



THE FUTURE OF RURAL YOUTH

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Dear Info Europe reader!

It is a pleasure for me to present to you this Info Europe.

The topic that we are dealing with in this edition is directly connected with our rural identity, as International Movement of the Catholic Agrarian and Rural Youth: The future of rural areas in Europe. As committed Rural Youth, through these articles we give our own vision about the rural areas in Europe and we set our challenges to turn these areas into the Rural World that we wish.

I hope you enjoy this Info Europe.

My best wishes

Berta Vizcarra Mir
MIJARC European-Team

1. INTRODUCTION

XXI century. Some recent events show us a crisis of our democratic states and endanger the European ideal. We can notice the rise of extremism and populism, some difficulties to implement the European union enlargement and a slow-down in the European construction process.

This situation gives the non-governmental sector, and especially youth organisation such as MIJARC, a special responsibility. The challenge is how we are going to give young people the opportunity to understand what is going on in the world, to act for a better society, to act for justice and democracy in Europe.

Lots of changes are taking place at all levels: for instance, Europe is changing. During the last year we have witnessed how Europe has launched debates such as the ones on youth policy and European governance. At the moment we are facing the European Convention on the Future of Europe, which is liable to affect our lives soon. The fact that these debates are taking place at the European level, without taking much account of what the local communities have to say is quite worrying, especially for those areas that have less opportunities to have access to this arena.

Rural areas are going to suffer changes in the years to come, and as a Christian Rural Youth Movement we think it is time to contribute to them. In the following pages, you are going to find what we believe to be an accurate description of the situation of rural areas in Europe: their drawbacks, their chances and our proposals and demands to give them a relevant place in the construction of

2. CHALLENGES OF RURAL AREAS

The technical, economical and social changes have influenced rural areas. During the last 50 years agriculture, the way we consume, and the social life have strongly changed. Whereas rural areas situated near urban areas profit from job offers, infra-structures and leisure offers, we can see how most of the structurally weak rural areas, especially the ones near the coast or the mountains that cannot benefit from tourism, suffer from high-structural Unemployment, low incomes,

the future of Europe; a social and sustainable Europe that will build up from the local to the global levels. This construction process is one of the reasons why we have to think about rural areas in connection with urban ones and work in co-operation.

Rural areas – what is the exact definition?

It is difficult to define rural areas. The definition of the OECD highlights that: „If 50% of the population of a region live in rural communities, this region is defined as a rural area. Communities with a population less than 100 inhabitants per km² are defined as rural communities.”

There are limits in scientific definitions, because what is called “rural” is mostly a subjective experience, as we cannot forget the great diversity among rural areas inside a particular country and at the European level. Even if a specific sign for rural areas is definitely the low population density, what is called rural is mainly a subjective experience: having a social network in the village and social life, the sense of proximity to other inhabitants, lack of access to certain basic services (employment, education and cultural offers, leisure activities, health...). Moreover, it is difficult to get an exact definition of what rural areas are without contrasting them with cities or urban environments. In that sense, saying that rural areas are non-overcrowded areas is a definition that we develop from contrasting them to industrial concentrations. Consequently, an independent understanding of rural areas is not easy to develop.

migration and low potential of development in commerce and trade.

Despite all differences among rural areas, one common concern is that their influence has decreased more and more as the main focus of public, political and ecclesiastical interest lies in big cities. The conditions of development in rural areas, influenced by structural change and modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation determine the daily way of life of rural communities.

a) Industrialisation and structural change

Industrialisation and structural change have led to sharp economic loss for rural areas. The fall of the primary sector, agriculture and forestry have had detrimental effects for the weakest rural areas. We can add to this the increasing settling of industry in overcrowded areas that are situated as regards transport facilities. The reduced market possibilities have also led to a loss of small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas. Human relationships and traditional systems of solidarity (exchange of machines...) have also been affected in the process of structural change.

b) Urbanisation and loss of functionality of rural areas

Lack of training opportunities and jobs or little choice either force the population to commute or create the pressure to migrate. Rural areas have been reduced to accommodation and production of food, when there is a lot more they can give. Numerous functions such as trade, a wide range of working opportunities and cultural life have been transferred to urban regions. We have to make sure that the rural areas can keep their identity and that we break the prejudices towards them.

Even agriculture is mainly granted the primary role of food production at the expense of its multifunctionality because of the subsidies guidelines, which means that it has lost its importance in areas such as developing sustainability, protecting the environment, and producing quality products.

The fact that some rural areas have specialised in a single sector (pig production, vegetable growing, car factories, tourism, etc.) has resulted into unbalanced growth and a threat to the sustainability of the area in the long term.

c) Development of population

The development of the population differs between rural areas situated near areas that offer job possibilities and those that are distant. We can describe 4 tendencies in the transformations taking place due to population migrations:

- ◆ increasing natural demography (births) + increasing migration to rural areas → increase of population
- ◆ decreasing natural demography but great increase of migration to rural areas → increase of population
- ◆ decreasing natural demography and no great migration to rural areas → stability
- ◆ decreasing natural demography and negative migrations → decrease + quickly ageing population

The decrease of the population is even intensified by the general demographic change, which also brings about a reduction of infrastructures, (for example fewer children – less kindergartens and schools). It is a danger that rural areas lose their best-educated people. The difficulties that rural youth encounter to have fair access to education threaten their future seriously as they don't have many possibilities to get a training (both academic and non-academic) in their region due to financial problems and lack of transport, which prevent them from attending higher education. Not to speak about the difficult access to the labour market.

Young people are forced to choose among some occupations that still exist and enter into a hard struggle of competition among themselves. Quite a lot of them have to leave their area to go to bigger towns or to other regions where it is easier to get an employment. This excludes them from applying for jobs that are too far away from their place of residence and affects their motivation to go on living there and contributing to local and rural development. However, we must not forget the number of good practises coming from youth organisations that promote local initiatives to make it possible for young people to stay and contribute to local development.

We can also note an increase of inequalities between rural populations. For instance, newcomers who have lower incomes and who do not come from the local community can face real

integration problems. Then, this lack of solidarity can add up to their economic trouble. On the other hand, in rural areas existing near urban concentrations, new population groups mostly from the cities have discovered the village as a place to live. For this reason more infrastructures, for example kindergartens, schools and youth services, are required, as well as new services (cultural, health..). They new inhabitants bring new points of view with regard to the way of life and also new challenges. For the existing life in the village with its festivities, organisations and norms this entails opening the discussion of integration among the different groups.

Guaranteeing an intact way of life in the village and making the new inhabitants, who carry with them their own traditions and habits, feel home at the same time is a new challenge which requires mediation and openness. Youth organisations play a key role and have a special responsibility in this process.

d) Modern and Traditional Values

Among others, increased mobility, the influence of the media and, last but not least the high social judgement of the urban way of living, with its more open possibilities to create life, made the rural and familiar community fragile and led to a loss of solidarity among the local population. Similarly, the mass media give a distorted and partial image of the church within society. Mass media often emphasise the negative aspects and they don't reflect the reality of the grassroots of the Church. In spite of this situation there are still young people who commit themselves. MIJARC Europe and its member movements have a crucial role in the transformation of rural areas through the evangelic action.

Homosexuality, foreigners, minorities, women's rights, the negative social impact of drug abuse, or homes for the aged to name a few are still less visible in rural areas. Despite the upcoming modern spirit, we can still find lots of taboos and norms in the villages. Tolerance is not being promoted through awareness actions in the way it should be.

Young people are confronted with "two worlds" and they are growing more aware of the opportunities open to them. Insecurity of roles, identity problems, future fears of parents and youth arise out of the contradiction of tradition and

modern spirit. Youngsters are educated in a culture which merges urban and rural elements and taking advantage of opportunities open to them often means moving to urban areas where they are available and where rural youth come across new challenges: leaving their cultural heritage behind to start a new life in the city and attempting to navigate through the changes undergone by the traditional structures of employment, family and community.

e) Lack of co-operation between local communities

All together rural areas and villages have become more complex and more complicated. Villages cannot develop themselves autonomously as the active groups at the local level are still far from co-operating. They live in some kind of concurrence that makes it difficult to build a common approach and vision for the future. This is a real challenge since in order to develop, there is a need for a common project that strikes the motivation to work together. It's important to seek for the causes of problems, so that we can work on them instead of having to work on the consequences.

f) Globalisation and neo-liberalism

As an effect of globalisation the pressure on nations and regions to adapt has increased. The capability and speed of innovation of enterprises becomes a key factor in the global economy world. Another serious consequence is the competition with regard to economic power, jobs and finances, which is not any longer carried out by cities and communities, but by vaster entities. The privatisation of former public services and de-regulation caused by the neo-liberal economic policies define the development also in rural areas. The equipment of rural areas with local schools, post offices and stations, groceries, retail trade, hospitals, district courts, etc. has frequently decreased. All together there is a growing danger that the competence between the regions will become stronger and that the weaker ones will lose.

Political, economical, social, religious and ecological measures should be implemented taking into account human-being needs in general, as they are going to effect everybody's lives, including the generations to come. Similarly to what happens locally, European Union policies

should also take good account of what the communities affected think of policies that target the development of rural areas.

g) Europeanisation and extension towards the East

With the development of the European Union more and more areas of competence, which have an influence on rural areas, have been transferred to the European level. During the last decades, rural areas did profit from numerous structural funds programs, but this is liable to change in a short time due to the reforms being planned at the moment. As a consequence of the integration of further members in the European Union the resources will be distributed differently to give an answer to the upcoming needs.

Solidarity between the European rural areas to create the conditions for further development is of the utmost importance, especially when we are referring to new EU members with a long rural tradition. More than just solidarity between different kind of rural areas, we need to build up a real solidarity between rural and urban realities. A co-operation between cities and rural areas is necessary to help each other. This co-operation is especially important for newcomers so as to achieve their integration at all levels. We need to imagine the complementarities between all kind areas.

Becoming EU members does not mean taking over the western industrialised economy. The development of rural areas and their local economies will need a place in the building up of Europe and it will require a common effort of all. Moreover, the youth perspective is not being taken into account in the integration process and spaces should be created to give them a voice. That is a good reason for giving support to the development of independent and democratic youth structures in those countries so that their ideas, proposals and actions are visible and taken seriously.

h) The actors and policies for the rural areas

The institutional landscape with regard to rural development becomes more and more complex. The European Union, national and regional policies, the ministries for agriculture, environment and consumption, the rural districts and

municipalities influence the development of rural areas. They are represented and assisted by planning offices. Apart from them, there is an impressive amount of institutions and organisations that also have a part to play in rural development. The richness that so many actors could bring to the dialogue and formulation of policies to favour rural development vanishes because of the lack of co-ordination among them. Instead of co-ordinated lobby actions, every actor has different objectives and therefore it is difficult to find point of common agreement to feed the dialogue. As MIJARC we must try to keep in touch with those organisations and make sure that rural areas don't disappear.

Youth organisations are also present in these turbulent waters and they do play an important part in building up the identification of young people with their rural areas. Youth organisations work independently and create their activities autonomously. They are the way to experience democracy and youth participation. They build-up their visions and activities in a bottom-up approach so they offer opportunities to make real proposals and take responsibilities. This way of working does not only have to be accepted, it also has to be supported. Youth organisations are real and necessary partners to create local policies. Their voice could be a very valuable contribution in the creation of local services, as they work with the youth for the youth. It is necessary to give young people the opportunity to make real proposals, give recognition to the work they do and support their structures in a most sustainable way without any form of instrumentalisation.

3. CHANCES OF RURAL AREAS

◆ Rural areas are attractive

The disadvantages of overcrowded areas, such as little availability of land and its high prices, high costs for labour, quality of life, lodging and environmental protection can turn into advantages for rural areas. Many rural areas near urban concentrations show a positive population development as a contrast to the cities. What are the conditions (values of leisure and relaxation) that gain importance? The area of leisure and tourism is an important branch of improvement for rural areas, which can profit extensively from the tendency to a natural and healthy relaxation. These conditions are also optimal to create new

places where spirituality could be developed: spiritual houses, sanctuaries... However, we have to be aware of the need to find a balance between the development of tourism and other activities such as agricultural ones. Sustainable development, and especially human beings and their culture should be at the centre of rural development, and enable, at the same time, the development of the villages while keeping their identity and way of life.

◆ **Low population density**

A specificity of rural areas in spite of all their differences is the low population density. This favours the knowledge of and about each other, which does not necessarily mean that social relations are automatically better than somewhere else. A certain lack of anonymity may also be a cause for social pressure. On the other hand, proximity allows inhabitants to find themselves in communities and to eventually organise themselves. When common action takes place, for example between consumer and producer or by exploring new forms of democracy, social closeness can foster the development of rural areas.

◆ **Combination of social and economical areas**

The traditions of rural life have shaped the country. House, home and a garden on its own, or the close combination of social and economic areas are terms that describe life and living together in the country even today. There is a lot of latent competence and qualities to bring into the sustainable change of rural areas and society. To us, sustainable development implies a combination of the social, economic and ecological dimension and the work for a world where everybody can satisfy their needs and the future generations will have the resources to do so.

In rural areas, sustainable development also implies a choice for an environmental-friendly agriculture that protects bio-diversity and involves development at the same time. Aware of the effects of the action of humankind on nature and the non-stop exploitation of the natural resources, we believe that there is a need to raise ecological awareness at all levels. To achieve this we have

to rethink our way of living because every action has global consequences.

Sustainable development should be regarded as a transversal element in all kinds of policies and actions developed: it's time to think globally in order to act at the local, national and international levels to develop a sustainable society by fairly distributing the resources and keeping in mind the generations to come. Rural areas have a key role to play in this process and it is up to the younger generations to create a dialogue amongst society to reach a stage where ecological concern equals the choice for a better social and economic situation, that is a sustainable one. Sustainable development also has to do with ensuring on-going support to the non-profit organisation sector both financially and in terms of recognition of its work. For instance, youth policy should be supported and granted the resources for developing in a long-term perspective.

◆ **Development of the technologies of information and communication**

The development of the technologies of information and communication allows a flexible creation of working places, which can become a chance for rural areas. The increasing chances in the area of ITC (for example by tele-jobs, advertising in Internet and electronic product orders) can be used for the promotion of rural areas as a location for commercial services. However we must be careful as it may contribute to a bigger isolation and a decrease of the social life of their inhabitants. We believe that employment and local commerce should keep its social dimension as much as possible and this is the reason why we are also asking for the creation of infrastructures that make it possible. Moreover, we need to consider that the development of information technology is not an answer to all problems. The development of this sector will never replace the production function of rural areas.

◆ **Integrated policies**

An Integrated and co-operative policy provides new room for acting and creating. It assists the self-initiative of people in rural areas and counts on their competence and their capacity to innovate. It is also a chance, taking into account that at the regional level there are a lot of financial

resources available from the European Union. Our task is to create the condition of a real solidarity between the different areas: rural and urban, as well between all the European areas.

4. OUR VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

International connections/relation with urban areas

We want rural areas to develop locally but to conceive this development in relation with the development of other areas. We are against inequality between regions. Rural communities need to promote more co-operative relationships and they need to take into account the development of other areas such as other rural areas (at a regional, national, and international levels) and also urban areas. We think that taking into account other areas can be enforced through the information and communication technologies (internet), but also through personal contact (international exchanges, common international projects). In that way, rural development will be promoting international solidarity through social and economical actions.

Infrastructure/culture

Rural areas should have access to basic services such as health, culture events, education but also functional public transports, shops that make up for basic needs and cultural services. This does not mean that we want to reproduce the opportunities available in the cities in rural areas; it only means that rural people need to imagine the way to provide access to quality services for everybody by using the own rural potentialities (village hall, local culture, local artists...)

Economic development/employment

We want rural areas to propose numerous and diverse employment opportunities. We want to have rural areas with a sustainable agriculture that maintains or even creates employment in the agricultural field with living wages.

Direct access to the market must be facilitated to the producers and fair prices must be paid for their products. The processing of agricultural products must be part of the economic activities in rural areas and create jobs. Small and medium-sized enterprises, which respond to local needs and which work in the spirit of social and solidaire economy, must be fostered. We want

rural areas to give a perspective for young people to stay and which promote income-generating projects (creating own economical activity).

Agriculture

Agriculture has an important role in the development of rural areas due to its multi-functionality. which means taking into account the economic, social and environmental functions of agriculture (quality products, spatial development, and creation of employment).

We want an agriculture, which produces food, which is sustainable, which provides a fair income for the farmers and allows them to maintain their job, which is environmentally friendly and which is fair to other farmers in the world. We want an agriculture that is self-sufficient, wisely regulated, and not dependent on subsidies for production. On the other hand, we want an agriculture which should get compensations for its multifunctional duties towards the community, e.g. landscaping, environmental care and its social dimension. We want to promote food-sovereignty, which involves granting people and national governments the right to establish and promote their own agricultural and food policies.

Education and access to information

We want rural areas where people can have access to formal and non-formal education. There is also a need to reinforce access to information through information and communication technology (such as Internet). It is important that little by little people can get concerned about their roots, their language, and their traditions.

Sustainable development

Rural development needs to be implemented along sustainable, fair and "solidaire" criteria and actions(for example: electricity coming from alternative energy projects, developing good consumers and producers relationships...). That means that activities that develop respect the natural, social, cultural and economical environment. In the same way, rural areas should be places where people are given opportunities to set experimental projects, to exchange their knowledge.

Rural areas also need to take into account their relationship with neighbouring urban areas (small

and middle-sized towns), not in a defensive way but with regards to potential complementarities between both of them.

We need political orientations at the local, national and European level to provide financial and technical support in order to enable this sustainable development to take place.

Local participation

We want communities to define social projects that require the participation of the population. We want rural areas where there are spaces to enable people (farmers, youth, old people, environmentalists, hunters, local authorities, teachers, children, newcomers, natives, educated and non-educated people...) to speak together, exchange ideas and have political and concrete common projects whose target should be the development of their community.

This way of working should reinforce the solidarity among the population but also with the population from other areas (at a local but also at the national and international levels).

Rural development

Rural development cannot exist without the engagement of the local population. A change of mentality is needed, so that people become aware of their competence and their possibilities to develop their rural areas. Therefore we need organisations which promote rural development and the involvement of all local population. A bottom-up approach is needed. Sustainable development through the participation of the local population should be a key for rural development. All the local actors should build a common project, common vision to achieve sustainable rural areas. It is also necessary that people involved in rural development actions do have the possibility to exchange with other rural areas in the world, that is the reason why international exchanges and communication facilities are necessary. We need a rural development that promotes a social and solidaire economy. Therefore it is necessary to influence policy-makers, so that they follow rural development strategies which go further than economic development.

5. CHALLENGES FOR MIJARC

All the actors should feel called upon to participate. For instance, a movement such as MIJARC should be involved in the discussions on rural development undertaken by the European Union and by the member states (Leader +, ...). Young people and their organisations should also have a crucial role there. At this point we want to stress again the role of youth organisations as they have a privileged ground to educate youngsters through an active pedagogy in a democratic environment that goes further than a simple reflection. It is through our movements that we have the possibility of bringing all the rural actors together and establish integrated bottom-up approaches. Through the promotion of the dialogue between all the actors involved we will be able to achieve common approaches and actions.

We are referring to the social actions that young people promote to contribute to local development starting from their own initiatives. Listening to young people should become a motivation to get organised and start discussing together about their conditions of life and try to find solutions for themselves and their communities. The fact that youth organisations work for young people with young people, that is starting from young people's needs and decisions makes us believe that they have an extremely important role in the building up of civil society starting from local communities and building up to the international dimension. For this reason, it is necessary to build a solid basis for youth participation.

As MIJARC, we have to build up a common vision for rural development in our national movements and at the European level starting from an analysis of the places where we are living in and spotting the areas where we can work to achieve improvements. In the process, it is necessary to train multipliers so as to extend participation and improve the quality of the work and create partnerships that enable us to give a more integrated perspective to our actions and positions. We should also continue to promote grassroot people to take responsibilities in youth structures and give recognition to the work that they do on a volunteer basis. Furthermore, these youth organisations should be supported so that they can ensure their structures and can carry out their work.

The aim for MIJARC regarding international development must be to make its members see that our society needs justice (through objectivity and equality) and solidarity. These values are the basis of international action, which we can create through partnership and trust. If people trust each other they discover common problems. While working on this, intercultural learning comes in. It is necessary to transform our society and to make our world fairer and equal.

As a Christian movement we must be able to identify the problems of rural areas and we must commit ourselves to their resolution through the Gospel. MIJARC has a crucial role in the transformation of rural areas through our actions, inspired by our Christian belief. The work on spirituality can help us feed our work.

- ◆ We need to work with young people so as to enable them to understand that rural areas are something interesting, a part of their identity and enable them to become proud of coming from rural areas
- ◆ We need to work with young people/ local groups so as to enable them to become active actors for local, rural sustainable development
- ◆ We need to develop materials, to enable young people/local groups to analyse their rural areas and explain why their rural areas are special.
- ◆ We need to promote international exchanges where young people/ local groups can get to know other rural areas and learn from how people in other parts of the world are organising rural life and development and act together
- ◆ We need to promote the CERIL - network, because it enables young people and the local population as a whole to experiment on rural development activities and also on their own economic activity and to have international and intercultural exchanges.
- ◆ We need to challenge and lobby policy-makers at the local, regional, national and European levels concerning sustainable rural development and the future of Europe.
- ◆ We need to organise meetings, seminars which allow young people to come together and discuss sustainable rural development,

to define clear positions and to take up common actions

- ◆ We need a closer co-operation with countries in Eastern Europe and we need to extend towards them to bring their reality into our organisation to construct Europe together
- ◆ We need to promote direct commerce possibilities, direct consumer-producer relationship
- ◆ We need to promote reflections, discussions, actions to show to the outside world what agricultural problems are and to promote our agricultural approach to the outside world
- ◆ We need training and education¹ on sustainable agriculture
- ◆ We need to be represented in a participative way in CPE
- ◆ We need to promote agriculture in our movements, because agriculture is part of rural development, of international development and of the development of society. That is why there is need for a working group on agriculture
- ◆ We need to keep in touch with the institutions and organisations working on rural development.

6. WHAT ARE OUR DEMANDS TO LOCAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN AUTHORITIES/POLICY-MAKERS?

- ➔ We need financial support for international youth organisations so that they can build up their organisation
- ➔ We ask national governments (especially Eastern European ones) to be aware of the need to support rural and agricultural organisations
- ➔ We ask the policy-makers to increase awareness of rural youth
- ➔ We ask the media for a positive communication about farming

→ We ask politicians to leave their management role and to go back to their decision making role, for example in WTO negotiations

→ We ask the national governments and the European Union to eliminate export subsidies

→ We ask for especial attention to small farmers, which play a social role by creating or maintaining employment in rural areas

IMPORTANT DATES

20 – 22 June 2003

Working Group Spirituality in Brussels, Belgium

20 – 22 June 2003

International Working Group in Brussels, Belgium

17 - 20 July 2003

MIJARC General Assembly in Barbastro, Spain

5 - 13 October 2003

International Seminar in Strasbourg, France

ABOUT INFO EUROPE

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