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# REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON RECEIVING NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEES **KEY LEARNINGS FROM PARTNERSHIP SKÅNE**



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## 1. Introduction

Collaboration between authorities, municipalities and NGOs is a prerequisite for newly arrived immigrants to become established in society and in working life as quickly as possible. In Sweden, it is the task of the County Administrative Boards to develop this collaboration. To support this work, Ramböll Management consulting (hereafter referred to as Ramböll) has been asked by the Coordination group of the County Administrative Board's Integration Network (LIN) to conduct an analysis regarding the success of the regional collaboration during its initial stages, based on the collaboration conducted within the framework of Partnership Skåne. The analysis aims to highlight some generic lessons from the development work in Skåne, as to inspire other County Administrative Boards on how to run regional and collaborative development work.

The conclusions and recommendations of Ramböll have previously been presented during a seminar on 6 May 2014, in which LIN representatives took part. <sup>1</sup>The following report constitutes Ramböll's written presentation of the assignment.

### 1.1 About Partnership Skåne

Partnership Skåne is a collaborative, regional development platform that aims to contribute towards an inclusive and coherent reception and establishment process of newly arrived refugees to the county of Skåne. The platform is coordinated by the County Administrative Board and is linked to a regional agreement in Skåne (RÖK), regarding collaboration between regional and local organisations when receiving asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. The operational work is organised among various projects, e.g. Social- and Health communicators (that supply newly arrived migrants with social- and health information in their home languages), as well as NAD (that aim to strengthen collaboration between the public and the idea-based sector). All subprojects are based on the platform's three main principles; i.e. relating to actual needs, being knowledge based and creating opportunities to participate. Currently, there are some fifty organisations involved in the platform, from both the public and the idea-based sector.

### 1.2

#### The implementation of the analysis

In recent years, Ramböll has evaluated Partnership Skåne a number of times, as well as evaluating individual subprojects, which have been realized within the framework of the platform. As such, the analysis is mainly built on the knowledge that Ramböll has acquired during previous assignments. To gain a better understanding of Partnership Skåne's context and overall developmental journey, Ramböll have conducted eight interviews with representatives of the County Administrative Board in Skåne as well as with other central collaborative partners. In addition to this, reports and previous research relevant to the analysis has been studied.

The report does not claim to offer a comprehensive account of the importance of collaboration and influencing factors. Rather, the report is to be understood as "hands-on", inspirational material that can be used by the County Administrative Board, and other actors, that are working towards furthering collaboration in each respective region.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bambuser.com/v/4674954>

## 2. SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

During the last decades, the importance of collaboration when it comes to the reception and process of establishment of newly arrived refugees has been given increasing attention. Many counties, like Skåne, have signed regional collaboration agreements on receiving newly arrived migrants, which in many cases also has its local equivalent. Meanwhile, both researchers and practitioners testify that achieving effective collaboration is difficult in practice. These experiences indicate that ambition in the form of a written commitment is not enough to ensure that co-operation works. Rather, co-operation should be understood as a process that needs active and continuous support. This understanding of the term co-operation (or collaboration), constitutes the basis for Partnership Skåne's work, and therefore also the basis for Ramböll's analysis.

In this chapter, six key components of a successful collaboration – as identified by Ramböll – are presented, based on the lessons taken from Partnership Skåne. Ramböll's definition of a functioning collaboration is one that is relevant (i.e. one that meets the needs of society, the individual and other partaking actors), effective and endures the test of time. The success factors contribute to these three aspects in different ways. They also have different characteristics. Some of the success factors relate to the content of the collaboration, while others are more clearly related to the process.

The six success factors are as follows:

- A systematic approach as the basis for collaboration
- A model that ties in strategic co-operation with operative organisation.
- The importance of a collaborative climate
- Managerial support
- A relationship to regional context
- The power of narratives

### 2.1 A systematic approach as the basis for collaboration

The experiences of Partnership Skåne indicate that collaboration should not only aim to improve each respective actor's organisation, but should also develop the interaction of the control systems, working methods, initiatives, and work processes of reception. This holistic approach is sometimes referred to as a systematic approach. The basic assumption in systematic theory is that the whole is not the same as the sum of its parts, which means that a system can be ineffective, despite all of its parts performing well. The Swedish Council of Innovation has described the systematic approach – in which focus is moved from the parts onto the whole – as a part of a broader shift in public sector perspective which, according to the Council, is needed to promote innovation, development and renewal in general. The different components of this shift in perspective, which also constitute the fundamental starting points for Partnership Skåne's work, are further described below.

Traditional organisation of the public sector	Organisation from a systematic approach
Control	Trust
Considering the parts	Looking at the whole
Case-based focus and authority needs	Target audience focus and societal needs
Citizens as receivers	Citizens as co-creators
Measures of performance	Measures of effect
Enquiries	Pilot schemes
Linear understanding of cause-and-effect	Understanding of complex systems
Competition	Collaboration
One year cycles	Longevity
Acutely treating symptoms	Preventing and understanding underlying causes

Traditional organisation of the public sector	Organisation from a systematic approach
Monitoring and supervising	Learning and reflecting
Following rules and a standardised working method	Professionals authorised to handle variation
Micromanaging	Understanding systematic factors
Playing it safe	Controlled risk-taking
External motivation	Internal motivation
Comparable performances	Comparable results
Procedural uniformity	Legal uniformity
Unit costs	The overall cost for society

Source: SOU 2013:40.

As such, the systematic approach involves shifting the focus from the different actors performance levels, onto the system as a whole. Examples of relevant questions asked from a systematic approach are:

- To what extent does the current establishment process promote newly arrived migrants' health? How can establishment procedures be developed in order to improve the health of the target group?
- To what extent does the current establishment process empower newly arrived migrants and provide them with the conditions to understand and navigate the system . How can establishment procedures be developed in order to empower the target audiences?
- To what extent is the current establishment process legally secure, offering support on equal terms to each individual, regardless of the age, gender or municipality of residence of the person in question? How can establishment procedures be developed in order to ensure the rule of law and equality?

In this context, collaboration becomes the means for developing the system, with the aim of delivering greater overall benefits to each individual. According to Ramböll, a systematic approach is a prerequisite to ensure that collaboration is as relevant and usable as possible, from a societal and individual perspective.

## 2.2 Platform for development work

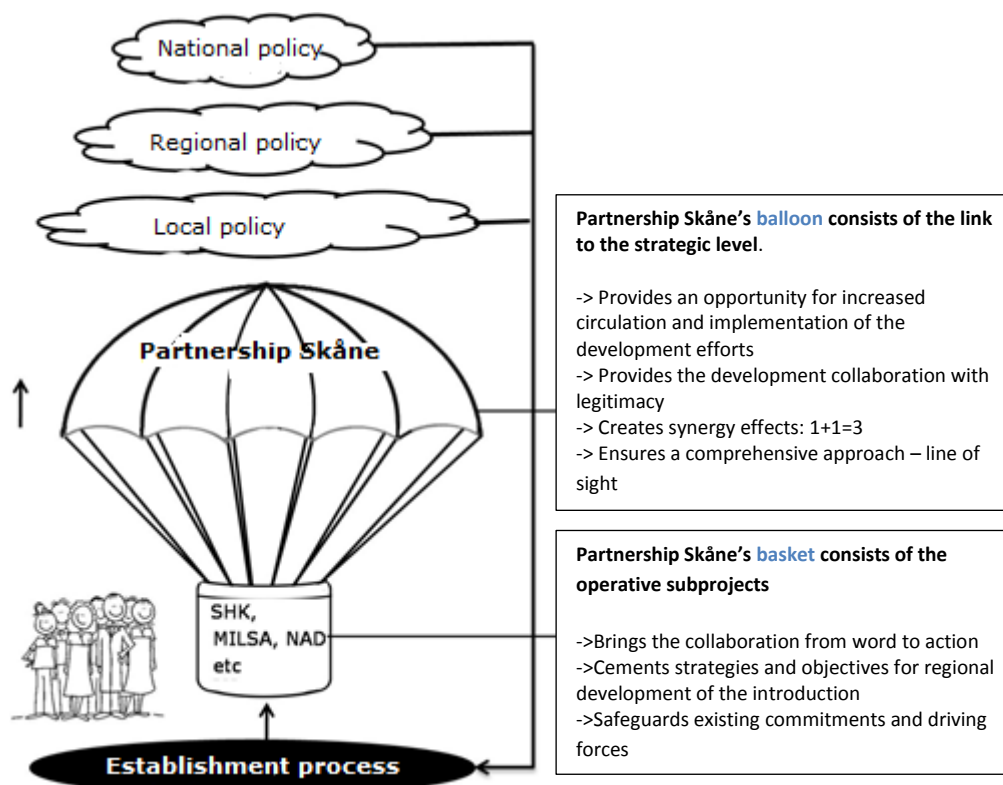
To ensure that the collaboration results in actual development that benefits newly arrived migrants, a common goal is not enough. It is also important to have a platform, from which goals and commitments can be operationalized and made a reality.

This platform should be anchored on a regional level. This reduces the risk of fragmentation or division of the work at local level. Furthermore, the regional ties will ensure that any taken initiatives are relevant to the overarching goal of the collaboration, and not solely to the respective actors. At the same time, it is essential that the collaborative work shows results, as to keep each actor willing and committed to continuing the collaboration over time. Therefore, it is important the strategic perspective is complemented with a workshop at the operational level.

In Skåne, Partnership Skåne has acted as the leading platform for collaboration, which has linked the strategic levels (via the regional agreements), with an operative workshop for various subproject. The role of the platform in running and maintaining the collaborative work is illustrated in the figure below.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The image is taken from Ramböll's evaluation of Partnership Skåne, which was presented in August, 2012.

**Figure 1: Partnership Skåne's role in the collaborative, development work for establishment procedures in Skåne.**



### 2.2.1 The significance of leadership

The responsibility of running a regional collaboration, even after the establishment of a platform, is often vaguely formulated and distributed between various people. In many cases such a responsibility regarding leading collaboration competes with other tasks. Experiences from Partnership Skåne shows that it may therefore be of great value to appoint a leader, who is responsible for managing and strategically pursuing regional collaboration work. Rather than having all the answers, the manager should facilitate the content and the process of the collaborative work in a way that promotes ownership, trust and consensus among the cooperating parties. To succeed in this position, he or she should have extensive expertise, which should include the ability to:

- identify common developmental areas from a systematic perspective.
- establish legitimate regard from collaborative partners and maintain authority through various challenging situations
- inspire, as well as instil a sense of ownership and participation among the collaborative partners
- be flexible and perceptive without losing sight of the long-term, strategic perspective
- lead and facilitate processes which include many different people and perspectives
- coach and give advice to individual collaborative partners if this were to be necessary

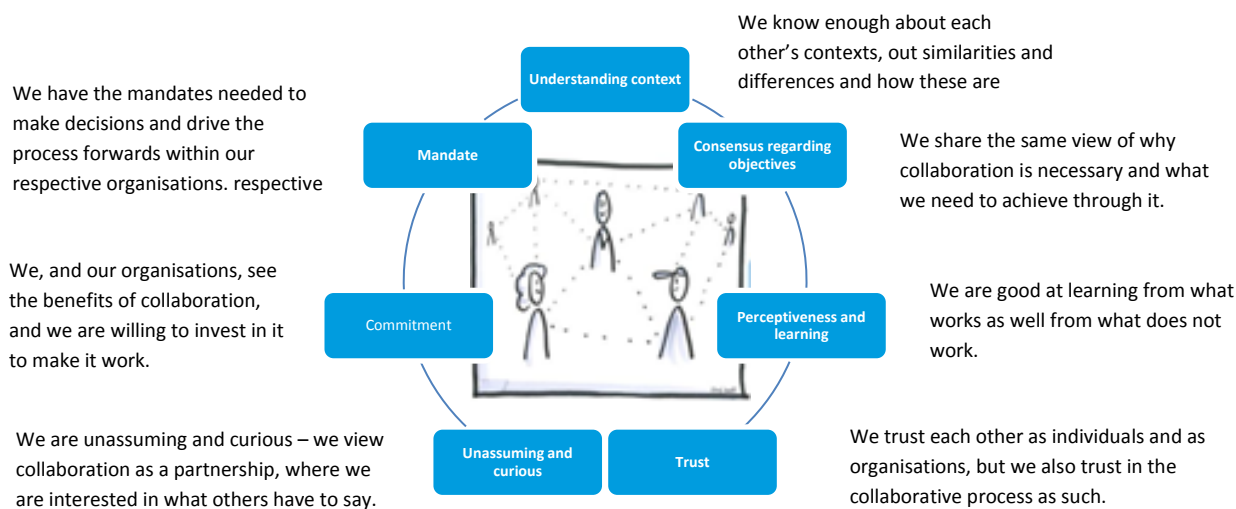
The manager should have good knowledge of the subject matter, and should also be a good communicator and process leader. He or she should also have strategic and analytical abilities. Furthermore, it is an advantage if the manager's background is neutral, i.e. does not come from an organisation that caters to the target audience, and as such, does not run the risk of having vested interests in the collaborative work.

### 2.3 A collaborative climate

Collaboration is a relational process that puts great demands on the partaking actors cooperation skills, and interest in making the collaboration work. Thus, an important key to success in ensuring a lasting collaboration is that there is a collaborative climate.

The figure below presents seven signs of a good collaborative climate, which Ramböll have identified by looking at the lessons learned from Partnership Skåne.

**Figure 2: Seven signs of a good collaborative climate**



### *Understanding context*

A common opinion in collaborative climates is that other actors do not "make the effort", which reduces the will to compromise and get involved in return. However, these difficulties are often due to a lack of knowledge regarding the other actor's regulations, room for manoeuvre, assignments and culture, that differ from that of the own organisation. Understanding the context of each collaborative actor therefore plays an important part in reducing the risk of misunderstandings, as well as increasing the will to collaborate and compromise. Being familiar with other actors' contexts is also important in order to find joint solutions to problems that perhaps are being caused by contradictory regulations. It is important to stress that it is usually not enough to spend ten minutes of the initial meeting going through all of the actors assignments. Similar to that of collaboration as a whole, the understanding of an actor's context should accompany the ongoing dialogue, in which the interacting actors should take time to ask and talk about why they can, or cannot do something.

### *Consensus on goals*

To ensure that the actors' time, resources and commitment are utilized in the best way, it is important that there is consensus on what collaboration shall lead to and why collaboration is needed. This prerequisite might sound obvious, but from experience from Partnership Skåne, as well as from other collaborative work, demonstrate that consensus is hard to achieve in practice. When formulating joint goals, all actors should be involved to ensure universal support for, and ownership of the goal. Formulating a vision involves defining which parts and aspects that the collaboration will initially cover. In discussions on collaboration in regard to newly arrived migrants, it is common to comprehensively refer to the "establishment period". However, in order to conduct a successful collaboration that increases the benefits for the individual, it is important to clarify which actors and organisations are involved in this process.

### *Responding and learning*

Collaboration is an ongoing process of change that needs to be flexible in order to stay relevant. Changes and challenges in the surrounding world, as well as lessons learned throughout the collaborative process, will place new demands on its contents. A good collaborative climate is therefore characterized by responding and learning about how the collaboration needs to be developed in order to better meet the needs of the target group.

### *Trust*

Collaboration is by definition a process that is often marred by great uncertainty. The actors do not own the problem or the solution themselves, but are dependent on each other. However, collaboration is voluntary, which means that all actors can choose to end the cooperation at any time. A more or less chaotic state often ensues, especially during the initial stage, when relevant actors are to formulate themselves and find a common direction and foundation on which to stand. A prerequisite for collaboration to last over time is thus that the representatives confide in the cooperative process. Said in a different way, the collaborating representative must dare to "rest in uncertainty"

It is important that there is trust between the people that are collaborating, but also between the collaborating organisation at large. This broader organisational trust is above all important to reduce the risk of collaborations becoming bound to certain people, and as such, breaking down with changes in personnel. In addition, this trust is important as it allows you to advance and adjust the collaboration to different locations and organisational levels. Establishing this type of trust is partly related to communicating and following up on feedback and results to more levels of the collaborating organisations. This also calls for collaborative representatives that are good at building and instilling trust in other people within their organisation.

### *Being unassuming and curious*

A common problem in collaboration is that there is a battle regarding who has the winning perspective. Collaboration is viewed as a negotiation with the goal of positioning oneself and gaining ground with regards to the other actors. This outlook leads to debate as opposed to dialogue and listening. As a result, the process is often halted, which in the worst case can lead to the collaboration breaking down completely. It is therefore essential to ensure an open and unassuming collaborative climate, in which all the actors feel like they are a team, curious to get to know each other.

### *Commitment*

Like most process of change, in collaboration it is often hard to safeguard the interests of all the collaborative actors. To strengthen the prerequisites for a sustainable commitment, it is important that the collaborative efforts can demonstrate results in the relatively early stages of collaboration. This includes, among other things, equipping the organisation at operational level from the beginning, to reduce the risk of the collaboration simply becoming a "debate club".

It is also important to develop a plan for how to make results visible, and how to feed these back to the collaborative participants, particularly those at management level. In addition to communicating the results, creating commitment also involves clarifying how the collaboration relates to the actors own self-interests. This does not mean that the sole objective of collaboration should be to strengthen the individual actors, as such a focus will likely lead to sub-optimization, which will not necessarily benefit the newly arrived migrant, or society at large. However, in order for each actor to be willing to invest in the collaborative project, it is important to identify areas of collaboration to which the various actors are personally tied, either in terms of mission or budget.

### *Mandate*

A reoccurring difficulty in collaborative work, are participants who lack a mandate to make a decision, or to achieve results within their own organisations. In part, this relationship may stem from the fact that collaborative work is sometimes seen as operating outside of the core of the organisation, thus there is a tendency for managers and people at the strategic level to neglect it. The lack of mandate often leads to deadlocks in the collaboration process, with diminished commitment of the collaborative group being the overall effect. A strong mandate is essential for any representative to establish and communicate the work being done within their parent organisation. It is therefore important to actively make sure that the



people who will participate in the collaborative work have the mandate to make decisions. This can be done, e.g., by strengthening the brand of the collaboration and emphasizing the strategic importance of the work to the core business. This way, a climate of cooperation, which is characterized by decisiveness and confidence in other people's ability to act on decisions, is ensured.

#### **2.4 Relating to a regional context**

To strengthen the legitimacy of the collaboration and to capture potential synergistic effects, Ramböll recommend working with existing strategic structures which apply for regional development in general. Partly, this association works to strengthen structures, for example by involving the integration perspective more clearly in the regional development strategy (RUS), and coordinating the collaborative work with the overall work to implement RUS. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen regional ownership which can be promoted by clarifying the value of developing establishment procedures for newly arrived migrants from a growth perspective ("sense of urgency"). For example, the OECD indicate that elevating the most vulnerable members of society, even just slightly, favours regional growth more than focusing on expertise.<sup>3</sup>

#### **2.5 Managerial support**

A key factor to success, highlighted in all the interviews conducted, is that the collaboration process has support at senior management level. A strong anchor to management creates trust for, as well as dedication to, the collaboration at lower levels of the organisation, which is important especially during the start-up phase when the results of the collaborative work are usually still unclear. Support for the collaboration at management level, is also central to reducing the risk of the process breaking down when personnel changes. Finally, a strong relationship to management is a prerequisite for means, such as time, being liberated.

There are different ways of strengthening the strategic support for the collaborative process. One way is simply to draw attention to the importance of senior management's support for collaboration, not only internally but also in external contexts. Another way is to identify managers within the organisation who are willing to act as internal alliances and ambassadors in conversations with managers at other levels, or in other parts of the organisation. To a certain extent, managerial support is linked to making the results of the collaborative process visible.

#### **2.6**

##### **The power of narratives**

The aforementioned success factors have mainly focused on structures, processes and practices. A final, but important key to success is the power of narratives, and the importance of communicating so that a common "we" emerges. This key to success is based on the assumption that we give meaning to situations through narratives, which is also confirmed by research. Narratives play an important part in how we chose to act and how we interpret different situations. A part of Partnership Skåne's success and brand is related to how the organisation has managed to establish a common narrative among the partaking actors. The narrative has been key, not least in creating support and bringing alive, the approach on which the platform's work and vision is based. Virtually everyone that Ramböll interviewed has said that Partnership Skåne's vision is about developing "an inclusive reception of newly arrived migrants, which is based on the individual needs".

Alongside the collaborative work, an important aspect of the power of narratives is how the collaborative actors talk about each other. According to Ramböll's experience, it is easy to make generalising, negative comments about other partners, e.g. "the Public Employment Service are always so inflexible," or the "health care sector is always so passive". However, these combined statements run the risk of constructing a narrative that creates distance and suspicion between the collaborating partners. In order to strengthen the foundations of trust and create a cooperative climate that is open, unassuming, and helpful, it can in other words be a good idea to actively consider

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2012), *Territorial Review Skåne, Sweden*.

what the current "narratives" regarding the other collaborators are, as well as what each actor can do to change these stories by talking about each other in a different way.

## **2.7 Concluding reflections**

Ramböll's analysis indicates that, to a large extent, developmental collaborative processes need a regional framework in order to be relevant, effective and sustainable. The County Administrative Board has shown that, through its regional, neutral position, it plays an important role in providing this framework. An important lesson is that this framework, as well as the collaborative process as a whole, should depart from a systematic approach. A system can be ineffective, despite each respective part performing well. It is therefore important that the collaborative work does not only focus on the respective achievements of each actor, but that it also looks at how the different actors in the establishment process collaborate from the newly arrived individuals' perspective.

The analysis further shows that focusing on the process of collaboration is as important as the actual content of the collaboration. "Softer" relational values such as trust, informality, commitment and ownership is central to collaboration to work. These values are created in good meetings between collaborative actors, and it is important to ensure an environment where such meetings are supported. Finally, the analysis focuses on the importance of time for collaboration. Collaborative work is not a sprint, but a marathon. In order to achieve sustainable change, perseverance is needed.