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competition-cooperation-solidarity

Social Experimentation in Europe:

Towards a more complete and effective range of the EU
 Actions for Social Innovation

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 decision-makers, both in Member States and at the European level.
 However, this new technique raises questions over implementation and
 follow-up, its validity and added value in different national and regional
 socioeconomic contexts.

*This study was realised at the request of the DIIESSES and the High
 Commissioner for active Inclusion against poverty for the Forum on Social
 experimentation in Europe on 21-22 November 2008, in Grenoble.*

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STUDY COORDINATED BY MARJORIE JOUEN



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Adviser for *Notre Europe*, she is in charge of employment policy; rural and regional development and EU enlargement.

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Foreword

Ranging from social policy innovation - of which she is one of the best analysts - to social policy experimentation, Marjorie Jouen invites us to grasp more fully the importance of the subject in the current climate, where development theory and social policy instruments are in need of re-examination.

Given her considerable knowledge of European Union policy, her advocacy comes with concrete recommendations on how to move forward in this field of experimentation - one of crucial relevance if we are to better understand the responsiveness of the social milieu in question, and to act more effectively.

JACQUES DELORS

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Executive Summary

Social experimentations are arousing growing interest among public decision-makers, both in Member States and at the European level. However, this new technique raises questions over implementation and follow-up, its validity and added value in different national and regional socio-economic contexts.

1 - Why experiment with and stimulate social innovation?

Experimentation is described as the carrying out of controlled experiments with a view to testing hypotheses. It is therefore distinct from invention to the extent that it is non-spontaneous and subject to evaluation.

In the social field, it is clearly situated in the area of innovation produced by local actors (NGOs, local and regional authorities, local governmental bodies, trade-unions, private companies, ...), as a tool for renewing social policy, in a context where this appears necessary and perhaps even vital, as a response to deepening social exclusion and the emergence of new social needs which the market is not able to meet. It appears as a means of streamlining the public decisions.

Like other innovation methods, social experimentations present advantages in terms of costs or speed. They contribute to the quest for alternatives ways to renewed policies, in the direction of

greater effectiveness, better efficiency and the adaptation to new social needs. They are generally seen as genuine catalysts in the socio-economic field of the knowledge economy.

2 – What is the place of experimentation in EU interventions?

Social experimentation must be seen in the light of the last thirty years' social policies in Europe, the critique of the welfare state and the reduction of public spending. It is noticeable that theories on social innovation only began to spread at a time when the model of the social compromise seemed to be waning, and the need for a democratisation of public policy became vital.

It represents the latest stage of a long tradition of supporting and promoting innovation in the area of cohesion policy in general and the ESF in particular. The Community initiative programme EQUAL (2000-2006), complemented by other tools for exchanges of best practice at regional and local levels, and cooperation between national administrations (peer-reviews and social OMC), offers a solid basis for launching new experimentation.

The range of European instruments has widened since 2007. Notably, the PROGRESS programme contributes to the support for experimentation. ESF offers a framework, on the one side, for a decentralised support to innovation and, on the other side, for reinforced trans-national cooperation. The territorial cooperation objective, in the cohesion policy, should – more than today - allow exchanges of experiments in the social innovation field.

3 - How to conduct experimentation with the best chances of success?

The scope of experimentation, just as the social innovation one, is somewhat large: the integration of target deprived groups into the labour market; social inclusion; the development of links between the different faces of the labour market (education, training, migration, the work-life balance); reform of specific economic sectors (the social economy, personal services, very small businesses); the working environment; the development of new social-policy synergies at local and regional levels; health, housing, ... Its content is also rather wide: financial incentives, guidance and advice, penalties ... Two procedures can be included under the term of social experimentation: the first is the testing of a policy provision created by a superior authority, the second can be likened to a call for proposals.

The experimentation practice as developed by certain fore-runners countries in North America and Europe provides useful insights. The following elements emerge:

- the protocol establishing the exact functioning method of the experimentation and binding the parties - in particular, the public authority and the organisation conducting the experimentation; it details the different stages, starting with the selection of the projects,

their timeframe and scope, and continuing to the conditions for generalisation or moving to a large scale – and, in between, the evaluation method, follow-up and impact analysis

- the idea of the sample, which allows to measure the results of the experimentation and to compare at any moment a population or area under investigation with one that is not – treatment group and control group. The optimal size depends on the nature of the experimentation and the context. It must be calibrated for each case, in accordance with objective criteria.
- the independent evaluation, which gives the experiment its scientific credibility. It allows the measurement of the behavioural change of the beneficiaries, that of the implementing bodies, and that of the external environment. Analysis of the process (how was the provision implemented? what really happened?) is as important as the raw impact.

To be a success, experimentations have to show policy relevance. Their chances will increase if they respond to real needs, if their results demonstrate obvious advantages when compared to current practices, and if the potential users are prepared and given support.

A successful experiment should not go without follow-up. This is exactly the risk that the protocol established at the start of the procedure is meant to avert – and, intrinsically, what makes the originality of experimentation in comparison to a policy of support for social innovations. This mainstreaming generally meets two obstacles: the capacity of experimentation to move to a larger scale and its ability to convince decision-makers and to inspire policy reform. To facilitate the future process of ownership, it is therefore important, from the start, to include the experimentation in its horizontal context, with the aid of a high-quality partnership, and in its vertical context according to a dynamic mode of multi-level governance.

4 - How to take up the challenge of trans-national cooperation?

Looking for new ways to improve the social policies is an issue of common interest shared by all, over the specificity and the diversity of national cultures, traditions, organisations and contexts. The EU support to social experimentations in the framework of trans-national cooperation may bring value added, as a tool for stimulation and mutual support. It may help to advance the rationalisation of experimentation and evaluation methodology. It may enable the Member States to trial simultaneously policy measures meeting social OMC guidelines. The object could then be to promote coordinated experimentations between several countries. It may allow to inform the diagnosis on current social phenomena and to lead to the politicisation of a social issue.

However, it requires strengthening attention in choosing the themes and streamlining the working methods to be able to overcome the obstacle of transferability. In any event, it is important to turn trans-national cooperation into an asset for experimentation rather than a cause of complications. The upshot is that procedures too cumbersome or ill suited to small size undertakings involving limited amounts must be shunned. This crucial task towards simplifying the procedures and technical support falls to the European tier.

Introduction

Social experimentations are arousing growing interest among public decision-makers, both in member states and at the European level. Explicit references to experimentation are made in recent EU decisions in the fields of the renewed Social Agenda, the open method of coordination as applied to social policy and the programming process of the European Social Fund (ESF), and in the conclusions of the informal meeting of ministers responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

This was not always the case. The United States, conversely, has a long-standing tradition – around four decades – and varied practical experience of randomised social experimentation, as applied to work integration, education, training, housing and social assistance. In the last ten years this technique has spread across the American continent (Canada, Mexico and others). It has also been used by several European countries (the UK, Norway and others) and encouraged by international organisations such as the World Bank, which has helped its growing popularity in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Social experimentation is often associated with social innovation and the search for ways to revitalise policy by making it more efficient, more effective and better adapted to new social needs. To this extent, they represent the latest stage of a long tradition of supporting and promoting innovation in the area of cohesion policy in general and the ESF in particular. Between 2000 and 2006 and with the help of the Community initiative programme EQUAL, the ESF developed a corpus of analyses and recommendations which – complementing other exchanges of best practice at regional and local levels, and cooperation between national administrations – offers a solid basis for launching new experimentation.

It must however be acknowledged that the technique of experimentation as applied to the social field is not yet well explored in all 27 EU countries. In spring 2008 the French presidency of the EU sought the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee, asking: “How can social experimentation contribute to the formulation of policy to promote social inclusion?”

In practice, social experimentation raises questions over implementation and follow-up. It is the subject of debate between social actors, who may question its validity and added value. The case still needs to be made that this instrument is relevant in different national and regional socio-economic contexts, and therefore able to overcome the obstacle of transferability. And a place still needs to be made for it in the existing regulatory and financial frameworks, at national and EU levels.

This study tries to summarise the current state of knowledge and practice, with a view to shedding light on the subjects of debate at the Grenoble Forum on 21-22 November 2008¹.

¹ The ideas presented in this study rely on various documents that were provided by the major stakeholders of social experimentation in different countries. They were enriched by informal exchanges with the European Commission's services (DG EMPL and BEPA), the *Haut-Commissaire's* Cabinet, researchers and evaluators, and EESC's rapporteur. The author would like to thank them sincerely.

I - Why experiment with and stimulate social innovation?

In Europe, social experimentation does not emerge from a plain field. It must be seen in the light of the last thirty years' social policies, of different measures used to stimulate innovation in technology and economic development, and of advances in the experimental method as used in physical science.

1.1 – What can be gained from the overhaul of social policies?

In **historical** terms, the long period since the three Golden Decades (*Trente glorieuses*) has seen the ascendancy of a critique of the welfare state's capacity to respond to new social needs, arising from industrial crises, transformed production methods and a changed organisation of society. The charge of inefficiency mainly concerned the welfare state's mode of operation – centralised, uniform and rigid. The 1990s, whose first half at least was scarred by persistent high unemployment, saw a search for a better way of reconstructing the socio-economic virtuous circle, while avoiding the three weaknesses mentioned above.

Social policy in this period was thus focused on **employment**, which was often seen as a sort of “productive factor”, promoting local and flexible approaches. Under budget constraints, the public authorities sought mainly to **create an environment favourable to social policy innovation**, which involved reducing administrative hurdles and limiting financial commitments. In this way, for example, the advantages of “local development and employment initiatives” – linking bottom-up approach, economic development and job creation – were brought to light at the European level and in several member states².

The turn of the current decade brought a revision in the previous thinking. The growth induced by the knowledge economy and new information technologies not only was not automatically a factor of social cohesion, but it actually might cause social exclusion of various forms – by the exacerbation of income inequality, by increased job insecurity and the phenomenon of the working poor, by the deepened educational disparities caused by the technological gap, by decreased prospects of social and professional promotion, by the weakening or inefficiency of intergenerational solidarity, which brought insecurity to new parts of the population (children, youth and others).

At the same time, social innovation of the uniquely bottom-up approach revealed its limits. Without casting doubt on the essential and regenerating benefits of local initiatives, this practice showed the need for a link with and guidance from higher levels of government – national or European – in order to counter the risk of a loss of impetus or of resources spread too thin. This is where social experimentation enters the picture. It is sometimes described as a micro-innovation³, since from the start it comes with a commitment by the public body to take account of results.

² See notably : *Les initiatives locales de développement et d'emploi, enquête dans l'Union européenne*, Commission européenne, OPOCE, CM 89 95 082 FR (1995). Communication COM (95)273 du 13 juin 1995, *Une stratégie européenne d'encouragement aux initiatives locales de développement et d'emploi* JOCE (1995). Marjorie Jouen *L'action de l'Union européenne en faveur des emplois d'initiative locale*, Problématiques européennes n°6, Notre Europe (2000). Marjorie Jouen, *Le soutien aux emplois d'initiative locale*, Rapport pour la Cour des Comptes européenne (2001)

³ Ad Hoc Working Group with EQUAL managing authorities from the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, *The innovation principle in the new ESF programmes (2007-2013)* (June 2006)

1.2 - The progressive dissemination of innovation in the social sphere

With regard to **innovation**, it is probably necessary to refer to economic development theory and to the ideas of the Austrian neo-classicist Joseph Schumpeter⁴ on the factors of progress and on successive waves of innovation. Schumpeter emphasised the key role of the entrepreneur, endowed with a pioneer spirit which predisposes him to put a premium on innovation and to trigger new cycles of development by being imitated by other economic actors. Schumpeter's successors have been particularly prolific and have helped to spread his ideas not only in the technology field but also in the domain of organisation. They have added to the analysis by emphasising the need not simply to support innovators and to nurture entrepreneurship but also to develop a creative milieu. Indeed, **innovation can happen accidentally** – the issue is of knowing how to make use of it, which brings into question the capacity of the organisations concerned to integrate it. **Innovation can also be encouraged** – in this case the issue is one of creating the right conditions for its emergence, something which requires stimulating factors within the organisation.

These authors have also directed their attention to the spreading of innovation; to the conditions under which the most reluctant actors – such as political leaders – appropriate innovation; and to the dynamic effects on other sectors (the “spill over” effect).

Applied to the social-policy field, this subject has been the target of much research, initially in Anglo-Saxon countries – divorced as they are from the social pact of the social-democratic tradition, whether continental or Nordic. The story of social progress in Europe is not the same from one country to another, but ideas have moved around freely and shared experiences – such as war and economic crisis – have produced relatively similar responses. The role played by workers, employers and the state; the degree of ideology in positions adopted by trade unions; the extent of antagonism in industrial relations; the sectoral or geographic organisation of these relations – all of these help to explain the social advances of the

⁴ Joseph Schumpeter, *Theory of the economic evolution* (First issue in 1911)

20th century. These paradigms continue to influence the self-image of Europe's countries, individually and taken as groups. In fact, theories on social innovation only began to spread in the 1990s, at a time when **the model of the social compromise seemed to be waning** in certain countries. By the same token, in places where the tradition was to defer to an elite or an inspired bureaucracy, it was necessary to await acceptance of these practices' obsolescence in the face of modern challenges, and under the pressure for a democratisation of public policy. It thus became apparent that alternative means of renewal were necessary: solutions to be formulated on the ground, in direct response to changes which were faster than foreseen.

Some have explained the current development of social innovation by the technological and sociological context. New information technology has removed obstacles (financial, temporal) and fed off the horizontal nature of networks. In addition, the individual and the expression of his specificity within the group are powerful forces of change⁵.

But the majority of explanations emphasise rather the advantages of innovation, in terms of costs or speed. Social innovations are generally seen as **veritable catalysts in the socio-economic field of the knowledge economy**: they allow new political approaches and new modes of implementation to be tested. *"Innovation is not an aim in itself, but a means of attaining higher quality and productivity."*⁶ Innovation also aims to improve the performance of locally-provided services and to increase economic efficiency. *"It is a move which results in economic gain, and which must be seen as an investment and not as an expense."*⁷ In reality, social innovation is the response to the needs for change of both beneficiaries and politicians – a fact which may be simplified into the economic formulae of efficiency gains and effectiveness gains.

Unlike technological innovations, which are directly dependent on the market, social innovations are often a direct response to the failings of social policy. This particularity explains, *a posteriori*, the failure of reform approaches founded

⁵ Robin Murray, Geoff Mulgan et Julie Caulier-Grice, *Generating social innovation : setting an agenda, shaping methods and growing the field* - Young Foundation (work in progress 2008)

⁶ Ad Hoc Working Group with EQUAL managing authorities from the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, *The innovation principle in the new ESF programmes (2007-2013)* (June 2006)

⁷ Margie Mendell, LEED Expert, Concordia University, Montréal Canada (CFE Insight n.4 July 2008)

solely on initiatives which conflict with the policies themselves. It also suggests the future importance of the policies reform challenge – both in their design and their implementation.

In the social field, much more than in technology, the beneficiary or the final user is important. In a non-linear process of social innovation, this actor plays a major role, in providing feedback on the mechanism of the policy – in the same way as the policy actor responsible for implementation, whether this be a local or regional authority, a public administration or a non governmental organisation. This situation can be summed up thus: *"Demand leads social innovation."*⁸ The conclusion here is that **it is necessary not only to stimulate innovators – in particular by financial investments and incentives in education and training – but also to listen carefully to users.**

To this must be added a detail of a behavioural nature: change is often perceived as a systemic risk rather than one limited to a single field. This fact further widens the spectrum of innovation: new objectives for a policy; new tools for implementation; new techniques for organising or delivering on policies; new responses to risks.

The scope of social policy innovation therefore appears somewhat large. On the one hand, it concerns the field of social policy⁹ – i.e. the integration of target deprived groups into the labour market; the development of links between the different faces of the labour market (education, training, migration, the work-life balance); reform of specific economic sectors (the social economy, personal services, very small businesses); the qualitative improvement of the working environment; the development of new social-policy synergies at local and regional levels; the creation of structures to help the transition into working life. On the other hand, social innovation includes the reorganisation of the conditions of work and production. This is the analysis of Margie Mendell¹⁰, which holds that social innovation is not limited to attempts to reduce poverty. Its objective is also to facilitate people's access to economic opportunity, to respond to demand for skills, and to improve social inclusion by means of the social economy. This analysis

⁸ Andy Westwood, President of OCDE-LEED Forum (CFE Insight n.4 July 2008)

⁹ EQUAL Ad Hoc working Group, opus cited

¹⁰ Opus cited

brings together a wide range of fields, including health, training, housing, culture, social-services tourism, communication, and others. The Young Foundation further extends this list to environmental questions.

1.3 - Social experimentation: the way to streamline bottom-up innovation

Methods for stimulating social innovation are numerous. The Young Foundation has recently compiled a list of more than 200 as part of a worldwide survey¹¹. They include competition – including as part of project tenders – sponsorship, public subsidy and philanthropy, the “toolbox”, counselling and support services, innovation platforms, risk capital, mutual assistance, incubators, experimentation, and others.

Referring to the dictionary definition¹², which concerns mainly the scientific field, **experimentation is described as the carrying out of controlled experiments with a view to testing hypotheses**. It is therefore distinct from invention to the extent that it is non-spontaneous and subject to evaluation. Experimentation is intended to go further than the experiment itself, in that it serves to validate hypotheses – a starting supposition and an imagined remedy. In the field of social policy this point is crucial. It is widely recognised that social phenomena and their causes have frequently been misdiagnosed over the last few decades, and that this has led to social-policy solutions which have been at best inefficient and at worst damaging. Experimentation is often less costly than other forms of extensive statistical study when observing social reality.

In its Opinion, the EESC¹³ recalls that there exist several definitions of social experimentation. One, by the American research group *Urban Institute*, mentions four characteristics: the random allotment of beneficiaries and a control group; an element of public-policy organisation; a follow-up mechanism; and an assessment. The department of the French *Haut-commissaire aux solidarités actives* proposes four components: the existence of a social-policy innovation, launched at first on

¹¹ Opus cited

¹² Larousse French Dictionary, Issue 2001

¹³ EESC opinion 1676-2008 AC EN

a small scale to take account of uncertainties over effects, implemented in conditions allowing for assessment of the effects, and all this with view to a generalisation of the experiment.

The EESC raises questions over the objective of the experimentation: is this simply to validate existing methods or should there be an aim to generate innovations? Frequent recourse to experimentation in North American countries can be partly explained by a pragmatic interpretation of social policy, which is seen as needing continual adjustment. Experimentation is perceived less as a means of innovating than as a method of rationalising changes in regulation. **In Europe**, there is generally a desire for a stable legal framework, and change is seen as a transitory period¹⁴: experimentation is not an integral part of the policymaking process, but rather **an instrument to be used on occasion** when such use can be amply justified.

The question raised by the EESC relates also to different conceptions of the innovation process¹⁵. In the area of industry, the most important model of the innovation process is linear. One moves successively and chronologically from the stage of research and creation, to the stage of production and development, and finally to distribution. Science discovers, industry applies the discovery, and society follows. This model is being placed into question by those advocating a more networked vision, with several loops of activity linking research, design, production and use.

In practice these two models take two distinct forms. On the one hand, processes of “regulated conception” carry innovations as their pre-defined objectives; expertise is available and results are assessed according to a validation process agreed on in advance. On the other hand, processes of “intensive innovation” have multiple objectives, sometimes imprecise; knowledge is not comprehensive and assessment methods remain to be defined. The first form corresponds to trend-based innovation, the second to innovation by rupture.

¹⁴ Hence, in France, the constitutional law dated 28 March 2003 which authorised experimentation stipulates that it should have a limited duration and that its end is marked by the return to common law.

¹⁵ Francis Aubert et Marianne Le Bail *L'innovation sociale dans les Parcs naturels régionaux* 2008 (not published)

Social experimentation is clearly situated in the area of innovation. Among other things it is conceived as a tool for renewing social policy, in a context where this appears necessary and perhaps even vital, as a response to deepening social exclusion and the emergence of new social needs which the market is not able to meet.

In addition, decentralisation has given local authorities sufficient autonomy to bring to fruition their own policies and to test new mechanisms. The cost of social spending is also a powerful factor to conduct reform, drawing upon the certainties of experimentation in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. **Experimentation appears as a means of streamlining the conduct of innovation and as a tool which allows social reforms to be based on concrete data.**

Experimentation is close to support for local initiatives **which is based on the innovation of locally-based actors**. These initiatives can be spontaneous, and we know from experience that they emerge in the marginal spaces between the market and the state – or between different public policies. In order to progress, they generally need specific support beyond that of the initial phase. Until now this support has taken a lower profile than that of experimentation, since it has been based on social-policy thinking which emphasises autonomy and the responsibility of actors. It is therefore not surprising that one of the *leitmotivs* associated with support for local initiatives is the effort to perpetuate the initiatives beyond their launch phase. This form of support for social innovation, once much practised at European level in the framework of cohesion policy, is also monitored by the OCDE in a Forum specialised in local development LEED¹⁶. The evidence suggests that this practice will survive alongside experimentation – hence the need to think though the connections and potential conflicts between the two methods.

¹⁶ www.oecd.org

II – What is the place of experimentation in EU interventions?

The EU's interest in bottom-up innovations aimed at policy renewal is not new. A brief historical recap is useful in grasping the current regulatory and financial framework.

2.1 - Numerous actions in support of innovation over close on 20 years

EU policy interventions go back **to the early 1980s**, as mentioned by the “Inventory of EU actions in favour of local development and employment”¹⁷, a document published by the Commission for the European Council of Essen in late 1994. It referred to “*ten years of experimentation*”, even if the term was not used entirely correctly. However, this inventory clearly showed the variety of instruments used.

“The basis dates from the ‘extra-quota’ programmes of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1979 and from a consultation carried out between 1982 and 1984, organised in liaison with the OECD and concerning around 50

¹⁷ European Commission, *Inventory of EU actions in favour of local development and employment* SEC 94-2199, 19 December 1994

local job-creation projects. Following a communication by the Commission to the Council and taking account of the interest shown by numerous Member States, the Council adopted on 7 June 1984 a resolution on the contribution of local job-creation initiatives to combat unemployment. ... During the last decade, EU policy actions have been refined to the point where they represent a complete panoply of instruments:

- In an early period, from 1984, EU interventions were concentrated on research-action programmes, such as LEDA; these were subsequently completed by programmes of information and exchange (ERGO, EGLEI, TURN, ELISE).
- In a second period, beginning with the reform of the structural funds in 1988, the Union moved towards more substantial actions, with European programmes and financing for innovative policy actions.
- In parallel, but on an embryonic level only, the EU tried to widen the scope of its support for these initiatives by making local development a mission of all the structural funds.”

During this period, the Commission described the record of the period 1989-93 as “very modest”. With regard to the specific actions (article 8 of EAGGF; articles 7 and 10 of ERDF; the programmes LEDA, EGLEI, EFGO, Poverty III), it noted that “if the majority of the instruments have fulfilled their objective of increasing the number of pilot experiments and giving depth to the methodology of local development, the amounts allocated have remained extremely small and have rarely allowed a genuine dynamic of innovation at European level to emerge”. The Commission considered that the launch of Community Initiative Programmes (INTERREG, REGIS, LEADER) had “on the whole allowed the organisation of a better synergy between the pilot programmes and the programmes making up the Community Support Frameworks.”

However, the Commission was already noting something that has regrettably remained true. “After ten years during which what counted was to respond precisely and rapidly to particular needs, it would be useful to examine the overall coherence of the provision. ... The transition from the experimental phase to the dissemination of successful experiments across the Community Initiative networks, as well

as through the Community Support Frameworks and operational programmes, has not been properly carried out, for lack of knowledge of the course to be followed between the successive stages corresponding to the links between different policy instruments: firstly, information and awareness-raising; then the development of a methodology, the dissemination of “good practice” and the experimentation itself; and finishing with the establishment of a network. ... The importance of the human investment necessary for these specific roles in support for innovation has sometimes been underestimated.”

Recognition of these methodological and organisational gaps led to the adoption of a Commission communication in favour of a “European strategy of support for local development and employment initiatives”¹⁸ in June 1995, followed by another communication in 2000 entitled “Acting for employment at the local level – giving a local dimension to the European employment strategy”¹⁹.

The second half of the 1990s, which corresponded more or less to the programming period 1994-99, saw **an explosion of support programmes for innovative actions or pilot projects, and of Community Initiative Programmes** (see Annex 1). The division of roles between instruments is related to a gradual increase in the importance of innovation, which was due to be integrated into standard regional and national programmes according to a plan dating from the outset and evoked again in 1994. “Community Initiative Programmes are actions invested with a particular interest for the EU and not covered by operational regional programmes. They create particular opportunities for cooperation and innovation; they contribute to the larger-scale implementation of innovations or new approaches; in principle they provide the means to disseminate pilot methods which have proved their utility, to build exchange networks and to encourage the dissemination of best practice”²⁰.

From the mid-1990s, the ESF underwent a change in course, moving closer to the needs of beneficiaries in a context of high and persistent unemployment. It supported any actions capable of helping individuals into the job market –

¹⁸ European Commission, *A European strategy of support for local development and employment initiatives*, Communication COM (95)273 of 13 June 1995, JOCE

¹⁹ European Commission, *Acting for employment at the local level – giving a local dimension to the European employment strategy*, Communication COM (2000)196 of 7 April 2000, JOCE

²⁰ European Commission, *Inventory of EU actions in favour of local development and employment* SEC 94-2199, 19 December 1994

including measures to combat illiteracy; career counselling; advice on housing, teaching and health; support for local development or for social-services workers; traditional forms of professional training; aid for jobs and for jobs of public benefit.

The two programmes ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT and a wide range of innovative actions were launched, with the aim of stimulating or developing bottom-up social innovations – often in partnership with local authorities, social partners, and civil society actors (see Annex 2). Specific areas of interest opened up at this point, reflecting the failings of traditional social policy: the social economy, also known as the “third sector” or “third system”, and local partnerships.

This partnership dynamic would spur a specific mobilisation in the form of “Territorial Employment Pacts”²¹. Following a call for shows of interest, 89 regions or micro-regions would sign up to a programme to encourage local employment, which would allow the creation of 54 400 jobs over three years (1997-99) using total public funds of 1.6 Billion € (of which 480 M € came from structural funds) and also a specific technical assistance budget for the creation and running of local projects, amounting to 300 000 €.

In parallel and on a smaller scale, mention must be made of the “Pilot actions to help the long-term unemployed”²², which were run in a similar way to the social-policy experiments. Certain components were however missing, a clear signal of the weakness of the European approach to supporting local initiatives, with regard to their generalisation in the framework of national policies. In 1995 the European Parliament had mandated the Commission to experiment for a two-year period with innovative solutions for the unemployed aged over 40 and jobless for at least two years. A programme of 15 M € was allocated to 16 zones of roughly similar size (NUTS III), chosen in 14 Member States because of their high unemployment rate. The mandate they were given was to think up and test policy measures to encourage a return to salaried, independent or cooperative work in 17 sectors relating to unsatisfied local needs, according to a list of “new employment sources” drawn up in advance by the Commission. This experiment was followed closely by the Commission, with a technical assistance team, regular meetings between representatives of the 16 bodies tasked with implementation, half-yearly progress

²¹ European Commission, *Territorial Employment Pacts – 89 local Pacts take up the unemployment challenge*, OPOCE, CX 2299175 EN C (1999).

²² Marjorie Jouen *Diversité européenne, mode d'emploi*, - Editions Descartes et Cie, Paris (2000),

reports and a final assessment. These Pilot actions, which yielded rich lessons for the areas concerned and for the conduct of similar programmes to help the long-term unemployed, were not subjected to any agreements with national or regional employment authorities nor to any commitment that they be considered in the framework of public policy. It is therefore unsurprising that the experiments were forgotten almost as soon as they were completed.

The panoply of methodological tools used at the end of the 1990s would not be complete without mention of the “Research action for the local development of employment”, which here concerned the development of theoretical knowledge on a subject not yet well known. In practice, the tool assumed a close relationship between the operators of local initiatives and the researchers mandated with analysing the processes, comparing experiments, assessing results and framing the resulting lessons learnt within an academic narrative. This type of exercise can be considered to have furthered analyses of local economic and social development, and to have given legitimacy to a decentralised approach to employment. However, it contributed little, or only in a very general way, to modernising the content of social policy.

2.2 - The 2000-2006 programming period

This period coincided with the rise in importance of the European employment strategy and its integration into the Lisbon Strategy. For the ESF, two instruments were closely associated with the logic of policy renewal: the Community Initiative Programme **EQUAL** and the innovative actions of article 6. These aimed to allow European-level experimentation with different methods and various instruments and to accelerate the cycle of experimentation- trans-national cooperation to generalisation (“mainstreaming”)²³.

EQUAL presented itself as the continuation of the Territorial Employment Pacts. The guidelines²⁴ identified numerous potential areas for innovation: education, unemployment, the reintegration of former prisoners, the return to work, the

²³ European Commission, *Implementing innovative actions in the framework of ESF article 6 (2000-2006)*, Communication COM(2000)894 of 12 January 2001 (2001)

²⁴ European Commission, *Guidelines for the Community Initiative Programme EQUAL*, Communication COM 2000/C 127/02 of 5 May 2000 (2000)

formalisation of informal work, the integration of migrants, changes to working time, the situation of carers in their families, the transition to retirement, etc. The emphasis was on the generalisation of experiments and on the transfer of successful experiments, with a focus on making clear the innovations' conditions for success and on exchange. EQUAL contained in theory all the ingredients of a successful strategy for encouraging local initiatives and other social policy innovations: local partnership, clarity on the type of innovation aimed at, a pre-selection phase allowing project preparation time, credits for technical assistance, and a significant element of trans-national cooperation. The programme gave rise to toolboxes, to collections of best practices, to a guide for programme managers and designers, and to a practice-based community consisting of fund managers and national thematic networks.

Finally, an innovation must be mentioned in the management of the ESF, with the introduction of a particular provision allowing access to small organisations: *“The intervention programme of the Fund allows that a reasonable amount of Fund credits allocated to intervention under objectives 1 and 3 be made available for distribution in the form of small subsidies, accompanied by special access provisions for non-governmental organisations and local partners²⁵.”*

2.3 - Instruments diversification since 2000

With the development of the open method of coordination and its application to social policy, **the range of European instruments has widened**. Thus, certain **peer reviews** effected in the context of the EU action programme to combat social exclusion 2002-06 allowed for significant results, which helped accelerate the modernisation of national policies by reference to the experience of other countries. The example of the policy response to over-indebtedness – which led to a law being adopted in Hungary, to reforms in Denmark and to the establishment of advice bodies in Germany – is particularly enlightening. The same goes for assistance to the homeless and for support to families at risk of social exclusion.

²⁵ Regulation 1262/99 of 12 July 1999 (Objective 1: catching-up regions, objective 3: human resources).

In the context of the strengthening of the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion²⁶, **the PROGRESS programme** contributes to the support for experimentation – on the one hand for new tools of mutual learning and exchanges of best practice, on the other for novel ideas which might be added to large-scale social programmes – for example, concerning minimum incomes, family welfare benefits, and long-term care. The programme is due to provide assistance for the study, dissemination and assessment of projects. It may also help ameliorate statistical capabilities and data collection in areas where information is insufficient – such as material deprivation, household revenues, the situation of migrants, the transition from working life to retirement, etc.

Concerning the ESF, the EQUAL assessments emphasised the necessity of implementing formal mechanisms in order to promote innovative approaches. They also advocated a form of **decentralisation of the support for innovation**, which led to the abolition of innovative actions at the European level and their introduction into each operational programme. In the chapter on “innovative trans-national and regional actions” promoted at national level by the ESF, one may thus find measures such as “innovating and experimental projects”, “partnerships for innovation”, and “trans-national cooperation for mobility”. However, the Commission retained the capacity to complete or strengthen actions at national and regional level, in the name of trans-national cooperation, and it does this by means of annual calls for proposals for the purpose of building learning networks.

The Union's support for social innovation is not evident uniquely in the field of social policy. This is all the more true given that the revised Lisbon Strategy recalls that “innovation and knowledge are the motors of European growth” and that this Strategy is an area of particular priority in the 2007-13 programme of the cohesion policy. Considering that the ESF is responsible for 20% of European subsidies received by regions, it is clear that the social dimension is far from negligible. However, without being formally excluded from the eligibility criteria for regional programmes, in practice social innovation is eliminated in favour of technological innovation.

²⁶ European Commission, *A renewed commitment to social Europe : strengthening of the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion*, Communication COM (2008) 418 of 2 July 2008

The lack of coherence with the logic of the ESF rules is clearly apparent for the third objective of cohesion policy – territorial cooperation. Two instruments explicitly dedicated to encouraging exchanges of experience, such as “**Regions for Economic Change**” and **INTERREG IV C**, contain a uniquely technological interpretation of innovation. This failing is difficult to explain if the needs and wishes of local and regional actors are taken into account. Indeed, it has been brought up by the president of the Committee of the Regions. “*INTERREG IV C, which aims for inter-regional cooperation, should retain all the ambitions of its predecessor, namely the stimulation of innovation. Not technological innovation, but social innovation, managerial innovation, political innovation, environmental innovation. Because this [instrument] represented a fantastic pool of experience, from which good ideas could be extracted in order to reinvigorate our policies*²⁷.”

III - How to conduct experimentation with the best chances of success?

Faced with the need to modernise social policy, political leaders and administrations increasingly seem drawn to the practice of experimentation, which offers the chance to base subsequent decisions on concrete data and a certain form of scientifically proven evidence, all at reasonable cost. As a response to doubts and questions, particularly among social-policy actors, the experimentation practice as developed by certain fore-runners countries in North America and Europe provides useful insights²⁸. In particular these refer to relevant areas and subjects for experimentation, to ways to conduct experimentation with the best chances of success, to follow-up, assessment, generalisation, multi-level governance and partnerships.

Three elements emerge from these lessons: the protocol establishing the exact functioning method of the experimentation and binding the parties (in particular, the public authority and the organisation conducting the experimentation); the idea of the sample, which allows the most objective impact measurement; and the assessment, which gives the experiment its scientific credibility.

²⁷ Michel Delebarre, *Speech at the launching conference of INTERREG IV C* in Lisbon (21 September 2007)

²⁸ Colloque DARES sur les expérimentations pour les politiques publiques de l'emploi et de la formation (22 and 23 May 2008) http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Retranscription_ADM_V2.pdf

3.1 - Which policy areas and provisions are appropriate?

All areas of social innovation – and the field is large if we take into account new social needs poorly addressed by current policies (see part 1.2) – **and all policy mechanisms** (financial incentives, guidance and advice, penalties) **can make appropriate subjects for experimentation.** However, the decision must appear reasonable. Should policy areas be chosen where current or future needs are greatest, from the point of view of beneficiaries or of renewing the policy itself? Or is it preferable to opt for areas where the chances of success are highest? Is it a good idea to choose areas with a high capacity for creating strong positive externalities?

The first instances of experimentation launched in the United States in the 1970s concerned tax credits and financial incentives to return to work for people receiving social assistance²⁹. Since then, policy areas have become more diverse in accordance with needs and opportunities, in the United States just as in other countries. In the framework of the “Self-sufficiency Project”, three experiments with the labour market (financial incentives, assistance and advice, penalties) were carried out in two Canadian provinces in the 1990s. In Mexico, a programme of conditional income transfer to poor families was tested under the name of “Progresa” and generalised under the name “Oportunidades”. In Europe, the first trials were conducted in the United Kingdom on financial aid to reintegrated working people (“Working Tax Credit”) and on measures to encourage job retention (“ERA” – Employment Retention and Advancement). In Norway, a programme to help ill people return to work was the subject of an experimentation in Bergen, whereas in Germany “Kombilohn” aimed to provide complementary income to beneficiaries receiving jobs. In France there has been experimentation with a system to simplify and strengthen financial incentives to leave social assistance (“Active Solidarity Income”) – a programme recently generalised – as well as a programme of financial assistance and intensive counselling on the return to work in areas of economic hardship (“Professional Transition Contract”). However, a recent study on the modernisation of the role of job centres³⁰ makes clear both the extent of experi-

²⁹ Guillaume Allègre, *L'expérimentation sociale des incitations financières à l'emploi : questions méthodologiques et leçons des expériences nord-américaines*, OFCE n°2008-22 (2008)

³⁰ J Kluge (Lead author), *Study on the effectiveness of ALMPs Report for DG Employment, social affairs, equal opportunities European Commission* (2005)

ments in Europe and the confusion of techniques used: among the 137 assessments cited and compared, only 9 were based on experimentation with random sampling.

The OECD-LEED Forum, which organises exchanges of best practice between members on social innovation at the local level, emphasises in particular the variety of legal statuses held by project organisers, and also the importance of the social economy. *“Innovation is not limited to the public sector, because in this matter the classic dividing lines, between private and public, state and civil society, are not relevant – since there is in fact a sort of continuum. The status of the organiser or the final beneficiary must therefore not be predetermined³¹.”*

Even though the Community Initiative Programme EQUAL was aimed more at innovation than at experimentation, the lessons to be learnt from its assessors are particularly enlightening. In examining the factors aiding the dissemination of innovations and incidentally facilitating the generalisation of an experiment, they note that social innovations spread more easily if **they respond to real needs**, if their results demonstrate obvious advantages when compared to current practices, and if the potential users are prepared and given support. They strongly advise verifying the policy relevance before launching a project. Concerning content, they make an observation that could probably be extended to other current European programmes: *“in the framework of EQUAL, innovation has a better chance of improving existing implementation mechanisms than of filling gaps in policy³².”*

This question of policy relevance draws attention to two factors, often ignored but important in the social policy field – the theoretical premises on which the experimentation is based; and the question of preferences and aversions.

In the opinion of experts³³, **there is always a theory underlying the decision** to start one programme rather than another. Much is to be gained in making this theory more explicit. For example, in the United Kingdom the prevailing opinion is that current unemployment among the under-privileged and under-qualified is largely,

³¹ Antonella Noya (CFE Insight n°4 July 2008)

³² European Commission, *EQUAL – Creating the conditions for change – Guide-book for mainstreaming in the training and employment policies* (2005)

³³ Colloque DARES sur les expérimentations, opus cited

if not exclusively, the product of labour-market supply (the attitude, training and motivation of the unemployed). This explains the focus of experimentation on the unemployed and not on employers. In other countries different reasoning prevails – for example in France with regard to the reluctance of the employers to hire older workers.

The quest for effectiveness in the area of social policy must take account of the cultural norms of each society. For example, paying people as an incentive for them to study is perfectly accepted in North America or Israel, but not at all in Europe. When it contradicts norms, experimentation is weakened and runs the risk of failure for external reasons. This factor is not to be ignored when attempting to transfer an experiment from one place to another or when trying to exchange best practice and choosing themes for trans-national cooperation. It is always possible that this cooperation will allow certain taboos to be surmounted, but the risk is probably not worth taking.

Lastly, it is clear that experimentation contradicts by definition the principle of equality, since it involves submitting certain individuals to specific treatment while excluding others. It is necessary to find the right answers and methods which can dispel suspicions of manipulation and arbitrariness.

3.2 - What methods and conditions are necessary for success?

The growing interest in experimentation can be explained by several factors, of which one is the association with scientific rationality – which the professionals are keen to emphasise. As for the conduct of the experimentation, several elements are highlighted.

The first feature is the existence of a **protocol** which details the different stages, starting with the selection of the projects, their timeframe and scope, and continuing to the conditions for generalisation or moving to a large scale – and, in between, the evaluation method, follow-up and impact analysis. This protocol binds the ordering party, in general the higher public authority, to the organiser on the ground – who might be a public body, a local authority, a non-government-

tal organisation or even a private enterprise. The experts counsel simplicity: the causal link between the planned incentive or process and the expected result must be direct, otherwise the experiment risks producing unhelpful results.

In order to better understand the results and to be able to compare at any moment a population or area under investigation with one that is not – treatment group and control group – experts recommend the method of **random sampling**, by analogy with research in biology. They are nonetheless aware of the moral and legal problems arising from the random selection of people who, in principle, are among society's most vulnerable.

If we consider that the choice must be ethical and fair and that it must win the support of beneficiaries, several solutions – more or less flexible – are practicable³⁴. One solution is to select individuals at random according to a process similar to the model used in medicine. For example, the sorting can be done by alphabetic order. A second solution is similar but concerns groups of individuals, linked for instance by their geographic location or their relationship with a social organisation (job centre, educational establishment, etc). A third consists of the progressive introduction of an element of randomness. Each individual knows that at some point he or she will be a beneficiary, because the programme is planned to expand progressively; those who have not yet been treated make up the control group. A fourth solution is the technique of the lottery or the call for shows of interest; in this case the limiting factors of number or amount are known to all future beneficiaries who accept the rule of random selection when they apply. A fifth solution is called “in the bubble” and is an intermediate group which has neither been identified as a priority nor excluded from the exercise. From the perspective of the behavioural assessment, this group is perhaps the most attractive one, because often it stays on the fringes of the programme yet without being completely distanced. The sixth solution is encouragement; this consists of providing a minor incentive in the form of information to all the potential beneficiaries and letting them choose whether to apply or not. In this way the sample can be built up gradually.

³⁴ Esther Duflo, MIT, *Colloque DARES sur les expérimentations*, opus cited

The use of ethical committees is systematic in the United States and could become generalised in Europe. The basic principle is that individuals must be informed, except if it is deemed that the information risks distorting the experiment or annulling its results.

Another precaution concerns respect for the principle of additionality, well known in the management of the European structural funds. The protocol must include a mechanism to ensure that the situation of non-participating individuals remains unaffected. It is important that the experimentation does not lead to the cancelling of another policy provision during the test.

On the question of **size**, it may be tempting to conduct several small experimentations rather than a single large one, in order to gain more information in the same timeframe, without endangering the public financing. However, there exists a minimum size needed to estimate the effects of an experimentation, taking into account “attrition” and the inevitable reduction of the number of subjects due to apathy and absenteeism on the part of beneficiaries and mobility or silence on the part of non-beneficiaries. Another distorting factor is the misappropriation of the treatment, either because beneficiaries do not follow the rules they have been set or because individuals in the control group manage to slip among the beneficiaries. Lastly, the promoters of experimentations often tend to amplify the expected results; the starting sample must be sufficiently large that the credibility of the experimentation and its results are not placed in question. If the observed effect is too weak, there will be disappointment and the opportunity of the experimentation will have been missed.

Conversely, the level of aggregation chosen – for example, a NUTS III zone – can turn out to be too large and lacking in pertinence to assess the impact of the experimentation by comparison. This is a case of underestimating the importance of the formative behavioural components (economy, culture, society) which are a far better explanation of the differences between territories than the minor effect of the new policy provision. The optimal size depends on the nature of the experimentation and the context. It must be calibrated for each case, in accordance with objective criteria.

More generally, 12 pieces of advice by an experienced American practitioner are worth mentioning³⁵:

- address important issues;
- have a reasonable procedural methodology;
- design a life-size test;
- ask questions people care about;
- fight for random assignment;
- do not be limited to a single experiment;
- do not bank on miracles;
- simplify;
- actively communicate results;
- do not confuse dissemination with advocacy;
- recognise errors and failures;
- be assured of the support of partners from the start.

This list can be joined to and completed by the conditions for success of innovations, according to the ad hoc group EQUAL³⁶:

- they are led by people who demonstrate an enterprising spirit, with a long-term vision and no aversion to risk;
- they aim to satisfy the needs of the users in question;
- they are supported by sound management, in order to make the most of the skills and interests of the various actors involved;
- they systematically follow relevant developments at a global level, in order to learn from new ideas and to avoid duplications or deadlocks;
- they are organised in such a way as to inspire confidence in the advantages they can bring, in particular in terms of cost-effectiveness and quality.

³⁵ Judith Gueron, former President of MDRC, *Colloque DARES sur les expérimentations*, opus cited
³⁶ Opus cited

3.3 - What are the conditions for mainstreaming?

A successful experiment should not go without follow-up. This is exactly the risk that the protocol established at the start of the procedure is meant to avert – and, intrinsically, what makes the originality of experimentation in comparison to a policy of support for social innovations. It is also what justifies the somewhat restricting framework in which experimentation is carried out.

This generalisation, better known in European terminology as mainstreaming, generally meets two obstacles: **the capacity of experimentation to move to a larger scale** and its ability to inspire policy reform.

The first obstacle is methodological. Generalisation contains an inherent component of experimentation, since it is at this stage that organisers are brought to consider the contextual conditions of success – and not simply the behavioural ones. Why does this new programme work in such-and-such a zone or neighbourhood and not in another? There is always the risk that the success of the experimentation was distorted because the treatment group was placed under too much pressure, because a preconceived theory has not been properly tested, because the area tested was too specific. However, it is possible to try to protect against such risks, by applying the “blind” test – with a random choice, assessing the process and the impact and not solely the result.

More generally, there is no certitude that what has been tested positively at a micro-scale will work at a macro-scale. Several techniques nonetheless allow a reduction of the risks of failure. The experimentation can be repeated in another territory; it is also possible to proceed in stages with pilot projects designed as larger experimentations. This was the method which inspired the European Union to finance innovative actions and Community Initiative Programmes.

The EQUAL network has put together a practical guide to facilitate this generalisation³⁷. It is presented as the result of a strategy that the promoters must design and implement from the start. This strategy breaks down into three stages: identification

³⁷ Opus cited

of the needs of decision makers (choosing the right moment, creating demand and responding to it); identification and involvement of the target audience; identification of best practices and relevant innovations, either according to a top-down model when the managing authority takes charge, or according to a bottom-up model when the promoter himself is responsible for the innovation and for submitting it to peers. Emphasis is also placed on the fact that the generalisation assumes a joint operation – by the innovation’s supporters to make it available and to interpret it, and by the future actors to appropriate it.

The second challenge consists of **convincing the decision makers** to follow up the experimentation – bearing in mind that, as the EESC notes disapprovingly – the delay in implementing a reform is often considerable even if the results were positive. In addition, it is possible that the experimentation will be perceived by political leaders and public opinion as of marginal importance. The “cost” of change, even when reduced by the demonstration of success in an experiment, remains high in our societies. However, the experimental technique can be a formidable learning tool: it can draw the attention of politicians or the public to little-understood phenomena or to causal links which are not at all obvious.

Time management is crucial, but practice varies. In the United States long-term experimentations, of three to five years, are common, whereas Europeans prefer shorter durations. Experts³⁸ estimate that the decision to generalise should be taken at the end of the experimentation, not before. But from a political perspective it can be considered preferable to generalise quickly if positive signs are forthcoming, on the grounds that time can be saved in addressing a problematic social situation.

The timeframe for carrying out experimentation can also conflict with the political calendar. The Mexican example is often cited to show that this problem can be overcome and that pessimism is ill-founded. In the example, a new government arrived at the moment that the PROGRESA experiment concerning family poverty was finishing. The assessment was so convincing and the success of the experiment so widely accepted by public opinion that the new government decided to take over the programme, simply changing its name. The other risk is linked to changing

³⁸ Colloque DARES sur les expérimentations, opus cited

economic conditions. Nothing can be done here except to ensure that changes in the general context apply to all, including non-participants. This situation can also change priorities or aggravate certain problems.

In any case, it is necessary to ensure that the subject is an important one for political officials and administrations at all levels. EQUAL's best-practice guide³⁹ places the criterion of political relevance on the same level as the criterion of best-practice added value.

It may prove useful to take a brief look at LEADER the only Community initiative programme to mainstream successfully. This is a programme to promote the development of rural areas, relying on the development of the local partners' capacity for autonomy, and a bottom-up approach. Its mainstreaming took place in two ways. First, since its inception, in 1991, LEADER has been extended twice under the name of LEADER II (1994-99) and LEADER + (2000-2006) before becoming a transversal approach common to all rural development programme as Axis 4 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development EAFRD. Secondly in the mid-nineties, two countries deemed the LEADER approach worth spreading to rural zones that did not receive any European support and they created their own national programme under the name of POMO in Finland and PRODER in Spain. The reasons for this success are numerous and some are highly specific to the very nature of the policy concerned. However, it would seem that two lessons should be learnt and applied in other fields: a strictly observed working method yielded undisputable quantitative and qualitative results for the actors in the field like for the political leaders; by stressing the political significance of the exercise, a very structured communication and information policy paved the way for a strong ownership by vastly diverse public and private actors, at local levels and at every tier, right up to European level.

3.4 - How to evaluate?

Experimentation and evaluation are linked with regard to the reform of social policies⁴⁰: they allow reduced uncertainty by providing objective data; a sharper

³⁹ Opus cited

⁴⁰ Bruno Crépon et Julien Guitard, *Les expérimentations en sciences sociales, une révolution pour l'évaluation des politiques publiques* (Variations n°32) (2007) http://www.ensae.org/gene/main.php?base=61&base2=1&detail_article=669

diagnosis of problems; a clearer picture of causalities; and better targeting and dosing of policy provisions. For example, in the case of a subsidy it is useful to know the minimum sum which will provoke changed behaviour, and thereby avoid wastage of public resources. In a list of measures, it is helpful to know priority targets for action. In consequence, the protocol for the experimentation must not only stipulate an evaluation but also the technique which will be used and the conditions under which the independence of the evaluators will be guaranteed.

The evaluation allows the measurement of three types of behavioural change: that of the beneficiaries, that of the implementing bodies, and that of the external environment – which can imitate or, inversely, respond by entering into competition. The main challenge is to distinguish properly between the first two changes, both of which will have a major influence on the observed results. Assessment essentially consists of making a comparison with a neutral state, which might be found in an area not under treatment. Analysis of the process (how was the provision implemented? what really happened?) is as important as the raw impact.

Most assessments are of long-term nature, dealing with numerous variables and attempting to combine analyses of effectiveness and efficiency with those concerning cost and benefit. To do this they make use of rich and highly-developed information systems, which mix administrative data with statistical and qualitative surveys.

There exist different types of assessment – those considered as standard; and random evaluation, which compares different populations at the end of the period. Without entering the debate between schools of evaluation, it can be noted that random evaluation has numerous advantages. It allows the possibility of conducting counterfactual analysis, considered by researchers to be the most convincing. It can only be carried out on an experimentation which was designed and conducted in accordance with it. It produces better “evidence” and thereby helps assure the extension of the experimentation or its generalisation in the case of success. It costs much less than standard techniques, which assume the collection of a large variety of data. It avoids controversies and the necessity for justifications over the chosen assessment method. Being concerned with assessment of

the process and indirect effects, it bypasses the usual distorting factor in social-policy matters – the focus on behavioural questions rather than on the real effect of a given measure. For improvements do not come solely from the content of the assistance; they come also from the way in which it is implemented and from the contribution of the local actors.

3.5 - What governance?

Social policy experimentation reflects a strategy of change in a political context where actors are numerous and their roles are far from being clearly defined: individuals, groups of individuals, civil-society organisations, local and regional authorities, local governmental bodies, politicians at all levels, and so on. Each of these might be alternatively beneficiaries, operators, mediators and, sometimes at the end, decision makers. An experiment must be conducted in particular conditions, but its success will only be fully recognised when it has confirmed the validity of the policy measure tested and when it has been taken into account in the reform of a general programme, or when it has caused a change in the diagnosis of certain social problems. To facilitate the future **process of ownership**, it is therefore important, from the start, to include the experimentation in its horizontal context, with the aid of a **high-quality partnership**, and in its vertical context according to a **dynamic mode of multi-level governance**.

Here too, research work on the mainstreaming of EQUAL programme products is particularly useful. It demonstrates the necessity of balancing three “pillars”, representing the product itself (its value), the partnership (its credibility), and the process (its effectiveness). The stakes of mainstreaming are firstly to convince, then to obtain a certain appropriation, in order to succeed in incorporating the product into general policy.

It is also important to overcome the reluctance of actors faced with risk, with the suspicion of being turned into a guinea pig, and with the extra workload and the complications that can come with the change. The experimentation’s promoter must not therefore lose sight of the importance of regularly associating all the actors in a **partnership process**, and of defining targets, a message, a calendar and a follow-up process.

One must not underestimate the possibility of a conflict of interest arising concerning local authorities or other local promoters of initiatives, who could feel dispossessed by the intrusion of another higher-level (regional, national or European) authority conducting an experiment. There is a strong risk here of accusations of exploitation or of violation of the subsidiarity principle.

To avoid any perverse effects of an excessively rigid form of experimentation designed solely by the supra-local authority, it is therefore useful to plan for other types of experimentation better suited to partnerships. In this case the general framework would be described in generally vague terms, but attractively enough to arouse the interest of local actors and their capacity for innovation. The formulation of hypotheses would be the responsibility of the experimentation promoters themselves. They would accept however to comply with commonly agreed rules for implementation and assessment; in exchange, the superior authority would commit, as it did with experimentations launched on its own initiative, to take lessons from the exercise – for example by generalising the policy measure tested, or by correcting the flawed existing measure.

In the final analysis, two procedures can be included under the term of social experimentation: the first is the testing of a policy provision created by a superior authority (on the model of the RSA in France, the Earned Income Tax Credit in the United States, the Working Tax Credit in the United Kingdom, or the Kombilohn in Germany); the second can be likened to a request for proposals (on the model of the French Haut-Commissariat’s 2008 request for proposals, or certain measures in the framework of EQUAL or the National Supported Work Demonstration in the United States).

IV - How to take up the challenge of trans-national cooperation?

Hitherto, social experimentation has been thought of in vertical terms: through conducting one or several trials at local level with a view to identify the policy measure best suited to improve and modernise a policy at national or regional level according to a State's institutional structure. Confronted with the scale of social challenges shared by all, e.g. social exclusion and poverty, and in the face of particularly bleak economic prospects as a result of the financial crisis and the credit crunch, it may be tempting to consider intensifying the use of social experimentation, falling back on trans-national cooperation. The experience the EU has accrued in the field of cooperation or support to innovation can be a sound starting point. One must however remain aware of the obstacles peculiar to the range of social protection systems in the 27 Member States, and of the novelty of the instrument proper.

4.1 – Experimentation as object of cooperation towards common interests

In social matters, the member States have primary competence: the European Union only intervenes in a top-up or complementary capacity. However, half a

century of EU integration has generated a degree of interdependence, whether linked to the single market or not.

It is a fact that there already exist, as has been shown above, many European instruments which are both diversified and sophisticated. Some are aimed at stimulating a social innovation fitting more closely with current problems; others seek to induce the Member States to modernise their social systems in harmony and coordination in order to reduce potential tensions arising from differing rhythms or directions (that has been the European Employment Strategy's purpose these past ten years). As an instrument for the renewal of social policies, **experimentation has a perfectly valid place in the European tool-kit.**

Admittedly, over the past twenty years the governance of structural funds, following a three-levelled process (innovative actions or pilot projects, Community Initiative Programmes, operational programmes) has not been consistently equal to the task. Cooperative actions have proliferated but without necessarily having any significant impact on the structural reform of public policies. This conclusion led EQUAL stakeholders to advocate the decentralisation of innovation within each operational programme. This organisational change, which may be more effective for the dissemination of innovation at regional level, makes it more difficult to spread outwards.

4.2 Correctly weigh up the diversity of the contexts

When contemplating the possibility of trans-national cooperation in the social field, **the first stumbling block would appear to be the diversity of national contexts.** In fact, research undertaken in preparation for the Hampton Court European Summit on the future of the European social model in 2005⁴¹ had brought out the ongoing validity of the Esping-Andersen typology⁴². It probably offers a reliable reading grid to understand processes for modernising policies and the social systems emanating from them, and to gauge the greater or lesser receptivity to experimentation as a technique in the 27 Member States.

⁴¹ André Sapir, *Globalisation and the Reform of European Social Models*, www.bruegel.org (2005) ; Marjorie Jouen and Catherine Palpant, *For a New European Social Contract*, Notre Europe, (2005); P de Rossa et JA Silva Penada, *A European Social Model for the Future*, motion for a European Parliament resolution (2005/2248)

⁴² Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, (1990)

This would roughly give the very sketchy and thereby disputable overview that follows. After the wobbles of the classical social compromise model, the Nordic countries have shown a remarkable ability to regenerate and to absorb innovation, including, for some of them, such as Finland, notions of differentiation, resorting to experimental approaches at local level. Anglo-Saxon pragmatism accounts for those countries' strong receptivity to innovation and experimentation towards rebuilding social policies severely shaken by deregulatory excesses. The countries partaking of the continental model suffer on the whole from low responsiveness and structural unwieldiness; experimentation is perceived as an alien technique. The Mediterranean countries' social systems have not all achieved the same level as a result of late development, an underdeveloped State system and enduring informal (notably familial) solidarities. Some feature a strong regionalisation often associated with greater receptivity to experimentation. Among the new Member States, some may be related to the Mediterranean and continental models. Others find themselves in a singular situation due to economic transitions the impact of which continues to have major implications for the cash flow of some population categories (e.g. pensioners) or of the public authorities. Finally, others enjoy freshly overhauled social systems, thus reducing the need for reform and experiment. In most of those, civil society struggles to gain vibrancy after the gagging its innovation and autonomous organisation capabilities were systematically dealt by communist regimes.

From the angle of experimentation, **the size factor** may also stand in the way: a group of 200.000 people may be considered a valid sample in a 50 millions strong country whereas it amounts to half the population of another. Yet in the framework of the European Union, it would be misleading to conceive of social systems perfectly impervious to one another, and to underestimate the convergence of interests.

4.3 – Strictly defined working objectives and methodology

The added value of Community intervention is broadly accepted for two main reasons: the first relates to scale – the EU can address problems the magnitude of which outweighs the possibilities of each State taken individually and for whom a

convergence of interest justifies a joint action liable to be more effective – and the second is the very opposite – the EU has an obvious interest in acting to resolve problems set at the fringe of individual national competences, such as cross-border problems for instance.

The support the EU offers towards social experimentation falls into several categories in so far as its focus is clearly stated. There is surely no point in conceiving of the launch of an identical experiment in several countries in order to provide a rational basis to a single social reform throughout Europe. Neither should the success of an experiment conducted in one given region be banked on as the basis for the reform to be implemented in another country, for the legal, cultural, social and political context is too different.

As against that a European approach may be useful for sharing the costs of the participants. It may stimulate innovation and give rise to a degree of mutual support, likely to advance the rationalisation of experimentation and evaluation methodology. It may enable the Member States to trial simultaneously policy measures meeting social OMC guidelines. The object could then be to promote coordinated experimentations between several countries. This may also lead to the politicisation of a social issue.

A **twin aim** comes into view: **speeding up national policy modernisation or the actors' learning curve** (in which case cooperation will be highlighted), as well as building up shared knowledge, **informing the diagnosis** on current social phenomena, by positing the existence of some convergence and of a European societal model (in which case transferability will be highlighted).

The choice of trans-national cooperation fields is a problem in its own right: collective preferences and reluctances must be taken into account, as does a greater or lesser advance in the modernisation of the social systems. Two approaches seem worth considering: the first could be targeting a specific policy field and a broad objective to be reached whilst allowing for a choice of scheme. This would yield a fairly broad range of possibilities, which will not provide any information towards a general reform at European level but will be likely to help each cooperation partner

to progress in their chosen path. With one network aim adequately clarified from the outset, a transversal evaluation will make it possible to understand why it worked or failed. Experimentation practice will have advanced as well as, with a little luck, modernisation along the lines of social OMC.

A second approach could consist in testing the same scheme in different contexts. Experimentation added value would then lie with the comparative analysis of the evolutions in the legal, financial, social environment. In this case, there would be more progress towards social diagnosis, the very content of social policies and their interactions with other policies.

In any event, it is important to **turn trans-national cooperation into an asset for experimentation rather than a cause of complications**. The upshot is that procedures too cumbersome or ill suited to small size undertakings involving limited amounts must be shunned. This crucial task towards simplifying the procedures and technical support falls to the European tier.

Annex

Annex 1: Development of programmes of support for innovation

1989-93

	EAGGF	ERDF	ESF	OTHERS
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS	ARTICLE 8			ERGO, EGLEI, ILE, LEDA, POVERTY III
CIP	LEADER	INTERREG REGIS	HORIZON NOW	

1994-96

	EAGGF	ERDF	ESF	OTHERS
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS	ARTICLE 8	ARTICLE 10	ARTICLE 6	
CIP	LEADER II	INTERREG II REGIS II	HORIZON NOW / ADAPT YOUTHSTART	

1997-99 (after the mid-term review)

	EAGGF	ERDF	ESF	OTHERS
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS	ARTICLE 8	ARTICLE 10 NGE URBAN PILOT PROJECTS	ART 6 NEW SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT LOCAL SOCIAL CAPITAL	RESEARCH-ACTION THIRD SYSTEM AND EMPLOYMENT LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED
CIP	LEADER II	INTERREG II REGIS II URBAN	HORIZON NOW / ADAPT YOUTHSTART INTEGRA	
CSF / DOCUP				TERRITORIAL EMPLOYMENT PACTS

2000-2006

	EAGGF	ERDF	ESF	OTHERS
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS		ARTICLE 4	ARTICLE 6	
CIP	LEADER +	INTERREG III URBAN II	EQUAL	

2007-2013

	EAFRD	ERDF	ESF	OTHERS
INNOVATIVE ACTIONS			ARTICLES 3 AND 9	PROGRESS
CCA / DOCUP		OBJECTIVE 3	OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2	

Annex 2: Community Initiative Programmes and ESF innovative actions (1994-1999)

NAME	PROGRAMME TYPE	THEME	AMOUNT (EUROS)	PERIOD	No. OF PROJECTS FINANCED
NEW SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT	INNOVATIVE ACTION (ARTICLE 6 OF ESF)	THE CREATION OF JOBS LINKED TO NEW NEEDS, TO CHANGING SKILLS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORLD OF WORK (TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS, PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, SECTORAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY OF WORKERS)	50 M	97-00	82
RESEARCH ACTION FOR LOCAL EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT	EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH ACTION	SUPPORT FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT AROUND LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS, TO RESPOND TO NEEDS NOT SATISFIED BY THE MARKET	ND	97 - 98	8 x 10 PROJECTS AT LEAST
THIRD SYSTEM AND EMPLOYMENT	PILOT ACTION INITIATED BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL OF ORGANISATIONS BELONGING NEITHER TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE NOR TO PROFIT-MAKING PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, IN SOCIAL SERVICES, CULTURE, LOCAL SERVICES, SERVICES RELATED TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING STANDARDS AND THE ENVIRONMENT	20 M	97 AND 98	81
EMPLOYMENT	EU PROGRAMME	IDENTIFICATION OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO UNEMPLOYMENT, AND ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS EXPERIENCING SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES IN THE JOBS MARKET (WOMEN WITH NOW, THE DISABLED WITH HORIZON, VICTIMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION WITH INTEGRA, AND YOUTH WITH YOUTHSTART)	1.8 Bn	94-99	6230

ADAPT	EU PROGRAMME	CHANGING THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESSES, NON-COMMERCIAL BODIES AND WORKERS, IN A CONTEXT OF INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATIONS	1.6 Bn	94-99	3846
LOCAL SOCIAL CAPITAL	INNOVATIVE ACTION (ARTICLE 6 OF ESF)	EXPERIMENTATION AND STUDY OF OPTIMAL CONDITIONS FOR MANAGING THE GENERAL ALLOCATION FOR MICRO-PROJECTS, IN THE AREAS OF SOCIAL COHESION, THE FIGHT AGAINST EXCLUSION, AND MICRO-BUSINESSES	28 M	99-02	30 INTERMEDIATE BODIES (676)

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