



National report Croatia

Towards first Croatian Rural Parliament



PRVI HRVATSKI
RURALNI PARLAMENT

Preparation

In the middle of the 2014 HMRR started with preparations for the first Croatian Rural Parliament (1st Croatian RP).

29th May 2014 on the **HMRR's General Assembly** one of the themes was organisation of first Croatian Rural Parliament. President of HMRR has introduced the concept of rural parliament to members. It was decided that Croatian Rural Parliament would be organised every two years and would put issues relevant to rural development in Croatian to the agenda. The main participants of 1st Croatian RP will be local rural stakeholders whose views, suggestions and messages need to be properly collected, shared with others, discussed and passed to the decision-makers. Baranja is proposed as the location of the first Croatian Rural Parliament.
No. of participants: 27

On 30 September 2014 representatives of HMRR organised **meeting with Zeljko Kraljićak, deputy prefect of Osijek-Baranja County** have agreed that the 1st Croatian RP will be held in Baranja and the county will be the host of the event. The plenary session will be held in Beli Manastir and thematic meetings and workshops in various locations in Baranja. The conference program will be associated with a program of traditional event in the county "Days of Wine and Tourism".

No. of participants: 6

The delegation of HMRR was given opportunity to meet **Croatian President, Ivo Josipović** on 10th October 2014 in the Presidential Palace. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce activities of HMRR and to inform the President about the preparations of the first Croatian Rural Parliament. A delegation consisted of representatives of the Board of HMRR and the organizing team for the preparation of Rural Parliament. The President expressed his interest in solving problems of rural development and willingness to monitor and support the preparation of the Croatian Rural Parliament.

No. of participants: 7

Round table "Towards the first Croatian Rural Parliament", held on 27th-28th November 2014, marked the beginning of meetings and promotional events that will complete the Rural Parliament in April 2015. It was attended by a total of 33 representatives of the various stakeholders of rural development, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Business and Trade, associates of Croatian representative in the European Parliament, the Association of Towns, Osijek-Baranja and Virovitica-Podravina counties, Regional Development Agency of Slavonia and Baranja, the Geographical Department of Natural Faculty of Science, several associations (Croatian Association of Young Farmers, LEADER network, Cooperatives for ethical finance etc.), LAGs and member of HMRR.

After the introductory presentations of Anneli Kanna/Estonian village movement and Goran Šoster/PREPARE, whose purpose was to introduce a wider range of stakeholders with the term and the concept of RP, participants agreed on the concept of first Croatian Rural Parliament. It was determined that 1st Croatia RP will be held in Baranja 16th-18th April 2015, organized by HMRR, Slap and LAG Baranja, in the household of Osijek-Baranja County. The main theme of RP will be "Perspectives for young people in rural areas" with sub-themes youth employment and quality of life.

No. of participants: 33

Consultations:

- ✦ Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Zagreb, 9 February 2015
- ✦ The meeting with Franjo Lucić, President of the Agriculture Committee, Zagreb, 12 February 2015
- ✦ Meeting with the Association of Croatian OPGs "Life", Zagreb, 16 February 2015
- ✦ Meeting of the Organizing Committee of the first Croatian Rural Parliament, Zagreb, 25 February 2015
- ✦ Meeting with representatives of the Ethical Bank, Zagreb 2 March 2015

Workshop "Towards the first Croatian Rural Parliament" was held on 12th March 2015 and through group work gave the contribution to the design of certain components of the program of the first Croatian Rural Parliament. Wider scope of rural stakeholders from whole Croatia participated and contributed to shaping of the Parliament. Participants worked in five smaller groups to discuss the following questions: Presenting Croatian rural area in Ethno village / Potential participants and sponsors / Tender for the idea and the example of good practice of youth employment / Frame for the drafting of the Declaration of HRP / Message rural Croatia to rural European Parliament. The results of the groups were presented to other participants and jointly discussed.

No. of participants: 36

First Croatian Rural Parliament, 16th-18th April 2015

Organizers of the first Croatian Rural Parliament: Croatian Rural Development Network in collaboration with the Association for Creative Development Slap, the town of Beli Manastir and LAG Baranja. But many other member organizations have also contributed to the preparation of the Parliament (Ecovast, REFLECTION, LAG Source, DOOR, etc.).

Location: Baranja region - the plenary part of the work at the Hotel Patria in Beli Manastir, and thematic workshops in eight different locations in the environment

Participants: 228, representatives of different social groups with different levels, from local to European participants.

Methodology: exchange of information, opinions and good practices, shared thematic reflection on the future of rural areas in the Croatia through rural cafe (world cafe) and thematic workshops

Main theme of the first Croatian Rural Parliament: "Perspectives for young people in rural areas"

Results: The Declaration of the 1st Croatian RP, the results of rural café and workshops, the message to the 2nd European Parliament, winners of the award for ideas and examples of good practice for youth employment in rural areas

The Parliament was held under auspices of Croatian Ministry of Economy and EESC. The event gathered representatives of rural communities from all over the country to discuss possibilities and prospects for development in Croatian rural areas and to see how they can make an impact on the policies shaping their lives. There were representatives of local stakeholders - residents of local communities, small farmers, craftsmen, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperative members, LAGs and associations active in rural development, but also local, regional and national governments.

The main event was organised in Beli Manastir, while field workshops were held in different parts of Baranja. Situated at the East part of Croatia, bordered by the Drava and the Danube rivers - Baranja manages to preserve a unique note, vineyards and love for wines, chilly peppers, special kind of fishing, traditional food and kind people.

After opening session, Rural Café was organised, during which participants exchanged views on various topics. One of the topics was "Declaration of the first Croatian Rural Parliament", i.e. message of inhabitants of rural Croatia and other rural development stakeholders to the decision-makers at European, national and regional level.

The starting point:

- The problems of Croatian rural areas - depopulation as young people are leaving, growing development lag between urban and rural areas, low quality of life; underutilization and fragmentation of agricultural land; neglecting of other resources.

We are committed to / suggest:

- give a greater role to the cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership in decision-making processes at the local and regional level;
- an integrated approach to rural development issues at all levels, taking into account the diversity of rural Croatia;
- empowering stakeholders on local level to actively participate in the design and implementation of local development plans.

The evening ended with the presentation of LAGs. Tradition and gastronomy of Baranja and specialities from other parts of Croatia were also presented.

On the second day, a round table "Development of rural Croatia in programming period 2014-2020" was organised. The rest of the day participants attended thematic field workshops that were organised at eight locations. Workshops were dedicated to the following topics: Eco-social economy in rural areas; Challenges and possibilities of agricultural production; Sustainable tourism as a development initiator; Energy efficiency and renewable energy sources; Creative

industries, innovations, new technologies and IT possibilities; Role of local community in rural development; Role of academic community in development of rural areas and Role and perspectives of rural parliaments.

The last topic "Role and perspectives of rural parliaments" was moderated by Goran Šoster/PREPARE and Višnja Jelić Mück/HMRR, PREPARE.

Conclusions:

<p><i>The problems of rural Croatia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Everything is centralised in Zagreb ✦ The demographic picture of rural Croatia is getting worse ✦ Low quality of rural life, basic living conditions are threatened (rural area has a lot of small problems (closure of post offices, the absence of ATM , etc.) ✦ There are particularly vulnerable parts of the rural area (Baranja , islands...) and the issues that need greater attention (for example small-scale fishing)
<p><i>What can we do?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ We need to encourage the bottom-up approach ✦ Many problems cannot be solved by using only bottom-up approach, but we need to identify problems and formulate the right message
<p><i>How to strengthen the voice of rural Croatia?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Rural stakeholders should demand their rights, participate actively in the work of the Network for Rural Development of the Republic of Croatia ✦ Local communities in Southeast Europe are weaker than in the rest of Europe - LEADER approach is welcomed and was recognized on local level before it was taken into account by the governments
<p><i>Regional/local dimension:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ To encourage young people to get involved in decision-making processes ✦ To reduce the gap between the regulations on paper and implementation ✦ To recognise the bottom-up voice, promote and advocate at the local level ✦ To take into account the voice of young people
<p><i>National level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Need for decentralization - need to work systematically on the fact that demographic policy should deal with this issue ✦ Civil society needs to strengthen its competencies so their message would be respected ✦ To institutionalize the voice of civil society (Network for Rural Development of the Republic of Croatia should function as a pool of knowledge) ✦ Membership in the EU brings senior political standard that implies the involvement of civil sector in the adoption of public policies
<p><i>European level - What is the message from rural Croatia to the second European Rural Parliament?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ To provide transparency, different countries in Europe should deal with "small" joint issues (ATMs, post office, etc .) - Learning on good practices ✦ SEE region lags behind the rest of Europe with the policies and investments in rural development

*The first Croatian Rural Parliament is a step forward, a meeting point and cooperation
→ we continue in this direction*

The first Croatian Rural Parliament concluded with the adoption of the Declaration, which will be sent to decision-makers at national and local levels. Also, a message from rural Croatia will be sent to the Second European Parliament to be held in November 2015 in Austria.

Parliament has proved to be the excellent place to hear the voice of rural Croatia, talk about the possibilities and perspectives of rural areas, present good practices and motivate residents to be involved in shaping rural development policy and to strengthen partnerships and links among all sectors.

Declaration of the First Croatian Rural Parliament

This Declaration contains messages and proposals that the organizations of civil society, expert and scientific organisations which deal with rural development, LAGs, family agricultural holdings, local self-government units, 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 inter-sectoral 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 inter-sectoral 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 Croatian rural area.

In agriculture and tourism, advantage should be given to quality over quantity, focus should be placed on local recognisability (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 inter-sectoral 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 on offer 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 access to 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 required in order to deal with the issues of development of rural areas. In order for this contribution to result in practical advances and solutions, it is necessary to enrich the higher education curriculums 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 bases" on rural areas and rural development should be created which would be accessible to a wide circle of users.

Communication with stakeholders

From the preparation phase until today main messages were communicated and sent to stakeholders in rural Croatia by HMRR members (36 members, of which 22 LAGs). We tried to include all relevant stakeholders in the whole process, communicating with rural communities, respected individuals, common people and all the rest.

A webpage <http://ruralniparlament.com/> was designed to disseminate information and make the Parliament visible.

Next step is to continue working on the guidelines defined by Declaration, until 2017 when second Croatian Rural Parliament will be held.

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