



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Call for papers

The RuraLEARN international conference will bring together academics, agents of applied research, and field practitioners from Europe and beyond who investigate ways of promoting **lifelong learning, in the widest sense, in rural communities and geographically disadvantaged areas**. Conference participants will present the outcomes of their applied projects or academic endeavours, share their experiences from this work, and discuss towards drawing common conclusions and formulating recommendations for the future. Speakers will include renowned international academics and EU representatives.

Conceptual context

Rural development traditionally forms an important pillar of EU's policies and an issue of priority for many European countries. Despite the decline of the primary sector of economy over the last years, rural production is an important aspect of European economy, and rural communities form a proportion of the overall EU population that cannot be neglected. However, the viability of rural areas needs more than agriculture alone. Rural development policies need to place agriculture in a broader context taking into account protection of the rural environment, quality of produced food, increasing competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, enhanced quality of life in rural areas, and, above all, **attractiveness of rural areas to young farmers and new residents**.

The role that **learning and education**, in all their forms, can play in this direction is crucial: better educated rural citizens of all ages and backgrounds, with ample life-long learning opportunities and access to the contemporary Information Society and Knowledge Economy resources, can resist to urbanisation, protect the natural and cultural resources of the countryside, understand the new challenges for rural Europe, and respond to them with new initiatives, flexibility and adaptability. In face of this evident need for the promotion of **'rural learning', all levels of education**, from primary to tertiary, **all forms of learning**, from formal to informal, from conventional professional training to open and distance learning, have to respond in a coherent and creative fashion. What is more, for rural learning, just as for rural development more generally, a strengthened **bottom-up approach** is needed, which can better tune rural learning programmes to local needs.



Participation in the conference

The conference offers an excellent opportunity for **researchers** and **practitioners** from Europe and beyond who wish to disseminate and share their work connected with the role and potential of learning and education in rural and geographically disadvantaged areas. The setting will encourage the cross-fertilisation of ideas from diverse disciplines and fields of practice sharing an interest in the theme of the conference. Particular emphasis will be placed on **bringing academic research and field-based initiatives and projects into close contact**, mutually productive and beneficial exchange. Theory, methodologies, experiences and outcomes will be discussed in depth so as to become more widely known to the academic community, the various stakeholders and the wider public.

Of particular interest to many of the delegates may also be the attendance of, or presentation in, a series of **seminar workshops**. These will delve deeper into major areas of the rural learning theme, such as school education, higher education, vocational education and training, adult education, technology-supported learning, etc. The workshops will emphasize practical issues, aiming mainly to make stakeholders in rural and remote areas aware of the opportunities offered by contemporary technology and policies in the field of education and lifelong learning.

Participation in the conference is free of charge.

Notification of interest

Those interested in participating in the conference should contact the organisers in the first instance at info@ruralearn.eu in order to reserve their place. If interested in submitting a paper, they should inform additionally follow the procedure described below.

Paper submission

The available options for paper submission are the following:

- **Extended research papers** (4000 - 5000 words)
- **Concise reports of work in progress** (1500 - 2000 words)
- **Presentations of case studies / good practice examples** (1500 - 2000 words).

For all the above, an extended abstract (400-700 words) has to be submitted by the 23rd of April 2007, explaining clearly the scope, background, and assets or findings of the work presented. Authors of accepted submissions will be notified by 30th April and asked to prepare and hand in their final papers by the 20th of June 2007. Detailed instructions will become available at www.ruralearn.eu.



Publication

Papers presented in the conference will be published in a book of proceedings in summer 2007; selected authors will also be offered the possibility to adapt their texts for inclusion in a formal report to the European Commission on the state-of-the-art and challenges in rural learning (both publications with ISBN).

Important dates

- Submission of extended abstracts: **23rd April 2007**
- Notification of acceptance: **30th April 2007**
- Submission of full papers: **20th June 2007**
- Conference: **24th – 27th June 2007**

Language

The official languages of the organisation are English and Greek. Interpretation from and into these languages will be available in the international sessions.

Location

The events will be organized on the Greek island of Chios. The events will be mainly hosted by the rural community of Mesta, a small medieval castle-village at the southwest end of the island. The local old school building is currently being transformed into a Rural Learning Hub, equipped with satellite broadband internet, offering opportunities for lifelong learning, creativity and expression to all villagers, and particularly to the young generations. It is in this traditional school building, in idyllic Mediterranean rural settings, that a big part of the conference will take place.

The programme will also include a number of special social events and excursions to local sites of interest.

There are frequent daily flights connecting Chios with Athens and Thessaloniki, some good-quality scheduled sea travel options, as well as, possibly, some charter flights from European cities during summer.

Organisers will happily provide participants with travel advice, and help in arranging accommodation.

Please note that under certain conditions travel and subsistence costs of invited individuals may be covered. For further details organisers can be contacted at info@ruralearn.eu.



Further information

The RuraLEARN cluster of events

The RuraLEARN conference is part of a wider cluster of public events that will be organised on the island of Chios, Greece, between the 24th and the 27th of June 2007. Beside the international conference and the seminar workshops, the events also include an open-access exhibition fair, as well as the winners' final selection and presentation ceremony of a competition for students and teachers.

An open-access exhibition and performance event, the **rural learning fair** will disseminate the concepts of RuraLEARN to the wider public. This is an excellent opportunity for projects, institutions and individuals to present the outcomes of their work and promote their innovative ideas, as well as an opportunity for networking and exchange between agents active in the fields of lifelong learning and rural development.

The **competition** for the “*Most Brilliant Idea for Better Village Life through Learning*” is aimed particularly at students and teachers in rural settings in Europe. These groups are regarded as a most critical factor for the initiation and take-up of educational innovation and a lifelong learning culture in the rural remote rural communities. Finalists will be given the opportunity to present their ideas to the public and the jury, and the three best entries will be selected. Winners will be presented with their prizes during a special ceremony on the last day of the events.

Other opportunities for participation

Beside the presentation of papers in the conference and workshops, other possibilities for your participation in the RuraLEARN events include presentations of projects and/or innovative ideas to the wider public, in the framework of the rural learning fair.

Entries into the competition for the “*Most Brilliant Idea for Better Village Life through Learning*” may also be an option for you. Please note that the competition is particularly aimed at students and teachers from rural settings in Europe.

Please contact the organisers at info@ruralearn.eu or visit www.ruralearn.eu for further details. It is advisable to register your interest in these events well in advance.



More on the choice of location

The events will be organized in remote rural settings on the Greek island of Chios, a mainly rural, geographically disadvantaged, less developed piece of insular land at the south-eastern fringe of the European Union, which however presents a tremendous developmental potential and a challenge for sustainable development initiatives.

By choosing this setting for the organization of its public events, RuraLEARN seeks to directly exemplify the challenges faced by Europe's rural communities in terms of development and inclusion, as well as the relevant opportunities that lifelong learning presents for Europeans of all ages in rural and geographically disadvantaged areas.

The events will be mainly hosted by the rural community of Mesta, a small medieval village at the southwest end of the island.

The geographical isolation has kept this village far from many of the influences of modern urban life, as can be clearly seen, for example, in its architecture: Mesta is nowadays maybe the only still inhabited medieval castle-village in Greece, with a small, but economically active population. The cultural heritage of the area, with features unique in Greece and the world (medieval architecture, cultivation of mastic, rich traditions, et al.), and its strategic position in the Aegean Archipelago leave ample space for innovative initiatives for sustainable rural development, which however are still almost non existent due to the lack of local social capital, a lack indeed of informed citizens.

The local Learning and Culture Association of Mesta has practically responded to this deficiency through visionary planning and concrete lifelong learning initiatives for local people of all ages.

One of the major visions and current projects of the Association is the transformation of the old school building of the village into a Rural Learning Hub, a place promoting an innovation culture in the community, offering opportunities for lifelong learning, creativity and expression to all villagers, and particularly to the young generations. It is this traditional school building, in idyllic Mediterranean rural settings, that will host the events.



The organisers

The conference and accompanying events are co-organised by:

- Ellinogermaniki Agogi, Greece (coordinator)
- University of the Aegean, Financial and Management Engineering Department, Greece
- Learning and Culture Association of Mesta, Greece
- University of Barcelona, Spain
- Institute for Future Studies, Austria
- TEHNE - Centre for Development and Innovation in Education, Romania

Further information

On the internet: www.ruralearn.eu

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