



# EU Social Platforms

A review on an experiment  
in collaborative research  
design



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Research & Innovation  
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# EU Social Platforms

A review on an experiment in collaborative research design

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2013

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation  
Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities

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# Introduction: Objectives, methodology and assessment criteria

The goal of the present review of four Social Platforms financed by the European Union's research budget (between 2007 and 2013) is to facilitate decision making on the future use of such platforms in new multi-annual research framework programmes of the European Union (Horizon 2020).<sup>1</sup> The platforms are a new way of bringing together researchers and stakeholders from civil society to work on urgent and complex socio-economic (policy) issues in a participatory manner.

The four distinct topics dealt with by the social platforms were:

- 1- Cities and Social Cohesion (SOCIALPOLIS)<sup>1</sup>
- 2- Families and Family Policies (FAMILYPLATFORM)<sup>2</sup>
- 3- Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 (SPREAD)<sup>3</sup>
- 4- Innovative social services (INNOSEV)<sup>4</sup>

Each platform was asked to draft a research agenda with new and relevant topics for inclusion in subsequent calls for European funded research. They were to do this by bringing academics and stakeholders together to address a broad range of societal views and policy needs and by producing a thorough and critical 'state of the art' report on current knowledge and expertise on which the agenda would be based.

What can be learnt from this experiment? And which assessment criteria are used in this review?

In terms of effectiveness, the evaluation questions used in this review were:

- did the platforms produce research topics for future European research agendas?
- did they produce other required deliverables?
- did they include, involve and listen to stakeholders from civil society and policy makers?
- did the platforms take into account key policy issues?
- did the platforms impact on policy making? (This was not an explicit goal of the platforms)

In terms of efficiency, the evaluation questions used in this report were:

- did the platform use available time efficiently?
- did the platform solve problems?
- can we say something about the quality of the consortium?
- can we say anything about how innovative the projects were? (This was not an explicit goal of the platforms).

The four platforms are so different that each one is described and analysed separately in Chapter 2, applying the questions above. The conclusions and recommendations are given in Chapter 3.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2.1. and <http://www.socialpolis.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2.2. and <https://eldorado.tu-dortmund.de/handle/2003/27684>

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2.3. and <http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2.4 and <http://inno-serv.eu>

Inputs used for this assessment: project documents and related literature, one-to-one interviews, attendance of project meetings and conferences and the results of an online questionnaire that was specially set up for this review.

We would like to thank all those who took time for interviews and for responding to the online questionnaire, in particular Marc Goffart, scientific officer at the European Commission, who facilitated and encouraged this review.

*1- The start of the  
social platforms*



# 1- The start of the social platforms

The idea and concept of Social Platforms as a way of doing research and identifying new/urgent/policy relevant research topics came from Member States (in particular Sweden)<sup>ii</sup> during the preparation of the 7<sup>th</sup> European research framework programme for 2007-2013. These Platforms were included in Research Theme 8: Socio-economic sciences and the humanities (SSH).

The Social Platforms were also inspired by the existing Technology Platforms that suggest new research topics for financing from the EU research budget. But the Social Platforms are more societal & policy oriented. They offer a means for civil society to influence and shape the European research agenda in certain areas, to tackle complex social problems and to include different perspectives of stakeholders (policy makers, civil society, researchers).

*2- Description and  
assessment of the  
four Social  
Platforms*



# 2- Description and assessment of the four Social Platforms

In this chapter, each platform is described and assessed as follows:

- 1- The subject, partners and identified 'special needs'
- 2- Timeline
- 3- Outputs
- 4- Assessment

## 2.1. 'SocialPolis' on Cities and Social Cohesion

All outputs of this platform can be found at: <http://www.socialpolis.eu/>

### 2.1.1. Subject, partners and first adaptations

The choice of topic for the first social platform was influenced by the violent and unexpected civil unrest and riots in Paris in 2005. The call for this first platform was published in December 2006.<sup>iii</sup>

The consortium that led this project was composed of Prof. Frank Moulaert (Belgium)<sup>iv</sup>, Prof. Jean Hillier (UK)<sup>v</sup> and Prof. Sako Musterd (the Netherlands)<sup>vi</sup>. The other consortium partners were from Italy, Austria, Portugal, Spain, France, United Kingdom and Canada<sup>5</sup>.

The project description mentions a number of non-academic stakeholders (civil society organisations, policy makers, private sector) to be consulted and involved in the work, but these were not included in the consortium from the start.

The later involvement of stakeholders led to some adaptations in the project's ways of working to ensure that stakeholders were really involved and received specific roles in the project. In terms of efficiency, this took more time than in classical or traditional research projects. An extension of the time frame was necessary, from 18 to 24 months, which later became the standard. A small grants scheme was also created to involve more local stakeholders. In the end, these adaptations led to the inclusion of 250 stakeholders.<sup>vii</sup>

### 2.1.2. Timeline

Each of the 11 academic partners of the project had its own research subject (or 'existential fields').<sup>viii</sup> Later on in the project a more transversal approach was adopted to make sure that 'social cohesion' would be addressed as a whole and not as a fragmented view of 11 different aspects.

The first coordinating meetings in Lisbon and Leuven (December 2007) worked on broadening and including new partners. Ten stakeholders were invited, including Eurocities and the European Commission. Linking these 'partners' to the research team and planning took possibly more time and effort than in traditional (academics only) research projects.

The first large scale meeting took place in May 2008 (Brussels) with 100 participants and the Network 1 of Stakeholders became operational. Presentations from the consortium coordinators and selected policy

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<sup>5</sup> Respectively: ITER s.r.l., Centro Ricerche e Servizi, Bologna and Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, Università degli studi di Milano Bicocca; Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Institute for Environmental and Regional Development; Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa; Universitat Barcelona – Departament de Teoria Sociològica; Centre de recherche et d'information sur la démocratie et l'autonomie (CRIDA); University of Manchester – School of Environment and Development; Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales, University of Québec.

makers (including Eurocities, a Swedish mayor, European Commission, European Parliament and Council of Europe) took place on the first day. The second day was more participatory and academics, public and civil society sectors worked in smaller parallel groups on specific themes.



The opening up of the platform with more stakeholders led to a more transversal way of dealing with the subject of cohesion, rather than according to predetermined 11 Existential Fields.<sup>x</sup> An Inner circle of stakeholders, whom the partners knew from previous research projects, became operational in September 2008 and helped propose future research topics. This inner circle of stakeholders was also asked to select candidates for a small grants scheme, set up to stimulate local workshops to find out more about 'real life' issues.<sup>x</sup>

An extension of the project's duration was then requested as the involvement of stakeholders took more time than expected.

The next step in the SocialPolis project was a large conference in Vienna (May 2009) with 200 participants. The enlarged Network 2 of Stakeholders was created. This conference was much more participatory than the first one in 2008. New methods were used such as the 'World Café' where over 300 participants could choose one of 20 tables where a discussion was facilitated which focused on stakeholders' expectations and contributions to the future of the SocialPlatform. The ideas expressed were then brought into plenary discussions and included in conference documentation.



In November 2010 a (final) learning event was organised in Brussels.

### 2.1.3. Outputs

All outputs can be found on the platform's site: <http://www.socialpolis.eu/>

**The deliverables were:**

- \* Creation of a network on social cohesion in cities by means of many meetings and workshops<sup>6</sup>
- \* An interactive website and a newsletter.
- \* About 60 documents:
  - \* A 'state of the art' review of current research on cities and social cohesion with 11 survey papers for each of the 'Existential Fields', one paper on 'The Concept of Cohesion' and one on 'Cities and Social Cohesion as a Whole'.
  - \* A report on transdisciplinary research in SocialPolis.
  - \* A less academic version, popularizing the results of Social Polis.
  - \* A proposal for a European agenda on 'Research on Cities and Social Cohesion' containing 2 Challenges, 5 Topics and 12 existential fields.
  - \* Final report (November 2010)
  - \* An academic publication came out two years later in a special issue of Urban Studies, a scientific research journal (July 2012).

### 2.1.4. Assessment

As said earlier, the goal of the platform was to prepare new topics for a European research agenda on Social Cohesion and Cities, based on a critical review of existing research and after consultation with stakeholders and taking account of key policy questions.

**Evaluating the effectiveness of the platform:**

- Did the platform produce a critical review of the state of the art? YES and also a more broadly accessible version of the results.
- Did it produce a research agenda? YES, and it was used by the EU in subsequent calls.
- Did it involve and consult with stakeholders? YES, even though this took time and learning. As the project progressed in time, consultation intensified and the number of participating stakeholders increased. From interviews and the answers to the online questionnaire that was set-up for this review, we note that the academic participants very much appreciated communicating with each other and with a broad range of people and sectors from civil society. The platform was seen as 'a good opportunity to cross boundaries between policy, practice and research'. Some participants from civil society noted that in meetings there were many more academics than non-academics, but it must be said that many stakeholders have links to the academic world (part-time teaching, research).
- Did the platform take into account key policy issues? Yes and no. Some said that the participation of policy makers from different policy areas was poor and therefore the project was not able to incorporate key European policy concerns. Participating EU civil servants and policy makers remarked that one cannot build a policy relevant platform in 24 months.
- Did the platform's existence and work influence policy making? Even though this was not an explicit goal, and probably unfeasible to assess in the short term, two types of remarks were made in interviews. One was that the EU did not take the results of the project into consideration in important publications

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.socialpolis.eu/fields-themes/welfare-and-social-services/>

on social cohesion and cities<sup>7</sup>, the other expressed the frustration of practitioners and stakeholders at a local level that the project only generated reports. We note, however, that the platform's results were used in the 'Better City, Better Life' publication prepared by Directorate General Research of the European Commission for the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, and that people involved in such platforms are generally focussed on concrete improvements and can easily feel frustrated at how slow European policy making moves.

### Efficiency:

- Did the platform use available time efficiently? YES and NO. The project could have saved time had it included more stakeholders in the proposal before and from the start. The themes to be tackled were set beforehand and had to be modified later on to include stakeholders concerns. However, this was the first platform and it discovered that it needed two years to complete its work which then became the norm for subsequent platforms.

- Did the platform solve problems? YES and NO. This first platform focussed on two things at the same time, clarifying what was called the 'problématique' i.e. the range of questions and challenges concerning cohesion in cities, and addressing what can or needs to be done concretely in cities facing real problems. The first was addressed with a series of articles which were prepared and published in an academic journal, while some partners wanted an easily accessible version of the results geared at finding real solutions. This dual track might be seen as a less efficient way of working. Perhaps this was inevitable in a first platform and possibly the result of a lack of experience with such a socially inclusive way of doing research. The project was also selected using 'classic' evaluation criteria such as 'scientific excellence', a necessary precondition but insufficient in itself for success in participatory platforms.

- Can we say something about the quality of the consortium? The consortium had high academic quality (articles published in an academic journal) and social engagement. An organisation such as Eurocities, which participated actively in the project, is also clearly a key and qualified player in this field.

- Can we say anything about the project's innovation? YES. Even though this was not an explicit goal of the platform, the online questionnaire that was developed and used for the review revealed a lot of positive reactions on how academics can work together in a new way with civil society representatives. Involvement of stakeholders alongside academics requires participatory and interactive methods, which were new or unknown to many academics, as was stated by the coordinator in its evaluation report (20-4-2009).



<sup>7</sup> BEPA (the Bureau of European Policy Advisers of the European Commission) does not mention the results of the SocialPolis project its 2011 publication on "Empowering people, driving change - Social Innovation in the European Union". Nor does "Cities of tomorrow- Challenges, visions, ways forward" prepared by the DG Regional Policy in 2011 mention the results of Social Polis.

### Summarising and concluding:

- The platform produced topics that were used in subsequent European calls for research which turned out to be very successful (resulting in, amongst others, multiple funded research projects on social innovation).
- Even though the project started with little participation of non academic stakeholders and policy makers, the project managed to enlarge the group involved by various means including a small grants scheme, a time extension, and more participatory and facilitative methods at meetings.
- There remained some frustration at the end amongst academics and locally active stakeholders about the project's impact on policy.

The social platform developed a specific methodology for producing socially relevant knowledge for shaping cohesive cities. The project was an innovative project dealing with transdisciplinary research while taking into account the knowledge and experience of practitioners.

## 2.2. 'FamilyPlatform' on Families and Family Policies

Documents of this social platform can be found at: <https://eldorado.tu-dortmund.de/handle/2003/27684>. The original project website ([www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu)) was discontinued after the project ended (but has been reactivated as a repository).

### 2.2.1. Subject, partners and advice

This second platform was a response to a European call for research-supporting projects FP7-SSH-2009-C. The project ran from October 1, 2009 until April 1, 2011.



As in the first social platform, the overall objective was to elaborate a focused research agenda that would address fundamental research issues and key policy questions for future research, in this case on Families and Family Policies in Europe. Again, the platform was to involve stakeholders, take into account complex and urgent policy issues and include a foresight study.

The platform was led by Prof. Uwe Uhlendorff, Dr. Marina Rupp and Matthias Euteneuer (Germany)<sup>xi</sup>. The project was made up of a consortium of 12 partners from Finland, Austria, Hungary, Portugal, Italy, Estonia, United Kingdom and Belgium.<sup>8</sup> An advisory board<sup>xii</sup> and

external experts were also identified.

Non-academic stakeholders were included and involved in the project from the start. Some 20-30 stakeholder organisations (mainly 'family organisations') had already confirmed their participation in the project proposal. This social platform brought together diverse perspectives from the scientific community, European family and children associations, policy makers and social partners.

Even though this project was well prepared, there were a few issues that needed clarification before the project could start: for instance, how would civil society organisations be integrated in the project beyond

<sup>8</sup> Respectively: Family Research Centre of the University of Jyväskylä; Austrian Institute for Family Studies at the University of Vienna; Demographic Research Institute, Budapest; Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon; Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Milan-Bicocca and Forum Delle Associazioni Familiari (FDAF); Institute of International and Social Studies at the Tallinn University; Department of Media and Communications of the London School of Economics; Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) and MMM Europe (Mouvement Mondial des Mères Europe) in Brussels.

a more traditional function of dissemination? Another idea that was brought up before the project started was to involve social partners like employers and trade unions (associations of working women in particular).

### 2.2.2. Timeline

The project was launched in October 2009. Consortium partners and advisors met three times<sup>xiii</sup> to prepare the first large meeting. This conference with all interested stakeholders was held in Lisbon (May 2010) and brought together 140 participants from different organisations and interests<sup>xiv</sup>. Results of the first phase of the project (literature review and major identified policy issues) were presented and discussed. <sup>xv</sup>There were intense discussions in 16 smaller groups on previously identified Existential Fields<sup>xvi</sup> (reviewing and discussing major trends in family life, gaps in research on the family, and challenges for policy) and in workshops on key Policy issues.<sup>xvii</sup>

Many (significant) differences in Europe concerning family life and family policies were identified and it became clear that there was a lot of research in some areas and none or very little in others. A significant result of the Critical Review Process that took place in Lisbon was to reach agreement on nine key research areas for the future research agenda.<sup>xviii</sup>



The next step was to identify societal trends<sup>xix</sup> impacting on family life as an important input for the foresight exercise and the design of future scenarios for family life in 2035. Using the Delphi method (an iterative and interactive consultation process) consortium members, advisors and stakeholders considered three questions during the foresight exercise: what challenges will families face<sup>xx</sup>, which drivers<sup>xxi</sup> will have a major impact on family life in the future and how do these interact.

The third step was to agree on which scenarios<sup>xxii</sup> could be defined. The preparation of the future research agenda went on in smaller meetings<sup>xxiii</sup> and culminated in a second and last large meeting in Brussels that same year (4-5 November 2010).

This meeting was attended by 112 participants, a wide range of stakeholder representatives, including the members of the consortium and the advisory board. A first outline of the proposed research agenda was presented and for the sake of coherence, short presentations were also given on earlier findings: a 'state of the art', a critical review and results of the foresight approach.

At the end of the project, 14 thematic areas were discussed in a systematic manner and narrowed down for the Research Agenda to 6 areas.<sup>xxiv</sup> After the last Brussels meeting, a few smaller meetings took place to finalise the work.<sup>xxv</sup>

### 2.2.3. Outputs

All outputs are presented at: <https://eldorado.tu-dortmund.de/handle/2003/27684>

The project produced:

- 'State of the Art' reports for all the 'existential fields'.
- A research agenda (also in a popularised version of results).
- A book on the wellbeing of families in the future (Challenges for Research and Policies) in May 2011. The book presented shortened and edited versions of all of the key Family

Platform reports: major trends found in research and policy, a critical review of research and policy, facets and preconditions of wellbeing of families and future scenarios, the research agenda.

- A second volume showed Spotlights of contemporary family life.
- Documentation of the results of the future scenarios dealing with different types of family with visual material.<sup>xxvi</sup>



#### 2.2.4. Assessment

The goal of the platform was to prepare new topics for a research agenda on families and family policies in Europe, based on a critical review of existing research and after consultation with stakeholders and taking account of key policy questions.

##### Evaluating the effectiveness of the platform:

- Did the platform produce a critical review of the current knowledge in its own area? YES and also a less academic, popularised version of the results. Participants who were interviewed for this review said they use this database regularly in their current work. A few participants noted however that French language literature had not been taken into account sufficiently.
- Did it produce a research agenda? YES, and it was used by the EU in subsequent calls for research projects. Moreover, the coordinator continues to liaise between the follow-up project and the FamilyPlatform's research and stakeholder community.
- Did it involve and consult with stakeholders? YES. The participants who replied to the online questionnaire that was used for this review were very positive about the mix of academics and stakeholders working together in this project. The best features of the project were described as 'the willingness of all participants to work towards a bigger goal' and 'talking and listening to different

stakeholders in small focus groups, with different perspectives, ideological and political positions and countries'. A few participants noted that there might have been more psychologists and economists involved, not only sociologists.

- Did it take into account key policy issues? YES. By working with a broad range of stakeholders, policy making and influencing organisations, some said they were proud of being able to 'construct a broad and detailed picture of the issues in question' in a participatory manner.

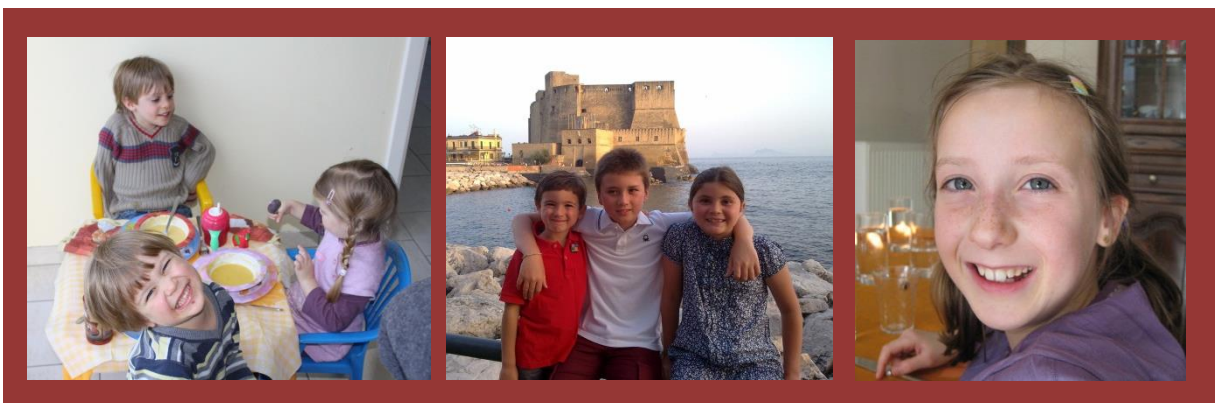
- Did it influence policy making? YES. Even though this was not an explicit goal (and probably unfeasible to measure in the short term), many participants stressed that this project was 'unique' as it involved so many stakeholders whose different views and opinions were included in policy recommendations to the EU. We detected two types of reaction from participants on this subject. Some were very positive and proud ("I do not see similar active discussions and practical results in other EU institutions") while others were perhaps more realistic ("I discovered how little and how slowly research results reach political and social stakeholders, for instance, about same-sex families"). Concrete recommendations were made on how the project could influence policy in a better way: the platform should be able to put findings into practice for further research, or should be able to experiment with local projects, with migrant families for instance.

### Efficiency:

- Did the project use and manage available time efficiently? YES. Compared to the first platform (SocialPolis) this project was better prepared and included stakeholders from the start. It required fewer start-up meetings to get the platform going and could finalise the research agenda within a time-span of only 18 months.

- Did it solve problems? YES. This project, which dealt with a subject where norms and values differ a lot, was very successful in clarifying and agreeing on concepts such as 'family wellbeing'.<sup>xxvii</sup> Different facets were identified at structured brainstorming and discussion sessions. After sharing the results, 10 dimensions of family wellbeing were identified.<sup>xxviii</sup> Also, the distinction between 'a family' and 'family life' was made, not straightforward given the diverse group of academics, practitioners and lobbyists.

- Can we say something about the quality of the consortium? The online questionnaire revealed that many participants valued the quality of the coordinators and this explained the project's efficiency and success. Diplomatic skills were mentioned but also the way work sessions were set-up: three days far away from daily life, listening to each other and building trust, produced good results. A suggestion was made for future platforms: when norms and values differ a lot on the specific subject, establish a code of conduct.



### Summary and concluding remarks:

The Social Platform on Research for Families and Family Policies gathered a consortium of 12 organisations working together to help increase the wellbeing of families across Europe. It did this by encouraging dialogue between stakeholders about family life, ultimately providing input into the EU's Socio-Economic and Humanities Research Agenda on Family Research and Family Policies.

- The project produced a research agenda that was used successfully in subsequent European calls for research proposals.
- Many stakeholders and policy makers holding different opinions and views were successfully involved with academics from the beginning. Working in small groups generated trust and respect, and more understanding of the real and complex issues.
- The project learned and demonstrated that a good understanding and dialogue between academics, stakeholders and practitioners is possible but not always easy. Stakeholders can be more goal and policy oriented than researchers, as they can clearly state the objectives and claims of their organisations. Academic experts were more focused on mapping the state of the art and the gaps in research.<sup>xxix</sup> But these two groups can work together!

## 2.3. 'SPREAD' on Sustainable Lifestyles in 2050

All outputs of this platform can be found in <http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/>

### 2.3.1. Subject, partners and advice

The SPREAD platform on Sustainable lifestyles 2050 dealt with moving lifestyles towards greater sustainability in the future. The project ran from January 2011 to December 2012. Different stakeholders (from business, research, policy and civil society) were invited to participate in the development of a vision for sustainable lifestyles in 2050. The goal was to produce new topics for a research agenda for the EU based on a critical review of existing knowledge. It was also expected to develop future scenarios and a roadmap for strategic action for policy makers. Participation of stakeholders and delivering innovative ideas for business, research and society were seen as important objectives.

The winning consortium was coordinated by Cheryl Hicks of the Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP) in Germany.<sup>xxx</sup> The consortium had 9 partners from Finland, Spain, The Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Sweden and France.<sup>9</sup> Some of the partners were universities and research institutes and other organisations from civil society. A group of 15 advisors was also included in the project. A People's Forum was to participate in the project from the beginning as well.

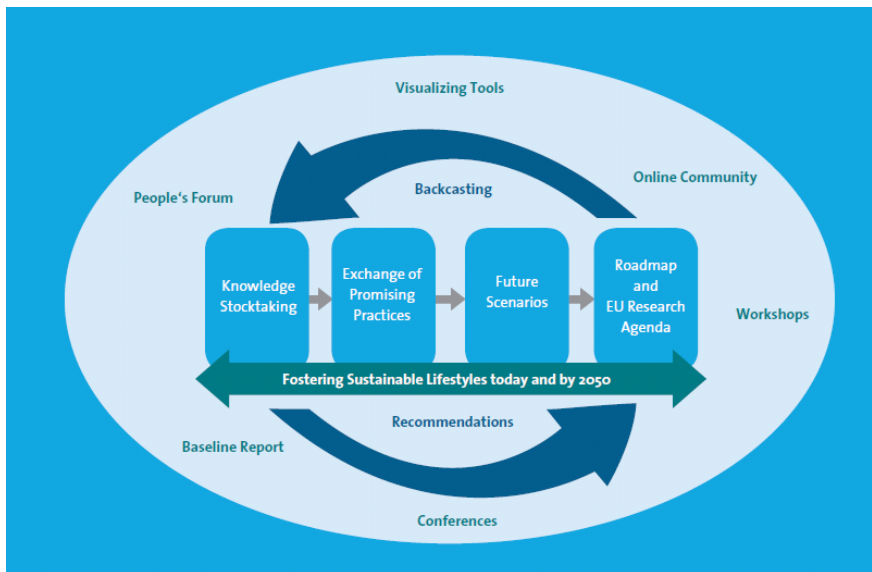
The project had a well-designed multi-level participatory strategy. However, suggestions were made that it could have included more representatives from smaller businesses, partners from other European regions and from the local Agenda 21 social movement.

### 2.3.2. Timeline

Like the previous social platform (FamilyPlatform), this platform included selected stakeholders from the start. It also put out an open call for more stakeholders to ensure broader participation. A flyer to launch the project was positively inviting: 'Join SPREAD, share your knowledge, exchange experiences, and participate in an open dialogue on sustainable lifestyles in our online community and during our project events'. The working of the social platform was described as a dynamic process from the beginning.

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<sup>9</sup> Respectively: Demos Helsinki; Ecoinstitut Barcelona; Energy research Centre of the Netherlands (ECN); Politecnico di Milano; Regional Environmental Center for CEE countries (REC); The International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics at Lund University (ULUND); Ashoka; EuroHealthNet and Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED).



A first large participatory conference to launch the project was held in May 2011 (Cologne) and a report was produced soon after in June.<sup>xxx</sup> Approximately 400 participants from different backgrounds were invited to share existing knowledge and promising practices for sustainable living, working and playing. Workshops dealt with agendas for new research, policy and action to promote,

incubate and enable sustainability-driven lifestyles and entrepreneurship. A number of working groups were set up permanently on: Consuming, Moving, Living and Society. The June report mentions the participatory methods that were used: a so called 'marketplace', networking spaces, and matchmaking facilitated engagement with 'learning by doing' activities demonstrating tangible impacts.

The next steps involved organising and holding several workshops:

\* In Brussels (June 2011) a workshop on Energy and Sustainable Living with 25 participants.

\* In Milan (September 2011) on 'Building Visions for 2050', with 40 consortium partners and 20 European experts.

\* In November, in Brussels, on 'Visions and Policy Action' (with 40 participants mainly from the European Commission)

\* In Helsinki (November 2011) on 'Counting Backwards' (with 50 consortium partners and 30 invited experts).

\* In four countries iFuture workshops were created as 'people's forum'<sup>xxxii</sup> for creating future scenarios and identifying different motives and values behind everyday consumer choices and behaviour in Europe.

In 2012, all other deliverables (reports, 'info-grams', and films) were produced and a meeting was held with policy officers of the European Commission in October. A final large Conference was held on 26-27 November 2012 in Brussels.

### 2.3.3. Outputs

All outputs can be found at: <http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/project-content/deliverables.html>

- A critical review of knowledge was produced after the first conference. This 'Baseline' report on sustainable lifestyles describes Trends, Behaviours, Enabling Environments and Policy Solutions. Four lifestyle domains (consumption, living, moving and health/equity) were identified and were used in the whole project.

- A future orientated analysis of existing and emerging sustainable lifestyles was produced, with visual material (idea cards, videos). A policy brief was also made in February 2012 of these emerging lifestyles. Examples of the idea cards:


**NATURAL LIVING**

*Emily, 40 year-old, computer engineer*

"...As soon as I could get a remote job we moved into a natural housing right in the middle of the forest. It is a wooden structured "nest" hanging in the trees. Energy is generated by a river nearby and solar cells on the top tree branches. The little family has turned out to be nearly fully sustainable: the kids play in nature and John my husband is dividing his day between taking care of our little "zero impact" jewel and growing our food in the garden..."

**How does it work?**

- natural housing, a new way of building and living in close relation with the natural environment.
- hyper ecological buildings are set down in natural contexts: floating near the seaside or deep in woods, mountains and deserts... in full symbiosis with the natural environment;
- remote jobs are highly appreciated as the condition to escape urban environments and down shift to a more simple lifestyle but keeping minimum purchase power.



**Comments**

**ACTIVE FARMING CLASSES**

*Ivan, 15 year-old, middle school student*

"...In our school there is a vegetable garden where I've been attending farming class since primary school, and I've always done very well. I know lots of local crops and farming knowledge. The teachers teach us how to plant and harvest, we have regular farming work in the vegetable garden, and our generation feels therefore perfectly comfortable with taking part in urban farming to produce on the spot part of the fruits and veggies we consume..."

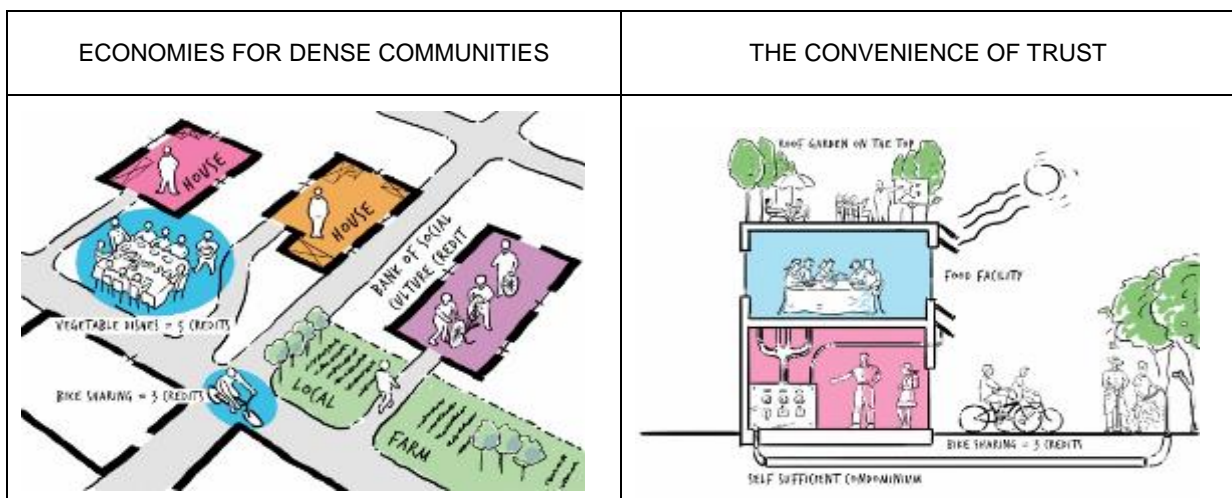
**How does it work?**

- sustainable active education goes through the normal education cycle, activity based learning projects have become part of the formal education method;
- farming classes and other basic knowledge around sustainable food are mandatory at every education level to prepare aware citizens able to take part actively in co-production of the food they will eat;
- the classroom is no longer the only place to learn. School campuses are developed with farming, food transformation and preparation facilities;
- school canteens are supplied with vegetables cultivated in the garden.



**Comments**

Likewise, several visions for sustainable lifestyles were identified.



- Based on this work, Scenario's for sustainable lifestyles were built using a back-casting method. The guideline for these scenarios was a substantial reduction of the impact on the environment of our current lifestyle: from using 30,000 kg of materials per person per year, to 8,000 by 2050. This 'material footprint' consists of materials used in our personal consumption of household goods, food and beverages, everyday mobility and tourism, electricity, heating and housing. The composition of this footprint is not the same for everyone, depending on needs, values and aspirations of each person's unique lifestyle.

The scenarios were also a result of combining different types of developments (meritocracy versus a more human-centred development), and endemic (local) technological development versus a pandemic (global) development.

- A Road Map to 2050 was the fifth deliverable. A second Policy Brief and Timeline Sheets were produced in the fall of 2012.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

- The Research Agenda was the last deliverable. It is based on the trends identified in the project, trends that can change the unsustainable patterns within the EU. It then presents eight (instead of the original four) 'enablers' of sustainable lifestyles, describing the societal challenges, the research relevance and challenge for each enabler.

### 2.3.4. Assessment

Like the other social platforms, the goal of the SPREAD platform was to present new topics for a research agenda on sustainability in 2050, based on a critical review of existing practices and research, in consultation with stakeholders and taking into account key policy questions, while also prospecting the future.

Our assessment on both effectiveness and efficiency of the project:

#### Effectiveness:

- Did the platform produce a critical review of the state of the art of current knowledge? YES. The 'Baseline report on sustainable lifestyles' describes both unsustainable and promising practices (trends), the context dependency of behaviours and how these are enabled by infrastructures, economy, research and policy. Participants said the project showed the range and variety of areas of research and the community of researchers and practitioners that exists in Europe.
- Did it produce a research agenda? YES. Based on SPREAD insights, the EU has published a Call Topic in 2013 on "Obstacles and prospects for a green economy and sustainable lifestyles in Europe" from which two large projects will be funded in 2013, starting in 2014 (total 10 million euros). This call was a coordinated action by the Social Sciences and Humanities programme and the Environment programme.
- Did it involve and consult with stakeholders? YES and even more so than in the two previous social platforms (SocialPolis and Familyplatform). There was a broad inclusion of representatives from business and of policy makers and an active and open call for participation geared at associations and civil society. However, there was also some criticism, perhaps inevitable when dealing with such a large and diverse group of participants: (1) Businesses asked for more inclusion of politicians, policy makers and members of civil society (like school teachers or pupils). (2) Other participants complained that there were too many multinationals involved and too few stakeholders from the south of Europe.
- Did it take into account key policy issues? YES. All relevant European policy proposals and actions were analysed and described in the project's reports. The consortium members had several meetings with EU policy makers over the course of time to find out what their policy needs, concerns and plans were.
- Did it influence policy making? POSSIBLY. Even though this was not a required goal for the platform, and difficult to measure in the short term, participants saw positive impacts. A couple of high level policy makers of the European Union declared at the closing conference that not only sustainable production and sustainable consumption are important (and the EU already has policies in these areas) but that sustainable lifestyles should be taken more into account.<sup>10</sup> A new approach to policy making was detected by some participants as the project created a motivation to implement sustainable lifestyles based on promoting promising practices, and not based on traditional policy instruments only, like taxes, bans, etc.

#### On efficiency:

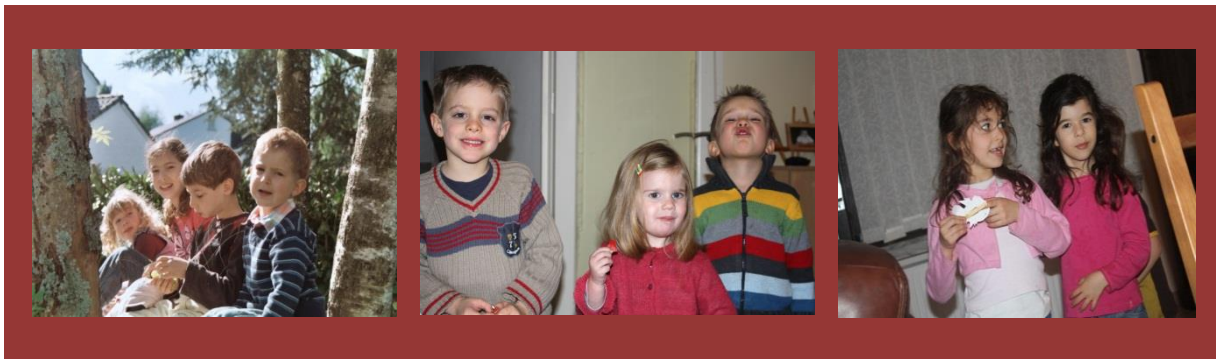
- Did the project use and manage available time efficiently? YES. The two years given to the consortium were used efficiently. Very early on in the project (May 2011), a large multi-stakeholder conference was held and a report produced. Only four months after the start, and at the request of the European Commission, the project produced a 'Memorandum on direction for future research on sustainable lifestyles' giving preliminary ideas and topics for future social scientific research on sustainable lifestyles.

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<sup>10</sup> The European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science delivered a message, besides Ms. Carina Törnblom, Head of Unit Consumer Strategy, Directorate-General for Health and Consumers.

- Did it solve problems? YES and NO. The quality and competences of the consortium partners made it possible to organise large, inspiring and very participatory conferences clarifying the problems. The consortium also produced well-written, well-designed and well-illustrated publications and other user-friendly dissemination and educational products. However, a reference and clarification of how the material footprint of consumption was calculated in this project, compared to the European Environment Agency's method, would have been useful. If the latter had been used, the current footprint is 16,000 kg per person per year and not the 30,000 kg p.p.a. presented by the SPREAD platform.<sup>11</sup>

- Was the platform innovative? YES. Even though the platform had not been asked to deliver innovative ideas, the consortium itself stated this as a goal. And indeed many participants who were interviewed for this review said that they had learned a lot, both about content (through meeting new people and organisations) but also about the methods used (how to organise large participatory meetings). It might however have been fair to mention the already existing roadmap to sustainability for 2050 made by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.<sup>xxxiv</sup>



#### Summarising and concluding remarks:

- The project delivered all that had been asked in an effective and efficient manner.
- The participation in this project was broad and the facilitation methods used in large meetings much appreciated.
- The reports and other dissemination products were well-written, illustrated and useful. The different lifestyles, idea cards, the short films and the possible futures showing how new sustainable practices would work in daily life, were all positive.

The social platform on Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 (SPREAD) brought academics together with different stakeholders – from business, research, policy and civil society. They participated in the development of a vision for sustainable lifestyles in 2050. This process resulted in a roadmap for strategic action for policy makers and delivered innovative ideas for business, research and society.

<sup>11</sup> Lower as it does not include all indirect effects of our consumption on countries all over the world, as the latter effects are less influenced by EU policies.

## 2.4. 'INNOSEV' on Innovation in Social Services

All documents and videos produced by this platform can be found at: <http://inno-serv.eu>

### 2.4.1. The subject, partners and start up



The INNOSEV European Social Platform deals with innovation in social services.<sup>xxxv</sup> The project started in February 2012 and has a duration of two years.



The goal of the INNOSEV project, like the other social platforms, is to suggest topics for a future EU research agenda, in this case on improving knowledge of the various (innovative) approaches regarding social services. This advice should be based on the identification, analysis and presentation of innovative practices in social services (i.e. health, education and welfare services such as care). Again, as with the other social platforms, this should be done

with a broad participation of end-user and civil society organisations. Present and anticipated political and policy making circumstances across Europe should also be taken into account.

The project is coordinated by Professor Dr. Johannes Eurich (Germany)<sup>xxxvi</sup> and the consortium is composed of partners from Germany, Denmark, Norway, Hungary, Italy, United Kingdom, France, and European organisations based in Belgium and Ireland.<sup>12</sup> They are researchers and stakeholders like end-users, citizens' groups and policy makers.

The consortium started its work right away as it had a balanced representation of theorists, analytical experts, service providers/practitioners and end-users (organisations). The involvement of various national and international stakeholders was seen as an important feature of the proposal and the large number of support letters from stakeholders was impressive.

### 2.4.2. Timeline



The project set off by conducting a literature review on innovation in social services for three sectors in Europe: Health, Education and Welfare. This first report by the project presents the state of the art on knowledge about social innovation in Europe. It clarifies the terminology used (definitions and concepts) and analyses the links and overlaps between social innovation and, for instance, 'service innovation' and 'social change'. It also includes a section on the criteria (and key words) to identify innovation in social services in Europe as they arise in the literature.

A second step was discussing and agreeing on the criteria and definition to be used in the project for selecting and further analysis of innovative projects. Innovation cannot be identified on its own, but links aspects such as novelty, type, context, improvement, sustainability with societal challenges and pressures for change and development.

<sup>12</sup> Respectively: Hamburg University of Applied Sciences; Roskilde University Department of Society and Globalisation; Diakonhjemmet University College; Budapest Institute; IRS - Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, Bologna; University of Southampton; Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne- IAE de Paris. The international organisations based in Brussels are: The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities-EASPD; SOLIDAR- Working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. In Ireland: The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), Dublin.

With an agreed definition of social innovation, the consortium partners contacted 750 service providers and assembled 167 innovative practices in health, education and welfare from 20 European countries. A report presents these innovations in practice:

- new services and/or co-operation across different service fields;
- new forms of organisations in cooperation with authorities, the stakeholders and/or citizens;
- new ways of financial re-sourcing;
- new ways of delivering services/targeting groups.

The report also identifies possible sources/origins for innovation: sometimes innovation develops within the organisation of the service provider to address unmet social needs. But innovation is also influenced by broader factors in society that can have a positive effect. This second report also gives an overview of the possible impact of the projects on end-users, on the service provider and on society.



From the list of 167 innovative social service practices, the consortium selected 20 cases, to be further described, analysed and presented to a wider public in the form of short videos.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The organisations involved in these cases were contacted and asked to agree with the platform's goals and ways of working. Ethical and privacy issues were considered and solved as approval was reached for making videos of these innovative practices.<sup>xxxviii</sup> An important choice in this project was the use of

local languages (and subtitles). The videos are presented on the website and used in workshops and debates in several venues and countries. An online questionnaire was also constructed so that viewers on the website could react to the video and give more inputs to the project's findings.

At the moment of this review, the consortium was also working on future scenarios and the research agenda.

### 2.4.3. Assessment

Like the other social platforms, the goal of the INNOSERV platform was to present new topics for a research agenda on innovation in social services, based on a critical review of existing practices and research, in consultation with stakeholders and taking into account key policy questions, while also prospecting the future.

#### On effectiveness:

- Did it produce a critical review of the state of the art of current knowledge? YES. In particular the research, discussion and agreement on a definition of innovation in social services produced a useful literature overview dealing with health, education and welfare services. Themes explored were: types of innovation and new forms of social services; new actors, roles and relationships between stakeholders and end users; governance, networks and ways of interaction/cooperation; new approaches to monitoring and acquiring funding and new perspectives.

- Did it produce a research agenda? On-going. The project was not finalised at the time of this review, but the work was progressing according to plan. However, in June 2013 the project proposed a number of future research themes to the EU, together with four other EU projects dealing with social innovation.<sup>13</sup>

- Did it involve and consult with stakeholders? YES. The mix of academics and practitioners and the sectorial mix in the project (health, education, and welfare services) were described by participants as

<sup>13</sup> WILCO (Welfare innovations at the local level I favour of cohesion) LIPSE (Learning from Innovation in Public Sector Environments) and TEPSIE (Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Social Innovation in Europe) and CSEYHP (Combating social exclusion among young homeless populations).

being 'mutually enriching'. Each group assumes the role of quality controller, discarding existing preconceptions and biases, in different phases of the project. However, there is some resistance to the inclusion of the private sector providers as they are geared at making profit. But at the same time there is an appeal not to exclude them as innovation arises out of hybrids and atypical partnerships and roles. A greater participation by economists would possibly be useful as the present economic downturn is having a great impact on social services.

- Did it take account of key policy issues? YES. Including stakeholders that represent service providers, end-user organisations (such as an association for independent living, and lobby groups like Solidar) form a basis for dealing with key policy issues. Also, the open and local meetings, workshops and road shows held in several countries, often using the videos, have brought up key policy issues.

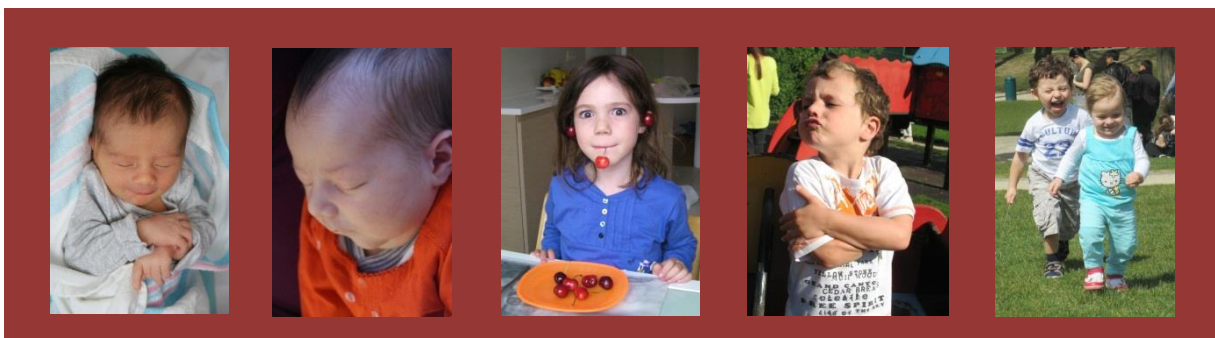
- Did it influence policy making? HOPEFULLY! Some participants said they hope that policy makers in the EU will listen to the results of the project. The inclusion of service users in research in this project is innovative and this is expected to 'make real change'. Through its coordination with other research projects (e.g. in the definition of the research agenda – see above) it also contributes to strengthening and structuring the European Research Area in the field of innovative social services.

#### Efficiency:

- Did the project use and manage available time efficiently? YES. At the time of this review, the project was going according to plan, even though the tasks are very ambitious: consultations and working with stakeholders, doing research, organising and holding local and international workshops, making 20 videos of best practices and using the results of an online questionnaire linked to the videos. Some representatives of end-user associations noted however that having academic people and practitioners working together is interesting and necessary, but 'one hears the voice of the academics a lot'.

- Did it solve problems? YES. At the time of this review we see that the project clarifies the concept of innovation in social services and presents concrete and inspiring examples of best practices that can be reproduced in other places and countries.

- Was the platform innovative? YES, even though this was not a goal in itself. Making short films of the selected innovative practices is in itself innovative as the films are then used in discussions to generate more inputs for the project. The online questionnaire on these films also produces data on how innovation is perceived by a larger public. All in all this is a new way of doing participatory empirical research of what we could call 'visual sociology'.



#### Summary and concluding remarks:

The Social platform INNOSERV on innovative social services was launched as a social platform in 2012 for a two year period. It is discovering and evaluating various approaches in social services (i.e. health, education and welfare services such as care) to propose new research topics. The platform investigates

the appropriateness of social services in different circumstances across Europe, and their potential in the future to provide good solutions to these issues.

- The project has a broad and good consortium of academics, end-user organisations and practitioners in different sectors of social services that is mutually enriching.
- The project is innovative as it uses films to show 20 carefully selected best practices and these videos are then used for further collection of data (besides dissemination purposes)

### *3- Conclusions and recommendations*



# 3- Conclusions and recommendations

The four European social platforms, funded from the EU research budget, brought together researchers and non-academic stakeholders on four separate and specific topics:

- Social cohesion in cities (project SocialPolis)
- Families and Family Policies (project FAMILYPLATFORM)
- Sustainable lifestyles 2050 (project SPREAD)
- Social innovation in health, education, and welfare services (project INNOSERV).

Each platform was asked to propose topics to be included in the European research agenda, after making a critical review of existing research in their own field, taking account of key policy questions and including a forward-looking dimension.

The four platforms were described in Chapter 2 of this review, with an evaluation of their effectiveness and efficiency. In this chapter we present the overall findings, the lessons learned and give a few recommendations.

## 3.1. Findings from the four social platforms

The three first social platforms produced the outputs fairly rapidly (in less than two years) using a relatively small budget (€ 1,5 million per platform). They carried out some 'traditional' research, producing scientific reports and articles, but they also organised and facilitated many large and small international meetings, conferences and workshops, for consultation and involvement of non-academic stakeholders from many walks of civil society. There was also a budget for translation to make sure that all could participate.

### 3.1.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness

Did the social platforms deliver what they were asked to do?

The main objective of the platforms was to propose topics to be included in future European research agenda. In that sense they were indeed effective as they all did this successfully. The fourth platform (INNOSERV) has not finalised its work but has also been effective up to now. Besides this task, the platforms were also effective in other domains, including projects' preliminary phases, as reviewed below.

- Did the platforms produce a critical review of the state of the art of current knowledge in their own field? YES. The four platforms identified problems, best practices and knowledge gaps in their own subject area and produced useful overview reports/databases.

- Did the platforms involve and consult with stakeholders? YES. The four platforms built new social platforms and partnerships, created a space for constructive dialogue between academics, civil society and policy makers on important, urgent and/or complex social issues. As the platforms evolved, they involved increasing numbers of stakeholders in the consortium, in advisory groups and even as deliverers of results. In this respect, we might possibly observe some 'learning curve' among this first generation of social platforms. From interviews and replies to the online questionnaire used in this review (see Annex

1) it is clear that the academics and the stakeholders appreciated working with each other across disciplines and nationalities.

- Did the platforms take into account key policy issues? YES. The four platforms had or are having an active interaction with policy makers, at local, national and European level. The platforms also discovered that theories and academic research only are not sufficient to detect, understand and solve complex and urgent policy issues. The interaction with civil society, business and politicians makes for a better understanding of real life socio- economic issues and preoccupations.

- Did the platforms prospect possible futures in their own field of expertise? YES. Some made scenarios, others detected long-term trends, and road maps to the future were made.

- Did these efforts lead to proposals for a future European research agenda? YES. The three completed platforms proposed topics that were taken up in the research agenda of the EU, in new calls for European funded research. The fourth is on-going.

- Did the platforms influence policy making? HOPEFULLY! Even though this cannot be assessed in the short term and was not a specific mandate for the platforms, many participants hoped that their work would be useful for influencing policy making in a positive way. Policy making requires identification of issues, causes and solutions, based on clear and correct definitions/concepts and availability of tools/instruments for implementation and monitoring. All three completed platforms have given indications on these matters and the fourth is already showing best practices that can be supported or replicated. There was frustration in the first platform (SocialPolis) as the EU did not seem to use the results of the platform in important policy documents or statements.

### 3.1.2. Evaluation of the efficiency

Did the social platforms deliver results in the best possible ways, using the least possible resources?

- Did the platforms use and manage available time efficiently? YES. As establishing and working with social platforms was a new way of doing European funded research, all those involved had to find out how much time would be needed for all tasks. The first platform (SocialPolis) asked for an extension of the available time (not funds) which was granted. While the FamilyPlatform managed to conclude all its task in 18 months, the next platforms were also given 2 years and have been able to finish the work in time. (The last one is not finalised but is on schedule).

- Did the platforms solve problems? Mostly YES. For instance the platform on sustainable lifestyles (SPREAD) managed to bring together different and sometimes opposing economic interests but demonstrate win-win possibilities. The platform on families and family policies (FAMILYPLATFORM) created a consensus on what can and needs to be done for the wellbeing of families while the opinions and concepts of what a family is were very different at the start. The first platform (SocialPolis) was perhaps less efficient as it focussed on two things at the same time: on the one hand, clarifying what they called the ‘problématique’ of cohesion in cities, and on the other, finding concrete solutions for those problems.

- Was the work of the social platforms value for money? Each platform cost € 1,5 million. Is this less expensive than how research topics and programmes come about ‘normally’ in the EU? The current practice of identifying new, urgent, socially and policy relevant topics for EU funded research is a multi-year iterative process, involving many European and national civil servants, national policy makers and experts in diverse committees<sup>xxxix</sup> - but we do not know how much it costs.

Looking at the value created by the social platforms, we note two types of answers from the interview and online questionnaire:

- Non-academic experts, practitioners, end-users, organisations and policy makers said that they appreciated that EU research money was not only being spent on academics doing ‘curiosity driven

research'. Funds were now also used for dealing with 'real life' social and economic issues. Almost all the respondents from civil society organisations said they had learned a lot from the academics, like generating future scenarios. They expected that this extra knowledge and know-how would increase the impact of their organisation on society at large, and therefore improve living conditions of those they represented. In this sense, the social platforms have created concrete results and good-will among civil society organisations.

- The academics interviewed were in general very positive and said they had learned from the stakeholders about 'daily life'. In some cases the interaction had led to a review of previously held concepts and beliefs, for instance, on the fact that in richer countries not all women want to work outside the home. The participation of private consultants (and social entrepreneurs) was also often mentioned as having been positive.

### 3.2. Other positive effects

#### Using participatory and innovative research methods

The evolution of the social platforms shows a gradual increase in the use of participatory methods. In the SocialPolis platform (the first one), reports were produced by the academics for each of their own 'existential fields' and presented in a 'traditional' or classic manner in plenary meetings. In a next phase, reports were however discussed in smaller groups with stakeholders. In a later phase of the project, participatory methods were used (like the World Café) which made better use of the know-how and expertise of the stakeholders.

In the second platform (FamilyPlatform), a more intense dialogue was organised from the start. Several days listening and working in smaller groups with both scientists and civil society organisations generated trust and made it easier for stakeholders to participate and contribute to final documents.

In the third platform (SPREAD), participatory methods were intensively and creatively used from the start. These were then presented as results in various ways: reports, idea cards, scenarios, infograms about different lifestyles, etc.

In the fourth platform (INNOSERV), 20 short films are being made to be used in the research project itself, in meetings at local level and for drawing a response from a larger public.

#### Dissemination of results

The reports and other outputs that were produced by the social platforms are available online for a broad public. In each platform, between 450 and 700 individuals and organisations participated in the work itself or in meetings where results were presented and discussed. Many respondents to our online questionnaire, not only academics, say they use the results and new databases regularly in their work. Besides the websites that present all the results, the academics from the first platform also decided to work towards a scientific publication in a scientific journal. The second platform published two books after the end of the project. The last one, INNOSERV has produced films online.

### 3.3. Some dilemmas and challenges

#### The choice of stakeholders

This review has revealed a spectrum of two extremes with regards to the choice of stakeholders:

- On the one hand those who wanted to include as many stakeholders as possible in the project;
- On the other those who wanted a well thought and balanced choice of stakeholders, avoiding too many divergent positions.

In the first group we find for instance the request to include trade unions in the FamilyPlatform and more small businesses in the SPREAD sustainability platform. The second group included both scientists and NGOs, worried about losing time or having too many political discussions.

## The role of stakeholders

There is also a spectrum of opinion on the role of stakeholders with two divergent positions:

- On the one hand those who say that practitioners and stakeholders know sometimes more than academics and should be given a role as knowledge and input providers;
- On the other hand, academics who have stated that stakeholders are welcome to voice their concerns and views, but that they should not see themselves as researchers. An inclusive way of working and thinking was described by a respondent as ‘a fad that should be seriously challenged’.

## On academics and stakeholders working together

Listening to each other in the social platforms was not always easy. Representatives of civil society organisations in several platforms said they had to make an important and continuous effort to be heard and to have their issues and realities included in the results. Issues like same-sex marriages, the need to give more attention to children when dealing with the topic of ‘families’ or the need to include more French language research in the project were mentioned. On the other hand, some academics said they had been ‘confronted’ by the need (demanded by the stakeholders) to present research findings in a more politicised or contextualised manner and less as ‘pure facts’. Other academics said they had to learn new facilitation and participatory tools for setting up, facilitating and managing discussions with stakeholders and practitioners.

## Theory and practice

In the first platform (SocialPolis), the popularised version of the project’s results looked critically at the possibility of using academic results of the project in different national, regional, cultural and social contexts. When results are too abstract, they are not applicable to real situations. A suggestion was made to focus on feasible solutions for different (present and future) contexts instead of just focussing on current problems. In the SPREAD (sustainability) platform, business partners suggested: always develop concrete targets for action based on the research effort.

## Applicability of results and follow up activities

In all the social platforms there were expectations, from both academics and stakeholders, that the results of the project would have an impact either on policy making or on improving social and economic living conditions. A few suggestions were made:

- involve more EU policy makers;
- test the findings and recommendations during or after the projects;
- make sure that results of the social platforms stay ‘online’ after finalisation of the projects,
- allow the platform members to meet after the project has ended, at least online, etc.

## 3.4. Conclusions and recommendations

As far as we could assess in this review, and as detailed above, the social platforms have been effective and efficient. A comparison of costs and added value shows a positive result. For € 1,5 million per platform, a lot of value was produced: new social-economic, urgent and complex topics for future research were proposed and the involvement of a large number of academics and civil society organizations led to the creation of new partnerships, knowledge and know-how in both academic and non-academic circles. A lot of good will and visibility for European funded research was also created.

The learning curve was positive: the idea for the social platforms originated from consultation between the EU and member states in 2005. The European social platforms were introduced as a new way of financing European research one year later. Special information meetings were organised by the European Commission for interested parties when the first three calls for project proposals were launched. For setting up and guiding the platforms, special efforts and new skills were employed by all

involved. For the first platform (SocialPolis), a bit more time had to be spent to involve stakeholders than in later platforms.

#### Our suggestions and recommendations are:

- *On choosing a topic* for a new social platform we suggest improving consultation within the European Union (Commission, Parliament, Committee of Regions, etc.) on what the needs are for developing policies related to social, ecological, economic, etc. wellbeing of citizens in Europe. To take into account the needs of civil society at large, the EU could set up a mechanism for inviting suggestions from civil society.
- *Selection of winning consortium:* We recommend that special attention be given to the selection of the consortium that will lead the next social platform. The chosen consortium needs to demonstrate academic excellence (as in a 'normal' selection procedure) but should also include stakeholders as advisors, etc. The selection of independent experts that evaluate project proposals should include some experts, practitioners and end-users from non-governmental and other civil society organisations (including businesses). This 'outside' world has its own insights and expertise with regards to real world problems.
- *Content:* We advise continuing to ask for the same set-up and deliverables as has been done up to now: the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in the consortium and its work and in the preparation of topics for future research agendas, and an initial critical review of the state of the art identifying knowledge gaps and policy needs and prospecting possible futures. The need to have a multidisciplinary approach when dealing with these cultural-socio-economic issues might need to be stressed even more.
- *Methods used:* Consortium partners (or at least the coordinator) should have experience with bringing together academics, policy makers, civil society and business, and of using facilitation, interactive and participatory methods and producing diversified end-products (and not only written reports or scientific articles).
- *Methods used:* Participants in the platforms should take time to get to know and learn from each other, creating trust and developing a common language. A code of conduct might be useful as social platform topics are sometimes closely related to personal and cultural norms and values.
- *Guarantee dissemination:* Allow enough funding so that the social platforms websites are maintained for at least a few years.

#### Continuation

Funding social platforms from the EU budget to establish a fruitful dialogue between academics and civil society and leading to new topics for the European research agenda, has proven to be effective. On the efficiency of these platforms, we only found positive added value for relatively low costs, and no adverse results. The learning curve is definitely good and it has created a lot of good will and visibility for EU funded research projects.

We therefore advise positively on the continuation of such social platforms in European Research Policy making.

# *ANNEX*



# ANNEX - Methodology used in this review

The author (Helena Imminga-Berends) was asked to 'Review these 3 or 4 social platforms, their outputs as well as their methods of operation (on the basis of the material available - online as well as through the EC - as well as discussions with some key actors). Ultimately, an assessment of the 'instrument' should be made (e.g. with regard to its continuation in the next Framework Programme, Horizon 2020)'.

The available material (online and at the EU) was consulted:

- 1) The four websites containing the information about the project: the coordinators, consortium, stakeholders, advisors, etc.
- 2) The academic results and reports such as the 'state of the art' analysis, identification of research gaps, expected future developments and trends, proposals for new research topics (suggestions for the EU research agenda), more popularised reports
- 3) Reports of meetings describing the methodologies used and the views and contributions of participants
- 4) Evaluation reports describing the procedures and methods used.

This material was analysed, some initial interviews were held with key people (project coordinators, EC scientific officers, SSH national contact point,...), and workshops and conferences of the newer projects were attended.

However, as we also wanted a more participatory approach and collection of original data from a broad group of participants, we developed an online questionnaire using the Appreciative Inquiry method.<sup>14</sup>

We sent the following three basic questions to all participants:

1- What did you really appreciate in the project? Or: What was its best feature, activity, aspect or result according to you?

2 - What did you learn? Or: please give us one example of a Good Practice or an innovative practice that you encountered in this project.

3- Can you propose or advise on improvements or innovations for new Platforms bringing together researchers and civil society?

A mail was directly sent to 350 participants from SocialPolis, 350 from FamilyPlatform and some 400 for SPREAD with an official letter from the Commission. The same questions were given to the consortium partners of INNOSERV.

In short, Appreciative Inquiry and more traditional ways of doing research can be distinguished as follows: instead of asking about what the problems are/were and what went wrong, the focus is on 'what is working well and why'? The replies, of course, also give insight in solutions.

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<sup>14</sup> This method was developed and first used by David Cooperrider & Suresh Srivastva (1987), see 1990 article in 1990: <http://www.stipes.com/aichap2.htm#DocInfo>. See also Appreciative Inquiry Commons website: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/> or Theodore Kinni, "The Art of Appreciative Inquiry", The Harvard Business School Working Knowledge for Business Leaders Newsletter, September 22, 2003.

Problem Solving Approach	Appreciative Inquiry Approach
Felt need, identification of problem(s)	Appreciating, valuing the Best of What Is
Analysis of causes	Envisioning what might be
Analysis of possible solutions	Engaging in dialogue about what should be
Action planning (treatment)	Innovating, what will be

### Response to the online questionnaire

In general this approach worked well and some follow-up interviews with respondents were conducted:

	Appreciative Replies	Inquiry Interviews with key people & respondents	Total Input
Social Polis	8	7	15
FamilyPlatform	20	8	28
SPREAD	10	5	15
INNOSERV	8	2	10
General	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>69</b>

**SocialPolis:** As SocialPolis was the oldest project, starting in 2007 and finishing in November 2010, many e-mail addresses were not valid anymore as participants had moved on to other jobs and countries. The two scientific officers involved in the project for the European Commission had either retired or moved on to another job in the European Commission but both were helpful. We received 15 serious and interesting replies from the online questions. We also interviewed the coordinator of the project (Prof. Moulaert) and Mikael Stigendal (the author of the popularised version). We valued the clear and complete final reports made by Prof. Moulaert (the coordinator and others) describing all the phases, methods used and results of the project.

**FamilyPlatform:** For the FamilyPlatform we received 27 interesting replies and had personal interviews with several partners and participants: the two coordinators, a Dutch resource centre, the representative and active participant of the MMM European Mothers Movement, the secretary of the French Families associations, etc. In order not to interfere with the evaluation and selection procedure for the follow-up research project that was taking place at the European Commission, the questioning stopped for a while.

**SPREAD:** For the Spread Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 project the mails with the questions were sent out by the project's coordinators themselves as they did not want to give us the e-mail addresses of the participants. This procedure made the review less independent as many participants replied sending a copy also to the project coordinators. We were present at a meeting between the project coordinators and the European Commission and attended the final two day conference in November 2012. We got 13 replies from participants to the online questionnaire, but very few from the consortium (official) partners and advisors. Even after the European Commission sent a mail again to all partners of the consortium, only three of the consortium members replied. We interviewed one advisor.

**INNOSERV:** For INNOSERV, which had just started when we started the review, we read all the available documents, attended a two day meeting of the consortium members in Dublin (in 2012) and a workshop in Brussels (April 2013) where practitioners and end-users watched and discussed about the videos with the best practices. We received nine replies from consortium members on the questionnaire.

We thank all those who helped us make this review, will send them the results, and wish them good luck.

Those who would like to receive all the (anonymous) replies to the online questionnaire, please contact: [helena@regenboogadvies.nl](mailto:helena@regenboogadvies.nl).

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<sup>i</sup> In the framework of the Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities research programme (SSH) of the 7th Research Framework programme (FP7)

<sup>ii</sup> Sweden had experience with Societally Motivated Research Platforms and identifying research problems through collaboration between researchers and policymakers/public sector actors. See:

[http://www.skane.se/upload/Webbplatser/FoU/Dokument/SMRP\\_SouthSweden.FINAL.pdf](http://www.skane.se/upload/Webbplatser/FoU/Dokument/SMRP_SouthSweden.FINAL.pdf). The European Commission also held a consultation with civil society in 2006:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/170706\\_statements\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/170706_statements_final.pdf). In the preparation of FP7 social platforms were mentioned ([ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/citizens/docs/ssh\\_towards\\_fp7.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/citizens/docs/ssh_towards_fp7.pdf)) and then included in the final programme: [http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ssh/about-ssh\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ssh/about-ssh_en.html)

<sup>iii</sup> SSH-2007-2.2.3 Social Platform on cities and social cohesion.

<sup>iv</sup> From ASRO (Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), Belgium

<sup>v</sup> Global Urban Research Unit (GURU) of the University of Newcastle uponTyne, UK.

<sup>vi</sup> Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>vii</sup> See: <http://www.socialpolis.eu/actors-of-social-polis/stakeholder/>

<sup>viii</sup> Welfare and Social services (Univers. Milano); Urban Labour Markets & economic development( ITER, Napoli); Housing, Neighbourhood and health (Newcastle University); Mobility, Telecommunications and Security (Newcastle University); Urban Ecology and environment (Univers of Manchester); Governance (Univer. of Barcelona); Education and Training (Univ of Lisbon); Urban and Regional inequalities (ISEG, Leuven); Diversity and Identity (Univ of Amsterdam); Creativity and Innovation (Univ of Quebec); Neighbourhood development and Grassroots Initiatives (Crida, Paris); Social Cohesion and the city as a whole (ASRO Leuven and Univer Wien).

<sup>ix</sup> Page 9 , in "Final publishable summary report" by Frank Moulaert, November 2010:

[http://www.socialpolis.eu/uploads/tx\\_sp/SOCIAL\\_POLIS\\_-\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.socialpolis.eu/uploads/tx_sp/SOCIAL_POLIS_-_Final_Report.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> As a result of this scheme, international stakeholder workshops were organised in Naples, Malmö, Leuven, Vienna, Santiago de Chile, Paris, Barcelona, Manchester, Milan, Brussels, Paris, Lisbon and Budapest.

<sup>xi</sup> Respectively : overall coordinator from the Technische Universität Dortmund, scientific coordinator from the Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung, University of Bamberg and project administrator from the Technische Universität Dortmund.

<sup>xii</sup> European Commission (Krzysztof Iszkowski, Elie Faroult); Haro (Sweden): Jonas Himmelstrand, Madleine Walin); National Family Planning and Parenting Institute (London): Clem Henricson; Bundesforum Familie (Berlin): Katherine Bird; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic; German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth; Union Nationale des Associations Familiales; University of East Anglia.

<sup>xiii</sup> 1- Kick-off meeting in Brussels, 26 - 28 Oct. 2009; 2- meeting on 'State of the Art- Major trends' in Jyväskylä, Finland, 23-27 Feb. 2010 with 41 participants; 3- Meeting on 'Future Scenarios' in Witten, Germany, 28-30 Apr. 2010 (with two parallel workshops).

<sup>xiv</sup> 60 researchers from university/research institutions, 58 stakeholders from about 50 family-related organizations, 11 social partners/policy makers; and 11 junior researchers.

<sup>xv</sup> In a way a similar set up was chosen as in SocialPolis.

<sup>xvi</sup> 1- Family structures and family forms, 2- Development processes in the family, 3- State family policies, 3- Family, 4- Living environments and local policies, 5- Family management, 6- Social care and social services, 7- Social inequality and diversity of families, 8- Family, media, family education and participation.

<sup>xvii</sup> 1- Transitions to adulthood; 2- Motherhood and fatherhood in Europe; 3- Ageing, families and social policy; 4- Changes in conjugal life; 5- Family relationships and wellbeing; 6- Gender equality and families; 7- Reconciling work and care for young children: parental leaves; 8- Reaching out to families: the role of family associations and other institutions.

<sup>xviii</sup> The nine key research areas, page 10 of Final report: 1- Contemporary parenthood, motherhood, and fatherhood; 2- children's experiences, trajectories and outcomes; 3- changing family forms, trajectories and networks; 4- post-divorce family forms and relationships; 5- families, social inequalities and living environments; 6- doing family: interactions and daily life, over the life-course; 7- ageing, 8- families and social policies; 9- family policies.

<sup>xix</sup> The six trends, page 7 of Final Report: 1) high dynamics in family forms; 2) increasing level of female employment; 3) changes and challenges in gender roles, parenthood, grandparenthood; 4) polarization in families, growing uniformity of life-styles but emergence of a dual society with winners and losers; 5) increasing number of migrant families; 6) care going public.

<sup>xx</sup> The nine challenges for families in the future, page 15 of Foresight report: 1) Work-life balance and time management; 2) Changes in behaviour (family break-up, changing sexual morality, reduction in parenting skills, balancing individual fulfilment within families, individualism/selfishness); 3) Ageing/demographic changing; 4) Uncertainty; 5) Gender roles of father/mother, cultural representations of gender roles, gender responsibilities, denial of gender identity; 6) Diversity (of family models, gender, father/mother, cultural, etc.); 7) Lack of mainstreaming, families not valued by society, public respect for parents and family values; 8) Economic crisis; 9) Immigration.

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<sup>xxi</sup> The four drivers of change, page 16 Foresight report: 1) Inequalities (social, cultural, economic, gender, ethical, etc.); 2) Migration; 3) Education and values in Society; 4) Care Systems.

<sup>xxii</sup> The four scenarios 1: Equal opportunities - open migration - diverse education and values - mix of private and public care systems; Scenario 2: Increasing inequalities - no migration (very select) - private education and extreme positions in values - privatisation of care systems; Scenario 3: Increasing inequalities - open limited migration - private education - accepted diverse values - privatisation of care systems; Scenario 4: Equal opportunities at a low level - restricted migration - rigid public education with very specific curricula - accepted diverse values - public care systems.

<sup>xxiii</sup> 1- 2nd meeting on Future Scenarios, Witten, Germany, 9 -11 Jun. 2010 (with two parallel Workshops), 2- Meeting on Key Policy Issues, Frankfurt, 9 September 2010; 3- Meeting on the main aspects of the research agenda, Bamberg, 06-08 October 2010.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The six final research areas in the Research Agenda: 1) Care; 2) 'Doing Family'; 3) Life-Course and Transitions; 4) Mobility and Migration; 5) Inequalities and Insecurities; 6) Media and new Information Technologies.

<sup>xxv</sup> 1- Meeting on Draft Research Agenda, Frankfurt, January 2011; 2- Meeting in April 2011- The research agenda (90 pages, finished at the end of March 2011) was reviewed by the participants of the consortium.

<sup>xxvi</sup> No drawings were included for 'Family with migration background' nor for 'Gay couple with adopted children'.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Also in the SocialPolis platform, there had been a need to define what 'social cohesion' was.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The ten dimensions of wellbeing: page 11 of Final Report: 1) Security for individual members of the family and for the family itself; 2) Individual self-fulfilment; 3) Health; 4) Involvement in society (citizenship/participation); 5) Love, respect and tolerance, 6) Balance; 7) Time; 8) Equality; 9) Support for families, 10) Living and environmental conditions.

<sup>xxix</sup> A need was mentioned for a balanced approach between the knowledge deriving from field experience with families and knowledge deriving from research. See: Final report by Prof. Uwe Uhlenhorff of 18/07/2011, page 8-9.

<sup>xxx</sup> <http://www.scp-centre.org/>

<sup>xxxi</sup> All documents can be found on: <http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/publications/publications.html>

<sup>xxxii</sup> Finland, Germany, Hungary and Spain, with around 80 participants in total.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> All documents can be found on: <http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu/publications/publications.html> . Four "enablers" on the pathway to 2050 were distinguished: \* Policy and governance, \* Economic and monetary systems, \* Social innovation, \* Individual behavioural change.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) had already developed a road map and research in 2010 (Vision 2050) with questions on page (page 12-13) such as:

- Who will (or should) be the first mover – people, governments or business? Where is business ready to move forward with other stakeholders?
- How can business, governments and society work together to encourage the desired value shifts and behaviour changes?
- Who will define the incentives and mechanisms?
- Who finances the transition?
- How can we achieve a level of trust?
- How can we give/create the right incentives for leaders of companies and countries to prioritize long-term stability and progress over short-term success?
- How can policy makers and business carry out the economic restructuring needed both quickly and without incurring job losses and economic insecurity?

<sup>xxxv</sup> call FP7-SSH-2011-3

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Heidelberg University, Institute for the Study of Christian Social Service.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> <http://inno->

[serv.eu/sites/default/files/European%20compared%20selection%20of%20innovative%20social%20services.pdf](http://inno-serv.eu/sites/default/files/European%20compared%20selection%20of%20innovative%20social%20services.pdf)

<sup>xxxviii</sup> This process is described in : <http://inno->

[serv.eu/sites/default/files/Regional%20cooperation%20with%20selected%20innovative%20practice%20organizations.pdf](http://inno-serv.eu/sites/default/files/Regional%20cooperation%20with%20selected%20innovative%20practice%20organizations.pdf)

<sup>xxxix</sup> Starting at the European Commission Directorate Research, then consultation with European Commission cabinets and other Directorates General, Expert advisory groups, Programme committees and European Parliament.