

Alliance Building Concepts

The rural areas of North Western Europe are currently facing huge demographic changes that are diminishing their vibrancy and economic well-being. These include out-migration of young people, ageing populations, & reduced employment and community well-being.

The increasing pressure on public resources for modern services and infrastructure in rural areas is further increasing the problem. The Rural Alliances project aims to address these demographic challenges in a new and innovative way, through the creation of dynamic "Community-Enterprise Alliances". These alliances will bring together entrepreneurs and businesses with communities and local government, integrating enterprise principles with community values, and harnessing the power of loyalty, pride & self-esteem to improve areas' competitiveness, sustainability & inclusivity.

What is an Alliance?

There is currently a wealth of literature on partnerships between the Private Sector, Civil Society and the State. Current Development policy and practice has embraced collaboration as a response to the failures of the development agenda over last 50 years. The term "Alliance" is often used in the business sector, to refer to alliances between firms aimed at generating profit through collaborative endeavours and cost-cutting through economies of scale. It is also commonly applied to collaborative relationships in the developing world. The terminology is often inter-changeable between "partnership," "collaboration" and "alliance." However, the Rural Alliances project aims to create a new kind of alliance, an "Enterprise-Community" Alliance. These alliances will be to some degree varied in their membership and form. However, they will by their very nature share the same goal- to build self-supporting, inclusive, confident rural communities, involving people of all ages, backgrounds and residential status to undertake joint actions & be their own agents for change.

The project partners, who are situated in Germany, France, Ireland, Wales, the Netherlands and Belgium, all have experience in a number of alliance-building or partnership creation projects demonstrating the different types of alliances that exist. These include many examples of good practice in building alliances, such as:

The Llandovery project, organised in part through support by Llandovery Town Council and The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment and made up of community members, local businesses and the council, with the mutual goal of the regeneration and conservation of the town and local area. <http://www.llandoverycommerce.com/>

In the Netherlands, a **Streekhuis** is an alliance between local entrepreneurs, businesses, local government, and community groups with the mutual goals of regional regeneration and development, and the promotion and branding of the local region and its products. <http://www.streekhuis.nl>

What is an ideal Rural Alliance?

Alliances are always varied in nature, depending on the local and regional context, membership, goals and aims, governance structures, management and monitoring systems. The initial impetus and origins of different rural alliances is varied. Alliances can arise as a result of a bottom-up, community-driven collaboration, or can be engineered by an organisation or government body with a goal of joining local actors together.

Despite the diversity in origins of alliances, the University of Marburg and University of Wales have been undertaking research since the project inception to start to define what makes a successful community-enterprise alliance, and to begin to develop a "Blueprint" for building one.

The Partners agreed during the last Transnational Steering Group meeting that all alliances should comprise at least one business/ enterprise, and at least one community group, and the alliance should have a mutual goal that will provide mutual benefit.

Partners have generated, through questionnaires and interviews carried out by the universities, other qualities that an ideal alliance should have. These include: the identification of a key "champion to promote and roll out the work of the alliance; good coordination and communication; good allocation of responsibilities and clarification of expectations; and the early identification of indicators for monitoring success, done in participation with all members, and monitored together.

The "ideal" rural alliance might take different forms in different places! However, it is hoped that by meeting the goals of this project, the alliances created will be successful, sustainable and will provide innovative, locally owned and locally managed solutions to the urgent challenges caused by rapid demographic change in rural areas.

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