



by Delme Harries

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# Change the village, Challenge yourself! You(th) can make a difference

**Rural Youth Europe and MIJARC (the International Movement for Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth) were supported from February 2005 for two years, by the European Commission for a two years research project: “Change the Village, Challenge Yourself! Youth can make a difference!”.**

This two year project was the result of a long term process that started 10 years ago! It was in 1997 and 1998 that the European Committee for Young Farmers and 4H Clubs - ECYF4HC (Rural Youth Europe’s name at that time) and MIJARC Europe held two seminars together in collaboration with the Directorate of Youth and Sports (DYS) of the Council of Europe (CoE) on the question of the prospects of young people in rural areas of Europe. These seminars brought together for the first time our youth organisations (ECYF4HC and MIJARC Europe) and politicians from the youth sector as well as from the Committee on Agriculture, the Environment and Local and Regional Authorities in order to discuss a special rural youth policy. As a follow up, ECYF4HC and MIJARC Europe organised a seminar on spatial development in 2000.

## ► The fields tackled within this project were:

### 1. Rural youth and their environment

- Identification with their region
- Role of agriculture
- The ‘village’ as a social system

### 2. Needs of rural youth

- Formal and non-formal education
- Employment
- Leisure opportunities
- Values and general needs

### 3. Youth participation in society and politics

- Opportunities in rural areas
- Are these existing opportunities practicable/interesting for/addressing rural youth?
- The relation between organised and non-organised youth
- The role of politics and how young people experience it

### 4. Youth work in rural areas

- Activities on a local level
- Role of youth organisations/schools
- New methods/approaches in rural youth work
- (Special) youth policy for rural areas

The project “Change the Village, Challenge Yourself!» was based on a European study, carried out through an on-line questionnaire, rounds of interviews and thematic workshops in our seminars. The aim was to give a relevant picture of the situation of young rural people in Europe while outlining recommendations on rural-related issues to European and national decision-makers as well as to youth organisations.

A further Double Study Session between members of Rural Youth Europe and MIJARC Europe was held at the EYC Budapest in Spring 2006 which dealt with issues like: youth participation and becoming active in your community, rural development, how to change the village, what is rewarding life in the countryside like and how to prevent the brain-drain from the countryside.

Participants highly profited from the exchange of good practice and developed new project plans during the week. The highlight of the week was the talk show - a discussion panel together with the participants and guests representing CoE, EU and other experts dealing with the issues mentioned above.

Through the project, the two movements were particularly interested in coming up with concrete measures to make life in the countryside attractive for young people, both in agricultural and other professions. The entire process, findings and recommendations as well as practical examples showing that young people can make, and have made, a difference in their local communities have now been summarized into a booklet.



The release of the project booklet took place on Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007 at the European Parliament. Mme Bernadette Bourzai, French member of the European Parliament and member of the Committee of Agriculture and Rural development, presented with the two movements the project outcomes. Referring to her experience as a small town mayor in the South West of France, she reviewed the problems European rural youth are confronted with.

Amongst the outcomes obtained, the two movements wished to highlight a few points: 50% of the participants answering the survey of the project fear having to leave their rural areas, although most of them would like to stay. Important obstacles such as employment, education, housing, isolation and leisure time opportunities affect them in their daily life. Thus, Rural Youth Europe is committed to raise awareness of these issues and demand action to improve the situation. We would encourage young people to take ownership of their rural areas by continuing with sustainable projects and driving communities forward as well as ensuring that rural youth will have a better future. This can be achieved by young people sharing good practice. Examples of these are included in the booklet.

The feedback received was really positive and encouraging. Actors from the social and political sector who were present at the conference congratulated the two movements for the achievements of the project and expressed their willingness to disseminate the results. We will keep actively promoting the valuable outcomes of our project and ensure that young people in rural areas are not forgotten. ■

The booklet which contains the results of the survey as well as examples of best practice can be found on our website [www.ruralityoutheurope.com](http://www.ruralityoutheurope.com)

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