

**25th June 2007**

***A Report on the findings of the European TRUSTNET IN ACTION Research***

**Towards inclusive governance of activities and situations entailing risks or impacts for mankind and the environment**

**Key words:** *risk, complexity, inclusive governance, territory, civil society, sustainable development, participation, regulation, precaution, democracy, cooperative research*

The sustainable development of European territories involves activities and situations associated with risks and impacts for mankind and the environment. These activities include not only technical or industrial activities but also various traditional activities (fishery, agriculture, management of natural resources ...). All these activities have, in one way or another, impacts on local, but also on national and international stakes such as security, health, environment, biodiversity, climate ....

In the context of the European Union, these activities are subject to national and international regulations. They are also affected by constraints that arise from the global competitive environment. The daily life of citizen is thus profoundly affected by decisions taken outside their territory, in the name of interests and issues both national and international, in the definition of which they are not been directly involved. This situation gives rise to citizens feeling frustration and powerlessness about their future and about democracy more generally. These feelings go hand in hand with a growing distrust of economic globalisation, of European construction, and of public institutions more generally.

Regulating activities entailing risks or impacts for mankind and the environment at national or European levels has been confronted during the past decades with increasing difficulties. Several major crisis have occurred (food & health crisis, technological accidents, environment pollutions, etc). The development of new technologies (GMOs, nanotechnologies) is also generating growing societal concerns.

**Changes toward new patterns of governance of those activities are observed in Europe. Use is increasingly being made of more inclusive processes involving a sustainable engagement of broader range of stakeholders in both the framing and resolution of complex social and technical issues. These new patterns of governance articulate citizen participation with existing procedures of democratic representation, thus contributing to improve the quality of decisions and their implementation. These evolutions are described in a report issued on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2007. This report:**

- **Analyses the observed changes towards inclusive governance and identifies a set of conditions and means favouring the sustainability of this still fragile evolution;**
- **Describes a new model of inclusive governance that is allowing a sustainable and active contribution of citizens and civil society actors to decision-making processes open to participation;**
- **Proposes pragmatic methodological pattern, the “cooperative inquiries”, in order to initiate progressive changes towards inclusive governance.**

**The report will be of particular interest to public and private decision takers and all those concerned at local, national, or European levels by activities and situations associated with risks and impacts for mankind and the environment: politicians at local, regional, national or supra-national levels, public authorities, NGOs, business managers, experts, scientists, interest groups ....**

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## Inclusive governance

Today's trend for public participation is bearing ambiguity. In effect, in many cases cases, participation is neither associated with actual changes in the traditional behaviour of decision-makers, nor explicitly connected with actual decision-making processes. It is often no more than a crisis management tool (or a tool to prevent crisis) that is left aside as soon as the crisis is over while decision makers restart "business as usual".

The development of inclusive governance is directed towards restoring the political dimension of decisions on activities and situations associated with risks and impacts in order to better address the expectations of the society and the complexity of actual situations. It is aiming at improving the quality, efficiency and practicability of decisions. It is about creating progressively the conditions for interested people and groups, associated in new forms of active territoriality, to engage in framing the issues and questions surrounding the preparation of decisions, in particular in identifying and evaluating possible options. This implies an actual transformation of decision-making processes and regulatory frameworks and necessitates a change in the roles, culture and practices of public and private actors.

Such change requires more than occasional participatory processes. However, it does not constitute a revolution, but rather a progressive transformation of decision-making patterns therefore adapting or completing the existing organisation of democracy. The proposed articulation between citizen participation on the one hand and democratic representation and private decision making processes on the other hand allows improving the quality of decisions without challenging the legitimacy of private and public decision-makers. Such transformation is notably expected to reconcile science and humanity, putting people at the heart of innovation and change in order to orient it and give it a shared meaning.

## A methodology of change: the "cooperative inquiries"

Developing inclusive governance necessitates creativity, invention and most importantly: "experimentation". TRUSTNET IN ACTION allowed identifying and characterising specific types of process of change: the "cooperative inquiries". The methodology of cooperative inquiries aims both at producing reliable knowledge for action and at creating the conditions for those concerned local actors to become full democratic players in the long term. The autonomous engagement of concerned stakeholders within cooperative inquiries enables the progressive construction and experimentation of inclusive modes of governance.

"An important distinction is therefore to be made between processes that are referred to here as "Cooperative Inquiries" and forms of stakeholder involvement (public consultation, opinion polls, citizens panels and conference) that are more passive and essentially aim at improving the knowledge basis of decision makers (who are themselves expected to produce change). In Cooperative Inquiries it is rather the growing influence of concerned local actors that is gradually expected to create the conditions for change.

## TRUSTNET

TRUSTNET is a European pluralistic think tank established in 1997 with the support of the European Commission (DG Research) to bring a fresh and pluralist thinking of the severe difficulties encountered by decisions on risks for public health and environment within the European Union, with a multidisciplinary, participatory and pluralistic approach. It has gathered a community of some 200 key public and private decision-makers, stakeholders and experts at local, national and European, levels with various positions: local, governments, policy makers, trade unions, NGOs, industry, as well as experts and researchers from various disciplines. From 1997 to 2003, TRUSTNET has gradually enlarged its scope from major hazard activities and technological development to more traditional activities impacting global stakes (such as natural resources valorisation for instance).

Supported by the European Commission (DG Research – Science & Society Unit), TRUSTNET IN ACTION (2004-2006) has created the conditions for a pluralistic and multidisciplinary group of stakeholders and experts to follow-up and analyse during three years 9 different actual inclusive governance territorial processes in 7 Member States using a cooperative research methodology.

TRUSTNET produced three reports – "TRUSTNET Framework: A New Perspective in Risk Governance" (2000) and "Towards Inclusive Governance" (2003), and the "TRUSTNET IN ACTION Final Report" (2007).

**The TRUSTNET publications are available on the website of the TRUSTNET IN ACTION project:**  
<http://www.trustnetinaction.com>