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Multifunctionality and local identity as paradigms for sustainable and competitive agriculture

DURATION OF THE PROJECT

Phase 1: 15/12/2006 – 31/01/2009
Phase 2: 01/02/2009 – 31/01/2011

PROVISIONAL BUDGET

791.649 €

KEYWORDS

Multifunctionality, competitiveness, territorial identity, high quality produce, sustainability, local partnerships

CONTEXT

The modernization of agriculture has gradually put pressure on its contribution to the yellow (social care and cohesion), green (environmental and landscape services) and blue services (water management and flood control), and thus on the ecological and social sustainability of farming. An important problem is that markets for remunerating such non-commodity contributions of farming are mostly lacking. Our hypothesis for this research project is however that such markets may be constructed on the basis of local identity and territoriality. The main objective of the project is therefore to investigate what local or regional identity means, how farming contributes to it and whether this concept can be a clue to promote multifunctional farming.

forced while WP 3.2 will focus on the role of co-operation and new forms of organization among local stakeholders in constructing and using agrarian-regional identities and promoting multifunctional agriculture (acceptance, conflicts, transaction costs, role of intermediaries and so on). WP 3.3 will focus on possible new financing mechanisms and their possibilities of application. Finally, the project is concluded with WP 3.4 which, based on the results of the previous WPs, identifies the 'windows of opportunity' for a successful implementation of local initiatives based on local identity in Belgium.

Methodology

Besides literature review and general data analyses on existing databases, the project will rely to a high extent on four case studies in a grounded theory approach, i.e. building theoretic frameworks from experimentally acquired data. Research in the four case-studies of which two in Flanders and two in the Walloon region, will provide the main research data for the three WPs. These case studies will be identified after a rapid appraisal of existing data related to regional identity and will be selected in order to represent distinct cases. In these case-study regions, existing data will be collected, interviews and surveys undertaken, focus groups and workshops organized. The target groups will be natives and non-natives, visitors, representatives from the farm, tourism, real estate sector and so on. The results of the interviews, surveys, etc. will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively using adequate statistical and econometric techniques. In the final WP 3.4, all information from the previous WPs will be combined into critical success factors and key performance indicators which can then be used in a windows of opportunity mapping technique.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Objectives

To analyze the main research hypothesis, Work Package (WP) 1 of the project will study the relationship between multifunctional agriculture and territorial identities. This WP has three main components. In (sub-) WP 1.1 the concept of territorial identity will be assessed and tested out in some case studies through interviews with concerned stakeholders. This will lead to a decomposition of the term identity and hierarchical relations (WP 1.2). It is expected that this part of the project will prove agriculture's role in building a territorial identity of rural areas, which can be referred to as an agrarian-regional identity. A third part in this WP will focus on the consumption of this agrarian-regional identities and how they are valued by different stakeholders (WP 1.3).

In WP 2 of the project, the economic effects of agrarian-regional identities will be analyzed. In WP 2.1. the focus will be on analyzing in how far (un)consciously built territorial identities influence economic values such as real estate prices, prices of tourist accommodation, and so on. The second part (WP 2.2) analyzes cases of rural regions (in Belgium or elsewhere) that succeed in creating a strong identity as basis to increase the economic competitiveness of the region. Based on this analysis, the critical success factors and key performance indicators of building and using local identity will be identified.

WP 3 finally, will combine the results of previous parts to assess the possibilities of an actively built agrarian-regional identity to increase rural competitiveness in Belgium. Based on lessons learned from the case studies, WP 3.1 will assess how agrarian-regional identities in Belgium can be (re)constructed or re-en-

INTERACTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT PARTNERS

The partners in the project are highly complementary with expertise in respectively economic and social geography, agricultural economics, sustainable farming, spatial planning and rural development. This expertise will be exchanged in a real interdisciplinary setting with regular meetings and discussions. For each sub-WP the partner with the most expertise in this field is responsible for developing the methodology and constructing the questionnaires but data collection is a common responsibility with mutual exchange and use of collected data among partners. The Department of Agricultural Economics of Ghent University coordinates the project and is responsible for the economic analyses,



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the Centre for Mobility and Physical Planning (AMRP) of Ghent University looks at the spatial planning aspects of agrarian-regional identity. The Institute for Social and Economic Geography of the Catholic University of Leuven will mainly focus on how regional identities are constructed as a shared vision of natives and non-natives, habitants and non-habitants, regular and non-regular visitors. The Social Sciences Unit (SSU) of the multidisciplinary ILVO (Institute for Research in Agriculture and Fisheries) mainly brings in its expertise with farm data analysis and sustainable agriculture while the Rural Foundation of Wallonia brings in field expertise with respect to the Walloon rural area as well as expertise with local action groups and action research.

PARTNERS - ACTIVITIES

The Department of Agricultural Economics of Ghent University (AGECON), with promoter Prof. dr. ir. Guido Van Huylenbroeck, focuses on the relations and interactions between the farm and its environment, and the consequences of these interactions for the development of the sector. Among the major research topics are multifunctional agriculture, the possibilities of diversification of the agrarian sector, the impact of agricultural and rural development policies. The research group has experience with both theoretical and empirical research and with a broad spectrum of research techniques, such as case studies, surveys, focus groups and econometric and mathematical modeling. The department has major expertise in leading interdisciplinary research projects financed by European, national or regional funding.

The Centre for Mobility and Physical Planning (AMRP), with promoter Prof. dr. Georges Allaert, conducts research within the broad range of physical planning. The expertise focuses on three aspects of physical planning: (1) physical planning and design, with a focus on physical planning, design and policy in the countryside (agriculture, nature, forestry, landscape), (2) spatial economy and management and (3) mobility. Their specific expertise in the physical planning of the countryside, makes them an ideal partner to investigate the planning contributions in creating local identity in Belgian regions.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND/OR PRODUCTS

The main expected outputs are papers on the definition and decomposition of the concept of agrarian-regional identity, on insights whether and how such identity can be (re)constructed and used to promote multifunctional farming and more sustainable farming practices, an assessment of critical success factors and key performance indicators and finally recommendations on how to develop and use the concepts in practice. Some intermediate workshops and a closing event at the end of the project are planned to inform all interested stakeholders about the project findings.

The research of the Institute for Social and Economic Geography (ISEG), with promoter Prof. dr. Etienne Van Hecke, focuses on social and economic spatial processes, with a clear emphasis on four topics: settlement systems, processes of social integration, regional economic networking (also rural) and tourism and recreation. ISEG combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It has experience in multi-variate processing of complex and large databases (census data for instance), and qualitative research, including the performance and processing of in-depth-interviews, focus group conversations and participant observation techniques. This makes them the most obvious partner to focus on the theoretical part of local identity, discovering the actors and assessing the opinion of citizens

The Social Sciences Unit (SSU) of the multidisciplinary ILVO, with promoters Dr. ir. Ludwig Lauwers and Dr. ir. Frank Nevens, is oriented to social sciences research of agriculture. The SSU mission aims at providing and analysing social responsible choices for agricultural development. They emphasize on the transition to a sustainable and multifunctional agriculture that remains competitive in a constraining environment. Research is basically multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary, systematic and prospective. Analysing the transition potentialities for multifunctional agriculture, given its specific

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Follow-up Committee

For the complete and most up-to-date composition of the Follow-up Committee, please consult our Federal Research Actions Database (FEDRA) by visiting <http://www.belspo.be/fedra> or <http://www.belspo.be/ssd>

territorial context is an activity that fits entirely in the SSU strategy, hence the choice of incorporating them as a partner in this project.

One of the major assets of the Rural Foundation of Wallonia, with promoter Dr. Cathérine-Marie Leroy, is their expertise of the Walloon countryside in all its dimensions. One of the products emerging from this is the Rural University of Wallonia (www.urw.be). Besides this knowledge acquired on the field, they carry out action-research by cooperating with scientific organizations. Therefore they are an appropriate partner to conduct the Walloon case studies in the project and to bring in the necessary field expertise.

