



Réseau européen pour l'inclusion et l'action sociale locale
European Local Inclusion and Social action network

POSITION PAPER
Summary of ELISAN's response to the European
Commission consultation on the Green Paper
on Territorial Cohesion

February 2009

ELISAN's main recommendations in brief

1. Put the social dimension back at the heart of European Union policies
2. Highlight the strong links between social aspects and territorial development
3. Renew the objective of economic and social cohesion through the principle of territorial cohesion
4. Give European regional policy back its rightful place and legitimacy
5. Territorial cohesion - a cross-disciplinary objective which is the engine for true territorial governance
6. Find a balance between territorial cohesion and the subsidiarity principle
7. A European Union intervention framework to be redefined
8. A specific European intervention aimed at a larger group of "territorial handicaps"
9. Integrate the territorial dimension in the development and implementation of the European Union's overall policy strategies (Lisbon, Gothenburg)
10. Test the analysis of the territorial impact of community sectoral policies: competition and internal market policies
11. Strengthen the complementarity between community and national policies
12. Bring together as many actors as possible involved in the fight against social exclusion

Overall context

1. Put the social dimension back at the heart of European Union policies

- **ELISAN stresses the importance of the European Union's social pillar and the importance of preserving a certain level of social protection and cohesion across all European Union territories in order to** deal with the major challenges which will emerge across all European territories between now and 2020: globalisation, demographic decline, climate change and access to energy. If social inequalities deepen during an economic and social crisis, the continent's overall development is likely to be held back for a long period.
- **This new objective must contribute to the discussions on renegotiating the European strategies for growth and employment and for sustainable development (the "Lisbon" and "Gothenburg" strategies),** which should take more account of the social cohesion and poverty reduction objectives set in 2000.

2. Strong links between social aspects and territorial development: it is essential to integrate social aspects into territorial analyses

- **The strong links between social aspects and territorial development need to be highlighted.** "Territorial development is closely linked with social aspects, as territorial development equally affects spaces (areas, regions) and the people who live in these spaces, and vice versa. The interdependence and mutual influence of population and spaces is a core factor of territorial development. Therefore, it is essential to integrate social aspects in territorial analyses.
- **Consequently, territorial cohesion is a necessary requirement of and complement to economic and social cohesion within the aim of sustainable development, meaning the balanced distribution of human activities across the Union.**" (quoted from the ESPON - European Spatial Planning Observation Network - study: Preparatory study on social aspects of EU territorial development)

Definition of territorial cohesion and contribution to current Union practice

3. A new definition of the economic and social cohesion objective

- **Territorial cohesion must aim at balanced development of European territory,** taking account of both the macroeconomic and social situation of states and regions and the geographical situation and economic and social "realities" of infra-regional territories. Each European territory must have the resources for its own development.
- **This means taking greater account of the territory's "added value"** – specifically the local territory - as the unit of analysis and the basis for developing all public policies, especially social ones.

4. Give European regional policy back its rightful place and legitimacy

- **Regional policy must not be decided with a view to compensating for the indirect negative effects of other public policies on the territories;** regional policy (economic and social cohesion) alone, as it exists today, is not enough to prevent and make up for the persistent differences observed at infra-regional level (urban/rural, etc.).
- **The purpose of regional policy should not be solely to favour the pursuit of the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives** on technological innovation, economic competitiveness or environmental excellence but should effectively pursue a territorial cohesion objective. In this respect, ELISAN advocates evaluating the territorial consequences of the Structural Funds' current concentration on the Lisbon objectives ("earmarking").

Extent and scope of territorial action

5. Territorial cohesion - a cross-disciplinary objective which is the engine for true territorial governance

- **The territorial cohesion objective must not lead to the emergence of a specific community policy on land use planning.**
- **Instead, it should be a cross-disciplinary objective to be implemented through the emergence of real European "territorial governance"** in order to maximise the effects of public policies on territories, especially regarding the implementation of social action policies, and should develop from multiple complementary and interlinked actors, competences and sectors.

6. Territorial cohesion and subsidiarity

- **The introduction of a territorial cohesion principle must be balanced with the application of the fundamental principles of subsidiarity and proportionality,** which are basic operating principles for the European Union.
- **ELISAN recalls that, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, decisions must "be made as close as possible to citizens", especially on social cohesion matters.** Indeed, we can note two elements in support of this: territorial disparities are always taking new forms and occur on increasingly smaller scales and are cumulative. Furthermore, social action policies require detailed knowledge and a personalised approach to the problems dealt with and the population remains attached to the European territorial model of balanced occupation of space and great diversity.

7. A European Union intervention framework to be redefined

- **However, the European level is appropriate for identifying and sharing problems encountered at local level** and thus for defining objectives and a common "reference system".
- **Union intervention should therefore:**
 - concentrate on **observation, warning, evaluation and coordination** of European, national and local policies

- while maintaining the **capacity for direct intervention in support of innovation and experimentation** and, complementing national interventions, encourage the strengthening of direct relations between local territories and the European Union, and local political proactiveness.

8. A European intervention aimed at a larger group of "territorial handicaps"

- **ELISAN encourages extending the special treatment which European regional policy can provide to regions** characterised by specific territorial handicaps, which are not limited to geographical factors but rather include structural factors (for example, the issue of maintaining universal access to services of general interest (SGEIs).

Better cooperation between actors and territories

9. Integrate the territorial dimension in the development and implementation of the European Union's overall policy strategies (Lisbon, Gothenburg)

- **The territorial cohesion principle should lead to better coordination and cross-disciplinarity of European policies with a territorial impact**, starting from the reflection and development phase of the Union's overall policy strategies (growth, employment, sustainable development).
- These strategies should include **real regional and territorial applications** which are explicit and shared by the actors.

10. Test the analysis of the territorial impact of community sectoral policies: competition and internal market policies

- **This coordination calls for strengthening the use of strategic evaluation of the spatial impact of any new legislative proposal.** On social cohesion matters, the "accessibility and quality of social services" approach could be an evaluation criterion for instance.
- **On the basis of a prior impact analysis, ELISAN thus proposes to consider:**
 - non-enforcement of checks on state aid to purely local social services, which does not affect intra-community competition,
 - study whether specific community aid should be granted to very enclosed areas impacted by a lack of local public services.

11. Strengthen the complementarity of community and national policies

- **In terms of observation and analysis of territorial needs, according to ELISAN, territorial cohesion involves developing a greater bottom-up approach** between local, regional, national and European levels in particular.
- **Territorial governance involves strengthened dialogue between the three levels of territorial actors** (local, national and community) and greater association of networks of players and specialist bodies such as ELISAN on local social action matters.
 - At community level, the **Committee of the Regions** should play a central role in representing local interests at community level.
 - At national level, better formal integration of the territorial dimension should be considered within the **open method of coordination on social inclusion matters.**

New territorial partnerships

12. Bring together as many actors as possible involved in the fight against social exclusion

- **The territorial cohesion principle fits into a sustainable development approach.** As sharing information and developing a common understanding of territorial issues are essential in the fight against social exclusion, **participation must not be limited to public-sector decision-makers and operators alone but must more systematically involve relevant private-sector and non-profit-making actors** in the analysis, development and implementation of territorial social policies
- Achieving a real level of participation in implementing the territorial cohesion objective initially involves **strengthening awareness-raising and education of local actors on community law and policies.**
- More generally, more systematic account must be taken of **what service users say** and the **expertise of people facing situations of poverty.**