

## Forum Synergies Roots & History

### ■ Sustainable development – not just a whole phrase but a lively experience!

The Forum Synergies network was founded 1995 as "European network of experiences in sustainable development" by 35 organisations from 16 European countries.

The main goal was to explore and illustrate practical ways of achieving "sustainable development", a term which at that time had started to become 'en vogue' in the political scene but was little understood in practical terms.

*«Come along...! Join us and take part in a touring exhibition where rural initiatives present their experiences in environmentally beneficial farming, combining integrated conservation with new job and income opportunities, and social and cultural activities.»*

In 1998, through this message, we invited people to join our "voyage of discovery, touring exhibition and travelling forum". The itinerary of this Sustainable Mystery Tour included 10 stops from Estonia to Portugal, in some of the most rural places in Europe to the European Parliament in Brussels.

### ■ Becoming legal"...and gathering experiences

Following this travelling exhibition, which is still well remembered today, Forum Synergies was founded as a legal organisation according to Belgium law in 1999.

In the following years we organised European gatherings in Estonia, Sardinia and Northern Italy, actively contributed our experiences to European policy debates and helped establish related networks such as PREPARE, for the pre-accession countries and CURE, for urban-rural relations.

Up to now, the central activity and strength of our network has been the exchange of practical experiences of (mostly rural) sustainable development for mutual benefit and the discussion of the main findings with policy makers.

### ■ Highlight on some of our activities 1995 -2016

- **Organisation of "Sustainable Mystery Tour"** in 1998, a traveling workshop across Europe for better farming and rural development policies.
- **Organisation of a conference on Agricultural and Rural policies in 2002**
- **Co-initiation of ARC2020** (Agricultural and Rural Convention) which has gathered a broad alliance of European stakeholders pressing for a genuine paradigm change in agriculture and rural policies in 2010

- **European Rural Sustainable Gathering (ERSG)** in Gordhe (DE - 2009), Vouneuil/Vienne (FR - 2010), Torino (Italy - 2012), Beaufortain (FR -2014), Plastira Lake (GR 2017)
- **Messages from the countryside** (SMT2012 reloaded)
- **Lifeshop** in St Michel l'Observatoire (2011), Moldova (2015), Ukraine (2016)
- **Rural Reality Check** during Estonian Rural Parliament (2013)
- **Conference “Local Food matters!”** (2014)
- **Youth programme:** Scholarships for young people in rural areas (2014), Rural Youth and Young Farmers Workshop (2015)
- **Thematic exchanges, workshops with field trips:** Farmers Ecology (2012), Herb Gathering (2012), Forestry (2016), Sustainable Development in Lakes (2009-2011)
- **Civic dialogue programme** to promote participatory democratic initiatives : workshop in Wales (2015), Poland (2016), Compilation of Ten examples of processes and practices in Europe - « When citizens, stakeholders and decision makers work together »
- **Networking on European level:** Networking in order to create European Synergies in the field of sustainable rural development is a strong need articulated by different actors and stakeholders and therefore our key focus. We cooperate with partners networks such as ARC 2020, PREPARE etc. in punctual activities or on-going processes such as European Rural Parliament 2017.

#### ■ Our concept of Sustainable development

Forum Synergies has never tried to define in a strict way what is sustainable development as each person enters by its own particular door, be it environmental, social or for promoting democracy and inclusion.

But these four pillars of sustainable development are a useful framework to demonstrate where initiatives are contributing to sustainable future.

- **the land** stands for people's access and attachment to local production, their culture, conservation or landscape and the protection of natural resources.
- **the local economy** gives priority to local knowledge and skills, local resources, diversified activities and high local added value.
- **the social cohesion** actively includes people and minorities into development activities, shares common knowledge within rural communities, promotes local solidarity and human relations through local society and cultural life, improve links between urban and rural actors..
- **the participative process** we focus on the process of developing methods which enable people to participate in sustainable development, to create choices, to make decisions and take action. We enhance dialogue among various partners and support collective approaches.