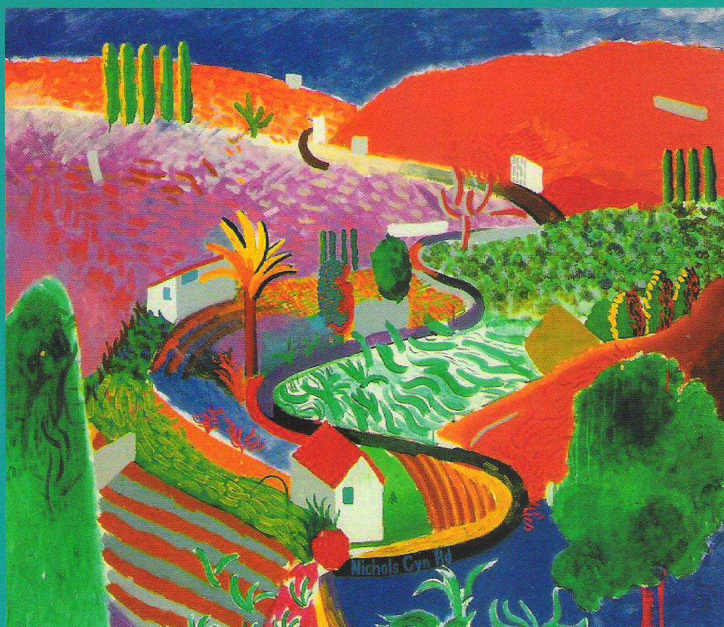


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THE PRACTICE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS IN EUROPE

24 Case Studies in Six European Countries

PRIDE Research Report



Edited by Ada Cavazzani and Malcolm Moseley

Rubbettino

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Osservatorio di Economia Agraria
per la Calabria - INEA, Italy
in association with
Countryside & Community Research Unit
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, UK



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The Practice of Rural Partnerships in Spain

Javier Esparcia, Joan Noguera, Almudena Buciega

This document is the result of an in-depth comparative analysis of four local partnerships for rural development in Spain. It aims to present in a synthesised way the key elements of the constitution and functioning of the studied partnerships, in the belief that lessons can be learned from this exercise in order to define guidelines for the future design and management of rural development policies, from a bottom-up approach.

Conclusions and statements made in this document have been filtered through a careful working process including the full transcription of the interviews carried out during the field work, notes on perceptions from participant observation in internal and external meetings of the members of the partnership, and all available significant documentation of the partnership. All this raw data has been later analysed to produce case study reports and a cross-site national report that is now presented.

Initially, four partnerships were chosen according to common criteria defined in the context of the PRIDE project (an overall focus on integrated rural development, the actual existence of projects being managed by the partnership, a well-balanced mix of public and private partners, and a willingness to co-operate). The basic data that guided the selection process was collected in an extensive survey carried out previously in the frame of the same project.

Two main rural development policies are at the root of the selected partnerships: LEADER and PRODER (a national LEADER-like operative program focused on the diversification of rural economy). The geographic distribution of the four partnerships was also considered specially in terms of avoiding more than one case belonging to the same region (*Comunidad Autónoma*). The selected partnerships in Spain are:

- ◆ *Asociación Salmantina de Agricultura de Montaña* (ASAM) (Salamanca Province in Castilla y León) (case SP 17)
- ◆ *Asociación para la Promoción y Desarrollo de la Comarca de Las Villueras* (APRODERVI) (Cáceres Province in Extremadura) (case SP 18)
- ◆ *Asociación para el Desarrollo Rural Integral de la Costa Occidental de Huelva* (ADRICOH) (Huelva Province in Andalucía) (case SP 19)
- ◆ *Grupo de Acción Comarcal Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz* (Valencia Province in Comunidad Valenciana) (case SP 20)

1. Context

The four partnerships are located in regions with important differences between them in physical, socio-economic, environmental and cultural terms. Andalucía and Castilla-León are very large territories, in fact, the most extensive regions in Spain each including an important number of NUTs III (provinces). What this implies in administrative terms is the existence of regional decision centres being very far from most of the territory. However, some regions (i.e. Andalucía) have created “delegations” at the NUTs III level in order to decentralise and approach local people.

Differences in terms of degree of development can also be observed among the four regions. For instance, Valencia is the region with the highest degree of economic development (i.e. per capita income) while Andalucía and Extremadura are some of the most lagging regions in Spain with *per capita* income rates under the Spanish average, 71% in the case of Andalucía and 72,6% in the case of Extremadura (1996). However, differences in the degree of development exist not only between regions but within each region. Therefore, Valencia and Andalucía present a big unbalance between more dynamic urban and coastal areas and inland rural areas, and even between different NUTs III centres. In the other two regions (Extremadura and Castilla-León) this dichotomy between the more dynamic and more deprived areas is not so strong, there being a bigger uniformity across the territory with only some main urban centres spread around the territory.

Employment is a problem for all these regions even when differences can be appreciated between and even within each region. Andalucía is the one with bigger unemployment problems (30% in 1997) followed by Extremadura with an unemployment rate of 27% (1997). The Valencia region and Castilla-León present more reduced unemployment rates, 20% and 18% (1997) respectively.

Within the Spanish context the central government assigned all regions with their own powers relating to different matters (e.g. health, education, agriculture, etc.). However, not all regions have the same degree of autonomy; for instance Andalucía and Valencia have been assigned with more powers than Extremadura and Castilla-León. All four regions have full autonomy concerning most rural development issues. However, the importance and concern given to rural development varies in each region and it does not necessarily coincide with the degree of autonomy that they have to work, i.e. in Valencia rural development issues have very low importance within the frame of the regional government policies.

LEADER was the first serious and successful attempt to approach rural development in an integrated way. Previously, in 1982 the Mountain Agricultural Law (LAM), inspired by the 258/75 EC regulation, intended to bring into practice the principles of integrated rural development from a bottom-up approach. According to this law, “Mountain deprived areas” were delimited, “Area Committees” were constituted and development strategies

were elaborated. Although all the mechanisms had been set for putting this policy into practice the lack of support from the Central Government made impossible the process to be initiated. This experience, or we would better say "lack of experience" affected the four regions which, by the time LEADER appeared, had not made any other attempt towards rural development.

Three out of four partnerships analysed are located in "deep rural" areas suffering from traditional intense depopulation, economic backwardness and a general bleak outlook. *La Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz*, *Las Villuercas* and *Las Sierras de Bejar y Francia* (ASAM) share common territorial characteristics: mountainous areas with high-cost mobility in terms of time and money, isolation from regional economic centres, long-term outmigration and depopulation, an aged population, lack of competitiveness of most economic activity, etc. On the other side, the *Costa Occidental de Huelva* (ADRICOH) is a more dynamic rural area located in the flood plains of the river Odiel, along the main route linking Portugal and Huelva (soon to become a highway), only 20 km away from the capital. This is a relatively rich area in terms of agricultural potential, fishing and agri-business, with some high value environmental areas (*Parque Natural Las Marismas del Odiel*). The reason why this territory enjoys a PRODER status is double: on the one hand, a strong concern on the side of the regional government with the promotion of rural development; on the other hand, the need to address the high unemployment rate and the seasonality of the dominant economic activities in the area.

2. Origin and Composition of the Partnership

As it has been said, in 1982 the Mountain Agricultural Law (LAM) intended to bring into practice the principles of integrated rural development from a bottom-up approach. Although the program was never implemented, the LAM is extremely important in the current territorial distribution of the analysed partnerships. Except for the *Costa Occidental de Huelva*, the action areas of the LEADER and PRODER partnerships match previously defined Mountain Areas in the frame of the LAM.

The launch of LEADER in 1991 was a turning point in the Spanish context with regard to local action for rural development. For the first time a public policy was put in the hands of the local society encouraging local actors to come together into formal partnerships to design a development strategy, and what is more important, it gave local actors the opportunity to allocate public funding to locally-raised development projects. This program (and its national version, PRODER) is, in fact, the origin of three of the four partnerships analysed, and strongly supported the consolidation of the other. It can be, therefore, said that the major force encouraging people to come together into a formalised partnership for rural development is the awareness of the existence of a source of funding.

All four partnerships are at present formal structures within the frame of the two mentioned policies that constitute their main way of action. However, in two of the four partnerships (ASAM and *La Serranía - Rincón*) the seeds of the co-operation philosophy can be traced back to an earlier stage in which there were members of the current partnerships already working together in a much more informal and precarious way. This “informal” first stage was strongly present in ASAM and to a lesser extent, in *La Serranía-Rincón*, and it can be seen as the result of the increasing concern some key people and organisations of the area about the need to counteract the process of socio-economic deprivation increasingly perceived. This *proto-history* that developed during the 1980s was a period of intense ideological discussion among local agents and continuous activism from those concerned with the passivity of the mainstream. Furthermore, these informal structures were more developed in the more isolated and lagging areas (ASAM, Rincón de Ademuz). The sense of isolation and deprivation generally pushed local people to co-operate, encouraging among them a *sense of place* and an increased involvement. On the other hand, in the more accessible and populated areas (Huelva) the need for action in favour of development has not been perceived to be critical by the local society and therefore, the previous voluntary structures did not have their main focus on promoting development.

The initial process of constitution of the partnership is characterised by the presence of leading individuals or institutions that disseminate the partnership idea to other local actors. Depending on the views of the leaders at this stage and the local context, the partnership was originally more or less opened to the inclusion of different partners. This leading role can come from two different approaches: on the one hand, a bottom-up process with key local actors, either public (local authorities as in Villuercas) or private (previous associations as in ASAM); on the other hand, a top-down approach inspired by the regional government.

The partnership composition is varied and includes a mix of public and private partners (see table 1). In general terms the percentage of public partners within the partnerships' Assembly is generally more limited than that of private partners. However there is also a general trend towards an over-representation of public authorities in the decision-making structure, i.e. Directive Committee.

The motivation for involvement varies among the public or private partners. Public partners mainly get involved:

- as they feel they are the only “legitimated” local representatives with the right to control the way in which public money is distributed and actions are implemented
- in order to secure a “slice” of the public funding “pie” for their municipality
- because they have a real concern and willingness to contribute to the common action for the development of the area

Table 1 - Composition of the partnerships Assembly and the Directive Committee

ASSEMBLY	ADRICOH	APRODERVI	ASAM	ASAM-AMBA SIERRAS	SERRANÍA-RINCÓN
Public authorities	12,5%	3,4%	4,6%	(**) ¹	67,5%
Private productive sector	51,6%	79,4%	95,4%* ²		15,0%
Private non-productive sector	39,1%	17,2%			17,5%
DIRECTIVE COMMITTEE	ADRICOH	APRODERVI	ASAM	ASAM-AMBA SIERRAS	SERRANÍA-RINCÓN
Public authorities	47%	46,7%	15,0%	52,4%	53,3%
Private productive sector	17,6%	46,7%	85%*	42,9%	20,0%
Private non-productive sector	35,4%	6,7%			16,7%

Source: Lists of members for each of the partnerships

On the other hand, private partners (individuals, enterprises, associations, etc.) get mainly involved:

- for personal interests in the possibilities that the partnership can offer them or their represented collective (funding, advise, technical support, networking benefits, etc.)
- because they have been formally called by the initiators to participate
- because they have a real concern and willingness to contribute to the common action for the development of the area

The degree of participation of the partners is directly linked to the type of motivation that brought them into the partnership structure.

3. Objectives and Development of the Partnership

Both the objectives pursued by partnerships and their development are directly linked to the requirements and lines of action introduced by LEADER and PRODER. The only exception at least in theory, is ASAM as this was a partnership constituted with a well-defined philosophy and objectives and is using LEADER as a tool to achieve them.

In general terms, the main objective of the partnerships is to promote development through the initiation of projects which meet the necessary cri-

¹ (**) ASAM-AMBA SIERRAS is a joint co-operation only for LEADER II. There is not an Assembly for the ASAM-AMBA SIERRAS partnership but each association has its own assembly and Directive Committees which express their thoughts to the ASAM-AMBA SIERRAS Decision Committee.

² (*) no split data available.

teria to be included within any of the action lines set by LEADER or PRODER (see table 2).

Table 2 - Action lines of LEADER and PRODER

LEADER	PRODER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and self-employment • Rural tourism • SME's, handcrafts • Valorisation of agri-food products • Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valorisation of the agrarian and forestry potential • Support to SMEs, hand-crafting and services activities • Support to tourism investment in rural areas: agri-torism, local tourism • Valorisation of the rural heritage, and development of agrarian communitie • Services to business in the rural areas

However, partner have also tried to adapt their objectives to the needs of their areas and in this sense they have placed more effort on trying to achieve more specific objectives, e.g. structure socio-economic sectors of the local society; encouraging rural tourism; strongly supporting SMEs initiated by specific sectors of population (e.g. women or youth).

In order to adapt the partnership objectives and the availability of funding to the perceived needs of the area a strategic planning process was necessary in the first place. Even when all the partnerships elaborated a rural development plan for the area this not necessarily imply a strategic planning exercise. In fact, exhaustive planning is not a process that all the partnerships managed to achieve in the first stage for of different reasons, i.e. time constraints, lack of experience, difficulties between partners for getting into an agreement, etc. Instead it is an exercise that partner (e.g. *Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz*) have been progressing during their years of operation and that they feel has to take place in order to face the initiation of the next programme (LEADER Plus or PRODER II). On the other hand, in those cases where a planning process had existed, changes in the local context or in the partnership composition may bring to the partnership the necessity to re-think their strategy in order to adapt it to the new circumstances (e.g. ASAM)

4. Organisation and Operation of the Partnership

Partnerships are constituted as non-profit associations. According to this status, they must have at least two structures, an Assembly and an Directive Committee. The Assembly includes collectives and individuals willing to participate in the process the partnership is encouraging. There are usually not many restrictions on anyone coming into the Assembly but they exist on representation within the Directive Committee. Even when the Assembly appears to be a very inclusive body allowing everybody to express their views and be actively involved, the reality is that the Assembly meetings only take place once a year and not always all the members attend. Furthermore, there is not a continuous feedback between Assembly and Directive Committee

and the former has a very limited capacity to influence decisions adopted by the Directive Committee, its main role being to ratify big general decisions already approved by the Directive Committee.

The Directive Committee is, therefore, the main decision-making body of the partnership. It includes a reduced number of representatives who meet periodically, usually once a month (even twice if an urgent issue arises). Public authorities are over-represented in this structure and they may influence its final composition, sometimes bringing partners into it for political reasons (e.g. APRODERVI). The main functions of the Executive Committee are, among others: decisional power on the allocation of funding and the definition of the strategy and its action lines. Although the Directive Committee has the final decision on the main actions of the partnership, they usually rely on the skills and knowledge of the management team, especially the project co-ordinator. Apart from the two basic structures, partnerships may create other structures in order to facilitate the achievement of their objectives (i.e. sectoral forums, working groups, etc). These new structures have been created by those partnerships with a strong leading management (technical) team or by those that have emerged with wider objectives than merely managing a concrete programme.

From the above an important conclusion that can be drawn is that the management team of a partnership is a crucial element influencing the functioning and the direction of the partnership strategy. Their professional skills and knowledge of the area gained in the everyday management has given the staff the capacity to propose decisions that are easily ratified within the Directive Committee.

It could be said that there is not a “conflict atmosphere” in the partnerships though there were some difficulties during the first stages (artificial territories, forced partners, location of the management office) that were solved through discussion in the frame of the partnership decision bodies. During present stages there is a “consensual” way of action in the Directive Committee that avoids the presence of conflicts very often from a *laissez-faire* perspective. In this sense, technicians have played a very important consensual role between the partners and they are very often called to be the leaders of the process that the partnership initiates.

Since three out of four partnerships were established in order to manage LEADER or PRODER, their actions strongly depend on the philosophy and lines of these programs. However, partnerships try to adapt actions to their different local contexts according to the needs and weaknesses perceived. Therefore, differences can be observed from partnership to partnership in the way they concentrate their efforts for development (rural tourism, agri-food industries, SMEs, etc.). In any case it is relevant the way that partnerships have managed to mobilise an important amount of private funding linked to investment in these sectors, as the proportion of private investment is much higher than public investment and also superior to any initial prediction (see tables in the case study reports).

The constitution of the partnership has very often brought to the areas the chance to initiate co-operation networks with other partnership and bodies in order to exchange experiences and points of view. This is particularly relevant for areas which had traditionally suffered from physical isolation and poor contact with other areas.

On the other hand, since all the partnerships manage a public programme (LEADER and PRODER) with public funding, formal evaluation is a requirement that all the partnership need to accomplish in order to justify their spending of that public money.

5. *Partnership and Local Development Outputs*

Given the youth of most of the partnerships (with the exception of ASAM) it is difficult to measure and be precise about the outputs that they in a direct or in an indirect way have managed to achieve. However, a major issue which arises in most of the areas is the fact that the partnership has managed to raise some awareness among institutional local partners of the advantages of working together and co-operating. Also, the sense of pertaining to a specific place or territory is being encouraged by the partnership and is growing among all those who are to a more or less degree influenced by the partnership (this is particularly felt in the cases of APRODERVI and *Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz*). An important achievement of the partnerships is the fact that they have raised among local public and private actors the necessity of becoming involved in a longer-term development process and the need for supporting local structures able to provide the areas with the necessary technical support (e.g. the current management teams working for the partnership).

Partnerships are playing a major role in trying to organise the different local economic sectors (tourism, agri-food industry, SMEs) into operating structures able to develop their own strategy and be competitive (e.g. ASAM and *Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz*). Although results can be already observed, i.e. the creation of new structures such as co-operatives, producers associations, working groups, achievements need to be observed in the long term since the sustainability of these structures is a crucial issue for the success of this objective.

More “measurable” effects refer to jobs creation and above all, job consolidation linked to the emergence and consolidation of new businesses. Some localities have been able to initiate projects supported (mainly funded) by the partnership to a greater extent than others because of their own social and economic dynamism. Reasons for this can be found in the local characteristics rather than in a “selective” action on the side of the partnership. In this sense, it is very important the role that partners can play disseminating information about the partnership programme in their own locality.

The effects of the partnership among local societies may be the most difficult achievements to measure. Actions initiated by the partnership have not always reached everybody, in fact those people planning to initiate a business

have become aware of the existence of the partnership and benefited from it. However, the rest of the people has known about the partnership programme only in relation to the publicity that the partnership made of the actions it implemented.

6. Conclusions

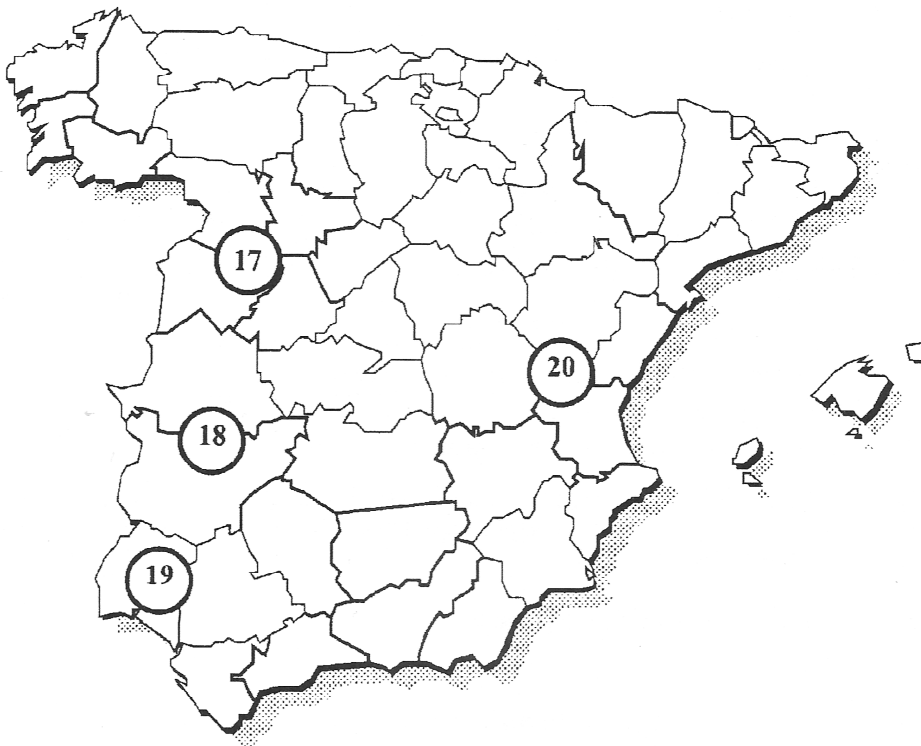
All four partnerships are good examples of the generalised trend towards new forms of participation in policy design and management at the local level. From the experience gained in the different case studies some main points can be extracted.

Some of the studied partnership (*Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz*, ASAM-AMBASIERRAS) offer a good example of the risks and effects that forcing different territories or partners to come together can have in the overall development of these areas and the partnerships themselves. One of the main issues to be considered at this respect is the fact that very often LEADER or PRODER have been trying to build a common territorial identity on an artificial territory created by the union of two areas with two different backgrounds. This attempt can, to some extent succeed and in some more years there may a greater sense of a common territory among the local society. However, it could also be the case that external pressures may oblige again various changes in the territory in order to keep benefiting from the necessary public support. This process, in the end, can bring a kind of "territorial esquizofrenia" causing to fail any future initiative which tries to raise this sense of territorial identity.

It is true that most studied partnerships would not be there in the absence of a good source of funding, that their actions to date may not be so determinant for the area in terms of economic dynamism, that very often there has not been a truly democratic way to build up the partnership, that the decision bodies are to some extent "controlled" by public local authorities. It could even be said that there is no certainty at this point that the partnership is making any difference in the degree of impact of the public money in the local economy. What is relevant, however, from the partnership approach is its ability to integrate into a single forum a diverse group of key people from the local society that come together from a variety of situations and with different interests, with the only purpose of deciding upon the future of their territory, with tools for influencing that future. Also, it is extremely valuable the knowledge of the local circumstances and the local people that partners bring to the strategy and hence, the input that they make to the sustainability of the projects initiated. In any case, this practice constitutes a fundamental shift in the rationale of the traditional *savoir-faire* in public policy that certainly requires some time for a good adjustment.

Public policy-makers and practitioners on the one hand, and the local society called to have a new more active role in public policy design and

management, will need to adapt to the new way of working. In the meantime, some “noise” will be perceived in the establishment of this new approach but a new, long-term process has started and is already showing clear benefits (more social concern and a willingness to co-operate from the local society, a better guided strategy on the basis of the local knowledge, a new way to place problems and views into a wider frame that helps to create empathy and mutual understanding, etc.) that are exclusively due to the existence of a partnership. If less than a decade of history, relatively reduced budgets and severe imperfections in the practice of the partnership approach are showing such results, the experience and the long-term view will surely improve substantially the outputs in the future.



- 17. ASAM - Ambassieras
- 18. APRODERVI
- 19. ADRICOH
- 20. Serranía-Rincón de Ademuz

Annex 2 - Comparative Table of Key Factors in the Practice of the Partnerships in Spain

	ASAM – Ambassieras (SP 17)	APRODERVI (SP 18)	ADRICOH (SP 19)	SERRANÍA- RINCÓN DE ADEMUZ (SP 20)
1. Context	***“informal” associative structures ** lack of human resources ** lack of entrepreneurship culture	*** <i>Mancomunidad</i>	** dynamic area *** qualified human resources	***artificially linked territories ** cohesión, identity (Rincón)
2. Origin and composition of partnership	**Strong ideas ***Key persons *Funding	*** key people (staff) *** funding *** local authorities (leading partners)	*** regional government **key people (Mayors, ADLs, project co-ordinator) ***funding	***regional government ***funding **key people
3. Objectives – development of partnership	***strong ideas ***long-term planning ** selective actions ***arrival of new “imposed” partners	***PRODER ** focus on key sectors ***knowledge of the needs of the area	*** PRODER ** sectoral actions (outside the major local economic activities) **social profile	***LEADER * different realities=> different strategies ** demonstrative effect of Rincón on la Serranía
4. Organisation and operation of partnership	**Personal trust ***Motivation **Competent management **Good knowledge of the area *** arrival of new “imposed” partners (Ambassieras)	** competent management *** leading role of local authorities	***competent management ** co-ordination of existing structures ** networking * economic diversification	***working groups *** 2 offices **long-term planning
5. Outputs	** organisation of social and economic sectors *** projects initiation	*** project initiation *** private investment	** sectoral projects **social outputs **emerging structures	** organisation of social and economic sectors ***emerging structures

*** most important **important *less important