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FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES
BALKAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION (BENA)

2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN NATURAL SCIENCES

PROCEEDINGS BOOK

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UNIVERSITY OF SHKODRA "LUIGJ GURAKUQI"
FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES



BALKAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION
(BENA)

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**University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi"
Faculty of Natural Sciences**

Balkan Environmental Association (BENA)

in collaboration with

Water Research Institute of Shkodra Region (WRISHR)

**Centre for Econics and Ecosystem Management,
Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development**

**2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN NATURAL SCIENCES**

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ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on young people as human resources for sustainable rural development. In order to effectively use their potential, there is a need to provide them with new and better competences, through educational system and multi-sectoral networking. Namely, young people are recognized as one of the „economic capital“ in sustainable agricultural and rural development. In 1992, the Republic of Croatia supported Agenda 21 (UN, Conference in RIO) and determined the development based on the concept of sustainability. Education is recognized as a key for the achievement of sustainable development. According to OECD criterion, 91,6% of Croatian territory is rural and 47,6% of the total population lives in rural areas. Croatia is implementing EU's Common Agricultural Policy as a member of European Union. It promotes sustainable rural development through diversification of the rural economy, integration of all relevant rural sectors and empowered local key stakeholders.

Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek developed three projects focused on young people, two are already implemented under IPA EU fund, that are contributing to sustainable rural development by introducing its principles to VET education, creation on new lifelong learning programmes and master studies. This paper will present some of the experience gained through their implementation

KEYWORDS: young people, human resources, sustainable rural development, projects

Introduction

According to OECD criterion, 150 inhabitants on km², rural regions cover 57% of the EU territory and 24% of the EU population. They comprise, together with intermediate regions, 91 % of the EU territory and 59 % of the total EU population. In compliance with the same criterion, 91,6% territory in Croatia is rural and 47,6% of the total population lives in rural areas. Rural development has vital importance for the prosperity of European Union. European Union needs continuing energetic and effective work in rural development for two main reasons – for the contribution which rural areas can make to Europe's long-term prosperity and the need to address gross social and economic disparities. (Dower, 2011;).

As a member of European Union Croatia will implement the EU's Common Agricultural Policy through support for rural development by the European

Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), that promotes sustainable rural development through diversification of the rural economy, integration of all relevant rural sectors and empowered local key stakeholders. For its implementation, it is necessary to develop human and social capital in rural areas. Particular attention must be paid to young people because they are extremely significant resource for development of human, social and economic capital in rural areas. The Republic of Croatia determined the development based on the concept of sustainability and education is recognized as a key for the achievement of sustainable development.

Materials and methods

The article analyses the overall situation of young people in European Union and their role in sustainable rural development. It is clear that young people from the rural area are particularly disadvantaged and that sustainable development of rural areas is not possible unless it meets their needs and empowers them, to play an active role in the community. The aim is to point out the importance of involvement of the scientific community in solving the aforementioned problems. It is essential that scientists introduce the results of fundamental research, as well as their knowledge and experience, into practice, and in doing so, to develop and implement specific models for improving the situation of young people in rural areas. Ability to finance the development and implementation of specific models and projects from EU funds, provides great possibilities for the scientific community, but also puts in front its responsibility for sustainable rural development.

For the purposes of this study, various scientific and expert literature was consulted, and references have been made to documentation of projects developed and implemented by the author of the work as well as to statistical databases and materials and literature on the Internet. Furthermore, the paper uses experiences and observations of the author in the field of rural development, the implementation of EU policies, and the implementation of various In writing this paper, the methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison and case study have been utilized.

Results and discussion

Description of the problems

The United Nations, in the report Our Common Future, defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In 1992, Croatia supported Agenda 21 (UN, Conference in RIO) and determined the development based on the concept of sustainability. Education is recognized as a key for the achievement of sustainable development. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport has, in 2011, developed the Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development aimed at introducing the concept of Sustainable Development in educational system in Croatia. Sustainable development has three dimensions: social, economic and environ-

mental. The Achievement of sustainable rural development requires considering of the new paradigm for development in which youth and young people have significant role. Namely, amongst other, key needs of the EU rural community are: the need for sustainable development and the need for better living conditions of youth and young people. It is evident that many needs of youth, both social and economic, are not being met. On the other hand, young people are significant human resource for sustainable rural development. In the last few years, European Union is facing financial and economic crisis. As a respond to the crisis, the Commission adopted Europe2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Also, Croatian society is facing with high unemployment rate that amounts to 18,4%, (August, 2013) which is caused by economy's downturn (GDP 2012/2011 -2,3%,) and low entrepreneurship rate. The problems mentioned above are even bigger in some regions of Croatia. According to Regional competitiveness index of Croatia in 2010, all Croatian counties which are ranked as least competitive are predominantly rural. As a consequence of the economic crisis, EU community faces with the threat to have "lost generation". Namely, young people aged between 15 and 25 years are probably the most vulnerable group as they are the group entering the labour market for the first time. According to Eurostat, the youth unemployment rate in the EU-27 was more than double the overall unemployment rate in 2012. At 22.8 %, more than one out of every five young persons in the labour force was not employed, but looking and available for a job. In the Euro area, the youth unemployment rate was even higher at 23.1 %. In Croatia the youth unemployment rate is 18.0%. In strategic framework Europe2020, special focus is being placed on rural areas and young people, but not especially on young people in rural areas, which emerged as a key issue in evaluation of the problem of unemployment of young people.

Recent studies show that the desire and intention of young people to leave the rural areas are affected by many socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors that come from their immediate surroundings and that are closely related to their future professional life and aspirations (Jamieson&Groves, 2008). So far, political practice in most youth policies have ignored rurality, and most rural policy ignored the young population. The European Commission conducted a series of consultations to solve the problem of youth unemployment in rural areas with the aim of defining new priorities and measures within the rural, cohesion and other policy for the period 2014-2020. Previous experience in the implementation of EU rural development measures give priority to the further implementation of the LEADER program, because it has been recognized that the Local Action Groups (LAGs) have shown significant potential to activate local development resources as well as the maturity of the adoption and implementation of local development strategies (LDS). Therefore, the LDS and local action groups, as recommended by the European Commission, will be key actors in the implementation of long-term development programs financed through the cohesion and rural policy of the European Union from 2014th to 2020th to achieve the following objectives: convergence between EU regions, increasing competitiveness and employment and increase

territorial and transnational cooperation. Program LEADER strictly defines the position of young people in managing LAGs, and opens space for strengthening and empowering youth to take on this role, and as such it is becoming increasingly popular in the new member countries and in the process of joining EU. LEADER approach promotes participation of every social partner in process of rural development. Social scientists are almost unanimous in the assessment that sustainable economic and political development of certain community, whether local, national or global, depends upon four types of capital: financial, physical, human and social capital. While the impact of physical, financial and human capital on sustainable development has been largely acknowledged since the very beginning of economic activity, social capital is rather new and less tangible factor of economic growth and development. (Tolić at all. 2009.).

For sustainable rural development it is necessarily to develop human capital. In order to make best out of social capital, it is crucial to invest in human capital, i.e. in education and intellectual capital. (Tolić at all. 2009.)

As recognised in The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion the presence of strong social and institutional capital is regarded as a reason for success and an 'asset' without which the future of rural regions is inconceivable. In areas where local public-private relationships are weak and where communication and cooperation between businesses, society and local authorities are not enhanced, social and institutional capital is considered to be lacking and to be a field where future policy interventions should focus.

How young people are integrated or excluded from local labour market in rural areas is revised in the PAYPIRD project (Jentsch&Shucksmith 2004). The project highlighted the complex nature of youth transitions into employment as a result of various factors, including: difficulties in accessing training and further education, a lack of quality jobs, the seasonal nature of jobs, a lack of transport provision and problems of housing affordability. Also, it is found that young people are isolated, unaware of existing policies, and especially of those of the EU. There is worrying discrepancy between young people's wish to be able to count on the assistance and support of institutions during their period of transition and the inability of those institutions to meet young people's needs. Moreover, at European as well as national levels, while there is a range of policies for young people concerned with employment issues, such policies tend to neglect the rural dimension. At the same time, where policies and programmes focus on rural development, young people are often ignored. Based on the research results, the report recommends more flexibility in educational systems, to meet diverse individual needs and building an explicit youth element into community development and promoting a local culture which accepts children and young people as social actors.

European Commission has initiated the Study on Employment, Growth and Innovation in Rural Areas (SEGIRA) in order to assess the employment and growth in rural areas with particular attention paid to women and young people. The study highlighted that the loss of young people and the corresponding replacement by an ageing population provides a critical threat to the ongoing vitality of rural economies and rural communities. This threat applies across

sectors but may be particularly important in agriculture where the average age of farmers increases relentlessly. According to A View on Employment, Growth and Innovations in Rural Areas the situation of women and young people in rural demography has not improved in recent years. It has in fact deteriorated. Namely, rural regions experienced the highest loss of youth in the period 2002-2009. Combined with the declining number of people living in rural there are real concerns about the potential for generational renewal in rural regions. For many in rural communities, and for those concerned with rural policy, one of the most pressing issues for the future sustainability of rural communities is the exodus of young people. (Shucksmith, 2010.)

This is also the case in Croatia - strong depopulation trend is present, the population from villegages decreased from 1961. to 2001. by 1.049.325 or 36,8% population in 1961. (Akrap, 2002).

Conducted research on perception of quality of life and intent on leaving the rural areas in Croatia shows that 19,6% of respondents have intent to leave rural areas. Comparative analysis of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and intent to stay in the village or departure from the country showed that younger, more educated and unemployed and people who have not started a family and that do not have a residential area prone to leaving rural communities. (Žutinić et al, 2008).

For the process of dissemination of knowledge and experience, their transfer in rural areas role of the institutions of higher education is very important (Tolić&Pušić, 2010;). Moreover, it is essential that scientists introduce the results of fundamental research, their knowledge and experience in practice, as well as develop and implement specific models for improving the situation of young people in rural areas.

Particularly it is important to create educational programmes that meet needs of the young people in rural areas at all educational levels including Lifelong learning programmes and informal education.

Following case studies presenting projects that are developed by experts from the Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek in order to strengthen human capital in rural areas through the development of up to date competences of young people and strengthen social capital through networking of key stakeholders.

Case studies

1. THE HERA NET- Highly Educated Rural Animators Network

Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek in cooperation with partners, has designed and implemented the project "THE HERA NET". Partners in the project were: Brod-Posavina County, Vukovar-Srijem County, Town of Valpovo and Croatian Employment Service. The project was also supported by LAG Karašica, LAG Posavina and LAG Šimanovci. Period of implementation was from 21st September 2012 till 20th September 2013. Project was implemented in the area of three Counties: Brod-Posavina, Vukovar-Srijem and Osijek-Baranja. The project included 84 beneficiaries, highly educated unemployed persons. 78% of which were under 29 years of age. Objectives of the project were: a) improving access to

sustainable employment of long-term unemployed highly educated persons in the rural areas of the Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem County, b) contribution to development of human resources in rural areas of targeted counties and c) application of results of fundamental researches in the field of rural development, rural sociology and development of human resources.

In order to achieve these objectives it was necessary to improve soft and upgrade technical competencies of highly educated unemployed persons from rural areas of Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties. Two new curricula for professional development programme: 1) Specialist for rural development and 2) Project management in rural development were developed and verified by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia. At first, through soft skills development programme beneficiaries' communications and presentation skills, level of self-esteem, assertiveness, decision making and team work capabilities were improved. After having completed soft skills development programmes. Programme "Specialist for rural development" had 27 participants, and "Project management in rural development" 54 participants. Methods of implementation were interactive and project focus learning, team work and learning by doing. The programmes provided participants with special skills and knowledge's about: implementation of EU rural politics, rural development, business communications, clusters and networks of interest, project cycle management (PCM), business planning and investment studies etc. With acquired competencies they are able to work in broader spectre of jobs: project team members for LEADER implementation and LAG's management, project managers (municipalities, development agencies, private sector, etc.) head of cooperatives, agriculture and agritourism clusters managers, agritourism managers, NGO leader etc. Moreover, the new soft and technical skills gave them a strong base for potential self-employment. Furthermore, in the scope of this project a nongovernmental organisation CINRA -Croatian Info Network of Rural Animators with three offices, one in each county (Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem) was established with a main mission to support participants in connecting to labour market and developing further programmes for highly educated unemployed persons in rural areas and whole local and rural community. Also, through information and promotion campaign participant's new knowledge's and skills were presented to more than 200 potential employers, professional and general public. Throughout the project implementation, partnerships were established among educational sector, CES, regional and local government in order to maximise the project's impact. Moreover, through CINRA a number of mobile teams for local development, so called micro-centres of knowledge were established.

2. ECO HORTY LAB

Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek has, together with "Matija Antun Reljković" Secondary School in Slavonski Brod, designed and implemented project ECO HORTY LAB. Partners on the project were also Ilok Secondary School, Croa-

tian Employment Service, Croatian Chamber of Trade and Crafts and Croatian Chamber of Agriculture. Period of implementation was from 21st September 2012 till 20th September 2013. Project was implemented in the area of two Counties: Brod-Posavina and Osijek-Baranja. The project involved 58 beneficiaries, professors from Secondary Schools in Slavonski Brod and Ilok. Objectives of the project were: a) to provide Secondary schools in Slavonski Brod and Ilok with material capacities for practical training and up-to date teaching and learning methods through implementation of learning laboratory- production education- ecology park and organic agriculture extracurricular; b) to increase professional competencies of Secondary schools in Slavonski Brod and Ilok for use and follow up modern teaching and learning methods.

Project "ECO HORTY LAB" created preconditions for an increase of practical knowledge and skills of students, which are relevant to the labour market, by increasing the professional and material capacities of schools involved and by increasing the professional capacity of teachers to introduce modern teaching approaches.

In fact, by equipping and putting into operation the "Production education- ecology park" which represents "learning laboratory" for agricultural skills and socio-economic models in organic horticulture production: vegetable growing, floriculture, fruit-growing, vineyard and landscape architecture, practical knowledge and skills of students of participating schools will be increased. Since the word is about the innovative and comprehensive concept (raised bed technology), students will not only increase the practical skills but also adopt concept of sustainable recycling economy, which is based on this innovative technology. Furthermore, through the existing additional educational activities of Pupils Cooperative "Tkanica" and developing a new curriculum for the same, the students will gain practical vocational knowledge of and entrepreneurial skills. Also, through project the vocational skills of teachers are improved, by increasing their professional knowledge and skills, as well as training for their introduction of new methods and techniques in teaching. The result is introducing a new, student-oriented teaching approach which encourages creativity and focus on solving problems.

Moreover, to ensure that the practical knowledge and skills of students, fit to the needs of labour market and trends in agricultural production, in cooperation with all project's partners, the necessary knowledge and skills were analysed and planned. Especially, through the project are created preconditions for increase the practical knowledge and skills of students for work in organic horticulture production, which are insufficiently developed at the national level and which are recognized as one the objectives of the Action plan for the development of ecological agriculture in the Republic of Croatia for the 2011th-2016th. Considering the EU forecasts on future trends it is evident that development of new teaching methods will be vital for upgrading of students skills and competences.

3. SRD Programme- new qualifications for new generations

Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek has designed project SRD Programme- new

qualifications for new generations for financing from EU funds and plans to start with implementation. Partner in the project will be Association of Students - AIESEC OSIJEK. Namely, new interdisciplinary graduate study programme "Sustainable Rural Development" based on student centred learning, proper use of learning outcomes, ECTS and student workload will be developed. It will have ten required modules and ten optional modules which will enable students to participate in the creation of their own competences. Furthermore, Programme will be evaluated by pilot implementation of short form of some developed modules. To support development of student centred learning approach and to set teaching standards "Guidelines for teaching methods, students support and students practical work" will be developed. Proposed project is going to improve capacity of Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek for implementation of student centred learning and Croatian Qualification Framework's (CROQF) principles by increasing the professional capacity of academic staff. They will be trained for: 1) introducing modern teaching approaches; 2) using clear examination criteria and procedures; 3) proper use of learning outcomes in development of study programmes. Also, material capacities will be increased through equipping a practicum and library what will enable implementation of student centred learning and modern teaching approaches (problem based learning; project based learning; teamwork etc.).

Finally, through information, dissemination and promotion campaign experience in implementation CROQF to professional and general public will be presented and exchanged. It is important to emphasize that "Sustainable Rural Development" programme will be created in response to need for new competences. They are result of changing approach to rural development, according to EU rural policy, and Croatian strategic determinant to develop on sustainable approach.

Rural development is an interdisciplinary and inter-cultural field, which calls for a variety of competences, including managerial, technical, scientific and social ones. It requires developing new interdisciplinary graduate study "Sustainable Rural Development" based on proper use of learning outcomes and student centred approach. According to analyses done in Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in Croatia is evident lack of interdisciplinary approach to sustainable development in existing educations programme. Also, in this moment in Croatia there is no interdisciplinary study for Sustainable Rural Development. There is one graduate study "Agribusiness and rural development" at the Faculty of Agriculture, Zagreb and there is one graduate study Agriculture economics at the Faculty for Agriculture in Osijek. These two studies do not have the dimension of social and ecological sustainability of rural areas as laid down in the new EU rural policy.

Conclusion

Faculty of Agriculture in Osijek has good experience with the process of introducing scientific and research results into rural areas. Efforts are aimed at better connecting and networking of all relevant stakeholders in the rural areas

in order to respond adequately to the needs of youth for sustainable rural development. Through creating new educational programs and training centres, the competences of young people are being strengthened and preconditions are being created for their networking with local public-private relationships what contributes to the development of the overall social capital in the region of eastern Croatia and beyond. Particularly, accent should be given to the education of young people in rural areas and to encouragement of scientific and-research work that will deal exclusively with youth issues in rural development. Such studies are only partially represented in the research of overall youth problem issues, that is, of the overall problem issues of rural areas.

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