

# CULTURAL VILLAGE of EUROPE



## Cooperation

Work in the village - the first workshop

Patato cooperation Douar Den

### **Cooperation or concurrence**

It was interesting that the first workshop was focused on Cooperation. The whole project Work in the Village itself is a project of cooperation. And the organisation of Cultural Village is also cooperation.

The European Union has a commissioner for competition: Mrs Nelie Smit Kroes. It is her job to care that there is enough competition, that companies do not make too many deals. The commissioner should care about a free market without deals. The EU has no commissioner for cooperation.

Everybody living in a small community knows about it. Cooperation is the first thing to look for when something is going wrong. When a farmer is ill, farmers in the neighbourhood will care for his cattle. That is (was) the practice in

many countries. In Mellionec it became clear that the selling of products became a problem. Four producers made a selling point together.

On the other side special in the smaller communities many people like to do things on their own. They call it freedom. It will be important to be able to find cooperation at the moment it will be needed. Many small enterprises disappeared in the last years. In which way could cooperation be a solution? And: what kind of cooperation? Cooperation in order to be bigger? Or cooperation in order to get skills that you do not have on your own?

Mellionec for sure will be interested in further forms and good examples of cooperation. In November 2008 they will continue with this theme.

### The first Workshop was in Mellionnec

On November 30th 2007 we had the first workshop in Mellionnec. Representatives of six villages of the Cultural Village network were present. There were over thirty participants from Mellionnec and Kreiz Breizh. The workshop was focused on cooperation. Mrs Isabel Guégin held a lecture on that topic, and we visited two examples of cooperatives: a shop in Mellionnec which three farmers and one baker together exploit for their products and Douar Den, a cooperative of biological potatoes.

Bert Kisjes informed the participant about the Work in the Village project. Palkonya, Ströbeck, Paxos, Killingi Nomme and Wijk aan Zee told about their planned activities within this

project. The participants of the workshop in groups started making an inventory of examples of self employment in the various villages.

Cultural Village will apply for a grant of the European Interreg fund. Therefore Mr Lollier gave an introduction about European projects.

In November the workshop in Mellionnec will be continued.

# Strong plea for cooperation

*Isabelle Guégin runs a cooperative company of consultants on gender equality in the workplace. Their objective is to make the companies and local authorities realize that gender equality can contribute to local development. She does a lot of work on female entrepreneurship. In the workshop in Mellionnec she made some interesting remarks on cooperation and self employment.*

There is a difference between de Very Small Enterprises in the traditional field like bakeries and hairdressers and self-employment concerning more innovative and atypical jobs.

Self-employment is often not lucrative. The self-employed have to do think about everything: creation, production and promotion and nobody knows everything. It leads to loneliness.

A good solution is to change the self-employment scheme into that of cooperation. By opening up the knowledge, one can break the rules and allow innovation.

But there is a difference between collaboration which is a juxtaposition of individual projects and cooperation where risks, responsibilities and outcomes are shared.

Cooperation needs human qualities like the ability to listen and ability to engage in dialogue. To want not to work alone is a good driving force. But a better one is the feeling that the project cannot

succeed without the input of several people.

Cooperation does not necessarily mean that people have to be the same. On the contrary it is important to use complementary qualities.



The shop of Folavoine in Mellionnec

# Roland Le Bouëdec about Mellionnec

In the fifties Mellionnec was an agricultural village through and through. In the sixties a big change started to happen. Agriculture was scaled up, the small farmers disappeared. In the years after, many houses were deserted and land was left uncultivated. In the seventies a revival started to happen with the influx of population. People came from the cities. In the nineties foreigners came, retired people from Great Britain. But also active people who wanted to start their business there.

The school was closed in the eighties and reopened in the nineties and work is in balance now. Some people work in the village and some in the region. Some found a way to live off organic farming and selling organic products. Mellionnec has room for that: 470 people are living on a surface of 2400 hectares.

So a Dutch couple, Jan and Jacky, found their way to Mellionnec. They bought a piece of land and now they are building horse driven wagons. These wagons are so nice that the community is proud of them. This is the address to go when you want to go from France to Wladiwostok in a hand made horse driven wagon. Probably unique in Europe.

The cultural life of the community is very high. Every year sees an exhibition of sculptures. And there is a festival of films in a place without even a cinema!

## Folavoine a remarkable cooperative in Mellionnec

Mellionnec is a community with 470 inhabitants. In 1998, there were 3 pubs, 2 groceries and 2 bakeries (a traditional one and an organic one) and a “crêperie” (traditional meal restaurant).

In 2002, only the organic bakery was still open. The organic baker initiated a plan. He spoke with three local organic farmers: a market gardener, a fowl producer and a goat cheese farmer.

They started to think about cooperation. That means that they were thinking what they have in common. What they had in common turned out to be ideas about consumption. All of them preferred organic farming as an important quality of consumption. They had in common as well their ideas about fair trade on an international scale. From these starting points they discovered common interests in the field of marketing, production and selling. Among them: reducing the amount of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer. Selling on the local market.

The result was a cooperative called “Folavoine”. They opened a common shop in Mellionnec. Three times a week they were selling their own products for three hours in the afternoon (16h-19h). The original aspect is that, the four cooperating persons run the

shop for free in turn. Other producers can also deposit their products but they will get their money when the product will be sold and part of the profit will be for the shop.

In 2008, the shop is still open. Now the opening times are three afternoons and three mornings. And the baker built a new bakery. More people in the surrounding area want his bread.

In the shop you will find various kinds of bread, goat cheese, cow cheese, butter, milk, yoghurt, eggs, fresh vegetables, wine, chocolate, cider, beer, fruit juice, tea, coffee, sugar, meat, jam, apples.

They are planning to organise in the next months a buyer’s cooperative for foodstuffs like fruits, rice, pasta, cereal and other consumer products. The shop is not only functioning for Mellionnec but also for people in the villages around who know about the shop and make use of it.

One of the important things is the direct contact the producers have with the consumers.



# Douar Den

The SCIC “Douar Den” is a cooperation organising the organic potatoes field in Brittany from production to sale. It associates potatoes producers and operators (transformers and dispatchers). Together they decide which quantity of potatoes will be produced, what the benefits of each of the partners will be, they have a place to stock the potatoes and for common material.

SCIC means Société Coopérative d’interêt Collectif (Common Interest Cooperative Company). It is a new status in France for multi-stakeholders cooperation. Different kind of partners can be associated : salaried employees, volunteers, consumers, public collectives, firms, associations. It is governed by cooperative rules: one person is one voice, and the profit of the company is kept as a stock that cannot be divided. Douar Den is the first agricultural SCIC in France and many people were very sceptical. It seemed to be impossible for them that people who have

traditionally opposite interests can cooperate.

“In the best of cases it will work during very good years” and they predicted that the initiative would collapse with the first problems.

The year 2007 has proved the opposite due to very bad weather conditions, the potatoe yield was a sixth of that of the year before. But they were able to anticipate this production disaster, and they managed to make an arrangement and avoided an economical disaster.

Five people are now working for this company: an agronomist, a technician, two employees and a secretary-bookkeeper. The organic potatoes production has been developed and Douar Den is the main supplier for organic potatoes in France.



Two owners of the cooperation



The street through Palkonya

# Inquiry in Palkonya

Balazs Harsagyi, the new mayor of Palkonya, told about their experience with an inquiry in the village in April last year. They made two workshops with the Opinion Leaders of Palkonya and talked about the strengths of the village and its future lead by a Marketing Consulting company, and then they made an inquiry from the result of the workshop. They visited 68 houses. The answers came for 60% from women and for 40% from men. He told the workshop about the results.

The aim of the inquiry was to know how people see the village (their plans, future, opinions) and to know what they expect from the Cultural Village of Europe events.

## The first conclusion:

Most people like the village. And they are open for people from outside. What they miss is a good mood and cohesion.

Young people were the most negative about the village. “But we have to catch them. That is important”. The most positive and committed people are of the age between 30 and 60. They like Palkonya, they are open to all possibilities. The elderly are passive. They do not want any change. The people agree about the main character of the village: wine, ambiance and hospitality.

## The main problems are:

1. Not enough working places 2. The road. Palkonya has one road. All houses are built along this road. But now there is a lot of truck traffic through the village. Palkonya has put much energy in protecting the houses. But the traffic is destroying these houses again. 3. The roads are in bad shape.

Perhaps they will get an internet connection.

Many people want a shop, a place where the products of the village can be sold. Palkonya has its wine. It should be possible to have a shop where this wine can be sold and other local products like smoked meat, vegetables, herbs and art.

On the question about the future, only eight people had plans for the future.

The Mayor got three ideas about the future:

- 1 In any case there should come this shop for the local products. There is a road. The people that come along this road should be able to buy something. Also it could be a cafeteria, and a tourist point, where a small wine tasting can be organised.
- 2 The village should also keep the “The Cultural Village” image.
- 3 The village municipality wants to buy one of the wine cellars. It could be an information post. The orientation on wine depends on people from abroad who will buy the wine.
- 4 The Municipality wants to start agriculture. Trying to find what is possible to do locally. It is unacceptable that the land is not used because the imported chickens in the supermarket are cheaper. This cannot be the reality. It is not an option to leave the land unused.
- 5 Palkonya is looking for intensive contact with the town Pecs, on a distance of 25 km. In 2010 Pecs will be Cultural Capital of Europe. And Pecs does not want to have all activities in the town. Palkonya could be included. That is a nice challenge.

## Kolophon

On this edition collaborated:

Anne Hauvespre, Ton Kroezen, Karin Seltmann, Ella de Jong, Szilvia Rechner, Ivan und Bert Kisjes.