

Reviewing Rural Development Plans and Programmes: A Progress Report

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Keywords: Rural Development Programmes, comparative analysis,

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to review the situation of tasks allocated to Working Group 1 (WG 1), highlighting what has been done up until March 2007 and singling out tasks ahead. A proposal for the final deliverable in terms of deadline and its contents is laid out and possible problems and limitations in the results are mentioned as part of a forward look.

1. Introductory remarks

This paper is aimed at providing an update on the current situation of the tasks allocated to WG1 within COST C27 Action. It will, likewise, highlight the way forward as well as present for discussion and comments suggestions about structure of the final deliverable and a calendar for completion of the work.

2. The tasks allocated to WG1

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and initial task allocation, WG1 was charged with:

- ✘ Task 1: Reviewing the operational –legal and normative- framework stemming from the European Union Regulations and Guidance on development policies applicable to minor deprived communities, in particular, Rural Development Policies.
- ✘ Task 2: Exploring planning responsibilities in Member States to single out the smallest territorial (local) authority empowered to put forward development policies
- ✘ Task 3: Reviewing Rural Development Instruments (plans/programmes) drafted by participating Member States following the EU norms cited above.
- ✘ Task 4: Putting forward conclusions and recommendations to the Local Authorities singled out in Task 2, to suggest alternative sustainable development policies, in view of the contents of the Rural Development Instruments reviewed in Task 3.

An analysis of the progress so far shows the following:

My presentation in Evora¹ provided a comprehensive overview of mechanisms currently in place for the request of financial assistance from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Moreover, it compared Rural Development instruments with those governing the Structural Funds for Cohesion Policy, as a general degree of coordination between all funds is mandatory. In addition to my own presentation, contributions from other participants at the Evora meeting supplemented this normative framework in particular situations.

At an early stage in WG operations, a questionnaire was prepared and circulated among all (then) participating countries. In addition to an initial overview of the state of preparation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the different participating countries, the main goal of that questionnaire was twofold: on the one side it intended to highlight which was the smallest planning authority empowered to pass development plans in each Member State. On the other hand, it aimed at clarifying the relationships between (municipal) Development Plans and (regional/national) Rural Development Plans and Programmes.

¹ Rural Development in the European Union: The legal and administrative framework and its application to Spain. Evora. April 2007:

The results of that survey were presented in Prague², although, unfortunately, no published record exists as yet. At the time of the Prague meeting, seven participating countries had replied the questionnaire but, subsequently four others did send their responses. Three are still outstanding plus the later joiners, Switzerland and Turkey, which were not participating at that early phase of the WG activities. The initial paper presented in Prague was, thence, further enlarged with the ensuing responses and today, an overall picture of 11 countries does exist, which might eventually develop onto a final paper covering the issue of planning responsibilities.

In what regards Task 3, this makes up the object of my presentation today. In order to complete the task, we tried to collect all Rural Development Plans and Programmes, preferably once they were approved by the European Commission. We have approached all MC members and obtained a great deal of information. In addition to that, we have conducted our own search and I want to show my debt of gratitude to Illaria Fumagali who provided the extremely useful link of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. An enormous amount of documents are regularly uploaded there and through that link I have been able to collect most of what I have reviewed.

Material coming from the Italian Ministry includes in many instances the whole plan or programme but, on a regular basis, a standard summary of the document which ought to be sent to European Commission services and a visual display in pdf format also describing summarily the contents of the document. The main body of my presentation today describes what we have reviewed so far. A main advantage of this standard format lies in the fact it makes comparisons much easier, while the main document provides the whole detailed info, and the pdf file assists in a visual display of its contents.

Finally, I have collected preliminary information about other plans and programmes that are still under scrutiny at the EC services. We have basic data but not to the same level of detail as the approved ones. We are hoping the Italian Ministry will continue to upload all this relevant documents and we will be able to review them. In addition to those two main sources of information, I have been able to collect useful info from the MC member Francisco Martínez Arroyo, official at the Spanish National Permanent Representation in Brussels, and from the European office in my University, which provides advanced notice of plans newly approved by the EC.

All in all, we have collected around 50 documents and so far reviewed almost 35. Notwithstanding a more detailed update which I will present to you shortly, it can be concluded up until now that most countries based their financial request on national documents, although in some instances, e.g.. Portugal, there is a main document for the “continental” part and another for the islands. For other countries, with a more decentralised system of government, -notably Italy, Spain and Belgium- , the main policy documents originate at the regional level.

Although it is difficult to ascertain the day-to-day situation, I reckon that in the next few months all programmes presented will be approved. This fact places a certain problem for the termination of the WG1 task, as it should be more sensible to review all available documents once they are through from the Commission. So we will probably

² Planning and development for minor deprived rural communities: responses to a questionnaire. September, 2007

wait to complete outstanding documents of those countries which we keep under control –basically Italy and Spain- and look forward to receiving the rest from those national representatives in this MC who have sent nothing so far; should that fail, I shall try to gather them from alternative sources. It should, nevertheless, be reminded that in what concerns the contents of the programmes, these are not too different, as they have to accommodate their format to the guidelines issued by the EC.

3. A review of Rural Development Plans and Programmes in participating countries

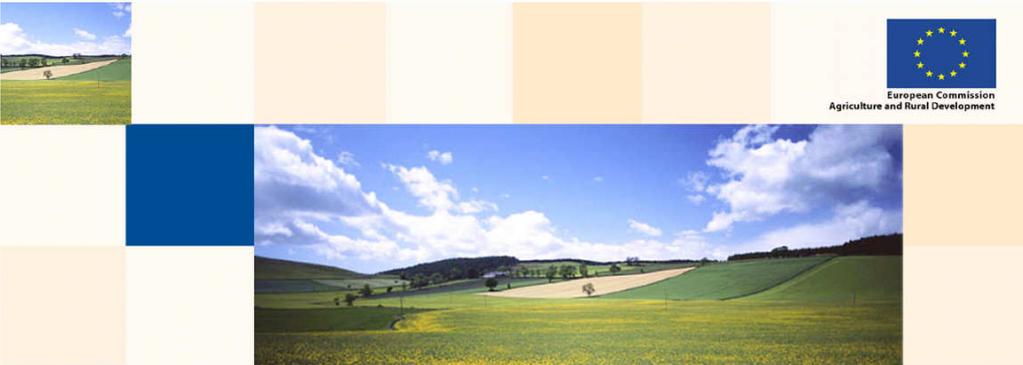
The comprehensive search undertaken to collect all relevant materials required by the European Commission to co-finance rural development in Member States has provided, in most cases, four sets of documents:

- The whole Plan or Programme, prepared by the national or regional agency empowered to do so in each Member State, in accordance with prevailing regulations there.
- A summary of the above Plan or Programme, in English or French, required by the EC and laid out in a standard format
- A set of Annexes, prepared by some, but not all, Member States.
- A visual summary of the Plan or Programme in pdf format highlighting the main facts and figures in the Plan or Programme.

From the very early stage it was obvious that reviewing the whole plan or programme for each responsible authority –around 50 including regional ones- would be too cumbersome a task to be undertaken in the available time. On the other hand, the level of information provided in those plans far exceeded what was considered necessary to complete Task 3. So we decided to concentrate on the summaries and resort to the whole document at a second stage, if necessary. What we have done is “to summarise the summary” or, to put it in a more technical fashion, to draw out of the summary those issues which can be considered useful to compare sustainable policy action applicable to minor deprived communities.

As a result, we have reviewed and elaborated, so far, the following documents:

- Belgium: Rural Development Programme for Wallonie
- Cyprus: National Rural Development Programme
- Portugal: Rural Development Programme for the continental territory plus Rural Development Programme for Açores islands
- Czech Republic: National Rural Development Plan
- Sweden: National Rural Development Programme
- Spain: National Rural Development Programme plus four Regional Rural Development Programmes
- Hungary: National Rural Development Programme
- Poland: National Rural Development Programme
- Finland: National Rural Development Programme
- Italy: 21 Regional Rural Development Programmes (a few still under review)



**Rural Development Programmes 2007-13
Spanish National Framework**

Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development
Directorate E II: Rural Development Programmes II
Unit E II 1: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Portugal and Spain

Rural Development Committee 24 October 2007-versC



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**Programme
de développement rural de la Province de
Bolzano**

AGRI E.I.4, Bruxelles, 24 juillet 2007



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The contents of my “summary of summaries” is fully useable to analyse in a comparative way what the administration responsible for rural affairs is aiming to do to promote sustainable development policies in its territory.

Since the documents submitted to the European Commission ought to be structured in a common manner, it was pretty simple to establish from the onset which were the issues of greatest interest. However, the local interpretation of some of the Commission measures leaves ample ground for some interesting actions to emerge.

4. Some preliminary conclusions: Forward looking

In the current stage of the WG1 progress, some conclusions have become evident:

- Coverage of EU member states Rural Development Plans at national or regional level is still incomplete, either because documents were not obtained or because plans are still through their approval process at the EC
- Not all participant countries are EU members and, thence, are not subject to the EU funding Regulations. For some, notably Norway, it is likely that similar documents –plans or programmes- do exist but so far these have proved unobtainable. For other States, notably Switzerland and Turkey, no information has been made available and, thence, nothing has been so far incorporated to our report.
- Most documents reviewed adjust themselves to guidelines issued by the EC in terms of presentation and format. That has reduced potential singularities and contributed to harmonizing the information obtained. Such a situation was anticipated, but we have to cope with it. In order to do so, I suggest:
 - To supplement descriptive information with some numerical data reflecting the different interest in each Member State on a particular type of Rural Development measure. Figures will probably have to be relative, i.e. in percentage, as absolute numbers would not allow us to take into account the size of the country or its population.
 - To analyse each summary by a local expert in a drive to interpret the shed additional light upon the measures described and their application, both in space and onto specific actions or projects. This kind of interpretation is reach-out for me as I do not well enough all territories in each participating countries. On the other hand, part of that information may perhaps be derived from a more thorough analysis of the whole document of the plan or programme, but, again, this task far exceeds my personal possibilities.

Looking ahead into the future, account should be taken that the next round of RDPs approvals by the European Commission will be in April. Even assuming a further one may follow suit, my understanding is we cannot perpetuate indefinitely the life of the WG. That accepted, I propose the following calendar:

- A final deliverable for WG1 should be ready for presentation and eventual approval in the next MC meeting in the autumn this year. Meeting this deadline may imply:
 - a) Some participating countries may not be covered by the survey, as no documents have reached me.
 - b) For others, if their Plans or Programmes have not as yet been approved, we might have to do with (partial) available information at the time of finishing
 - c) For those countries whose documents have been reviewed by me, a second – expert- revision of my own summary is required with personal comments on the accuracy of my revision, the justification of measures chosen and the applicability of those in terms of sustainable development policies. All in view of the geographical context of the territories affected.

- Any additional documents produced in the participating countries would be welcome. That should make up a list of guidance on sources of assistance to minor deprived communities.

I volunteered to putting together the information above and making it available to you in the Autumn MC meeting, provided my requests are met by yourselves.

The contents of the final deliverable may be:

- ✘ All official documents collected: The whole national/regional plan or programme, the summary submitted to the EC by member states, and the visual display summarising the document.
- ✘ All summaries produced by us, containing policy proposals for the sustainable development of rural areas
- ✘ A set of interpreted recommendations drawn out from those summaries translating policies into more detailed action, if possible referenced to the different geographical settings where the minor (rural) deprived communities are located.

It is essential WG2 initiates its work immediately, so that WG1 proposals can be tested in real situations, i.e., when proposed to local authorities.

My final conclusion is WG1 has achieved its intended goals and may produce a useful document not only in itself but, surely when jointly analysed with action actually implemented or proposed in successful case studies provided by WG2. It is essential for the ongoing progress of our Action that a final deliverable is drafted and presented as the outcome of our Group. I believe the material obtained is enough to meet such this requirement, if only with a little bit of your help