



Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Lilian Topic
Executive Officer

Submission

Parliamentary Inquiry- retaining young people in rural towns and communities.

I would like to address point 3 of the terms of reference:
developing strategies and recommendations as steps that might be taken to increase the number of young people who decide to remain in or return to rural towns and communities.

Apart from the promise of jobs many young people leave their home towns for the excitement of the bright lights of the cities, only to be disillusioned. They could be the bright lights themselves of their home towns if they were encouraged and supported to stay. They leave for lack of opportunities but with guidance they can create their own opportunities.

Providing skateboard ramps, internet cafes, cinemas etc fulfil some roles but they are not enough. Young people need to be more then occupied and entertained. Amusement culture is an insult to those who are ready to join society as adults.

Starting a small business is not an option for most untrained young people and the failure rate for first time small businesses is too daunting. Many rural towns are now placing their hopes on tourism and related ventures but tourism relies on the whims of the tourist and their economy. Also not all rural towns have a marketable advantage (gimmick) in an increasingly competitive industry. If young people are to be encouraged to stay put they need to see that they have a longer term future than one season. We need to demonstrate a real commitment to young people futures. We cannot propose short term schemes and funding just to be seen doing something.

All young people's features look quite bleak even if they have a particular career path mapped out. It is bleak because we adults are handing them an environment of uncertainty. Many feel conscious of the threat of global warming, they are overwhelmed and feel impotent and depressed. This dilemma can be turned into an opportunity. There is so much opportunity in small scale, local, environmentally sustainable ventures. Encouraging young people to invest in themselves and their future is a win-win situation for them, their towns and their environment. There would no longer be a perceived or real disadvantage to living outside of urban areas. There is so much untapped potential in every town. Every town is unique therefore every opportunity is unique.

I offer some suggestions to the inquiry:

- Every town has people who could mentor, donate time, assist, teach, support and encourage these ventures. The sustainability of these towns depend on it (keeping banks, doctors, hospitals is dependant on population). Young people could receive seeding grants or tap into already existing grants. They could receive support from council with land and buildings, until they became self supporting. Light industry and sustainable technology businesses pay rates too. They may receive instruction on co-op building as a form of self financing.

- Students at local high schools could take subjects related to the local sustainability venture, preparing them for leaving. These subjects teach hands on, real life practical skills. Eltham Secondary College is an example. Students do (if they chose to) a two year permaculture program encompassing all the important curriculum subjects i.e. biology, science, maths, contributing to more meaningful experiences for them.
- Community Supported Agriculture (C.S.A) These would not compete with local farmers (who mostly work in bulk for industry bodies or overseas markets) on the contrary they would support and supplement local food supplies. Local farmers may want to diversify and participate with young people and C.S.A schemes. With the rise of petrol prices the cost of transport to rural supermarkets may not just be too expensive but ultimately impractical. With so much unused land in rural areas C.S.A could supplement the supermarkets service.
- Bio fuels farmers are suffering the rising costs of diesel fuel to the point where it is no longer feasible to farm. Locally produced bio-fuels from waste oils or production crops solve the problem for farmers and opens a business opportunity for young people. Access to fossil fuels is diminishing either because the reserves have hit their peak or oil rich countries are making it difficult to access. A town without food and fuel is a town without people. Any politician with vision would take steps to avert a crisis and I am sure their consistency would reward them with continued legitimacy.
- New technologies could be embraced and manufactured in light industries, especially those along a train line. They could design, manufacture and sell sustainable products and concepts like water saving devices, solar equipment, waste disposal for bio-mass energy etc. There also would be a need for installation services, and add on effects. These ideas are almost non-existent in most towns so the opportunities are endless. Sustainability is not just the new catch-phrase it is a real solution to the real problems not just facing young rural people but all people.

Thank you for this opportunity, I am available to discuss these suggestions in more detail.

Yours Truly,



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