

Clustering with social objectives

1. General recognition of the added value of clustering with social objectives

Clustering with social objectives is a fairly new concept that needs to be further developed and promoted at all levels of society and by all actors. Local and national governments should recognize the great potential that lies in processes of mutualisation such as they have been proposed by the DESEO partners. They add value to the traditional concept of clustering which focuses above all on economic objectives and interests of the cluster partners. Of particular importance is their democracy-oriented cluster philosophy, promoted by social economy and other actors.

Moreover, the prospect of new local initiatives for social inclusion that would be based most and foremost on resources of their own partners can only be welcomed by local, national and European authorities.

The new cluster concept should be brought in when developing awareness-raising initiatives and programs in different fields and on diverse issues such as, for instance, entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility, anti-discrimination or partnership.

Organisations and actors in the social economy sector, in turn, should be open to cooperation with other traditional enterprises and the public sector.

2. Adaptation of the legislative framework

Legislation and resulting measures that relate to issues such as public-private partnerships, promotion of equal opportunities, entrepreneurship or public procurement should be adapted in order to provide better conditions and incentives for cluster creation. Local authorities, for instance, could promote services, based on clustering processes, when allocating public contracts. Clustering with social objectives may be made an award criterion in the public tender, to give just one example.

Nevertheless, sometimes legislative texts *as such* do not need to be adapted. They might already provide a range of opportunities to promote social values in clustering processes.

Local authorities, however, might not feel in a position to rightly interpret these rules. Clarifications need to be delivered. This might happen through the publication of guidelines for the concrete implementation of relevant legislation, by means of specifically organised seminars for local administrators etc. It might be interesting, for instance, to integrate the subject of clustering with social objectives into seminars for local authorities on quality criteria in public procurement, such as they have been announced by the Commission for the upcoming years.

3. Promoting other forms of cooperation and mutualisation of resources

Territorial Pacts, Consortiums or SCICs already deliver precious good practice examples regarding a mutualisation of resources of social economy, local authorities and other local actors with more than purely economic objectives.

Their experimentation in other cities and regions might encourage local stakeholders to intensify network relationships and experiment clustering themselves.

So far, examples for these forms of cooperation exist only in some member states. However, territorial pacts found their successful continuation beyond the period in which they were financed by the European Community. SCICs are still fairly young, but start being set-up and tested by an increasing number of local stakeholders in France.

It seems thus worth to spread information on these forms of collaboration throughout Europe so as to encourage local authorities and other local actors to follow these examples for local partnerships. Networks of clusters pursuing social objectives should be promoted. They might ensure the establishment of a European pool of expertise regarding clustering with added value. Moreover, they would be in a position to continuously validate and disseminate European minimum standards and models for clustering in domains such as equal opportunities.

4. Recognition and promotion of social economy and other solidarity-based initiatives

Social economy has an important role to play in the experimentation and realization of clustering for equal opportunities and related forms of local cooperation with added social value such as SCICs or territorial pacts.

Activities of a social economy structure are very much based on mutualisation processes among its own members. Principles of cooperation and burden-sharing most often predominate over purely competitive attitudes and profit-thinking.

In addition, different forms of cooperation between diverse social economy actors, based on a mutualisation of resources, already exist. They also paved the way for the development of other solidarity-based (social economy) initiatives such as credit guarantee unions, funds etc.

Due to its community-oriented interests and multifold objectives, linked to different aspects of sustainable local development, social economy could already prove its capacity to build alliances with other local actors such as local authorities, small and medium enterprises or citizens' initiatives.

It is therefore crucial that social economy be recognized by local, national and European actors as an important social and economic actor, as well as a motor and test bed of innovative initiatives such as clustering for equal opportunities. Not only bigger structures, but also social economy enterprises of small size should obtain a greater visibility as promoters of fundamental values, cooperation and social well-being.

Related measures should also go hand in hand with dissemination of information *on* and promotion *of* solidarity-based financing. The latter may, not at least, constitute an important pillar of cluster initiatives for equal opportunities.

5. Increasing visibility of new forms of local cooperation

An important contribution of local, national and European institutions in the promotion of (social economy) clusters for equal opportunities and similar forms of cooperation is to give them the largest possible visibility. The experience of DESEO partners has shown that these kind of actions are indispensable when it comes to consolidate the future cluster partnership, but also and above all when additional partners and resources have to be found.

Even though they might be in a position to provide valuable expertise in clustering processes, smaller cluster structures may find it hard to carry out intense awareness-raising activities and reach potential partners. Local authorities, for instance, could make available more efficient means of communication, but also better communication channels and a wider network of contacts. Thereby, they would also ensure the precious contribution of smaller (social economy) enterprises and organisations to local development processes.

6. Integration of clustering initiatives in local policies and programmes

Experience of several DESEO partners has proven that cluster processes are most probable to be launched and maintained if they are integrated to the largest possible extent in action programmes of other local actors as well as in other local key policies and strategies.

Local authorities, while conceiving and realising local development strategies, gender equality plans or strategies for social inclusion and equal opportunities should take cluster initiatives with related objectives into account.

Cluster partnerships might be consulted, for instance, in the programming phase of relevant strategies. Moreover, they should play an important role in the implementation process by delivering their expertise and services.

Hereby, visibility and sustainability of cluster processes will be increased. Moreover, local actors have the opportunity to ensure that medium term and long-term objectives of the cluster are in coherence with general objectives of local development and vice versa. In this context, it seems once again crucial to stress that cluster structures should become a natural part of processes of local decision-making and effective implementation of political strategies. Cluster processes and policies will reinforce each other. Costly overlaps will be prevented. Democracy will be strengthened. Thereby, the clustering process will once more prove to be a win-win game for all parts of the local community.

7. Promotion of a new culture of cooperation and governance

Mutualisation processes go far beyond mere networking. They require a stronger commitment from all involved parties as well as a higher willingness to share not only resources, but also (decision making) competences.

Nowadays, 'competition' is a widely spread term used to describe the supposed key to success regarding economic growth. All too often, however, competitive behaviour may also destroy social and economic resources and compromise the construction of synergies. In this context, artificial dichotomies have been created that oppose public and private actors, but also private actors among themselves.

Face to these developments it seems necessary to create and promote a new culture of cooperation, in which diverse stakeholders have the same rights and obligations. This will require a re-allocation of responsibilities among the different actors and the establishment of joint decision-making procedures. Here, it is of major importance that all involved organizations develop respect for each other.

Private actors, including social economy, might take over additional responsibilities and tasks for the local community. Local clusters for equal opportunities, for instance, might raise, among their members, a major part of resources needed to establish specific initiatives and services. Therewith, they will discharge public authorities. However, social economy and

other actors will only be able to successfully carry out new tasks and maintain partnerships, if they are given the opportunity to shape the framework of their activities. They have to be more strongly involved in planning and evaluation of local policies and other initiatives.

Alternative methods of participation of local actors, such as they are currently promoted in the framework of the TSR® - Territorial Social Responsibility process, could be introduced and tested on local territories.

Decision-making in social economy structures or on territories with strong partnerships between social economy, local authorities and other actors might serve as an example for alternative systems of governance.

8. Technical training of local authorities, entrepreneurs and other local actors

Awareness-raising and information activities on new concepts of local cooperation, including clustering, are important, but might not be sufficient to ensure a proper test and application of these concepts on different territories.

Local actors wishing to discuss and set-up clustering processes themselves will most probably need more specific information and guidelines regarding very technical aspects of mutualising resources and cooperation in general.

First of all, information on already existing good practice examples of clustering for equal opportunities and similar initiatives has to be pooled. Specific training measures could be conceived and realised by organisations that have successfully established clustering processes. Local authorities are in a position to support, by different means, the realisation of such training, which might address local administrators, private enterprises and diverse other structures. They might promote training processes by a) disseminating information and raising the visibility of these initiatives, b) making their own experts such as lawyers available to discuss with participants, c) providing venues, d) co-financing trainers, or simply by e) encouraging their own administrators to take part.

9. Allying universities

Universities should, wherever possible and appropriate, be involved in programmes promoting the establishment of new forms of clusters such as clusters for equal opportunities. On one hand, researchers might deliver a precious contribution to the development of appropriate methods for local clustering with social objectives.

On the other hand, social economy universities and other academic institutions should be encouraged to more deeply integrate issues linked to cooperation, (social) entrepreneurship and cluster creation in their own curricula.

10. Changing patterns of thinking in economy and society

Respect of all the aforementioned recommendations would probably not lead to expected results, if actions to promote new ways of local cooperation and mutualisation would not also *raise the awareness of different actors on the real need to create equal opportunities.*

Public authorities, social economy, private companies, academics and other stakeholders, including each single inhabitant should be able to understand the social, cultural and economic value of an equal participation of women and men in different spheres of life. Shortcomings have to be better highlighted, alternatives need to be shown.

Campaigns and political discourses might not be enough. Awareness-raising should be practice-related and happen in actions.

To give just two examples: A very useful exercise, envisaged by DESEO partners in Dunkerque are surveys among employers whose enterprises operate in what is perceived as traditionally masculine sectors. The outcome of these surveys might show in a number of cases the important contribution women may deliver in these sectors. Education and training, addressing men and (young) women of all ages could more strongly build on these findings and try to re-orient patterns of thinking. Girls and women should be given stronger incentives to find out about their own capacities while discovering ‘male’ professions and activities.

Another good practice that should be quoted in this context are the efforts of the Credit Guarantee Union in Västra Götaland to introduce equal opportunities training and a checklist for its business advisers and credit counsellors. These actions ensure that equal opportunities are not only issue of discussions, but also applied in practice.

Local and national governments as well as EU decision-makers should take this into account while developing relevant legislation and foster an active implementation of equal opportunities throughout all are areas of society and economy.

Activities promoted during the year of equal opportunities may be useful, but not sufficient if deeper changes of mentalities are to be achieved.