



European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy:

Comments on the Committee of the Regions' White Paper on Multilevel Governance

REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, brings together local and regional authorities as well as social economy enterprises from 16 EU member states. Its major objective is to create stable partnerships and common policies for sustainable local development and social inclusion. REVES promotes active citizenship, social responsibility, solidarity, participation and good governance as pre-conditions for a greater social cohesion and economic development.

REVES congratulates the Committee of the Regions on the initiative taken with the White Paper on Multilevel Governance and the various seminars held for its preparation.

The document is timely, as it points to an issue which is vital for the future of Europe. In a number of cases, it is not necessarily missing policies or strategies which lie at the heart of difficulties Europe is facing today. A main reason for the latter is the lack of an appropriate approach to horizontal and vertical - governance. Different stakeholders, including single citizens, should contribute to the European project and well-being of all. However, for this they also have to be better associated in shaping policies and strategies and, where appropriate, defining their role in the implementation.

REVES therefore agrees with a number of principles that were put forward by the Committee of the Regions such as the promotion of participation in democracy, partnership or shared governance in diverse areas.

However, REVES would like to draw the attention of the Committee of the Regions on the following points and proposals:

- **A European Charter on Multilevel Governance** appears useful, but will have lasting success only if a largest possible number of European, national, regional and local stakeholders, and not only governments, are involved in its preparation and committed to promote its respect and application.

- The Committee of the Regions describes 'Multilevel Governance' as 'coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities, based on partnership and aimed at drawing up and implementing EU policies'. REVES members hold that this description or definition could be made more ambitious, not at least in consideration of the challenges brought about by the crisis of existing socio-economic models and paradigms. A definition of 'multilevel governance' in the European Union could also clearly express the willingness of local and regional governments to contribute, through multilevel governance, to the realization of European values such as welfare for all, solidarity etc.

- **Partnership:** Partnership is the very basis for sustainable multilevel governance, if one defines it as a relationship between different actors sharing common goals. If we expect all citizens to contribute to Europe's well-being by bringing in their ideas, motivation and skills, we have to involve them much more strongly. Therefore, horizontal partnerships are vital, as well. They do not necessarily have to lead to an increase of complexity in governance procedures, but can be developed by re-coordinating, in a more effective way, already existing procedures and resources. Methods and instruments to promote horizontal partnership and co-governance involving social economy organisations, intended in the wider sense, can be adapted according to different policy fields, dimensions of policy measures etc. In recent years, the Committee of the Regions conducted interesting research and adopted a number of opinions on different kind of such partnerships. A part of these opinions are mentioned in the White Paper, others seem to be ignored. REVES would like to encourage the Committee of the Regions to continue in carrying out and publishing a stocktaking of already existing expertise on this issue. Moreover, it seems crucial to evaluate possibilities to have a follow-up and actualization of the diverse initiatives that were already taken. An example here is the opinion on "Partnerships between local and regional authorities and social economy organisations: contribution to employment, local development and social cohesion", adopted on 26 March 2002.

- **Participation:** A number of interesting and innovative practices regarding participation and shared governance exist and/or are being developed throughout Europe. Again, REVES members would consider it useful if the Committee of the Regions and/or the Commission could establish a database containing different kind of information on appropriate tools to support participation in democracy (this database could have different categories for diverse target groups: rather technical and methodological information for those wishing to implement and animate new participatory processes; relevant information and policy examples for decision-makers that sometimes have to create the conditions to promote such processes; information for citizens and their organisations wishing to get involved in participatory processes at different levels).

- **Experimentation:** REVES welcomes the willingness of the Committee of the Regions to promote experimentation at local and regional level. This should be done in particular when fostering the application of new methods for participation in democracy. Regions, cities, but also other levels of government, should receive incentives to experiment in this domain. Often, this is the only way to trigger real changes concerning fundamental issues such as governance: Experimentation does not impose, nor does it oblige to carry on the initiative in case it is considered ineffective. However, it can be an eye-opener for different stakeholders (and motivate the latter to continue a specific experience in another way even if this experience did not have the expected results).

- **Cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee:** Diverse issues mentioned beforehand are also treated by the European Economic and Social Committee. The Committee of the Regions could have a deeper exchange with the EESC, where appropriate and useful.

- **Open Method of Coordination:** Additional terms or procedures such as an 'open method of regionalised coordination' might increase the confusion of citizens as to the functioning of the European Union. Instead, the Committee of the Regions and its partners should insist on the necessity to base national action plans on local and regional ones. These local and regional action plans should be somehow made an obligation or could at least be promoted through various programmes and policies of the European Union. In coherence with the principles of participation in democracy, various local and regional actors, be they public, private or social should be associated to the conception and implementation of these plans. Procedures could be based on examples such as the Piani di Zona in the Social Service and Health Sector in Italy.

- **Consultation and Structured Dialogue:** REVES invites the Committee of the Regions, but also and above all the European Commission, to develop a real dialogue which goes beyond mere consultation. To give just one example: The Structured Dialogue is an important means of exchange between the local, regional and European level. However, there is, in our opinion, too much structure and too little real dialogue in Structured Dialogue meetings. It would be useful to have opportunities for more interaction and the possibility to deepen some issues on the spot. In this context it could also be of use to organize parallel, rather 'technical' meetings between the Commission and local/regional experts from different territories.

- **Territorial cooperation and EGTC:** REVES strongly supports the promotion of territorial cooperation through instruments such as EGTC. It encourages the Committee of the Regions to elaborate, together with the Commission, concrete tools and expertise to assist in the establishment of such kind of cooperation among territories.

However, again, the Committee of the Regions should promote the involvement of different stakeholders in the cooperating territories (as it suggested already in the White Paper). This is vital also for the promotion and dissemination of the instrument EGTC as such. Civil society organisations for instance could be in a position to act as a driving engine for the establishment of an EGTC and add to the diversity of EGTCs in terms of objectives and policies (going beyond infrastructure and services).

- **European Territorial Pacts:** REVES is willing to take part in discussions and, eventually, the implementation of such pacts.

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