

Open Space on food and local development: a multi-stakeholder meeting initiated by the Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise in Belgium.

Summary

In 2013 and 2014, the Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise (CATL) organisation organised a collective consultation on food, involving nearly 150 people. The Open Space method helped reveal and structure participants' ideas.

Key words

Open Space, citizen participation, local initiative

Context

This project follows informal discussions between local stakeholders in and around Liège who were involved in sustainable development or transition.

Partners

The Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise (CATL) resulted from stakeholders who were involved in projects to transform the local food production system coming together: organisations (Barricade, Liège en Transition), researchers and consultants specialising in sustainable development (Tr@me, Propage, Agès, Exposit D), a cooperative selling farm products (Point Ferme), a body incorporating regional authorities (Groupement Régional Économique des vallées de l'Ourthe et de l'Amblève) and the local action group (GAL) 'Pays des Condruses'.

Activities

At its launch (November 2013), the CATL organised an open space which brought together around 150 citizens.

An Open Space is a meeting during which participants themselves establish the agenda by defining the themes they wish to work on, then



splitting into sub-groups to share their analyses and develop proposals.

The forum starts with a plenary assembly during which participants sit in a circle. After having explained the rules and introduced the issue, the organiser asks participants to suggest themes to be discussed around the issue of the day.

The agenda thus emerges spontaneously. Workshop leaders pin their proposal on the 'deal wall', which the rest of the group will sign up for at a later stage. The workshops take place simultaneously and the results of the discussions are reported back to the other groups during a plenary session. This developmental stage may be followed by a meeting where the whole group ranks the ideas by priority in order to draft a strategic plan.

During this first Open Space, 42 workshops were organised on questions relating to food: production methods, short circuits, access to funds, access to seeds, transmission of knowledge, (de)pollution of soils, role of local institutions and economic actors ... An action plan was developed and 14 thematic groups were created.

In June 2014, a new working day once again brought together 150 participants. The two-fold objective of this day was partly to take stock of the dynamic underway, and partly to jointly construct practical projects, by connecting with existing initiatives. Speakers therefore presented initiatives which are currently underway and others positioned this initiative in an international context.

During this second day, nine thematic workshops were created on issues relating to models of production and commercialisation

Results and prospects

This experiment is very recent and it is still too early to evaluate it and draw conclusions.

Comments

This experiment appears to be promising due to its method: an Open Space which allows several working areas to be identified, following by a project development phase. For the time being, participation seems to be consistent.

