



PROFILES OF ISOLATED COMMUNITIES AND WAYS INTO INTEGRATION



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PROFILES OF ISOLATED COMMUNITIES AND WAYS INTO INTEGRATION

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Publisher: ENSI i.n.p.a.

Authors: Georgia Liarakou, Costas Gavrilakis, Evgenia Flogaitis

Proofread: Margaret Fleming, James Hindson

Assistance: Günther Pfaffenwimmer

Layout: Walter Reiterer

Assistance: Jihyun An

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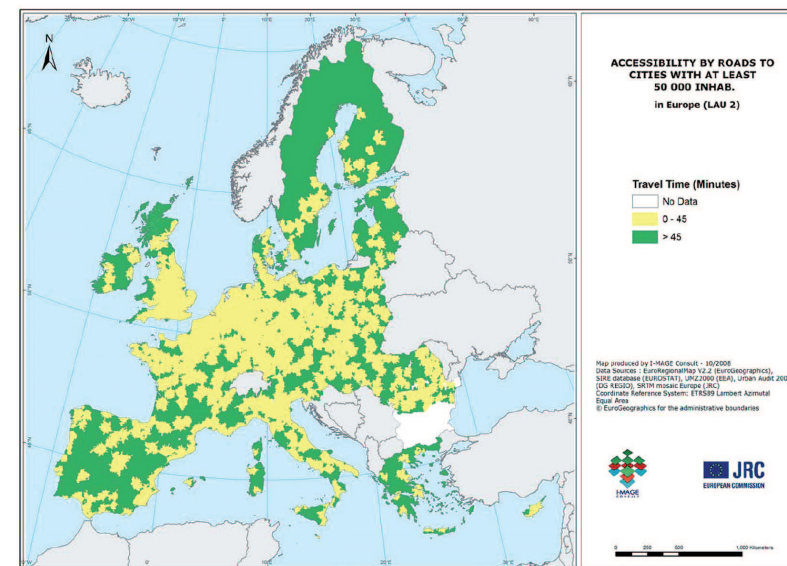
CRITICAL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

If the development of school community collaboration can contribute to local sustainability in urban areas, similar collaboration in remote and isolated regions may also be vital for the local community. Given that isolated communities mostly have small populations there is a need to undertake common projects where young people, professionals and local authorities share their ideas and know-how to plan and implement sustainable development initiatives. It is possible that school community collaboration in isolated communities might be a pivotal factor for civic engagement through creating opportunities for raising awareness and working toward innovative and sustainable solutions.

Before considering the particular features of isolated communities it is important to determine which regions might be considered as “isolated”. The definition of what is remote or isolated varies substantially among different regions of the world¹. Recent estimates suggest that very remote areas cover only about 10% of the world’s land area with “remote” being defined as locations, usually uninhabited or sparsely populated, that are more than 48 hours travel from a large city (Nelson, 2008). With regard to human settlements different variables are used to identify remoteness and isolation such as rural population density, the proportion of people with access to electricity, the length of the surfaced road network, access to improved sanitation and water sources, the proportion of mobile phone subscribers and internet users. Given that this survey was conducted in Europe a definition was adopted that combined an EU approach based on driving time to the closest city with the OECD classification of regions according to population density (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2008). Proximity to a city is considered as an indicator of access to a wide range of services. A region can be labeled as remote if at least half of its population lives more than 45 minutes by road from any city of at least 50,000 inhabitants (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2008) (Map 1). According to this definition, 49.1 % of the EU-27 land area is remote and 12.4% of the population are living in such areas (Jonard et al, 2009). Specific cases of isolated communities are the more than 1,200 small European islands belonging to the European Small Islands Network (ESIN, 2007).

¹ With regard to semantics, throughout this report the words remote and isolated are used interchangeably.

For instance in Ireland, there are 33 inhabited small islands that have a total of about 3,000 inhabitants with populations ranging from 1 to about 900, while in Sweden there are 576 inhabited small islands with about 32,000 inhabitants, with populations ranging from 1 to about 5,000.



Map 1. Remoteness in Europe - Accessibility by roads to cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants, Source: Jonard et al, 2009

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Isolated communities located in mountains, islands and other areas are unique in terms of their natural and human environments and have distinctive features and cultures. Usually, however, such communities face several difficulties related to their small size. Limited natural resources and diseconomies of scale in infrastructure development and service provision are coupled with other issues of isolation such as the cost of transport and vulnerability to the impact of natural disasters (Kerr, 2005). With a low population density, many of these communities receive little attention from central government and as a result often suffer from insufficient support and poor provision of basic infrastructure and services. A lack or a shortage of public

transportation networks, health facilities and quality affordable housing can have a significant impact on the quality of life, diminish future prospects (Roberts, 2004) and undermine the sustainability of these communities. In addition, their small size and isolation can make such communities vulnerable to external economic, social and environmental changes.

During the last two decades the intensification of globalization and the speed of technological change have affected remote places. Many of these places are becoming “less remote” through connection to global networks that occur as a result of communication technologies (ICTs). Connection to such networks facilitates access to new technologies but also to global markets and public service infrastructure. ICT can reduce the time and cost of travel, and also reduce the cost of accessing finance, health, education and other government services. Distance education and telemedicine applications are also an attempt to reduce the impact of distance from metropolitan centers that remote communities experience (Ramirez, 2007). In order to reduce remoteness many European countries have developed incentives to promote broadband networks as part of the basic infrastructure in remote areas. According to the European Commission (2013), almost all European homes should have had the possibility to access at least a basic broadband service at the start of 2013. Nevertheless differences between urban and remote areas still exist. Standard fixed broadband coverage is estimated to cover 95.5 % of homes within the EU, although its share in rural areas is lower at 83.2 %. In some remote parts of eastern and southern Europe broadband connectivity rates are particularly low with the lowest being in three Bulgarian regions, two Greek ones (central Greece and the Aegean islands) and the Romanian region of Nord-Est. In all of these areas less than half of all households had a broadband connection in 2013, with the lowest being in central Greece (40%) (Eurostat, 2014).

Pressures deriving from globalization are also profoundly affecting the local use of natural resources (Dietz et al, 2003; Kramer et al, 2009). Conservation literature has largely focused on the direct effects on the local natural environment of transport infrastructure including mortality from construction and the modification of wildlife behavior (Trombulak and Frissell, 2000). When remote human settlements are globally connected a household’s production and consumption decisions are also affected with implications for the local natural and social environment. In addition global and international environmental phenomena and threats, such as climate change and sea level rise, combine with local pressures of development activities (e.g. cutting forests for local use) to place additional stress on the local natural envi-

ronment (Pelling and Uitto, 2001). Small Mediterranean islands are typical examples of isolated microcosms which are vulnerable to global and local pressures such as climate change, mass tourism, pollution, and invasive species among others. Due to their small size and isolation everything is accentuated and any sudden change can irreversibly disturb their natural and social equilibrium.

One of the most important common problems that isolated communities face is population decline. Two decades ago researchers already noted that the low population of isolated communities made them especially vulnerable to economic, social, and environmental trends emerging from a nation’s transition from local manufacturing and resource-based industries to a multinational global economy (Miller, 1995). Rural population as a percentage of total population has been dramatically decreasing both globally (66.5% in 1960, 47% in 2013) and in European Union countries as a whole (39% in 1960, 25.6% in 2013) (World Bank, 2014). According to Dijkstra and Poelman (2008), trends in Europe reveal that remote regions have experienced a negative population growth over the last few years with four out of five remote rural regions either experiencing a loss of population or growing more slowly than their country’s overall population growth rate. Attracting and retaining people seems to be a significant challenge for these communities if they are to remain vibrant and sustainable into the future. In addition the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon, (the flight of talented, creative and highly trained individuals to urban areas) creates significant economic and social costs (Burton and Lockee, 2000; Docquier et al, 2007).

These negative trends in population growth are also matched by lower economic growth with remote regions in Europe having the lowest share of national gross domestic product (GDP). They also have the lowest productivity in all sectors (agriculture, industry and services) and their GDP is consistently shrinking or growing more slowly than the overall rate for the country rate (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2008). Britain is a typical example of these trends. In this small and highly urbanized country there are remote settlements that have seen a decline in traditional industries such as agriculture and mining and these are the areas that also have a high incidence of low earnings, an ageing population, poor job opportunities, declining incomes, unemployment and health inequalities (Giddings and Underwood, 2007; Roberts, 2004).

However remoteness doesn’t only have negative implications. Many isolated communities offer a unique opportunity to become ‘laboratories of sustainable development’. For example, remote regions of the world provide a refuge for an important amount of the Earth’s biodiversity and although remoteness does not

necessarily correlate with biological richness, many of these localities host many intact ecosystems and a rich biodiversity. It is interesting to note that 67% of the world's existing protected areas are in remote regions (McCauley et al, 2013; Sanderson et al, 2002). In addition many isolated communities have not been seriously affected by damage linked with a modern way of life such as the over exploitation of natural resources, pollution, the disappearance of traditions and cultures, and extensive construction, whilst their natural capital and traditions often remain unharmed. Rural communities in general reflect valued norms, such as a strong work ethic, concern for neighbors, low crime rates and high quality of the environment (Miller, 1995). Such communities have often survived for thousands of years with limited resources, and may offer interesting insights into sustainability. Having said that, there are also dangers in assuming that traditional resource use is always sustainable. However in many cases such resource management regimes have evolved in ways that ensure local sustainability (Kerr, 2005). Learning from these experiences might be fundamental for implementing more integrated sustainable development projects in remote regions.

Furthermore the small size of isolated communities provides good opportunities for implementing sustainability. Research indicates that it is better to direct sustainability initiatives at a local level since the scale of change required at the macro level (national or global) is so great that problems of coordination across political units are bound to be enormous (Bridger and Lullof, 1999, 2001). In the context of small remote communities sustainability can be measured and thus the chance of generating successful examples is increased.

The use of renewable energy sources is a typical example that shows the potential of remote places to become test beds for sustainable development. Small islands are often renewable energy pioneers and a number have achieved the goal of sustainable energy use, independent of the mainland whilst others have impressive plans for the future (Bacelic Medic et al, 2013; Garcia and Meisen, 2008). El Hierro is the smallest and most remote of Spain's Canary Islands with 10,700 inhabitants has developed a plan for a hydro-wind system that will combine wind energy with appropriate storage solutions. This project will 'generate three times the island's basic energy needs for residents, farming cooperatives, fruit and fish canneries, and the 60,000 tourists who visit every year. Any excess electricity will be used to desalinate water at the island's three desalination plants, delivering almost 3 million gallons of water a day, enough for drinking water and to cover part of the irrigation needs' (Laurie Guevara-Stone, 2014). El Hierro isn't the only example. Many small

islands in Europe have started making the transition to sustainable and renewable energy systems. In these cases the size and the remoteness of small islands and other such isolated places become an asset.

In addition to the potential for developing a sustainable energy supplies, there are many examples where remote communities are maintaining their socio-economic position, showing adaptability and diversification and presenting cohesive and active community structures (Giddings and Underwood, 2007). Sustainable development models based on these characteristics could be developed to reverse the trend of decline, revitalize such communities and to provide tangible examples of new sustainable ways of life. Such developments would be especially beneficial for young people who often face the consequences of the declining economic and social structure of isolated communities more acutely. Young people make up a key group in a community and should be a specific focus for sustainability and social welfare initiatives. Without a critical proportion of young people living and working in an area no isolated community can flourish and plan for a viable future.

In this context the availability of high quality educational services is one of the most critical factors for retaining young people and their families in remote areas. Saying that the sustainability of isolated communities requires the sustainability of their schools isn't an exaggeration. But are schools in remote communities actually sustainable?

SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

The trends of declining population, failing traditional industries, decreasing incomes and services as well as increasing local unemployment also challenge the sustainability of schools in remote areas. The sustainability of small remote communities and schools are interrelated in that the demographic and socio-economic issues faced by isolated communities are strongly linked with the consolidation, even the closure of schools, and vice versa.

Today, more and more European schools in remote areas face decline, consolidation or closure due to either to a decrease in the student population or cost – cutting measures. The most direct and obvious impact of an ageing population in these areas is the decrease of student population which often results in school closure (Morgan and Blackmore, 2007; Wildy and Clarke, 2010; Kinash and Hoffman, 2009).

Within the ESIN region for example, the number of schools on small islands decreased between 1987 and 2007 in line with the decline in number of island children.

Although a decrease in population may be linked to, and even be the direct result of schools declining or closing, a relatively common phenomenon characterizing remote areas is that many families prefer to educate their children outside the community. The centralisation of education services in metropolitan areas sometimes makes it necessary for parents wishing to gain access to a broader education for their children, to relocate temporarily or even permanently into urban centres. In addition to the lack of access to support systems, resources, organizations, and educational institutions prevalent in urban areas, Redding and Walberg (2012) note that students in remote rural schools may be disadvantaged by the narrow scope of curriculum and instructional practices that constrain individual opportunities for progress and remedial support if needed.

In addition, remote schools often experience high teacher turnover and this is a critical factor that creates a vicious cycle of decline and disengagement and leads to further reduction in class size. Attracting and retaining qualified teachers in rural schools is more difficult than in metropolitan and large regional inland cities (Sharplin, 2002; Roberts, 2004; Halsey, 2005; Barley and Beesley, 2007; White and Reid, 2008). Frequently, newly qualified teachers and principals are appointed to rural and remote schools because they are considered less complex than large urban ones (Wildy and Clarke, 2010). However, according to Wildy and Clarke (2010), such teachers often do not intend to stay for long and have an expectation that they will progress from remote schools to larger school and more urban locations. The social and economic factors mentioned earlier and that affect the quality of life in remote areas also discourage teachers from accepting appointments, or limit the time they remain in those communities (Roberts, 2004).

On the other hand schools in remote communities also close because they are expensive to run. It seems that such schools are “victims” of neo-liberal policies of economic rationalism (Roberts, 2004) as the viability of public services in general is increasingly being assessed in economic and efficiency terms rather than more broadly on a socio-economic basis. According to Haslam McKenzie (2007), who has made a study of the Australian situation, as a government follows a stringent neo-liberal economic policy, services and infrastructure have been rationalized based on efficiency rather than equity. Consequently, many services are deemed ‘unaffordable’ and are either downsized or withdrawn all together.

Within this context many social services, including schools, have been either consolidated or closed as a cost-cutting measure (Miller, 1995). The possible cost savings for each student and the expectation of “economies of scale” largely explain the consolidation of remote schools (Redding and Walberg, 2012). Even in Finland, the most successful education system in the world according to the international Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 65% of small (those with fewer than 50 students) comprehensive schools (schools with grades 1 through 9) have been closed over the last two decades mainly as a result of money-saving policies (Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014). A similar situation is reported in Greece where in 1995 small schools represented the 56.8% of the total primary schools compared with 39.7% in 2003 and 25.5% in 2010 (Koulaidis, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2010).

The uncertain future and ongoing debate about the economic and educational advantages and disadvantages of small schools in remote areas might also be a hindrance to educational planning and school improvement and lead to their further decline (Karlberg-Granlund, 2011). Schools are obviously at the very sharp end of the economic downturn in remote communities (White and Reid, 2008) and the closure of a school in a small community causes critical negative impact on the social capital of that community which in turn can have an impact on the potential for sustainable development. When young people leave isolated communities to find better education opportunities and a more favourable way of life elsewhere they rarely return. These young people however are both the future workforce in a community and the customer base for local businesses (Roberts, 2004). Not only that but they also constitute the demographic base for the “reproduction” and revitalisation of the community as well as the future human capital.

The sustainability of a school would appear to be a critical issue for isolated communities and it is obvious that the revitalisation of remote schools should not only be addressed through an economic lens. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is a fundamental human right for everyone and based on this Roberts (2004) underlines the importance of education to the realisation of personal and political power as well as the potential for education to break the cycle of disadvantage and disempowerment experienced by many communities. Many researchers argue that rural and especially remote schools, are essential for the sustainability of local communities, since they can build capacity in these communities, both at a systematic level including economic development, and at the level of personal empowerment (Kilpatrick et al, 2002; White and Reid, 2008; Kinash and Hoffman, 2009).

But what should the role of the school in a remote community be in the light of these ideas and trends? What should be the place of a school in the community and what changes should be introduced to their traditional practices to promote sustainability?

THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Because a school is often the only major organization or government service remaining in remote areas, its role in the community needs to be reconsidered. In addition to meeting the educational needs of its students, it should also contribute to a local community in a more direct way. Remote and isolated schools should not only become the 'heart of their community', but also 'the focal point of external economic and social influences, as well as political requirements for change and renewal' (White and Reid, 2008).

Being a vital part of the community isn't a totally new role for remote schools. In addition to providing community residents with basic education, remote schools traditionally play a central role in the life of their community (Miller, 1993, 1995). They function as one of the most important social, cultural and community institutions, act as a meeting place for the community and serve as centres for entertainment and a gathering place for cultural and recreational activities (libraries, sports etc). Because of isolation and limited resources community residents often do more for their schools compared with those in urban centers. Furthermore, remote schools often constitute the trustee of local history/culture and are a local melting pot of innovation. When a rural or isolated area feels under pressure, the school provides a sense of connection to the past, with the present, and to the future (White and Reid, 2008).

However over the last few decades remote schools have partly lost their connection to local communities. Kretzmann and McKnight (in Miller, 1995) noticed: "As schools become more professionalised and centralised, they have tended to distance themselves from their local communities. The vital links between experience, work and education have been weakened. As a result, public and private schools in many rural and urban communities have lost their power as a valuable community resource and many economically distressed towns, communities and neighborhoods have begun to struggle toward economic revitalization without the valuable contribu-

tions from the local schools". Although this remark is based on rural schools in the USA, similar trends can be observed in Europe. Often local schools see themselves only as an educational resource for the young people in a community, while the community has generally been viewed solely as a revenue resource for sustaining the operation of the schools (Miller, 1995). Therefore linkages between the school and community are weak and the two parts function separately without making essential contributions to each other.

If remote schools are to play a strategic role in community development, they need to reconsider their relations to the community and build strong linkages for mutual support. They have to restructure elements of schooling to provide educational experiences which serve both educational needs and community sustainable development goals (Miller, 1995). This means creating learning opportunities that contribute to overcoming the decline in isolated communities and increasing community engagement in finding sustainable solutions. In this respect a school isn't the dominant source of education while its role isn't limited to producing well-educated young people. Instead, students engage in meaningful community-based learning while the whole community is responsible for students learning. Schools and communities work together drawing on the skills and knowledge of the community as a whole (Kilpatrick et al, 2003).

This new role for schools in remote areas requires the development of linkages, meaningful partnerships and joint projects. Different stakeholders and sectors need to be involved to create collective learning activities that respond to community needs. School and community resources need to be mobilised and teamwork and network building become an essential part of school and community culture. In this way remote schools can act as a catalyst for the development of local communities as learning communities which explicitly use learning for promoting sustainability (Kilpatrick et al, 2003). In fulfilling this role the school by itself needs to become a learning organization which has the ability to set goals and pursue them and continuously transform itself and contribute to building shared visions.

By working together and developing linkages with its local community, a remote school becomes an important element in the creation of community social capital. Social capital is defined as the connections and interactions between people which lead to the development of social networks that can build community capacity and facilitate coordinated actions (Putnam, 1993; Miller, 1995; Ferragina, 2012). It is a multidimensional concept that combines social norms, social organizations

and networks, trust and share values. Social capital leads to civic engagement and improves the efficiency of the community via coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In every community the nature of the social capital is determined by the quantity and quality of the interactions between individuals and groups. Through building and sustaining linkages between school and community, social capital can be created. As school and community interact, networks of social relations are forged which contribute to the community's stores of social capital, and to community sustainability (Johns et al, 2001; Kilpatrick et al, 2010; AuttiandHury-Beihammer, 2014).

These kinds of interactions based on trust, cooperation and collective ownership are crucial for the sustainable development of a community. It shouldn't be forgotten that sustainable activities such as those to protect environmental amenities, balance economic development interests with environmental protection or manage commonly held natural resources are much more challenging than other community development activities such as building a sports or community center. As Bridger and Lullof (2001) note, what makes them so different is they either involve public goods or pit private property rights against the interests of the larger community. In such cases, there will inevitably be conflicts between the common good and what is in the short term best interests of the individual. Thus building, bridging and linking social capital becomes critical in a community, and educational improvement strategies of high priority.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Although the importance of school community collaboration has been stressed since the 1990's (Miller, 1993, 1995), developing such collaboration in isolated areas isn't yet common practice. On the contrary, it seems that collaboration is still a challenge. The conclusions of a themed issue on rural schools published by the *International Journal of Educational Research* in 2009, generally suggest that learning approaches including local stakeholders are needed. Various factors have been identified in the literature to explain this lack of collaboration such as the failure to recognize that a serious problem exists in a community, the reluctance of educators to promote schools as a resource for community development efforts, limited time and resources, the fact that this practice isn't included in the traditional approach to schooling and institutional inertia (Miller, 1993).

However there are several interesting examples of small and remote schools that are successful in terms of their contribution to the development of their communities especially in Australia. Here, several interesting initiatives and projects have been developed during the last twenty years to facilitate strong school and community partnerships in remote, rural as well as indigenous education (see for example Johns et al, 2001; Kilpatrick et al, 2003; Hasley, 2011). Recently the need to involve local communities in decision-making and school community relationships has been identified as a key determinant for success or failure of a school in small and remote Australian school contexts (Western Australia Department of Education, 2011). Approaches have included community participation in educational programs, efforts to align attitudes to education between schools and communities and the development of personal relationships. In addition the Australian government has allocated \$46.5 million to the Remote School Attendance Strategy. From 2014 this strategy has been implemented in partnership with communities and schools, with the goal being to increase attendance rates in remote schools.

The analysis of successful case studies has encouraged attempts to build a theoretical framework for school community collaboration in remote areas. (e.g. Miller, 1995; Kinash and Hoffman, 2009; Wildy and Clarke, 2010). Miller (1993, 1995), for instance, presents three interrelated approaches that can be used to build strong linkages between schools and communities and that also lead to leadership development, enhanced civic responsibility and a revitalized sense of community. These approaches have emerged through investigating community and educational issues of rural America. The first approach reflects on the school as a community centre serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and as a vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of services. For example, the infrastructure and the teaching personnel of the school provide educational and retraining opportunities for the community as a whole and the school provides a location for the provision of critical social services for youth and families, such as health care, networking and so on. The second approach emphasizes how the community can be used as the basis for enquiry by students. In this approach the community is viewed as the basis for an "open learning curriculum". Students are involved in different community studies, such as assessing needs, monitoring environmental and land-use patterns, documenting local history and so on. During this research students become familiar with simple research methods and also collaborate with local people, discover local assets and as a result value their community. The third approach of school-based enterprise, places a major emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills whereby students not only identify potential service needs in their rural communities, but also establish a

business to address those needs. Interesting examples of this approach (Stern et al, 1994) are the setting up of shoe repair service, delicatessen and day-care business in one particular community. In attempting to analyse the quality and effectiveness of such projects, Kilpatrick et al (2003) proposed a generic model of the relationship between indicators of effective school community partnerships and the level of maturity of these partnerships (Figure 1). Maturity is a measure by examining how schools and communities go about developing new linkages and sustaining them, with a mature partnership increasing the likelihood of both a school remaining open and the community remaining healthy and vital (Kinash and Hoffman, 2009) and, eventually, the capacity of individuals and communities to influence their own futures (Kilpatrick et al, 2003). However, according to Kilpatrick et al (2003), this in no way suggests that ongoing school community partnerships are of less importance. The model was developed by Kilpatrick et al (2003) through an analysis of case studies from rural Australia and classifies the maturity of a school community partnership into three broad levels; early, middle and late. There are twelve sequential indicators leading to a successful school community partnership and these are listed below:

- 1) School Principals are committed to fostering increased integration between school and community.
- 2) School has in-depth knowledge of the community and resources available.
- 3) School actively seeks opportunities to involve all sectors of the community.
- 4) School has a high level of awareness of the value and importance to partnerships of good public relations.
- 5) School Principals display a transformational leadership style which empowers others within the school and community and facilitates collective visioning.
- 6) School and community have access to and utilise extensive internal and external networks.
- 7) School and community share a vision for the future, centred on their youth.
- 8) School and community are open to new ideas, willing to take risks and willing to mould opportunities to match their vision.
- 9) School and community together play an active, meaningful and purposeful role in school decision making.
- 10) School and community value the skills of all in contributing to the learning of all.
- 11) Leadership for partnerships is seen as the collective responsibility of school and community.
- 12) School and community both view the school as a learning centre for the

whole community, which brings together physical, human and social capital resources.

It is obvious that the assessment of a partnership based on these indicators cannot be a definite or objective task, however deciding where to place an indicator on a three level scale makes this task easier. For example, when decision making is weighted towards the school the partnership is at an early stage of maturity whereas if decision making is shared between school and community it is considered that the partnership is at the middle stage. Eventually, when it is weighted towards community, the partnership is mature in terms of decision making.

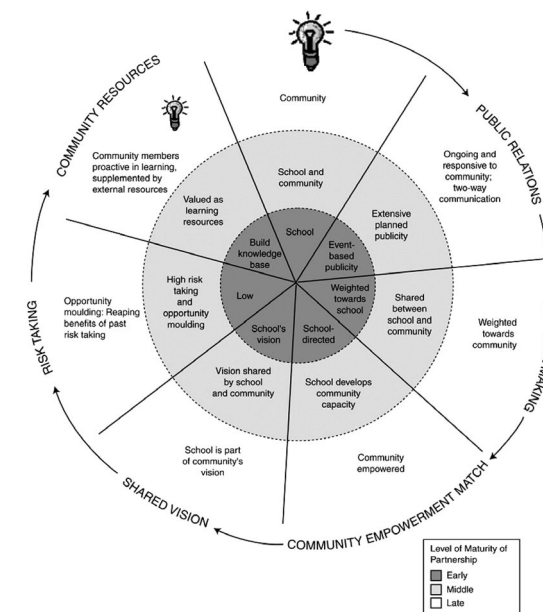


Figure 1. A generic model of the relationship between indicators of effective school community partnerships and the level of maturity of these partnerships

Source: Kilpatrick et al, 2003

The case studies and models described in this section all suggest ways to create and evaluate school community collaboration in remote communities. However all of them examine partnerships between the school and various stakeholders from the point of view of the survival and revitalization of remote communities. As a result any initiative or joint project that involves a school and local stakeholders is

considered as valuable if it contributes to community development in these ways. Without challenging the relevance of this approach and the value of the school community activities developed, there is a need for a greater focus on the issue of “sustainable” community development. According to the UN, community development is ‘a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems’. This definition stresses the importance of local decision making but it doesn’t specify the context of the actions that are undertaken.

Sustainability places an even bigger challenge to the revitalization and development of remote communities. According to Bridger and Lullof (1999, 2001) the ideal typical sustainable community incorporates five interrelated dimensions. Firstly it promotes local economic diversity. Secondly it is based on self-reliance that entails the development of local markets, local production and greater cooperation among local economic entities. A self-reliant community would still be linked to larger economic structures but would have a vibrant local economy that would better protect it from the whims of capital. The third dimension refers to the use of energy and the management of waste. The fourth involves the protection and enhancement of biological diversity and stewardship of natural resources whilst the final dimension relates to social justice. A sustainable community provides for the housing and living needs of all residents without any kind of class or racial-based separation and equality of access to public services. It also strives to empower citizens who can effectively participate in the decision making process.

Many of the actions that are central to this definition of sustainable community development are different from those found in other kinds of community development initiatives. As mentioned earlier in this report, what differentiates these actions from more typical community development activities such as building a playground, is that they might be controversial and create conflicts in the local community. Such conflicts might be raised between the common good and what is in the short term best interests of the individual or related to issues of social justice, such as migration.

The aim of this report is to analyse school community collaboration for sustainable development in remote and isolated areas in Europe. Our central questions are: What are the characteristic features of such collaborations and what can be done to enhance these kinds of partnerships in remote schools across Europe?

RESEARCH PLAN

This preliminary study was carried out to collect and report on the experience of educators and other practitioners who have developed collaboration towards sustainable development in remote and isolated communities of Europe and to analyse factors that foster or prevent such collaboration. A preliminary study is justified because there is a lack of such research in a European context. The research questions in this study were:

- What are the general characteristics (profile) of remote schools and communities developing collaboration (e.g. type of schools, characteristics of communities, factors of isolation etc.)?
- What are the main characteristics of these collaborations (e.g. type of linkages, partners, duration, outcomes etc.)?
- What are the main constraining and facilitating factors that encourage or prevent such collaboration?

In order to answer these questions a qualitative research approach was chosen. Such an approach is justified both by the preliminary nature of this study as well as by the initial lack of information regarding the extent to which there are such collaborations in isolated regions. In addition, the subjective meaning of the term ‘isolated community’ also favoured a qualitative approach, since potential respondents might have quite different perceptions of what an ‘isolated community’ is. To overcome the possible difficulties that could emerge due to different meanings of isolation, two interrelated criteria were utilized. The first was the EU definition of remote regions (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2008), and the second, the feeling of isolation described by respondents themselves. Respondents were asked several questions in which they were required to outline particular characteristics of their communities and indicate their feeling of isolation regarding for example, transportation infrastructure, access to social services and so on. The final sample only included respondents who met at least one of the above criteria.

THE RESEARCH TOOLS

The research tools of this study were a questionnaire and interview guide (see Appendix I). The questionnaire consisted of both open and closed questions. Questions

were organized into three main sections: (a) a description of the school and the community including demographic and socio-economic characteristics, characteristics indicating the “isolation” of the community as well as current and planned activities towards sustainable development; (b) a description of school community collaboration. This was the main section of the questionnaire, and required respondents to describe the main characteristics and impacts of school community collaboration; and (c) final comments representing participants’ opinions about factors that encouraged and constrained collaboration, the role of ICT and the prospects of the school becoming a learning center for sustainable development. The interview guide consisted of the same sections (above).

The selection of people and organisations to take part in the research was based on the experience and recommendations of CoDeS network members. The researchers asked the CoDeS members for short lists of people and examples which to their mind represented interesting school community collaboration in the remote regions (mountainous, lowland, insular) of their countries. It should be noted that some of the countries participating in CoDeS have no isolated areas (e.g. The Netherlands, Germany), which explains why the sample doesn’t include case studies from these particular countries.

The reliability of the instrument was tested with the support of three key teachers from remote schools and as a result of their comments a new version of the questionnaire was developed. The most important change recommended was to turn several open questions into closed ones in order to increase the possibility of gathering more data. However in every closed question space was given for respondents to note additional comments. The choice of closed questions was also associated with the difficulties faced due to language differences. Initially the questionnaire was in English but thanks to colleagues in the CoDeS network it was translated into three more languages, i.e. German, Romanian and Greek.

THE SAMPLE

The questionnaire was sent to 50 people and organisations and 24 completed questionnaires were received, all coming from schools. This is a 48% response rate. The final sample consisted of 23 schools as one Austrian school (Musik-NMS Henndorf: Salzburg-Umgebung) had to be excluded as it didn’t fulfill the ‘isolation’ criteria. The participating schools are from the following countries and regions:

- Greece (Dodecanese and Cyclades regions): 11 schools
- Austria (Kärnten, Oberösterreich and Salzburg): 4 schools
- Cyprus (Nicosia region): 2 schools
- Italy (Piemonte, Sicily regions): 2 schools
- Romania (Moldova–Bacau, Cluj regions): 2 schools
- Norway (Hedmarkregion): 1 school
- Spain (Catalonia region): 1 school

In detail, the schools that participated in this study were (Map 2):

Greece

- 1st High School, Island of Kalymnos: Dodecanese
- General Lyceum of Afantou, Island of Rhodes: Dodecanese
- High school and Lyceum, Island of Ios: Cyclades
- High school and Lyceum, Island of Kassos: Dodecanese
- High School and Lyceum, Island of Lipsi: Dodecanese
- High school and Lyceum, Island of Patmos: Dodecanese
- High school and Lyceum, Island of Chalki: Dodecanese
- High school and Lyceum of Olympos, Island of Karpathos: Dodecanese
- Primary school, Island of Sifnos: Cyclades
- Primary school, Island of Kea: Cyclades
- Primary school of Chora, Island of Amorgos: Cyclades

Austria

- Europa HS Dellach/Drau: Kärnten
- Nationalparkhauptschule Winklarn: Oberes Mölltal, Kärnten
- Ökolog HS Lembach: Bezirk Rohrbach, Mühlviertel, Oberösterreich
- BG/BRG/BORG St. Johann im Pongau: Pongau, Salzburg

Cyprus

- Peripheral school of Farmakas and Kampi: Nicosia
- Primary school of Anayontas: Nicosia

Italy

- Comprehensive Institute “Antonino Rallo” – Favignana: Sicily
- Istituto Comprensivo Sanfront – Paesana: Piemonte

Romania

- School 'Pelagia Rosu' Marisel: Cluj
- Secondary School of Palanka: Moldova-Bacau

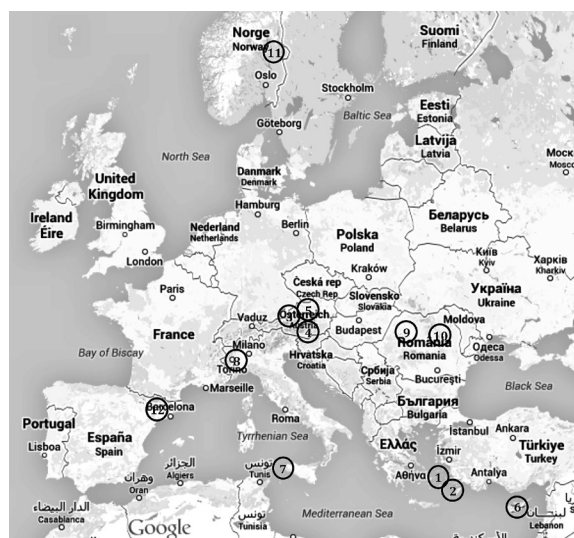
Norway

- Tylldalens skole: Hedmark

Spain

- Primary school Mare de Déu del Patrocin, Cardona: Catalonia

Twelve of the respondents were interviewed in more depth after the submission of the questionnaire. There were two reasons for the follow-up. Firstly, some respondents had given unclear answers to some questions that needed clarification. A second group of respondents had described interesting case studies without giving many details and the researchers wanted more information about these.



- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| (1) Cyclades (Islands of Ios, Sifnos, Kea, Amorgos) | (7) Sicily (Favignana) |
| (2) Dodecanese (Islands of Kalymnos, Rhodes, Kassos, Lipsi, Patmos, Chalki, Karpathos) | (8) Piemonte |
| (3) Salzburg (St. Johann im Pongau) | (9) Cluj (Marisel) |
| (4) Kärnten (Dellach/Drau, Winklern) | (10) Moldova-Bacau (Palanka) |
| (5) Oberösterreich (Lembach) | (11) Hedmark (Tyllidalen) |
| (6) Nicosia (Farmakas and Kampi, Anaylontas) | (12) Catalonia (Cardona) |

RESULTS

A. PROFILES OF ISOLATED SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

School characteristics

The respondents represented 9 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and 4 primary / lower secondary schools. The size of the schools in terms of student population, varied widely. Some Greek and Cypriot schools had extremely small numbers of students. For example there were only 8 students in the primary school on the island of Kea and 15 in the Olympos high school on the island of Karpathos. The largest schools in the same were the Istituto Comprensivo Sanfront-Paesana in Piemonte in Italy with 680 students and the secondary school of Palanka in Romania with 460 students. Similarly the number of teachers varied from 1 teacher on the island of Kea to 80 in the Istituto Comprensivo Sanfront-Paesana of Piemonte²

It is interesting to note that the two high schools on the islands of Chalki and Karpathos in Greece both had high numbers of teachers per student. On the island of Chalki there were 15 teachers for only 18 students, whilst on the island of Karpathos there were 11 teachers for 15 students. This high teacher/student ratio is because of the need to cover a wide range of subjects at a secondary education level regardless of the number of students. Small schools on the Greek islands (e.g. the High School and Lyceum on Kassos and Lipsi) often face a lack of specialized teachers and have in the past protested against this teacher deficit in various ways, such as occupying the school building. An extremely low teacher/student ratio is a distinctive characteristic of small island schools, where consolidation is impossible because only one school exists per island. These low teacher/student ratios highlight both the opportunities of teachers to provide high quality education and the relatively high operational cost of these schools.

The characteristics of the sample Communities

The sample was made up of schools from 12 insular communities (eleven from Greece and one Favignana from Sicily), 1 lowland and 10 mountainous communities. It should be noted that the two Cypriot case studies should be classified as island communities but due to the fact that Cyprus is such a large island they are classified

² The Istituto Comprensivo is a quite different case from the other schools since it is composed by 9 small schools: 3 kindergartens, 4 primary schools (6 to 10 years old), 2 secondary schools (11 to 14 year old). They gather children from 8 different municipalities, but just 4 of them have a school building.

as lowland (Analýontas) and mountainous (Farmakas-Kampi). The population of the communities also varies, from 250 inhabitants on the island of Chalki (Greece) to 10,740 in St. Johann im Pongau (Austria). Because of the focus of this study, most of the communities have been classified as rural even though three of them were referred to by the respondents as semi-urban (Kalymnos, Analýontas, Cardona). One community (Afantou on the island of Rhodes) was described by the respondent as urban, however according to the EU system of classification, Rhodes as a whole is classified as a predominantly rural, remote region.

The demographics of the communities described by the respondents reveal some critical points that represent, more or less, the socio-economic situation as well as the demographics of these regions. For instance, in most cases a significant population decline was reported during the previous decades, and in some communities, such as in Olympos on the island of Karpathos, the islands of Kea and Chalki and in Piemonte there is a higher proportion of older people. As a result, the student population has declined, and declined rapidly in some cases. The comments of the Tyllidalen and Piemonte schools clearly describe this situation.

“Tyllidalen is a rural district. Our community has ca. 160 households and ca. 450 citizens. We can see that there will be fewer children in the school. According to the prognoses we will have about 20 children in the school in six years ahead.”

Tyllidalen, Norway³

“There are many elderly people, while young couples usually move toward the plain and the bigger cities. From 14 year on students have to go quite far, to another place, to attend any high school.”

Piemonte, Italy

There are of course some exceptions, such as the island of Ios, which has a relatively high proportion of young people, and the island of Sifnos, where the population has increased over the last few years at an annual rate of 2.5%. This increase is probably however due to the fact that Sifnos is relatively near to the capital of Greece, Athens. Another critical point is the seasonal fluctuation of population that was reported in some cases, especially those that are popular tourist destinations during the summer such as the island of Ios. Such a fluctuation is likely to influence the social

³ It should be noted that quotes are exactly as written in the responses to the questionnaires or transcribed from the recorded interviews and have not been changed.

and cultural characteristics of these areas. In some cases there is a significant proportion of immigrants. For example, in the Piemonte region 10% of students are from immigrant families.

However, the most alarming demographic characteristic of these communities is the brain-drain phenomenon mentioned by some respondents, such as in Winklern in Austria:

“High migration, especially of the educated young people (brain drain situation).”

Winklern, Austria

The economic life of remote communities is usually directly connected with the kind of local natural resources, environmental conditions (e.g. soil type, weather) and the access to neighbouring urban centres. Tourism is a common economic sector for both insular and mountain communities, though based on different characteristics (i.e. sea and sun on islands, winter sports on mountains). Different agricultural activities are also common and including farming, fishing, beekeeping, logging and wood processing. In the public sector there are services supporting the basic needs of the inhabitants such as municipal services, health centers, the police and so on. It is worth noting that in a number of communities the public sector is dominated by schools and in some (e.g. the island of Chalki) the number of teachers might be considered too high when compared with the numbers working in other public services. Other occupations mentioned by respondents included trade, masonry and handicrafts (e.g. potters, carpenters) whilst a small number of small manufacturing companies (such as woodworking, furniture in Tyllidalen) were also reported. In four communities (i.e. Tyllidalen, Lembach, Winklern and Farmakas-Kampi) respondents noted that a significant proportion of inhabitants were commuters, i.e. people that travel between their place of residence to another place of work, usually a neighbour big town offering more job opportunities.

With regard to social and cultural life, the answers given by respondents highlight an interesting diversity of activities that take place and enrich the everyday life of these remote communities. Daily activities and the occasional events are both connected with the culture of each region. The specific events are usually fairs of one kind or another with many of them in Greece, Cyprus and Italy having a religious purpose. Other festivals include musical concerts and on the islands of Patmos and Ios these usually take place during the summer. Several music and dancing groups also offer cultural activities. These are common in Favignana and Piemonte. On

several Greek islands such as Sifnos, local people have revived older traditions and festivals. In some communities the cultural life has a seasonal variation due to fluctuation of population. For example in the summer, when the Cypriots of Farmakas and Kampi living abroad visit their home villages they revitalize their communities.

In Favignana of Sicily:

- “New Week of Egadi”: a cultural event aiming to face problems, inherent knowledge, enhancement, preservation, protection and conservation of Cultural Heritage of this area and thus promote tourism in Italy and abroad. Favignana is located in the center of the Mediterranean area and therefore the history of the entire Western world has passed to these shores and these amazing islands.
- Local Musical Band: that involves about 100 musicians aged from 6 to more than 40 years old. This band promotes the community in the abroad, since it participates in competitions with high classification and very important awards. This band promotes the artistic growth of many young people and educates to collaboration, motivating them to achieve a common goal.

“During the last few years Greek immigrants from Farmakas have organized a festival presenting traditional jobs such as distillation of zivania (a Cypriot alcoholic beverage), wine production, production of soutzoukos (a traditional sweet) etc.”

Farmakas-Kampi, Cyprus

Other communities focus on sports and various outdoor activities.

“We have some traditional events that have a cultural and sporting dimension. The rural community offers opportunities to the children and adults of Tyllidalen. These are important, because it means that people don’t have to leave this rural district. Football, skiing, trips into the mountains for everyone in all ages, farming traditional, all take place etc.”

Tyllidalen, Norway

It is notable that in the most remote areas participating in this study, local people still work in different craft activities and hence contribute to the conservation of the local culture. For example, sewing, weaving, and woodcarving are common in Romanian communities; sculptors and creative carpenters still work in Catalonia, while in Favignana local people create modern handmade pottery and stone items

carved from a specific limestone called calcarenite. Making traditional clothes and shoes, wood sculpting are common practices in communities such as Olympos on the Island of Karpathos Island. In a number of communities these activities are important sources of income especially when they are linked with tourism. In terms of social life, a particular activity that takes place in Piemonte should be highlighted.

“There is an association (Università di valle) which proposes to different villages a lot of courses every year about craftwork, foreign languages, conferences about current issues, environmental themes, presentation of writers, filmmakers, gym activities, health issues....”

Piemonte, Italy

Sustainable development

Before asking about examples of specific school community collaboration, the general opinion of respondents about whether local sustainable development plans have been developed and implemented in their communities was explored. Without providing further clarification about the concept of sustainable development and its potential practical dimensions, respondents were asked to state to what extent they consider their communities have sustainable development plans. The answers given indicate that the majority of respondents from Greece, Norway, and some from Austria and Romania consider that such plans have not been developed at all or only to a small extent. On the other hand, participants from Dellach/Drau, Lembach – Austria, Ostana/Piemonte – Italy, Favignana, Palanca, Cardona, Farmakas-Kampi and Anayontas of Cyprus and Chora of Amorgos consider that sustainability plans have been developed and implemented. However most of these plans, without knowing their overall nature and practical implementation in detail, seem to follow a top-down approach since only in three cases (i.e. Winklern and Lembach – Austria, Farmakas-Kampi) did local people contribute to their formulation.

An interesting plan in Favignana of Sicily:

- “Sole e stellene Egadi/Sun and star in Egadi Islands” is a project promoted by Egadi municipality and AzzerCo2 Energy Service Company in order to develop environmental sustainability standards. Until a few decades ago Egadi Islands lived on tuna and local fishing, mining of calcarenite stone and agriculture in a sustainable economic cycle. Now our archipelago is subject to special laws that protect it from unauthorized building, wild fishing and wild hunting but, unfortunately,

in the last years there are strong economic interests that threaten a sustainable development in our islands goal.

But...

Only the 50 % of the local people have understood the importance of recycling and wild fishery is still practiced by not local fishers against all the laws that preserve our marine protected area. Inhabitants of Egadi archipelago are not yet sufficiently aware of importance of sustainable development.

Various types of sustainable development activities undertaken by remote communities were described by the respondents. For example in Anayontas the community council has undertaken several projects to improve the socio-economic and environmental profile of the community. The examples of Favignana (see text box) and Cardona are also interesting.

"The community has proceeded to: (a) the approval of the segmentation of 50 plot lands, which are going to be assigned to families having low salaries, (b) the final approval for the development of a Sports Centre, (c) the final approval for the development of a Cultural Centre and an Amphitheatre, (d) the final approval for the development of green spaces and a recreational park, (e) the development of an urban park."

Anayontas, Cyprus

"EURONET 50/50 is a European project which has as its main goal to save energy and be more sustainable."

Cardona, Spain

The feeling of isolation

The concept of community isolation is open to different interpretations and there are many different representations based on personal perception and experience. As a result of this subjectivity part of this study was tried to establish what 'feeling of isolation' meant to people, whether respondents consider their communities to be isolated and which factors create or strengthen any feeling of isolation. Respondents were provided with a list of factors which in the experience of the researchers were likely to create or strengthen the feeling of isolation such as transportation, access to health, cultural, public services, job opportunities and so on. Each factor was followed by a 5-point Likert scale and space allowing respondents to justify their answer by using personal examples. In general, transportation and access to

health – cultural – public services, emerged as the strongest factors of isolation and were mentioned by the majority of the participants.

"It is difficult to start an enterprise due to transportation problems."

Lembach, Austria

"The transportation infrastructure connecting my community with urban areas is poor. In fact hydrofoils connecting our archipelago to the main land (Sicily) should be more frequent in order to reach medical, cultural, sport centers, high schools, colleges and universities, particularly Marettimo Island is the most isolated with a total of about 3 hydrofoils crossings a day all year round. Islands can often become cut off during storms and when sea conditions are rough."

Favignana, Italy

"Serious difficulties especially in the winter because of the limited ship lines."

Island of Ios, Greece

In general small islands and other remote communities (e.g. Lembach) suffer from a lack of doctors and medical care. The problem of access to health care is compounded on some small Greek islands especially because of the lack of frequent boat services to transfer people to mainland Greece or bigger neighbouring islands where more comprehensive medical services are available.

"We don't have doctors!"

Choraon the island of Amorgos, Greece

"A government doctor visits our community only once per week."

Anayontas, Cyprus

Job opportunities and economic development were also both stressed as critical factors of isolation by particular communities such as those in Romania and some Greek islands (Kassos and Kea). It is interesting to note however, that some communities, such as the islands of Sifnos and Ios and Tyllidalen stated that they face no problems with employment.

Several communities, such as Piemonte, Chora of Amorgos and Kassos also expressed serious complaints regarding the lack of support from the central government though others such as the Romanian communities and Favignana didn't stress this factor.

"The Italian government is not interested in developing the mountainous areas... There are not specific policies for the mountain areas, or they are so restricted that we can't consider them supporting the real development of the mountain."

Piemonte, Italy

"There is such a 'big distance' between Athens and the small islands..."

Island of Kassos, Greece

"Due to small population, basic infrastructure projects (e.g. landfill, recycling and water waste treatment system, airport) cannot be implemented; and when implemented they have long delays."

Island of Ios, Greece

With some exceptions, such as Farmakas-Kampi, Favignana and some Greek islands, social cohesion don't seem to be a critical factor contributing to community isolation. Instead, it seems that in most remote communities their small scale reinforces mutual understanding and support. The fact that generations of families have grown up in close proximity leads to an extended network of kinship, friendship and work relations that sometimes can be very intensive.

"Small communities strong passions..."

Island of Kassos, Greece

Communication services is the factor among those listed on the questionnaire that gained the most positive score in terms of overcome the feeling of isolation. This probably implies the impressive spread of ICT and telecommunication networks to even the most remote areas. This is a particularly interesting point and it should be further examined whether ICTs could play a bigger role in addressing other factors of isolation.

"Communication media is sufficiently evolved, now all the people are using the Internet for making purchases; Egadi school is connected with different academies or didactic institutions and administrative organizations, in Italy and in other countries. Our students are connected with classes in Tuscany or Aosta without leaving our islands, using an interactive e-learning platform."

Favignana, Italy

"The only existing infrastructure in our island is the Internet and mobilephone agencies..."

Island of Kassos, Greece

In general the feeling of isolation is stronger on the Greek islands than in mountainous or lowland areas, although there are some exceptions. It should be mentioned that no respondent listed additional factors related to isolation to those listed in the questionnaire either in the spaces provided or through the additional interviews. This probably implies that the factors listed covered the key elements of what is perceived to be the 'isolation' of a region.

B. SCHOOL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

This study has revealed several interesting case studies of school community collaboration in isolated communities, most of them directly associated with the natural, social and cultural characteristics of each community described in the previous section. These collaborations cover a wide range of subjects, lengths of time, number and roles of participants, and implications for local communities.

One section of the questionnaire gave those schools that had never developed any collaboration with the community an opportunity to describe and explain why they had not done so. However there were no responses to this section of the questionnaire as all respondents described at least one project suggesting the need for further research. Having said that, this preliminary study has revealed a number of interesting findings especially in relation to the constraints to such collaboration.

Subjects and types of linkages

The collaboration projects described in this section cover a range of themes and different approaches to linkages between school and community including outdoor activities, lifelong learning activities, edutainment activities and local studies. All of these reflect the diversity of resources and interests of each community. In order to obtain a clear understanding of these case studies we used Miller's (1993) interrelated approaches to school community collaboration. These approaches were then further elaborated and adapted according to our data. As a result we propose a classification of three approaches to collaboration: (a) the school as a community centre, (b) the community as a field for inquiry and action and (c) school community based enterprises. Using these three general categories we attempted to classify the projects into several sub-categories, depending on the dominant subject of

each one, i.e. environment , health care , culture, capacity building (encompassing the lifelong learning), sport and economic/management. It should be noted that the majority of the projects were complex and multi-dimensional, hence there was overlap between them.

The School as a community center

Several projects directly or indirectly transformed the school into an open space that hosted activities or provided services for the community as a whole. In many projects the school partners provided infrastructure and/or personnel to implement various activities, such as workshops, seminars, presentations and so on aimed at informing and sensitising local people, parents and of course the school community about issues of common interest. Different types of activities were developed within this context:

- **Environmental activities**

In Palanca for example, students participated in the development of a science lab in the school focusing on environmental topics amongst others. The local community benefited in a number of ways through this activity.

“Realization and equipment of a science lab. The lab was equipped only for teaching activities. Community members participated in this lab at information sessions about renewable energy, ecological footprint, slow food, benefits of using medicinal plants (by NGO “Friends of Earth” Galati). Courses were organized about sustainable agriculture (by NGO-s “GAL Valea Muntelui”, the “Ecological Centre for Youth Bacău”). Also activities were organized related to the “Day for Nonformal Education” by “BUHA, Ecological Centre Association”.

Palanca, Romania

On several Greek islands (e.g. Kalymnos) members of the local community (professionals, students’ relatives etc.) supported environmental education projects implemented throughout the school year in different ways. The results of these projects were presented to the whole community. Power point presentations, exhibitions and drama sketches were used to inform parents and other members of the community about the activities and impact of the projects in raising community awareness of various environmental issues. Moreover special days were organized by the schools to stimulate environment and health actions.

“We organize a day of recycling and a day of blood donation for the local community.”

Afantouon the Island of Rhodes, Greece

Analyontas, Cyprus

“My school, your school, our school, the place that nurtures us, strengthens us, improves us”

During an environmental education course the idea of redeveloping the schoolyard as a place for stimulating children’s creativity emerged and was discussed. The initial motivation was the fact that adolescents aged 13-15 years, who were not studying at the school, frequently damaged the schoolyard (i.e. graffiti on the walls, destroying the plants etc.). The challenge therefore was not only to remake the yard but also to avoid future damage. The project that was undertaken included two main dimensions-actions: (a) environment, (b) game and human relationships.

The project focused on the schoolyard, a place that consisted of an incomplete playground, a “green area” empty of plants and a part of the yard that needed immediate repairs for safety reasons. Key partners of this project were the school community, the Community Council, private agencies, the parents association and NGOs.

This place is being reconstructed and transformed into a place of creative activities.

The actions that have already been undertaken include: development of a Special Education room, installation of a safe playground, the installation of new signs and a cabinet for science materials, installation of shelves and creation of a cloakroom in the school’s storeroom, creation of a new “trips’ stand” which was placed at the schoolyard, painting and drawing of the external school walls, drawing of ground games, purchasing of educational and entertainment games, development of a flower and botanic garden, planting of trees.

In order to avoid future damage, the principal had in depth discussions with the adolescents responsible for damage in the past, as well as with their parents. Through mature discussions all revealed the common value of the community while they decided this schoolyard should become an open place

for everyone. Today the schoolyard is indeed an open safe place for creative activities and no damage has been observed.

- **Health care activities**

In the context of health care, the research identified examples of schools that had become centres providing the community with health-related activities or had organised similar projects taking place in other locations. For example, the secondary school of Olympos on the island of Karpathos and the school Dellach/Drau had both taken part in such activities trying to raise community awareness of drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and other physical and mental issues.

“(1) An experiential seminar for a group of parents – students – teachers by a scientific team of the disease prevention center ‘Diodos’ regarding sexually transmitted diseases. (2) Organizing of a school for parents under the scientific support of a psychologist.”

Olymposon the Island of Karpathos, Greece

- **Capacity building activities**

Several collaborations that could be seen as lifelong learning projects and usually implemented in schools, focused on building the capacity of students and the local community in languages, ICT and other topics.

“Our project involved the whole families, giving students and young people, their families, and our local communities a cultural support. ... We have been starting since 2006 different courses on ICT, parental care, foreign languages, etc. ...”

Favignana, Italy

In Piemonte, local people and students had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Occitanian minority language as well as other widely spoken languages such as French and English. They also acquired other more general skills such as time management (see below the text box for Piemote).

Capacity building activities were sometimes aimed only at parents. For instance, the secondary school on the island of Chalki initiated a lifelong learning Grundtvig project entitled ‘Learning Parents’. Ten parents from the school Parents Association participated in courses on basic English and computers. The project included also exchange visits as a tool for learning and networking.

Another topic described by several respondents related to providing students and members of the local community with practical information and capacities regarding possible professions that could support local sustainable development. The schools on the islands of Kea, Ios and Karpathos for example, as well as the schools of Farmakas-Kampi and Favignana have all developed such projects.

“Family members, friends and students shared information and experiences related to traditional professions within a project implemented in the school.”

Island of Kea, Greece

“Parents and grandmothers were invited to the school to discuss about old professions and customs.”

Farmakas-Kampi, Cyprus

In Dellach/Drau and in the island of Ios the school collaborated with local professionals and organized workshops on beekeeping, a local traditional occupation in which young people could potentially take up as a profession.

- **Cultural activities**

A large variety of cultural activities engaging schools and communities and usually hosted in schools, were very common in many collaborations. Activities included the revitalisation of local customs, theatre performances, exhibitions, films, libraries, and even a soiree.

“Parents and children cook together traditional dishes to celebrate Christmas and Easter.”

Farmakas-Kampi, Cyprus

“In the context of the project ‘Self-Evaluation of the Educational Work’, being implemented for third year, we organize every year a meeting with parents, in which each parent prepares characteristic dishes of his/her region (for immigrants) or special dishes or gifts. This kind of “soiree” is very popular since teachers (who change every year) meet parents.”

Island of Chalki, Greece

“A local cultural association, parents, shops owners and the municipality supported the implementation of a folkloric exhibition.”

Choraon the Island of Amorgos, Greece

“Organizing a theatre performance entitled ‘Ta aravoniasmata’ (‘The engagements’) in collaboration with the Youth Cultural Association.”

Afantouon the Island of Rhodes, Greece

“Pupils in collaboration with teachers organize movies projection on Saturdays. This is a cultural event for the community and many people, even grandmothers and grandfathers join it.”

Island of Kassos, Greece

• Sports activities

Mountain biking and mountain trips were common activities in the collaborations reported by Tyllidalen and Piemonte. Sport events were also organized in Dellach/Drau, Palanca and Farmakas-Kampi.

“Students and parents participate together in a football/basketball tournament.”

Farmakas-Kampi, Cyprus

“The school tries to work (...) the sport associations supporting e.g. mountain biking, or climbing (...)”

Piemonte, Italy

The response of the school in Piemonte included a number of interesting projects most of which related to the approach ‘School as a community center’. These are presented in the text box below. The projects from Piemonte could be classified under several headings including environmental activities, cultural activities and capacity building activities such as the ‘Youngsters Municipality Council’.

Piemonte, Italy

This collaboration focused on the role that a school in a mountain community affected by depopulation can play. Small schools should be seen as fundamental ‘instruments’ to keep small towns alive, but in order to survive they need to build a strong alliances with their local communities.

Since the end of World War II the population of the Italian Alps valleys has steadily decreased. The community of the upper Po valley has five municipalities, three of which are small mountain towns with less than 600 inhabitants each. Paesana (3.000 inhabitants) and Martiniana Po are the two biggest towns. The three other towns, i.e. Ostan, Oncino and Crissolo have suffered most depopulation.

The Istituto Comprensivo Don Milani di Paesana – made up of five schools (pre-primary, primary and lower secondary) and located in a beautiful valley in Piedmont within the natural park area of the river Po – is one of the few cultural resources in an area that has only two small libraries and no cinemas or theatres. For over six years now the Institute Don Milani has been acting as a knot – sometimes the central one – between local institutional networks with the aim to value and maintain the cultural identity of the valley while opening it to Europe and the whole world.

The collaboration between the schools and the local communities has followed two complementary directions:

- At first the school started a network of relationships with private and public institutions in order to financially and culturally sustain its own projects. Projects in the last 6 years have consisted of activities aiming to a) protect the Park territory and other areas in Piedmont; b) develop Occitanian as a minority language in Italy; c) develop science education and laboratorial methodologies; d) develop early learning of the main European languages such as French and English. All these activities have encouraged the involvement of families and fostered a greater knowledge of the community’s environment and traditions. Families were significantly involved in welcoming and hosting foreign pupils and teachers. Initiatives launched by associations such as Legambiente were integrated in the school projects and the pupils participated in national campaigns such as “Clean the world” or “Small Municipalities Great School”.
- Secondly the school, welcoming proposals coming from different actors in the community, has become a major knot in a local network. The fact that all the children in the valley attend the Istituto Comprensivo “Don Milani” makes the collaboration easier. One example has been the Youngsters Municipality Council (Consiglio Comunale dei Ragazzi) of the Paesana Municipality. This project aimed to develop young peoples’ awareness and abilities to self-manage their free time with sport and music or other activities. The meetings of the board are held at school during school hours and elections also take place in school. Sport activities usually take place in the school gym hall.

Source: <http://codeslegambientepiemonte.wordpress.com/>

Community as a field for inquiry and action

Several projects were reported in which partners investigated the environmental and cultural attributes of their communities and developed activities aimed at their protection and improvement. By exploring and documenting their community, participants become aware of, understood and valued their own places. Through this kind of enquiry, community members built “relationships of care” for the places they lived in and undertook social action which in the long term could contribute to the well-being of the community. This category of projects is dominated by environmental activities related either to the natural or to the built environment. Many participating schools developed projects with the collaboration of the community to discover the ecological and human environment of their place. These projects focused on different topics such as local plants (see the project of Kassos in text box), a natural park, the local river, fountains and so on.

“Our school has made a new cooperation with the National park Hohe Tauern. Together we have developed a special school program which both sides deal with. The National park Hohe Tauern can fulfill its educational mission with a very reliable partner. Our school can use both the staff and the materials of the NP. Our students complete in the duration of the secondary level up until five three-days projects in the national park, where they live in shelters and learn in the nature from nature. The NP rangers work as experts in the project days and in cooperation with the teachers work on topics that aim at the NP region.”

Winklern, Austria

In some cases enquiry activities are coupled with the valorization of the natural and cultural environment. In Cardona, for instance, the school and community developed common projects for valorizing the fountains and other features of the village. In Marisel the school worked together with the community to develop environmental trails and a tourist map of the village, while in parallel they collected materials for a village monograph and for the local museum.

“Collaboration for realization of a tourist map of the Marisel village, the Calendar of holydays and a monograph of the village. Collecting materials for the village monograph, also for the local Museum.(...) Marking tourist trails in the zone of Marisel, also collecting garbage in the zone.(...) Building environmental trails in Marisel, establishing the key points of the trail.”

Marisel, Romania

“... undertake global actions as a town to know and protect our near environment. In these actions authorities, three public schools and families collaborate together(...) - Live around our rivers (animals, plants, social activities, windmills...) - Fountains of the town (recognize and clean them).”

Cardona, Spain

Winklern, Austria

The small village Winklern is a remote mountainous community located in the Mölltal region in Carinthia, southern Austria. It is one of the seven communities of the National Park (NP) Hohe Tauern (central Alps). The two pillars of the regional economy are the agricultural sector and tourism. The National Park is a considerable economic factor in the region. However, when the NP was established 30 years ago, the population was concerned that this could mean restrictions for the cultivation of the cultural landscape. In exchange for the sustainable management of the agricultural cultural landscapes the NP had to guarantee the farmers certainty in terms of income and continuity of agricultural functions (temporary lease agreements).

This project is a collaboration between the NP and the Secondary School in the region (called “Nationalparkhauptschule Winklern” - National Park School Winklern), aiming at fostering environmental learning and responsibility as well as raising the acceptance of the NP within the community. The two main-aims of the collaboration are: pupils should understand the role of the NP in fostering the sustainable development of the region from an environmental, social and economic point of view and secondly raising awareness for the cultural and natural heritage to strengthen the pupils’ sense of responsibility for the region they live in.

One major focus of the collaboration is the annual outdoor program “Nature-Sports-Fun”, where pupils spend some days in the NP and are guided and taught by NP-rangers.

The stakeholders involved in the collaboration consist of the NP-staff and rangers who support the school during excursions and hut keepers, where pupils live during the outdoor program “Nature-Sports-Fun”. Other local inhabitants, such as farmers, landowners and hunters are involved

occasionally for temporary projects; many of them are parents of the pupils as well.

Leaving the “teaching environment school” and making use of “learning environment nature” just outside the classroom door, pupils can experience the fascinating nature of the NP region using all their senses. In this context students learn to value the natural and cultural heritage and are later prepared to accept responsibility for the region’s future welfare.

Source: <http://codeswinklern.wordpress.com/>

Environmental protection activities were the most common theme of collaboration between school and community. The majority of the respondents referred to at least one activity of this kind with waste management (cleaning of public areas such as a coast and buildings, recycling materials, composting etc.) and forest protection (planting – reforestation) being among the most common issues. Such efforts sometimes tackled gaps in public services or attempted to initiate a project that should actually be undertaken by public authorities.

“Planting trees and coast cleaning every year: the bigger classes together with the municipality.”

Island of Ios, Greece

“Action for hallway cleaning: Students gave a petition to the ‘responsible’ (authorities, persons...)”

Lembach, Austria

“Waste minimization and management in schools. Litter collection every year in May.”

Dellach/Drau, Austria

School community-based enterprises

The projects that were classified into this category attempted to create new ideas and to inspire students and local communities with the vision of a new (sustainable) model of development. Although the projects mainly had educational purposes, they also had clear economic dimensions. In parallel, participants became familiar with various competences.

There are not many examples of these types of projects and in fact only two participating schools reported having implemented such kind of projects. Lembach’s school presented a short-term collaboration with the community based on a celebration of the local Market’s celebration.

“400 years Community Market in Lembach (June 2012): Students and teachers participated in the Market with a stand and sold flaxseed oil and potatoes.”

Lembach, Austria

On the other hand the school in Lipsi Island presented two medium to long-term collaborations. The first aimed at protecting and promoting traditional local products (see box text) while the second focused on the development of a food garden in the school.

“The last two years teachers, parents, students and the Municipality of Lipsi collaborated to develop a seasonal organic food garden in the school. Teachers and students decided what, how and where to plant as well as where to provide the organic vegetables. The roles of parents and the Municipality were limited. The parents provided us with plants and gathered the remaining grass for their livestock. The Municipality provided with soil and manure from a public pasture. We offered the products to the school canteen and to students for free, to teachers with in cheap price as well as to local groceries which sold them on behalf of us. With the small amount of money we gained we bought new seeds and plants.”

Island of Lipsi, Greece

Island of Lipsi, Greece

The unique secondary school (50 students and 15 teachers) on the island of Lipsi (17 km², 790 inhabitants) instigated collaboration with local community, aimed at giving prominence to traditional local products which could become the basis for sustainable development of the island. In particular, the collaboration focused on local products, such as cheese, olive oil, aromatic herbs and soap, promoting them to the local and tourist market. The local economy is based mainly on tourism and agriculture. Because of the small scale economy, young people do not have many opportunities to develop new job opportunities, and some of them who have studied in tertiary education leave their island for a better future.

Although the initial motivation was to collect money for the school to support activities such as school trips, later on a vision was formed that

this undertaking could lead the local community to an alternative model of development. The project started in 2005 and continues today, even though in some years teachers' interest has been limited. During the first steps (2005-2006) the undertaking was integrated into a project entitled 'Economy and Business Dexterity') coordinated by the Ministry of Education.

The key actors of the project are students, teachers, local professionals, citizens and the municipality. In particular, pupils were responsible for bundling local food products together in an imaginative and attractive manner and then promoting and selling them to local shops and enterprises as well as to the tourists that visit Lipsi. Teachers supported students in managing the project and connected them with local producers and shops. Several professionals and citizens participated by offering their products for free of charge and advising students on how to preserve and protect the quality of products. The Municipality (especially the mayor) also contributed by providing ideas and resources as well as fostering collaboration. Students and teachers have also founded an NGO entitled 'Techno-lipsi'.

The main strength of this project has been the continuing participation of several external partners and the encouragement of the local community, whilst the main barrier is the displacement of some teachers and the suspiciousness of some (although just a few) citizens regarding the quality of the products.

According to the teacher that coordinates the project on behalf of the school: *"this undertaking contributes to the protection of natural resources, as basis of the production process. It also proposes an alternative way to create new jobs and to reinforce the economic development of an isolated community which needs the retention and the employment of young people".*

Instigators, duration, needs/motives and partners of the collaboration

The research showed that those instigating a collaboration are commonly the people or organisation that inspired the project in the first place and then gave momentum to the creation of the project. According to most responses, the instigator of the collaborations in this study was usually a school. In fact all but seven projects were initiated in this way. Only on two islands (Kalymnos and Kassos) were

the projects initiated by the community (on Kassos by a youth association), whilst in the other five instances, i.e. Lembach, Dellach/Drau, St Johan in Pongau, Karpathos and Sifnos, projects were instigated jointly by both school and community. The conclusion that schools are the main project instigators can only be a tentative one since our initial contacts for this research were mainly associated with the education sector and because of the relatively small sample size. However it should be stressed that in many projects there was a dominant partner, at least at the beginning, who seems to take the key decisions all by themselves.

Roles of different partners in a Comenius project with four countries

- Parents: hosted the children in their houses
- Municipality: organized a reception, lunches and an event for spreading the outcomes of the program
- Hoteliers: hosted the teachers
- Professionals: sponsored project activities
- Youth council: gave fishing lessons
- Dance Association: gave dancing lessons

Island of Lipsi, Greece

The length of these initiatives varied from a couple of days (for example of the islands of Kea and Olympos on Karpathos) to many years such as the projects in Winklarn, the islands of Ios, Lipsi, Favignana and Cardona. It is interesting to note that there doesn't seem to be a relationship between the length of a project and maturity of the collaboration (in terms of Kilpatrick et al.'s (2003) model) or its effect on the local community. Moreover, during the process of collaboration, especially the long lasting ones, new elements are usually added to enrich and /or partially re-orientate the project.

A further question relates to the motivation for starting and participating in collaborative projects. According to the respondents two factors emerged as the most important. The first was that "Opening the school's doors" to the local community allows better communication and the exchange of ideas and experiences with local people whilst at the same time it contributes towards breaking the isolation of a school and the building of social cohesion. The second factor was more practical with collaborative projects being designed to meet particular needs. For instance in the case of Palanca the school needed a science lab and in the case of Analyontas there was a need to improve the schoolyard to support students' creativity.

“...• to break isolation

- to maintain and reinforce social cohesion and cushion disparities*
- to ensure high quality education*
- to cope with demographic decrease.”*

Favignana, Italy

“Missing the school’s science lab.”

Palanca, Romania

The kind of partners that work together in projects has already been briefly described but it is worth looking in more detail and the groups that take part in collaborative activities. Apart from schools (students and teachers), partners of collaborations were mainly local authorities, parents of students and different groups of professionals. In some instances, associations such as NGOs, the church and local enterprises also contributed in many different ways (see the case of the Island of Lipsi in the text box).

In Piemonte for instance, parents had a crucial role in the collaboration by hosting foreign pupils, while in other cases they merely participated in conferences about health and well-being. Parents in general largely participated by providing know-how and practical support while occasionally they took part as learners.

“Parents were involved from the beginning. They knew about the objectives and the activities. Each one of them was actually a qualified worker. Examples: a parent who is an electrician adapted the electrical system; a carpenter parent renewed the necessary lab-furniture; another one made the water supplies; a house painter parent cleaned the wall; curtains were made by tailor relatives of children. Parents also made the final cleaning. Financial support was completed by children, selling cookies made by their mothers to the public on special celebration festivals.”

Palanca, Romania

Local authorities such as the city or municipal councils usually provided technical, financing and logistical support, infrastructure and personnel, whilst professionals offer their know-how.

“Municipalities of Paesana, Ostana, Sanfront, Rifreddo: the persons in charge of policies for the young ones participated in the meetings, the local authorities

financed some of the activities planned, or supported them with their personnel (e.g. for transportation).”

Piemonte, Italy

“Municipality of Ios: Technical-material infrastructure: carrying the little trees, digging holes for planting, providing materials needed for cleaning the coast (plastic bags, gloves) – later on particular classes visited the mayor to raise questions (interview) in order to obtain an integrated picture of the environmental problems of the island as well as the possibilities for solving them.”

Island of Ios, Greece

According to some of the Greek respondents professionals involved in the projects, usually offered financial support and know-how. However there are also several other more active types of contribution depending on the subject of the project. “A psychologist: he realized a research about well-being of young people in the mountain areas, with a focus on our community. The research was financed by a bank foundation with the partnership of the school.”

Piemonte, Italy

The role of the few NGOs reported as partners had more to do with providing information, advice as well as financial and technical support.

“The school tries to work within a network including the catholic associations, the different municipalities, the sport associations supporting e.g. mountain biking, or climbing, the young associations (e.g. Consiglio Comunale dei Ragazzi, progetto spazilogiovani), the social services, the local associations (ProLoco) (...) Every year we organize some events together with these organizations. The specific activities depend on the possibilities of funding.”

Piemonte, Italy

It is very important to stress that according to the respondents, it seems that in most cases plans are not discussed and decided in common from the beginning of the collaborations. The instigator is usually the partner who sets the context and the goals of the collaboration, while the other partners join during the development of the project and their contribution depends on the goals and tasks set.

Outcomes

Although collaboration as a process has an inherent value, the outcomes of this process are also highly important. Respondents were therefore asked to assess whether the collaboration they had participated in had contributed to the sustainability of their local community. The answers to this question were divided between those who considered there had been an impact on sustainability and those who didn't see an impact. For example, those on the island of Kea considered that their project did not affect community sustainability and another 8 out of the 23 respondents stated that their projects only contributed in a small way to local sustainability. These respondents were from the islands of Chalki, Ios, Olympos on Karpathos, Chora on Amorgos, Afantou on Rhodes, and Tyllidalen, Lembach and St. Johann im Pongau. On the other hand, a number of other respondents appeared more optimistic. For example respondents from the island of Sifnos, Dellach/Drau, Analyontas and Marisel stated that their collaborations had made a good contribution to sustainability, whilst those from Favignana and Palanca considered that their projects had significantly affected the sustainability of the local community. However, once again, we should note that these are the subjective assessments made by the respondents, all of whom had different personal understandings of what the sustainability of a community means. That is why a section of the research instrument made an attempt to clarify responses by asking respondents to compare their ideas of sustainability with factors that characterise the concept of sustainable community as outlined by Bridger and Luloff (1999, 2001).

The perceptions of respondents regarding which particular dimensions of sustainability have been affected by their school community collaboration vary. Most focused on the environmental dimension. They considered that their projects had improved environmental protection in their community either directly, for example by planting trees or cleaning particular places, or indirectly by raising environmental consciousness of children and adults.

"It raises the consciousness of children and adults about the importance of choices for environmental sustainability, protection of the environment."

Piemonte, Italy

"The science lab with its modern tools facilitates ecological education of the community members."

Palanca, Romania

"People begin to realize the importance of environmental protection. (...) They are more sensibilised about environmental topics, and they act in consequence."

Cardona, Spain

"They learn to appreciate and recognize their own region and that it is necessary for them to participate in its protection and 'conservation'."

Winklarn, Austria

The majority of the respondents (including those from Chalki, Kassos, Afantou on the island of Rhodes and the island of Ios, Tyllidalen, Lembach, Dellach/Drau, Piemonte and Winklarn) considered that their collaboration also improved the social life of their community in several ways. There are however some communities, such as Olympos on Karpathos, that saw limited improvements and others such as St. Johann im Pongau that saw none. Most respondents focused on the improvement in personal competencies related to the development of collaboration and in communication as well as the benefit of sharing experiences and the feeling of "belonging" to a community. Most of the statements about enhanced competencies referred to students.

"Especially within the youth there is some evidence they are organizing common activities in a more coordinated way."

Piemonte, Italy

"They appreciated the concepts of collaboration and team-work."

Chora on the Island of Amorgos, Greece

"Our students collaborated with the students of the secondary school and the workers of municipality (which are relatives, friends and neighbors of our students); they observed them while working and shared comments about the work undertaken."

Island of Ios, Greece

It appears that the effects of collaboration described above do not seem to impact generally on the more essential socio-political dimensions of sustainability related to social equity, justice and so on. Though once again, there are some exceptions. In Favignana for example, the respondents mentioned the improvement of social cohesion and active citizenship and to some extent of the local economy:

"Our project involved the whole families, giving students and young people, their families, and our local communities a cultural support. It has improved the social life of the community and active citizenship. (...) Education measures enable small communities as in Marettimo to economic and social grow."

"It has stimulated more initiatives to projects aimed at social work."

Favignana, Italy

According to the majority of respondents, the economic life of the communities has only been influenced in a limited way by these projects. At least one third of respondents including those from Chora on the island of Amorgos, the islands of Kassos and Chalki, Tyllidalen and Lembach, stated that their projects had little or no impact on the economic life of local community. Having said that, a few communities such as the island of Kalymnos, Marisel, and Winklern, expected to gain some economic development benefits through their collaborative projects. The community of Cardona also expected some economic improvement as the quote below shows, though how this is linked with the collaborative project is not clear.

"More job places / Reducing the lighting energy consumption in schools."

Cardona, Spain

One of the most critical dimensions associated with sustainability, especially in isolated regions, is the retention of young people in the community. However, in answers to the question about this issue, only the respondents from Winklern, Tyllidalen, Favignana, Marisel and Chora on the island of Amorgos seemed to think that the collaboration had the potential to reduce the migration of young people from the community.

"When they were young, they had good memories from their youth. I think they consider that when they are going to settle down with children on their own."

Tyllidalen, Norway

"Some parents came back from a big city (Trapani) to Marettimo in order to allow their pupils to participate at our experimentation."

Favignana, Italy

Since the retention of young people in a remote area is critical it is important that they have a positive view about their community because this implies a certain level of optimism and to some extent their potential willingness to stay. One of the

questions asked was about the impact of collaborative projects on young people's views of their community. The answers were encouraging in that the majority of participants considered that the projects did have a positive influence on students' view of their community and in some cases a significant impact. Some respondents for example mentioned that students had the opportunity to learn about and appreciate either particular aspects of the community related to the subject of the project or about the community as a whole.

" They are encouraged to learn more about the community and about the territory of the community."

Piemonte, Italy

"They developed a concern for traditional local professions, and ways to continue some of them which are useful but tend to disappear."

Island of Kea, Greece

"Students feel more responsible and committed."

Cardona, Spain

"Students understood that credible, well justified projects by collaborating with other institutions would create things for the interest of the all community. The volunteer work got new dimensions in their eyes."

Palanca, Romania

"They understand that collaboration is needed to make something good for our place, and they learn to be active and not to expect everything from the authorities".

Island of Ios, Greece

Such a view demonstrates that collaboration might not only improve students' feelings about their community but also encourage them to be more active community participants and take more responsibility for their future. For example, the respondents from Favignana mentioned that:

"Students are more responsible and conscious of their role in society. They can have an active role in order to build a more active citizenship. The gap of isolation is in part narrowed."

Favignana, Italy

School community collaboration has in some cases had a positive effect on young people's views of their community, but what about the other way round? Did community views about the school and young people change? According to respondents this factor has also been positively affected with comments implying that many people not only learned more about their local school, but also began to recognize its critical role in the community and realized that its purpose extended beyond merely educating children. Furthermore in some cases the schools even appeared to reverse some cautious or negative community views.

"The school is proposing quite a lot of activities to the population and the people come to them."

Piemonte, Italy

"The local community admired of the project and appreciated the social role of the school."

Choraon the Island of Amorgos, Greece

"The local community has realized and accepted that the school participates and plays a leading role into actions."

Island of Ios, Greece

"Local people understand that the school is changing, becomes vital part of the community and its role extends far beyond producing a well-educated group of students."

Olympos on the Island of Karpathos, Greece

"School plays a great role in our communities and islanders are very proud of their institution."

Favignana, Italy

In conclusion, it appears that in most cases the collaborative projects seemed to be a successful first step for schools and communities toward achieving a greater mutual understanding and appreciation of the role that each plays in overcoming isolation. Having said that, the research exposes only very general impressions and further research especially focusing on local people is needed to understand the full impact of collaborative projects on a community.

C. Constraining and facilitating factors

One of the main goals of this research was to find out about the factors that both facilitated and constrained school community collaboration for sustainable development in isolated communities. The respondents gave both positive and negative feedback to questions related to this aspect of collaboration with the personal interviews being particularly enlightening. Having said that when reading the section below it should be remembered that that the conclusions are based on the researchers interpretation of interviews with school principals of schools.

Constraining factors

One of the most important constraining factors in a school community collaboration stems from the difficulties of remote schools in attracting and retaining qualified teachers. Due to rapid turnover, many teachers in isolated communities are not willing to contribute to projects which need long term commitment. In many cases and especially on small Greek islands there was a strong desire of teachers to move to bigger schools or get back to their place of origin as soon as possible. Such a trend prevents these teachers from being integrated into the community they currently work in and working towards a common long term plan. Moreover with regard to the situation on the Greek islands the staff of a school is often made up of newly qualified teachers working on one year contracts, which might or might not be renewed at the end of the year. Given that several schools in isolated communities usually employ new teachers this potential lack of commitment constitutes a significant obstacle for collaboration.

"There is a rapid turnover of teachers."

Island of Chalki, Greece

"I don't know if this project is going to continue given that two out of three teachers are of temporary status and we don't know if they are going to be with us the next year."

Island of Lipsi, Greece

Another set of constraining factors relates to the attitude of those in both the school and the community. Many teachers, for example are not willing to volunteer and invest additional working hours to such projects for understandable reasons.

"Reluctance of teachers in collaborating with community/community agents because of lack of remuneration of additional activities."

Palanca, Romania

Similarly, some teachers are suspicious of the role of external partners such as parents, as they are concerned that collaboration might result in possible intervention in the teaching process. All these negative factors are strongly associated with the lack of a collaborative tradition in a school and/or the community and those individuals who are enthusiastic about collaboration and volunteering often encounter serious challenges if they are minority in a school/community which lacks such a culture.

"Some teachers consider these collaborations as 'suspicious' and are not willing to participate anyway in actions which are open and all partners are equal and can express their opinion. They consider that such actions pave the way for interventions in their teaching into the class."

Island of Lipsi, Greece

Two other factors also emerged associated with school and community culture: the fear of change in general and the resistance to initiatives that challenge the traditional boundaries of school.

"Isolation of the school from the community life: (...)Fear for changes"

Palanca, Romania

„Some colleagues do not want the students to participate in actions encouraging the entrepreneurship because they consider such a choice gives prominence to the economy and to material commodities."

Island of Lipsi, Greece

Furthermore, socio-political and cultural differences, as well as competitive relationships within small communities often constrain the development of collaboration. Such differences in relationships may be between school and community, between stakeholders with different interests and cultures or between individuals. In all these instances, relationships are a barrier to the development of open and sincere communication and trust needed for the formation of a climate of mutual understanding and support. These are all important elements needed for a successful collaboration.

"Social class and cultural barriers often impede the development of cooperative relationships between school staff, parents and other community members."

Marisel, Romania

"Personal and political differences cause conflicts which are brought into the school and the community council."

Analyontas, Cyprus

"School and community have different priority of values."

Palanca, Romania

In some cases local people consider schools as an 'economic resource'. An example of this is that local home owners sometimes might increase the cost of a room or apartment when a new teacher arrives in a community making it difficult for them to gain a feeling of integration. In other communities parents don't appear to value education greatly because they consider that the welfare of their children would be better secured through them leaving school and getting a job. Sometimes for example, gaining work even in a low skilled job that offers what is perceived as easy money such as tourist services, is seen as a higher priority than education. Some parents therefore don't encourage children to become involved in school initiatives that might raise educational goals and aspirations.

"Some parents do not believe in education."

Olymposon the Island of Karpathos, Greece

A third set of factors impeding the development of school community collaboration relates to practical issues. According to respondents, obstacles stemming from bureaucracy discourage innovation. For example, potential partners in a collaborative project often need permission and/or practical support from public or local government institutions to implement a project in activities such as those involving interventions on public spaces. Sometimes such institutions do not adopt the vision of the project (especially when it involves an innovative idea) or merely due to bureaucratic delays, put obstacles in the way of collaboration. This is a constraining factor that should not be underestimated.

"We wait authorities to send documents and answers for months..."

Analyontas, Cyprus

Additional practical reasons such as lack of time and financial support might also constrain collaboration. Although the lack of financial support often constitutes a real problem it is possible that in some cases this might motivate partners to find alternative low cost ways to implement their projects.

“Limited funding to improve sensibilisation in the region. Lack of time for schools to plan and organize more actions.”

Cardona, Spain

Facilitating factors...

As expected, the research revealed a number of factors that facilitate collaborative projects and act as a counter balance to the constraining factors.

Firstly the commitment of the school principal is of key importance and several respondents stated that a project is impossible to implement without having this. Having said that, new teachers are often eager to teach and work towards a common project and this is another critical factor. It is often the case that new teachers, rather than longer established ones, have the enthusiasm not only to inspire and stimulate school community to begin or become involved in a collaborative project, but also to sustain the pace of work. Given that in some isolated communities teachers usually stay for just a short period before returning to their place of origin or moving to another school, a remarkable proportion of the respondents consider that teachers, who want to stay for a long period and invest their time fruitfully in an isolated community, constitute another critical factor facilitating collaboration. It has been observed that some interesting school community collaboration have lost their dynamic and declined because the teacher who was the “soul” of the collaboration left the school.

“When teachers live in the village they are more interested in becoming involved more in education of the local community members.”

Palanca, Romania

The participation of teachers who have lived in other areas and communities and who have different experiences and ideas can also enrich a collaboration with new dimensions. It is obvious that the exchange of ideas and practices has been valued by the participants in this study as a positive factor, implying the need for organizing collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including from other communities who can bring an expertise and knowledge which are not available locally. Good

public relations leading to positive publicity are also important both to attract new partners and to disseminate progress and the results of a collaboration. Publicity can reinforce collaboration dynamics: (a) by strengthening the self-confidence and the coherence of the group, (b) by forming an “internal identity” for the project, and (c) by encouraging new stakeholders to become involved. Moreover it can improve the profile of the community as a good place to live.

“It is very important that the community is well informed about schools initiatives”.

Island of Chalki, Greece

Finally a flexible curriculum which can meet the needs of the community is also an important factor encouraging collaboration.

“Adapting the curriculum to the local needs; Offering more extra-curricular activities; Inclusion in the school objectives: development of the community spirit.”

Palanca, Romania

...and the role of ICT

Probably the most important element in facilitating successful school community collaboration in isolated communities is access to ICT. Most local communities and the schools in particular seem to have already developed adequate ICT infrastructure to support high quality communication and networking while some schools already participate in interesting relevant projects such as distance learning.

“We are partners of: ... Pegaso University, in order to improve high education using academic tools as: e-learning platforms and video-conference system. School is a learning centre.”

“One of our most important pedagogical experiences in e-learning is MARINANDO - MAREttimo IN Ambiente di apprenDimento Online (Marettimo in online learning environment). MARINANDO, a project supported by the National Agency for the Development of School Autonomy, is an experience carried out in the year 2006/2007 by 11 year old pupils in Marettimo, the smallest island of Egadi Archipelago. The aim is to try the potential of ICT tools to make distance learning, by connecting teachers and students who are in different places far away.

- *Connection with schools in Florence and Scandicci (FI) through video-conference and shared electronic board.*

- 10 hours of connection a week.
- Co-operative learning among students.”

Favignana, Italy

With regard to school community collaboration, respondents used ICT in three ways: (a) as practical support for the project, (b) for recruiting and networking stakeholders – and partners, (c) for dissemination. The fact that none of the respondents in this research considered communication to be a major factor in the isolation of their community highlights the potential of ICT in collaboration projects. The comments of respondents are clear...

“Development of communications and broad-band.”

“Working with others and adopting more personalized approaches are the most important areas of education in XXI century. ICTs are very important because an effective use of them (e-learning collaborative tools for examples) is fundamental in order to involve students, teachers, parents, communities in isolated areas as small islands.”

Favignana, Italy

“ICT is important because of necessity of transmission of information.”

Marisel, Romania

“ICT contributes very much to the collaboration. The website of our school, the Facebook page and our e-learning platform facilitates school community collaboration.”

“Modernization of the existing equipment, proper IT equipment; facilitated communication among institutions, among institutions and community members by modern tools, ex: Internet.”

Palanca, Romania

Even for one of the more skeptical respondents admitted that ICT can provide useful tools.

“It is a useful tool helping communication but we don’t believe that is essential.”

Cardona, Spain

Schools as learning centres for sustainable development

The final issue examined in this research was whether respondents considered that a school could be transformed into a local learning centre for sustainable development. This question assumed that the concept of a ‘learning centre for sustainable development’ encompasses all three approaches adapted from Miller (1993) with the implication that the school becomes an open local laboratory for sustainable development.

There was large majority support for this vision with only two respondents who did not consider that a school could be a “learning centre for sustainable development”. This was probably because they were primary schools and felt strongly committed to their role of educating young children.

“The school is like a family for its own students. But we don’t believe that the school has to play that role in the community.”

Cardona, Spain

“No I don’t think so. Because we don’t have that power and we only have pupils when they are in the beginning of the school carrier. The pupils have to focus on other goals in life when they are so young.”

Tyllidalen, Norway

Having said that, most of the respondents embraced this perspective regardless of the level of education provided. A number of them however set some implicit limitations and/or requirements in order for this perspective to become a reality. These included the involvement of more institutions and a change in the views of local people for example.

“Yes, since local people realize that their island can become productive and can feed them. This presupposes a different approach of the children and another education that focuses on the development of the natural resources of our region.”

Island of Kassos, Greece

“Yes, to some extent, by organizing informational seminars at least 1-2 times per year and setting goals for the implementation of such projects.”

Olympos on the Island of Karpathos, Greece

Others were more optimistic and expressed no doubts about schools adopting this role and some respondents considered that their schools already functioned as

community learning centres by undertaking collaborative activities and developing collaborative proposals.

“Yes, because everything depends on education.”

Chora on the Island of Amorgos, Greece

“Our school is already a learning center for all our community. It has identified three challenges that are very important for the success of transformation of our islands in coming years:

- 1. to narrow the gap in standards of citizenship with other places;*
- 2. to maintain and reinforce social cohesion;*
- 3. to ensure high quality education to cope with demographic decrease.”*

Favignana, Italy

“We hope so!

The school chose the promotion of sustainable development as a topic of its plans (Piano dell'OffertaFormativa). In each class, since the very small pupils, we start promoting reflections and small actions about the sustainability and environmental protection.

We would like to have a permanent collaboration with the Parco del Po, enriching their website with the school projects (but for this year we didn't get the money to do it).

We want to develop Comenius projects and other international projects about discovering the richness of our territory, in environmental resources but also in cultural aspects, to share the reflections about the necessity of sustainable development with other schools in different environments.”

Piemonte, Italy

“Yes, I consider the school has an important role in promoting sustainable development in a small rural community because it is starting point in education of new generation of citizens of community.”

Marisel, Romania

“Yes for sure! The learning center of Dellach is the stage of development - Preschool Kindergarten Music-school Secondary school adult education!!!”

Dellach/Drau, Austria

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Our study has several limitations that partly affect the validity and applicability of the results. The most important ones are those related to the instruments used for data collection, the composition of the sample and the language barriers. School-community collaboration in remote settings is an issue with many different dimensions and it was not possible to analyse all of them within our study. For example, we had to make choices and compromises to ensure that the questionnaire was at length that encouraged completion. In addition, although the inclusion of seven different European countries and 23 schools allowed us to get a broad range of characteristics about school-community collaboration in Europe, the size of the sample did prevent us from analysing each situation in depth and getting more detailed information on the collaboration undertaken such as the problems that occurred and ways difficulties were addressed. A case study approach coupled with an investigation of the educational framework and policies concerning remote schools in each country would lead to deeper insights.

However the most critical limitation related to the language barriers that hindered us from obtaining an integrated picture of the collaboration activities. Most teachers that participated in the survey struggled to express themselves in English, resulting in short answers in the questionnaires and interviews. In addition, several difficulties occurred in the interviews through skype or telephone as participants were sometimes reluctant to express themselves freely. We consider that the lack of personal contact coupled with language problems was an impediment to gaining rich information in many situations.

CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE RESULTS

This study has revealed several features and dimensions to school community collaboration in isolated communities of Europe. Some of them converge with previous findings reported in the literature and others enrich them. In line with the research questions, our findings describe: (a) key features of schools and communities which undertake such projects, (b) the main characteristics of these collaborations and (c) critical constraining and facilitating factors.

In many cases the schools that undertook these projects had very small student populations while the average student/teacher ratios, both in primary and secondary schools, are particularly low. Such ratios constitute both a pedagogical advantage and an administrative disadvantage as the relatively high operational cost might become the reason for the consolidation or closure of schools. These particular characteristics imply that such schools should not be regulated by the same economic and educational policies as urban and sub-urban schools.

Several remote or isolated communities, where school community collaborations have taken place, have suffered from a significant decline in population and students numbers. The economy of these communities is mostly based on the primary sector (i.e. agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery) and traditional professions, with tourism also being an important source of income for many. Without some critical changes, these sectors can hardly maintain a viable economy and local welfare system that will retain young people in communities. Traditional professions, production models, products and services should invest more in quality and sustainability. Such an approach could support a new sustainable model of development especially when linked with the undamaged natural environment found in isolated communities. So far small steps have been taken in some communities towards the planning and implementation of sustainable development strategies although it seems that local people rarely participate in the formulation of such plans. Despite these issues it is important to note that there is still an active social life in many communities linked with traditional rather than modern socio-cultural activities and events.

We consider that the “feeling of isolation” might be different, and probably more important than the actual physical geographical isolation in these communities. We therefore attempted to find out how isolated people felt in communities and identified the main factors that caused such a feeling. Although there are exceptions, in general inhabitants of insular (island) communities felt more isolated than those in mountainous and lowland areas. Poor transport networks and lack of easy access to healthcare, cultural and public services were the most critical factors contributing to the feeling of isolation. Lack of job opportunities, limited support from central government and insufficient economic development also reinforced this feeling. It was interesting and hopeful to note that there were two factors that did not contribute to this feeling and in some cases could reverse it. The first was ICT infrastructure / and communication services and the second the social cohesion of these communities. Respondents stated that they have good ICT (e.g. broadband

networks) access in their communities whilst the small size of these communities often fostered a strong social cohesion. These factors should certainly be taken into account in future activities, policies and plans which attempt to address the isolation of remote communities. School community collaboration should also take advantage of these factors.

With regard to the focus of school community collaboration, a wide diversity of subjects and approaches were reported. Environmental protection activities, lifelong learning projects, cultural, outdoor and sports events as well as infrastructure developments in schools were typical examples of collaborative projects. In order to achieve a systematic classification we used Miller's (1993) approaches to school community collaboration which was then further elaborated and adapted according to our data. As a result we propose a classification that has three approaches to collaboration:

- a) the school as a community centre,
- b) the community as a field for enquiry and action and
- c) school community-based enterprises.

With regard to the first approach, most of the projects attempted to transform the school into an open centre providing learning opportunities both to students and the whole community. Only a small proportion of these projects focused on other types of non-educational service provision. The other kind of services reported were the cultural ones such as theatre performances and showing films. The second approach was dominated by enquiry activities and action towards the protection and/or valorization of the natural and cultural environment. However there were no projects that enquired about the other aspects of sustainability, the social, political and economic dimensions. Projects attempting to develop school-community-based enterprises were also rare. The fact that schools hardly ever became involved in provision of non-educational services and entrepreneurship activities, probably indicates that they didn't feel capable to undertake such projects or that they consider that such initiatives lie beyond their traditional role (Miller, 1993), even though they provide students with many other competences.

We also made an attempt to assess the level of the maturity of these collaborations using indicators developed by Kilpatrick et al (2003). Firstly it was interesting to discover that one of the main motives for initiating a collaboration was the opening up of the school to the community. This matches the third indicator (see the

introduction), of Kilpatrick et al (2003), i.e. “the school actively seeks opportunities to involve all sectors of the community” even though the types of partners becoming involved are relatively few. The most common partners that took part in collaboration were local authorities, parents of students and some professionals related to the subject of the project. Only in a few cases were associations such as NGOs and the church also involved. The fact that most of the linkages were initiated by the school clearly indicates that these collaborations were at the early stage of maturity. In addition, according to the roles taken by the partners (e.g. technical, financing and logistical support, infrastructure, know-how), it is obvious that the setting of goals and decision making in the collaboration was weighted towards the school. This is another indication that collaboration were at an early stage of maturity (9th indicator). Furthermore, it should be mentioned that many collaboration last for many years. This is an encouraging characteristic that probably implies the commitment of principals and teachers to foster integration between school and community (1st indicator) though in and of itself it is not a clear indication of the maturity of the collaboration.

With regard to the contribution of collaboration to the sustainability of the local community, participants were divided. Some considered that such projects had a substantial impact on sustainable development whilst others expressed doubts. However, the majority of the respondents considered that the projects had contributed to the improvement of environmental protection and raised environmental awareness. The projects also offered opportunities to students and local people to socialise and exchange ideas and experiences. Few respondents referred to social cohesion and active citizenship as an impact of collaboration whilst there were no comments about outcomes linked to the socio-political dimensions of sustainability, such as social equity and justice. In addition it seems that very few of these projects made a clear contribution to the economic development of the local community. What is obvious is that there is rather an unbalanced situation where the socio-economic dimensions are on the margins of some collaboration. Such a situation doesn't match what Bridger and Lullof (1999, 2001) defined as an 'ideal typical sustainable community'. It was also clear that each respondent, school and community, had different ideas of what sustainability was.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that these collaborations provide opportunities for a community to interact and grow together. Moreover they certainly improve some (mainly environmental and cultural) aspects of the community. However, projects attempting an essential reconsideration and reconstruction of the develop-

ment model are limited. More challenging sustainability issues, such as production models, energy use, management of common resources, land uses, unemployment, immigration, social justice etc., constitute subjects that local schools and communities don't deal with. Projects with such subjects could lead to initiatives that reconsider the dominant development model and community life as a whole. They would provide local people with opportunities to make long-term plans for their common future. Most of the communities examined have a huge natural and cultural resource potential and a sufficient human and social capital that could support a sustainable model of development. It seems however that the concept of 'sustainable community development' has not been essentially integrated into the school-community collaborations agendas. Here is a role that can be filled by education.

Eventually, several interrelated groups of constraining and facilitating factors with regard to such collaborations emerged. Those that prevent or constraint collaboration included: (a) the regulatory framework of remote schools (e.g. turnover and motivation of teachers), (b) the perceptions and culture of the school and the community and (c) practical dimensions and the bureaucratic framework. On the other hand factors seem to pave the way for the development and sustaining of fruitful collaborations included: (a) a commitment to the school and the community and cultivation of a mutual trust, (b) communication and publicity, (c) the openness of a school in allowing the involvement of diverse partners and (d) curriculum adaptations. In addition one of the most critical facilitating factors was ICT infrastructure. It was obvious that local communities can invest in this asset to improve collaboration.

Recommendations

Solving the problems that beset remote schools is certainly a difficult task. Wildy and Clark (2010) use the concept the 'adaptive problem' to describe the distinctive challenges that face isolated schools and communities. The concept comes from Fullan (2005) and refers to problems that are “politically charged, as solutions are difficult to discern and learn and some disequilibrium on the way to addressing the problem is inevitable”. However some key areas identified in the literature might help remote schools in flourishing and becoming a catalyst for the development of their communities. Pegg (in Wildy and Clark, 2010) summarized these areas as following:

- a coordinating approach across government and non-education jurisdictions
- the development of partnerships to address inequities in

education provision in remote areas through a strategic approach among State, territories and isolated areas

- the delivery of a seamless package rather than a collection of separate programs that is sensitive to the issues of education in remote areas
- support to provide qualified and experienced teachers in remote schools and to retain them in those schools.

The last area is particularly relevant for the topic addressed in this report, i.e. remote school-community collaboration for sustainable development. Two main issues should be addressed in this area. The first relates to initial and in-service teacher education and the second to incentives for retaining them in remote communities for longer periods of time.

Initial teacher education should better prepare future teachers for teaching in remote communities. Usually teacher education curricula don't prepare students to build meaningful partnerships between schools and communities in urban or remote areas. The dominant educational policies focus on standards and testing which result in a pedagogy that results in classroom-based teaching and learning. Furthermore a centralised state educational system that leads to a standardised curriculum for all schools, regardless of their specific characteristics and locations, such as the differences between urban and rural schools. These tendencies are reflected in pre-service as well as in-service teacher education. White and Reid (2008) characterize this dominant teacher education approach as 'metro-centric'. This view results in teachers who are ill equipped to deal with the challenges of teaching and living in remote communities. The turnover increases and so does the distance between school and community.

There is clearly a need for a more appropriate preparation of teachers to teach and live in remote communities. Teacher education institutions should equip students with the skills and knowledge that would enable them to develop actions towards sustainable development that involve the whole community. This requires an emphasis on both pedagogy and sustainable development and place-based and place-conscious pedagogies could provide the framework for this innovative approach (Gruenewald, 2003; White and Reid, 2008; Comber et al, 2007; Gruenewald and Smith, 2008). Place pedagogies highlight the importance of a situated context and emphasise the local and the known. Place pedagogies help teachers develop learning opportunities that are both meaningful and relevant to students because they are connected to their own communities. It is important to note that

place-based pedagogy is not limited to outdoor activities. It aims to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationships to a specific socio-ecological place and this is what makes it so vital for community's sustainable development. As Gruenewald (2003) notes 'a critical pedagogy of place encourages teachers and students to re-inhabit their places, that is to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future'.

Such an approach needs considerable changes to the traditional teacher education curriculum. Pre-service training should include subjects and activities that help teachers to link their teaching and learning practices with the social and ecological dimensions of 'place' and particularly of remote communities. Initiating student-teachers into multi-grade classrooms and multi-age settings, including adults, would be an important dimension of the teacher education curriculum. Furthermore the teaching focus should move from the classroom-based to a new perspective that places the teacher in the broader community. This means helping teachers to understand the links between the classroom, the school and the community and develop community-oriented teaching and learning. As Halsey (2005) notes, pre-service teachers need the opportunity to contemplate how to participate and respond in terms of pedagogy and as a member of a community. Managing curriculum integration as well as developing teaching approaches and learning opportunities with content relevant to the local needs and interests are fundamental competences for a teacher intending to develop meaningful partnerships between school and community. These educational competences are coupled with research and negotiation skills. It should be stressed that these kinds of competences are valuable not only for remote schools but also for urban ones. The difference is that in remote settings such competences are crucial for the revitalization and in some cases even for the survival of both remote schools and communities.

However, even the best prepared student might face difficulties in becoming an efficient teacher in a remote area for any length of time and especially for longer periods of time. As we have mentioned in the introduction, remote schools experience more difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff than schools in urban areas. The negative impact of this challenge on school-community collaboration has also been emphasized in respondents' comments. Rapid turnover of teachers causes a loss of knowledge and experience and is an impediment to the development of viable school community partnerships. Interesting initiatives that come to a premature end because a teacher leaves a school might result in mistrust and disengagement of the local community from future attempts.

Rapid turnover doesn't relate only to teachers. Difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff might face all public sectors and private enterprises in remote communities. The poor provision of infrastructure and basic services as well as the lack of career development opportunities are among the factors explaining the resistance of making remote teaching a long-term career option.

Solving these problems is not an easy task. Financial incentives are important but they have often been proven not to be effective in attracting qualified personnel to work for the sustainable development of the community. As Haslam McKenzie (2007) notes, while this incentive can be effective in the short term, it creates a mentality of being 'here for money' which doesn't help the development of community social capital. Wildy and Clark (2010) who reviewed the relevant literature, stress the need for appropriate systemic, career and personal factors to be in place to retain teachers in isolated schools. For instance personal/work life balance (e.g. practical issues of housing, finances, partners career, professional development and the recognition of remote school service in career progression are factors that could encourage teacher to stay in a remote area for a longer period of time.

In addition to these incentives, we consider that a critical factor for staffing remote schools with teachers willing to remain and work towards sustainable development of the community is networking. Our study revealed the feeling of isolation experienced by most respondents. This feeling was even stronger for teachers who didn't come from a remote area. Enhanced support networks could lead to the integration of teachers and communities and mitigate the impact of geographical isolation. Networking could positively affect different levels. Professional connectivity is very important for teachers, especially the newly qualified teachers who need the support of their experienced colleagues to address the challenges of being a teacher in a remote school and developing collaboration towards sustainable development. Mutual teacher support, mentoring but also peer-networking might be effective strategies for empowering teachers to better plan and implement such projects (Kadji-Beltran et al, 2013). Dissemination of successful collaboration and best practice are also vital for breaking isolation. Educational institutions and universities should play a key role in collecting and disseminating successful examples and developing networking between teachers and schools, not only from the same area but also from other communities in Europe that face similar problems.

In this context the existence of adequate communication technologies is of high importance. As we have noticed earlier in this report, broadband connectivity rates are generally high in remote European areas. That means that ICT infrastructures

is available and sufficient and can be used by teachers for improving their work in the remote schools. There is a general consensus in relevant literature that ICT could be very beneficial for remote schools (e.g. Davidson et al, 2007; Wildy and Clark, 2010; Redding & Walberg, 2012). The use of distance learning technology enables small schools in remote locations to expand and supplement their curriculum while ICT facilitates teachers' interaction and networking. However, although young people have access to digital technology in their everyday lives, it seems to be still peripheral to the learning process in the classroom in remote areas (Davidson et al, 2007). Certainly there are several European projects that aim at the design and implementation of ICT based distance learning frameworks (e.g. REVIT, 2011) but there is still much to do in this area. In addition teachers might use ICT for social networking but there are not many professional networks for remote teachers that could support them in their everyday work. Building communities of practices within teachers can mutually interact, exchange ideas and create common projects through Web 2.0 tools could be an effective strategy for empowering teachers in remote schools.

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APPENDIX I

Researchers and educators from 28 European countries work together to prepare a framework regarding school – community collaboration for sustainable development. In particular CoDeS project is a multilateral network aiming at: (a) gathering and analyzing information about school – community collaboration around EU and (b) producing various useful tools for school and community stakeholders which could inspire and support the development of such collaborations. For example a tool box and a travelling guide are going to be published and disseminated at the end of this project. You can find further information about CoDeS in <http://www.comenius-codes.eu/>.

A special focus of this project is the small and remote communities. In particular we are interested in reporting the experience of educators and other practitioners who have developed such collaborations in these communities and analyzing factors that foster or prevent these undertakings. It must be mentioned that some of us live and work in remote communities (for example in small islands). Thus we recognize the need to exchange ideas and experiences that could inspire and improve our efforts to make our communities more sustainable.

Within this context, we would like to invite you to share with us your experience by completing a questionnaire. Of course the final report, including the results of this analysis, will be sent to you.

You can send the questionnaire to the e-mail addresses:

liarakou@rhodes.aegean.gr or cgav@aegean.gr.

Please do not hesitate to ask for further clarification if needed.

We appreciate your contribution.

Kind regards

Georgia Liarakou, Assosiate Professor

Department of Primary Education

University of the Aegean

Costas Gavrilakis, Lecturer

Department of Primary Education

University of Ioannina

Do you have experienced a fruitful collaboration between school and community towards sustainable development?

We invite you to share with us your experiences regarding such school-community collaborations in your region. Thus, you can contribute to our effort to develop useful ideas, methods and tools for European practitioners, such as teachers, local authorities, professionals etc.

QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Description of the school and the community

Country: _____ Region: _____

Community: _____ Population: _____

School name: _____ Education Level: _____

Number of students: _____ Number of teachers: _____

Contact person: _____

Position: _____

Email: _____

Which of the following terms could better describe your region/community?

☐ Mountainous ☐ Lowland ☐ Insular

☐ Other

☐ Urban ☐ Semi-urban ☐ Rural

☐ Remote* ☐ Not remote

* Inhabitants need more than 45' to reach a city with at least 30,000 inhabitants

☐ Sparsely populated area ☐ Not sparsely populated area

How would you grade the following components of your community?

Component	Very poor	Poor	Neither poor nor good	Good	Very good
The transportation infrastructure connecting my community with urban areas is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The access of my community to health – cultural – public services is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job opportunities and/or employment rate in my community are ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The economic development of my community is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social cohesion (e.g. solidarity and relationships in general among inhabitants) in my community is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The support from central government to my community is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The communication services (phones, internet) in my community are ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please give examples that explain the above answers, if needed...

Which are the main economic sectors of your community?

Are there any craft practices?

Could you describe in brief some characteristic cultural events and customs?

To what extent the community has integrated plans towards sustainable development?

- ☐ Not at all ☐ To a small extent ☐ Neutral
☐ To a good extent ☐ Significantly ☐ I don't know

Could you give an example?

In case there are local plans towards sustainable development, to what extent local people have contributed to their formulation?

- ☐ Not at all ☐ To a small extent ☐ Neutral
☐ To a good extent ☐ Significantly ☐ I don't know

Could you give an example?

B. School – Community collaboration

Has the school developed any collaboration with the local community (i.e. local authorities, NGOs, parents, professionals, individuals etc.)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, this is mainly due to:

- The curriculum does not allow such initiatives
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
- Teachers are not interested in such initiatives
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
- The community is not interested in such initiatives
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

- There has not been such an idea yet
 - ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
- Other...

If yes, which was/were the subject/s of this/these collaboration/s?

Which has been the most interesting case?

Which were the needs and/or the motives to initiate this collaboration?

Who initiated that collaboration?

- ☐ The school
 - ☐ The community
- Who?

Duration of this collaboration.

Partners involved (and their role):

- ☐ Local authorities (Specify)

Role:

- ☐ Professionals (Specify)

Role:

- ☐ Parents

Role:

- ☐ NGOs (Specify)

Role:

- ☐ The church

Role:

- ☐ Individuals (Specify)

Role:

- ☐ Other (Specify)

Role:

To what extent has this collaboration contributed to the sustainable development of the local community?

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all | <input type="checkbox"/> To a small extent | <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To a good extent | <input type="checkbox"/> Significantly | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know |

If there was such a contribution, which were its main dimensions?

- It has contributed to the environmental protection of the community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

How?

- It has improved the economic life of the community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

How?

- It has improved the social life of the community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

How?

- It has improved the institutional operation of the community.
- ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

How?

- It has encouraged young people to stay in their region (not to abandon their region)
- ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

How?

Has this collaboration affected students' view of the community?

- ☐ Not at all ☐ To a small extent ☐ Neutral
☐ To a good extent ☐ Significantly ☐ I don't know

How?

Has this collaboration affected local people's view of the school?

- ☐ Not at all ☐ To a small extent ☐ Neutral
☐ To a good extent ☐ Significantly ☐ I don't know

How?

* Please, send some characteristic pictures (.jpg or .tiff format) of the collaboration...

C. Final remarks...

According to your experience, which are the main factors that:

(a) could facilitate a school-community collaboration in your region?

(b) impede a school-community collaboration in your region?

To what extent and how do you think Information and Communication Technologies can support your work in school-community collaboration?

Would you think the school could become a learning center promoting the sustainable development of the community? If yes, how?

PROFILES OF ISOLATED COMMUNITIES AND WAYS INTO INTEGRATION

The report includes the theoretical framework, results and discussion of a study on school-community collaboration in European remote and isolated communities.

Main characteristics, type of linkages, outcomes as well as constraining and facilitating factors of several projects were investigated with regard to insular and mountainous communities. A questionnaire consisted of open-ended and closed questions and interviews were the research tools. Findings reveal that although there are some cases that essentially contribute to local sustainable development, most of them are in a very early stage of maturity. Developing partnerships is situational while the progress of some cases depends entirely on charismatic persons. It is obvious that teachers working in such communities need methodological support to plan and implement effective collaborations. The role of ICT is very crucial to support the development of a community of practice among practitioners and experts.