

The Future of Rural Areas

**Reviving the
Countryside Together**



Christian Röser

Starkmacher e.V. - 2017

Madie Project

Author: Christian Röser.

Co-authors: Christian Röser, Malaika Mhambo,
Anne Kaiser & Nikolas Bosch.

Editing by: Christian Röser & Martina Muschelknautz.

Graphic Design by: Juan Camilo Poveda Rz.
PowFlow - StartUp.

Publisher: Starkmacher e.V.
Coblitzallee 8 - 68163 Mannheim.
Germany

www.starkmacher.eu



Reviving the countryside together” by Christian
Röser is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution - Share Alike 4.0 International License.

The Future of Rural Areas

Reviving the Countryside Together

Contents

Introduction	6	Entrepreneurial Skills	58
Historical Context	10	The ability to identify strengths and weaknesses.....	60
The Industrialisation of Agriculture -		The ability to cope with stress	61
A Turning Point in Food Production	11	The ability to deal with failure.....	63
Consumer Behaviour and the		The ability to build up the right contacts	65
“Supermarket” Phenomenon	12	The ability to acquire money and use it efficiently	67
Rural Areas and the Experience of Loss.....	14	Striving for improvement.....	73
The Current Trend Towards		Working Productively	76
Megacities and Connectivity.....	15	Summary Entrepreneurship	82
Trend Reversal: “Back to the Country”	20	A Basic introduction to pedagogical Methods	84
Strengthening Rural Areas in a Global Context.....	21	The Pedagogical Approach at Starkmacher e .V.....	85
The Opportunities Cooperative Action	24	The Crash Barrier Method.....	90
Good examples from European practice.....	27	Systemic Project Management.....	92
Starting Small - The Family Farm Project.....	28	Practical Applications of Theme-	
Landscape Parks	33	Centred Interaction (TCI).....	96
Veraterra	39	Network Action.....	98
How to Revive the Countryside. The Foundations		The Rural Academy	102
for Success.....	46	The Good Consultant’s Handbook from Norway	104
Philosophy	50	Closing Remarks.....	106
The Process	54		

Introduction

A far-reaching view, the peace that you need to be aware of yourself, a rhythm that moves you and gives you strength, people whom you know, and not so many of them that you can't keep track of them on the way...everyone has some kind of image like this of life in the countryside. Not everyone takes the radical route that John Seymour describes in his legendary, seminal book "The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency" - back to the roots of self-sufficiency and dreaming more and more of a new life, in connection to oneself and nature - but rather moves to the country with new ideas. Even fans of big cities and their pulsating life know how to enjoy a break in the countryside and in nature.

So what is the myth of life in the countryside about? Are the dreams and projections of those who are new to rural areas realistic? How do those who have stayed in the countryside and have lived with its challenges for years experience it? The MADIE project has set out to create perspectives for European rural areas. It has collected model experiences and called on the people behind them. This book summarises the results of many visits to Europe's rural areas. It also describes methods to revitalize and reinvigorate the countryside. The guiding principle is always joint action.

This book is aimed at those who have always lived in the countryside and want to find new ways to understand themselves and their passion, and to get involved. It is aimed at people who dream of a future in the countryside and want to understand how they can shape it. It is for people who advise those living in rural areas on behalf of government agencies. It lays out the priorities and the issues that have been identified as particularly relevant over the course of two years of international cooperation. It is striking, for example, that many

actors in rural areas are active as entrepreneurs but often have little training in this area. They see opportunities and seize them. This is where consulting can be brought in productively and contribute to success. Promoting entrepreneurial activity has many positive side effects. Entrepreneurs are pro-active. They see opportunities and accept challenges. These are elements that these people bring to rural areas and that are urgently needed there in order to master the processes of adaptation and development. Selected pedagogical and didactic approaches that have proven their worth in supporting change processes are also presented.

The MADIE project and this book focus on the power of joint action. Just like Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen - who founded one of the first cooperatives in a rural area and then influenced large sections of society - had already recognised this power and was able to channel it through cooperation and the cooperative, there are many actors who make use of modern cooperation forms with today's topics such as energy and marketing cooperatives.

There is an important European component in the context of cooperatives and cooperation in rural areas. When it comes to cooperation in rural areas, Europe is still shaped by a variety of historical differences. While new cooperatives have been emerging in the West in an incredible variety of forms over the last few decades and have supported the competitiveness of the actors, in the Eastern partner countries the basic feeling of mistrust towards competitors, even on the smallest scale, is huge, due to forced collectivisation in the former communist countries. For the European Union to grow together, we need an intensive exchange of ideas among all those who are passionate about promoting the development of rural areas, regardless of whether they are located in the south, east, north or west.

Rural areas offer enormous opportunities and perspectives for people and their questions to today's world. This book

would like to encourage you to ask yourself these questions, to contribute your own passion and to find suggestions for concrete implementation. In addition, there is also an overview of model examples, topics and methods that are helpful for work with rural actors who want to make a difference. The contents are based on exchanges and experiences by the five European partners, who have lived and experimented over two years of collaboration and cooperation, thanks to the support of the European Union. A detailed description of the partners can be found on the www.ruralacademy.org on-line platform. In addition, the platform constantly offers up-to-date information and educational content that is shared by a constantly growing community and professional actors.

The Industrialisation of Agriculture – A Turning Point in Food Production

When thinking of the pivotal changes of our time, people often talk about the invention of book printing, the industrialization of the economy thanks to steam engines, the invention of modern mobility with cars or the invention of computers. There is no doubt whatsoever about the long-term changes brought about by these inventions and trends.

There is one shift that is given little attention. The industrialization of food production and the spatial separation of production from food consumption. This was a deliberate, human-driven development, as it actually made the emerging industrial society possible in the first place. Industrialization, and with it enormous increases in efficiency, above all through the use of machines, have set a process in motion that is to this day ongoing. Fewer and fewer people are needed to produce more and more food. This freed up workers who were much-needed for the boom in industrial production, especially in its first decades. The first working class cities were established when people leaving the countryside to find jobs in the new urban areas around the new industrial production facilities needed housing. Prior to this development, cities were always closely linked to the surrounding countryside, but, in terms of the supply of food and raw materials, the geographical proximity was significantly reduced. Farms, especially, which were unable to follow the trend simply because of being physically bound to the resource soil, reacted by starting a process either of growth or failure, which is still active today. Only farms that were able to achieve continuous increases in efficiency and thus benefits in production costs by increasing

Historical Context

cultivated land area were able to keep up with the changing structures. Food has increasingly turned into a commodity that is exposed to market mechanisms, much like other industrial products. To this day, the challenge for farmers is to continue to value the simple fact that food is crucial to life, and to focus not only on efficient production, because if price pressure and efficiency are the only decisive factors, food quality crises are inevitable, as food scandals in Germany and other EU countries have shown.

Increased efficiency in agriculture made workers available to industry. This process is still under way, except that in times of digitalisation and after decades of increasing efficiency, the industrial society is no longer able to create unqualified jobs or even to provide work for highly qualified people. At the same time, a high level of expertise is required in industrialised and mechanised agriculture just to remain competitive in terms of world market prices for products. This makes rethinking agriculture and rural areas necessary, as well as setting new trends that meet the current needs of society and take into account the opportunities and potential of rural areas and create new perspectives.

Consumer Behaviour and the “Supermarket” Phenomenon

As you stand in front of the vegetable and fruit counter in the supermarket, you are basically seeing a display of what is in demand today. Unpackaged fruit and vegetables from the global market, which is able to deliver anything at any time,

and pre-packed goods, say, for example, two peppers in plastic wrappers covered in marketing texts. Even if some of the produce is local, in order to be accepted by consumers, it must be in line with current sales trends, such as small packaging units for households that are increasingly small. If we look at the word “market” in “supermarket”, it’s clear that a typical feature of markets is that supply meets demand. Initially, the offer was clearly regulated. You would find whatever produce was available at the specific time of year, and only in set quantities. Consumer habits had to be based on the conditions of production. In the context of rural development, it was clear that supply, for example from food producers, would meet corresponding demands. With increases in the efficiency of food production and the development of the food processing industry, but above all with the evolution of mobility and of very favourable conditions to transport goods all over the world, the market grew into the “supermarket”. The word “super” can be understood to mean that everything is available at all times and in whatever quantity is desired. This is the logic of global commodity flows.

This is plain and simple fact, and cannot be judged in itself. Rural areas in particular, however, have been seeking an answer to this development for decades. It is not enough to complain about this trend and criticise it. It is supported and encouraged by consumers who accept the offer and thereby also set the direction. Nevertheless, consumers are reflecting their approach more and more. The development of organic farming, the trend towards low-impact eco-tourism and local quality products has long been established. Now, we need new forms of cooperation and qualification for people who want to actively shape the rural environment and take advantage of this opportunity.

Rural Areas and the Experience of Loss

In the past decades, rural areas have suffered losses in many respects - loss of jobs, emigration, especially of young people, lagging behind in the development of new infrastructure, restrictions on education services and medical care are just some of the issues that people living in the countryside have to deal with. Even today, the social and political debate continues to focus on how much the preservation of livelihoods and quality of life in rural areas should be allowed to cost.

Above all, the apparent or effective lack of prospects has led to ongoing migration of people to urban areas. This can be observed in all European countries, but also in the world. Globally, the trend is even more pronounced, while in Europe there are signs that it may be possible to first stop the trend and then perhaps even reverse it, and that people find the possibility of moving back to the countryside attractive. New approaches are needed for this, but they are already being attempted in some early positive examples. However, in the perspective of the MADIE project partners, the key is to intensify cooperation between people who are still living in the countryside or who are already returning to it, in order to transform the loss into a profit. This book shows that it is possible.

The Current Trend Towards Megacities and Connectivity

Rural areas are attracting attention from different directions. First, from the people who live in the countryside and shape it, but also from actors such as governments or the European Union. Most of them face the major challenge of population loss due to emigration with all its consequences, such as shortfalls in medical services and in the educational sector, or in terms of modern communication with lacking fast internet connections and mobile coverage. But the issue is also a quality of life, with lacking cultural and leisure activities. Various parties are acting to improve and stabilise the situation. Again, this includes people who live in the countryside, but also state actors and the European Union with a wide variety of rural development programmes. Such programs supply the means to provide the countryside with the necessary infrastructure, to keep it attractive and to revive it.

Especially in the key issues of medical care and access to education, the limited number of people often hinders economically-viable operation of doctor's offices, hospitals or schools. Even in successful tourist regions, local hospitals and schools are being closed and relocated to major regional centres. The income opportunities which are an advantage of well-developed tourist areas are not sufficient, by themselves, to keep regions alive. The situation becomes truly challenging in those regions where not even tourism generates income, for example through the sale of local products.

People in rural areas often come up with very creative, cultural approaches in order to conserve their living environment. They

use the myth and desirability of the narrative about life in the country as a place of relaxation, of authentic values such as those behind healthy, artisanal food and products, of healthy nature and honest people. Of course, much of this narrative is true and is just begging to be rediscovered and lived.

An opportunity is provided by those people who make a conscious decision to change their lives and move from industrial or urban regions to the countryside. Regardless of whether they were raised in the countryside or whether they moved there as adults, actors and enthusiasts who work to strengthen rural areas often come from a certain milieu, with a high level of education and the experience of not having lived in the countryside themselves. Furthermore, the tendency to rediscover rural areas is limited to highly developed countries. If the partially successful local action that is deliberately presented in this book as a model is placed into a global context, it becomes clear that rural areas are undergoing a massive loss of importance globally. This can imply two options: a hopeless fight against an unstoppable trend, or the opportunity to successfully establish a niche with an impact on overall development. In order to operate successfully, it is important to understand one's own situation, as well as global trends.

In his book „Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization“, Parag Khanna describes a very interesting vision of the future. With his approach, called “Connectography”, he shows how everything is interconnected at a faster and faster pace. He calls this increasing connectivity. In his TED talk “How megacities are changing the map of the world | Parag Khanna”, however, it becomes clear that, instead of nations acting together or against each other, increasingly, economic megaclusters are moving the world through financial, trade and energy flows. These megaclusters are made up of megacities that are growing ever closer together and will in the near future have populations of over 100 million. Parag Khanna

makes a simple comparison. The administration of cities such as Mexico City, for example, which is still small in relation to the Asian clusters that have about 20 million inhabitants, has more people to manage and provide vital infrastructure to than most European states. Under the enormous pressure of development, new strategies have emerged in megacities, and they rely heavily on connections and networks with other actors. Connectivity, a term often used by Khanna, or the ability to access networks, is vital to survival. He believes that megacities will have to tackle the challenges of our time, such as climate change, environmental pollution, scarce resources and innovative mobility, and develop solutions through ever tighter connectivity, or that they are actually already in the process of doing so.

From a global perspective, people are leaving the countryside faster and faster and moving to metropolises despite huge difficulties. On a global scale, people are moving to the places that have the best connectivity and are growing. This is a well-known phenomenon, and yet it is astonishing that it has not yet been possible, with the exception of a few successful tourist regions, to develop counter-models that are sufficiently attractive and durable, in particular to keep people without higher education who grew up in rural areas in the countryside and provide them with an attractive perspective.

Throughout the entire talk held by the man who is the currently most respected visionary of the future and - as he refers to himself - “global strategist”, there is absolutely no mention of rural areas. This is a reality that must be faced by all those who want to support and shape rural areas. In order to advance this heartfelt cause and to operate successfully and provide useful advice, the global trend must be included in individual considerations and strategies. If the trend is understood and consciously perceived, a clear demarcation can take place while proven transferable mechanisms and strategies can be used for further development. The question is, for example,

whether economic growth is a factor that must be competed with. Economic success and growth are important motivating factors for many people. Here, however, “rooted” rural areas can set new standards that support a more sustainable concept of life. Connectivity, for example, is an aspect that opens up great opportunities for further development and, inspired by the global trend, can yield invigorating impulses for rural regions. A good example of this type of networking in rural areas is supplied by landscape parks in Norway. This term is often used to describe the development and conservation of nature in a given area. In Norway, however, a “landscape park” indicates a region in which all the actors living and working in the area connect and jointly promote further development. “Landscape parks” live off this connectedness.

The aim of the actors who are involved in preserving and rediscovering rural areas must be to ensure that, on the world map of the future, the spaces between emerging megacusters do not remain blank, as they are today, but express their vitality and identity with their own colour. The title of John Seymour’s book, “Rural Life. Pictures from the Past” needs to be rekindled with fresh, new life, so that the countryside remains alive, in the word’s fullest meaning, also for many people in the future.



Trend Reversal: “Back to the Country”

The megacities mentioned in Khanna’s TED Talk and constantly increasing connectivity are both part of a strong trend for the future. This trend offers many advantages. Khanna mentions them in his lecture. The growing number of connections gives us the opportunity to come up with shared solutions to our planet’s major problems. Connectivity promotes cooperation, resource management, learning from one another and, thanks to ever stronger links between economic centres, peace as an important foundation for development.

But there is something missing in this vision that he conveys. What happens to the countryside? Not all people want to or are able to live in the growing megacities of our world. Moreover, it is an issue of space. Why not use those increasingly depopulated and abandoned areas, which also happen to be the most beautiful on our planet? Of course, the strong trend towards urbanization will find solutions to the pressing questions linked to large cities and will, in an ongoing process, try to improve the quality of life there.

But what will happen to the landscape, to small villages and rural clusters? If more and more people move to urban centres, does this automatically mean that the countryside will be more and more sparsely populated? That it will only be used for agriculture and thus for the production of food and organic resources (biofuels, vegetable oils for petrochemistry etc.)? Or does this mean that, piece by piece, nature will recapture these areas and mould them according to its will, which may actually not be the worst alternative?

It is time to add something new to this trend towards megacities. As well as the trend of self-sufficiency, which was founded decades ago, and of people who choose to leave society, there are established movements and new impulses to shape rural areas.

In the course of our MADIE project, we added another approach, which will be briefly introduced in a dedicated chapter. We have used our experience and thoughts with the aim of rethinking villages. The newly conceived village or rural area stands for the multitude of approaches through which people successfully make their way back to the countryside or to an awareness that perceives rural areas and what they stand for in a new way.

At present, the trend back to the countryside is certainly a phenomenon among the well-educated population, as mentioned. This is also reflected in the initiatives. One of the challenges will be to ensure that positive experiences can be transferred, so that people in the countryside will once again be able to satisfy the primary needs of income generation, basic medical and educational services.

Strengthening Rural Areas in a Global Context

In the spirit of connectivity, the chance of greatness is offered by many small opportunities coming together. One solution to the challenges ahead is connecting. This is nothing new in itself, nature itself does this with swarm behaviour, and many initiatives experience this approach concretely. Within the MADIE project, however, it became clear that cooperation

in rural areas is mostly limited to the local and regional level, and that international initiatives are often ideological in character or focus on specific aspects such as climate or resource conservation. Basically, being firmly anchored in the local or regional - and thus manageable - space is a strength. However, in the context of global challenges, our experience with the MADIE project shows that a further step is needed to build sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. It is a question of connecting initiatives and actors to form a new “cluster” that is perceived globally.

Megacities are showing the way. Each metropolis has its own identity and sometimes they even compete directly with another. Nevertheless, according to Parag Khanna there are now more than 50 committees, working groups and think tanks that are jointly looking for solutions to the most pressing challenges. Even teamwork and networking are being practised, despite the competition.

In this search for solutions to the most pressing problems, such as climate change, soil erosion, air pollution, drinking water and others, locally rooted rural areas can contribute a great deal. However, they must engage in and connect to global trends for this purpose. They can bring in a decisive new approach to this process: organic plant intelligence. Stefano Mancuso is a representative and co-founder of this new way of thinking, and also of a whole field of research: he is a founding member of the “International Society for Plant Signaling & Behavior” and a professor at the University of Florence with a focus on plant neurobiology. In his lectures, such as his TED talk “The Roots of Plant Intelligence”, he shows how enriching the approach of the plant world could prove for the further development of humanity. What may at first sound irreconcilable becomes very concrete when it comes to practical applications. Mancuso advises the Japanese government on economic innovation and NASA on the search for new methods to explore space. However, his thinking above all changes the way we look at

our planet and at interactions between man and nature. In his talks, he shows how plants employ sophisticated modes of communication with one another and how they solve complex problems innovatively and creatively.

One of the core messages is that solutions are often based on highly developed communication and coordinated behaviour. When it comes to a new understanding of organic thinking that is tightly linked to nature, and to introducing this understanding into our communication on the further development of our social structures, then rural areas, with their proximity to nature, must ideally play a shaping role.

The idea of the “rethinking” village is a step in this direction: the point is first of all to rethink one’s own environment, the place and the region and connect to them. But then, however, the aim is to move further and create a network of “rethinking” villages that is open to a variety of new ideas and approaches to enable sustainable and healthy development. A vital, diverse network is needed. If we take the new perspective of Stefano Mancuso seriously, it must grow organically. This requires platforms that organize communication simply and effectively. With the Rural Academy that is presented in the chapter entitled “Connectivity”, the MADIE project team is pursuing exactly this intention. The Rural Academy is intended as a service platform, which connects different initiatives and movements in rural areas and brings them into contact with global trends.

The Opportunities Cooperative Action

The idea of solving challenges and coping with them in rural areas through cooperation is by no means new. With Mr Raiffeisen's idea of the cooperative, the rural world created a model that later went on to enrich large sections of society. In order to be able to keep up with the changing framework conditions of a multimedial, connected world and its real-time communication, this idea of joint action must be adapted and thought out anew. Over the past 20 years, cooperatives have been making a comeback in many areas. Innovators are often people in rural areas who, for example, create machinery rings or energy cooperatives, who, working together with innovative small towns, set up food cooperatives and start trends. The MADIE project incorporates these elements and adds the opportunities that stem from being connected. The connectivity approach is a possibility for further innovation for all active people in rural areas. We want to use this aspect of a global trend to preserve and rebuild a future in the countryside with all the actors in rural areas and the people who are inspired and excited by it.

Cooperative action requires trust as its most important capital. The MADIE project developed from observations made on a trip to Hungary. This was the situation in 2013: in rural areas, many small farmers with farms of between 10 and 24 hectares, which are very small compared to the EU average, had almost reached the end of the road as local supermarkets had opened up to the European market, and local agricultural products, such as fruit, were suddenly facing competition from Europe. The small size of farms meant that economically-profitable operation on the European market was almost impossible. The mistrust towards cooperation between farmers, caused by the negative experience of forced collectivisation under communism, means that there was hardly any common action to minimise costs and increase productivity. Cooperative and joint action, however, are, with only a few exceptions, the most effective way to quickly become competitive and open up prospects for the future. Some examples: Establishing

common marketing channels, developing common brands, sharing machinery, working on the regions and marketing them for tourism. The examples presented in the following chapter show approaches to cooperative action. However, the foundation of successful cooperation always also lies in the passion and innovation of the individual who contributes his or her skills. The chosen examples underline this aspect, too. A key factor in all the developments and initiatives outlined above is the Internet and fast access to it. In order to give rural areas a future and enable connectivity and cooperation, a first-rate connection to the world wide web is needed. It is a crucial building block in order to give the new vision of rural life a chance to become a decisive voice in shaping our future.



Good examples from European practice

Local cooperation and the development of different forms and structures of cooperation open up an extraordinary number of opportunities to help shape changes resulting from global developments for local growth and implement them successfully. Especially in rural areas, cooperation is one of the most useful tools in solving local challenges. However, it is not always easy to establish a successful cooperative or other cooperation structure. This process requires overcoming obstacles that hamper the effectiveness of collaboration. Cooperation is a challenge, but, at the same time, it also provides the tools to design constructive changes jointly. It enables both context-specific action and multiple reactions to the changes that everyone is confronted with. The basic condition is that the people who are involved are open to new things and, at the same time, willing to make a change if this is necessary in order to move forward.

In this chapter, we will present three different initiatives from three European countries – from the north, in Norway, to the south, in Italy and Croatia. Each is very successful in its own way and has developed a strong external impact. A shared feature is that they are all growing and that more and more initiatives and people are joining the local structures that we are about to discuss. There are deliberate differences in the initiatives. They have adapted ideally to local conditions. Even though they are role models, it is important that they do not become blueprints for other regions. Each model must be adapted to its new context and cannot simply be copied. In their diversity, the examples show that it is possible to implement new ideas and innovations if all parties involved come together on-site to actively plan the cooperation.

Starting Small - The Family Farm Project

Dijana and Peter Fabjan are from Croatia, and they still live there. Wait - they still live there? Now you are probably wondering about why we would be placing the emphasis on the fact that they still live there. Surely there is nothing unusual about Croats still living in Croatia? This is not quite the case for Dijana and Peter. For a long time, they were not sure whether they would stay in Croatia. They had even successfully applied for an Australian visa. Croatia's net migration rate has actually been negative since 2009, and it continues to fall every year. This means that every year there are more people emigrating from Croatia than immigrating there. In addition to this worrying trend, rural flight and high youth unemployment in Croatia are also ongoing phenomena. Croatia has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe. The consequences are varied and have already been discussed in this book.

As a result of these issues, it is becoming increasingly unattractive to live in Croatia's rural areas and build up a livelihood there. This especially applies to young people. Dijana and Peter also thought about moving away in 2015, when it became apparent that they would have to close their business. With the issues in Croatia, the Fabjans seemed to be left without any prospects in the countryside. Until 2015, they operated a wholesale flower business through which they had generated their income for the previous ten years. As the prospect of closing their business turned increasingly real, the future of the Fabjans became uncertain. They had two options: Leaving Croatia, as so many of their friends had done before, or staying in Croatia, the choice that, in their hearts, they knew was right.

Life is funny sometimes, and when one door closes, another often opens up. By chance, Dijana was chosen as a representative of the NGO "Economy in Community", based

in Križevci, to participate in Starkmacher's PRESET project. PRESET was an exchange project with the aim of empowering young people to take initiatives and dedicate themselves to entrepreneurship in the fields of ecology, sustainability and renewable energy. After attending the first seminar in Argentina, she came back a new person. She was full of energy, inspiration and ideas about what she wanted to do in the future and how she wanted to transform these visions into reality. These experiences broadened Peter and Dijana's horizon and opened up new possibilities for them. Inspired by the PRESET project, they had found the encouragement to make a plan to follow their heart's desire. They wanted to make a contribution to life in their community. They live in a small community, which has helped them out countless times. They wanted to give something back and stay in the community. But they also wanted to give something back to Croatian society by working with new values and spreading them. With the new self-confidence they had gained through the PRESET project, the Fabjans decided to stay in the countryside and in their community and began dreaming of creating a sustainable, environmental town where there are features such as organic agriculture, rural tourism and education, sustainability and renewable energy.

During the second PRESET exchange program, which took place in Croatia, the Fabjans had the opportunity to get to know other like-minded people from their region, Križevci. There are four other farmers in their area with whom they are friends to this day, and their bond continues to deepen. With the MADIE project, Peter was invited to take part in another rural development initiative. He was surprised that this possibility opened up further doors. Through MADIE, Peter learned how to establish and run a cooperative. He was taught about business models and plans, asked to explore his wishes, needs and perspectives and then to set milestones for himself to clearly lay out how the goal of establishing his own cooperative could be achieved. In addition, he continued

to develop his soft skills and communication skills, learned to anchor knowledge in political networks and ways to rethink rural areas. He also learned about successful examples. With all this knowledge, experience and the contacts they had gained, Dijana and Peter were now confident about implementing their plans. The two projects had given the Fabjans the tools and methods to become entrepreneurs. Equipped with new courage and knowledge, they started getting organized, establishing contacts, acquiring further skills and searching for things that would help them with their project. Peter later said that without the knowledge he gained through the MADIE project and the experience it provided, he would have hardly dared to establish his own agricultural enterprise in Croatia.

The result of the Fabjans' activities and relationships was that they founded the first private organic agricultural cooperative in Croatia. This was a remarkable step, especially if you consider the historical experiences of former communist states. In the days of communism, agricultural cooperatives quickly became an accessory to the forced collectivization of private property. Even after the downfall of communism, cooperatives were stuck with a bad reputation. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, many cooperatives were founded with the sole aim of siphoning off funds from the state and investors. These cooperatives were neither profitable nor efficient, because establishing stable and self-financing structures never actually was the plan. Corruption continues to be a major problem in the context of cooperatives, and it damages their public image. Under these conditions, establishing a cooperative implies the risk of defeat and lack of acceptance by the population, politics and potential members. Nevertheless, the Fabjan family, along with 4 other companies, took the daring step of establishing a cooperative. The success they have had to date has rewarded them.

The Zeleni Div Cooperative currently comprises five farms, the Fabjans' family farm and the four farms they came into contact with through PRESET.

With the help of the cooperative, they are able to serve their markets together, expand and jointly lease an additional 25 hectares of land. The joint marketing of produce in Zagreb, for example, is a great success. Previously, each of the partners used to drive their own vehicle up to three times a week to deliver the products to the capital, whereas now Peter takes over delivery for all of them. An enormous saving in terms of time and fuel for the community, which only became possible through the trust and cooperation that had been built up. By pooling resources, each member's customer base grew, while the product range on offer also instantly increased. In 2017, the Fabjans applied for permission to convert the newly leased area to organic farming. The arable land will now be transformed over the next three to ten years in a controlled manner, until residues and traces of conventional agriculture have been eliminated as far as possible. Until the process is completed, the Fabjans must sell their products as conventional agricultural products and gradually adapt to the requirements of organic farming. In addition, the cooperative is also planning future projects to raise awareness about climate change, environmental protection and the importance of organic farming.

For the Fabjans, the biggest change in recent years has been becoming farmers. They founded a family business and a brand called 'Z VRTA. They cultivate one hectare of land at home and the 25 hectares of land leased together with the other members of the cooperative. They have set themselves the goal of offering their customers food made only from their own produce. 2017 was their first year as professional farmers. They invested in a greenhouse, following the advice of their experienced partners. Unfortunately, the construction of the greenhouse took longer than expected and also became more expensive. When the growing season began, and the greenhouse was still under construction, the Fabjans ran the risk of running out of money. The pressure on them increased, but giving up was not an option for the family. They didn't

want to give up their shared dream so quickly. Although they didn't know what the weather would be like over the next few weeks, they planted 300 tomato and pepper plants right next to the unfinished greenhouse. They were once again following the advice of their more experienced colleagues. They were lucky: Temperatures and weather conditions remained stable, and the plants thrived. They went on to plant potatoes, salad greens and onions. As Peter and Dijana are not trained farmers, their goal for the year was first of all to gain experience in agriculture. Their favourite method helped them - "learning by doing". Their courage and drive paid off. This season, they were able to produce puréed tomatoes, dried tomatoes and roasted peppers in olive oil, jams, cider vinegar, potato gnocchi and other goods.

This experience shows what it takes to establish a successful cooperative. Dijana and Peter are convinced that the success of their own newly established farm and of the cooperative is based on the fact that their network is rooted in the deep relationships they have built. Without this network, it would have been much more difficult to open a business in a sector that they did not know much about. A strong network fosters exchange and support.

Even if their business and the cooperative are still young and still have to find their way, their experience shows that if you follow your heart and are willing to take risks, something new, innovative and fruitful can emerge. You can become a pioneer; in this example, they were successful in becoming the first private, environmental agricultural cooperative in a country. It is currently developing into a role model for the whole country, with requests for consultation coming in. It shows that, through trust, ego-thinking can be overcome and cooperatives can be established, even in countries whose history is marked by negative feelings towards cooperatives.

To quote Peter: "We are still a long way from great success, but we strongly believe in it because we have built a strong, honest foundation for our cooperative:

A network based on trust and honesty."



Landscape Parks

In many rural areas of Norway, as well as in countless other regions around the world, good quality, unique products are offered.

For example, products that are typical for a specific region may be special because of the local conditions or the region's tradition. All this highlights such products and gives them a unique selling point. However, this is often not at all well-known, or not as much as it could be. Today, this has not changed much compared to 50 years ago! Despite globalisation and the digitisation of the world, many small producers are unable to use the opportunities that are opening up to position themselves better. This is astonishing if you consider the broader picture in terms of glocalisation.

The word glocalisation combines globalisation and localisation. This describes the view according to which every event has local and global effects. This means that the local and global are inextricably interwoven. In a world of increasing digitalisation and globalisation, the networking of people and economic, social and political contexts is pervasive. Nothing happens separately. Globalisation has a local impact and local implications. At the same time, local events can also cause global change. These connections are key for many companies, large or small: Many companies can only make a profit if they open up to the world market and adopt international strategies. But what are the possibilities for a small farmer or the owner of a little hotel in the countryside? How can local small and micro-entrepreneurs publicise, promote and distribute their offers more effectively?

The landscape park model from Norway provides an answer to all these circumstances and developments. By creating local identities and establishing local cooperatives, contact points for specific marketing and sales strategies are developed. In addition, cooperatives also offer opportunities for mutual help, exchanging information, gathering ideas or planning projects. This offers local entrepreneurs completely new opportunities to sell their products and thereby generate more income.

Dirk Kohlmann came up with the idea of establishing landscape parks at the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of Norway's independence from Sweden. Dirk is from Germany, originally, and has lived in Norway for 22 years. He has worked there for more than a decade as deputy head of the Agriculture Department for the County Governor of Hordaland. County Governors are the regional representatives of the royal family and the state in the individual provinces. They implement national laws and guidelines, regulate the distribution of subsidies, promote regional development and have several supervision competencies. Another important remit in this area is rural development and advising farmers and communities.

In 2005, the main celebration of the 100th anniversary was held with the Queen in Hardanger, a region in the province of Hordaland, in south-eastern Norway. These celebrations were organized mainly by the County Governor of Hordaland. However, the advisory and administrative authority didn't want to simply organise the anniversary, but also to take advantage of the opportunity to present the region, its traditions and its population. In his position as a representative of the Department of Agriculture, Dirk was asked to oversee the local entrepreneurs during the celebrations and to present their needs and their work to the public. This worked well and the celebrations were a great success for the local actors. They were able to become more recognisable and promote their products.

Nonetheless, everyone involved was aware that efforts to achieve regional recognition and brands should not end after the celebration. After the celebration, discussions were held with stakeholders to discuss how to pool the interests of local companies and represent them both locally and abroad and to promote the development of the region. The answer soon became obvious: cooperation could make the creation of a local identity and brand possible, while at the same time promoting development in the region. The Vikebygd landscape park project was developed on this basis.

There are now eleven landscape parks in Norway. Every single landscape park is individual. There are no obligatory basic structures. The landscape parks are open cooperatives; anyone can participate, also with their own ideas. There are no constraints or obligations in terms of how a contribution must be made. There are also no fixed positions as there are in organizations or similar associations. This is really about rethinking the old and doing so within a flat structure. The advantage that stems from this type structure is huge. As a result, each landscape park is designed individually, according to the local needs and ideas of the entrepreneurs, the sectors

that are represented and the surrounding conditions. The landscape parks are also very receptive to different industry branches. Farmers, hotel owners, other businesses (jewellery, delicatessens, bakeries, tourism, etc.), cultural (associations, music and theatre groups, etc.) and public institutions (e. g. schools, universities, offices) can all contribute. In addition, one-off actions, as well as periodic ones, agreements or connections, such as the establishment of companies (event tourism, food, etc.) can be carried out. Cooperatives can thus also be built within the landscape park's cooperative, e.g. selling goods jointly or establishing a distribution chain from raw material producers to processing production.

In Vikebygd, for example, the opening of the landscape park revived cider production. Local fruit growers joined forces to revive the long tradition of the Hardanger Cidre. Most of the remainders from local fruit growers go to a start-up company, which was born out of the landscape park project. The start-up uses less popular fruit varieties, or fruits that cannot be sold because of blemishes, but are perfect in terms of taste and for food processing, and produces beverages from the local harvest. This turns a local raw material into a locally-processed product. This creates a distribution chain that remains local, is sustainable and offers benefits to all parties. This example shows how close cooperation in a landscape park is.

Due to this open-minded approach, the landscape parks have already achieved many successes. Participating in something big helps many people to see the world with new eyes. Through this change of perspective and by collaborating, a lot of new opportunities open up. This is good not only for generating new sources of income, it also gives mental strength and positive emotions. By focusing on business activities and ways to link them, answers can be found to the question of the direction that local society wants to develop in socially, culturally and economically. Through local cooperatives, recognition value increases. The local identity is shaped and strengthened, the

participants can identify in it and be filled with pride. This identity can also be used to create local brands. They can then provide local products from the region with a specific label that may stand for such values as tradition, quality and much more. This kind of label brings all of the participating sectors and businesses together, while at the same time opening up the possibility of selling bundled goods regionally, nationally or worldwide, either in supermarkets or on-line. Because the brand creates identity, everyone wants to get involved with the highest-quality input, thus generating added value not only for themselves, but also for the community.

This open-minded approach offers tremendous benefits for stakeholders, but it may prove overwhelming due to the wide range of opportunities. The freedom to become involved as you like has advantages and disadvantages. There are many ways to organize and perform actions, and just as many rules you can play by. Over the years, all landscape parks have also shown another point of stress. There are no direct payments or compensation for work in the cooperative. This would not, in itself, be a problem, as participation is voluntary and each participant is free to choose when and how much to be active. However, there are always a few enthusiastic members who do more than the others. These people are usually the main driving force behind a landscape park. They are, so to speak, the “leaders” in the process. They don't feel appreciated, even though they manage to organize the park almost on their own, as well as handling all the burdens of their professional life. However, people who commit above and beyond what is normal are much needed. This issue was recognised by the actors. County governors want to help landscape parks find solutions to the problem. Representatives of the landscape parks are invited to engage in active discussions with each other, accompanied by the district governors, to come up with joint solutions. The idea is to give the “leaders” financial compensation for their efforts. How this will be organized and financed is still under discussion. What is certain, however,

is that under no circumstance do county governors and cooperatives want to lose these committed members.

On the whole, the landscape parks are, among the examples of best practice described in this book, the local cooperation initiatives that have been developed furthest and have gathered the most experience to date. They are closely networked, diverse, open, flexible and innovative. The landscape parks succeed in establishing social, cultural and economical participation in a life that is led in harmony with nature, and also in using the strengths and abilities of the community, but also of individual actors, to achieve this harmony. New sources of income are generated and existing ones can be expanded. The creation of a local brand simplifies distribution and makes new, innovative ways accessible. Strengthening local identity serves as a connecting link, directs focus to the common good and is at the same time a source of motivation and inspiration. In this way, landscape parks make rural areas attractive for residents, those who decide to return to the countryside and visitors.



Veraterra

Loppiano is part of the Figline e Incisa Valdarno municipality in Tuscany, nestled in a beautiful spot about 20 kilometres from Florence. In summer, the heat shimmers and the horizon flickers. The grain fields, vineyards and olive groves define the rolling hills. You can even make out small forests in the distance. The birds chirp and fly high through the air. The cicadas sing in the bushes. It's an idyllic scene. And a holiday destination for many thousands of tourists every year. A dream for many. Not for everyone, though. Rural flight is a problem in Italy, too. Every year, more and more people are moving from rural areas to cities. But why would anyone think of leaving such a beautiful area in the first place?

Along with the reasons for rural flight that we have already discussed in this book, alienation from nature also plays a major role. People are increasingly moving away from nature with their modern lifestyle. Computers instead of physical work outdoors, television instead of a long walk, and staring intently at a screen instead of observing nature with your own eyes. We clad our feet with shoes as we walk through cities of concrete, but when was the last time that we felt cool earth under our bare feet? We may have our own pets and know the names of some house and garden plants, but what do we know about (regional) plant and animal life? By losing direct contact with nature, we lose appreciation of nature. By losing knowledge about nature, we lose awe and respect for it.

How can we help people to re-establish contact with nature? Finding an answer to this question has been one of the guiding principles in Pietro Isolan's work. Pietro wanted to find a way to convey knowledge about nature, without it becoming too abstract. A high degree of abstraction is common in many traditional educational institutions, such as schools, vocational schools and universities, but it does not ground the students. Rather than observing the effects of human action and natural

processes with their own eyes or feeling them with their own hands, students are encouraged to learn everything by rote and in theory. Alienation from nature, however, can be hindered only through “learning by doing”. It is great to have a sound theoretical background, but a lot of knowledge and experience can only be gained through actual contact with nature. When is a fruit or vegetable ready for harvesting? How much water does this plant need if it is growing in area A or B? The only way to figure this kind of question out, and many more, is by actually being out in the fields and using your five senses: only through direct contact, by smelling, tasting, seeing, feeling and touching, can you develop a real feeling for nature.

Since his agricultural engineering degree in 1993, Pietro has been working as a technical manager in oil and wine production on an organic farm in Loppiano. The impulse to become a social entrepreneur came from the guided tours of the farm when it began offering agritourism. Over the years, Pietro noticed that although many people lacked knowledge about how high the potential of rural areas and sustainable agriculture is, they were interested in learning more about it. By and by, he realised that he wanted to teach. He not only wanted to educate people, but also to bring them back to the countryside and enable them to live and work in harmony with nature. With this in mind, he wanted to promote the idea of long-term sustainable action (in tourism, education and multifunctional agriculture). In 2014, he thus founded “Veraterra”, a non-profit organization in the form of an association. Veraterra organizes free educational events, activities and events, much like any conventional non-governmental organization. It also offers customized training, programs and consulting services for interested institutions and companies. These offers, which can be booked upon request, ensure that the association can finance itself autonomously. For Pietro, however, the social benefits are paramount. Along with tourists and companies, the target groups are mainly schoolchildren and disadvantaged people (people with disabilities, traumas) of all ages.

Today, three other employees work alongside Pietro, part-time or on call. With staff being added at Veraterra, over the course of the last three years several large projects in Florence and the surrounding area have already been designed and implemented. Veraterra, for example, worked with students on vegetable gardens and olive oil production and prepared practical lessons for a vocational school for agriculture.

During the cooperation with MADIE, Pietro and one of his employees were able to use the training sessions to further their education. The Canvas model, especially, helped Pietro to better position his association. He was able to become aware of his key skills, to gain knowledge about planning cost and revenue, and about the opportunities for acquiring customers and selling products. This helped Pietro transition from being a social actor to becoming a social entrepreneur. This cooperation also paved the way to establishing the RuralAcademy in 2016. The RuralAcademy is a knowledge platform and community of people who are interested in organic farming, its tenets and social principles. In particular, the focus lies on multifunctional agriculture. This is because multifunctional agriculture incorporates all of the possibilities for value creation in rural areas into the planning of areas of business opportunities. In addition to food production, it includes other services such as farm holidays, educational work, therapies, wellness events and much more. This type of agriculture lays an ideal foundation for making rural areas more attractive. The RuralAcademy is both an off-line and an on-line community. In Italy, it is currently made up by a network of local organic farmers from around Florence. Among other things, the network creates educational opportunities with Veraterra to provide farmers, students, tourists and disadvantaged people with “learning by doing” knowledge about organic and multifunctional agriculture.

The local cooperation was inspired by and realized within the framework of the MADIE project and has already made a difference for Pietro and his colleagues. In addition to the joint

educational work, further areas of cooperation are gradually being identified and engaged in. There are synergy effects in many aspects such as marketing, joint purchase or sharing of required tools or machines. The aim is to continue establishing new groups of small farms or enterprises at the local level so that they come into contact with each other and establish national networks.

On-line, the RuralAcademy is an Internet platform that shares contents related to rural development and education over social media. In addition, this platform serves to create a community where the members engage in a lively exchange and offer mutual help. This is supported by trained coordinators who provide content and tips and act as moderators. The aim of the Academy and Veraterra is to offer customised content (in terms of context, user, target group, educational goals). One of the Academy's aims is to make the Academy itself replicable and to create an offer that crosses boundaries (in Italy as well as in Europe and worldwide). In order to achieve this, qualified consultants provide training and courses throughout Europe, creating a Europe-wide network, both on-line and off-line.

Veraterra may still be a young and small association, but it can already boast great successes. However, for Pietro, the main point isn't success, but rather the experiences that he shares with other people. The empathy that is established between participants and trainers is an key motivating factor for him. It isn't only about sharing knowledge, but also coming together on a higher level. Is there anything more beautiful than working with children, hearing a happy laugh, or getting a heartfelt, friendly smile from someone who has experienced trauma, knowing that for a fleeting moment the disturbing memory was forgotten? Positive contact to nature can also foster relationships among people.

There were, of course, some setbacks along the way, too. One cooperation project did not work out because the participants

were pursuing different goals. Another project came to an early end when the private agricultural school that was running it was forced to shut down for financial reasons, forcing the project to stop. Every idea, all the effort - for nothing. This was a depressing experience for Pietro. However, Pietro was also able to learn from his setbacks: For example, it became clear to him that cooperation only works out when all parties involved clarify their viewpoints and shared goals can be defined, which are then pursued together. Pietro also came to understand that he should not be too modest. At first, he did not attach much importance to the fact that the name Veraterra was mentioned publicly in project descriptions, project contracts and project implementations. He had started working with large institutions early on, and he stayed silent in their shadow. The association, its social concerns, work activities such as counselling and initialization or participation of projects did not become known. You shouldn't be excessively modest, but rather allow your light to shine bright, even if you are working with larger or better known actors. Today, Pietro knows this and does things differently. Pietro has dreams for the future. He dreams of working full-time for Veraterra and would like to start his own organic permaculture farm with his wife and sell surplus produce.

Through European cooperation, the idea of Veraterra has developed into a full-fledged NGO, which is already implementing many projects in the field of education and services, in cooperation with other partners and the local RuralAcademy. The idea of adding value to local cooperation has been revived and has proven itself sustainable. The structures that have been developed and turned into reality are growing and creating new values for Veraterra and the other members.



How to Revive the Countryside. The Foundations for Success

The initiatives for rural areas presented here are good examples of innovative development from different European countries. However, the political, economic and social framework conditions are very diverse in these countries. For example, in Croatia, a former communist country, cooperatives and cooperation among farmers are not established and are negatively viewed. They are equated to fraud systems, because in the past, after the country opened to the European Union, cooperatives were usually set up solely for the purpose of obtaining fraudulent funding. The idea of cooperation itself and of its shared benefits encounters great difficulties, as forced collectivization under communism had a detrimental effect. The example from Norway shows change processes in one of Europe's richest countries. Despite the wealth of Norwegian society, the motivation for the processes of change that started in the early 2000s lies in the plight of rural actors and in the desire to come up with a common response to marginalisation and loss of perspective. The booming oil industry created jobs, which led to the people emigrating from rural areas, especially. Individual companies and small enterprises, left with mostly young people, lacked the continuity and creativity to move forward alone. In Italy, the economic crisis has hit many companies hard. Portions of capital for further development could not and still cannot be used by the banks. At the same time, increased efficiency in the mass production of the most important agricultural products has led to a massive fall in prices; it has affected not only the local Italian market, but also the markets of other countries throughout the EU. The economic model of boosting profits by increasingly efficient production has reached its limits for most agricultural products from rural areas in Italy, but also in all other EU countries. We first need new survival models, and then, above all, we need to develop new perspectives.

An important change has taken place over the last 10 to 15 years in almost all European countries. Appreciation for local products has greatly increased, as well as the awareness

that supporting local producers equates to doing something good for oneself. A success factor that builds on this aspect is common to all presented examples: the development of new forms of cooperation or the rediscovery of old ones. Norway has more than a decade of experience in this field. The creation of landscape parks (“Landskapspark”), in the example of Vikebygd-Landskapspark, Norway’s first landscape park, by bringing together diverse actors, has created a framework in which individual members are able to contribute their individual creativity and also received decisive support from the network. The success factor that can be inferred from this is a healthy mixture of private initiative, innovation and organized collective support. Olav Bleie’s innovative idea (www.aldesider.no), making cider (Norwegian: Sider) from his apples and developing the local brand “Alde Sider”, would not have been as successful without the network and meetings with other actors involved in the “Vikebygd” park. Conversely, the joint “Landskapspark” benefits from this idea and several young farmers have now also decided to produce cider. Since it is not a mass product, it has a market, and demand from the region alone currently exceeds supply. In addition, requests for export have already been received. These are also fruits of the joint marketing activities organised by the “Landskapspark” network partners.

The example of Croatia shows another success factor. By working together, seven farmers from the region around Krizevci have managed to make direct deliveries to their customers, all of whom live in the greater Zagreb area, more efficient, thus saving time and money. The complementary products of the individual companies have also created a more attractive offer for customers, which has stimulated the market. All this became possible as the seven partner companies trusted each other more and more. Trust is a crucial success factor for rural development. In order to build trust up, independent meeting platforms such as those created by the MADIE project are needed. In the former communist countries, especially, trust is a currency that is just as important as monetary capital.

The Italian example stands for another success factor: the multifunctional nature of action. Regardless of which field of rural life you are active in, be it agriculture, tourism or other business sectors. The combination of opportunities for activity or entrepreneurship is a crucial factor for the development of business, but also to bring stakeholders together. Integrating educational work into the processes of companies that form a network, for example in Tuscany, has led to the development of new target groups for new and traditional products.

The examples prove that it is possible not only to secure attractive jobs in rural areas, but also to create new ones. In addition, they show that people who feel at home shape their area and region. Active cooperation based on mutual trust and a wide range of approaches lay the foundation for success.

The above-mentioned examples implement cooperation in different ways. They rely on different models, which differ mainly in terms of how the cooperation is organised and the kind of legal commitment that is required. They show that there is no one model for cooperation; instead, finding the right style for the group of actors and their objectives is crucial.

In Norway, cooperation is loosely organised. There are regular meetings of the “Landskapspark” actors, who discuss activities and make decisions. Their collaboration takes place under a common umbrella, called “Landskapspark”, which acts like a brand. There is no membership, but rather commitment to the common goal.

There is no organisation in Italy, either, but there is a community that gets organised above all through social networks and irregular meetings. On social media, work is carried out in closed groups for which an invitation from existing members is required. Admission is dependent on personal motivation and objectives.

In Croatia, the classical cooperative as a common organisational platform was chosen. Connections between members are close. Participation entails a great deal of commitment and responsibility.

Regardless of which form is chosen, all actors need to be willing to develop along with their partners. With this foundation, the chances for success in rural areas increase.

Philosophy

The MADIE project focuses on connectivity, that is, on actively linking all aspects that influence life in rural areas. We want to use this aspect of a global trend to preserve and rebuild a future in the countryside with all actors in rural areas and anyone who is inspired by or enthusiastic about it.

There are crucial framework conditions for connectivity that are important in shaping the future. First and foremost is a fast Internet connection, as it allows you to stay in touch with the connectivity trend and make yourself a part of the global community. According to the institutions that are involved in the MADIE project, rapid access to the Internet is the key factor that has had a significant positive impact in rural areas in recent years. Whether you are simply advertising small rooms or apartments on a global tourism market, like the members of the Landskapsparke in Norway, or marketing your own products directly via a dedicated or general online platforms, the Internet creates individual possibilities. However, bringing your own strengths to the network is key for the implementation of the philosophy of solidarity. Connections only work if the nodes in the network are strong. Conversely, the network strengthens the respective nodes through the exchange of information and

resources. For example, a study conducted within MADIE by a Hungarian partner, NOK Non-Profit, shows that, regardless of the country in which positive developments take place, it is always a combination of people, ideas and resources making development possible. The Internet is a crucial tool for this.

A sound infrastructure in the areas of health, education, mobility and culture is, of course, just as important. From the experiences of project partners in all the participating countries, the question arises as to the value for society as a whole of preserving structures in rural areas, so that living there is actually possible. Solutions look very different both nationally and locally, depending on tradition and national geography. It is clear, for example, that there is little room for compromise in healthcare. Despite innovative approaches, medical assistance and basic care can be rationalised through remote diagnosis and care only to a certain extent. However, new opportunities open up for education and culture with changing media and the Internet. Mobility is currently undergoing major changes. It poses a challenge for both rural and urban areas. In the end, decisions on investment in rural areas are usually based on economic factors. This is why it is so important to represent interests jointly and show the added value of a living rural area for society as a whole. Good networking makes it easier to find all kinds of reasons to invest, as the framework conditions for life and the quality of life become visible on a broader basis.

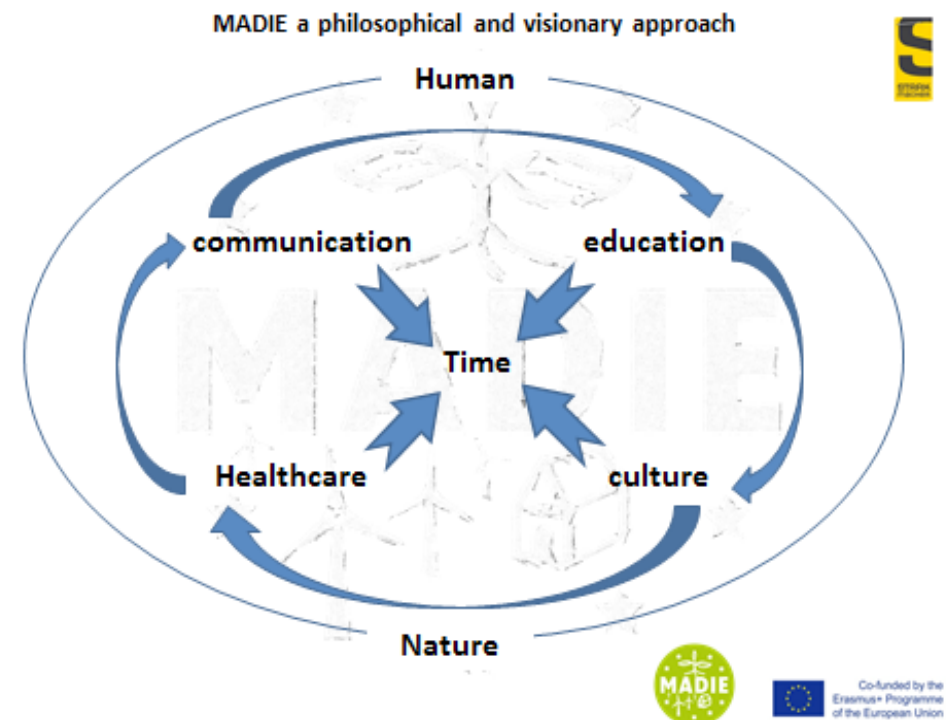
At first glance, the idea of solidarity seems very logical, and actors who have been working together for more than 15 years, as is the case in Norway, are often no longer aware of the extent to which they have come to see their cooperation as a given. This is in sharp contrast with experiences among farmers who were interviewed in Hungary or Croatia, for example, who, according to their own statements, mistrust or have mistrusted every form of cooperation, based on their past bad experiences. However, when individuals have made their own attempt to cooperate, for example by building up joint

marketing of their organic produce, the experience is usually positive and, as the Hungarian study has shown for Hungary, there is growth. This is a very clear example of the need to redesign cooperation and solidarity in your individual and group actions, time and time again. It is crucial that all actors learn that cooperation is an added value by repeating positive experiences. Consultants and all active actors in rural areas should work to strengthen people's experience of connectivity. The vision of the "Rethinking Village" stems from the philosophy of connectivity and experiences within the project partnership. It is a projection screen for different ideas, activities and the input of actors towards rural development.

The first questions were: What is our individual vision and what is our common vision as a group? What drives and inspires us? The motivation to embark on a journey of change and development is the key to success. Both for the people who were involved in the examples presented above, as well as for the initiators of the MADIE project, the common vision is implementing change and development through networking and cooperation. Behind this cooperation are concrete actions such as finding common solutions to local challenges, jointly managing economic and energy resources and developing a new way of communicating. Parag Khana, whom we discussed earlier, believes that on a global scale everything is connected with everything else in relation to our field of action, the rural, local area.

A further feature influences considerations on the Rethinking Village. Following a current global trend, all processes are accelerating as technical possibilities develop. The question arises: Fast, faster and what then? Where is the limit of what human beings can endure in the acceleration of their lifestyle? Rural areas are facing a crossroads in terms of which direction they will take. Will they participate in the overall trend and also accelerate, which in many regions of Europe and the world will be a never-ending attempt to catch up, or will they deliberately

develop an alternative model? This is a question that must be consciously addressed in order to shape rural development. The answer to it is and will be as diverse as the people in the target region. It is clear, however, that pressure on rural areas is continuing to increase and that there is a risk of being seen only as a large-scale resource supplier of agricultural products. The fact that people have been emigrating from rural areas for decades and that this trend is intensifying globally indicates that the pressure is real, and it touches directly on the key issue: which is best, staying in the country or emigrating to a city? The idea of the Rethinking Village is therefore built around deceleration. Based on the principle of cooperation, the goal is to strengthen local structures and represent them together to the outside world. In this process, making relationships deeper is the decisive factor, not the speed of action.



The diagram illustrates this idea. Every element is connected to all the others and the factor that establishes and deepens links is the invested time, in this case the time that all parties involved devote to the process, that is, in order to decelerate. The philosophy of the Rethinking Village is also inspired by Otto Scharmer's essay "The blind spot of leadership". Here, Scharmer talks about the fact that the most powerful turning point in our time is humanity's shift from egosystems to ecosystems, in terms of our actions. He describes how, for example, economic behaviour has always been based on vested individual or group interests. In his opinion, this egocentric gaze is in the process of being replaced. The future lies in society turning towards common interests, be they economic or of other nature. The focus is on the element that brings us together, working on common interests. This results in an innovation that is relevant to the overall system, added value and thus progress. Otto Scharmer's approach fits very well with the idea of the Rethinking Village.

The Process

People who are active as advisers or consultants are accustomed to a process-oriented work style. All of the examples have one thing in common: the impulse towards enhanced cooperation came either entirely from outside or was brought forward by involving outsiders.

The basis of any cooperation is trust between the actors and partners. In these examples, confidence was systematically built up with the help of mediation by neutral third parties and then deepened to provide the basis for more intensive and interlinked cooperation.

Another important aspect is cooperation on specific issues. It is easier to seize a concrete opportunity to get people to work together than to philosophize about the theoretical possibilities of development. This also applies to material aspects such as joint marketing, tourism development or cooperation in purchasing. Concrete, limited examples of cooperation with clearly defined goals and time periods should be at the forefront. As described in the last chapter, cooperation needs reinforcing through positive experiences, because they create trust on which further things can develop.

Working in a process-oriented manner means understanding yourself as a neutral person in the role of a consultant who is accompanying the process and has a realistic sense of time. In doing so, you should concentrate on achievable milestones that initiate a spiral of positive experiences in terms of cooperation. This creates trust as a foundation for the successful development of the target group and the region in which it operates.



Entrepreneurial Skills

Before we take a closer look at entrepreneurial skills themselves, it is important to address what it really means to be an entrepreneur. The word “entrepreneur” has its roots in French; literally translation, it would be “someone who undertakes”. The Oxford Dictionary defines an entrepreneur as “a person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit”. This, however, does not lead us to the heart of the deeper meaning of the French word. In French, entrepreneurs are not so much the people who own a business or company or who bear personal financial risks, but rather, they are people who are marked out by a specific attitude. The entrepreneurial spirit is shaped by the desire to innovate, find market niches and develop new business ideas and models. An entrepreneur creates new products, adopts new forms of production, uses new methods or organises new activities. Ownership of a large capital is not necessarily relevant in order to be defined as an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur dares to think outside the common framework and beyond traditional approaches. This means, for example, that entrepreneurship can also be practised within already existing companies. This is then referred to as domestic entrepreneurship or intrapreneurship. If we approach entrepreneurship using this somewhat broader concept, it becomes clear that it goes far beyond the mere act of creating a company or implementing a business idea.

At first glance, considering all these different facets of entrepreneurship may prove overwhelming and make it difficult for you to imagine yourself as an entrepreneur. However, it is important to underline that not everyone is born an entrepreneur and that entrepreneurial skills need constant development and training.

It is also crucial to realize that it is highly unlikely that you will be able to become a perfect entrepreneur. With this as a given, the best strategy is to develop strengths and find ways to overcome our weaknesses by improving or by relying on

external support, our own employees or business partners. In order to further simplify the approach to entrepreneurial skills, we will discuss ten key features that mark out entrepreneurs.

The ability to identify strengths and weaknesses

The first step in the approach to inner entrepreneurship is to become aware of one's own skills. We have included a SWOT questionnaire in the appendix to help aspiring entrepreneurs analyse themselves. Please try to answer the questions as honestly and critically as possible. If you are not sure how to answer a question, follow your first intuition or discuss it with a family member or friend to understand how they perceive the issue.

This kind of self-analysis can be very taxing, because being honest with oneself and maybe receiving some critical feedback from others can also be demotivating. And of course there are just so many qualities that one feels are necessary to be a successful entrepreneur, a good boss, an empathetic fellow human being and so on...

In order to remain capable of action even in the face of all these challenges, it is important to focus on the most important qualities that entrepreneurs have and to remember that it is not possible or even necessary to achieve a high level in every area.

The first main feature of successful entrepreneurship is a passion for action and creation. This innate passion in the entrepreneur gives intrinsic drive and stimulates the internal reward system.

This is important because starting a business can be difficult and requires, as a basic feature, energy to guide you through difficult times. The motivation of earning or having a lot of money is often not enough to start a company. This passion for creation and action that we are discussing offers optimism, self-motivation and the possibility to motivate and convince others. What's more, self-confidence originates from standing behind what you do. A second important feature is endurance. Anyone who starts a successful company must overcome every obstacle and endure hard times. Another important feature is openness. Rational openness provides the necessary basis for creativity and innovation, and enables you to remain flexible and adaptable. In addition, being willing to take risks lays an important foundation. Risks are closely linked to a high level of responsibility, for example towards staff (paying wages, securing jobs), consumers (offering quality products) and oneself (taking care of your own physical and mental health).

The ability to cope with stress

One of the keys to success is knowing how to listen to your own body and become aware of your limits. If you listen to your inner voice, you can actively take precautions to make sure that you stay mentally and physically healthy. Therefore, it is important to reduce stress and find enough moments to refuel. It should be pointed out that these moments are not only physical breaks, during which you leave your work area, desk or telephone, but also mental breaks in which thoughts about the current activity can be released and expanded. Unfortunately, there is no universal recipe for the best way to reduce stress, as we all function differently. However, this

is precisely what should encourage you to create your own recipes for relaxation. This is an interesting task, which, if thoroughly executed, becomes a learning process for life.

You can relax, for example, by doing sports, playing an instrument or listening to relaxing music. Even though reading or consciously spending time with your family, friends or even alone can seem like a luxury under the pressure of economic constraints, they are sustainable and significant activities. Deliberate distraction, for example by learning a new skill or activity and pursuing further training, serves success. Successful entrepreneurs report that it is very important to seek refuge within oneself now and then, within your inner silence, for example by going into nature or taking a hot bath, not only in the Nordic countries. Rituals can also help to switch off, however small they may seem. These rituals include a good morning coffee or tea, a hot shower or a nice run. In order to stay healthy and efficient, it helps to keep a watchful eye and control over your working hours, to end the day consciously, for example by writing down what remains to be done, turning off your work phone and stepping out of your own work mode with awareness.

In addition to these activities, active relaxation techniques have been proven to promote the harmonization of body and mind. These techniques include autogenic training, yoga, Qi Gong, Thai Chi or other exercises that combine breathing and movement. The impact of such techniques should not be underestimated. Even if at first they may feel strange or there are no immediate positive effects, it is worthwhile to give this whole process time and engage in these activities.

The ability to deal with failure

It is very likely that as an entrepreneur you will also be confronted with defeat or failure. For this reason, it is important that you consider the idea of failure before you find yourself in that situation. As a general rule, there are two different patterns to deal with this situation. One reaction is to be overwhelmed and therefore unable to operate. If you are in fear or in a state of shock, it becomes difficult to make the right decision in time and to free yourself from the situation. Another way of dealing with the situation is to allow yourself to experience the negative feelings and fear, but in a proactive manner, thus taking steps, however small they may be, towards the right questions and solutions. Like this, you will be able to get your thoughts moving again and, step by step, to concentrate on the essential and analyse events. As a result, you become able act quickly and rationally again to correct errors and get back on track. A fitting quote from Nelson Mandela backs this approach:

“Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.” The most important strategy for dealing with defeat and failure is to keep going, if necessary to pick yourself up and to approach the issue once again.

Success should be seen as a process. From a pragmatic point of view, failing is simply a part of the trial and error principle on the road to success. Decisions are made, approaches are attempted and the chosen strategy proves either to be useful or a mistake. Depending on whether the selected strategy or approach is successful, you keep it or drop it for a new one. Henry Ford once said: “The only real mistake is the one from

which we learn nothing.” Failure or the recognition that you are at a dead end are not, in themselves, negative, if they lead to the reassessment of previous work, the selected strategy and the attempted approach.

The laugh is always on the loser.

This saying shows that, when dealing with failure, as well as addressing it personally, external criticism and potentially also negative behaviour from outside parties have to be taken into account. If, however, you also receive some constructive criticism, this can prove to be a very good contribution to the solution process, since an outside-in perspective that broadens the horizon is incorporated. It makes recognizing the error's sources easier. They are often complex and can be at least partially induced by outside factors. A different viewpoint can help to recognize them.

It is important that you steel yourself for impending defeats and challenges, and build up resilience. To avoid overwinding, failure needs to be taken into account and dealt with openly. Group discussions with colleagues or family members to actively communicate difficulties or failures are helpful. It is important to actively seek support to handle stress and deal with mistakes in a constructive way. It is just as important that you do not take potential failure personally. There is no point in dealing with negative judgement or doubts that others may have regarding your own abilities. Handling failure correctly is an important cornerstone in the foundation of success.

The ability to build up the right contacts

Starting your own project is a big step. On the way to creating your own successful company or a joint cooperative, it is important to establish the right contacts. Finding the right ones at first appears difficult and rather vague. The question arises as to whether meeting the right people is mainly a matter of luck. Even if this is the case, we can still give luck a helping hand. We will focus on three aspects to better understand what “the right contacts” means.

Hiring the right people/getting them involved: When starting a new project, it is especially important to use available funds efficiently, as financial resources are often limited. It is therefore worth your while to take your time when recruiting staff or selecting co-founders so you select the right people. If the project is to have a larger team in the long-term, it is especially important to carefully select the first people, as they make up the inner circle of responsibility. Aside from personal aptitude, qualification for the intended tasks plays the key role. Being qualified for the job can mean that the requirements of the job description are fulfilled, that the necessary skills or competencies (e.g. communication skills) for the new task are brought to the table or that special requirements (e.g. training in accounting or marketing) are fulfilled. This seems obvious. In practice, however, it is still important that you make yourself aware of your own decision criteria. Even a decision that comes from a gut instinct should, in the end, be made consciously. It is crucial that the person you choose fits into your existing or future team. People only work optimally in teams that stick together and have a congenial atmosphere. An intriguing topic in this context is the employment or involvement of friends or family members. In principle, this approach can make a

company strong. However, it is important to be aware of the foundation on which your decision for a person is based. If a friend or family member brings the necessary qualifications, this can be a real enrichment. If key skills are lacking, the best of friendships is no use and may, on the contrary, even lead to failure of the enterprise and possibly of the relationship.

Establishing contact with experienced people who have an entrepreneurial spirit: This may include people who are entrepreneurs themselves and can share their experience. It is good to have experienced people, and their advice, by your side. Establishing contact with (local) politicians or other public authorities, journalists or civil society actors can also provide great support. Involving people at an early stage is always important, so that they support the project. It is especially interesting to look for like-minded people in social initiatives. For example, to advance a cooperative, you need active members with the same vision! Once the potential target groups for support of all kinds have been identified, it is important to give luck a hand and find opportunities to establish these contacts. Are there any events that are thematically close to your project, or events with the right guests, that you can participate in? Are there any regional/national platforms yet, which can serve as a contact point to meet these people? Are there any digital platforms where you can exchange information or get to know like-minded people or supporters? One example is the RuralAcademy (www.ruralacademy.org), which developed from the MADIE project. It is worth taking a look at how a support system comprises multiple levels. Let us mention some aspects, by way of example: the exchange and supply of financial resources, consultation or emotional support, access to specific networks, transfer of knowledge or active support as a worker are examples of this. It is important to approach new contacts openly and without fear of rejection. You probably won't hear anything much worse than a "no"! For more information on what communication during initial contacts can be like, please refer to the handbook

about consultancy in rural areas, which can be found on the ruralacademy.org platform.

A healthy relationship with the customers:

This last point is, of course, key to the company. The vision for which the company was started only has a chance if the target group, be it consumers, tourists, learners or other companies, has a good relationship with you and the contact is strengthened.

The ability to acquire money and use it efficiently

Additional capital is usually required to put your project into practice. This may cover anything from wages to the purchase of machinery and materials. You may even require funds for larger renovations or hidden and unforeseen costs. It is crucial to write the financial and business plan in advance and to do so as accurately as possible in order to assess the required capital, so that reality is represented clearly and unforeseen costs or unpleasant surprises, in general, are minimized.

Regardless of financing, drawing up a financial and business plan is crucial.

Support in this process is offered by a wide variety of sources, such as consulting firms, public authorities or books about the subject. In the MADIE handbook about consultancy in rural areas, you will find the Canvas model as an example of a concept for developing a business plan. In the examples of good practice described in the previous chapter of this book,

there are impulses for ideas for companies in terms of content. Once the company is started, good budgeting and management of the in- and outflow of funds is key. This means that past, present and future costs can be monitored easily in the long term.

When it comes to the correct handling of money, good accounting is the be-all and end-all. An approach to accounting that is well-suited to fulfil several purposes, such as company overview, providing records to tax authorities, etc. gives you an advantage. Like this, the work hours invested in accounting are used efficiently and spare resources which can then be used to develop the company. This is particularly important for joint ventures such as cooperatives. Accounting should be transparent and efficient, so that people can devote their energy to developing cooperation. It is always advisable to create links and synergies wherever possible. There is a certain lightness that stems from this and helps to develop and achieve goals.

It is also important to create reserves.

Even if it often proves difficult, especially at the beginning. They can act as “advance financing” for future investments or unforeseen costs. Future tax payments and unexpectedly high tax back-payments, for example, can be covered by these reserves. Opportunities to build up reserves should be seized, because in an emergency, they can prove extremely helpful. One idea that is being discussed more and more often is to deposit a certain percentage of all income to a separate account, so that this money is available for an emergency. Separate accounts can make saving easier, since they basically only act as an additional form of insurance and day-to-day business is handled over the normal business accounts.

A further helpful step towards economical action is a carefully thought-out cost-benefit analysis. The foundation of every

decision is to obtain as much information as possible about an investment opportunity or planned expenditure. You should consider these issues: Do I really need this investment? Yes, no, or is there an equivalent investment opportunity that is more cost-effective or multifunctional? Do I need this investment in the short, medium or long term? Do I have the money I need to make the investment right now? If not, would a loan be worthwhile or is the cost higher than the benefit? Honest answers to all these questions lay the foundation for sustainable decisions. The motivation driving your purchase is decisive. For example, you can only deduct a certain luxury purchase, such as a somewhat more luxurious company car, from tax if you make enough profit that you have to pay taxes in the first place. Investing because of the desire to own property, make an impression or simply for the sake of comfort should be questioned. Investments should only be made after careful consideration. Especially at the beginning, you will keep thinking of things that all seem necessary. It is important to concentrate on what is urgent and essential for operation. If you manage to build up reserves, the capital should be invested sensibly. There are forms of investment that are tailored to companies and that you might not be aware of as a private individual. It is worthwhile to consult an investment or banking advisor. However, despite the usefulness of the investment, the liquidity situation of the company must always be kept in mind, so that the reserve can still be used promptly in an emergency. If you make profit from interest-rate investments, you may also need to pay taxes, which you should include in your financial planning. Forward-looking planning is crucial, because unforeseen expenses or lean periods may come up at all times.

Let us now turn to acquiring funds, in general. Generally speaking, there are three ways to finance your business. The options include self-funded financing, equity financing and loan financing. Mixed forms are usually chosen to minimise risk as much as possible. Self-funded equity loans are often

the first form of financing, especially for smaller start-ups. The advantage here is that the capital can be invested independently of other lenders and no interest payments or redemption fees have to be met. This means that, even in bad times, there is no pressure due to loan repayments or interest. Equity capital is created and grows through generated profits, private capital or the acquisition of additional shareholders and their capital. For example, a cooperative can start and grow through contributions from its members.

The other two forms of financing work through borrowed capital. Equity financing, for example, is a type of external financing through equity. For example, additional equity is generated with the involvement of further shareholders or the increase in contributions from existing shareholders, such as additional cash contributions (in various forms, e.g. cash payments, shares, participatory notes and option or convertible bonds) or contributions in kind (e.g. machinery). There are also some special forms of equity financing, such as venture capitals and financing from angel investors. In both cases, the investors not only provide financial support, but also know-how, advice and contacts from their own network. This offers many advantages and helps young companies, especially, to better understand the market and entrepreneurial activity. It has a high added value compared to traditional participations or loans. You can look these investment types up online to find out whether there are any interesting business angels or capital venture networks, organisations or platforms in your own country and whether you can access international contact points. You should think about the features that attract these investors. Good preparation is a must, because anyone who invests wants to have his or her risk outlined and assessed. You should also keep in mind that these investors are highly sought-after and that quite some time may go by before they make a definitive commitment.

Another special form of equity financing is crowdfunding or crowd investing. Many (micro-)investors or investors typically provide projects or companies with a small amount of money over the Internet. The investors provide mezzanine financing, a hybrid of equity and debt financing.

In crowdfunding and crowd investing, this is often equity-like.

Profit participation rights, participatory loans or silent participations are granted in return for the provided capital. If a form of financing with participation is chosen, you should always be aware that, with the exception of silent participation, the investor always also has a say, as well as other rights. In addition, the whole process has to be legally regulated in a contract. Another aspect that you need to keep in mind is that your investors are also demanding something. Usually, this would be a share in the profits. However, the cost of capital also rises at the same rate, as the return on a loan is often higher than the interest payments on a loan. Generally speaking, however, an increased equity ratio, whether through internal or external equity capital, has the advantage of increasing creditworthiness because there are more liability assets and collateral. Especially in the start-up phase, such forms of financing are helpful, as start-up capital and creditworthiness increase simultaneously. This also reduces the risk of insolvency or bankruptcy.

Another financing opportunity is offered by loans. Loans should only be taken out from officially recognised banks and other credit institutions. There are special loans just for start-up companies, and in many countries there are also special development banks for start-ups. They provide the perfect first point of contact, as they can also help further along in the founding process. However, it is always worth asking your main bank or other banks for conditions on loans. It is always good to be able to choose from several offers. Nowadays, you can very easily compare interest rates online and to get some

orientation. Before taking out a loan, you should have received comprehensive consultation and had sufficient time to consider. Those turning to a bank should already know what kind of credit they are seeking, such as a micro-loan or a real estate loan. Clearly, without solid planning and good preparation for the bank appointment, a rejection is guaranteed. If you do not receive a conventional loan, security may also be provided in the form of a personal guarantee or by a guarantor bank. Obtaining credit from a bank often proves difficult if you do not have enough security available. In addition, such payments are often subject to strict conditions (fixed terms, instalments and interest rates). If you find yourself unable to repay the loans, bankruptcy often becomes a looming presence. Therefore, you should choose loan repayments that leave you enough flexibility to react to new circumstances and, at the same time, enable you to pay interest and redemption fees even during tough times.

State subsidies for start-ups are opportunities worth taking advantage of. Especially in rural areas, new initiatives to support these areas and make them more attractive are in demand, and, if the idea is sufficiently well-developed, it may receive support from dedicated programmes. Aside from this, there are loans for companies in many countries, such as start-up grants, start-up funds and regional, national or international (e.g. European) support programmes. There are also other free or convenient offers such as coaching, further education and similar options. In addition to the state, employment agencies, chambers of commerce, vocational training centres, banks and Internet providers also provide special offers to business start-ups. MADIE's theme and rural development are highly topical issues. You should also consider any kind of promotion and support from a networking point of view.

If you look at them closely, all types of financing have pros and cons. It is important to assess which type of financing best fits with your personal situation. Realistic business and

financing plans are important in this process, as well as for the foundation of the company.

Striving for improvement

The thing about market niches is that, once they are discovered, they do not remain niches for long. Choosing entrepreneurship also means aligning your actions to the pursuit of improvement. Keeping your finger on the pulse is a survival strategy. Regularly carrying out competitor analyses helps to re-evaluate the position of your own company on the market. Even if rural areas, in particular, are successful in creating a new market on their own, it is still necessary to react to rapidly changing framework conditions, as is exemplified by the landscape parks in Norway, among other realities. Keeping an eye on the market is time-consuming, but offers great added value to the project. For example, discovering new trends early on can be a great advantage that brings new customers or reduces costs. The market is influenced by many different actors and variables. Here is a small overview:

First of all, a competitor analysis should be carried out. Its main objective is to assess competitors and acquire knowledge about their customer loyalty, strategies, market penetration and so on. In the analysis, importance should be attached not only to general basic information about your competitors, such as company size, sales, company holdings etc., but also to acquiring strategic directions, marketing, product and sales strategies and services offered. Three basic questions are relevant. What is the product, market and sales strategy? The product strategy can be assessed by analysing the product range (quality, breadth and depth of the assortment) and planned product expansions. The marketing strategy deals

with marketing measures and evaluates them. The sales strategy investigates sales outlets, distribution strategies and measures. To safeguard your own company, it is important that you have a service strategy that analyses customer satisfaction and information and collects customer contacts over different channels (home pages, social media, email, telephone). In this context, you should also question the company's own products and strategies. The following questions can be helpful: How does the quality of your products compare to others? Do substitutes for your product exist? What is your unique selling point? Can you/do you need to improve your products or adjust prices? Do other market participants have better strategies? Are there any new research findings on the efficiency of your strategies? Do your strategies work? The available information is used to carry out a strengths and weaknesses analysis for your own company.

As well as evaluating competitors, regular market analysis is crucial, or maybe even more important, as you yourself can implement the derived measures. Points of interest here include market forecasts, market dynamics and potential, sourcing markets, trends and innovations, as well as production, products and sales markets of main, secondary and waste products. Internet use allows identification and evaluation of global trends and market developments in other regions or countries also from rural areas.

Customer analysis is one of the most important topics to be analysed. Without regular satisfied customers, companies cannot survive long. It is crucial to know your own target groups well. The following questions can be helpful: Who are your existing customers and who are your potential customers? How can you recruit new customers? How can you bind customers to your company and how can you position yourself in front of competitors? Do you give the opportunity for customers to lodge a complaint about your products or services? Are customers satisfied with your customer

loyalty actions (discount campaigns, customer cards, online delivery...)? Surveys with customers or even non-customers will help you to find out what price expectations, needs and desires people have. If at all possible, asking your existing customers directly about their satisfaction with your products in comparison to competing products is especially valuable. In this way, gaps in supply and new trends can be identified and, if necessary, filled.

Furthermore, the state should be included as an actor in analyses. The state can initiate many processes with its actions. Subsidy policies must be taken into account, particularly in rural areas. For example, will there be subsidies for your industry or products in the near future, or will subsidies be abolished? Are prices regulated, approvals granted or licensing requirements imposed?

A good competitive analysis always requires a clear definition of the goals. They narrow required information down and help to classify it in the overall picture. Competitor analyses can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses, plan and optimize strategies and also to review your general positioning. However, a competitive analysis simply shows a snapshot of a particular moment and must be pursued continuously. It is therefore a time-consuming process that you constantly have to start afresh, and that requires constant adjustment and decision making. The advantage of this kind of analysis is that it enables you to react promptly to market developments, which increases planning and future security. The orientation and emotional security gained from it is thus consolidated and, as an important result, it creates a further basis for physical and mental health.

Working Productively

Lots of people have trouble being productive. They are easily distracted or they lack the necessary drive. Sometimes, they have so many tasks that they don't even know when to start. If you approach the issue factually, what emerges is that low productivity originates from three different sources: Self-organization, inner attitude and external circumstances.

First of all, let's take a look at self-organization. It comes down mostly to good planning and time-management. To get yourself organized, you can start by writing to-do lists and to-do-later lists. These lists help to get things out of your head and to free up your thoughts - a free mind works better. You have taken the first step towards self-organization!

If on any given day you have a long list of tasks to deal with or you are not sure about how to prioritise your assignments, a system known as the Eisenhower Matrix may prove helpful. It is very useful to filter tasks and order them by priority. It is a 2x2 matrix in which the quadrants are divided by urgency and importance. This creates four squares, each with two features (important or not-important and urgent or not-urgent). Everything that falls in the first quadrant, that is, everything which is important and urgent, you should immediately handle yourself. You should set a deadline for things that are important, but not urgent, and then carry out these tasks yourself at a later time point. Things that are not important, but need to be dealt with urgently, should, if possible, be delegated to others. If you have no employees, you should handle them yourself after other urgent tasks. When addressing tasks that are neither urgent nor important, you have to ask yourself whether they are worth wasting your precious time or that of others. This is the reason you should reject such tasks.

Eisenhower-Matrix		Wichtigkeit	
		wichtig	nicht wichtig
Dringlichkeit	dringlich	Aufgabe selbst erledigen	Aufgabe delegieren
	Nicht dringlich	Frist setzen und Aufgabe selbst erledigen	Aufgabe verwerfen

Planning your day the night before may also prove useful. Like this, you can jump right into the workday and, as you already know what and how much you need to do, you can start and get to work more quickly. This prevents the stressful situation of having to get your bearings in the morning and gives you a good feeling for the tasks ahead of you. Starting the day with the most challenging task can also be helpful. Once this is done, your other tasks will seem easier, you can reward yourself with a moment of happiness, and you have freed yourself from the task that put the greatest pressure on you. Just as important as the order in which tasks are processed is that you finish whichever assignment you start and move on to the next item on the list only if you realize that the task requires more time or that it cannot be carried out due to other external factors.

For this reason, it is crucial that you only place as many actions in your daily planning or to-do list as can be actually managed in one work day. It is acceptable to occasionally postpone tasks to the following day. You actually have to be prepared for this. However, you should keep an eye on your overall time management. As well as only having as much as you can manage on the daily schedule, you should also plan enough buffer time and breaks during the day. If you plan enough buffers, the

daily target can be reached even if you get delayed. Tasks can turn out to be more extensive or complex than you thought, and mistakes can occur. In addition, your own actions also depend on many other factors, such as how much time other people have available, their punctuality, the traffic situation, postal channels, misunderstandings, faulty technology and so on. Breaks are just as important for productive action. These should be inserted regularly. The Pomodoro Technique is one way to plan breaks. Francesco Cirillo developed a concept based on working for 25 minutes intervals, each followed by a 5-minute break. Each interval is called a pomodoro. This is Italian and means tomato. The name comes from the tomato-shaped timer that Cirillo used in his first attempts.

After four pomodori, you should take a longer break, lasting 15-20 minutes.

You can also plan the breaks differently, however, it is important to take a break after about 90 minutes and to take a longer break after four working hours. The goal is to find a rhythm that allows you to work with purpose and concentration, so you should not pressure yourself by measuring your work intervals too exactly, nor should you allow yourself to lose your concentration. Depending on the task to be performed, you must also be able to design the breaks individually. Breaks are especially relaxing if you do the opposite of what you were doing previously. If you were just working actively on the field and were physically exerting yourself, you should use your break to sit down, relax and maybe read something. If, instead, you were only occupied with sedentary mental work, active breaks are much better for restoring creativity and concentration once you resume work.

The inner attitude with which you approach your work is just as important as self-organization. Negative thoughts will not take you any further. They usually only drag productivity down. It helps to become consciously aware of the elements

in your work that motivate you and focus on those features. You should engage internally with the positive aspects of your work or task and change or accept what you do not like, and mentally place it at the back of your thoughts. Positive thoughts help you to stay optimistic and to better channel your concentration.

Routines that make you happy and helpful (remuneration systems, mantras or mottos, approaches, rituals, etc.) can also be helpful. However, how you put concentrated and productive action into practice is of course an individual matter, just as there are personal paths to stress reduction. It is important that you address the issue of your own approach to work tasks. If, however, you are lacking the drive to begin with a task, asking yourself why you have to or, even better, why you would like to fulfil this task may help. Looking to your long-term goals can provide motivation and inspiration. Placing concrete objectives for specific tasks in advance can help to make the tasks more attractive. One way of specifying objectives is the SMART method, in which each letter has a specific meaning. S stands for specific (defining goals in a concrete and specific manner), M stands for measurable (as in qualitatively or quantitatively measurable facts), A stands for appealing (designing tasks so you find them more attractive), R stands for realistic (the objective must be feasible) and T stands for time-bound (there is a fixed date for achieving the goal). The best way to do this is set it down in writing, so you can keep an easy overview.

SMART

P	E	N	E	E
E	S	S	A	R
Z	S	P	L	M
I	B	R	I	I
F	A	E	S	N
I	R	C	T	I
S		H	I	E
C		E	S	R
H		N	C	T
		D	H	

If there are too many tasks, the burden can be eased by following the Pareto Principle. According to it, many tasks can be fulfilled with an effort of 20 to 80 percent. These percentages are a rough guide and can vary from task to task. It is only intended to underline that perfectionism demands 100 percent of the available labour input, whereas good or sufficient results can be achieved with considerably less effort. If you take leave from perfectionism, you can work on more tasks in a satisfactory manner and with less stress. This will spare you time and stress.

You can protect yourself from stress also by learning how to say “no”. If you are already busy with upcoming tasks, you should avoid taking on additional tasks that do not fall within your area of competence. You may also want to restrict how

accessible you are to others in order to have time for your own tasks.

If you politely make this clear to your counterpart, then you will surely receive understanding and be approached at a different time, or the task will be delegated differently.

Another way to further expand the ability to work productively is, for example, the 18-minute rule.

Before you start work, you take 5 minutes to think about what you have to do on that day or what you should pay special attention to. Afterwards, you should take a minute after each working hour to draw a conclusion. Was the time used effectively? Were there any distractions? Can the working method be optimised? An ordinary working day results in eight such summaries. When you finish working, you take five more minutes to review the day. Did you reach all your goals? What is in store for tomorrow? Were there moments in which it was difficult to stay concentrated? What were the causes, and are there any solutions to this? This self-reflection will make it easier for you to recognize distractions, avoid them and increase your productivity in the long run.

External circumstances also influence the ability to work productively. The working environment has a crucial influence on the ability to concentrate. You should set up your workplace so that you feel comfortable. Clean and simple workplaces improve your focus and reduce time wasted looking for things or rearranging them. The best approach is to place only the work materials that you intend to use immediately on your desk. Tasks and papers that pile up can be distracting, stressful, and they can put pressure on you.

Excessive noise or bad air also hamper your concentration, so you should make sure that your work space is quiet and air it regularly.

It is also important that work areas are bright and pleasantly lit. Some people can concentrate better if they have soft music in the background or if they spray certain room scents, which can also increase creativity and productivity. Plants provide a better indoor climate and can have a calming effect on the mind. Pictures can enliven a room and stimulate the mind.

As well as the physical environment, the social working environment also contributes to promoting productivity. In a positive working atmosphere, employees can come out of their shell and work creatively. Moreover, there are no distractions caused by negative thoughts or arguments. As a manager, you should always try to create an open working atmosphere and talk about problems in a direct and friendly way and try and solve them quickly or look for solutions.

Nutrition is also a decisive factor. It should be well-balanced, and it should suit you. Together with individually tailored sleep time, this results in a decisive balance that supports productive work.

Summary Entrepreneurship

If you mentally go over the preceding chapters again, it should become clear how much the success of an enterprise depends on the actor's attitude. Inner attitude is what makes the difference between the pursuit of profit through risk and the original aspect of creation through entrepreneurial action. Today, in a constantly evolving world of increasing globalization, the demands on entrepreneurship are constantly changing. For this reason, an entrepreneur must grow constantly, not only economically, but also as a human being and in terms of personality.



A Basic introduction to pedagogical Methods

The MADIE project has brought together many actors in rural development. Over the course of the project, previous consultancy experiences were exchanged and new approaches to consulting and implementing pedagogical and didactic support for cooperation processes were experimented. Two handbooks outlining the core of the partners' work have been written to accompany the consulting and supporting activities that are to be carried out. This book examines the development process of rural areas in an overarching, global context. Counselling and supporting people who want to dare to increase cooperation is a feature that is always embedded in general developments. The methods and approaches described here therefore provide indications and inspiration on how to methodically approach the process of creating more cooperation in rural areas.

There is also the Norwegian partner's manual "Close to Good Helpers", which can be found on www.ruralacademy.org. The book describes the qualities that a consultant needs in order to be successful. It also includes specific tips on how to design the local counselling process in terms of the consultant's demeanour.

Both books combine the practical experience of the partners that are involved in the project.

The Pedagogical Approach at Starkmacher e .V.

The goal at Starkmacher e.V. (which means "empowerer"), since it was established in 2006, has been to give people the strength and resources to successfully achieve their own goals. We are committed to making sure that everyone can discover and develop their talents and abilities, so that they can be used

to improve life together in society. Another important aspect is the strengthening of the individual's skills by promoting project- or topic-related cooperation. In a team, the skills of the individual are complemented by those of the other members. Learning and further development are possible. This is the cornerstone of Starkmacher e.V.'s pedagogical and educational work. This work is based on the following theories: In his book "Schulfach Glück" (which could be loosely translated as "Happiness as a School Subject"), Ernst Fritz-Schubert describes results from studies on resilience, i.e. the capacity to endure adverse situations.

Human beings are strong when:

- They have self-esteem.
- They are aware of their abilities and limits, know their needs and know how to deal with their emotions and control them.
- They can act independently.
- They take responsibility for their actions, push their boundaries and dare to venture into the unknown.
- They know their resources and how to use them as problem solving abilities.
- They have a positive, emotional connection to their immediate environment, they feel like they belong, are surrounded by people who trust, value and love them.

Positive emotions as a basis for learning success and healthy, holistic development - the Broaden-and-Build-Theory by Barbara Fredrickson

- Negative emotions narrow your focus, awaken survival instincts and reactions such as a fight-or-flight response.
- Positive emotions widen your field of perception, promote thinking in contexts and allow access to different strengths.
- New synapses are formed, the ability to learn increases, lasting social and personal resources are built up

(relationships, social networks, knowledge/know-how, endurance).

What does a person need to develop a strong personality?

- Caregivers who treat him or her with respect and appreciation
- Confidence in him- or herself and consequently in his or her abilities
- Role models for his or her own behaviours and relationship patterns
- The space to test and experience limits
- The satisfaction of basic needs

The four basic needs according to Klaus Grawe

- The need for control and orientation
- The need for attachment
- The need for self enhancement
- The need for pleasure/avoidance of pain

The fulfilment of basic needs is pursued, as neglecting this or being permanently dissatisfied leads to damaging mental health and well-being.

In the context of rural development, this pedagogical approach is aimed primarily at consultants who are tasked with initiating change and supporting development processes. Four practical, application-oriented approaches can be derived from the theories:

1. An approach to promote mutual respect and appreciation among those involved in the process

Crises and misunderstandings are part and parcel of making a real difference. Whenever people work together, conflicts and tensions develop.

Respect and esteem for each other sound like they should be a given, but mindfulness and the moderators' support are necessary in order to raise awareness and promote these aspects over the course of the development process.

2. An approach to enable participants to experience recognition and self-efficacy

You must be able to achieve your own goals even within a joint process. Achieving this and the willingness to get involved by bringing your own talents to the table always require moments of reassurance and recognition within the group. Even more important is the experience of self-efficacy. My actions make a difference. I can make a difference in my local environment, set something in motion and create a perspective together with others. In consulting processes, it is always worthwhile to keep an eye on whether any achievable partial goals can be incorporated or whether bigger goals can be divided into small sections. By achieving them, the participants get a feeling that they are able to achieve their aims and of self-efficacy. This in turn releases the energy and drive that then serve to achieve major goals. Ideally, the consultant also ensures that the achievement of a goal is properly acknowledged and appreciated.

3. An approach to develop the strengths of individuals in the community

Networking and cooperation are the main topic, as they reveal potential. Anyone who intends to overcome deeply-rooted behaviour and patterns of thought in order to conquer challenges such as rural development, for example, must join forces with others. The examples of cooperation that are presented in this book illustrate this very nicely. All of these pedagogical approaches build on the power and feedback of the individual for and through the community.

4. An approach for positive conflict resolution, positioning and pro-social behaviour

Intensive work is needed to develop teams that are able to meet local challenges.

Individual members must get involved and push their own boundaries.

The approach of the empowerer places special emphasis on emotional experience. All decisions are made through the interplay of intention memory (logical-analytical thinking) and extension memory (associative-emotional-practical thinking). We invite all those who support people in their further development or achieving goals to reflect on this. Extension memory is a highly sophisticated system that draws on information from all of our past experiences. In our society, the focus is primarily on intention memory, whereas extension memory receives little attention. Starkmacher e. V. therefore deliberately sets an anchor in extension memory for all insight and progress achieved throughout consulting processes. The achievement of an intermediate goal can be anchored, for example, by inviting everyone involved to a small spontaneous celebration of this great event. Success is made visible and the spontaneous party has a positive emotional impact.

These four approaches provide orientation in terms of which overarching aspects of moderation, coaching or process support should be generally considered. They can always be given different relevance, depending on the character and attitude of the process facilitator. The leader's attitude is more important than the method. Respect, appreciation, community, positioning and the ability to deal with conflicts must first of all be experienced. Without a role model capable of conveying safety and orientation, it is difficult to lead and achieve success in collaborative processes.

Bibliography:

ERNST FRITZ-SCHUBERT, Schulfach Glück
BARBARA L. FREDRICKSON, The Power of Positive Emotions
AMLER/BERNATZKY/KNÖRZER, Mentaltraining im Sport
KLAUS GRAWE, Neuropsychotherapie
ALBERT WUNSCH, Abschied von der Spaßpädagogik

The Crash Barrier Method

The Crash Barrier Method is a new approach that stems from the years of work and practical experience of single trainers, teachers and educators at Starkmacher e.V. It makes use of scientifically based methods from the field of pedagogical research.

In this context, the crash barrier should be taken as a metaphor, and not as a scientific concept.

The Crash Barrier Method is based on two essential points: participants should be given the freedom that they need to develop without limitations. The trainer's task is to establish thematic areas and provide suggestions that are taken up by the group and further developed by the participants themselves over the course of the training, without the trainer actually stepping in. The trainer should act as an active observer in this dynamic process of further development.

The trainer, however, is not limited only to the role of a participating observer; his or her role in the Crash Barrier Method goes beyond this.

If you transfer the image of the crash barrier to an educational

setting, you can imagine the trainer acting as a crash barrier would: by giving the driver orientation, protecting him or her, but also establishing limits. However, the crash barriers are not to be understood as a static construction that provides all drivers with the same exact path and direction, but rather as an individual and somewhat flexible boundary. In this context, as it features group-dynamic processes, it is important to integrate individual participants into the group process using set crash barriers.

Therefore, the Crash Barrier Method does not only serve the purpose of keeping the group on the right track. If the trainer transfers the functions of the crash barrier to his or her work, other tasks to be performed emerge: sticking to the limits of his or her participants is only one of the essential points, because the driver and seminar participants will stay within the guard rails and avoid collision with other participants or even with the barriers themselves due to excessive speed only by sticking to the appropriate limit. The trainer is therefore also responsible for the progress and speed of the group dynamic. Only allowing and ensuring a consistent speed keeps all participants active in the process and on an equal footing. This method requires a high degree of empathy and flexibility from the trainer as well as from the participants. It is essential for the trainer to use his or her professional competence and expertise to provide – much like crash barriers do – orientation to the participants. Above all, the trainer must be able to rely on his or her empathy to react appropriately to all participants. For trainers, the challenges and hazards of this method lie in having to handle the barriers with a certain degree of flexibility and in their role as participating observers, as mentioned at the beginning.

Since the crash barriers are also used to guide individual group participants as they engage in group processes, the trainer must constantly switch between an individual and a group-specific approach. This calls for intense interaction,

and it clashes with the role of the observer. The Crash Barrier Method was developed based on this balancing act. If the trainer succeeds in remaining an observer, the group is able to open up new spaces and develop new themes, to which the trainer must react with great resilience in order to tie the diversity of the group together. But it is precisely the opening up of new topics and perspectives that leads to innovation and new insights, based on which Starkmacher e.V. has been able to carry out its projects with so much success and through which it will continue to develop its projects.

Systemic Project Management

The aim of the MADIE project is to support consultants in rural areas. Project management continues to play a major role in this. In this chapter, it builds an important building block for successful process design. Work on projects is automatically associated with a beginning and an end. For this reason, people who are active in an advisory capacity should always focus on the process as a whole and consolidate it by purposefully dividing it into projects. The following definition should be understood in this sense. Project management is an umbrella term for all the planning, monitoring, coordinating and controlling activities that are necessary when designing and redesigning systems, processes or solutions.¹

¹ See Kuster, J. u.a., Project Management Handbook, Berlin-Heidelberg, 2015.

Project management provides various methods that take the complexity of projects into account, structure them and pave the way to successful implementation. Project management is applied in a project-specific manner, and accounts for different types of projects. This means that there is not one type of project management; instead, there are many approaches that may refer to different economic theories or even organizational psychological models.

Within the framework of systemic project management, projects are defined as social systems that have their own tasks and goals, internal structures, system boundaries, but at the same time also key external relationships². The project as a social system is made up by a number of people who, on the one hand, want to define and achieve a common goal in terms of contents within the framework of project cooperation and, on the other, are confronted with the complexity of their individual realities. Shared communication, from consultation to reflection, is therefore key. Communication is the basic process within a social system that sets it apart from other social systems. Due to the self-regulation and learning ability of social systems, a project is better able to process complexity compared to externally controlled systems and thus successfully implement processes of change. Systemic project management is therefore ideally suited to strengthen and structure processes of cooperation that have already been started in rural areas or to initiate them.

The following procedural principles have been developed within the framework of systemic project management³:

- Going from a rough outline to a detailed view,
- generating alternatives

² Ibidem

³ Ibidem

- breakdown into phases
- problem-solving methodology

Due to the central role of breaking down projects into phases, this principle is dealt with in detail in the course of the model's outline.

To ensure a process-oriented approach, projects are carried out in phases. The aim is to separate single project sub-steps in terms of time and logic. Like this, the project process is structured with partial goals and verifiable indicators that enable corrective measures and risk assessments at an early stage.

J. Boy developed a phase model that breaks down like this⁴:

1. Definition phase
2. Planning phase
3. Implementation phase
4. Closing phase

As part of the definition phase at the beginning of project planning, project managers and clients clarify their objectives, expectations and actions. The focus is on feasibility and cost-effectiveness. Problem analysis, goal clarification and potential analysis are carried out. In the context of rural development, the economic factors do not necessarily need to be at the forefront from the very beginning of the process. In order to stimulate cooperation and clarify the framework conditions, the roles must first be defined. Above all, the issue of the consultant's role must be clear. In the project partners' experience, it is not important whether the consultant is responsible for project coordination, but that both the project management and the other roles within the planned cooperation are defined so that they are clear and transparent for everyone.

⁴ See Boy, Jaques, Projektmanagement, 11th ed., Offenbach, 2000, p. 33ff

After the roles and the project have been defined, a rough plan is drafted, which includes the direction in terms of content and the time frame for all the elements. Financial aspects and their weighting in the overall process have to be clarified no later than this point. After the rough plan has been checked for feasibility, an initial financial plan is drawn up and the profitability is calculated and recorded. The end of this phase is the project order, which in the context of rural development usually goes to a coordinating group and to different people within the group in relation to their roles. They work for everyone in the region and ensure a regular exchange of information.

If the project order is clear, the planning phase of the project begins. This is where concrete project and concept planning takes place. The individual sub-steps are defined and developed in terms of content and methodology. The information and findings from the analyses of the definition phase are taken into consideration. Sub-goals and response indicators are listed. Tasks and scope are defined, a time schedule is structured, and a risk analysis is prepared. Information paths are defined, the roles of potential project partners are differentiated and possible interfaces are described. This phase ends with the definition of milestones, a differentiated financial plan and cost planning.

The implementation phase is characterised by the implementation and review of the sub-steps and their indicators. Discrepancies or malfunctions are recorded, evaluated and a response is developed and implemented. The persons responsible for the individual sub-steps stay in regular contact with the project managers. Once individual sub-steps have been completed, they are evaluated, financially concluded and documented.

After completion of the last sub-step, the project report is prepared as part of the final phase. This includes an evaluation of

the results and the process, highlights interfaces and conflicts, as well as the time and cost conversion. Results are presented and the employees' interaction and skills are showcased. The phase ends with project accounting and the dissolution of the project team and resources. The project is now complete.

This outline of classic project management shows how the experience of systemic project management should be adapted to the processes of rural development. If structures have been built and a powerful team has successfully been assembled, it should continue to accompany the overall process. Stringing projects together may prove helpful. Once one project has been completed, an important interim goal has been defined and successfully accomplished. This means that development has taken one step further and more projects can be initiated or completed, if they have already been started.

Practical Applications of Theme-Centred Interaction (TCI)

TCI was applied successfully during training, particularly in Finland and Italy.

The rules developed for this method proved to be particularly helpful in leading target-oriented discussions, and were a cornerstone of the practice units and their implementation. Not all of the rules accepted in TCI proved practical for the group.

But the following rules were applied and internalized by the groups:

- Represent yourself in your statements: Speak in the “I” and not using “one” or “we”.
- Express your personal reactions and restrain yourself as long as possible in interpreting others.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Side discussions take precedence.

Network Action

The entire MADIE project and the on-line learning platform that stems from it, RuralAcademy, are based on the principle of successful networking and the improved cooperation that it fosters. The original inspiration to tackle the issue of promoting forms of cooperation and ways of working together in rural areas came from the observation of the plight of many farmers and small businesses, especially in the Eastern Member States of the European Union, after the market opened up and foreign products from efficiently and cooperatively organised associations and cooperatives penetrated even the smallest supermarket in the most provincial towns at dumping prices. Small-scale local farmers and actors who work individually cannot compete with these prices and risk losing their livelihoods.

The interesting feature is that cooperation and mergers of rural actors have a long-standing tradition in Europe. The MADIE project has conducted a study in this topic under the leadership of the Hungarian partner, showing that cooperation in the partner countries has tradition and formative nature. The study is available on the www.ruralacademy.org homepage.

A strong West-East divide was observed in terms of how frequent cooperation is and how matter-of-course it is felt to be. The thesis that farmers in former communist states tend to react negatively to offers of cooperation has been confirmed. This aversion is rooted in forced collectivisation and the feeling of newly won sovereignty after the fall of communism, which many are probably not so ready to give up. It is interesting to note that the study showed that in Hungary, especially, many new local movements are emerging or are already active, and had not really been taken into consideration by administrative bodies such as the Chamber of Agriculture prior to the study. It can therefore be concluded that the move towards intensive local cooperation started already several years ago, and that model cooperatives and local associations of producers, farmers and consumers are already being established.

In the examples that we discussed in the previous pages, we looked at the Croatian cooperative which is launching a new trend in the country with its cooperation, and at the Norwegian landscape parks, which, after years of successful establishment, are currently readjusting to respond to the challenges that have been identified.

Regardless of where the actors in rural areas find themselves, collaboration is often either taken for granted or has already been initiated. What needs to be promoted is awareness of what cooperation means and of the benefits it brings. Cooperation and networked thinking always challenge individuals and companies. However, if all parties involved accept the challenge and are willing to invest in one another, be it only with their time, then in the end the only possible outcome is for everyone to win. According to the rural consultants who are involved in the project, it is precisely here that the work can begin. We need to keep reminding ourselves about the fact that everyone can actually only win when cooperation begins and that there are lots of connected advantages, and emphasize this again and again. Actually organising cooperation is a diverse and individual process that, in itself, is easy to manage. It is difficult to get started and inspire all actors to work together and to remember that, in the end, everyone can only win. When cooperation attempts have failed in the experience of the MADIE partners, then it was usually not due to the consulting or development process, but rather to the actors' lack of willingness to place general welfare before their own, thus enabling new growth, or to a lack in trust that was not successfully addressed in the first steps of the joint process. It is here that consultants have to invest the most energy: building up and constantly fostering trust among the participants, as well as pointing out opportunities for cooperation and making them visible.

Network action offers another big advantage. In order to further your own personal development, you need the courage

to leave your own comfort zone and dare to try something new. As a lone fighter, you need personality traits such as an appetite for risk, a robust psyche or a lot of experience to make headway into unknown territory. However, you need to leave the comfort zone in order to be successful in the long term as an active person on a farm or another rural initiative or enterprise. Only then does growth become possible. This is where cooperation comes in. In a community, even those who have too little experience or lack the appropriate personality traits can use the skills of their comrades-in-arms to venture into unknown territory and thus grow. When you have people who are willing to support you with their experience and their personality traits, you are more likely to dare to take that step forward. Ultimately, everyone benefits from this, because the growth of the individual always has a positive effect on everyone within the community.

A good example of this is the use of new marketing or sales options on the Internet. Not everyone is familiar with them, and some may even be sceptical about this new reality. However, if one or more people have already gained experience in the field and are able to clearly explain the opportunities that they make available and provide help in taking them, more people will dare to take that step and set up their initiative or enterprise on-line. This in turn increases the attractiveness of a region or cooperative, as customers or other target groups are offered a wider range of products and services.

One very serious issue is the situation of young people in rural areas. In order to be able to stay, they need jobs. Depending on the level of qualification, work is often either not available or requires becoming self-employed. Entrepreneurship offers great opportunities here, especially in the situation that is described in this book. Rural development is often linked to self-employment and entrepreneurship. Therefore, a separate chapter is dedicated to the topic. However, starting out in the business world, especially for young people, does not require

only knowledge, but also courage and appropriate support structures. In terms of connecting to the global connectivity trend, using the Internet to network with other like-minded people comes into play here. The PRESET project (www.presetplatform.org) is an example of precisely this. The on-line learning platform offers people from all over the world the opportunity to network their knowledge and make getting an initiative, a new job or a business started easier. The idea is that there is always at least one person in the emerging community who can answer or help if you don't know how to face a challenge. The experience of the PRESET project has shown that often simply the knowledge that someone can help in an emergency gets people moving. If we want to encourage young people in rural areas to become active, then the development of a group with as many people as possible acting in a network is a strong tool. The Rethinking Village presented here in turn links up with other clusters, or rather the actors involved link up to it.

Global networking complements and significantly expands the local community, and with it the room for action in your own environment.

The Rural Academy

The whole world is talking about digitization and is trying to prepare for it in some way. Rural areas cannot escape this trend. In order not to miss its developments and to play off its strengths, forms of communication, business models and all other areas relevant to society need to be rethought and actively redesigned using the Internet and new media. To achieve this, and to try and keep abreast of the connectivity trend and get into the global community, rural areas, especially,

need fast Internet access even more desperately than urban regions. In metropolitan areas, you have any number of necessary or desirable services, cultural programmes and basic infrastructure, all within easy reach, even if you are lacking an Internet connection or only have a poor one. This applies, for example, to learning opportunities. Whereas you can easily take advantage of a large offer and attend courses in a city, this is much more complicated in the countryside. Due to the lack of population density, it is difficult to find enough people interested in a topic to be able to offer a wide range of courses. This is a widely known and much discussed issue.

From the very beginning, the goal of the MADIE project partners has been to provide an answer to this emergency. On the assumption that access to the Internet is widely available, the Rural Academy online learning and teaching platform was established; it is managed by active people for active people in rural areas. The main aim is to disseminate knowledge and experiences in rural development and thus foster local and international cooperation through exchange. The www.ruralacademy.org platform invites you to share your experience through a small video contribution, film or piece of literature/statement on the topic. The objective is to set up a platform where people who are active in rural development can provide answers to questions about rural development. The approach is above all audio-visual, as this is a strong form of communication in today's world. In addition to the short, regular podcasts by people sharing their experiences and knowledge, which are freely available, you will also find online seminars and training sessions for the members of the Rural Academy community which is in the making and will be accessible by providing a contribution. This will ensure the offer's high quality in the long term.

The educational mission and the exchange of good examples are among the main features of the recently launched platform. Soon, there will also be a marketplace for products and services

offered independently of location. In addition, the Co-Working Space will enable the exchange of ideas with other people and the creation of working groups on specific topics.

Regardless of its specific contents, the platform uses the new opportunities of the Internet to advance the basic idea of networking and cooperation.

The Good Consultant's Handbook from Norway

A new tool for the work of consultants and all those who are active in rural areas is the handbook by the Norwegian partner, the County Governor of Hordaland. The staff of this local political administration has succeeded in redefining cooperation in rural areas at the beginning of the millennium. With the concept of the Landscape Park, they created an organised form of cooperation that has set an example for many regions throughout the country. Based on this long-standing experience, the new handbook, entitled “Being Close to Good Helpers” was developed over the course of the MADIE project. It equips initiators and moderators with concrete tools to establish and lead cooperation processes. You can find it in the Rural Academy “Library” under www.ruralacademy.org. You can also browse through expert knowledge on topics such as entrepreneurship, moderation, behaviour, error management culture, etc., adapted to the specific context of rural development, and find a film in the Videos section of the online platform that shows the background of the landscape park idea.

The book provides crucial assistance in fostering networks, based on years of experience.

Closing Remarks

In the global trend of connectivity, where everything is becoming more and more interconnected, and with increasing numbers of people living in urban areas, the question of rural development is as relevant as ever. After decades of a downward spiral comprising emigration, devaluation and loss of perspective, the rediscovery of opportunities and quality of life in rural areas has gained momentum. With the opportunities that derive from networking local ideas with global trends and topics through the Internet, there is an opportunity to either foster or initiate a positive spiral. Based on the experience of this book and other educational products on the www.ruralacademy.org on-line platform, collaboration and cooperation are particularly important in this process. What ways they come up with to organise themselves, is up to the people who come together to shape the countryside. The diversity and joy of design which emerged over the two years working on the project are a sign of courage, and they stand for all the values that people can discover when they set out to explore and help shape life in the countryside. As an author, John Seymour has responded to the crisis in rural areas of his time with a radical concept of conscious self-sufficiency and separation from existing systems. For him, the goal is to add value to the production of food as an important element in the primary care of human beings. He has reminded us of lost knowledge regarding interconnectedness in agriculture and taught it to us. With today's possibilities, the current

actors can develop a new model and become the creators of an approach that reconciles modernity and tradition through communication, maybe for the first time in history. Local and quality production of food and other goods, and the offer of services and tourism can be combined with the international exchange of knowledge, experiences, visions and, of course, even material goods. In parallel to mega cities and mega clusters, another self-aware player is joining the global game: the collectively organized rural space.



Fylkesmannen i
Hordaland



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

[The content of this study does not reflect the official opinion
of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and
views expressed therein lies entirely with the authors.]

The Future of Rural Areas. Reviving the Countryside Together

Building up local networks affords the rural areas of Europe a great opportunity. When cooperation between diverse actors succeeds, a potential that is not available to individuals is unlocked. This book explores contexts in which cooperation can be experienced and ways to foster it. How have rural areas developed over time? What do positive models for their growth look like? What are their backgrounds? This handbook was developed from the experience of qualification programmes that were conducted as part of the MADIE project for consultants who work with people and initiatives in rural regions. MADIE stands for Multifunctional Agriculture as a

driver for Innovation in rural Europe, and it is supported by the European Union within the framework of the Erasmus+ project. Innovation through cooperation - this may sound obvious, but this principle is not firmly established in many European countries. This book, along with the complementary educational resources that are available at www.ruralacademy.org, provides background information and enables you to become active yourself. All the resources were created through European cooperation. International cooperation enriches local processes, and experience has shown that it promotes innovation.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union