”842.

7.3.2 The social production of success and failure

Once again, Mosse’s depiction of projects as places where there is “no respite from the work of creating interest and keeping alive”843 rings true from experience in the field. In the Baltics programme, the relative ambivalence within the DFID operational unit for central and eastern Europe as to the shape of an intervention that would be coherent with the Department’s new pro-poor SLA policy, coupled with a benign disinterest on the part of national authorities, created the space for an organising idea, driven by an organised group, towards a more-or-less turn-key ‘policy and practice’ outcome. The attraction for the development company and, progressively over the inception months, for the CSEED Unit as they became more acquainted with the partnership and community development concepts at the heart of the programme, was the assembly kit presentation of a local development policy to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion. It was a package that connected all the relevant stakeholders – local authorities, local businesses, local communities, state agencies. It promised nine area-based partnerships created, nine local area strategies and action plans facilitated, skills building for ‘integrated’ rural development – and the promise of continuing outreach to national policy and programme managers. The only thing missing was the colour picture on the box. Despite several early stumbles – in full view of DFID – there was a growing sense that the approach was gathering interest in the target regions – partnerships were gradually brought into existence over the first year attracting media and local interest. Community groups were taking notice and their nominees were signing up for training. Country teams invested in creating a ‘party atmosphere’ as entry point to participatory engagement.

By the end of the first full year, the programme was operating across all nine target areas and nationally – and quarterly reports to DFID narrated its social life in the

achievements, the frustrations, the insights and the lessons learned. In Latour’s terms, the programme “had acquired reality”, it had genuine participants, functioning plans, implemented on schedule and was replicable. However, recalling Long’s reference to the influence of “outside forces” (Long 1984b:175-7) on development interventions, it was a decision taken far away from the Baltics in the Dutch city of Laeken at that time, that created the context for a further intensification of energy. We knew than that all three countries would become member states of the EU within months of the closure of the programme and the intervention became a preparatory workshop for the introduction of the much more amply funded EU Leader programme. We set our sights on gaining the attention of the EU officials responsible for bringing rural development programmes, including Leader to the Baltics and following a successful encounter between one of the partnerships and the relevant EC fonctionnaire along with his national counterpart, the nine partnerships were on the Commission’s as well as national policy managers’ radars. Partnerships and their members as well as the community facilitators were further energised and committed. For our part, as the project team, nothing could be allowed to jeopardise what Mosse has described as the “regime of success”, including the individual failure of members of the team. Moreover, such was the determination that the partnerships would produce demonstrably acceptable, relevant and fit-for-purpose local strategies and action plans that the project team not only facilitated but did the drafting. This could then be reviewed, discussed, debated and eventually approved by the partnership board – taking ownership of the product and process, claiming credit locally, acquiring (small) funds for allocation and increasing local profile. Then, as partnerships began to implement their action plans locally, issuing calls for proposals to local communities, energy levels once again soared, although soon to be mingled with the disappointment and frustrations of those which were not successful. But, by this stage, the programme had met probably its most significant outcome (never stated as an objective) in connecting the nine partnerships to the upcoming Leader programme, and was about to quit the field. Was ‘tackling poverty’ simply a pretext – or had the “side effect” of our programme become the definitive result?

The South African project could not have benefitted from anything like the same ‘external’ boost that the BRPP gained by the ‘happy’ coincidence of the wider policy platform (i.e. in the latter case, the accession timetable). The generation of interest and commitment was dependent on the way in which the programme was promoted, interpreted and translated into the interests of the many different groups of stakeholders. As Mosse observes wryly, “for policy to succeed, it is necessary, it seems … that enough people, and people with enough power, are willing to believe that it is”.

EU funded programmes, like DFID, place considerable emphasis upon ‘visibility’ actions to ensure that the beneficiaries (and others) appreciate where the support is coming from. From the early months of the programme, there was a considerable effort to promote the grant schemes. “The expectations were enormous – the money seemed a lot in round terms at the time – and there were newsletters that they published where they advertised the funding - the launch – that was a huge political event with something like 2000 people somewhere on the Wild Coast. And the Prime minister speaking promising jobs for young people”. There were, as we have seen, divisions in the team as to how to implement the project generation element. Results for the first rounds of calls for community projects were disappointing – and to make matters worse, an early mid-term review report challenged the approach to project generation and local economic development. While there was sufficient collective interest among the key stakeholding groups – provincial administration, EU delegation, development company and project team – to resist the call for more fundamental change, the “reality” of the intervention was under threat. Changes were made in the team and greater emphasis placed on institutional capacity and policy.

Looking back on it, it is clear that the social production of confidence was failing at this point. Officials from the provincial administration, close to the programme, were increasingly critical of the social dynamic observed in a number of the projects receiving funding. It was difficult to gain access to senior provincial government policy managers. While every project award was an occasion for celebration, these were limited to those involved in the project in question, sometimes a first occasion for ‘outsiders’ to meet ‘insiders’. There were few opportunities for bringing different constituencies together and by the time of the second conference, attendance was modest. Eventually, it was the accumulating evidence of the failure of the existing de-centralised project generation system that brought about a change in process – and a concentration of support from the centre. While the change brought a new energy, enthusiasm and confidence – and succeeded in allocating the funds involved – the more lasting legacy of the programme, according to the final report, seems to have been in strengthening institutional capacity for LED, which was explicitly downplayed and warned against in the early months of the intervention. As has been said elsewhere, while the programme team maintained good relations with the EC delegation officials, the dialogue was essentially on administrative and financial matters rather than policy with the result that there was a reduction in interest from that source. Nevertheless, overall, the programme was seen to be a success – the funds had been successfully allocated and within the regulatory regime, a considerable number of projects funded, some of which created sustainable and worthwhile jobs, more innovative LED projects were supported towards the end of the programme, lessons were learned and capacity built. To my knowledge, there was no collective reflection on lessons learned from the three major EU funded interventions over that decade. The policy cycle had moved on.

Skype interview with former Head of Project Generation – May 2011.
7.3.3 External projects and policy traction

Edwards (1989:118-20), quoting Sithembiso Nyoni, Zimbabwean Director of the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress, bluntly points out that “no country in the world has ever developed itself through projects”. Hickey seems to concur. He contrasts the limited impact of, on the one hand, the more ‘conditional’ pro-poor politics within international development interventions stressing partnership, inclusion and civil society with, on the other, the “more or less success” and longer term impact of policies that are the product of national political systems in eight countries. Yet, a central tenet of the international development community’s view of its role in reducing poverty has been the conviction that “‘getting the politics right’, is critical to success ...” Certainly, DFID’s ambition has for many years been to influence national (and donor aid) policies in ways that are consistent with its (current) worldview and political approach to tackling poverty. European Union aid has long been conditional on policy and practice changes in the recipient countries. Even in the case of regional development and cohesion policy within the European Union, as in the Northern Irish example (Chapter One), the Commission (or rather some senior officials) sought to change member state policies and practices and to introduce “an integrated approach ... able to unlock endogenous local potential and create sustainable growth”.

Delivering policy change was integral to the logic of intervention of both projects and set the context for the encounters between the technical assistance team and project worker on the one hand and the personnel of the host administration on the other. The starting premise for that relationship, as writers like Ferguson and Long point out, is the assumption that the existing policy framework (including legal and institutional) is ‘deficient’, backwards and not in line with ‘best practice’ as articulated by the technical assistance team. How successful the team will be in importing and sharing new ideas and practices will depend on factors, such as the technical competence of the team members – as well as the ability in the practice of “the social work of enrolment, persuasion, agreement and argument that lies behind the consensus and coherence demanded ... by the politics of aid” as perceived by host counterparts up close and in the narrow encounters at the project interface. Outside that zone, as we have seen, other shaping variables, over which the project team has little control, for example national and international policy frameworks, at one level – or the influence of personal lifeworlds, can either facilitate or repudiate its mission.

The wider political and policy context in the Baltics – preparation for EU accession and for the introduction of EU Structural Funds – was critical to the outcome of the BRPP. During the first year of operation, there was, at best, a detached interest on the part of national policy makers in this small UK funded project in three backward

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and poor rural regions, up to then generally neglected in national policy frameworks. Following confirmation in late 2001 that all three Baltic countries were on track to join the EU in 2004, the programme was uniquely positioned to make available its services and expertise to national ministries to assist in preparation of a niche Leader measure. That offer was accepted, pilot measures were prepared and successfully negotiated with the European Commission. The DFID team achieved an important ‘impact goal’. However, had the decision in Laeken in December 2001 delayed membership for these countries, beyond the life cycle of the project, it is more than likely that the political will at national level to adopt the local development model would have been less evident and any policy traction substantially weaker.

There was less evidence of a coherent link between national, provincial and local development measures in the Eastern Cape. On the face of it, “the Province was very enthusiastic” about the competitive grant scheme model – “money to test out ideas” in what was no doubt viewed by many as a relatively ‘policy-free’ environment – ‘it’s the way we do LED here’. While the EU Support for LED programme was viewed generally in positive terms, official attitudes among senior policy and programme managers also suggested a degree of benign detachment, verging at times on disinterest. The programme had been designed as an integral part of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDP) (2005-2014), a connection often made by the project team in its reports and marketing material. Mosse and other writers, (e.g. Green 2011) point to the importance of securing inclusion in the right “policy documents (that) … assume status as part of the conceptual toolkit which determines the parameters of the thinkable ....” Yet regular substantial reviews of the PGDP over the years make scarce mention of it, other than as one source of funding for enterprise development, running alongside but not coordinated with “a range of players, (ECDC, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Land Bank and so on)”.

Despite many public pronouncements of the mission of both the South African and the Provincial Governments as “a developmental state”, there was little substantive engagement between the programme team and the political policy-making class in the Province. To some extent, the reluctance to commit may have been due to LED’s somewhat ‘lowly’ place on the government’s economic development policy hierarchy “LED is still seen as trying to alleviate poverty – not a structured process to get people to undertake sustainable economic activity … LED isn’t prestige … not for the big boys”. Whether this was a result of perceptions of the results of earlier major LED programmes delivering less than anticipated, or as a result of a shift in overall policy – on the donor side towards budget sector support and on the national side to substantial ‘industrialised’ top-down programmes such as Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and massive job

856 IV with Frank Arthurs (former Head of LED at national level – LED consultant for DEDEA on LRED) – April 2010.
creation – LED attracted little effective or public support from political leaders in the Province. Mosse highlights this issue when he remarks that “development success depends on socially sustained interpretations which ... are vulnerable to the effects of policy change”857. Our efforts to ‘recruit’ or enrol a senior policy maker presenting at the second (and last) LED conference were politely dismissed as “too heavy”. In the final days of my involvement in the programme, in a lively encounter with a well-placed and influential policy adviser, the neo-liberal logic of our local partnership model for LED was held up to ‘real-world’ political scrutiny and ‘parked’.

On a personal reflection, when drawing on lifeworld and experience in context of encounters at the development interface, there is an ever present danger of blanking out and ignoring the uniqueness of actual project context. I could draw on lived experiences from Northern Ireland, new forms of development governance under the reformed Structural Funds, earlier ‘achievements’ in the Baltics Rural Partnerships – for an unshakable belief in the ‘unquestionable and self-evident superiority’ of a bottom-up-top-down, partnership-based approach to tackling the wicked and hard-to-get-at problem of rural poverty and social exclusion. In the words of Long, I had all the material for “a kind of trade-in-images ... to redefine the nature of state-civic society relations”858, that had the potential, if I could only sell to the policy shapers at the ECSECC, to make a lasting contribution to the construction of the “developmental state” in its effort to throw off the legacy of the apartheid system and inequalities of its neo-liberal successor. The dizzy level of ambition and lifeworld ‘blindness’!

7.4 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has set out to look inside the ‘black box’ of international development and technical assistance from the perspective of a project worker/practitioner operating with a project team. Since the middle years of the last century, international development has been an integral part of the relationship between ‘The West’ and ‘less developed’ countries as well as those in transition towards integration and membership of global and regional networks within that sphere. That ‘international development’ is in interests of the more powerful nations, cannot be in doubt. We have only to listen back to protests of US Republican members of Congress at Trump’s proposed cuts to USAID budget and loss to the US of its ‘soft power’. It is not the purpose nor the intention of this thesis to judge whether this is for the good or for the bad, although in other circumstances, one might take a view on the consequences of an alternative Trump-Brexit ‘ourselves-first’ approach to international relations with poorer and less ‘developed’ states. Over these seven chapters, our mission has been to understand how, even within these mega frameworks, institutional and individual agency, as exercised by project teams and project workers, are constantly shaping their room for manoeuvre in the

practice of ‘policy’ in ways which are hard to predict and towards outcomes that are difficult to foresee.

International ‘aid’ and ‘development’ projects have become commoditised. Private sector and for-profit companies and corporations have a substantial and critical role to play to ‘keep the show on the road’. It is a sector about which less has been written in the development literature. In our extended reflection on the role of project workers and project teams in two such projects – working in what were, at the time, ‘middle-income’ countries in transition and not ‘typical development targets’ – we do not put forward findings or conclusions that apply across the global industry. That may be for others to do. However, from our in-depth and partly ethnographic study of these two main cases, we can conclude with some degree of assurance that the principles of agency apply equally in such ‘private sector’ contracted-out situations. Motivations and nature of primary relationships may differ. It seems likely that the somewhat more intermittent situation of the development worker in that context may lead to greater tendency to comply, or contrive to comply, with received policy prescripts as livelihood interests outflank ideology and even experience. Yet, in the end, it is in the ‘autonomous’ zones of project implementation, outside the day-to-day supervision of the managing body (development company or donor agency) that compromises will be struck, deals will be done, acceptable stories created (Edwards and Phillips 2000) and the project worker and project team muddle through the inevitable ambiguity of project land.

Somewhat typically, by the time our two projects were closing, the respective donor policy agendas had shifted towards new global objectives and priorities. The project teams disbanded. Many of those with whom they interacted continued working in their respective areas, with more time to reflect and make judgement on the value of the experience, less caught up with the urgency of project oversight and embroiled in the social dynamic of the project space. What then remained after the final reports were written and invoices paid? In the Baltics, an early draft Leader measure, the existence of three pre-formed and ‘experienced’ local area partnerships and several cohorts of trained community development facilitators ‘taken over’ and incorporated into the EU Leader programme two years ahead of most new member states in 2004. How they have performed in relation to tackling rural poverty and social exclusion in the intervening years? How different or otherwise to the example of the power grab in West Waterford local action group observed by O’Reilly? one can only speculate. In the Eastern Cape, I am inclined to see a (late) shift away from the predominance of a ‘market-only’ model of local economic development entirely dependent on “the people with the organisational skills and the networks – and they are white” towards assertions of greater self-reliance and belief in home-grown (or closer to home) and institutional capability for initiative and managing ‘development’. Much of the latter generated by

exposure to – and the experience of having to redress – the inadequacy and failure of some of the “cargo” generation of projects supported over the period.

Does any of this amount to the development grail of sustainability and replicability of logframe results sought by project cycle managers – or to the inevitable “failure … and side effects” predicted by Ferguson?862 What if neither holds? What if the legacy is essentially and simply two project interventions that, by virtue of their stated intent, loosely shaped agreement between donor and recipient state, their allocated resources, formalised plan and implementation strategy, created the space for project team and project counterparts with their different lifeworlds to engage around different approaches to tackling rural poverty. The projects provided the space to experiment, experience, draw lessons from, share ‘tricks of the trade’ and to dialogue. Whatever unintended outcomes, in any event, have been reimagined, reshaped, morphed, adapted and made to fit different circumstances in the course of the compromises and the contests over the years of project interactions and since their closure. Hardly transformative in terms of tackling rural poverty – but, now I ask, was that ever really the main objective?

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