

CAPITALISATION OF THE PROCOPII PROGRAMME

Joint programme involving the following
networks:

- Solidarité Laïque (France)
- Federation of NGOs for Child Protection (FONPC) (Romania)
- National Network for Children (NNC) (Bulgaria)
- Alliance of Active NGOs in social Protection of Child and Family (APSCF) (Republic of Moldova)

SUMMARY

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A few words on the capitalisation process

The capitalisation of the Procopil programme covered the 8-year roll-out of the programme, from 2005 to 2012. The aims of this capitalisation process were defined as follows:

- *To formalise the innovative and/or successful working practices developed as part of Procopil;*
- *To share the experience gained on national, regional and international levels ;*
- *To assess the methods to be used in future projects in light of the practices and experiences analysed;*
- *To strengthen the technical skills of the teams from each of the networks (FONPC/NNC/SL/APSCF) through participation in the capitalisation process.*

The capitalisation process focused on two main areas of innovation in the Procopil programme:

- *The dynamics of inter-country cooperation (in terms of both management of the programme and implementation of activities);*
- *The strengthening of ties between associations and authorities, particularly through a specific project: 'Institutional Capacity Building and Social Action' (RIAS).*

The capitalisation exercise was held from June to December 2013. Led by a team made of members of all four networks involved in the programme (Solidarité Laïque in France, the Romanian FONPC, the Bulgarian NNC and the Moldovan APSCF), it resulted in four successive missions in Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and France. The missions facilitated discussions in each country with around twenty key actors involved in the programme, including individual interviews and group workshops bringing together several of the programme's partners.

The capitalisation process therefore benefited from the significant involvement of each of the national networks at every stage.

How should this summary be used?

This summary is accompanied by a series of 6 fact sheets and 6 videos (corresponding to the 6 fact sheets). The fact sheets should be read in addition to watching the videos in order better to embody the experience of Procopil participants and for a more detailed reflection.

The structure of this summary is the same as that of the 6 modules: fact sheet + video. As such, each of the main parts of this summary contains a reference to the various modules.

Promoting closer collaboration between associations and authorities in order to improve the living conditions of children, young people and families in difficulty: that was the ambitious goal set by the Procopil programme involving France, Romania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova in 2005. Some years after the fall of authoritarian regimes, this goal entailed massive cultural change, moving associations out of their simple role as service providers and transforming them into actors with a full part to play in public policy. How should this gradual integration take place? How should understanding and mutual recognition between associations and state actors be facilitated, making the most of their shared interests in the planning and implementation of field projects?

The programme used three tools to achieve this aim:

- **Project support funds:** The programme has developed a number of funds (Departmental Network Support Funds, Innovative Initiatives Support Funds, etc.), all aimed at involving state actors in the implementation and monitoring of field projects.
- **Training:** Between 2006 and 2012, the programme was able to train over 700 professionals using pairs or three-person groups of trainers from various partner countries, develop new professional standards and form the basis of a 'regional hub' for training.
- **Advocacy:** Since 2007, advocacy initiatives have focused particularly on the delegation of social services. This advocacy work then leads to mutual reflection with state actors on ways to manage public action.

In order to achieve this objective, Procopil chose to work on a regional, multi-country level, relying on the shared history and challenges of the three Eastern European countries allowing them to enrich each other. Based on a previous Franco-Romanian programme, Procopil then gradually integrated Bulgaria and Moldova to develop this regional dimension. The aim was to manage the programme together, to design and conduct training and exchanges, and to build a common identity. Four countries, four contexts, huge differences in members' expectations and needs: how could such a programme be jointly managed and implemented? How could this be done in a way that was suitable for all yet adapted to each country's needs?

⇒ **The capitalisation of the Procopil programme in 2013 allowed us to return to three unique and innovative features that made the programme what it was.** Teaching these could be useful, both for the partners that developed the programme and all those seeking to develop innovative programmes of this kind:

- **New ways of jointly managing a complex programme**
- **New kinds of inter-country exchange and training**
- **New relationships between associations and authorities**

New management practices

(Fact sheets/videos 1 and 2)

The first unique feature of Procopil concerns ways of managing and monitoring the programme:

- **Collective management by associations and authorities** to create close dialogue, to get to know each other better, to coordinate actions better, and to create the most suitable programme. How can we make sure that everyone feels included and engages in dialogue in this new kind of management practice?
- **Collective management by the four countries** so that the expectations and needs of each country are taken into account and common strategies are adopted for each one. How can we empower the managing partners to ensure a more balanced and shared programme?

Shared management by associations and authorities

From the very beginning, the programme sought to introduce a **'team of 4'** (associations and authorities from France and the partner countries), making management of the programme a **'laboratory' for dialogue**.

The involvement of authorities alongside associations in managing the programme is one of the main features unique to Procopil (and more generally the 'Concerted Multilateral Programmes' of which Procopil is an example), but also one of its vital assets. Both on a national and regional level, authorities have attended steering committees and acted as stakeholders in the definition of guidelines for Procopil.

The involvement of authorities took the form of:

- **guaranteed visibility** for the associative networks;
- **a means of reconciliation** and dialogue;
- **a means of ensuring** that activities carried out as part of the programme were consistent with existing laws and policies;
- **a public space for advocacy** for associations, a means of advancing the respective visions of authorities and associations by jointly managing innovative activities.

This multilateral dialogue is not without problems. In particular, programme partners must take into account two basic considerations to ensure that this joint management is not reduced to a formal exercise:

- **Timing** : each network sought to include authorities in the management of the programme from its first steps ('later is too late'), and to win the loyalty of those involved so that they could act as gateways to their organisations.

- **Transparency:** each network gradually learnt to communicate with all programme members and leaders on the decisions taken and the manner in which they were made.

In addition to these considerations, one of the factors that enabled us to mobilise authorities in the long-term was the interlinking of state actors from the four countries. **Active French cooperation** was a deciding factor in this area (historically very important from the beginning of the programme, this involvement even facilitated the creation of the post of regional cooperation officer for children's rights).

- French cooperation enabled acknowledgement of the associative partner networks: it acted as a **guarantee of the quality** and seriousness of the programme in the eyes of the country's authorities, and facilitated mobilisation of the actors throughout the programme.
- The actors themselves also valued French cooperation: it allowed them rapidly to establish **relationships with a variety of associations and state actors** in the field of childhood, and to build cooperation more suited to their needs.

Regional management by four countries

Between 2002 and 2005, France and Romania developed a programme of cooperation (Romanian Joint Childhood Programme) which formed the core of the Procopil programme. From 2005, this programme expanded to include Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova. There were thus four countries in a programme where the majority of cooperative relationships were still based on a bilateral approach.

Procopil sought to base its guidelines and define its activities around these four different contexts and a wide range of expectations. In response to this challenge, the programme set out three key principles:

Joint establishment of the programme

- **Procopil identified two complementary levels of management** of the programme:
 - a regional space to set out overall guidelines for the programme;
 - 4 national management areas enabling each country to define its needs and priorities and to create its vision for the activities to be implemented as part of the programme.
- **By becoming co-designers, the programme partners can get away from the classic bilateral development relationship** (sponsor-beneficiary). This approach questions the role of the French as leaders. Solidarité Laïque has therefore gradually learned, alongside its partners, to distinguish between two positions: on the one hand, its role as administrative and financial guarantor, and on the other, its place as 'one partner among equals' in the collective management of the programme.

- **This joint establishment requires national networks to be real project managers.** They must be able to clarify their members' expectations and propose a vision for activities to implement. In order to achieve this, the networks emphasise the importance of specific guidance for their missions and calendar. Some networks (such as the Moldovan Alliance) have even chosen to put their management of the programme at the heart of their Board of Directors in order to ensure the consistency of the projects carried out.

Over ten years of the joint management of Procopil, the progressive empowerment of the managing partners and the emergence of an increasingly balanced and dynamic partnership is clear.

Flexibility

The programme's flexibility, its ability to adapt constantly to partners' strategies, is inevitably difficult insofar as it affects the cultures and cooperation habits of the sponsors, project managers and partners. However, Procopil's aims are as follows:

- **Flexibility over time:** Over 10 years in operation, the aims and activities of the programme have changed frequently to adapt to changing contexts and partners: by gradually moving away from 'project' logic ; by giving communities more say over management; by changing its focus from childhood to a broader consideration of social action policies, etc.
- **Flexibility in the national implementation of strategies decided at the regional level:** Each country has considerable flexibility in the choice to integrate and adapt common activities according to its priorities.

This flexibility is one of the programme's strengths. It has made Procopil a kind of '**programme-process**' with a great ability to adapt. But this flexibility is also a challenge. There are many considerations that the partners need to take into account to overcome this challenge:

- Firstly, **to guarantee the visibility of common objectives** so that this flexibility does not lead to a multitude of objectives, fragmentation of activities, or sudden changes in direction;
- Secondly, **to draw up specific reports on each country's needs**, making sure that these reports are not 'diluted' by frequent changes.

Ongoing regional dialogue

Joint management by four countries meant that Procopil had to find a way of exchanging information at the regional level that **went beyond the mere compilation of each country's priorities** and made the respective needs coincide, allowing a shared identity to be built. Several lessons were learned from this:

- **Invest in dialogue:** Procopil's first response was to invest very strongly (in time, financial resources, etc.) in dialogue to avoid losing some of the partners along the way.

- **Build 'close blocks':** Outside of 'formal' time, which is vital for setting guidelines, the programme sought to create 'close blocks': small teams from each of the four countries focused on specific projects. These blocks best enabled us to create a shared culture and working habits.

- **The work of organisations:** To ensure the quality of this regional dialogue, the partners emphasised the importance of regional committees and working groups and the need to limit the time spent on general exchanges on contexts in order to leave sufficient time for joint planning exercises.

INTER-COUNTRY EXCHANGES AND TRAINING

(Fact sheets/videos 3 and 4)

In the context of European Union enlargement and at a time when regional exchanges have become an increasingly sought-after lever for action, Procopil has been exploring. In fact, the development of inter-country exchanges has been a way for the partners to train elsewhere, to learn among 'peers'. This mutual learning has permitted each of the partners to:

- **Discover new themes or practices:** for example, the issue of the children of migrant parents;
- **Understand new, innovative measures** from different countries: for example, host families, the integration of the disabled into the workplace, etc.;
- **Familiarise themselves with new ways of organising social action:** for example, the delegation of services, strategic planning for associations, the implementation of departmental frameworks for action, etc.

Thus, by increasing the number of examples and opportunities for learning, the programme has gradually stopped focusing on the top-down transfer of knowledge from France and become a partnership. It has approached capacity-building using the strengths and innovative ideas of each country. As such, regional outreach has acted as a kind of **'accelerator' in transforming cooperative relationships.**

Acting at a regional level has enabled the programme to take into account both similarities and differences at the same time. Similar contexts have enabled Bulgaria, Romania and the Republic of Moldova to share practices that are close to their local realities (common political heritage, ongoing decentralisation process, shared need for the professionalisation of social action, common perspective on 'deinstitutionalisation', etc.). In this respect, **operating at the regional level has proved to be a strength for the partners: it has allowed them to move away from regarding the French model as the only reference and to observe innovative practices closer to their own field of possibilities.**

Several types of complementary activities have allowed this regional exchange to develop:

Exchange of field experiences

The chance to hear others speak about their practices and to go on field trips is one of the unique features of Procopil, and one of its main assets. Partners stress the importance of 'seeing' activities and participating directly in the work of others: participating in the development of a departmental plan for childhood in France, visiting a drop-in centre in Moldova, learning about a social enterprise integrating disabled people into the workplace, etc.

Training

Training activities have been a key factor of Procopil since the beginning of the programme and have been central to building a common regional dynamic. Indeed, they have aimed to **establish together, between the four countries,** training modules that are both common to all and adapted to the needs of each country.

These training activities began in Romania, led by Franco-Romanian pairs of trainers, and were then developed in the Republic of Moldova and in Bulgaria. **Three-person teams** were put in place at this point, enabling diversity in contributions and the putting into perspective of the experiences of each country.

Given this broad vision of training and exchanges, participants in the programme were faced with several considerations and challenges:

- **Challenge of balance:** This meant ensuring that the experience of one partner did not completely set the direction of the exchange, or conversely, that everyone's opinions were sought on everything. The challenge of these exchanges was thus to identify both the needs and '**areas of innovation**' of each of the partners to ensure balanced contributions.
- **Challenge of common formats:** The format of the training activities and exchanges was one of the areas of disagreement between the partners: on one hand, more top-down approaches ('lectures'), and on the other hand, broader approaches based on an exchange of experiences. We have therefore kept the formats quite flexible, according to the subjects under discussion.
- **Challenge of language:** Training had to be delivered in three different languages in the partner countries. The programme initially sought to allow everybody to speak their own language to avoid imbalances and flattening discourse. However, the need arose to encourage teams capable of holding exchanges in one or two intermediary languages.
 - ⇒ **One solution: communication between trainers.** To avoid differences in the expectations and approaches of trainers, the partners emphasised the **importance of preliminary meetings, which varied according to themes and training modules**. When communication is too weak, one of the dangers is that participants who are less prepared may adopt foreign courses that are out of step with their contexts and expectations.

The basis for a network of trainers

The diversity of training exercises and exchanges has enabled strong links to emerge between trainers from the four countries, over and above the organisations to which they belong. Many partners are now seeking to formalise this 'network of trainers'; for example, by creating a catalogue allowing them to observe the needs and resources of each country and to set up new joint training models.

It should also be noted that Procopil has enabled us to gain an overview of training in the various countries involved in the programme in order to identify possible development scenarios for a regional hub of training in social work.

BRINGING TOGETHER ASSOCIATIONS AND AUTHORITIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL ACTION

(Fact sheets/videos 5 and 6)

Over the past decade, a growing number of associative programmes have built a clearly more ‘political’ element into their objectives: contributing to the improvement and application of public policies in their sector. Behind this development lies the significant challenge of culture change: recognising the role of associations and the value of their expertise. Procopil was built on this desire for change in the culture and practices of public action.

In order to achieve this objective, the programme focused on four main areas:

Four ways of bringing together associations and authorities

Strengthening the role of association representatives in public policy

The programme sought to strengthen the national associative networks involved in Procopil, enabling them to create or consolidate their secretariat, gain visibility in the eyes of the authorities, learn about other networks, etc. For example, Procopil was central in the creation of the Bulgarian NNC, which is now one of the foremost spokesmen on issues linked to childhood.

In addition to strengthening these groups, partners also, and above all, sought, through training and the exchange of practices, **to enhance the way local associations perceive themselves** in order to break away from the mere provision of services, which is still dominant.

Bringing together, through mutual training, the practices of associations and authorities

The programme has placed **exchanges between professionals, as a mean of transforming public action from the field**, at its heart. Since NGOs often play the role of pioneers, training is a mean of sharing their experiences with state actors, but also of ensuring their expertise is recognised by the authorities.

For example, training on oversight activities has been particularly useful and appreciated by state actors, since this is an area still in need of professionalisation.

The unique format of these training activities was a major factor in their success with state actors: more inclusive, less formal, more interactive, based more on experience and bringing together more diverse participants than classic formats.

Developing or investing in forums for dialogue to enhance policy

The strengthening of associative networks was accompanied by their presence in open ‘consultation’ areas for national and local authorities on law- and policy-making (National Council for the Protection of Childhood, interministerial committees, committees on specific subject areas, etc.). In order to guarantee effective participation, **networks mobilised their members to build common positions** and ensure regular monitoring of these policies.

For example, the Bulgarian NNC took an important step in building a collective voice on ongoing Bills by involving the Association of Bulgarian Municipalities (ANMRB) in its reflections.

It should be noted that the influence of NGOs has been stronger when aimed at developing **specific sectoral policies** (education, health, etc.) rather than transforming the ‘methods’ of public action (decentralisation, delegation of services to NGOs, etc.). Within this sectoral approach, one thing that has worked particularly well is the creation of new frames of reference, courses and jobs to enrich social action (education specialists, youth workers, host families, etc.).

Sharing information, acting as a watchdog

The ability of associations to act as a watchdog for policies has proved to be a key factor in their legitimacy, a way of being ‘taken seriously’ and ‘perceived as useful’ in policy-making. Here are two examples:

At the national level: Partners of Procopil have since 2009 been simultaneously involved in writing the Alternative Report on the Rights of the Child, and have thus mobilised a large number of their members in collecting field data. These reports have formed the basis for very useful dialogue with national authorities. Incidentally, it is Procopil’s dynamic of reciprocity that has led Solidarité Laïque in France to get involved in writing this alternative report and to join other French actors in the role of watchdog.

At the local level: One of the innovative approaches taken by some partners is the drafting, together with local authorities, of an overview of local expectations and resources.

In addition to these approaches, members of the programme have also sought to encourage the direct participation of beneficiaries, particularly children, in dialogue and decision-making: Parliamentary hearings, participation in ‘local citizens’ groups’, etc.

The growing role of authorities in the programme: the example of RIAS

Over the course of its development, Procopil has given local authorities an increasingly important role within the programme, based on three observations:

- **The increasingly central role of authorities** in defining and implementing social action;
- **The lack or weakness of strategic frameworks** enabling the coordination of social action at the local level;
- **A weak culture of participation,** both of local authorities and beneficiaries themselves.

Procopil has therefore made dialogue with authorities a priority in planning its members’ projects, in identifying the relevant target audience for training, but also, and above all, in implementing a space for authorities directly to exchange experiences: RIAS (Institutional Capacity Building and Social Action).

Outline of the RIAS project

The RIAS project, developed between 2010 and 2012, mobilised 34 Romanian, Moldovan, Bulgarian and French local authorities around the objective of strengthening their management practices for public social action policies.

- The first phase of the project enabled the creation of a series of reports on the methods of implementing public social action policies in the various authorities involved.
- The second phase enabled the organisation of a series of exchanges of practices on several topics: territorial organisation and the delegation of social services, planning, identification of needs, decentralisation and allocation of powers, etc.

The project had two objectives:

- **First, the strengthening of authorities:** enabling them to ‘relate’ to others, assess their practices, liaise, etc.
- **Secondly, the promotion by these authorities of closer collaboration with associations** by showing proof of the success of collaboration and enabling state actors to promote this collaboration themselves with their ‘peers’. These exchanges have also encouraged the Bulgarian NNC (in

conjunction with the Association of Municipalities) to make an official practical guide, aimed at authorities, with a series of examples of successful collaboration.

Challenges to be overcome

Partners noticed three particular challenges in these exchanges:

- **Managing the tension that can arise between the project's two objectives:** In particular, avoiding a negative perception by authorities of the role of associations.
- **Mobilising the strength of actors within the authorities:** If the technical services of the authorities have been the main participants in the exchanges, especially in the case of associations with elected representatives, this begs the question of the place of the elected representatives themselves, whose mobilisation could constitute a second phase in the exchanges.
- **Adopting a long-term approach to these exchanges:** The RIAS helped to challenge perspectives and identify new practices, but action is not automatic. It is very dependent on the political context, the flexibility of authorities, etc. Developing these exchanges with elected representatives, concentrating on the implementation of new plans of action, will undoubtedly be necessary.

The place of decentralised cooperation

Relationships based on decentralised cooperation have been a very useful platform on which to build exchanges with RIAS. The General Councils of Savoie, Marne, Aveyron, Rhône, Aude and the Nord have participated in these exchanges with their partners from Eastern Europe.

This link to decentralised cooperation has enabled us to build on and strengthen earlier partnerships by consulting those in the field. It has also enabled us to engage in decentralised cooperation on social action, a subject often overlooked in exchanges between authorities, even though the skills to be mobilised are important and complementary. Furthermore, it has enabled us to perpetuate beyond the programme the dialogue engaged in as part of RIAS.

One consideration to take into account is the fact that RIAS exchanges uncovered vastly different views on a very 'political' subject: the respective place of authorities and associations. These exchanges must therefore be sufficiently prepared in advance to avoid these different views weakening existing relationships based on decentralised cooperation.