

"Rural Potentials for Regional Development"

Conference of the 6th Framework Programme projects TERESA
and ETUDE. November 27th-28th, 2008 Vienna.

Day 1, parallel thematic discussion III:

What is the contribution of local capacity to rural development?

Chair: RUUD KEMPENER

Impulse statements: PIERLUIGI MILONE (Perugia University/ETUDE)
LIISA HÄME
THOMAS DAX

Rapporteur: PAT ENRIGHT

Initially, there were short contributions from three speakers. Thomas Dax highlighted the importance of local capacity building and the important current role of LAGs (Local Action Groups); currently under Leader there are approx 900 LAGs in the EU. But this is probably a reflection of a much greater level of local action activity throughout Europe. This contributor also emphasised two aspects of local capacity building, first the emphasis on diversification of farm households, second the relevance for many different types of rural areas. Also success factors in local capacity building were highlighted including; acknowledging diversity as potential, extend participation as much as possible, view changes as an input not a threat, focus and learn from evaluation.

Pierluigi Milone drawing on experience from the High Tiber area of Umbria highlighted the crucial role of 'social capital'. He stressed success must be based on the people living in the region and that social capital is the principle driving force in creation and the adaptation of networks, and is a basic factor in creating knowledge and contributing to development. The inertia of the system and institutions surrounding supply chains can be a significant issue to address in achieving change in a region.

Liisa Hame stated that one should not underestimate the possibilities for local innovation, but be cautious in expecting innovations to be transferable and generalisable. Liisa observed from her experience that there is good liaison between research/new ideas and practitioners, but there is often a failure to make links with the administrative/political system so full advantage is not made from these developments. She observes much positive evaluation work of programmes but rarely sees evaluation recommendations influencing new programmes.

There followed a discussion on social capital, is it inherent in every community? The consensus was yes but needs nurturing, encouragement. Small projects facilitated by small amounts of money can help nurture and develop it. But for it to develop and work it needs an objective, a focus. Can be difficult in some communities where there is a low level of trust and self-esteem. But sometimes a new issue, new focus can

overcome this inertia or negative situation.

In local capacity building, voluntary effort is important and needs to be recorded, measured and recognised. In working with groups at local level, patience is required; participatory tools are important, sometimes no action will ensue, focus on little improvements at the beginning.

Overall the conclusion from this workshop was that local capacity is a crucial aspect to rural development. It requires careful attention and a lot of skill to encourage and utilise the potential of the local community. The following discussion was much centred about the need to recognize the multi-functionality of agriculture in policy making and of the success (or lack of success) of the pillar 2 policy measures.