

Joined-Up Governance at Local Level

A Governação Conjunta ao Nível Local

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Abstract—This article analyzes an interorganizational cooperation initiative among local actors to improve local policy coordination. Based on the network approach to local governance, the study provides insight into why local actors cooperate and how cooperation works. The analysis is based on interviews with local authorities, public managers and local politicians.

Keywords—Governance, Local Government, Networks, Collaboration.

Resumo—Este artigo analisa uma iniciativa de cooperação interorganizacional entre atores locais para melhorar a coordenação de políticas locais. Com base na abordagem de rede para a governança local, o estudo fornece informações sobre por que os atores locais cooperam e como a cooperação funciona. A análise é baseada em entrevistas com autoridades locais, gestores públicos e políticos locais.

Palavras-Chave—Governação, Governo Local, Redes, Colaboração.

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1 Introduction

THIS paper describes a local governance initiative of the former Civil Governor of the District of Braga in Portugal. The initiative started with the creation of a public-private partnership called the Prodisbraga which developed a strategic plan for regional development at District level, the creation of a consultative council to improve policy co-ordination and a network of organizations called the Gaddisbraga to share information about EU and domestic regional development programmes. The objective was to improve inter-organisational relationships and co-operation be-

tween local actors in the District. The initiative can be considered as an attempt to revitalise the role of the former Civil Governor at local level and to develop a proactive response to the regional development programme of the Portuguese central government.

The former Civil Governor of Braga created a sort of informal governance structure to improve inter-organizational cooperation and the quality of the dialogue between local actors, something which had been on his own political agenda for many years.

At the same time, this governance innovation also has to be seen in the context of the current regional policy programme of the Portuguese central government, which focuses on the reduction of regional disparities, the deconcentration of public services and the decentralisation of central government responsibilities to local government. As a result, there is a recognised need for joined-up programme implementation, so that different geo-

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graphical areas are better coordinated and there is better horizontal co-ordination of public policies. This case study provides an interesting insight into why local actors want to cooperate and how their cooperation works in practice. The analysis draws upon face-to-face interviews with eighteen members of the organisations which are part of the new governance institutions created by the Civil Governor at the District of Braga, including interviews with local officials, public managers and local politicians.

2 The institutional context of the new local governance initiative

The territorial organisation of Portuguese public administration is comparable to the French prefectural system with the only difference being that the Portuguese system is much more centralised than the French administrative system. As with the French prefect, the former Civil Governor was appointed by central government. He/she represented central government at district level and is the “eyes and the ears” of central government. Districts are the level which is nearest to local authorities.

During the era of the dictatorship, Civil Governors had strong and authoritarian powers in controlling public services and local government. The country was ruled by an autocratic regime which developed a very formal and hierarchical administrative system. For example, Mayors of local authorities were hierarchically subordinated to the Civil Governors of their district, who had the power to dissolve the local authorities if they proved to have behaved illegally, failed to fulfil their administrative tasks or refused to carry out decisions made at higher levels. Furthermore, they had the power to scrutinise Municipal Chambers (*Câmara Municipal*) and public services and even to control civic associations and corporations. They also had police powers and were responsible for the maintenance of public order (CAREAT 1998). The authoritarian role of Civil Governors at district level was supported by the highly hierarchical structure of the overall administrative system at the time. They ruled through a hierarchical set of controls, answering directly to the Minister of Interior.

The change of regime in 1974 and the new Constitution of 1976 led to the abolition of the districts and the Civil Governors. The Constitution also foresaw that the districts would persist until the creation of Administrative Regions (Art. 291 of the Constitution).

The districts used to have two formal bodies which were both presided over by the Civil Governor: the District Assembly (*Assembleia Distrital*) and the District Council (*Conselho Distrital*). The former aimed at fostering economic and social development and to coordinate activities of the local authorities and the parishes (the *Freguesias*, the smallest territorial administrative divisions) in equipping and maintaining their schools and in conserving the cultural heritage and traditions in their local areas. The District Council was an advisory body on all matters submitted to them by the Civil Governor, the District Assembly or the law (Law 79/77, Art. 87). The previous eighteen districts still exist even though there has been an erosion of their role and their elected bodies have ceased to exist.

As a result of these changes, the responsibilities of the Civil Governors were also reduced. Their powers were limited to the representation of central government and the coordination of decentralised services; improvement of the relationships between the administration and citizens; and administration of public safety and civil protection. Furthermore, the traditional control and supervision of Civil Governors over local authorities was reduced, as local authorities became more self-confident and increased their democratic legitimacy. Since the 1976 Constitution there have been local elections for the Municipal Assembly (*Assembleia Municipal*), the Municipal Chamber (*Câmara Municipal*) and the Parish Assembly (*Assembleia de Freguesia*).

The reformers envisaged a new regional map and the Constitution established that “administrative regions” would replace the districts and regional authorities would replace the Civil Governors. The new ‘administrative region’ would have three key functions:

- direction of public services in the regional area,
- co-ordinating and supporting the activities

of local authorities and

- preparing the regional plans. (art. 257 and 258 of the Constitutional Law 1/97).

However, the process of regionalisation and the creation of regional agencies has continually been delayed because national politicians have been hesitant to make any decision on these issues. Armando (1986) claims that the tradition of municipalism and the importance regained by the municipalities after the 1974 revolution weakened the enthusiasm for regional administration. This trend, together with the Jacobin argument against regionalisation, has constituted a strong countervailing force to the introduction of the constitutional provisions.

Consequently, regionalist pressures were nowhere strong, outside of the islands of the Azores and Madeira, where physical distance added a different dimension to the debate. Indeed, the constitution of 1976 institutionalised these two islands as Autonomous Regions with devolved powers.

Everywhere else, the centralised nature of Portuguese administrative system still prevails today. This can be seen from the slow changes in the balance of staff at central and local levels. In 1979, 84% of civil servants worked in central government and only 16% in local government (CICTRA 1987), while twenty years later in 1999, 80% of civil servants still worked in central government and 20% in local government (IGBDRHAP, 2001). In 2018 the percentage of civil servants in local government was 22% (SIEP 2018)

As a consequence, there is a gap in Portuguese politics between central government and local government which needs to be filled by an intermediate level with democratic legitimacy. The current regional institutions – the Commissions for Regional Coordination and Development (CCDR – *Comissões de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional*) lack the political legitimacy to manage regional problems effectively (Pereira 1992). To some extent, this gap is being filled by the establishment of local government associations. Since the 1970s inter-municipal cooperation has been growing, initially through technical offices called GATs, which gave technical advice on inter-municipal projects to improve local infras-

tructure. This form of cooperation was fostered in 1981 (Decree Law 266/81) and further reforms encouraged the cooperation between local authorities for the joint management of local facilities and energy resources.

The pressures to decentralise and to establish regions increased in the 1990s. The commitment of government to deconcentration and decentralisation was, apparently, an important issue on the administrative reform agenda. For example, it was an issue in the manifesto of the winning party in the 1995 election. However, the result of a national referendum to decide on the geographic configuration of the regions proposed by the government in 1998 caused a set back in this process.

The majority of voters said “no” to the regions, so that the government had to withdraw from this policy and find an alternative to regionalisation. The revitalisation of Civil Governors at district level and the redefinition of their role was, at the time, the expedient which Central Government found in order that it could continue to pursue the target of deconcentration. A new statute (Decree Law 213/2001) gave the Civil Governors a new role. Besides their role as a representative of central government, they now have to disseminate information to citizens about public services, to follow up issues which involve several organisations, ensuring that each service co-ordinates its actions with the others, and to give financial support to district social associations. In short, the new statute envisages a role which is closer to enabling the co-operation among public agencies and promoting the dialogue between them, rather than ordering them what to do. This was an attempted to revitalize an old institution which role in the political and administrative arena was in decline.

The governance concept and the idea of inter-organisational networks of public and private actors who are jointly engaged in policy implementation are useful to understand the governance innovations which the Civil Governor implemented in the District of Braga to foster the new role.

3 Local Governance and Networks

Recent literature on public sector reform shows a growing interest in network approaches to local

governance (Goss 2001; Bogason 2000; Bovaird and Löffler 2009; Lecy et al. 2014). Local governance stresses the increasing complexity of interactions between actors from different sectors in public decision-making and service delivery. The increased involvement of nongovernmental actors in public issues is often explained by the blurring of boundaries between public and private sectors. The externalisation of public services in the last decade or so is another factor facilitating new approaches to public governance.

New and innovative ways of organising and providing public services have given rise to a whole variety of new organizational forms. According to Rhodes the new forms of governance are “self-organising inter-organisational networks” (1996, 666).

This means that it is no longer sufficient to manage a public organisation efficiently in order to provide high quality public services to the right target groups. Indeed, many public managers now recognise the need for improved co-ordination of service delivery through the management of a network of relationships between government agencies, private and nonprofit organizations. Managing networks is about creating strategic consensus for joint action within a given setting and it includes strategies to improve co-operation between actors in order to achieve better co-ordination (Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997).

The management of these networks is an important aspect of modern governance. However, this does not mean that local governance is equivalent to networking. As Bovaird et al. (2002) point out, there are other governance mechanisms which still remain important, such as hierarchies and markets (see also Rhodes 1996; Larpour 1997; Pierre and Peters 2000).

Nevertheless, the changes which have taken place in the District of Braga illustrate a case where the hierarchical co-ordination of public services at district level has been largely replaced by more horizontal structures through which the Civil Governor tries to develop more co-operative and collaborative relationships between local stakeholders.

4 New Governance Structures in the District of Braga

4.1 EU Structural Funds as a Catalyst

The central government programme for regional development required changes in policy implementation in order to meet the requirements of the EU structural funds. Since the failure of the regionalisation process the government had been committed to starting a new approach, based on promoting coordination and cooperation between local actors. The strategic programme of the Constitutional Government favoured a more integrated approach towards regional development. It established three strategic axes in relation to regional development:

- a) correction of regional disparities in order to promote harmonious regional development;
- b) reform of deconcentrated public services;
- c) decentralisation of powers and responsibilities to local authorities, associations of municipalities and metropolitan areas.

Co-operation among deconcentrated services at local level has traditionally been low in Portugal. Common issues are hardly discussed between local actors. Fragmentation and lack of appropriately co-ordinated services are widely considered to be costly problems which impede the effective and efficient provision of public services. The formal and hierarchical nature of Portuguese administration has reinforced these characteristics and hampered lateral communication and the establishment of innovative organizational forms (Araújo 1999). The government envisaged the revitalisation of the role of Civil Governors at district level in order to tackle these issues, by promoting dialogue and co-ordination between local actors, and between central and local government, and by coordinating public investments at district level.

4.2 The Network Approach in the District of Braga

The Civil Governor, Mr Fernando Ribeiro Moniz, was the figurehead for this initiative. However, the real mentor and promoter was the deputy Civil Governor, Mr. Manuel Ferreira. He was appointed

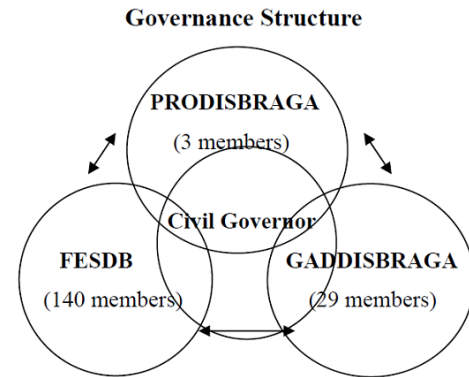
by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, after the Socialist Party had won the elections and been granted a mandate for its second term in government. He is known as a dynamic person with long experience as a local politician. As leader of a non-profit organisation he had developed skills as an innovator and networker, enabling the interactions between multiple stakeholders. In his professional background he had worked in the private sector, had been elected President of a Parish (*Presidente de Junta de Freguesia*), then Mayor of a municipality. Subsequently, he was the administrator of the Association of Municipalities of the Ave Valley, and then co-ordinator of the development Programme for the Ave Valley (*ProAve*), a programme for regional Development which was financed by EU structural funds. As he pointed out in his interview with the author, his personal experience at different levels of government had given him a better understanding of the need for integration. Hence he was well positioned to influence all levels of the administration with which the District had to deal and he had the ability to represent the intentions of central government toward local actors and to develop an integrated approach towards local development which would take account of the interests of the key local stakeholders involved. Other interviewees confirmed the vital role played by Mr. Manuel Ferreira in promoting dialogue and enabling the interactions between all local actors involved in the new governance structure. They stressed that he personally made the informal contacts to invite local personalities to join this initiative, whose presence would be essential to the success of the new local governance structure.

In order to deal with the problems and issues outlined above, the Civil Governor of the District of Braga established a new governance structure which consisted of three key elements.

- **PRODISBRAGA** - Governmental Programme for the District of Braga (*Programa do Governo no Distrito de Braga*),
- **FESDB** - Economic and Social Forum for the District of Braga (*Fórum Económico e Social do Distrito de Braga*),
- **GADDISBRAGA** - Office for District Development Support (*Gabinete de Apoio*

ao Desenvolvimento do Distrito de Braga)

Figure 1 - The Governance Structure of the District of Braga



PRODISBRAGA aimed at involving the associations which represent all the municipalities of the District in order to develop an integrated approach towards regional development. First, it did an assessment of the investments needed in the District in order to improve regional development. This provided the basis for a strategic plan which was then submitted to central government. According to the participants involved in the strategic planning process, they believed that the strategic plan would give them more power to negotiate for domestic and EU funds with central government.

Another part of the new governance structure was the Economic and Social Forum for the District of Braga (FESDB). The FESDB was anchored in a "loosely formal" structure to enable local actors – organisations from the public, private and non-profit sectors – to share knowledge about local issues and promote dialogue, participation and interaction among them. It was a consultative body which was an important source of information and aims to coordinate public policies and public services. The FESDB was organised in working groups, according to the issues identified by participants, which are responsible for discussing and proposing initiatives in areas like regional development, administrative reform, welfare and volunteer services, ICT and e-Government, and training. One ambitious project of the FESDB was the development of one-stop shops ("single windows") in all the parishes of the District which was done in co-operation with the National Association of Parishes.

A third element of the governance structure was the GADDISBRAGA which aimed at identifying strategies for policy implementation through joint action of the public and private sectors. The GADDIBRAGA was a network which had several aims such as:

- to organise and share information about financing from national programmes for public investment and EU structural funds and other programmes to promote regional development;
- to facilitate and promote inter-organisational co-operation through joint projects and programmes;
- to organise and gather information for District development and to transfer it to the PRODISBRAGA;
- to give technical assistance to those organisations whose activities are within the framework of the GADDISBRAGA proposals and which intend to apply for funding to the EU or national programmes;
- to contribute to the strategic development of the District; and
- to promote the establishment of other initiatives in social areas.

It aimed particularly to articulate national, regional and local policies and look for new methods of co-operation among local actors with an operational orientation. It was clear that these new arrangements depended on the voluntary cooperation of all key actors and their willingness to make compromises. At the centre of the new governance structure was the Civil Governor, with a new role as an enabler and facilitator of co-operation among local actors. There was a new emphasis on horizontal coordination within flexible forms of interaction. Hierarchical control had been replaced by a continuing process of negotiating among different interests.

The interviewees have suggested that it was the deputy Civil Governor who took the most active role in proposing an informal structure to support and improve relationships between local actors. The network had two layers of participants: an inner group, which was in the forefront of this process and was committed to its success, and a second group whose members saw the GAD-

DISBRAGA as an opportunity to enhance their own activities and who were looking for opportunities to participate in projects together with other partners. The former centralised, formalised and top-down administrative process has given way to a more loosely-coupled form which includes both hierarchic and non-hierarchic structures.

4.3 The emergence of new cooperative relationships

Co-operation between local stakeholders was not strong before the creation of the GADDISBRAGA and project management was not joined-up. In general, cooperation only existed within the two main areas of the District: the Cávado Valley and the Ave Valley. The deputy Civil Governor engaged personally in the promotion of the new governance structure in order to ensure that these old habits were changed.

The creation of the new governance structure allowed the development of new inter-organizational relationships based on consensus and cooperation. The stakeholders involved admit that consensus became important for the functioning because the formulation of programmes required that they must “work with each other” not “work against each other”, as had been traditionally the case.

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Participation was not formally structured through the establishment of clearly defined units. An interviewee pointed out that everyone who was in the GADDISBRAGA was essentially in it simply for their own convenience, i.e. for what they can get out of it that could be of use in their area. In general, each participant only knows about the projects in which they were engaged. When asked about the areas where joint initiatives were taking place, interviewees could generally not identify them. Members tend to

join together according to the projects they want to implement. Consequently, there was not an integrated approach to local policies between participants. In fact, there was essentially a policy of “let a thousand flowers bloom”, where the outcomes were largely determined by the availability of domestic and EU funds. Nevertheless, it had been the growing affinity between some of the actors involved which influenced their decision to cooperate with each other, and other actors had started to share ideas about future projects. The participants of GADDISBRAGA admitted that this was only the beginning of a new way of doing things and they were still learning how to cooperate.

District development becomes a priority between some local actors which found in GADDISBRAGA the opportunity to develop joint projects. There were three main reasons for this option: *a)* the more active and participative actors worked in such issues; *b)* the two valleys showed low levels of economic and social development compared with other regions in the country and *c)* the central government policy for regional development and the EU structural funds stressed joined-up initiatives. The valleys showed in 1999 an Index of Adjusted Income¹ per capita of 0,860 for Cávado and of 0,873 for Ave which was well below the index of the capital (0,949) and the national average (0,894). Concerning the Index of the GNP it was 0,831 to the capital (Lisbon), 0,327 to the Cávado Valley and 0,374 to the Ave Valley (OCQV 2003, 49-51). Hence, regional development became a target for cooperation and the establishment of partnerships fostering projects in such area.

To have a deep and real knowledge about the economic and life quality of the district it was established a partnership between the University of Minho and the Agency of Regional Development of the Cávado Valley (ADRVC) to elaborate an economic chart of the Cávado Valley. The purpose of this project was to collect and analysed data in order to have a complete sort of indexes which helped to compare the region with other regions in the country and to have a concise picture of

the impact of regional policies in the district. The results of this study were available on the internet and would help public and private actors to make decisions concerning regional development. This project was fund in 75% by ERDF and 25% by the ADRVC, and the total amount was 89 923 Euros. To complement this diagnosis another project was established to study the social reality of the Valley Cávado. This initiate was a partnership of ADRVC, the Civil Governor and the Catholic University which aimed to elaborate a) a social chart of the Cávado Valley, b) an observational committee to study the life conditions of the population and c) to set up a social network for the Cávado Valley. This initiative focused on the social area and intended to be the basis for a better articulation between public and non-profit organization working in such issues. The total cost of this project was about 156 455 euros and it was fund in 62.5% by the European Social Fund (ESF) and in 37.5% by domestic funds.

Other projects developed jointly by actors of the GADDISBRAGA were under implemented. In some extent they were the result of the above mentioned initiatives, but above all, by the enabling role performed by GADDISBRAGA. For instances the Project Innovation in the Social Economy join nine non-profit organizations. The project cost about 586 081 euros and was fund in 75% by the ESF and in 25% by domestic funds. The main purpose was to provide technical assistance in management and increased employment in small family enterprises like handicraft, gardening, laundry, recycling. Another target was to give technical assistance to associations which aimed to integrate in professional life disable people and risk social groups like ex-drug addicted, ex-alcoholic and homeless. Particularly there was a concern to provide knowledge that increased the skills to manage their small business, to trade the products in the regional and local market, and to promote the integration of minorities in the labour market.

The data about the number of projects approved and fund by UE structural fund and national funds (Table 1) shows that its number increased sharply after the creation of GADDISBRAGA, from 91 projects in 1996 to 180 in 2001. In 2001 the number of projects approved

1. The Index of Adjusted Income shows the differences in internal distribution of real income.

for the Cávado Valley represented an increase of about 156% and for the Ave Valley an increase of about 91%. This was the result of the combination of two elements: a) the new EU cohesion and structural funds programme which started in 2000 and, b) the influence of GADDISBRAGA in promoting joined-up governance to develop new and innovative initiatives.

Table 1 - Number of Projects Approved

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cávado Valley	36	30	49	45	39	100	58
Ave Valley	55	34	34	51	42	80	44
Total	91	64	83	96	81	180	102

Source: Markttest Sales Index 2003.

Concerning public investments through EU structural funds there was an increase particularly after 2000 (see Table 2). It is worth to stress that the Cávado Valley investments increased more than in the Ave Valley. Perhaps the fact that members of the inner group of GADDISBRAGA which was in the forefront of this process belonged to the Cávado Valley, explain, in part, this difference.

Table 2 - Projects Approved and fund by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

	(thousand euros)						
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
ERDF (Projects Investments):							
Cávado Valley	30074	23983	32757	29329	55594	101904	40972
Ave Valley	22873	41536	25666	27546	50736	55805	34359
ERDF (EU contribution):							
Cávado Valley	21438	15835	20626	17228	36271	59782	25298
Ave Valley	15688	25589	17505	18425	34636	32426	19323

Source: Markttest Sales Index 2003.

Public investments drawn into the district from central government followed a similar pattern of EU funds. After 2000 there was an increase in the amount of funds transferred from central government (Table 3) to fund investments in the district.

Table 3 - Total of Central Government Public Investments in the District of Braga

(Thousand euros)					
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
55 564	68 383	115 945	136 837	253 639	284 300

Source: Departamento de Prospectiva e Planeamento 2001.

Many of the interviewees agreed that there was an important need to motivate more of the local actors and organisations to develop a strategy for co-operation which promotes District development and benefits from the EU structural funds. Other interviewees believe that the new governance structure was more important for getting additional information and building up deeper knowledge about the District, its problems and its challenges. These participants regarded the GADDISBRAGA mainly as an opportunity to exchange information between actors from the public and private sector. Indeed, the structures in the new governance arrangements, but particularly the GADDISBRAGA, facilitated and motivated the sharing of experiences between organisations, and allowed better identification of needs, planning of efforts, and elimination of overlap between activities.

There was a view shared across the interviewees that they needed to develop joint projects by looking at the experiences of other local actors and learning from them.

They believed that the GADDISBRAGA had promoted dialogue between local actors and filled a gap at District level, increasing the co-operation between local actors from the public and the private sector. All interviewees agreed that there remains a need to set up a more efficient system for the collection and dissemination of information about the District, but there was not any agreement about how to achieve this.

5 Conclusion

The case study of Braga illustrates the importance of new governance structures in order to foster dialogue and cooperation between different local stakeholders. It also showed that co-operation is

not just the result of a deliberate decision from participants to become engaged in a common initiative. The decision to co-operate and the areas where it happens have been partly shaped by the structural funds available for regional development and the initiatives promoted by central government. It was clear that working together would be a condition for getting funds into the District. Interaction between actors in GADDISBRAGA was greatly increased by the advantages and the funding opportunities offered by EU and national programmes, and the announcement of success in such applications has been important in bringing in more local actors. This was illustrated by the fact that there were areas where it was difficult to implement joint initiatives because there were no EU structural funds or national programmes.

Therefore, the stimulus to co-operation appears to depend on:

- the availability of funds from a national or a EU programme;
- the possibility of submitting joint projects;
- the requirement for horizontal public policy co-ordination;
- the need to draw up mutually consistent local and District programmes.

Consequently, while it can see among local actors an attempt to increase their interaction in public policy planning and implementation, this was driven by the need to fulfil the requirements of EU and national funding – at present, the cooperation is still driven by the self-interest of local actors.

The interviews showed that cooperation was the result of the need to find alternatives to improve activities and, for certain local actors, an opportunity to raise funds. However, and above all, there was a shared idea that local actors were learning how to cooperate and learning the benefits of that cooperation for local development.

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