

Regional houses, fundament underneath regional networking

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Summary

The development of a region starts with networking. Stakeholders should meet and connect preferably in a triple helix context. Then afterwards the connecting needs to be formalized, structured and organized.

A proving example of professionalization in a region is a regional house where triple helix stakeholders can assemble and be facilitated; this feeds and eases the collaboration, will enhance projects to strengthen the region and is the starting point of contacts with parties and institutes from outside the region.

Issue/Problems

What is the next step after a network has been set up?

- How to professionalize the network?
- How to remark the relevant stakeholders, like for instance, entrepreneur organization; water board; various government institutes; knowledge and education institutes?
- How to help them organize?
- What are the needs of the stakeholders? Their advantages in a network?

Background

Rural areas are under pressure. On the one hand ageing is a growing phenomenon in rural areas; on the other hand urbanization draws youngsters out of urban areas into the cities. The transition in the agricultural sector strengthens these developments, as do the cut backs by the government due to the economic crisis.

In rural areas populations are shrinking, demographics are changing and local governments have less means. Therefore local communities can only stay vibrant if local governments, institutions, citizens and entrepreneurs act like partners and form new local alliances that take responsibility for the vibrancy of their own community.

In the Interreg project Rural Alliances 12 partners in 6 countries have formed an alliance on stimulating, advancing and professionalizing new alliances in rural areas.

Alliances are growing in four phases: initiative, growth, stabilization, professionalization. This briefing is on professionalization. How to bring structure and organization to a new alliance.

Background (continued)

Conditions for a regional house start with assembling the relevant stakeholders, their needs & wishes.

This should be done by an intermediary who knows the region and the stakeholders, is familiar with entrepreneurs and public habits and has the capability to connect the various stakeholders.

They should jointly gather the needs, wishes, interests and goals and so determine a common agenda. Together they should form a platform led by daily management.

The daily management, chosen out of members of the platform, steers the projects, searches for funding and hires qualified staff needed to address the agenda.

Interests in the Issue

The goal of intermediary organizations, like the regional houses Het Groene Woud and Brabantse Kempen, is to increase the quality of the environment and vibrancy in their region.

They facilitate:

- governments finding enthusiastic local people and alliances with ideas and drive for their own community, working on local policy goals
- local people and alliances realizing their community goals and link them to (the knowledge and means of) local governments and institutions.

Even more important is the bridge that a regional house forms between the different (semi) public institutes and between them and the private stakeholders.

Existing Policies

Roles of governments and communities are changing; from communities participating in government initiatives, to governments participating in community initiatives. In the past governments were directive organizations knowing what was best for their communities. Now they are usually in dialog with their inhabitants. Local communities are becoming more and more aware and inhabitants want to take their own destiny in their own hands.

At this moment the shift in roles is going on to the next level: communities and governments being more and more partners in local alliances.

The partners in the Interreg Rural Alliances (9 intermediary organizations, 1 municipality and 2 universities) are studying and sharing experiences with (new) rural alliances working on their own vibrancy and have produced new instruments to facilitate (new) rural alliances.

Policy Options

Advancing strong new rural alliances (public-private networks) arise and grow when people are able to meet, get to know each other and share ideas and energy. Therefore the roles of governments and local communities have to find a new balance.

Governments (administrative and official) have to:

- change from initiator to facilitator
- give trust and support to local energetic groups of citizens and entrepreneurs & cover their backs
- help communities to start new rural alliances by bringing people together and teach them how to find their way in existing rules, regulations and financing
- be clear, resolute and decisive (prevent delay)
- share knowledge and experiences with other governments

Policy Options (continued)

Local communities have to:

- feel responsible for the vibrancy of their own community
- activate and gather local enthusiastic energetic (and skilled) inhabitants
- share with governments how best to facilitate rural alliances
- share knowledge and experiences with other communities

To facilitate this shift one could create a temporary regional intermediary organization, for instance a regional house.

Recommendations

Governments should advance the installing of a regional house by facilitating local communities to meet, by getting to know them, by supporting energetic inhabitants and by relieve and protect them from energy leaks like bureaucracy, organization and administration.

Support them directly, or by organizing a (temporary) regional mediator; by supplying funding for the start and by supporting the regional house in their policy.

Regarding policy the platform and possible organization in the regional house must not be formalized as a new governmental institute who makes policy but as a public private collaboration who advises as an authority.

Sources

www.rural-alliances.eu

Naar een nieuwe generatie gebiedsorganisaties <http://www.netwerkplatteland.nl/netwerk-platteland/publicaties/>

www.hetgroenewoud.com

www.brabantsekempen.eu

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