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Description of the project

The ambition of DQE project was to bring together Lisbon and Gothenburg, competitiveness and sustainability. Today, still, the challenge of competitive sustainable development is a crucial issue within the EU as certain problems persist (e.g. social exclusion, increase of environmental problems, poverty, ...), and while convergence of economic performance between regions needs to be reinforced.

However, to date, the 3-pillared development approach, combining Economy, Society and Environment, remains more of a development framework rather than a development tool or strategy. Economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability, or socio-economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability are still often addressed separately, conceptually and in practice. Economic interests see their interaction as antagonistic, even 'mutually exclusive', while on the other hand "green" policies are often claiming it is not so. The Social dimension is even less well defined than the Environmental dimension. For example, Social aspects, with the exception of education & employment policy, e.g. measures against social exclusion, or poverty may be considered as externalities to economic efficiency. Under this light, it is important that competitiveness and sustainability are addressed simultaneously, their intrinsic interrelations identified, and the concept of mutually reinforcing economic, societal and environmental development become clear, operational and its limits well understood.

DQE project starts at this point: it realises that we need better conceptual tools for regional and business development which will effectively promote growth that is simultaneously competitive and sustainable. Its ambition has been to test methods and discuss in depth how competitiveness and sustainability can be combined at business and regional levels.

Figure 1 below shows how integrated development is more or less practiced today; Figure 2 shows what should be addressed in integrated development and where its challenge lies, and Figure 3 summarises the findings.

Figure 1 Integrated development as usually practiced

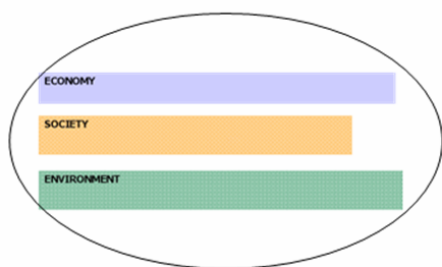


Figure 2 The challenge of integrated development

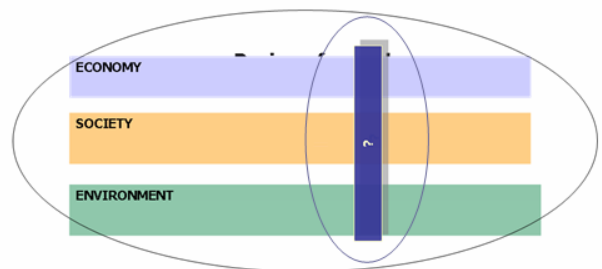
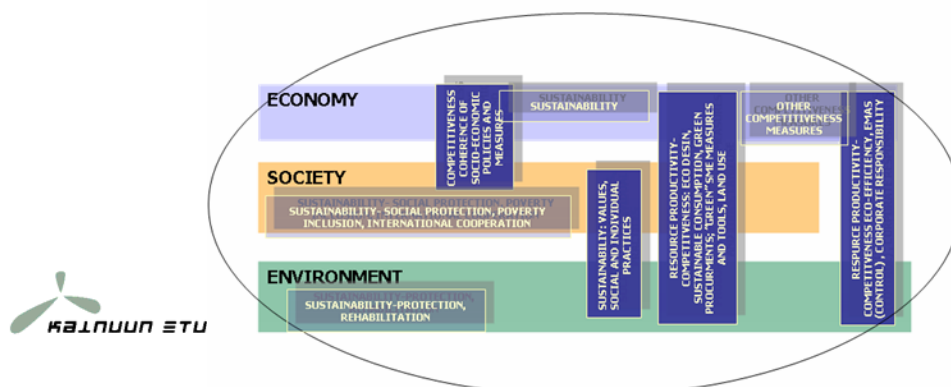


Figure 3 Integrated development implies many levels of integration





Towards the Sustainable Region / DQE project is based on the Design, Quality, Environment assessment criteria, an integrated development business tool, formulated by Lahti, Finland OSKE (Regional Centres of Expertise Programme) 1999 – 2006.

The DQE project effort has been especially appreciated by UNESCO which granted the Decade prize for Education on Sustainable Development to DQE project.

Full title of the project: Towards the Sustainable Region / DQE project

EU funding: Interreg III C North CIP

Operation duration: January 2004 – June 2007

Contexts: Partners come from 4 Objective 1 regions and 2 Objective 2 regions. The joint development (conceptual output) took place among all 6 regions, while the regional operations (testing of the DQE tool to SMEs) were implemented in 4 regions.

Project activities & results: The project activities have been organised into two parts: (1) field work with SMEs and (2) joint conceptual development.

(1) The field-work consisted of testing of the DQE audit tool in 17 companies in 4 regions. The objective was to promote a comprehensive approach for 'producing with the environment'. To access this objective, the relevance and effectiveness of the DQE audit tool were tested and the range and quality of the results of its application were assessed and compared between the 4 partner regions. Results: 17 improved or new products reached markets and there is feedback.

(2) The joint development of the project consisted of three parts, in the form of interregional working groups. They are:

- Interregional Work Group 1 (IWG 1) Regional policy: Five (5) improved regional policy approaches, taking into account integrated development parameters.
- Interregional Work Group 2 (IWG 2) SME development tools: Improvement of the original DQE questionnaire to be more easily accessible to companies and clarifying the links between assessment results and development actions. The Design parameter, as product planning tool, was identified as most important to integrated business development.
- Interregional Work Group 3 (IWG 3) Knowledge management: Formulation of two (2) educational units comprising a total of 8 lectures addressed to business students, consultants and entrepreneurs who are interested in integrated development.

Partner organizations and contacts

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