



FORUM SYNERGIES: Look to the local!



A message from a European network of sustainable practices to the ARC process

Towards a new framework of policies

Europe needs a new framework of policies which supports people in finding local solutions to the challenges we face today. We are worried about growing poverty and vulnerability of rural economies and communities; about the reappearing of nationalism which grows upon economic insecurity and the exclusion of a growing number of people from decent livelihoods; about unsustainable farming practices and about unfair distribution of public money.

We are engaged as European citizens for policies which enable people to take responsibility where they feel at home. We believe that sustainable land use and more democratic decision-making shall be at the very heart of policy reforms which are ahead of us. We want to see more education and capacity building for farmers and consumers so that they can produce and consume healthy food as a rule, not as an exception. We want policies which provide enough and healthy food for all, while preserving the environment and the capacity of eco-systems so that they can regenerate the living resources we depend upon.

We want to tackle rural poverty and growing disadvantage of people in rural areas by adapting the rhythm and the speed of development programmes to the people. Subsidies and rural development programmes which aimed at making agriculture and rural regions more competitive in global markets have left too many people more vulnerable and excluded. If EU programmes enter and leave rural areas like high speed trains they increase the differences between rich and poor. Instead of forcing people to migrate to growing cities, public policies and support should strengthen the social fabric of rural areas instead of dividing people into winners and losers.

We want policies which preserve and create values beyond money. If governments or private enterprises invest in land or rural infrastructure they should respect a number of social and environmental principles which prevent further exploitation of nature and people. We want states and enterprises to put money where sustainable practices and lifestyle grows, not where these are further systematically undermined.

We believe that in order to avoid further disconnection between people living in rural and in urban regions, policies for education and capacity building should first give them more responsibilities and influence in decision-making; - then more competence and more democratic decision-making will follow. Instead of subsidizing and compensating farmers, policies should contribute to more self-help and self-organising. We do not believe that simply more information through the internet will create better cooperation between people living in rural and in urban areas. We want better quality of communication, and more recognition of local knowledge.

A new approach to Public Health

Healthy food is at the very beginning of a healthy life. We do not believe that public health is just a question of access to medicines and curatives. For us, the key word is sustainable and organic farming as well as a sustainable lifestyle. In order to avoid a vicious circle of bad food, obesity and public illness, we need first and foremost a more inclusive education in sustainable production and responsible consumption practices. We wish policy makers to take a fresh look at local knowledge in order to deal with the challenges of dwindling resources and increased demand for food. A broad access to local know-how which promotes public health is not a question of business but a priceless common treasure.

Look to the local

Farming and food as well as land and natural resources should not become hostage of speculation. They are essential elements of our European food culture and biodiversity. We deplore a growing disconnection between people, their land and sufficient and healthy food production. We see ever more people losing interest in cultivating land as they have lost trust in a common future, in a decent livelihood and in a European community.

We call for policies which stop land grabbing and speculation with food commodities. We reject exclusive rights on seeds or animal breeds through patenting or other exclusive rights. Speculative investments of large companies are disconnecting farmers and communities from the land and food resources. We want policies which restore responsibility of land owners and land buyers towards the local communities. We say: If you join our community, you are welcome – if you just invest money, you are not.

We want to see the “polluter pays” principle to be strictly applied. Local actors must be empowered to oppose massive and irresponsible land purchases. We wish to see community farming, farmer-consumer cooperatives to be supported, instead of allowing big supermarket chains to extend their dominant market power. We want policies which provide rural infrastructure adapted to local marketing, small slaughter houses, dairy industries, as well as hygiene rules which allow farmers to keep and reinvest their added values in their communities and regions. We want innovation through decentralized and bottom-up research. We want food and rural services with identity.

EU farm and rural policies must re-localise food-production and re-connect farmers and their local communities. Farmers and consumers must create a new kind of market ownership. We prefer small scaled structures, and infrastructure, because they can offer decent work for more people and reconnect us to the specific resources and conditions of food and agricultural production.

Forum Synergies has something to offer. A wide range of experiences and success stories in sustainable rural development; engaged European citizens to contribute to the urgent change needed in policies; and - if necessary - a good deal of resistance against an economy and a lifestyle which undermines our common achievements of democracy and solidarity.

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