A wide range of scientific analysis - from the European Environmental Agency, the World Bank to the United Nations and WWF - underline that our way of life is increasingly unsustainable. If everyone in the world lived like the average European, we would need 3 planets to live on - three planets that we obviously do not have. As WWF International’s president Chief Emeka Anyaoku said in the ‘Beyond GDP’ conference hosted by the European Parliament and the Commission in November 2007:

“Societies cannot continue to operate as if the planet was a business in liquidation. We cannot continue to call income what in reality is resource depletion. We cannot claim economic success for development patterns that leave […] people marginalised and which stoke the fears of resentment and conflict.” Overexploitation of natural resources is “also taking away the development rights of future generations”.

It is imperative that Europeans as others on the planet bring their use of resources, their creation of CO₂ and generation of waste down to a level that is sustainable over the long-term. The EU's Cohesion Policy has a key role to play in achieving this ambitious, but crucial objective.

Cohesion Policy after 2013 will most probably account for one of the largest share of the EU budget. It will be the most important funding line to spend European taxpayers’ money inside Europe and therefore has an exemplary status. Cohesion Policy has an essential role to play in promoting this crucial transformation to a sustainable way of life - and with this also promoting the long-term socioeconomic development and well-being of people across the European continent.

As tentatively stated in § 17 of the general regulation for the 2007-13 funding period: “The objectives of the Funds shall be pursued in the framework of sustainable development and Community promotion of the goal of protecting and improving the environment as set out in Article 6 of the Treaty.”

While this might be a start of pointing in a right direction, WWF believes that Cohesion policy has to go much more beyond that “framework”, and radically shift to implement sustainability and only sustainability. If not, there might be no more need for any territorial cohesion instrument as - in a few decades - most of Europe’s territory will be depleted of natural resources and rendered inhabitable anyway.

As a long-standing partner and stakeholder in this policy in Brussels as well as at national and regional levels in many EU member states, WWF would like to propose a further refinement and development of EU Cohesion policy in terms of delivery mechanism and scope.
**Delivery mechanism of Cohesion Policy:**

WWF is convinced that the current delivery mechanism is already pointing in the right direction, but can still be further improved. We are of the opinion that a transparent, integrative and participatory delivery mechanism presents a clear added value and not inordinate administrative burden for the beneficiaries.

The following key principles in delivery are essential to keep and strengthen:

a) Environmental integration

Environmental integration is more than just some shares of funding for the environment. Integration needs to happen at horizontal level throughout the whole policy cycle from programming to evaluation. Environmental governance is to be applied via SEA or EIA assessments, via long-term impact analysis, via the involvement of environmental stakeholders, via sustainability managers, via efficient project selection and monitoring criteria but also via a strict application of the cross-compliance principle. Highest levels of energy and resource efficiency must be sought for in all investments and energy audits should be part of all the ex-ante evaluation of projects. With climate change having substantial impacts on Europe, all investments should also be planned, conducted and evaluated using a climate-proofing methodology. We call on the Commission to collect existing good practice in environmental integration from the last and the current funding periods. Ideally, the responsible units from the ministries of environment are developing, guiding and overseeing all the different methodologies for environmental integration. They should also exchange experience with other member states officials and the commission to come to a joint and systematic methodology latest in the beginning of the new programming period.

b) Participation

Participation of a broad range of interested parties is essential for the success of EU Cohesion policy. Participation encompasses local, regional and national stakeholders as well as representatives of social, economic and environmental partners. Participation needs to be applied according to certain minimum quality criteria and in a systematic way throughout all member states and regions and implementation bodies in Europe. Minimum quality standards suggested are:

- Give all partners equal status and voting rights
- Provide all partners with the same information and the same documents at the same time and ensure their access to all documents relevant to the committee work
- Ensure that information and relevant documents to be discussed by the committee are received by partners at least 2 weeks in advance of the meeting
- Establish transparent feed-back mechanisms for comments and input given in the committees
- Involve all partners in the development of project selection criteria and in the process of project appraisal and selection
- Ensure that the minutes of all committee meetings are publicly available, at latest 2 weeks after the meeting
- Offer all committee members training and capacity building to ensure high-quality participation
- Cover direct costs of travel, overnight accommodation and copying for NGO committee members
- Use a transparent selection process for the appointment of NGO committee members
- Offer at least one place for an environmental NGO partner in all committees (not only for the OP environment)

Partnership is leading to better projects, better governance, less misuse of funding and at the same time boosts democracy, the ability of population groups to engage in politics and local ownership of programmes and projects. In many respects, participation in the whole cycle of Cohesion policy can showcase, advertise and communicate the added value of Europe and European funding for European citizens.

c) Transparency

One other essential element of the delivery mechanism is transparency. Transparency about how the policy is developed, how funding is allocated through the national and regional planning, who benefits for which activities and with what sums of money, what impacts do the investments have and how are the activities evaluated during and after completion. In the era of internet, transparency can be achieved easily and with no additional costs. All preparatory documentation, the programmes, project selection criteria and processes, the composition of committees, proposals, selected projects, beneficiaries, auditing, monitoring and evaluation criteria and reports should be posted at a central website. This enables a wide control of the use of EU funding, ensures that funding is benefitting the population and is not ending in some clever people’s pockets, enables people to engage effectively in the policy as they have all the relevant information and creates a wider debate about EU’s added valued for the citizens.

Scope of Cohesion Policy:
When considering the scope of the policy: even with a more focused use suggested in the current funding period, WWF calls for a further strategic concentration of the funding. In the context of a discussion about public moneys for the public good, we argue for using EU Cohesion money only for sustainable development. All funding needs to benefit the citizens of Europe, both present and future, and needs to be invested where it can bring real added value. For WWF, this is clearly demonstrated within the context of sustainable development investments.
There are major problems and developments ahead of Europe, all potentially changing the social, economic and environmental landscape of Europe dramatically. Those are for example:

- climate change, more floods, more droughts;
- energy, security of supply, efficiency, energy saving, renewable energies;
- demographic changes, more urban population, more older people;
- globalisation, less job security, new educational challenges;
- migration, inner EU migration, immigration of non-EU citizens

WWF is not arguing that Cohesion policy will be able to address all the challenges ahead, but we think that there are large fields of activities which would solve the mentioned problems but also bring Cohesion across all regions in Europe. Cohesion in our understanding not only depends on economic statistics, but is a much broader concept including social and environmental living conditions, inclusion, fairness, happiness, political participation, equal access to natural resources and a healthy environment. Maybe the term livelihood can better capture this notion.

Overlaps between a more open concept of Cohesion and the so broadly discussed challenges ahead of Europe can be found for example in the following fields.

**Urban planning/ Sustainable housing**: energy efficiency, eco-technologies in renewable energies for heating and cooling, strategies to stop urban sprawl, strategies for the inclusion of elderly people, public transport, credit schemes for private house owners for investments into energy refurbishments etc.

**Energy**: development of new technologies, new sources of renewable energies, strategies to break national market monopolisation, energy efficiency in all production and consumption sectors, energy auditing, re-activation of smaller, regional energy production circles, training etc.

**Transport**: de-coupling growth from more road transport, de-construction of roads, tolling technology, speed reduction technology for inner-city roads, car sharing or city bicycle infrastructure, free public transport for all or for disadvantaged groups, rail fright and rail passenger transport, de-construction of smaller airports or ports, energy efficient shipping and railing etc.

**Efficient resource use**: "waste" elimination or minimization, with by products cycled into other uses - transformation from a "cradle to cradle" rather than the current "cradle to grave" cycle, strategies to design and develop products, service and even infrastructures in a no-waste mode, re-use of components in stead of re-cycling which is often only down-cycling at the moment etc.

**Job creation/ training**: eco-technology, innovation in efficient natural resource use, jobs in sustainable transport, eco-efficient construction etc.
Environmental protection: strategies and technologies for fair and efficient access to natural resources, investments in natural resource pricing strategies, investments in payments for environmental services, reduction of air, water, soil and noise pollution, implementation of the polluter-pays-principle, investments to implement the water framework directive and to implement marine protection etc.

Nature protection: protecting natural resources as the baseline for prosperity of future generations, monitoring of species and habitats, networking and exchange of experience, implementation of natural flood, droughts and fire protection measures, re-naturalisation of derelict sites, investments in eco-tourism, leisure and sporting activities in nature, educational activities etc.

All those are just examples how a future sustainability scope of Cohesion policy could be translated into projects. What is more important than collecting even more ideas is the concept that all investments must contribute to sustainable development, meaning that they need to result in an added social, environmental and economic value for European regions and cities. Viewing the above mentioned examples, Cohesion policy cannot keep up the current objectives and earmarking focussed on the Lisbon agenda, but has to switch focus to the Göteborg agenda. Cohesion policy cannot continue to be seen as primarily an economic instrument, but as a mechanism to shift the future of European development and to ensure a continuous existence of natural resources in Europe.

As Stavros Dimas, Commissioner for the environment said in his concluding remarks at the Beyond GDP conference of November 2007:

“It is quite possible for something that is good for GDP to be bad for society. [...] To meet the challenges of the 21st century we need more integrated and transparent policies”.

While Cohesion policy is one of the most powerful, visible and well-funded European policies, WWF is convinced that it bears the chance to bring well-being to European citizens and regions and to stop natural resources depletion at the same time. We do not need further analysis or research about the ‘how’, we just need to start doing. Policy makers all over the world ought to have the political courage to shift large sums of public spending towards the implementation of a sustainable way of life. Let’s start and showcase this in European regions and cities!

If you have further questions, please contact Stefanie Lang.
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