

EVALUATION SURVEY INTERVIEWS

INTERIM REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper reports the general findings of eighteen interviews involving 21 leading members of the SAUL project, completed in the main during the first half of 2004. Based on the premise that to fulfil its potential SAUL has to incorporate a productive process of transnational learning, these interviews were conducted as a part of the overall evaluation of SAUL.
2. The timing was chosen to coincide with the early stage of the project, so that it could influence SAUL's subsequent development. The interviews, based on a standard questionnaire, had a threefold purpose:
 - to establish a base-line from which to measure the transnational learning process that is expected to take place during the remaining, major part of SAUL;
 - to identify changes which might be made to strengthen the transnational learning process; and
 - to reinforce the learning project message with leading members of the SAUL team at an early stage.
3. This report is structured to reflect the replies to the questions used to frame the interviews. Answers to related questions have been amalgamated to simplify presentation. The list of those interviewed, the survey process and the interview preparation form are attached as annexes.

II. SAUL AS A TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING PROJECT

4. The first point to establish is that the type of learning being pinpointed is individual learning by SAUL participants. This is also implicit in the learning logs (see section VI below). Whether this translates into learning by the organisation for which the individual concerned works, and then into policy and practice changes, is beyond the scope of the current survey. However, it is confirmed that key figures in the SAUL project do not keep their transnational learning to themselves.
5. The questionnaire, therefore, concentrates on whether the structure and ethos of SAUL is contributing to its ability to foster individual, transnational learning. Generally, respondents feel that there are several key features that contribute to this aspect of SAUL. In particular, as SAUL grew out of an Interreg IIC project, for many transnational learning could start from an established basis.
6. The selection of projects is one of the key factors in influencing SAUL's ability to generate transnational learning. Experience is more easily transferred transnationally, if the projects in the different participating regions are similar in nature. In this respect the selection of SAUL projects, although obviously chosen at an initial stage before the key issues had been refined, is thought to be well based.
7. Turning to the substance of SAUL, there is an opinion that the themes are too numerous and too complex. This means that learning in any one area can be

spread too thinly. This is complicated by two other factors. First, partly as a result of the scope of the themes, the policy agendas among the partners differ widely. Secondly, the technical language used is not easy to translate. The publication of a glossary of technical terms on the web site is suggested.

8. The feature that contributes most to SAUL's character as a transnational, learning project is the participation in joint project group (jpg) meetings of members from other partner regions. There is also added value when formal jpg meetings are supplemented by additional informal meetings and visits. Site visits linked to the jpg meetings are considered extremely valuable learning opportunities. All transnational members feel that they are able to make a positive contribution. The other jpg members interviewed during the survey reciprocate this impression.
9. The relaxed atmosphere of the jpgs contributes strongly to the formation of informal networks within SAUL and the ability to think outside normal frames of reference. But it is not axiomatic that jpg meetings give rise to transnational learning. The agenda, management and minutes of the meeting have to be designed to promote that aim. Also, allocating jpg members to track an individual action or investment project helps to deepen jpg discussions.
10. However, there are bounds to the potential of jpgs. The finance for these meetings is less than proposed originally, as the budget was cut when the SAUL project was approved (although additional meetings have since been added). Shorter and less frequent meetings restrict the potential of jpg meetings as a learning device particularly, as is almost bound to happen, jpg membership changes over time and meetings are held at irregular intervals.
11. Further, the composition of jpgs is decided before the key issues raised by the project have been firmly identified and agreed. Therefore, there is advantage to be gained where membership is supplemented with experts on particular topics. It is also considered that jpg membership needs to consist as much of operational as managerial staff.
12. The Steering Group meetings potentially could act as a forum for transferring learning on substantive matters between jpgs. However, at the time the interviews were conducted it was considered that the Steering Group agendas were tending to become too crowded with administrative matters. The symposia could partially act to plug the gap that is identified, but are necessarily limited to general points on selected SAUL issues. Again, there is now more experience of Symposia than when the interviews were conducted and this view of them may have now changed.
13. At the time the interviews were conducted the development of the website was also in its early stages. However, despite the widespread criticism of it, the potential to use the site for transnational learning is foreseen, as long as it does not become too crowded and consequently too difficult to navigate around. Since the interviews were conducted the web site has also developed considerably.
14. Similarly, the programme of symposia had only just started and not all interviewees had attended them. However, those that had attended more than one

are enthusiastic in terms of each symposium being an improvement on its predecessor, as experience on their organisation and format grows. The symposium evaluation forms are the prime source of information on this topic, and a further source of material for evaluating SAUL as a learning project.

15. On the downside, the administrative complexities of Interreg IIIB are seen as a barrier to learning. They occupy time and energy that might otherwise be used for reflection about SAUL's substantive themes. However, the regular reporting cycle is a discipline, which forces participants to confront the issue of what SAUL is achieving.

III. TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING ON SAUL KEY ISSUES

16. Most of the interviews were conducted when the SAUL project had been operational for less than a year. The jpps had mostly only had their first, and essentially 'getting acquainted', meeting. Few interviewees had attended one symposium, if that. Nevertheless, there are already good examples of learning starting to take place on all three key issues.
17. The survey is intended to supplement the learning logs, so it concentrates on the broad-brush aspects of transnational learning. Also, in view of the leading roles of the interviewees in SAUL, the survey deals with higher-level, policy learning as opposed to detailed learning more appropriate at the project level.
18. In the Frankfurt region, the general influence of experience from other regions is to increase trust between the general public and the authorities. Particular policies, which have not been immediately accepted, are seen to work elsewhere. Similarly, the Saarland, Luxembourg and Rhein-Ruhr regions are now more confident in adopting a more proactive role, having seen the experience in other partner regions. In the Amsterdam and London regions the influence of SAUL is to strengthen and widen the application of SAUL policies.
19. On the role of socially inclusive spaces in the sustainable development of metropolitan regions, a difference is emerging between declining regions where the priority needs to be on environmental improvement and growing regions where the emphasis is on increasing facilities. As a general point the importance in open space provision of quality, as opposed to quantity, is emerging from transnational working. Related sustainable development issues, such as the use of renewable energy in projects, have also been realised in the course of SAUL work.
20. There is a transfer of experience between the Amsterdam and Rhein-Ruhr region on water management. In the London region, where because of its scale the sustainable development theme is harder to articulate, the learning from other regions is on the high cost and long-term nature of programmes to upgrade open spaces. Several projects are being completely rethought, most notably in Saarland, Amsterdam and London, where recreation has come to the fore in place of land reclamation, agriculture and nature conservation respectively. In all projects there is an emphasis on sustainable transport, most notably cycling.

21. Turning to the issue of regional identity, this is seen to be difficult in the London region because of its size. Nevertheless, there are examples in south and west London of sub-regional identities being more widely recognised. The Frankfurt region is also dominated by separate sub-regional identities, but there are indications that SAUL is sowing the seeds of a larger regional identity. From the experience of other regions, in Saarland the approach being taken is that identity has to be fostered and cannot be imposed. The special character of the Amsterdam region, in terms of promoting identity, is now more appreciated. Generally other regions are learning from London about techniques to reach out to a wider spectrum of the population, and hence promote a more inclusive regional identity.
22. Finally, the planning through partnerships theme is finding a particular resonance in the three German regions. Learning from the London and Amsterdam regions, as well as from each other, is leading to a more inclusive public sector relationship with the private and non-governmental sectors. However, even in these two regions, new internal and external partners are being found as a result of SAUL.
23. In the Saarland and Rhein-Ruhr regions new models of public/private cooperation are being experimented with. In the Amsterdam region contact with other SAUL regions had even led to the improvement of internal communications in one of the partner organisations. In the Frankfurt region the influence of SAUL is even spreading to improved cooperation within the public sector. There also, public participation in a project is now seen not just as part of a consultation process, but as embodying the essence of the project itself. Further, in Luxembourg community involvement is seen to be essential, not just because residents may necessarily want to use the facilities being provided, but because they want to feel that they have the choice to use them if they wish.
24. On TEMs, although it was very early days, there are signs of mutual learning taking place between the Saarland and London regions on organisational issues.
25. More generally, transnational work provides a stimulus to innovative thinking among participants, which goes beyond particular concrete examples. Examples are the involvement of artists in SAUL projects and planning work in Rhein-Ruhr, Saarland and Luxembourg. Similarly, in the London region there is likely to be a growing emphasis on the involvement of young people. These examples would probably not have happened without SAUL, but cannot be traced to a particular transnational learning experience.
26. Because there is limited involvement in SAUL by senior policy makers it is difficult to translate individual learning into institutional learning. In that connection, while the use of English is not seen as a significant barrier between SAUL participants, except in the London region general documentation produced for the project cannot be used for communicating SAUL messages more widely in the participating regions.

IV. REGIONAL STRATEGIES

27. Even compared to the action and investment projects, the regional strategy strand of SAUL was at a very early stage at the time the interviews took place. The main

benefit at this point of transnational cooperation is the realisation that 'you are not alone'. Also, this aspect of SAUL has been extremely useful in helping to see that there is added value to individual projects in each region being linked together. This is more easily appreciated by those coming from outside the region, than for those within the region.

28. Generally, learning on the regional strategy topic is concentrated in Luxembourg, where this is the focus of its SAUL involvement. However, the implications of transnational learning there are found to a greater or lesser extent in all SAUL regions.
29. The evolving role of the planner as mediator and facilitator is more widely realised, particularly in the three German regions, as is the value of a more participatory approach to regional planning. The interaction of formal and informal processes at the regional level has become more apparent, as is the need for those involved in formulating spatial policies planning at the regional level to engage with those preparing policies and plans in other sectors such as agriculture and forestry.
30. The symposium on Governance had been particularly valuable to the London and Amsterdam regions, in terms of emphasising the value of focusing debate around a spatial vision and the importance of decentralising power to local and regional governments.

V. SAUL'S WIDER INFLUENCE

31. If after less than a year it was too early to see other than initial signs of transnational learning, it was even more premature to expect SAUL to be having a significant influence beyond its own remit. However, there are already signs of this beginning to happen.
32. In the Amsterdam region SAUL's influence is changing Provincial and National thinking on the balance between agricultural and recreation use in certain areas. Also, the importance of quality in open space provision is being realised more widely. In particular, the institution of a group of Dutch "SAUL mates" is helping to engage a wider group in the SAUL project. There is a widening German/Dutch exchange on urban forestry issues.
33. In Saarland, SAUL's positive approach to public involvement has been extended to other areas where mining is likely to cease. Similarly in an adjoining part of the South Region in Luxembourg, SAUL is having an influencing on planning studies. In the London region the lead partner's experience of SAUL is being incorporated into the wider contribution it makes to open space policy at the regional level.
34. More generally, a wider range of partners is being sought in developing SAUL policies and a wider range of options investigated for their implementation. Investment in new tramways in London is likely in future to take more account of recreation journeys. In the Frankfurt region a network of European officers is being set up, as a result of interest in SAUL. Experience of SAUL in both Rhein-

Ruhr and Frankfurt is stimulating related projects in another Lander. Also, there is evidence of SAUL having an influence on the development of other Interreg IIIb projects.

VI. LEARNING LOGS

- 35.** These, rather than the results of this part of the evaluation of SAUL, are the major source of detailed information on the transnational learning that SAUL is responsible for. For SAUL to operate as a learning project the learning log process has to be working well.
- 36.** Again, it was early days and some respondents had no experience of completing the logs. It was felt by that the logs should have been promoted at an earlier stage. However, those that had completed logs are generally very positive, and have many good ideas about how to use them. These ideas have now been adopted in most cases:
- logs should be completed at the end of the jpg meetings;
 - logs should be put on the web site;
 - the log form should classify the learning being recorded under the main SAUL issues;
 - the logs should be discussed at jpg meetings to turn individual learning into ‘group learning logs’; and
 - the logs should be analysed during the project, possibly classified under the SAUL key issues, so that learning between jpgs can be enhanced.
- 37.** There is a minority current of opinion which finds the logs too formal and passive and feels that, because learning often takes place after a period of reflection, the completion of the logs quickly does not meet this point. However, this is countered by those who say that if the logs are not completed quickly, learning experiences get forgotten. To meet both positions completing the logs quickly needs to be supplemented, as suggested above, by discussion at a subsequent jpg. Also, other logs are completed outside of jpg meeting and these can be used to record lessons distilled after reflection.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

- 38.** Even though the SAUL project was in the early phase of becoming operational when the interviews were conducted – for example, some jpgs had not met and the rest only once – there is already ample evidence of transnational (and other types) of learning taking place. Further, there are promising signs of SAUL beginning to have a wider influence. The features of SAUL designed to promote and record transnational learning are working well.
- 39.** Many of the points identified in this report where improvements could be made have been addressed, partially it is assumed as a result of the interviews. For example, the web site has been greatly improved. At this stage drastic changes to SAUL procedures are probably inappropriate. However, if resources permit an interim report on the main messages emerging from the completed learning logs

would be of value to the ongoing evaluation of SAUL. After three symposia, the results of the evaluation forms could also be summarised now. Further a glossary, as suggested earlier (para. 8), would certainly help, if only for the final report.

40. The most pressing need is to find a new mechanism for inter-jpg learning. A reserved slot at Steering Group meetings for substantive discussion of the key issues might fit the bill. A summary of the learning logs mentioned in the previous paragraph could form the basis for this discussion. Alternatively and/or additionally a special meeting could be held for jpg leaders.
41. For the jpgs, any which still feel the need to supplement their expertise should do so sooner rather than later. Those that have not taken advantage of scheduling an extra meeting should give this urgent consideration. Likewise, the learning log good practice identified above (paragraph 36) is commended to all jpgs.
42. In terms of amplifying the wider impacts of SAUL, the institution in other regions besides Amsterdam of “SAUL mates” (see para. 32) should also be actively considered.
43. The original proposal agreed at the outset of this aspect of the evaluation of SAUL is to conduct a further round of interviews in the latter half of 2005 (i.e. in time for the results to be available for the final report). Using the first round of interviews as a baseline, interviewees would update their responses to the original questions in the light of subsequent experience of working on the SAUL project. At this second stage there also needs to be more emphasis on learning at the institutional level both within SAUL and beyond.
44. This is likely to be a heavier task than the first round, because the time period covered will be longer and the information gathered will be greater and more complex than for the initial set of interviews. The steering group might also wish to consider whether additional interviews should be conducted with individuals in their organisations not directly involved with SAUL. This would help to confirm the project’s wider influence.
45. Besides decisions about the next stage of the interviews the Steering Group may also wish to discuss the use to which material arising from the evaluation of SAUL can be put at the Frankfurt symposium.
46. Beyond that, some thought needs to be given to whether the material collected by the learning logs, symposia evaluations and the two-stage interviews with leading participants needs to be brought together and possibly supplemented for the SAUL final report. The aim would be to convince a wider audience that SAUL operated well as a learning project, both within and beyond the partner regions.

Annex 1: List of Interviewees

Name	Place	Date
Kirsten Adamczak	Dortmund	21.01.04
Sabine von Bebenburg	Frankfurt	23.07.04
Tom Buxton	London	27.04.04
Ed Buys	Amsterdam	19.07.04
Jane Carlsen/ John O'Neil	London	08.04.04
Matthew Carrington	London	29.07.04
Gerd Rainer Damm	Saarland	10.08.04
Michiel Furet	London	11.06.04
Clive Fox	London	08.04.04
Andrea Hartz	Saarland	10.08.04
Reinhard Henke	Frankfurt	09.08.04
Tim Houghton	London	27.04.04
Martin Jones/Anita Konrad/ Helen Rawlins	London	16.06.04
Rainer Kestermann	Dortmund	21.01.04
Philippe Peters	Luxembourg	26.07.04
Irene Seijo	London	23.04.04
Femke Vergeest	Amsterdam	19.07.04
Sioned Williams	London	12.03.04

Annex 2: The Survey Process

1. Questionnaire agreed with the Secretariat following written consultation with the Steering Group
2. Sample agreed with the Secretariat to include all Steering Group members and jpg leaders. (In the event 1 steering group member has not been interviewed.)
3. Letter from lead partner to all potential interviewees explaining the survey and enclosing the questionnaire (Dec 2003).
4. Interview date arranged and interview preparation form (Annex 3) dispatched.
5. Interview.
6. Draft record of interview prepared by John Zetter and dispatched to the interviewee.
7. Comments from interviewee incorporated in final record of the interview.

Annex 3: Interview Preparation Form

The purpose of this form is to help you prepare for the one-to-one meeting that has been arranged for you with John Zetter. As you know, he is the member of the SAUL team evaluating the effectiveness of the project. (The attached letter from Clive Fox explains the background.) The questions listed below will be used to structure the meeting with John. The format allows you to make your own notes beforehand, as the basis for the discussion at the meeting.

It is estimated that the meeting will last no longer than 1½ hours and that you should spend up to 1 hour preparing for it. Within a week of the meeting John will send you for comment a draft of his record of what was said. Near the end of the SAUL timetable you will be sent the record and asked to update it in the light of subsequent events.

1. What features of SAUL do you think either contribute to or detract from its character as a learning project?	<input type="text"/>
2. In your experience of SAUL investment and action projects on which of its key issues - the vital role of socially inclusive spaces in the sustainable development of metropolitan regions; regional identity; and planning through partnerships - did transnational learning take place? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>
3. In your experience of SAUL regional strategies on what particular issues did learning take place? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>
4. How has the particular investment project, action project and/or regional strategy in which you are involved been changed in the light of learning stemming from involvement in SAUL? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>
5. Has SAUL had an impact on other projects and strategies which are not part of SAUL? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>
6. What occasions (eg symposia, web site visits) were the most fruitful for providing learning opportunities? Please give examples	<input type="text"/>
7. Are the learning logs useful, or should they be amended or replaced? Please give reasons for your opinion.	<input type="text"/>
[For JPG leaders only]	
8. Do the JPG members from other countries make a particular contribution to learning within the SAUL project? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>
[For other JPG members]	
9. Were you able to help in the learning process of the project in another country to which you contributed as a JPG member? Please give examples.	<input type="text"/>