

European Rural Rides

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In 1821 William Cobbett published his first version of *Cottage Economy* followed by his widely read *Rural Rides* in 1830. In both books he established himself as a rural realist, a political reformer and a farmer with an open eye for agricultural conditions and the situation of the poor farmer. Although William Cobbett was commenting on the United Kingdom, and especially the south of England, this article extends his title to underline the established fact that, approximately 150 years later, one third of Europe's farmers are still living under difficult conditions.

After the second world war a number of European countries became involved in programmes for the new independent countries in the so-called Third World. Such programmes focussed to a large extent on agriculture and especially on the agricultural production of small farmers. Small farmers in these areas are also poor farmers.

It became rapidly clear that an overall approach was needed to cope with problems in rural areas of underdeveloped countries. It became clear that all sectors of community or village life had to be taken into account. It became clear that other types of employment had to be created in rural areas. It became clear that job-combination might be of importance as a tool in development. Summarising, it became clear that an integrated policy of rural development had to be created.

The young experts grew older; they finally came home and took jobs in their home countries. A number of these experts became involved with the national agricultural policy of the day, working for various agencies or institutions of the ministries of agriculture. They observed the bleak outlook of poor farmers, within the national and the common agricultural policy, living in areas that later became known as Less Favoured Areas (LFAs). Startled, they recognised that, whilst they had been working for the development of poor farmers in developing countries, there were still poor farmers living in underdeveloped European Areas.

Both national governments and the European Commission provided funds for research in projects dealing with aspects of less favoured areas. The European Regional Development Fund has done so since 1975. Prior to 1980, 12 case studies were underway in France alone. The EEC paid for three Integrated Rural Development (IRD) research projects, one in the Belgium province of Namur, one in the German areas of Tirschenreuth and Daun and one in the islands off the coast of Scotland.

In 1978, the European Economic Community (EEC) resolved to provide financial assistance towards a programme of European research in Integrated Rural Development. To define problems more precisely a seminar was organised in October 1979 at Bayreuth in the Federal Republic of Germany, the results of which were published in Gardiner and Husemeyer (1980). Three subjects emerged clearly from this seminar:

- i the necessity to carry out a number of case studies in IRD;
- ii a study of the role, the desirability and the future of part-time farming and multiple job holding; and
- iii a study of the development of land-prices and the

influences of non-agricultural land-use and administrative limitations.

It was decided afterwards that the study of the landmarket should be carried out as a special project. Furthermore, an expert committee was requested to prepare a draft 'call for offers' for case studies in integrated rural development; and for studies on multiple job holding and job flexibility.

Some twenty five research groups applied and after a selection by an international expert group, 3 projects on job combination and job flexibility were awarded as well as twelve case studies in IRD.

PART TIME FARMING

The three projects on "part-farming" were carried out in the Federal Republic of Germany, in the Tirschenreuth, the scene of a large IRD project by the EEC; in the United Kingdom, in parts of England and Wales on farm-based tourism; and in Ireland. The results together with a French and an Italian inventory of the problems of multiple job holding and job flexibility were discussed during a workshop in Brussels early in 1983. A summary report prepared by Dr. W. Himmighofen will be available shortly. It concludes that the old equation "one farm equals one family equals one income" does not apply anymore. Yesterday's view of part-time farming was that it belonged to the transition of an agricultural to an industrial society and that it would not survive. The present research shows it to have a different future. Part-time farming is a human, social and economic response to industrial society. This leads to the prediction that part-time farming is not destined to disappear but may well increase.

The future part-time farmer may well be a highly skilled, flexible *entrepreneur* adequately reacting and economically and socially adjusting to ever changing conditions.

TWELVE CASE STUDIES IN IRD

The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) required the case studies to produce a more or less common methodology for the analysis of the various aspects of IRD; to report about possible strategies; and to present the results of their research in such a way that they can be compared. These conditions required a coordination of research activities from the beginning of the projects.

In December 1981 the expert group prescribed in more detail the aspects of efficient project coordination:

- frequent meetings of project leaders and research workers at workshops;
- circulation of relevant information through a co-ordinator;
- circulation of half-yearly progress reports among project leaders;
- mid-term reports should be comprehensive with regard to the completed methodology phase enabling decisions on future orientation of the programme;
- a commonly agreed format of a final summary report at the end of 1983; and
- the production of an overview report on the practical and applicable achievements.

Both the Himmighofen text and the summary reports are to be published in the Proceedings of the European Symposium on Integrated Rural Development to be held on 24-25 September 1985 at Wageningen, Netherlands by NRLO, P.O. Box 297, 2501 BD Den Haag, Netherlands.

With more than 100 research workers and 12 project leaders, the 7 members of the expert group and the co-ordinator did not succeed on all these points. They did organise four workshops, two of which involved visits to a project area. They made a thorough study of common aspects of the concept of IRD. They agreed on a format of the final summary report of which ten were presented before the end of 1983. They produced an analysis of their methodology and the final reports will all be available shortly'. And most important of all, a large number of research workers practiced multidisciplinary research in IRD and visited with project teams in other areas and other countries through EEC travel grants.

A COMPARISON OF CASE STUDY AREAS

Before going into some statistics and before trying to formulate some of the more important results reached by the teams, the diversity of the areas under study should be stressed.

From the situation on the map it is clear that the areas differ in climate, in landscape and in agricultural activities. Radnor and Eden is sheep country with an altitude not exceeding 600 m. The Italian Stura di Demonte valley is a milkproducing, cattle breeding, chestnut producing area with some forestry between 600 and 3000 m. The French Alps project shows the additional advantage of exploitation of Winter Sports Stations such as Val d'Isere; the Bocage region surrounding Caen is rather densely populated, showing the production of a variety of crops like fruits and potatoes as well as dairy farming and beef and pork production. The German projects in the north compare agriculture in lowland areas, fishery, poultry farming and tourism along the coast; the other German project compares agriculture in a hill country on Europe's largest basalt volcano (1500 km²) with that in a nearby prosperous area with arable land producing sugar beet, potatoes and cereals. The Irish area is a rugged peat country with sheep and cattle on the west coast. The Belgium Namur area is a forested rather poor cattle area with a lot of small scale tourist sites.

LESS FAVOURED AREAS

The case studies have been largely carried out in so called Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) to a large extent falling under *directive 75/268*. A study of the map of Europe shows that one third of the total utilised agricultural area and approximately one third of all the farms fall under this directive.

Whilst 65% of the EEC budget goes to agriculture, only 5% finances the Guidance Section, as follows: modernisation of farms (*directive 72/159*); cessation of farming and reallocation of the agricultural area for the purpose of structural improvement (*directive 72/160*); socio-economic guidance and provision for education and training of farmers (*directive 72/161*); and the continuation of mountain and hill farming, to counteract depopulation and to ensure conservation of the countryside (*directive 75/268*).

The budget of the entire Guidance Section for 1984 is 539 mio ECUs, of which 210 mio ECUs goes to *directive 75/268*.

Summarising, one third of the European farmers get only 2½% of the common agricultural budget to assist with the special handicaps under which they have to work and live in these low productivity areas.

CASE STUDY CONCLUSIONS

The fact finding part of the case studies established a few economic and demographic trends that are more or less similar for each of the areas under study.

At the Bayreuth seminar it was assumed that these regions all suffer from a decreasing population and a relative increase of people over 65. Results over a period of 10 to 15 years show that this is not a general trend. In about half of the areas the total population is increasing, sometimes rapidly. The demographic data show a higher proportion of people over 65 as compared with the national averages, the proportion being slightly higher in some areas and markedly so in others. The proportion of people between 25 to 65 is generally lower.

The average purchasing power of people in these areas tends to be lower than the national average. The unemployment figures tend to be higher or even much higher than the national average with the exception of some study areas in France.

The conclusions and recommendations produced by the various research teams are aimed at local constraints, local possibilities, local strategies and local solutions. They encompass the regional administration, the national attitude towards the farming community and the traditional evaluation of the contribution of the countryside towards the benefit of the urban-based consumer. And they leave the reader with a growing concern about the real effects as compared with the original aims of EEC and national policy instruments.

A particularly important conclusion from the case study reports is that policies and measures, whether national or regional, are not in general integrated. There is a lack of co-ordination at various levels and the legal formulation of existing community and national directives is too strictly agricultural. The study from the south west of England, for example, found as follows. "Playing some role in supporting the community or economy, or sustaining the infrastructure, of the hills area at least 20 government departments and agencies are involved each with a distinct regional structure and pattern of administration and of handling statistics, etc; e.g. 3 tiers of local authority with many individual authorities within each tier and perhaps a dozen other statutory agencies. The only nominal mechanism which exists to correlate the actions of these bodies is the County Structure Plan, which has very little executive bite."

Agriculture is unlikely now to win back the position of dominant development factor that it had in the past. Therefore successful development activities should be aimed at all sectors within an area including agriculture, industry, services, education, training and tourism.

Another important result of these case studies is the realisation that communities in LFAs and other peripheral agricultural areas must accept that the prime initiative in securing their own continued well-being may increasingly rest with them. In a number of cases they have taken initiatives already. They have organised themselves into action groups. They are becoming articulate, even loud-voiced after the pattern of labour unions; and they are promoting their own case more aggressively.

Although a number of actual problems seem to be closely related with the present economic situation such as the unemployment rate, the decrease in services, the closing of village schools and the decrease of public transport facilities, it is evident from the research results that all these problems have a structural component.

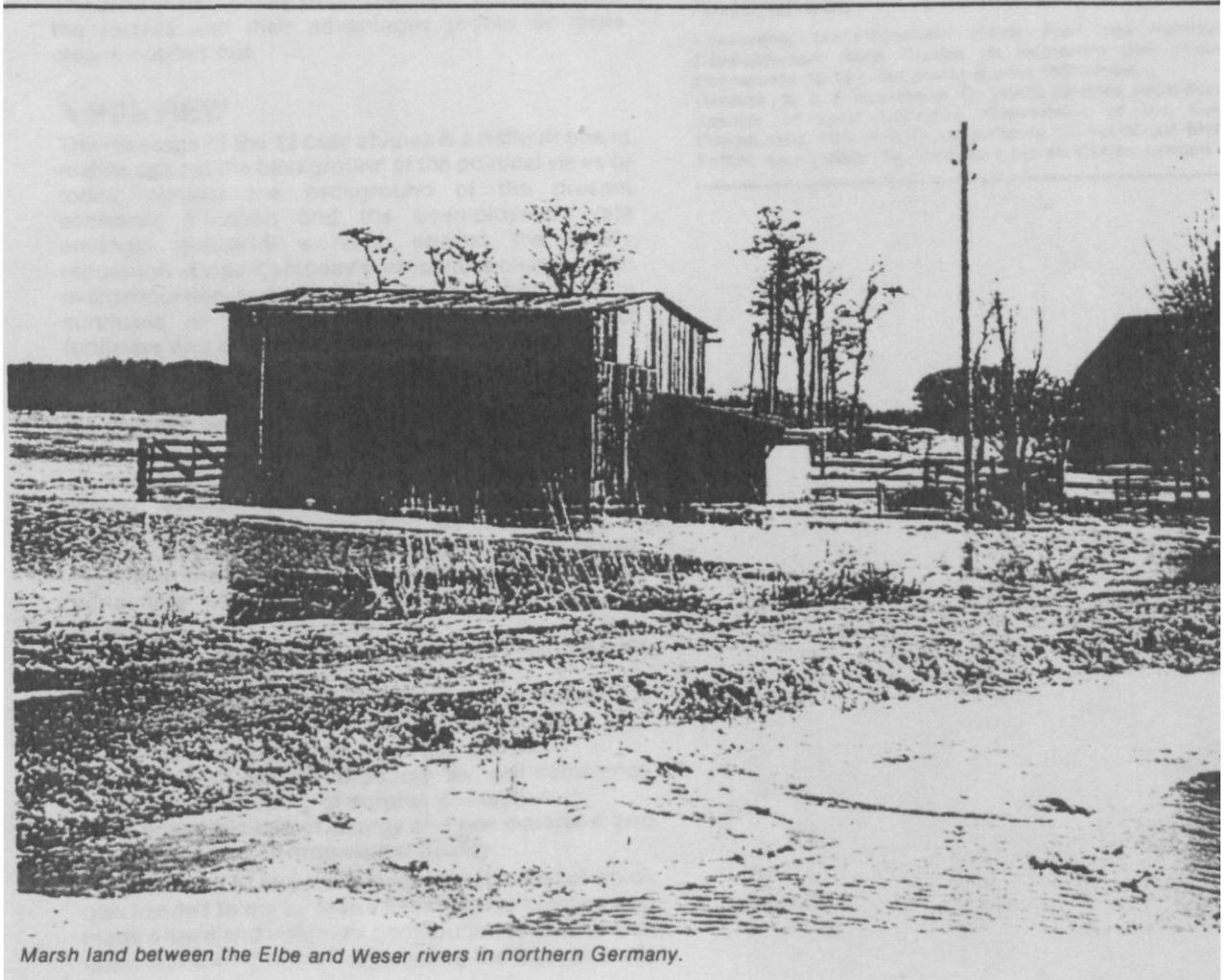
Finally, it became apparent that the EEC activities towards developing less favoured rural areas are only known to a very few insiders. Therefore the community can be presented and regarded as an 'expensive monster' which costs a lot but brings few rewards. The direct and indirect advantages of various EEC measures are generally little recognised.



An alpine village in south eastern France where farmers are involved in cattle breeding and small scale dairy production.



These terraces on steep slopes in the Piedmont area of northern Italy were formerly used for growing barley but are now abandoned to extensive grazing.



Marsh land between the Elbe and Weser rivers in northern Germany.

FUTURE STRATEGIES AND POLICY MEASURES

The research reports list numerous suggestions for future strategies and policy measures at community, national and regional levels. The general trend of these measures is better co-ordination, more authority and more autonomy at the level of regional councils; and this needs to inspire future strategies.

A badly needed new definition of *Integrated Rural Development* should be the root of new strategies and directives encompassing all sectors of regional activity and not only agriculture. Suggestions for such definitions are part of practically all the research reports.

The fact should be accepted that a general programme at community level or national level for the development of rural areas will not have the desired effect. Details of measures and programmes should be formulated and decided upon at the regional level, they should be geared to regional problems and phrased by people living and working in the region.

A minimum standard of public infrastructure (education, transport, services) must be maintained in rural areas, even if this is going to result in a permanent subvention. Lowering the cost of using private cars for people living and working in rural areas through a special kilometer-lump sum or abolishment of car taxes should be considered for example.

It is necessary to increase the self-sufficiency of these areas and to strengthen community finances whilst at the same time decreasing project bound subsidies because they prevent the realisation of community preferences. It is also necessary to prevent discrimination against multiple job holders.

Strategic policies should be developed for forestry at the community level.

The aims of EEC policy should be better advertised and the awards and their advantages should be more clearly spelled out.

A PREVIEW

The message of the 12 case studies is a difficult one to realise against the background of the political views of today; against the background of the present economic situation and the unemployment rate amongst industrial workers; against the smelly reputation of a part of today's agriculture charged with overproduction and soil and water pollution through surpluses of manure and over consumption of fertilisers and chemicals.

We need a new agricultural policy with new objectives. We need a decentralised administration and a distribution of responsibilities which will become easier by applying information technology. According to new trends in the Netherlands agricultural policy as voiced during the recent OECD conference of directors of agricultural research, we need not only an active policy of integrated rural development in certain regions in the community, we also need an integrated agriculture with the following objectives, amongst others:

- fair prices and better quality of products for consumers;
- reasonable incomes and working conditions for farmers as compared with other employment;
- maintenance of employment in agriculture;
- stimulation of certain products for self-sufficiency (wood) and curtailing of surplus production;
- more economic use of energy and raw materials; and
- improvement of environmental quality.

I will end with a few personal remarks, the first of which was handed to me by Marie Elisabeth Chassagne who made a lucid and visionary contribution to a seminar in Caen last spring when I was visiting the Bocage study

area. In her publication *Pour une Politique du Développement Rural* (Chassagne, 1982), she writes as follows.

"There is a lot at stake. Our economy, our society, are confronted with a structural crisis touching all the developed industrial countries. The old remedies do not help us anymore. We have to devise and experiment with new models and systems of society.

The countryside, the rural areas may well be the place to situate such models of aspects of a future society. There we find people who know each other and not the urban faceless bureaucracy; there we find unexploited resources and human potential full of the will to live. No government can maintain itself without properly acknowledging the rural facts and the rural factors".

It may well be that the problems and the populations of the rural parts of Europe (still more than 90% of the whole) are presently politically uninteresting. It may well be that the countryside is underpopulated and people still move away to urban areas. It does not mean that these areas are ceasing to exist in the near future. On the contrary, it seems that a change is underway; some areas are beginning to show an increase in population. May I call attention to Toffler's Third Wave and especially to his "electronic cottage" (Toffler, 1980). The new workers sit at home at computer terminals or go to the "corner workshop" taking part in a largely decentralised production process. May I recall his statement: "Today it takes an act of courage to suggest that our biggest factories and office towers may, within our lifetime, stand half empty, reduced to use as ghostly warehouses . . .". We may well ask whether "a post-industrial society is also a post-urban society". And we may well assume that the future of the European countries is closely linked with, perhaps depends upon, a well-balanced development of the rural area of the European community.

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