



Participatory rural planning

finding common ground in local communities

Participatory rural planning

The Mezőcsát micro region approached the environmental social scientists (www.essrg.org) to design and implement the micro regional rural development plan using interactive, participatory planning methodology.

This resulted in the biggest ever Hungarian rural development project built on public participation.

Rationale

The aim was to involve local citizens of the marginalized micro region in planning their future through a transparent procedure of future searches in nine village communities to explore common goals for community actions.

Objectives: from vision to action

- set aside old disagreements
- encourage new thinking and open mindedness
- create understanding about common desires for future development
- develop proposals which can gain wide and immediate support

Main phases

- **establishing common ground:** participants are asked to define their own stakes and roles in the topic
- **mapping state of the art:** participants map out problem areas, current trends and intentions in plenary discussions
- **visioning exercise:** diverse groups put themselves into the future and describe their preferred future. They create future scenarios in rural development
- **identifying common projects:** participants enlist action steps in close future to reach those visions
- **prepare action plans:** participants select proposal they want to continue to work with by agreeing on schedules, resources for the ideas local people want to support

Process and results

Local people from all walks of life being either resourceful (information and knowledge, expertise, authority and ability to act) or in need (marginal, least power to influence formal decisions) took part in the half day planning event with 20-30 participants working in groups of 5-8.

The group meetings usually focused on three or four micro regional tasks and initiated participants to transform their creative capabilities for short and long term actions.

The main result was the immediate activation of local resources and networking across various stakeholder groups as well as the socially grounded rural development plan of the micro region.

Active involvement in group work and understanding about common desires for the future development resulted in a social learning process.



Some tips how to prepare

- Carefully map existing rural development initiatives to build interchanges between researchers, technicians and the local population
- Previously assess local knowledge by extensive interviewing to identify problems of local development in advance
- Contribute to self-organising of local people through implementing a community-worker training
- Facilitate people's participation and empowerment: involve municipality leaders in planning, organise the mobilisation and transfer of local people, invite students and professors who are willing to work with community groups
- Promote shared responsibility and appropriate attitudes for participatory planning
 - Build capacity of community groups through professional trainings in topics identified by local people and facilitators (e.g. tourism, project management)

References

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