

Micropol

Governance Good Practice Description

Sphere: Governance

Lormes and Murat (Burgundy and Auvergne regions) with reference to the Soho Solo network in the Gers (Central southern France)

Good Practice Title: Governance of Rural Telecentres in France

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Brief Description of Good Practice:

The Lormes and Murat Tele or Smart Work Centres are both public sector driven initiatives, initiated by the association of town/village councils of the District of Nivernais Morvan (where Lormes is situated) and by the association of town/village councils of the District of Murat. These associations (or communities) of local councils are established to enable the provision of collective services and actions where the individual local council (in France often a village or small town) is not able or equipped to do so or where simply it is more efficient over a wider geographical area. Each local authority association will appoint a local councillor, supported by staff to oversee and manage ICT/Digital development (often as part of wider economic development)

The Centres are 100% publicly owned and recent new developments of the Centres have been 100% publicly funded (including ERDF money). There was no private sector input into the original development of these centres

The telecentre of Lormes (which includes its community focused services to raise the digital literacy of the inhabitants of the geographical area of the Nivernais Morvan) has been developed as part of a District Wide 2.0 strategy designed to develop 2.0 infrastructure and services to allow the District to fully participate in and contribute to the Digital 2.0 economy and society.

The network of eight Centres in the Gers, Soho Solo was established originally under an Interreg IIIB programme by the local county European Centre for Innovation and Enterprise and is now managed by the Chamber of Commerce and industry. The individual Centres are owned and managed by associations of town/village councils or other publicly owned or funded bodies.

It was and is precisely because of the lack of private sector investment in ICT related activities, including the development of High Speed Broadband infrastructure and in particular teleworking centres that public support has been so necessary.

The public/private partnerships are focused on the day to day (largely informal) relationship between private sector companies and independent workers based at the Teleworking Centres and the Centre's management where the Centre's services are evolving in line with the technological, social and organisational needs its users.

There is however no direct private sector involvement in the either the day to day operation of the Centres or their strategic development and there are no specific structures set up to allow or encourage direct private or community sector involvement in the running of the Centres. The focus of the relationship between the public sector operators and the private sector users has been on the provision of technical, social and economic services to the businesses and workers either already based at the Centres or interested in being based there (+ in the case of Murat and Soho Solo to the wider teleworking community living in or planning to move to their districts).

Through the provision of these services the public authorities (and with Soho Solo the Chamber of Commerce and Industry) aim to ensure that businesses and teleworkers are fully prepared, trained and equipped for working in an often remote rural location and that they are given every opportunity to integrate into the local community and contribute to it. These services and the individuals who operate them have become the principal means for ensuring good governance processes. As citizens and businesses the users/occupants of the services also have their rights as electors.

Why the good practice was used: The publicly-led/ publicly funded/publicly owned/publicly managed model is a good practice when it is associated with the provision of ongoing support services (technical, social and economic) – which the three examples used in this document have adopted.

The model in itself is appropriate in rural areas where the public authorities (and public agencies/public interest organisations) are the principal means of planning and facilitating economic development.

The Centres illustrated also accommodate a limited number of businesses and teleworkers (from 4 to 15) which facilitate the development of direct and productive relationships between users and operators.

What are the benefits of the good practice: The publicly-led/ publicly funded/publicly owned/publicly managed model has the benefit of actually producing results (Centres built/converted and up and running). As most of them have also been established as dual or multi-functional Centres (Tele-working + Digital literacy training + high-speed internet access.....) this has also enabled them to provide much wider value for the local community and act as enablers, raising the wider social and economic potential of the area.

High speed broadband networks have also almost exclusively been developed in these areas with public money as the economic model used by private operators was not appropriate for less densely populated remoter areas.

What problems/issues were associated with the good practice: : The problems/issues associated with publicly-led/ publicly funded/publicly owned/publicly managed model are well illustrated with the recent opening/planned opening of ten tele-working centres in the Nièvre.

The provision of support services has been a major (perceived) factor in the success of the existing centres in attracting and keeping both businesses and workers. These services are either provided at the Centre (Murat + Lormes) by the local authority and/or via a central service provider (in the case of Soho-Solo the Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

Currently under discussion in the case of the 'new' centres in the Nièvre, is the creation of a 'SCIC' (a Community Enterprise with a cooperative constitution) to provide these ICT and possibly customer support services (reception etc) and also to provide a 'welcoming' service (as is very effectively provided in the Murat Centre) to prospective businesses and individual teleworkers interested in settling in the area.

In addition there is an idea (not yet a proposition) to offer the teleworker/tele-businesses formal training programmes created by Centres such as Murat, which are aimed at preparing and informing future teleworkers/tele-businesses interested in setting up in the new Centres and helping to ensure the long-term success of their enterprises

How the success of the Good Practice was measured: Years of operation of the Centres/network; number of businesses/teleworkers based at the Centres and staff employed in providing services (in the case of Murat the number of people attending their formal training courses)

Effect from using the Good Practice: the publicly-led/ publicly funded/publicly owned/publicly managed model (supported by pro-active and responsive support services) has contributed to the success of the Three examples used in this document. This is however difficult to quantify.

Lessons learned: the publicly-led/ publicly funded/publicly owned/publicly managed model is an effective one where it provides pro-active and responsive support services and where it develops on a step by step basis. Although not directly related to the topic of this best practice, each of the models examined has been developed alongside or as part of wider digital/economic, environmental and social regeneration programmes. People and businesses will be more reluctant to move to a declining area, it is important to show them that there is a future for the area to which they can contribute

Main idea that you want to stand: Develop structures and services that welcome new businesses and teleworkers and enable them to contribute to the local community

For more information:

<http://numerique.nivernaismorvan.net/> : Lormes

<http://www.paysdemurat.fr/telework/accueil.html> : Murat

<http://www.soho-solo-gers.com/en/index.php> : Soho-Solo