

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples of projects and practices that address or are driven by young people living in rural areas. These examples want to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in the delivery of the 2007-2013 RDPs in the view of supporting young farmers and rural youth, show how young people can be involved in policy design and implementation, raise awareness about possibilities offered by EU rural development programmes, and finally draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the policy.

My Featured Space



Students from villages located in the Carinthian-Slovenian Alps together with researchers, teachers and other rural stakeholders, developed new scenarios for rural living spaces in the future.

1. Background information: why the approach has been put in place

Massive outmigration of youth from rural areas, which contributes to brain-drain, demographic decline and lack of innovation, are issues that many EU countries are experiencing. “My featured space”, a research programme initiated by the Carinthia region in Austria, in co-operation with other regions in Slovenia (Upper Carniola region) and Italy (province of Udine) aimed to find possible solutions to reverse this tendency. In particular the project’s main scope was to better understand what conditions can make rural areas attractive to young people in the future, so to reduce their migration to urban area. Furthermore, the project aimed to involve young people in research activities, and it was part of the wider programme “Sparkling science”, launched by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research. Young people were actively involved in the research programme, implemented between 2009 and 2011 and financially supported by LEADER and other public sources (Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research).



2. Description of the approach: how it was done in practice

The project focused on finding what the young people needed in the future for living and working in attractive rural regions. It was intended as a research and learning process, where focus was on i) asking youngsters their vision of an attractive living space; ii) learning to understand the interactions between different actors in the complex system “rural region”; and iii) elaborating models and visualizing scenarios of future attractive living spaces.

The project was launched by an ‘introductory’ workshop in January 2010, during which the activities of the project were agreed and divided in four main phases. In the introductory workshop students from the different countries were asked to propose a logo for the project and discussed and agreed about the main activities to be implemented during the project. The kick-off meeting of the first phase (22-23 January 2010) was the occasion for participants to select the logo, among those proposed, which was finalized by professional designers. During this **first phase of work** (January—April 2010) students were guided to use the methods of qualitative social research to document and present their living space with short videos. During the workshop, students worked together to define guidelines to be used to interview a number of key actors in their region and define specific parameters to characterize their living rural spaces.

The initial results of this work were presented at the kick-off meeting of the **second phase of the project** (7-8 May 2010 in Italy). After the presentation of the videos and the research conducted by the students involved, the parameters proposed by each group were discussed in order to elaborate a common list to be used for rural areas. The final list elaborated contained some twenty parameters such as ‘jobs’, ‘social networks and communications’, ‘commuters’, etc.

During the **third phase** (October 2010 – January 2011) together with the Institute of Information Systems of the University of Klagenfurt, young people developed and used the computer game based on the elaborated model. In the **fourth phase** (February to May 2011), students elaborated pilot projects that used the research findings of the previous phases to solve some of the issues in their respective regions. Young people were actively involved in planning and implementing the project. This included preparatory works on research topics, working on results and follow-up actions.

Communication activities were also undertaken to give visibility to the project, in particular a dedicated project website was created (in German and English); the project was advertised in regional TV and radio channels (e.g. ORF Carinthia), and; materials were published in regional printed and on-line media.



3. Conclusions/lessons learnt relevant for the future: what were the results

The project resulted in detailed research on possible new scenarios to make rural areas more attractive to young people. It was also a good opportunity for young people to learn about different research methodologies (interviewing techniques, focus groups), as well as interpreting scientific theory (e.g. Frederic Vester's sensitivity model), but also filming, editing and presentation techniques, project management, rural and regional development, and major issues related to youth and life quality.

The project contributed to strengthening the cross-border cooperation and integration of pupils from the three neighbour regions (Slovenia, Austria and Italy). Youth involved in the project was very active and interested to contribute with different skills and expertise. Overall, the concept was well fit in the regional needs, and the methodology used seemed attractive into engaging young people and also offered clear benefits for other partners. It also provided an alternative to conventional training delivered in schools. What worked really well and made the difference was to divide work into small task groups, the immediate application of theoretical knowledge, the use of audio-visual methods and the integration of the project activities and results into regular school programs. Youth had the opportunity to know their peers in neighbour countries and had the chance to meet important stakeholders from their regions. Team work went very well, and the freedom of expression among the participants was respected.

There were no major issues with regards to the project implementation. Regular evaluation of projects activities and results was helpful to monitor emergent difficulties and reshape some activities accordingly. The project can be considered as a good model for engaging youth in rural development and it benefited from the LEADER approach. However, the overall project has a more systemic character, crossing various policy boundaries, such as rural development, youth, research, social policy, education, and thus seems to be hardly applicable under the 'measure framework' and priorities of the 2007/2013 RDP.



More information at <http://www.myfeaturedspace.info/>

Information included in this fiche is primarily coming from the case studies carried out within the ENRD Initiative on "Youth and young farmers in rural areas". The fiche is compiled by the ENRD Contact Point on the basis of information collected in the EU Member States and Regions. The content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions, national or regional authorities.

Updated: February 2014