

FACTS

Democracy is at the heart of sustainable rural development

- **Tools for democracy.** The topic of **participation and civic engagement** is on the best way to become one of the most important democratic tools in order to influence policies in the future. On one hand, the on-going neglect of the people's longing for a sustainable development by some current policies is a multidimensional affront to human, social, cultural and environmental realities. On the other hand, more participation is enhanced by European and local institutions and bottom-up approaches are also raised by citizens empowering themselves.
- **Rich in experiences.** In many places of the world participation and civic engagement have already become reality. They have partially succeeded in influencing the political system or have at least reached a broader public, materialized in collective action. More organisations are focusing on governance processes, studying, accompanying and training on participative democracy, territorial dialogue, community-led development, self-management.

On a European level the work of the ARC during the last two years has shown quite impressively the importance of motivating, bringing together and consolidating civil society organizations in order to give them a voice to be heard.

Forum Synergies has tackled the topic of participation and civic engagement from its beginning as it is one of our main philosophic principles (-> link to FS website: About FS, Philosophy). Apart from that we have given special attention to that topic within our thematic exchanges, namely the Lake Project, Access to Land, Rural Actors for Health, Farmers Ecology.

• **Need for capacity building.** When we really want the voice of people longing for a sustainable future to become heard and respected also on a political level there are two major challenges to be faced: make people believe that they can have the power for change and enable them to build up constructive dialogues with other stakeholders.

CIVIC DIALOGUE

What Forum Synergies wants to focus on

- **Civic Dialogue.** A new concept of how to approach the broad topic of democracy. Our intention is to deal with the **topic of dialogue between different stakeholders** when it aims at:
 - influencing policies which have a strong impact on territories with regard to agriculture, food, environment and social cohesion
 - contributing to the solution of local or regional issues of sustainable rural development
- **Topics we will tackle:** We will start a call for proposals so that Forum Synergies members and partners will have the opportunity to express the topics they feel to be crucial. Our frame is **Europe in general**, our focus will be **mainly rural** and ideally persons/groups who have experience in leading or analysing civic dialogue.

• We will concentrate our work on the following topics:

- **democracy within societies, states, the EU** (*dialogue between citizens and authorities to build or influence public policies*)
- **civic engagement** (*cooperation between actors to build local projects ; territorial dialogue*)
- **dialogue and relationship building** (*environmental mediation; conflicts resolution in rural spaces*)

Explicitly we see the challenge to tackle the youth, to think about ways of how to include minorities, of how to promote democratic processes in times of crisis, how to respect different cultures or how we can shorten the distances between grassroots and European level.

VISIONS

What we want to learn / achieve

- **Gaining a deeper insight.** We want to learn from success stories in order to better understand the mechanisms which lead to successful civic engagement.
- **Capitalise the experience existing.** During the last years Forum Synergies thematic exchange programmes have addressed the topic of civic engagement, participation and democratic processes from different angles. We wish to bring together all

the lessons learned in order to create an added value on different levels from local to European.

- **Spreading.** Capacity building is one of the key-competences of Forum Synergies. In order to make more success stories happen our vision is to create a kind of snowball effect where civil society organisations continue to build a broad alliance in order to promote sustainable rural development.

ACTIONS

We planned and started the following actions, your contribution and collaboration is welcome at all levels. Share with us your main concerns and questions so that we can plan our activities most effectively!.

- **Inventory of organisations.** In order to create a broader link Forum Synergies **started building up an inventory of organizations** working in different parts of Europe on participation issues, on territorial dialogue or environmental mediation.
Do you have contacts to share related with participation and civic engagement topics?
- **Success stories: we selected 10 experiences to illustrate examples of processes** and practices of dialogue, initiated by citizens or public authorities, from local to European level, mainly in rural areas. It is an on-going process so:
Do you have experiences to promote?
- **Framework and Tools.** What are the main questions when you want to find how you can contribute or initiate a process whether in your local place or on a broader political level? Well, the questions will be manifold : how to start, whom to contact, which techniques to use, how to handle conflicts etc., etc. Forum Synergies started **gathering guidelines and tools** from which you can get inspired, taking into account the diversity of approaches and frameworks.
What happens in your region or country, how is it promoted and implemented?

- **Events.** We organised specific **workshops** (Wales 2015) on this topics, that also include **Capacity Building units**.

Do you have proposal to host a workshop or share specific knowledge during next workshop? (foreseen in Spring 2016).

- **Hot topics.** Which are the topics that concern you most? We have identified some but are opened to your suggestions: involvement of youth, participation of minorities, self-management, links between representative democracy and participative democracy etc...

Is there any key topic around which you would like to focus on?



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