

DECLARATION

of the First Croatian Rural Parliament

held at Beli Manastir, from 16th to 18th April 2015



PRVI HRVATSKI
RURALNI PARLAMENT

This Declaration contains messages and proposals that the organizations of civil society, expert and scientific organisations dealing with rural development, LAGs, family farms, local self-governments, micro-, small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, craftsmen and other stakeholders engaged in rural development in Croatia, gathered at the First Croatian Rural Parliament, would like to convey to decision makers at European, national and regional levels.

Bearing in mind the problems that the Croatian rural areas are faced with:

- decreasing number of inhabitants, and especially outflow of young population,
- unbalanced development and continuous lagging behind in the development of rural areas,
- increasing gap between the quality of life in rural and urban / urbanized areas,
- unused agricultural land and fragmented agricultural holding,
- unrecognised, neglected, uncared for and disconnected development resources of the rural area,

building on the estimate according to which rural development is not positioned comprehensively and in a sufficiently quality manner within the framework of economic and social development of Croatia – regarding its policies, strategies, programs and regulations as well as the need to approach the issue of retaining youth in the rural area in a systematic and coordinated manner, encouraging creative approaches in employment and removal of barriers on all levels,

we stand for the following key developments:

- ensuring of intersectoral cooperation and partnership in the decision making processes at all levels,
- taking into account of differences in the needs, current state and development potential of Croatian rural areas when addressing the issues related to rural development,
- ensuring constant assistance and support for the development of capacities of stakeholders in the area of rural development with regard to their active participation in the processes of design and implementation of local development plans and strategies.

The solution to employment of youth in rural areas should be sought in the area of new business models that lean strongly on the local potential, including the local work force, cultural identity, tradition, resources and needs of the community. Wide possibilities are present in the areas of eco-social economy, information technologies, social innovations and creative and cultural industries which offer employment of local character, motivate the application of fresh ideas and approaches and open space for affirmation of young talent. Support systems need to be developed which will ensure intersectoral cooperation, permanent interdisciplinary communication and practice as well as, by means of promotion, education and establishment of targeted funding, encourage initiatives and support social innovations.

Educational programs at all levels need to be improved by introducing innovation, creativity and more width in the approach, by promoting the feeling of responsibility towards the community, changing the attitude towards different types of work, such as self-employment, volunteering and activism, motivating lifelong learning, additional education and re-qualification. All groups of inhabitants should be motivated to create interest in humane, socio-economic, environmental, historical and cultural aspects of the rural Croatia.

In agriculture and tourism, advantage should be given to quality over quantity, focus should be placed on local recognizability (branding), eco-production of food, homemade seasonal menus, short supply chains and good relations, developed communication and mutual trust between producers and consumers. Tourism in the rural area needs to be extended year-round, while at agricultural holdings it is a welcome additional economic activity. Development of creative entrepreneurial marketing should be fostered, along with the use of social networks and modern technologies, networking and development of joint destinations, in order to achieve the density and variety of services available. Small providers of services in the tourism sector should be provided with systematic support in the area of networking, clusters and promotion.

Efficient energy use and production of energy from renewable sources must become an important source of income for rural communities. Such activities are closely tied to agricultural production and rural tourism, offer possibilities of employment, contribute to diversification of occupations, fight against climate change and energy security.

Use of information technologies decreases the gap between the quality of life in rural and urban areas, removes youth mobility issues, enables setting up of new business relations, decreases the need for intermediary services and opens up wide possibilities for e-education. Integrated conditions for the use of a wide range of IT solutions, including systematic training of the population in Croatian rural areas, needs to be ensured as soon as possible.

Different forms of formal and informal networking, including **intersectoral partnerships and initiatives at local, sub-regional and regional level** will be playing an increasingly important role when it comes to including all parts of the society into the movement towards sustainable development, along with promotion of innovative economic activities, diversification of jobs and initiation of new forms of employment, in line with the local needs and technological possibilities but also bearing in mind socially marginalised persons.

Through **Community-led Local Development (CLLD)**, a new form of local, rural, urban and sub-urban development has been shaped, within the scope of the Cohesion Policy 2014 - 2020, whereby the local community gains in importance as the initiator of changes. The role of Local Action Groups – LAGs is ongoing and strengthening, with the possibility of using European Structural and Investment Funds for local development. New possibilities of quality relations between the city and its rural surroundings are opening up, which includes the possibility of new jobs and employment, along with the use of European funds. According to the national Rural Development Program, the development of rural Croatia leans directly towards only the Agricultural and Fisheries funds. The Government of the Republic of Croatia should ensure a fuller implementation of CLLD in the second part of this development period.

Throughout all of the areas that have been considered at the First Croatian Rural Parliament, **the need for gaining knowledge and skills necessary for the development of the rural area** has been pointed out. In order to ensure continuous strengthening of capacities of all the stakeholders in the area of rural development, and not only at the local level, providers of services from all three sectors need to be involved into this demanding process and their continuous education and training should be encouraged at the same time.

Constant contribution from the academic community is essential in order to deal with the issues of development of rural areas. In order for this contribution to result in practical advances and solutions, higher education curriculums should be enriched with the necessary knowledge, capabilities and skills of youth for life in rural areas, field work, development of practical capabilities and connections with the local structures; research goals should be aimed at key problems of rural areas and "knowledge pools" on rural areas and rural development should be created which would be accessible to a wide circle of users.