

## Assessment of rural development programmes to enhance youth integration

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### *Abstract*

*In recent years concern about social exclusion processes has reached also rural areas. The rising unemployment and the limited opportunities for young people have turned the attention of policy analysis to this social group and to processes of social exclusion under these specific regional conditions. The results presented are drawn from the EU-project "Policies and young people in rural development" under the 4<sup>th</sup> Framework programme (FAIR6 CT-98-4171) where different aspects of economic and social integration/exclusion of young people in rural areas and their recognition in rural development programmes of the EU has been analysed. The paper focuses on the scope to enhance the aspect of young people integration in rural/regional programmes. To this end, it starts with a presentation of the policy background and its evaluation, particularly with regard to its rising priority over the last EU-reforms. It continues with the investigation of selected exemplary cases of policy measures and initiatives specifically addressing young people in rural development provided by the seven project partners study areas. The concluding part draws on evaluation studies on rural development programmes all over the European Union with regard to youth participation and explores the scope for future strengthening of respective activities and inclusion of young people concerns in rural development programmes.*

*Experiences from this analysis suggests that with fundamental changes in the market structures and relations programmes targeted at specific rural areas cannot neglect the emerging interrelations to other areas. Hence a rural policy addressing the needs of young people has to address directly its insertion into the regional framework and its relation to regional policy.*

## **1. Introduction**

Rural development has seen a significant rise in being addressed as relevant concept of policy priority. The notion of integrated and territorial development of rural areas gained some of its attractiveness from the vague position between territorial and social dimensions, acting both as support system in the fields of territorially disadvantaged areas and social problem groups. In recent years the discussion on exclusionary processes for different groups in society advanced and, among others, young people have been identified as a specific target group. Following the increasing labour market problems unemployment of young people and their prolonged difficulties in the transition process turned policy attention to this group.

The EU-research project "Policies and Young People in Rural Development" (PAYPIRD) focused on the issue how policy measures, in a wide definition of rural development, could be shaped to respond adequately to that threat of social exclusion of young people in rural areas. To this end, the project has been carried out through empirical fieldwork in selected study areas of 7 EU member states, reflecting the diversity of rural areas conditions across the EU.

These study areas comprised all of the three types of standard rural problem, selected following the typology proposed by the EC's document "The Future of Rural Society" (CEC 1988). The study area of Scotland (co-ordinator of the project) Angus and Wesermarsch in Germany can be allocated to the type of integrated rural areas. North-East Mayenne in France and Santa Maria de Penigao in Northern Portugal belong to the type of intermediate areas; and Suomussalmi in Finland, North West Connemara in Ireland and Murau in Austria are examples of different peripheral areas. This selection should be wide enough to address different context situations both with regard to regional development processes and policy approaches towards young people.

This paper is oriented at the regional perspectives and the impact of rural development policies. In particular, it combines a synthesis of policy assessment with the views expressed by young people in the study areas. This leads to the viewpoint that all the different kinds of measures and actions in a territory have to be analysed jointly and their inter-connectedness is of particular relevance to regional performance. Moreover, the local and regional level must not be realised in a static way but have to be analysed in the dynamic development with regard to other regions.

## **2. Rural development policy**

Before assessing the impact of rural development policies on young people's integration into social and economic life in rural areas we have to outline the policy background. It is rural policy which has received over recent years increasing political attention although there remain quite divergent views on the different concepts to be used and on the appropriateness of policy processes to serve the target of integration of sector approaches. The rural approach, albeit often alluded to as being similar to agricultural development, is in its core a territorial approach, applying regional policy measures for

specific regions, the rural areas. Hence, the following presentation deals with both (a) the various policies with distinctive territorial dimensions and impact on rural areas and (b) rural development policy as addressed by EU policy reform and targeted at through EU agricultural policy via establishing a "second pillar" to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

### *The development of territorial objectives*

In many countries of Western Europe regional and rural policy are closely interrelated and a sharp distinction between the two policy concepts cannot be drawn easily. When addressing the rural policy evolution it is therefore interesting to recall the background of broader territorial schemes as expressed under the general regional policy. Many of the regional problem areas having been defined in most European countries (Artobolevskiy 1997) implicitly had a strong rural bias since large regional support areas covered regions with deeply rural characteristics. It was only in the 1980s that the European structural policy developed into a substantial Community structural policy. With the start of the reform of the Structural Funds the investment and volume had to correspond to the regional priority objectives (obj. 1, 2 and 5b) since 1 January 1989.

The second reform of Structural Funds in 1993 confirmed the approach taken and EU-commitment for regional policy has been deepened continuously over the 1990s. Moreover, the *Cohesion Fund*, established with the Maastricht Treaty, has provided since 1993 an additional instrument to support the 4 lagging EU-countries Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal in the preparation for the Monetary Union, and simultaneously to the economic growth process. With the EU-accession of the Scandinavian countries Finland and Sweden the situation of sparsely populated areas was acknowledged as a distinct problem pattern and led to a further regional priority objective (obj. 6).

In addition to the prime programme oriented at rural areas (Objective 5b: facilitating the development and structural adjustment of rural areas) the other objectives include to a great extent also rural areas, and Community Initiative programmes like the LEADER (and INTERREG) programme which focus on innovative actions in rural areas and building a European network of rural actors, as well as some pilot projects and innovative measures had a direct link to rural areas.

The most interesting element of Structural Funds from the conceptual point of view is the Community Initiative LEADER (Liaison entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale). It aimed at establishing local action groups, raising their awareness for rural development action and initiating a long-term learning process.

In many respects the reform of the EU Structural Funds in 1988 was accompanied by the rise of the debate on the "The Future of Rural Society". Through the commission paper under this title (CEC 1988) rural policy gained momentum as a specific European issue. Its underlying concept contributed to trigger the ensuing discussion addressing a much wider scope of functions for rural areas than had been considered before.

The link between agricultural structural policy and a broader territorial approach was deepened for the regions targeted during the former periods by Objective 1, 5b and 6 of the Structural Funds. Incorporating all actions envisaged under the different Structural Funds into a single programming schedule, pointed to the rising role of rural areas for the aim of "economic and social cohesion".

As analysis by the European Commission (1999a) pointed out there is now evidence available for actual convergence of lagging regions: From 1986 to 1996 GDP per head of the 10 poorest regions increased from 41% of the EU average to 50%, and in the 25 poorest regions it rose from 52% to 59%. This trend can also be seen at the national level, as GDP per head in the four Cohesion countries went up from 65% of the EU average to 75%, and the recent publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cohesion Report reaffirmed this position (Europäische Kommission 2001). Much of these regional shifts have a direct impact on rural areas, although the actual performance of regions is quite diverse. Depending on the territorial level of analysis further in-depth studies and inter-regional comparisons are needed to provide an advanced assessment on the impact for (specific) rural areas.

With Agenda 2000 reform the Structural Funds programmes have been concentrated. The territorial and programme concentration intended to reach particularly regions and people most in need of support and to avoid overlapping activities. Actually the share of EU population covered by the regional objectives has been decreased to about 41% (and for national support areas to 35%). The objectives have been reduced to the three primary objectives corresponding to the three main Structural Funds.

Also the Community Initiatives have been restructured and limited to the four Initiatives INTERREG, LEADER+, URBAN and EQUAL. For rural development policy it seems important to have an Initiative like LEADER+ with a large scope for innovative actions, networking activities and, what is essential for the future perspectives, relying on a structure which allows an experimental character in its measures.

#### *Evolution of EU policies for rural development*

The actual rural development policy of the EU can therefore not be assessed easily by analysing one type of programme, but has to include elements from the following different EU-programmes, inter-linkages between these programmes, and further territorial actions provided by other programmes:

- Objective 2 areas (new), particularly those parts focusing on problem of rural areas
  - LEADER+ programmes
  - Rural Development Plans, according to Reg. (EC) 1257/1999.

What has been said above, seems to be even more relevant to this period (2000-2006). The host of measures affecting rural areas have to be seen also within Objective 1-programmes, and horizontal programmes (like Objective 3); moreover, other Community Initiatives, like INTERREG and partly

also EQUAL, as well as local action group work, e.g. local AGENDA 21 and environment activities are of outmost concern to rural development. Having outlined the wide field of actions impacting on rural development it becomes clear that such a wide concept is not captured by the actual policy but lends itself heavily to the discussion of territorial development policy. It seems, however, promising that over the last years the preparation of the European Spatial Development Perspective - ESDP (CEC 1999b) has shown the readiness for addressing such viewpoints at a European level and, particularly, the high relevance of rural issues and its territorial implications on the agenda.

Most EU documents state that the main means of support for rural areas of the European Union was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and this still remains the case to some extent. This reflects also the public opinion where rural is still strongly equalled with agriculture or, at least, primarily agriculture driven. The distribution of CAP aid within the farming community, in general, does not address territorial aspects and is often described as being quite regressive: “the main beneficiaries have not been the smaller farmers and poorer regions but the larger farmers and more prosperous agricultural regions” (Lowe et al. 1999, p. 57). The original EC member states were not concerned with regional inequalities and only in 1975 the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Less Favoured Areas (LFA) scheme were set up. The LFA programme authorised member states to pay financial compensation to farmers operating in mountains and other “less favoured areas” in order to ensure the continuation of farming, thereby maintaining a minimum population level, or conserving the countryside. The programme operated very early through direct income payments to farmers and directly indicated through its aims the tight inter-relationship of agriculture and environment, particularly in such areas. However, from the introduction of LFA support to the appreciation of its impact on environmental performance under Agenda 2000 decisions was a rather long way (Dax and Hellegers 2000).

With the start of the discussion on Agenda 2000 proposal, particularly induced by the Cork Declaration in 1996, discussion on the future of agricultural support and rural development policy and its relationship broke out. The outcome can be seen as a compromise between the two opposite viewpoints: It attaches rural development more closely to agricultural administration and regulations, but on the other hand allows for some continuation of the concept of rural development going beyond agriculture. Yet, doubts about the opportunities for rural policies under these circumstances have been raised which relate both to the scope of activities being eligible or implemented and to the contents, e.g. with relation to its integrative capacity (Lowe and Brouwer 2000).

#### ***Integration approach of rural development***

However, there is concern and discussion on the widening of the concept, including the difficulties of acceptability in society and implementation in administration structures. In many different fields the interest for rural specificity has evolved and lead to intensified debate. This concerns both the territorial dimension, and in particular regional policy which has extended its field of interest to local

development processes and the interactions between different parts of the territory, including the inter-relation of rural and urban areas.

Whereas previously actions for rural development had focused on its backwardness and were restricted mainly to the agricultural sector, empirical studies at the international level have confirmed that there is no uniform development trajectory. In particular, this means that rurality in itself does not automatically mean lagging economic development. In particular OECD (1996) has revealed through the establishment of a territorially disaggregated data set that for a series of countries employment increase was higher in rural than in urban regions which has been underlined with more recent analyses (Von Meyer et al. 1999).

This heterogeneity of performance of rural areas cannot be explained sufficiently by standard economic theory. It appears that in many cases intangible aspects are the most important in "making the difference" (OECD 1998, p. 12f.). Thus the reason for (economic) success does not just lie with physical capital but often must be sought in human capital (the ability of people to participate in the economy) and social capital (the capacity of communities to organise themselves). Hence the aim of rural policies consists in far more than simply compensating disadvantaged areas/people. It is realised that it is central to *initiate development processes* and to focus on the institutional framework for relevant initiatives. In such a context the contribution of the LEADER initiative, albeit small from its financial resources, might be crucial for the kind of discussion and processes required to overcome regional inertia which was prevailing in many rural areas. With regard to our topic there appear interesting conclusions on the role of young people in this process. There is no doubt that overall aims were not directed at, or even mentioning young people as a target group. However, as we will show later, recently there is quite a distinct acknowledgement of young people in that process.

## **2. Young people in rural development - experiences from case studies**

It is intended to provide some insight into the situation and potential for youth specific formulation of measures and processes in the selected case studies (Dax et al. 2001). Whereas the context of the Austrian study area Murau is analysed in greater detail, with the aim to explore also potential scope in a wider range of measures, only a selection of specific measures and programmes which seem, due to some of its features of particular interest, have been addressed for the other study areas.

### ***Experiences from case studies***

All over the seven study areas it became clear that young people have not been a significant priority group of rural development programmes, if regarded as relevant at all. The missing attention towards youth issues in the programmes has been reflected by the statements of young people interviewed in the project all over the different study areas. Participation was interpreted as a critical and somewhat awkward issue by young people (Machold and Dax 2001) and information on both national and EU

policies was rather low. The various measures on rural development which have increased over the last years due to the Structural Funds programmes and a general rise in importance of territorial approaches have been performed without reaching significant awareness among the young. Yet, one has always included as one important aim, the aspiration to counteract out-migration from rural areas in these programmes. Only few activities in the study areas, but also all over the EU measures, e.g. LEADER Community Initiative, objective 5b programmes and other territorial programmes have directly addressed young people. The project's analysis therefore included also horizontal measures which did reflect the concern for young people targeting already somewhat earlier.

The analysis is of greater detail for Austria, as information could be made available for the study area and the provincial situation with regard to youth specific programmes. The focus was to show that it is not primarily an issue of the detailed objectives towards youth policy which brings about respective activities, but the commitment and participatory elements in the rural society as a whole. Whereas specific labour market youth measures have been developed in the wake of reorientation and harmonisation of EU labour market policy, only recently a series of innovative actions going beyond labour market aspects are available to young people or got some public relevance. This would seem to be a starting point for future inclusion in rural development programmes.

The situation in the other study areas is exemplified by one youth measure per study area which might serve in our opinion as reference with regard to the tackled issues or the methods used. Measures described range from

- the cooperative work linking training and employment actors in a French rural context,
- the training activities of a youth theatre in Kainuu in Finland,
- the international collaboration of a customer service training, based in Finland (and Scotland),
- the New Deal programme for Young People in the UK with a specific programme for musicians, but no clear assessment on its specificity for rural areas,
- to a *YOUTH START* funded programme in Ireland (Mol an Óige), concentrating on in-school and out-of-school activities for those “at risk” of leaving the system.

Similar examples could be mentioned from the study area in Portugal, where LEADER activities tend to revive old local traditions of handicraft and look for young people participating in such schemes or, in an other interesting project, raising children’s awareness of local development by having them draw how they perceive the local community and its future (ADICES, AEIDL 1997). Likewise in the German study area, corresponding to its socio-economic characteristics, labour market measures with relation to young people prevail.

When looking beyond the study areas there are a few relevant additional examples available. The activities of some Local Action Groups (LAGs) are specifically targeting at young people and bringing together local agencies working with young people. Moreover FAO has revealed in its work on

increasing the involvement of young men and women in rural development as a strategy for rural development in the CEECs some interesting case studies. All of them relate to comprehensive territorial work applying a cross-sectoral approach (FAO 1998).

Although the cases examined seek to address the great variety of fields of actions and aspects of youth development, all of them share the general objectives of either addressing aspects of integration of young people in the rural context or raising awareness of the community and young people about their importance to the community and encouraging them to participate actively in local development initiatives.

### **Youth related policies in study area Murau, Austria**

In the district of Murau and in its neighbouring districts Knittelfeld and Judenburg which form together the NUTS III region Upper Styria West there are a lot of measures addressing, explicitly or implicitly, the development of rural areas. During the Structural Funds period 1995-1999 (for Austria, due to EU-accession in 1995) the district of Murau belonged to the objective 5b area and, for the period 2000-2006, just *partly* belongs to objective 2 (new).

In the objective 5b-programme measures with “youth dimension” are mainly found in the ESF sub-programme under the training and educational measures for unemployed people (ÖROK 1999, p.59). The new objective 2 programme has not yet started to approve projects. Due to the scattered location of programme areas (arising from delimitation at the municipal level) in some parts of Austria, and particularly in the district Murau, one has to envisage that the regional dimension will be weakened for the benefit of more sectoral enterprise support. To maintain the regional aspects, it will become more important to utilise the opportunity of LEADER+ programme to include areas outside EU-target areas and thus follow a more distinct regional approach. It has to be mentioned in this context that the LEADER II programme has not been located in the study area of Murau. As there are now a great number of Local Action Groups (LAGs) proposals for LEADER+ programme which exceeds the maximum of LAGs to be selected for Styria (and Austria as well) there are still significant obstacles for the LAG Murau to be approved for inclusion in the new programme (decision to be taken in summer 2001).

With the LEADER+ programme, at least mentioning young people as one target group among others, a base for an active integration is provided. However, given the regional institutional framework and recalling the views expressed by the young people in the individual interviews and group discussions (Dax et al. 2000) there are tremendous barriers to actually increasing participation of young people in the region. Nevertheless, as will be shown later, there is rising concern about the issue and a core group of local actors is committed to work for youth integration at different levels.

The perspectives underlying have been elaborated along work on the so called regional development model, co-ordinated by the EU regional management Office and have been approved by the planning



advisory board in June 1999. Its main intention was the formulation of objectives with regard to the economic, social and cultural development of the region and the preparation for (future) allocation of financial aid.

Table 1: Youth related policies, province of Styria and study area Murau, Austria

Rural/regional programmes	Prime characteristics
Objective 5b-programme (1995-1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversification, adjustment and adaptation of farming activities (EAGGF - Guidance)</li> <li>• Development and diversification in non-farming sectors (ERDF)</li> <li>• Development of human resources (ESF)</li> </ul>
Objective 2-programme (2000-2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restricted to a scattered area of municipalities of study area</li> </ul>
Regional development model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-ordinated by EU regional management Office</li> <li>• approved in 1999</li> </ul>
LEADER+ programme (2000-2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strength of wood production</li> <li>• young people as one target group</li> <li>• LAG proposal still to be approved</li> </ul>
Youth oriented activities	
nex:it (youth future programme of province Styria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• categories: Sense of community, art&amp;fun, TEC-future, action of music, and clean world</li> <li>• only few approved projects in rural areas</li> <li>• started in 2000</li> </ul>
Labour market projects: for young women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Mafalda goes countryside" (since 1998) improve conditions for young women and increase sensitivity of local society</li> <li>• Now@ (since 1996) turntable between young women and local enterprises</li> <li>• "Frauen für Frauen" integration of young and middle aged women after parents leave</li> </ul>
Labour market projects: for young unemployed people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Young people" (1995-1997) qualification training, personal consulting</li> <li>• "Mürztal 2000" (since 1999) qualification modules extended, enterprise contact platform, "socio-pedagogic consulting centre"</li> </ul>

Source: Dax et al. 2001, pp.154-163

Most of the measures or projects carried out in the district of Murau with a potential youth dimension focused to some extent on young people's integration into labour market. In table 1 measures addressing young people explicitly as target groups, or addressing young people through the contents of projects (attractiveness of courses, education, innovation etc.) have been selected. The four labour market policy initiatives show that some innovative action for young women and unemployed young persons has been started also in rural areas. There is scope to extend the experiences gained from these

pilot actions to other rural areas. In particular, the mentioned initiatives reveal the need for long-term commitment and integrated concepts which are not restricted to labour market issues and skill improvement but embrace the more difficult aspects of less tangible factors like institutional change and psychological barriers.

The main priorities and measures of the past rural development programme did hardly reflect the needs and aspirations of young people nor have these been taken into account substantially in the planning process. To the young people interviewed such policy programmes (and on-going discussions about future regional programmes) are not relevant which means that they have hardly been confronted with the policies and that youth relevant parts of the programme could not be communicated as option to young people of the area. On the opposite, young people do not feel understood or appropriately taken into account in local initiatives. As has been mentioned, they deplore the small number of young people (after school age) staying in the region which hinders to build greater commitment involving them as local actors (Dax et al. 2000, p.8).

The visible lack of youth projects might derive from the fact that no need for such projects is experienced and expressed by young people, local actors and communities. It has been repeatedly suggested by young people and local experts that the situation looks different in other neighbouring districts. This probably might be derived from *the predominance of local traditional structures which are still working very well* and reduce aspirations for change. On the other hand, young people interviewed criticised the lack of willingness of adults and the local/regional representatives to listen and understand young people's desire for participation in a more 'youth adequate' way.

As the response to the youth future programme next:it of the province Styria has been quite high it becomes obvious that an enormous dynamic development can be set off by providing the 'right' framework conditions for activities. Providing easy accessible structures with few bureaucratic restrictions is as important as providing financial aid to ease potential participants to join in, especially if no adequate structure exists. The programme reveals also that the scope for experimental activities is taken up by various groups of young people and could be further developed. The fact that many projects comprise more than one district or region can be seen as a positive indication with regard to the persisting difficulties for co-operation among municipalities, regions, etc. The orientation on larger areas reflects the need for linkages between (smaller) territorial units. Actions of this kind might contribute to break up existing barriers and improve co-operation activities and encourage others to follow.

### ***Experiences from other study areas***

The range of measures and activities with young people as significant target group is much wider than revealed in the analysis of the Austrian study area. A short overview on some selected examples from

the other study areas should provide a sense of possible issues and different approaches which are heavily related to the specific regional culture and institutional framework.

In *France* the organisation of the *Centre de ressources* is a vivid example of the importance of intermediary agencies which fulfil tasks of networking activities of people in the region, both vertically and horizontally. The emphasis is put here on matching education offer and demand at the local and regional level. The example shows also that quite different funding has supported activities and contributed to human resource development and employment creation in a deeply rural area. The Centre de Ressources addresses the whole population and not only young people, although young people constitute an important part of the people who visit the Centre. The main actions of the Centre de ressources relate to information provision/exchange: the Centre offers information mainly about training and employment by providing a documentation room, collaboration with the National Job Centre (notice board), collaboration with the "Missions locales" and the "Permanences d'accueil, d'information et d'orientation" (PAIO).

One of the few examples of cultural activities is the *youth theatre's training in Kainuu in Finland*. This project specifically addresses young people aged 12-25. It is conducted by the LAG Organisation "Kainuu Businesswomen LEADER II" and funded by Leader II. During the course young people study theatre production in a number of forms. Course participants come from all round the Kainuu region and also from other regions in Northern Finland (AEIDL 1999).

The *SHEP training programme* is an international project of the study area which is run by a Finish LEADER group together with Scottish Ross & Cromarty Enterprise (Scotland-Highlands and Islands) and Savo Amazon LEADER, an other Finnish LEADER group. Pupils from two senior secondary schools in Finland attend a customer service course and will be trained on themes concerning customer service with an international aspect. The basic aim is to teach young people the importance of good customer service, the development of tourist environment, as well as marketing and teamwork in tourist industry. Courses of the project include both theory and practice, and during the course students learn the basics of tourism and customer service in both Finnish and English (AEIDL 1999).

The New Deal programmes have been set up since 1998 with the aim to improve job opportunities for people out of work. It gives job seekers aged 18-25, 25 plus and those with disabilities an opportunity to develop their potential, gain skills and experience, and find work. There are six main New Deal programmes, varying in a number of ways: The *New Deal for Young people* (NDYP) is targeted on 18 to 24 year-olds who have been claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JAS) for at least six months. The measure is compulsory, and includes a "gateway" period of advice and support followed by four options: subsidised employment, full-time education and training, voluntary work, environmental work. Recently, a specific programme, the New Deal for Musicians under the NDYP was designed and developed with the help of the music industry. It is intended to help young musicians who are eligible for NDYP and who are seeking a career in the music industry.

It is projected that about 250,000 young men and women will find work over the four years planned for the programme (about a third of participants) which should make this programme almost self-financing over that time. In contrast to this evaluation, young people interviewed in the sample of this research project by the UK Team seemed to have more negative than positive impressions on the New Deal programme (Shucksmith et al. 2000, p.50-56). It is concluded that the New Deal programme will have to work harder in order to reach especially those groups of people with multiple disadvantages and special needs. Similarly, young people interviewed in the Angus study area felt that employers voluntarily seized the opportunity to dispose of cheap labour force offered by the programme (voluntary work, environmental work). Some interviewees had the impression that participation in New Deal measures was received negative by potential employers and difficulties to break this vicious circle were still persisting.

In *Ireland* a high percentage of young people still cease education at the age of 15 years (or less). The early drop-out rate in the study area of Ireland is about 38 per cent somewhat higher than the national level with 26%. Mol an Óige was a four year *YOUTHSTART funded project*, (January 1996 – March 2000), which addressed the 10-19 year-olds at risk of failing in school by developing and testing innovative approaches to the issues relating to educational disadvantage.

Evaluation results in relation to the project Mol an Óige reveal the following operational features to be significant in enhancing educational provision and participation (MacGrath et al. 2000, p.40).

- Educational provision and development should incorporate schools, pupils, communities, parents, community development agencies, youth work organisation and statutory bodies (shared project ownership).
- Developing support for young people in terms of their intellectual and emotional needs. New measures in-school and out-of-school are needed to develop the interests and commitment of young people especially of those “at risk” of leaving the system. Personal development of skills which enhance self-esteem and assertiveness, leadership strategies, learning support and career counselling are examples of in-school measures.
- Initiating mentoring support for pupils by non-teachers (mentors as positive role models).

Initiatives such as Mol an Óige could serve as “models of good practice in enabling schools and communities to deal effectively with education disadvantage” and provide an idea how measures could be implemented in practice (MacGrath et al. 2000, p.39).

### **3. Perspectives for increasing involvement of young people in rural development**

The low awareness of youth as a target group of rural development is reflected by the singularity expressed in case studies presented in the previous section. Few regions did take the option to include

youth workers in their territorial approaches and to take the viewpoint that future orientation has to be based on youth development. Consequently, evaluation studies did not pay any attention to the issue. If it was either evaluation of regional programmes (objective 1, objective 5b) or of Community Initiatives (LEADER) the issue of raising participation has been assessed by referring to the dimension of overall participation of local and regional actors.

### *Evaluation of programmes*

The thrust of evaluation studies for rural development programmes had to fulfil requirements concerning the quantitative assessment of programmes progress. The financial performance, aspects of coherence and effectiveness, quantitative impacts and issues of efficiency have been the focus of the evaluations prepared for objective 5b programmes for some countries, and most of these commissioned by the European Commission DG VI.

In addition, to its main quantitative outline these evaluations did stress a number of more qualitative issues which have an impact on the issue of how to handle young people's involvement in rural development. In particular the following aspects emerged:

- The great variety of projects and the request of complementarity with other Community, sectoral, national and regional policies, in some regions created confusion and increased costly bureaucracy, pointing to a need to increase integration of the different initiatives (PACEC 1998). This uncertainty about orientation in the programmes available is particularly pertinent for those groups of local population (like young people) less acquainted with institutional regulations and lower experience of participation.
- Overall there was a high degree of synergy between the EC funds and national measures, particularly with regard to Objective 5b programmes and LEADER II. Problems cited relate primarily to "limited integration in administration procedures and limited information flows" (PACEC 1998, p. 50). "An improved co-operation and co-ordination of actions supported by the structural funds involved for the purpose of reaching synergy effects is particularly important on the local level" (Tissen and Schrader 1998, p.XV). With regard to young people it is extremely important to regularly address this aspect and to question meaningfulness of information available. Young people interviewed had the tendency to feel informed only superficially and to be not adequately addressed by information and public discourse.
- Although the programmes evaluated have induced a wave of assessment of regional strengths and weaknesses and considerations on local actors involvement, evaluations suggest that local activity should be stimulated further and options to increase awareness and consequently improve co-operation with different sectors through programmes should be used (PACEC 1998, p. 57).
- Developing skills is a priority chosen in almost all rural development programmes. In countries with high level of education achieved also in rural areas one has to adapt carefully new

training programmes to local and regional needs. For example, Finland is indeed producing an especially good all-round educated population, but there are certain needs within the objective 5b regions at the intermediate and higher levels (Malinen et al. 1997, p. 23 f.).

- The analysis of the actions and measures at the local level is of major interest to illustrate the programs impacts. In fact, the consideration of, exclusively, the overall impacts could disguise important and significant territorial disparities (Isla and Soy 1998, p. 7f.) which seems particularly relevant for the situation of remote rural areas, e.g. in mountain regions as can be seen for the Austrian study area.
- Although it is well known and has been extensively explained one has to respect that there is a considerable trade-off between degree of innovation of projects and programme implementation. In general, traditional measures are easier to apply and show greater rates of accomplishment (Isla and Soy 1998, p. 71). One is also inclined to see a preference for more harmonic regional strategies taken by responsible administration institutions at all levels. Young people's aspirations tend to be seen as immature and provocative and hardly fit into a more traditional, consensual approach.
- In many contexts the central role of intermediary agencies and the specific tasks of Local Action Groups (under the LEADER Initiative) have been addressed. It arises from the widespread European experience that local development is not a mere local task but has to be achieved in co-operation with regional and national authorities. The long-term commitment of "facilitators" can not be over estimated as crucial element for enhancing participation and ensuring outcome of programmes.

It has not been feasible to approach each issue of problems for all the regions. The priorities on the aspects to analyse, the methodological estimates and the content differ and thus synthesis reports could not deal with some interesting issues (Isla and Soy 1998, p. 70). It therefore becomes important for future programmes to highlight youth participation as a potential field of activity for rural (and territorial) development programmes.

In many aspects LEADER I was a pilot scheme and can be "considered as provider of a precious stock of knowledge about rural Europe utilised for a better targeting of rural policy actions" (Dethier et al. 1999, p. 166). However, the lessons learned for rural policy are not always clear-cut. Although the experience of LEADER initiatives was highly appreciated, particularly in Southern Member States and in Ireland where LAGs were significant in number, the innovative aspects of LEADER "did not really affect the implementation of mainstream rural policy" (Dethier et al. 1999, p.179). Even when in LEADER II the number of LAGs has risen substantially and implementation affected a number of areas almost five times greater than in the first period the link to mainstream policies remained weak. There is scope to investigate the lack in the transfer of experiences to general rural policy (Saraceno 1999).

Some of the obstacles might be seen in the fact that an experimental programme induces processes which need time. Positive returns become visible only in the long run and a minimum degree of continuity is needed. Moreover core aspects of the LEADER programme, such as participatory approach, innovation or networking have been less relevant within the framework of LEADER I and contributed marginally to its value added. Indeed it appears that meanwhile much greater priority has been laid on networking and participation.

Moreover, the evaluation report does not refer directly to young people as actors or target group in rural development. However, the important impact which is seen in the better qualification of human resources through training activities and the emphasis put on questions and issues that different stakeholders may have in terms of information needs indicate fields particularly relevant to young people. Variables such as democratic participation of the population and the territorial diagnosis were largely missing. The report continues: “This finding should not be taken as an indication of irrelevance of these aspects but the contrary: when they were applied the results were indeed impressive.” (Dethier et al. 1999, p. 173). In addition it is made clear that representation of local actors should be extended (to more than just one interest group) and LAGs should not remain the single specific focus of activity but ensure also the inclusion of other innovative actors.

#### *Youth integration: a requirement of rural development programmes*

It is particularly in the Irish context that rural policy has dealt extensively with the problem of social exclusion and even addresses the issue directly in its national rural development plan. The ex-post evaluation for LEADER II in Ireland also has elaborated quite straightforward proposals that situations of social disadvantage or exclusion have to be checked by LEADER groups and the “youth sector should also be given specific recognition” (Brendan Kearney and Associates 2000, p.59f.).

This notion has already entered into the official requirements for LEADER+ programmes for the period 2000 – 2006. The guidelines for the Community Initiative set out in the requirements for the development strategy (Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften 2000, para 14.2(a)) that young people (and women) provide useful inputs to the development of rural areas and therefore strategies have to look for better employment chances for these target groups. The criteria for selecting pilot programmes have to reflect this Community priority. Moreover under para 14.2(b) it is referred to the socio-economic situation of the area and an approach is required which does not reduce options for future generations. The inclusion of young people as a distinctive target group thus is a clear reference that from now on a closer examination of the role of young people in the rural development process will take place.

Obviously, this shift in priority of EU requirements has not been translated into the spirit of the bulk of the new programmes which had to be conceptualised before the guidelines have been published. Yet, young people have to be mentioned now explicitly as target groups and potential local actors.

The inclusion in the guidelines has to be seen as a consequence of the discussion in the 1990s, and for example culminating in the set of principles laid down in the “Cork Declaration”, including the desire to encourage participation in the formulation and delivery of rural policy. However, the time constraints inherent to formulation and strategy conceptualisation of regional programmes act as an important limitation on the scope for EU programmes to foster truly participatory forms of rural development.

The debate on participation in rural development has taken up elements from the policy and programmes on social exclusion (AEIDL 2000a). Recently, the tendency of out-migration of young people from rural areas has been addressed and the long-term historic trend has been assessed as detrimental to rural regeneration in general. The effect of marginalizing young people in rural areas is best reflected by the very limited number of options facing young people there: to remain unemployed or to emigrate (Lowe et al. 1999, p. 40 f.). Although the situation has to be differentiated according to the regional (and local) contexts and unemployment is not the only problem for young people, one can find supporting information in the interviews of our research project that young people face considerable difficulties with regard to being accepted in the rural society and hence see primarily obstacles when trying to “participate” more intensively in their communities.

Lowe et al. (1999) see a wide scope for effective local participation in the economic development and planning of rural areas and regions. The new paradigm emerging with the shift towards “bottom-up” approaches in regional policy did not any more see rural (and peripheral) areas as just externally-driven locations but paid increased attention to the potential of local actors for endogenous development. The development of rural pilot schemes in Austria, France and Spain at the start of the 1980s particularly centred on accentuating the internal forces of those areas. The development of EU rural policy, and in particular the LEADER initiative, took the same approach and thus has seen participation as central element to the rural development process. The domination of traditional institutional structures had the effect that processes of participation did evolve slower than anticipated and action remained limited to core representatives of local society (e.g. Dax and Hebertshuber 2000). As has been shown recent EU guidelines give scope to not just considerations how to raise inclusion of larger parts of the population but even require them as an integral part of programme formulation and evaluation.

The shift in discussion has also altered the scope of measures, as the focus is not any more on reaching consensus but increasingly on addressing conflicting positions of different stakeholders. The rising complexity for the regional work is addressed in many recent practical and theoretical studies (e.g. Bratl 1996, Scheer 1998).

For our theme it appears important to emphasize those forms of participation which reflect objectives of excluded young people, and young people in general, which include widening the networks of



established organisations and giving opportunities to excluded individuals. This last notion allows to address the issue of limited options, experienced as the core problem for young people in rural areas.

#### **4. Conclusion: Reflecting the regional framework**

The analysis of the youth perspectives and the impact of rural development programmes on youth integration have revealed that this is a neglected policy field where action has been taken up only recently. The potential for increasing youth involvement seems tightly linked to the overall situation of local actors inclusion into the formulation and application of policy measures and local action.

What has been repeatedly addressed in the interviews of young people is that there can not be detected a lack of personal interest in local affairs but that policies quite often raise issues in such ways which are not attractive and comprehensible. A more direct orientation towards young people in their diverse needs and aspirations might increase understanding and reflection on policy options. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that general problems of the transition processes and inter-generation differences are often put into the foreground which easily conceals actual youth integration difficulties in a specific region.

The use of evaluation studies across the EU on specific core programmes of rural development could reassert the position that young people did not matter as target group and impacts on them have not been analysed in the past. However, the actual on-going shift towards incorporation of the issue as a new dimension corresponding to social exclusion aspects in rural areas offers a challenge for future programmes. Given the difficulties of institutional change one has to be realistic and limit expectations with regard to a swift alteration and inclusion of youth views.

Many young people have realised these obstacles which seem in the case of remote rural areas intrinsically higher than elsewhere. Following this assessment they turn their attention and orientate beyond their home region. This reflects the economic weaknesses of many of those regions. Drawing conclusions for policy measures must not lead to resignative views on the limitations of local and regional policies, but could also help to reformulate the issue of the dimension and variation of regional development. It will become more important to respond with rural development programmes to the question of the position of rural areas within greater regions and inter-related territories. This would also reflect the viewpoints of young people who are torn between rural and urban attractiveness and are looking for perspectives at very different regional levels.

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