
Tool Proto-type' partnership activity: study visit → how potential partners address a specific issue or solve a specific problem within their local environment

The study visit is the very first opportunity for representatives of the potential partner areas to discuss their project face-to-face. It is therefore a key step in the process of developing a strong and long term partnership. Particular attention should be paid to a series of points, so that as a result of this first visit each partner is in a position to decide whether to go forward with developing the cooperation project... or not!

Before you leave

- Each partner needs to be very clear about the local objectives of the cooperation project;
- Each partner has to define which of these objectives are indispensable and which of these objectives can be considered as a little bit more flexible (this determines what is negotiable and what is not);
- A detailed programme of the visit should be shared, discussed and agreed between the different partners beforehand.

Objectives of the study visit

- To meet the people who you plan to work with;
- To get to know the partner area;
- To understand how decisions are made in the partner area;
- To set a series of common objectives which are compatible with the individual objectives of all partners;
- To validate that it is possible to work together;
- To estimate the resources the partners will be able to commit to the cooperation project;
- To identify potential sources of problems;
- To assign specific roles to each of the partners.

Example of a typical study visit programme

Day 1

Travel; upon arrival in the partner area: informal welcome by the hosting partner and informal evening.

Day 2

Formal welcome of the visiting partner delegation, involving technical experts, elected local representatives, financing bodies and any other relevant stakeholder (e.g. project promoter):

- o Presentation of the partner areas (including the administrative and territorial organisation);
- o Presentation of respective expectations of each of the partners;
- o Presentation of respective objectives of each of the partners;
- o Presentation of the 'skeleton' of the project;
- o Formal welcoming dinner.

Day 3

- Morning field visit of the area: local actions linked to the theme of the cooperation project, meeting of technical stakeholders and potential promoters, etc;
- Afternoon work session: common objectives, experiences made in each area, actions which could be common;
- Evening: informal dinner.

Day 4:

- Morning work session: define the role of each partner (for project development and for its future implementation), define a provisional calendar (draft action plan), establish the guidelines for a budget and exchange about co-financing possibilities;
- Afternoon visits to the area: meeting with project promoters, discovery of local products and/or local traditions...
- Evening: official dinner; signature of a document confirming that partners will continue with the project (e.g. with presence of journalists for local communication). The idea is not, at this stage, to come up with a complete cooperation agreement (which takes much more time and distance to elaborate) but to formalise the 'intention to cooperate'.

Day 5:

Return journey home.

Some hints which may make things easier

- Consider that the language issue can become an important barrier: find an appropriate solution for interpretation, ideally working with someone who knows the subject on which you plan to work;
- Allow for sufficient travel time (and for rest after a long journey);
- Switch regularly from formal to more informal arrangements. This allows people from the partner delegations to mix and talk, but also provides people from one delegation to have a debriefing on the discussions among themselves and to take a step back to think about the exchanges;
- Allow for nice people-to-people activities offering the possibility to learn more than during formal meetings and where personal relationships are built, which make the project easier and more feasible! Try to respect the fixed agenda though.
- Formalise common objectives;
- Start to define the roles of each partner for the future steps of the cooperation project.