

COMMUNITY X CHANGE AND THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS PANEL : BRIEFING PAPER



What is Community X Change?

We have been meeting since 2006, using an approach similar to what some people call a Citizens Jury, to share our experiences of life in rural areas and to push for change.

Who are we?

We are a very diverse group ranging in age from 14 to 84 from all over Cumbria and County Durham in the North of England. Before this project none of us were involved in politics or campaigning.

What have we done?

During our weekend meetings, we shared our experiences of rural life and came up with a list of things that we think should be changed to improve life in rural areas. A number of other experts (like us, because we are experts too) gave us some more ideas to think about, before we produced a set of recommendations.

A group of us then took our recommendations to Brussels where we met with some 70 other citizens from 10 regions across Europe as part of the European Citizens Panel. Funded by various foundations and the European Commission's DG Education and Culture, the panel met over a long weekend, by the end of which we had produced a set of European recommendations which were then presented to a mix of decision makers including Mariann Fischer Boel: Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner, Michel Delebarre: President of the Committee of the Regions, Janusz Wojciechowski: The Vice President of the European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Dirk Ahner: Director General of DG Agriculture Regional Policy. Inspired by the process and a desire to make a difference we have continued to meet.



What do we want and when?

At the end of our long discussions in the UK and in Brussels we have decided to prioritise two main recommendations.

1. Young people must be involved in the decision-making of all EU projects.

In particular we would like to see any European Union institutions who influence rural policy, for example the DG for Agriculture and Rural Development, ensure that young people are directly involved in decision making processes. We recommend that this be done through the formation of youth forums, the employment of youth advisors, the use of standards on youth participation, participatory budgeting and the identification of a senior officer with responsibility for youth participation.

2. People's voice must be heard

There should be regular processes such as ours as part of European decision making. For this to happen there must be agreed participation standards

We have worked hard in our own time to produce these recommendations and are looking to work with people who are able to help make these recommendations a reality. We have a small piece of funding which will last us until the middle of next year, if you are interested in working with us we are anxious to hear from you as soon as possible ideally before Christmas 2008.



For more information:

If you would like to meet with any of the group call us on +44 7855 341480 or email pbinclusion@btinternet.com

Websites:

Community X Change: www.ruralsos.org.uk
European Citizens Panel: www.citizenspanel.eu/

