

Managing Quality of Life in the Context of Urban-Rural Interaction – Approaches from the Baltic Sea Region

Stefanie Lange and Petri Kahila

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Stockholm, Sweden, 2012



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Preface

This report is the final report of the INTERREG IVB project NEW BRIDGES '*Strengthening the Quality of Life through the Improved Management of Urban Rural Interaction*'. Approved under priority 4: 'Attractive & competitive cities and regions' the project received funding from the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Eight local and regional authorities and three international organisations from Baltic Sea Region countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) cooperated in the project between January 2009 and January 2012. The Union of the Baltic Cities, Commission on Environment (UBC) was the project-leading organisation while Nordregio had responsibility for work package 3, 'From challenges to pilot actions' and the Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology (ECAT) for work package 4, 'Implementation of the pilot actions'.

Project activities were framed by a Conceptual Framework and guidelines developed by Nordregio and ECAT. Outcomes and analysis in this report are based on local synthesis reports prepared by the project partners including literature reviews, surveys and interviews carried out between 2009 and 2011. The authors would especially like to thank the following persons for their hard work throughout the NEW BRIDGES project and for their valuable input into this report: Guido Sempell, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg (Germany), Andreas Obersteg, HafenCity University Hamburg (Germany), Annely Veevo and

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In addition to this report, '*Planning Together for Better Quality of Life - Guide for Integrated Management of Urban Rural Interaction*', which included policy recommendations to the EU, national and macro-regional levels, as well as the complimentary methodological package '*NEW BRIDGES Online Toolkit*', was published and can be downloaded from <http://www.urbanrural.net>.

Stockholm, April 2012

Summary

The NEW BRIDGES project '*Strengthening the Quality of Life through the Improved Management of Urban Rural Interaction*' ran between 2009 and 2012 and involved local and regional authorities from across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). The core intention of the project was to apply the concept of quality of life to regional planning and development, improve the management of urban-rural interaction and to implement pilot actions that would contribute to improving quality of life. Therefore the NEW BRIDGES project operationalised quality of life through three key elements (residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services), followed an individual involvement approach and suggested the city-regional level as the geographic scope for all activities.

By identifying various challenges in respect of the three key elements of quality of life and possible pilot actions to be implemented, the project initiated seven different processes that contributed to a better understanding of quality of life and bridged the gap between individual preferences and policy goals within regional planning processes.

A number of local stakeholders were involved throughout the duration of the project. Through different cross-border and -sectoral cooperation patterns, local stakeholders were engaged actively and created new partnerships between e.g. authority members representing at least two different municipalities.

Finally, eight different pilot actions were prepared and partly implemented by the end of the project. In the processes leading up to their implementation a number of 'good practice' examples were identified which will be included in ongoing planning and future strategies on the regional level.

The NEW BRIDGES project generally facilitated policy goals formulated at the regional, national and EU levels and specifically at the transnational level. Pan-Baltic cooperation on quality of life related issues in urban-rural interaction, and the exchange of knowledge and experience, created added value to the project partner organisations and the city-regions involved. Thus the NEW BRIDGES project clearly contributed to the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

1. Introduction

Quality of life is important to the people and influences their decisions over, for instance, where to live and work. Our community and place of residence influences and shapes our interpretations of how we define quality of life. This does not necessarily however have a direct relationship to current living conditions but focuses rather on enabling people to attain their goals and to choose their ideal lifestyle. According to Massam (2002) quality of life is perceived individually and can be seen as “an indication or cause of attraction of a place”. Furthermore he argues “the desire to improve the quality of life in a particular place or for a particular person or group is an important focus of attention for planners”.

Although the notion of quality of life has had a considerable influence on social and political trends and has become an important dimension in various policy fields, including spatial and environmental planning, in practice, planners often lack effective approaches, tools and instruments with which to operationalise the concept and its individual perspective in planning processes or to implement the required actions. Moreover, it is clear that the various attempts made and the methods used in respect of managing quality of life issues in the framework of urban-rural interaction have been rather limited. As such, it was on this basis that the NEW BRIDGES project ‘*Strengthening the Quality of Life through the Improved Management of Urban Rural Interaction*’ was approved under the priority ‘Attractive and competitive cities and regions’ of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013.

With local and regional authorities from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden as project partners (see table 1), the NEW

BRIDGES project aimed to:

- Apply the concept of quality of life to regional planning and development and thus contribute to increasing the attractiveness of cities and regions as places to live and work.
- Challenge administrative borders and built up new urban-rural partnerships that address inhabitants and local stakeholders’ concerns regarding quality of life.
- Actively involve and engage inhabitants and local stakeholders in planning processes and bridge the gap between individual needs and policy and planning goals.

The project activities were built on three pillars. Firstly, the concept of quality of life, as the thematic scope of the project was operationalised by three key elements (residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services). Secondly, the key elements were investigated within the geographic scope of urban-rural interaction, in so called city-regions of which seven were defined within the project. Thirdly, the project had a clear involvement approach focusing on the local inhabitants and stakeholders who were impacted by, or the target of, project activities.

On the basis of the qualitative and quantitative outcomes from the seven city-regions this report analyses the challenges as regards quality of life faced within the management of urban-rural settings. Based on a clear ‘involvement-based’ approach the report considers individual preferences concerning quality of life related issues and traces the various ongoing processes currently underway in the city-regions delimited in relation to the implementation of pilot actions.

Table 1: NEW BRIDGES partner consortium

Project partner	Country
Union of the Baltic Cities Commission on Environment (Lead partner)	Finland
Nordregio (Lead Work package 3)	Sweden
Environmental Centre for Administration and Technologies (Lead Work package 4)	Lithuania
Hiiu County	Estonia
City of Turku	Finland
Regional Council of Southwest Finland	Finland
Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg	Germany
Zemgale Planning Region	Latvia
Kaunas District Municipality	Lithuania
Marshal's Office of Lower Silesia (Voivodeship)	Poland
Örebro Municipality	Sweden

2. Theoretical background

This chapter introduces the two concepts at stake, namely, ‘quality of life’ and ‘urban-rural interaction’. This discussion is partly based on the Conceptual Framework, which was produced at the early stage of the project. Here, however, the intention is to establish a dialogue within and between the concepts ‘quality of life’ and ‘urban-rural interaction’. If we are to gain a firm grasp on these two concepts we need to have an overview of some of the theoretical approaches used

and the practical difficulties faced in dealing with them. Since the various project partners began from different starting points and often displayed highly individual characteristics, there is also a need to open up, rather more thoroughly than has previously been the case, the concepts under scrutiny here in order to reach an overall understanding of the various elements of quality of life and urban rural interaction and the ways in which they interact.

2.1 The concept of quality of life

When we enquire about the wealth of a region, and about the quality of life of its inhabitants, we have to consider how we define quality of life and what kind of information is required. The profound question whether quality of life focuses only on quantitative subjects or whether qualitative issues should be considered as well. We may argue that quantitative subjects are basic and incomplete to measure quality of life; however such evaluations are widely used to direct public policy (e.g. Diener and Eunkook 1997).

Many theorists have tried to conceptualise the quality of life approach. In response to the Swedish level of living approach, Allardt (1976 and 1993) suggested a broader and more comprehensive approach to quality of life. In his approach, an individual may meet basic needs of quality of life by achieving three dimensions of quality of life: having, loving and being. “Having” refers to material assets crucial for survival and for avoidance of misery, “loving” relates to social needs which relate to relationships with other people and the community and “being” stands for the need to integrate oneself into society and to live in harmony with the community and nature. Allardt’s approach has remarkably influenced research approaches dealing with quality of life.

The level of interest as well as the scope of various studies has increased noticeably during the last twenty years, especially with regard to quality of life in relation to medicine, public health, economics, urban planning and other disciplines (Costanza 2007). Various studies have assessed quality of life within different spaces and policies on the local, regional and national level. Despite the copious volumes of literature however; there is only a tentative consensus over the concept of quality of life

and what it means. The multifaceted, and in many ways very subjective character of quality of life, is the basis for its interdisciplinary nature.

The importance of quality of life related questions in the development discourse is often connected to the effective allocation of scarce resources. Because of limited resources, local authorities have to find the most efficient way to allocate finances to welfare within their communities. This question is usually approached by using various kinds of indicators or indexes to explain the improvement or decline in the quality of life. However, we may argue that economic and financial indicators and indexes are to some extent unsatisfactory means of understanding and explaining individual well-being in a broader sense.

Quality of life is a broad concept relating generally to the overall level of well-being in society rather than directly and solely to material wealth. That means measuring quality of life goes beyond quantitative indicators. Rising incomes do not necessarily translate into better quality of life. The recent development of the topic also includes an approach to analyse how urban systems explain the differences in quality of life (Vemuri and Costanza 2006). Therefore, we may argue that urban areas (and also their surrounding rural areas) are able to develop a competitive advantage that will improve and encourage development and planning in respect of the whole region. Examples here for instance include the initiative ‘Healthy Cities’ originally initiated by the World Health Organisation¹.

Most of the issues related to the daily life of individuals have, to a certain extent, linkages to a geographical dimension. This approach is linked to

¹ More information under: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/home>

the general need to introduce spatial aspects into the framework of quality of life. According to Pacione (2003) an important reason for a broader perspective in this respect, is again the fact that quality of life is not directly related to material wealth. The evaluation of quality of life involves rather the relationship between people and their everyday living environment, which brings their individual perceptions and their appraisal to the centre of the debate.

Fahey *et al* (2004) characterise the concept of quality of life on the basis of the following three dimensions:

- Quality of life is a 'micro' concept meaning that it refers to individuals' life situations.
- Quality of life is a 'multi-faceted' concept meaning that it does not simply relate to specific situations or particular areas of life but rather to the relationships between them.
- Quality of life is both characterised by subjective and objective perception meaning that subjective perceptions are attitudinal; individual goals and orientations as objective perceptions are related to living conditions.

It could be argued that Fahey's characterisation represents quality of life as a 'container concept', which integrates many different dimensions of life such as its social, physical and cultural aspects. A

broader concept of quality of life acknowledges the need to belong to different places and social groups as well as to differentiate oneself by pursuing aims and making decisions and choices. The concept of quality of life is not however so specified as to cover wider approaches. Thus quality of life comprises not only the characteristics mentioned above but also various actors and levels. There is, moreover, a demand for a more comprehensive approach, meaning that quality of life issues are looked at both between and within various disciplines rather than, as it has traditionally been the case, concentrating on their distinct connotations.

A more comprehensive conceptualisation of quality of life would provide important input to policy-making and long-term policy goal formation as well as helping to bring about the desired impacts in these on local communities. A more transparent concept may lead to the recognition of prescriptive criterion against which present conditions of quality of life can be judged. This would undoubtedly help in the delivery of the necessary information for successful policy-making.

In the NEW BRIDGES project, quality of life was understood in relation to individual preferences reflected in three key elements: residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services (cf. chapter 4.1).

2.2 The concept of urban-rural interaction

The perception of 'urban' and 'rural' is context-sensitive as the words mean different things to different people, countries, planning and policy cultures. Also the influence of different lifestyles and stages of life in relation to the specific spatial context may comprise urban and rural settings. For instance, the diversified usage of rural areas surrounding cities has resulted in various conceptions and expectations, and ultimately in the ongoing urbanisation of the countryside. Thus the distinction between lifestyles in urban and rural areas has become increasingly blurred (e.g. Cloke 2006).

It is obvious that different people in different situations experience 'rurality' as well as 'urbanity' in different ways and value different characteristics. Increasing similarities between urban and rural areas offer unique and attractive combinations and the possibility to choose and experience different lifestyles. Individual factors influence the actual perception of 'rurality' and 'urbanity' which includes e.g. household characteristics and structures, national identity, age, gender, education, familiarity with the countryside and/

or the 'urban world'. Again, the different stages in life and family terms influence current norms, individual values and preferences and may lead to the adoption of certain or specific perceptions (cf. chapter 2.1).

So, urban and rural areas are not only interlinked in multiple ways such as common labour markets and the common provision of services but also face common challenges such as those relating to demographic development, urban sprawl, migration and climate change. This affects the quality of life of people living in these areas. Moreover, by pursuing their everyday life activities, (e.g. increasing mobility, diverse lifestyles), people challenge the current balance in respect of the provision of services, call for better accessibility (in respect of both the traditional provision of public services and new issues such as fast broadband internet coverage etc.) and demand a broad variety of residential choices. This in turn raises questions about the purpose and usefulness of administrative borders and indeed of traditional territorial units in respect of the responsible authorities.

The traditional view of urban-rural interaction considers urban areas to have a positive impact on rural development and thus focuses solely on cities. Very often the role of the rural population in sustaining cities economically (especially rural cities) is forgotten. At the same time, urban development policies face new challenges and difficulties due to the rapid economic and functional changes in both urban and rural areas. Neither rural nor urban policies can be based on the assumption of a dichotomous and independent mode of policy (Hoggart 2005). There is then a need to integrate rural policy into regional and sectoral policy in order to enable implementation.

The concept of urban-rural interaction is well established in the regional planning and economic geography literatures. The desire to develop a clear view of, and concept for, urban-rural interaction is theoretically challenging and dependent on subjective principles and opinions. Different theories provide both the opportunity and the necessary methods to analyse

urban-rural interaction. Numerous studies underlining various aspects of urban-rural linkages such as migration, commuting, and employment have indeed already been undertaken but only a few specifically consider urban-rural interaction (Davoudi & Stead 2002). The concept of urban-rural interaction is generally also not specified, as it covers wider standpoints in respect of various disciplines. Urban-rural interaction rather comprises multiple actors, factors and levels, which again makes precise definition difficult.

In the NEW BRIDGES project, urban-rural interaction was conceptualised through city-regions - as a complex network of urban-rural interaction that determine a certain geographical scope depending on the existing facilities and assets such as infrastructure, services and housing stock rather than following administrative borders and authorities' territory (cf. chapter 4.2).

2.3 Quality of life in urban-rural interaction

The concept of urban-rural interaction touches upon two main points that need to be considered. Firstly, policy goals based on urban-rural interaction can only be implemented if urban and rural areas are viewed as equal. Secondly, as urban and rural areas are differentiated and specialised according to diverging pretensions and conditions, the economic and political promotion of urban-rural interaction cannot be impartial.

The same issues apply to the concept of quality of life in relation to urban-rural interaction. Quality of life is not a straightforward process within urban-rural interaction as the concept may be too vague and subjective in this respect. Therefore, the concept of quality of life needs to be put into broader perspective within the framework of urban-rural interaction rather than being treated merely as a cluster of salient but disparate factors.

It could be argued that approaching the notion of quality of life in such a broad and generic manner appears rather meaningless to policy-making. On the other hand the concept of quality of life covers issues such as the provision of services, residential preferences, mobility, recreation, sources of livelihood, environmental quality and affordable living costs. Consequently, the notion of quality of life is important to individuals and so should quality of life related issues be. The concept of quality of life, as well as its related issues, is then important for policy-making. As an example: individuals may choose where they reside and satisfy their individual

preferences. This location might either be within a relatively short distance to and from their place of work or alternatively the individuals concerned might be willing to commute longer distances (Rouwendal & Nijkamp 2004). Addressing quality of life in urban-rural interaction is appropriate as it connects to the overall attractiveness of a region and touches the individual preferences of the people living in the region.

Both concepts are in this case linked to individual perceptions and to the private meanings of spaces and places. It is assumed that spatial representations, preferences and behaviour are linked to each other and that people act based on prevailing interpretations and representations of reality. Images and representations of 'rural' environment and consecutive urban-rural migration are firmly linked and might lead to changes in rural spaces and structures (Van Dam et al 2002). Since people are arranging and re-arranging their lives within various urban-rural settings, the distinction between two different lifestyles decreases. Typical elements of interdependencies have changed and will become even more complex. Thus quality of life in urban-rural interaction can be approached by analysing individual (life) phases as well as by describing relationships and connections as they appear.

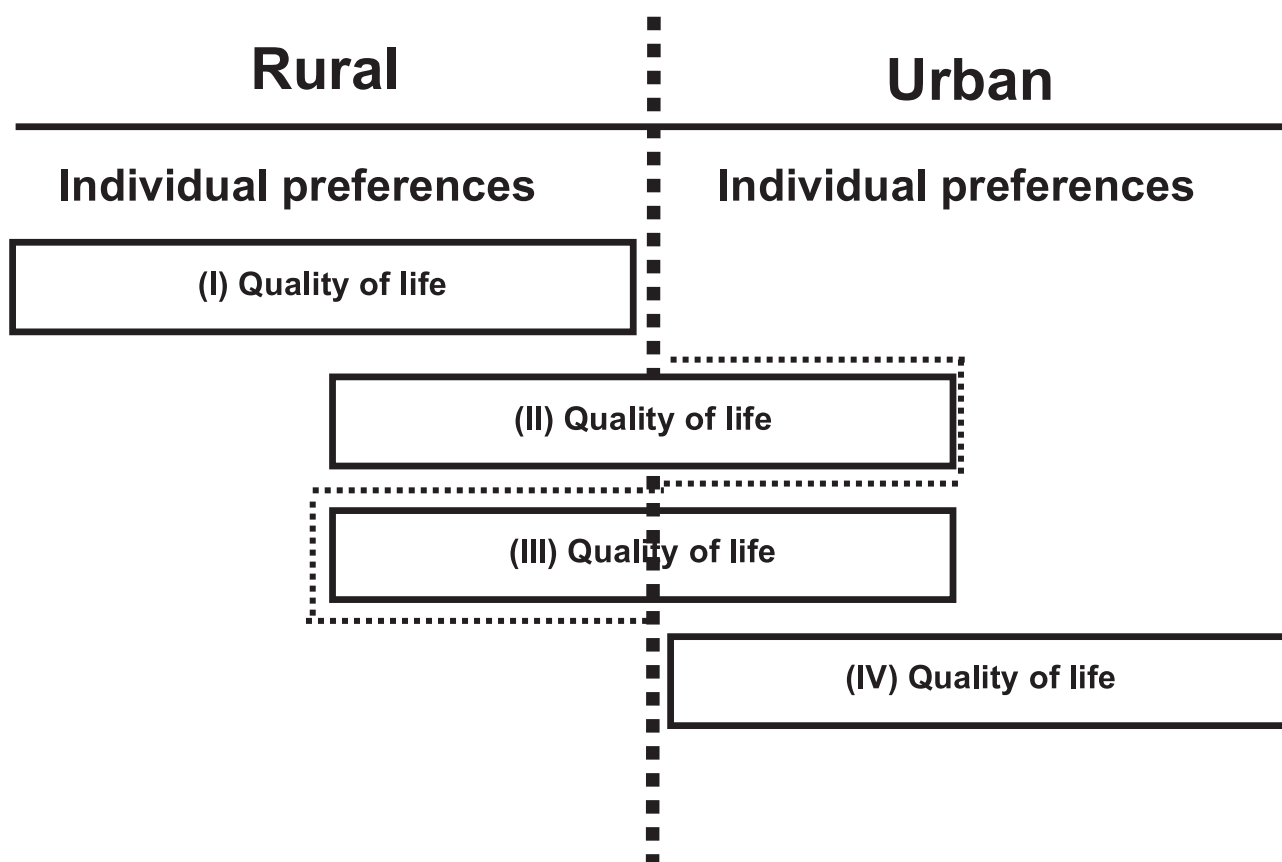
Figure 1 illustrates changes towards a new kind of environment and individual (life) phases. The figure is a result of experiences gained in researching urban-rural interactions and flexible life-styles in Finland

(Kahila & Rinne-Koski 2005). Quality of life in relation to urban-rural interaction depends on choices and actions based on individual preferences. Four different patterns can be described that are determined by peoples' desire to combine the 'best' parts of 'urban' and 'rural' milieus (I-IV). The first pattern (I) addresses individuals who prefer entirely rural areas and use urban areas only occasionally for instance for shopping or cultural activities. The second pattern corresponds to individuals who prefer rural areas as place of residence but their attitudes and needs towards urban areas are versatile (II). People who prefer urban areas as places of

residence but use rural areas regularly and actively for instance for recreational activities, or those who own a second home etc., are included in pattern (III). The fourth pattern (IV) refers to people to whom rural areas do not have any particular importance or meaning in their daily life.

Again, an individual may pursue only one pattern, choose between two or three or even switch between all four patterns within a lifetime. A single action will always appear within a wider and comprehensive ensemble of elements which, in practice, constitutes a broader circle of interdependencies.

Figure 1: Patterns of individual preferences concerning quality of life in urban-rural interaction (Kahila & Rinne-Koski 2005)



We may assume that the elements of quality of life in figure 1 are primarily arranged around the desire to improve one's quality of life that is actualised through these representations and the combination of rural and urban lifestyles. They may also however be perceived as separate lifestyles, in which case these two lifestyles can be seen to represent the extreme ends of the lifestyle spectrum thus complementing each other. The outcome is rural change that leads to diversified urban and rural interaction.

Thus far, the various efforts undertaken and the methods used in respect of the management of quality of life in the framework of urban-rural interaction have

been rather limited. The challenge for planners and policy makers remains to link micro-level interactions to macro-level changes. There is then a clear need to understand the various dimensions of quality of life. However, exploring the spatial aspects of quality of life in relation to urban-rural interaction on the basis of quantitative methods alone would be inadequate. Qualitative approaches are required in order to properly consider individual choices based on preferences and values.

Thus, it is important to reflect individual preferences regarding quality of life related issues in a daily perspective and generate (new) locally adapted

solutions and methods of policy-making within the context of urban-rural interaction. Subjective perceptions are in this respect not only meant to indicate where the challenges lie but also to identify potentials for improvements, e.g. in spatial planning. Subjective perceptions are also capable of bringing forth various aspects, which may compensate for the lack of quality

of life indicators. This kind of information is normally acquired by means of interviews or questionnaires at the individual level. Within spatial planning this is commonly viewed as a bottom-up approach, i.e. allowing people to directly influence their living conditions and environment (cf. chapter 4.3 & 5.3).

3. Policy approaches

How can individual aspects and perceptions be included in and matched with policy aspirations and targets in spatial planning and regional development? Individual aspects and quality of life related issues are increasingly considered as an important justification and operational pattern for community planning efforts (Pacione 2003). Quality of life is an attractive concept for developers and planners because it comprises a comprehensive and also a proactive approach to local action and circumstances.

If efficient, a shift to a quality of life based approach in spatial planning and development policy may have the potential to offer a balance between individual preferences and policy efforts. Under a quality of life paradigm, it will also be possible for policy-makers to initiate new measures and processes and create long-term investments and thus attain improved quality of life for people living in the community. This is attractive for policy-makers in the context of the need for sustainable development and smart growth and also for residents given that they are increasingly concerned about public safety, air quality, having a peaceful neighbourhood etc.

Building a policy based on quality of life necessarily draws upon issues like equity and efficiency. This partly relates also to the bringing together of two different worlds: amenity planning and a rational approach to planning. Although the setting of objectives inevitably varies between regions, it should be possible for communities to generate their own approach to quality of life questions. The key issue here to understanding and applying a quality of life approach in spatial planning and development policy is to have an adequate policy capacity to deliver such policies. The critical element in respect of appropriate capacity is the quality of local policy cultures. Healey (1998) argues that such capacity requires well-integrated, well-connected and well-informed policy environments to create opportunities and improve local conditions. The setting

of objectives must inevitably be a regional process but access to the appropriate levels of capacity undoubtedly enables communities to successfully generate their own approaches.

Healey argues further that collaborative approaches stress the necessity of building new policy discourses in order to develop stakeholder involvement and to widen different forms of local knowledge. In connection with Healey's arguments, individual aspects need to be highlighted as people are increasingly aware of their life situation and their subjective well-being. People also increasingly now connect their living conditions to their daily environment, which thus needs to be taken into account by planners and policy-makers when forming an effective approach to quality of life.

Recognised as having a significant impact on social and political trends, the concept of quality of life has become an increasingly important dimension in various policy fields, including spatial planning, environmental planning, health promotion and social policy. In a practical sense, quality of life measures are now intrinsic to development policies on the local, regional, national and EU levels. Although the notion of quality of life found its way into policy agendas it has not yet been sufficiently integrated into these agendas as adequate definitions and comprehensive perspectives remain elusive. Policies, for instance, often focus on specific areas, e.g. income, housing or environment not taking into account possible (negative) interdependencies (EEA 2009).

In the following, we look into policy documents at the EU level to see how they address the concepts of quality of life and urban-rural interaction. Later we concentrate on the Baltic Sea Region and examine to what extent quality of life in urban-rural interaction has been addressed in policies at the national and transnational levels.

3.1 EU policy documents addressing quality of life

The European Strategy for Sustainable Development (the Gothenburg Strategy) was one of the first policy documents to include the concept of quality of life. The strategy defines 'Improving quality of life' as one of its goals towards sustainable development in the European Union. Due to the strategic direction of the document,

quality of life is however rather understood through the environmental lens that stresses e.g. the efficient use and management of natural resources (CEU 2006). Quality of life as perceived at individual level was however highlighted by the EU Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development in 2007 when they

adopted the Territorial Agenda for the European Union. Besides sustainable economic growth, job creation, and social and ecological development, the agenda stresses “better living conditions and quality of life with equal opportunities irrespective of where people live”. As such, a territorial dimension was added to the concept of quality of life (COM 2007).

The EU Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion 2008 discusses quality of life in the light of current challenges such as growing major cities, resource efficiency and the provision of services. The paper emphasises the need for balanced regional development, close cooperation between levels and sectors and calls for improved governance and integrated approaches to address current challenges (CEC 2008).

In the Territorial Agenda for the European Union 2020, the term quality of life is no longer explicitly mentioned. However, the agenda still supports territorial cohesion and pinpoints “Territorial Priorities for the Development of the EU”. One of the priorities entitled “Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions”, highlights the importance of “long-term solutions to maintain economic activity by enhancing job creation, attractive living conditions and public services for inhabitants and businesses” especially for territories that need to cope with depopulation. In this way then it could be argued that related aspects and elements of quality of life have been included throughout the agenda (COM 2011).

3.2 EU policy documents addressing urban-rural interaction

In 1999 the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) introduced urban-rural partnership to spatial planning in Europe. The document highlights the interdependencies between urban and rural areas and underlines the necessity of common approaches and partnerships. Instead of competing against each other the idea is to utilise ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ assets in order to tackle common issues and challenges (EC 1999).

Regional territorial assets such as the capacities of both people and businesses are also considered crucial for a region’s competitiveness and prosperity in the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. The paper introduces the concept of functional regions as an intermediate level of governance to regional development. Cooperation between authorities and stakeholders, levels and sectors

is recommended as an integrated approach towards balanced regional development (CEC 2008).

Those points have also been taken up in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 which promotes territorial cohesion by emphasising polycentric and balanced *territorial* development. It is, once again, broad partnerships and integrated governance that are supposed to support urban and rural areas to identify common assets and elaborate joint development strategies. The paper suggests functional regions in the sense of city-regions (i.e. city plus peri-urban neighbourhoods) as well as cooperative activities beyond administrative borders including the private and public sectors (TA 2011).

3.3 Quality of life in urban-rural interaction – policy approaches in the Baltic Sea Region

Looking at the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) several pan-Baltic organisations reflect the EU policy goals concerning quality of life and urban-rural interaction in their strategic documents by stressing the relevance of applying the concept of quality of life to urban-rural settings. The relevant strategies described below elaborate the framework for, and direction of, future activities in the member countries and cities in the BSR.

Transnational level

An important document on the macro-regional level in the BSR is the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). The document provides an Action Plan for the Member States addressing issues concerning the marine environment, prosperity, transport and energy as well as safety and security. As the strategy makes no provision for new institutions, funding, instruments or regulations, its role is rather as an integrated framework by which to utilise existing structures, institutions and actions – many of these in the form of projects funded

by the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. In terms of the topic, the strategy stresses the need for coordinated joint actions in the BSR, aims to make the Baltic Sea Region an accessible and attractive place, and suggests the need (in so doing) “to pay special attention to the quality of life of citizens” (CEC 2009).

As an important pan-Baltic actor VASAB (Long-Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region, Vision and Strategies around the Baltic 2010) concentrates on territorial cohesion as promoted by the EU (cf. chapter 3.2). In its strategy, VASAB focuses on transnational cooperation in spatial planning, territorial integration, more specifically on urban networking and urban rural relations as well as accessibility and management of the Baltic Sea. Joint transnational and cross-border activities as well as cooperation and partnership between urban and rural areas are proposed as *actions* to be taken in order to tackle future challenges such as e.g. unemployment, migration, accessibility and attractiveness (VASAB 2010).

The concept of quality of life is included in the overall city development and planning claims the Union of the Baltic Cities’ (UBC) Sustainability Action Programme 2010-2015. The action programme highlights the *individual* dimension of quality of life and calls for participatory planning methods and citizen involvement in city development and planning. Furthermore, the agenda highlights the need to monitor people’s quality of life and to implement targeted actions (e.g. pedestrian and cycling pathways) to improve well-being, health, accessibility and attractiveness in UBC cities (UBC 2009a).

Last but not least, the Council of the Baltic Sea States/Baltic 21 points towards the need for “symbiotic” partnerships between cities and rural landscapes in the Baltic Sea Region in its Strategy on Sustainable Development 2010-2015. According to the strategy interaction and dependence between the urban and rural areas can be mutually supportive contributing to an improved quality of life. Thus the document calls

for the better management of urban-rural interaction (CBSS 2011).

National and regional level

Regional development and planning is generally addressed in both National Spatial Plans and National Development Plans in almost all BSR² countries. Sweden does not have a policy document for spatial planning at the national level. While the relevant national policy documents vary in detail, urban-rural interaction and its common management is however highlighted in a general sense. The concept of quality of life is implicitly addressed in relevant national planning documents dealing with sustainable development. The understanding of quality of life related issues ranges from economic wealth and social inclusion to environmental questions (Steinhauer 2009).

The concept of quality of life is also included in development strategies at the regional level. In some cases its improvement is even explicitly formulated as a strategic goal. Nevertheless, these strategies focus on certain aspects that are considered to be crucial in respect of improved quality of life. Those aspects include the following: infrastructure, environment, waste management, investment, transport, education and sustainability.

Having said this, quality of life is still not sufficiently well recognised and addressed in policy documents on either the national or regional levels. The documents moreover lack an integrated approach to managing quality of life issues in the urban-rural interaction context. In order to attain the goal of improved quality of life, individual perspectives need to be taken into account, reflecting everyday situations and challenges. Thus, the need remains for more bottom-up approaches to the quality of life issue in regional planning and development strategies taking into account local inhabitants’ perspectives and preferences across and beyond administrative borders.

² BSR countries considered here: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

4. Towards the implementation of quality of life – Conceptual Framework

Improving the quality of life and urban rural partnerships are main aims in policy documents at the EU and Baltic Sea Regional levels (cf. chapter 3). Although the concept of quality of life found its way into policies and strategies, the approach to implementing certain measures has not yet been sufficiently considered. A coherent definition of quality of life and especially ‘good’ quality of life does not exist which makes it difficult for policy- and decision-makers to set targets and take actions. Moreover, quality of life is perceived individually and touches various policy areas (cf. chapter 2.1). In order to be able to properly integrate quality of life into planning processes the concept needs to be operationalised while involving the individual level.

In order to address the gaps and respond to the policy documents described above, the NEW BRIDGES project was developed and approved under the priority “Attractive and competitive cities and regions” of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. During its duration between January 2009 and January 2012 the project involved eight local and regional authorities as well as three international organisations from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. The project aimed at improving the management of urban-rural interaction and strengthening quality of life by pursuing seven different approaches towards the following objectives, namely, to:

- Apply the concept of quality of life to regional planning and development and thus contribute to increasing the attractiveness of cities and regions as places to live and work.
- Challenge administrative borders and help in the construction of new urban-rural partnerships that will address inhabitants’ and local stakeholders’ concerns regarding quality of life.
- Actively involve and engage inhabitants and local stakeholders in planning processes and bridge the gap between individual needs and policy and planning goals.

This discussion was mainly based around the Conceptual Framework produced by Nordregio at the beginning of the project. The Conceptual Framework provided a common approach for the implementation of the intended activities but also operationalised the concept of quality of life and clarified various other project terms. The main intention was to enable project activities to be viewed from a commonly understood perspective. Since all project partners had different initial starting points and characteristics the Conceptual Framework had an important role, basically, to function as a reference point upon which all partners could define their forthcoming activities within the project.

According to the Conceptual Framework, project activities were constructed around three pillars. Firstly, the concept of quality of life was operationalised by three key elements (residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services). Secondly, the key elements were investigated within the geographic scope of urban-rural interaction, in so-called city-regions of which seven were defined within the project. Thirdly, the project had a clear involvement approach focusing on the inhabitants and local stakeholders impacted by the project activities.

In the chapters to come, the following questions will be addressed on the basis of outcomes derived and analysed from the NEW BRIDGES project and partners’ activities:

- What kinds of challenges in respect of quality of life in relation to urban-rural interaction do local stakeholders raise in BSR city-regions?
- How can urban-rural interaction be better managed in order to address these challenges and strengthen the quality of life?
- How can newly developed approaches be integrated into regional planning structures?

The project was supported by VASAB who considered NEW BRIDGES to be a useful project in terms of attaining the objectives outlined in its Long-Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region, Vision and Strategies around the Baltic

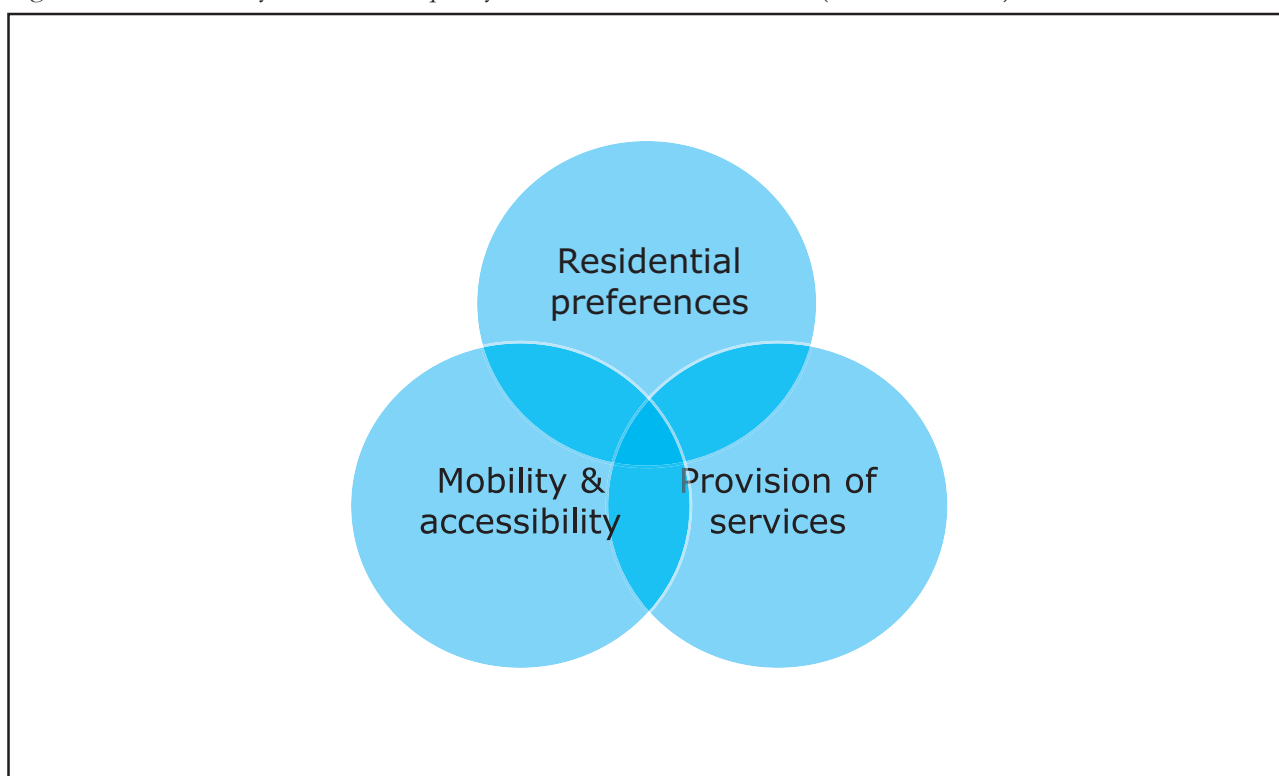
2010. CBSS/Baltic 21 approved NEW BRIDGES as a Lighthouse Project in 2009 because of its relevance and 'value added' in respect of the Strategy on Sustainable Development 2010-2015 (cf. chapter 3.3).

4.1 Operationalising quality of life

To be able to actually work with quality of life related issues and enable stakeholders to set a comprehensive strategy for the improvement and progress of quality of life in urban-rural management later on, we pursued a pragmatic approach in the NEW BRIDGES project and operationalised quality of life rather than

interrogated the concept thoroughly. In the project, quality of life was therefore understood in the light of individual preferences reflected in three key elements: residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The three key elements of quality of life in NEW BRIDGES (own illustration)



These three key elements defined the thematic framework in which the project partners could determine their own approach to quality of life and to the intended activities to be undertaken during the NEW BRIDGES project. Depending on local circumstances and individual preferences, it was kept open whether the project activities would concentrate on only one key element or would result in a combination of all three key elements. Working with these key elements in the NEW BRIDGES project the intention was to bring together individual preferences and policy-making processes as well as urban-rural management and spatial planning. The thematic framework was expected to enable project

partners to identify relevant challenges concerning the three key elements, while applying involvement methods and creating new partnerships. The following sections provide an insight into the three key elements as they were defined within the Conceptual Framework.

Residential preferences

Images and representations of the 'urban' and the 'rural' are interlinked and influence each other. It may also be assumed that these images and representations make people act on the basis of prevailing interpretations of reality, which are connected to everyday understandings of 'urbanity' and 'rurality' in the context of individual

life experiences. In other words, such images, representations and subsequently the related individual interpretations are critical when exploring residential preferences in regions with urban and rural structures (cf. chapter 2.2).

Changes in household structure or employment situation play an important role in the decision-making process on whether to move from one specific residential environment to another. Also retained preferences for particular residential environments might also influence the decision to move. Other key issues are perceived opportunities and restrictions concerning a person's actions in a given environment, neighbourhood or city, and the emotional, social, and socio-economic opportunities and restrictions that an environment offers. In practice, a new residential area needs to have something that a person may identify with and that presents an opportunity which a person either requires or plans to use (e.g. Champion & Fisher 2004, Brereton *et al* 2011)

Considering people's motives for relocating and drawing conclusions about the demand for residential areas, one has to be flexible about designating between urban and rural areas. Both types have to be defined in a rather broad way, because researchers and planners do not, generally, consider the notion of 'rural' and 'urban' in the same way as the individual does. The characteristics of desirable rural and urban environments around regions are often identified under broader meanings such as quiet, green, safe, space etc. In reality however it is merely a question of semantics and socio-cultural traditions in countries or regions whether these areas are regarded as rural or (sub)-urban.

Expressed preferences for particular types of residential areas have an important influence on decisions in respect of choosing new places of residence. We should however also pay attention to a household's constraints and resources that allow or prevent a move from an urban to a rural setting. Such resources and constraints have an impact on the individual household's ability to make relocation decisions (Van Dam *et al* 2002).

Mobility and Accessibility

Aspects of accessibility and mobility concern the ability of people to access and engage in different opportunities and activities. According to Farrington & Farrington (2005) the use of quantified factors alone is insufficient to properly measure accessibility. Thus, value-based judgements of peoples' accessibility should also be considered. The "culture of mobility" is linked to different social, economic and cultural backgrounds and refers to the extent to which services are demanded, accessed and used. The perception of

accessibility has to be recognised as a potential driver of how areas function and how people behave in relation to accessibility. Therefore, different cultures of mobility need to be explored and characterised as the basis for improved planning towards the creation of better accessibility.

The major explanation of prevailing developments in urban-rural dynamics relates to changes in the spatial distribution of employment opportunities. Significant changes have occurred in employment patterns between urban and rural areas while the mobility of workers has increased (e.g. Tervo 2008). Thus, one of the most important explanations for contemporary trends refers to changes in residential preferences and commuting patterns caused by advances in, and the lower real cost of, transportation and communications technologies.

Increasing individual mobility and access to affordable forms of transport has led to formerly 'rural' areas becoming increasingly infused with urban influences and interests. As such, an area can be regarded as 'rural' in terms of land use and population density while the people living in these areas exhibit attachments, perceptions and values which are more 'urban' than 'rural' in the traditional sense and are dependent on a range of particular social and economic circumstances. One of the key issues in this regard is that of individual mobility. For instance, supermarkets have the potential to anchor other services provided in small towns, strengthening town-hinterland linkages and weakening wider linkages to larger urban centres (Powe and Shaw 2004). On the other hand, supermarkets may lead to the demise of other independent services in the town itself, with negative knock-on effects for rural development in terms of economic growth and tourism (Powe and Shaw 2004). In addition, it should also be borne in mind that, due to the increasing diversity of lifestyles and consumption patterns, daily mobility patterns are becoming much more complex. This is most evidently the case in larger, densely populated regions because of the enormous choice of geographically spread facilities for shopping, recreation and other social activities.

Provision of services

In the urban-rural context, the provision of services is especially relevant in terms of residential location and mobility. Hence this element is closely connected to the notion of residential preferences as well as to mobility and accessibility. The expansion of urban areas into rural settings can substantially improve access to services. Better transport to services within regions will increase people's access to information as well as to administrative and political decision-making structures. Increasing flows of people may also assist in broadening access to important sources of knowledge, allowing

households to respond more effectively to consumer preferences and the provision of services (Powe and Shaw 2004).

If the desired services in rural areas do not have sufficient quantity or quality, lifestyle choices may diminish the stock and viability of such services through the increased consumption of urban services. Recent research has indicated that ‘newcomers’ in rural areas tend to maintain their consumption habits and to exhibit stronger ties to larger urban centres (Powe & Shaw 2004). Hence, not only the general level of accessibility is critical, but also the quality and even the level of individual capacity (e.g. with regard to *e*-services) to use the provided services. However an important question remains: To what extent do the existing services truly meet the peoples’ needs and how can they more effectively benefit from the services already provided?

Efforts to improve accessibility to services have focused predominantly on local accessibility planning and have tended to deal primarily with transportation issues. Solutions designed to improve access to services need also however to be determined in closer proximity to local level actors and in relation to local structures.

Only on the local level can these services be better directed in accordance with the characteristics of the local area and the requirements of reaching service consumers who may represent different population groups (e.g. young families, retirees) with different demands in respect of the type, proximity and frequency of services (Moseley 2008).

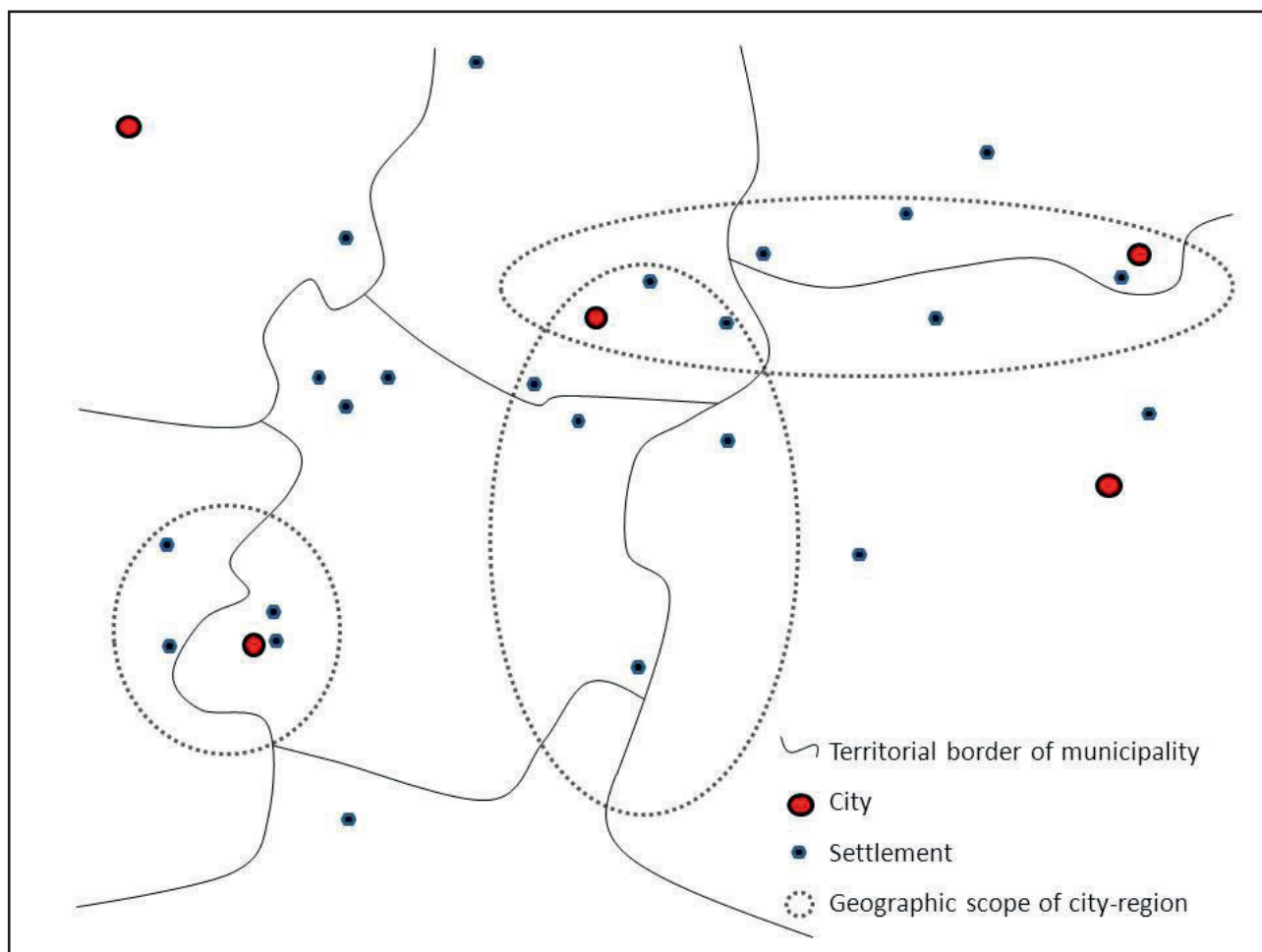
For many residents in urban-rural areas, especially for people who have access to a private car, the problem of access to services is less significant than the attractions of living in a beautiful area. On the other hand, for people with lower incomes and without access to private transport the resulting potential lack of access to services may have a significantly negative effect on their quality of life. Service equality is therefore an important issue in respect of social justice between different residential areas but it can also be regarded as an issue of sustainability. This means that disparities in service provision may have direct implications for the individuals affected but also for the future sustainability of the different residential areas in regions in terms of people’s choices and preferences. This can, in return, have a significant impact on the socio-economic well-being of the entire region.

4.2 City-regional approach

Within the NEW BRIDGES project urban-rural interaction was conceptualised through *city-regions*. A city-region was understood as a complex network of urban-rural interaction that determines a certain geographical scope depending on the existing facilities and assets such as infrastructure, services and housing stock rather than following administrative or territorial borders. The concept recognises that such facilities and assets imply certain geographies for several stakeholders (e.g. mayor, private firm and inhabitants) and their specific logics and rationales. The quality, performance, interdependencies and accessibility of these facilities and assets to be found in the city-region are considered

crucial to the individual appraisal of quality of life (cf. chapter 2.1). Therefore the complex pattern of urban-rural interaction needed to be considered within the city-regional context in order to understand the challenges in respect of strengthening the quality of life. Moreover, the geographical scope of a city-region was supposed to reach beyond administrative borders and to cover ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ areas based on challenges that were defined in relation to the three key elements of quality of life (cf. chapter 4.1). Figure 3 depicts the possible geographic scopes of city-regions as applicable in the NEW BRIDGES project.

Figure 3: Possible geographic scopes of a city-region (own illustration)



4.3 Involvement approach

Quality of life is generally perceived individually (cf. chapter 2.1). Consequently the NEW BRIDGES project pursued an involvement approach that would in the first instance address the individual level. Inhabitants, but also representatives from interest groups,³ should be involved especially at the beginning of the project when identifying challenges concerning quality of life in the city-region. Secondly, the involvement approach is aimed at local stakeholders who became fundamentally important for the development and implementation of the pilot actions. For more detailed information on how we defined local stakeholders in the NEW BRIDGES project see box 1.

The involvement approach towards the pilot actions aimed to synchronize individual perspectives on quality of life in urban-rural interaction with strategies and policies formulated at the local and regional levels. Therefore the project for instance tried equally

³ By interest group we mean a group of individuals who have a common interest in a certain topic, e.g. cycling, green space in cities or bird species.

to incorporate inhabitants' needs as well as planners' visions in respect of the three key elements of quality of life: residential preferences, mobility and accessibility and the provision of services in city-regions. Based on the Conceptual Framework, the involvement approach in the NEW BRIDGES project followed the structure and consecutive phases presented in table 2. The project activities in the city-regions kicked-off during the information phase (1) with the information meeting. Raising awareness for the project and identifying relevant stakeholders and challenges regarding quality of life were the main goals during this phase which aligned the different initial starting points in the city-regions at least to some extent (cf. chapter 5.1 & 5.2). The main purpose of the participation (2) and involvement phase (3) was to actively involve inhabitants and local stakeholders in the process of implementing the pilot actions accompanied by local stakeholder meetings. The analysis of individual preferences through surveys in the city-regions was an important tool enabling us to take full account of the individual level through

the gathering of individual perspectives on quality of life issues and the project process (cf. chapter 5.3). Phase 4 was dedicated to the implementation of the pilot actions which made cross-sectoral cooperation necessary (cf. chapter 5.5). During the reflection phase (5) the implementation of the pilot actions was finalised as far as possible (cf. chapter 5.4). Certain steps were

identified during the cross-sectoral working group meetings that would support the continuation of the cooperation as well as the integration of project outcomes into ongoing planning processes after the end of the project. The entire process was internally evaluated among local stakeholders involved in the project (cf. chapter 5.7).

Table 2: Involvement structure in the NEW BRIDGES project

Phase	(1) Information	(2) Participation	(3) Involvement	(4) Implementation	(5) Reflection
Goals	Awareness raising	Analysis of individual preferences	Selection of pilot actions	Implementation of pilot actions (as far as possible)	Reflection on implementation process
	Identify challenges in city-region	Analysis of local circumstances	Concrete engagement of local stakeholders		Evaluation of the entire process
	Identify relevant local stakeholders	Active involvement of local stakeholders	Identification of relevant sectoral stakeholders		
		Specification of challenges identified			
Meetings	Information meeting	1 st Local Stakeholder meeting	2 nd Local Stakeholder meeting	1 st Cross Sectoral Working Group meeting	2 nd Cross Sectoral Working Group meeting

Box 1: Local stakeholder

A local stakeholder is an individual person (e.g. inhabitant, authority member, politician) or even a representative of a group (e.g. NGO, association, interest group) whose interests are affected by the NEW BRIDGES project, its thematic as well as geographical scope and those whose activities significantly affect the project and/or its parts.

Stakeholders (or different groups of stakeholders) follow different geographical logics. One illustrative example is the mayor of a municipality who naturally focuses his/her actions on the good of the entire municipality, since he/she has been elected by the inhabitants living in this particular municipality (and assumedly they want to be re-elected). So the geographical scope is, in the first place the respective municipality. Real estate developers however follow a very different geographical logic. They want to exploit certain market potentials in some areas. They generally care little for municipal borders. They follow a rather functional rationale, i.e. what they define as their market defines the geography of their actions.

Naturally this is a very narrow definition, since the mayor as well as the entrepreneur is at the same time an inhabitant of one particular city-region. This means that they might also define their geographical logics beyond their professional lives, i.e. from an everyday perspective as consumer/individual using personal criteria to describe the attractiveness of a certain city-region such as its quality for e.g. housing, mobility, services or recreation.

5. Improving quality of life management – Baltic Sea Region approaches

The NEW BRIDGES project supported local and regional authorities throughout the Baltic Sea Region in their individual processes towards improving quality of life management in urban-rural planning. Within the Conceptual Framework developed during the

project (cf. chapter 4) the partners started their own implementation processes. The various *operative steps* undertaken with a view to contributing to better quality of life management are described in greater detail below.

5.1 Defining the geographic scope – NEW BRIDGES city-regions

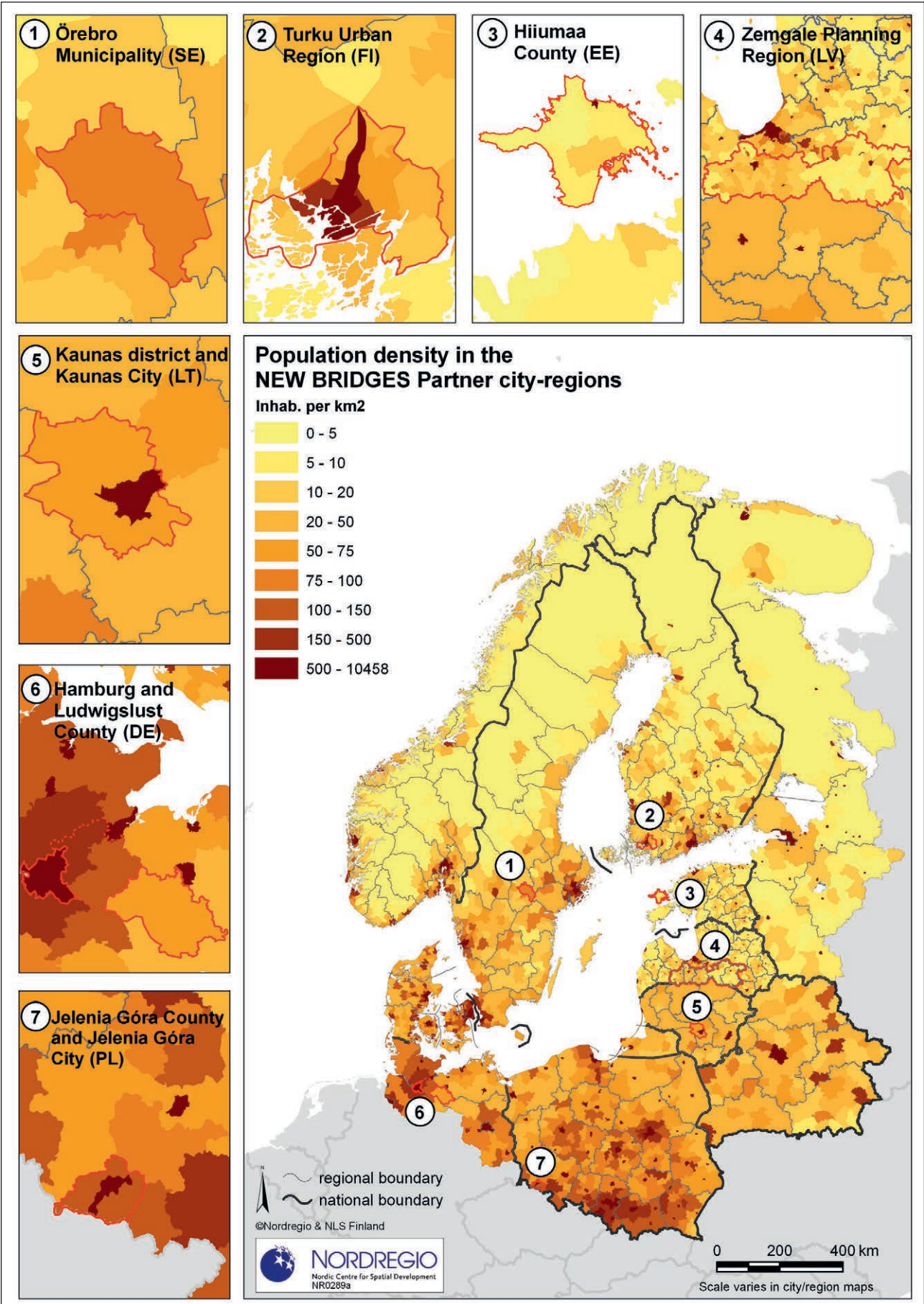
Based on the city-regional concept (cf. chapter 4.2), the project partners defined seven city-regions located throughout the Baltic Sea Region (cf. map 1). Reflecting local circumstances, priorities and challenges, the city-regions - while following various geographical demarcations - turned out to be very different. The city-

regions were either based on informally agreed networks and partnerships or already formally adopted networks. Five out of the seven project partners installed a *new* mode of governance for a certain geographical area that reaches *beyond* existing administrative borders. (cf. table 3).

Table 3: Geographical demarcation in NEW BRIDGES city-regions

Geographical demarcation	NEW BRIDGES city-regions
Area of an informal existing network	City of Hamburg and Ludwigslust County in the context of the Metropolitan Region Hamburg (DE)
Partnership with one or more neighbouring municipality(ies)	Örebro and Lekeberg Municipality (SE) Kaunas District and Kaunas Municipality (LT) Jelenia Góra County and Jelenia Góra City (PL)
Formalised (new) mode of governance	Municipalities within the Turku Urban Region (FI)
Official planning region	Zemgale Planning Region (LV) Hiiumaa County (EE)

Map 1: Population density in NEW BRIDGES city-regions (own illustration)



5.2 Recognising local circumstances

Reflecting different characteristics, local circumstances and policy environments, the city-regions had very different initial starting points ranging from metropolitan settings (as in Hamburg, DE), through networks of municipalities (as in Turku Urban Region, FI) to rather peripheral areas (such as Hiiumaa Island, EE). Nevertheless, the strengths and weaknesses of the NEW BRIDGES city-regions in respect of quality of life issues turned out to be rather similar. Generally, historical, cultural and natural values were recognised as supportive of attaining a better quality of life. However, a number of circumstances and trends (such as demographic development, migration, the lack of integrated strategies) challenge the planning processes in terms of utilising and maintaining these assets.

Strengths and weaknesses in respect of the three key elements of quality of life differ between urban and rural areas as well as between individual city-regions. Local identity is perceived as strong in urban (Turku) and weak in some rural areas (Jelenia Góra, Kaunas District). The provision and accessibility of services is counted among the strengths of urban areas (Hamburg, Jelenia Góra, Turku and Zemgale) while it is either lacking in some way or almost entirely absent in rural areas (Hamburg, Jelenia Góra, Kaunas District). The transport infrastructure (i.e. facilities, connectivity, quality) functions well in the cities (Hamburg, Jelenia Góra, Turku) whereas remote areas in the city-regions are undersupplied. Improvements are needed regarding common urban-rural transport facilities (Hamburg, Kaunas District, Jelenia Góra). Demographic developments, migration and thus a declining population, especially in the rural areas of the city-regions, can also influence the perception of quality of life negatively in those areas (Hamburg, Jelenia Góra).

Weaknesses and gaps are also recognised when tackling quality of life related issues such as lack of integrated strategies (Hamburg, Örebro, Jelenia Góra)

or common policies e.g. concerning the provision of services (Jelenia Góra, Turku) as well as mutual communication and cooperation between authorities, stakeholders and the other actors concerned.

The seven city-regions also faced a number of common challenges concerning the three key elements of quality of life. The declining population level, due to demographic development and migration, necessarily has a long-term impact on the provision of private and public services especially in rural and partly suburban areas (Hamburg, Hiiumaa, Zemgale) and on public services in general (Kaunas District, Jelenia Góra, Turku, Zemgale).

Transport systems on the city-regional level need to be prioritised in order to maintain and strengthen accessibility and mobility between rural, suburban and urban areas for people living in city-regions (Hamburg, Kaunas District, Jelenia Góra, Turku, Zemgale). Working across administrative borders, even on the basis of a new governance approach, was seen as a challenge by most of the partners. One particular issue in this respect is to overcome the lack of communication and cooperation between relevant stakeholders and to find appropriate governance structures that would enable new partnerships and address quality of life related issues on the city-regional level (Hamburg, Jelenia Góra, Örebro, Zemgale). The conservation of nature (Örebro) and cultural landscape as well as social issues as part of the quality of life concept are also seen as important issues (Hiiumaa, Kaunas District, Jelenia Góra, Turku, Zemgale). The provision of job opportunities especially in the rural areas of the city-regions was mentioned by a number of partners (Hamburg, Hiiumaa, Jelenia Góra, Zemgale). It was thus the task of the NEW BRIDGES project to help the city-regions to cope with and more effectively address such challenges. Table 4 summarises most relevant information concerning the NEW BRIDGES city-regions.

Table 4: Main characteristics of NEW BRIDGES city-regions

City-region	PD ⁴	Administrative setting	Quality of life related aspects
City of Hamburg, Ludwigslust County & Brunow (DE)	2,351 49.5 17	Metropolitan Region of Hamburg, 3 federal/city states (including the City of Hamburg), 3 counties (including Ludwigslust), Brunow municipality	Public and private transport, long-term and local provision of services in rural areas, house prices in urban areas
Hiiu County (EE)	10.9	County of Hiiu, 5 municipalities, City of Kärda	Provision of job opportunities, migration, mobility, public transport, accessibility of services, attractiveness, nature and culture preservation
County (Poviat) of Jelenia Góra and City of Jelenia Góra (PL)	100 772	County of Jelenia Góra, 9 municipalities, City of Jelenia Góra	Public and private transport, accessibility of services, nature and culture preservation
Kaunas District and Kaunas City (LT)	56.5 2,254	Kaunas District, 25 sub-districts, City of Kaunas	Public and private transport, infrastructure, accessibility of services
Turku Urban Region (FI)	586	Turku Urban Region, 14 municipalities, City of Turku	Residential preferences, public and private transport, provision and accessibility of services
Zemgale Planning Region (LV)	29.3	Zemgale Planning Region, 22 municipalities	Public and private transport, accessibility of services
Örebro and Lekeberg Municipality (SE)	94.5 14.7	County of Örebro, 12 municipalities (including Örebro and Lekeberg), and City of Örebro	Quality of life as such, youth unemployment, accessibility of services

⁴ PD = Popular Density in persons per sq.km



Bus connection between Riga and surroundings (LV)



Local grocery store outside Turku (FI)



Nemunas River in Kaunas District (LT)



Inner-city recreation in Wrocław (PL)

Pictures: Stefanie Lange

5.3 Involving inhabitants and local stakeholders

The involvement of local stakeholders and inhabitants was crucial to the success of the NEW BRIDGES' project activities (cf. chapter 4.3) as their individual perspectives were seen as vital. Local meetings organised by project partners throughout the project's duration (cf. table 2) were the main tool to get inhabitants and local stakeholders involved in the NEW BRIDGES project. A number of different involvement methods were introduced and applied during the meetings (e.g. brainstorming, focus groups and world café) in order to structure discussions and to identify the most relevant challenges concerning quality of life in the city-regions. The involvement methods were taken from and accompanied by the 'Stakeholder Involvement Toolkit for Local Authorities: Engage your stakeholders'⁵ published by the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC 2009b). The involvement methods used will not be further discussed in this report.

Surveys and interviews among inhabitants and local stakeholders were found to be appropriate methods through which to gather individual perspectives on quality of life related issues in the respective city-region and whether they should be incorporated into decision-making processes in respect of pilot actions. 'Good practice' examples derived from the involvement approaches in NEW BRIDGES are presented in detail in the UBC Good Practice Database⁶.

Local inhabitants were primarily involved, at the beginning of the project, in identifying the challenges that emerged in respect of the three key elements of quality of life (residential preferences, mobility & accessibility and the provision of services) while policy- and decision-makers, among others, were increasingly engaged as the project developed towards the setting up of pilot actions and implementation.

As urban-rural interaction was the primary focus of the project, the partners were asked to identify relevant stakeholders not only within their authorised territory but also across administrative borders; within the city-region. Most of the partners succeeded in creating closer cooperation or new partnerships between stakeholders, e.g. working with one or more municipalities (Örebro, Turku, Hamburg) or city and district (Kaunas, Jelenia Góra). Based on the challenges identified, relevant policy- and decision-makers as well as other actors working in different sectors (e.g. public transport, private services) were brought together to discuss the potential pilot actions to be implemented. Cooperation between stakeholders from different

authorities, municipalities and sectors represented a new approach in most of the city-regions concerned and was perceived as being both fruitful and necessary in tackling the common challenges faced in an effective manner.

Over the duration of the project a total of 1528 local stakeholders, including local inhabitants, were involved in the various project activities across the seven studied city-regions. Each project partner organised at least one information meeting, two local stakeholder meetings and two cross-sectoral working group meetings. These local meetings saw 820 participants of which the majority were practitioners e.g. (planners, civil servants, authority members; 464). In addition, representatives from associations and NGOs (including chambers of commerce; 76), researchers (55), politicians and mayors (as decision-makers; 45 respectively 30), private business representatives (46) and journalists (12) also participated in the meetings (cf. figure 4)⁷. Local inhabitants (42) were however somewhat underrepresented in the local meetings. This may be the case for a number of reasons. Firstly, the involvement of local inhabitants in planning and decision-making processes is a rather new and often challenging task. Given the timeframe and everyday obligations, the project partners had to work in a resource-efficient manner without much time to experiment with different methods and tools. Secondly, joining a local stakeholder meeting as a 'local inhabitant' requires a certain degree of self-confidence. People often simply do not consider themselves to be local stakeholders in the sense of having a real 'stake' in the process.

Corresponding to the different local circumstances (e.g. population density), the number of participants in the meetings differed between the city-regions. For instance the meetings in Hamburg (DE) and Turku (FI) brought together 167⁸ and 209 participants respectively whereas only 63 local stakeholders joined the meetings in Hiiu-maa (EE).

The information meetings (first meetings, cf. table 2) saw the highest number of participants in almost all city-regions after which the amount of participants decreased significantly. This is of course due to the broader scope of the information meeting and the more targeted approach in the following meetings. As the processes evolved towards concrete pilot actions,

⁷ The figure shows only the approximate variety of participants as the categorization of participants into certain groups have been done by the partners and based on participation lists. This might have caused a different understanding of who belongs to which group.

⁸ Participants who participated more than once are however counted only once.

⁵ The toolkit can be downloaded from: <http://www.matruschka-project.net/index.php/matr:toolkit>

⁶ UBC Good Practice Database: <http://www.ubcwheel.eu/>

the interest of inhabitants and stakeholders became, on the one hand, more targeted while on the other the project partners now knew better whom to involve and thus the range of relevant local stakeholders

narrowed. The size of each meeting varied between 96 (information meeting in Hamburg, DE) and 5 (2nd local stakeholder meeting in Hiiumaa, EE). On average, each local meeting took place with 24 participants.

Figure 4: Stakeholders involved in local meetings throughout the NEW BRIDGES project (own illustration)

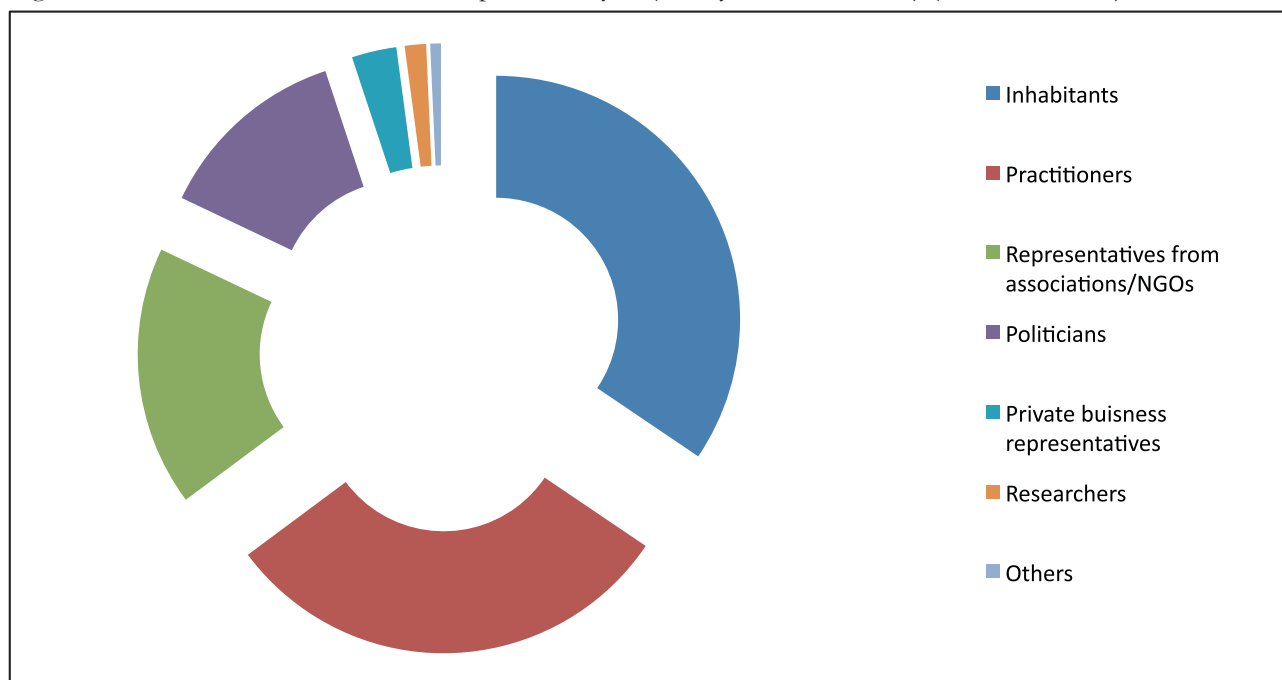


The empirical analysis conducted during the NEW BRIDGES project consisted of a survey among local stakeholders and inhabitants as well as interviews with policy- and decision-makers engaged in the city-regions. The survey was an additional tool used in addition to the local meetings to reach the individual level.

In total, 708 local stakeholders, of whom 244 were local inhabitants, responded to the survey that was conducted in five city-regions (cf. figure 5). The survey on individual preferences regarding the three key elements of quality of life (residential preferences, mobility and accessibility and the provision of services) provided feedback to the project partners concerning

their respective processes as regards the pilot actions. The majority of the people involved in the survey agreed upon the activities and on what was considered important in respect of quality of life in the city-regions. According to the survey results, the work done by the regional authorities and planners within the NEW BRIDGES project broadly matched the individual preferences of the local inhabitants and stakeholders concerned. The result of a survey that was conducted on quality of life in Örebro Municipality (about 16,000 respondents) prior to the NEW BRIDGES project was recognised in the regional analysis but is not included in figure 5.

Figure 5: Stakeholders involved in the empirical analysis (surveys and interviews) (own illustration)



Through both the local meetings and the surveys, inhabitants could only be involved to some extent given the fact that individual preferences are crucial when discussing quality of life related issues in regional planning. Local stakeholders were however engaged in all city-regions and interested in the NEW BRIDGES

project and its Conceptual Framework. With the implementation of concrete pilot actions as the main aim in the project this made the process attractive to many local stakeholders gaining both their interest and their involvement.

5.4 Implementation of pilot actions

The NEW BRIDGES project aimed at implementing so-called pilot actions. Box 2 provides examples of what a pilot action could be in this sense. The pilot actions were used as important tools guiding discussions regarding quality of life in urban-rural interaction towards concrete activities. The preparation and implementation of pilot actions challenged local stakeholders to think in practical terms within a new mode of governance: the city-regional level. Moreover, the pilot actions encouraged discussions and ideas that would improve quality of life in the city-regions 'on the ground'. The measures and actions to be implemented would thus be close to people's everyday lives and bear upon the quality of life related issues they face regularly.

The pilot actions were also meant to confirm the new urban-rural partnerships established during the project and to provide 'good practice' examples on the city-regional level.

Although not all pilot actions were finalised by the end of the project the activities were and are strongly linked to ongoing strategic and planning work in the city-regions. The pilot actions were partly financed by the NEW BRIDGES project and became practical examples for how the concept of quality of life could be operationalised and further integrated into planning activities while showing what is required in order to improve quality of life issues management and thus strengthen urban-rural interaction.

Box 2: Pilot action

A pilot action as understood in and initiated during the NEW BRIDGES project:

1. A pilot action is a concrete action or measure implemented up to the end of the NEW BRIDGES project. Depending on the challenges identified in the city-region the pilot action can address local transport issues (e.g. improvement of bus connections), the provision of services for specified groups of the population (e.g. elderly people, families with children) or land use patterns (e.g. second housing or infrastructure related to residential preferences).
2. A pilot action is a process aiming at introducing NEW BRIDGES outcomes into existing strategies (or strategies currently under preparation) in a more inventive way such that, for instance, it adds a new angle to the strategy rather than complementing the document (e.g. gain commitment of new groups of stakeholders or a clear individual approach to the planning process).

A pilot action can also combine 1) and 2). Generally the pilot action had to correspond to the project partner's capabilities and to the financial resources available within the context of the project's life cycle.

The NEW BRIDGES pilot actions are described in brief below. In addition, detailed information concerning good practice examples, methods and tools applied in the NEW BRIDGES pilot implementation processes have been published in 'Planning together for Better

Quality of Life - Guide for Integrated Management of Urban Rural Interaction' and the 'NEW BRIDGES Online Toolkit'. Both publications can be accessed at <http://www.urbanrural.net>.

Table 5: NEW BRIDGES pilot actions

No.	Title	Geographic scope	Stakeholders involved ⁹
1	Local shop and services	Ludwigslust County/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and the Hamburg Metropolitan Region	154 (13)
2	Detailed plan for urban distribution and marketing centre	Island of Hiiumaa: Kärda Town and Kõrgessaare municipality, linking other municipalities of Hiiumaa island, i.e. Käina, Pühalepa and Emmaste	59 (1)
3	Development of sustainable transport / Cycling paths network scheme	Area of Kaunas city and Kaunas district municipalities	90
4	System of integrated planning	One of the most intensive traffic lines in Jelenia Góra <i>powiat</i> , joining urban and rural elements (cities with villages)	96
5	Strengthening the quality of life on the border of three municipalities by planning sustainable housing areas, paying attention to housing preferences, to the accessibility of public transportation, and improving the provision of services across municipal borders	Eastern parts of Turku (the suburbs of Kohmo, Lauste, Vaala and Varissuo), northern parts of Kaarina and the southwestern part of Lieto + industrial areas Tuulissuo and Avanti (Turku Urban Region)	209
6	Sustainable mobility concept, evaluation of sustainability regarding housing preferences, and the provision of services of the partial master plan in progress across municipal border	Maaria-Ilmarinen partial master plan area in Turku and Lieto, public transport in addition northern Turku, Liedon asema and Aura (Turku Urban Region)	
7	Mobility development plan for rural areas	Zemgale Planning Region with possible inclusion of directions of service to other regions and cross-border roads to Lithuania	108
8	VINNA –In-depth Master plan for VINtrosa-Latorp and Hidinge-LanNA	Lekeberg and Örebro municipality	65 (28)

⁹ Stakeholders involved in local meetings organised during the NEW BRIDGES project. The number of inhabitants involved is shown in brackets.

(1) Local shops and services

This pilot action presents the exemplary service centre in the County of Ludwigslust which is designed to provide basic supply and other services for rural villages where the service level is currently very low. Various amenities such as post offices, shops, agricultural services, cafés and tourist information offices could be located in the service centre. The centre could also be modified according to local needs with, for example, meeting and communication points, administration services and interaction with health services arranged there thus offering better accessibility to basic services for citizens in rural areas and also contributing to the sale of regional products. On a more strategic level, the focus was on discussing what kind of role retail and services have in relation to sustainable development in rural areas and to regional attractiveness more generally. One of the expected results of the pilot action was the successful promotion of the idea in a conference and the sensitising of local and regional stakeholders to the idea. At the end of the NEW BRIDGES project a first draft of the concept including an indicative financial was developed.

(2) Detailed plan for urban distribution and marketing centre

The pilot action in Hiiumaa County concentrated on creating a detailed plan for an urban distribution and marketing centre. In Kärddla, there is an old harbour area that was destroyed in the Second World War for which the Kärddla municipality has prepared a new plan encompassing the marine area. The pilot action of the NEW BRIDGES project aimed at planning the area surrounding the marine area with a view to complementing the plan for the harbour area. The idea was to plan an urban centre with market facilities for local handicraft and food producers. The construction of the urban market centre is expected to be financed in cooperation with private partners. The marketing facilities of the urban centre were expected to give local handicraft and food producers the opportunity to provide better access to their products. The aim was to build a centre that would become a good example of island-based urban and rural cooperation. In addition to the preparations of the detailed plan for the urban centre, the potential for an increased number of local customers and tourists visiting the centre was identified and transportation routes were analysed. Further actions will include finding funding and investors and beginning the construction plan process.

(3) Development of sustainable transport / Cycling paths network scheme

In the Kaunas District and Kaunas City region, the pilot action developed aimed at creating a sustainable transport system and a cycling path network scheme for the area encompassing the Kaunas city and Kaunas district municipalities. The cycling paths network was expected to unite urban and rural areas and was to connect directly into the public transport scheme. Various service possibilities were also expected to arise alongside the paths network. Furthermore, the pilot action aimed at foreseeing suitable locations for terminals in areas where urban and rural areas merge and at promoting permanent cooperation and the coordination of public transport, traffic and taxes between Kaunas City and the district municipalities. The pilot scheme responded to the existing need for a joint urban-rural public transport system and a cycling path system in Kaunas district. It contributed to the promotion of cycling paths as a way to communicate and as an eco-friendly and healthy means of transportation. A final conference was held in Kaunas and decisions were made on the setting up of a working group for cycling development in Kaunas district and for the creation of a cycling development programme. Later, a cycling development programme will be drawn up and documents for infrastructural work in priority areas will be prepared. The active search for further financing in respect of project implementation will continue and a working group with stakeholders and representatives from the City of Kaunas and from the district municipalities will be established.

(4) System of integrated planning

The goal of the pilot action carried out in the city-region County (*Poviat*) of Jelenia Góra and City of Jelenia Góra was to develop a system of integrated planning in order to improve the quality of life and urban-rural interactions. According to the pilot action plan, the planned new system of cross-sectoral integrated planning between authorities would tackle challenges related to the high costs of transport organisation caused by the significant dispersal of houses and housing estates. The expected results of the pilot action were improved cooperation between local public institutions and improved urban-rural interactions and quality of life. All of the planned activities were concluded by the end of the project period however no binding decisions were made. The next steps after the conclusion of the project will be to spread the pilot action to cover all of the municipalities in Jelenia Góra and to do both quantitative and qualitative research on a regional integrated transport system. Technical investment will be dealt with after consultations with local governors in the Jelenia Góra district.

(5) Strengthening quality of life on the border of three municipalities by planning sustainable housing areas, paying attention to housing preferences, to the accessibility of public transportation, and improving the provision of services across municipal borders

Pilot action five is the first of two pilot actions undertaken in Turku Urban Region and consists of various actions related to residential preferences and sustainability, services, mobility and accessibility. Responsibility for the pilot action and its related activities is shared equally between the City of Turku and the Regional Council of Southwest Finland. The pilot action positively interacts with the PARAS project¹⁰, the structural model of Turku Urban Region and relevant municipal strategies.

Drawing up an idea plan for sustainable small scale housing with good accessibility was one of the main aims of this pilot. The pilot action aimed at promoting the provision of services across municipal borders and in particular increasing the usage of surplus services in the part of the area that belongs to the City of Turku. Further, it was central to the pilot action project to aim at overcoming the social barriers between the immigrants in the eastern suburbs of Turku and the well-off residents in Kaarina and Lieto.

The common result was expected to be an overall pilot concept for Turku Urban Region that would create an integrated management plan comprising a framework for evaluating sustainability and responding to residential preferences in proposed housing areas. The management plan would include a regional service centre network, a sustainable transport concept and a structure for a regional public transport network. After the NEW BRIDGES project ended, a final seminar on all activities that took place under the pilot action was organised in 2012 in Southwest Finland. As a result of the pilot action, an idea plan for sustainable small scale housing with good accessibility was drawn up and was taken into account in the structural model for Turku Urban Region. The future priority actions include finding solutions to lowering the social barriers between the different kinds of areas and promoting the use of services across municipal borders. In addition, the City of Turku will now engage in collaborative master planning with the town of Kaarina regarding the Northern part of the pilot action area with a focus on service planning across municipal borders.

(6) Sustainable mobility concept; the evaluation of sustainability in relation to housing preferences and the provision of services of relating to a partial master plan currently in progress across the municipal border

The second pilot action in Turku Urban Region focused on creating a sustainable mobility concept and evaluating sustainability in relation to housing preferences and the provision of services in a partial master plan in progress across the municipal border. The pilot action area covered the border area between the City of Turku and the municipality of Lieto. The objectives of the pilot action included the development of a sustainable public transport network and a sustainable mobility plan as well as the extension of the public transport connections from Turku to Lieto and the promotion of cycling. The partial master plan for Turku and Lieto (in progress) was evaluated according to the themes of residential preferences, services and mobility and accessibility. The pilot action addressed challenges related to various issues such as what are the requirements for a good transport system network, what kind of demand is there for the kind of new housing that has been proposed in the idea plans and what are the requirements for better services and accessibility.

Other activities within the pilot action covered five municipalities including the main road and the railway to Turku. The settlement structure of the area is considered difficult because it is rather dispersed but the surrounding countryside is commonly considered attractive. The municipal plans were evaluated with the most suitable areas for further housing development selected. The sub-project also aimed at contributing to the creation and maintenance of a feasible service network in the area which currently suffers from a rather dispersed settlement structure. A public transport structure was planned to function in conjunction with the main road. Walking and cycling within and between towns and villages was also promoted.

Another sub-project focused on the former municipality centres of Merimasku, Rymättylä, Velkua, Askainen and Lemu and aimed to support them by directing housing and especially by promoting leisure housing activities. The sub-project further contributed to maintaining basic services in the former municipality centres by developing new service concepts and providing leisure time services. Developing a sustainable transport concept with an economically feasible bus transport system for areas with low population density was also one of the main goals here.

¹⁰ PARAS project: Project to restructure Finnish local government and services http://www.stm.fi/en/strategies_and_programmes/paras

Towards the end of the NEW BRIDGES project period the Regional Council of Southwest Finland reported that the pilot action activities had been broadly involved in the work with a newly completed regional structure model. An agreement between regional authorities was reached in September 2011 but the management of the mobility concept will need further national financing. In the near future, the implementation of regional mobility management and cycling improvement are envisaged. In addition, a new bus network with cross-border bus lines will start operating in July 2014 and the public transport network included in the regional structure model will be implemented.

(7) Mobility development plan for rural areas

The objective of the pilot action in the Zemgale Planning Region was to draw up a mobility development plan for rural areas in order to improve the road infrastructure and the public transport system in the countryside and thus increase the accessibility of rural areas. The pilot action dealt with challenges related to discontinued traffic routes for buses and railway lines that make it difficult for the rural population to access cities. It also addressed problems related to poor coordination as regards the transport system where bus and train timetables are simply not integrated. The weak level of accessibility undoubtedly impacts on the unemployment problem in the region although the recent mobility development plan was expected to indirectly address this issue. Furthermore, the territorial reform process, overseeing the creation of larger municipal units has taken administrative centres further away from rural areas. The expected result of the pilot action was an elaborated mobility development plan with concrete actions that would function as a useful midterm planning document for Zemgale Planning Region (2012-2018). At the conclusion of the NEW BRIDGES project, the elaboration of the mobility plan was complete but work on updating and improving the plan continues. The mobility plan has already become an established planning document in Zemgale Planning Region and is used as an instrument to attract financing.

(8) VINNA –In-depth Master plan for Vintrosa-Latorp and Hidinge-LanNA

The aim of the pilot action in Örebro Municipality

was to cooperate across municipal borders between the municipalities of Örebro and Lekeberg and to plan the bordering rural areas of the two municipalities as one rural area. The main aim of the pilot action was to initiate a long-term strategy for strengthening the role of quality of life in urban-rural regional planning. Cooperation between different authorities was promoted and the aim was to draw up a common Master plan for Örebro and Lekeberg. The planning process is long and it will continue after the end of the NEW BRIDGES project. The focus of the pilot action was on housing, public transport systems and local services. A long term strategy for stakeholder dialogue was also developed. In the project, it was considered important to make issues related to the quality of life and the social dimensions of planning more visible and to make those issues equally important with the economic and ecological dimensions in sustainable development planning.

The pilot action tackled two main problems. The first is related to the current situation where physical planners and social planners work separately for the most part and are thus not necessarily able to understand each other. The aim was to get the representatives of the two professions to work together, to share their experiences and knowledge and to identify benefits and advantages of integrated and cross-sectoral planning. The second challenge dealt with citizens' involvement. Individual needs and ideas concerning quality of life are dependent on gender, age, culture, education and other factors which are not always, in practice, taken into consideration in planning processes. As such, a fuller dialogue between politicians and citizens was developed.

The pilot action contributed to cross-sectoral cooperation, citizen involvement, the development of a children's Geographical Information System (GIS), to the formal decision-making process at the 'right' level and to future sub-projects. A platform for cooperation across municipal borders was established but the challenge remains to maintain it. It will also be challenging to continue to keep the citizens involved and to encourage them to continue to participate as well as to include the concept of quality of life in future planning processes. As a result of the pilot action, stakeholder involvement is expected to be more broadly used in the region and the tools and methods related to participation and sustainable development will be further improved and disseminated. Two or three further sub-projects will also be set up.

5.5 Interacting across administrative borders and sectors

In order to strengthen quality of life in the city-regions, the cooperative management of common activities across administrative borders and sectors was identified as one of the main pillars in the NEW BRIDGES project. Through local meetings, stakeholders representing different interests were involved in the process from the identification of challenges to the implementation of the pilot actions. A number of stakeholders were present throughout the entire process, some left and others joined as the activities became more concrete. About 40% of the stakeholders were first involved in the second half of the project, namely, in the planning and implementation phase of the pilot actions. Figure 6 shows the three patterns of cooperation among *key* stakeholders that occurred during planning and implementation of the pilot actions. In most cases however the processes conducted in the seven NEW BRIDGES city-regions were based on at least two if not all three patterns of cooperation.

In order to fully address quality of life related issues in the context of urban-rural interaction and to be able to identify suitable pilot actions, cooperation across administrative borders was adopted as the basis for further discussions and activities (cf. figure 6A). Cross-border cooperation between two or more municipalities took place in three city-regions (Kaunas, Turku and Örebro). In the city-regions of Hamburg, Hiiumaa and Jelenia Góra, stakeholders representing the city-state and the county government cooperated with other stakeholders working on the municipal level. For the implementation of pilot actions further cooperation was however required.

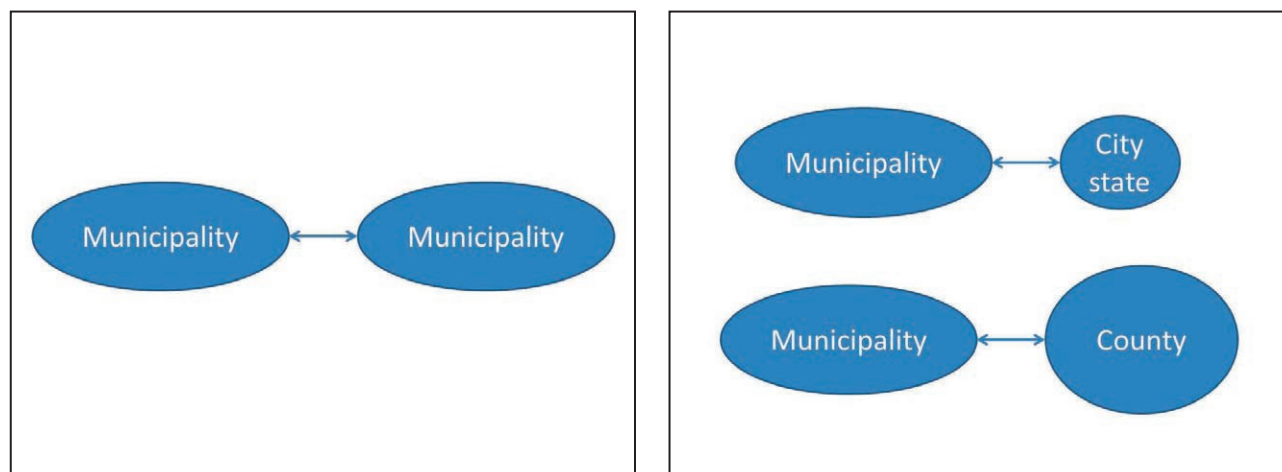
Due to their separate bases of legitimacy, cooperation between stakeholders responsible for transport related issues on the regional and national levels was crucial to the implementation of pilot action activities in Zemgale Planning Region. The pilot action implementation process in Hamburg city-region also required cooperative discussions between different levels of government (cf. figure 6B).

Private companies or public agencies were involved in almost all processes at some stage. Cross-sector cooperation became increasingly important towards the implementation period of the pilot actions. In the case of Zemgale, the planning authority actively involved transport companies (bus operators) whereas consultant firms were engaged in Hiiumaa and Jelenia Góra. Representatives from public agencies dealing with transport and mobility were engaged in the city-regions of Örebro and Turku Urban Region (cf. figure 6C).

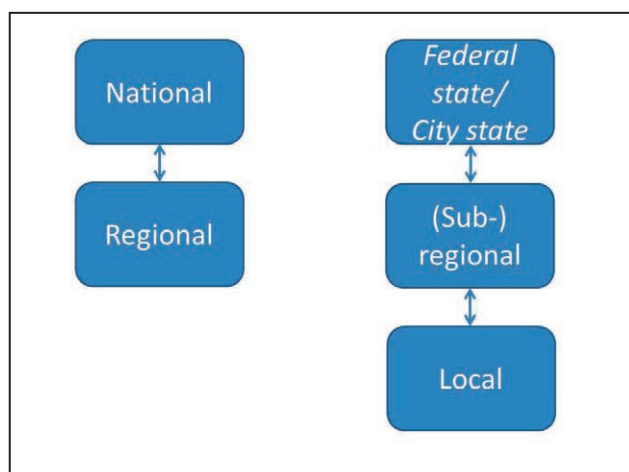
In order to strengthen the quality of life and improve the management of urban-rural interaction, cooperation across administrative borders, levels of government and sectors was essential to the success of these processes. Stakeholders shared common issues and needed each other's engagement in order to properly tackle the issues identified. Through the NEW BRIDGES project local stakeholders were not only involved in meetings and discussions but were able to cooperate and create new partnerships. Thus the project installed a new mode of governance on the city-regional level (cf. table 4).

Figure 6: Patterns of cooperation in city-regions, simplified (own illustration)

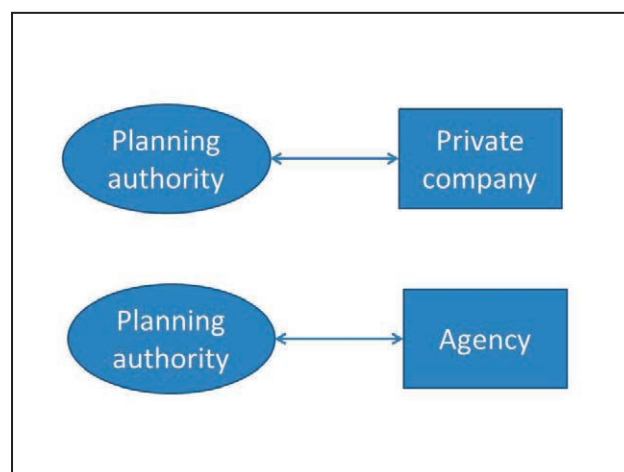
A) Across administrative borders



B) Across levels of government



C) Across sectors



5.6 Transnational cooperation

Despite different local circumstances and initial starting points the project partners learned from each other by exchanging experiences concerning their processes. Transnational cooperation, inherent to all INTERREG

projects, was facilitated during project meetings where project partners participated in targeted workshops. Table 7 lists these project meetings and the topics of the individual workshops.

Table 6: Project workshops

Meeting date	Meeting place	Topic of the workshop
September 2009	Stockholm (SE)	Stakeholder involvement
May 2010	Kaunas (LT)	From challenges to pilot actions
February 2011	Turku (FI)	Integrated Management System
June 2011	Wroclaw (PL)	Learning from each other's progress
November 2011	Hamburg (DE)	Communication of results

By discussing both common challenges and individual questions, the partners were introduced to the various approaches to quality of life, good practice in respect of managing urban-rural interaction while also learning about planning structures in other city-regions and BSR countries. Differences in planning systems and cultures and in the size of the budgets available to the various project partners made transnational cooperation difficult but at the same time interesting and inspiring.

All project partners appreciated the field trips and peer visits organised during the project. The field trips and project meetings took place back-to-back and supported the understanding of urban-rural interaction

and the city-regional approach. From practical examples e.g. of a local grocery store, bicycle routes and city-regional planning approaches, the partners derived new ideas and adopted good practice solutions in their own city-region. Peer visits were organised among the regional authorities themselves and on the basis of similar challenges and pilot actions. Project partners visited each other and discussed in-depth their approaches in accordance with their special fields of interest and pilot actions. Questions over the extent to which this new knowledge was 'institutionalised' need however to be more fully analysed and thus are not further addressed in the context of this report.

5.7 Stakeholder's point of view

As described above, local stakeholder involvement was one of the main pillars in the NEW BRIDGES project and was seen as crucial to the processes implemented in the seven city-regions (cf. chapter 4). To evaluate the involvement approach internally and receive feedback from local stakeholders, an internet-based survey was conducted in November 2011 within the project. All questions were translated into the partners' respective languages. In total, 206 stakeholders who had been involved in the NEW BRIDGES project at some stage received the questionnaire of which 65 representing all city-regions responded (31.5%). As the number of local stakeholders involved in the processes and thus the number of responses varied quite extensively between the city-regions, the following analysis can only provide a general point of view.

Evaluating the cooperation

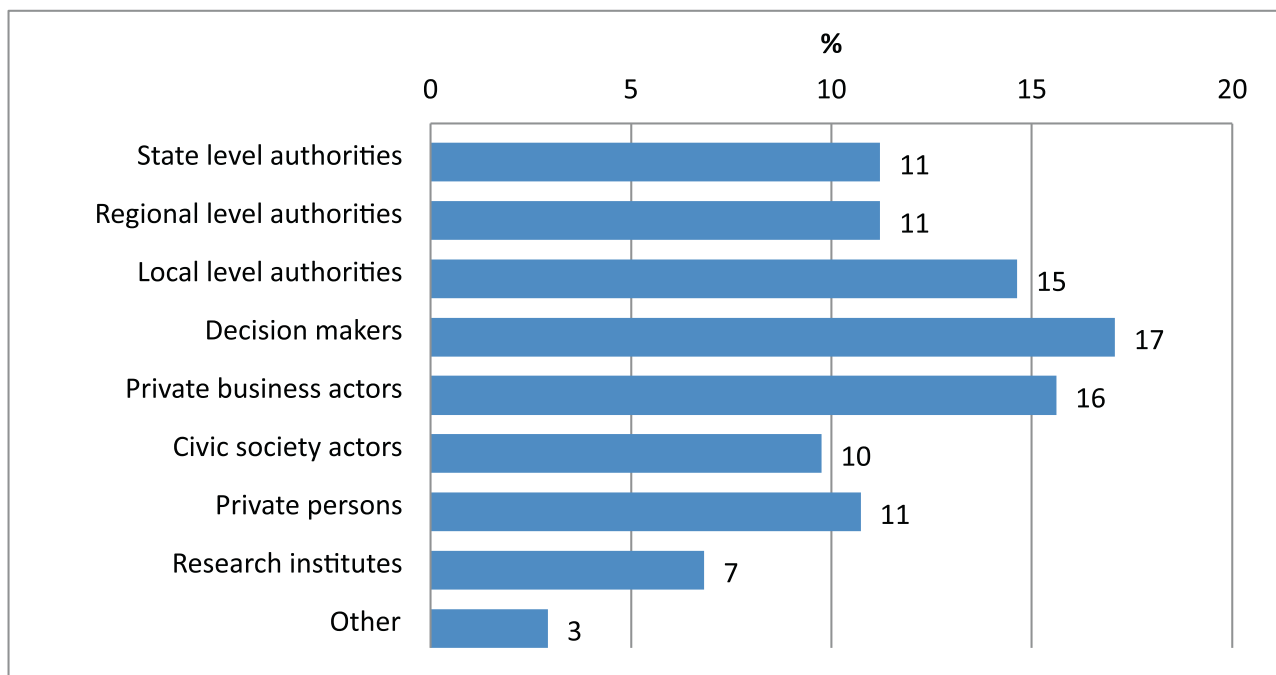
The majority of the respondents were authority members (75%) of which 55% worked at local authorities, 6% at regional and 14% at national authorities. This reflects the different patterns of cooperation (cf. chapter 5.5) while also underlining the level of interest and engagement held by public authorities, especially at the local level, in the NEW BRIDGES project. It may perhaps have been expected that the regional level authorities would have had a greater interest in being involved in projects like NEW BRIDGES. However, we have to bear in mind that the state level authorities responding to this questionnaire were normally located at the regional level. Moreover, we should also recognise the different regional and local level administrative structures in the countries that will have a demonstrable effect on the distribution of answers. 5% of the respondents were decision-makers. The survey also reached other groups of local stakeholders who were involved in the processes such as private persons, representatives from interest groups/NGOs and researchers. Most of the local stakeholders were highly engaged in the processes as 70% of the respondents participated more than three times in local stakeholder meetings organised in their respective city-region. The distribution of answers corresponds with figure 4 (see chapter 5.3) in which the involved stakeholders are presented. It can however be said that the process in the NEW BRIDGES project was authority driven and that the project as such did not fully reach out to non-administrative people and organisations. The participation rate at the local stakeholder meetings was rather high as more than 70% of respondents participated in these meetings on more than three occasions.

Looking at local networks, 80% of the respondents knew two or more stakeholders who participated in the local meetings, 8% knew none of the participants and 6% knew all of the participants. Again, local circumstances differed between the city-regions, i.e. the likelihood that stakeholders would know each other is much higher in a smaller community like Hiiumaa compared to Hamburg. While one third of the respondents would have cooperated to the same degree with participants they met during the local stakeholder meetings, about half of the respondents elaborated less cooperative activities without the meetings. Thus, the NEW BRIDGES project brought local stakeholders together, strengthened and challenged already existing cooperation while also contributing to new partnerships.

People participated in the local stakeholder meetings based on their own existing contact networks, or alternatively based on the contact networks of their colleagues. The strength of the existing cooperation structures in the city-regions was supported by the fact that - although stakeholders had cooperation with each other - the NEW BRIDGES project succeeded in combining existing cooperation structures. This outcome was encouraged by the fact that one-third of the respondents would have had cooperation with the participants in the local stakeholder meetings to the same degree and about half of the respondents somewhat less.

Although a network behind a variety of actions can be regarded successful, there is always a requirement, or at least a desire, to have broader participation rate in various meetings. The same characteristic can be found with regard to stakeholder involvement in the local stakeholder meetings in the NEW BRIDGES project. The respondents indicated (figure 7) that local level authorities, decision makers and private business actors were the stakeholders most often required if objectives were to be attained or implemented successfully. It is also worth noting here the emphasis on this placed by local level authorities. It could also be argued that the activities in a project like NEW BRIDGES have to be anchored to existing administrative structures. This fact alone suggests the need to increase the involvement of decision-makers. Another dimension indicates the importance of business partners as 16% of the respondents pointed out that private business actors were generally absent from the stakeholder meetings but required to make the process work. On the other hand, civic society actors and private persons were not to the same extent seen as essential in the stakeholder meetings.

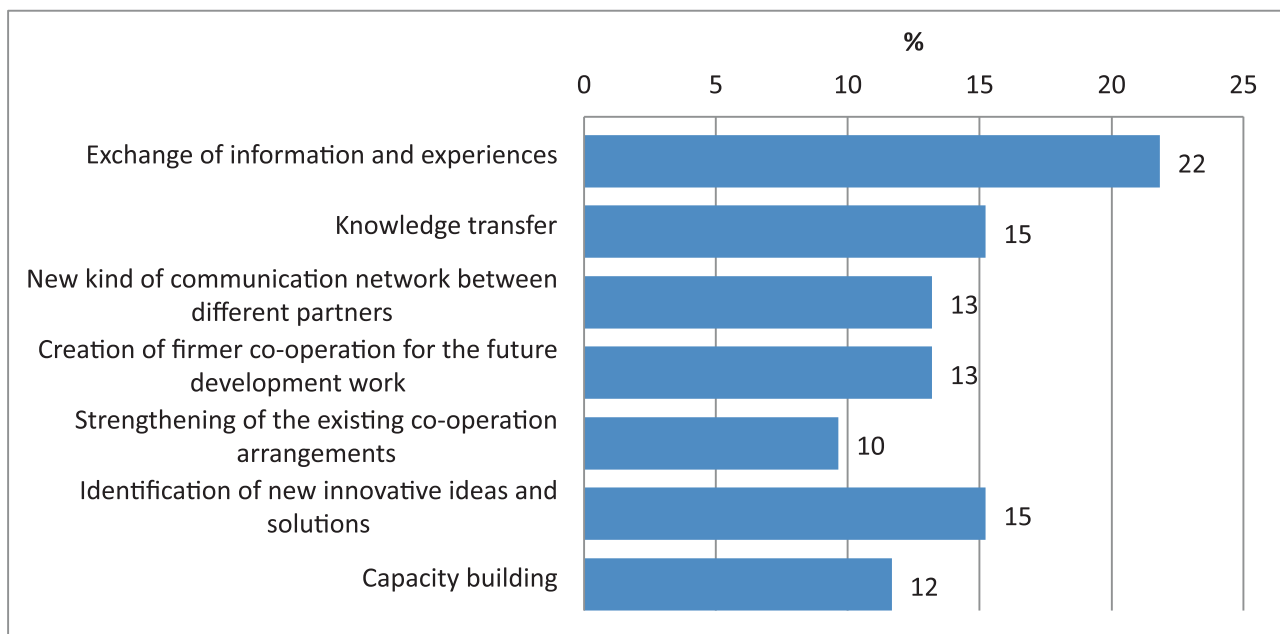
Figure 7: Local stakeholders required to make the processes work (own illustration)



Normally projects like NEW BRIDGES are carried out by local and/or regional authorities leading to their more intensive contribution during the course of the project. Involving regional and national level authorities in the project implementation process will however promote better integration of the project's activities with broader national and regional strategies. Private actors often have a more practical point of view as regards project implementation and, as such, they tend also to put more emphasis on material investments than other groups. It may be argued on the basis of previous questions that local government authorities have a major role to play in the coordination and initiation of the participatory development process and also in the mobilisation of resources. However, the main challenge is to structure the initiative in a way that it develops institutional capacity at the local level. This refers directly to the need to foster participation rates of the non-governmental sectors and private persons.

On considering the success of the cooperation structure in the NEW BRIDGES project the crucial question is, what are the main benefits and outputs? Figure 8 below illustrates the results from this point of view. The most important benefit gained from the cooperation structure was the exchange of information and experiences. This was seen as the main benefit by 22% of respondents. Knowledge transfer and the identification of new innovative ideas and solutions were also viewed as important benefits and/or outputs of the cooperation undertaken in the project. The intentions and objectives of various projects often focus on a strengthening of current cooperation structures and the enhancing of capacity building. It is however noticeable that the cooperation structures where, in part at least, already in place in the city-regions as strengthening existing cooperation structures and capacity building received the lowest rated responses from the respondents.

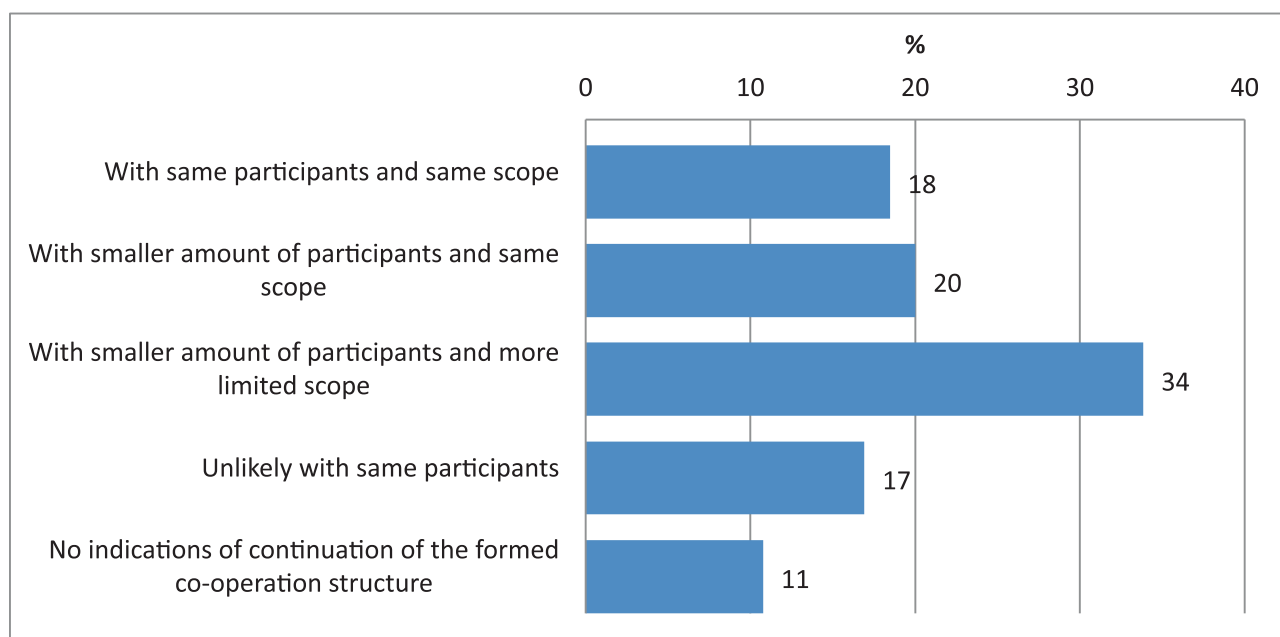
Figure 8: Added value of cooperation (own illustration)



The majority of the respondents indicated that the established process and cooperation would continue after the end of the NEW BRIDGES project. However, 34% stated that the number of participants as well as the scope of activities might decrease while 11% of the respondents do not expect the project to continue (figure 9). This generally positive attitude towards continuation reflects the necessity of further cooperation on the matter either because of the cooperation providing

valuable experience and good practice or due to the fact that there are remaining challenges which need to be addressed. It could be argued that the higher level of motivation in respect of maintaining the cooperation structure reflects successful implementation of the activities in the project. It is clear however that the project did not achieve all its set objectives and thus that further challenges remain. These issues will be further analysed in the context of the following sections.

Figure 9: Continuation of the established cooperation (own illustration)



Evaluating the implementation process

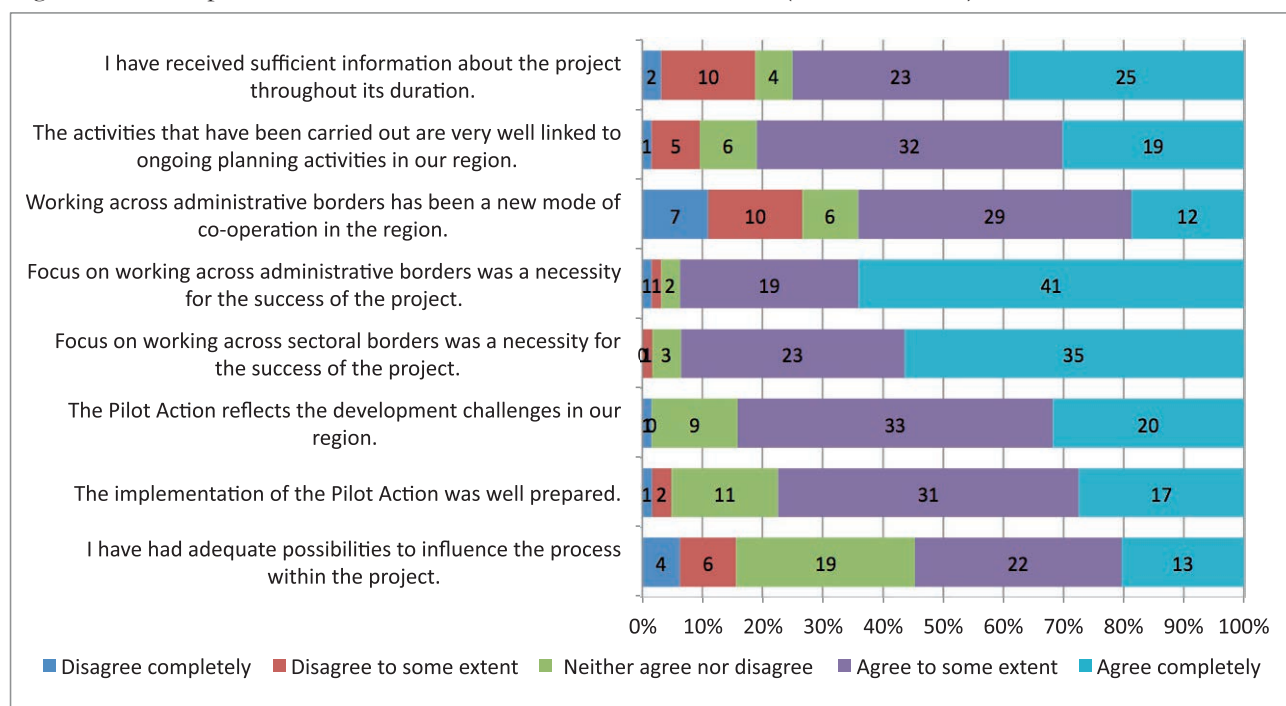
The processes utilised in the strengthening of quality of life issues and improved management of urban-rural interaction in the city-regions were evaluated by a set of statements concerning quality of life, urban-rural interaction and stakeholder involvement.

The implementation of the cooperation structures in the NEW BRIDGES project was evaluated by presenting eight statements to the respondents. It is clear from figure 10A that the focus on working across both sectoral and administrative borders was regarded as a necessity for the success of the project. This manner of working across administrative borders was not however a totally new experience in the city-regions. One crucial issue here in relation to the implementation of project activities is how well can activities be merged with ongoing development processes and strategies in the region? Again we can clearly see from figure 10A that project implementation addressed the development

challenges and that these activities were also strongly linked to ongoing planning activities in the city-regions. It has been one of the cornerstones of the NEW BRIDGES project to create innovative and new kinds of solutions that can be easily applied bringing new thinking to the ways in which planning procedures are set out.

The preparation of the cooperation procedures, i.e. local stakeholder meetings, was however the subject of some criticism from the respondents who suggested that there was in reality little opportunity to actually influence the context of the project. Some respondents, moreover, did not receive sufficient information about the project throughout its duration. One of the main reasons for this could be that most of the respondents were not involved throughout the entirety of the project. Nevertheless, this outcome underlines the importance of constant information delivery in respect of the project's activities through all possible channels.

Figure 10 A: Cooperation across administrative borders and sectors (own illustration)



The process of producing and promoting the NEW BRIDGES project activities will be analysed in two sets of statements: the first set of statements will underline the importance of quality of life in the city-regions while the second will gauge the involvement of the stakeholders. The concept of quality of life and its understanding and inclusion in the planning procedures was the central theme of the NEW BRIDGES project. We can clearly see from figure 10B that the concept of quality of life has become more transparent and better understood in the city-regions. The respondents recognised that quality of life is an important topic and they also understood better the various dimensions of

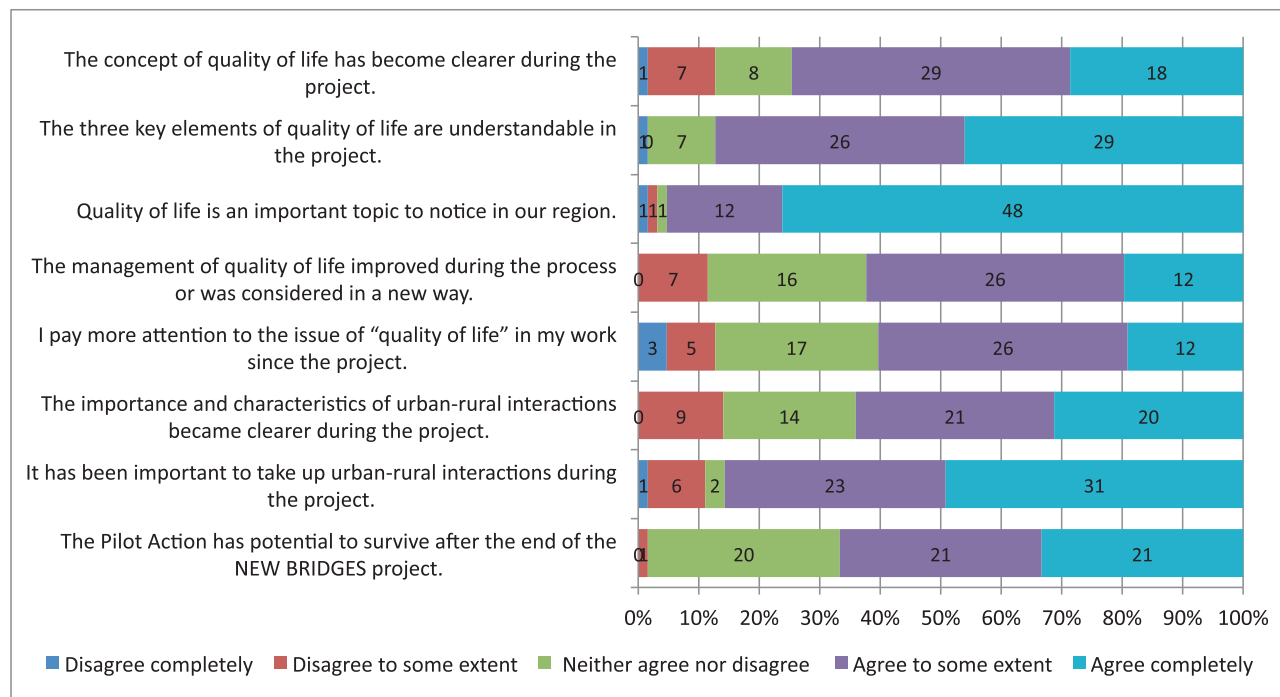
quality of life. Perhaps the most noteworthy issue here is the obvious improvement in the management of quality of life issues and observations about the dimensions of quality of life in the respondents' daily work. This development highlights that the NEW BRIDGES project has succeeded in creating a new approach to planning and development policies in the city-regions.

Another important theme in the project has been urban-rural interaction and understanding its different characteristics. According to respondents' reactions to the statements, this was important in acknowledging various dimensions of urban-rural interaction during the project. It is also important to note that urban-rural

interaction has become clearer for the respondents, but interestingly not as strongly as the concept of quality of life. It is however clear that the NEW BRIDGES

project has been very successful at underlining and strengthening the respondents' understanding of the concepts of urban-rural interaction and quality of life.

Figure 10B: The concepts of quality of life and urban-rural interaction in the project processes (own illustration)

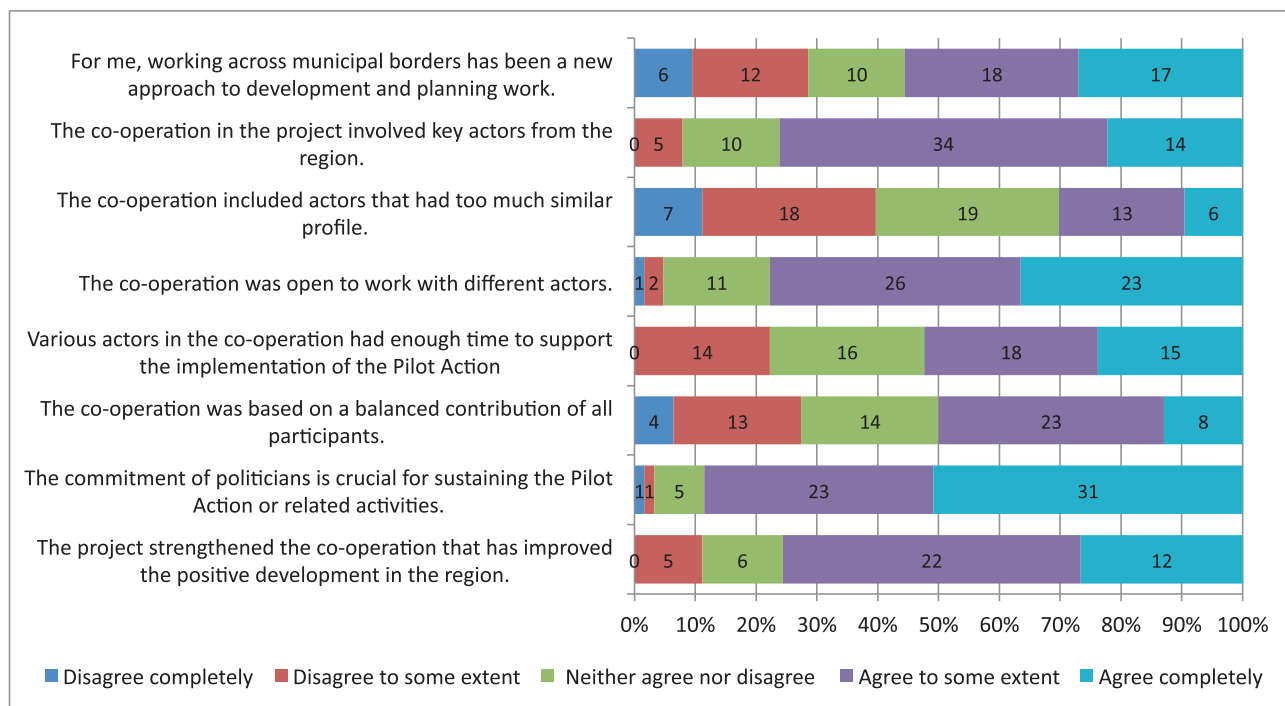


In the figure 10C, respondents judged a number of statements mostly relating to the involvement of various actors in the cooperation structures within the NEW BRIDGES project. The respondents considered the project particularly successful at involving politicians and the representatives of local and regional authorities. The involvement of the latter group can be explained by the fact that the local stakeholder meetings and other project activities were mainly run by local and regional authorities. There were also some respondents who assessed politicians' involvement less successfully. Inhabitants and private actors (like entrepreneurs) were two groups that proved less easy to involve. This point of view corresponds with the previous question about the groups that were central to the project activities. It could, however, be argued that this outcome was somewhat disappointing from the project's point of view because one crucial point was the question of how to involve individuals and other private actors in the planning procedures of the city-regions. Nevertheless,

the respondents also considered that the NEW BRIDGES project generally succeeded in bringing new people into the development activities.

The challenge of getting private actors and inhabitants involved in various project-related activities is not something that was specific to the NEW BRIDGES project. In reality the absence of private sector involvement is not simply the result of a lack of effort on the part of authorities or the project implementers. One crucial issue here is that the activities in a project like NEW BRIDGES are often intimately connected to core planning tasks making the project content not particularly attractive for private actors or local inhabitants more generally. The question of practicality is also relevant here again especially for private actors. The NEW BRIDGES project dealt with the concepts of quality of life and urban-rural interaction. These were not easy issues to approach even for the various authorities and other participants in the project.

Figure 10 C: Stakeholder involvement in the processes (own illustration)

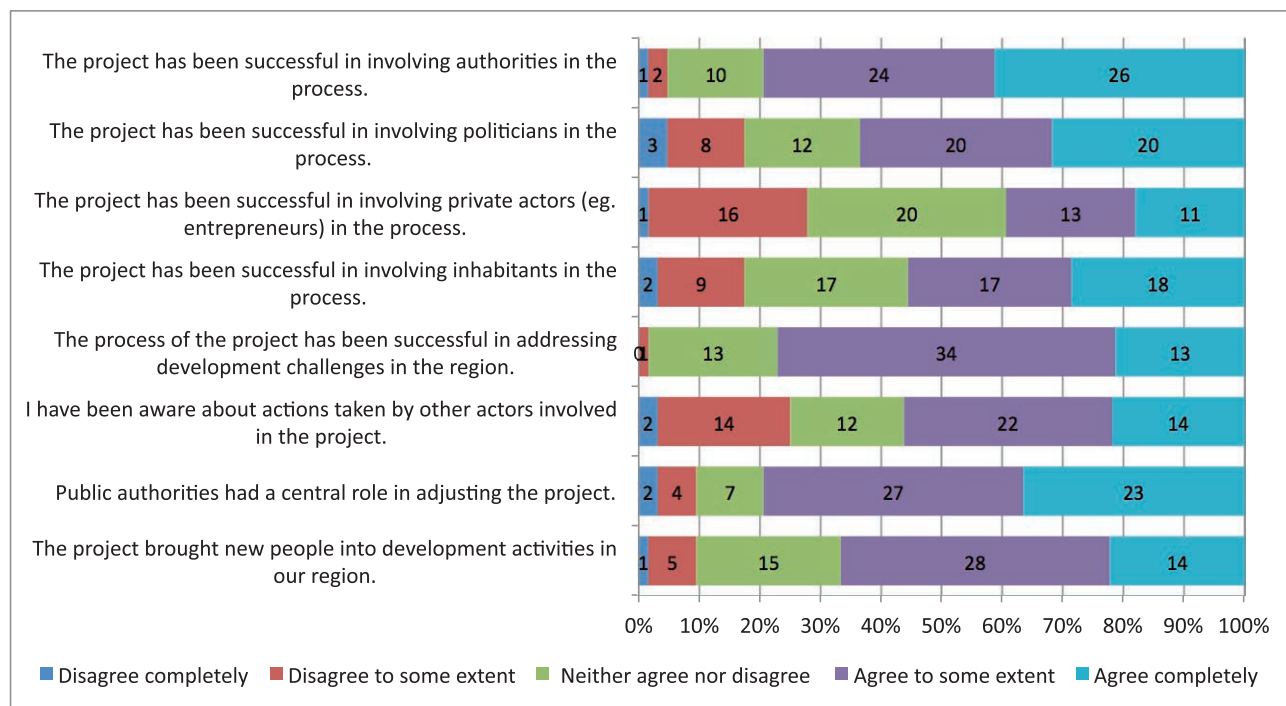


The last set of statements dealt with cooperation structure related matters (figure 10D). Here the respondents considered that the continuing commitment of politicians is crucial to sustaining the pilot action related activities. It is clear that within a project there is always the possibility to test and/or build some alternative or new kind of approach. However, in order to make permanent decisions, the commitment of decision-makers is indispensable. As such then, more effort should be made to get politicians involved in the processes, from the very beginning. The NEW BRIDGES project succeeded in involving a broad range of people across a wide range of project activities. The respondents assessed that cooperation was generally successful and that the project succeeded in involving *key* actors from across the city-regions. This point of view is also supported by the fact that cooperation did not include too many actors with similar profiles. It seems that the local stakeholder meetings were successful in creating new modes of complementary arenas where

people from different backgrounds and professions had the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas.

The respondents were however somewhat critical towards the idea of working within the local stakeholder meetings. They often considered that cooperation was not evenly based on the balanced contribution of all participants. On the other hand, it is natural that working within a particular cooperation structure will usually emphasise the importance of some actors over others. One reason for this may be that not all of the participants were involved throughout the entirety of the project. Some respondents felt that they did not have adequate time to support the implementation of the pilot action. This relates directly to the existence of a prompt project timetable which does not allow for major delays in implemented activities. Most of the respondents had, moreover, previously worked across administrative borders in relation to development and planning work, but there were also some respondents to whom it was a new approach.

Figure 10D: Cooperation structure in the processes (own illustration)



6. Potentials relating to quality of life issues in urban-rural interaction – Lessons learned

Strengthening the quality of life by improving the management of urban-rural interaction is both a challenging and a long-term planning process. Nevertheless, the NEW BRIDGES project contributed to a better understanding of the concepts of quality of life and urban-rural interaction among regional and local authority members and other stakeholders across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). The project successfully created a common 'language' between research, planning and policy concerning the matter.

The concept of quality of life was operationalised through three key elements (residential preferences, mobility and accessibility as well as the provision of services), which enabled the project partners to actually *work* with the concept. The concept of quality of life was then applied to regional planning and development in seven city-regions. According to local stakeholders, quality of life is an important issue and through the project they learned to better integrate the concept into their routine daily work. The experiences gained from the preparation and implementation of pilot actions may additionally influence future planning processes and thus contribute in the long-term to increasing the attractiveness of the respective city-regions as places in which to live and work.

Using quality of life issues as a core organising theme in terms of policies and planning strategies seemed to work quite well in getting local stakeholders both involved and engaged in the various implementation processes. Local inhabitants however were more difficult to reach through the NEW BRIDGES project and seemed more hesitant about sharing their opinions and preferences. By pursuing a clear involvement approach, addressing inhabitants and local stakeholders, the project contributed to bridging the gap between individual needs and policy and planning goals. The project proved that local inhabitants have to be considered as local stakeholders too and thus that they do have a 'stake' in planning processes especially when tackling quality of life related issues.

Quality of life stems from miscellaneous standpoints entangled together in various urban-rural frameworks. They are often associated with migration

and economic trends between urban and rural environments. However, while each aspect is applicable in specific conditions, none offers a valid and convincing framework on its own. The NEW BRIDGES project has shown that any attempt to conceptualise quality of life by means of a single factor or dimension is thus inadequate and potentially misleading. Outlining a comprehensive list of questions and arguments enables us to explore the limits and possibilities of quality of life in the urban-rural context. The NEW BRIDGES project has clearly demonstrated that combining aspects of quality of life and urban-rural interaction suggests a fertile and rewarding direction in which to develop and manage a new mode of urban-rural interaction. It will feed into the ongoing discussion of processes and changes while also bringing forth new sites for planning discourses.

Based on the experiences gained in the context of the NEW BRIDGES project, quality of life is now recognised as a good concept to use in order to reach individuals and to increase the recognition of individual preferences in regional planning. Although quality of life, especially 'good' quality of life is difficult to define, those who got involved had something to say and were happy to share their thoughts and needs. It is clear that both the authorities and the stakeholders more generally were, as a result, better able to understand the quality of life issue and not only in the context of recognising accurate problems. They also learned to better identify opportunities to engage in problem solving and to outline how local communities can act to ensure that they enjoy a reasonable quality of life.

Through reference to the three key elements, discussions were concretised thus enabling them to reflect more clearly people's everyday lives at the city-regional level. Targeted involvement methods and tools, such as internet-based surveys, concrete discussions on quality of life in focus and nominal groups, were crucial when gathering information concerning local knowledge and individual preferences. The involvement of local inhabitants and stakeholders in local meetings was also seen as being fundamentally important for the process and should preferably be the starting point for

all future local activities.

Urban and rural areas have generally been viewed as displaying opposite and indeed competitive tendencies in respect of development and planning. In many cases, both local and regional governance structures have usually either failed or simply been unwilling to seek common approaches to take full advantage of urban-rural interaction. This was not however the case with the authorities or stakeholders acting as partners in the NEW BRIDGES city-regions. There were no real confrontations between the authorities and stakeholders. The organised local meetings generally succeeded in both underlining and strengthening the respondents' understanding of urban-rural interaction. This undoubtedly generated a better level of understanding across the city-regions in the project on the existence of urban-rural interdependencies in various fields beneficial to both areas. One of the most important success factors of the NEW BRIDGES project was the fact that collaboration between 'urban' and 'rural' partners cannot take place in a vacuum. The project offered the necessary institutional arrangements to deal with urban-rural interaction and quality of life related issues. The approach taken to identifying challenges and common actions was also important here.

Different patterns of cooperation played an important role in the city-regions. Working across administrative borders and cooperation between municipalities brought not only new viewpoints into the process but also new planning opportunities to 'govern' certain issues on a new level, the city-regional level (e.g. close co-operation between city state and county government, new partnerships). Involving representatives from different municipalities as well as the promotion of new implementation processes as such challenged traditional structures, the roles of certain institutions (e.g. the traditional supervisory role of county government) and established routines.

Some differences in stakeholder involvement appeared not only between city-regions but also between the stakeholders concerned. The fact that capacity levels differed markedly between stakeholders representing urban and rural areas also had a significant influence on the work undertaken at the city-regional level. The fact that the relevant stakeholders (e.g. politicians) in rural areas often have numerous responsibilities or work only part-time, made it difficult for them to remain fully engaged in the project with them being generally less able to remain engaged to the same extent as their colleagues in urban areas who were often appointed to work full time on this issue. They also often have to deal with obstacles such as a lack of common strategies or meeting points, funding and legitimacy. Working across administrative borders requires a certain degree of alignment between e.g. two municipalities in order to

overcome socio-economic differences, meet different political agendas and priorities, accept diverse power relations and find an adequate level of representation in respect of all of the relevant stakeholders.

Whether a pilot action will ultimately be implemented or not depends very much on the relevant politicians and local government activities. Political commitment and support is essential to the 'success' of the project's activities, thus decision-maker involvement needs to be taken into account from the very beginning. Of course it is not only planning processes that can go on for years; political processes can also be quite similar in nature. Elections and other major and often unforeseen events can postpone project activities. Nevertheless, if the project activities and outcomes (e.g. pilot actions) are linked to the overall strategic and political agenda (e.g. as 'good practice'), they have a better chance of being followed-up and maintained after the project itself has concluded. In order to achieve integration ownership of, and the responsibilities within, the process or pilot action need to be clarified as soon as possible.

The pilot actions in the NEW BRIDGES project also show that the issue of geographical scale is highly significant in the quality of the life approach in respect of urban-rural interaction. Basically it establishes the degree to which our knowledge regarding quality of life is generalised and defined. An individual's own 'life space' may in this context be considered an ideal level but can, nevertheless, also be the most difficult to approach. As such, the most often used specification here is peoples' relation to particular areas or how they use the various services located in these areas. It is clear that current planning procedures lack instruments to help 'factor in' the individual level. The degree of knowledge about quality of life is more generalised in planning procedures covering larger geographical areas. In most of the city-regions discussed here the pilot actions were successful in reaching this lower geographical scale while also managing to bring a measure of 'added-value' to regional planning procedures.

The common Conceptual Framework, applied throughout the NEW BRIDGES project, guided the project partners through their processes and generated new planning approaches ('thinking outside the box'). The three pillars: quality of life, urban-rural interaction and the involvement approach were the keys to the undertaking of successful processes in the city-regions. However, individual problems remain concerning planning procedures, problems that could not be solved within the timeframe and budget of the NEW BRIDGES project. Such challenges generally relate to political changes and changing priorities, current legislation, public procurement processes, the lack of financing and of a long-term perspective that hampers implementation and the integration of new approaches

into ongoing and future strategies.

In addition to this report the policy recommendations derived from the NEW BRIDGES project addressing the EU, national and macro-

regional levels were published in *Planning together for Better Quality of Life - Guide for Integrated Management of Urban Rural Interaction*¹¹.

¹¹ The guide can be downloaded from the project website: <http://www.urbanrural.net>

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¹ PD = Population Density in persons per sq.km

² Stakeholders involved in local meetings organised during the NEW BRIDGES project. The number of inhabitants involved is shown in brackets.



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