

How to better use rural resources for cultural development, and revitalise rural life through culture?

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Culture and art are an integral part of local development. They are an essential component in the quality of life - the more choices people have to participate in cultural and artistic events, the more satisfied and happy they could feel. From an economic perspective, the development of the cultural sector in a rural area contributes to creating more jobs, increasing revenues as a result of selling goods and services, and enhancing cultural tourism activities in rural areas. My grandmother once told me: *“Never complain that you have nothing to eat - look first on how to use the ground in your own garden to grow up your own vegetables”*. A wise expression, especially in the period of crisis we currently live in...

In Europe today, the distinction between “rural” (“remote”) and “urban” is not very clear. The general distinction is the one accepted by OECD

http://www.oecd.org/home/0,2987,en_2649_201185_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

– based on the density of the population:

“A region is rural if more than half the people there live in communities with a population density of fewer than 150 persons per square kilometre”.

At the European Union level, there is no common definition. The European Commission Directorate-General VI has published a report on rural development,

<http://www.nordregio.se/spespn/Files/2.3.ruralareas.pdf>

incorporating numerous variables relating to rurality, such as:

- areas which are not "urban";
- small number of people engaged in rural activities, including farmers;
- isolated areas where different social groups apply their own system of values, in other words, their tastes in leisure activity, styles of consumption, cultural preferences, etc.;
- landscape, or “the countryside”;
- a way of structuring and organisation of a territory where most of it is taken by agricultural activities;
- share of employment in the field of agriculture-the more agricultural jobs, the more area is considered as “rural”;
- the countryside's recreational vocation with footpaths, picnic areas, the rural heritage, etc.

Other criteria could be:

- accessibility of goods and services;
- opportunities for social interaction;
- choices among the number of cultural, leisure and entertainment activities on a territory.

As a result of rapid economic development in Europe, cities are invading rural areas, making it more and more difficult to make a clear distinction between urban and rural. This is especially applicable to small and urbanized countries. Member states have generally developed their own definitions of rural areas. Thus, the term rural communities is used in different countries across Europe with diverse connotations. Angles of interpretation are:

- Small communities where density of population is very low;
- Isolated villages with small number of inhabitants;
- Small towns – up to 20 000 inhabitants;
- Underprivileged and culturally deprived groups living in small towns, villages and rural areas;
- People living in areas outside of big cities; and
- People having a collective memory at a certain rural territory, and having a sense of place.

The concept of “*culture-led regeneration*” was first mentioned in the 1990s, and is driven by the objective to expand the depth and breadth of cultural life in the local communities through:

- Creating innovative, enjoyable, and high-quality arts experiences;
- Introducing new dynamics and encouraging creative solutions to problems;
- Engaging diverse communities;
- Nurturing and developing diverse art forms;
- Cultivating a wide range of artistic, human, and financial resources; and
- Developing an awareness of the social, critical, and practical functions of art-making.

My impression is that the research work on diverse angles of cultural policy, arts management, fundraising and creativity, concentrates mainly on places where cultural life flourishes – cosmopolitan cities, big and small towns, urban areas.

Much less researched are the issues related to:

- Tools and strategies to build long-term vitality for the arts in rural areas;
- Opportunities and barriers to the sustainable development of creative/cultural businesses in rural and remote regions of Europe;
- Artistic projects and programs in rural or remote regions which give social and economic effects, using the regional resources of all sorts;
- Social development of youth in rural areas, using artistic processes;
- Revitalization of the numerous cultural and community centres (which were very active during the past socialist regime), spread in rural areas in many transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe;
- Economic issues, including new funding initiatives of foundations in rural areas and the development of rural cultural tourism.

I selected below key resources on the topic of developing and revitalising rural life through arts and creativity – some of them available for download. Have a look and send us more!

A Typology of Rural Areas in Europe (1999). In: Towards a new Urban-Rural Partnership in Europe. Strategic Study. Study Programme of the European Spatial Planning of the European Commission:

<http://www.nordregio.se/spespn/Files/2.3.ruralareas.pdf>

Artistic Explorations in Cultural Memory. (2006). By Mariangela Lavanga. Report on the research workshop at the Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University, 3-4 November 2006:

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Arts and Culture in regeneration (2006) International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), D'Art Topics in Arts Policy, N o: 25.:

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Craig, Garry, Shucksmith, Mark & Young-Smith, Lucy (2004). Rural Community Development in Europe. An Initial Scoping Study for the Carnegie UK Trust.

Creative Industries in the Rural East Midlands. Case Study Report (2008). Jo Burns & Colin Kirkpatrick, Burns Owens Partnership:
http://ruralculture-em.org/resources/publications/EM_Rural_Creative_Industries_Case_Study_Report.pdf

Cultural Development in Rural and Remote Regions (2006), IFACCA report, D'Art topics series:
<http://www.ifacca.org/media/files/CulturalDevelopmentRuralRemote.pdf>

East Midlands Rural Action Plan (2007-2013). East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum:
http://ruralculture-em.org/resources/publications/Rural_Action_Plan_Part_1.pdf

Johnson, D. (1991). The Arts in Rural Areas. Arts Council of Great Britain, London

Juska, Arunas; Poviliunas, Arunas & Pozzuto, Richard (2005). Rural grass-roots Organizing in Eastern Europe: The Experience From Lithuania . In: Community Development Journal 2006 41(2):174-188

Malinen, Pentti. (1993). From Village Research to Development: Village as Rural Development Agent. In: Finland's National Rural Policy facing the Challenge of European Integration, University of Oulu. Research Institute of Northern Finland. Research Reports 114: 148-169.

Matarasso, F. (2005). The Arts and Rural England: Policy Review Stage 2: Summary of contributions to the consultation process, Arts Council of England, UK.

Nemez, Gustav. (2005). The Politics of Rural Development in Europe. Institute of Economics Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Discussion Papers 2005/5.

Ploeg, J.D. van der; Long, A.; Banks, J. (2002). Living Countrysides. Rural Development Processes in Europe : The state of the art. Rural Sociology Group, Mansholt Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Roca, Maria de Nazaré Oliveira. (1998). Youth and Rural Development in Europe - Policy Issues and Responses in the European Community. In: Increasing the Involvement of Young Men and Women in Rural Development in Europe.

Smiles, R. (2006). Cultural Development in Rural and Remote Areas. Strawberry Hill. International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies.

Stathopoulou, Sophia, Psaltopoulos Demetrios & Skuras Dmitris (2004). Rural Entrepreneurship in Europe: A research framework and agenda. In: International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research. Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., Vol.10. pp. 404-415:
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/10.1108/13552550410564725>

Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper (2006):
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>

Vickery, J. (2007). The Emergence of Culture-led Regeneration: A policy concept and its discontents', CCPS Research Papers, University of Warwick, UK.

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