



Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

In this editorial we will share information about the finalization of a rural extension project and the further development of the *JAEE*. Since Hansje Eppink was one of the Wageningen partners in the project, we decided to write the part on the project, and thus the larger part of this Editorial, together.

The project is the Western Balkan Rural Extension Network (WBREN) TEMPUS project. On 25–27 November 2013, the third and final annual conference of the WBREN project took place at the Faculty of Agriculture of Novi Sad University in Serbia. The conference was also the last project meeting. Earlier annual conferences were held in Skopje in 2011 and in Sarajevo in 2012. Dr Miroslav Vesković, rector of Novi Sad University, a university with 50,000 students, opened the conference and shared that the Faculty of Agriculture is valued highly, and that the first rector of the university was from the field of agricultural sciences. The university still feels a strong social responsibility for that sector and for its strategic development. The dean of the Agricultural Faculty, Dr Milan Popović, shared that currently 8% of the student population is from the field of agriculture. The Faculty of Agriculture was founded in 1954, and next year it will celebrate its 60th anniversary. The faculty has an undergraduate, graduate, integrated, and PhD programme. The PhD research programme is in the fields of agronomy, agricultural economics, and veterinary medicine.

Dr Chris Garforth from Reading University, who is the WBREN project coordinator, was then given the floor. He reminded the 60–70 colleagues present that a previous project meeting took place in Novi Sad in 2010, at the start of the project. He also stated that the project was designed by the Western Balkan partners, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, and Albania, who invited colleagues from four EU member states—the United Kingdom, Finland, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands—to support them in the project. He shared that the project has been a learning experience at many different levels. Positive points of the project in his opinion were the visits to the region, the creation of new friendships, and the establishment of collegiate relationships.

Chris Garforth also reported on what the project set out to achieve. The idea was to have a project with 20 partners from eight different countries, including partners from formal higher education and non-formal education. Links that already existed were further developed. Four outputs were defined: (1) developing four courses on rural development, (2) curriculum development and training of trainers for non-formal education, and training for rural extension and development, (3) the creation of Centres for Rural Extension, and (4) the development of a WBREN Network. The project started in January 2010 and was to last until January 2013. However, an extension for the contract was granted until December 2013 to give more students the opportunity to graduate. The progress reported was: (1) there are new modules for the higher education

curriculum; (2) a needs assessment was conducted, (3) training modules were developed, and (4) training programmes were planned and implemented for the non-formal education sector. Furthermore, five partner universities established Centres for Rural Extension, and a network website was launched (<http://www.wbren.org>). An important observation was that there were many things that the project had hoped it would have progressed further with, but this was seen as part of the nature of these kinds of projects, which are characterized by big plans being made at the beginning, by those who draft the proposals, plans that are then often difficult to realize.

Harri Westermarck, Professor Emeritus of the University of Helsinki in Finland and co-founder of extension science in the 1960s, spoke about dreams, and the use of servant leadership (a type of leadership which is aimed at sharing power, addressing needs of co-workers and an orientation towards helping them with competence development and performance improvement) to help people follow those dreams in rural areas. He challenged the students of the programme on rural development in the room regarding their dreams and their intentions to help others to realize theirs. Then we (Martin Mulder and Hansje Eppink) had the opportunity to speak about competence in the field of multifunctional agriculture and regional planning. We stressed the reality of the diversity of users of the green space, the fact that only a limited number of them are involved in agricultural production, and the resulting challenges for and competencies required by educational staff who are involved in regional learning arrangements. This presentation was based on the PhD work of Pieter Seuneke (on robustness of multifunctional agriculture) and Carla Oonk (on education and regional planning) of Wageningen University.

Fatbardh Sallaku (together with Alban Jaupi and Shkelqim Fortuzi), Head of the Department of Agro-Environment and Ecology of the Agriculture University of Tirana, Albania, spoke about a project they undertook on land consolidation in certain regions during the ongoing process of privatization of the economy. The situation is that many regions in the country are characterized by the existence of a number of small and fragmented land parcels. A project on land ownership displayed this and was used to inform deliberations on land exchange. It appeared that most owners wanted to exchange but not to sell property. This also holds for Albanians who left the country but still own pieces of land which they are attached to, sometimes for nostalgic, but also for economic reasons. During the project, various problems were revealed in land ownership, as a result of a considerable number of errors and inaccuracies in land registration. Some parcels even had up to four ownership claims. Municipal organizations serve as a kind of land bank. To facilitate the progress of land exchange, progressive taxation is being proposed when land is not being used. Privatization is hampered by the fact that a lot of land is used by people who do not own it, such as in cooperative farms and rental farms. A model of land leasing is being proposed, in which farmers can obtain lease contracts of five–seven years. An important insight revealed by this project on land exchange is that different roles need to be distinguished regarding those who have, manage, and work the land.

Željko Vaško, Associate Dean for International Cooperation of the University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Agriculture, Bosnia and Herzegovina, spoke about the role of green and livestock markets for rural areas. The situation is that there are 35 green, 40 livestock, and 14 mixed markets. The majority of the green markets are in the cities, the majority of livestock markets on the other hand are in villages. The biggest challenge for the sellers is

the current low purchasing power of the public. Over 70% of the sellers find sales conditions unfavourable; they especially wish to have lower fees to reduce the transaction costs that are incurred by getting access to the market. Various recommendations were given to improve the green and livestock markets as they are important for the sales of agricultural products produced in rural areas.

The afternoon started with a presentation by Professor Věra Majerová, Head of the Department of Humanities, Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Live Sciences, Prague. She gave a presentation about the rural population in the case of the economic crisis in the Czech countryside. Due to the crisis, which started at the end of 2008, unemployment rates in rural areas have increased dramatically. It was mentioned that the social crisis arising from the economic crisis is increasing the vulnerability of people with lower levels of education and also minority groups.

Her presentation was followed by another given by Vasko Zlatkovski, Head of the Department of Plant Protection of the University Goce Delcev at Stip, Macedonia. The title of this presentation was 'Tempus WBREN—A Step Forward'. He briefly talked about his experiences and lessons learned from participating in the WBREN project during the previous four years. Working with the partners, he perceived different frameworks for understanding the objectives of the project, which by working together, became clearer. The project remains very relevant for Macedonia. The unemployment rate in the rural areas of Macedonia in 2011 was 31%. An important question then is how can these people be assisted in such a way as to prevent them migrating to urban areas? He mentioned that rural development in the context of Macedonia is often equated with rural tourism. However, this project showed that rural development is much more than that. The project also helped to realize the importance of using fieldwork in educational programmes. This resulted in the inclusion of a programme component of three months of practical fieldwork in the newly developed study programme on rural development.

The next presenter was Mirela Tomaš-Simin, Assistant Lecturer at the Agricultural Faculty of the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. She, like Vasko Zlatkovski, mentioned the relatively new concept of rural development in her country. Issues addressed in this domain were: land fragmentation, poor development of infrastructure, extensive agricultural production, and problems of underdevelopment and illiteracy of the rural population. She mentioned that agriculture is recognized as one of the major polluters of the environment, but that it is also one of the main driving forces of the economy of Serbia. In her opinion, organic agriculture can be one of the ways to address the environmental problems of agriculture. In Serbia, only 1% of the arable land is under organic agriculture. This 1% comprises 4000 small-scale farmers, although none of those farmers exclusively grow organically; around 15–20% of the land they work is used for organic production. It was stated that organic agriculture can play a significant role in the development of rural areas because it enables economic growth, diversification of activities, and it can attract financial resources. It enables the hiring of young people and the active involvement of women in agribusiness, which leads to a decrease in the unemployment rate and contributes to economic development of rural areas by creating added value for products. But an important question regards who the drivers in Serbia are who are promoting the development of organic agriculture. Converting to organic agriculture is not an easy process. In Finland consumers are the main driving force. In Serbia consumer awareness is very low and it is difficult to convince consumers and producers to change to organic agriculture. Currently, organic lobby organizations, such

as Organic Serbia, are the driving force. But a concern is whether they have enough power to make organic production grow in Serbia.

The afternoon ended with a presentation by Professor Zoran Njegovan, Department Director at the Economics Institute, Serbia. He briefly presented the results of a research project that made a regional classification of the rural areas in Serbia, based on several indicators like socio-economic and living conditions. Serbia has a past involving a centralized government. Currently the country is in a decentralization process, and is providing opportunities for the people in the rural areas to participate. It was stated that in the Western Balkan Region, organic agriculture is seen as an important tool for rural development. The Balkan countries have a tradition of homemade products. Each region often has its own local products. To develop this sector further, macro structures need to be developed. Since the organic sector is a new sector, the sharing of knowledge and experiences between the countries is needed to increase and improve it.

Looking back at this conference, and the finalization of the WBREN project as a whole, we see that the participants in the project learned that rural development is a complex and dynamic field of practice and academic concept. It was recognized that teachers in this field need to stay up to date. Learning and sharing experiences, like this project conference, support the process of becoming professionals with a vision on rural development. The project activities created a platform for building a Western Balkans rural development network. Although we must conclude that only part of the potential for mutual learning and development in the field of rural development was used, a lot was done. However, much more still needs to be done.

Regarding the development of the *JAEE*, we can be brief. We had our annual meeting with the publisher, this time at the premises of Taylor and Francis. The details of the *JAEE* were discussed. We can conclude that we as the Editing Team, including the Editorial Committee and the Editorial Advisory Board, are very satisfied with the current situation of the journal. The journal is widely circulated to the academic field worldwide, it is used well considering the ever-growing number of website visits and full-text downloads, the copy inflow is further increasing which means that our acceptance rate will further be decreased to around 20% of the material which is sent in, and the average quality of the articles we publish is increasing further. Manuscripts come from all over the world. We are getting more selective as to the manuscripts that are being submitted. Papers should: (1) be based on the current state of play in theory-building in the specializations in which they are positioned; work that is based on the theoretical models of the 1970s and 1980s, which have been criticized heavily, will not do the trick anymore, authors need to be conscious of and acknowledge recent theoretical discussions, developments, and models; (2) employ adequate and valid research designs and appropriate and advanced levels of data analysis; simple case studies and questionnaire research on specific local practices, based on which anecdotal or idiosyncratic results are presented, are not sufficiently yielding academic knowledge which is interesting and important for other scholars and practitioners. Research should answer pressing and important problems in practice, policy, or science itself, from an academic perspective; (3) results and conclusions should be relevant for a wide audience in the field of agricultural education and extension, and add to the advancement of the scientific knowledge in our field of study.

Furthermore, we returned to the debate on the name of the journal. Frequent readers of the *JAEE* will remember the discussion we had about proposals to change the name to

reflect the developments of the field. The idea was to at least delete the term 'extension' from the title, as many found it too anachronistic. The name change was proposed because our suggestion to introduce a subtitle was discouraged by the publisher. Times change, however, and the current publisher is more in favour of including a (short) subtitle for the journal, instead of changing its name. A proposal for the subtitle is now being reviewed by the publisher and may be in effect as of the next volume of the *JAEE*. An important issue in the debate about changing the journal's name was that Thomson Reuters would see the journal as a new title, which would make inclusion of the journal in the Social Science Citation Index more difficult. In that respect it was striking that when as we were in the reception of the Taylor and Francis office we saw a journal entitled *Philosophical Magazine*, one of the oldest scientific journals in the English language. Interestingly, the journal publishes about condensed matter physics, so it is a hard sciences journal. So, why are we worried about the title of our journal if alpha-science titles can contain beta-science content? Of course there is a science-history explanation for this curiosity, but it is the content that makes the difference, and readers will attach meaning to the title based on that content, and not the other way around. Therefore, for the time being, we will follow this example, and hope to stay in business for at least as long as the *Philosophical Magazine*.

Regarding the impact factor of the *JAEE* we have to make a small but significant correction to the previous editorial. The impact factor of the journal in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) is still 0.5, which is just below Q2. In the field of education and educational research the *JAEE* ranks higher than many well-known journals. It is correct that the journal is Q2 in Scopus. The 2013 impact factor will be known in spring 2014, and we hope that the journal is cited just a fraction more often: we need about 10–15 more citations to the journal in existing SSCI-journals and we are there.

Finally, we welcome Dr Kristin Davis, Executive Secretary of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), to the Editorial Committee of the *JAEE*. Her inclusion on the committee reflects the policy to increase the international scope of the journal further. Kristin is an active scholar and ambassador of agricultural education and extension. Given the relationship between the *JAEE* and the *Journal for International Agriculture and Extension Education (JIAEE)*, and the change in editorship of the *JIAEE*, Professor Brenda Seevers, Distinguished Achievement Professor at the Department of Agricultural & Extension Education of New Mexico State University, will be stepping down from the *JAEE* as her term at the *JIAEE* comes to an end, and her successors will be Dr Amy Harder of the University of Florida, as Executive Editor of the *JIAEE*, and Dr Robert Strong of Texas A&M University as Managing Editor of the *JIAEE*. We were happy to work with Brenda Seevers, and wish all new colleagues lots of success with their new positions.

For now we wish you lots of pleasure reading this new issue of the *JAEE*.

MARTIN MULDER and HANSJE EPPINK, Editor-in-Chief