



SLOVENSKI  
PODEŽELSKI  
PARLAMENT  
SLOVENIAN  
RURAL  
PARLIAMENT

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE  
4<sup>TH</sup> SLOVENIAN RURAL PARLIAMENT**

Novo mesto / Šentrupert, September 2017

# 4<sup>th</sup>SLOVENIAN RURAL PARLIAMENT. Harmony between rural areas and agriculture.

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Text: Goran Šoster et.al.

Translation: Tanja Dominko, PhD

Design and printing: I-lbis d.o.o., Ljutomer

Edition: 300 copies

Publisher: MGRT/DRSP

Ljubljana 2017

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Evropski kmetijski sklad za razvoj podeželja: Evropa investira v podeželje



## Rural Parliament Session

Rural Parliaments in Slovenia and in Europe / Goran Šoster ■ 4

### HARMONY BETWEEN RURAL AREAS AND AGRICULTURE

Services in rural areas / Andreja Krt Stopar ■ 7

Value chains / Petra Medved Djurašinović, PhD ■ 9

Risk management / Barbara Trunkelj ■ 11

Employment and infrastructure in rural areas / Aleš Zidar ■ 14

Coexistence of generations in rural areas and the role of the youth / Majda Černič Istenič, PhD ■ 17

Food security / Nina Barbara Križnik ■ 19

Smart management of natural resources / Marija Markeš, PhD ■ 21

Knowledge is key for development / Emil Erjavec, PhD ■ 23

Cooperative movement / Bogdan Štepec ■ 27

Modernisation and simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy / Luka Juvančič, PhD ■ 30

## Day Of Local Economies

### STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL AND SUB-REGIONAL ECONOMIES

Neo-endogenous development potentials in rural areas / Irma Potočnik Slavič, PhD ■ 33

Common management of rural resources / Gaja Breclj ■ 35

The impact of LEADER/CLLD on Local Economies / Goran Šoster ■ 37

Implementation and modifications of local development strategies by 2018 / Alina Cunk Perklič et.al. ■ 40

Inclusion of non-governmental organisations in the implementation of Community-Led Local Development / Tina Divjak ■ 43

The local aspect of CLLD / Aleš Zidar, Roman Medved, Goran Šoster ■ 45

### CASES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Land of Hayracks ■ 47

Delicacies of Dolenjska ■ 48

## Selected documents from rural parliaments

Declaration of the 3<sup>th</sup> Slovenian Rural Parliament ■ 49

Manifesto of the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Rural Parliament ■ 55

**Goran Šoster,**  
President of the 4<sup>th</sup> Slovenian Rural  
Parliament Programme Committee

## **RURAL PARLIAMENTS IN SLOVENIA AND IN EUROPE**

Over the past few decades, rural areas have been experiencing a true revival, coming as a result of rapid lifestyle changes, increased mobility, more advanced communication paths and channels, and a general increase in the European standard of living. However, improved development indicators do not necessarily mean an improved quality of living for all groups. Certain social groups and remote areas are not affected by the positive trends in development, resulting in an increase in inequality and unequal opportunity. Despite the general urbanisation of rural areas, the gap between cities and their outskirts is also growing. Different perspectives on rural development often lead to clashes among social groups, even though their objectives are very similar.

The majority of paths that lead to achieving the set objectives are integrated into the mechanisms of parliamentary democracy. A positive trait of these political systems is that they consider the will of the majority; however, at the same time they often exclude diversity and marginality. Excluded, weak, endangered, and independent groups are left to search for alternative ways of asserting their rights and achieving their objectives with no majority support.

One of the alternative models of social dialogue are rural parliaments. The operators and protagonists of this approach are civil society representatives, most often non-governmental organisations and movements. Rural parliaments create a space for dialogue and seek paths to alternative solutions to complicated relationships. They make important contributions to democratic processes in the society, since they place participatory democracy right alongside representative democracy. They provide a wide circle of interested parties, organisations, individuals, and all the stakeholders of rural life with a direct opportunity to share their perspectives on their living environment. By confronting different views, rural parliaments are building a bridge between the civil society and the state, which is one of the key building blocks of modern democracies. Rural parliaments connect seemingly non-connectable concepts of interpersonal relationships and unite volunteers, officials, scientists, farmers, workers, clerks, consultants, the young and the old.

The incentive for establishing such a form of social dialogue comes from northern Europe, from Sweden. In the late 1980s, they recognised



how necessary it was to forge a stronger connection between the dispersed and remote parts of the country, especially rural areas. Every second year since, they have been organising discussions with massive representation from every part of the country and from every target group, extending over several days. The original approach has soon spread across national borders and has to this day found its supporters in many European countries (besides Sweden there are also Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Scotland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania). Rural parliaments are being organised in many Balkan countries, with the movement PREPARE spreading the initiative even further, to the very outskirts of Europe, namely Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Republic of Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. The growing influence of rural parliaments can be seen in all the countries that have allowed this contribution to participatory democracy to become a constant. At the same time, a stronger influence on development policies has been noticed on the level of the European Union as well. Contributing to this fact, among other social factors, is the European Rural Parliament, organised by non-governmental organisations and movements every second year.

In Slovenia, the tradition of organising rural parliaments began in 2011, 20 years after the country attained its independence. Each of the previous three rural parliaments was different and adapted to fit the most explicit challenges of the time. The most frequent topics of rural parliaments in Slovenia and in Europe are the quality of life in rural areas, agriculture, the use of rural space, creating jobs, exploiting resources, taking care of the young and the old, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the development of rural areas.

The 4th Slovenian Rural Parliament goes into a detailed discussion on seeking harmony between rural areas and agriculture, and focuses on the significance of local economies in its introductory stage. The starting points for discussion have been summarised in the present publication. This year, Slovenian participants will be joined by the representatives of 12 European countries. Over a third of participants of the 4th Slovenian Rural Parliament come from LAGs and NGOs, one fifth from public administration, and one tenth from consulting and developmental institutions. Over a tenth of participants are independent individuals, farmers, and entrepreneurs – we would like to see these numbers rise in the future.

Rural parliaments in Slovenia are still in the adapting phase and still seek their optimal form. The constant that remains is the principle of integration and of overcoming differences between various perspectives on rural development. The increasing inclusion of active stakeholders is a gradual and demanding task due to the different

roles and competences within complex social relationships. The dialogue is slowly transforming into a discourse that moderately sharpens the cutting edges of polar differences between the wishes of the civil society and the perspectives of public institutions. Rural parliaments have a great potential and a promising future.



**Andreja Krt Stopar,**

Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia

## **SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS**

*The future is the challenge, the key factors of development are people*

As small as Slovenia is compared to other EU member states, it is also very diverse. Slovenian terrain is fascinatingly dynamic, but this also means that conditions for agriculture are extremely difficult. Slovenian farmers have always had to rely on their own common sense and ingenuity. It was Janez Vajkard Valvasor who already wrote about a great deal of ingenuity that farmers needed in order to survive in the region between the Alps, the Pannonian Plain, and the Adriatic Sea, due to unpredictable climate and weather changes. These conditions forced farmers to either be involved in many different branches of agriculture or work as blacksmiths, set up their own mill or sawmill, trade goods, or run an inn for horse and cart drivers. Today, these activities are deemed complementary.

A high level of ingenuity and innovativeness comes in handy in modern days, as well. Slovenian rural areas offer several privileges, such as a diverse and catching cultural landscape, a fairly clean environment, favourable climate conditions, an extremely rich ecosystem with diverse life forms, numerous water sources, a variegated cultural heritage, a strong tradition of knowledge and farming skills, a favourable geographic location, and a hub for tourism. Here, in the heart of Europe, you will find beautiful farms. I am certain our future lies in the maximum production and consumption of local food.

The majority of farms are still smaller, with their income stemming from different sources and agriculture not necessarily representing the main activity. However, these farms do play an important role in preserving the cultural landscape and rural area life. In order to keep their role, additional incentives are required for introducing and developing parallel types of work and income, coming from complementary agricultural activities.

From the perspective of the sustainable development of rural areas and the preservation of the natural environment, it is precisely services that have significant potential. As a multi-functional space where traditional activities and knowledge, such as agriculture, forestry, crafts and cuisine, prevail, rural areas offer and make room for new opportunities in pursuing social, environmental, technological and

tertiary activities, all with the intent of creating prosperity for individuals and the society.

The objective of the policy of rural area development is sustainability that cannot be measured only in GDP, but also in the prosperity of people and the living environment. Sustainable development can only be found in internal connections within a local area that is supported by its recognisability as a unified product on foreign markets.

The co-financing of primary agricultural production must be preserved within the European Common Agricultural Policy and additional attention should be paid to the incentive for a wholesome and sustainable development of rural areas. Agriculture as a branch with a multi-layered role must be joined with the concept of the strategic public good – it must also be defined as such and assigned relevant services. In this way, Slovenian farmers will benefit from additional income, which will keep the population in rural areas and preserve the cultural landscape. New products of development, such as green tourism and inter-generational coexistence, would become a part of this circuit.

Discussion points:

- Determine the possible perspectives for a greater engagement of the population in rural areas in the service sector.
- Form a knowledge-/skill set for a better and more diverse offer of services in rural areas.
- Finding solutions for new employment possibilities in the scope of rural area services.





**Dr. Petra Medved Djurašinić,**

Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises  
with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia

## VALUE CHAINS

Agriculture and the food processing industry of Slovenia are strategic branches that provide Slovenian consumers with safe and quality agricultural products and foodstuffs. One of the main challenges of the agri-food chain, which connects different stakeholders, is to keep Slovenian rural areas alive, vital and pervasive, while agriculture and the food processing industry should remain innovative and full of potential for further development, allowing them to face all other challenges on the way, as well. The main challenges in the development and innovation of the agri-food system are as follows: the improvement of peoples's health, well-being and life expectancy, safe foodstuffs that consumers can trust, sustainable and ethical food production and processing as well as packaging, product quality, meeting the needs and demands of consumers, communication, training, and the transfer of technologies to support innovation. We must not forget to mention social challenges, such as health, demographic changes, prosperity, food supply security, sustainable agriculture and bioeconomy, clean and efficient energy, smart, green and integrated transportation, climate activities, the efficient use of resources (including raw materials), and an inclusive, innovative and safe society. Facing the above mentioned challenges demands a lot of effort on the part of stakeholders in the agri-food chain, so a successful management of the chain is of utmost importance. This means that each member of the food-supply chain has their own value, role and significance. A successful management of the agri-food chain may be crucial in the establishment of new value chains, which do not end with consumer end-products, but also include the decomposition process after use. The processing of biomass into products with an added value is the best illustration of such a value chain. In this case, we can talk about compliance with the principles of circular economy. With regard to the development and innovativeness of the food processing industry, as well as the economy as a whole, the value chain is defined as a group of stakeholders who form a vertically connected chain or network with complementarities in research studies, development, innovations (linking several technologies and production directions), and marketing and/or business operations reflected in end-product sales or the sales of mid-chain products within international value chains and networks. In terms of the economy, the key role from the

perspective of the focus of value chains on products is played by so-called market initiators, whereby a chain must include at least three economic subjects.

### **The needs of different interest groups**

In the future, value chains will have to be established so as to meet the needs of all interested parties. The following will have to be taken into consideration:

- existing chains (long, short) and their main characteristics (advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and threats);
- uniform understanding of the term »value chains«;
- natural conditions of Slovenian rural areas;
- demands and needs of different interest groups (producer, processor, vendor, consumer, etc.) and
- different aspects of value chain functioning (environmental, social, economic, health, and global).

### **Development potential for satisfying the indicated needs**

With regard to the presented challenges, trends and the needs of different interest groups, the development potential that exists in Slovenia and is based on several stakeholders will have to be taken advantage of. A strong emphasis will need to be put on the development of the competences and skills of human resources, the stimulation of entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas, on cooperation, and on the transfer of knowledge and technologies. In addition, main activities will have to include the aspect of sustainability in the functioning of value chains.

### **Discussion points:**

1. Which agri-food value chains best support the sustainable development of rural areas and people's health?
2. Which are the most important relationships for stakeholders to agree on?
3. How, when and who is responsible for training stakeholders in order for them to be able to accelerate their development with mutual cooperation?



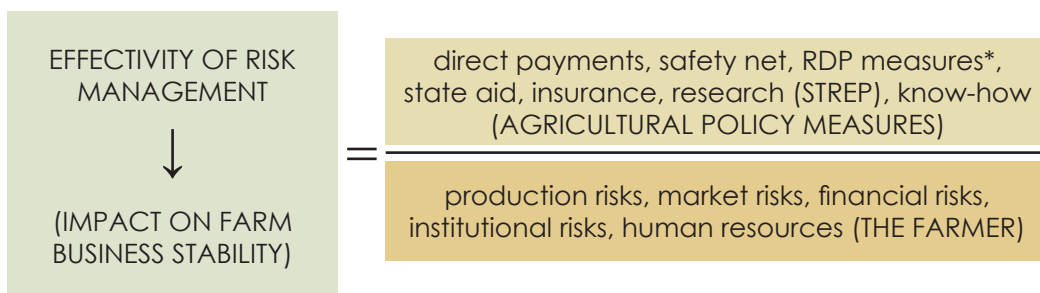
## RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE AGRICULTURE

### Definition of “risk” and risk management in agriculture

Risk is defined as the possibility to project probable results in advance, whereas uncertainty is used when referring to something that cannot be foreseen. Risk as the subject of this workshop includes both.

Effective risk management in agriculture is particularly challenging due to the nature of agricultural markets, which are volatile and rigid, and due to the increasingly urgent issues of climate change, globalisation and neoliberal market orientation. It is getting progressively harder for technological, agricultural and economic know-how to keep pace with the emerging risks, which is why it is also getting more and more difficult to anticipate risks (especially income risks) and put in place effective preventive measures.

With different measures, CAP supports producers in the face of an increasingly uncertain agricultural production environment, which is a trend that will continue in the formation of CAP post-2020, together with the tendency toward an effective use of public funds.



\* The co-financing of premiums in the EU takes into consideration WTO provisions in the cross-sectoral rural development regulation (65% and the lower threshold for co-financing damage at 30%).

### Types of risks in agriculture

*Defining risk on the level of the farm*

Understanding risk and risk management helps farmers reach better decisions. On the level of the farm, we distinguish production risks, market risks, financial risks, legislative risks, human resources risks and combinations of risks. The emphasis falls on whole-farm

risk management, since single-risk strategies lead to the wrong conclusions.

*Defining risk for the purpose of agricultural policy planning*

Understanding risk and risk management helps agricultural policy assess the effectiveness of different types of risk mitigation tools and improve the existing system. In support of better decision-making, the Slovene Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food commissioned the study Development of an integrated system for coping with production and income risks in agriculture and fisheries in Slovenia, which found that a continuation of the co-financing of production risks by the state is the only reasonable measure in the management of normal risks in agriculture and fisheries, that farmers are not (yet) interested in the foundation of a mutual fund for production risks as a complementary system for managing catastrophic risks, and that income insurance might become attractive for Slovenia after 2020.

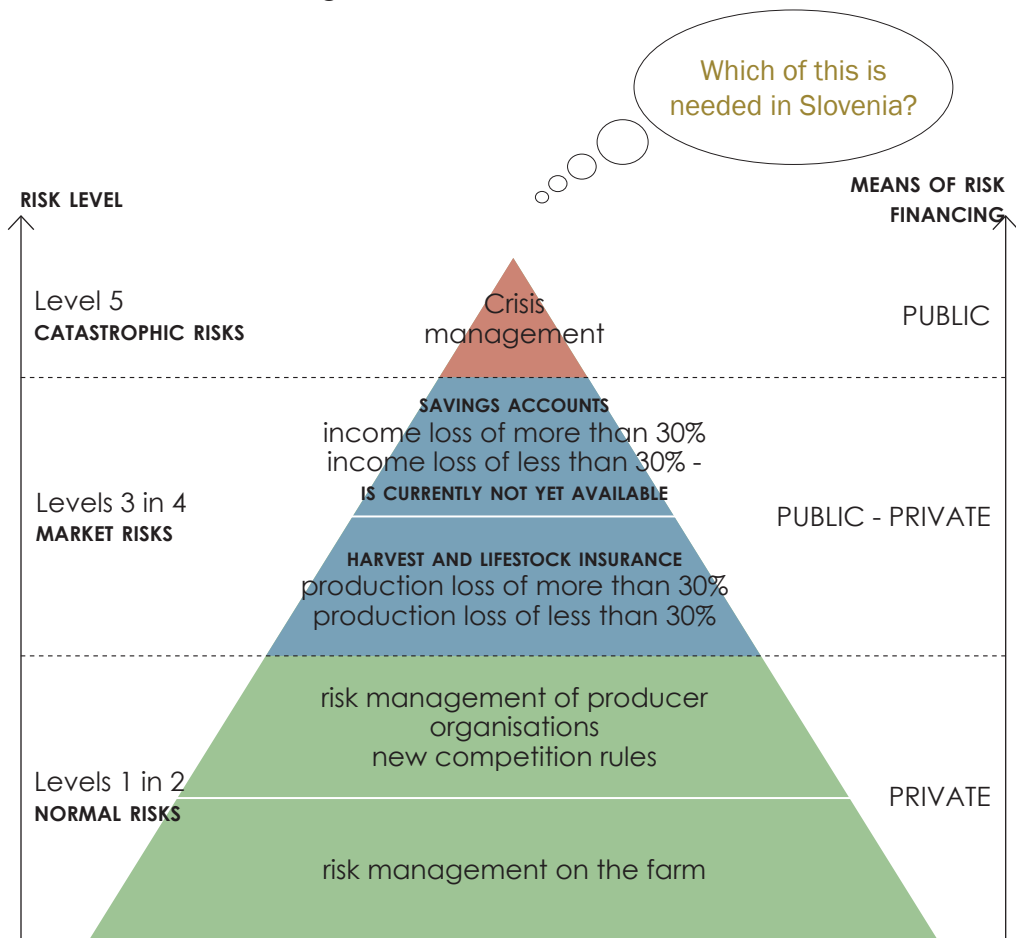


Figure: Levels of risk management in agriculture



For the purpose of better risk management after 2020, the EU Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development requested the study State of play of risk management tools implemented by member states during the period 2014–2020: national and European frameworks. The study aimed to deliver suggestions to the EU and its member states for the formation of an effective risk management system related to income uncertainty and market volatility in the scope of CAP post-2020.

**The purpose of this workshop in the scope of the rural parliament** is to add new contents and directions to the debates on risk in relation to the new CAP post-2020, which are already underway in Slovenia and are led by the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Ljubljana. Workshop results will yield additional information for all stakeholders in agriculture and rural development who will decide on the selection of CAP measures post-2020 applicable in Slovenia.

### **Discussion points:**

- 1. What can a farmer do BY HIMSELF in order to manage risks and what help can he expect from the agricultural consultant?** What tools would farmers need to improve risk management on their farms? Would it be reasonable to implement an EIP project that would result in a tool for integrated risk management on the farm (and strengthen the first level of farm risk management), based on the cooperation of science, the public service for agricultural consultancy and agricultural producers?
- 2. How can we increase the willingness of farms to opt for insurance or buy into a mutual fund)?** Would farmers be interested in savings accounts “for hard times” that would make them eligible for tax relief?
- 3. How can we improve risk management awareness and the attitude toward risks, and how can we improve the mutual solidarity of farmers when it comes to risk management?** What sort of risk management does a farmer expect from a cooperative or from other types of producer associations? What experiences do workshop participants have in this regard?

## **EMPLOYMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN RURAL AREAS**

The issue of employment and job creation in rural areas is largely dependent on investments, which represent the basis for the establishment of fundamental infrastructure, the improvement of conditions for the expansion of activities, easier operations, and the number and quality of new jobs. The term infrastructure is very broad (road, digital, social infrastructure, etc.). The trends of rural development programmes and other European plans are increasingly focused on softer contents, so it would be sensible to focus mainly on the lacking institutional infrastructure. Bureaus and institutions should be user-friendly and inviting. For the normal functioning (development) of both fields of infrastructure, several conditions must be fulfilled, not only financial but also systematic – such that would allow the interested parties a simple, inexpensive, and especially fast realisation of investments towards the development of rural areas. Within the current programme period, the EU can barely follow these objectives. The programmes do not provide sufficient support for the establishment of new jobs and do not significantly improve the possibilities of survival in rural areas, especially in the more secluded regions of the country. The majority of measures is intended for agriculture and forestry, which is understandable, while the accompanying measures that are needed for the development of these areas, such as the management of the much needed infrastructure, knowledge transfer, an adequate environment for young people, families, etc., are in many ways neglected. The following facts represent the basis for this statement:

- Jobs in rural areas (especially in agriculture) are increasingly expensive – the estimated value of investments for the establishment of a new job position on average amounts to somewhere around EUR 40,000 to EUR 70,000 (only ten years ago, this amount was significantly lower). The reasons behind it are many – they are more expensive especially due to greater competitiveness on the market, which results in more expensive equipment, machinery, a better work environment that needs to be compliant with the demanding Slovenian and EU legislation, and greater productivity in order to reach an adequate price on the market. Competitiveness is weakened also due to the vast administrative burdens encountered by previously and newly employed people in agriculture, and in rural areas specifically.



This creates a need for the additional education and training of stakeholders, drains the limited resources for the development of rural areas, and demands precious time from the employed.

- Insufficient EU funds for the creation of new jobs, which derive mainly from the CLLD programme. Unfortunately, this programme will not be able to meet all the identified needs, especially due to the management bodies who have also foreseen it to co-finance investments, which was in the previous programme period solved better with Measures 322 and 323. This is a long-term and planned process that demands a clear strategy and a professional approach to the development of rural areas – achieving successful results in the scope of different programmes and in different programme periods. Unfortunately, this is not emphasised enough by the management bodies, who focus more on the realisation rather than the quality of the project.
- An analysis of the efficiency of European funds would offer an interesting comparison with the success rates of measures passed by the European Social Fund (ESF) in the rural areas of other European countries, especially since this fund is not a constituent element of CLLD, despite the civil initiatives' great efforts for ESF to be included.
- The overly demanding and strict attitude of the supporting environment toward the implementation of activities in rural areas – right from the start of the investment and throughout the planning and implementation of the project, especially if it is co-funded by the EU (exaggerating demands and control mechanisms by the Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food). The non-stimulatory attitude of agencies and bureaus toward beginner entrepreneurs (after the registration of their business, they are visited by various inspectors, who burden the beginner with exaggerating or time-consuming and administratively unreasonable demands). This points to the large issue of lacking and only partially successful institutional support infrastructure (the more successful the supervisory agencies, the less successful the entrepreneurs and employers in rural areas).

### **Needs:**

- providing additional resources for investments into fundamental infrastructure in rural areas that would enable a similar life standard as in more developed regions of the country and consequently preserve a more evenly distributed population density;
- bridging the gap between supervisory agencies and employers

in rural areas;

- in addition to the requirements of agriculture, forestry and food processing, the key factors for the development of rural areas are: young people, families, women, the elderly, and entrepreneurs. It is not just about creating jobs, but also about providing the conditions that would make modern life possible and thereby ensure sustainable development (modern technology, healthcare, conditions for an active way of life of people in their third age, social activities – these are mainly soft contents that are very significant, yet neglected).

### **Discussion points:**

1. The multi-functional role of an individual in relation to institutional infrastructure – I as a provincial, I as a citizen of Slovenia, I as an employee.
2. In your opinion, what is the key factor in creating new jobs in rural areas? How important are the social environment that supports individuals and the infrastructure of an area? What type of knowledge is needed to provide adequate infrastructure and jobs?
3. What kind of countryside and what kind of jobs do the identified target groups seek?
4. How to enable and encourage economic and social development and harmonise it sustainably with spatial possibilities and potentials? Taking into consideration rationality, social justice and environmental protection in the process of encouraging the creation of new jobs.
5. How to face the challenges of the near future: the lack of workforce in Slovenia due to structural discrepancies and demographic changes (aging of the population, large number of pensioners, etc.); what are your suggested measures for the activation of the long-term unemployed, the re-integration of the elderly, and a higher employment rate of young people?





**Dr. Majda Černič Istenič,**

PhD, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljani

## **COEXISTENCE OF GENERATIONS IN RURAL AREAS AND THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH**

Almost every EU country, including Slovenia, has been facing a gradual aging of the population due to an increase in life expectancy and a low birth rate. This demographic trend is closely connected to numerous changes that are taking place in society and to challenges of ensuring social security, employment, and living conditions. The gradual aging of the population also heavily affects the existing relations between generations. Expert and political discussions often stress the negative challenges of aging (an increase in pension expenses, health security and social security systems) that can be attributed to the concept of intergenerational solidarity. This concept and the establishment of connections between younger and older generations should not be observed merely from the financial perspective, but also in the sense of encouraging mutual cooperation and exchange, as well as a better understanding and new forms of coexistence between generations.

Undoubtedly, there is a strong and growing presence of segregation – separation according to age – in today's modern industrialised societies. What contributes greatly to the so-called generation gap is the social structuring of age in the sense of different age groups living isolated next to one another in terms of chronological age, e.g., children are separately included in daycare services and schools, while older people are part of age-homogeneous pensioner communities, e.g., nursing homes. Research shows the primary aim should be to create socialising and cooperating opportunities between generations in order to effectively bridge the generation gap and encourage understanding between them. Such opportunities can emerge in the scope of voluntary initiatives, proposed by both older people and the youth. Older people can offer various mentorship programmes with different contents, activities, and services to children and adolescents, who in return can offer their voluntary services to older people in their homes and join intergenerational projects, e.g., crafts and arts, introducing modern media technologies and using them for learning purposes, etc. Another opportunity for a better understanding among different generations are age-integrated centres, e.g., multi-purpose educational institutions that simultaneously offer care and educational programmes for children and daily services for older people. Here, teachers play a very important role with their knowledge and skills

of connecting the youth with other generations – in this sense, the inclusion of intergenerational perspectives into teacher training and the curriculum bears the same level of importance.

The above mentioned actions and measures are often – as experienced in numerous attempts of introducing social policies and practices – hardly realisable without taking into account specific social conditions and the context of a local environment, in which different groups of people reside. As pointed out in the academic literature, ideas and suggestions for creating socialising and cooperating opportunities for different generations were mostly formed in an urban environment; however, the question remains whether they meet the demands and wishes of residents of rural areas. The objective of the workshop with the above mentioned title is to determine the already existing practices in this field and to further identify the possibilities regarding this matter in the rural areas of Slovenia.

**Discussion points:**

1. What are the incentives and obstacles for intergenerational understanding and coexistence in rural areas?
2. Which are the already existing forms and methods of bridging the generation gap in rural areas and which should be created/ developed additionally?
3. Who are the most important players in these endeavours and which are the most appropriate locations/facilities in rural areas?



**Nina Barbara Križnik,**

Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises  
with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia

## FOOD SECURITY

Slovenian agricultural policy is facing numerous challenges. We are living in a time of climate change and a new technological revolution, which influences the growing awareness and demand of consumers with regard to food security. The growing competitiveness within the agri-food chain as well as the increase in the power of corporations are increasingly pronounced features of the food market. Agriculture is also facing a new wave of structural changes. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been changing due to the impact of the mentioned challenges.

The production of sufficient quantities of quality and healthy foods sold at affordable prices is one of the main objectives of CAP, yet CAP is not only seeking to provide food security on the EU level. The world is facing an accelerated population growth – according to estimates, the world's population should reach 9.5 billion in 2050. The goal of producing sufficient quantities of food was reached already in the 1970s, yet we are still coming to grips with how to produce quality food with traceable origins. Thus, the future development of Slovenian agriculture demands that natural conditions involved in production be taken into account. The abundance of forests, a large share of grassland, and the decreasing share of cultivated land dictates an especially well-considered use of available agricultural land, from the point of view of food security, economics, as well as environmental protection. In the future, if we want to make use of our comparative advantage of a relatively well-preserved natural environment and the cultural landscape, the sustainable production of food will need to represent a priority in the further development of Slovenian agriculture and of our rural areas. The establishment of short transportation routes, the supply of the population with food of the highest quality, produced with a small carbon footprint and exerting a lesser burden on the environment, leads to a high quality of life in cities, as well as in rural areas.

The production of food is of great strategic importance for Slovenia. The production of food and drinks is among Slovenia's most significant economic activities and one that provides numerous jobs. Besides that, the existence of the agri-food chain is necessary for the preservation of food security in Slovenia. In the last couple of years, we have

noticed a regression of this economic branch, which is notably badly organised. There is an insufficient concentration of offerings and an insufficient vertical connection to the suppliers of agricultural raw materials. We have also fallen behind in terms of the innovativeness of our products. Nevertheless, we have a unique opportunity to increase our self-supply, since research shows that the average consumer is still very much attached to Slovenian products, tradition, and the environment. With an intensive promotion of local products, we can turn the demand in favour of local products. Our agriculture must therefore see an upgrade of the high technological, phytosanitary and veterinary standards, as well as standards of environmental protection and animal prosperity. A sustainable and economic use of available production resources represents the basis for ensuring food security, i.e., an adequate level of long-term self-sufficiency in terms of food, which can significantly affect the stability and quality of food supply in Slovenia given the increasingly risky global market.

It should be pointed out that Slovenia is a net importer of agri-food products. The import-to-export ratio tilts in favour of export, which means that Slovenia is not able to satisfy its needs for agri-food products with local production alone.

**Discussion points:**

1. How will we ensure technological progress and an increase in production capacities?
2. What are the possibilities for the development of companies and farms with a complementary activity? How about other forms of employment in rural areas?
3. How can we increase the level of self-supply with food, seed materials and indigenous species?
4. In what way can we stimulate the purchase of food by Slovene producers and processors in the scope of public service contracts?



**Dr. Marija Markeš,**

PhD, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning

## **SMART MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Natural resources – forest, soil, water, air – have always been in the centre of man's interest, use and exploitation. Every society follows certain social and economic norms in its use of natural resources. It is these norms and agreements that are oriented toward preserving the sustainability of these resources and ensuring their availability for current and future generations.

Today, we all emphasise the significance of the sustainability of resources; on top of that, in all its important documents, the state is committed to sustainable development. Here we regard sustainable development as achieving positive results for all the stakeholders in the development chain – not only for humans, but also for the environment with all its living beings and their support systems, altogether considered as nature.

In the past, various relationships were formed in human society between man and nature, and consequently also among natural resources, making them either more or less interconnected, co-dependent and well-balanced. Today, our society is predominantly characterised by a paradigm that states that nature serves man, since it is man who must provide society with a quality and healthy living environment, with food, water and clean air via natural resources, with additional economic benefits of using natural resources, and, of course, with space for relaxation and recreation. In this sense, natural resources and nature, including other living beings, are cherished according to their economic value, especially from the perspective of the increasingly popular ecosystem-based services.

Although these approaches may give the impression of integrity and a consideration of all stakeholders involved, the feeling of individuals in everyday life is quite the opposite – the managers/owners/users of natural resources feel limited and threatened in their activities, while environmental activists feel pushed to the side in the process of decision-making on how natural resources are managed, leading to the natural environment being further endangered and degraded.

These facts lead to a paradox in which natural allies fight one another, while profits are generated by industries that take advantage of the preserved natural resources and nature as such.

### **Discussion points:**

1. In today's society, are we really not able to recognise the value of nature as such? In doing so, we would also acknowledge the right to life and a healthy living environment of other living being, and by refusing noise, toxins, radiation, etc. near our settlements, we would show that we take into account these "wishes" and rights of other living beings as well;
2. Does the right to water (drinking, irrigation, energy, etc.) not also include the right of other living beings to use water as their basic habitat?
3. Does the right to recreation not also extend to the right of chamois, deer, stag, etc., to pasture in peace?
4. Is environmental protection at its core not the protection of humans and the sustainability of natural resources?



**Prof. dr. Emil Erjavec,**

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## **KNOWLEDGE IS KEY FOR DEVELOPMENT (ALSO OF RURAL AREAS)**

Knowledge is the key factor in social, economic, and spatial – regional development. Testifying to this are the theory and practice on why certain countries and regions are more successful than others. In a time of intensive technological change (digitisation) as well as social change (social crisis), knowledge, innovations, ideas, solutions, and every other aspect of knowledge are crucial. Rural areas and their communities, which in the economic sense mostly fall behind urban regions, are not excluded from these processes. Quite the opposite: alongside democratic inclusive structures it is precisely knowledge (individual and collective), creative thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship that sets successful regions apart from the less successful ones. The Cork Declaration, passed by European rural area stakeholders in 2016, was probably the first ever to affirm knowledge as the engine of change in rural areas in the scope of the Common Agricultural Policy.

The knowledge required for development extends to diverse areas of activity of individuals and communities in rural areas. Production technologies that extend from traditional farming and forestry to even the most modern of services are fundamental. The location of economic and social activities is a significant, yet, unlike in the past, not a decisive factor. In a new global world, modern rural areas do not represent only an interesting living environment, but also a chance to perform different economic activities.

The production of food and the use of forest resources remain a significant but no longer sole source of development in rural areas. Gaining in importance are the quality of the environment and nature, which have, with new approaches, become a source of employment and prosperity in rural areas. Knowledge is also gaining significance, linked to social activities and extending from social entrepreneurship to seeking new forms of collective activities.

Knowledge is a complex notion that extends over the entire spectrum of education, research, consultancy, teaching of skills, training, and different forms and methods of knowledge transfer. Its lever are creative individuals and their organisations who focus on forming and spreading knowledge. Knowledge should not be equated only with information that has flooded the modern world, since one needs

to know how to obtain, comprehend, and form information into developing solutions. Knowledge is formed in a system of innovations, which may be area-specific or transferred from other environments. With the latter, adjustment to local conditions is of great importance. It is evident that knowledge needs to be tailored to the natural, cultural, and actual economic framework of each country and local community. Therefore, every environment needs its own planners and transmitters of innovations.

Modern societies have developed complex systems of knowledge that join public and private, international, national and local sources of knowledge, and put the user in the centre. The needs, solutions and approaches that seek, spread and form collective knowledge are on the rise. A merely locally-limited development based on successful individuals does not enable the quality development of rural areas and the local community. Only by seeking interaction and synergy among different links in production, environmental, social and local communities can solutions that lead toward an inclusive development and the preservation of healthy rural areas be formed.

With its support instruments, the modern state can significantly contribute to the creation of a system of knowledge formation and transfer. This field has also been subjected to significant changes. New approaches are formed, regional and rural development policies increasingly include knowledge as a criterion and an element of support, while innovative solutions, especially collective ones, are encouraged and rewarded.

Slovenian rural areas boast a distinctive and resonant number of examples of successful development. Especially individual rural economies and households have developed original solutions and wrote various success stories – mainly with public support –, which preserve jobs and foster prosperity. Generally, this includes successful individuals who have used their own resources and knowledge to form creative solutions, befitting their abilities and aspirations. These individual success stories cannot entirely hide the actual lack of integrated collective solutions. The development of local communities is not just a set of good individual examples, as it also demands the formation of collective solutions.

The reasons for this lack of a broader developmental dimension do not lie only in the neglectful attitude of the state, as commonly noted, but are rather deeper and more multi-faceted. The main reason lies in the fact that communities themselves are often not capable enough to develop and adopt collective solutions. They lack ideas and knowledge, and the willingness to take collective action is rather low, which where we usually fall very much behind the more





developed rural areas we strive to follow. Contributing to this are also an educational system that is not up to date, public systems of research and knowledge transfer, which, regardless of some positive impacts, do not meet the needs of modern times, in particular the requirements that need to be met for the successful development of rural activities and communities.

Contributing to the lack of collective solutions are also public support activities, which are not directed toward seeking creative and collective solutions efficiently enough, but are predominantly distributive; they have a seemingly strong social character, but in essence they only preserve the unwanted condition, rather than improve it. In its support of individuals, the Slovenian rural development policy is very locally limited, with investment support not being sufficiently checked in terms of quality and the expected delivery on goals set. The distribution of funds is implemented mainly on the basis of physical indicators, while a lesser role in the acquisition of funds is played by creative solutions and solutions that would connect a larger number of participants. Knowledge and cooperation are the main deficits of Slovenian development policies in rural areas, as they are regarded as an intertwined set of issues, deriving from the expectation of the interest sphere and the modern samples of behaviour and values that favour the individual and their interests.

There are distinctive needs to change the roles and the systems of knowledge for the development of Slovenian rural areas, even though they are not sufficiently acknowledged. School systems, especially those that co-create occupations for rural areas need to be reformed and future professions in rural areas strengthened by focusing on organisers and communicators of knowledge. Especially at the tertiary level, where professional profiles are finalised, significant changes in strengthening social competences, aptitudes for strategic planning and management, and the understanding of broad entrepreneurial, environmental and social dimensions of rural areas are needed. These contents are not sufficiently represented in school curriculums and their transfer onto students does not meet the demands and the characteristics of current younger generations. In general, it is important to refresh and establish new public systems of knowledge formation and transfer, since they are the very factors that shape individuals from the beginning and play a key role in policies pertaining to knowledge formation and transfer. Responsibility for this lies in the hands of institutions, interest groups, and the state.

In terms of the formal systems of knowledge, systematic encouragement and a bigger role of informal knowledge networks are needed. Extracurricular classes, development networks, and non-governmental organisations that emphasise the importance of

knowledge in the scope of their activities can significantly affect the spreading of knowledge and the formulation of collective solutions. However, we must never confuse the representation of interests with knowledge. They are two completely different things and the level of knowledge needs to be increased also in informal rural development networks.

Unfortunately, in Slovenia knowledge is still not recognised as a key factor in change and development. The new implementation of knowledge will also demand significant changes in beneficiaries who are used to creating solutions for themselves and seeking public support afterwards. There is a growing number of cases where such public support does not bring results, due to it not being strategically well-considered, which is something that is not taken into account to the degree it should be upon the distribution of funds.

Slovenia needs a new commitment to development, one that would encourage the formation of autonomous and creative individuals and groups who will be able to plan and realise solutions together. Such objectives lack public support, and even in those cases where they exist, they do not meet the demands or acknowledge the possibilities of rural areas and their inhabitants. Key changes must occur in the forthcoming programme of Slovenian rural development, in which knowledge must become not only the main priority, but also provide direction and act as a lever in the process of fund allocation.

This pressing shift toward knowledge is crucial for the future of Slovenian rural areas. It can only be based on self-reflection and recognition that different, better, and original approaches are what is needed. Are all who are involved in the development of rural areas capable of implementing such a shift? Or are we just going to wait for »the state«, which could be the intermediary in this process, but cannot really change how individuals and organisations act? The very recognition that we must and can act differently to give knowledge and collective solutions a new value represents a significant change, the first important step and one that we should make decisively.



## COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The workshop Cooperative Movement aims to define the role and the importance of cooperatives for the development and prosperity of rural areas. In Slovenia, agricultural and forestry cooperatives have provided their members with the buying-in and sale of agricultural products for as many as 145 years, they are the largest providers of quality local food, and they make significant contributions to developments in rural areas. In addition to agricultural cooperatives, rural areas in Slovenia are creating new opportunities for the development of other kinds of cooperatives in tourism, social services, elderly care, and others. In the past couple of years, public attitude towards the cooperative movement has also changed considerably, leading to cooperatives being perceived as organisations that safeguard inclusivity. Cooperatives foster equality, solidarity and social responsibility in the communities they operate in. Cooperatives focus on people, not on capital. Since cooperatives are based on the needs of a community, they are committed to the sustainable development of local communities, to local supply and services, and to the development of local economies.

The objectives of the workshop are tied to the role of cooperatives in the forthcoming common agricultural policy and to their role in rural areas in general. Has their undertaking been successful? Where can we find opportunities for an even greater activation of the cooperative movement?

- **Cooperatives make a significant contribution to fostering prosperity in rural areas**

Agricultural and forestry cooperatives ensure food security, since cooperatives in Slovenia buy in more than 80% of all farm-produced food, while many also have their own processing facilities for milk, meat and wine. By being present in every Slovenian village, they preserve a cultivated and populated countryside, provide employment for 3,000 people, take care of local development, and represent an important social actor in rural areas. Cooperatives connect smaller farms that would have a hard time surviving on the market on their own.

- **Cooperatives are partners of rural value chains and local networks of production**

Cooperatives are rural undertakings dealing in agriculture, forestry and fishery. As such, they are interlinked with circular and green economies. In the scope of their activities, they face unfair and non-transparent relationships in the value chain. Cooperatives connect the offerings of smaller producers and offer them on the market through different sales channels.

- **Cooperatives create societal added value**

Within their operating framework, cooperatives are the providers of important rural infrastructure. With their shops, processing facilities, and headquarters in particular, they keep the countryside populated and cultivated. This fosters the development of other rural undertakings as well as the development of tourism. Cooperatives can thus also be formed in other areas, such as tourism, workers' cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, cooperatives focusing on social services, and others.

- **Cooperatives are concerned with the sustainable management of natural resources**

Natural resources, such as water and soil, and biodiversity are the cornerstones of forestry and agricultural production, which is why they need to be managed sustainably and preserved with the help of new technologies and methods that protect water, soil, and the environment in general.

- **Cooperatives face challenges resulting from climate change, similar to agricultural holdings**

Cooperatives strive towards the production of biomaterials and sustainable energy from renewable sources, but they require more efficient investment schemes.

- **Cooperatives encourage knowledge and innovation**

Cooperatives of all shapes and sizes, including farmers and foresters, must have access to suitable technology, cutting-edge connectivity, and modern management tools that bring economic, social and environmental benefits.

- **With the forthcoming Common Agricultural Policy, cooperatives must be provided with adequate opportunities for development and funding**



For their undertaking, cooperatives require a flexible and goal-oriented policy, which should not be unnecessarily convoluted.

**Discussion points:**

1. The importance of the cooperative movement for the implementation of the forthcoming Common Agricultural Policy, be it direct (organisations and groups of producers, collective logos, etc.) or indirect (a more efficient implementation of measures)
2. Taking into consideration the coming technological changes (digitisation), the Common Agricultural Policy and the strategies of the Republic of Slovenia, which specific characteristics should agricultural and other cooperatives put a special focus on to develop and communicate them to the public in order to provide the best possible services to their members and ensure longterm competitiveness?
3. Which are the most important generally beneficial effects of cooperatives and how can they be supported by rural development policies and other policies?

## **MODERNISATION AND SIMPLIFICATION OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE NEEDS OF SLOVENIAN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS)**

The same as for all EU member states goes for Slovenia – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU plays a very important role in the economic situation of agriculture in the country, as well as in the related and complementary branches (modification and distribution of foodstuffs, and forestry and the forest-wood chain, respectively). At the same time, it substantially impacts the environment, the population, and the prosperity of rural areas – be it directly (through agricultural environmental payments and the financing of development initiatives) or indirectly (through environmental legislation and regulated regimes of protected area management). In cycles that usually coincide with the common budget frame, objectives, tools, the extent of means, and the realisation of CAP adapt to challenges that are dictated by external (international trading environment) and internal factors (public opinion, budget, the institutional development of EU).

Challenges concerning European (and consequently Slovenian) agriculture and rural areas are numerous and diverse. Some of them, e.g., achieving food security and income from agriculture, have been on CAP's agenda from the very start; others, such as facing climate change and the changed attitude of consumers towards food, have only been emerging lately. Regarding new challenges faced by CAP, the existing discussions mostly expose the increase in farm resilience in the sense of production and income risk management, as well as the improvement of the operation of the entire food-supply chain, the contribution of agriculture to the preservation of the environment and climate change prevention, the development of rural areas and raising the quality of life, the modernisation of generations, and last but not least the change in consumers' expectations. A general objective can be seen especially in the importance of innovations and the necessary simplifications in carrying out agricultural policy, also by paying closer attention to the principle of subsidiarity. CAP's general financial frame will be heavily influenced by the EU turmoil of the past few years (migrations, Brexit) and the related introduction of new or the expansion of existing policies (mostly in the field of security), which decreases the possibilities for preserving common CAP means.

Influenced by these challenges, discussions on CAP priorities and



measures after 2021 are underway. In March 2017, the European Commission launched an extensive public discussion on »Modernising and simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy«, enriched by certain events, such as The European Conference on Rural Development in Cork (September 2016), and the viewpoints of certain member states, international non-governmental organisations, and the academic sphere. Based on these activities, the European Commission will by the end of 2017 present a report on CAP post 2020, followed by legislation propositions, which will present the foundation for the new CAP.

Concurrently with the discussion on the future arrangement of CAP, Slovenia faces internal challenges deriving from a fragmented land structure, the lack of cooperation between market subjects, falling behind in productivity, a feeble acceptance of the new environmental paradigm, and impoverished work in rural areas. Slovenia is in need of a new commitment, a new common strategic agreement among all key players drawing a common vision and a concept of agriculture and rural area development. Such an agreement would represent a quality starting point for a strategically well-considered and wholesome approach to developing agriculture and rural areas, both in the scope of CAP as well as other European and national policies that influence economic and social prosperity in Slovenian rural areas.

In order to face the challenges deriving from the discussion on CAP changes and from the developmental resources of Slovenian agriculture and rural areas, the researchers involved in the project CRP V4-1608 (Impacts and Perspectives of CAP on Slovenian Agriculture and Rural Areas) have through a series of workshops, involving key stakeholders from the field of agriculture, identified a selection of five priority issue sets as stated below:

- 1. Stability of management and resilience of agricultural holdings** (income position of a holding, risk management, rural area prosperity);
- 2. Agriculture and environment** (environmental/spatial perspective of CAP, less-favoured areas (LFAs), accommodating to and mitigating the effects of climate change, organic agricultural production);
- 3. Value chains and economic connections** (relations between individual links in value chains, transition to bio-economy and possibilities of expanding the value chains);
- 4. Future farms** (knowledge and innovation transfer in agriculture, competition and productivity, generational transfer);
- 5. Vital rural areas** (economic and social resilience of rural areas,

endogenous development).

The foremost issue in question is the search for new perspectives and less established priority areas of agricultural policy. The objective of the discussion in the scope of the 4th Slovenian Rural Parliament is to determine whether the above stated priority sets and their contents present and adequately enrich, as well as broaden the strategic directions of agricultural policy. Expanding certain viewpoints would also enable an easier preparation of national standpoints in negotiating the new CAP reform, as well as modernisation and a more efficient sustainable approach.





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## **NEO-ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT POTENTIALS IN RURAL AREAS**

*»Build out rigidity, build in flexibility«:  
Local economy trends in Slovenian rural areas*

**Trends and processes in contemporary rural areas.** Slovene rural areas, categorised as predominately rural, are very geographically diverse, comprising huge historical, cultural and natural heritage, with a relevant share of ANC and specific land cultivation, increasing inter-regional disparities and different types of integration into cross-border regions. Contemporary Slovene rural areas as multifunctional localities with a heterogeneous and mosaic-like structure are exposed to restructuring, as they are trapped between traditional processes and structures on the one hand, and modern developmental processes on the other, both of which are strongly reflected in local economies (Potočnik Slavič 2011).

**The needs of local entrepreneurs and rural areas.** In the era of globalisation, especially small firms located in rural areas are extremely fragile (Klemenčič, Lampič, Potočnik Slavič 2008). The pace of re-structuring is fast, overwhelming and profound, creating business opportunities while also setting-up (un)known risks (Woods 2007, Epp and Whitson 2001). The reconstitution of rural areas under globalisation introduces into rural localities new networks of global interconnectivity, which become threaded through and entangled with existing local assemblages, sometimes acting in concert and sometimes pulling local actants in conflicting directions. The networks, flows and actors introduced by processes of globalisation fuse and combine with extant local entities to produce new hybrid formations. In this way, places in the emergent global countryside retain their local distinctiveness, though they are also different from how they were before. (Woods et al., 2015; Lampič, Mrak, Potočnik Slavič 2015).

**Potentials of local entrepreneurs and local economies.** Generally speaking, businesses in rural areas usually choose one of the following options: (1) to stay rooted in the local milieu, if this is permitted by the nature of their business and the economy of scope, (2) to combine a certain level of embeddedness with some connections to outer, wider systems (often recognised as glocalisation; Klemenčič 2005, Massey 2005), or (3) to become completely integrated in international networks. However, in practice this appears far more complex: as the

empirical examples indicate, both processes (globalisedness, Dubois 2010) are in fact parallel and multidimensionally interwoven.

**Proposals for relevant institutions co-creating the development of local economies and the welfare of the local population.** Since Slovene rural areas have been constantly lacking jobs (in quantity and quality; Klemenčič, Lampič, Potočnik Slavič 2008), it is important to focus on two drives that essentially create local/regional economies (and the international business environment as well), i.e., the permanent development of existing entrepreneurial facilities and the forms of supportive business environments. Both of these drives, if they are set-up and are correlating properly, should create favourable circumstances in which companies could flourish and create favourable networks within the local economy and the broader milieu.

**Potential vision of the future development of local economies.** Since Slovenia has opted for the sustainable development paradigm, we propose to upgrade local economies in the following directions: economic (empowerment of regional economic cycles), social (creating and maintaining unfolding rural webs) and environmental (re-use of brownfields). Local embeddedness increases resilience and the return of benefits to the region from global engagement. Firms trading internationally should be encouraged to source materials locally and to participate in regional support networks. Networking inside rural areas (into a rural web connecting tangible and intangible capital) combined with purposeful and long-term international networking is necessary for the success of local/rural economies.



## **COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF LIVING RESOURCES**

Slovenia is rich with low-carbon and sustainable natural resources, the value of which grows rapidly in the light of current global processes. The resources in question are forests and timber as a renewable raw material of circular economy, quality and abundant water resources, renewable energy resources (sun, water, biomass, geothermal energy and wind), a fertile soil and a favourable climate for food and industrial crop production, beauty and diversity of land, as well as biodiversity. Many opportunities for the transition to a sustainable society can be seen in the sustainable use of space and in a more efficient use of energy. Although this diverse rainbow of natural resources shines as an exceptional foundation for social prosperity, it should not be taken for granted. The benefits of our resources can be usurped by others, they can remain unexploited, or can even be destroyed by non-sustainable actions. Furthermore, wholesome and lasting prosperity cannot be granted to us as individuals. Clean air, quality drinking water, efficient public transportation – either all the inhabitants of a certain area enjoy them or nobody does. Prosperity only comes if we stand together as a community and join forces in striving towards it. That is why we need to perceive resources as having development potentials, make plans for their use as a community, and ensure the sustainability of their management, so that generations to come may reap what we sow.

Local communities are the most primal guardians and protectors preserving the quantity and the quality of natural resources in their own environment, since these represent the basis for a sustainable prosperity future generations can enjoy. Therefore, local communities have a vital interest in sustainable resource management in their environment. They wish to act as sovereign, active and responsible co-creators of lasting prosperity at a level they can still handle. They join forces in considering the type of their product, the reasons and procedures behind it, the type of resources their environment has to offer, and the most promising development opportunities deriving from them.

This type of management comes with numerous synergistic effects; it enables communities to exploit local natural resources for building social assets, create green employment opportunities in the local environment, and generate income for meeting the needs of the

community in terms of development. Besides, it contributes to food and energy self-supply and to the increase in competition by greening the current field of industry and construction. In this respect, community management of natural resources is the synergistic driving force for the transition to a low-carbon society.

Numerous sovereign, active and responsible communities that already practice natural and other resource management in their environment can confirm this. Good practices are already present in Slovenia and abroad, persistently breaking new ground. They can be found in various fields and forms, e.g., small farm cooperatives, organic family farms, community gardens, alternative economies (collective use, renting, exchanging), community sustainable land management, companies with unconventional ownership structures (internal ownership and employee co-management) and their merging into chains and clusters, eco-settlements, community energy projects, civil society community initiatives, apartment cooperatives, alternative currencies, etc. Good practices should serve as inspiration and incentive for other parts of Slovenia.

Inspiring practices can be found on the map at **[www.dovoljazavse.si](http://www.dovoljazavse.si)**.

*The Project Dovolj za vse: Skupnostno upravljanje z življenjskimi viri ("Enough for All: Community Management of Living Resources") is implemented by Umanotera, the Focus Association for Sustainable Development and the Legal Information Centre for NGOs, and is co-financed by Eco Fund, the Slovenian Environmental Public Fund.*



## THE IMPACT OF LEADER/CLLD ON LOCAL ECONOMIES

The globalisation of economic flows and everyday life has fundamentally changed social relations and the role of the individual in society. An important part of these changes has had negative effects, which are most notable in local communities, especially in rural areas. Overall global trends are challenged by movements social theory designates under the umbrella term "localisation". Localisation trends stress the central importance of local needs and prioritise the specific interests of different target groups. The interests of local or other interest groups are once more put front and centre, and precede individual interests. Localisation trends present a serious alternative to the interests of the protagonists of capital and private property, as they move from continuous growth and the accumulation of goods and capital towards (sustainable) development and a more even distribution of available goods. Sustainable development is becoming a necessity due to the limited capacities of our planet and the negative effects of ever growing inequality. An equilibrium of economic, social and environmental interests is one of the prerequisites of sustainable development. It is much easier to adhere to the principles of sustainable development locally than globally. Local communities are naturally predisposed to "common good economics". Related initiatives include solidarity economy, the commons (Oström, 1990), economic democracy, economic subsidiarity, gift economy, and economics beyond growth. What they all share is the principle of participation (Felber, 2010). Participation is coming into its own as a value, adapted to the emerging needs of many local communities that have been disadvantaged amidst various globalisation trends. One of the most prominent contemporary trends is the proliferation of local economies, which include a variety of innovative initiatives. Some of them have already grown into notable international movements. The most prominent forms of local economies are local currencies, eco-villages, participatory budgets, independent cooperatives, energy-self-sufficient villages and towns, housing communities, non-institutional networking of vendors and consumers in community supported agriculture, and others.

In addition to the aforementioned alternative (independent initiatives), local economies can benefit significantly from systemic measures that foster initiatives from the bottom up. Politics give increasing emphasis to circular economies, short supply chains, local brands, and self-

sufficient energy systems. An important part of European funds goes to the LEADER programme, which has in the present programming period matured into the CLLD programme (Community Led Local Development). Similar to independent localisation initiatives, LEADER/CLLD acts in accordance with the “bottom-up” decision-making approach and is participatory at its core, since cooperation among the public sector, the industry, and the civil society is a crucial prerequisite for the foundation of Local Action Groups.

Directing public funds into different programmes and measures suffers ever increasing public pressure, especially in agriculture and rural development. That is why these programmes and measures need to be justified with transparent effects and results. Since the beginning of the 1990s, LEADER/CLLD has had a disproportionately high impact compared to the invested funds. The projects undertaken by members of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the LAGs themselves are in the interest of local communities. Project operators frequently invest into the projects a considerable part of their own funds, be it volunteering, work or money. With only minimal funds they strive to achieve the most to satisfy local needs. The percentage of European funds intended for LEADER/CLLD varies by country, but most often amounts to about 5% of the Rural Development Programme. In exceptional cases, countries or regions allocate to this programme more than 30% or even 40% of funds. In Slovenia, public funds dedicated to this programme have almost tripled due to the extension of EARDF into EMFF and ERDF.

A substantive analysis of the projects implemented by LAGs in the scope of LEADER/CLLD shows a pronounced affinity with local economies. The majority of the funds on the level of local development strategies, which provide the basis for project selection, is allocated to local initiatives that promote tourism. Due to the high multiplier effect of tourism, economic impacts must be evaluated more broadly and should not focus solely on immediately and directly measurable results. The projected positive impact of LEADER/CLLD on local economies in Slovenia is based on a number of items. Local development strategies for the period 2014–2020 are very much focused on job creation, which is why the emphasis on tourism will continue. The second factor has to do with the fact that the current Rural Development Programme in Slovenia has redirected the previous Village Renewal and Heritage Preservation measures into LEADER/CLLD. The expectations of local communities in this regard are therefore high, which consequently means a suitably higher quality of local projects. Expectations are high also in the field of rural core service development, which play an important part in improving the quality of life.

The impact of LEADER/CLLD on local economies is highly positive. The programme fosters sustainable rural development and at the same



time diminishes the negative effects of globalisation trends. It is based on the needs of local communities and the consensus of social groups. The rich Slovenian tradition of approaching local development collectively, as partners, promises success. A stronger LEADER/CLLD is building a stronger, enduring foundation for the development of a future society.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND MODIFICATIONS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES BY 2018**

The Local Development Strategy (hereinafter: LDS) is a product of local populations who, by cooperating in the preparation of the strategy, actively co-decided on the fundamental needs of their local area, as well as the objectives of the strategy itself. LDS is the fundamental strategic document of a local action group (hereinafter: LAG) and represents the basis for the absorption of relevant European funds included in this project.

The preparation of LDS was a challenging process for LAGs. It comprised the analysis of the current state of events and the needs of local areas, as well as numerous workshops and meetings, where the fundamental needs addressed by LDS were gradually formed. Every LAG decided which of the four topics, determined by the Decree on the Implementation of Community-led Local Development in the programme period 2014–2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 42/15, 28/16, and 73/16), will be pursued by LDS with regard to the identified needs of the area. A strong emphasis in strategy preparation was put on intervention logic, which represents a throughline of every strategy, since it joins needs, objectives and measures into a sensible plan for achieving the objectives set. From the definition of the action plan derives the description of transforming objectives into measures, with which LDS goals will be achieved, with the financial plan being another important part of LDS. Besides the description of the strategy and its goals, LDS also includes the target values of indicators and milestones that enable the monitoring of the efficiency of LDS implementation.

The confirmation of LDS and LAG was a key moment in the implementation of LDS, since it enabled LAG to publish its first public tenders and select its first operations. A new approach that comprised three different funds – the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EARFD), the European Regional Development Fund (ERFD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) – represented a challenge for all stakeholders involved in the confirmation process, not only for the rapporteurs of LDS, but also for its countersigning officers. The confirmation procedure for LDS and LAG was demanding and long, but despite all the obstacles, 37 LAGs that cover the entire territory of Slovenia were confirmed by the end





of October 2016. The lengthy confirmation procedures of LDS resulted in a delayed start of LDS implementation; nevertheless, taking into account the fact that LDS and LAG confirmation procedures are complex and challenging, LDS and LAG were, compared to other member states, confirmed on time.

Since the confirmation of LDS, the first public tenders for all the funds included in the measure have already been published. At the same time, the first operations have already been confirmed and chosen by LAG. In some cases, it has become evident that the needs in the local area have already somewhat changed in the time between the preparation of LDS and the publication of the public tender, so it would be sensible to improve some documents concerning the functioning of LAG or the selection procedures.

A performance review that comprises a review of the implementation of activities and milestones set by LDS will be performed by the relevant management bodies in 2019. With regard to LAG, objectives are deemed to be achieved if they amount to at least 85% of the objective value on 31 December 2018. In the performance review, the management bodies focus on the following milestones:

- the number of concluded operations compared to approved operations,
- the share of allocated funds in the decision on confirming the operation compared to a specific financial framework,
- the share of paid out funds compared to allocated funds in the decision on confirming the operation,
- the number of newly created jobs,
- with regard to the ERFD fund, the number of local stakeholders involved in the implementation of CLLD projects, as well as the number of people who live in LDS areas, and the number of supported partnerships are to be reviewed.

In the preparation of LDS, the milestones were set too high. At the same time, reaching them may also be at risk due to lengthy procedures of passing LDS and LAG, as well as procedures of confirming operations by officials in charge of the final confirmation of the operation. Certain questions arise that are linked to achieving the objectives and milestones set by LDS and the possibility of changing them in the preparation of the modifications of LDS.

Due to the changed developmental needs of local environments, the need for improvement in LAG operations, and the upgrade of internal LAG control procedures, as well as due to possible questions concerning the set objectives and milestones in the scope of

LDS, the national legislation gives LAGs once a year a chance to propose a modification of LDS, which must derive from the changed circumstances in the LAG region. The proposed modifications must be well-founded, while the effect of the proposed LDS change on achieving objectives and milestones set by LDS is also of great significance. For this reason, the Coordinating Committee of CLLD, which includes representatives of all three funds, has prepared special instructions, wherein it clearly determines the procedure for submitting modifications to LDS, as well as the substantive emphases of the proposed changes. The instructions are publicly available on the website of the rural area development programme at [www.program-podezelja.si](http://www.program-podezelja.si).

Compliant to the provisions of Regulation 1303/2013/EU, a performance review of operational programmes is to be performed in 2019. With this review, it will be determined whether the milestones of programmes at the level of priority tasks were reached. Reaching the mentioned milestones represents the basis for granting the performance reserve. In case of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the granting of the performance reserve depends on reaching the set milestones within the entire priority task, including LEADER measures. Reaching the milestone by the end of 2018 is in large extent affected by payments deriving from several measures in the scope of the same priority task. In short, the implementation of LEADER measures plays an important role in reaching the milestone set. From the passed LDSs and their set objectives, it can be foreseen that the indicators at the level of LEADER will be achieved, which is a prerequisite for being granted the performance reserve for the LEADER initiative. In case of EAFRD, it is important that the indicator "number of people living in areas with LDS" and the financial indicator "invested funds" are achieved.

Slovenian management bodies of individual funds keep pace with the few other EU member states that will succeed in reaching the milestones in the implementation of CLLD measures and the European and national legislations in the projected prescribed period. Contributing to this are to a large extent also LAGs, who carry out activities successfully and on time, as determined by individual LDSs. A wise saying by the ancient Greeks states that even if you do not get any external reward, that does not mean that you should not strive toward a job well done. The future of Slovenian rural and urban areas depends on several factors, yet it is largely dependent on the stakeholders who live and breathe in the local environment.



**Tina Divjak,**  
CNVOS

## **INCLUSION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are an indispensable partner in the implementation of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), whose main principle is satisfying local needs through the bottom-up approach. For an easier performance review of this approach in Slovenia, the non-governmental umbrella organisation CNVOS and its regional hubs, in cooperation with the Slovenian Rural Development Network, started to systematically monitor the inclusion of NGOs in the implementation of CLLD in 2016. The final objective is to estimate if and to what extent NGOs can take advantage of their potential for contributing to the implementation of the objectives of Local Development Strategies and satisfying local needs in the scope of the CLLD programme currently underway in Slovenia. The results of the first monitoring phase, which comprises the experiences or the inclusion of NGOs in CLLD in the period until the end of May 2017, show the level of inclusion of NGOs in the LAG partnership, the decision-making process on the contents of Local Development Strategies, and the implementation of operations financed with LAG funds.

The monitoring of CLLD implementation has shown that NGOs in Slovenia have a relatively high interest in cooperation, although many faced obstacles other partners did not, or only did so to a lesser extent. Many of the issues of NGOs emerge across the entire country, since due to the legislation and the instructions of individual governmental bodies practices in this field are in many aspects unified, whereas practices may differ among different LAGs.

In 2017, Slovenian LAGs and NGOs have already been active and have cooperated in the submission of proposals to ministries for achieving administrative and legislative improvements. Some proposals have contributed to a simpler and more efficient implementation of CLLD for all local partners, while others have focused on a more successful inclusion of NGOs. The final objective of all improvements is to pave the way for as many successful stories of development of local and regional economies as possible.

Analysis has shown that the main obstacles in the inclusion of NGOs in CLLD, which also hinder a more efficient implementation of their projects, are the disproportionate administrative demands in the distribution of funds for CLLD operations, which derive from the legislation and

the instructions of managerial and intermediary bodies, and the poor financial competitiveness of NGOs for the inclusion in LAGs and the implementation of operations. What is needed is a transfer of good practices for the simplification of administrative procedures. Such an example are practices deriving from the Guidance on Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) by the EC (passed in September 2014) and the adoption of other measures for the elimination of obstacles that render the inclusion of NGO's particularly difficult (e.g., elimination of the limitations on co-financing with volunteer work, consideration of VAT as an eligible expenditure for non-taxpayers, etc.)



## THE LOCAL ASPECT OF CLLD

The CLLD programme represents a means for the encouragement of joint local development, following the bottom-up approach. With this approach, the local population – by forming local partnerships (Local Action Groups, hereinafter LAG) – can actively decide on priority tasks and development objectives of a local area. In Slovenia, the measure is implemented as part of the integrated instrument »Community-Led Local Development« (hereinafter CLLD), which is financed by three European Funds (the so-called agricultural, fishery and regional funds). The measure for the implementation of CLLD was recognised by local stakeholders as an adequate and significant opportunity for development, based on the realisation of developmental potentials and key problem solving in relevant areas. LAGs are active in four subject areas that are crucial for local developmental needs: job creation, the development of fundamental services, environmental protection and nature preservation, and greater inclusion of young people, women and other vulnerable groups. From this perspective, CLLD is ideal for the development of local economies in rural areas.

The implementation of CLLD is much more demanding than the implementation of the previous LEADER programme in the previous programme period. This year, LAGs have published more than 50 public tenders for the preparation of operations that would encourage local development, and have received more than 500 applications. In the implementation of the programme until now, local partnerships have faced many issues that slow down and hinder a high-quality, timely and resource-efficient implementation of the programme. With regard to the structure of LAGs (the non-governmental sector, natural persons, smaller enterprises, the public sector), the administrative demands for co-financing projects that encourage local economies are largely disproportionate to the level of complexity and the extent of individual projects. The local environment has already seen some issues with regard to the implementation of CLLD, since potential project partners are withdrawing from the preparation of projects under the current conditions due to the unreasonable complexity of the programme.

The implementation of CLLD will not satisfy all the needs included in the Local Development Strategies (LDS), since local economies and consequently the creation of new jobs are not granted enough financial means. CLLD cannot fill the financial and programming gap that emerged with the abolition of certain measures in the

Rural Development Programme (Village Renewal and Heritage Preservation). In the scope of CLLD, this is a lengthy and planned process that demands a clear strategy and a professional approach to the development of rural areas. Only by combining the means from different European funds, can we achieve visible long-term results. In the management of CLLD, the managerial bodies (the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology) unfortunately neglect this long-term strategic aspect in comparison to the excessive administrative technical demands in the implementation of individual operations.

CLLD is based on the bottom-up approach and therefore displays certain particularities that need to be considered in addressing LDS LAG operations. The operators are in most cases economically weak, yet able to vastly enrich and multiply the minimal financial support. An overly demanding and too stringent approach of the support environment and the legislation toward the monitoring of such »small projects« in rural areas slows down local initiatives and hence also the development of local economies. The legislation and the support environment should therefore not equate CLLD with large investment measures or LAGs with financially strong investment operators in agriculture and the industries.



## TRAVELLING WORKSHOP

### THE LAND OF HAYRACKS

The first open-air museum of hayracks near Šentrupert in the Mirna Valley of Dolenjska aims to present and preserve different types of hayracks, a Slovene ethnographic particularity used for drying hay and other crops. Due to the changing face of agriculture, these hayracks are losing their original significance and are consequently being left to decay, which in turn heralds the loss of important national, technical, cultural and landscape heritage tied to their use. In addition to the exhibition of hayracks, the park also displays other ethnological contents, such as cutting grass or harvesting hay and grains, and hosts cultural events, workshops and even weddings. The park was officially opened on 6 June 2013 by Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia.

On an area of 2.5 ha, the park features 19 hayracks of different types and 1 km of footpaths. The oldest hayrack on exhibit is called "Lukatov toplar" ("Luka's toplar"). It was built in 1795, which makes it one of the oldest preserved double hayracks in Slovenia and worldwide. The museum features six distinct types of hayracks: three single (single, single cloaked, single stretched) and three double hayracks (a low hayrack, a "goat" hayrack, and a linked hayrack or "toplar"). In the near vicinity of the park, there also stands the Simončič double hayrack ("Simončičev toplar"), the only hayrack in Slovenia that has attained the status of a cultural monument of national importance.

The Land of Hayracks and the Centre for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, which is its constituent part, were established with the help of LEADER funds (programme period 2007–2013).

## TRAVELLING WORKSHOP

### *DELICACIES OF DOLENJSKA*

Dobrote Dolenjske (i.e., "The Delicacies of Dolenjska") is a collective brand distinguished by a rich variety of boutique foodstuffs and other innovative products, which is being developed within the scope of an increasingly prominent culinary and tourist destination.

The story of Dobrote Dolenjske began with an idea that flourished as part of the project *Podeželski šopek* ("A Rural Bouquet"), which was carried out in the frame of LEADER 2007–2013. The project partners realised that the rural areas of Dolenjska have yet to launch readily identifiable tourism-oriented products or take a comprehensive approach to their promotion and development. As the project *Podeželski šopek* was underway, most farmers had still not registered their complementary activities for the processing and crafting of various products, while the Dolenjska region could offer them no option of selling their products in an organised manner – that is, under a recognisable brand which would ensure local self-supply and a steady offer of products from Dolenjska on the one hand, and promote the region in terms of an innovative, sustainable and rich locally-focused tourism on the other.

The brand Dobrote Dolenjske comprises high-quality products from Dolenjska, all of which are traceable with a high degree of precision. Before the product can be put on the market, it must first be certified. Its suitability is evaluated by a three-member expert commission, which decides whether the product can join the brand and obtain the certificate Dobrote Dolenjske.

With their products and handicrafts, Dobrote Dolenjske connect not only locally, but also regionally. With stories of their own and highly relevant messages, these delicacies of Dolenjska influence the interconnectedness of local residents, vendors active in tourism and the catering industry, businesses and local communities, and create an added value that boosts the prominence of the region in terms of tourism. The largest vendors can currently sell their products in the shop of Dobrote Dolenjske in Trebnje, at numerous OMW petrol stations, in Mercator shops, and in a boutique shop in Ljubljana Old Town, probably the most eminent spot of them all.





## DECLARATION OF THE 3<sup>rd</sup> SLOVENIAN RURAL PARLIAMENT

The participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Slovenian rural parliament come from all parts of Slovenia and represent different interests of rural areas, deriving from organisations from the non-governmental, the governmental, and the private economic sectors. We gathered with the intent of engaging in a balanced dialogue to discuss the issues and opportunities pertaining to rural areas and to help improve the conditions for living and working in the mentioned areas by exchanging our opinions and standpoints.

Numerous current documents determine the visions, aims, measures and activities in which we invest with the purpose of developing rural areas. In the declaration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Slovenian rural parliament we do not repeat what had already been said and written. On the basis of previous deliberations and discussions within ten workgroups, the plenary part of the rural parliament passed the following statement and decisions.

Rural areas offer a whole array of **challenges**, which would, if adequately dealt with, substantially improve the lives of the rural population. Conquering such challenges would contribute to: the slowing down of depopulation, the increase in employment opportunities, the strengthening of local economies, the increase in the profitability of the majority of agricultural activities, and the decrease in the abandonment of areas with less favourable farming conditions, which would result in stopping the reduction of farming areas and their overgrowing. This would also halt the exaggerated urbanisation of rural areas, the exclusion of some areas and local population, the ceasing of a whole array of services in rural areas, and the ever growing cases of poverty and the exclusion of certain groups of population.

The relocation of several administrative, economic and **public** functions (health services, education, public transport) from smaller towns to bigger urban centres results in the decrease in the accessibility of services in rural areas, which weakens the already weak rural areas and accelerates the unfavourable migration flows. Better accessibility of services in rural areas is extremely important for the preservation of the developmental dynamics of smaller towns which with their services and job positions meet the demands of the dispersed population in rural areas. An even population density cannot be maintained without the establishment of **regions** and a vital network of smaller towns.

Rural areas are not able to keep up with the fast developmental pace of propulsive economic activities which employ the workforce.

Job positions are moved from rural areas to cities and abroad, what is especially acknowledged by the migrating young population, resulting in accelerated ageing of the population structure in rural areas.

The developing paradigm of **green economy** is a good cue for new deliberations and raising awareness about the importance of connecting natural resources and nature protection by understanding the processes of food production and nature protection, while taking into account a fair distribution of job positions, capital and technologies.

The insufficient local infrastructure in rural areas represents a big issue. The water supply and the sewer system in rural areas have still not been dealt with sufficiently. Along with both, the broadband communication network and the transportation network are a domain which should connect every Slovenian village with the world as fast and safe as possible.

The demands for a growing share of self-supply in the food and energy sectors significantly influence the employment opportunities in rural areas. The **forestry-wood** chain, which represents one of the pillars of green economy, also significantly contributes to the development of Slovenian rural areas. The need for health and a healthy living environment also offers a lot of opportunities in rural areas, since health is usually connected with a healthy lifestyle and a healthy environment. Living close to nature and respecting its rich diversity has become a maxim of the modern world and a big opportunity for rural areas. Among other things, the need for safety is connected to greater social inclusion and the preservation of welfare for the entire rural population.

The diversification of local economies and the diversification of income on farms represent the basis for the preservation of job positions in rural areas. Apart from the increase in the offer of local products, the majority of employment opportunities in rural areas are connected to redirecting extensive agricultural activities towards more intensive activities and eco-farming. The pylons of supplementary activities on farms, the most propulsive activity being tourism, face unnecessary and hindering administrative obstacles, especially when compared to more developed countries. A more diverse tourism offer in rural areas provides more employment opportunities for young people.

Diversification is important for achieving the adequate level of added value in rural areas and contributes to the economic results on the level of a particular activity as well as agriculture as a whole. The increase in the production efficiency is possible only when connected to **innovativeness** in all phases of the production process, which can



only be achieved by better technology of individual subjects and by accelerating the development of **business models** which additionally contribute to the competitive edge of the production and services in rural areas.

More emphasis should be given to education in rural areas, especially by connecting all actors involved in the process of **education** regarding the development of rural areas. Innovative approaches, such as the clustering of schools, chambers and economic entities, should be implemented. We need an organised network of organisations for educating adults, which would actively encourage the life-long learning in rural areas. There are growing demands for education deriving from contents not connected solely to agriculture (information knowledge, tourism, marketing, entrepreneurship, communications, etc.) in rural areas.

It is important to organise the relationship between **private and public** by timely management of a participatory and transparent discussion among all actors and by including all actors in the early stages of project proposals, by changing the legislative on the responsibility of land owners regarding land use of other users, and by seeking solutions for the common public and private good on the basis of clearly set goals.

The participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Slovenian rural parliament have determined that the interests of rural areas are not adequately taken into account in various policies. The **intertwining of policies** which influence the development of rural areas is wide and takes place on different management levels. We stress the need towards mutual harmonisation of goals, measures and procedures and suggest that public initiatives in a bigger way focus on projects with a bigger multiplicative effect, award connecting, and encourage social innovations.

The participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Slovenian rural parliament are committed to:

- contributing to the creation of new job positions while increasing the level of self-supply in food and energy sectors;
- accelerating organisational forms of **intergenerational** integration and cooperation as an opportunity for new job positions;
- establishing trust and co-operation of stake-holders in the **forestry-wood chain**;
- creating short supply chains, contributing to the increase in quality and higher food safety;
- including Slovenian food in public food services and suggesting changes to the **Public Procurement Act** towards an obligatory

additional standard, apart from the price, when it comes to selecting providers;

- preserving the cultural dialogue in dividing the accessibility to private and public property, while respecting property rights and the public interest;
- preserving natural resources and the diversity of nature in long-term favour of the broader community;
- enriching the tourism offer in rural areas by encouraging new investments and innovative approaches in its creation and promotion;
- voting against excessive building on agricultural land on the one hand, and on the other contribute to preventing the over-growing of agricultural land;
- contributing to the best of their abilities to raise awareness of each individual in Slovenia on the importance of **nature protection** and the role of **agriculture** in preserving our planet, while reaffirming this stance as **consumers**;
- contributing to higher competitiveness of the Slovenian rural areas by greater inclusion of the population in life-long education and the general increase in occupational competences;
- contributing to the general welfare by **creating** new products, technologies and knowledge which would all contribute to greater economic success, while at the same time **protect** natural resources;
- encouraging vertical and horizontal connecting of stake-holders in the food chain with the intent of better marketing and **fairer distribution of values** among stake-holders;
- taking care of further development and the strengthening of agricultural and forestry cooperativism in Slovenia with the goal of enabling the development of the Slovenian rural areas and improving the self-supply of food;
- contributing towards raising the awareness about the need to **preserve agricultural land** among all generations and a respectable relationship towards fertile soil, agricultural land and harvest;
- helping establish suitable conditions and direct the transformation process in the so-called **farming policy**, which would improve the standard of living among the rural population, while at the same time reduce the pressures on the environment and nature;
- systematically and in an organised manner transfer knowledge



and experience onto the **younger generation** to increase the identity and new entrepreneurial opportunities;

- striving towards establishing the principle of **participatory democracy** in the planning and realising of policies pertaining to rural areas.

From the legislative and the **executive** authorities and the local communities, we demand an increase in the quality of life in rural areas by:

- improving the access to services in rural areas, especially by preventing the move of urgent health services to distant urban centres;
- by establishing suitable **tax policies**, which would encourage employment, **leasing farming lands**, and provide relief, and at the same time support new forms of connecting for easier marketing of goods and services;
- providing stimulatory tax legislative, informing, educating, and promoting of cooperative values and **cooperativism**;
- sanctioning food providers who by **deceiving consumers about the origin** of their food and its quality seek their market niche and advantages;
- enabling smaller organisations and individuals from the private and the non-governmental sectors to have equal access to European funds, although they are lacking in their finance and human resource departments, which are burdened by administrative obstacles and demand the pre-financing of projects;
- establishing the conditions for further development of the **forestry-wood chain**, resulting in the preservation and development of rural areas;
- enabling **farms in the hilly/mountainous areas** to function in or receive **concessions** for forests which are owned by the Republic of Slovenia;
- offering stimulatory support to **young people** on farms;
- **rejecting** the signing of trade treaties **TISA** and **TTIP**;
- **preserving the cultural landscape** and village cores within the spatial planning policy;
- **including experts and guaranteeing the transparency of political decisions, and including the media**;

- stopping the construction of transport connections on the most fertile lands, when it could be planned on less fertile lands;
- sustainably exploiting natural resources and lowering the carbon footprint of the country as a whole and not only as a burden of rural areas. Only by enforcing a balanced network of renewable energy resources, we can enter the world of developed and environment-friendly countries.

Positive changes can be achieved only by including the rural population and those groups which affect the life and work in rural areas the most in decision-making. The inclusion of the local population, of all generations and both genders, and the acknowledgement of their initiative according to the bottom-top principle is key. The partner relationship of all actors included in the development of rural areas needs to become the predominant manner of decision-making about the directives and the dynamics of future development of rural areas. The rural parliament represents a modest, yet important contribution towards building equal partnerships on the state level, thus this form of participatory democracy will be maintained by organising rural parliaments at least every second year. The access to the inclusion in the partnership discussion needs to remain open for all the initiatives, organisations and individuals who are working towards the common good.

Podčetrtek, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015



## EUROPEAN RURAL MANIFESTO

1. We, representatives of many people and organisations rooted in rural Europe, have adopted this European Rural Manifesto as a statement of the aspirations, commitments and demands of rural people, drawing upon meetings in many countries during the European Rural Parliament campaign.
2. Diversity of rural areas. We deeply appreciate the wide diversity of areas and peoples in Europe, arising from the varied geomorphology, climate and biodiversity of land and sea and from the long history of human activity across the continent. We see this variety, as expressed in human culture and natural resources, as an enormous opportunity for the future well-being of all peoples in Europe.
3. Common values. We acclaim the common values which bind the people of Europe – democracy, equality, the rule of law, recognition of human rights, the spirit of cooperation. We are impressed by the common themes emerging from the European Rural Parliament campaign across the face of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea and from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean.
4. Quality of life. Those who live in rural Europe value highly the quality of life which is offered by the countryside, the farms, villages and small towns, the coastal margins and islands, mountains and forests with their local cultures, wildlife, landscapes, healthy environment and cultural heritage.
5. Concern about rural conditions. However, we are very concerned that many regions are affected by narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for satisfying and fairly-paid work, the loss of population as young people move away, the consequent demographic imbalance, the decline in services, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people or ethnic minorities and environmental degradation.
6. The need for action. We believe passionately that these challenges must be addressed, for the benefit not only of the rural communities but also of the whole population of Europe. We all depend on food, timber, fibre, energy, water and minerals produced in rural areas. Farmers, enterprises and other rural actors create a common wealth for Europe. Rural areas contribute greatly to amelioration of climate change, recreation, public health and social, economic and spiritual well-being.
7. Rights. **We assert** the right of rural areas and communities to full recognition by all the people and institutions of Europe, to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations,



and to full participation in political processes. **We ask** governments at all levels to endorse that right. In all aspects of policy and action related to rural communities, women and men should be afforded equal rights.

8. Vision. Our vision for the future of rural Europe is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified rural economies and by effective stewardship of high-quality environment and cultural heritage. **We believe** that rural communities, modelled on that vision, can be major long-term contributors to a prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable Europe, and to a sustainable global society.
9. Partnership. The pursuit of our vision demands in every country a refreshed and equitable partnership between people and governments. We, the rural people and organisations, know that we have a responsibility to give leadership and to act towards our own collective well-being. **But we also fairly demand** that governments at all levels, including the European institutions, work to make this crucial partnership effective.
10. Review of the state of rural areas. **We urge** the European Union to mount a major review of the condition of rural areas within the European Union, and of the contribution which rural areas now make, and can further make, to the well-being of the Union. The report on this review should be published in 2017, to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the report 'The Future of Rural Society'. Its conclusions should be reflected in enhanced focus upon rural areas within all relevant EU programmes and funds. We wish to use the continuing European Rural Parliament process to enable rural communities to influence the preparation of policies for the period beyond 2020.  
**We ask** the Council of Europe to consider launching a review of the condition and needs of rural areas in all their member countries.
11. Reversing the spiral of decline. Many regions are affected by a 'downward spiral' in the vitality of rural communities. Loss of population (particularly of young people) leads to reduced viability of rural services and weakened local economies, which prompts more loss of population. **We call for** concerted efforts by rural stakeholders, all relevant agencies and governments to 'reverse the spiral' by promoting appreciation of and pride in rural ways of life rather than imposing urban norms, strengthening rural services, diversifying rural economies, and enabling young people to remain in or return to the rural areas.
12. Youth. Many young people are ready to remain in, or move into, rural areas and to take responsibility as farmers, rural entrepreneurs





or citizens for the future well-being of rural economies and communities. Young people need attractive employment, well-targeted systems of education and vocational training, apprenticeships based on local needs, access to land, housing and credit, social and cultural activities suited to young people, and specific support to young farmers and entrepreneurs. **We call on** governments and civil society to meet these needs and to enable young people to participate actively in political processes. **We support** the call that has been made for rural youth to have their own Rural Youth Parliaments both at national and European level.

13. Refugees. The arrival of desperate people from areas of conflict and disaster, seeking refuge and new lives in Europe, is provoking thought and action within our networks. While urging governments and other agencies to work urgently to solve the underlying causes of this crisis, **We call for** a warm-hearted response, based on solidarity between peoples. We believe that for many rural areas, and particularly those with declining populations, this offers an opportunity to integrate refugees and other newcomers. The process of integration must include the necessary job creation, investment in housing, services and infrastructure. Successful integration efforts should be celebrated.
14. Poverty and exclusion. We recognise the progress that has been made in fighting poverty and social exclusion in Europe. But millions of people are still afflicted by poverty and social exclusion of different kinds. Social and territorial cohesion are integral to our vision of Europe. **We call for** sustained effort to promote inclusion and full participation in society. Of particular concern are the needs of Roma communities in many European countries, who are among the poorest and most excluded of all Europe's rural people. They should be recognised as people with equal rights to suitable jobs and education for their children. All people have talents and skills to offer.
15. LEADER and CLLD. We strongly advocate a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development, pursued in a bottom-up and place-based spirit. We wish to see the widespread application of the LEADER principle, and its extension into Community Led Local Development, both within and beyond the EU. We are highly concerned by the current lack, in many countries, of a truly integrated process of regional and rural development. **We urge** institutions and governments within the EU to demonstrate trust in Local Action Groups, to expand their funding, to adapt their rules and procedures to the needs of rural communities, and to ensure a truly integrated approach to

local development and to the use of multiple funds. We urge all sectors in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries to lay the groundwork of partnership between sectors for the use of LEADER and CLLD.

16. Rural Services and infrastructure. Basic rural services, such as shops, postal services, schools, primary health care and public transport as well as social infrastructure, are vital underpinning to the quality of life in rural areas. Adequate physical infrastructure – water supplies, sewerage systems, and electricity, energy supplies, transport systems – is also vital. But in many rural regions, rural services are already weak or being lost and infrastructure is inadequate, which can contribute to a vicious cycle of decline. **We call upon** governments and service providers to recognise the right of rural people to adequate infrastructure and reasonable access to all basic services, and to enable rural communities to make decisions and take actions to secure services and infrastructure appropriate for our needs.
17. Broadband and mobile communication. Access to high-capacity telecommunications is becoming crucial to the social, cultural and economic life of all Europeans and to the provision of vital services. Because of their distance and sparse population, rural areas have particular needs for effective telecommunications. However, many rural areas, particularly in central and Eastern Europe and peripheral EU regions, are at present gravely disadvantaged by weakness in telecommunication systems. **We call** on governments, multi-national funders and telecommunication providers to work urgently towards access to high-speed broadband and mobile services for all rural populations, and where necessary to enable rural communities themselves to take action to ensure this service.
18. Local and sub-regional economies. The rural regions of Europe embrace thousands of local and sub-regional economies, rich in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the lifeblood of communities and contribute greatly to the broader economies of European nations. **We assert** the high importance of enhancing the vitality and viability of these local and sub-regional economies throughout rural Europe. The means of doing so will vary from place to place, but can embrace initiative in many different sectors – agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy production, manufacturing including added-value enterprises, supply chains, tourism and service industries, plus businesses based on information technology. There is high scope for social enterprises. Of high importance is the provision of versatile advisory, business support and credit services, plus vocational education and training, accurately geared to the existing and potential job opportunities.



19. Small and family farms. We recognise the major contribution that commercial farms make to the European economy. However, we are gravely concerned with the loss of the farm labour force, and for the well-being of the many millions of small and family farms, within the EU and in South East Europe and the Black Sea Region, especially in remote areas, mountains and islands. These farms give livelihood to millions of families, provide food to local markets, form the staple population of thousands of communities, and sustain traditional ways of life on which the health of the land, landscapes, ecosystems and cultural heritage depend. They may retain viability by forming cooperatives and social farming enterprises, adding value collectively to their products, diversifying their farm incomes and local economies and gradually forming larger land units. **We urge** governments, donors, civil society organisations and rural communities to recognise and support family farming as a viable European model.

20. Small towns. Small towns, which number thousands in Europe, have crucial importance as social, economic and cultural centres for rural communities. They are the centres of commerce, public and social services, secondary schools and healthcare; offer major opportunities for tourism; and collectively make a major contribution to regional and national economies. However, they are not recognised as a major target of national or European policies and programmes, often being perceived as neither rural nor urban. **We advocate** a mainstream European Union policy focused on small towns, recognising all the important contributions they make in the social and economic structures of rural regions and their vitality; and for greater focus on the needs of small towns in national policies.

**We call for** increased cooperation between communities, organisations and authorities in rural and urban areas in order to gain the full benefit of social, cultural and economic links which such cooperation can bring; and for vigorous exchange of ideas and good practise between those involved in rural and urban areas.

21. Climate change and natural resources. In the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, **we assert** the major role which the rural areas of Europe can play in combatting climate change and sustaining environmental resources; and also recognise the need to assist rural areas to adapt to climate change. Over 40 percent of the land surface of Europe is in forests, which can capture and sequester carbon and which contribute massively to renewable resources of raw material and energy. Rural areas are well placed to meet the growing demand for

renewable energy from wind, hydro, tide, solar, geothermal and woodfuel sources, in ways which respect untouched nature and the environment of land and water, and which bring direct benefit and employment to rural communities.

**We call for** increased use of agro-forestry, agro-ecology and bio economy approaches. **We also urge** that the conditions created by climate change should be taken into account in the definition of disadvantaged regions when assessing the allocation of financial support.

22. Western Balkans and South East Europe. Rural communities and economies in the Western Balkans and South East Europe countries are deeply affected by the political instability in the region. The process of accession to the EU is on hold. This slows up the process of political reform. Rural development is seen by governments as a low priority. **We urge** the EU to revitalise the accession process in this region, including much more effective support to rural development processes.
23. Leadership in rural development. We acknowledge the important role of leadership at all levels and between levels. We recognize that a prime responsibility for identifying needs and delivering solutions rests with us, the rural actors. However, leadership in rural development involves collective action from local, regional, national and European levels and is characterized by commitment, communication, cooperation and building trust. **We call upon** civil society, governments and the private sector to work in partnership to offer capacity building, resources and support to foster an environment which encourages innovative, sustainable and accountable leadership, inspiring and engaging future leaders.
24. Civil Society Networks. The European and national networks which have led this European Rural Parliament campaign are rooted in local action and participative democracy. Their membership includes thousands of village-level action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures which run essential services and promote cooperation among rural actors. **We call upon** governments and the European institutions to respect the independence of NGOs and their networks and to support their activities.
25. Partnership between civil society and governments. We believe that effective rural development demands an open-minded and innovative partnership between people and governments, side by side as equals. **We call upon** rural stakeholders to work positively with governments; and upon governments, international institutions and appropriate agencies to establish meaningful



systems of consultation and collaborative decision making, in order to enable rural stakeholders to participate in shaping and implementing policies and to lay a strong foundation for fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and governments at all levels.

26. A supportive climate. **We call on** governments to act in a spirit of trustful and open-minded partnership with rural communities, recognising their right to self-determination; and to provide a supportive climate of law, regulation, administration and finance. This supportive climate should include a full commitment to democracy and the rule of law; coherence between different aspects and geographical levels of policy across the whole field of government action related to rural areas; rural proofing of all relevant policies and programmes; simplified design, and sensitive and flexible use, of regulatory, fiscal and financial systems to encourage initiative by individuals, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, social enterprises, cooperatives and others; and respect for the rights of rural communities in forging international laws and treaties.
27. Education. In a changing world, people everywhere need constantly to enhance their ability to adapt and innovate in social and economic activity. For this reason, education and lifelong learning – starting in early childhood - have a crucial place in enabling rural communities to thrive, with the necessary cooperation and networking, and to participate fully in developmental processes. They have particular importance in enabling young people to understand the opportunities for a rich and viable life in the countryside, to attain and constantly renew the skills which are needed, and to participate as citizens. We urge educational authorities to ensure effective access for rural communities to education services, including distance learning and vocational training suited to the realities of rural life.
28. International exchanges. We believe that the work to achieve sustainable rural development throughout the wider Europe can be greatly assisted and accelerated by exchange of good practices among rural stakeholders and governments in all European countries and further afield. East and West can equally contribute to, and gain from, such exchanges. **We call for** a truly pan-European approach to exchange programmes, through cooperation between governments, NGOs, multi-national donors and others within and beyond the EU. A leading contribution to this process should be made by the European Network for Rural Development and the EU-funded National Rural Networks in all EU member states.

29. Advocacy and action. **We ask** the European NGO networks which co-initiated the Second European Rural Parliament to lead a programme of advocacy and action based on this Manifesto, working closely with their national members and all willing partners.
30. Our pledge. **We pledge** our own continued commitment to the pursuit of the vision and the actions outlined in this Manifesto. We believe that the rural communities, the governments and the multi-national institutions, working together, can achieve a renaissance of the rural regions of Europe. With that conviction, we declare that **ALL Europe Shall Live!**



