

# CONCEPTUALIZING THE SOCIAL BEST PRACTICES AT THE INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL

*Eleftheria KOUMALATSOU<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** *The development of Best Practices is not an isolated set of policies/ entity that can be just copied and then reproduced. Researchers have argued that there are different levels of good practice. Creating or finding good practice is about plotting, mapping and reflecting on who were the key players, the structures and the situation that made practice work. There is, however, no practice that is best for everyone or in every situation, and no Best Practice remains best for very long as people keep on finding better ways of doing things. Article provides an analytical overview of the identification of good practice in general and particularly in the field of Social Economy.*

**Keywords:** *social economy, best practices, indicators, innovation, criteria*

## **1. What does “Best Practice” mean?**

There are numerous definitions of the term “Best Practice”. Nevertheless all definitions examined are sharing the common principle that a Best Practice is a method, process, activity, incentive, or reward and techniques that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means. A Best Practice is believed to be more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, when applied to a particular condition or circumstance. Thus, Best Practices could be examples of field-based activities, operational procedures or capacity building approaches that are successful and sustainable in social, economic and environmental terms and can be adopted by other organizations. Good Practice

---

<sup>1</sup> International Consultant, email: e.koumalatsou@bolt.gr

outcomes include innovative approaches or models to solve a problem or to respond to a need as well as practical tools such as training materials and checklists.

The Peer Review Programme for the European Employment Strategy states that<sup>1</sup>:

- Good Practice should be relevant to current and emerging policy priorities;
- Good Practice should bring concrete responses to problems targeted by current and emerging policy;
- Good Practice is declared 'good' on the basis of demonstrated and reliable results;
- Good Practice is assessed as 'good', if potential users judge that they could take it up so there is an assessment of the transfer potential by those who want to adopt it.

In its 2002 paper for an EQUAL conference in Barcelona on Networking for Inclusion, the European Commission suggests that the following requirements, ideally, should be met to qualify as good Practice:

- **Innovative** – it provides new, creative solutions to common problems of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality in the labour market;
- **Effective** – it makes a difference, and has a positive, tangible impact on the life of socially disadvantaged individuals, groups or communities;
- **Efficient** – it delivers value for money;
- **Sustainable** – it produces lasting benefits for participants and the community at large;
- **Reproduced** – it has the potential to be reproduced in similar contexts, serving as a model for generating initiatives and policies elsewhere;
- **Transferable** – it has the potential for transfer in different contexts and/or for different problems;
- **Policy relevant** – it addresses real issues and responds to the needs of policy-makers.

In the next section the main focus is to describe related criteria and structures previously elaborated in social policy contexts and hence to examine useful ways in which one might identify and analyse the good practice in the social economy field.

---

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, (2005), Employment and social affairs, EQUAL, Making Change Possible: A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide_en.pdf).

For achieving this aim a number of relative socio-economic networks initiatives and organisations are being examined. Therefore there were selected and described the most applicable cases to the field under consideration.

## *2. Criteria of "Best Practices" applied by*

### *The Local Economic and Employment*

#### *Development Programme (LEED, OECD)*

A qualified source in the field is the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme<sup>1</sup> of the Organisation of Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD). LEED is a Co-operative Action Programme that, since 1982, has been dedicated to the identification, analysis and dissemination of **innovative approaches and good practices** in stimulating **local economic growth**, creating **more and better jobs**, enhancing **social inclusion**, and fostering **good governance at local level**. It is one of few OECD bodies that are open to both Member and Non-Member economies as well as international organisations. To increase collaboration with initiatives locally, the LEED Programme established a Partners Network in 1990. It's LEED's worldwide network of regional and local governments, development agencies, business and non-profit organisations, private sector and foundations that work towards achieving sustainable economic and employment development. In this context, LEED runs an intensive capacity development programme at its Trento Centre in Italy, including specialised seminars, workshops and "active" policy reviews.

The OECD LEED Trento Centre for Local Development<sup>2</sup> was established by the OECD, the Italian Government and the Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy) in 2003. The Centre is an integral part of the OECD LEED Programme. The mission of the Trento Centre is to build capacities for local development in OECD Member and Non-Member countries.

Among other objectives Trento Centre for Local Development aims to strengthen the relationship between policy makers, local development practitioners and the scientific community and to facilitate the **transfer of expertise and exchange of experience** between OECD Member and Non-Member economies. In this regard the Trento Centre focuses on the area of **social innovation, social inclusion, and social economy** and aims to contribute to improving social cohesion through the identification and dissemination of local innovations; it identifies and analyses the role of the social economy in giving rise to new economic activity and creating new mechanisms of social inclusion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme: [www.oecd.org/cfe/leed](http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed)

<sup>2</sup> OECD LEED Trento Centre for Local Development: [www.trento.oecd.org](http://www.trento.oecd.org)

An extensive desk research throughout the LEED program studies, reports and other working papers shows that OECD has created a typology for identifying what is a Best Practice in each particular subject. That means that in respect to each specific area of study a series of criteria and principles have been formulated and the Best Practices were being ranked accordingly. Note should be made of the fact that the most OECD working papers examined concerned mostly business and employment development vis-à-vis a particular group of population (youth, women etc). In view of that and in accordance with the project objectives the following cases are pulled out and described:

#### **A. Criteria Of Good Practice In University Entrepreneurship Support**

This report<sup>1</sup> presents the results of a 2008-2009 collaboration with the Federal German Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs on university entrepreneurship support in the Eastern German Länder. It includes a list of criteria of good practice directed at those who are designing strategies and infrastructure for academic entrepreneurship support. The criteria list of good practice was an attempt to define what constitutes good practice in university entrepreneurship support. The analysis indicated that "The criteria list can be read as a 'tool'", which allows universities to self-assess and re-orient (i) their strategy in supporting entrepreneurship, (ii) their pool of financial and human resources, (iii) the support structures they have established, (iv) their current approaches in entrepreneurship education and start-up support, and (v) their evaluation practices. It will also advise those involved in the design of public policy interventions.

Accordingly the list of criteria and principles are the following:

##### **Criterion 1: Strategy**

*Principles:*

1. A broad understanding of entrepreneurship is a strategic objective of the university, and there is top-down support for it.
2. Objectives of entrepreneurship education and start-up support include generating entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviour and skills, as well as enhancing growth entrepreneurship (both high-tech and low-tech).
3. There are clear incentives and rewards for entrepreneurship educators, professors and researchers, who actively support graduate entrepreneurship (mentoring, sharing of research results, etc.).

---

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2009), Universities, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Criteria and Examples of Good Practice, [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/8/43201452.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/8/43201452.pdf).

4. Recruitment and career development of academic staff take into account entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviour and experience as well as entrepreneurship support activities.

### **Criterion 2: Resources**

#### *Principles:*

1. A minimum long-term financing of staff costs and overheads for graduate entrepreneurship is agreed as part of the university's budget.
2. Self-sufficiency of university internal entrepreneurship support is a goal.
3. Human resource development for entrepreneurship educators and staff involved in entrepreneurship start-up support is in place.

### **Criterion 3: Support Infrastructure**

#### *Principles:*

1. An entrepreneurship dedicated structure within the university (chair, department, support centre) is in place, which closely collaborates, co-ordinates and integrates faculty-internal entrepreneurship support and ensures viable cross-faculty collaboration.
2. Facilities for business incubation either exist on the campus or assistance is offered to gain access to external facilities.
3. There is close co-operation and referral between university-internal and external business start-up and entrepreneurship support organisations; roles are clearly defined.

### **Criterion 4: Entrepreneurship education**

#### *Principles:*

1. Entrepreneurship education is progressively integrated into curricula and the use of entrepreneurial pedagogies is advocated across faculties.
2. The entrepreneurship education offer is widely communicated, and measures are undertaken to increase the rate and capacity of take-up.
3. A suite of courses exists, which uses creative teaching methods and is tailored to the needs of undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate students.

4. The suite of courses has a differentiated offer that covers the pre-start-up phase, the start-up phase and the growth phase. For certain courses active recruitment is practiced.
5. Out-reach to Alumni, business support organisations and firms are a key component of entrepreneurship education.
6. Results of entrepreneurship research are integrated into entrepreneurship education messages.

#### **Criterion 5: Start-up support**

##### *Principles:*

1. Entrepreneurship education activities and start-up support are closely integrated.
2. Team building is actively facilitated by university staff.
3. Access to private financing is facilitated through networking and dedicated events.
4. Mentoring by professors and entrepreneurs is offered.
5. Entrepreneurship support in universities is closely integrated into external business support partnerships and networks, and maintains close relationships with firms and Alumni.

#### **Criterion 6: Evaluation**

##### *Principles:*

1. Regular stock-taking and performance checking of entrepreneurship activities is undertaken.
2. Evaluation of entrepreneurship activities is formalised and includes immediate (post-course), mid-term (graduation), and long-term (Alumni and post-start-up) monitoring of the impact.

#### **B. Shooting for the Moon: Good Practices in Local Youth Entrepreneurship Support**

This handbook<sup>1</sup> takes the discussion of what constitutes successful local entrepreneurship support frameworks further and seeks to provide a gateway for

---

<sup>1</sup> OECD LEED Trento Centre, Italy, (2010), Shooting for the Moon: Good Practices in Local Youth Entrepreneurship Support, [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/shooting-for-the-moon-good-practices-in-local-youth-entrepreneurship-support\\_5km7rq0k8h9q-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/shooting-for-the-moon-good-practices-in-local-youth-entrepreneurship-support_5km7rq0k8h9q-en)

further exchange of good practices on this topic. It presents a criteria list that has emerged from LEED work on youth entrepreneurship, the academic debate and the work of practitioners. Its three dimensions are: opportunity creation, entrepreneurship education and start-up support. The criteria list can be read as a 'tool' to self-assess and re-orient current strategies, structures and practices in youth entrepreneurship support. The selected good practice initiatives – ranging from Oresund Entrepreneurship and its extensive use of Facebook for student recruitment, to Finnish business succession courses that involve young entrepreneurs in 'real-life' incubation – offer inspiration, but also pressure, to adapt and go beyond the prevailing paradigms that some policy makers and practitioners may have with regard to youth entrepreneurship.

The criteria list can be read as a tool to self-assess and re-orient strategies, structures and practices in youth entrepreneurship support and they are grouped into the following three dimensions:

*Dimension 1: Opportunity creation*

Making places conducive to youth entrepreneurship. The higher the recognition and appreciation for entrepreneurship in a place is and the deeper entrepreneurial behaviour is embedded in society, the greater the public support for creating the necessary framework conditions, such as availability of financial, human and physical resources and information, the 'easier' it is to recognise opportunities and to turn them into business ventures.

*Dimension 2: Entrepreneurship education*

It aims at generating motivation, attitudes and competencies for entrepreneurship. Assisting the establishment of new firms is a key objective for entrepreneurship education, but not its only one. Creating entrepreneurial mindsets that drive innovation in existing firms is of equal importance, yet success is much more difficult to measure.

*Dimension 3: Start-up support*

Providing a helping hand in business start-up without taking away the 'do it on your own'. It is all about making entrepreneurship support systems accessible and attractive for young future entrepreneurs, and about rectifying market and system failures in financing and premises.

To conclude, it is also noteworthy to mention that all OECD-LEED studies have exactly the same structure and they demonstrated and analysed the selected Best Practices by using the following ten common features, independently of the subject: Rationale and general information (of the organization, program, practice or activity); Timeframe; Budget and financing sources; Human resources; Activities; Partners; Success factors; Achievements; Website; Contact.

### 3. Criteria of “Best Practices” applied by *UN-Habitat: The Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme (BLP)*

The Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme<sup>1</sup> (BLP) is a global network of institutions dedicated to **the identification and exchange of successful solutions** for sustainable development.

The BLP partners' network identifies initiatives in such areas as housing, urban development and governance, the environment, economic development, **social inclusion**, crime prevention, **poverty reduction, women**, youth, infrastructure and **social services**.

Best Practices are outstanding contributions to improving the living environment. They are defined by the United Nations and the international community at large as successful initiatives which:

- Have a demonstrable and tangible impact on improving people's quality of life;
- Are the result of effective partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors of society;
- Are socially, culturally, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Best Practices are promoted and used by the United Nations and the international community as a means of:

- Improving public policy based on what works;
- Raising awareness in decision-makers at all levels and in the public of potential solutions to common social, economic and environmental problems;
- Sharing and transferring knowledge, expertise and experience through networking and peer-to-peer learning.

The original call for Best Practices was launched in 1996 during preparations for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) as a means of identifying what works in improving living conditions on a sustainable basis.

An International Conference on Best Practices was held in Dubai in November 1995. The Conference adopted the Dubai Declaration and established the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment in 1995.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme (BLP): <http://www.bestpractices.org/blpnet/BLP/index.html>, <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=1>



As a result of six successive Award cycles in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006 there are currently over 2,700 Good and Best Practices from 140 countries featured on the Best Practices database. At each cycle, an independent committee of technical experts (Technical Advisory Committee) identifies Good and Best Practices and prepares a shortlist. An International Jury selects the award winners from the shortlist.

Starting in 2006, the Dubai International Award consists of 12 Awards, the traditional 10 for Best Practices and 2 for Best Practices Transfers.

Every two years, up to 10 outstanding initiatives receive the “Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment”. Those initiatives meeting the criteria for a Best Practice are included in the **Best Practices database**. The lessons learned from selected Best Practices are analysed in case studies and guides and transferred to other countries, cities or communities.

The searchable database contains over 3,800 proven solutions from more than 140 countries to the common social, economic and environmental problems of an urbanizing world. It demonstrates the practical ways in which public, private and civil society sectors are working together to improve governance, eradicate poverty, provide access to shelter, land and basic services, protect the environment and support economic development.

The Best Practices database is a joint product of UN-HABITAT, and the Best Practices Partners. The Best Practices included in the database have made outstanding contributions to improving the quality of life in cities and communities.

They applied seven broad and inter-linked criteria, namely:

### **Criteria and Considerations for a Best Practice**

The major criteria for a Best Practice to be considered a candidate for the Award include<sup>1</sup>:

**1.1 Impact:** A Best Practice should demonstrate a positive and tangible impact on improving the living environment of people particularly the poor and disadvantaged.

*a. Sustainable Shelter and Community Development:*

- i. Extension of safe water supply and sanitation;
- ii. Affordable housing, services and community facilities;
- iii. Access to land, secure tenure and finance;

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Dubai International Award <http://www.dubaiaward.ae/>

- iv. Community-based planning and participation in decision making and resource allocation;
  - v. Inner-city core, neighbourhood and settlement revival and rehabilitation;
  - vi. Safe and healthy building materials and technologies.
- b. Sustainable Urban and Regional Development:*
- i. Job creation and eradication of poverty;
  - ii. Reduction of pollution and improvement of environmental health;
  - iii. Improved access to public transport and communication;
  - iv. Improved waste collection, recycling and reuse;
  - v. Greening of the city and effective use of public space;
  - vi. Improved production and consumption cycles, including replacement/reduction of non-renewable resources.
  - vii. Protection and conservation of natural resources and of the environment;
  - viii. More efficient energy use and production;
  - ix. Preservation of historically/culturally important sites;
  - x. Formulation and implementation of integrated and comprehensive urban development strategies.
- c. Sustainable, Efficient, Accountable and Transparent Settlements Management:*
- i. More effective and efficient administrative, management and information systems;
  - ii. Gender equality and equity in decision-making, resource-allocation and programme design and implementation;
  - iii. Crime reduction and prevention;
  - iv. Improved disaster preparedness, mitigation and reconstruction;
  - v. Social integration and reduction of exclusion;
  - vi. Leadership in inspiring action and change, including change in public policy;
  - vii. Promotion of accountability and transparency;
  - viii. Promotion of social equality and equity;
  - ix. Improvement of inter-agency co-ordination.

**1.2 Partnership:** Best Practices should be based on a partnership between at least two of the actors mentioned in item 4.

**1.3 Sustainability:** Best Practices should result in lasting changes in at least one of the areas listed below:

- (i) Legislation, regulatory frameworks, by-laws or standards formally recognising the issues and problems that have been addressed;
- (ii) Social policies and/or sectoral strategies at the (sub) national level that have a potential for replication elsewhere;
- (iii) Institutional frameworks and decision-making processes that assign clear roles and responsibilities to various levels and groups of actors, such as central and local governmental organisations and community-based organisations;
- (iv) Efficient, transparent and accountable management systems that make more effective use of human, technical, financial and natural resources.

Additional Criteria and Considerations:

The following criteria will be used by the Technical Advisory Committee and Jury for differentiating between good, best and award winning practices.

**1.4 Leadership & Community Empowerment:**

- (i) Leadership in inspiring action and change, including change in public policy;
- (ii) Empowerment of people, neighbourhoods and communities and incorporation of their contributions;
- (iii) Acceptance of and responsiveness to social and cultural diversity;
- (iv) Potential for transferability, adaptability and replicability;
- (v) Appropriateness to local conditions and levels of developments.

**1.5 Gender Equality and social inclusion:**

Initiatives which: accept and respond to social and cultural diversity; promote social equality and equity, for example on the basis of income, gender, age and physical/mental condition; and recognise and value different abilities.

**1.6 Innovation within local context and transferability:**

- (i) How others have learnt or benefited from the initiative.
- (ii) Means used for sharing or transferring knowledge, expertise and lessons learnt.

**1.7 Transfers:**

- (i) Tangible impact resulting from the transfer of one or more of the following: ideas, skills, processes, knowledge or expertise, and technology;

- (ii) Changes in policies or practices.
- (iii) Sustainability of the transfer as part of a continuous process of learning and change.

**Best Practices Partner Network:** The Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme works with a decentralized network of organisations committed to the identification, analysis and dissemination of lessons learned from Best Practices. Each partner brings its own expertise and geographic coverage to the programme, creating a world-wide network of organisations. Partners incorporate Best Practices into their ongoing activities such as education, research, training, capacity-building and advocacy.

**Best Practices Steering Committee (BPSC):** The BLP is governed by and reports to a Steering Committee comprised of its partners. The Steering Committee establishes the policies and procedures which guide the substantive work and activities of the BLP and its partners. The regulations and procedures governing the Steering Committee are elaborated in its Terms of Reference.

#### *4. Criteria of “Best Practices” applied by EQUAL Community Initiative - Sharing Good Practice*

EQUAL<sup>1</sup> was the Community Initiative under the ESF. It was implemented by all Member States, following common guidelines established by the Commission. EQUAL had been the largest programme to support social innovation in the fields of social inclusion and employment ever. It allowed accumulating and sharing good practice throughout its six years of its operation, starting in 2002.

EQUAL has provided evidence for innovative and adaptable policy strategies and delivery mechanisms that bring greater inclusiveness to Europe’s diverse labour markets, based on the efforts and achievements of 3,480 development partnerships with more than 20,000 partners, reaching over 200,000 persons in Europe<sup>2</sup>. The learning experience under EQUAL focused on investigating and testing more effective ways of overcoming social exclusion and tackling discrimination in

---

<sup>1</sup> The EQUAL programme was not continued in the form of a separate Community action after 2006, but mainstreamed into all ESF Operational Programmes, by capitalising on and integrating the principles that contributed to its success: partnership approach; privileged support for innovation; priority given to equal opportunities and to non-discrimination as well as the emphasis placed on transnational co-operation.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, (2009), EQUAL opportunities for all Delivering the Lisbon Strategy through social innovation and transnational cooperation <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=141&type=2&furtherPubs=no>

employment and the job market, and **on sharing examples of the resulting good practice across borders**, with the intention of influencing policy and general practice.

EQUAL gave ample space to experimentation, which has been understood as an opportunity for organisational learning, based on experience and testing, under real conditions, of what works and what does not. This was brought about through systematic evaluation and using sound evidence for assessing and implementing policy and practice alternatives whilst also learning from peers and taking full account of national and European experience.

**Successful experimentation** under EQUAL, for a broad range of employment and social inclusion issues, has generated:

- Insight into, and knowledge of, the nature and forms of discrimination, inequality, and labour market exclusion shared by strategic stakeholders (What are the key problems to address?);
- Confidence in the advantages of innovative solutions in terms of cost-effectiveness, quality or additional features (Why is their transfer and incorporation into regular practice suitable and feasible?);
- Understanding the conditions for, and advantages of, improved strategies and actions, also in the light of experience in other Member States (How to tackle the key problems?);
- Acceptance, mobilisation and commitment of key stakeholders for implementing the innovative solution, based on the credibility of the partnerships (Who will use the innovations?).

### **Organised Transfer and Mainstreaming**

As mentioned in the report “*EQUAL opportunities for all: Delivering the Lisbon Strategy through social innovation and transnational cooperation*”<sup>1</sup> the innovative solutions are not implemented automatically, and the innovators need to be nurtured and encouraged throughout the innovation process. A key milestone in the innovation process is the validation of results meaning that these have to provide evidence and are able to demonstrate that they are:

- **suitable**; i.e. show advantages over current practice and other innovative options, generate additional value and are relevant.

---

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, (2008), Making Change Possible A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide_en)

- **feasible**; i.e. are realistic, can be used as models, and can be implemented elsewhere.
- **Acceptable** to the disadvantaged and excluded groups, to administrations and stakeholders.

EQUAL has proven the advantages of innovative solutions in two ways. It has produced a large body of evidence of the benefits of the thoroughly validated good practices, the most relevant of which are presented in the following sections. Moreover it has involved stakeholders in the development and validation processes and can therefore call on testimonies from opinion leaders and decision makers.

Social innovations tested and validated under EQUAL have been successfully integrated into policy and practice across a broad range of fields. These include:

- reaching out to integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market, such as migrants or people with disabilities;
- developing effective links between social inclusion and labour market actors and institutions;
- improving the quality of the work environment through more flexible working time arrangements or work organisation that benefit both employers and employees;
- supporting emerging trends and partnership models in the fields of social economy and business creation;
- creating synergies at local, regional and national level ("systems innovations") by establishing new interfaces between organisations;
- new modes of coordination and cooperation between institutions and support organisations; or
- networking and partnerships between stakeholders.

### **Validation of the policy relevance and evidence at EU level**

The overall EQUAL validation process involves two complementary feedback loops:

1. Firstly, the '**evidence of good practice loop**' where the evidence of comparative advantage of the promising good practice case is verified, by applying the following **common criteria**:

- Analysis of the evidence of the advantages of the good practice identified in tackling discrimination and inequality in the field of employment (this may involve having 'credible champions' to present the innovative solution);

- Views of stakeholders/users have been involved in the evaluation of the good practice at Member State level;
- Transparency of the results, and access to the relevant information proving the case (if the proof is difficult to find, the logic of the concept may be sufficient to be persuasive);
- Potential to be transferred to, and applied by, other actors, in other regions, in other contexts, and that it can be applied on a larger scale;
- Demonstration of how the innovation can be embedded into the mainstream policy delivery systems in a sustainable way.

2. Secondly, the **'policy relevance loop'** where the relevance of the underlying issue, the proposed solution and the policy arguments presented are checked with policy-makers and key stakeholders, by applying the **following common criteria:**

- Link to the policy agenda at EU level or in a larger number of Member States, to be assessed against the political agenda of EU policy-makers and key stakeholders at European level, and emerging policy opportunities;
- Specific relevance of the good practice to the thematic focus, or to the policy argument it has to support;
- Adding value to the policy debate, notably by providing convincing evidence for policy arguments, quantified where possible;
- Addressing policy gaps, new policy objectives, or issues cutting across established responsibilities and policy domains.

#### **The "Validation double loop":**

##### ***Policy Relevance ↔ Evidence of good practice.***

EQUAL has produced many successful paradigms regarding the social inclusion of women and Roma.

For more information and EQUAL examples please visit the library of Communication & Information Resource Centre Administrator (CIRCA): [http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/empl/equal\\_etg/library?l=etg1/04\\_examples/practice\\_communities&vm=detailed&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/empl/equal_etg/library?l=etg1/04_examples/practice_communities&vm=detailed&sb=Title)

## 5. Criteria of “Best Practices” applied by Leader+ - An [REDACTED] European Community Initiative

Another source we can draw lessons for designing a typology of Best Practice is the European Structural fund “LEADER+”<sup>1</sup>. “Leader+” is a European Community initiative for assisting rural communities in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity of their local area, and is co-financed by the Guidance Section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF).

Leader+ was designed around four predominant themes:

1. Making the **best use** of natural and cultural resources, including enhancing the value of Natura 2000 sites.
2. Improving **the quality of life** in rural areas.
3. **Adding value to local products**, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions.
4. The use of **new know-how and new technologies** to make products and services in rural areas more competitive.

A Leader+ publication called “LEADER+ Best Practices” identified seven criteria make up the Leader approach as follows:

### ***Area-based approach***

This entails defining a development policy on the basis of an area’s own particular situation, strengths and weaknesses. In Leader, this area is a fairly homogeneous local rural unit, characterised by internal social cohesion, shared history and traditions, a sense of common identity, etc. Awareness of the area-based approach has been growing, with ‘prime movers’ in the local area recognising the important role of endogenous resources in achieving sustainable development. At LAG level, the area-based approach has contributed to a better identification of rural actors within the territory.

### ***Bottom-up approach***

This aims to encourage participatory decision-making at local level for all development policy aspects. Its objective is the involvement of local players, including the community as a whole, economic and social interest groups, and representatives of public and private institutions. The bottom-up approach relies on

---

<sup>1</sup> “Leader+” (‘Links between actions for the development of the rural economy’) is a Community initiative launched by the European Commission and coordinated by its Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.



two major activities — ‘animation’ (facilitation of activities) and training of local communities — and comes into play at different stages of the program. It is important that the project is initiated by local actors and that the public concerned with the action has previously been consulted.

#### ***Partnership approach and the ‘local action group’ (LAG)***

The LAG is a body of public and private actors, united in a partnership that identifies a joint strategy and a local action plan for developing a Leader+ area. The LAG is one of the most original and strategic features of the Leader approach. Endowed with a team of practitioners, decisionmaking powers and a fairly large budget, the LAG represents a new model of organisation that can considerably influence the institutional and political balance of the area concerned. The LAGs have provided appropriate mechanisms for participation, awareness raising and organisation of local actors in favour of rural development. The allocation of tasks and responsibilities between the partners (programme authorities, LAGs, members of the LAGs) should be clear and transparent.

#### ***Innovation***

In addition to the Leader concept and its implementation in the field which in itself is innovative, the initiative also demands that the actions are innovative. They may be: actions

to promote local resources in new ways; actions that are of interest to local development but not covered by other development policies; actions providing new answers to the weaknesses and problems of rural areas; or which create a new product, new process, new forms of organisation, or a new market.

Innovation is also embodied in the programme’s pedagogical and networking components: disseminating information to other groups of players wishing to gain inspiration from achievements elsewhere or to carry out joint projects.

#### ***Integrated approach***

The actions and projects contained in the local action plan are linked and coordinated as a coherent whole. Integration may concern actions conducted within a single sector, all programme actions or specific groups of actions, or, most importantly, links between the different economic, social, cultural, environmental actors and sectors involved in the area.

#### ***Networking and cooperation between areas***

By facilitating the exchange and circulation of information on rural development policies and the dissemination and transfer of good practice and innovative strategies and actions, the Leader network aims to limit the isolation of LAGs and to create a

source of information and analysis of the actions. To complement existing European and national networking, some LAGs have spontaneously organised themselves into informal networks. Another core part of Leader is the cooperation between rural areas. Cooperation between areas can be transnational but may equally take place between areas within the same Member State (interterritorial). In Leader+ a specific budget is allocated for cooperation projects.

### ***Local financing and management***

Delegating a large proportion of the decision-making responsibilities for funding and management to the LAG is another key element of the Leader approach. However, the LAG's degree of autonomy varies considerably depending on the Member State's specific mode of organisation and institutional context.

Consequently this criterion is to be considered on a case-by-case basis, in the various administrative contexts.

The demonstration of the Best Practices follows the below structure:

- Brief history of the project
- Main activities
- Concrete outputs and results
- Problems encountered/ lessons learnt
- The 'Leader+ added value' of the project
- Duration
- Budget
- Leader+ Best Practices
- Contact details

### *Methodology of collection and selection of good and best practices*

In an annual exercise, and with the help of the national network units, the Leader+ Contact Point, assisted by experts, collects good practices among the Leader projects in the EU, and selects some of them to be included in the good practices' database on the Leader+ website: <http://ec.europa.eu/leaderplus> .

The method used was the following: firstly, the Contact Point carried out a SWOT analysis (strengths/weaknesses/ obstacles/threats) in the Member States on the state of good practice. The main partners in the Member States for this exercise were the national network units (NNUs). The result of the respective analysis was that the criteria for finding good practices were everywhere closely linked to the seven Leader+

elements. The Leader+ Observatory added two further European criteria which underline the European aspect of Leader+: transferability and sustainability.

## **6. Conclusion remarks**

To conclude all the organizations and initiatives described in this article are sharing one common view: they identify a list of criteria followed by some selected criteria and then they demonstrate the Best Practices under an almost equivalent formation.

Having concluded an extensive desk research at the ways through which a Best Practice could be identified in similar socio-economic themes, it is more easier to proceed to design the methodology regarding the identification of good practice for the improvement of social inclusion through economy activities.

## **Bibliography**

- \*\*\*Dubai International Award <http://www.dubaiaward.ae/>
- \*\*\*Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme: [www.oecd.org/cfe/leed](http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed)
- \*\*\*OECD LEED Trento Centre for Local Development: [www.trento.oecd.org](http://www.trento.oecd.org)
- \*\*\*The Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme (BLP):<http://www.bestpractices.org/blpnet/BLP/index.html>
- European Commission (2008), Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Making Change Possible A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide_en)
- European Commission, (2005), Employment and social affairs, EQUAL, Making Change Possible: A Practical Guide to Mainstreaming, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/mainstreamguide_en.pdf)
- European Commission, (2009), EQUAL opportunities for all Delivering the Lisbon Strategy through social innovation and transnational cooperation <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=141&type=2&furtherPublications=no>, <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=1>
- OECD (2009), Universities, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Criteria and Examples of Good Practice, [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/8/43201452.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/8/43201452.pdf).
- OECD LEED Trento Centre, Italy, (2010), Shooting for the Moon: Good Practices in Local Youth Entrepreneurship Support, [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/shooting-for-the-moon-good-practices-in-local-youth-entrepreneurship-support\\_5km7rq0k8h9q-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/shooting-for-the-moon-good-practices-in-local-youth-entrepreneurship-support_5km7rq0k8h9q-en)