



European Rural Parliament 2015

## **National report – Iceland**

prepared by

Landsbyggðin lifi

### **Introduction**

The Icelandic partner to ERP 2015 is Landsbyggðin lifi – LBL, which is a civil organization of people in Iceland who wants to stimulate and strengthen the population throughout the country. Emphasis is placed on linking people together and helping each other to form a strong umbrella, a forum for individuals and civil groups, which are committed to strengthening and enhancing their local community and thus contribute to the development of regional harmony throughout the country both economically and culturally.

LBL is part of *Hela Norden skal leva* and looks to other civil organizations in Europe for good ideas for rural development. LBL has worked on a national development policy as well and is working on a youth project, with the aim of looking into what rural areas must have for young people to want to live there; basic service, employment opportunities and their responsibility in that future. LBL is funded by grants, which it uses to pay for outlaid costs, but everyone in LBL works on a volunteer basis as we don't have funds for salaries.

LBL organized its national campaign in this way :

1. LBL board meeting in Reykjavík on 10.5.2015 – main points debated.
2. Regional plans – an innovation through governance network in 2015.
3. Internet survey – LBL sent out an internet survey by Facebook.
4. Meetings in Iceland; Flateyri, Hólmavík and Höfn
5. Output for Europe.

### **Results of each factor.**

#### **1. LBL board meeting in Reykjavík on 10.5.2015.**

All seven board members took part in the meeting, but on the board we have people from the East, North, West of Iceland and Reykjavík. The board had a debate about what topics they believed was most important to the rural areas. These were the ones decided on:

1. Environmental, residential quality and culture. Inhabitants have to take nature into account and realize that it is the driving force behind us, without it we have no future. One of the biggest mistakes humans make is thinking that natural resources are unlimited. They are not.
2. LBL National development policy – the need for a national development policy that plans for 20 years and is a living changing policy. Here is an abstract in English, the full policy is on our website.

LBL's regional policy isn't written solely for the rural part of Iceland but for the entire country and its inhabitants. People need to know what possibilities each community holds

when they make a decision on where to live. It is therefore extremely important that regional policies are written by the country's own people without any political influences.

We want to encourage you to familiarize yourselves with LBL's main objectives. Among them are the following points;

1. Developing a unified regional policy for the country as a whole.
2. Place of residence, safety and welfare of each and every inhabitant.
3. Making Iceland self-sufficient in every area. Providing job security, food safety, heat, electricity, clean water and communications.
4. Equality is key to prosperity and increases welfare. Focusing on increasing a person's influence in its own community's development.
5. That people will not be discriminated against based on where they live, e.g. worse loan terms, as it lowers the standard of living.
6. That each part of the country becomes as self-sufficient as possible, both financially and structurally.
7. Agricultural land to be preserved for production for future generations and that products will be processed as close to its origin as possible.
8. Mutual resources to be managed by communities as close to its origin as possible. Charge for the right of use of each one.
9. Education to be diverse and opportunities to study in your community as long as possible.

The preceding is only a quick overview but we hope that it has sparked an interest in learning more about [LBL](#) and its regional policy.

## **2. Regional plans – an innovation through governance network in 2015.**

In 2010 the Icelandic government introduced Iceland 2020. Iceland 2020 is a macro policy statement embedding a vision for the future, which was developed through dialogue and collaboration between hundreds of Icelanders around the country. The plans of action were formulated for each of the eight regional districts. The first year (2013-2014) the plans were funded by a long-term investment plan. This year (2015) is the second time we have had these meetings, the results was to be announced by middle of June but will not be ready until July. The reports themselves, in Icelandic, will be accessible on the website: <http://www.stjornarrad.is/sl/soknaraetlanir-landshlutanna/aaetlanir/> LBL believes these meetings will give us information about what people believe needs to improve in their local community.

7 out of 8 regional organizations were contacted, leaving out the capital region. Each were asked how their meetings were conducted and what its inhabitants think are the region's biggest social problems. Each region reported one or more meetings with a varied list of participants; governmental, professional and academic with a few of them having open meetings. The meetings were similar in every case. Participants were separated into groups, working with certain questions concerning different social problems in their region. Even though each region produced different conclusions, these subject are among the main points that were brought up in each regional meeting. The organizations will then decide how to process and present their findings.

1. Communications. A dire need to improve internet coverage and securing access to three-phase internet everywhere.

2. Health. Biggest topics mentioned were emergency transportation, access to psychiatric help, distance to hospitals, and the need for more nursing home places for the elderly as well as hospital beds for all. A difficulty recruiting people for jobs in the field.
3. Housing. Shortage of housing for rent and its possible causes, e.g. increasing tourism.
4. Infrastructure. Strengthening of commerce and service.
5. Regional image. Stronger image both locally and outside of the region. Better information for inhabitants on the pros of their region. Working towards a positive view and pride towards regions.
6. Transportation. Flight into the east and north parts of the country is imperative in the opinion of the area's inhabitants. Opening those regions up to increased tourism and commerce. Improving roads, especially eliminating single lane bridges and gravel roads. Tourists' access to certain locations needs to be improved.
7. Education. Ensuring education for all ages and increasing supply for simple and short courses that reinforce the job market. Fighting school drop outs with added support.

### **3. Internet survey about attitudes to rural living.**

LBL put together an internet survey on attitudes towards rural living. We used our Facebook account to distribute it and on 5. July we had 467 responses, which far exceeded expectations. The survey is attached to this report. The main results of the questions are:

1. What is your gender? 68% of those that answered are *women*.
2. Your age? 25 % are *between 51 and 60*, 21% *between 31 and 40*.
3. In which part of the country do you live? 37% lives in the *North*, 31% in the *South*.
4. Where do you live? 34% live in the *Capital area* and 32% live in *Towns*.
5. Where do you see yourself living in the future? 62% see themselves living *in the rural areas* but 27% *in the capital area*. That means about 7% of the people that currently live in the capital area see themselves living in the rural area in the future.
6. What do you think is of primary important for rural habitats? 77% say *access to health care*. 76% say *employment security* and 61% say *access to education*.
7. Which businesses are most important for rural areas? 80% say the *fishing industry*, 77% say *tourism* and 74% say *agriculture*.
8. How important do you consider food security to be? 85% say it is *important*.
9. How important do you consider nature conservation to be? 87.5% say it is *important*.
10. Which educational levels are important to the choice of residence? 87% say *elementary school*, 76.5% say *nursery school*.
11. What do you consider to be the main problems of the rural areas? 70% say *monotonous business sector*, 68% say *employment security*, 65.5% say *health care issues* and 64% say *declining employment opportunities*.

Looking at these results we can say people worry about employment, schools, health care and they see the need for living in harmony with nature and securing food supplies.

### **4. Meetings in Iceland; Flateyri, Hólmavík and Höfn.**

Landsbyggðin lifi – LBL had meetings in Flateyri, Hólmavík and Höfn in November 2014, and June 2015.

In Flateyri the main reason for the meeting was to reviving the group there, but they have not been very active for the last years. About 22 persons came to the meeting and the LBL members introduced the organization and our projects. The village Flateyri had just had very bad news about its fishing industry, the biggest company was going to close down the fishing factory. People asked if LBL could become a pressure group/lobbying group for the rural

areas. That is something LBL intends but we have a long way to go. 3 persons took on the work of reviving the group in the area.

In Hólmavík we had a meeting with 5 women between 25 and 35. The meeting was very good, we learned a bit about what is happening in Hólmavík, they have a growing community but need a powerful economic development office to help develop new job opportunities. They are finding it a bit difficult coming home again from getting their education, as they experienced being label arrogant for flaunting their new degrees to some of the lower educated locals and having to constantly prove that they don't think of themselves as superior.

Höfn; There we had a meeting in June, advertised it quite well but only 2 persons were at the meeting, the janitor of the building where the meeting was held and a female restaurant owner. We sat down with them and had a very good talk about the area. Höfn is a very stable community, the fishing industry is powerful and the municipality rich. They both said the possibility of getting houses or apartments for rent was the most urgent issue, tourism is taking over a lot of housing.

In all these places the fishing industry is the main business. In Höfn the owners of the fishing rights are big, they "own" the town and Höfn is seen as their home base, but in Flateyri the owners' home bases were not in the village, they come and go and feel no social responsibility towards the community.

#### **5. Output for Europe.**

Landsbyggðin lifi – LBL does not know enough about what is going on in Europe, but one of the issues grassroots organizations need to look into is the banking systems. The cost of loans for the governments and municipalities is a major factor and means we just don't have enough left for the basic services we need and want to be able to provide to our sick, disabled and senior citizens. This is the elephant in the room, do we want to deal with it?

Reykjavík/Kópasker, 11. July 2015

Landsbyggðin lifi - LBL,

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