

8<sup>th</sup>  
OCTOBER 2004

FRIDAY  
Hotel Jurys Cork, Ireland

### **IDELE Pre-Briefing Note**

#### ***What does Local Employment Development mean?***

For the purposes of our approach Local Employment Development implies a number of things:

- That actions conceived, managed or delivered at **local** level can permit the opening up of new **development** opportunities and new sources of **employment** that can generate additional wealth, well-being and social cohesion;
- That acting locally can also open up the possibility that these new development opportunities and jobs can be more **equitably distributed** – giving better prospects for the inclusion of the young, minority ethnic groups, the unemployed, and the socially excluded generally;
- That these local actions have to be seen as **one component** within the full package of activities that make economic development and employment possible;
- That they can only be properly understood and evaluated in the context of a complex set of **geographical, social and economic variables**, and against the background of actions at other, wider, levels - regional or national;
- That there is a clear role for **policy intervention** to kick-start Local Employment Development where it does not happen, and to identify and remove the barriers that stand in the way - even though many elements of the local development process take place spontaneously as a product of market forces or out of evolving civil society;

#### ***In what sense “local”?***

One of the difficulties for the local as a policy domain is what we might call the “curse of the definition”. People tend instinctively to know what is meant by the phrase “taking a local approach” but when the question is asked; “what precisely do you mean by *local*?” the debate quickly runs amok and the instinctive clarity that all start with immediately evaporates. “Local” is clearly not a discrete and clearly bounded invariable entity.

One person’s “local” may for another be sub-regional or regional. For some a “local approach” might mean the central authorities having a neighbourhood office through which to deliver their activities. For others, a truly “local” approach might demand that actions are conceived, managed and delivered exclusively by

local actors. Rather than trying to define such differences away, it is the essence of the IDELE process to recognise and work with the different elements and understandings that make up the local approach in different places. We believe that what is regarded as “local” cannot be abstracted from history, culture, place identity, language and power relations. Particularly significant, of course, is the way administrative boundaries are determined by different governments for their own purposes.

While this should help us to decide not to spend too much time debating any absolutes of definition, it also means that we need to be aware that there is much scope for misunderstanding when people come together to share ideas about something as the call “ a local approach”. We know that the “pictures” they have in their minds in using the phrase are socially and culturally constructed and are likely to be fundamentally different. In practical terms therefore we must be aware of the complexities of what we are dealing with, and be sure to remember the different meanings that people will bring with them as they take part in IDELE. One thing we can be very clear about, however, is that this is not a project simply about some geographically definable form of “area based” initiative. It is far more complicated than that!

### ***IDELE: What are we trying to achieve?***

Our approach to IDELE starts by rejecting the notion that local actions for employment and development are simply about helping residents and stakeholders in *deprived localities* to come together to find short-term solutions for the difficulties that they face – important though this may be. It is natural, of course, that these sorts of actions will form a key component of the material gathered to support IDELE - since so many of the projects available for scrutiny have emerged from time limited European programmes designed to experiment with ways to address local problems. The essence of IDELE is, however, to distinguish from among these experimental projects and the wider universe of local actions those that are *well found, sustainable and can usefully be transferred from place to place* – poor places and rich places.

What we are seeking to demonstrate through IDELE is:

- How locally influenced action can help to create and enhance a spirit of entrepreneurship and enterprise not just in economic activity but in finding and developing new ways to do a variety of things from delivering services to building social and civil capital to making public administration more creative;
- How the sorts of barriers that tend to be encountered in capturing the benefits of local action in different kinds of geographical, economic and political contexts can be overcome – sometimes by local action itself but also by things that are done at other levels in the hierarchy of government and public administration;
- How the insertion of a local action space into both public programmes and private sector management strategies can help both generate new sorts of sustainable jobs and offer employment chances to a wider segment of the economically active population;

In essence IDELE is a learning driven process. The first objective is to **(I)dentify** the most important lessons that can be drawn from more than a decade of largely experimental actions for Local Employment Development and having recovered

the lessons to **(D)isseminate** them and **(E)xchange** informed views about them. On the basis of this rolling programme of desk research, seminars and discussions and web-based interaction the second objective for IDELE is to ensure that the local dimension of policy is fully understood and properly positioned across all European Commission programmes, and takes its appropriate place in the European Employment Strategy.

Throughout the IDELE process we will also address a number of what we can call 'horizontal' themes. For the most part these are the ones already set out in the European Employment Strategy – providing adequate incentives for all those willing to take up work; promoting social cohesion and social progress; encouraging lifelong learning and finding way to engage the social partners. The overall aim is to focus attention on how the productivity and creativity of the active population of the EU can be enhanced while sustaining the quality of jobs and making sure that there is both equality of opportunity and an active attempt to include those currently in unemployment and social exclusion.

### ***Seeing the “local” as part of a multi-level system and not as a closed box***

One of the most important contributions that IDELE intends to make is to bring the local approach out of the ghetto that regards it as simply “having local people do those things that can be done better locally”, especially when it limits itself to poor people in deprived places. It needs to provoke a quantum step forward in policy making that acquaints all those working in policy development, at whatever geographical level, with the fact that

*actions conceived, managed or delivered at local level can permit the opening up of new development opportunities and new sources of jobs that can generate additional wealth, well being and social cohesion.*

The important thing to recognise here is that the local approach must not be limited to situations where the process of conceiving, managing and delivering actions is all *simultaneously* local. The local approach can, for example, encompass things *conceived and managed locally* but delivered at scale by regional or national level agencies. It can encompass things *conceived and managed centrally* but delivered sensitively at a local scale using local agents. The Local Employment Development approach itself is an idea *conceived at European level* that has been handed down for *managing and delivery* to local partnership bodies.

Sensitising general policy to the additional possibilities and value added of local approaches – appropriate for different issues in different contexts – is the contribution that the IDELE process is seeking to make. To put it more simply, European and national approaches need to be more responsive to local opportunities and know how best to capture the added value that can be expected to arise. The flip side of this is that local players and partnerships need to be more persuaded of the need to “think out of the (local) box” and to look for appropriate solutions for their local problems – even if the logic of efficient and effective action means they might be best managed or delivered by those outside. While the exhortation might be to “build your own wheel” it is critical to be aware that that engine may be somewhere else in the vehicle!

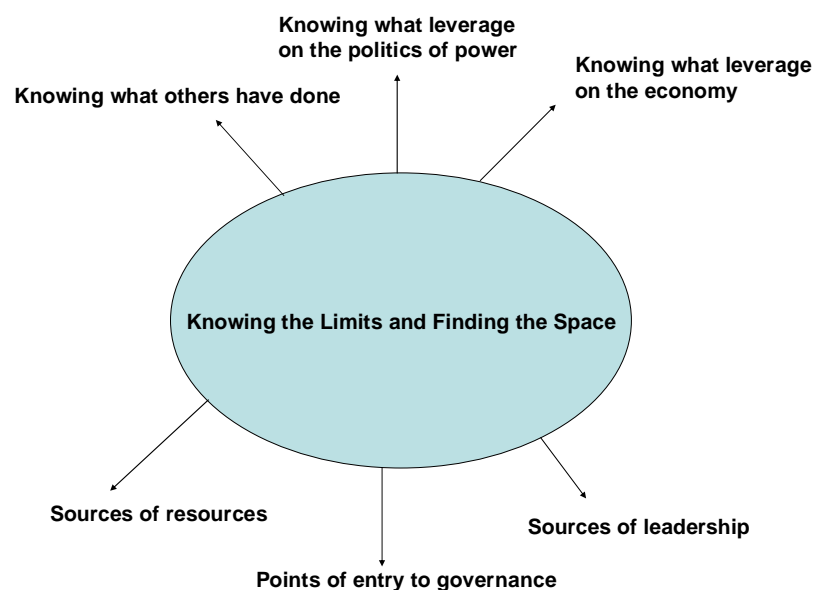
***Time to “get real” about local approaches***

After more than a decade of largely European inspired experimentation and pilot action the time has come to “get real” about the local approach. The time for “grandstanding” is over – telling the sponsors what excellent value they got for their money is rational economic behaviour but not when the source of funds has already dried up and is unlikely to return. We need to have *real* conversations about *actual* value added and get a realistic view of where and precisely how “going local” makes its best contribution. This clearly varies sharply depending on the policy issue that is to be addressed and the geography (urban, rural, growth region, depressed area) and the governance system (centralised, decentralised) that is expected to take local action on board. We already know that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions and that these sorts of contingent conditions can strongly influence whether a local approach can be expected to go well or badly. What IDELE offers to all who participate in it is the chance to participate in the evaluation of the thinking that lies behind *acting locally* so that we can give it a solid policy platform

***Finding the space for local action and using it to set realistic ambitions.***

The sorts of issues confronting those who set out to act locally – having clearly specified what the problem is that they want to address of course – is first of all to secure the **resources, leaders and people** they need to deal with it. In parallel, (if they are sensible) they also need to see what others have done and learned already in similar situations. In doing this, it is vital that they “cut their cloth” appropriately and set themselves realistic ambitions about what they can and cannot hope to achieve. Even so, they have another serious issue to consider – where can they fit their activity into those of others already in place, and where can they exert the leverage they need on the system of local governance in order to have their claims to be vital actors in the process best recognised? Figure 1 sets these combined and interacting issues out pictorially.

*Figure 1: Finding the Resources, Space and Leverage for Local Action*



In the context of Figure 1 it is obvious that, in any given situation, the “pattern” of local action will be strongly influenced by the national, regional, economic and historical context. In some cases (regardless of resources) the limits of the space for local action may be highly constrained, in others, highly permissive. This is one of the *systematic* sources of difference in the shape and outcomes for Local Employment Development that we wish to emphasise through the IDELE process. Indeed, one of the early insights from IDELE is that the nature of the existing governance system as a restrictive or permissive force should be acknowledged up-front. A second *systematic* source of variance lies in the geographical-economic-social context against which the action is set.

It follows from this that there can be no simple prescriptions for “best practice (except of the most generic kind) for Local Employment Development, and that the only way to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local actions in the face of such contextual variety is by a process of *conversation and shared learning*, by *benchmarking* where some general idea of “like-for-like” is identified through these conversations. By informed and structured conversations, and through a regular process of “open co-ordination”, the actors – local and non-local – involved in local approaches can learn how best to navigate the complexities of the policy environment they are seeking to inhabit. This, in essence, is what the IDELE process is seeking to achieve.