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Knowledge Society from the Point of View of Rural Sustainability

Bruckmeier K. and Tovey H. (Eds.) 2009 *Rural sustainable development in the knowledge society*. London: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 294.

The theory of sustainability conquered the world of developers approximately 20 years ago. But transformation is not an easy process since changes in the economy during the last 200–250 years creating global market-oriented, mass production industries fixed the rules in every aspect of everyday life. And another obstacle exists while each place has its own climatic, geographical, political, social and economic background the process of transformation cannot be unified. The philosopher's stone exists in neither alchemy nor in the practice of sustainable development, moreover during the process of intervention at national level the regional or micro-regional spatial differences of a country must be taken into consideration. That is why Karl Bruckmeier and Hilary Tovey, the writers and editors of this book had to make an enormous effort to synthesize the global trends in European rural sustainable development out of different case studies from several European countries. Their work was supported by researchers and academics from 12 European countries. The book is based on the 6th Framework Research Programme which lasted 30 months from 2004 to 2007. The aim of the research was to reveal how certain knowledge types are embedded in the context of rural development, who the actors of the development process are and how these knowledge types interact or counteract with one another. The name of the project is CORASON (Conditions for Rural Sustainable Development). The countries were chosen to represent the European border region considered as forming the so-called Green Ring where strong conventional agrarian traditions survived the waves of industrialisation and the bottom up approach of collectivisation in the case of ex-socialist bloc countries. This theory was introduced and

explained in 2001 in the book *Europe's Green Ring* edited by Leo Granberg, Imre Kovách and Hilary Tovey. Countries involved in the CORASON project were Great Britain (Scotland), Germany (East Germany), Spain, Portugal, Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Sweden, Greece. Countries equally represented new and old members of the EU, ex-socialist countries and countries with a long tradition of market-based economy. In the case of core countries like Germany the chosen territory also represented the aforementioned Green Ring in the case study from East Germany. This idea led to skipping France which bears classical agrarian traditions. The main point in each case study was the examination of a process in each country where the focus was on how the theory of sustainability reaches people involved in rural development and the local inhabitants. Rural development and rural areas are the common point in each case study but these studies deal with a vast range of subjects in this field such as local entrepreneurship development, green energy production affecting agrarian practices, traditional clam fishing, reproduction of traditional agrarian practices, rural tourism and the case of local products. Qualitative techniques such as content analysis and interview and observation were used during the preparation of case studies. The research teams also used statistics and content analysis in the pre-research phase after drawing a portrait of each nation and its role in sustainable rural development by policies, laws and actions and how these countries give a definition to the terms of rural development or sustainable rural development. The overview of these determinative actions shows that there are hardly any similarities between development policies at government or developer level. In most cases only one of the essential sustainability pillars (ecological, social, economic) was taken into consideration and each pillar will lead to different approaches in practice. This colourful picture has one unifying element that can be discovered in these policies. It is the supranational policy creation of the European Union which is used as a guideline for member states and especially for new members whose acquaintance with these theories is a rather new phenomenon. Appearance and diffusion of the idea of sustainability in Eastern European countries is definitely a result of the enlargement process of these countries.

The research process of CORASON used seven different approaches to interpret the processes. These seven approaches were merged into two core chapters in the book. One deals with diversification and innovativeness in rural areas while the other gives interpretations of theory of sustainability and the possibilities given by the environment. Each topic contains six case studies where the East and West, North and South of Europe are represented. (In the

case of a missing case study from Spain a second Polish case study is used from a different part of Poland which represents the work of another Polish research group).

The book contains a frame story with articles written by the two editors. These articles try to define the common core elements in the process of rural sustainable development. The introduction deals with the general trends of knowledge transfer and gives a brief presentation of each nation's rural policies and images of sustainability. The case study section is followed by a summary of how the innovation processes can be classified which are closely related case studies with many references to the practices. As a conclusion the editors summarize the book with a realisation of an important element in the process of development which operates as an immanent and everlasting part of rural communities: knowledge and local knowledge transfer. In most cases local knowledge is not taken into consideration as an important element. Codified knowledge is an important and irreplaceable building block in sustainable rural development but not the only type of knowledge that should be used. Local traditional knowledge or pre-industrial or lay knowledge is as important as codified knowledge which has to complete codified knowledge in order to get an applicable approach which suits the territorial needs. These two knowledge types have to be used in a balanced way which is easy in theory but really hard to do in practice. This is the point where local inhabitants and outside developers have to cooperate. One useful solution can be the appearance of an insider outsider, i.e. an outside expert with local roots in the area of development.

Finally we would like to emphasize two merits of the book. One is a different way of using the phrase of knowledge when the writers talk about the knowledge types used and needed in development and innovation. This new construction of knowledge is a way different knowledge is formulated by academics in the discourse and research of knowledge society. The usual term is a product of views generated by post-industrial development practice. Modern knowledge society needs only these terms. But in the case of a rural knowledge society which lacks elements like modern technological or scientific knowledge more terms and knowledge types should be taken into consideration so the process of modernisation and development can be followed, described and compared. Only this broader concept of knowledge will let us understand how rural areas become a part of modern knowledge society and make it possible to formulate the requirements of sustainability. The authors expanded the term 'knowledge' into the locally produced tacit or traditional knowledge types unfamiliar to

former scientific practice. And because of this attachment the daily practice of development observed locally led to a different experience which the reader could imagine from the details of national policies and scientific theories listed in the introduction of the book. The framework one can interpret the term sustainability is built in the different ways of knowledge which can be transferred where scientific, managerial or organisational and local knowledge plays a different part in the process.

Another great improvement is the fact that the authors emphasize that all the knowledge types are fluid categories since the border between different knowledge types can easily be transformed and reconstructed. The authors recognize this phenomenon but they don't give more information on how these liquid categories should be used to make a new classification of skills and knowledge types used in a rural context for development. I suspect this will be the topic of their forthcoming research which will be a good base for a new book.

I recommend this book to those who would like to look into the rural development processes in Europe to get a wider picture of what are the main building blocks of rural knowledge society.