



Pilot Case Studies

Synthesis Report

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Introduction	5
2.1 Policy Context	5
2.2 Background to the SME-DE Project	6
2.3 The SME-DE Project – Case Studies and Conceptual Framework.....	7
3. The Case Studies.....	10
3.1 Italy	10
3.1.1 Udine Greenways - Udine.....	10
3.1.2 Udine Greenways – Martignacco and Moruzzo.....	12
3.1.3 Consortium for APEA.....	13
3.2 Denmark.....	14
3.2.1 Aarhus - Using energy savings as a driver for growth	14
3.2.2 Denmark - Intermediaries group	15
3.3 United Kingdom.....	16
3.3.1 Leeds – Northern Gas Networks	16
3.3.2 Leeds - Innovation Consulting Group.....	17
3.4 Bulgaria	18
3.4.1 Varna - Supporting SME voice	18
3.5 Croatia.....	19
3.5.1 Dubrovnik – Engaging rural SMEs	19
4. Analysis	21
4.1 Organisational arrangements – communications and confidence building measures.....	21
4.2 Contextual factors.....	25
4.3 Deliberative engagement.....	26
4.3.1 Methodologies.....	27
4.3.2 What worked?	27
4.3.3 What didn't work?	31
5. Conclusions	36
5.1 Building confidence with intermediaries and SMEs	36
5.2 The wider context	37

5.3 Using Deliberative Engagement	38
5.4 SME networks.....	38
5.5 Practical implications for intermediary executive training and the DE Guide	39
Before the event.....	39
At the event.....	40
After the event	40
5.6 Some implications for policy	41
Appendix 1	42
Aggregated results from the evaluations completed by participants at the DE events.....	42

1. Executive Summary

This project set out to answer a simple question: how can small and medium sized businesses in a number of settings (urban and rural, and in different locations in Europe) be actively engaged in addressing difficult, ‘wicked’ long-term business sustainability issues such as those associated with climate change? The thesis underlying the project had two key elements:

- That intermediary organisations (such as trade bodies, municipal authorities and sectoral organisations) have a key role to play in activating SMEs in this way, and
- Engaging SMEs in a highly participative way, where they work together to share and discuss ideas and come up with solutions to climate-related challenges (often referred to as a deliberative approach), is an effective way of enabling SMEs to address these challenges.

The project posited that communications and confidence-building measures, as well as contextual factors such as political and cultural contexts, were likely to be critical to the success of deliberative engagement involving SMEs and their intermediaries. The project was built around a number of case studies in different EU countries involving deliberative workshops with SMES and intermediaries.

We conclude that deliberative engagement, allied to a proper understanding of organisational and contextual factors, has the potential to facilitate collaborative problem-solving amongst SMEs and their intermediaries in addressing ‘wicked’ problems. This includes sustaining that collaboration through the development of on-going SME networks. Because of its creative and discursive nature, deliberative engagement allows people and organisations to explore issues holistically and create bottom-up solutions to difficult challenges. SMEs and their intermediaries are interested in engaging on business sustainability issues, given a well-designed process with the right focus.

The conditions for this potential to be realised are critical, and relate not only to the practicalities of a well-designed deliberative event, but also to the way in which intermediaries communicate and build confidence with their SMEs. Contextual factors are also key: the political, cultural, organisational and geographical contexts for intermediary and SME engagement will all affect the ease and extent to which deliberative engagement can be used effectively. Policy makers and others should not underestimate the challenge of engaging intermediaries and SMEs in this way. Deliberative engagement can be seen as risky, particularly in challenging political or regulatory contexts, and many intermediaries and SMEs will not be familiar with this approach. It requires firm commitment and leadership by intermediaries, as well as stimulus by ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and innovators within intermediary organisations.

We draw out practical learning from the case studies that will be used to inform executive training material for intermediary organisations and a simple guide to deliberative engagement. We also draw out some key implications for policy making within the EU.

2. Introduction

The main aim of the SME-DE project has been to develop an on-going, demand-driven executive programme and supporting materials that will equip business intermediaries with a new set of capabilities and business tools which will enable them to engage with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in powerful ways, so that those SMEs can collaborate effectively in solving their common and complex long-term business sustainability problems.

This project was funded by the European Commission, through its Lifelong Learning Programme. It was delivered by a partnership of the following organisations:

- Leeds Beckett University, UK (Project Lead)
- University of Udine, Italy
- Aarhus University, Denmark
- The Involve Foundation, UK
- Varna Economic Development Agency, Bulgaria
- Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, Switzerland
- University of Dubrovnik, Croatia
- The Foundation for European initiatives, UK (Project Management)

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2.1 Policy Context

Much of the current policy context can be traced back to the development of the European Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EU2020). This strategy aimed to improve the EU's competitiveness and resource efficiency while maintaining its social market economy model. EU2020 was launched in 2010 at a time of financial and economic turbulence which undermined the growth of the European economy, a situation from which it has only recently started to recover. The strategy was conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States, with a set of goals focused around the priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It set out five inter-related headline targets for the EU to achieve by 2020 in the areas of employment, research and development, climate change and energy, education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The prevailing economic climate has increased the pressure on SME leaders to focus on short-term survival rather than on wider issues associated with sustainability. As a result, there are concerns amongst European policy makers that SMEs do not contribute as much as they could to shaping policy and generating solutions on the sort of business sustainability issues highlighted in EU2020. The EU has identified this as a significant problem, as SMEs are major employers in Europe and their active contribution in helping to solve the long term issues facing them is crucial.

2.2 Background to the SME-DE Project

The challenge that lies at the heart of the project is how to engage small and medium sized enterprises on business sustainability issues.

An initial comparative scoping exercise by Leeds Beckett University prior to this project, with academics in Australia and Canada undertaking similar projects on business sustainability and climate change, highlighted the need for: a European study; a focus on organisations rather than individual citizens; a focus on SMEs rather than large-scale or public sector organisations, as well as comparing and contrasting urban and rural settings. This gap was confirmed by a literature and secondary sources review and discussions with European experts in the field (including The Involve Foundation).

Business sustainability issues, such as those linked to the challenge of climate change, can be characterised as ‘wicked problems’ (these are complex, intractable issues that are never wholly resolved or reconciled). To address wicked problems, collaborative methods such as Deliberative Engagement (DE) are often recommended. Deliberation is where people come together to learn, discuss and work out solutions together. There are more formal definitions of deliberative engagement, one of which is *‘an iterative process with multiple exchanges as the dialogue proceeds through agenda setting, strategy development and decision-making’* (Ed Weeks, Associate Professor Emeritus at the University of Oregon). Such strategies seek to involve relevant stakeholders in a collective process that is designed to find the most appropriate way forward for all. This results in the formulation of a common, agreed approach in which those people who are affected directly also become participants in the search for a solution. In some forms of DE, participants are not merely consulted but actively involved in the planning process. This corresponds with the view that for wicked problems (such as engaging SMEs on business sustainability issues) expert and top-down solutions are inadequate and more participative approaches are required instead.

There are parallels here between engaging the public with complex society-wide issues, such as the implications of an ageing population or health reform, and the SME community and its engagement with long-term sustainability issues. The evidence indicates that what appears to be effective is an approach that is educative, collaborative and which binds the participants to negotiated solutions. While some work has been done to consider Deliberative Engagement in the context of the public sector and large companies, this learning has not been transferred to or re-purposed for the SME community in any planned or consistent way. Indeed, the evidence is that this capability is lacking given that prevailing business models in the SME sector are based on competition and competitive advantage through exclusion, rather than on collaboration (except where this shows obvious advantages).

A problem identified in the initial scoping of this project is that many SME business leaders are extremely busy and quite solitary. They spend their time focussing on the business and it is difficult to engage them on issues which they regard as being ‘too difficult’, deferrable, or not of immediate benefit or threat. However, they do often interact with intermediary organisations that may regulate them, offer specific support and services or provide networking opportunities.

Given this context the project has explored how collaboration and engagement can be made attractive for SMEs through the enabling role of intermediaries, how it can be sustained and what

this engagement can do to inform policy-making so that SMEs are actively involved in the process. Furthermore, can the evidence from this pilot project help to stimulate deliberative problem solving more generally for SME communities and lead to more innovation and long-term sustainability? In summary, the case study research undertaken for this project sought to address an inadequately answered question: how can SME leaders in a number of settings (urban and rural, and in different locations in Europe) be actively engaged in addressing difficult, long-term issues?

2.3 The SME-DE Project – Case Studies and Conceptual Framework

The SME Leaders and Sustainability: Deliberative Engagement (SME-DE for short) Project has a number of important elements including a literature review, a programme of evaluation, as well as dissemination and exploitation activities. At its core, the project has been built around a series of pilot case studies across Europe which have explored the use of DE with SMEs and their intermediaries, in both urban and rural settings. This synthesis report brings together the learning from across these case studies.

Partners delivered a total of nine case studies during 2015/2016:

- Three case studies in Italy (led by The University of Udine)
- Two case studies in Denmark (led by Aarhus University)
- Two case studies in the United Kingdom (led by Leeds Beckett University)
- One case study in Bulgaria (led by Varna Economic Development Agency)
- One case study in Croatia (led by The University of Dubrovnik)

The case studies were aimed at piloting Deliberative Engagement events with SME intermediaries. SME representatives were invited by the participating intermediaries who also hosted the event. The case studies were designed and delivered following a series of preparatory stages including:

- A detailed literature review, which also described a conceptual framework for the action research (more on this below) (led by Leeds Beckett University)
- A plan for the implementation of the pilot case studies, which set out the core research questions and analytical framework, and gave partners detailed guidance and templates for planning their case studies (led by Leeds Beckett University)
- Discussions with SME intermediaries, using a discussion guide prepared by Involve, to explore previous practice in SME engagement, as well as intermediary training needs
- Detailed evaluation protocols, to enable partners to capture feedback in a consistent way following the DE events from intermediaries, DE participants and facilitators (led by the University of Udine)
- A data collection framework, to enable partners to capture all of the data on their case studies in a consistent way (led by Involve).

Each of the partners involved in the case studies has prepared a detailed case study report, using a case study report outline provided by Involve. The case studies are also summarised in this report.

This project has used the European Commission's definition of SMEs as those enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euro, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euro.

A key output from the literature review was a conceptual framework for the case study research. The thesis underlying this framework is that a series of organisational and contextual factors are critical to the effectiveness of Deliberative Engagement with SMEs on wicked issues such as climate change. These factors are summarised as:

- **Organisational arrangements:** these are the factors that contribute to engagement and process design. They include communication measures to bring together the interests of SME-DE partners, intermediaries and SMEs in order to initiate and form relationships and to build the confidence necessary to implement DE.
- A wide range of **contextual factors** influence the implementation of the SME-DE approach which include EU and national policy context, market factors, heterogeneity of SMEs, the characteristics of intermediaries and the Information asymmetries/deficits that exist
- **Deliberative Engagement** within the context of the SME-DE project emphasises the initiation and formation of a relationship between an intermediary and SME(s) designed to address a complex issue associated with business sustainability and subsequently the design and delivery of an event using deliberative techniques.

A visual representation of the conceptual framework is set out in Figure 1 below:

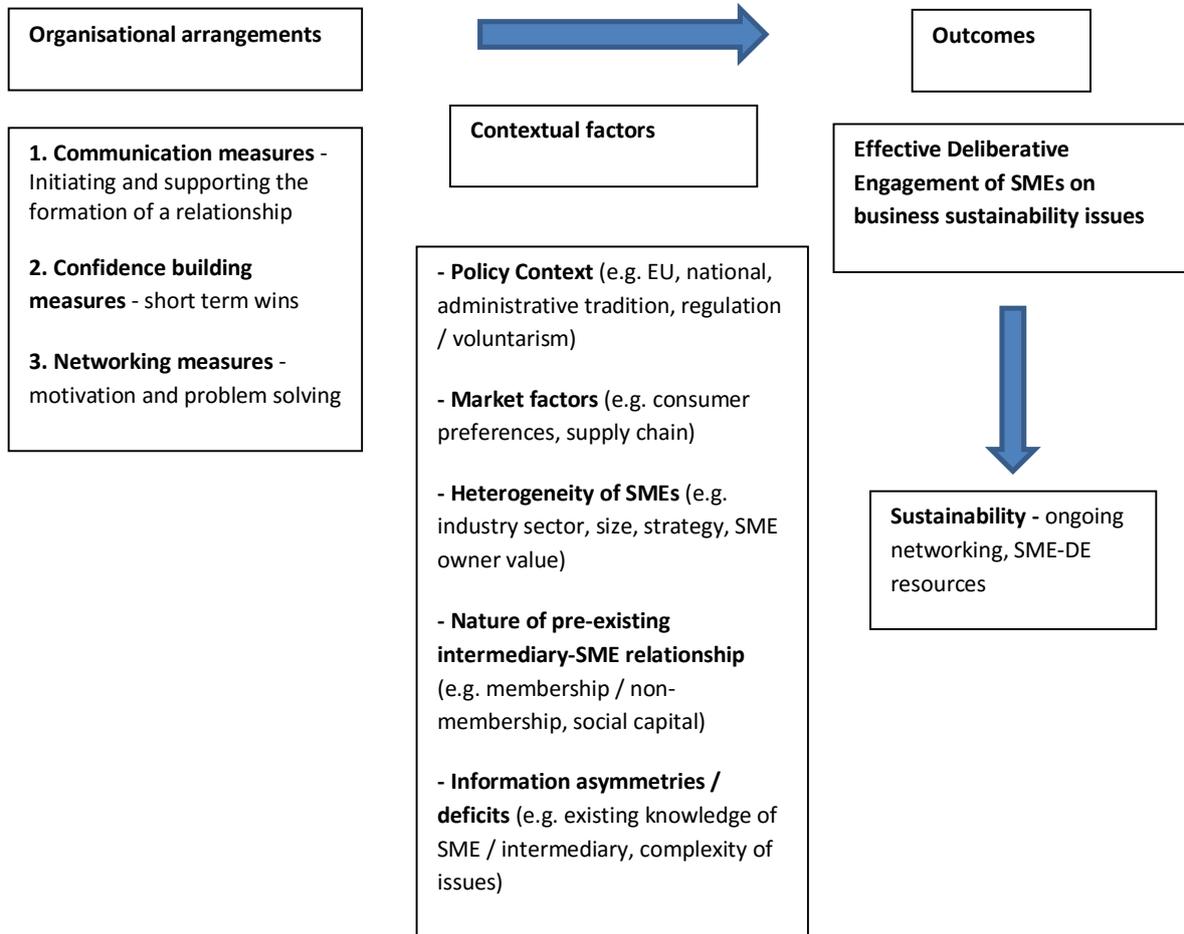


Figure 1: SME-DE project conceptual framework

3. The Case Studies

Set out below are summaries of each of the case studies, including their objectives, a description of what happened, as well as an outline of their outputs and the key insights generated by the research. Indeed, the case studies generated a range of learning which now informs key project outputs such as a Deliberative Engagement Guide and an executive education training package for SME intermediaries.

The Deliberative Engagement methodologies varied across the case studies, from established techniques such as Open Space through to bespoke deliberative approaches designed for the circumstances of the case study. These are described further in the case study summaries below. The learning from these different approaches is explored in greater detail in the analysis in section 4 and the conclusions in section 5.

3.1 Italy

The University of Udine undertook three case studies. One of the case studies did not result in a Deliberative Engagement workshop, but this case study still provided useful learning about the organisational and contextual factors affecting intermediary and SME engagement.

3.1.1 Udine Greenways - Udine

In the summer of 2014 The University of Udine contacted all of its intermediary partners, in order to explore opportunities for developing a case study around their needs. Among those who answered, the Agenda 21 Office of Udine Municipality suggested asking whether the Udine Greenways (UDG) project, launched in 2012, would be a suitable candidate.

The UDG project is part of a process in line with the European Landscape Convention signed in Florence in 2000 which promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. Udine Greenways was born from collaboration among nine municipalities in the Udine area: Campoformido, Martignacco, Pagnacco, Pasian di Prato, Povoletto, Pozzuolo d'el Friuli, Tavagnacco, Tricesimo and Udine itself. In 2009 these municipalities signed a sustainability covenant and constituted the so-called *Sistema Urbano Udinese* (SUU), to develop a model of sustainable development for their communities. Following local elections in 2011 the Municipality of Pagnacco left the SUU, while in 2015 the Municipality of Moruzzo joined it.

In practice Udine Greenways consists of an interactive portal (<http://udinegreenways.comune.udine.it>) and an app of walking and cycling routes based on a comprehensive database of cultural, historical and economic landmarks. The UDG's portal and app have been live since the summer of 2014, but need to be further enhanced, in particular with the involvement of "environmentally responsible" SMEs which could become both a point of interest and of service along the routes offering food, restrooms, first-aid and bike-repair kits. However, after a positive start, in the late summer of 2014 the UDG project had lost momentum. The SME-DE project was seen by the Agenda 21 Office as an occasion to help re-launch Udine Greenways involving local SMEs in its development.

Case study objectives

The overall aim of the cooperation between the SUU Municipalities and Udine University was to re-launch and promote Udine Greenways, engaging more SMEs. The objective initially was to encourage more SMEs in the agricultural and hospitality sector in the SUU Municipalities to follow environmentally sustainable practices and adhere to Udine Greenways. However by early 2015, due to varying political priorities and the impacts of the economic crisis, it was agreed that the project needed to be made more relevant to the wider business community.

A new objective was agreed in January 2015: to test the interest for Udine Greenways in the SUU's business community beyond the agricultural and hospitality sectors and to verify what changes needed to be implemented to make it more attractive to all enterprises. A participatory event was organised for Tuesday 28th April 2015 in Udine with the aim of introducing the UDG project and to get SMEs from different business sectors to discuss and revise its covenant.

The Deliberative Engagement event

The event started at 15.00 on 28th April and lasted four hours. It was divided into six main sessions: welcome speeches, presentations, Q&A session (coffee break), deliberative workshops, recap session, and closing remarks (followed by an informal networking session).

Out of 50 businesses which had been invited, 20 SMEs agreed to participate; 16 of them showed up on the day, while another 7 of the 30 that had declined the initial invitation, arrived unannounced. Two businesses were represented by two people. Hence a total of 25 entrepreneurs representing 23 SMEs were present at the beginning of the event and 18 of them stayed to the end and took part in the DE session. Present too were the intermediary, University of Udine staff, representatives from the Municipalities and other stakeholders.

All the SMEs were micro-businesses, mostly family run and interested in better understanding how Udine Greenways could help them promote their businesses and their community. Two thirds came from the agricultural and hospitality sector, while the rest were involved in various services, crafts, etc.

After an introductory Q&A section, the facilitators from Udine University gave a brief explanation of the second part of the event, during which the SMEs would be split in to two workshops in order to discuss and improve the covenant for adhering to Udine Greenways. The objective was for the businesses present at the DE event to make it relevant and applicable to all business sectors and not only to the agricultural and hospitality sectors as in its original version. For example, the pledge to use and sell only local produce might not apply to all businesses interested in adhering to Udine Greenways.

The facilitators had already anticipated that time would be too limited to use one of the standard intensive participatory techniques for the deliberative workshops. They therefore designed a straightforward, bespoke methodology, built around the principles of giving information, sharing ideas and facilitating deliberation. Hence, after inviting all participants to introduce themselves, each facilitator read the UDG's three objectives and asked the participants to write on pre-prepared sheets how their business could contribute to the attainment of each one of them. Then all

contributions were shared, discussed, categorised and summarised into broader themes which could be applicable to businesses in general. This summary helped each team compile a list of improvements to the original prescriptions of the covenant.

In the plenary session following, all changes to the covenant were written on post-its which were stuck to a poster-size copy of the original covenant hanging on a flipchart. Each suggestion was discussed and revised during the plenary session and eventually approved or discarded. A total of nine modifications were approved and inserted by the officials at the Agenda 21 Office in a draft version of the revised covenant visible to all participants on the wide screens positioned around the room. The event was closed by the Deputy Major of the Udine Municipality who thanked all participants for their contributions and promised to get the draft covenant discussed and approved at Municipal level as soon as possible. This speed of response was regarded as important in order to get SMEs signed up to Udine Greenways and involved in the initiative.

3.1.2 Udine Greenways – Martignacco and Moruzzo

This case study also grew out of the preparatory discussions on Udine Greenways with the Municipalities outlined above.

Case study objectives

The aim was to test specifically whether the UDG project could be of interest in more peripheral and rural areas, such as the Municipalities of Martignacco and Moruzzo.

Martignacco has ca. 7,000 inhabitants and, apart from a large company producing bakery products, many of its businesses are retail outlets located in a large commercial centre, Città Fiera, which mostly attracts customers from Udine and its north-western periphery while also targeting the population from the whole Friuli Venezia Giulia Region. There are also another 50 SMEs in Martignacco which are small, family owned businesses such as small farms, grocery stores, pubs, restaurants as well as people offering bed and breakfast accommodation for tourists (B&Bs).

Moruzzo is a much smaller community with less than 2,500 inhabitants in the hills North-West of Udine. There are no large companies and most businesses are family-run farms, B&Bs and restaurants, with some crafts shops.

The specific objective of the DE event, as agreed with officials from both Municipalities, was to verify how to implement Udine Greenways in Martignacco and Moruzzo. That is, 1) how could SMEs contribute to the sustainable promotion of these areas, and 2) how could they network together?

The Deliberative Engagement event

The event was held on 26th May 2015 in Martignacco. The two intermediaries (i.e. the two Municipalities) had invited a total of approximately 60 SMEs and local associations, 45-50 from Martignacco and a dozen from Moruzzo. 16 SMEs agreed to participate and 13 showed up at the event. In addition, two SMEs who had initially declined the invitation also joined the event. A keynote address was made by the Deputy Major of Udine, whose presence underlined the importance of the involvement in Udine Greenways of smaller communities too.

All the SMEs were family run micro-businesses, mostly farms and some B&Bs and restaurants. Unfortunately, the municipality of Martignacco did not fully share the idea of the Agenda 21 Office in Udine to open up Udine Greenways to businesses other than the agricultural and hospitality sectors, and decided not to invite retail outlets from the large commercial centre.

The event was organised by the Municipalities of Martignacco and Moruzzo together with the University of Udine in a local pub whose owner had participated in the earlier event in Udine on 28th April, and was enthusiastic about Udine Greenways.

The event started at 20.45 and lasted three hours. The facilitator from Udine University had agreed with the intermediaries that, given the short time available and the experience with the previous case study, they wouldn't use a standard 'off the shelf' methodology for the deliberation. Rather, they would develop a simple deliberative process, based on the methodology used in the previous DE event on 28th April. During the first hour and a quarter the intermediaries and other stakeholders presented the UDG project, its achievements and its future development. In the second part all SMEs sat together in a circle to discuss how UDG could be promoted in their areas. There was insufficient time at the end to draw together a formal consensus, and the event ended with a brief summing-up by one of the intermediaries.

3.1.3 Consortium for APEA

The third Italian case study did not result in a DE event, however it provided useful learning about intermediary and SME engagement.

One of the intermediaries who responded positively to the University of Udine's initial enquiries about the SME-DE project was an industrial consortium in the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) region in north-east of Italy who wished to explore whether they could use the SME-DE project to promote their activities concerning sustainable development among their members, who are mainly SMEs.

In the summer of 2014 the FVG Regional Council approved a plan for an industrial policy reform which included the reorganisation of the industrial consortia and districts in the FVG Region and their transformation into APEA (*Area Produttiva Ecologicamente Attrezzata*, i.e. Ecologically Equipped Productive Area).

Case study objectives

The consortium's management took on board the request by the Regional Office to obtain some guidelines for the future APEA regulation by involving its members in a participatory process. The objective of this case study was therefore to encourage the SMEs located in the consortium to participate and help draft the guidelines for the APEA regulation, which they would most likely have to adhere to in the future. The idea was that the guidelines would be based on the consortium's experience and would be made more robust and legitimate by the deliberative approach used to draft them.

An initial plan for the case study was agreed in February 2015, and this included proposals for two DE events with SMEs, to comment on and improve the draft APEA regulations. However, shortly afterwards the consortium management board decided not to proceed with the case study because it was felt it was too early and too sensitive to involve businesses in designing the guidelines for the

APEA regulation. The case study therefore did not proceed further. This experience did though generate some valuable learning which is highlighted in section 4 below.

3.2 Denmark

Aarhus University undertook two case studies.

3.2.1 Aarhus - Using energy savings as a driver for growth

In this case study Aarhus University worked with three intermediary partners: The Business Development Centre Herning & Ikast-Brande, and the two municipalities of Herning and Ikast-Brande:

- The Business Development Centre Herning & Ikast-Brande (www.erhvervsraadet.dk) has 675 member organizations, mainly from urban industrial areas. Its aim is to create growth, innovation and development in the area of Herning and Ikast-Brande. Most of its members are SMEs employing between 10 and 50 employees in a range of commercial sectors.
- The Municipality of Herning (www.herning.dk), in the Region of Midtjylland, has a population of 88,864. The area is partly rural but dominated by the city of Herning. The Municipality of Herning was one of the first local authorities in Denmark to work strategically on energy consumption and now has a strategic energy plan for the local area. In 2015, the municipality was considering expanding this plan to include SMEs and others in the private business sector
- The Municipality of Ikast-Brande (www.ikast-brande.dk) has a population of approximately 40,000. It has a strong track record of supporting the businesses in its area and has received national recognition for this work. In 2015 the municipality was looking to expand its business support services in the energy arena.

Case study objectives

The overall aim of the case study was to raise awareness amongst SMEs about the importance of their contribution to achieving EU carbon reduction targets. Given the practicalities of engaging with SMEs on a wide subject of this nature, the organisers agreed to focus specifically on the issue of energy reduction as a way of saving money and stimulating business growth. The event was therefore designed with the objective of inspiring local SMEs to realize that energy savings can be seen as a key driver for their growth.

The four partners organising the case study (Aarhus University and the three intermediaries) each had their own specific objectives for what they wanted to achieve from the event, which were different but complementary.

The Deliberative Engagement event

21 people participated in the event, held on 2nd September 2015. Three of the participants were from companies with over 250 employees, but the remaining 18 were from SMEs. Most participants were from Herning while only one SME came from the area of Ikast-Brande. There were 5 other people present from the organising team. The SMEs were from a range of business areas, including

textiles, logistics, electronics and the automotive paint sector. The event was held at the premises of one of the participating companies, who offered a company tour as part of the event.

The event started at 14.00 and lasted four and a half hours. After the welcome and two scene-setting presentations on energy saving, the participants split up onto two tables where they engaged in a facilitated discussion. This involved the participants sharing experiences and ideas for energy saving. This aspect of the event was followed by a plenary session where the discussions were summarised. The subjects explored in this plenary session included the idea of setting up an energy savings network amongst SMEs and how this could be made to work in practice.

After the case study the three intermediaries (The Business Development Centre and the two municipalities of Herning and Ikast Brande) invited the SMEs from the event, along with other SMEs, to form a network on energy savings. This network has now been established, with the SMEs agreeing to finance its operation. Given this development the case study event can be viewed as a catalyst for a wider and sustainable process of collaboration amongst the intermediaries and SMEs on the issue of progressive energy management.

3.2.2 Denmark - Intermediaries group

The second Danish case differed from the other case studies, in that it involved just intermediary organisations that work with SMEs on climate-related issues.

Case study objectives

This case study was convened in order to explore the issues of SME engagement from the perspective of a group of intermediaries. All the organisations taking part have experience of engaging SMEs on climate-related issues. The participants were:

- The Danish Board of Technology Foundation (DBTF), who were providing expert input on DE
- The Danish Federation of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
- Grakom, the Danish Association for Communication, Design and Media
- CLEAN Green Business Growth, a public-private partnership
- Green Growth – Smart City, also a public-private partnership
- The Danish Ecological Council
- An environmental consultant in the municipality of Allerød
- Aarhus University, who were the event organisers.

The Deliberative Engagement event

The workshop took place on 22 January 2016. It was held in Copenhagen and lasted for 3.5 hours. After introductions, there was a presentation on DE from the Director of DBTF. This was followed by facilitated group discussions that explored:

- Exchanging participants' experiences of engaging SMEs
- How to get SMEs engaged on climate-related issues
- What training needs do SME intermediaries have?

The participants initially found it difficult to think about DE in an SME context. It emerged that this was partly due to the language being used: the term ‘Deliberative Engagement’ was difficult to understand at first, and when participants realised that it describes a very natural process of discussion and working through issues together, they were able to understand it. In fact, they then shared a wide range of experience of engaging in a deliberative way with SMEs, including supporting craftspeople to become green ambassadors, knowledge-sharing networks and working with municipalities and SMEs on energy-saving strategies.

The participants agreed that there were five key lessons to draw out from their discussions about how you can engage SMEs on climate-related issues:

- The DE needs to provide direct and tangible business benefits for the SMEs taking part, otherwise they will not be incentivised to engage
- The subject-matter for the DE should address something that has a real, everyday relevance to the SMEs
- Draw on previous case studies that have produced good outputs and use this as a selling-point to attract SMEs
- Communicate in ways that will make sense to SMEs. Use plain language. Point out that they will miss out on something valuable if they don’t take part.
- The importance of an independent and trustworthy organisation that can help open doors for SMEs in to other networks.

The participants commented that the definition of SMEs is very wide. A small business of 10 people will have a very different set of needs and capacities when compared with an organisation of 100 or more employees. They made the point that DE will need to be tailored to the needs of the SMEs taking part.

The intermediaries were interested in continuing their discussions through an on-going network, but the lack of resources to fund this has meant that the network has not yet got underway.

3.3 United Kingdom

Leeds Beckett University undertook two case studies in the UK.

3.3.1 Leeds – Northern Gas Networks

Northern Gas Networks (NGN) is a private sector service provider which transports gas to 2.7 million homes and businesses across the North East of England. It is one of eight gas distribution networks in the UK and has approximately 2,000 employees. NGN is obliged, as part of the UK energy regulatory framework, to support a range of social programmes, including providing direct and indirect support to low income and vulnerable households. NGN’s operating region has one of the highest levels of fuel poverty in England with an estimated 24 per cent of households spending more than 10 per cent of their income on heating. To address this challenge NGN work in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders. Many of NGN’s partner stakeholders are SMEs.

Case study objectives

Leeds Beckett University and NGN agreed that the case study should focus on ensuring a coordinated approach to addressing fuel poverty across partner stakeholders, and should therefore aim to answer the following question:

“how do you get relevant organisations to work together to reduce fuel poverty in the north of England?”

The workshop aimed to generate learning around the subject amongst the participants, including drawing on good practice and highlighting productive areas of collaboration, while also indicating where resources are being used inefficiently through a duplication of effort.

The Deliberative Engagement event

The DE event was held on 25th June 2015 and ran for two and a half hours. Twenty-four SME organisations attended the event in addition to the teams from Leeds Beckett University and NGN. The participants were drawn from the private sector, social enterprises, local development agencies, charities and housing associations.

A short welcome by NGN’s head of social strategy was followed by the deliberative session which made use of an Open Space Technology approach. Open Space Technology, or simply Open Space, is a meeting framework that allows an unlimited number of participants to form their own discussions around a central theme. The key principles of Open Space Technology were set out for the participants on a PowerPoint slide at the start and this remained on display for the duration of the event.

Participants sat in a circle and introduced themselves and were asked to consider the overarching theme and articulate (using post-it notes) an issue they wanted to discuss with others at the event. Six issues were identified and the other participants were asked to join one of the discussions which took place on individual tables. After 40 minutes the whole group reconvened in a semi-circle. Each participant was given a postcard and asked to write down their reflections on what had been discussed on their table. Six new issues were then identified (allowing the opportunity to introduce a different issue for discussion) and the cycle began again. The length of the event allowed for two complete cycles to take place.

3.3.2 Leeds - Innovation Consulting Group

The intermediary in this case study was an innovation consultancy that has been delivering business support to SMEs for more than 40 years. It is a Private Limited Company with more than 100 staff (so they are also an SME). It specialises in supporting SMEs to think differently, maximise their capacity to innovate and implement growth strategies. The consultancy had no previous experience of deliberative methods in their dealings with SMEs, but they recognised an opportunity to develop additional business support services related to business sustainability and particular environmental issues.

Case study objectives

It took a considerable amount of effort between Leeds Beckett University and the consultancy to discuss and work through the potential objectives for the event. These detailed discussions led eventually to a clear question to be addressed in the DE event:

'how can small businesses best realise the commercial advantages associated with eco-sustainability'

The specific objectives for the case study were agreed as:

- Introducing deliberative methods to the intermediary
- Testing out a deliberative method with a small number (10-20) of SMEs
- Identifying potential solutions in the area of resource efficiency and informing the design characteristics of effective business support interventions
- To further develop the relationship between the consultancy and Leeds Beckett University.

The Deliberative Engagement event

The DE event was held on 3rd March 2015. As with the NGN case study, which followed this one, the organisers agreed to use an Open Space methodology. The workshop was held in a readily accessible hotel which had been used by the intermediary before, and ran over two and a half hours. Just six people took part in the event, including the facilitator, fewer than had been anticipated. The other participants were consultants who themselves provide business support to other SMEs.

After a short welcome and introduction to Open Space Technology, the participants worked together as a group, setting the agenda themselves in terms of the issues they wanted to discuss. Each issue was explored in depth. Some rich stories of SME engagement and SME investment in sustainability were encouraged and shared amongst the participants.

3.4 Bulgaria

3.4.1 Varna - Supporting SME voice

The Bulgarian case study was organised and led by the Varna Economic Development Agency (VEDA). Varna is a major Black Sea resort and is the third largest city in Bulgaria. VEDA is a not-for-profit, non-governmental agency, established in 1997 under a joint programme of Varna Municipality and USAID to assist the advancement of regional economic development. VEDA provides leadership to the local business community in establishing the conditions for sustainable economic development of Varna and the region. It supports capacity building amongst SMEs through information provision, consulting services and training, networking support and attracting foreign investments into the region.

Case study objectives

The aim of this case study was to work with a group of SMEs and other intermediary organisations to answer the following question:

"how can intermediary organisations (chambers of commerce, agencies, clusters, etc.) help small and medium enterprises to solve their sustainability problems or to help their "voice" to be heard by the public authorities (municipalities, ministries and others)?"

The Deliberative Engagement event

The workshop took place on 12th June 2015 in Varna. There were 18 participants, comprising a mixture of urban and rural SMEs and other intermediary organisations. A wide range of businesses were represented at the workshop from sectors such as tourism, sustainable development, health and social care, and business franchising, as well as the Black Sea NGO network. In addition, there were 10 other people at the workshop representing the event organisers, facilitators and SME-DE project partners. The workshop ran for two hours, and was followed by a drinks and food reception.

The workshop began with a welcome and introduction from the Director of VEDA. This was followed by short presentations about the SME-DE project, including some of the experiences from the Italian case studies. The facilitators then posed the question outlined above, following which the participants divided into two groups to discuss their responses. These discussions were lightly facilitated by the two facilitators. At the end of the workshop participants reconvened in a plenary session where they shared a summary of the discussions on the two tables.

3.5 Croatia

3.5.1 Dubrovnik – Engaging rural SMEs

The Croatian case study was organised and led by the University of Dubrovnik. The University played the role of intermediary in this pilot case study which grew out of the challenge of engaging with rural SMEs on sustainable development.

Case study objectives

The case study workshop was held on 21st May 2015 at the University of Dubrovnik. It was attended by a number of SMEs and intermediaries involved in rural tourism, as well as officials from the local development agency, the City of Dubrovnik municipality, the University of Dubrovnik and a number of SME-DE project partners. In total there were 15 participants. The event was organised at very short notice due to personnel changes at the University, and the organisers only had a limited period of time to plan and prepare for the event. They nevertheless managed to attract a range of different participants. The leadership and organisation of the event by the University of Dubrovnik were critical to the event taking place - they played the role of broker in bringing the SMEs, other intermediaries and the city municipality together.

The objective for the workshop was to discuss:

communication with small and family businesses in sustainable development.

The Deliberative Engagement event

The workshop ran for approximately two and a half hours. Following a welcome by the University of Dubrovnik and presentations about the SME-DE project and some of the experiences from the Italian case studies, the group discussed the issue of communication with SMEs on issues associated

with sustainable development. The event was lightly facilitated and took the form of a round-table meeting. The issues that arose from the workshop included:

- The concerns of the SMEs present included property inheritance, support from local authorities to develop infrastructure and facilities (e.g. car parking for visitors) and marketing/communicating with tourists via social media and websites
- Intermediary organisations and the Development Agency highlighted the need to overcome mistrust between family-run SMEs on joint marketing and promotion. They also raised co-financing of media relations and SME communication, lobbying government, promoting the value of sustainable tourism to SMEs, and the need to build long-term personal relationships with SMEs.
- The City of Dubrovnik talked about the need for SMEs to be assisted in applying for funding, as well as its continued commitment to promoting traditional crafts and rural development. This includes supporting the diversification of produce to meet market demands and supporting professional education in sustainable development.

There was a limited amount of interaction and discussion between participants at the event. Most of the workshop was taken up by a series of presentations followed by people stating their requests or concerns. The meeting only became genuinely deliberative (i.e. with a back-and-forth flow of ideas) once the representatives from the Municipality had left and the room 'relaxed'. This may reflect the lack of experience locally with more deliberative and discursive forms of engagement, but would seem to point more strongly to the cultural context of how people traditionally interact with state and other governmental actors.

4. Analysis

This section of the report uses the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1 above (see page 9) to provide an analysis of the learning from the case studies. The report then goes on to draw conclusions, set out in section 5 below.

4.1 Organisational arrangements – communications and confidence building measures

The case studies have strongly reinforced the thesis summarised in the conceptual framework, that is: the critical importance of effective communications and confidence building when seeking to engage business organisations in forms of deliberative engagement.

This communications and confidence building worked in two ways:

- between the SME-DE project partner and the intermediary, to elicit their interest in holding a deliberative event, and
- between the intermediary and the SMEs.

Communication and confidence building with intermediaries

All of the project partners invested considerable time and energy in developing relationships with intermediary organisations, building on pre-established relationships and contacts. This relationship building was instrumental in creating both trust and understanding with the intermediaries.

An example of this is how Leeds Beckett University's project researcher worked closely with NGN's stakeholder support officer over a period of eight weeks in the run up to the event. This also proved an important means of abating any concerns that NGN had about employing an unfamiliar technique such as deliberative engagement. It also reflects the fact that it can take time to build understanding of, and buy in to, novel engagement methodologies. In the other UK case study, there was a long standing relationship between Leeds Beckett University and the consultancy and a willingness on the part of the latter to develop deeper connections with the University.

In the Bulgarian case study the intermediary, VEDA, has a high regional profile and is well-respected and well-connected in the business community. This, and a track record of relationship building with the SMEs and other intermediaries, enabled the project leader to engage them and quickly build their interest in taking part in the case study.

Commitment by the intermediaries to promoting, planning and taking part in the workshops was, needless to say, absolutely crucial. We know from extensive research elsewhere that success in public participation efforts is highly related to the lead actor's commitment to the participatory process. The intermediaries' convening power, reputation and networks were essential in making the DE events not only happen but also in ensuring outcomes that would add some value. This was seen across the case studies, reflecting the leadership and convening role of organisations such as VEDA, NGN, the Universities and the various municipalities.

Another important factor in developing a strong, trusting relationship between the partner and the intermediary appears to be assigning representatives from both organisations to work closely on the planning and organisation of the event. An example here would be from the UK case studies.

The impartial nature of the Universities was seen as important by the intermediaries, particularly when convening and brokering relationships between a number of different intermediaries and stakeholders. This, and the fact that the project was backed and funded by the EU, added important third-party endorsement to the initiative.

Relevance and adding value

In cases where the intermediary was unfamiliar with deliberative engagement, communication and confidence building measures were instrumental in helping the intermediary to understand deliberative engagement and its value. In the Italian case studies some of the intermediary partners were able to see the potential value to them of engaging with SMEs in this way. For example, the Agenda 21 Office of Udine Municipality saw how this could help them to reinvigorate the Udine Greenways project and broaden the involvement of other businesses in the area. Similarly, although the DE event did not go ahead in the consortium case study, the intermediary could see the potential value of involving SME members in helping to draft the guidelines they would be working with in the future.

The Udine Greenways case studies also highlighted that some of the intermediary stakeholders were cautious in committing wholeheartedly to an event where they were not convinced that a DE approach would be worthwhile and beneficial for their SME and other business contacts.

In the Danish energy-saving case study, the three intermediaries could all see the added-value of taking part in the pilot: the Business Development Centre was already working to create connections and synergies between businesses, the Municipality of Herning were looking to expand their strategic energy plan into the business sector, and the Municipality of Ikast-Brande (who already had a strong track record of working with businesses) were looking to develop a strategic energy plan for their area.

Communications and confidence building with SMEs

In terms of the actual techniques used for communicating with SMEs, there was little variation in the case studies. All of the intermediaries favoured getting in contact with SMEs on an individual basis rather than relying just on mass marketing techniques. In the Croatian workshop the intermediaries commented that in their experience they have to make personal contact with SMEs – often by visiting them in person – to engage them in attending trade events, and even then it can be difficult to get them to attend.

The experience of the intermediaries in the Italian case studies reinforces this point about the necessity of making personal contact. Very small SMEs in the case study areas often do not use email (or use it very rarely) and so a telephone call or visiting in person is essential in order to engage them. A third of the participants in the Udine Greenways case study said that their personal knowledge of the organisers played a role in getting them to participate in the event (as was the experience in the UK case studies). It is also worth noting that the intermediary in Italy targeted

those SMEs who they thought would attend, which meant that a potentially large cohort of SMEs might have been excluded from the invitations.

Some of the case studies used other media channels to make contact with the SMEs. For example in the energy-saving case study in Denmark, the Business Development Centre advertised the DE event on its Facebook and LinkedIn pages. The event was also announced on local radio and through an article in the local paper. It appears that these routes were effective because when the intermediary subsequently telephoned SMEs to personally invite them they found that many had already signed up to the event. However, it should be noted that this may have as much (or more) to do with the intermediary's positive reputation in the business community, rather than the way in which the event was brought to the SMEs' attention. The organisers felt they could have done more to reach a wider pool of SMEs, by tapping into the SMEs' own networks.

Reputation

It is apparent from a number of the case studies that the intermediary's reputation was a key factor in attracting SMEs to attend the DE events.

The influence of this in one of the Danish case studies has already been noted above. In the case of Northern Gas Networks (NGN) in the UK, the SMEs were invited by NGN's head of social strategy a month before the event and were then sent follow up reminder emails. None of the correspondence provided significantly more than the time and location of the event and details of the strategic question that was to be discussed. The good uptake on the part of the SMEs suggests the importance of NGN's good reputation and also the benefit of having an issue that was relevant to the SMEs. This is borne out by the fact that many of the SMEs cited a desire to develop a better relationship with NGN as a reason for having attended the DE event. In the Bulgarian case study 75% of the SMEs attending the event cited their personal knowledge of the organisers as one of their reasons for attending.

Feedback from SMEs across the case study workshops show that the two most common reasons given for their attendance at the workshops was their personal knowledge of the organisers (21 per cent) and, interestingly, the possibility of learning more (23 per cent). The latter statistic further reflects the relevance of the issues being discussed (see Appendix 1, Question 6).

Ensuring relevance to SMEs

The case studies suggest that the relevance of the topic of deliberation to the SMEs invited can be a key factor in securing good attendance at DE events.

In the UK case studies, it is notable that NGN had identified that there were numerous organisations that had a direct interest in reaching the fuel poor and used this insight to shape the topic of inquiry for its DE exercise, thereby ensuring the relevance of the DE event to the SMEs it invited.

The importance of relevance to SMEs is also suggested by the experience of the other UK case study whose event was not as well attended as had been expected. Like NGN, the consultancy group enjoyed a good local reputation and had made an effort to ensure that the topic for its deliberation exercise was clearly defined. The intermediary's reflection afterwards was that:

“you have to hit SMEs when they are looking for a solution to a particular problem that they are facing”.

This is also borne out by discussions with the consortium in Italy where, historically, attendance had been poor for events discussing subjects that were not of immediate interest to their businesses. The challenge seems to be in ensuring that the engagement moves beyond “nice but not essential” issues, otherwise busy SMEs tend not to commit to attending such events.

In all of the case studies, organisers avoided very broad topics like ‘tackling the implications of climate change’, and instead focused on issues that were much more practical and bounded. This highlights the importance of a strong and focused strategic question around which the event can be organised: fuel poverty in the NGN case, making Udine Greenways attractive to a wider range of SMEs, energy saving in Aarhus, SME voice in Varna, etc. The practicalities of working in the ‘real world’ with business intermediary organisations and municipalities meant that the case studies had to be practically focused on issues that mattered to the organisations involved. This point about making the issue directly relevant to SMEs was also highlighted in the second Danish case study.

It is worth noting at this stage that contextual factors - and in particular political contexts - also had a significant influence on some of the case studies (this is explored further below in section 4.2), and this highlights the importance of the intermediary’s role. Those who are close to the SME audience bring vital contextual intelligence to the planning of DE events: what subject will have traction? what issues should we avoid? where and when should we hold the event?

Other incentives

It was clear from a number of case studies that other incentives were also at play which attracted SMEs to the events. In particular, the opportunity to network with other businesses and organisations was cited as an important factor for participants in a number of case studies. Although, interestingly, this is something that is culturally contextualised: in the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo case study, the Friulian character of self-reliance means that rural entrepreneurs tend to be more conservative and less interested in networking than their urban counterparts.

Summary of Section 4.1

- It took time to build confidence about the project with intermediaries, particularly where people are unfamiliar with DE
- Commitment and leadership by the intermediary is crucial, as is the presence of a champion or entrepreneur within the intermediary to stimulate this buy-in
- For DE to have traction with both intermediaries and SMEs it needs to be highly relevant to business and strategic needs. It will help if there are other benefits such as networking opportunities.
- Direct, personal communication with SMEs is essential for getting SMEs interested in DE. Intermediary reputation will help facilitate this.
- A DE event should have a clear, focused and practical agenda.

4.2 Contextual factors

The conceptual framework for this project posited that there are a range of contextual factors with the potential to affect the engagement of SMEs, including regulatory and political environments, market factors and information asymmetries. We have already discussed above how factors such as relationships, reputation and business-relevance will affect SME engagement. This section looks at the evidence from the case studies regarding wider contextual factors.

Regulatory, political and cultural environments

Some of the case studies (most notably the Italian and Danish case studies) engaged with a number of municipal (i.e. local or regional government) stakeholder organisations, or they sought to develop a case study that would have a significant regulatory element (in the case of the consortium case study in Italy).

An unwillingness to surrender some power on the part of governmental decision makers is often a common obstacle to successful public or stakeholder engagement and participation. In the case of the Italian consortium case study an uneasiness about putting an important decision in the hands of SMEs proved to be an insurmountable barrier and the engagement workshop did not proceed. The focus of the consortium case study - looking at the drafting of environmental regulations - was felt to be too sensitive (given the complexities of multilevel governance involved) to be opened up to engagement in this deliberative way. The intermediary was unwilling to take the risk of experimenting with innovative methods of engagement and as a result resorted to more traditional and hierarchical methods of engagement, that is: one in which top-down control of the consultation process remained with the intermediary.

The Martignacco and Moruzzo case study in Italy showed that deliberative engagement can be more difficult to implement when there is a deep-rooted subsidy-dependent culture, such as in the farming sector in this part of Italy. Where this is the prevailing culture, organisations will be more used to State-led actions and less familiar with approaches that encourage them to take ownership and responsibility for solving their problems. An element of this dependant culture also seemed to be evident in some of the discussions in the Croatian case study, where participants were looking for funding from municipalities. In practice this means that the self-efficacy and empowerment implied by a DE approach does not always fit comfortably for businesses, intermediaries and municipalities.

In both of the Italian UDG case studies, the organisers had to work hard to overcome barriers of mistrust between various private and public sector stakeholders. To help overcome these issues the involvement of a reputable and impartial partner, such as the University, and the commitment and persistence shown by the intermediary, are crucial.

In the Danish energy-saving case study, Aarhus University had to work to navigate concerns amongst the municipal intermediaries over buy-in and potential conflicts of interest, before the intermediaries felt comfortable about realising the benefits of working together to promote and host the workshop.

The NGN case study in the UK also showed the impact of particular regulatory factors in creating the broad conditions for the DE event. That is, the regulatory requirement placed on UK energy

companies to support a range of social programmes. This creates an environment in which different stakeholders are encouraged to work together on common problems.

Market and information factors

The Danish energy-saving case study highlighted that the participating SMEs were very focused on return on investment, rather than being driven by customer pressures relating to sustainability and climate change. However, the project lead (Aarhus University) did reflect that this may have been due to the focus of the workshop which looked specifically at their own energy use. One thing that did influence the SMEs to take part in this case study was the experience of their peer organisations who had taken part in similar events previously. This also reflects the points about cultural context: familiarity with this sort of engagement can help smooth the way for running DE events.

The findings from all of the case studies show the importance of contextual factors. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription or blueprint for Deliberative Engagement given the impact of different situational conditions. No engagement process starts from scratch with a clean slate; each builds on a history of events and interactions, antecedent conditions and situational factors, which can subsequently influence the process of engagement.

Summary of Section 4.2

- Contextual factors will have a significant impact on using DE, in terms of both enabling and hindering it
- Because of its novel nature, and the way it seeks to empower SMEs, DE can be difficult to implement in politically risky contexts or where the prevailing culture is top-down or subsidy-dependant
- Conversely, in other contexts, DE can be seen as a way of supporting intermediary strategies in new and productive ways.

4.3 Deliberative engagement

The use of deliberative forms of engagement as a means of activating collaboration, problem-solving and networking amongst SMEs lies at the heart of the SME-DE project. We have already discussed the crucial importance and impact of communication and confidence building measures, as well as the contextual factors affecting business engagement.

Assuming that you can get the SMEs together at an event, what then: how useful is the deliberative approach in fostering collaboration, problem-solving and the development of SME networks? This section of the report reflects on what worked, and what didn't work, in the case study DE events. To set the scene for this discussion it is helpful to first provide an overview of different approaches (or methodologies) for Deliberative Engagement.

4.3.1 Methodologies

In designing and planning their DE events partners deliberately chose to keep their workshop methodologies straightforward, to make it easier for the SME and intermediary participants - many of whom would be unfamiliar with more participative and deliberative forms of engagement - to feel comfortable.

Most of the case studies were designed around a linear information / discussion / plenary format. Initial presentations were followed by facilitated 'round table' or group discussions, followed in turn by a summary or closing plenary session involving all of the participants. Two of the case studies experimented with an Open Space methodology. It is important to note, however, that there is no single 'right' approach or methodology for Deliberative Engagement, instead fitness for purpose is the key attribute. In other words, people organising a DE event should use (or design) a deliberative methodology that will support the event's objectives and meet the needs of the participants. If the methodology needs to be simple (and a simple approach can often be the best strategy) then that is a completely legitimate course of action. The methodology should always be at the service of the objective.

The case study DE events were designed with their particular participants in mind, hence the straightforward and relatively short formats. In practice, the workshop formats proved to have both strengths and weaknesses, some of which were event-specific and others were due to a wide range of other organisational and contextual factors. The next two sections draw this learning together.

4.3.2 What worked?

Workshop objectives and design

Each of the case study workshops had clear objectives and these objectives were achieved and in some cases exceeded. For example, in the case studies in the UK the process provided an opportunity to introduce the concept of deliberative engagement to an intermediary and an opportunity to test out a deliberative approach with groups of SMEs. NGN expressed their overall satisfaction with the diversity of the organisations who had participated; they felt this provided an important point of difference that will help in the promotion and development of similar stakeholder events in the future.

The mix of participants and diversity of discussions were also seen as helpful in the Danish energy-saving workshop - one of the intermediaries specifically commented on this in their evaluation. This diversity enabled participants (including the intermediaries) to understand one another's points of view better and helped to tackle misconceptions.

Close attention to event design and facilitation were also critical to the success of the case study workshops. Although the methodologies employed were simple and straightforward, partners recognised that good design and facilitation are vital and they planned their workshops accordingly. The planning and facilitation enabled the workshop objectives to be achieved, to manage the time available, to be flexible where necessary and to enable discussion and deliberation. Feedback from participants (see Appendix 1) indicates that this was broadly achieved. Figure 2 below summarises the feedback from SMEs on various features of the workshops:

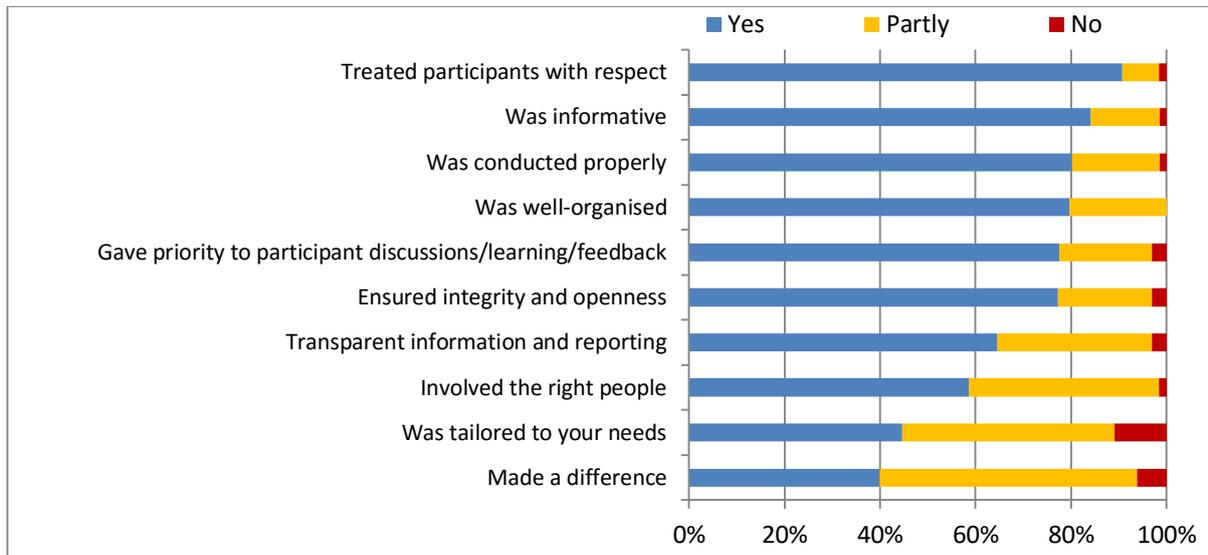


Figure 2 – SME feedback on workshop quality, all case studies (Q11 on the evaluation form, see Appendix 1)

As we can see from the data:

- Three quarters of SME respondents felt that the workshops had given priority to participant discussions, learning and feedback
- Most SME respondents felt that the workshops were well-organised (80 per cent), conducted properly (80 per cent) and treated participants with respect (90 per cent).

The deliberative nature of the workshops enabled participants to be creative, to see issues ‘in the round’ and share ideas and solutions. One of the entrepreneurs who participated in the Italian UDG workshop said:

“we took a new approach: we went beyond the simple thinking about a bicycle path and talked about sustainability and the environment.... We created an important opportunity to get local businesses involved, and in particular local farmers, in a bigger project”.

This creativity and problem-solving was also seen in the Danish energy-saving workshop, where the participants discussed how to engage SMEs more broadly on climate change issues. They agreed that a new vocabulary was needed to get SMEs interested and that this had to include the business benefits and returns on investment. Language such as ‘improved reputation’ and ‘becoming more sustainable’ had less traction with the participants than focusing on the direct benefits to their businesses.

In the Danish energy-saving workshop the different roles played by the collaborating intermediaries also seemed to help, as well as the fact that the event took place at a company which participants

were interested in visiting. In addition, being very clear about the aims of the event was considered to be a key factor in making the deliberative conversations both focused and productive.

The last point to make about workshop practicalities is the importance of making events like this welcoming, enjoyable and fun for participants. This is particularly important when SMEs are being invited to take part in something unfamiliar (a fifth of SMEs participating in this project's case studies had never taken part in workshops or research before). In the Italian case studies, for example, the workshops were accompanied by drinks receptions, which allowed participants to relax and feel welcomed.

Benefits to Intermediaries

Feedback from the intermediaries engaged on the case studies was positive. In the Danish energy-saving case study, each of the intermediaries got what they wanted from the event: the Business Development Centre found that there are SMEs interested in taking part in future networks on energy saving and the two Municipalities obtained the input of SMEs into their strategic plans. In the UK's NGN case study, the intermediary's positive experience of the DE workshop has led to them looking to develop and extend the format for use elsewhere: in particular, they could see the value of using the insights of external stakeholders to shape their organisation's wider strategic thinking. NGN has also recognised the potential of a deliberative format to tackle complex internal as well as external issues. In the Bulgarian case study, the intermediary's confidence in participatory approaches increased as a result of taking part.

A number of participating SMEs commented positively on the enabling and leadership role of intermediaries. In the Italian UDG case study, the event demonstrated to SMEs that public authorities care about their opinions and it demonstrated to public authorities that the private sector is willing to invest time in helping shape policy if they find an organisation which is ready to listen to them. A participating SME commented:

"for the first time I realised that public and private stakeholders can work together without being completely detached: during normal conferences there is such a distance that few results are achieved."

This benefit was also seen in the Danish energy-saving case study, where a number of the SMEs commented positively on engagement by the municipalities, with one participant saying:

"I really respect the municipality for being part of this, and when they reach out, we are more than willing to participate".

Feedback from a number of the case studies indicated that building and nurturing relationships with key intermediaries was an important attractive factor for some of the participating SMEs. For example, in the UK's NGN case study a quarter of SME participants said that increasing their knowledge of the intermediary was a key factor behind their decision to attend the workshop.

SME feedback

Feedback about the DE workshops from participating SMEs was generally positive. In the Bulgarian case study nearly all the participants said that they were extremely or very satisfied with the workshop, with three quarters saying that the workshop had made a difference (a quarter saying it had partly made a difference). None of the participants said that the workshop had been a waste of time. Participants were equally positive about factors such as the event being informative and that participants were treated with respect. Over 90 per cent of the participants said that they would recommend a colleague to take part in a similar workshop.

In the Danish energy-saving case study, 90 per cent of the SMEs were satisfied with the event and all the SMEs (except one) said they would recommend a colleague to participate in a similar activity. And in the UK's NGN case study, 83 per cent of participants were satisfied with the event, with 25 per cent saying they were extremely satisfied. Everyone attending the NGN event believed the event made a difference and 79 per cent had a positive perception of the proceedings and the outcome.

Looking at the aggregated data across all the case studies (see Appendix 1), three quarters of SMEs who responded to the evaluation said they were satisfied with the DE workshops, and nearly all participating SMEs said that they would recommend taking part in something similar to their colleagues.

Networks and collaborations

There was clear evidence from the case studies of networking and collaboration, and in at least one case the setting up of a new collaborative network.

In the Italian UDG Udine workshop, most of the SMEs were positive because the DE event was seen to have generated a shared outcome. One of the SMEs commented:

“we actually contributed something to a project we may become part of”

A third of the businesses taking part in the UDG Udine workshop recognised that the event offered an opportunity to build new networks. One of the participants remarked that:

“I networked with other SMEs and we met after the event to talk about some ideas we had developed there. The event was the right occasion to talk among ourselves about Udine Greenways, but also of other things. Since we Friulani are so reserved, these occasions are a great opportunity to talk and network”.

In the Bulgarian case study the most important outcomes for the intermediary were strengthening local collaboration and networking, as well as building capacity and skills for the collective resolution of problems. During the DE workshop participants were not just actively taking part in the discussions, they were also helping each other to solve or answer their concerns and queries.

Prior to the event conducted as part of the Danish energy-saving case study, one of the intermediaries had expressed doubts about whether SMEs could tackle problems collectively and not just talk about their own problems. Following the event the intermediary commented that SMEs

“were able to find common ground as to the chosen challenges discussed”. Furthermore, the networking opportunities from the event were particularly valued by the SMEs.

Following the Danish workshop the intermediaries and a number of the SMEs set up a network to take forward the work on energy saving. The SMEs decided to finance the network themselves and in this way solved the financial challenges for the intermediaries. The Municipality of Herning also plans to engage this network in their on-going work on strategic energy planning for companies in the region.

The workshop in the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo pilot resulted in some concrete suggestions for both the sustainable promotion of Udine Greenways and of SME networks. Participants asked both municipalities to allocate time and space for the discussions started at the workshop to continue, although some of the SMEs expressed scepticism that this will happen in practice.

4.3.3 What didn't work?

We now turn to a discussion of the things that didn't work so well in the case studies. This provides equally valuable learning about the challenges of engaging intermediaries and SMEs in this way. It exemplifies both the differences and similarities of experience across the countries taking part in the case studies.

Unfamiliarity and culture

One of the challenges with using highly participative, deliberative methodologies in this context is that SME and intermediary participants may not be used to this way of working. This certainly presented a challenge in some, although not all, of the workshops.

In the Italian UDG Udine case study a high degree of unfamiliarity with the co-productive and empowered nature of deliberative engagement meant that a number of SME participants found it difficult to make the best use of the event. Some of the SMEs seemed instead to need to voice their opinion and to address their concerns to politicians, including those at the regional or national level even though they were not present in the room. The group needed active facilitation as they found it difficult to self-manage the discussion in terms of time and focus on objectives.

This was also reflected in the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo event where unfamiliarity with the deliberative approach meant that participants struggled to think about what they could do to tackle problems. Instead, many of the participants kept emphasising that 'the State' needed to provide the funds for Udine Greenways. Participants did make several suggestions but they were not necessarily trying to reach consensus on a common approach and time ran out before the facilitator could help them to reach a shared outcome.

At the Martignacco and Moruzzo event, a number of participants also expressed doubts about the dimensions of business sustainability and the particular impact of climate change. One of the participants suggested that the other business people were not expert enough to contribute to the discussion, creating tension at the start of the workshop. This highlights the point - commonly experienced in public participation activity - that participants will not necessarily conform to expectations. They will bring their own views, values, understandings and prejudices into the room. They may also want to discuss the things they want to talk about, rather than what is on the agenda.

This highlights the importance of good event planning and design. So, for example, if there is a need to give people information, or if it is likely that space will be needed to ‘surface’ and air scepticism, then this needs to be factored in to the event design - alongside good facilitation to keep things to time and to manage conversations where people want to go ‘off-piste’.

The Martignacco and Moruzzo experience indicated that getting SMEs informed to the point where they can effectively participate in a DE session can sometimes be challenging: they may not read what is sent to them, they have little time to invest in separate information sessions and initial presentations may not have the intended impact.

The experience of the Croatian case study, as already touched on in section 3.5.1, reinforces the point about unfamiliarity with collaborative approaches, at least when trying to convene this between state and business actors. The Croatian workshop only became genuinely deliberative, with a good flow of ideas and discussion, once the municipal authority had left the event. This reinforces the importance of designing DE to suit the circumstances and objectives, and it may not suit every circumstance.

The fact that the DE case studies in the UK and Denmark resulted in both an appetite by some intermediaries to make further use of the deliberative approach, and the establishment of at least one network, could suggest that some European cultures are more conducive to innovating in this way – or at least that DE approaches are easier to implement in some countries than others.

Collaboration and problem-solving

Notwithstanding the evidence of networking and collaboration already discussed above, it is interesting to note that in their feedback a much smaller proportion of SMEs said that they had tried to solve problems in their workshops (7 per cent) compared with those who said they had used the workshops to identify common problems (14 per cent), learnt something new (16 per cent), had listened to other participants’ opinions (21 per cent) and had expressed their own views (16 per cent) (Appendix 1, Question 7).

Given the short duration of the case study workshops, and the fact that for many this was their first experience of this way of working, we would not have expected participants to move very far into problem-solving at this stage. This sort of collaborative participation is a process of getting to know and trust others, of sharing and discussing information and ideas, and then moving on to solve common problems together.

Practicalities

The case studies provided some very practical learning about running deliberative workshops with SMEs and intermediaries.

Time constraints

It was not easy to strike the right balance between keeping the workshops short enough to attract SMEs (given the demands on SME time and the assumption that SMEs would not be willing to

commit to a whole-day event) and long enough to make them informative and, most importantly, productive.

Feedback from the Danish energy-saving case study indicated that the limited time available meant that the SMEs were not able to get as much from the event as the intermediary would have liked, given that there was a tendency for the SMEs to focus on their own challenges rather than more common issues. Feedback from the intermediary at the NGN workshop in the UK also indicated that a longer workshop would have been helpful to get the most out of people's contributions.

Information v participation

Another balance that needed to be struck was between information-giving (most of the workshops had one or more presentations to start the proceedings) and time for the deliberation and collaboration. In the Danish energy-saving workshop, one of the introductory presentations was not as relevant to the SMEs as it could have been, which underscores the importance of making these events highly relevant and practical for the SMEs. It was also felt that having two presentations at this workshop took time away from the subsequent discussion session.

The organisers of the Italian case studies reflected that the discussion elements of the workshops would have benefited from more time, with the introduction of the UDG Udine workshop perhaps taking too long and not focusing sufficiently on the needs of the SMEs.

It can be a challenge to manage the expectations of the participating intermediaries, particularly where multiple, and municipal, organisations are involved: everyone may want to have a say. In some countries the prevailing culture may expect these formal contributions to be made at the start of meetings; in others, formalities may not be so important and this makes it easier to move more quickly on to the deliberative sessions.

Managing room dynamics

In the Bulgarian case study, some of the participants took quite a passive, introverted role in the workshop, writing down their answers to the question being asked of the group and handing this to the facilitator. The facilitator did encourage their further involvement by getting them to speak to other participants on a one-to-one basis. There was a tendency by some participants – and this is common to all groups and gatherings – to dominate some of the conversation: the facilitators were alert to this and sought to bring in other voices. The facilitator in the Danish case study also found that they had to manage some dominant voices.

At the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo workshop it took a while for people to start participating, and some did not participate at all. The organisers reflected that, in addition to the challenge of an unfamiliar event, a smaller number of participants may have helped people to feel more comfortable about speaking up and getting involved.

We should note that, as already discussed above in section 4.3.2, feedback from SMEs across the case studies was generally very positive about the way that the workshops were facilitated.

Workshop design and facilitation

In the UK's NGN workshop, a number of participants indicated that the event was "partly" a waste of time. This seems to be due to the lack of a tangible outcome for the workshop and the sense that "time will tell" whether the event was useful or not. Although the outcomes of deliberation are inherently uncertain, the organisers concluded that more could have been done to share some preliminary thinking about next steps, as well as outlining specific protocols around sharing the information that was generated. This is associated with a desire not to be too prescriptive about the deliberative discussion (particularly when using a methodology such as Open Space which has an open agenda), while at the same time giving participants a practical sense of purpose and direction. Reflecting on the insights generated by the participants' feedback, it might have been better to have instead set out at the start some scenarios or options to give a better sense of what potentially could happen after the event.

Feedback at the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo event also indicated that objectives were rather vague, mainly because officials from the intermediaries did not articulate an overall vision about how the UDG project would develop.

The NGN workshop also gave rise to some other practical suggestions for improvement (relevant particularly to the use of Open Space, but also to other methodologies):

- When inviting SMEs, ask participants to think in advance of the event about particular issues they may wish to highlight for discussion. This may also have helped to counteract the awkwardness some people seemed to feel at the start of the Open Space process when asked to generate topics for discussion
- The suggested topics could then be pinned up on a board in advance and during the registration process participants could be encouraged to take a look and come up with additional ideas before the start of the workshop
- NGN suggested that another way of addressing this problem would be to get people to interview the person next to them at the start and then introduce that person (name, job and organisation) to the rest of the group. They could then also ask their neighbour about the issue they would like to see discussed, another strategy to mitigate awkwardness and generate topics for discussion
- Finally, the need for round rather than square tables to encourage discussion is noted.

In the Italian Martignacco and Moruzzo event there was no pause between the introductory session and the DE activity. As a result, all controversial issues brought up by the initial presentations were then aired at the beginning of the DE workshop, rather spoiling its initial atmosphere. An intermediate Q&A session might have helped avoiding people carrying over their doubts into the workshop. In addition, the late timing of the event meant that people got rather tired as the evening wore on. However, there was no other optimal time as farmers are at work during daylight hours and are only available for this sort of event in the evening.

Intermediary commitment and buy-in

We have already discussed the central importance of intermediary commitment in section 4.1 above. This point is reinforced by the experience in the Martignacco and Moruzzo case study, where one of the municipality officials seemed not to be that interested in feedback and inputs from SMEs. Indeed, they did not stay to the end and missed most of the discussion among SMEs. This created considerable tension among other stakeholders who felt let down. Having said this, once the report on the workshop was shared by Udine University, both intermediaries were thankful and asked the University to continue their involvement in the project. This experience may also reflect a lack of capacity in what are in fact very small governing bodies, and also a lack of experience in working directly with SMEs.

The two municipalities in this case study had also not involved other intermediaries such as trade associations in the SME engagement process because trade associations are often perceived as rather remote in more rural areas. As a result, there were very few SMEs from sectors other than agriculture, which meant that there were no ideas in how to make Udine Greenways interesting for other sectors. Similarly in the UDG case study, the DE event did not attract SMEs from all the area's municipalities, because some local authorities were more efficient than others at engaging and some were sceptical of the participatory nature of Udine Greenways.

The experience in the case studies also seems to suggest that membership-based intermediaries, such as traditional trade associations, may be less effective and interested than "arms-length" intermediaries (such as municipalities and strategic bodies) at engaging SMEs. This may be because arms-length intermediaries are expected to facilitate the availability of additional assets and to take more of a strategic leadership role, whereas membership-based organisations rely primarily on membership fees and may not have the resources to address wider sustainability challenges, where the return on their investment is unclear.

Summary of Section 4.3

- SMEs taking part in the case studies were generally positive about the workshops they took part in, and they appreciated the opportunity to get involved in addressing common challenges. The engagement reflected positively on the intermediaries.
- Close attention to the design of a DE event is critical. Matching the deliberative technique to the event's objectives and the needs of the participants is key. Good facilitation is also vitally important.
- There was evidence of active collaboration and, in one case, the setting up of an on-going SME network.
- However, DE can be difficult when organisations are not used to this collaborative and empowered way of working. Even where organisations are more receptive to DE, it takes time and effort to move on to actually solving problems.

5. Conclusions

This project set out to answer a simple question: how can SME leaders in a number of settings (urban and rural, and in different locations in Europe) be actively engaged in addressing difficult, long-term issues such as those associated with business sustainability? We have sought to answer this question by developing and testing a conceptual framework built around three key elements: organisational arrangements, contextual factors and deliberative engagement (see Figure 1 on page 9). We suggest that deliberative engagement is one way through which SMEs can be actively engaged in addressing difficult and long-term issues that affect them. What can we conclude?

The evidence from the small number of case studies in this project suggests that deliberative engagement can be used to actively engage SMEs in this way. The research shows it has the potential to facilitate collaboration between SMEs and their intermediaries in solving difficult or ‘wicked’ issues. However, the conditions which need to be present for this potential to be realised are critical. They relate not only to the practicalities of a well-designed deliberative event but also the way in which intermediaries communicate and build confidence with SMEs.

Contextual factors also play a key role. A range of political, cultural, organisational and geographical influences for intermediary and SME engagement all affect the ease and extent to which DE can be used effectively. Policy makers and others should not underestimate the challenge intermediary organisations face in engaging SMEs in this way. Many SMEs will see this approach as problematic and it will only work if you have firm commitment from the intermediary. The case studies also reinforce the point that every situation is different and that the engagement needs to be tailored to suit the circumstances and context. In other words, fitness for purpose is key.

5.1 Building confidence with intermediaries and SMEs

The project highlights the importance of not only communicating effectively and building confidence with SMEs, but in particular with intermediaries.

Intermediaries

Getting intermediaries engaged and interested in taking part in the case studies proved to be a complex, and at times daunting, task in all the countries. This project will leave a legacy of tools for intermediaries interested in using DE to foster collaboration amongst their SMEs, but it is worth drawing out the learning from how we engaged and interested the intermediaries in the first place.

Factors that contributed positively to intermediary engagement included:

- Investing in building relationships and trust. This was facilitated by engaging with leaders and working with nominated individuals or specialist units within the intermediary to turn initial expressions of interest into a well-planned and resourced DE event. This insight highlights the importance of senior level commitment within the intermediary to the goals and aspirations of DE.
- The key role played by ‘policy entrepreneurs’ within intermediary organisations: people who will champion innovation and novel forms of engagement. Building the capacity and capability of these entrepreneurs will be an important factor in implementing DE in the future.

- Demonstrating added-value to the intermediaries – what will they get out of this? For example, broadening capacity to deliver sustainability strategies by co-opting SMEs.
- Speaking to intermediaries in their language. The expression ‘Deliberative Engagement’ will mean very little to most people, so use terms that will resonate with the people involved.
- The involvement of a reputable and impartial partner (for example the Universities in this project) can help lend credibility and confidence to the process.

SMEs

The experience from the case studies highlights the critical importance of effective communication and confidence building when seeking to engage SMEs in different forms of deliberative engagement. Workshop organisers managed to attract SMEs to attend and take part in their workshops. The things that attracted the SMEs and caught their attention have already been explored in section 4 above. What can we conclude from this experience? The key factors seem to be:

- The intermediary’s reputation was key in attracting SMEs to take part
- SMEs reacted more favourably when contacted by an intermediary perceived to be able to deploy key assets (e.g. reputation, expertise, access to funding, network of national or international contacts, etc.) that can help them to achieve their objectives
- The relevance to SMEs of the topic being discussed was an important factor in securing good attendance at DE events, particularly topics that have tangible business-related impacts and benefits. Some SMEs taking part in the case studies were motivated more by issues such as return on investment than sustainability or climate-change *per se*
- It is better to avoid very broad topics and focus on practical and bounded issues
- For some SMEs the opportunity to network with other businesses was an incentive to participate
- Credible commitment by the intermediary. Promises made need to be kept, to maintain the trust of SMEs, for example in following up actions agreed at the workshop.

5.2 The wider context

When seeking to engage SMEs, this project’s conceptual framework was broadly confirmed, that is: organisational arrangements are of critical importance. Yet their impact is significantly mediated by contextual factors, including regulatory, political, organisational and cultural environments. The main conclusions from the experience of the case studies were:

- Top-down practices and traditions created a problematic environment for the DE process - which is based on principles like co-production, empowerment and self-efficacy - to succeed.
- The flip side of this experience is that intermediaries and SMEs with a less top-down culture were more receptive to DE and made more of its potential
- Deliberative engagement with SMEs can sometimes be a step too far for intermediaries, particularly when they are navigating around issues associated with a risky political or regulatory environment
- In some cases organisers had to overcome mistrust between private and public sector participants

- Information asymmetries meant that some SMEs did not take part actively in the workshops as they had little knowledge of the topic.
- DE is difficult to implement when there is a deep-rooted subsidy-dependant culture. This is because the self-efficacy and empowerment implied by a DE approach does not always fit comfortably in these circumstances. This point applies to SMEs/businesses as well as intermediaries.

Organisations intending to use DE in top-down or subsidy-dependant contexts will need to take time to build confidence in using this more collaborative approach. It may be that the impact and benefits will need to be show-cased using examples from elsewhere, or perhaps demonstration events will be needed to give intermediaries (and SMEs) the confidence that this approach can add value in helping them to solve difficult, common problems.

We should also note that the SME-DE project itself created an atypical environment, in that this was an EU-funded project where the project partners were initiating and to a large extent managing the case studies. The challenge will be in translating this atypical context to a more typical one. For the DE approach to take root amongst intermediaries and SMEs it will need catalysing and resourcing. Furthermore, we have already discussed above the importance of entrepreneurial leadership within intermediaries and the independent role of the universities. Some of this project's outputs are aimed at supporting intermediaries to take on this approach and we also draw out some implications for EU policy makers in terms of capacity building (see section 5.6 below).

5.3 Using Deliberative Engagement

The use of deliberation – where people come together to learn, share ideas and work out solutions together – is at the heart of the conceptual model developed and tested in this project.

The case studies demonstrated that, given the right sort of circumstances, SMEs are willing and able to come together to deliberate on issues, and this includes more challenging issues associated with business sustainability. As we might expect, these issues should be framed in ways that are business-relevant, such as energy saving opportunities, tapping into the tourism potential of sustainability programmes, or delivering regulatory requirements around social objectives. In addition, the deliberation should be planned carefully, with a focus on matching event design to purpose and contexts, supported by effective facilitation.

Furthermore, if stakeholders believe in the engagement, and organisational arrangements are designed and implemented to stimulate real participation, arms-length intermediaries (for example municipalities, business innovation hubs and economic development agencies) can be effective enablers of this collaboration.

5.4 SME networks

A one-off deliberative engagement workshop is always going to have limited value in terms of building the capacity of SMEs to both collaborate in solving problems and contribute to wider policy development in the EU. It is only really the start of a wider capacity-building process. The real value will come when deliberation is used as a means for fostering on-going collaboration. Indeed, building and sustaining effective SME networks - through the enabling and convening role of intermediaries - is a key outcome which underpinned the original motivation behind this project.

The pilot case studies have shown that deliberative processes have the potential to trigger the creation of new SME networks and collaborations. Not only that, but they demonstrated a genuine appetite on the part of SMEs for ‘something to happen next’. This is something that has been learnt (repeatedly) in other forums of public and citizen participation: engagement should be seen as an on-going dialogue. As one of the project partners said:

“ participation is like cooking a fish: once you unfreeze it you have to cook it; you cannot stop, otherwise it will spoil!”

The leadership role of intermediaries is critical to enabling this network creation, at least in terms of starting the process off, but also in helping to sustain networks (although this project did not explore the long-term sustainability of these networks). And in the one example from this project where an on-going network was established, impact on business profitability seems to have been a factor in motivating the network’s creation.

5.5 Practical implications for intermediary executive training and the DE Guide

This project has a number of outputs, which include:

- Online self-directed training material for intermediary executives
- A simple guide to Deliberative Engagement.

Summarised here are the very practical elements that will need to be included in those outputs, drawing on the learning from the case studies. This information is designed for intermediaries interested in hosting DE events:

Before the event

- The critical importance of communicating in ways that will both reach and then engage SMEs to become interested in attending a DE event. Personal is generally best, don’t simply rely on broadcast media. The key is understanding how best to reach your target audience. Make use of other networks, particularly if diversity and engaging the previously unengaged are important for you.
- Knowing what levers and drivers will attract SMEs. This may include intermediary reputation, business relevance of the topic, networking and funding opportunities. Use language that will resonate with your target SMEs.
- Allocate sufficient resources to plan, deliver and sustain the SME participation. Task someone to be responsible for making this happen.
- Articulate clear objectives or a clear strategic question to be addressed at the DE event. Planning and delivering the workshop will take effort and resources, so make sure you have a very clear purpose for doing it. Keep this purpose focused and practical, even if it is a ‘wicked’ or complex problem. For example, consider a small part of the issue to address first. Frame it in terms of things that will matter to the SMEs.
- Plan the DE event carefully. Pay attention to process design, it’s very important. Design the workshop to deliver the objectives. Think about what might side-track the meeting (e.g. complaints) and make sure your design can cope with this. Be flexible - the unexpected will almost certainly happen! Engage an experienced facilitator to facilitate the event.

- Plan for a short event (ideally 2-3 hrs); any longer and SMEs may not be prepared to attend. Think about how numbers at the event will affect group dynamics. If you need to engage lots of people, then plan to use small-group work for the deliberative part of the event.
- Simple is best when it comes to the deliberative methodology. There are plenty of off-the-shelf techniques that you can draw on, but given the short timescale of an SME workshop you will almost certainly need to adapt these to suit your context. Alternatively, use an approach similar to those trialled in these case studies. Remember: fitness for purpose is the key. The methodology should be at the service of what you are trying to achieve at the DE event.
- An important element of this purpose is going to be creating the right sort of environment at the workshop to encourage people to deliberate. Using an appropriate deliberative methodology is important, but if you don't create the right sort of environment for people to feel comfortable and empowered to take part, then your event will not succeed. So make sure your design takes account of these 'softer' considerations.
- Plan ahead for how you intend to sustain the SME network after the event.

At the event

- Good facilitation (and, of course, that detailed plan you prepared beforehand) will be key to the event running successfully.
- Make sure the event is welcoming and enjoyable! Participants will almost certainly have anxieties, so make sure they quickly feel comfortable. Don't underestimate the importance of having fun.
- Make sure that people have the information they need (this should all have been part of your pre-planning and maybe also pre-event communication with the SMEs). You will almost certainly need to spend some time at the start of the workshop giving people information and dealing with any questions about the process and outcomes. Keep this section short and to the point. Perhaps even experiment with more interesting ways of information-giving than just presentations, e.g. adapting a world café approach.
- Depending on the audience, you may need to agree ground rules for things like behaviours, respecting each other's contributions, staying to the end, etc.
- Make sure enough time is available for the real heart of the event - the deliberation.

After the event

- At the very least, there should be some element of 'next steps' after the workshop. But what you should be aiming to do is sustain the SME network and develop the collaboration begun at the workshop.
- It may take time to build trust in and commitment to a network, so think about how this can best be supported. For example you may need to be more hands-on to start with if the SMEs are less self-organising.
- Even if the SMEs are self-organising here, you may still need to help facilitate the network. Be creative as to how this can be resourced, for example the SMEs may be willing to help fund this if they see added-value.

5.6 Some implications for policy

The case studies have highlighted some implications for policy within the European Union, in respect of activating SMEs and supporting the capacity of intermediary organisations. These implications have been weaved into the analysis and conclusions above, but some key points are highlighted here:

- Deliberative Engagement, allied to a proper understanding of organisational and contextual factors, can facilitate collaborative problem-solving amongst SMEs and their intermediaries in addressing ‘wicked’ problems. Because of its creative and discursive nature, DE allows people and organisations to explore issues holistically and create bottom-up solutions to difficult challenges. SMEs and their intermediaries are definitely interested in engaging on business sustainability issues, given a well-designed process with the right focus.
- However, policy makers should not underestimate the challenge of making this happen in practice. Deliberative Engagement can be seen as risky, particularly in challenging political or regulatory contexts, and many intermediaries and SMEs will not be familiar with this approach. It requires firm commitment and leadership by intermediaries, as well as stimulus by ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and innovators within intermediary organisations.
- It can also be challenging to introduce the innovation of DE in contexts where prevailing cultures tend to be top-down or subsidy-dependant. At the very least, the pace of its introduction may take more time and effort. The EU should explore how it can best support the building of DE capacity in these contexts. This capacity-building ought, in the first instance, to be directed at intermediary organisations.
- DE has the potential to facilitate the development of SME networks, particularly where SMEs and their intermediaries see the added-value and business salience. This project did not explicitly explore how these networks can best be sustained, although at least one model for this did emerge from the case studies. The EU would benefit from further research in how to sustain these sorts of SME networks.

Appendix 1

Each of the case studies undertook evaluations of their DE events, using standard evaluation forms prepared by The University of Udine. This appendix summarises the quantitative data from the participant evaluations, aggregated across all of the case studies.

Aggregated results from the evaluations completed by participants at the DE events

DE event date	Country	Completed forms 1	Completed forms 1 (SMEs only)	Completed forms 1 (Intermediaries only)
3 March 2015	UK	5	3	2
28 April 2015	Italy	30	16	9
21 May 2015	Croatia	12	4	5
26 May 2015	Italy	19	15	2
12 June 2015	Bulgaria	23	12	5
25 June 2015	UK	24	19	2
2 September 2015	Denmark	19	11	8
22 January 2016	Denmark	6	0	3
Total		138	80	36

Q3. Here today you represent ...

	All		SMEs only		Intermediaries only	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
A company with less than 50 employees	70	50.7	70	87.5	-	-
A company with between 50 and 250 employees	10	7.2	10	12.5	-	-
A company with more than 250 employees	5	3.6	-	-	5	13.9
A trade union or industry association	9	6.5	-	-	9	25.0
A consortium	1	.7	-	-	1	2.8
A university, consultancy or research outfit	7	5.1	-	-	7	19.4
A local/regional authority	14	10.1	-	-	14	38.9
Other	22	15.9	-	-	-	-
Total	138	100.0	80	100.0	36	100.0

Q4. Have you ever before attended activities which aim at getting organisations to express their views and collectively tackle problems?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases
Yes, I have attended events such as public meetings, conferences, discussion groups, workshops, etc.	100	52.6%	73.0%	52	44.8%	65.0%	30	65.2%	85.7%
Yes, I have signed in to online events such as forums, blogs, etc.	24	12.6%	17.5%	17	14.7%	21.2%	4	8.7%	11.4%
Yes, I have participated in surveys and/or other research projects	34	17.9%	24.8%	22	19.0%	27.5%	7	15.2%	20.0%
No, this is the first time	32	16.8%	23.4%	25	21.6%	31.2%	5	10.9%	14.3%
Total	190	100.0%	138.7%	116	100.0%	145.0%	46	100.0%	131.4%

Q5A. [if yes to Q4] Were any of these past activities focused on climate change, other environmental issues or other sustainability topics?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases
Climate change issues	40	23.5%	38.1%	20	23.3%	36.4%	13	23.6%	41.9%
Other environmental issues	51	30.0%	48.6%	27	31.4%	49.1%	17	30.9%	54.8%
Other sustainability topics (e.g. social or economic sustainability)	65	38.2%	61.9%	32	37.2%	58.2%	20	36.4%	64.5%
None of the above	14	8.2%	13.3%	7	8.1%	12.7%	5	9.1%	16.1%
Total	170	100.0%	161.9%	86	100.0%	156.4%	55	100.0%	177.4%

Q5B. [if no to Q4] Why not?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases
I / my organization was not interested in the topics	1	3.7%	3.7%	1	4.5%	4.5%	-	-	-
I / my organization was always rather busy	3	11.1%	11.1%	3	13.6%	13.6%	-	-	-
I / my organization did not think they were very useful	1	3.7%	3.7%	1	4.5%	4.5%	-	-	-
I / my organization was not aware of any such activity	16	59.3%	59.3%	13	59.1%	59.1%	3	75.0%	75.0%
Other	6	22.2%	22.2%	4	18.2%	18.2%	1	25.0%	25.0%
Total	27	100.0%	100.0%	22	100.0%	100.0%	4	100.0%	100.0%

Q6. What made you participate to today's activity?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases
My personal knowledge of the organisers	53	18.3%	38.4%	34	20.7%	42.5%	11	13.9%	30.6%
Curiosity	35	12.1%	25.4%	25	15.2%	31.2%	4	5.1%	11.1%
The innovative approach of this activity	44	15.2%	31.9%	22	13.4%	27.5%	15	19.0%	41.7%
The focus on sustainability	37	12.8%	26.8%	16	9.8%	20.0%	14	17.7%	38.9%
The possibility of voicing my point of view	28	9.7%	20.3%	17	10.4%	21.2%	5	6.3%	13.9%
My organisation sent me to this activity	19	6.6%	13.8%	7	4.3%	8.8%	10	12.7%	27.8%
The possibility of learning more	64	22.1%	46.4%	38	23.2%	47.5%	16	20.3%	44.4%
Other	10	3.4%	7.2%	5	3.0%	6.2%	4	5.1%	11.1%
Total	290	100.0%	210.1%	164	100.0%	205.0%	79	100.0%	219.4%

Q7. During today's activity, did you ...?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases	Responses	% of responses	% of cases
Learn something new	78	15.5%	56.9%	49	15.8%	62.0%	19	15.6%	52.8%
Listen to other participants' opinions	106	21.1%	77.4%	65	21.0%	82.3%	25	20.5%	69.4%
Express your views	73	14.5%	53.3%	49	15.8%	62.0%	17	13.9%	47.2%
Get feedback on your ideas	33	6.6%	24.1%	19	6.1%	24.1%	9	7.4%	25.0%
Identify common problems	69	13.7%	50.4%	43	13.9%	54.4%	16	13.1%	44.4%
Try and solve problems	34	6.8%	24.8%	22	7.1%	27.8%	6	4.9%	16.7%
Talk to people you work together with on other projects	41	8.2%	29.9%	24	7.7%	30.4%	11	9.0%	30.6%
Network with new people	68	13.5%	49.6%	39	12.6%	49.4%	19	15.6%	52.8%
Total	502	100.0%	366.4%	310	100.0%	392.4%	122	100.0%	338.9%

Q8. Overall how satisfied are you with today's activity on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 is "I am extremely dissatisfied" and 6 is "I am extremely satisfied"?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Cases	%	Cumulative%	Cases	%	Cumulative%	Cases	%	Cumulative%
1 = extremely dissatisfied	2	1.4	15.1	1	1.3	21.3	-	-	2.8
2	2	1.4		2	2.5		-	-	
3	17	12.3		14	17.5		1	2.8	
4	31	22.5	82.7	20	25.0	76.3	8	22.2	94.4
5	50	36.2		22	27.5		14	38.9	
6 = extremely satisfied	33	23.9		19	23.8		12	33.3	
Subtotal	135	97.8	97.8	78	97.5	97.5	35	97.2	97.2
No answer	3	2.2	2.2	2	2.5	2.5	1	2.8	2.8
Total	138	100.0	100.0	80	100.0	100.0	36	100.0	100.0

Q9. To what extent did participants today have a chance to voice their point of view?

	All		SMEs only		Intermediaries only	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
All participants had such a chance	97	70.3	56	70.0	27	75.0
Many participants had such a chance	20	14.5	9	11.3	4	11.1
Some participants had such a chance	10	7.2	8	10.0	1	2.8
Few participants had such a chance	2	1.4	1	1.3	1	2.8
None of the participants had such a chance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	129	93.5	74	92.5	33	91.7
No answer	9	6.5	6	7.5	3	8.3
Total	138	100.0	80	100.0	36	100.0

Q10. Overall to what extent did participants make an effort to express their views on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 is "not at all" and 6 is "very much"?

	All			SMEs only			Intermediaries only		
	Cases	%	Cumulative%	Cases	%	Cumulative%	Cases	%	Cumulative%
1 = not at all	-	-	10.9	-	-	13.8	-	-	5.6
2	3	2.2		2	2.5		-	-	
3	12	8.7		9	11.3		2	5.6	
4	24	17.4	80.4	18	22.5	75.1	5	13.9	88.8
5	47	34.1		23	28.8		13	36.1	
6 = very much	40	29.0		19	23.8		14	38.9	
Subtotal	126	91.3	91.3	71	88.8	88.8	34	94.4	94.4
No answer	12	8.7	8.7	9	11.3	11.3	2	5.6	5.6
Total	138	100.0	100.0	80	100.0	100.0	36	100.0	100.0

Q11. Today's activity for you ...

		All		SMEs only		Intermediaries only	
		Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
A. Made a difference	Yes	48	42.9%	26	40.0%	14	46.7%
	Partly	56	50.0%	35	53.8%	14	46.7%
	No	8	7.1%	4	6.2%	2	6.7%
B. Was a waste of time	Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Partly	10	9.0%	5	7.9%	3	9.4%
	No	101	91.0%	58	92.1%	29	90.6%
C. Ensured that information and reporting were transparent	Yes	74	62.2%	42	64.6%	22	62.9%
	Partly	42	35.3%	21	32.3%	13	37.1%
	No	3	2.5%	2	3.1%	0	0.0%
D. Ensured integrity and openness	Yes	92	79.3%	51	77.3%	29	87.9%
	Partly	21	18.1%	13	19.7%	4	12.1%
	No	3	2.6%	2	3.0%	0	0.0%
E. Was tailored to your needs	Yes	56	47.9%	29	44.6%	19	55.9%
	Partly	45	38.5%	29	44.6%	11	32.4%
	No	16	13.7%	7	10.8%	4	11.8%
F. Involved the right people	Yes	70	60.9%	37	58.7%	24	70.6%
	Partly	42	36.5%	25	39.7%	9	26.5%
	No	3	2.6%	1	1.6%	1	2.9%
G. Treated participants with respect	Yes	107	92.2%	59	90.8%	32	97.0%
	Partly	7	6.0%	5	7.7%	1	3.0%
	No	2	1.7%	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
H. Gave priority to participants discussions, learning and feedback	Yes	88	75.9%	52	77.6%	27	84.4%
	Partly	25	21.6%	13	19.4%	5	15.6%
	No	3	2.6%	2	3.0%	0	0.0%
I. Was informative	Yes	93	76.9%	58	84.1%	23	67.6%
	Partly	23	19.0%	10	14.5%	9	26.5%
	No	5	4.1%	1	1.4%	2	5.9%
J. Led nowhere	Yes	2	1.8%	1	1.6%	1	3.1%
	Partly	18	16.1%	10	15.6%	6	18.8%
	No	92	82.1%	53	82.8%	25	78.1%
K. Was well-organised	Yes	99	81.8%	55	79.7%	28	82.4%
	Partly	21	17.4%	14	20.3%	6	17.6%
	No	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
L. Was conducted properly	Yes	104	84.6%	57	80.3%	31	93.9%
	Partly	17	13.8%	13	18.3%	2	6.1%
	No	2	1.6%	1	1.4%	0	0.0%

Q12. Lastly, would you recommend to a colleague to participate in an activity similar to today's?

	All		SMEs only		Intermediaries only	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
Yes, surely	78	56.5	44	55.0	20	55.6
Yes, probably	51	37.0	29	36.3	14	38.9
No, most likely not	6	4.3	5	6.3	1	2.8
No, definitely not	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	135	97.8	78	97.5	35	97.2
No answer	3	2.2	2	2.5	1	2.8
Total	138	100.0	80	100.0	36	100.0

Q13. Would you be willing to participate in further research for this project?

	All		SMEs only		Intermediaries only	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
No	41	29.7	28	35.0	11	30.6
Yes	97	70.3	52	65.0	25	69.4
Total	138	100.0	80	100.0	36	100.0