



*The Village Initiative : a showcase for the French Rural Network
during the national seminar in Agen (December 2010)*

Objectives

On December 16th and 17 2010 was held in Agen the first national seminar of the Rural Network on the thematic “New ruralities, new public policies”. In order to promote the actions taken within the national thematic groups and within the regional networks, a 2000 m² “Village Initiative” was implemented, just next to the Exhibition centre where were held plenary sessions and workshops.

The concept idea was to reproduce a “village square”, a strong symbol in France of informal social life, meetings and exchanges between inhabitants, especially within rural areas.

Contrary to many seminars promoting local products, network’s “immaterial” productions were presented here, i.e. all tools and initiatives gathered and all best practices collected. This new way of presenting experiences was especially appreciated by all networks members: this Village Initiative took place during two days, and was organized thanks to a strong cooperation between the National Supported Unit and to all network’s members.

Methods

The Village Initiative hall size allowed the implementation of eight smaller squares, all of them corresponding to issues dealt within the network: Europe, image of rural territories, space use, territorial innovation, territorial economy, local resources, local attractiveness and services.

Signs used to give participants directions were to reinforce the impression of being in a village.

In order to prepare the various stands, one network’s member was in charge of organizing its own square, bringing together a working group constituted of other network’s members (among them Regional networks) and their partners.

Each square offered different spaces, dedicated to all communication modes:

- “Bistrot”, equipped with chairs and tables for informal discussions;
- “Showcase”, with a video projector to take part to discussions based on experiences’ presentation (20 minutes of intervention). The projects’ leaders came to present their project: the full list of presentations could be found at the entrance of the village and within each square.
- “Mini forum”: organization of thematic workshops,
- “Resource centre”: displaying of all the documents produced by network members. Participants could consult the experiences catalogue, but could also find experiences online, thanks to the computers available for all.





Two specific villages' squares

- The Europe square occupied the central position in order to welcome all European Network's members or other national networks representatives. All cooperation offers were posted and LEADER referents within the National Supporting Unit were here to fix meetings if needed.
- The Image square offered a continuous video programming on innovation within rural areas and debates on the role of image in territorial networking

Results and benefits

400 persons visited the village for two days: informal discussions have been as essential as workshops, facilitating exchanges and opening up between all categories of actors: local representatives, regional networks, researchers and technicians.

Mini forums were quite appreciated: indeed they could all find answers to their interrogations concerning strategies to develop and initiatives to transfer in their own territory.

The village also allowed new cooperation projects to emerge on specific thematics.

This initiative success was summed up by one of the participants : "thanks to this place, one can feel the atmosphere and the main tendencies concerning rural areas and can also find new partners to work with".

More information

<http://www.reseaurural.fr/files/actes-agen-3.pdf>

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