

RECITE II PROJECT – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL MARGINAL AREAS OF EUROPE: ALENTEJO (P), LAPLAND (F), TRENINO (I)

The actions of Recite II “Learning Sustainability” in Trentino - Italy

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The restoration of some ancient alpage huts is important for our communities. The alpage hut is the place where once people went in summer with the cows to make them eat the fresh grass. It's a typical peasant structure, peasant house that now is being, for the majority, abandoned. So, all over the Alps this very big and important architectural patrimony still exists, but it is left mostly unused. Traditional farming with cows is being abandoned in most areas, but it is still a unique way of life that must be preserved not only as a form of economy, but as a source of culture and traditional identity for the inhabitants of the Alps. We have to combine alpiculture (alpine agriculture and cow farming) with new kinds of income, and tourism is one of the proposals that can be accepted and are the most suitable to give good results, because the Alps are one of the first, if not the first, tourist destination in the world (1).

The pilot project we carried on in various places in Trentino inside Recite II “Learning Sustainability” meant to combine traditional farming systems with tourism, and the first step was to rearrange some huts and use them for tourism. We tried to do it, using the Bottom Up Project, that is working with people from the beginning to the end, involving them in every phase of the action, and sharing every decision with them. We did that because we think that ordinary people are the best promoters of themselves, specially in rural marginal areas, where the classical advertising techniques are not working because the territory is weak and the human resources are scarce. We try to work with the ordinary peasants and with their families. We try to work with women because women are the traditional hosts of the house. We try to match tourism with agriculture. What we are trying to do is make the peasants produce quality gastronomy and sell it to tourists because tourists are able and willing to spend more money for quality goods than ordinary citizens.

It is a kind of tourism that we can do only during the summer. One thing we are trying to do is to get the tourist season larger. Now in the Alps there are only two periods when people come, one is fifteen days in the winter, around Christmas and the other is one

month in the summer, usually August. We can not think of building a new form of economy based on only forty-five days of work, so what we are trying to do is getting the tourist season longer.

The second action of the project is taking place in Vanoi Valley, which has a very strong characteristic, it is called “The Painted Valley” because a large number of its houses and little chapels are painted. So we have got these ancient peasant houses and every house has got a popular fresco. Usually they are sacred frescos with saints or Madonna or Jesus Christ, and so. What we have done is organize in every little village a village committee that has restored its fresco, and from that, the first step, the inhabitants together with the animators are organizing cultural initiatives and events. So it is the people themselves who are organizing their future and their tourist activity. This is a crucial point: the Alps have got a very beautiful natural territory but it also contains a long, long history beyond and we want to exploit the historical and cultural heritage to make tourism.

The third action of “Learning Sustainability” takes place in Cimego. Cimego is a small village in Trentino, about four hundred inhabitants and our project is called Doing Business to Produce Culture. Our aim is, of course, doing business because we think of tourism as an economic activity that has to produce profit and money, for the simple reason that without money people will stop living in the rural and marginal areas. But, if you will not create culture and quality of living in the mountain villages, people (and especially young and educated persons) will leave. In short words: money is not enough.

This project was strongly wanted by the municipality and by a small cultural association. These were the starting points, the wheel of the municipality and the wheel of a group of about ten people. It means that also from a small point you can begin the process of sustainable development. Another big push, that is professional and participative training, was organized by Cosmos that is a cooperative that is specialized in sustainable development and participative approach. The Center of Alpine Ecology that is also another partner of the RECIT II project, the Tourist Consortium of the Valley and the Center of Local Studies supported this project, so you see from the beginning the importance of the culture and the heritage.

Cimego is situated in a rural and marginal area and it is a very, very small place with strong problems of population. You may ask why we chose to make the project there and all I can tell is that we did not choose, we were chosen because I was working in

the Center of Alpine Ecology when the mayor of the little village one day phoned me and told me - why don't you come to Cimego and see what you can do?- and so we went there and we can say that we found people who strongly desired to develop themselves. This was the starting point because every kind of economic development has got a cost, has got social cost and has got cultural cost. This is the reason why we can not decide to develop people, it must be people who want to develop themselves and who want to take the cost and the risk of development.

But, of course, it is not possible to start development from nothing. Cimego already had a history of organization and participative development from the base and the people were already able to organize themselves. The inhabitants of the little village had already done a lot of things but they had never done them with economic purposes. There was also another strong thing. Cimego was a place that had a very special history; it was a history of heresy against the Catholic Church. It is a medieval story and people were a little bit ashamed to talk about this. There were people burned by the Inquisition and there were witches burned. There were heretics and there was witchcraft, and we decided to exploit this old and almost forgotten story to contribute to a cultural growth and to make people proud of their identity. Before the project begun, we organized a session of training for the people, so we called to this little village the biggest experts in heresy in Italy, and for about one month we trained the ordinary people to be proud of their history and of their identity, even if their identity was going against the ordinary history that was told in school. The aim of this action was to prepare the people first.

The Bottom Up approach is a strong demand of the European Union. We wanted to organize a course for fifteen young professionals to make them able to organize the development of their own territory. First we trained the ordinary people, then we made the second step that was to extract from the inhabitants of the valley fifteen young persons who should be able to create self-employment and to lead enterprises to carry on the process of development on a professional base. We filled in the application forms for the European Social Fund and we were the first group in Trentino to be successful in receiving fund for training outside towns. We started the training course "Agents for Territorial Development" and we did four months and a half of continuous training, eight hours a day, for these fifteen people. During the course Prof. Figueira, with his collaborators, went to see us and to give us his contributions.

We divided the course in theoretical lessons and practical lessons and, first of all, we did what we call territorial reconnaissance. I discovered that people from marginal and

rural territories normally do not know their own land so the first step was getting to know exactly what the cultural, economical and agricultural resources in their territories were, and which sort of people wanted to collaborate with the project.

The second step was going from a local level to an international level so we said we could be successful only if we could go out from the local level so, from the beginning, we tried to achieve an international connection and to build an international network. We asked the people from RECITE from Portugal and Lapland to come to this little village in Trentino to see what was going on. At that time the municipality of Cimego was asked to take part to the project and we were immediately very happy to belong to this project and to begin thinking in a European way. We planned how to belong to the project and what to do with the money from Europe and we thought to make an ethnographic trail and to make a museum of popular culture. So we are trying to develop popular culture to built attraction for the tourists, but most of all to raise the sense of identity.

Now the training course is finished and the tourist office will open briefly and we will also establish the eco-museum. We made an ethnographical exhibition and we asked the people to take all the tools from their old work and we made an exhibition to show what the work was, which was the first step, and also what we wanted to do in the future. This is our proposal for the future. It's called Ethnofestival. We have also invited our Portuguese friends to work with us because RECITE is the first European step, and the Ethnofestival will be the second, we hope. We want to organize this festival of ethno-music with a European camp for young people and we also want to do research on old music so that it can be registered on computer in order to make it possible for the musicians that work with the old music to elaborate it in a contemporary way.

The perspectives of our project are, first of all, to continue with European collaboration with our Portuguese and Finnish friends and friends from Corsica, and hopefully with others who are interested in these kinds of items. We want to build a network.

These are the three projects for tourism on which we are working in RECITE: in the future, we want to link them with other areas of intervention because we want to builds better standards of quality of life in mountain territory. We want to connect these rural, marginal areas where we are working with the biggest cities, to link them from a cultural point of view to try to break cultural isolation, that is one of our biggest problems. Marginality is not only a matter of land and distance but is, most of all, a cultural problem. And we also want to cooperate with the agricultural sector . We want

to support what we call identity economy that is traditional economy but developed in a modern way, using new technology. We want to work in an international and transnational system, using networks and giving young people different occasions of qualified and good jobs, creative activities, new perspective of life, inside the valleys and on the mountains.

Another world is possible.

- 1) *Alpine Space Programme – Interreg III B Community Initiative*, European Union Report, Bruxelles, November 2001: every year, about 100 million people visits the Alps