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## Support for social and community development

Comment Paper, REVES



on behalf of



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**DG Employment, Social Affairs**  
**and Equal Opportunities**





## INTRODUCTION

REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, is the only European network that brings together Local Authorities and Social Economy Actors in order to create stable partnerships and common policies for sustainable local development and social inclusion. It promotes active citizenship and organized civic engagement in society, social responsibility, solidarity, participation and good governance as pre-conditions for a greater social cohesion and economic development. REVES members are local and regional authorities, from small rural communities gathered in consortia, to large metropolitan areas and regions, and social economy organisations, ranging from single local associations or co-operatives to regional, national or even European level third sector organisations. At present, REVES embodies organisations coming from 14 states (12 EU member states plus Morocco and Russia), for a total of 80 members.

Since several years, REVES has been developing an approach allowing to set up a coherent framework for local policy planning and evaluation by extending the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility of enterprises to a wider concept involving all key actors on a given territory: Territorial Social Responsibility (TSR<sup>®</sup>) .

A socially responsible territory has been defined as “a territorial socio-economic system which implements all its policies in a coherent and transversal manner, by setting a model of sustainable development that strikes the balance between the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimension. Local policy measures are implemented in the present taking account of the future, according to the principle of good governance, by raising the awareness of local actors on the need to take a responsible stance.” This concept has been and still is further elaborated in the framework of various projects. Its principles correspond with common objectives of the European strategy against poverty and social inclusion such as the mobilisation of all relevant bodies, participation, the application of a multi-dimensional approach to social inclusion or subsidiarity.

REVES hopes to contribute to this seminar with its experiences regarding in particular partnerships between local authorities and the third sector. In this context it is able to provide information on models of local strategic partnerships in general, the role and performance of the third sector in local (social) development, on experiences in multi-sectoral planning as well as mainstreaming of social inclusion initiatives, the decentralisation of social inclusion activities at local and regional level etc.



## 1. RELEVANCE OF THE PRESENTED MEASURES

By having introduced the sub-measures presented in the discussion paper, the Portuguese government shows its recognition of the importance of the local level when it comes to sustainable social development.

Social inclusion and welfare cannot exclusively be generated at national level. If one traces back the history of durable welfare systems, it becomes obvious that it is in the so called “*solidarité de proximité*” (solidarity by proximity) at local level where they most often had and still have their origin. Social capital and social infrastructure cannot be developed by the national governments *in the very first place*, but have to be created in municipalities and neighbourhoods with the national level acting rather as a partner promoting and disseminating these processes and experiences.

Measures such as the Portuguese Social network for development may successfully foster socially sustainable development at local level if the underlying **principles** such as integration, subsidiarity or participation are consequently **put into practice**. Local communities dispose of a wide range of different resources to fight social exclusion and to promote the overall well-being. Up until today this potential has by far not fully been tapped.

With its capacity to mobilise citizens and make them participate in local development processes and political dialogue, the **third sector/social economy** significantly contributes to social inclusion and community development. This has rightly been stated in the discussion paper and is reaffirmed by the Portuguese programme where 1/3 of the agents involved belong to associations and other non-profit organisations. It is not without reason that these organisations and enterprises are steadily growing and referred to, even more in times of crises. In addition, one should bear in mind that third sector organisations/social economy integrate **disadvantaged people or groups** not only in their capacity as their employers, suppliers of social services etc., but also due to the fact that a part of their membership is made up of persons that can be considered as socially excluded or that personally experienced similar situations.

Two expressions of local society, based on democracy and participation, third sector organisations and local authorities pursue common objectives combining social, economic and environmental aspects. There is thus a solid fundament for a stable collaboration tackling local social development.

The promotion of **local partnerships** through measures such as the Social network for development should therefore become an intrinsic element of each



social inclusion strategy. Local partnerships should be built between local authorities, third sector organisations and other local actors that engage in setting up and pursuing a local social inclusion strategy with common objectives, based on the pooling of resources/skills and leading to an adequate re-allocation of responsibilities. They are an indispensable means to successfully fight social exclusion and to build local welfare. Needless to stress, that such partnerships should nevertheless be structured and may have their limits if they are to be operational. However, this argument should not be used as a means to exclude the active participation of socially excluded groups.

In this regard the Portuguese experience also shows that it is in the framework of *partnerships* where the **sustainability of projects and other measures** can be ensured best. Once engaged into a project or a partnership beyond project boundaries, different local actors often become aware of the mutual (social) benefits created and might be willing to continue and deepen collaboration. Consequently, it might be of use to link sub-measure 5.1.1 and sub-measure 5.1.2 even more strongly (making the potential for partnerships a vital criteria for project selection etc.).

**Local authorities** have, of course, a crucial role to play within those local partnerships. However, it seems to be rather dangerous to more or less deliberately stick to the old notion of local/regional/national government and administration as *main* sources of welfare and social protection: An obsolete attitude, it might not only slow down the activities of local initiatives working on innovative solutions to problems of social exclusion, but also deprive local authorities of the possibility to interact with different local stakeholders so as to create suitable policy measures and to make use of different local resources. With this respect it should be stressed that there is a need to develop **territorial social responsibility** (see introduction) among all local actors, encouraging them to actively contribute to the well-being of the whole local community.

Local authorities should be considered as indispensable partners within local strategies for social inclusion and, finally, as guarantors ensuring the access of all citizens to social benefits/social infrastructure and rights.

The Portuguese projects show that activities are still to a large extent centred around local authorities and other public institutions. It appears thus necessary to adapt the programme so as to better mobilize other relevant stakeholders (Objective 4, NAP/Incl).



In this context another important principle, mentioned in the discussion paper under the term “**integration**”, is that of transversality: A multi-sectoral approach should be taken when developing policies and programmes for social inclusion; local actors from different areas/policy fields and different levels have to be involved. Measures such as the ones reported should therefore also aim at fostering the creation of local equivalents to “inter-ministerial monitoring committees” in the framework of projects and partnerships. It is only by such an integrative approach and partnership that a real “comprehensive action” as formulated under Objective 3 of the Portuguese NAP/Incl can be developed. This aspect seems to have been partially taken into account when formulating partnership criteria for projects under both sub-measures. However, it should be further developed, for instance, when it comes to the involvement of “relevant stakeholders” (Objective 4a) not primarily working on social issues.

## 2. TRANSFERABILITY/CONDITIONS

Caution should be exercised regarding **training** such as it is promoted by sub-measure 5.1.2. Depending on the subject and objectives of the respective training activity one should have a close look at *who* is teaching *whom*, *what* is being taught and *who* is developing the content of the respective training measure. Experience has proven that training for persons working in the field of social inclusion and local/community development might fail, for instance, if it is focused at one aspect only and provided by bodies usually operating in another “system” (example: management). This experience could be made in the case of some Italian co-operatives that, after special training sessions, could improve their management systems to a large extent, but considerably weakened their social performance.

Institutional training in the field of local (social) development does not always seem to be an adequate solution. It is also in the framework of the aforementioned local partnership that knowledge and skills can be transferred based upon information and experiences provided by a number of various local actors on a regular basis. Different forms of mutual exchange may be developed and regarded as a kind of self-training for the local community, its development agents etc. Avoiding a one-sided approach to social and community development, they might sometimes be more suitable.

It would be interesting to receive more information about the character of the training measures supported by sub-measure 5.1.2.



Another pre-condition for the transferability, the correct implementation, follow-up and sustainability of measures as they have been presented in the discussion paper is **awareness-raising among politicians and within local public administration**. This does not only concern Portugal, which experiences major problems in that respect. Changes regarding the dominating organisational and institutional culture that still fosters a fairly hierarchical and centralised top-down approach are necessary. Awareness-raising measures and information activities should therefore not only be targeted at individual citizens or disadvantaged groups, but also at decision-makers and officials/administrators. They have to be closely involved into processes of interaction and exchange between different local actors and be willing to communicate results within their own structures.

Even though the effort of local actors is fundamental so as to successfully fight social inclusion, the importance of initiatives at national and European level cannot be neglected. European/national programmes and policies are crucial in order to encourage and support social inclusion activities, to foster exchange etc. However, a pre-condition for their success in different member states is the capacity of the European and national level to build upon local/regional/national realities and experiences. It is therefore important to foster the exchange between those vertical levels and to apply the lessons learned from the implementation of policy measures such as they have been presented. This being said, it appears evident, that a successful social inclusion strategy cannot be developed and implemented via mere top-down or mere bottom-up processes. It should rather be based on a **(feedback) circle**, allowing different horizontal and vertical levels to contribute with their resources as well as to support and to correct each other in the framework of a continuous interaction.

### 3. QUESTIONS

- 1.) The Social network for development seems to be a useful instrument to promote local coalitions and partnerships. However, the discussion paper provides only little information on its structure, "mode of functioning" and the implementation of its own principles that should also apply to the network itself. As for the principle of participation: Who has access to the network, which rights do members have? Is decision-making centralised within the ISSS – if not, which decision-making mechanism and bodies do



exist? To what extent exactly are third sector organisations involved and how do they get access? Do they take part in decision-making procedures or do they have a mere consultative function?

How can the central role of local authorities in “social councils” etc. be defined?

- 2.) Regarding sub-measure 5.1.2: Who may be a member of the special management unit in charge of project selection and the de-localised team that deals with the technical aspects of project applications? Does the special management unit collaborate with any other organisation/body at local, regional, national or European level?

Referring to what was already explained above it would be welcome to get some more details on the training measures promoted by this sub-measure: Who is teaching? What are the contents of such training sessions? Who is developing these contents? Which criteria do applicants for projects have to comply with when they plan to include training?

- 3.) With respect to the principle of integration: In how far are both sub-measures related to the other measures belonging to Axis 5? In how far are measures designed under the five axes linked to each other; will there be a comprehensive evaluation crossing the results?