

European rural Parliament

Notes on Group 3: **Financial Aspects of the 2nd European Rural Parliament in 2015 (ERP'15)**

The aim is to assure sufficient financial sources for the event in 2015. The main open questions are:

- What will be the costs of the ERP'15 ?
- Which are possible sources to finance ERP'15 ?

1. Experience in financing of Rural Parliaments

Usual structure of the costs of Rural Parliaments is divided between 1/3 of preparation costs and 2/3 for the event itself.

There are various experiences in the approach to the events, called Rural Parliaments, regarding the costs, methodology, duration, attendance and influence. The most ambitious, largest, the most influential, and rural parliament with the biggest budget is Swedish Rural Parliament. It is organized biannual, gathers around 1.000 participants and costs around 500.000 EUR. On the other hand there is experience of so called "low budget" rural parliaments, like the one in Slovenia or in Lithuania. The budget of the first Slovenian Rural Parliament, which lasted only one day and gathered 130 participants, was approximately 20.000 EUR. The budget of the first Lithuanian Rural Parliament, which was also one day event with 150 participants, was approximately 15.000 EUR.

The budget of the first European rural Parliament, which was one and a half day event with 130 participants, was between 50 and 70 thousand EUR. Hela Sverige Ska Leva / All Sweden Shall Live, which was the main founder of that event, invested just in the salary and travel of the full time coordinator of the 1.ERP approximately 45.000 EUR. There was no participation fee for the participants and the travel costs of participants are excluded from that calculation. Many costs are "hidden" as in kind or because they were covered by participants, by their organisations or by organizing partnership (All Sweden Shall Live, ERCA and PREPARE).

2. Costs of the ERP'15

The size of the costs is depending on many factors (length of the event, country, number of participants etc.) The presumption for the structure of the costs of the ERP'15 was three and a half days event, whereby the participants would arrive on Wednesday, to gather and have the common dinner; continuing on Thursday with field trips/travelling workshops; having the conference on Friday; concluding with additional, eventually optional field trips on Saturday and depart on the same or on the next day. We presume to have minimally 250 participants at the ERP'15. Quick estimation of the costs for such event is approximately 165.000 EUR.

The costs of the ERP'15 could be reduced by the lowering of the participant's number and by shortening of the event. Due to the critical mass and minimal number of participants, which is considered to assure the sufficient quality of the event, it is recommended not to have less than 3 days event with minimally 250 participants. Selection of the place and of the country of event could also significantly influence the costs. There is a general estimation that the costs of the accommodation are lower in the countryside than in the big cities and that the "eastern" countries are in general cheaper than "western" countries. The distance from the airport should be one of the criteria for selection of the venue. PREPARE coordinator made research of the air costs few years ago

and the cheapest airport in Europe to fly from most parts of the continent was Munich. Brussels was among the most expensive airports as the flight destination as the centre of the travel from the different European airports. It is recommended to have the venue closer to the so called “poorer” countries to reduce the travel costs of the participants with lower financial capabilities.

It is urgent to employ one full time coordinator of the ERP’15 for at least 6 months before event. Coordinator should be experienced person, familiar with the European rural matter. One or more volunteers should assist the preparation process. An open call would be reasonable to select the volunteers.

It is foreseen to have at least two or three preparation meetings. The costs of each would be approximately 2 – 3 thousand EUR. Participants of the preparation meetings should be the members of the core team, supported by the coordinator and volunteers. Some meetings could be implemented virtually via Skype or by telemeetings, but also physical meetings of the core team are urgent.

Timing could also play a role in the costs, since the prices are lower out of the tourist seasons. It is estimated that November 2015 would be the most suitable choice of the ERP’15.

Other main items in the consideration of the costs are:

- translation costs (depending on number of languages in which we translate and the ways of translation; simultaneous/consecutive);
- preparation of materials (invitations, programme, reports);
- distances of the field trips/travelling workshops to be kept short for the reason of costs and also for the time reason, to spare precious time and avoid long travelling with bus;
- selection of the cheap accommodation in the countryside should not split participants in small groups, if possible, participants of the ERP’15 should be accommodated at one place or at least at the walking distance from each other to keep the spirit of the group and to increase the exchange possibilities.

3. Sources for the ERP’15

The sources/costs of the ERP’15 could be split between “in cash” and “in kind” sources/costs. For the time reason, the group was not able to divide systematic between both sorts of the sources and listed all possible sources in a single overview.

The main source foreseen for the ERP’15 is the project of 19 partner organisations, submitted by the lead partner Hela Sverige Ska Leva / All Sweden Shall Live to the call from the European programme Europe for Citizens. Over 100.000 EUR is foreseen cost of the project, based on the number of the mobilities. This is considered to be split among all participating countries in some way not excluding those, which are not involved in the application.

Participation fee is another important source, which can be kept provisionally until the other sources are defined. It is foreseen to finance mainly the accommodation costs from the participation fee and just partly to reimburse the travel costs, depending on the range of sources for the ERP’15.

Three European organisations/partnerships, acting as co-organisers of the ERP’15 will contribute mainly in kind. PREPARE could use smaller part of the grant from the C.S.Mott Foundation, in the case if the grant for the next two years will be approved. Another possible source from the PREPARE’s activities are scholarships in cooperation with Forum Synergies and Foundation de France. In kind contribution from PREPARE would be delivered in part time activities of the PREPARE

Coordinator and PREPARE experts. ELARD would be able to contribute with the part of the staff resources and office for the meetings in Brussels, if needed.

The country and the organisation, hosting the ERP'15 should co-finance the event both in cash and in kind. Capabilities of western countries are most probably higher in this respect than eastern.

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) was important stakeholder at the first ERP in 2013, providing the conference room, translations and printing some materials for the participants and broader dissemination. In some way EESC could contribute again, however the event will not take place in Brussels this time. It is to check with representatives from EESC about the size and form of contribution from their side. The problem in this regard seems to be the change of the EESC members, which takes place in September 2015.

Other (European or national) institutions, which would probably be able to support the ERP'15 are:

- Council of Europe,
- European Network for Rural Development / Contact Point,
- Committee of regions,
- National Rural Networks,
- Standing Working Group for rural Development in the Western Balkan countries,
- Estonian Kusk foundation,
- Companies/sponsors
- GIZ / deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; Germany
- Trusts and Foundations focused on support in the target countries (participants/host)
- etc.

Also members of the European Parliament have certain budget for activities, which could be linked to the ERP'15. Preparation meetings could easily be held in Brussels on the costs of MEP's.

At the European level there might be some specialized schools or universities, which would be interested to support the ERP'15 with students/translators, which need experience and do not require the full economic price for the services.

In the local area possible donors of the ERP'15 are local mayors, municipalities, companies and other organisations, particularly those hosting the groups at the field trips/travelling workshops (Local Action Groups, NGOs, Cultural and Tourist organisations etc.)

On the project level another source would be the LEADER projects of trans-national cooperation. The problem with that source is timing, since the new budget period for LEADER and other European sources is starting with delay and such applications are taking long time to be selected.

4. Urgent actions

To reduce the costs of the event, the host country/organisation should be selected as soon as possible. Core team should prepare the call for hosting the ERP'15 and disseminate it through PREPARE, ERCA and ELARD channels.

Coordinator of the ERP'15 should be selected, and sources for her/his salary assured, to start working latest in May 2015. Parallel to that, volunteers should be selected to work with the coordinator as the team, upgrading and partly taking over the preparatory work from the core team.

Finding committed Members of European Parliament to host and finance one or more preparation meetings of the core group, including the travel and accommodation costs.

Securing the financial sources for the ERP'15 requires the "per partes" approach, which means that the three co-organizers PREPARE ERCA and ELARD would consider the options for providing the sources of ERP'15 by their possibilities. "Per partes" approach enables not only looking for the sources by partners but also by the nature of the costs. It is easier to look for the source separately for the staff, for the travel, for accommodation etc. than to raise the money for all at once. Of course, the complete overview is needed in transparent way, which is the task of the ERP'15 core team.

In the pessimistic scenario, in case if the submitted application of the project to the programme Europe for Citizens will not be approved, ERP'15 should gather minimally 150 participants, whereby the significant share of the sources would be assured in the form of participation fee. All efforts of various stakeholders will upgrade that pessimistic shape of the event which should be held latest in November 2015.

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