



“What Roles for Rural Areas in Tomorrow’s Europe?”



Summary Report of the European Citizens' Panel

A citizens' perspective on the roles for rural areas
in tomorrow's Europe

Monday 2 April 2007

EU Committee of the Regions, Brussels

www.citizenspanel.eu

European Citizens' Panel

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1. Introduction

The European Citizens' panel is a pilot bottom-up initiative that has engaged citizens from ten different regions of Europe to deliberate on policies that affect rural areas. The initiative has operated at two levels: regional and the European. At the regional level, citizens, who have been randomly selected and who capture the diversity of populations, have participated in panels to debate rural issues and make recommendations to their respective policy-makers. This work has drawn on information provided by key stakeholders and experts with an interest in rural affairs. At the European level a number of citizens from each regional panel have met in Belgium for three days of discussion and reflection in order to direct their attention to a wide range of European challenges relating to the future roles of rural areas. The previous round of regional analyses and proposals has helped inform this dialogue and has provided a valuable resource for citizens to appreciate commonalities and differences across their respective territories. Accordingly, the European Citizens' Panel welcomes the opportunity provided by the Committee of the Regions to present this preliminary report that summarises the activities and outcomes from this second stage of the project.

2. The rationale for the European Citizens' Panel

Rural areas cover 90 percent of Europe's land and host approximately half of its population. They provide food, jobs and open space for leisure and cultural activities. They also constitute a reservoir of biodiversity and natural resources such as water, clean air and renewable energies. They are, in short, a key element of Europe's heritage. The work of the European Citizens' Panel has embraced these attributes and, in so doing, it can be located within a suite of interlocking considerations:

- the scope to input into the work of the institutions of the European Union on policy matters related, for example, to agriculture and rural development,

regional development, social affairs, transport, energy, the environment, spatial planning, education and culture;

- the inevitability of further reforms relating to the frameworks for policy, not least those out to 2013 and beyond to 2020;
- the challenge of deepening European integration based on mutual recognition and an appreciation of cultural differences;
- the potential to nurture new trajectories of social learning that can benefit European citizens and those charged with public decision-making; and
- the value of aligning more closely the processes of deliberative democracy alongside established routines of representative democracy.

The contribution of the Citizens' Panel, therefore, is not only related to the future well-being of rural Europe. It also seeks to demonstrate the power of an innovative participatory process, with potential wider application, that can re-energise the contemporary governance of European affairs.

3. The deliberative process of the European Citizens' Panel

This summary report represents the outcome of three intensive days of discussion across six language groupings by 87 citizens drawn from the ten participating regions of Europe. Citizens have assembled not as representatives of their regions, but rather as individuals with their own knowledge of, life experiences from and commitment to the future of rural Europe. Over the short period that citizens have been together, they have shared much by way of cultural backgrounds along with their concerns and visions related to this territory. They have reflected on potential trajectories for public policy and they now bring forward a statement of issues and recommendations related to the realisation of better and different roles for rural areas in tomorrow's Europe. This section of the summary report identifies the key elements of the deliberative process that has been followed.

Day 1: Friday 30th March 2007. Citizens assembled at the offices of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels and, as a practical way of introducing themselves to each other, they set-up mini-displays of their regional character and the activities and outcomes of their regional Citizens' Panel. The formalities commenced in the afternoon in plenary session with a welcome being extended by Mme Christine Boon-Falleur (DG Education and Culture). The potential value of this pilot European Citizens' Panel initiative was emphasised, not least in the context of enriching democracy and informing the programme commitment of the European Commission to supporting active citizens for Europe. This was followed by a series of short presentations by citizens of their deliberations on

Citizens' Panels in their respective regions. These demonstrated the importance placed by citizens on rural society, provided provocative narratives of rural change and potential, identified new geographies of spatial collaboration, and highlighted the multi-dimensional character of rural development. Presentations by Michael Murray (Queen's University, Belfast) and John Bryden (University of Aberdeen) complemented this analysis by citizens and served to identify core dimensions of the rural challenge and potential ways by which these could be related to EU policy domains. In short, this initial phase of the work programme achieved important objectives of considerable information sharing, and giving initial shape to the deliberative agenda. The day concluded by citizens voting on the importance that they attached to a possible 18 themes (each with recognised transversal relationships) that had surfaced from their preparatory investigations. Citizens were given six votes and were asked to distribute those votes as they felt appropriate across the themes. The results were as follows:

- Education – 60 votes
- Health – 50 votes
- Youth – 49 votes
- Transport – 47 votes
- Energy – 44 votes
- Agriculture – 41 votes
- Employment – 29 votes
- Participation – 28 votes
- Land use planning – 25 votes
- Infrastructure – 25 votes
- Conservation – 22 votes
- Housing – 19 votes
- Enterprise and Industry – 15 votes
- Services – 15 votes
- Funding – 11 votes
- Tourism – 9 votes
- Public administration – 9 votes
- Population – 6 votes

Day 2: Saturday 31st March 2007. The purpose of this second day of the European Citizens' Panel was to take the discussion of these preliminary themes further forward by exploring, through transnational workshops, the underlying concerns that citizens have for the welfare of rural areas, the priority themes that require attention, and the visions that will inform future directions. The Panel was divided into eight work groups with technical assistance being provided in each instance by a combination of facilitators, rapporteurs, interpreters and computer data archivists. Citizens having fully listed their concerns were invited to select up to three themes that command a collective workshop priority weighting and then to share these concerns and themes in a plenary session. In total, the eight working groups came forward with 21 priority headings which can be assembled into the following categories: youth (n=3), education (n=3), transport (n=3), conservation and environment (n=3), enterprise and employment (n=2), participation (n=2), agriculture (n=1), health (n=1), and funding (n=1). In two work groups special attention was

given to the creation of two separate but additional themes relating to aspects of integrated rural development that, for example, included linkages between renewable energy, agriculture and environment with a view to sustaining rural areas. In short, citizen deliberations by this stage of the process had provided potent evidence that rural issues and policies cannot be easily, if at all, compartmentalised. The challenges facing rural society have joined up realities that in turn require strategic and joined up solutions.

During the second part of the day each working group re-convened to create shared visions for the priority themes that they had identified. However, this stage of the deliberative process was enriched by awareness of the concerns identified by other working groups that had, perhaps, chosen a similar priority. Citizens were invited to look into the future in relation to each priority theme and to prepare a vision statement and related illustrative materials. These were put on display and reported back-on in a plenary session and, thereafter, all citizens were invited to view this output and add personal written comments.

Day 3: Sunday 1st April 2007. The opening plenary session reviewed the work completed by citizens during the previous day relating to the identification of themes, concerns and visions. This was followed by the participation of two experts who responded to questions prepared by the European Citizens' Panel. In their important contributions to the deliberative process, Mme Ilona Braunlich (with experience of DG Regio) and Mme Elena Saraceno (with experience of DG Agri) highlighted the value attached to citizens giving opinions. The primacy of agriculture in rural policy formulation was addressed and matters relating to organic and quality food production, the outlook for small-scale producers, pluriactivity and income diversification were examined. The sectoral committee structure of the European Parliament was mentioned as an issue and linked to which is the need for a territorial lobby that will champion broad quality of life issues in rural Europe. In regard to environment, the speakers commented on the value of the Natura 2000 project and the need for its further development by way of adequate funding. Attention was drawn to the contribution being made by the TENs initiative in strengthening rural connectivity, the contribution of the European Social Fund to training and education and the overarching opportunity that exists for citizens to look beyond 2013 in seeking to influence policy transformations.

Citizens then returned to their transnational working groups to formulate recommendations against their selected themes. In undertaking this work, the

comments from individuals that had been posted against the previous visions were considered and the informal sharing of ideas across work groups was facilitated for those groups dealing with similar fields of enquiry. All recommendations were then presented and reviewed at a plenary meeting of citizens and prioritisation was carried out using a preference process of 8 votes per person. The plenary allowed citizens to individually review the voting results and, to close, consideration was given to the handing-over of the European Citizens' Panel summary report to European Commission officials on Monday 2nd April 2007.

4. Themes for the Roles of Rural Areas in Tomorrow's Europe

This section of the summary report draws together the key concerns, visions and recommendations of the European Citizens' Panel in regard to the 10 priority themes that have emerged from its dialogue. The voting preferences of citizens against each recommendation are displayed.

Youth. Citizens identified the following concerns: the need to strengthen opportunity for young people in rural areas, more youth education, retaining young people in rural areas and encouraging them to return to rural areas, listening to young people and their needs, giving support to their self-initiated project ideas, improved bus services especially late evening services and free travel for those under 18 years of age.

The vision content of the working groups on youth includes young people in rural areas having the same opportunity as those in urban areas, more youth associations and youth groups with improved leisure time activities, better apprenticeship opportunities and a climate in which young people are listened-to.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- The EU should divert some funding from agriculture to invest in infrastructure (e.g. sports facilities, education, services) that will make rural areas as attractive as cities to young people (n=20*)¹.
- Children and young people must be involved in the decision-making of all EU projects. This should be done through policy standards and good practice guidelines on participation with children and young people, for example youth forums. The EU should support this by giving funding to make this happen (n=18).

¹ total number of votes cast for this recommendation

Education. Citizens identified the following concerns: the need for educational opportunity for all sections of society, in both urban and rural settings, with particular attention being given to young people, the elderly, minorities and the disabled, the availability of multiple levels of educational provision, training including internships, and maintaining local schools.

The vision content under this heading relates to access to education and training being enjoyed by all age groups, education and training standards harmonised across Europe, entrepreneurship knowledge as part of the curriculum and students from disadvantaged backgrounds being able to more easily enter higher education.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- Everybody should receive education according to their own specific skills and needs, ensuring that nobody's rights for education are impaired and that, based on surveys on professions / vocations in shortage, an appropriate training programme is developed and delivered to learners without age, ethnic, or financial limitations (n=36).
- All children should start to learn a common foreign language in the 3rd class (primary school) at the latest (n=30).
- Our recommendation is to use existing EU funding programmes e.g. INTERREG / ERDF to enable regional education structures to learn from each other on best practice so as to adopt an educational system that will achieve our vision of lifelong learning in rural areas (n=26).
- We want a quality education system that is demand-oriented, affordable and accessible to all that demand it. EU regulations should promote apprenticeships and vocational jobs (n=25).
- The EU should complement state funding of educational institutions in order to ensure free access and local availability (n=17).

Transport. Citizens identified the following concerns: the lack of affordable and adequate public transport (both bus and train based) in rural areas, not least its availability for young people, the elderly and the disabled, along with the need to recognise its contribution to saving energy and reducing pollution. Citizens commented on the challenge of extending the European road network to more peripheral areas in order to enhance accessibility.

The visions for transport in rural areas make reference to the presence of affordable and environmental friendly services with a reduction in road traffic, the acceptance of car free Sundays, greater appreciation for inter-modal movement (for example, in regard to freight) and greater coordination among all modes of transport.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- Policy for integrated rural public transport, as an essential part of any rural development policy (n=30).
- Encourage road hauliers to use other means of transport such as combined rail and road transport and inland navigation (freight in-transit to be boarded on trains as, for example, in Switzerland) (n=26)

Conservation and Environment. Citizens identified the following concerns: the need to preserve rural character including the retention of agricultural land, avoiding the build-up of dormitory villages, preventing the expansion of cities into rural areas, having long term commitments to sustainable land planning, limiting the general development of housing and industry in the countryside while making provision for farmers and their families, enforcing environmental regulations and retaining the peace and ambience of rural space. Additionally, citizens asked that politicians should support sustainable energy sources and the greater use of recycling practices.

The visioning work under this theme relates to sustainable forestry policies, sustainable housing development, environmentally clean transport including 'green cars', independent and renewable energy production (for example, in schools), a healthy flora and fauna, a healthy agricultural industry and a situation where new roads go around natural areas rather than through them.

The recommendation of the Citizens' Panel is:

- The number of kilometres/miles on all products reaching consumers should be clearly labelled on those products (n=15).

Enterprise and Employment. Citizens identified the following concerns: unacceptable levels of unemployment and the lack of investment in rural areas for enterprise creation, the need to grow small and medium sized businesses including

craft based activities, encourage the presence of a diversity of professions in order to maintain rural regions, and have less bureaucracy for businesses to deal with. Tourism was perceived as an economic opportunity, not least job creation, with particular attention being given to eco-tourism.

The visioning process under this heading recognises that, in the future, funds for Research and Development are more easily accessible by rural entrepreneurs and that there is less bureaucracy and simpler application forms. Moreover, new economic activity respects the environment, logistics that support enterprise offer quality access, and spatial relationships between industry and wildlife, natural areas, leisure areas and housing are well managed by planning controls.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- Small and medium-size business entrepreneurship support at start up. Less taxes and fees and easier access to funding sources for rural entrepreneurs (ie. less bureaucracy) (n=22).
- In order to organise industrial / corporate activities in rural areas in an environmentally-friendly way, all companies / industries have to commit themselves in writing to abide by an environmental plan with a view to compliance with EU regulations (n=22).

Participation. Citizens identified the following concerns: the difficulty of having rural interests listened to and the need to generate opportunities for citizen engagement on priority topics, which could include greater use of citizen surveys and citizen panels. Concern was expressed about the lack of funding to the community and voluntary sectors which in turn is leading to difficulties for community based decision-making and services. Furthermore, citizens expressed the view that decentralisation and devolution could bring politics closer to citizens and that more thinking must be given to how best the relationship between territorial scales and citizenship can be fostered.

In their vision for the future of rural areas the Citizens' Panel working groups see the gap between politicians and citizens as being filled by much greater volunteerism across Europe and with real influence being in the hands of citizens through referenda, forums, panels and blogs. Politicians will take equal interest in their voters before and after elections.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- Establish a bottom-up system for EU funds allocation, control and feedback through committees made up of impartial citizens who would influence the distribution and use of received funds (n=70).
- We propose that the Citizens' Panel continues to be an accepted stakeholder on propositions to the European Commission regarding the future of our rural areas with immediate effect (to start on Monday 2nd April 2007!) (n=21).
- Politicians have to be interested in voters not only before elections, but also, afterwards (n=6).

Agriculture. Citizens identified the following concerns: the uncertain future for agricultural production and the need to return to a human scale agriculture that is environmentally friendly and linked to the production of healthy (possibly organic) foods. Citizens articulated the need for more jobs related to the farming sector, perhaps in agri-tourism, and expressed support for a landscape based mode of production that could produce high quality food with a good productivity performance.

The visioning by this work group relates to fair prices for farmers and consumers, along with much more information for consumers related to choices being made.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- The Citizens' Panel strongly recommends that EU policy makers develop fair trade within rural Europe and a clear European labelling system by symbol and word that is universally recognised (n=50).
- Redirection of funds towards regional organic producers (including renewable energy resources, construction material, insulation) by means of EU directives (n=34).
- We want by 2012 an agriculture that is honest, environmentally friendly and affordable and that guarantees quality food for everyone. This can, for example, be encouraged through tax breaks and lobbying, but also through a better balance in the distribution of funds, not just to agriculture but also to all rural needs (n=20).

Health. Citizens identified the following concerns: the inadequacy of health services in rural areas regarding accessibility to hospital care, management decisions not

being patient-centred, lengthy waiting lists, the need for nearer on-call doctor services and support for hospice and other caring services in rural areas. Additionally, the view was expressed that society must have quality and healthy food and thus support should be offered to farmers and through education channels about the importance of these matters.

In setting out a vision for health matters in rural areas, the citizens' panel working group on this topic have articulated an active European policy for health which involves the citizens. Four elements are identified: easy access to healthcare and treatments for everyone which are free for the poorer and close to home; the need to address the power of the large pharmaceutical companies and to limit the high prices charged for drugs; giving favour to international research and the availability of international treatment; and supporting prevention and treatment campaigns to combat international sickness and health problems such as obesity, avian flu, AIDS, and smoking.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- We recommend equity of access to healthcare and sharing of health resources across all EU borders (n=23).
- We recommend having a European, organized, concerted and fair approach in the struggle against public health issues, for example, obesity, prevention campaigns, promoting the production, distribution, consumption of healthy food, promoting access to healthy life and sport, and helping the poorest countries implement the same means of prevention and treatment (n=22).

Funding. Citizens expressed concern that the EU must invest more into its constituent regions and that, more generally, social benefit systems require assessment in regard to which agencies control funding and deliver support.

The visioning activity under this heading sees balance between urban and rural areas, clearer rules on distributional responsibilities and which industries are eligible for support, more transparency on disbursements and more attention being given to the family and family relations by the EU.

The recommendations of the Citizens' Panel are:

- All under 18s and disabled people should have free public transport in Europe by 2012 to and from rural areas to improve social networking and educational opportunities (n=36).
- Set a common basic minimum wage throughout European countries (n=19).
- We advise that part of the EU financing for agriculture is transferred to enable other economic players to operate in rural areas (n=5).

Integrated development. Citizens identified the following concerns in regard to some of the core elements of this priority theme: the need to preserve the viability of rural areas through a combination of measures related to youth, employment, services, energy, environment and agriculture. The issue of housing was commented on by citizens in relation to it being too expensive for local first time buyers and competition from the second homes market. Citizens were also concerned about the relative lack of services in rural areas, especially healthcare and the need for a greater and sensitive police presence.

The visioning activity related to this heading focuses on the sustainability and identity of rural areas in 2020 which will have rediscovered the value of everyone belonging there, where people live in harmony with their environment, where people are close to services and employment, and where a diversity of agriculture is practised. Moreover, energy and agriculture will be inter-related, for example through biomass production, and more use will be being made of wind, solar and water resources.

The recommendation of the Citizens' Panel is:

- The European policy for the coming years must denote that the territorial identity of rural areas be retained. But in so doing we must also keep in mind agriculture, services, employment, healthcare, education and all environmental aspects. These points must be regionally evaluated every five years (n=44).

5. Conclusions

The members of the European Citizens' Panel are pleased that they have been able to engage in these serious and important deliberations regarding the future roles of rural areas in Europe. The Citizens' Panel commends its analysis and recommendations to policy-makers. In conclusion, the Citizens' Panel would draw attention to the following key insights that emerge from its work:

- the dialogue over the three days has allowed citizens to shift from a very broad range of concerns to those that are more focused;
- the issues that citizens have debated have moved in many instances from regional scale concerns to more strategic and European scale challenges;
- citizens' concerns have been reshaped from an emphasis on sectoral and separate issues to an appreciation of the many cross-cutting dimensions of policy that impact on rural areas;
- there is an appreciation of rurality by citizens that integrates society and economy, with environment and landscape;
- there is an acknowledgement by citizens that the future roles of rural areas are situated in a policy context with multiple levels of intervention – transnational, EU, national, regional and local; and finally,
- there is a genuine enthusiasm for involvement by citizens in shaping that future for the rural areas of Europe.

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The initiative is being implemented by...

...At the regional level:

- Bavaria, Germany; and St. Gallen, Switzerland: Gesellschaft für Bürgergutachten (Society for Citizens' Reports) and Technical University of Munich
- Cross-border panel between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland: North South Rural Voice (NSRV)
- Cross-border panel between Hungary and Slovakia: The Carpathian Foundation
- Cumbria and Durham, North of England, United Kingdom: University of Newcastle – PEALS unit (Policy Ethics and Life Sciences), Right 2B Heard and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
- Flevoland, the Netherlands: Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM), Free University of Amsterdam
- Rhône-Alpes, France: Eurodebat and Economie & Humanisme
- Wallonia, Belgium: Fondation pour les Générations Futures (FGF) and Tr@me.

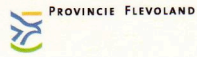
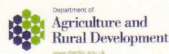
...At the European level:

- European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL)
- Foundation for Future Generations (FFG).

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