

SURE Sustainability in Urban and Rural Europe

Report on Initial Seminar, Göteborg , Sweden, 23-24 November 2009

This two-day event was the first step in a project launched by the partners named above and part-funded by the EU programme 'Citizens for Europe'.

The aim of the project is **to connect citizens, organisations and policies to sustainability**. The objective of the Göteborg seminar was to establish the range of ideas to be addressed within the project. These are to be taken forward into a larger Conference, to be held in Krakow, Poland in May 2010.

The 17 participants at Göteborg, from 10 different European countries, represented a range of non-government organisations and of NGO networks – see list of participants at Annex.

Day 1

Karl-Erik Nilsson, Chairman of Hela Sverige skal Leva, described the aims and activities of this nationwide network of local action groups. It seeks to promote the good life everywhere in Sweden, with strong emphasis on democracy and on integration, diversity and localness in services and economies. Its priorities for 2010 include a focus on sustainable settlements and villages. It supports the Transition Sweden initiative, part of the rapidly growing Transition Network*. It is committed to cooperation between urban and rural interests, and plays an active part in European networks, through PREPARE*, ERA* and ERCA*.

* see descriptions later in this report.

Michael Dower (acting as Moderator in the absence through illness of Bernd Schuh of ÖIR) described the background to the project, namely the rising public and political concern with sustainability and climate change, coupled with the need for recovery and reflection after the current economic crisis. These issues are global in scale, demanding awareness and action both collectively and by individual citizens, in the spirit of Mahatma Ghandi's advice, "Be the change that you wish to see".

Michael commented that the last few years had seen rising awareness of two key points :

- growing pressure on the world's resources, with related issues of poverty, food security, energy security, climate change and sustainability
- the inter-dependence of rural and urban areas.

This awareness drives the CURE initiative – Convention for a Sustainable Urban and Rural Europe – jointly launched by some of the organisations represented at this seminar. The CURE team has been working closely with the EU's Regional Directorate General in a series of workshops focused on urban-rural linkages. It is supporting the SURE partners in the present project; and has also secured funding from *Fondation de France* for a project on Food Chains for Urban-Rural Sustainability, FOCUS, to be launched in early 2010.

The SURE project is founded on a simple but challenging idea. There is rising consensus among scientists that climate change is accelerating; is largely caused by emissions of carbon dioxide and 'green-house gases', resulting from human activity; and will have devastating consequences if not slowed down. This is what Al Gore has called 'An Inconvenient Truth'. To slow it down requires radical reduction in use of fossil fuels; capture and sequestration of carbon on a massive scale; and reduced deforestation. Politicians are coming round to the same realisation, and are striving to reach consensus on global action. But politicians cannot move faster than people will let them, notably in democratic countries. There is no public consensus on the need for drastic action. Citizens generally do not realise that they, by their life-choices (as householders, consumers, travelers etc) contribute to the over-use of the world's resources and to the emissions that cause climate change. Even those who do realise this may find it hard to understand how they can themselves contribute to the solution, how they can "Be the change". Organisations also, both public and private, may not grasp that they need to change their practices, and how this can be done.

In this circumstance, how do we **connect citizens and organisations to sustainability** ? That is the simple but challenging idea. To address it, the seminar will address five key themes :

1. The nature of the sustainability challenge
2. The ways in which people and organisations can be connected to that challenge
3. Examples of good practice in this field
4. Ways in which good practice can be mainstreamed
5. The implications that this may have for changes in the policy context.

Day 1 would focus on the first two themes. Day 2 would open up the other themes, which will then be more fully explored at the Conference in Krakow.

The nature of the sustainability challenge

This theme was addressed first through a whole-group discussion, which pointed towards the following key elements in the sustainability challenge (* these items attracted the most votes as meriting further discussion).

The problem

- Population growth and rising aspirations, which together cause continuing rapid rise in pressure on the world's resources
- Poverty, and the acknowledged need to tackle it on a global scale
- * Food security
- * Energy issues, reliance on fossil fuels, the prospect of Peak Oil, carbon emissions and their impact on climate change
- * Urbanisation, and how it detaches people from direct access to land-based resources; spatial planning and settlement patterns; urban-rural linkages; the resilience of metropolitan areas, and the resilience of rural areas.
- * The 'growth' paradigm, and how it drives the accelerated consumption of resources, already on a 'two-planet' basis
- * The power of commerce, with world-scale companies (more powerful than some nations) controlling the major resources and dominating the supply chains of food, fuel, minerals, forestry products etc

- The pattern of governance, with nearly 200 nations, sectoral administrations, short-term politics, corruption etc
- * Low levels of public awareness of what sustainability means, and how far we fall short of it; plus denial of the problem and lack of imagination about the future.

Elements of a solution

- The need for urgent, radical, worldwide change
- Personal responsibility, and ‘small, concrete steps’
- Focus on quality of life, as well as standard of living
- * Traditions regained ; skills regained and relearned; diversity recognised
- Access to land, for allotments, dachas etc
- * Local food production, encouraged by public procurement policies
- * Help to subsistence farmers to remain in place and to diversify their incomes
- Bottom-up approach, localisation and innovation
- Tackle poverty
- * Pursue managed change, recognising the psychology of change, addressing denial, using media and education, ‘getting to the heart’
- * Find and spread good practice
- * Understand, and find ways to cut through, the sectoral divides in policy and administration
- * Use the Internet and IT intelligently to serve all sectors, to make services more effective, to reduce the need for travel.

This discussion led us to recognise ‘**An Uncomfortable Reality**’ to set alongside Al Gore’s ‘Inconvenient Truth’. This Reality is that people, and the commerce that serves them, are driven, worldwide, by the aspiration to consume, to raise incomes while seeking cheap prices, to improve living standards, to seek the benefits visibly enjoyed by the rich and famous. These aspirations provoke migration between countries; and they reinforce, rather than reducing, economic disparities between nations, regions and classes. Governments tend to support this popular aspiration, reflecting this in commitment to growth and competitiveness, rather than to resilience and viability. The focus is on GDP, rather than gross domestic happiness. Capitalism, or its communist equivalent, tends to focus on internal profit, and to disregard externalities such as impact on the world’s resources or on climate change. The consequence is denial of these external impacts, and a collective psychology which is essentially unsustainable.

The true challenge is to address this Uncomfortable Reality at the same time as the Inconvenient Truth.

We agreed to use, in the first place, three key entry-points – food; energy and transport; settlement patterns and urban-rural relations – in analysing the challenge of change. A fourth entry-point, telecommunications, was left over to Day 2.

Connecting people and organisations to the challenge of sustainability

This second theme consumed the rest of Day 1. First, three Working Groups used the entry-points mentioned above – food; energy and transport; settlement patterns and urban-rural relation – to discuss how to connect with citizens and organisations in the cause of sustainability. Their report-back pointed to the following key ideas :

Food

- The aim must be to provide adequate healthy food for all, in Europe and throughout the world, in a sustainable way, with long-term security. There is currently gross inequality in food supplies, crudely as between North and South.
- The 'sustainable way' implies minimum damage to biodiversity; use wherever possible of renewable resources; minimal use of fossil fuels; control of emissions of carbon and greenhouse gases. But further debate is needed about what sustainable food implies, and how that should be translated into policy at European and other levels. This will affect CAP reform, the future of the EAFRD (notably Axis 2), the Fisheries Policy and WTO.
- A higher degree than now of local and national self-sufficiency in food supplies, in order to reduce 'food miles' ... while recognising that regions around the world differ in their physical ability to be self-sufficient, and that exporting food can assist Third World countries to tackle gross poverty.
- Europe is generally favoured in climate and fertility etc, but it imports and exports food on a very large scale and it lacks a clear policy for partial self-sufficiency at the level of farms, villages, sub-regions, nations or the whole EU.
- Preoccupation with the Common Market and with the Lisbon 'competitiveness' agenda appears to blind European politicians to the value of the multiplicity of local markets and local food chains and to the high value (in local food production and sustainable land management) of the millions of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms.
- Systems of food production, processing and distribution are increasingly managed by multi-national companies or commercial networks. Their behaviour has massive influence, for good or ill, upon the sustainability of food systems. They can bring cheap food to the masses, this alleviating 'food poverty' among consumers. But they tend to operate in a buyer's market, to the serious disadvantage of producers; and their own operations can be grossly unsustainable, for example where they clear rain forest to grow soya or palm oil.
- Governments can use laws, regulations or incentives to promote sustainability in systems of food production, processing and distribution. For example, they can impose compliance with environmental standards; offer payments to farmers for producing environmental 'public goods'; support moves towards organic farming; encourage healthier eating among consumers. These signals can greatly influence how producers or consumers behave, but are subject to the risk of becoming 'green fascism'.
- There is clear evidence of growing demand, particularly among wealthier and better educated people, for healthy, sustainably produced food. Such food tends to be more expensive, and poorer people can ill afford it.
- Those public organisations which feed people, e.g. schools, hospitals, care homes, defence establishments, may be well placed to use their public procurement to support local and sustainable suppliers and to raise awareness among their consumers of the impact of the food that they eat : this is one objective of the FOCUS project.

Energy and transport

- Supply of reliable energy at reasonable prices is crucial to everyday life. The restrictive practices of energy companies may have to be addressed by the EU and governments. Control of energy supplies by hostile or volatile governments is a concern.
- The world has passed the point of 'Peak Oil', so that the rate of consumption of oil exceeds the discovery and viable exploitation of new suppliers of oil. This provides a

- rising incentive to explore alternative sources of energy, though the strength of that incentive depend significantly on oil prices.
- Rising price of oil will affect developing countries most severely, adding to food prices and causing hunger and potential strife. These countries may be those least able to find alternatives : this underlines the need for global action.
 - If carbon emissions are to be cut, then either carbon from fossil-fuel use must be captured (still an unproven technology) or alternatives to fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) must be found ... or both of these.
 - Alternatives include nuclear, which is expensive, short-life, dependent on uranium supplies, and subject to serious and unsolved problems of disposal of toxic wastes; bio-fuels, increasingly used but already in severe competition with food production and also with the need to protect forests; wind power, also increasingly used but volatile; hydro-electricity, very significant in mountainous countries; wave power, still being developed; hydrogen, still being developed; solar energy, increasingly used and one of the few techniques that can be directly applied by many householders or small businesses; and wood or other biomass, which offers real potential if managed in a genuinely renewable way.
 - In this context, there should be strong emphasis on energy conservation, include retrofitting of existing building stock, high standards in new building stock, and use of energy -efficient equipment, vehicles etc : this may be encouraged through incentives, building regulations, emphasis on cost-saving
 - Promotion of localness in social and economic activity could reduce the need to travel or to transport goods and services. On the other hand, some forms of centralised distribution can reduce the energy used in transport.

Urban-rural relations

- In the Czech Republic, people are deserting the centres of towns and cities. Suburban settlements are growing. Soil from villages is being sold to development companies. So, the growth of cities is leading to loss of the social character of the villages.
- In Bulgaria, there is movement, especially of young people, from the countryside into cities, and into other countries. This has a great impact on the areas left : they lose social vitality, have an ageing population, and suffer the closure of schools, hospitals, and shops. The landscape, and the natural and cultural heritage, suffer through the decline of farming and the loss of people. On the other hand, the in-migration causes crowding, poor housing, traffic problems, increased pollution and ill-health, and lower quality of education in the cities.
- From Romania, people are migrating to the UK, Italy, and Spain. They send money back, but also build houses of unsuitable design (the 'Dallas' inspiration). Many Bulgarians migrate to Spain, and to Greece and USA. Bulgarian Turks are arriving in fairly big numbers in Belgium, joining others of the same nationality. However, the current crisis in the Western construction sector is prompting some migrants to go home : as they often lack up-to-date skills, many go into the countryside where they can live with their parents. The process is thus disruptive in both directions
- Turkey has seen massive migration from rural areas into Istanbul and other cities during the last thirty years. Strong links are often retained between the migrants and their villages of origin : for example, some social groups in Istanbul receive weekly deliveries of food from their native villages.

- In Romania, there are 3 million subsistence or semi subsistence farms, and in Bulgaria about 800,000. They are the grey economy – feeding themselves and their neighbours (by barter) and sending food to relatives in the city. They are invisible to the taxman and civil servants working the Rural Development programmes, so little help comes from these. They may be officially under the poverty line, but actually not doing too badly, and maintaining traditional landscapes and buildings. But when residents get too old there are no young people to replace them. There is need for an integrated approach to rural development in these areas, in order to sustain the communities and to diversify the local economies.
- Regarding the Roma minority, there are many different groups. Some live on the edge of cities in very concentrated groups. Others move around or live in villages which are not their own, this having an inherited culture which they do not respect. In Turkey, about 10,000 Roma settlers, who had been in poor housing on the edge of Istanbul, are now being thrown out as property values increase, and will be sent to new housing stock far from the city with no transport or facilities or services.
- Old member States also have problems, principally with urban sprawl. Large peri-urban areas are being developed for commerce and other uses, sometimes encroaching (through a change in the regulations) upon protected natural areas. This is also a problem in Czech Republic and Bulgaria.
- **What is to be done?** A good idea could be to create more green cities, perhaps using brownfield sites. It might be possible to make settlements more sustainable by interlinking the natural areas using a landscape or green framework.
- There is need for more community participation in the planning and management of settlements. As there is greater anonymity in cities, interest-based groups – such as football clubs, churches, cooking groups, ethnic minorities – might assist in the building consensus and taking initiatives.
- More thinking is needed about the value of compact cities – they may minimise the use of land, but do they offer a better quality of life? High or low density housing, which is better? Should mixed land use be encouraged, so that people can shop, work and relax near to their homes? Could a better community atmosphere be created in cities by encouraging neighbourhood activities and groups, so that people think and work together, for example on allotments and landscaping?
- In rural areas, can NGOs take the lead in strengthening rural communities and diversifying the economy? This is happening in Romania and Bulgaria. For example, in Transylvania, ADEPT is helping small farmers to sell their products in local towns and in Bucharest, to add value to farm products, to gain agri- environment payments for their traditional husbandry, to promote the local heritage and to develop rural tourism, which in turn increases the awareness of local people that their heritage is worth conserving.
- In South Bulgaria, the Turkish minority are involved in similar projects, working with UNDP. An example is diversification of crops - they formerly lived on tobacco growing until prices fell, it was seen as bad for health and took a lot of manual labour : now fruit and potatoes are replacing tobacco.
- In the Czech Republic there are local projects, which could be good models, supporting local food brands of cheese, bread, honey, wine, spirits, potatoes and grapes.
- Is major tourism development sustainable? No, because it is dependent on outsiders and their money and on decision-makers in other countries. It is a volatile industry, open to threats from terrorism, disease or recession. It may depend on unsustainable air travel. It

can have a damaging impact on the landscape, for example in the Bulgarian mountains. Even tourism based on heritage can lead to fake heritage or “Disneyfication”.

Transition Towns

Stephen Hinton offered an explanation of the Transition Towns movement, and the initiative that is being taken in Sweden. Its starting-point is the idea of Peak Oil. Globally, we have already used up half of the 3 trillion barrels of oil that have been discovered. Oil production per head of population peaked in 1979. “We must leave it before it leaves us”. Transition is needed from a world dependent on oil to one which is not – a major challenge when you realise that one litre of oil provides the same energy as 175 person-weeks of labour. That transition is unlikely to be led by governments or by corporations : it has to be led by people, working together at local level.

The Transition Town movement started at Kinsale in Ireland, and is led from Totnes in Devon, England. In character, the movement is viral, open-sourced, self-organising, solution-focused, sensitive to place and scale and the diversity of places, learning from its mistakes, joyful.

Transition Sweden has 550 members, including Hela Sverige skal Leva, LEADER groups, small farmers, nature conservation groups and others. It has 20 active groups, focused on themes or on localities such as Transition Uppsala. From its experience to date, Stephen offered ideas for a process in creating a Transition initiative. This process might include :

- create a Website
- set up a Steering Group
- raise awareness, for example of Peak Oil and what people can do about it
- lay a foundation by talking to others, finding existing local initiatives, bringing them in, cooperating
- celebrate, to show that you are active (in Totnes, this took the form of planting walnut trees in many parts of the town)
- create working groups
- use open spaces creatively
- promote reskilling, for example in natural building methods such as clay or wood
- build good relations with local authorities
- honour older people and their knowledge
- “let it go where it wants to go”
- create a local ‘energy descent’ plan.

Stephen urged that a strong link be made between CURE and the Transition Towns Network. Many different interest groups should be brought together into a more powerful voice. The Transition Training Company offers training in transition techniques, which could be helpful to other organizations.

Day 2

Day 2 started with a set of three Working Groups, focused on

- (1) The uncomfortable reality
- (2) Connecting with the inconvenient truth
- (3) Internet, modern communications and technology

Their report-back pointed to the following key ideas :

The uncomfortable reality

Stephen Hinton, reporting back for the group, suggested that we may need to tackle this issue in the way that a Company CEO would address what is going wrong in his company. This is a bit like peeling off the skins of an onion. First one can assess what is going wrong, then analyse the behavior which has caused it, then look at the rules which prompted or allowed that behaviour, then (in turn) examine the system underlying the rules, the infrastructure and finally the ideas and values which are the 'hidden drivers'. These ideas and values are the underlying paradigm which may need to be turned round. The question is, can 'Europe Ltd' pursue this process in addressing the formidable paradigm which is the 'uncomfortable reality'. A major difficulty in doing so is the lack of effective, measurable connection between the different elements in the socio-cultural-political system – information, research, education, rules of ownership such as limited liability, media, advertising, life-styles. It might be possible to find keystones to 'unlock' the structure, such as television, work, policy, home and garden, or school.

Connecting with the inconvenient truth

Participants offered a variety of ideas for how people and organisations can connect with the inconvenient truth of man-made climate change. These include :

- Use our own competence and background
- Learn from the Transition movement
- Adopt change management techniques
- Build on existing organizations and networks, such as village action groups, LEADER groups, national rural movements : where such organisations are already recognised and trusted by local communities, they may be better suited than a brand-new organization to introduce new ideas
- Encourage creation of village action groups or similar bodies where they do not now exist
- Work on sustainability issues at local level, building (where appropriate) on the earlier activity under Local agenda 21
- Promote participatory planning of settlements, through which residents can shape the way that they can become collectively more sustainable
- Use Information technology, whereby householders or businesses can find easy access to advice about energy-saving equipment, sustainable products etc
- Promote widespread use of energy meters and carbon meters
- Analyse what fields of expertise we need, and how to bring them together. The fields may include awareness-raising; change management; mobilization of communities; community development; education and training; lobbying for policy change; technical expertise, for example in IT, and cross-sectoral links.
- Find the necessary finance
- Identify and (as appropriate) involve stakeholders at different levels – individuals, community groups, NGOs, interest groups and networks, businesses, media, local and regional authorities, national governments, the EU and even global bodies such as UN, FAO, OECD etc
- Disseminate good practice, with urban-rural exchanges and international comparison and lively uses of information technology

- Raise awareness, through local campaigning, education, lifelong learning, use of films such ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ or ‘The Age of Stupid’ ... in the belief that awareness will lead to understanding, and so to acceptance of responsibility and behavioural change
- Find and liberate the leaders, or ‘fiery spirits’, at local and higher levels, who can inspire change
- Create or extend cooperative structures, in order to engage people and to create stronger buying power.
- Use ‘signals’ from government – laws, enforcement, tax, subsidy - to provoke change, as has been done to reduce smoking or drink-driving in some countries, while recognising that this will only work if the majority of people understand the need and if the rights of minorities are respected
- Support EU initiatives, such as the Energy Directive, aimed at increasing insulation of buildings and stimulating production of renewable energy.

Information technology

The report-back included the following ideas :

- IT is already being used in many fields, including control, public administration, education, health, commerce, industry, teleworking, banking, personal exchanges (blogs, facebook, entertainment of all kinds); and its scope is constantly expanding
- In terms of sustainability, IT can reduce the need to travel, increase the speed of communication, improve efficiency in many fields of production or commerce, assist conservation of energy, reduce waste of paper and produce other benefits.
- There are dangers in reliance on IT, for example fraud, false information, viruses etc. Moreover it can accentuate the disadvantages of more remote regions, which are difficult to serve with broadband or even with basic telephone services. A key principle should be equality of access.

Good Practice

We did not have time for a full session on good practice. The earlier report-back from working groups points towards interesting initiatives in many countries. In addition, the following examples were offered :

- Settlements aiming at self-sufficiency in energy supplies include Kantzen and Güssing in Austria; Hostetin in Czech Republic; a suburb in Slovakia, with 10,000 population served by biogas; the towns of Kolding and Samsø in Denmark
- An organic gas power plant in Hungary, created by communes with help from a University
- The community company which produces wind power and biogas in the island of Pellworm, north-west Germany - one example from the good practice database that is being gathered by Forum Synergies.
- The ADEPT initiative with small-farming communities in Transylvania, Romania
- In England, the production by many rural communities of village design statements or parish plans, which express their collective aspirations for the future.

Mainstreaming of good practice

We had a short discussion on mainstreaming of good practice.

Stephen Hinton said that mainstreaming is not the right concept for the Transition Towns movement, because their processes are not prescriptive : they act by seeking consensus. However, the Transition network in the UK is making a Best Practice database, so information could be disseminated through this, using the “hub” idea – supporting each other.

It was suggested that “mainstreaming” could be a damaging idea, because it can lead to a loss of focus. Once something is centrally accepted, it tends to lose innovation and to be taken over by bureaucracy. To mainstream in a creative way, governments and the EU must put their houses in order first. Governments do learn, but it takes time and example from front runners.

The aim should be to move from Good Practice to common practice. This has been the mode of Local Agenda 21, and is widely used by environmental NGOs

The experience of mainstreaming LEADER is not encouraging, in that some governments are marginalising LEADER or giving the LAGs a very narrow brief and tight controls. Nevertheless, the Evora Conferece on mainstreaming of LEADER may offer useful ideas, and there is certainly a wealth of good ideas in LEADER’s past and present activity. The ENRD Contact Point, as successor to the LEADER Observatory, is building a database of good practice.

Forum Synergies also is creating a database of good practice, funded by the *Fondation pour le Progrès de l’Homme*.

Networks

Five participants spoke about the European networks that they represent.

European Rural Alliance (ERA). Jela Tvrdonova described the creation, through meetings in Sweden in 2005 and in Finland in 2006, of the ERA, which is conceived as a platform, rather than a network. It brings together individual NGOs, or groupings of them, into a forum for discussion, policy formulation and lobbying. It is intended to be voice of rural interests, complementary to the two longer-established groupings of farmers and of environmental NGOs. The farmers tend to focus on CAP and Axis 1 of Pillar 2 : the environmental bodies tend to focus on Axis 2 : ERA is concerned with the whole of the EARDF, and the well-being of rural communities and economies generally. It has no base funding, but operates through projects : one of these, with 60,000 euros from the EU’s Citizens for Europe programme, is focused on village-level meetings in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania. ERA will hold a general meeting in Prague in mid-December.

European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA). Vanessa Halhead said that ERCA is a grouping of national rural movements of the kind which were described in the report “European Rural Movements” which she wrote and which was published in edited form by PREPARE in 2005. ERCA’s membership is closely related to, but not the same as, that of ERA. ERCA’s aim is to share experience among the members, and to work on policy issues.

European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST). Pam Moore and Phil Turner spoke about the work of ECOVAST, which was founded in 1984 to promote the well-being of the people and the heritage of rural Europe. It has members in most of the EU countries and some further afield, and formal national sections in 10 countries. Most relevant to

the present seminar is its ASSET programme, Action to Strengthen Small European Towns. Small towns occupy a ‘policy gap’ in EU terms, being the focus of neither the rural nor the regional development programmes. ECOVAST is gathering systematic evidence throughout Europe about the nature of small towns and the challenges that they face. The 18 national responses so far received, plus case studies, show great variety, and confirm that small towns can be an entry-point to the promotion of sustainability, provided that they can be brought effectively to the attention of policy-makers.

PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe. Goran Šoster described PREPARE, which was created in 1999 as a partnership between two European organisations – Forum Synergies, and ECOVAST – and three existing national rural movements from Sweden (Hela Sverige skal Leva), Estonia and Hungary. Its aim is to strengthen civil society in rural areas, notably in new EU member states or accession countries, and to promote exchange in rural development. Since its formation, it has helped people in 7 further countries – Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia - to set up national rural movements, and these bodies have joined the partnership. It organises annual Gatherings, each time in a different country, typically attended by about 80 people from 20 countries. It is funded by grants from the C S Mott Foundation and other sources.

European Evaluation Network Jela Tvrdonova described this formal network, set up and funded by the European Commission, of which the job is to carry out formal evaluations of the Rural Development Programmes of EU member states. Among other projects, she and Bernd Schuh of ÖIR are currently preparing impact indicators related to some of the ‘new RDP challenges’ stated last year by the European Commission, namely climate change, bio-diversity and water quality.

Implications for policy

Time did not permit long discussion on this.

We recognised that **governments** (at all levels) can play a key role in leadership and in using signals of all kinds – public information, laws, enforcement, taxes, subsidies, research etc – to move people towards behavioural change and sustainability. This will only work if the majority of people understand the need, and if the rights of minorities are respected : for example, the imposition of higher petrol taxation in France caused rural dwellers to fight against it, as they saw it as discriminatory. Example of intervention include :

- landfill taxes to provoke more recycling
- increasingly rigorous building standards to ensure high levels of insulation, encourage use and generation of renewable energy, and move towards carbon neutrality
- requirements that a proportion of transport fuel be from renewable resources (the dangers of this being noted)
- the introduction of trading in carbon emissions (the dangers of this being noted)
- subsidies to encourage action to mitigate climate change, for example within agriculture and forestry programmes
- the recent EU Directive on Energy efficiency in the housing sector making more projects eligible for funding - insulation, renewable energy etc - with a budget for post 2013 : from 2020 all new construction must be emission free. .

Industry and commerce can also take a lead in the drive towards sustainability, on their own initiative or if driven by government rules or consumer demand. Examples are the Sustainable Forests regime, the offer of 'green' energy, the increasing (though still modest) use of local food producers by super-market firms.

Citizens can make their presence felt in the drive towards sustainability, through what they buy, what they throw away, how they travel, how they insulate and heat their homes, how they respond to signals and offers for government and commerce etc.

In the above senses, the drive towards sustainability can be seen as either a **vicious or a virtuous circle**, linking citizens, industry and commerce, and government.

- in a vicious circle, citizens are supine, do not respond to offers from industry and commerce, resist intervention in their behavior by governments; or governments and industry are inactive, so that movement is slow
- in a virtuous circle, citizens are assertive, governments take a lead, industry is inventive, citizens respond to signals from other actors, and movement is faster.

Where does **civil society** fit into this ? Its job is to oil the wheel, to prompt movement at each point in the circle. It works with citizens to raise their awareness, articulate their concerns, provide information etc. It addresses government on behalf of citizens. It encourages or pushes industry or commerce into more sustainable approaches. It can also act directly, through animating communal or cooperative action, managing land, raising funds etc.

Concluding session

In the final session of the seminar, participants offered ideas that could be taken forward to the Conference in Krakow.

Laura Vanhué focused on the idea of urban-rural linkages. Both urban and rural areas are affected by the 'uncomfortable reality'. They share some priorities. They may have physical links, such as public transport systems or urban sprawl, or social links such as migration of people from one to the other. We must reflect these links in the SURE project. This implies bringing in the urban and rural interests, both within civil society (for example to campaign against urban sprawl, which can damage biodiversity and cause unsustainable travel patterns) and in the EU family. DG Agri, DG Regio, DG Transport and DG Energy should be involved, together with Green MEPs. We should build on the series of workshops on urban-rural linkages organised, with CURE's help, by DG Regio.

Michael Dower agreed that some urban-rural linkages have serious implications for sustainability. For example, migration into cities can weaken rural communities and cause congestion in the city, while migration outwards from cities can use precious farmland and put low-income rural people at a disadvantage in the housing market. Urban and rural interests must be equally represented at Krakow.

Michael noted that the division of responsibilities between DGs in Brussels, or between Ministries in member states, often impedes sustainable solutions. The divisions in the EU may be made worse, rather than better, in the new Commission. Mr Barraso proposes creation of a DG for Climate Change, removing that issue from DG Environment

Vanessa Halhead was concerned about the continuing lack of a rural voice : there was still no strong mechanism for presenting this to Brussels. Michael responded that the DG Agri Rural Development Advisory Group, under its new Chairman, appeared to meet this need, as did the grouping of NGOs at the Council of Europe. Also CURE, ELARD, ECOVAST, Forum Synergies, RED, Eurogites and PREPARE had all been represented at recent seminars on urban-rural linkages organised by DG Regio. He suggested that ERA and ERCA need to become more visible, if they are to be included in the agricultural and territorial debates.

Phil Turner suggested that whilst ERA and ERCA were getting stronger they could ask others, such as ECOVAST, to speak for them at the DG Agri Advisory Group. He mentioned that ESPON has three programmes looking at rural regions. They are:

EDORA - European Development Opportunities for Rural Areas

PURR - Potential of Rural Regions/PURR and

TransSMEC - Transnational Support Method for European Cooperation

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2483>>.

There is also a research programme on ESPON CLIMATE - Climate Change and Territorial Effects on Regions and Local Economies in Europe

http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/website/content/programme/1455/2233/2236/2567/index_EN.html

Preparations for the Krakow event

It was agreed that participants in Krakow should be drawn from rural NGOs, urban NGOS, environmental bodies such as Greenpeace and WWF, those who are focused on sustainability such as IFOAM, the Transition Towns Network, national and regional governments, local authorities or their associations such as CPMR, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), relevant DGs at the European Commission (such as Regions, Transport, possibly Education, and the expected new DG for Climate Change), members of the Agriculture and Regional Committees of the European Parliament. We need to search for a common language among the different types of NGO, and to take advantage of the strong lobbying ability of the environmental NGOs.

Michael Dower outlined the next steps.

1. Report from Göteborg. Michael would prepare the first draft and circulate to the organising group for comment.
2. List of potential invitees. Michael will circulate this with the report : this will then become the lead partner's responsibility.
3. Meanwhile, the Polish Rural Forum, as hosts for the conference, will check dates with the Agricultural University where the event will be held.

SURE report on Goteborg seminar

Websites

CURE www.cureforsustainability.eu

ECOVAST www.ecovast.org

Forum Synergies www.forum-synergies.eu

ICLEI www.localsustainability.eu

PREPARE www.preparenetwork.org

Transition Towns www.transitiontowns.org

ERA www.europeanrural.eu