

Imaging Rural Identities in an Enlarged Europe

Overview

The aim of this project is to build a process focused on image production as a social, participatory process and innovative tool in rural development. It aims to give the participating rural groups in Ireland and in a number of EU countries the capacity to express themselves (i.e. successes, challenges and issues) and to communicate that to others both in and outside their own region and country. The project will be undertaken in a way which empowers rural groups through processes that include reflection and self-awareness, acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and (re) establishing links with community leaders and policy makers.

This project will involve the production of images through the use of photography and video. It will run from 1st January 2005 through 31st December 2006, covering a 24-month period. It will involve a multi-disciplinary team from the Department of Agribusiness, Extension & Rural Development, University College Dublin; IRD Duhallow and Rural Resource Development Ltd, and two image professionals. The project will also have a transnational component, liaising with institutes from France, Italy, the Netherlands and Latvia and Local Action Groups.

Genesis of Project

From 2002-2004, six European research institutes¹ collaborated in an exploratory project about rural communication processes. The project, known as Transforming Rural Communication (TRUC) aimed to understand how rural actors communicate in light of the dramatic changes occurring in rural areas across Europe and how strategic communication practices can contribute to increasing autonomy, access to resources and decision-making structures and overall strengthening rural livelihoods. The project produced a total of 18 in-depth case studies from across the EU as well as a rich theoretical basis on which to build further exploratory work.

This proposed project emerges from the TRUC project as a means to involve rural groups in participatory methodologies and strategic communication practices to improve their capacity to have a 'voice' with the outside world i.e. to engage rural actors in rural development policy debate and construction relative to the enlarged Europe. Strengthening rural people's capacity to express themselves creatively can be seen as a unique opportunity to build a common political ground and sense of citizenship in Ireland and throughout Europe.

Aims & Objectives

The project aims to encourage rural groups to reflect, discuss and debate on their individual and collective situations and strengthen their overall capacity to express 'who they are' and 'what are their needs', which is especially important in light of the constant changes facing rural areas in Ireland. This project supports this process of

¹ University of Pisa, Italy; Centre for Agriculture & the Environment, the Netherlands; Baltic Studies Centre and the University of Latvia, Riga; Institute of Organic Farming of Federal Agriculture Research, Germany; QAP, France; and University College Dublin, Ireland.

communication, by providing a forum to discuss issues of diversity, rurality and identity which are central to this project, with other rural groups and policy makers within their area, region and across Europe.

Objectives

1. To address the importance of engaging rural people in shaping and influencing rural development policy. It encourages rural groups in Duhallow and West Clare to engage with community leaders, institutions, and policy makers to strengthen the communication link between these entities.
2. To reflect and discuss the issues of “identities”, “multiculturalism” and “social integration” in light of the changing economic, political and socio-cultural contexts of rural groups in Duhallow and West Clare. This may lead to regenerate the sense of citizenship, through the recognition and expression of multi-cultural identities at local and national levels and across Europe.
3. To encourage communication through images (photographic and video) and thus provide alternative media (video and photo exhibitions) through which to convey the realities and issues faced by rural people.

Specifically, the project’s objectives will be realised through:

- The production of images – photography and video by two rural groups through a series of workshops and training. The images produced will aim to express the identity and needs of each group.
- Training, discussion and reflection related to the images produced as a means to strengthen individual and group identity and development and to understand the issues important to each rural group.
- The conveyance of the images produced to policy makers and community leaders through video and photo exhibitions.
- Generate a sense of empowerment for each group that will come from a creative and artistic atmosphere, self-awareness, acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and through establishing new links.
- Coordinate a transnational exchange with representatives from both the research institutes and their respective local action groups to share and learn from each other’s experience in image production and its outcomes as well as strengthen their voice on an EU platform.

Methodology

The project will involve multi-disciplinary country teams and liaise with four European research institutes. The country team will comprise three social scientists from UCD, two Local Action Groups and two image professionals as follows:

UCD

Deirdre O'Connor (Team Leader)
Jim Kinsella
Julie Tritz (Project Coordinator/ Administrator)

Local Action Groups

Maura Walsh, IRD Duhallow

- Youth Group

Doirin Graham, Rural Resource Development Ltd

- Women's Group

Image Professionals

To be identified.

It is important to stress that the project is grounded in participatory processes that encourage and facilitate both groups to be active participants throughout the process (i.e. design and self-evaluation) and as a result direct beneficiaries of this project. Furthermore, the people from each group will be the authors of the images they produce (photography and video); the role of the UCD researchers and the image professionals will be to guide and facilitate discussions as well as to provide technical assistance throughout the project.

Finally, the project will liaise with four other research institutions in Europe, who are as follows:

1. Babel: NGO, French non profit association for inter-cultural exchanges in Europe, Paris-Grenoble (France), overall coordination of IRIDE project.
2. CLM: Centre for Agriculture and Environment, Utrecht (Netherlands)
3. MAS: NGO, socio-cultural action group, Riga (Latvia)
4. Pisa Research Group: School of Agriculture, Pisa (Italy)

The main purpose of the transnational dimension is to create a voice within EU policy.

Project Management

The project will be guided by the Project Steering Committee while the overall project management of the project will be the responsibility of the UCD Team Leader (Deirdre O'Connor).

Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee will serve as the national coordinating team representing UCD and both IRD Duhallow and Rural Resource Development Ltd. The committee will be comprised of Julie Tritz and Jim Kinsella and/or Deirdre O'Connor both from UCD; Maura Walsh from IRD Duhallow and Doirin Graham from Rural Resource Development Ltd. Julie Tritz will be the lead researcher and will

be guided in her work by the Project Steering Committee. Further she will provide progress reports to each meeting of the Project Steering Committee which will meet three times a year.

Liasing and Networking

A key aspect of the work will be to ensure that substantial consultation is undertaken both internally (with the participating groups) and externally (with the transnational participants). To ensure this happens it is proposed to establish two liaison groups within the project areas and a formal transnational network.

Liaison Working Group

This will consist of representative(s) from each rural group participating, a representative from each LAG and Julie Tritz. The purpose of the group would be raise issues of concern and/or discuss the project that could be brought to the Project Steering Committee if needed.

Transnational Network

This network would comprise social scientists, local action groups and rural groups across all five-partner countries. Its purpose would be to exchange experiences via a website and through the two transnational exchanges held during the duration of the project.

Project Outline

Time	Objectives
January – March 2005	<u>Task 1: Introductions/ Planning²</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct introductory workshops: explain, discuss and plan project as well as establish relationships with rural groups (3-4 workshops per group) ▪ Agree on photography method and training curriculum for Task 2 ▪ Identify Photography Trainer for Task 2 ▪ Arrange workshop schedule for Task 2 (Julie) ▪ Participate in first Transnational Exchange (location to be decided) ▪ Conduct Project Steering Committee meeting (February 2005) ▪ Organise Liaison Working Group; conduct first meeting
April – December 2005	<u>Task 2. Photography Training & Production</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct workshops: will involve a combination of technical skill acquisition (photography training); theory on photography methods and discussion of issues relative to each group. <p>Further, time will be set-aside throughout these workshops for reflection in using photography as a communication tool (8</p>

² We would like to express the importance of involving both groups in the planning and decision-making process both in the initial months of the project as well as throughout the project's duration. Their involvement in the overall process will also be reflected via the Liaison Working Group.

	<p>workshops per group)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visually document agreed upon themes ▪ Conduct workshops to discuss photos taken and reflect on overall process (2 workshops per group) ▪ Agree on video training and production curriculum for Task 3 ▪ Identify Video Trainer for Task 3 ▪ Arrange workshop schedule for Task 3 (Julie) ▪ Conduct Project Steering Committee meetings. (July 2005; November 2005) ▪ Conduct Liaison Working Group meetings
January – August 2006	<p><u>Task 3. Video Training & Production</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct series of workshops per rural group³: will involve technical and communication skill acquisition; theory on video production, and discussion of issues relative to each group. Further time will be set-aside throughout these workshops for reflection in using video as a communication tool ▪ Generate a list of photography and video exhibition ideas for Task 4 and 5 ▪ Conduct Project Steering Committee meetings. (February 2006; July 2006) ▪ Conduct Liaison Working Group meetings
September – October 2006	<p><u>Task 4. Project Dissemination: Local, Regional and National Levels</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organise photo and video exhibitions in local, regional and national arenas ▪ Conduct workshop per exhibition held to discuss and reflect on exhibition experience ▪ Conduct Liaison Working Group meetings
November – December 2006	<p><u>Task 5. Project Dissemination: EU Level</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct transnational exchange, in Brussels preferably to meet and engage with policy makers at EU level ▪ Conduct workshop to debrief and reflect on the transnational exchange ▪ Conduct Project Steering Committee meeting. (November 2006) ▪ Conduct Liaison Working Group meetings

³ Number of workshops conducted per group for Task 3 will be discussed in greater detail near the end of Task 2.

Expected Outcomes

- Improved understanding and appreciation by LAGs, policy makers and administrators of the role and contribution of images in (re) defining rural identities in Ireland.
- Improved skills of participants to use photography and video as means to express and present themselves. These skills are important to raise both the self-awareness of rural people and their capacity to attract partners and to collaborate in order to reach their goals.
- Strengthened connections, exchanges and understandings between rural groups, local and regional institutions and policy makers in Ireland and the EU as a result of participating in this project.
- Contribution to the discussion about rural identities in Ireland and the identification and presentation of specific rural issues and their solutions proposed by the rural people themselves.

Project Outputs

The following are planned outputs from the project.

- Progress reports (three times per year) by Julie Tritz which would be presented at the Project Steering Committee meetings.
- Production of video and photo exhibitions to be shown in local, regional and European cultural events.
- A book of images; stories and methodological lessons will be produced at the end of the project to highlight the reflections, contributions and experiences from each country.