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Bridges for Inclusion

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Bridges for Inclusion¹

Sérgio Aires

Introduction

- 1 This article is based on the results of an European Transnational Project called Bridges for Inclusion promoted, between December 2007 and November 2009, by the European Anti-Poverty Network / Portugal under the PROGRESS Programm (European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity 2007-2013) in partnership with the following organizations: European Anti-Poverty Network – Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), Union Régionale des Entreprises d'Insertion – Languedoc Roussillon (France), Flemish Network of Associations of People Experiencing Poverty (Belgium), Anti-Poverty Information Centre (Bulgaria), Caritas Romania Confederation (Romania), European Anti-Poverty Network (Europe) and International Labour Office (Geneva – Switzerland).
- 2 The main objective of the project was to make a more clear and effective relationship between employment, social welfare and social inclusion and to enhance strategies and practices, particularly those coming from the fields of inclusive entrepreneurship, social economy and local development, where this positive relation can be concretized.

Brief presentation of the project Bridges for Inclusion

- 3 The European Employment Strategy was established in Luxembourg fourteen years ago (1997). Since then, the EU Member States tried to coordinate their employment policies following common objectives which are defined and reviewed periodically. In 2000, the Employment Strategy became one of the key pillars of the Lisbon Strategy, when a new vision for the EU was forged based on the complementary triangle between economic, employment and social pillars. At the same time the European Strategy on Social Inclusion was born and the EU set itself the goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. Through the Open Method of Coordination the Member States have tried to coordinate the national policies of social inclusion according to the

objectives and indicators defined at the European level (Nice, 2001). This was further developed in 2005, when a streamlined process brought together other related OMCs on pensions, health and long-term care to form the EU Strategy on social protection and social inclusion. At the same time, the decisions made following the KoK report², to refocus the Lisbon triangle on the two “poorer sisters”, (economy and employment) left the social pillar isolated and subservient to the macro/micro and employment pillars.

- 4 Even though the process of “feeding in and feeding out”³ was supposed to ensure coherence between the two strategies, in reality, the liaison and communication between European strategies for employment and social protection and social inclusion were not strategic or effective. There weren’t sufficient or efficient “bridges” between these two apparently separated “worlds”. The launch of the Commission’s Active Inclusion Recommendation in October 2008 was an important attempt to build these links based on the three pillars. But how far is this being implemented, and what role can local/regional initiatives in key fields like social economy, local development, undeclared work contribute to really ensuring that an inclusive labour market is created, and that employment plays its role in promoting inclusion?
- 5 Social Economy in its different forms and levels has always played an important role trying to “alleviate” this lack of coordination, providing specific instruments by which people who were furthest from the labour market could be supported into decent work, and/or social participation. These organizations (in their different structures, formats, approaches and actions) have a large experience of social and professional integration of social excluded groups overcoming, in their daily life, the obstacles of the policies that are developed in a top-down way by government (and not counting with their participation), from different ministries and national or regional departments. Therefore this project has tried to collect evidence from different national settings of what specific social and professional integration schemes and local development projects are actively contributing to the implementation of active inclusion, and thus vital to fight poverty and social exclusion, attempting to identify key success factors and obstacles.

Main objective of the Bridges for Inclusion project

- 6 The Bridges for Inclusion project aimed to identify how a more effective relationship can be established between employment, social welfare and social inclusion strategies, built on local experiences, in order to provide guidance on how to enhance strategies and practices. Priority has been given to assessing the role of these initiatives, in the context of implementing the Active Inclusion approach, particularly those coming from the fields of inclusive entrepreneurship, social economy and local development field.

Specific objectives of the Bridges for Inclusion project

- Conducting a European survey on social and employment inclusion, to produce a catalogue of real “employment and social welfare for inclusion” measures and actions in each country or region;
- Analyse the relevant actions concerning the connection between employment, inclusion and protection (active inclusion) and social economy through a “peer review” exchange between neighbouring national partners;

- Demonstrate (by putting in evidence concrete actions and micro-projects) the power, capability and added value of social economy to produce active inclusion with different target groups, through specific employment measures;
- Present guidelines for inclusion taking in consideration: different actors, different strategies, different publics and different contexts.

The key actions developed by the Project to achieve its objectives

a) European general overview on employment and inclusion policies

- 7 Development of a report with an overview on Employment and Social Inclusion policies over the last 10 years in Europe.

b) National/regional overviews

- 8 Following the same objective of the general overview, a set of six national/regional researches was made to identify key strategies, programmes and actions in the field of the promotion of employment and the social welfare for inclusion in each of the country partners. These reports from these six national overviews were presented and discussed in national/regional workshops between different actors in order to identify key areas and organisations to involve directly in the project.

c) Elaboration of the “Guidelines for Social Protection, Employment and Local Development”

- 9 This document was made in the framework of the project expressly to help the various partners in the designing and implementation of different strategies within their national laboratories.

d) Mutual learning bilateral peer reviews

- 10 Each partner organised a peer review to receive another partner. This peer review offered the possibility to exchange different views and experiences and to better prepare the design and implementation of the national laboratories of experiences.

e) National laboratories

- 11 Each partner selected a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 different experiences/ organizations from the social economy field which had as one of their focus of intervention the construction of bridges between employment and inclusion. These organizations were invited to present their visions, their experiences and their needs and in the light and objectives of the project they were orientated to put in practice – with the support and consultancy from the partners in each country – strategies to better for better building bridges between employment and inclusion strategies. These laboratories and the activities implemented by the organisations were the basis for the construction of this final product of this project: the guidelines to build better bridges for inclusion.

Some key findings

- 12 In the beginning of the project we formulated a hypothesis on what were the necessary bridges to ensure that employment could provide an adequate bridge to inclusion, particularly through social economy and local development approaches. However, we discovered through the course of the project, particularly as a consequence of the work done in the national laboratories, that other steps were necessary if these approaches were to fulfil their objectives of providing an effective link through employment to social inclusion. This analysis took us into a much broader debate about what kind of society we wanted and what more fundamental changes were necessary to ensure that employment could be an effective tool for inclusion.
- 13 Therefore through the work with the national observatories the partners identified the interplay between 3 key factors that are vital to ensure that employment leads to inclusion, at a structural and strategic level.
- 14 These structural bridges are:
- a. Income**
- 15 The level of income defines how far the labour market is inclusive. Only if an adequate living wage is provided can employment be considered an effective bridge to inclusion. Low income disconnects employment and inclusion (employment is not inclusive – it is only a job). The adequacy of income will depend on the degree of regulation on the labour market, which depends in turn on how effective and accountable are the participatory mechanisms of decision-making in employment and social policy fields. Income is a key aspect of quality of work, which ensures that work promotes human dignity and development rather than instrumentalizing people as “cogs” in the economy.
- b. Participation and participatory decision making**
- 16 Participatory decision making is vital at all levels, if inclusion is to be a reality (at national, regional and local level). Participation influences: 1) the power of decision makers (their role and limits in decision making); 2) the level of income – throughout participation in decision making about the income distribution (more generally – the distribution of the resources that are available); 3) the degree of effectiveness and accountability of a strategy, project or service to its users; d) the capacity to empower people in decisions on their own lives and of their communities.
- 17 Bridges connect or disconnect employment and inclusion depending on the way these key elements themselves interact and are interconnected. Their interactions are wide-reaching and complex – they interact with each other and shape each other; in other words – they constitute a complex whole which challenges in basic ways how we organize our society and in whose interests.
- c. Regulation**
- 18 Regulation by the state (at different levels to control the market and defend the public good) is the key instrument to ensure both: a) the adequacy of income and b) the effectiveness and scope of participation, i.e., what procedures/methods are used, the

forms and effectiveness (impact) of participation; and c) defines the parameters of decision making – puts limits on the scope of the market operations, e.g., the concentration of the power in laboratories.

Eight key strategic steps identified:

- 19 We summarize some of the overarching learning from the project – organized in eight key strategic steps which the partners have felt are crucial to make urgent progress on building effective bridges between employment and inclusion.
- 20 Eight key steps for ensuring effective bridges between employment and inclusion
1. Rethink the concept and indicators for employment and for social inclusion emphasizing the importance of 3 key interlinking factors: income, participation and regulation.
 2. Reinforce the active inclusion concept (access to adequate income, quality services and quality work – and the relevant policies) by:
 - a) Including participation as a fourth element (next to adequate minimum incomes, access to social services and quality employment);
 - b) Recognizing the autonomous importance of the four elements (instead of the current subordination to employment) and the importance of a genuinely integrated approach;
 - c) Regulating the implementation of the approach at EU and national level (e.g., through a Directive on Minimum Income, guaranteeing access to services, minimum wages, etc).
 2. Institutionalize civil participation in decision making (in employment and social policy, but also in all other areas), based on two human rights officially recognized and adopted by the UN in the previous century – the right to development and the right to participate in development. Embed structured dialogue mechanisms which promote civil participation in decision making in the EU's National Action Plans process on employment and social inclusion.
 3. Give new support to bottom-up, and space based local development social inclusion approaches, which bring together key stakeholders and trial new approaches to supporting active inclusion and to generating social inclusion.
 4. Ensure that revised policies to deliver inclusion, through employment and other means, are actively supported through EU financial instruments – cohesion policy and structural funds.
 5. Take urgent steps to embed ex-ante and post social impact assessment in employment as well as economic and other policy fields through participative mechanisms, to ensure that they contribute to delivering inclusion and provide step-by-step monitoring of the above steps at EU, at national and local level.
 6. Recognize, support and strengthen the capacity of the Social Economy to serve as a crucial bridge between employment and inclusion, by providing an EU legal and financial framework and developing a charter of key criteria to ensure inclusion through employment embedding quality employment/training pathways, integrated support services, guaranteeing adequate income and embedding participation and empowerment of users in the management and delivery of services.
 7. Develop a more constructive approach towards the informal economy – with less emphasis on penalizing individuals trying to survive in worsening economic conditions whilst taking stronger action against systematic abuse and tax evasion by often large companies. Use lessons learned from the types of activities developed through the Informal Economy on how to enrich inclusion through employment policies. Understand better the obstacles to establishing legal economic activity and developing effective mechanisms to support steps from the informal to formal economy.

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ANEXOS

All the materials listed were produced by the project Bridges for Inclusion and were an important part of the capital used to write this article. All these documents, an important patrimony of the project, are available in the webpage of the project: <http://bridgesforinclusion.eapn.pt>

AAVV., *Frameworks reporting the activities developed with the National Laboratories*, October 2009.

AAVV., *Report from the Peer Review developed between Portugal and Spain*, December 2008.

AAVV., *Report from the Peer Review developed between Belgium and France*, December 2008.

AAVV., *Report from the Peer Review developed between Romania and Bulgaria*, December 2008.

NOTAS

1. This article was written with the contributions of: Douhomir Minev – European Anti-Poverty Network / Bulgaria, Elizabeth Santos – European Anti-Poverty Network / Portugal, Elke Vandermeersch – European Anti-Poverty Network – Flanders (Belgium), Evelyne Pereira – European Anti-Poverty Network – Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), Florentina Constantin – Caritas Romania, Jordi Estivill – Independent Consultant of the Project Bridges for Inclusion, Maria Jeliaskova – European Anti-Poverty Network / Bulgaria, Maria José Vicente – European Anti-Poverty Network / Portugal, Raul del Viso – European Anti-Poverty Network – Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), Sian Jones – European Anti-Poverty Network.
 2. The Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment. Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok. European Commission, November 2004.
 3. Between the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and the National Reform Programmes on Growth and Jobs.
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RESUMOS

O projecto Bridges for Inclusion tinha como principal objectivo identificar como é que poderia ser estabelecida uma mais efectiva relação entre as estratégias de emprego, protecção social e inclusão social, com base em experiências locais, de forma a evidenciar diferentes orientações e práticas. Uma especial prioridade foi dada à forma como tais iniciativas são postas em prática, particularmente no contexto de implementação de estratégias de inclusão activa, sobretudo aquelas que provêm do campo do empreendedorismo inclusivo, da economia social e do desenvolvimento local. Este artigo apresenta as principais conclusões e recomendações deste projecto.

The Bridges for Inclusion project aimed to identify how a more effective relationship can be established between employment, social welfare and social inclusion strategies, built on local experiences, in order to provide guidance on how to enhance orientations and practices. Priority has been given to assessing the role of these initiatives, in the context of implementing the active inclusion approaches, particularly those coming from the fields of inclusive entrepreneurship, social economy and local development field. This article presents the main conclusions and recommendations of this project.

ÍNDICE

Palavras-chave: estratégias, emprego, inclusão, pobreza, exclusão, economia social

Keywords: strategies, employment, inclusion, poverty, exclusion, social economy

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