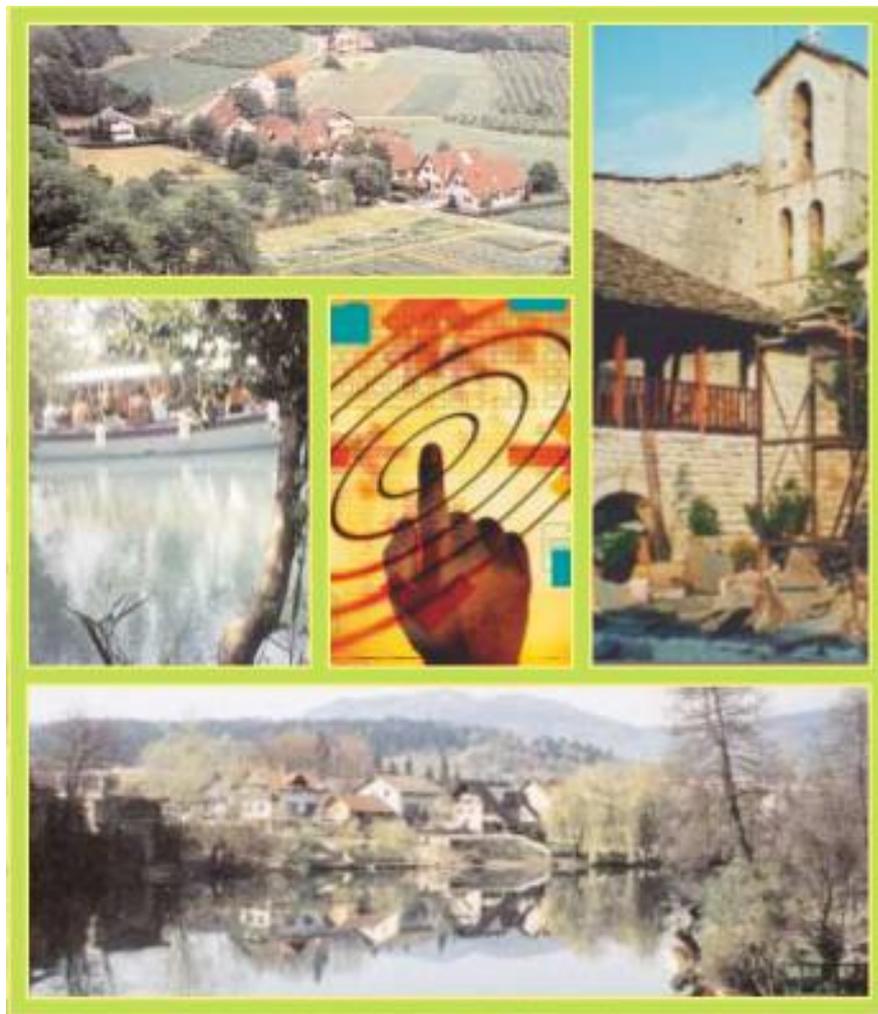# THEMATIC GUIDE TWELVE

Volunteering and Sustainable Rural Development

_____

EURACADEMY ASSOCIATION

EUROPEAN ACADEMY FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

THEMATIC GUIDE TWELVE
Volunteering and Sustainable Rural Development

Written by:

Michael Dower, Ryan Howard, Urszula Budzich-Tabor, Vanessa Halhead, Fouli Papageorgiou, Roger Evans and Christell Åström

Edited by: Chris Milnes

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

Euracademy Association is a pan-European, non-profit membership organisation devoted to capacity-building of rural communities in Europe. The Association brings together planners, researchers and practitioners of rural development, who each year organise a Summer Academy on a theme pertinent to sustainable rural development; publicise a Thematic Guide; and run a distance learning course. In addition, the Association organises conferences, undertakes research and coordinates EU-funded projects with a view to building up a body of knowledge on sustainable rural development. These activities aim to prompt lifelong learning opportunities amongst members of rural communities, by using a variety of educational means.

This is the 12th Thematic Guide in the Euracademy series. It will be used as a reference tool in the Thirteenth Summer Academy, held in Szombathely, Hungary from 13th July to 21st July 2014 and coorganised by Euracademy Association in cooperation with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This Thematic Guide will be revised in the light of the discussions in the summer academy, enriched with examples brought in by participants, and published. It aims to provoke the reader's thinking on topics such as:

- How can volunteering enhance local democracy and decision making processes in rural areas? Theory and practice

- What is the contribution of volunteering in delivering the wide range of local services?

- What is the role of local leaders / animators in stimulating volunteering?

- How can we define the LEADER methodology to encourage volunteering?

- How can volunteers become involved in the preservation, interpretation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage of their localities?

- What is the role of NGOs in promoting sustainable local development through volunteering?

- Can training and lifelong learning help volunteers to achieve better results?

- What are the benefits of bringing together different generations – i.e. the young and the seniors – to take joint action as volunteers on various fronts?

- Do bottom up local initiatives have a better chance of success if volunteering is part of them?

- How can voluntary work support entrepreneurship in rural areas?

- How can social innovation be promoted in rural areas through volunteering?

For the Euracademy Association, this issue is part of the broader challenge of **sustainable rural development.** It inevitably cross-relates to, or overlaps with, the themes of previous Summer Academies, each of which had a Thematic Guide:

- Developing Sustainable Rural Tourism

- Education and Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Rural Development

- Culture and Sustainable Rural Development

- Sustainable 2020 for Rural Environment in Europe

- Local Governance and Sustainable Rural Development

- "Culture and Landscape: contributions to sustainable rural development"

- "Social Innovation and Sustainable Rural Development"

These Guides are offered gratis to members of the Euracademy Association.

Happy reading!

*The **Euracademy Association***

Volunteering – the basis for collective self-help, local action, participative democracy and civil society

By Michael Dower

Professor of European Rural Development, University of Gloucestershire, England, and former coordinator, PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe

Volunteering

I start by offering a definition. I suggest that volunteering is:

Action taken by a person or group on their own initiative, in what they perceive to be the public interest, without direct financial reward.

This definition embraces the following thoughts:

- Volunteering is active, not passive

- The action is taken by people not because they are told to do it, not because they're paid to do it, and not for direct private gain

- The action is taken in the spirit of public interest, of altruism rather than selfishness

- The action is aimed at the well-being of a group or of the cause.

Those who volunteer may be driven by diverse motives or emotions – a sense of duty, a religious faith, empathy for other beings, respect for nature, a sense of obligation to past generations or to the well-being of future generations. Very often, their action is provoked by the collective needs of the communities to which they belong : these may be communities of place (such as a village), or communities of interest (such as people who suffer from a particular disease or handicap, or who are enthusiastic about steam engines). Often, the voluntary action comes into play because such collective needs are not met, or not adequately met, by the action of public bodies or the commercial market.

A powerful third sector

Looking across the face of Europe, one can see volunteering as a powerful force. It is not always recognized, and indeed may be scorned, by public authorities or capitalist tycoons. But in fact it is the basis of a powerful third sector, alongside the public and commercial sectors, and it contributes enormously to the meeting of those needs that are not met by the state or the market.

Reflect for a moment on how people lived before the state or the market were invented! Families, clans or tribes had to be collectively self-reliant in order to survive. They divided or shared the essential tasks of hunting, gathering, cultivating, building shelters, caring for children and the elderly. Traditions of communal or voluntary work, undertaken without financial reward or private gain, have continued into modern times, despite our governmental and commercial systems; and have become enriched by global communications, global awareness and global concerns.

Volunteering and sustainable rural development

What, then, is the role of volunteering in sustainable rural development?

In earlier Summer Academies, rural development has been defined as:

A deliberate process of sustained and sustainable economic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, designed to improve the quality of life of the local population of a rural region.

For the purpose of this 13th summer academy, the key words in that definition are 'change', 'local population' and 'sustainable'.

Change. Change comes in many forms. It may be desired by rural communities, or it may be forced on them by decision of public authorities, by collapse of industries, by cultural innovation or other factors. The hope for change, or the threat of change, are often the stimulus for voluntary action, as shown by the case studies of:

- Construction of a village hall, and school dining room, by the voluntary action of village people at Monyash in Derbyshire, England … *realising a desired change*
- Local people as voluntary teachers to sustain a village school threatened with closure in northern Sweden … *averting a threatened change.*

Local population. A major theme in earlier summer academies has been the crucial role of rural populations in the shaping of policies and actions related to their own future well-being. The furtherance of the well-being of local populations is the central purpose of rural development. Local people know best the problems they face, the needs they have, and the resources that can be brought to bear to meet those needs. In all parts of Europe, including those countries which have only recently moved away from centralist government, people are increasingly willing to take co-responsibility for the pursuit of their own well-being, rather than relying wholly on the action of governments. Political changes over the last 30 years have somewhat decreased the dominance of governments; and the recent economic crisis has caused reductions in public expenditure, with adverse impact on the services needed by rural populations. All these factors point to a growing opportunity for, and growing importance of, voluntary action.

Sustainability. The word 'change', taken alone, sounds like a short-term thing. But rural communities, even more than the people who live in rapidly-changing cities, know that their well-being is a long-term issue. For example, farmers work to crop rotations lasting many years: foresters pursue management regimes extending over decades. That is why rural development should focus on sustained and sustainable change.

In defining sustainability in this context of rural development, it is not sufficient to refer to the famous Brundtland definition of 1987 that sustainable development is:

Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

That definition provides no basis for assessing whether a particular programme or project is truly sustainable. Moreover, during the period since 1987, people in different parts of rural Europe have become increasingly aware of threats to security; poverty and social exclusion; the fragility of national and local economies; climate change, with its links to the use of fossil fuel, and the need to use renewable energy; and other adverse impacts upon the environment. This awareness, and the search for true sustainability, has become a significant driving force behind the latest expression of volunteering, namely the burgeoning of local initiatives in many parts of both urban and rural Europe.

Local action

In February 2014, the organization AEIDL organised a conference to celebrate its 25th birthday, with the title "Reinventing Europe through local initiative". This was focused upon 25 case studies of local action in different cities, towns and rural areas of Europe. The next few paragraphs, which draw upon the conclusions of the conference, are based upon the report which I submitted after the event as rapporteur-general and which is published on the AEIDL website *www.aeidl.eu* .

It was clear from the case studies that the impulse to take action was usually rooted in the locality. People are driven by the needs of their family, their home, their neighbourhood, their locality. If the world does not give them a good life, they seek to take their life into their own hands. It was clear also that the impetus towards action came from three main types of motive – social, economic and environmental.

Social impetus. Many initiatives spring from the desire among communities to help themselves out of poverty, exclusion, unemployment or other disadvantage. Moving examples are two case studies which I offer below - the project "Together for each other" launched by the Roma community in Cserehat, Hungary; and the project in the Kurdish Villages of the Kavar Basin in Turkey. In both cases, there was external help to start and to co-fund the projects, but both depended greatly upon the voluntary effort of the communities.

Economic impetus. Many local initiatives are prompted by the frustrations felt by small farmers or other small enterprises, because they have low bargaining power as compared with the big companies or large farms who operate within the European 'common market'. But in reality Europe is not a single market: a contains a multiplicity of local markets, which provide the main focus for hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises. For them, the key issue is viability, to be able to make a living by providing goods and services for residents of, and visitors to, their own region. This has driven many local economic initiatives of the kinds that were described during the AEIDL conference. These initiatives draw upon the economic self-interest of those who are taking part, but often involve a strong element of volunteering, particularly in the early stages : moreover they often have significant spin-off into social and environmental benefits. The case study of the Polish initiative "The Valley of the Carp" provides an example.

Environmental impetus. The third driver of many local initiatives is a strong sense among millions of European citizens that we should be taking better care of our planet and our heritage. Thinking globally, they increasingly want to act locally. They sense that national governments and the European Union are not truly grasping the severity of the environmental challenge, the reality of climate change, the link between human activity (notably the gigantic use of fossil fuels) and potentially disastrous heating of the Earth's atmosphere, the continuing heavy loss of biodiversity, and the threats to the

rich cultural and architectural heritage of Europe. So, many local initiatives are driven by the conviction that citizens should act where governments cannot, or do not, act. That conviction drives the widening network of Transition Towns; the activity of major European networks such as Birdlife International, Europa Nostra, ECOVAST and Greenpeace; and an enormous diversity of local projects focused on environmental conservation and improvement. The case study of the National Trust in England, Wales and Northern Island illustrates the massive scale of environmental activity by voluntary bodies.

Participative democracy

The need for voluntary action by citizens depends to some degree on the structure of public authorities. Where local authorities are truly local, they may give leadership in local initiatives. For example, some years ago, the village school in *La Porcherie*, a small village in the south of France, was threatened by the lack of children. The village Mayor took direct action to solve this problem. The head-teacher's house was vacant. The Mayor advertised in the national Press for a large family to move into that house. 70 families applied. The Mayor chose an unemployed lorry-driver from Lille, who moved in with his 10 children. The school was saved, and the driver became the village carpenter. This is elective democracy at work.

By contrast, a municipality in northern Sweden may be so large that the Mayor is 200 kilometres from a typical village. Small village communities, remote from other settlements, coping with hard winters, are forced to be personally and communally self-reliant. That is why Sweden has over 5,000 village-level action groups, focused on sustaining or creating communal services and enterprises upon which they depend. A neat example of such activity, contrasting directly to the French example above, is the action taken by a small village community near the Arctic Circle in Sweden, when the county authority proposed to close a village school for lack of children. The villagers provided a small team of volunteers to act as assistant teachers, which allowed the authority to reduce its staff costs and keep the school open. This is participative democracy at work.

The civil sector

The network of 5,000 village-level action groups in Sweden is simply one dramatic example of the scale of the voluntary, or civil, sector in 21st century Europe. This sector is becoming an increasingly powerful force in the life of the continent, including its rural areas. This force is increasingly recognized, and valued, by governments at all levels. To illustrate this point, I briefly open up themes which other speakers in the Summer Academy will elaborate.

National rural movements. The village-level action groups in Sweden (including the one that I described earlier) are federated at county and national level into the organisation *HelaSverigeska Leva,* whose name means "ALL Sweden shall live", which is itself a rallying cry on behalf of rural people in the face of a government which has often focused attention only or mainly on urban areas. This organisation can claim to speak for hundreds of thousands of people living in rural areas, including tens of thousands of active volunteers in their communities. It is one of a growing number of similar national rural movements, now existing in 20 European countries, which will be described by UrszulaBudzich Tabor in her talk on the Polish Rural Forum and by Vanessa Halhead, Secretary of the European Rural Communities Association. Urszula and I are both former Coordinators of the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe, which since 2000 has been working to strengthen civil society in what are now the new member states of the European Union and the accession and neighbourhood countries of the EU. Through this continuing work, which has recently taken me on visits to Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, we have gained face-to-face evidence of the rising determination of people in such countries to take their own lives into their own hands in the rural areas, in the same spirit of voluntary initiative that is so strongly developed in many parts of Western Europe.

LEADER. A crucial platform for active contribution to rural development by civil society is provided by the LEADER approach, which was first launched by the European Commission as a Community Initiative in 1991. It has gradually been applied more widely throughout the European Union, and in the most recent programme period (2007-13) was implemented through a distinct Axis in all national and regional rural development programmes in EU member states. In the new programme period, it is again an obligatory element in rural development programmes co-funded by the EU, and is being promoted by the European Commission as part of the programmes which the EU will support in accession and neighborhood countries. The essence of the approach is the formation, in each chosen rural subregion, of a partnership between public, private and civil sectors; the production, by that partnership, of a local development strategy for that subregion; and the involvement of local people and organisations in realising that strategy. The extent of involvement of voluntary bodies, and of volunteers, in that process varies from one LEADER area to another; but these locally-based strategies and funding can, at best, be a powerful support to voluntary action. Ryan Howard may throw light on this in his talk on 16 July.

Participation. The significance of LEADER in its original form in 1991, as a Community Initiative, was that it permitted the European Commission to bypass national governments and to provide funding directly to subregional partnerships. This was seen by the Commission as necessary because, at that time, governments were often operating in a very top-down manner, with limited involvement of the general public and limited opportunity for voluntary groups to take part in shaping or

implementing rural development policies. Since then, the attitudes of government andof citizens have evolved. The European Union has insisted that the process of preparing rural development strategies and programmes shall include full consultations with the general public and with civil society organisations, and has developed mechanisms at European level (the Rural Development Advisory Group, and the European Network for Rural Development) and at national level (National Rural Networks) to enable processes of public information, consultation and involvement throughout the process of implementing the programmes.

Governments and civil society are gradually learning to climb together the 'ladder of participation', of which the successive steps are :

- Information (we, the government, tell you what we intend to do)

- Consultation (we invite you to comment)

- Participation (we invite you to share in deciding what should be done)

- Partnership (we invite you to join us in the implementation)

- Delegation (we trust you to carry out the work).

In many countries, governments and civil society are still on the early steps of this ladder, with governments still operating in a top-down manner, and citizens lacking the collective self-confidence to play an active role. That situation prompted the recent events in the Western Balkans and Turkey, focused on 'Empowering Rural Stakeholders' and jointly initiated by PREPARE, the inter-ministerial Standing Working Group in that region, and the European Commission.

Mechanisms for volunteering. Self-confidence among volunteers, and willingness to listen and share among governments, are not alone enough to enable wide-spread volunteering and action by the civil sector in rural development. Mechanisms are needed, and governments need to set a legal, fiscal and financial climate within which those mechanisms can operate. The case study of the village hall at Monyash provides a simple example. The County Council gave a 50% grant towards the cost of the new building: the villagers wished to contribute their share of the cost in the form of voluntary labour: the County Council changed its normal rule, that match-funding should be paid in money, and agreed with the villages a basis for assessing the value of the time they spent.

The local initiatives presented to the AEIDL conference of November 2013 illustrated vividly the wide range of techniques which have been developed by local actors in order to make good things happen from the bottom up. They include new forms of social enterprise, cooperatives, local food chains, local energy groups, eco-villages, transition towns, slow cities. Financial mechanisms have been created, in order to retain money in the local economies or to apply local capital to the meeting of local needs: they include local currencies, local banks, time-banking, crowd funding, equity capital and regional branding. Many of these mechanisms depend upon the acquiescence, or the active support, of governments. The creation of associations, foundations or charities may depend upon the detailed content of national laws. The finances of civil bodies can be greatly strengthened if governments permit voluntary contributions to be offset against tax. The case study of the National Trust, with its 80,000 regular volunteers, demonstrates not only the scale of volunteering but also the high benefit of a long-standing trustful relationship between government and the major voluntary body.

VILLAGE HALL IN ENGLAND

The people of Monyash, a village serving a rural population of about 500 in the uplands of Derbyshire in England, wanted to build a new village hall and (at the same time) to create a dining-room and spare classroom for the village school. The County Council had established a scheme of financial help to such initiatives, based normally on a grant of 50% of the capital cost, the other half to be paid by the village. The villagers wished to contribute their share 'in kind', i.e. by voluntary labour in actual construction of the building. The County Council changed its normal rule, and agreed with the village a basis for assessing the value of the time they spent, which was then credited as their share of the cost of the building.

ROMA PROJECT IN HUNGARY

The Cserehát region in northeast Hungary has a large population of Roma, many of whom have suffered severely from social exclusion and poverty. The United Nations Development Program, from its regional office in Bratislava, agreed with the Hungarian government to launch a programme of assistance to the Roma community in that region. In the first place, this assistance took the form of skilled animators, working patiently to encourage the village communities to take initiative. In the village of Fulókércs, a local leader Imre 'Zorro' Mata took the initiative in training local people in farming and forestry and created the EgyüttEgymásért social cooperative, formally established in 2010. It has received grants of $15,000 from the UNDP for equipment, and €100,000 from the EU for its building, training and a wage subsidy scheme. It is now financially self-supporting and providing permanent work for over a dozen people, plus casual work for others. A kindergarten has been set up, and there are plans to extend tele economic activity into carpet and tapestry weaving

.

KAVAR INITIATIVE, TURKEY

The mountain villages in the Kavar Basin, south of Lake Van in southeastern Turkey, are home to Kurdish people, many of whom have returned to the villages after being forcibly moved away by the government following the conflicts of the 1990s. They have had to rebuild homes which were damaged or destroyed, and to bring abandoned land back into cultivation. In 2008, the Hüsnü M. Özeyğin Foundation (based in Istanbul) offered to help the villages to strengthen their fragile economies and social infrastructure. In a manner similar to the Roma project in Hungary, this help started with a single animator, based in one of the villages and working patiently to gain the trust of the village people and to encourage them to decide how their collective lives might be improved: this process of trust-building took about a year. During the subsequent years, the Foundation paid for the training of women in beekeeping, and supplied 10 beehives to each woman who wished to keep bees. It funded the creation of a village oven for bread-making; the planting of orchards; and the equipment for a new enterprise to grow ornamental flowers, managed by a group of women. It paid for the construction of a primary school, to serve the whole group of eight villages; and for the construction or conversion of a number of buildings to serve as village halls. This funding from the Foundation has been matched by a great deal of voluntary effort from the villagers.

THE VALLEY OF THE CARP, POLAND

The Barycz Valley in Poland has a long-established tradition of carp fisheries, the fish being many harvested in September and October for consumption within the region. In 2006, the Lower Silesian Foundation for Sustainable Development, based in Wroclaw, organized a 'Carp Days' festival which attracted about 1,000 people. The following year, part of the event was organised by the Barycz Valley Foundation, which later became a local action group under the LEADER programme and has continued to support the event.   The Carp Days festival now attracts up to 500,000 people every year. It has a valuable networking effect as it brings together fisherman and fish farmers, restaurant owners, tourist operators, community associations and local authorities. It provides a platform for producers to add value to their products through direct sales; and has led to the development of new products, such as smoked carp, which has proven to be very popular with tourists.

NATIONAL TRUST

The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty was established in 1895 as an 'association not for profit'.It operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (there is a separate National Trust for Scotland). Its formal purpose includes the 'preservation for the benefit of the Nation of lands and buildings of beauty or historic interest and of their natural aspect, features and animal and plant life'. Acts of Parliament have given it the power to give permanent protection to the lands or buildings which it has acquired, by declaring them inalienable, which effectively means that they cannot be taken over for any other purpose unless there is a vote to that effect in Parliament. During the last 120 years, it has gradually become the owner of 200 great houses, over 100 historic gardens, a total of over 250,000 hectares of land and 1120 kilometres of beautiful coastline. Almost all this property is rural, and this major voluntary organisation makes a massive contribution to the well-being not only of heritage and landscape but of rural economies and communities. Most of the property has been given directly to the Trust; or yielded in lieu of death duties (i.e. inheritance tax) to the government, which has then handed it to the Trust for permanent safeguarding which is a remarkable example of trustful partnership between government and voluntary body. The Trust has over 4 million members, who contribute to its work by their annual voluntary donations. Over 60,000 people give regular practical help as volunteers to the Trust's work: they guide visitors, work in the gardens and woodlands, repair footpaths or serve in the shops.

A young volunteer helping clear woodland

A volunteer hard at work in one of NTgardens

The LEADER Approach: Encouraging Leadership in Volunteering for Rural Development–An Irish Perspective

By Ryan Howard

Chief Executive Officer South & East Cork Area Development (SECAD) Ltd,Ireland

Introduction

'LEADER' is interpreted and delivered in different ways across the EU. The history, positioning and status of 'Volunteering' differ from place to place. In attempting to provide a clear rationale behind the links between LEADER and Volunteering, this paper provides an overview of the background to Volunteering and the evolution of the LEADER Approach in Ireland. It will also focus on the specific actions of one Irish LEADER LAG, South & East Cork Area Development (SECAD) in terms of the types of initiatives that SECAD has introduced to support Volunteering and Leadership. Finally we will explore the lessons and practices that may be transferable to other areas.

Volunteering in Ireland

Almost 40% (553,255 people) of the population of Ireland are involved in one or more voluntary activity. This is according to the GHK 'Study of Volunteering in the European Union – Country Report Ireland'. Their figures are generated from the National Census which began to ask questions about the levels of volunteering per household in 2006.

Volunteering has two distinctive origins in Ireland; 'Caritas', doing good work for the benefit of others, is a tradition that is found across the Christian world. In Ireland this was led by the early monastic church providing shelter and medical aid to the homeless and sick. One of the most successful charities in Ireland today, St. Vincent de Paul, continued to maintain this mission.

The Voluntary Sector in Ireland also derives from a Civil Society 'self-help' movement which is deeply embedded in Ireland's social and cultural heritage. The oldest form of the Irish Language has a word 'Meitheal' which describes the actions of people helping each other, such as the centuries old tradition of farmers helping each other to complete the harvest. At the turn of the nineteenth century it was associated with the early 'workers movements' the first of the Irish Workers Unions and the first 'Producer Co-ops' and in latter times the significant expansion of the 'Community Development Movement'.

Whilst Volunteering has a more visible impression on Irish Social and Educational Services, it also has a significant impact on the economy. According to Donoghue et al (2001) the Voluntary Sector was worth 8.6% GDP/9.5% GNP (€4.6bn) to the Irish Economy in that year. Significant contributors include voluntary hospitals and community schools as well as sporting organisations. One of Ireland's largest volunteer bodies is the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) which has over 2,300 'traditional sports clubs' across the full Island involving more players, mentors and volunteers (all un-paid 'amateur' status) than all other sports combined. It also manages the largest sporting stadiums in the country including its main stadium, 'Croke Park' which is amongst the most modern sports stadia in Europe.

The GHK Review of Volunteering in Ireland notes that from the late 1980's, in line with the improvement of Ireland's economy there was a reduction in the numbers of people volunteering. Equally with the on-set of the recent world-wide recession from 2008 there was a marked increase again in the numbers of volunteers.

The report also noted the significant growth of the number of local Civil Society led groups involved in the process of 'community development' from the early 1990's. By 2006 volunteer groups involved primarily in Community Development activities had become the second largest grouping of Voluntary Bodies in the country.

The LEADER Approach was introduced in Ireland (and other parts of the EU) in 1991 with a focus of enabling the sustainable development of rural communities, a key element of which was to encourage 'community development initiatives' across rural Ireland. Given the reliance of the community development sector in Ireland on the 'volunteer and volunteer leaders' there was a major challenge for the LEADER Programme to encourage further volunteering in rural areas at a time of economic growth and growing urbanisation. The re-

maining focus of this chapter will be how the LEADER Approach has strived to achieved this goal.

The LEADER Approach

LEADER (*"Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'ÉconomieRurale"*, meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions') is a local development method which allows local actors to develop an area by using its endogenous development potential (European Network for Rural Development).

The EU wide LEADER Approach was first introduced in 1991 as a EU Community Initiative, a 'trial' of the concept of supporting a 'bottom-up' or local approach to addressing rural isolation, competitiveness and sustainability. Such was the success of the LEADER Approach it was agreed by the European Commission and Member States of the EU to further expand the initiative in 1995 from the original test areas. Today there are over 2300 groups, known as Local Action Groups (LAGs) delivering the 'LEADER Element' of the EU Rural Development Programme. The Table outlines the seven key principles that underpins the LEADER Approach.

Although LAG's across the EU follow these same principles, LEADER is delivered in a number of different ways. Jean-Michel Courades, senior official DG AGRI with responsibility for the LEADER Element of the EU Rural Development Programme identified three different types of approach in an EU Wide review of LEADER in 2010. In some instances he found that LAGs were in essence committees/units of the Local Authority making recommendations for the Local Authority to consider. The second type of group was more autonomous of the Local Authority, making final decisions at the level of the LAG but all contracting and grant payments were undertaken by a regional or national body. Finally, in a relatively small number of areas (including Ireland), all elements of the animation, administration, decision making, contracting, payment and audit control/financial management have been devolved to the LAG.

LEADER in Ireland

The LEADER Approach evolved in Ireland in a different and distinctive manner from elsewhere in Europe. Firstly, as noted, Irish LEADER LAGs are amongst the relatively few that have the direct and full responsibility of administering, managing, contracting, paying and accounting for the public funds allocated through the LEADER elements of the RDP. This is a form of 'participative democracy'. Secondly, when LEADER was introduced in 1991 it was connected to an already emerging process that had been led by Civil society movements with the support of Trade Unions and other social partners – called 'integrated development groups', types of informal local partnerships.

SECAD Chairman John Horgan at a rally attended by 600 people on April 7th 2014 to promote 'Participative Democracy' and the Impacts of a Volunteer Based Civil Society Led Local Action Group

These volunteer groups were loosely formed around a shared desire to improve the local economy and create employment at a time of high levels of underemployment in and migration from rural areas, with little opportunity for young people (particularly those with no direct involvement in farming). Local development groups had 'plans' with limited success due to a lack of resources, until LEADER arrived – it was the fuel that these civil-society-led 'partnerships' needed to implement their 'bottom-up' vision. LEADER also provided a set of 'principles' which mirrored those of the 'integrated development' movements themselves. It was natural for the members of these groups to become the nucleus for the new Irish LEADER LAGs.

Finally, related to the last point, when LEADER was introduced as part of the EU Supports for Rural Development it was seen by the Irish LEADER LAGs as just one element/source of resources (and not the only source or focus) for the ambitions and plans of the LAG. Their approach was later defined as 'Global' planning, based on a broad 'Local Development Approach' and providing a bridge or platform for a range of investment types and sources to be targeted and delivered through the LAG. As part of Irish Law any voluntary body seeking to access or distribute public funds need a 'corporate legal status' to protect both the investment and the volunteers from potential downstream litigation. Thus the LAG's generally formed 'Private Companies Limited by Guarantee' (i.e. with Limited Liability) and were approved for 'Charitable Status' to distinguish them from 'private companies for profit'. Combined, this legal status and the 'global planning' orientation of the LAG provided an improved positioning for the groups in terms of creating relationships with a host of Ministries and other prospective funders in Ireland and beyond.

The Principles of LEADER

The area-based approach – This entails defining a development policy on the basis of an area's own particular situation, strengths and weaknesses. In LEADER, this area is a fairly homogeneous local rural unit, characterised by internal social cohesion, a shared history and traditions, a sense of common identity, etc. The raison d'être of the area-based approach stems from the growing awareness by and for the prime movers in the local area of the role of endogenous resources in achieving sustainable development.

Bottom-up approach – This aims to encourage participatory decision-making at local level for all development policy aspects. The involvement of local players is sought, including the community as a whole, economic and social interest groups and representative public and private institutions. The bottom-up approach relies on two major activities ("animation" and training of local communities) and comes into play at different stages of the programme.

Partnership approach and the "local action group" (LAG) – The LAG is a body of public and private players, united in a partnership, that identifies a joint strategy and a local action plan for developing a LEADER area. The LAG is one of the most original and strategic features of the LEADER approach. Endowed with a team of practitioners, decision-making powers and a fairly large budget, the LAG represents a new model of organisation that can considerably influence the institutional and political balance of the area concerned.

Innovation – Even though the LEADER concept and its implementation in the field are innovative in themselves, the LEADER Initiative stresses that the actions must also be innovative. They may be actions to promote local resources in new ways, actions that are of interest to local development but not covered by other development policies, actions providing new answers to the weakness and problems of rural areas, or else the creation of a new product, new process, new form of organisation or new market. Innovation is also embodied in the programme's demonstrative and net- working components: disseminating information to other groups of players wishing to gain inspiration from achievements elsewhere or to carry out joint projects.

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

Networking and cooperation between areas – By facilitating the exchange and circulation of information on rural development policies and the dissemination and transfer of innovation, the LEADER network aims to break the isolation of LAGs and to establish a basis of information and analysis on the actions. To complement existing European and national net- working, some LAGs have spontaneously organised themselves into informal networks. Cooperation between areas can be transnational but may equally take place between neighbouring areas.

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

Source: European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)

South & East Cork Area Development (SECAD) is a LAG based on the south coast of Ireland. It is somewhat unusual in terms of size (over 140,000 inhabitants making it one of the larger LAG Areas in the EU) and in terms of socio-economic and typographical mix; combining coastal, rural, peri-urban landscapes, combining traditional agrarian communities through to communities with industrial infrastructure ranging from very small to large scale industrial clusters. Included in this mix are communities with higher than average incomes and other communities that are on opposite side of the socio-economic spectrum. There are communities that expanded rapidly during the economic boom years and others that did not grow in the same fashion. At the time of global recession many of these communities experienced an increase in unemployment double the national average.

SECAD has from its formation in 1995 supported strategies to encourage greater levels of volunteering, particularly promoting the development of volunteer based community development groups. This is undertaken in the belief that effectively managed and focused social capital activities will be essential elements of a more inclusive, caring, 'happier' and sustainable society.

So how can a LAG (SECAD) support 'Leadership in Volunteering' in these situations and circumstances? What strategies were employed and what has been learnt as part of this process? Some of these experiences and actions are offered below:

a) The LAG Structures and Ways of Working; Encouraging Volunteering

- The **Board Members** of SECAD are all volunteers. Some come from professional backgrounds (such as Local Government, Trade and Employer Unions or State Agencies) but the majority are from small business or community/voluntary bodies with a variety of experiences and backgrounds. Being involved in a multi-dimensional development body making hundreds of significant decisions yearly (involving prioritising investments and determining how much should be allocated ranging from 'zero' to 'half a million' euro) can be daunting. Annually SECAD invests in providing new board members with induction training whilst there is a joint board and committees training programme each December-January to review Directors inputs and responsibilities. Meetings and training programmes are located and timed to suit volunteers. The organisation supports a replacement policy of up to one third of new directors per year to allow for 'continuity' and for 'fresh' inputs. Over one hundred 'community volunteers' have gained experience as a SECAD director – each taking the skills/capacity building approaches gained back to their constituent organisations.

- SECAD has a range of **Sub-Committees** and **Working Groups** made up of volunteers other than Board Members. There can be over 50 people per year involved in these groups who are primarily focusing on specific challenges or actions that are agreed as key 'projects' to be supported by the SECAD Board. These can be 'short term' in nature but require a large time commitment. Again this is a valuable **training ground for volunteers** and leaders of community development both as potential future SECAD Board Members and drivers of development across local communities.

b) LAG 'Soft' Investment Supporting Volunteering (Rural Development Programme)

- In a recent survey undertaken by SECAD it was found that 351 volunteer based community groups availed of 'soft' supports from the LAG over a three year period from 2010-2013. These 'soft' supports are made up of a **combination of training, mentoring and advisory services** offered by SECAD through the LEADER-Rural Development Programme. These supports included training programmes which include modules for specific members of volunteer groups (e.g. Chairing a Meeting or Duties of a Group Secretary), modules for group development (e.g. developing subcommittees and working groups) and modules for directors of not for profit groups (e.g. Corporate Governance for Voluntary Sector Directors).

- SECAD also has a panel of **skilled mentors** offering a range of expertise from legal and financial backgrounds to web-design and use of social media. These supports are offered without charge to volunteer based groups.

- SECAD's staff compliment includes **Community Development Officers** who are qualified and experienced in community animation and development. They advise Community & Voluntary Groups of any supports, opportunities or challenges that may be of some relevance from public and private sources and will work with groups to prepare actions-plans to address challenges or issues.

- Every six years, in line with the development of the LAG Local Development Strategy development and consultation, SECAD provides a 'Community Planning Training Programme'. In the first instance this provides specific 'planning skills' for a group of volunteers nominated by community structures across the LAG Area. These local '**Plan-Leaders'** then work with their volunteer colleagues in various volunteer groups in their 'parish/local area' to develop their own 'parish-community plan'. This will, amongst other things identify current weaknesses and gaps in local volunteer services provision including a) future training needs for existing groups b) future structures (where no existing structures are in place to meet a need and

new volunteers are needed); c) future capital projects that are prioritised locally and where the community/voluntary sector will take a lead role in terms of project management.

c) LAG 'Capital' Investment Supporting Volunteering (Rural Development Programme)

- The Board of SECAD agreed as a priority in the RDP 2007-2013 to invest in facilities prioritised by local community and voluntary bodies. Between 2010 and 2013 this accounted for over 45 projects and €3m of RDP Funding which was over half of the grant support allocated by SECAD from the LEADER-RDP during that period. In each case SECAD development officers assisted the volunteer community groups (application teams) who also availed of related community training and mentoring facilities to develop their projects, fund raising and facilities management plans. These skills will be transferable and of further use in the future. SECAD prioritised investing in facilities that would have the broadest impact in the community (75% of the community facilities are used by more than ten different 'volunteer' user groups). Over 50% of these investments were the improvement or extension of indoor facilities needed by a range of community and volunteer groups, thus allowing these groups the opportunity to further expand and develop.

- A mechanism which LEADER first introduced into the process of EU Funds was to recognise the 'time' given by volunteers by designating a notional or virtual monetary value per volunteer hour given to a project. This value in turn can be calculated as part of the 'matching finance' (in lieu of cash) which is of importance at times when it is difficult to raise funds in the local area or for groups or projects based in lower income areas.

d) LAG Investment in Volunteering through 'Global Funds' Approach

- As part of the broader platform for the delivery of supports to the local area, SECAD (together with other local development companies) also manages the largest Social Inclusion Programme in Ireland. SECAD utilises this programme funding to invest in developing and building the capacities of specific 'social inclusion focused groups' in each of the main market towns and peri-urban centres of the SECAD area. These groups in turn develop the services, skills and facilities to support low income families and other 'target groups'. Through this strategic approach, SECAD has enabled a network of six separate volunteer managed full-time services to evolve across to area which independently (from SECAD) access their own funds today to underpin their own viability.

- SECAD has applied for separate funds to help establish volunteer groups to meet specific needs which could not be supported though the rural development programme – this includes European Social Funds (ESF). One example is the 'Equality Support Mechanism' which SECAD accessed to gain the resources to establish peer support (volunteer based and managed) networks for low income women in rural enterprises. SECAD has successfully established four of these networks over the past three years involving 180 members.

- In recent years SECAD has been asked (together with other local development companies) to provide, supervise and manage 'employment experience placements' for people who are without employment and dependant on state supports for over one year. SECAD has responsibility for 220 such placements every year. Each person is given a job description and placed in one of 156 local volunteer bodies who have agreed to host and oversee these placements. The support helps the volunteer groups in a variety of ways from managing local facilities, providing administration support, reception duties or others types of supports. It takes some of the pressure off the 'volunteer' and allows the groups to achieve more.

e) LAG Driven Volunteering Strategies

- Apart from supporting local volunteering actions 'prioritised' by the community itself, SECAD together with its partners, will identify and prioritise strategies that the organisation believes will increase the levels or capacities of volunteering locally. For example, the SECAD LEADER approach has supported a specific 'village and market towns' festivals support programme with the purpose of growing community (volunteering) development across the theme of 'pride-in-

place'.

Middleton Food Festival, one of over 100 'community volunteer managed festivals' that have received support, guidance, committee skills training and marketing support from SECAD.

- Another example, which has been successful in larger towns as well as rural communities is an evolving set of 'environment focused' support programmes encouraging group responses to local waste management, biodiversity planning, community allotments etc.

One of a series of community and volunteer focused 'environmental programmes' - in this case training for people to establish shared or 'community composting facilities' run and managed by volunteer based community councils.

- A final example come from a programme managed by SECAD, a National Social Inclusion programme where SECAD took the approach of developing local out-reach services to the most disadvantaged by investing in the capacities and facilities of local volunteer groups rather than establishing 'out-reach' offices of the central organisation which would have become unsustainable over time. The impact of these strategies in terms of 'volunteering' has been enormous to the area.

LEADER – Transferable Lessons & Conclusions

What can be learned for those delivering LEADER across the EU and beyond regarding the strategies and experiences of SECAD?

For one, there is the potential to strengthen volunteering locally by making a direct link between local volunteer led development bodies and their representation on the Board Structures of the LAG. This has a double positive impact in that it creates the direct 'bottom-up' link between the Board and the communities (Civil society groupings) whilst also improving the knowledge and capacity of those that serve on the Boards, Committees and Working Groups of the LAG. This knowledge and capacity can then be applied to improve the project management capacity of their respective volunteer groups. Maintaining a high level of input from volunteers on the Board of the LAG also requires a strong commitment to support these volunteers in terms of induction, on-going training and ensuring that matters such as the timing and location of meetings is suitable to those who are representing volunteer based bodies.

LEADER has the ability to support volunteering at a community level by bringing in the expertise (internal or external to the LAG) to enable the community to plan and prioritise its focus and resources including its social capital. Undertaking community planning from a bottom-up approach is a useful tool for communities to support their inputs into local and regional authority plans. LEADER can be a key support in this process to ensure that the 'local citizens' have a clear vision of what they would like to see (and not see) developed in the coming years for their areas. LEADER Groups can also 'time' this develop to occur in parallel to the development of their Local Development Strategy. How does the development of a 'community plan' actually help volunteering? It helps by providing the local community council type structure with a clarity and a legitimacy in terms of their activities; it also serves to bring more people, future volunteers, into the debate locally of what the main challenges and opportunities are for their area.

Having identified local priorities LEADER can then support local volunteer groups by 'Prioritising Investment' to underpin project management skills and providing capital grants for volunteer led projects. LEADER LAGs have the opportunity to add project assessment criteria (including number of volunteer groups benefiting from proposed project and use of volunteers during the development of the project) that will help volunteer led groups to be allocated LEADER Funds. The LEADER LAG can also use its position as a platform to enable sustainable rural development to attract other fund sources, developing more supports (Global Grants Strategy) that can be offered to volunteer based groups.

Finally, the LEADER LAG can and should be a leader in terms of developing 'its own' vison for volunteering, being clear and consistent in supporting this vision over the longer term and delivering a *particular* 'LAG' strategy to encourage and enable volunteering to suit its *particular* area.

Questions raised in this Chapter:

1. Are Civil Society 'volunteer' based groups leading 'LEADER' in your area – if not why not?

2. Is LEADER recognised as an agent of positive change, promoting and leading sustainable planning and develop-ment in your area?

3. Is LEADER a key contributor to the growth and development of 'Volunteering and Social Capital' in your area? If not, what changes could be introduced to the structures or local development strategies to ensure a greater fo-cus on volunteering?

4. Should the levels of 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' of the LEADER Groups in your Member States be increased so that these could become a 'lead/example' for other services and supports to be delivered through volunteer based civil society groups or that the LAGs would be better placed to offer a broader interface between public investment and community needs in the future? What capacity building challenges would this raise and how could these be ad-dresses?

VOLUNTEERING IN CARRIGTWOHILL

Volunteering in Carrigtwohill, a small village of two hundred households in the eastern part of Cork County (Ireland) was under severe pressure in 1997. The community had spent a decade fundraising to raise enough money to build their own community hall. In many countries it is unusual for the community to be the main partner, fund raiser, owner and manager of a community resource facility and community services centre. In Ireland it is normal that the community (volunteer group) council or other volunteer based grouping would take responsibility to develop local facilities.

Having succeeded in their efforts to develop their own 'Community Hall', the then Chairperson and many of their fellow volunteers were on the verge of retiring. The incoming Chairperson, Ollie Sheehan, a local farmer, found that many of the Community Council Members were exhausted after a decade of fund-raising. He was looking for a way to turn this situation around. In the following months he and five other members of the community council that he had selected attended a series of 'Community Planning Training Modules' designed for communities that wanted to learn about the LEADER Methodology. This training was delivered by a highly professional men mentoring team funded by the Local LAG (SECAD).

'For the first time we were being asked to apply *business type* project management techniques into the preparation of community plans, projects and activities. We learned to apply the LEADER Principles, the bottom-up approach, in consulting with our own communities' comments Ollie. 'Our first project, agreed after much consultation locally was a village walk which looped around one side of the village and went though some land owned by the Local Authority. The Authority gave its permission and the Community Council went about making an application for LEADER Funds. The deal agreed with the LAG was that they would pay for materials through LEADER and we, the community would find the volunteers to do the work. A whole new body of volunteers needed to be energised and encouraged to become involved – a key part of the SECAD Training showed us how to approach and ask for volunteers. This is never easy but if you have a clear project, with a clear project plan and time scale people generally are delighted to become involved. That's how it starts'.

Ollie Sheehan with volunteers on their first 'LEADER' supported project – Carrigtwohill Community Footpath

Now nearly twenty years later Ollie, no longer Chairman bur still an active member of the Community Council can reflect on multiple successful projects and the creation of several volunteer project management teams involving hundreds of people, young and old, from a range of backgrounds and experiences. The combined value of the community assets is phenomenal and includes a playground, community developed walking routes, a multi-million Euro all weather sports facility and community events such as a Medieval Festival attracting thousands of visitors every year.

'The symbol of LEADER is the seedling that is about to grow. I believe that the SECAD Community Training that we participated in and our first project, the Community Loop-Walk were our *seedling*. What followed was a series of projects and partnerships between the community, the LAG and others including local business and authorities that continued to build on the momentum of the first projects. We needed reminding of what was important about being part of a community. Volunteering is a great way to create strong bonds and pride within a community. Good and fulfilling volunteering needs good organising, planning, team selection, project management and execution.SECAD, LEADER has provided the on-going training and support to maintain and develop these skills

Carrigtwohill Medieval

LEADER & VOLUNTEERING: KNOCKNAMANAGH STORY

Some would suggest that as a general rule-of-thumb a volunteer group should not attempt to tackle an issue that is too big for them. When Mylie Collins and a group of like-minded people in the rural community of Tracton decided that they would attempt to save and bring back to life a derelict school from the 19th Century, many even in his own area through that they were insane.

The building in question had been a primary school and had served the community for well over one hundred years. It was of unusual design for a rural school as it was a two storey structure – an imposing structure just outside the Village of Minane Bridge. It did not have indoor plumbing or toilets and was replaced in the 1950's by a more modern facility on another site. The building soon became derelict and an eye-sore and was threatened with demolition by Cork County Council.

That was until Mylie and his team of volunteers decided to not only save the building but to turn it into a culture and arts centre for the area. On Sunday March 9th 2014 at 7.30pm, almost eight years after work commenced they realised their dream with the official opening of the new 'Little Theatre' wing, the third and final phase of the project.

This achievement is stunning by any standard. In a small rural community where the average fund-raising for local voluntary and charity needs would be around €10,000 per year, Mylie and his team raised over €500,000 from local donations and loans. In the initial phases of the project in 1997 the plan was to raise a large amount of their initial capital from Bank Loans. With the onset of recession the Banks in Ireland were not providing loan capital to projects, least of all 'buildings' owned by a Community for social and artistic purposes. However it was essential that the group were in a position to raise the 'non-public cash' required to match their application for public funding. With the option of a bank loan closed to them the Group came up with a new solution, a community loan facility, whereby local households would agree to provide an interest free loan to the group.

By the end over €1.2m had been raised and invested by the Group into conserving, renovating and extending the building to add to its functionality, more than one third of which was raised through their local loan facility.

To achieve all of this the group motivated and animated hundreds of new volunteers to become involved in activities associated with the necessary fund raising (to repay bank and community loans) and the project has led to the formation of eleven new community and voluntary groups directly associated with the new facility. The building is managed by a full time administrator, Lisa Roach, and is maintained by a team of four people who are hired through community employment schemes.

Miley, when asked about the role and impact of the Local LAG (SECAD) makes the following points;

1. Without the financial assistance forthcoming from SECAD a project of this scale would have been impossible to undertake. Despite the heritage importance of the project none of the dedicated institutions in this area for example the Georgian Society or the Heritage Council of Ireland were in a position to offer material assistance.

2. The confidence and security generated by SECAD approval for the project was a huge encouragement to Community involvement by way of financial contributions and voluntary commitment.

3. The advice and individual attention given to the project by SECAD personnel enabled the restoration committee to navigate the daunting administrative challenge in managing and bringing to fruition such an enterprise.

4. In terms of volunteerism there has been a great ripple effect. Ancillary fundraising activities, such as the Roberts Cove Vintage Festival, involves up to 100 local volunteers and the involvement of new areas at the Centre such as Drama, Music Education, a Genealogy Service, has activated a widening range of voluntary skills.

A photo of the derelict building before renovation

Members of the KOST Committee which were involved in the Knocknamanagh Project from the start in 2006
Front row l-r: Pat Cooney, Paddy Mulhern, Mylie Collins, Eddie Murphy, Val Dempsey
Back row l-r: Martin Archer, Barry Good, Laurence Desmond, Martin Horan, Philip O'Donoghue

The complete building including all extensions

IMPACTS OF LEADER ON VOLUNTEERING – A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE

Tillberga Neighborhood Service Cooperative – citizen driven community service

Tillberga is a small community of 2 200 people just outside one of the major cities in Sweden, Västerås. Before the Swedish municipality reform in the early 1970: s, it was a municipality in its own right. This might be one of the reasons for the strong local identity and believe in itself. In 1993 when a large part of the services then provided by Västerås municipality was threatened, the community came together and fought for their right to local services. Since then the cooperative TGS runs services on behalf of the municipality in care services for elderly and differently abled persons as well as preschool and afterschool care. TGS also operates a restaurant, a youth center, a library, cultural services, park and sports facilities including the local swimming complex. It is only the school that remains within the municipality organization. In Sweden this is a very unusual example of local community work.

Fellowship, participation, security and quality are the mission statement of Tillberga Neighborhood Service Cooperative. This comes from a strong belief that a local community can do it more efficient than the local authorities and at the same time provide a better service that is more in touch with local community needs. This together with a demo-cratic process with civic responsibility creates social and economic synergies and in the end good citizens and a vibrant community.

However, that local commitment can reduce over time and needs to be nourished are important lessons learnt for all voluntary work and organizations. Tillberga is no exception. After almost 20 years in providing citizen driven community services, both with volunteers and employed staff, there was a need for something new to gather around and for new ideas and projects to come alive. The organization was now solid and had a good base to work with but without enough financial or human resources to work for these new ideas to be realized.

With financial help from Leader NorraMälarstranden in 2012, TGS got the opportunity to finance a facilitator for two years whose main function was to act as a "first aid officer"; to help get new life into local commitment and the future, to help create a change of attitude that things can actually happen in Tillberga again. The project called "Vision Tillberga" consist of three different parts; Community events, Democracy development and Local community planning.

Volunteers participating in local events

Results so far are a number of new events, a new community center, social enterprises have started and several new voluntary associations have started. The most interesting from a Leader perspective are the synergies that this project has created. When the project started a lot of ideas that had been put on hold for many years started to come alive and they led to further activities among new stakeholders. Especially for young people this has had a major effect. The ideas that were facilitated by the project led to three different youth project

funded by Leader NorraMälarstranden in our small scale youth project "For youth by youth". A youth festival, a skateboard ramp and a rock concert were all youth projects that came alive thanks to Vision Tillberga. As a result one of the new associations is TB Event – an association for young culture in Tillberga.

The conclusion is that the Leader project "Vision Tillberga" has proved essential to invigorate the community and to once again bring Tillberga community alive and brimming with activity.

Volunteers participating in local events

The experience of the Polish rural forum regarding the contribution of civil society in Rural Development

By Urszula Budzich-Tabor

Secretary of the Board, Polish Rural Forum

The present paper illustrates how civil society can be mobilised to participate in rural development, based on the experience of the Polish Rural Forum (PRF). In the course of the last 10 years this organisation has had to find solutions to a wide range of practical issues linked with the strengthening of rural civil society. Some of these issues will be discussed below.

1. Rural civil society in Poland and the origins of the Polish Rural Forum

The democratic transition initiated 25 years ago by the Round Table and the first free elections in Poland, and ending by the fall of the Berlin Wall, led to an unprecedented burst of civil society activity, previously severely restricted and controlled by the state. This activity was also partly a response to new societal challenges which the public sector – in itself undergoing dramatic transformation – could not address on its own. This process was also observed in rural areas.

The rural NGO sector in Poland consists, on the one hand, of traditional, "old-style" organisations such as rural women's clubs or voluntary fire brigades – which, however, often take up new roles and tasks – and, on the other hand, more formalised NGO of the new type, primarily associations and foundations. These are unequally distributed across Poland, with the more traditional organisations dominant in the South and East (densely populated areas with small-scale, multifunctional agriculture), while the new ones emerging more quickly in Northern and Western Poland (with the majority of new post-war settlements and large-scale agriculture).

The unquestionable success of Poland's transformation has been accompanied by changes of rural societies. The rapid growth of businesses, especially SMEs, improvements of technical infrastructure, as well as the spectacular growth of agricultural profitability and exports, do not necessarily benefit all rural areas. Thus, rural NGOs have to deal with issues such as unemployment, lack of perspective for youth, depopulation and ageing, disappearance of social services, loss of cultural

and architectural heritage, and the still persisting gap in the quality of life between rural and urban areas. According to a recent study, a large proportion of rural NGOs feel the responsibility for their area as a whole (rather than one specific field such as sports or culture): 37% say their activity focuses on regional and local development, 20% deal with social aid, other fields are mentioned by less than 10% of rural NGOs[1].

The aid offered to Poland in the early years of transition, and later a variety of EU funding sources, contributed to the emergence of several large, national or regional level NGOs specialising in rural development. Since the late 1990s these organisations, as well as a number of smaller but more active NGOs, started to meet and exchange, and eventually decided to create a new body which would strengthen cooperation and represent the rural interests in the policy debate (at the time there were organisations representing farmers and rural municipalities, but no representation of rural civil society). In this way, the Polish Rural Forum[2] was created, first as an informal structure (in 2003), and then – when the cooperation seemed to be going well and the basic operating procedures were established – in late 2005 it was formalised in the legal form of the "union of associations".

The Polish Rural Forum did not have the ambition to become a mass-membership organisation: until now there are only 85 formal members (out of an estimated 80.000 rural NGOs in Poland), but it includes all types of rural organisations, among them a number of "umbrella" organisations (for instance the Union of "Soltys" or

_____

[1] W. Goszczyński, R. Kamiński, W. Knieć (2013) „Dylemat linoskoczka, czyli o profesjonalizacji, autentyczności i perspektywach rozwoju organizacji pozarządowych na wsi i w małych miastach" (The balancing act: professionalisation, authenticity and development perspectives of NGOs from rural areas and small towns), published by the Polish Rural Forum

[2] In Polish "Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich"(Forum for the Animation of Rural Areas) or FAOW, see www.faow.org.pl

Village Leaders with approximately 40.000 members, or the Federation of Educational Initiatives working with some 300 small community schools). The policy of accepting new members is quite restrictive to avoid the organisation being hijacked by particular interests or discredited by fraud or mismanagement. Potential members have to submit an application explaining why they want to join, and provide recommendations of two member organisations.

The main objectives of the Polish Rural Forum are to animate rural communities and increase their participation in the process of rural change, as well as to promote sustainable rural development. The activities of the PRF include:

- education and training for local communities and rural NGOs,

- stimulating cooperation between different rural stakeholders,

- participating in policy dialogue,

- facilitating exchange between rural actors in Poland and rural NGOs in other countries.

In all its activities the PRF follows the "horizontal" principles of **involving and motivating local community organisations**, and **ensuring that their voice is heard in the policy debate**.

2. Keeping the local actors involved

Although the PRF was originally initiated by some of the largest and strongest rural NGOs in Poland, great care was taken from the beginning that they do not dominate the association. In its Charter, village-based associations have a **guaranteed minimum of seats** at the Board (this minimum is set at 30%, in the Board elected

in June 2014 this proportion is actually over 50%). The **membership fee** is also kept at minimum: it was set at PLN 36 (approximately EUR 9) per year in 2003 and it remains at this level, although bigger organisations are free to contribute more.

The rules established at the time when the PRF was founded are still respected and each successive Board

upholds the same philosophy. The Board meetings are, in principle, **open to all members** and their summary records are published on the website. In the effort to have as many member organisations involved in its activities, the policy is to elect the maximum number of Board members (11). All the work of the Board and Audit Committee members (participation in meetings, representing PRF in various bodies, supervision of projects) is **voluntary**.

Much effort is made to ensure member's attendance in the annual General Assembly, for instance linking it to events such as conferences where participants can have their overnight (and sometimes travel) costs covered. This is an important consideration, since for many small rural NGOs the costs of travel to the meeting place and hotels can be prohibitive. In general, however, all these efforts are only moderately successful and attendance at the General Assemblies tends to be low, unless linked to attractive events addressing "hot" topics (as for instance in 2013 during the conference for Leader groups).

An important element of the PRF policy is its **approach to projects**. When the Forum is the applicant or partner of a project funded from the EU or national funds, it takes great care not to compete with its member organisations and – as far as possible – to invite them to be partners. In the largest project carried out recently by the PRF, called "Good start" (providing training and consultancy to rural NGOs, funded by the ESF), five regional support centres were located in five member organisations across Poland. Great care is taken that the project activity does not overshadow the PRF's obligations towards its members.

Another element of this policy is undertaking projects which would strengthen the capacity of rural NGOs. This does not only mean projects that are targeted at training, information or consultancy to rural organisations, but also initiating projects which are innovative, starting new themes and raising the awareness of rural NGOs of issues that are only beginning to be recognised as relevant for Polish rural areas. Examples are:

- "Facilitating Alternative Agri-food Networks" (2008-2010), a collaborative research project financed from the European Union's 7th Framework Programme for Research analysing barriers and disseminating good practices in the area of local food products and short food chains, implemented jointly with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun;

- "Fair Village Events", started in May 2014 and funded from EuropeAid, raising awareness of rural communities about the impact rural inhabitants can have on global issues such as climate and social justice.

3. The challenge of effective policy dialogue

The Polish Rural Forum was initially set up primarily to ensure that the **rural voice is heard** in the national (and EU) policy-making level. On the one hand, many rural NGOs felt that they can have a greater impact on rural policies if they speak with one voice. On the other, the decision-makers themselves – notably the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – made it clear that they are fed up with having to deal with individual rural NGOs each focused only on its own interest, and would prefer to deal with one national organisation. Its ability to impact rural policies, especially at the time of Poland's accession into the EU, very quickly helped the Forum establish a strong reputation, both among local communities and with policy makers at regional, national and EU levels.

The Polish administrative system is highly formalised and the involvement of civil society consists largely of formal consultations of all legal acts and participation of CSO representatives in the Monitoring Committees of EU funds. Under **consultations**, proposals of legal acts are developed by government officials and legal experts, and then uploaded on the relevant websites with the request to provide comments within relatively short deadlines (e.g. 2 weeks). It can be very difficult to provide an opinion at such a short notice, and even more difficult to collect views of different member organisations. The PRF has up to now managed to raise interest and provide meaningful input into consultations of those themes which are considered priority by most of its members (such as education, diversification of incomes, environmental issues and the Leader approach).

The representative of the Polish Rural Forum is a member of the **Monitoring Committee** of the Rural Development Programmes, and this person (a former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, for many years active in the field of rural animation and participation, since her retirement collaborating with the PRF on a voluntary basis) has managed to gain respect of both the Managing Authority and other stakeholders. She is one of the most active members of the Committee and prepares regular reports for the PRF website, and many decisions important for rural NGOs were taken because of her interventions in the MC meetings.

One of the key issues in which the PRF has tried to impact policies is the **Leader approach**. The Forum members were aware of the potential of this approach for rural areas across Europe and from the beginning tried to promote it in Poland. One of the first activities of the Forum after its creation was sending a request to the Polish government and the European Commission that the Leader approach should be available also to new Member States (which was initially not foreseen in the accession negotiations). This initiative was successful on both levels: the EU legislation was adjusted to enable new MS to use the Leader-type approach, and Poland – after initial hesitation – decided to make use of this possibility in the funding period 2004-2006. Thanks to the intervention of the PRF representative in the Monitoring Committee, additional budget was later allocated to the Leader+ measure, enabling twice as many Leader groups to be established than was originally envisaged.

In preparation for the programming period 2007-2013, the PRF nominated several experts who took part in the Ministry of Agriculture's working group to develop principles of the Leader Axis in the RDP. They proposed, for instance, the introduction of "small projects" which did not have to conform to existing measures from the RDP and were intended as a flexible tool for Leader groups to support local initiatives. Not all proposals of the PRF representatives were taken into account, and in particular the idea of the small projects was later distorted by administrative requirements. However, this work helped to strengthen the PRF's reputation as an organisation with expertise in Leader and capacity for dialogue with the public administration. Partly as a result of these efforts, the programming of the next period, 2014-2020 was carried out in a much closer cooperation between the MA and the rural stakeholders.

Although Local Action Groups constitute a large part of the PRF members, it became clear, with progress in Leader implementation, that a **representation of LAG interests** is needed at both national and regional level. The PRF did not want to take this responsibility for fear it would diminish its capacity to represent other rural interests and deal with other themes than Leader. It therefore helped to establish cooperation between the 335 Leader groups in Poland first at the regional level

and then, eventually, at the national level. The Polish LAG Network was created and the PRF is its supporting member. The two organisations cooperate very closely in all matters related to the Leader approach and the new Commission's initiative of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).

In addition to taking part in the official policy processes, the Polish Rural Forum undertakes other activities which enhance its impact on policies affecting rural communities. One such initiative was stimulating a wider **policy debate** about the role of rural areas in Poland and their development needs, for instance through the project "Questions about the future of Polish rural areas", which involved three regional debates (organised by member organisations), one national debate and the publication of a book summarising outcomes of the debate and good practices in rural development. The whole project was carried out by voluntary work, with a very small amount of external funding (approximately EUR 5,000).

Another contribution of the PRF to improving the impact of rural NGOs on policy making was its participation in the project "Model of cooperation between NGOs and public administration", financed by the European Social Fund and implemented in partnership with the Polish Ministry for Labour and Social Policy together with 5 leading national NGOs. The objectives of the project was to find systemic solutions to **improve relationships between NGOs and administration**, especially at the local level, and the PRF was the only organisation in the partnership representing the rural civil societies. Materials and methodologies developed in this project are being currently used in many rural municipalities to ensure more equitable relationships between public administration and NGOs and to facilitate cross-sector cooperation.

An important factor strengthening the impact of the Polish Rural Forum on rural policies in Poland is its capacity to act at the **European level**. This is assured, first of all, by its participation in PREPARE – Partnership for Rural Europe, an informal but well-established transnational organisation whose aim is to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development, with particular focus on new EU member states and candidate countries. PREPARE's help and examples from other countries played an important role in the decision to establish the Polish Rural Forum.

Thanks to PREPARE and other contacts at the EU level, the PRF can express the voice of Polish rural communities in consultative bodies of the European Commission (such as the Rural Development Committee or the Coordination Committee of the European Network for Rural Development). It is also extremely important to have direct access to EU regulations and guidance already at the stage when they are being drafted, and to hear about new initiatives or interpretations of legal acts at the same time as the Managing Authority, without having to wait for it to be translated and made available in Poland. This gives rural stakeholders more time to react to proposals and even, occasionally, to be better informed than the Ministry officials.

4. The balancing act: between professionalism and volunteering

It would seem the activity of the Polish Rural Forum is a success story. Without significant external funding it has managed to survive for more than 10 years and has become a recognised player in all matters related to rural development in Poland. At the same time, it has not lost sight of its members, including many small local NGOs, and it has not attempted to "monopolise" the rural scene but rather to open it for other actors.

However, this road has not been easy. A number of **dilemmas** had to be addressed, and for many of them the answers have yet to be found. Most of these dilemmas are probably common to a good many rural organisations across Europe, while some could be specific due to the PRF history and the context in which it operates. These dilemmas can be grouped into the following main categories: dilemmas related to the type and size of organisation, to human resources and to funding.

4.1. Dilemmas related to the type and size of organisation

It has been mentioned that the PRF has not intended to be a mass organisation. However, this is still an open issue which comes up occasionally in the discussions with questions such as: "should we try to attract more members? Would this give us greater weight in policy-making? How would it influence our capacity to manage the organisation?"

Up to now, the decision has always been to "stay small": partly because experience shows that being heard in the public debate depends more on the quality of contribution than on the membership base, and partly as a personal choice of the people who have shaped the Forum in the early days. It was also a conscious choice to make all the material developed by the PRF available to everybody, not only to its members.

However, a more even distribution of its members across the country would be desirable – at present there are strong concentrations of PRF member organisations in several parts of Poland, whereas in other regions there are only one or two members. Some efforts

have been made to improve this but they have not been very successful so far.

It is possible that in the future the situation may change and the number of members will increase. The PRF charter envisages that, at the moment when the number of members exceeds 100, there is a possibility to replace the General Assembly by the meeting of regional representatives. This could facilitate the management of the organisation, but – on the other hand – might create different categories of membership and discourage some organisations from participation, so such a decision will have to be carefully considered.

An important element in the PRF policy has always been to stay away from politics. Individual members may have their political preferences, but the organisation as a whole has always avoided affiliations with any politically-coloured events or initiatives – or, if necessary, took care to invite people from different parties. This is becoming even more important now, when the political scene in Poland is becoming increasingly polarised. However, it also means that the PRF is perceived by practically all governments as an "alien". Good working relationships developed over the years with lower-level, non-political officials in different Ministries can help to address this issue.

4.2. Dilemmas related to human resources

The Polish Rural Forum shares a number of characteristics concerning human resources with other rural NGOs. This means, in particular, that only a small proportion of work is carried out by employed staff, a lot of tasks are performed by volunteers – in the PRF case this is primarily the work carried out by the members of the Board and the audit committee. For these volunteers, participation in meetings, taking part in e-mail exchange, helping to prepare positions etc. can take an estimated 20 man-days per year[3].

In addition, the PRF employs normally 2 persons as full-time (or 3/4 time) staff. These employees are paid from projects and must deal with a variety of tasks, ranging from negotiating project partnerships, organising events, identifying and recruiting experts, to preparing reports and collecting financial evidence. This requires highly skilled and motivated personnel, usually vastly underpaid (compared to what they could get for a comparable job in the private sector) and without much possibility of promotion. A number of methods is used to maintain their motivation, as well as the motivation of volunteers. These methods include:

- **promoting initiative**: employees are encouraged to come up with own ideas and solutions, and helped by more experienced team members to make them a reality;

- **developing autonomy** by gradually increasing the level of responsibility; staff members can start with managing small simple tasks and eventually become project managers or coordinators of more complex undertakings;

- **stimulating cooperation** by flexible arrangements (one person manages a project and the other provides administrative supports, then the roles are switched, as far as possible the method of "two pairs of eyes" is used for important decisions or reports etc.).

These principles of personnel management are also used, as far as possible, in relation to short-term experts, volunteers and trainees engaged for specific tasks in projects. The ability to draw on a large **team of experts** with a wide range of skills, with whom the PRF has a long-standing relationship of mutual respect and trust, is a very important asset, as is the group of retired but still active people who are willing to contribute their unpaid time.

The PRF also tries to share its experience with other rural NGOs. For instance, the June 2014 issue of the newsletter published within the "Good start" project contains an article on effective methods of personnel management in rural organisations, based mainly on the PRF's own experience (and inspired also by some ideas linked to Total Quality Management).

4.3. Dilemmas related to funding

The attempt to maintain independence from all political affiliations and not to be driven by project-funding – while keeping membership fees to a minimum – has a price, and this price is **financial stability**. The PRF has never received any grant for its operating costs, and it has always had to combine its statutory activities (obligations towards its member organisations) with the implementation of projects which were needed to provide basic funding for its office and staff. However, such a combination raises the issues of potential conflict between PRF's mission and the project objectives, as has been mentioned above.

Fundraising requires time and skills, and it is not easy for an organisation such as the PRF: donors tend to give priority to other, more "trendy" themes than rural development; some of them have long-established partners whom they like to finance; others prefer small, locally-based organisations. Researching funding opportunities and preparing application is time-consuming and requires high level of professionalism, and there is also the issue of non-competing with its members. Whatever the reason, the PRF has not been very successful in mobilising funding, and thus its ability to provide a long-term perspective to its members and staff has been limited. If until now it has managed to survive
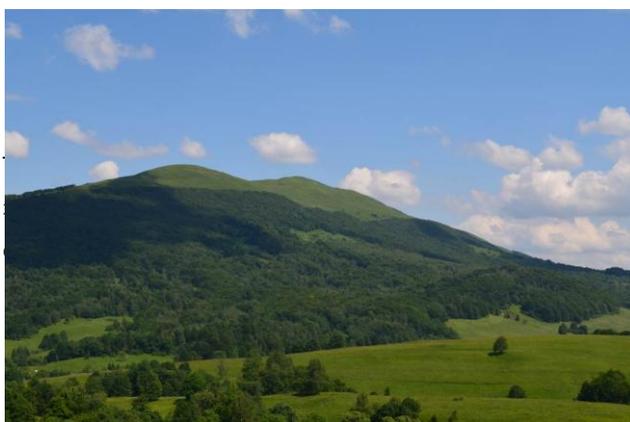
and fulfil its statutory obligations, it is mainly due to the high motivation of its staff and the persistent effort of the volunteers in the Board.

4.4. The balancing act

Overall, the experience of the Polish Rural Forum shows the need to achieve **a balance** in a number of fields:

- a balance between being a purely **mission-based** and **project-based** organisation. The PRF has so far managed to respond to the needs of its members, while at the same time initiating and implementing projects that would open new horizons before its members, but it has been done at the cost of financial stability;

- a balance between its own **need to survive** and the need to **build up the capacity of its members**. The PRF has had to make difficult choices in order to ensure its own existence – and to provide some sort of continuity for its staff – while making sure that it is not competing with its members and that project funding does not reduce its capacity to carry out its statutory obligations;

- a balance between **voluntary contributions** and **professionalism**. It is important for the PRF to maintain the image of a professional organisation in order to take up policy dialogue with the government, but this has to be done at the minimum of costs – while keeping in mind that much of the input from volunteers could not be bought with any amount of funding.

It is also important that this "balancing act" would not be possible without a **consensus on objectives**. While there can be different views about specific decisions, the people who have shaped the PRF policy over the last decade remain broadly in agreement about the basic objectives of the organisation (animating rural communities and increasing their participation in the process of rural change, as well as promoting sustainable rural development).

While the future of the Polish Rural Forum may sometimes seem uncertain, its position among rural stakeholders in Poland and the commitment of the people who drive its activities give it a permanent place on the Polish rural scene.

Questions for discussion:

- Think of a rural NGO trying to encourage local inhabitants to participate as volunteers: what methods can it use? What are the key barriers?
- Think of yourself as a volunteer: what do you expect from the person (persons) managing the project/organisation in which you volunteer? How much guidance, how much freedom to show your own initiative?
- Think of five reasons why networking can be beneficial for rural NGOs.

Rural Movements in Europe

By Vanessa Halhead

Co-ordinator and Director of the European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) and Director of Scottish Rural Action

Introduction

This chapter introduces the rural movements of Europe. Based on nearly 30 years of experience, research and action, the rural movements have come to be an important force in mobilising the rural communities of Europe, and their millions of volunteers, to develop their future in a more co-ordinated and empowered way. This is a far more complex and involved subject than this brief paper can do justice to, so the aim is to give an overview of the main process and features of the growth of the rural movements, and to raise some questions for discussion.

Background

"The rural movements that have developed in Europe over the last 30 years represent an organised approach to providing a network and voice for rural areas, their people and the many organisations working for rural development. Faced with many years of rural decline, centralising policy, globalisation of markets and European integration, rural people have organised themselves to raise the challenge of a new rural Europe. They work at village, regional, national and international levels, to make sure that the voice of the rural people is heard at every level of decisions making. They also work together to build the capacity, confidence and achievements of the local actors in creating a better future for Europe's many thousands of rural communities. Because of their high level of organisation, networking and direct relationship with the rural communities, the rural movements represent a potentially very significant new voice on the European stage, and are likely to become key players in the EU." [4]

My involvement with the rural movements had its beginnings in 1998 when first attending the biennial Swedish Rural Parliament. This was an inspirational experience, which revealed the potential for co-operation, empowerment and influence of small rural communities when they are organised and united. In 2003, I set out to understand more about the European Rural Movements, in order to inform the promotion of such a movement in Scotland. With the help of a Churchill Fellowship, I was able to make informative study visits to four countries in which rural movements were known to be functioning, Estonia, Finland, Slovakia and Denmark, and also met with others including Sweden, Poland and the countries involved in the PREPARE[5] network. Whilst writing the report of this research, I also looked at the wider picture across Europe, and at that time identified a total of 18 organisations which met the description of national rural movements. This report on the Rural Movements in Europe was one of the first to attempt to document this remarkable 'quiet revolution' that is developing in rural Europe.

Since the publication of the report, a dedicated band of people across Europe has worked hard to develop understanding and networking between these movements, and to promote their growth in new countries. In 2009 we established the European Rural Community Association (now Alliance) to provide a network for the rural movements and a voice for the rural communities at European level. More recently, in partnership with PREPARE, we have established the European Rural Parliament as a platform for enabling rural communities to raise, debate and address their important issues in the context of European. The first European Rural Parliament was held in Brussels in November 2013, and will be a biennial event, moving around Europe. In Scotland, I am proud to say, we will hold our first rural parliament in November 2014.

The growth of the rural movements

"The Village Action Movement is an expression of people's desires to engage in collective values as well as an expression of their ability to find new solutions. Organised collectively in democratic associations, the people develop and uphold their local communities; they are simply trying to reclaimed the local power"[6]

---

[4]Halhead V, The Rural Movements of Europe, PREPARE, 2005

[5]Partnership for Rural Europe – working to build rural partnerships in the pre-accession and accession countries

[6]"Local Level Democracy in a Historical Perspective in Sweden" Ulla Herlitz, University of Gothenburg, 2001

What are they?

A movement is distinct from a network. A network is about exchange. A movement wants change.

The rural movements are national and, in some countries regional, civil society organisations, mobilising and uniting the many local communities and organisations working for rural development. They aim to empower rural communities to address their own development and to lobby for the changes needed to safeguard their future. The main functions of the movement are to help rural communities:

- to address their own futures
- to support local action for local development
- to celebrate local identity and culture
- to build local, national and international networks
- to have a stronger voice and to influence local, national and EU policy

The rural movements are part of a world-wide trend towards participatory rural development. They are also key players in mobilising the social capital of rural areas.

Why are they needed?

"When society 'left', the inhabitants formed village action groups to work for the development of their community."

Rural areas face particular challenges, compared to urban areas, when it comes to enabling the provision of a sustainable life for their inhabitants. This is the subject of constant policy debate and research, however, the development of the rural movements is a testimony to that difference and the needs that it produces. Over 90% of the EU territory is rural and a quarter of the population, yet electorates and decision makers are predominantly urban. As a consequence, the rural social voice is still very weak in all countries and at the level of the EU. It is also often overshadowed by the voice of the agriculture lobby, which is generally powerful. Whilst agriculture is critically important for many reasons, the lives of the majority of rural people in most European countries are no longer connected to it, yet very few countries have integrated rural policy, Finland being one of the notable exceptions.

From the research, it was clear that each rural movement was established and structured in response to the changing circumstances in their rural areas and the conditions prevailing nationally. Whilst there are national differences, the fundamental reasons for their establishment are very similar across all of the countries, and persist to the present time. The timing of their establishment also related to the presence of particular trigger-factors in terms of rapid and damaging change. For instance, due to the merging of small municipalities and rural depopulation in Sweden in the 1960-70s, or due to rapid agricultural decline and rural-urban migration in Estonia post-independence.

The main reasons cited for the establishment of the rural movements include:

- agricultural decline and rural economic change
- rural-urban migration and imbalanced age structures
- remoteness and isolation of many rural communities
- centralisation, local government restructuring and loss of local democracy
- decline of the welfare state and reduction in public funding
- cultural and economic urbanisation
- lack of rural focus in policy and in the structure of administration
- the need for a stronger political voice for rural communities
- globalisation of markets and effects of the EU internal market
- the need to build civil society in the EU accession states

The movements have also responded to perceived gaps in administration. In Sweden and Denmark village mobilisation was partly a response to the amalgamation of municipalities in the 1970s and the loss of power to the parish level. Finland, Sweden and Estonia have no municipalities at the village level, so are mobilising villages to participate in the planning and delivery process. Slovakia has village municipalities and is focussing attention on developing micro-regional partnerships to add strength. All are focussing on creating broad partnerships to work with the authorities at each level of administration. All are seeking to strengthen social capital to compensate for the reduction in public resources.

The trends identified above are no less important for Europe's rural areas now than they were, and are continuing to drive people out of the rural areas. The 1970s saw very high levels of rural out-migration in the Nordic countries, a trend which has slowed but not stopped. In Eastern Europe, the 1990s produced a similar significant decline in the fortunes of the rural areas, following the move from a communist to market-led system. Such trends are also being experienced in most rural areas of Western Europe as the influence of the globalised economy is weakening their competitiveness, reduction in public expenditure is undermining the welfare state and increasingly centralised administration is reducing local democracy.

When and where did they start?

Starting in Scandinavia, national rural movements have been formed in at least 24 European nations, and the process of formation is continuing. The rural movements, in their present form, began in the 1970s. There have however been other, much older social movements in rural areas in many parts of rural Europe, for

instance the Norwegian movement dates back 200 years. A brief chronology of the current movements shows the following pattern of development.

C19	Norway	1998	Hungary
1976	Finland	2000	Slovakia
1976	Denmark	2001	Iceland
1979	Netherlands	2002	Poland
1980	England	2002	Lithuania
1982	Scotland (closed in 1999, now re-forming)	2003	Slovenia
		2004	Latvia
1989	Sweden	2005	Czech Republic
1990	Wales (not currently operational)	2006	Croatia
		2010	Macedonia
1990	Ireland	2012	Serbia
1991	Northern Ireland	2012	Montenegro
1992	Estonia		
1993	Portugal		

How are they organised?

"The Village Action Movement is an expression of people's desires to engage in collective values as well as an expression of their ability to find new solutions. Organised collectively in democratic associations, the people develop and uphold their local communities; they are simply trying to reclaimed the local power"

In each country, the structure of the rural movement responds to the national culture and priorities, the formal administrative structures of the country and also to the stage of development of the movement. Movements differ in the extent to which they are set up to be truly representative of local rural communities 'village movement' or are networks of rural civil organisations 'rural forum', some are both.

- **A 'village movement'** is an organisational expression of local village action for rural development. It is a way of bringing together the people actively involved at the most local level of rural society, and supporting their efforts at regional and national levels. It is mobilising rural communities to address their own futures, to influence local and national policy and to build local, national and trans-national rural networks. **The 'rural forum'** is a mechanism for providing a co-ordinated response to the needs of rural development, on the part of the many organisations that, individually, represent aspects of the wider rural sector. The key roles of a rural form are to develop a co-operative and integrated approach, and to work with government to address rural issues.

The distinction between the two models is important in determining the nature of the relationship with the local level, and is the subject of much consideration. The Swedish example combines both forms of membership, but has evolved to favour the village movement. The

Polish Rural Forum is an example of the rural forum structure. It is clearly a more difficult and lengthy process to mobilise a village action movement with true local community membership from across a country. It is also the case that at local level, voluntary groups may be many and diverse. In Finland and Sweden, for example, considerable work went in to developing village associations to act as an umbrella for this local diversity.

In the more highly evolved movements[7] voluntary membership structures have been established at different levels to correspond with levels of administration (village, municipal, county, national). These different levels of the movement enable it to speak to and work with decision makers. Through ERCA, the movements now also have a structure to relate to the European level.

Through this varied experience, a picture has emerged of the effectiveness of the different structures. The diagram below describes the model which is now generally held to be the most effective and involving. This places the rural communities themselves at the heart of the structure and process, with the many sectoral interest organisations in a supportive capacity.
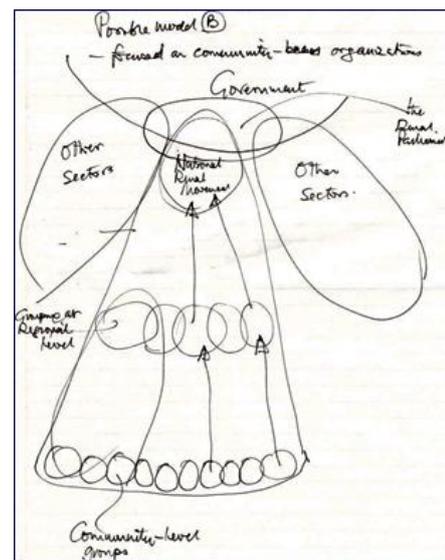
The Swedish movement 'All Sweden shall live' is such an example, comprising 5000 village associations, as well as 44 member NGOs. The movement also has 100 municipal networks and 24 regional networks of its own members. This has taken over 25 years to evolve, but is considered to be a very effective model.

What do they do?

The work of the national movements is varied and broad, and relates to the national context, structure of the movement and stage of development. The case studies in this chapter give some examples. In broad terms, the movements work with developing networks

---

[7] For example the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Estonia

of local community associations across the country, supporting their work with advice, training and shared experience and giving a voice to the rural communities in policy making at different levels.

The activities of the movements vary at the different geographical levels:

At local level:

They have formed broad-based, legal, community associations to:

- fight for local services and run local projects
- develop local community plans and link these to municipality plans
- deliver services, start enterprises, form partnerships

At regional level (where this exists):

They have formed regional community associations to:

- support communities with training, advice, contacts
- develop regional community plans
- work with regional authorities and link community plans to statutory plans

At national level:

They have formed national associations to:

- link the local and regional community associations
- develop national community plans
- organise the 'Rural Parliament'
- work with government and national NGOs
- link community plans to national policy

The 'rural parliament'

A feature of the rural movements that is worthy of note is the 'rural parliament'. In basic terms, this is an ongoing process of strategy formation and implementation, climaxing in a national biennial gathering of rural communities and interests, which provides an opportunity to showcase rural areas and celebrate their work, network rural communities, raise important rural issues, develop strategic plans and provide a voice to government. This model was pioneered in Sweden, where it has reached an impressive level of development with in the region of 1000 delegates attending, as well as senior politicians and decision makers. The success of this example has led to the idea being adopted by other countries[8] and also at European level, where the first European Rural Parliament was held in 2013.

"Rural areas are so big, with so many players, that we now realise we need support from each other. It is important to have the support of the local people and civic society behind you. The strength of the Rural Parliament

is their wide support within the rural community. It is difficult for the government to ignore this".[9]

The European level

During recent years, the rural movements have been working to build European level networks. This effort recognises that co-operation can bring many benefits by building on the collective strengths of the national movements. It also recognises the strong similarities between the issues facing rural areas across Europe and that approximately 60% of policy affecting rural areas is influenced by EU policies. Strengthening EU policy for rural development is therefore a priority and there is a pressing need for the EU to engage civil society more closely. This will only happen if the rural population gains a stronger voice. The challenge is to achieve a far more ambitious approach to integrated rural development that is multi-sectoral, place-based, local, based on participation and partnership and to enable rural people and organisations to play a leading role in this process - *a people's vision for rural Europe.*

The European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) has been set up to address this challenge. ERCA is the European network for non-governmental organisations and networks, at European, national and regional levels, that implement integrated, cross-sectoral, place-based and local rural development. It is working to:

- Promote integrated, place-based rural development at European level
- Enable debate and influence policy on rural development in the EU and nationally
- Support, empower, network and promote the national rural movements
- Enable exchange of knowledge and mutual support between rural people across Europe

ERCA is also working with related European networks, in particular the Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE), to build the European Rural Parliament.

We are all strengthened by co-operation.

The rural movements and volunteering

Why are the rural movements relevant to the theme of 'volunteering'? Most of the people who are involved in these rural movements are volunteers, people working hard to enable their own communities to survive and flourish in all kinds of ways. Without this massive army of volunteers, in Sweden alone estimated at over one million people, rural communities would not have survived the forces that constantly challenge their sustainability. Volunteer work has always been a feature of rural communities to the extent that it has assumed the status of a non-formal 'currency' in some countries, as for example *Dugnat* in Norway and *Talko* in Finland. In

---

[8] Estonia, Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Scotland

[9] Head of the Slovak Rural Development Agency, 2003

Scotland, the 2010 census showed that approximately 40% of the rural population are involved in volunteer work. The rural movements are helping to harness and strengthen of this extensive social capital to ensure the sustainability of rural communities.

Recent figures given for the number of community groups and individual volunteers involved with the rural movements are:

Movement	Community group members	Individual volunteers
Sweden	5000	1,000,000
Netherlands	4300	150,000
Lithuania	1150	300,000
Ireland	1200	34,000
Finland	3000	4,550,000 volunteer hours
Estonia	200	
N. Ireland	300	

A study undertaken in Finland in 2003 as to the extent of the engagement and benefits from their rural movement found that:

- 1.6 million volunteer hours invested totalling €16 million (in 2014 this figure had risen to 4.55 mill. hours)

- €3.2 million independent funding and €31 million public project funding raised

- 8000 development measures implemented

- 1000 village plans in effect

- 2.5 million+ Finns assisted by village development work

In conclusion

From this very brief introduction to the concept of the rural movements in Europe, it is possible to say that these are a strong manifestation of the power of the local level to support and express itself at every level, mostly through volunteer work. Although levels of development and influence vary from country to country, there are strong examples which prove the potential of this form of organising the largely volunteer force that exist across rural Europe.

The key characteristics of the rural movements are that they are:

Bottom up rooted in the local community and owned and run by local people

Supportive mobilising, networking and supporting action for local development

Structured organised and networked at local, regional, national and international levels

Co-ordinated working with a clear common purpose achieved by strategic planning

Influencing undertaking advocacy to shape local, regional, national, EU policy

Informed well connected with good information dissemination

International internationally connected through a common network

As the movements become more self-aware and connected in a European context, so they develop in confidence and know-how to undertake this work. They are also now entering the European stage, through the European Rural Parliament and other mechanisms, to begin to raise the profile of the rural social agenda, to ensure that the interests and well-being of the rural communities of Europe are reflected in European and national policies.

In essence, the movements enable the huge strength of the social capital of the rural communities to be harnessed and manifested at a national level. They form a civil society 'mirror' to government at different levels and have the independence to work with, but also to challenge the formal processes of politics and policy. They embody the principles of participative rather than representative democracy. They also give a degree of constancy and permanence – governments and policies may come and go, but the rural communities are always there.

Discussion points

Some questions are raised for discussion in respect of the role and activities of the rural movements: the role of the rural movements in supporting and harnessing social capital in ways that add value to the local situation and volunteers

- the relationship between the rural movements and other players within the rural arena

- the relationship between participative and representative democratic systems and the mechanisms for effectively implementing this relationship

- the role of the rural movements in influencing rural policy formulation, at all levels, in favour of the needs of rural people and communities

SWEDEN: HelaSverigeska leva! HSSL - All Sweden shall live!

Swedish National Peoples Movement for Rural Development

www.bygde.net

"A new form of place-based, participative local democracy"

"Organised collectively in democratic village associations, the people develop and uphold their local communities; they are simply trying to reclaim the connections between local identity and power."

National context

All three levels: national, regional/county and local/municipality levels are important in Sweden. The 290 local authorities (municipalities) are rather big and influential. The municipality is the most local level at which political decisions are taken. The municipalities are funded through own taxation and state transfers.

The NGO-sector (e.g. popular movements/"*folkrörelser*") is extensive and influential. They participate in preparation of governmental bills and are actors in tri-partnership at all levels of society.

History

The Swedish Movement, e.g. Popular Movements Council (PMC), was established in 1990.

The main factors motivating its establishment were:

- To continue the actions and co-operation among NGOs and village groups built up in a rural campaign during the late 1980s
- To inspire and support the growing village movement
- To influence rural development and policies

Some national NGO's were the main actors in setting up the movement, supported by the government, e.g. a special committee for rural development.

Objectives

The aims of HSSL are:

- To encourage rural people and support Village Action Groups
- To network and disseminate good examples
- To give a voice to rural Sweden
- To influence rural policies

The objectives are determined by a Rural Parliament, which gathers every second year. Formal decisions are made by the Annual General Meeting. The Board manages daily work. The work programme is prioritised mainly by discussions at the Rural Parliament and member-meetings.

Organisation

HSSL is a Voluntary Association, operating at national level. Village action groups and organisations supporting HSSL's aims can be members. There are 24 HSSL regional associations operating in all counties and 100 at municipal level. The different levels of the organisation, except the village level, correspond to a formal democratic structure and decisions are made according to common democratic principles for voluntary associations. The organisation is run by a board comprising 2 co-presidents (1 male/ 1 female), 7 members and 5 deputies. The board is representative of the membership structure, through the regional associations and national NGOs. There are skilled staff members at national and regional levels, including 6 at national level. The annual budget is in the region of 1 mill. Euro, most of which comes from government and part from member fees, sponsorship and projects.

Participation

Local people are members of Village Action Groups who are members in HSSL. There are meetings and actions on village, municipal, regional and national level. As the structure is developing more and more issues are handled in the regional and municipal networks. Issues can be raised by anyone at any level, by direct contact, at regional meetings or at the Rural Parliament, which is open to all. The relations between the authorities and the movement are nowadays good. The government is influential by financing, but does not really interfere.

Activities

The main activities are meetings, projects, information, lobbying, referendum, participation in official delegations, and the Rural Parliaments every second year. Activities are delivered by people at all levels of the organisation. HSSL are relatively free in the use of their funds, however, the government expects delivery of voluntary work, training, advisory services, democratic and economic development and views on different rural matters. HSSL have a lobbying role and member organisations count on lobbying support, they influence the

government and politicians on every level including national policies, but not as much as desired.

Achievements

The main achievements include creating a Village Movement supporting local democracy and rural activity, and giving legitimacy to local development.

Special programs at governmental, regional, municipal and village level have been realised. Funding for local projects have been available.

Problems

The main barriers to progress have been:

- Earlier no legitimacy from politicians and staff. Even seen as a threat.

- Sector oriented policies.

- Market economy solutions which do not fit local levels in sparsely populated areas. No long-term view

- Positive politicians/parties nowadays, but non-acting.

- Complicated regulations for financing small projects.

HSSL experienced and overcame one major crises caused by actions to change the movement into a pronounced lobby-organisation.

FINLAND: Suomen Kylätoiminta ry (SYTY)

The Village Action Association of FInland

www.village-action.fi

"SYTU is the villagers' voluntary co-operation organisation which aims to develop the village as a functional community"

"The national association was formed in order to integrate sectoral interests, at local and national levels, to strengthen the involvement of village people and to bring their interest groups together. If we want to get support for these village groups we needed a body that was fighting for this at national level."[10]

National context

There is a strong top-down tradition and sectoral administration in Finland consisting of Ministries and Regions. Sub-regions and micro regions (partly NGOs) and Villages (totally NGOs) are both getting stronger

Municipalities are the most powerful at local level, but NGOs are becoming more powerful - step by step.

History

1970s - campaigning by Professor LauriHautamäki

1982 - formation of unofficial central unit, the Delegation of Village Affairs

1997 - Association of Finnish Village Action, SYTY, was set up by Dr EeroUusitalo

Objectives

To promote the well-being of villagers, through the action of:

- Village Associations
- Regional Village Associations
- SYTY, working in co-operation with municipalities and Ministries

Organisation

SYTY comprises the national organisation, 19 regional village associations, 20 national level rural organisations and 58 Leader LAGs. There are 3000 registered village associations many of which are members of the regional associations.

Participation

At village level, there is substantial active participation, and on the basis of "talkoot" (voluntary work).

On regional and national levels, people participate as members of the board. Issues are raised by members. This direct participative democracy is becoming stronger, whilst the representative democracy of municipalities has more problems in remaining strong.

Activities

The main activities include:

- strategic village planning at local, regional and national levels
- policy development and advocacy
- projects, services and common events
- international co-operation

Until the 1990s the emphasis was on lobbying, now the focus for the village associations is on taking responsibility to improve the conditions of their own village.

The Plan of SYTY is one part of the overall Rural Programme for Finland. SYTY is able to submit proposals to be included in this Programme, thus involving direct work rather than lobbying.

Achievements

Local Action Groups work everywhere in Finland and they support the development work in villages.

Village actors plan the future of their villages. The State helps and gives aid to implement this plan.

There is small State Aid to the Village Action Movement.

A survey carried out in 2003 gave an insight into the role of SYTY in building social capital, figures are per annum:

- 1.6 mill. volunteer hours invested totalling €16 mill (in 2014 this figure had risen to 4.55 mill. hours)
- €3.2 mill. Independent funding and €31 mill. public project funding raised
- 8000 development measures implemented
- 1000 village plans in effect
- 2.5 mill.+ Finns assisted by village development work

Problems

There were problems in the past in gaining the confidence of local people and working with them to devel-

---

[10]Eero Uusitalo – Chairman of the Village Action Association of Finland

op new forms of village association. This has been over-come with time.

Influencing rural policy is an on-going problem. This was greatly improved by more formal links being established between the movement and the government, through the Rural Policy Committee.

ESTONIA: 'KODUKANT'

Estonian Village Movement

www.kodukant.ee

All the power of a small village

"When our villages live, we will live" – "historically, the heart of Estonian culture and economy has been a village. Since the Estonians mastered their state and land again, the rural people have started to develop their environment. As in a real heart our most precious principles and values were fixed there." Arnold Rüütel – President of Estonia.

National context

The democratic process in Estonia started in 1991 when Estonia regained its independence from the Soviet Union. Today the democracy in Estonia is, broadly speaking, to be compared with most other West European democratic countries. The most local level for civic decision-making is the 241 Communal Councils (municipalities), there are also 15 County Councils. The number of NGOs in Estonia is about 19,500, which is a high in relation to the population of 1.4 million.

History

The idea of the movement started in 1991, through partnership with the Swedish rural movement. The motivation was to improve conditions in the countryside where decades of occupation had left Estonian villages devastated. Structural changes in the transition from a central planning system to market economy had huge consequences for the structure of Estonia's rural settlements with increased poverty, unemployment, limited growth of services and depopulation of rural areas. Two counties were selected as pilots, supported by partner counties in Sweden and financed by the Swedish International Aid Foundation SIDA. The county administrations were responsible for the projects. The success of the pilot projects became known among other villages in Estonia and several county organizations of village movements were registered as legal NGO-organizations with their own board. This ultimately led to the formation of the national movement in 1997.

Objectives

The aims and objectives of Kodukant are:

1. Technical advice
2. Networking and communication
3. Capacity Building
4. Advocacy
5. Support for local initiatives

6. Co-operation between villages, counties, countries and sectors.

Organisation

Kodukant became legally registered in 1997. Over 4000 individuals are directly involved in the movement, which has staffed county level associations in all 15 counties. The central organisation has only 1 employee, and is mostly run by the voluntary efforts of the board and others. Specific projects employ staff on a temporary basis. Kodukant is financed by a variety of project-based funding sources. The main funding comes from projects with the Ministry of Agriculture, Social Ministry, Estonian Local Initiatives Program, European Union and the Baltic American Partnership Fund.

Participation

Kodukant has a local office in all the 15 counties of Estonia. Each office works with local NGO´s and organizations in arranging activities on different levels (education, discussions, study tours).

We have divided Estonia into 5 regions and in each region education (e.g. for village leaders) takes place.

The county organizations also act as counsellors to the Ministry of Agriculture in specific questions by collecting proposals and ideas, which Kodukant distribute to the Ministry.

The main brainstorming takes place at the Rural Parliament. 20 delegates from each county organization are selected. Their task is to prepare proposals and questions before the Parliament where work groups are working out declarations to be sent to the Government and ministries and municipalities.

Issues are raised by the members of the organization.

Activities

Examples of projects have included:

- Organizing the Rural Parliament
- Local Healthy Foods - to stimulate local food production and consumption.
- Village Leaders Capacity Assessment.
- EU Coffee Talks - to discuss Estonian integration in EU
- Access to Assets - to strengthen the sustainability and increase professionalism of local rural NGOs

- Estonia – The Natural Way. To provide training for individuals involved in rural tourism.

- AITUMA. Helping women to start small enterprises and establish a regional marketing network

- Environmental project – in partnership with Sweden, to promote sustainable development activities

- E-Village project - preparing villages throughout Estonia for create development plans and apply for funding.

Achievements

Kodukant records many achievements, and is a vibrant organisation. Listed among its achievements are:

- The biennial Rural Parliament which unites the movement and develops its strategy and links with government

- Many projects, each attracting funding and partnership with government, EU and other organisations

- Initiating the national Local Initiatives Programme, a national fund for rural initiatives

- International co-operation, through ERCA, PREPARE and partnership projects

- Successfully supporting the development of rural movements in other accession countries.

- Working with the Government: Kodukant has become a mediator between villages and the government through education, advocacy and lobbying. Since its foundation, Kodukant has always pursued a partner role to the public sector in the development of rural Estonia. Representatives of Kodukant are members of committees of different kinds on national, regional, and local levels. A representative of Kodukant takes part in the Round Table meetings with the President of Estonia, aiming to make proposals for the civil society.

Problems

Because of the difficulty in raising funding for staff, Kodukant relies on volunteer labour to organise at national, regional and local levels. At national level this has resulted in overload for the most active people in the organisation. There is an over-reliance on project funding to maintain the work of the movement.

NETHERLANDS: Landelijke Vereniging Voor Kleine Kerner (LVKK)
National Association of Small Villages

National Context

The Netherlands has 480 municipalities, 12 provinces and the national government. The population is 16 mill. of which 10 mill. live in the rural areas and the 1000 small towns and villages. The local municipalities are responsible for providing services and local planning.

- In most villages there are voluntary **village associations**, which organise activities and promote the interests of the village with the municipalities.

- The village associations are organised in 12 **provincial associations**, which promote the interests of the villages on the provincial level, give advice to the villages and offer assistance and services. They are funded by the provincial government and village associations.

- The provincial associations are organised since 2002 in the **national association** of small villages (LVKK). LVKK is mostly funded by the national government.

History

LVKK grew out of a long history of rural community organisation to address rural issues, dating back to the 1950s in Friesland. The first provincial association of villages was formed out of this work in 1979, and was followed by other provincial associations. LVKK itself was established 1975 to address the disparities between rural and urban areas. The provincial associations, supported by LVKK worked to retain the social-welfare facilities in villages, but found this very challenging - "like pulling on a dead horse". In more recent years, the opinion of the government and LVKK is that citizens have to be more responsible for their own wellbeing in the village and the rural area. The provinces and municipalities have to offer more assistance and services to the people instead of making their own plans for the villages. "That is asking for a cultural change-over of the provinces and the municipalities".

Objectives

The main aim of LVKK is to improve the standard of life in the villages and to try to narrow the gap between citizens and the government. The movement has helped to mobilise and connect associations of villages in every province, in order to combine the experiences from across the country to gain a stronger voice with the government. The objectives and work programme of LVKK are decided by the national board, which includes representatives from the provincial associations across the country. In this way, the ideas and priorities of the local communities form the basis for the work of the movement.

Organisation

LVKK is an independent NGO. The voting membership of LVKK comprises members from each provincial association, which themselves comprise 4300 village associations. LVKK has 2 permanent employees. Funded is received from the ministries of agriculture and social welfare, plus project funding from other sources and donors.

Participation

Village people meet several times a year at meetings at provincial level. Every other year LVKK organises a rural parliament and 'national village day' where people from all over the country meet to exchange information and debate key issues for submitting to government. Issues are raised by the people in the villages, through the provincial associations. Four meetings a year are held between the employees of the provincial associations.

Activities

The main activities are:

- Bringing people from different village organisations together in working groups, or conferences

- Influencing rural policy and government legislation, based on consultation with over 1000 villages

- Organising the rural parliament / national day of villages

- Disseminating information to the villages

An annual work plan is agreed with the funding ministries.

Intergenerational Learning for Nature Conservation Volunteers

By Fouli Papageorgiou

*Architect – Planner, PRISMA- Centre for Development Studies
and Euracademy Association*

Introduction

INVOLEN is an innovative project promoting intergenerational learning and game-based learning through ICT tools, targeting nature conservation volunteers in 5 European countries (Italy, Greece, France, Hungary and Slovenia). INVOLEN brings together two different age groups, adolescents and senior citizens and encourages their participation in voluntary activities for the protection and preservation of the European ecological heritage, focusing on NATURA 2000 sites. Seniors and youth are challenged to work together in groups and design their own interactive ICT games on nature conservation. A wide dissemination campaign of the INVOLEN model is launched by initiating mobile game competitions leading to European awards in all participating countries.

The INVOLEN project has been funded by the European Commission, through the Grundtvig programme of the Lifelong Learning Initiative. The project is implemented by a multi-national partnership consisting of environmental and rural development NGOs, adult education institutions, and public/private research centres, committed to a multidisciplinary and multi-cultural approach to the project.[11] The European Academy for Sustainable Rural Development is taking part as associated partner.

Background

The literature on environmental education shows that many environmental educators focus their efforts on children and youth, hoping to provide the next generation with the desire, commitment, and ability to create an ecologically sustainable future[12]. However, many educators are aware of the need to focus on adults too, for two reasons: firstly, because there is an urgent need to address the serious environmental problems of today; secondly, because adults, especially people of the third age, have the potential to contribute substantially to environmental conservation by transferring knowledge and wisdom of past generations to the present needs of environmental sustainability. At the same time environmental educators recognise that there are substantial barriers in involving seniors in adult education. Intergenerational learning comes into the picture to offer benefits for young and older citizens.[13].

Experience shows that involving senior citizens in nature conservation activities brings them closer to nature, creating benefits on many levels, such as stimulating physical and mental activity, creating a sense of purpose, and offering opportunities for socialising[14]. Furthermore, the experience of the project partners

---

[11]•Institute of Biometeorology (IBIMET) - National Council of Research (CNR) – IT
•PRISMA, Centre for Development Studies – GR
•La Ligue de l'enseignement – FR
•Hellenic Ornithological Society – GR
•PAN Parks Foundation – HU (withdrawn)
•NEC - Notranjski Ekoloski Center – SL
•Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) – Centre for Economic and Regional Studies (CERS) – HU

[12]Duvall J. and M. Zint, A Review of Research on the Effectiveness of Environmental Education in Promoting Intergenerational Learning, Journal of environmental Education, Vol. 38, No 4, 2007
[13]Boström Ann-Kristin, Lifelong Learning, Intergenerational Learning, and Social Capital" from Theory to Practice, Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, 2003
Owens, P. E., & McKinnon, I. (2009). *'In pursuit of nature: The role of nature in adolescents lives'*. *Journal of Developmental Processes, 4(1),* 43-58., 2009
[14]Mike Walker. In press. Wildlife for Senior Citizens in Powys care home.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/midwales/hi/people_and_places/newsid_9365000/9365131.stm

Hellenic Ornithological Society and La Ligue de l'enseignement with children and youth, as well as relevant literature, show that their well-being is nurtured by frequent contact with nature, helping them to develop values and knowledge that underpin sustainable lifestyles[15]. This is further corroborated by the observation that over recent decades there has been a contraction in nature-based childhood and teenage experiences, with fewer opportunities of first-hand experience of nature compared to previous generations[16].

Involvement in nature conservation, for the non-professionals, has to be on a voluntary basis. Voluntary activity has been widely accepted as a valuable asset for communities, contributing to community cohesion and a sense of responsibility among its members. To encourage volunteering from an early age is particularly important, as it provides a sound basis for continuing such activity during adult life. Moreover, to offer to senior citizens opportunities for voluntary work creates a much-needed feeling of being both creative and useful to the community. Thus, the INVOLEN project has put into practice the two notions of volunteering and intergenerational learning, to stimulate awareness, sensitivity and active conservation and protection of nature, especially in protected areas that fall within the NATURA 2000 list.

Approach

To encourage learning and active involvement by both generations, the project has introduced innovative solutions to learning that make use of the potential of IT to create interactive learning environments, exploiting the possibilities of game-based learning. The older learners are given the opportunity to become familiar with IT tools, learn the basics and become more immersed if desired. The younger learners are enticed by the use of attractive IT tools and environments, based on mobile phones, which form a large part of their everyday social activity. The learning methodology is based on gaming techniques and interactive learning, investing on three learning components: "stories" narrated by the senior volunteers focusing on their personal experiences and the local traditions reflecting aspects of environmental sustainability; field visits and conservation experts' information on the protected areas selected for study; and the use of open source interactive software, which through a gaming process guides the player list,

understand and find solutions for the conservation issues and sustainability needs of the protected area. [17].

Part of the INVOLEN methodology is also based on the notion of "learning facilitation" assigning this role to teachers and conservation experts, who encourage and support self-learning and mutual learning between the two generations instead of the conventional teacher-student transfer of knowledge. Also, by linking the learning process to a specific protected area and to one or more communities, inside or close to that area, the learners are encouraged to adopt an area-based and community-based approach.

Achievements

A first task that had to be undertaken was an investigation on competences and training needs of the target groups of the project - i.e young volunteers of secondary school age and senior citizens. For this, 9 focus groups were held in 5 countries. A report has been produced bringing together the results of the discussions in the focus groups highlighting that:

- Both young and old expressed a vivid interest to know more about the current conservation needs of protected areas. The young were enthusiastic about the use of smart phones or tablets for gaming, and the seniors expressed a curiosity for this, although they lacked, in general, sufficient ICT skills.

- In order to encourage knowledge transfer between the generations, it has been suggested to encourage jointly performed conservation activities by young and senior participants, such as field visits, clean-up activities or activities to achieve practical skills related to traditional techniques of nature conservation

- The teachers who took part expressed their interest in learning more about intergenerational learning methods, to improve or diversify their teaching skills; and were very keen to gain new experience in the field of nature conservation. ICT skills in the area of location-based game development also proved to be an attraction for them, offering a new dimension to environmental education.

The second step was to develop a methodology for intergenerational learning and volunteering, using game-based techniques. The methodology dealt with:

a) The definition of intergenerational learning; how the intergenerational learning techniques would be applied in the INVOLEN learning activities; what

[15]Chawla, L. Growing up green: Becoming an agent of care for the natural world' Journal of Developmental Processes, 4(1), 6-23, 2009.

[16]Owens, P. E., & McKinnon, I. (2009). 'In pursuit of nature: The role of nature in adolescents lives'. Journal of Developmental Processes, 4(1), 43-58., 2009

[17]an example is provided by the following website: http://arisgames.org/

would the facilitators' role be in promoting intergenerational learning; how the practical aspects of learning could be approached, so that the benefit would spread to both groups of learners, young and seniors.

b) The design of Location Based Games (LBGs) given that the learning process built in the project is based on the development of mobile games for outdoors use, custom-made for the protected areas in focus. Background information on LBGs is included and a connection between LBGs and learning about nature is proposed. Several patterns of LBGs are outlined accompanied by basic technological issues that have to be taken under consideration during the design, development and testing of the games. Guidelines for constructing a conservation-aimed LBG using intergenerational storytelling are included, focusing on issues of group management, game mechanics, use of technology, stories/material collection, narratives, playtesting and environmental/natural parameters.

The learning facilitators from 5 countries who agreed to take part in the pilot-testing of the INVOLEN methodology attended a two-day training workshop held in July, 2013, in Lorient, France. The workshop aimed to build the capacity of the facilitators to carry out the intergenerational learning methodology, including the ICT tasks that are central to it. The objectives and basic principles of intergenerational learning were presented, such as mutual and reciprocal benefits; participatory scope; active learning approach; good planning; culturally grounded learning; promoting of active citizenship; fighting age-related stereotypes; adopting an interdisciplinary approach. One of the main tasks of the facilitators has been defined to be a clear understanding of their audience's skills (youth and seniors), so that they can provide the most appropriate learning activities and a fair distribution of tasks.

The ICT training included a short introduction on contemporary storytelling and the connection between oral narrative and digital storytelling, emphasising that narratives have been shared in every culture as a medium of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and instilment of moral values. Crucial elements of stories and storytelling were presented, such as plot, characters, and narrative styles. A brief overview of Location Based Services (LBS) followed, which represent an emerging class of information systems, providing mobile users with information tailored to their geographical location. Several paradigms of Location Based applications associated with augmented reality and location based tours, gaming and game-design were presented. The ARIS platform (Augmented Reality Interactive Storytelling Engine) was proposed as an application best suited to the scope of the project among several available platforms; and practical advice on how to construct a conservation-aimed game within an intergenerational framework was provided. The advice focused on team management, stories collection, storyboard setting and scenario elaboration, playtesting key-points, and the combination of nature and technology issues. The theoretical part was followed by a practical exercise, during which the participants had to construct a location-based game using information and photos taken during a visit to the surrounding natural area.

The facilitators during training indoors; and outdoors during the practical part of the workshop

The Lorient workshop was followed up by three webinars, which provided additional input on location-based game-design using the ARIS platform, answered questions, offered support on technology issues; and guided the facilitators in gaining practical experience themselves in game development.

The pilot testing of the INVOLEN methodology was carried out from October 2013 to April 2014, based on the delivery of 5 pilot courses, which involved …. young and older volunteers in 5 countries http://www.involen.eu/en/opportunities-to-participate/descripiton-of-pilot-courses). Three secondary schools (Greece, Italy, Hungary) and two NGOs (France, Slovenia) have been involved in organising and delivering the pilot course, employing their own and external staff of learning facilitators and other experts.

The pilot courses have been delivered in six Units, according to the guidelines of the Learning Methodology. Each Unit included one or more meetings, depending on the duration of each meeting, and included the planning of the learning and volunteering process by the participants themselves; environmental conservation and ICT training, especially location-based gaming on ARIS; documentation of stories narrated by the senior volunteers; design and development of at least one game per course, for a defined protected area; conduct of conservation activities performed together by youth and seniors; playtesting, refining and publishing the games for public use.

Moreover, an online searchable database has been set up, containing the stories narrated by the senior volunteers during the pilot course implementation, as well as some "case studies" offered by environmental conservation experts, and is accessible through the INVOLEN website (http://www.involen.eu/en/learning-tools-resources/stories-from-elders). The database has the format of a library, with search facilities, and includes at present 21 entries from 4 countries. The stories have been documented digitally and have been transcribed by the junior volunteers and translated in English by the partners. The stories' library will be enriched with additional entries throughout the life of the project and particularly during the wider application of the INVOLEN methodology through the European competition to be launched in autumn 2014 in the five countries of the project.

Pilot course sessions in Greece, Slovenia, Italy and France

The volunteer conservationists' games

Six online mobile games in the participants' national languages and in English, have been developed by the volunteers and facilitators, with some assistance from ICT experts. The storyboard of the games has been created by the junior volunteers, based on the stories narrated by the older volunteers, coupled with information on contemporary conservation issues of the protected areas selected in each country, provided by conservation experts. The games' content features videos, pictures, geopoints, virtual characters as well as digital information that was either gathered on site, while the volunteers carried out conservation activities, or through desk research. The games, which have been developed on the ARIS open-source platform (http://arisgames.org) can be viewed through the website of the project (http://www.involen.eu/en/learning-tools-

resources/mobile-games). In order to play the games, the user has to download the free ARIS App via Apple's App Store or iTunes on their iDevice (i.e. iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, iPad mini) and seek the games through their game-names.

More schools and NGOs will now be invited to produce games for environmental conservation, involving youth and senior citizens: a five-prong European Competition is planned to be launched exploiting the knowledge infrastructure already created in the five project-countries, i.e. Italy, Greece, France, Slovenia and Hungary, in the autumn of 2014. Groups of young and older volunteers will compete for the design and development of the best European "volunteer conservationist's games". Three finalists will be selected by an independent jury and public voting; and will be invited to present their games in the end-of-project International Conference in Florence, Italy. The "products" of the competition entrants will be translated in English including the seniors' stories that will be uploaded on the stories' Library; and the games, to be demonstrated on the website of INVOLEN. During the competition, an online Helpdesk will be set up to provide answers to questions raised by facilitators supervising the contestants, supported by all partners, with sections in the national languages.
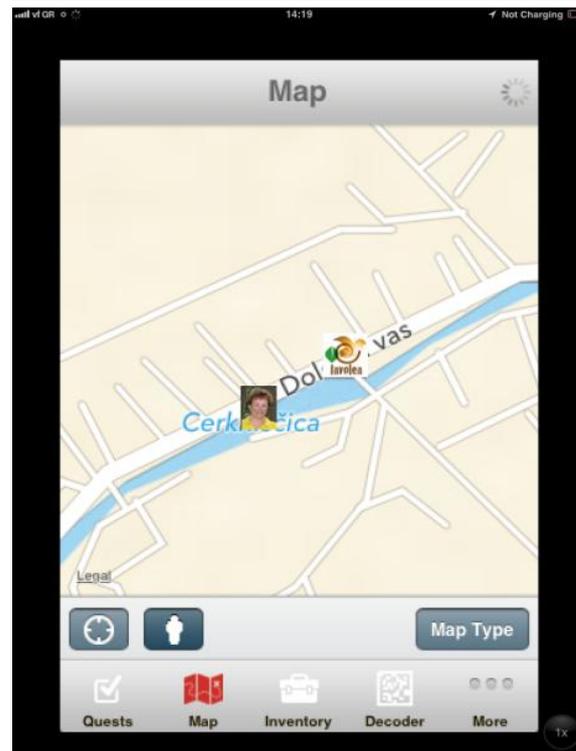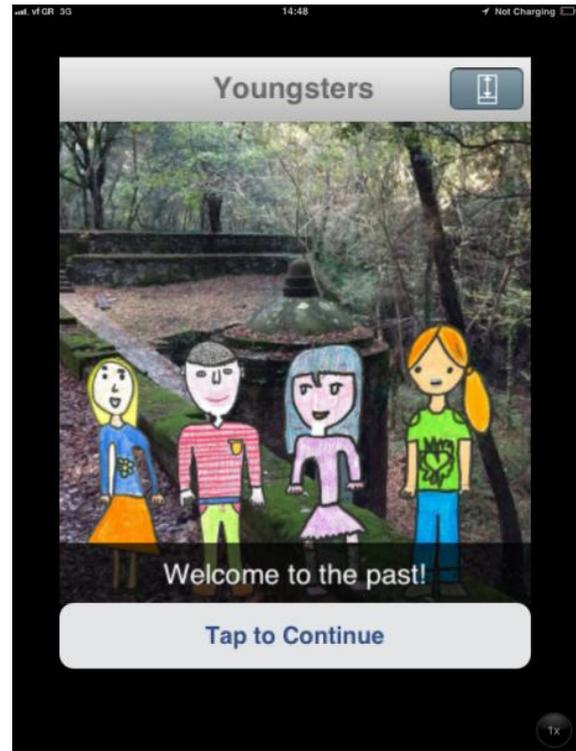
Screenshots for the games developed in Italy, Slovenia and Greece

The European competition's contestants can benefit from A Learning Guide in the format of a Handbook, which is planned to be published in the autumn of 2014 to help schools, NGOs, adult education institutions and other stakeholders who have the capacity to deliver training in the context of environmental education and intergenerational interaction to apply the INVOLEN methodology. The Guide explains step by step the piloted methodology; includes experiences and lessons learnt from the pilot implementation of the methodology in the form of case studies; provides examples of nature conservation activities that can be introduced to make intergenerational learning more effective; and transmits basic knowledge on the technical and design issues of mobile, location-based game development as part of the learning process. The Guide is accompanied by two Learning Toolkits, one for facilitators and one for volunteers, which contain examples and experiences from the pilot course already implemented with examples of conservation activities; volunteering for nature conservation; understanding of "old" and "new" conservation approaches; opportunities for intergenerational learning, etc. The facilitators' toolkit includes two additional units, one focusing on volunteer management techniques and the other making reference to the recorded training webinars, with links for direct online access (which have been part of the learning facilitators' training).

Conclusion

The INVOLEN project has tried out an experiment of a new methodology for involving young people in environmental protection activities as volunteers, using the "language" and "tools" that young people are so fond of, namely smartphones, tablets and gaming. This methodology has also offered opportunities to senior citizens to transmit knowledge and oral cultural heritage about environmental conservation to younger members of society, and create bonds with them through jointly performed activities and sharing of challenges and novel learning experiments. Both groups have been immersed in the tasks they were challenged to perform, enjoyed their joint work thoroughly and, hopefully, came out of this experiment with a more grounded belief in both environmental conservation and the value of volunteering.

Questions for discussion

- How can intergenerational cooperation contribute to the protection of natural areas of value? Provide examples from your area/experience
- The school is the perfect place to start promoting volunteering in connection to nature. The activities that start from an early age usually continue in later years and the values instilled become consolidated. Discuss how this can be inserted in the school curriculum and supported by parents.
- How can ICT and mobile telephony be used to encourage nature conservation and voluntary activity? The INVOLEN project has offered an example; can you provide other examples that you know of? or are just your original ideas for action!

VOLUNTEER CONSERVATIONISTS' LOCATION-BASED GAME IN THE VRAVRONA WETLAND PROTECTED AREA NEAR ATHENS, GREECE

The pilot implementation of the INVOLEN methodology in Greece was conducted by HOS, the Hellenic Ornithological Society, in co-operation with PRISMA, Centre for Development Studies. The target group of volunteers included 12 students, 3 seniors and 2 facilitators -17 people in total, guided by environmental and ICT experts when needed.

One among the aims of the INVOLEN project is the design and development of a location-based mobile game based on an intergenerational learning process. This activity was performed within a volunteer conservationists' framework of environmental activities carried out in the Vravrona wetland, a protected area belonging to the Natura 2000 network. One of the games created by young volunteers and inspired by the stories narrated by seniors is "Brauron-Vravrona". The game incorporate environmental conservation input provided by experts of the protected area combined with local seniors narrations in a role playing scenario developed by the young volunteers using the ARISi platform. The game is located along the path leading to the ancient temple of Artemis within the protected area of the wetland. The players are as-

signed the role of "official explorers" of the area and are invited to enjoy a walk on the trail in order to relax and escape the hustle of the city. The players are called to follow the virtual character of goddess Artemis as their guide throughout the game who provides hints and sets quests for the player to complete. The "Marathon minnow" endangered fish species needs the explorer's help in order to avoid extinction. Players are called to share photos of domestic water waste, pesticides and general waste and debris found in the area in order to alert the public about the danger. A recording of one of the senior volunteers talking about the meaning of organic agriculture and the avoidance of chemical fertilizers is used as the "voice" of a farmer's character appearing in the game while the player also gets additional environmental input presented in the form of "eco-tips" ARIS plaques along the course of the game. In this game, the pollution on account of the pesticides, the migratory species, the release of the domestic waste, the Vravrona tomato and fig, inspired by the narrations of the seniors and the experts, are entwined in an inventive way.
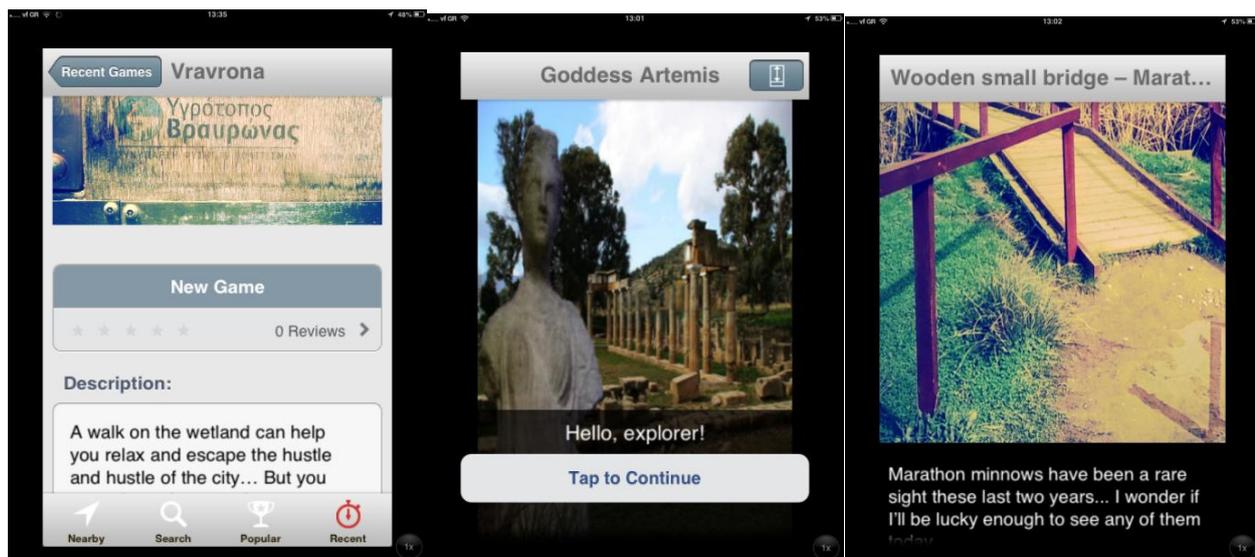
Screenshots for the games developed in Greece, " Vravrona"

VOLUNTEER GARBAGE REMOVAL ACTIVITIES IN THE VRAVRONA WETLAND PROTECTED AREA NEAR ATHENS, GREECE

The Greek pilot group of 17 volunteers performed environmental cleaning activities during the final field visit to the protected area. Besides a scheduled play-testing session involving the two games designed by the volunteers, participants carried out garbage removal on the wetland area. The INVOLEN group joined a local volunteer group from the nearby town of Markopoulo in their regular meeting for cleaning activity on the area. Volunteers also participated in bird watching activities organised by the staff of HOS. In relation to the environmental conservation, the fa-

cilitators mentioned that *"youths were very active during the conservation activities"*, and noted that they enjoyed the conservation activities themselves as *"It was a very engaging process"*. They added that they were *"happy to be part of the protection of the area"*. Moreover, the facilitators suggested that *"other schools could also be interested in following or evolving the project's methodology on conservation/environmental projects"*. The youth also mentioned that the use of ICT in a natural environment can be interesting, motivating and engaging.

Young volunteers collecting rubbish from the Vravona wetland Natura 2000 site.

VOLUNTEER CONSERVATIONISTS' LOCATION-BASED GAME IN THE MONTI LIVORNESI PROTECTED AREA NEAR COLOGNOLE, ITALY

In Italy, IBIMET-CNR was responsible for conducting the pilot implementation. IBIMET-CNR worked closely with the secondary school Micali (IC. T. Tesei) which was reached through the one of the recruited facilitators, a volunteer of the World Wide Fund For Nature –Livorno, and member of the local project "OcchisulleColline" , a local project which gathers all the associations that aim at the protection and valorisation of Monti Livornesi. A group of 8 young volunteers, 3 seniors, 4 facilitators, 1 environmental expert and 2 ICT experts - 18 participants in total- were engaged to the process. In order to complete the game development process the group discussed the stories provided by the senior volunteers, the environmental input from the experts and concluded into the scenario for the game *"Boar Marley adventure"*.

The final storyboard includes the most important features met along the pilot methodology implementation such as the following;

- The virtual character of *Boar Marley* personifies the typical species (wild boar) of the protected area.

- *Boar Marley* has obtained bad habits taught by humans, a symbol of a bad human behaviour towards nature. The player has to set the character free of these habits.

- Water is one of the most important natural resources in the protected area. Within the game context, water brings the player back to the past.

- The aqueduct is the most important artefact of the protected area and the engineer Poccianti was the most famous character connected to the aqueduct. During the game the player meets Eng. Poccianti and has to provide answers to his questions.

- Protected species and other typical species of the area are introduced by expert botanists belonging to the pilot group.

- Finally, the wild orchid *Spiranthesspiralis* brings the player back to the present time.

The process for the storyboard definition was long and faced a continuous interaction between all pilot group members. New ideas and objectives were discussed a lot because of the students' endless creativity, and the seniors' willingness to provide added value to the game. In particular, seniors stressed the didactic and educational purpose of the game, suggesting actions to cultivate a feeling of respect towards nature on the players' side by engaging them into a playful process.
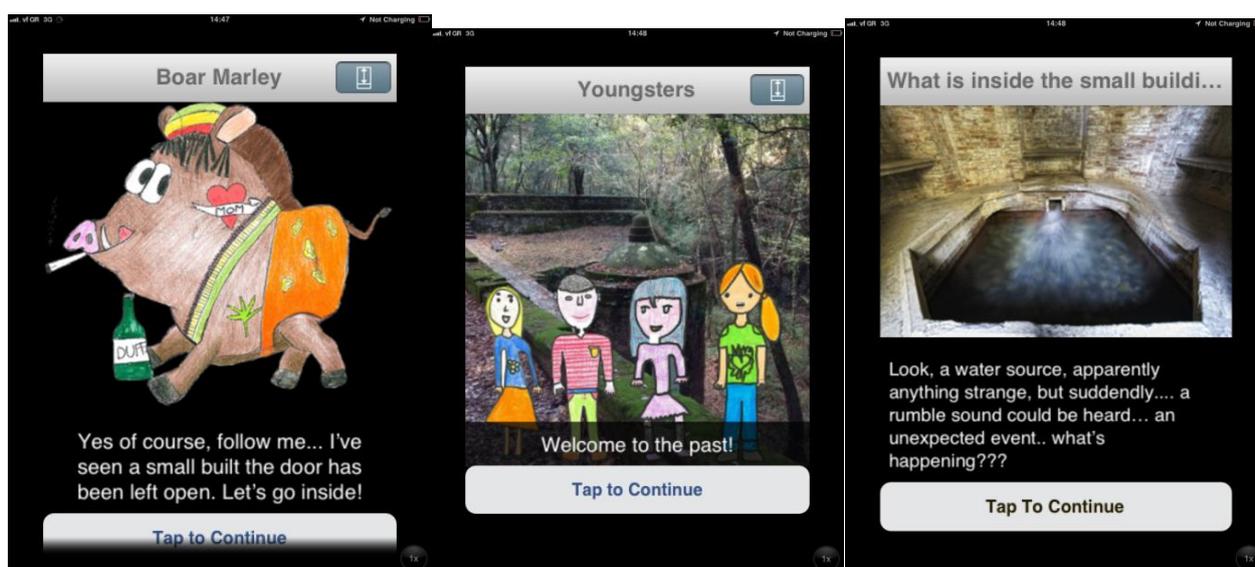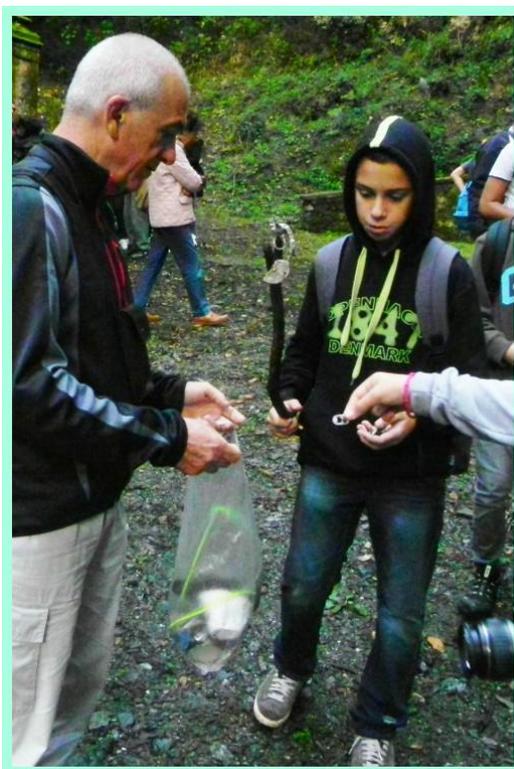

Screenshots for the games developed in Italy "Boar Marley adventure".

VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AT THE PROVINCIAL PARK OF MONTI LIVORNESI WITHIN THE INVOLEN PROJECT

Graziella Rossini, Francesca Ugolini, Laura Pellegrino, Luciano Massetti, Antonio Raschi

Institute of Biometeorology – CNR, Firenze, Italy

Within the INVOLEN project, all pilot group members showed a high level of sensitivity towards nature protection. Seniors were also naturally keen to show pupils how to behave in a natural environment. A field trip and additional activities were organised to introduce students to nature protection volunteering.

For instance, during the field trip (November 2013) in the protected area of Monti Livornesi at the Colognole aqueduct, by demonstrating a proper attitude (collecting rubbish, taking pictures of flowers and insects, close observation of life forms ..), seniors gave tips and input on how to behave in nature. Students started to copy them and in this way, at the end of the day the paths were all cleaned up.

Another volunteering activity for the protected area was planned together with the facilitator from WWF, who is also a member of the local project *OcchisulleColline,* which gathers all the local associations who work for the protection and valorisation of the protected area. In fact, since it was impossible to carry out further field trips due to several school restrictions, an agreement with *OcchisulleColline* recognised the INVOLEN pilot group as a responsible crea-

tor of informative panels for visitors which will be installed on the trails network in Colognole.

The panels encourage visitors to behave respectfully in the protected area. Facilitators and seniors created some effective phrases based on four themes "Noise; Animals; Garbage; Flowers" and students created some coloured sketches for the panels.

Drawings were done in a classroom and the activity was led by the teacher of arts.
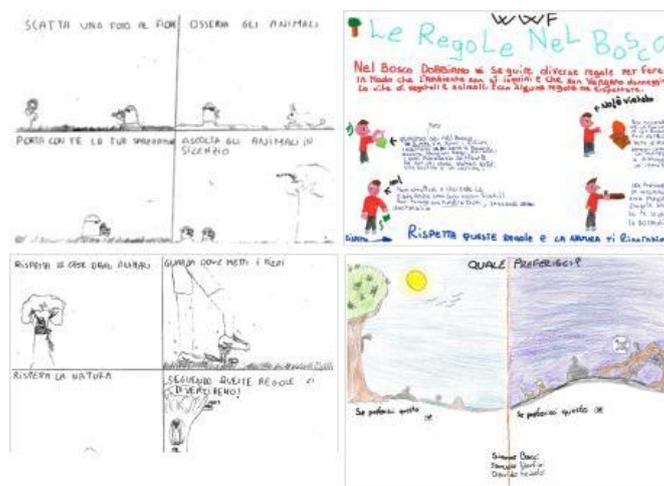
The best sketches were selected by the volunteers of the *OcchisulleColline* project who are still working on the printing and installation of the panels, supported by the Province of Livorno.

A preliminary version of the panels is shown here.

Volunteering and social enterprise

By Roger Evans

Chairman of the Board of Evanter OÜ

1. Background

History and contextual background

Historically, there has been a long tradition within communities for people getting together to take part in voluntary activities for the common good in Europe's rural areas, in particular during harvest time and to help disadvantaged members of the community.

In a major study on volunteering in Europe the European Commission reports (GHK, 2010) how the nature of and contribution from communities to volunteering has changed over time. In relation to more organised form of volunteering, the development of civic initiatives in much of Europe dates back to the 18th and 19 centuries. While a boom in such new initiatives in some eastern European countries was seen between the First and Second World Wars and especially in the Baltic States during the period of independent statehood. During the communist regime very little volunteering based on voluntary participation took place in many of the CEEC countries and between 1940 and 1988 many associations and societies were banned. However, gatherings of friends and family to accomplish tasks on an informal basis were still common occurrences; although it must be noted that this form of activity was not classified as volunteering as such.

The history of the voluntary sector in the UK is one of gradual secularisation and formalisation of voluntary action, and of changing roles in relation to the State. Howlett (2008) provides a helpful discussion on how government interest in volunteering has developed and how volunteering and volunteers became deeply involved in many aspects of the welfare state. Taking World War II as a starting point to reflect on the increasing role of the State in influencing, developing and controlling volunteering in the UK, Howlett begins his discussion with the advent of a comprehensive welfare state (Beveridge Report) that assumed the need for charity and volunteering to be removed. However, Beveridge recognised voluntary action was an important component of a healthy democracy and also that voluntary action encompasses much more than the services that were nationalised into the National Health Service and the wider welfare state.

During the 1960's the number of people volunteering and the number of voluntary organisations increased as disillusionment with public services grew and opportunities for people to participate in decision making and in activities of local communities diminished. In the years that followed volunteering was also considered as a way to positively engage young people with society,

Following a change of government in 1979, Conservative Policy brought with it a contract culture designed to encourage organisations to deliver services on behalf of the state. As Howlett (2008) points out, as part of the contract culture thinking, it was assumed volunteering helped to provide a cheaper alternative to state provision. It was also assumed that volunteering could and should be used as a way to encourage civic engagement and social participation amongst young people and to keep the unemployed active where voluntary organisations were perceived to be delivery agents for services and sites of participation.

2. Definitions and who/what they are

a. Volunteers

b. Social enterprise

2.a Volunteers

The EC report highlights a range of volunteering definitions used by international organisations:

Volunteering has been defined at EU and international level in a number of documents. International

and European reports and studies reinforce the concept that volunteering is a matter of individual choice, is done without thought of remuneration or reward and benefits others.

The Common Objectives for voluntary activities among young people outlined in the 2002 Council Resolution define:

• Voluntary activities as all kinds of voluntary engagement. They are open to all, unpaid, undertaken by the individual's own free will, educational (non-formal learning aspect) and offer added social value; and

• Voluntary service is part of voluntary activities and is characterised by the following additional aspects: fixed period; clear objectives, contents, tasks, structure and framework; appropriate support and legal and social protection.

A commonly used definition at EU level is that the term 'volunteering' refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. It is undertaken of a person's own freewill, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain.

The European Youth Forum believes that an activity can only be defined as volunteering when it meets the following criteria:

• an activity undertaken of a person's own free will and involves the commitment of time and energy to actions of benefit to others and to society as a whole;

• the activity is unpaid but can include reimbursement of expenses directly related to the voluntary activity;

• it is for a non-profit cause and is primarily undertaken within a nongovernmental organisation and therefore cannot be motivated by material or financial gain;

• volunteering should not be used to substitute or replace paid employment.

Voluntary organisations at EU level highlight the importance to differentiate between long term commitment, closely linked to the development of citizenship and which contributes to the daily work of voluntary organisations and NGOs, and voluntary service which is for a fixed period, within a structure, with clear objectives etc.

The Association for Voluntary Organisations (AVSO) distinguishes between:

• Volunteering (Bénévolat ,Ehrenamt) which can be occasional or regular, part-time or full time. It is good practice to ensure that formal volunteers are covered by appropriate accident, health-care and third party liability insurance, that they receive appropriate training and management, as well as the reimbursement of all out-of-pocket expenses.

• Voluntary Service (Volontariat, Freiwilligendiens) which refers to specific, full-time project-based voluntary activities that are carried out on a continuous basis for a limited period of time.

These are not to be confused with 'civil service', a voluntary service managed by the state – or on behalf of the state - e.g. in the social field or in civil protection; and 'civilian service' which is an alternative to compulsory military service in some countries, but is not voluntary.

However, volunteering can still be understood differently in different Member States – for example, in certain European countries, civilian service (an alternative to compulsory military service, but not voluntary, such as in Germany) and the inclusion of volunteering as part of school curriculum (such as the Netherlands) can create the concept of 'compulsory' voluntary activities.

Finally, the European Volunteer Centre defines volunteering as an activity that "can occur in different settings either informally, like helping out in the neighbourhood, or formally within the structures of non-profit organisations. Its nature can vary from part-time (most of the times) to full-time and from one day to many years of practise in several different fields. It is good practice to ensure that formal volunteers are covered by appropriate accident, health-care and third party liability insurance, that they receive appropriate training and management, as well as the reimbursement of all out-of pocket expenses."

Definitions usually outline that volunteering is undertaken out of a person's free will, without concern for financial gain (unpaid) and is for the benefit of others (although it is recognised that volunteering brings significant benefit equally to the volunteer).

The main elements of the volunteer concept in laws and regulations adopted by EU

Member States describe actions that:

• are performed with the free will of the individual;

• are developed in the framework of non-profit, non- governmental organisations;

• have no professional character;

• are non-paid; and

• carried out for the benefit of the community or a third party.

In the majority of EU Member States (16) there is no legal definition and no specific law regulating the

aspects of volunteering, although there are sometimes policies or established practices that support the development of volunteering.

Country-specific laws generally define volunteering as activities performed by individuals, based on their free will, for the benefit of another and without compensation. Accordingly, a volunteer is generally recognised across Europe as a person who in a free and responsible way commits himself/herself to carry out voluntary service.

Education levels

An analysis of the national surveys highlights a clear trend between the level of volunteering among the population and an individual volunteer's highest attained level of education:

The national reports of 20 EU countries have illustrated that there is a positive correlation between education levels and the tendency to volunteer (see Table 3.8 – in short, the better educated people are, the more likely they are to volunteer. This is in line with the findings of several international studies that have shown that volunteers tend to come from better educated segments of the population.

2.b Social enterprises

Social enterprise lies at the heart of the social economy. Social enterprises are businesses that trade in the market for a social purpose. It is broadly accepted that social enterprises have three common characteristics:

Explicit social aims – There is a clear social purpose which drives the organisation or business. This explicit social aim is core to the activities, rather than incidental. Any profit that the business makes is reinvested into the purpose of the social enterprise.

Commercial activity – The venture will aim to derive a significant portion (more than 50%) of its income form commercial contracts or the sale of goods and services to a market. The organisation may still however generate income from a variety of other sources such as local authority grants etc.

Social ownership – There will be community accountability either through a co-operative structure or management by voluntary trustees.

There are many types of social enterprise (co-operatives, development trusts, community interest companies, employee owned businesses, credit unions, intermediate labour market companies, registered social landlords, social firms, trading arms of charities) as well as an increasing number of hybrid versions of the various approaches to social enterprise.

Social Enterprise has also been defined as follows;

"A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners." (UK Department for Trade and Industry)

Social enterprises are dynamic, progressive businesses that we can all learn from. They experiment and innovate, and have the advantage of being able to draw upon best practice in the voluntary sector, as well as the entrepreneurial flair that exists in the best of our companies." (Patricia Hewitt UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)

"Social enterprises are businesses that trade in the market with a social purpose. They use business tools and techniques to achieve social aims and include an incredibly wide range of organisations, for example co-operatives, development trusts, community enterprises, housing associations, social firms, and leisure trusts." (UK Social Enterprise Coalition)

3. The benefits of volunteering

a.   To the volunteers

b.   For social benefit and social enterprise

Measuring the economic benefits of volunteering presents many challenges due to the informal nature of many voluntary organisations, the huge numbers of people involved and the diversity of volunteering undertaken by individuals much of which goes unrecorded. However some estimates suggest volunteers generate 30 Euros worth of work for each Euro of public funding spent in supporting volunteering.

3.a   To the volunteers

The benefits of volunteering to the volunteers:

A wide range of benefits has been described much of which is qualitative and relates to the personal development of the individuals providing the volunteer inputs:

- Volunteering is a great way for staff to develop workplace skills by being challenged to apply themselves outside of their comfort zone e.g. organisation, leadership, team-work and specific practical skills.

  This diverse exposure also helps staff think more creatively and empathically about customers and clients.

- Development of their potential and improve their self-esteem and self worth

- Raising of employability through actual work experience

- Reduces the risk of social isolation (especially combating isolation and depression)
- Creation of support networks

Other benefits to volunteers included: learning more about themselves, for example, their interests, skills, and beliefs; developing new hobbies and interests; productive use of spending their free-time; helping with work to retirement transitions; doing something they are good at; civic education experience, replacing school civic education and military service; enabling young people to learn about active participation in society and active citizenship.

3.b For social benefit and social enterprise

Some benefits to communities deriving from volunteering have also been listed – while some can be said to be direct benefits eg:

- Increase in social capital
- Capacity development
- Social inclusion and minority integration
- Integration and solidarity within the community
- Grassroots community group development leading to increased and more active democracy
- Promoting active ageing by encouraging older members of the community to take part in volunteering
- Creating local networks of interpersonal relationships, promoting integration in the local community e.g. intergenerational links.
- Improvements to the local environment
- Support to the creation of new jobs and social enterprises

Other benefits may come though identification of gaps in community service provision or within the social infrastructure. These may also require additional workers and can lead to long-term job creation through provision of essential activities and services, which are used by members of the community. These can range from local sport clubs to transportation for the elderly or specific health care services.

In many part of Europe however t*he 'more-for-less'* policies and practices that flow from public service cuts and for example the UKs big society 'agenda' have been described as in danger of displacing paid employees with volunteers.

The implication that previously paid roles can be taken by volunteers is worrying. If libraries can now be run by volunteers, were the previous professional incumbents wasting their time on 2-year librarianship courses?

Clearly there is a role for volunteer input into social enterprises, particularly in the start-up phase (the equivalent of the 'friends, families and fools' that new private businesses turn to for support) and there's evidence that unpaid input into rural community enterprises can make the difference between success and failure. But is it sustainable in the long term?

Enterprise and employment

The experience of many successful social enterprises is that you can't sustain a social enterprise entirely on voluntary input. Even The Old Crown in Cumbria, UK - the celebrated community-owned pub in Hesket Newmarket - has recognised that community ownership is one thing, but running the pub as a viable business is best done by employing a landlord.

Traditionally, meals-on-wheels services for vulnerable community members have relied on volunteers. But Hertfordshire Community Meals have learnt that large-scale volunteer input is not appropriate for their business model. The professionalisation and scaling up of their social enterprise has brought service improvements and real savings, but with drivers employed on part-time contracts, not volunteers.

Towards a mixed model...

Ultimately, in the current economic climate, a mixed model - paid staff and volunteers working together - is likely to be a necessary route to sustainability. Even Anglian Community Enterprise in Essex - one of the government's pathfinder Health Service 'spin-outs' - employs over 1,000 paid staff, but has 400 volunteers working in the community as health promoters.

In Pontypool, South Wales, UK all the production staff of the radio station - Able Radio (a well-respected and hugely successful Social Enterprise) are volunteers. Ask the public to define what 'volunteering' actually is, and the majority would answer in a way we have all come to expect: that it's the selfless giving of personal time, energy and effort to assist a multitude of charitable causes. But things are changing in the volunteering landscape and increasingly; volunteers themselves now need to gain more than just a sense of altruism for all their hard work. In this tough economic era, no one can afford to simply give up large swathes of their time to lend a hand; many volunteers now need to be able to gain worthwhile skills and experience that can strengthen their CV's for future employment and due to decreased funding and increased costs, social enterprises are even more reliant on the goodwill of volunteers.

In a perfect world, this is a mutually beneficial situation where both sides gain, as Rob Symons, General Manager of Able Radio explains. 'A Social Enterprise is, at its heart, a company,' he says, checking his volunteer list for the day. 'So whilst still working towards social aims, those who work there are aware of the need to behave in a professional, business-like fashion. A good Social Enterprise will value its volunteer as a crucial resource in achieving its goals. As such, they are likely to be well used, are likely to have suitable and fulfilling work and be treated with great respect. In addition, for any volunteer using volunteering as a way of gaining experience to improve their employability, time in a Social Enterprise may have a great impact.'

The added value that is derived from volunteering for a Social Enterprise can't be denied; because they have sustainability at their core, most Social Enterprises are unique and innovative places to spend your time. They can push the boundaries of what is achievable due to the flexibility of their business model (unlike many privately owned companies), they tend to be super responsive to the training needs of their staff and volunteers, creating strong partnership working relationships across all sectors is the norm - and because they usually are placed frontline within communities - you can guarantee a good Social Enterprise will be the first to know of any opportunities locally: all great reasons for a volunteer looking to gain worthwhile skills and networks to join one!

4.   Management and development of volunteers

Volunteering England have a helpful guidance not on how to induct and training volunteers (http://www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/inductionandtrainingforvolunteers). The following is an summary of their advice

Induction aims to introduce new volunteers to the organisation and their role in it.

Pre-arrival

This forms part of the recruitment process, and will consist of any information about the organisation and the role that you send the volunteer before they start with you. For example:

- Leaflet or similar about the organisation and what it does
- Volunteer role description
- Contact details and directions and/or map of how to get there

Organisational induction

Explaining what the organisations goals are, and how it goes about achieving them, and helping the volunteers understand where they fit within the organisation as a whole. You might include:

- Background/history of the organisation
- Mission statement
- Services provided and client groups
- Organisation chart
- Talks from paid staff and established volunteers about their roles in relation to volunteers and the organisation as a whole

Local induction

Ensuring that volunteers have a clear understanding of their role and how they will carry it out, as well as site-specific information and guidance on support and supervision mechanisms including: issues of health and safety and finance; volunteer agreement; arrangements for support and supervision, including if appropriate allocating a key member of staff, mentor or buddy; problem-solving procedures (discipline/grievance/complaints); training programme/training needs identification process; relevant policies e.g. confidentiality, data protection, phone/internet use

Group v. individual induction

Group induction can take less time overall, and allows for discussions to take place where appropriate. It can also enable volunteers to start to build relationships and provide a support system for each other.

On the other hand, if you only have volunteers starting from time to time, it might put them off if they have to wait a while for enough others to join and form a group, so it could be as well to start people one at a time.

How much information do I include?

Don't overwhelm new volunteers with masses of detail on their first day. At the same time, you need to make sure that what they need to know is covered. Just remember that it doesn't all have to happen on the first day.

It is a good idea, though, to keep a checklist so that you and the volunteers can keep track of what has been covered and what hasn't.

Training

The training your volunteers receive will depend entirely on the kind of work they will be doing, and on the numbers of volunteers you need to train at any one time. Initial training may be required to enable the volunteer to carry out their role effectively, and depending on the role may take hours, days or weeks to complete. Ongoing or refresher training may also be required to keep volunteers skills fresh,

or to enable them to develop within the organisation and to take on further tasks.

On the job

The most common way of training volunteers and probably the most economical is on the job training. This is most appropriate if you only take on one volunteer at a time, and the work they will be doing is relatively straightforward. A member of staff, or another volunteer, will show the volunteer how to do a task and then supervise them as they do it. This method is effective as long as the person doing the training takes care to make sure the new volunteer really understands what they are meant to be doing, and the volunteer feels able to ask questions without feeling stupid. Its also a good idea to have some written notes for the volunteer to refer back to, if they aren't sure of something.

External trainers

A second method is to send volunteers on a training course with a trainer from outside the organisation. This can work either with groups or individual volunteers, as you can either send one or two people on a public open course, or book the trainer to do the course purely for your organisation. This can be an expensive way to buy training, but its worth it if your volunteers need to learn some more complex skills. You can also make it more economical, if you are buying the training in, by letting other local organisations participate, and sharing the cost that way.

References

GHK (2010): Volunteering in the European Union – Final Report. Study on behalf of the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture). Published on 17 February 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/doc/Volunteering%20in%20the%20EU%20Final%20Report.pdf

Howlett, S. (2008) Lending a hand to lending a hand: The role and development of volunteer centres as infrastructure to develop volunteering in England. Volunteering Infrastructure and Civil Society Conference. Aalsmeer, Netherlands.

COMMUNITY SHOP IN KIRKMICHAEL, SCOTLAND

This case study charts the process of the community of Kirkmichael in Rural South Ayrshire and how the community managed to retain their local shop service, Scotland

Introduction

The village shop in Kirkmichael closed at the end of March 2010 as the owner was retiring. This left the community with no shop. The residents expressed a clear wish to retain this vital service, by coming together to deliver this service. New premises were identified and funds were raised from the community, Ayrshire Leader, Plunkett Foundation and Village Core.

THE SHOP OPENED ON APRIL 4th 2010.

- Staffed by a team of volunteers and managed by the volunteer committee.
- Having SAVED this vital service, it needed to grow and become sustainable.

Why Open a Community Shop?

- The advantages to rural communities of having a shop, pub and post office reach far beyond what they sell and the services supplied.
- Communities say they are important meeting places, and are vital to the social and economic sustainability of their community. Over the past 20 years, Kirkmichael residents had seen two pubs, a restaurant and the local post office close.
- The shop was not usually the main source of shopping for residents, rather the 'convenience' or 'top up' shop. The committee understood this and ensured that product ranges reflected this
- Rural shops can also offer further enticements that many supermarkets cannot such as locally made and produced products. South Ayrshire has a wealth of local producers.

There are economic benefits as well

- A village shop will both employ and serve local people throughout the year, helping to ensure that money stays within the local community.
- Local suppliers and contractors can be used to supply goods and services and customers may be people who work in local businesses but live elsewhere.
- Estate agents advise that rural communities with at least one shop and/or pub are considered more desirable places to live.

There are social benefits too

- Village shops help to create informal social support networks and when people use them regularly, they get to know their neighbours. This is especially important for more vulnerable groups such as the elderly, those caring for children or relatives and those living alone.
- Recognising neighbours and having the opportunity to interact helps develop a sense of belonging and safety.
- Village shops can provide a drop-off and collection point for a wide range of services such as dry cleaning, shoe repairs, film processing and prescriptions, which can be especially useful for those with limited access to transport.
- They can be a focal point to promote and sell tickets for other local activities, amenities and events, and provide information for those in the village as well as passing trade.

A village shop brings environmental benefits

- Local shops help to reduce the distance people travel by car, especially if a variety of goods and services are provided.
- By supplying local produce in particular, the distance goods travel and the subsequent packaging needs are reduced.

So, why are Village Shops on the decline?

- Unfortunately, for commercial shopkeepers the financial rewards of a rural business are often small – high rates and low returns, coupled with the long hours required has meant that many village shops have closed down. This coupled with the economic downturn and changes in shopping habits have meant that village shops are closing across the UK.
- Often, the value of the shop to the community is not fully realised until it has closed.
- Increasingly, villages have become determined to do something about it.

- A community-owned shop is one in which there is community involvement in either the setting up or the running of the shop.
- By pooling efforts and finding out what level of commitment the village can support, a community-owned shop is one way forward.
- Community-run enterprises have a better chance of survival than independent shops as the community is usually keener to support a venture in which they have an economic and social interest.

Description of Business:

- Small General Food Store
- Café (light snacks and home baking)
- Licensed premises

Product Summary

Shop:

- Newspapers and magazines
- Off Sales
- Dry Goods
- Frozen products
- Stationary items
- Cards and local craft items
- Small household and cleaning materials
- Fresh and locally sourced meat, vegetables & dairy products

Café:

- Home Baking
- Teas and coffee
- Juice and soft drinks
- Wines, Beers and Spirits
- Light snacks
- Home made soup
- Take-away Menu

How will it be Sustainable?

The shop turnover was anticipated to be around £117K with costs of around £96K. Sales were boosted by daily newspaper sales which were predicted to account for £39K annually. The business needed to grow by around 25% to become completely sustainable on sales alone. This was anticipated to take around 3 years and the shop was grant dependant until that time.

What were the steps

- The shop was announced as closing
- Kirkmichael Village Renaissance Group consulted the community
- 2 questionnaires
- 3 public meetings
- Created Volunteer Rota
- Applied for funding
- Created business plan
- Obtained loan finance
- Sourced premises
- Refurbished premises
- Obtained relevant licenses
- Recruited Managers (2)
- Trained staff of appropriated courses
- Opened shop

Lessons learnt

As far as the process goes, this community has a very smooth run. The community saw that they were losing a service and acted to change that.

Why was this group so successful?

This group managed to ensure that the community knew what it would be like to lose the shop and how it would be if the community opened the shop themselves. The management group are strong. The group were able to access advice and help to get the process going and provide the optimum chance of making the project work. They have managed to convey the importance of USE IT or LOSE IT. The shop is better used as a community enterprisethan it was as a private enterprise.

In Conclusion

This group / project survived because it had:

- Local commitment
- Strong Management Committee / Board
- Good mix of volunteer skills
- Wide range of experiences within the committee
- Strong and common community goals

Volunteering and local democracy in the context of Finland's recent local government reorganisation

By Christell Åström

Secretary General of the Finnish Rural Policy Committee

Introduction: The restructuring of Local Government in Finland

Finland has a large surface area with a very sparse population. The population density is 17 inhabitants per square kilometre. Approximately 42% of the inhabitants live in rural areas, which cover around 95% of the country. Keeping these numbers in mind, it is understandable that the Government's aim, which can be read in the Programme of the Finnish Government 2011, is quite challenging. The Government programme, which is an action plan agreed on by the parties represented in the Government that sets out the main functions of the Government for the period of 2011-2015, states that: "The Nordic welfare model, based on a high employment rate, competitive economy, equal services and care for all, has proven to be the best social system. It combines social cohesion with competitiveness. The Government will take a determined approach to improving the basic structures of the welfare society. The entire country will be developed, while respecting unique local characteristics."

In Finland, local authorities are broadly responsible for the provision of basic services to citizens. Local authorities have strong self-government, based on local democracy and decision making, and the right to levy taxes. There are 320 municipalities in Finland (2014). Finnish local and joint authorities employ over 439,000 persons, which is approximately 20 per cent of Finland's workforce. The annual expenditure of local authorities was 46 billion euros in 2013.

A process of local government restructuring is under way in Finland. The process began in 2005 with the introduction of the Project to Restructure Local Government and Services. The goal of this initiative has been to create a system of governance that ensures the continued delivery of high-quality services by local governments.

The scope of the municipal reforms currently under way is unprecedented. As a project, the restructuring of local government involves a reform of the Act on Municipal Structure, social and health service reform, reform of the state subsidy system, overall reform of the Local Government Act, and the mapping out of local government obligations. The general aim of this project is to continue to safeguard the provision of universally comparable and high-quality services to citizens across the whole country, to strengthen regional autonomy, and to renew municipal infrastructure in such a way that ensures cost-effective provision of services. A further aim of the restructuring process is to harmonise urban community structures and strengthen local democracy.

The intention, here, is that Finland will have much larger municipalities than before. It is believed that these larger bodies will be better placed to safeguard commensurate services across the nation; as the population ages, the number of people of working age decreases and the public sector is faced with increasingly limited resources. The current restructuring of local government is reflected in the number of municipalities. Including the Åland islands, there were a total of 431 municipalities in Finland in 2006; this number fell to 320 in 2014, 16 of which are located in the Åland islands.

Prime Minister JyrkiKatainen's Government is implementing a nation-wide restructuring of local government and regional authorities in accordance with its

government programme, which is intended to create the foundation for local government founded on strong base municipalities. A strong base municipality consists of natural areas of employment and labour activity and is sufficiently large as to be able to independently take responsibility for the provision of basic services, to the exclusion of specialist medical care and social services for demanding circumstances.

Despite the wide range of opinions, at both a national and regional level, for the practical aims and statewide measures associated with the restructuring of local government, the need for this process is widely understood in relation to the significant challenges that lie ahead in the decades to come. These challenges must be responded to, regardless of the political landscape in parliament at any given time. From the perspective of rural areas, the question, here, is not only that of what types of local government structures will be found in the public sector in the future, but also that of how local services and local democracy will continue to be organised. Understandably, these questions have been a source of great concern in rural communities.

As a direct consequence of the restructuring of local government currently under way in Finland, an increasing number of municipalities will consist of one or two administrative centres or activity hubs and then the vast rural areas surrounding them. Good examples of such municipal regions are Salo and Kouvola. The challenge in these heterogeneous municipalities is how to evenly and equally develop them in the face of their varying needs and terrains (towns – sparsely populated rural areas). Regions with low population density have criticised the restructuring of local government for centralising these structures to too great a degree rather than genuinely seeking to renew operational methods, increase cross-sector cooperation, and cooperation between the public, private, and third sectors.

The Challenge of local democracy in the context of the ongoing government reorganisation

Local democracy means that every member of the population may have an impact on the development and growth of a region. This arrangement means that citizens are able to make more of a direct impact on and be more involved in decisions regarding the use of public funds.

The reform processes in local and regional service structures have a major effect on the extent to which residents of rural areas are able to participate in and make an impact on their own social surroundings, the operations of their local region, and matters concerning the development, planning, preparation, and decision making involved therein. In practical terms, this is a question of the means that local people have available to them by way of participating in the improvement of common well-being and the design, planning, and development of services, free-time activities, the environment, land use, and business growth and employment, as well as the pursuant decision-making processes.

Owing to the increasing size of municipalities and the fall in the number of elected representatives, those in decision-making positions have more responsibility and power than ever before. Moreover, as a result of the merging of municipal regions, there is an increasing distance between the decision makers and members of the public. Therefore, solutions are needed in order to give local residents the opportunity to be societally active in other ways than through democratically held elections alone. The Constitution affords the individual the right to participate in the development of his or her society and environment.

The growing need for forms of local democracy as a result of the restructuring of local government has been responded to by different stakeholders. The issue has become a hot conversation topic among local governments and NGOs alike in many municipalities. Local democracy has been increasingly discussed at the local level in conjunction with the report on the merging of municipalities precisely because the Act on Municipal Structures requires that, in their municipal merger reports, municipalities evaluate the ways in which local democracy and citizen participation opportunities are implemented. If a municipal merger does in fact occur, then the respective municipalities must record the means by which local democracy and citizen participation and inclusion are to be implemented in the relevant merger agreement.

Despite its current relevance, it often remains difficult to understand what is meant by local democracy. A legislative framework has been drawn up for local democracy. Recommendations have been made by some organisations that the new Local Government Act currently being prepared include a binding agreement on the means afforded to citizens to participate in and influence local democracy through the activities of their municipality. Such recommendations have been made by e.g. The Finnish Rural Policy Committee (YTR) and the Village Association of Finland.

66

This situation is somewhat paradoxical insofar as Article 27 of the Local Government Act, which has been in existence for almost twenty years, provides municipalities with broad-ranging opportunities to promote citizen participation and inclusion in local government. Even in comparison with other Nordic countries, the Finnish Local Government Act is especially empowering. Despite this, however, experiences of the operational means and practices associated with local democracy and direct citizen involvement are particularly low in Finnish municipalities. The provisions afforded by the law have not been utilised to their full potential. This is not only a legislative issue but also one of attitudes.

Local democracy has been a key component in the ongoing reform of the Local Government Act. The draft of the law currently under consideration is enabling in nature and provides municipalities with the opportunity to organise their operations to best suit local conditions and needs. The current draft gives more weight to safeguarding the opportunities for citizen participation and inclusion than is presently the case.

The greatest challenge remaining is that of how to best change attitudes. In order for genuine and broad-ranging citizen participation and inclusion to be enacted in all municipalities, in the form of concrete actions towards the development of a person's own well-being and living environment, as well as the development of society as a whole, there must be changes in the attitudes and expertise of officials and decision makers, as well as those of the citizens themselves. It is essential to remember that the strengthening of local democracy affects every municipality and not only those involved in mergers. These changes will not happen overnight. In recent times, however, there have been positive signs of things moving in the right direction, which gives cause to believe that such a reform is possible.

The growing challenge of voluntary work and the organisation of municipal services

Owing to the increasing pressure on the relationship and cooperation between municipalities and the third sector, stemming from the reform of local government and service provision, there has also been a move to examine these reforms from the perspective of NGOs and the ability of the third sector being to function in a supplementary capacity alongside the public sector, as a creator and seller of social services. This conversation has been fuelled by increasing concern over the disappearance or relocation of services. In many rural areas, the role of NGOs as service providers is already seen as a solution to this problem. The background of this lies in Finland being the promised land for non-governmental organisations and as-

sociations. Indeed, there are NGOs for every conceivable need.

In a welfare state, the responsibility of municipalities to organise and create services is incredibly important. Municipalities provide almost any services needed and for whichever target group – often in the face of extremely tight legislation and with limited funds. However, it should be stressed that services are also important to the general public, as well as to the social support of local communities and their members. This lays the foundation for a welfare society that involves participation, a residential and living environment, social relationships, and the opportunity for free-time activities, and not one solely built on the services provided by the state or their location.

The most important task carried out by many traditional organisations and associations remains the same: to increase a sense of community in a region in the form of voluntary work. For example, efforts are made to maintain a sense of safety and security by visiting elderly people in their homes – chopping fire wood or taking an elderly person to the shop – and this is part of the voluntary operations of many NGOs. Indeed, many NGOs are confused about the debate centred on the third sector as the saviour of rural community services.

A situation in which the state places increasing emphasis on the importance of the role played by the third sector is in direct conflict with the guiding principle of non-governmental organisations. Naturally, there are currently organisations that are ready to and are, to some extent, already involved in providing some municipal services. But this work is not done on a voluntary basis. It is paid for and bound by employment law and the statutes and limitations regarding competition and involves professional-level expertise. It is not the case that every NGO would want or be able to provide such services. Nor are they required to.

NGOs are autonomous in their operations and decision making, with their activities being firmly founded

on the active involvement of people at a grass-roots level. Such activities are not the result of a governmental decree; rather, they develop from with the organisation itself, starting with the people working and volunteering therein and without the external pressure of requirements set by public authorities. However, there can be no discussion of the cooperation between the public and third sectors without taking into consideration the highly commendable starting point of all NGO-based activity. Moreover, the role of the third sector, including the work it carries out and its relationship with the public sector, cannot be examined without also discussing the values of the people involved and their motivation to participate in NGO operations.

There is still a strong need for organisations and associations that promote and support community spirit and the well-being of citizens via the voluntary work that they do. It is of extreme importance that such work is appropriately recognised and that these organisations and associations are publicly recognised for everything they do. An important factor in involving people in voluntary work is their own values and motivations. Society's role, here, is to facilitate such voluntary work and also to thank the volunteers for their tireless and vital efforts.

Summary

Finland aims to maintain its Nordic welfare state model in the future. An important part of this model is the role of the citizen as an active and involved member of society. The challenges on the horizon are significant, but the work required to tackle them has already begun – at the national, regional, and local levels.

The starting point for any development of municipal operations must be the notion that, above all else, the municipality is a community for all people. Here, an important strategic question is that of how we will be able to strengthen and consolidate local agency, entrepreneurship, and a sense of responsibility, as well as citizen participation and inclusion. One of the important functions carried out by a municipality is to facilitate the smooth running of the everyday life of various age groups. This means ensuring that local services, housing, transport, working telecommunications, employment opportunities, and free-time activities and facilities are provided as a coherent service package. A key factor in the promotion of local community spirit and well-being is the sheer wealth of organisations and associations that carry out their work on a voluntary basis. Without these, Finland's rural communities would be significantly worse off and less vibrant places in which to live.

Achieving the goal of true local democracy is largely a matter of changing attitudes, learning from what has gone before, and implementing new ways of working. This may take time; we first need to create a shared vision of the future towards which we can all aim. Moreover, this work has to be done with determination and at all levels – nationally, regionally, and locally. Indeed, the cooperation between the public, third, and private sectors must be made more effective and efficient in relation to local democracy and the creation and provision of social services. There are many opportunities and, even though resources are increasingly in short supply, new working methods and broad-based cooperation will provide the means to maintain an active and healthy society across our nation, including the more sparsely populated rural areas. Voluntary work occupies a central role in this regard.

THE RURAL POLICY COMMITTEE YTR WORKING WITH LOCAL DEMOCRACY ISSUES ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The Rural Policy Committee (YTR) is the common network of all rural development actors in Finland. YTR promotes the viability of rural areas by influencing political and administrative decision making, developing necessary working methods, tackling development needs in different fields and under specific themes, and by funding national rural research. The committee is intended to achieve rural well-being.

The Rural Policy Committee is a cooperation body appointed by the Government with 36 members and their alternates. Members come from different ministries and administrative bodies, specialist organisations, and various associations. Matters for the Committee are prepared by the Secretariat. The work of the Secretariat is led by the Secretary General.

The actions of the Rural Policy Committee are based on the Rural Policy programme, which lays down the policy outlines and proposals for practical measures pertaining to several different areas of society. The programme is the action programme for the Committee. Besides central government, the measures are carried out by municipalities, associations, educational institutions, and other non-governmental organisations. The Committee prepares the Rural Policy Programme and promotes the implementation of the measures stated therein.

The sixth Rural Policy Programme, 2014-2020, was approved in February this year. The programme is entitled 'The Possibilities of the Countryside' and consists of 63 proposals.

It contains five themes, of which one is participation and local democracy. The aim of this theme is that, by 2020, local democracy will function well, there will be an active civic society, cooperation between civic actors and municipalities will be smooth, and local development will be strong. Residents of rural areas and rural communities participate in and make an impact on the development of society and their local environment, as well as on the associated decision-making processes, in a multi-faceted way. Eleven (11) draft measures have been made under the remit of this theme, which are intended to be implemented by 2020. The most important of these measures, from the point of view of the preparation of the programme, have been deemed to be measures 1, 4, and 5; the aim of which is to promote the implementation of local democracy and to strengthen the local and national-level cooperation between civic actors and the public sector.

In conjunction with the preparation of the programme, the Rural Policy Committee has renewed its operating methods and the programme is now to be implemented with even further-reaching cooperation with various thematic networks. Seven (7) thematic networks were instigated at the beginning of the year. The Civic Action network promotes the implementation of the aforementioned measures and achieving the aims set for local democracy and participation. The network is partially funded by the Rural Policy Committee. The networked approach is intended to cross sector borders and to increase the interaction between national, regional, and local level actors. It is our belief that, owing to increasing resource cutbacks, the opportunities for rural development will primarily stem from new ways of working and the consolidation of cooperation and collaboration.

In practice, this means that we need to educate public civil servants, subcommittee members in municipalities and also residents on how to work together in cooperation and how to take into consideration each other's opinions regarding local democracy for example. A large national coordination project concerning local democracy and changing structures of rural areas is currently being planned by the thematic group Civic Action. The aim is to share good examples of ongoing local democracy solutions where the private, public and third sectors have cooperated successfully. The aim is also to initiate discussions among citizens of new local welfare systems.

An important role of the thematic networks is to initiate different kinds of innovative piloting projects concerning local democracy, providing local services in rural areas in a new way (mobile health-care services, combining different kinds of public and private services) and how to strengthen the status of voluntary work in rural areas, just to mention a few. An important benefit of these pilot projects is that they discover and highlight obstacles in the legislation for example. The role of the Rural Policy Committee is therefore to open a dialogue with politicians trying to change legislation that is preventing good and innovative practices in rural areas. One example of an existing challenge is the need for functioning broadband

internet throughout the whole country, especially in rural areas.

One important aim is also to diversify the Leader groups' roles as regional developers. We have now 55 Leader- groups in the whole country. Another important organisation in this network is The Village Action Association in Finland, with their 19 regional village developers and over 4000 local village associations. These local associations play an important role in the voluntary work carried out in villages. It is important that they are heard also on the national level. The Rural Committee emphasises the importance of the local associations' work to keep rural communities alive and ensure that they remain good places to live in.

LOCAL VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY FOR SAVING THE OLD TRADITIONS: HÖVEJ, HUNGARY

Hövej is located in the North-western part of Hungary; the nearest town from the settlement is at a distance of 8 km. The village celebrated its 750 anniversary in 2007. Its population is around 300, the mayor of the settlement is Dr.NémethnéIstvánErzsébet from 2006.

In the life of Hövej, *traditions and customs* play a very important role, as the name of the village has been admittedly linked up with the *world-famous lace*, which appeared in the 1860-s. The main element of the Hövej-strategy is to create a liveable village for the local residents. The mayor, who completes her second cycle, has consciously built the strategy. First, she created a *liveable village* and a *cohesive community*, and gained the support of the population. Both the enterprises, the members of the municipality, and the integrated local people were successful in creating the conditions of a liveable environment. The first objective was to establish a nice, ordered village, where the residents feel comfortable.

The development has already started in 2008. The biggest result was the preservation of *the old tradition of the Hövej-lace*. They managed to acquire geographical protection, which means that in 2012 the settlement's lace received eternal right to wear the "Hövej" appellation for the products made (and only made) in the village. Its importance is, that in the exhibitions only the lace-maker women from Hövej can appear in front of the public with this brand. The protection-process was also started by *the lace-maker community*; it was a bottom-up initiative. The main goal of the municipality was to save the reputation of the Hövej-lace. In 2011, the settlement could renovate the *Lace-museum*, which is an important tool in ensuring the survival of the traditions, and which we will be able to visit during one of the study tours.

The realization of the work was mostly *based on volunteerism.* The *lace-maker women,* together with the mayor created the program called "Hövej lace-dreams", which aim is the acquirement of the "Hungaricum" appellation and to get on the list of the Hungarian intellectual heritage. The lace-maker

women also wish *to inspire the local population* to this old tradition. From 2012 the masters of the local industrial and folk art hold *lace-making courses* both for local and non-local girls and women. The village also works continuously on the image of the lace.

The success of Hövej, the good quality of life of the local population lies on more grounds. They put an emphasis on the population retention, the creation of a liveable village and the attendance of the heritage, which can only be kept with *the hard volunteer work of the local community*. It is for sure, that the lace-tradition takes its share from the local successes. These also contribute to the development of the local tourism, which can offer a long-run perspective for the sustainable development of Hövej.

For more information: www.hovej.hu

[i] ARIS (Augmented Reality for Interactive Storytelling) http://arisgames.org/