



RDPE: Delivering Success through Local Action

3rd – 4th February 2010
Dunchurch Park Hotel and Conference Centre, Rugby

10 key thoughts on Rural Development by Michael Dower

1. Folk, Work and Place

Sir Patrick Geddes, the famous Scottish biologist, was a stimulator and animator of local action in Scotland and elsewhere. He offered “Folk, Work and Place” as a motto for understanding places and helping them to develop. Nowadays, we tend to use ‘Community’, ‘Economy’ and ‘Environment’ as the equivalent of these simple words.

Perceive them as the great triad, an equilateral triangle, to be linked and balanced. For example, if in your area you have jobs and a fine landscape but no affordable housing, you will not retain your young people. More fundamentally, the intimate link between folk and place is a source of that sense of identity which can drive regeneration. For example, the national pride of the Basque people is expressed in the developmental work of the great Mondragon cooperative. In France, the very title of the ‘Pays’, which are partnerships of municipalities for development work, expresses the pride of local people in their own place; and the Regional Parks have a double mission, to protect and value the heritage, and to benefit the people. So, think on “Folk, Work and Place”.

2. Local Distinctiveness

Having travelled widely in Europe, to every country of the EU and beyond, I am inspired by the tremendous diversity of landscapes, cultures, economies, communities in this remarkable continent. The varied geology, landform, climate, ecosystems, human history, built heritage, language etc. are a tremendous asset for local development. This high diversity, and the local distinctiveness that results from it, was the inspiration for the European Landscape Convention, which I helped to write; and for the Character of England map, which reveals the rapid change from one area to the next, particularly evident if you traverse England from south-east to north-west across the geological boundaries. This diversity - far more marked and intimate than in, for example, north America, Australia or Africa - is the root of identity and pride for the people, and can be a major asset in unifying people for their own development. It is already reflected in the names of your LAGs - Shropshire Fells, Northern Marches, Chalk and Cheese, North Pennine Dales, Surrey Hills etc. Understand it, use it, protect it.

3. Local Economies

The EU was animated by, and still seeks to operate, the idea of a single Common Market, in which commerce and labour can freely move. The Lisbon agenda aims to turn Europe into the strongest knowledge-based economy in the world. Within the common market, major companies compete for market share. In England, five major companies sell 80% of our food. But Europe is also a multiplicity of local markets and local economies, not wholly self-contained but nonetheless vital to your efforts to sustain jobs in your areas, to add value to your local products. That is why, when I was National Park Officer of the Peak District, I provoked the formation of the

Peak District Products Association. I urge you to understand and strengthen your local economies ... and do not discount or under-rate the informal economy.

4. Narrow and broad Rural Development

Please understand the difference between narrow and broad rural development. Narrow rural development is what the RDPE covers. Broad rural development includes also the policy and spending of public bodies, in the rural areas, on education, health and social services, transport, water and much else. It commands far greater annual resources than the narrow work, and it can have a major influence for good or full. For example, the closure of a cottage hospital can do more damage that can be put right by 5 years of narrow rural development : the opening of a new school can lift a whole community. So, keep an eye on the broader pattern of public policy and spending in your area. Try to influence it in favour of your people : be 'the tail that wags the dog'. The next 3 ideas may help you to achieve this.

5. Champion

You can be the champion of your area, your patch, your 'Pays'. By "you" I mean the LAGs, the partners, the staff. To play that role you will need to:

- *Know* your community – understand its needs and aspirations, animate its energies, gain its trust
- *Then* speak for it – articulate its needs and hopes, negotiate on its behalf, submit proposals and bids
- *Be* its champion.

6. Local Delivery (the prime subject of this event)

Axis 4 of the RDPE is a means of delivery, building on the 3 phases of the Leader initiative. It enables national measures to be applied at local and sub-regional level, through local development strategies which are close to the people, understanding their needs, enlisting their energies. The scope of this local delivery varies greatly across Europe. Some LAGs can deliver only Axis 3 and 4, others are much wider. For example, in Andalusia the LAGs deliver 15 of the EAFRD measures, from Axes 1, 2 and 3. Elsewhere, LAGs are delivering not only the RDP but also other programmes. For example, the local development companies in Ireland deliver also a range of social programme : the LAGs in Denmark deliver both the RDP and the Fisheries programme. You could have the ambition to gain a similar wide scope of action.

7. Partnership

A key principle of Leader is local partnership across the sectors. This is a key challenge. It is not a mere matter of sitting together round a table. It is about enabling and ensuring that partners are actively involved in the programme, so that you can truly use:

- The power and resource of local authorities and other public or quasi-public bodies
- The know-how and acumen of the private sector
- The enthusiasm, energy and local knowledge of NGOs.

A broad range of skills are needed to achieve partnership working and an effective LAG. Moreover, beyond the formal partners is a broad range of organisations whose commitment to your programme may be needed at different points in time.

8. A process over time

Local development is not a quick process. The EU realised this : it has gradually extended the length of each programming period from 4, to 5, to 6, and now to 7 years. So, brace yourself for the long haul. Let your programme evolve and hopefully expand over the years. Be flexible and resourceful and timely in seeking funds. Ensure your projects are both sustainable and durable.

9. Support from public authorities

This issue of time points separately to the need for effective support from public authorities at all levels. I say to the representatives of Defra, the RDAs, local and other public authorities who are here :

- Local delivery is vital
- You cannot achieve effective and sustainable local development by the action of government alone
- If the people co-own the process, your money will gain a greater multiplier, with more sustainable benefit
- Think about the implications of broad and narrow rural development
- Release the collective energies of people to tackle their own needs
- Try to ensure continuity of financial support
- Keep administrative and financial systems as simple as possible
- Support the spirit and achievement of Leader.

10. Opportunity

The future of Leader, of local development, of local delivery is in your hands. You must be animators, champions, pioneers and innovators; the synthesisers of folk, work and place; protecting and using local distinctiveness, strengthening local economies, influencing both narrow and broad rural development, gaining and sustaining the support of partners and of public authorities ... and pursuing all this over time. I wish you well in this great work.