

An alternative cohesion policy

Brian Harvey

EAPN conference, Brussels,

**Workshop *An alternative
cohesion policy***

23rd September 2011

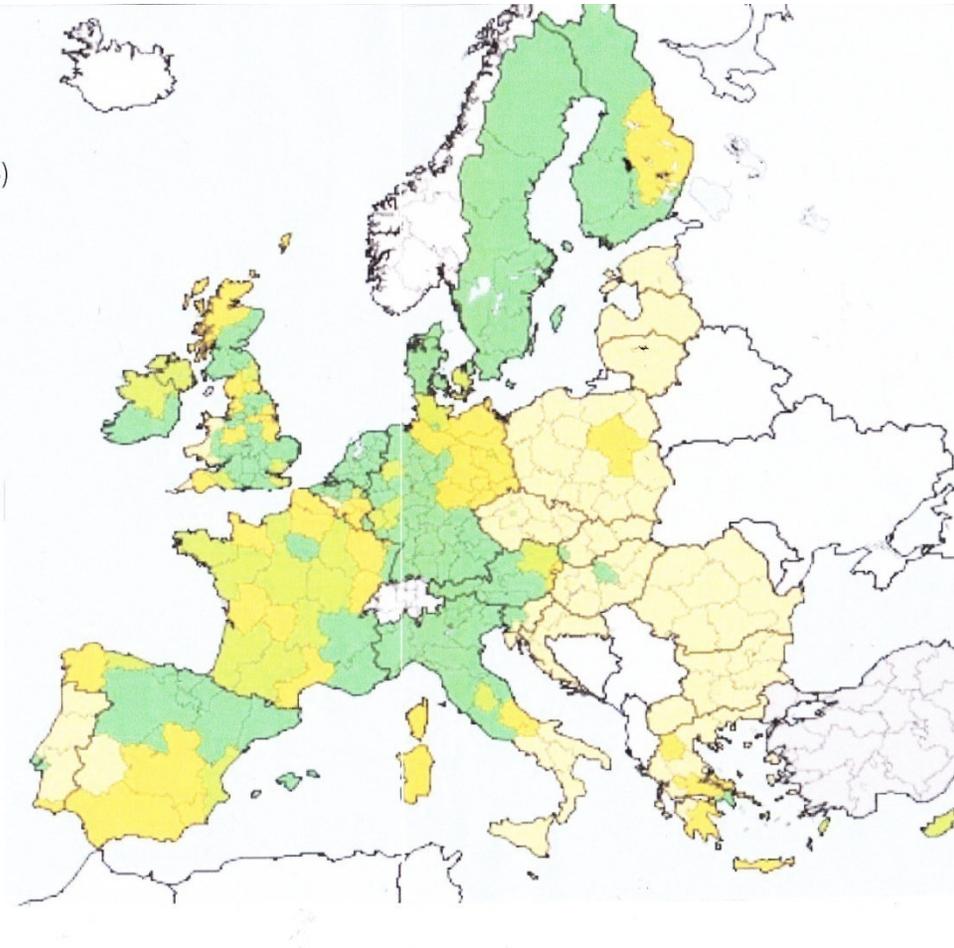
brharvey@iol.ie

General problem: Cohesion policy has not delivered social inclusion. Model has failed.

- ▶ Has *not* made decisive impact on poverty, social exclusion promised Lisbon (2000). Still 16%.
- ▶ Gaps between poor and rich regions remain wide
- ▶ Richer regions have concentrations of extreme poverty (e.g. London, <244%)
- ▶ Cohesion policy *reinforces, not counteracts* poverty-generating priorities of member states
 - ▶ European value-added low, falling.
 - ▶ ‘Governmentalized’. Challenges rejected.
- ▶ Cohesion policy based on paradigm of poor *regions*, rather than poor *people*.

Poor places. Poor people?

As a percentage of EU27=100



Specific problems of cohesion policy

- ▶ Division of cohesion policy
 - ▶ Regional fund has minimal regard for social objectives
 - ▶ Even promotes *exclusion* e.g. transport, tourism
 - ▶ Prevailing official view: ‘ESF does social policy’
- ▶ ERDF €203bn (+Cohesion fund) larger than ESF €75bn
 - ▶ 2014-20: ESF €84bn (25%), €183bn proposed
- ▶ Social fund is primarily *training* fund
 - ▶ Does not help poor outside labour market (old, young)
 - ▶ Does not address problem of working poor in labour market
- ▶ Does not reach really poor
 - ▶ Inadequate in identifying ‘poor people’
 - ▶ Only 2.9% for disadvantaged people (DG REGIO, in Barca 70)
 - ▶ Does not enlist those who work most closely with them (NGO community). Massification of EU funds this century.



How did this happen?

Ask Fabrizio Barca, author of the Barca report

Explanations

- ▶ Original cohesion policy: integrated services in distinct project areas
 - ▶ ‘Never to compensate entire member states’
- ▶ Capture by political élites
 - ▶ Failed to build social capital, democratic participation
 - ▶ Made part of mainstream govt spending (additionality?)
- ▶ Cohesion debate stagnated, lost creative drive
 - ▶ Distinct European agendas ever less visible
 - ▶ Finally buried with extinction of EQUAL programme
- ▶ Exclusion of civil society, poor from debate
- ▶ Evaluation became complacent, self-congratulatory, could no longer prove impacts. Self praise = no praise.

EAPN experience

- Partnership principle little observed. Not consulted in design. Excluded from cross-border groups.
- ERDF: projects for social inclusion rare, social inclusion groups not involved in monitoring.
- Many states do not involve NGOs in delivery
- Commission abandoned oversight role
- Few states have:
 - Global grants. A real test that governments have failed.
 - Technical assistance. Why are NGOs excluded?
 - Capacity building to make NGO participation possible.

So why should we be surprised that poverty levels persist, unaffected?

Where do we start?

- ▶ Need for re-conceptualization
 - ▶ What happened strategic debate invited by Barca?
 - ▶ Poor *people* as much as poor places. We need a new type of map.
 - ▶ Commitment to reduce *social* inequality
- ▶ Involve poor and their advocates
 - ▶ Involve in re-design: top-mezza-bottom
 - ▶ Cohesion forums etc.
- ▶ Reaffirm Commission role: design, programming, priorities
 - ▶ Require member states to address poor people, concentrations of poverty/wealth. Reject operational programmes if need be.
- ▶ Re-balance funding ESF/ERDF + Cohesion
- ▶ Move funding away from member states directly to regions, localities, like pre-1988?

Concrete proposals

- Commence re-design
 - Identify poor people, concentrations of poverty
- A single fund?
 - Two funds not necessarily wrong, *if* ERDF embeds social inclusion, *if* ESF can reach out to all excluded groups, if €€€ rebalanced. But is this possible?
- Involve NGO community
 - *Designers* at European, national, regional, local levels
 - *As deliverers*, using global grants, technical assistance, capacity building
 - Endorse new *methods*, esp. community development
 - On an appropriate, smaller *scale*.

Final comments

- Cohesion policy has failed to deliver social inclusion.
- Cohesion policy, as currently articulated, will *not* deliver *EU2020* objectives.
- Time to make space for those whose *ideas* can make it work. Capture imagination of excluded.

‘When you change who decides the policy, you change the policy’.