**C O N C E P T**

**Compass for Local Empowerment** (22-05-2022)

Across the European Union, the population in rural areas is on average older than in urban areas. Population numbers will slowly decline over the next ten years. Combined with poor connectivity, underdeveloped infrastructure, a lack of diverse employment opportunities and limited access to services, this trend makes rural areas less attractive to live and work in. At the same time, rural areas also play an active role in the EU's green, digital and social transition. This offers opportunities for the sustainable development of rural areas. With the publication of **the Long-term vision for the rural areas** on 30 June 2021, the European Commission is taking a further step towards broadening rural policy. Preserving a vital countryside has been identified as one of the priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2021-2027. The model is based on place-based development, in which the efforts of residents are seen as the most important driver and the realization of one's own local identity as a guideline for action. The long-term vision is accompanied by a Rural Action Plan. Drawing up a Rural Pact is part of that Action Plan. On May 31, 2022, the SBE held a Dutch-German symposium on Powerful Villages/Local Empowerment. The results of this symposium are summarized in this Compass. In doing so, the SBE wants to contribute to the Rural Pact aimed at improving the quality of life and economic growth in rural areas.

The Rural Action Plan focuses on four action areas. Rural areas need to become Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous:

1. **Stronger**: Emphasis is placed on empowerment of rural communities, better access to services and social innovation; Rural areas should be home to empowered and **vibrant local communities**. Enabling all individuals to take active part in policy and decision-making processes, involving a broad range of stakeholders and networks as well as all levels of governance is key to developing tailor-made, place-based and integrated policy solutions and investments.
2. **Connected**: better connectivity, both in transport and digital access
3. **Resilient**: preserving natural resources and greening agricultural activities to combat climate change, while ensuring social resilience by providing access to training courses and diverse quality jobs;
4. **Prosperous**: diversify economic activities and improve the added value of agriculture, agri-food activities and agritourism

The focus of the SBE symposium - and with it that of this Compass - is mainly on action area A. **Stronger;** including empowerment of rural communities, better access to services and more social innovation. During the symposium, residents, government and social and social partners discussed what is needed for Local Empowerment and the maintenance of local services and social innovation. We bring the collected proposals together in this Compass.

**The Rural Pact – strengthened governance for EU rural areas**

The Rural Pact will provide a common framework for the engagement and cooperation of a wide range of actors at the EU, **national, regional and local level.** It will contribute to increased synergies, complementarities and coherence between the EU, national, regional and territorial policies and interventions to achieve the objectives of the long-term Vision and respond to the common aspirations of rural communities. Sharing experiences and best practises in the development of strategies, action plans and concrete measures that have been taken will contribute to ensuring that all rural areas are stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous by 2040.

Many factors are important in the Rural Pact process, but what is definitely necessary is connecting the Rural Pact with the local communities. For that in this Compass we want to answer questions like:

Scotland launched in 2015 **the Community Empowerment Act** to help communities to do more for themselves and have more say in decisions that affect them.

It is a law that will help people do that. We also help by giving community groups money to make them stronger, and asking public bodies to make sure they listen to what communities want.

* How can we reach a successful local interplay, between residents, public authorities and local organizations/companies in shaping empowered and vibrant local communities?
* how can residents be empowered to become a full-fledged partner in this local interplay: Local Empowerment!

**Local Empowerment 🡪** **Empowered Communities**

Empowerment means people having power and control over their own lives, and people get the support they need. You can't empower someone else or make someone empowered. It is about ways of working and supporting people that means they can take control and responsibility for their own lives.

**Community empowerment** refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. It implies community ownership and action that explicitly aims at social and political change. People should be able to have their say in decisions that affect them. Involving people and communities in making decisions helps build community capacity and also helps the public sector identify local needs and priorities and target budgets more effectively. Community development considers community members to be experts in their lives and communities, and values community knowledge and wisdom. It is not determined from outside the community but grows/emerges from the affected community. Community empowerment has four elements: **inclusion and participation,** **access to information, capacity of local organizations and** **professionalism of empowering actors**.

An important tool for working on community empowerment is the **Village Pact**. The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced the Village Pact Community Planning as a process which helps public agencies to work together and with the community to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives. In the Netherlands, broad experience has been gained with Village Plans (Village Pact) in the past 20 years. In those 20 years we have seen a development in which initially much emphasis was placed on the role of government to ensure an adequate level of facilities to an increasingly stronger role for the community itself to shape quality of life in collaboration with the government and partners.

**Basic conditions for community empowerment in relation to the Rural Pact**

The reference to the Community Empowerment Act Scotland underlines the importance that citizen participation is regulated legally, including law/legal foundation, budget etc. That means needed support and policies like:

* formalised recognition, respect and (financial) support for value of bottom-up processes (right to challenge)
* alternatives for segmented and compartmentalized public and private funding (local revolving funds)
* incentives for goverments to reconsider their traditional position (training politicians and public servants in new roles, integrated development services)
* incentives for local integrated approach of sustainability (green deal)
* experiments for development of integrated regulations (free zones)

The Rural Pact could contribute to this by stimulating these basic conditions on the national and on the European level.

Initiating and sustaining local change processes depend to a great extent on non-political, independent local leaders. They are the real gamechangers. The important role of those gamechangers can be greatly enhanced by bringing them together in network-meetings to facilitate learning from each other. The Rural Pact could support these exchanges in cooperation with grassroot organisations like the European Rural Community Alliance.

To strengthen cooperation we must build new alliances by not only looking at the own organization and sector, but also looking for links with other organisations/institutions. Organizing cross connections like schools that partner with tech companies or farmers with childcare/care. These cross-connection also have to go beyond the village borders because local communities must be seen in connection with other communities and there region.

**Infographic**

The infographic onpage 4 brings together the elements of local empowerment/community empowerment discussed at the symposium. The Results of the cross border symposium Powerful Villages/Local Empowerment Mai 31 will integrated into the Infographic after May 31. At the symposium practical situations were discussed for 9 domains in the workshops of the Symposium Powerful Villages/Local Empowerment. The collected tips will be displayed per workshop.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workshop** | **Tips** |
| **1.1  The village hall keeps the village together.** |  |
| **1.2 Building sustainable villages together.** |  |
| **1.3 Village connectors: supporters of cooperation in and with the village.** |  |
| **1.4 Young people provide new energy.** |   |
| **1.5 We welcome newcomers.** |  |
| **2.1 Smart transport solutions.** |  |
| **2.2 How to facilitate sustainable collective initiatives.** |  |
| **2.3 A new destination for the empty church** |  |
| **2.4 We ourselves come up with a solution for the housing shortage.** |  |

**Infographic**

**Legal regulation, support and budget for community empowerment**

Control over our own lives

 Housing

Transportation services

How does the village organize itself? (Cooperatives..)

Community support organisations

Village connectors

Strong collective initiatives

Sustainable villages

Migrants

New function Church

Village Halls

Young people

**Model for Village Pact**

Developing a Village Pact can be based on the community capitals framework:



**.**