



France 2006

Social Inclusion cross cutting policy tools

Discussion Paper, Hugo Swinnen



On behalf of
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Discussion paper

Social inclusion policies: Coordination and partnership

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Introduction

The initiative presented by the French Directorate General for Social Action (DGAS) to be discussed during the Peer Review concerns the coordination of inclusion policies and the partnership towards and within these policies. In its paper, the coordinating Directorate brings together a number of past, running and future initiatives related to the issue of coordination and partnership. It is not a presentation of one initiative, with a clear cut outcome. A focus on results and evaluation would not be much appropriated for this paper and for the exchange during the Peer Review meeting. Therefore I choose to focus on the different aspects of the coordination and partnership process in social inclusion policies.

After a short introduction about the governance issue in the European social inclusion area, I will give some “food for thought” along the line of three entrances for discussion: government, governance and the process of policy development. This is not a fully systematic nor a scientific overview of issues related to the three issues at stake. It will hopefully facilitate the exchange and mutual learning during the Peer Review meeting. In the third chapter of this paper I will highlight some interesting or critical aspects of the French example. A description of the French example as such will not be found in this paper. I therefore refer to the paper of the French social inclusion policy coordinator DGAS¹.

1. Discussion at European level

Within the overarching objectives of the OMC for social protection and social inclusion the French Peer Review subject is at the heart of the third objective, i.e. “(c) good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy”². More in particular, the coordination and partnership instruments presented in the French paper for the Peer Review aim at the third more specific objective within the strand “eradication of poverty and social exclusion by ensuring: (...) (f) that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty, that they are efficient and effective and mainstreamed into all relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural fund (notably ESF) programmes.”³

These objectives of the OMC on social inclusion touch a number of issues that are discussed in a wider policy context on European level. These include at least the following:

¹Directorate general for social action (2006). *Social inclusion policies – France – 2006: Coordination and partnership*. Paris : Ministry of employment, social cohesion and housing.

² European Commission (2005). *Working together, working better: a new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union*. COM (2005) 706 Final. Brussels : European Commission, p. 5

³ Ibidem, p. 6

1. The comprehensiveness of policies, i.e. including all relevant policy domains to tackle a (social) issue;
2. The integrality of the approaches, i.e. problem oriented instead of sectoral;
3. The partnership between different government levels, within contexts of deconcentration and decentralisation;
4. The partnership between government and other partners, i.e. civil society, social partners, NGOs;
5. The involvement and participation of target populations in the policy process.

The discussions about these issues at European level are a mirror of - and to - discussions on all other levels of government within Europe. The background for them are developments in the fields of citizenship (participation, personal rights and responsibilities), privatisation (less government), deregulation (other government), and (de)centralisation (local government / subsidiarity).

At European level promotion of partnership and participation / involvement of local governments, non-governmental partners and target populations in social inclusion policies are present in a multitude of policy domains, programmes, networks and organisations. If it comes to social inclusion issues, local and regional governments, their networks and programmes are particularly active in this (See e.g. Urbact – RETIS (regions and cities) – Eurocities). However, the distinction between the five aspects as mentioned before is not always clearly present. In all the NAPs Inclusion the issue of involvement of different levels of government and relevant stakeholders is discussed, more or less extensively⁴. Also, most of the independent experts in their reports make critical remarks on one or more aspects of the issue, but there is hardly any systematic approach or review of the different aspects at stake. This Peer Review seems a good opportunity to go into such a systematic discussion.

2. Some reflections on government – governance – policy development processes.

First I will discuss issues related to government. This section will deal with the issue of coordination between government bodies within and between different levels. This has to do with repartition of competencies, with comprehensiveness, integrality and mainstreaming of policies and approaches, with (de)centralisation and (de)concentration.

The second section will deal with governance. Here we go beyond government bodies, to look at other potential partners in public policy development at different levels. Points of discussion are (de)regulation, public-private partnership, the role of social partners and civil society and the changing role of government.

Finally, the third section is about the development process in social inclusion policies. How is it organised and who is involved in it at what stages and with what competencies? Issues at stake: representation and representativity, visibility and public debate, systematic monitoring and evaluation.

2.1. Government

2.1.1. Vertical relationships

In most European countries social inclusion policies are developed and/or implemented at different government levels: national, regional, municipal and even sub-municipal (neighbourhood or district). This is most clearly the case in countries with a federal structure, such as Germany, Austria and Belgium. And in another form in the UK. But of course also in countries with strong forms of regional autonomy, such as

⁴ see i.a. the MSI project – www.europemsi.org

Spain. In some of these countries local authorities at municipal or city level have less autonomy than in traditionally centralised countries such as the Netherlands, which is radically decentralising social (welfare) policy to the municipal level. In all European countries forms of deconcentration and/or decentralisation affect social policies. At the same time, the social policy debate throughout Europe shows a growing importance of convergence at national and European levels. Its reasons are the problems related to mobility and competition between regions and countries and the political ambition to develop a competitive and social Europe.

So, on the one hand public authorities at different levels face an increase of scale as a result of growing interdependencies on the scale of agglomerations, of nation-wide converging tendencies and even of international interdependencies. On the other hand, due to the decrease of scale and “proximity politics” and the concentration of problems within localities, they face deconcentration and decentralisation. Of course, the divergent histories of countries, regions and localities still produce significant differences, but this “double-movement-trend” is occurring everywhere⁵.

In different policy domains there seems to be a need for renewal of these vertical relationships. In key words this need comes from:

- New interdependencies;
- The growing complexity of policy structures and the need for better implementation;
- New views on government: voluntarism versus legalism, subsidiarity versus straightforward (unconditional) decentralisation.

One could observe in all European countries very complex policies and relationships. Even if there is certain logic in the distribution of roles between central, regional and local governments, this logic is often not systematic, nor is it clear for everyone. This distribution is partly the result of political and institutional power “games” (in the past).

Solutions to this problem can be found in:

- More clarity about the existing division of responsibilities between the levels;
- Structural changes to improve the logical distribution of responsibilities and improve the quality of implementation at all levels;
- A generalised decentralisation;
- New forms of subsidiarity, and
- More (voluntary) willingness to cooperate.

In the last two solutions new views on government come into the picture (although subsidiarity and voluntarism in government are not new in itself).

Subsidiarity and voluntarism

Good results are too often reached in spite of the structural complexity. This costs a lot of energy that could be saved. Among those opting for structural changes, there is a debate on decentralisation as a solution for better integration of services. But further decentralisation in itself will not always resolve the problem. A well-organised system of subsidiarity among the different governance levels seems to be more interesting. Three major variables should define the rules of such subsidiarity regulations:

- the importance of distance vs. proximity;
- the reality of different contexts, and
- the importance of equality vs. specificity.

⁵ Davelaar, M., Swinnen, H., & Woerds, S. ter (2003). *European cities and local social policy: Survey on developments and opinions in six European countries* (Forschungsbericht ; nr. 7/04). Bern: Federal Social Insurance Office. (also available in French and German).

One should look carefully to define the best level for tackling each specific matter. It is clear, for example, that proximity is of most importance to put into practice good individual integration plans, both socially and economically. The living environment of people is essentially the neighbourhood and to some extent the city or the municipality. It is important for social services to be present and to organise at that level. To monitor and evaluate, on the contrary, a certain distance has its advantages. With further decentralisation these roles – usually fulfilled on higher levels – risk becoming less important, which could in turn have a negative effect on local mobilisation and activity. Regional and national levels are more appropriate for these purposes. To organise and plan employment integration or social housing it seems that the level of the (urban) region (e.g. agglomeration) is more appropriate than the level of the city or municipality, since the local labour and housing markets contexts are more regional.

One typical example is that national governments respond to the subsidiarity trend by delegating responsibilities downwards to cities, who uplift these – voluntarily and responding to the search for an appropriate scale – to the agglomeration or regional level. Does this mean that the agglomeration level should become a new statutory level of government? Or should this level – responding to new ideas about good governance – remain a voluntarist partnership structure?

Social Policy analyses in different European countries clearly showed the need for working on all different scales and the need for constant shifting between these scales. Depending on the nature of a social problem, governments on all levels should be able to adjust their policies.

Roles of different government levels

In different European countries we see that national government departments join the regional and local administrations in thinking about new strategies and projects for social inclusion. From a perspective of integrated policy development they tend to formulate their policies in a problem or issue oriented way. When not coordinated, this development can have unintended consequences (the local level being over-demanded by projects and initiatives).

In this respect, the central question that returns time after time is how to strengthen both national leadership and local (c.q. regional) autonomy?

By following the open method of coordination?

Before the most recent decentralisation operation, the French policy to combat poverty and social exclusion had a number of characteristics that were similar to the European Union's open method of coordination. Missions and targets were centrally defined (or commonly agreed), but local authorities could decide on the methods and means for realisation of these missions and targets. Strong points of the French policy seemed to be the large but strict frameworks in which local governments (departments) have to function.

Since the newest decentralisation movement, it is not clear how things are (to be) organised.

How large is the freedom of local authorities? And how strict the national framework? And to what extent does central government support local authorities with a monitoring and evaluation system, involving them in the development of indicators?

Improving the quality of local policies is as important as accountability.

Of course accountability is crucial, and local authorities must demonstrate that resources were used effectively. It is also true that the formulation of accountability criteria harbours the danger of homogenising tendencies. It is therefore essential that – in addition to this form of 'accountability' – the national government also contributes substantially to local governments: with ideas, by providing access to national and international examples of good and bad practices, but also by encouraging risk-taking and experimenting and by granting free space. Improving quality can also be a national government's task.

From setting specific goals to setting a common agenda?

An answer might be to formulate fewer goals and investing more in common efforts to set a local or regional agenda. And this with a maximum of freedom for local authorities to translate the general goals to their own situation, and to formulate their own strategies.

2.1.2. Horizontal relationships

At the central government level there are good reasons for further strengthening the internal coordination within Government, between departments and offices. If one strives for more integrated policies – is the argument – then there has to be more coordination at all levels. Coordination units can do this by combined task forces, by interdepartmental working groups or liaison-officers in all relevant departments.

The risk of these specific co-ordinating bodies is that their activities remain marginal within each department or in relation to specialised offices. An exception to this can be found in the U.K. where the Social Exclusion Unit is situated in the deputy prime ministers office and has regular meetings of high ranked government officials from all departments. This means that such bodies can be influential, if they are situated at a sufficient high political level.

“The Prime Minister set up the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997. Since then the Unit has led innovative thinking in addressing some of society's most difficult problems. Initially part of the Cabinet Office, the Unit moved over to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in May 2002 and worked closely with other parts of the Office such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate to tackle deprivation. ODPM became the Department for Communities and Local Government in May 2006. The Unit works to create prosperous, inclusive and sustainable communities for the 21st century - places where people want to live that promote opportunity and a better quality of life for all. The work of the Social Exclusion Unit includes specific projects to tackle specific issues and wide-ranging programmes to assess past policy and identify future trends.”⁶

In several European countries, the coordination of social inclusion policies at national level is in the hands of one directorate of one ministry. In the Netherlands e.g. this led to a very limited real involvement of other ministries in the development of the NAP/Inclusion. The NAPs inclusion have some difficulties to get beyond an enumeration or inventory of policies of different ministries and departments. Even if, step by step, these ministries and departments take into account the overall picture and evaluation of the previous plans in defining the next, there seems often to be hardly a common social inclusion policy. One important step in this is of course the transparency of budgets linked to different objectives, and the creation of common or transversal objectives with according budgets. The French “Document de politique transversale” is an example of such a step. One of the advantages is that it makes it possible to assess the degree of comprehensiveness of the social inclusion policy: which domains are included and to what extend (budget level)? It also creates possibilities to get into debate about and measurement of the mainstreaming of social inclusion policies.

Horizontal relationships between government bodies are of course also important on other than national levels. More in particular at local level, where the major efforts for social inclusion have to be combined in direct relation to target populations, coordination and cooperation between different sectors of public policy is crucial. Two major questions here are:

- To what extend does the coordination at national level facilitate or even stimulate cooperation at local level?
- To what extend does the coordination at both national and local levels lead to an integrated approach of the social inclusion issue?

In many countries efforts have been made to develop integrated approaches at local level in terms of one stop shops (guichet unique), one file or chain approaches, case management, etceteras. In order to de-

⁶ See <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/>

velop these, it is important for local administrations that budgets from different sources can be combined in a creative way “to solve problems instead of executing sectoral policies”. In spite of good intentions, at both national and local levels, administrations seem to be reluctant to move consequently in that direction. Some of the reasons can be found in political-administrative or bureaucratic traditions and accountability rules, and also in professional identities and routines.

For both the vertical and horizontal relationships between government bodies it is important to get beyond procedures and regulations and come to new forms of dialogue and debate (mutual consulting, Peer Reviews ...).

2.2. Governance

Social inclusion policies do not only depend on the efforts of governments at different levels. To a large extent other than public actors have or could have great influence on the degree of social inclusion and on social inclusion strategies.

2.2.1. Government is leading

But the overall responsibilities of government put it in a leading role. A main issue for debate is the question how government can fulfil its desired leading role. Government finds itself often in a situation with major players or interests that can not or do not want to be steered because of different interests or because those actors are organised on a different scale and are accountable to others.

In such situations public authorities have to adapt their role constantly and choose between being a regulator, director, negotiator or mediator. These roles can be described as follows.

Regulator: a strongly controlling government with a bureaucratic apparatus that relies on its own expertise for developing solutions. Its legitimacy is the responsibility for society as a whole, provided by the democratically elected representatives of the people. In social inclusion policies government has to take this role when social justice, equality and equity are at stake, e.g. in the setting of standards for social protection.

Director: a government that first determines its own goals and type of solutions, and then encourages private initiatives to take care of the services and come up with specific solutions. The government knows the social needs and relies on private initiatives to help realise its goals. This situation occurs often in the relation between government and service providers for target populations.

Negotiator: a government that seeks a win-win situation. Both the government and social groups (i.e. private initiatives: profit as well as non-profit) draw attention to problems and opportunities. The government sets priorities as guardian of collective interests and challenges other parties to do the same for their own particular interests. Policy emerges from the interaction between actors and the policy outcomes cannot be determined beforehand. Goals are set, but they will shift during the process. This is e.g. the case when government is negotiating with employers about their role in the labour market integration of vulnerable groups.

Mediator: in this definition of the government's role, the emphasis lies on the creation of a solution, not on the exact content of that solution. It highlights the responsibility of social organisations for solving problems and achieving synergy. The government should concentrate on constructing links between parties, which (because of the limited scope of their visions or opportunities) are unable to do so themselves.

Moreover, the government must identify obstacles, such as power differences, that prevent these actors from taking responsibility for themselves.⁷

The situation determines which of these definitions should be chosen, and what style of leadership is suitable. No single conception of the government's role is applicable in every circumstance. Some of the partners that play an essential role in developing solutions to problems cannot be guided by the local government, because it lacks the formal authority to do so. Some issues cannot be left to the interaction between existing parties, because the collective interest (e.g. centres for drug addicts, construction of refugee centres, etc.) or the interests of minority groups are at stake, for example. In some situations, the government does not possess the necessary knowledge to formulate clear goals beforehand. If this is the case, goals will have to emerge from cooperation and negotiation among various partners. Criteria for choosing roles, in other words, will arise from the opportunity, the usefulness and the desirability of adopting a certain role and will thus depend on the context, the issue at stake and the actors involved. To be aware of the role to play in a particular situation and to be clear about that role to all partners is a first step to success.

2.2.2. Governance is not a zero sum game

The tendency for more governance often goes together with the tendency for less government. This could be true in terms of quantity of rules and regulations, but is certainly not true, or productive in terms of the quality and dynamics of government. Partnership in governance is not a zero sum game. For those who believe that power is indivisible, government is certainly losing influence (because politics is moving towards the market, civil society and increasingly vociferous citizens). But for those who believe in a dynamic view of power, and who realise that a strong government needs a strong civil society and vice versa, a strong role for other actors may also contribute positively to government. It may even strengthen the position of government, if the other actors challenge the governmental actors to accentuate their specific role⁸. This principle applies also to the relation between levels of government: a strong local government needs a strong national – and European – government. In the field of urban (social) policy this has been clearly shown throughout Europe. The most dynamic urban policies have been developed in those countries where national government – on its own initiative or challenged by the cities – has taken up a leading and guiding role in his field (e.g. UK, Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands).

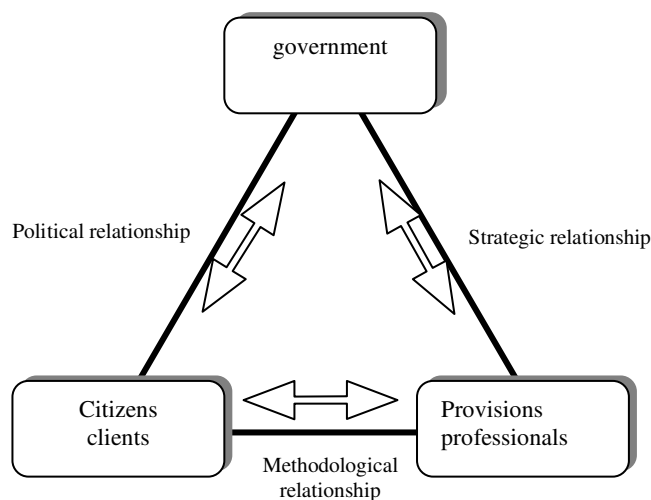
2.2.3. Distinction between partners

When creating partnerships with non-governmental actors, one has to distinguish between the different types of partners and the roles they take up in specific situations and contexts. If government can and has to take different roles in governance, the same goes for its partners. In relation to public authorities citizens can be seen and act as voters, clients, users, target population, consumers etcetera depending on the issue at stake, and the public service they are dealing with. But also civil society organisations play different roles. In partnerships to promote social inclusion non governmental actors are called to co-produce social cohesion, but they have to be valued in their specific positions and roles. The relationships between government and the different types of actors and between the different actors themselves are from a specific nature. This can be visualised as follows⁹.

⁷ Davelaar, M., Duyvendak, J.W., Swinnen, H., & Graaf, P. van der. (2001). *Good governance and 'The social pillar of the major-cities policy': attributes and qualities of a succesful local governmental strategy*. Eindhoven : Gemeente Eindhoven / Verwey-Jonker Instituut, p 16

⁸ Davelaar, M., Swinnen, H., & Woerds, S. ter (2003). *European cities and local social policy: Survey on developments and opinions in six European countries* (Forschungsbericht ; nr. 7/04). Bern: Federal Social Insurance Office. (also available in French and German), p 134

⁹ Davelaar, M., Duyvendak, J.W., Swinnen, H., & Graaf, P. van der. (2001). *Good governance and 'The social pillar of the major-cities policy': attributes and qualities of a succesful local governmental strategy*. Eindhoven : Gemeente Eindhoven / Verwey-Jonker Instituut, p. 21



The descriptions of relations between parties in this graph express their interdependency, which stems from the distribution of knowledge and skills (as well as the political relations) in (local) society. This requires bi-directional analysis. Politically, the relationship between government and citizens is one of reciprocity: citizens elect and sanction, the government administers. The local government is expected to guide private initiatives in a political sense, but it possesses relatively little steering power in their ties with many actors involved in the social inclusion process. The bureaucratic organisation is expected to enter into strategic partnerships with non governmental professional actors. Genuine partnerships are only possible if all partners enjoy enough opportunities for joining the guiding process. And finally, the link between provisions or professionals is to be seen as a methodological one, but the role of the citizen is also increasingly seen as co-producing services and provisions.

This “reciprocity” in the so-called policy triangle requires considering each actor’s position, interests, involvement and contribution autonomously when constructing partnerships.

There is a lot of studies and debate about both government’s and citizens’ position and role in the social inclusion process. Much less is being analysed on the specific position and role of professionals. Within the policy triangle used here, we see professionals as resources for policy development and implementation. This means that there has to be a strategic relationship with government. In Europe, there are different traditions and tendencies as to the relationship between government and professionals (and their institutions). In some countries they are part of public bodies, in others they are mostly situated in non governmental institutions. Also the financing and steering traditions are different, giving professionals more or less autonomy in relation to government. In the Netherlands e.g. professionals are mostly situated in non-governmental institutions. Until the nineties they were very autonomous in their choice of objectives, priorities and methodologies. Since then, governments, both at national and local levels take up a much more steering role and tend now to see professionals purely as instruments for policy implementation. Neither of these two attitudes makes sufficiently use of the full potentials of professionals as resources for development and implementation of social inclusion policies.

2.3. The policy process and the involvement of all actors

At least the following issues have to be clarified under this heading:

- The comprehensiveness of the policy process as such;
- The stages in which to involve different actors;
- The degree of involvement of these actors;
- The relation between coordination within government and the involvement of non government actors;
- The appropriate methods for involvement;
- The preconditions for adequate involvement.

These issues are very much interlocked, but I will give some remarks on each of them.

2.3.1. The comprehensiveness of the policy process

The remark here can be very simple: each and every policy process should follow a complete policy cycle, i.e. starting from the analysis of the context and issues at stake, through the definition of policy and the decision making, to implementation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. But everyone knows how difficult it is to put these stages consequently and coherently into practice. This is all the more difficult for transversal policy issues such as social inclusion. The NAPs Inclusion until now show clearly that all European countries are struggling with mostly comparable difficulties in terms of coordination, integration of budgets, setting clear indicators for monitoring, the link between monitoring and evaluation, and accountability rules. A "methodological" Peer Review on all and each of these issues would be more than worthwhile.

2.3.2. The stages in which to involve different actors

If participation is to be an integral part of mainstreaming social inclusion into all aspects of national and local public policy-making, then it requires that the actors at all levels of the policy cycle, both horizontally (across all ministries and State agencies) and vertically (from those involved in the policy design, its implementation, the provision of the programmes and/or service, to the external target audience - individuals, groups and representative organisations), need access to information, to be consulted and to participate in each stage of the policy process¹⁰.

2.3.3. The degree of involvement of different actors

According to the MSI project¹¹ describes involvement as a number of stages, ranging from the provision of information to joint decision-making, or co-determination.

- **Information** and the sharing of knowledge is the 'life blood' of involvement, as without the full and complete availability of information on the policy initiative, which is made available in good time, it is not possible for either consultation or participation to be meaningful.
- **Consultation** provides those individuals or groups who are interested and involved to express views on a proposal and to influence the final decision but not to be involved in the making of that decision, which remains the prerogative of the policy-makers who may, or may not, take into consideration the views put forward through a consultation process, in making the decisions. Consultation cannot be effective unless those who are been consulted have all the relevant information on the proposed policy.
- **Participation** recognises the contribution made by all the stakeholders in the decision-making process equally and it provides individuals and groups with the ability to influence the process and to have their views incorporated in the final outcomes.
- **Co-decision** making goes one step further by ensuring that a consensus is reached during the decision-making process, that policies are arrived at jointly and that they reflect the concerns and

¹⁰ Swinnen, H. (2005). La démocratie participative dans le processus politique local: Le cas de la ville d'Utrecht (Pays-Bas). In M.-H. Bacqué, H. Rey, & Y. Sintomer, *Gestion de proximité et démocratie participative: Une perspective comparative* (pp. 179-195). La Découverte: Paris.

¹¹ see www.europemsi.org

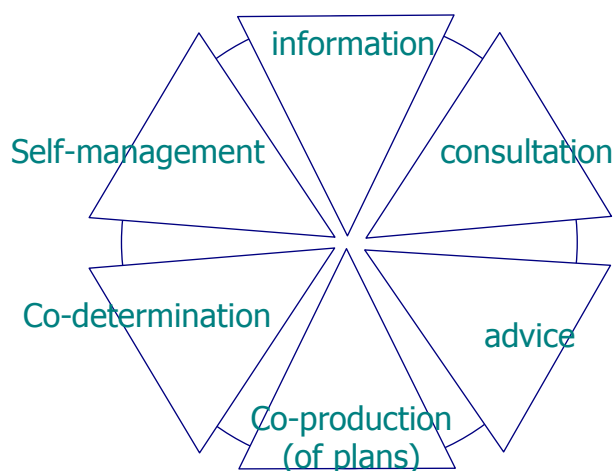
priorities of all those who will be affected by the decision, resulting in all the stakeholders having a joint ownership of the final outcome.

The OECD looks at this process another way, as a continuum of options. This continuum provides a framework for the relationship between statutory agencies and the voluntary sector:

- Information;
- Consultation;
- Partnership
- Delegation
- Control.

“Consultation varies in form simply informing people what government proposes to do (information) to various levels of empowerment (partnership, delegation and control) explicitly designed to involve those outside government in a decision”¹².

Even if there are some nuances between these two visions, they follow the analysis of most authors describing the stages of involvement in a more or less hierarchical way, from less to more or from weak to strong involvement. In theory they are absolutely right. In the practice of policy development and implementation however, a number of factors intervene with this model, which make it inevitable to define which actor can (or wants to) have influence at what point in time on which issue and to what extent. Therefore, the different levels of involvement could also be seen as equally important options for an optimal policy development and implementation process. All depends on contexts, issues and governing rules.¹³



But the choice for one or the other degree of involvement should be clear to all actors and be possible subject for negotiation. Of course, involvement will be more motivated if actors have some decision-making powers as well as an advisory role. Responsibility and competencies are linked. If non govern-

¹² Background paper in OECD Responsive Government Shand D and Arnberg M OECD, Paris (1996), as quoted in Supporting Voluntary Activity: A White Paper on a framework for supporting voluntary activities and for developing the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector Government Publications, Dublin (2000).

¹³ Swinnen, H. (2004). Participatie van burgers in stedelijk beleid: vorm en toets van sociaal beleid. In J. Steyaert, & H. Swinnen, *Het soortelijke gewicht van sociaal beleid: Liber amicorum voor Wim Woertman* (pp. 131-150). Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut.

mental actors, including target populations are to be jointly responsible for taking care of the social inclusion policies and process, they need to have a say about (at least part of) the financial and other resources being allocated. But, as discussed in the section about the different roles of government, it is obvious that in some cases co-determination of specific actors would be in conflict with the formal rules of democratic control or even with aspects of general interest.

2.3.4. Coordination within government and the involvement of non government actors

If we expect government to organise involvement of non government actors in all stages of the policy process there is clearly a tension between what we called the government issue and the governance issue. And perhaps even within the government issue between horizontal and vertical relationships. Government bodies tend indeed to try and come to internal consensus before getting into discussions and negotiations with external actors. And the external actors mostly expect government bodies to act as such. But many of the policy choices at all government levels are compromises that remain stable only as long as they remain more or less intact. This clearly influences the possibilities for real influence by non government actors. This tension is an extra argument for involvement from the very first stages of policy development, for a continuous / regular switch between internal (government) and external (governance) processes and for clarity about the possibilities to influence policy in the making.

2.3.5. The appropriate methods for involvement

Coherence between objectives, strategies and working methods within consultation and participation processes is essential. Apart from the (important!) technical issues linked to working methods, some of the more basic questions to be answered for each concrete action are the following:

- Do we need a more structural approach (permanent committee) or is a more ad hoc approach (forum, conference) sufficient or even more appropriate?
- Do we want to raise collective or individual influence?
- How do we measure, or organise the legitimacy of invited partners? By rules of formal ("political" or "statistical" representativity) or by checking the inputs or outcomes (e.g. through surveys)?
- How do we handle the relation and potential conflicts between representative democracy and forms of participatory democracy?
- How do we see the relation between the well or better organised actors and others?

Whatever the answers to these questions are, it is clear from experiences in many countries and situations that a number of different strategies and methods have to be used and combined in order to get sufficient and productive involvement of the most relevant actors (including target populations) in the social inclusion policy process.

Involvement of a multitude of actors in the process of policy development and implementation could be regarded as a form of participatory democracy. In order to be clear, coherent and transparent about participation in the policy process, a certain degree of institutionalisation is needed. But every institutionalisation carries with it the risk of exclusion of certain sections of the population. People who understand how the system works are in, others are out. How far can we build a system for participatory democracy without creating new exclusions? Or do we take these exclusions for granted?

2.3.6. The preconditions for adequate involvement

Key words: time, support, recognition, visibility (no black boxes), public debate and dialogue

To be adequate, involvement needs appropriate time schedules. In different countries we can observe a certain bias as to the time used by government to prepare the NAPs in relation to the time accorded to non governmental partners to realise their involvement. More in particular the less powerful or professionalised partners are often put in an uncomfortable position.

Linked to the previous condition is the condition of giving sufficient government support to grass roots organisations in order to enable their development and functioning. Otherwise, their involvement in the policy development process and more in general in the process of social inclusion can not be assured.

In addition to participating in the policy process, there must be recognition of the different but equally legitimate roles of partners as co-producers but also as consumers of public policy and services. Therefore, mechanism for responding to citizens' concerns (role of consumers) and for individual and collective defence of interests have to be in place. If these different mechanisms do not exist or do not function well, citizen input will come at times and places where they can't be used productively.

The whole policy development and implementation process, including the internal government processes, should be as visible as possible to all invited non governmental partners. Since the internal processes are mostly like black boxes, partners can't understand the time schedules used and their own place in it.

Finally, in order to motivate partners' involvement, but also to organise checks and balances, public debate and open dialogue are crucial. This has to take the form of formal political debate in parliament of course. It is somewhat amazing to see how little social inclusion is debated in parliament in some European countries. But also public debate and dialogue through public meetings and conferences is important to keep social inclusion on the public agenda. Last but not least, dialogue has to be also an integral part of the actors' involvement process itself. This means that public authorities not only listen to these actors, but also give feedback and discuss about what happened with their advice.

3. Why is the French example interesting?

The French example is particularly interesting because it includes elements of all aspects discussed in the previous chapter. Some of these elements are fragmented or experimental, others are just starting or planned for the future, but they seem to be – or could be - part of a more comprehensive and integrated strategy under construction.

3.1. In terms of policy choices

Both comprehensiveness and integrality (mainstreaming) are basic for the new French social inclusion policy. This is most clearly shown in the Document de politique transversale sur l'Inclusion Sociale. Not less than 27 different programmes are included. They touch of course the more obvious ones in the fields of employment, housing, education and vocational training, youth, health and equal opportunities. But also the sectors of tourism and culture are involved. Even if employment and employability issues are central in this document, which is in line with the renewed Lisbon strategy, this document seems to go beyond that to include also social inclusion "for its own sake".

In terms of integrality or mainstreaming, the French government sets six transversal objectives. As it is mentioned for each of them: "from the citizen's viewpoint":

- Reinforce social cohesion through reduction of poverty
- Diminish child poverty
- Promote the integration of youngsters
- Diminish the number of illiterate persons
- Eradicate "unworthy" (French: indigne) housing
- Promote the mobilisation of institutional actors for social inclusion

For these transversal objectives, a total of nine indicators are mentioned. The operationalising of these however is mostly still to realise.

3.2. In terms of policy tools

In the French paper, the budget provisions are mentioned as just one element of one tool for coordination and partnership. This tool, if properly developed could very well become the most crucial one for the coordinated efforts at national level, and thus also one of the major preconditions for coordination with other government levels and partnership with non governmental actors.

One will of course have to wait for further development of the indicators, the quality of the monitoring and the political feedback to judge the efficacy of this tool.

A weaker point in this is the absence of insight in other than national government budgets in the different sectors of public policy (both at other government levels, and from non government side).

3.3. In terms of policy development

For the horizontal coordination at national level, the necessary mechanisms are in place. Furthermore, national government initiated during the last few years a number of experiments at local and regional levels to involve all relevant partners in the policy process and to gather local and regional input for the development of national policies. Besides these initiatives from the national level, in number of localities in France, there exist consultation and participation practices creating input for local and regional policy development. The efforts to put social inclusion on the public agenda through conferences are also very important.

The most difficult issue for the near future will be the systematic development of local actor's involvement and the organisation of the feedback loop between local and national social inclusion policy. The "commission départementale de cohésion sociale" is meant to be an instrument to link national and local policy development. To promote participation at local level throughout the country and to realise a dynamic relationship between national and local levels, a continuous effort in methodological and strategic support from the side of national government will probably be needed.

3.4. In terms of methodology

Experiences with different participatory methods and their evaluation show that France is indeed thinking in terms of different types of input for policy making. Exchange within France, but also on a European level of experiences and expertise in this field is highly recommended. More in particular in view of some remarks in the previous chapter of this paper about the link between different types or degrees of involvement and the participation methods to be used.

3.5. In terms of preconditions

The French political administrative model in which the existing deconcentration model of the prefectures has been combined (or "doubled") since the early eighties with a decentralisation model through the "conseils généraux" and followed by the introduction of the regional level (conseils régionaux) seems very complicated for foreign observers (and perhaps not only foreign observers). To realise productive and dynamic vertical relationships between national and local government it could provide the necessary infrastructure. The creation of the already mentioned departmental committee for social inclusion makes use of that infrastructure. But infrastructure is not all. The will to collaborate at local level will have to be actively

promoted and supported. And the relationship between prefectures (as the “go between”) and national government has to be used in a creative and dynamic way.

As to the relation between government and non government actors I see some specific challenges for France (and other countries as well). When observing some French experiences, it seems as if there is not much room for other relationships than the full autonomy of the voluntary sector at the one hand and the full instrumentalist use of the voluntary sector (“le monde associatif”) at the other hand. Experiences in other European countries seem to offer more variety.

A second issue is that of representation and representativity. Within the practice of governance and participatory democracy representativity should not always be judged along the same type of criteria as within representative democracy. To be a valuable partner in policy development one should not always be formally representative for a specific group or a specific field. As I argued earlier, there are other forms of legitimacy to take into account as well.

3.6. Back to the future

When I first studied the French minimum income scheme RMI in 1992¹⁴, I was impressed by the political will to find a fair balance between rights and duties of both public authorities and social benefit claimants. I was also impressed by the systematic and logic approach of the income and integration pillars of the system. Finally I had the chance to observe in a few local situations the active involvement of many partners, jointly guided by national (through the prefecture) and local government (conseil général de département).

In the meantime, as in most European countries, a lot of successes and failures and political changes have intervened and made social inclusion policies what they are today.

Although the RMI / RMA is only one element within social inclusion policies, the principles that guided the introduction of the minimum income almost 20 years ago (1989) seem to be leading today the national social inclusion strategy.

Critical observers, such as the French member of the European group of non governmental experts, and EAPN France point out some strengths and weaknesses of the French social inclusion policy.

According to the French expert there is a strong commitment of the national government to the implementation of the National Action Plan, although the economic and financial constraints have limited the fight against poverty. The strongest efforts can be seen in the fields of employment, vocational training and housing. Since 2004 he sees a growing effort also in social objectives and actions for the most vulnerable. Furthermore he observes a lack of visibility and strong social mobilisation through the social inclusion policies.

As the local level he sees also a strong commitment to combating poverty and social exclusion and mostly with the same types of analyses and possible solutions as mentioned at national level. But there seems to be little connection between local policies and the NAP/inclusion.¹⁵

The French EAPN group agrees on the efforts for coordination between government bodies at the national level. They see an important weakness in the relation between national and local government levels. They also criticise the weak involvement of people in poverty in the monitoring and evaluation of the NAP. And they have problems with the timing of consultation of non government partners in the development of the

¹⁴ Swinnen, H. (1992). *Le revenu minimum d'insertion: discours, dispositif, pratique: Un regard extérieur*. Den Bosch: NIMO.

¹⁵ M. Legros (2004). *PNAI et territoires, La situation française : un rendez-vous à minima*. Rennes : ENSP

NAP/inclusion. On the other hand, EAPN France joins the independent expert in its positive analysis of government's commitment to the NAP and its implementation¹⁶.

These severely summarised comments seem to confirm the challenges as presented in this paper and constitute all the more arguments for the full implementation – and evaluation – of the tools for coordination and partnership as they are described and foreseen in the French paper for this Peer Review.

¹⁶ EAPN – France (2005). *Rapports nationaux de mise en oeuvre des PAN – Réponse de EAPN-France au questionnaire de EAPN*. Bruxelles : EAPN