



EGPA-Conference 2005

31.8. - 3.9. 2005 Berne Switzerland

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Abstract for: Study Group 4

Title of Paper:

Interorganizational cooperation at local level: the case of municipal associations in the District of Braga

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Interorganizational relations to coordinate actions to deal with complex problems at local level have increased in recent years. Partnerships, joint ventures, networks and other forms of cooperation are some innovative arrangements to engage in activities to achieve common purposes. Recent literature of administrative reform shows a growing interest about network and partnership approaches to local governance (Goss, 2001; Bogason, 2000), particularly how these new arrangements operate and how cooperation works among local actors.

Intermunicipal cooperation has emerged in the last decades in Portugal in several different forms, which change according to the kind of source pressures for their creation and the goals to achieve. Among these new arrangements, associations of municipalities are one of the oldest forms of intermunicipal cooperation. Associations of municipalities are well-established structures for local governance, regulated by a Decree-law, which establishes the structure and competencies of such organizations. Associations of Municipalities tried to fill the absence of regional governance structures and to answer the recognised need for joined-up programme implementation to improve horizontal public policies coordination. This paper analyses these governance institutions to understand how intermunicipal cooperation influence local governance and the co-ordination between local actors concerning the implementation of public policies. It analyse the way municipalities engaged in joint initiatives looking at the initiatives implemented by two associations of municipalities in the District of Braga: the Association of Municipalities of the Cavado Valley and the Association of Municipalities of the Ave Valley. The analysis draws upon a survey and face to face interviews directed to Mayors and top civil servants in the municipalities.