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While the main perspective taken by this guide will be partnership within the EU and a focus on the EU Structural Funds (SF), most of the arguments and practices presented are applicable across a number of other policy areas within both the EU context but also the national, regional and local contexts. In fact, there are increasing similarities between the Structural Funds, the Pre-Accession aid (IPA) and the instrument of the new Neighbourhood policy (ENPI). The structure of these new instruments (and particularly their cross-border dimension) is increasingly being modelled on the current structure of the Structural Funds. For example, the Commission is no longer simply earmarking money. It is now increasingly trying to make sure that the funds it earmarks are used sensibly by the relevant authorities. This means that funds provided by the EU will have to be used to implement active development policies. The Commission now asks for co-financing from the relevant authorities. This is done with the aim of increasing the sense of responsibility and the efforts of the authorities towards an efficient and effective utilization of these funds (as the experience with the Structural Funds shows).

Starting from the next programming period (2007-2013), the EU partnership principle (examined in greater detail in the paragraphs below), will also be applied to the New Neighbourhood Instrument. The Commission will ask for the creation of partnerships to include representatives of different bodies and organizations of each country in the planning and strategy development. Thus, the Commission is contributing to the creation of democratic processes at the same time

ensuring that the projects implemented will be useful for both the EU as a whole and the single country.

To summarize, it is reasonable to argue that experiences and best practices concerning partnership, taken from years of SF implementation in the Member States (both old and new) could indeed be relevant for all neighbouring countries covered by the EU relevant policies.

Thus, starting from the definition of the partnership principle at the EU level, this guide will try to explore the concepts and ideas it underlies as well as some of the forms and structures it can take. The practice of partnership is included in this guide also in the form of practical examples and best practices taken from a number of different countries (ranging from old to new Members States and EU neighbouring countries).