

Chapter 16

Innovative Management of Community Territories and Inter-Organizational Communication for Regional Development

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ABSTRACT

The chapter addresses engagement, facilitation processes, governance, decentralized decision-making process, and inter-organizational relationships in rural communities in Portugal involving the community lands in mountainous areas. These lands are multifunctional in that they are used for forestry, grazing of ruminants, honey production, mushroom and dry nut gathering, water and wind rights, as well as plant protection and preservation of ecosystems. The management of these lands is the responsibility of the common land associations. These local institutions and their leaders represent the local users of these community lands. The chapter presents empirical data from an exploratory research study of inter-organizational linkages with these common land institutions and other governmental organizations and civil society entities. The entities include ministry and regional level organizations, municipal governments, and local development associations.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter addresses interorganizational communication, relationships, and multi-stakeholder relationships considering aspects such as communication, coordination, and cooperation between national, regional, or local organizations involved with the territorial sphere of the common land associations. These general aspects are analyzed based upon an adapted instrument constructed by Kang (1984) and also interviews and observations at community territory (common lands) meetings. The importance for

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the exploratory study (case study) is to strengthen the collaboration through a discovery process with interorganizational strategic planning and governance, as well as to determine how to improve capacity building and administrative competencies in management of rural community territories and their natural resources. A question to be addressed involving the capacity building is linked to the role of a horizontal-based entity concerned with strengthening regional development. The question is: What entity can facilitate a strategy to improve interorganizational communication for the territory?

The improvement in relationships and communication among rural and regional organizations in the same sphere of interest is related to an integrated rural development approach that attempts to permit organizations to mutually reinforce one another, or in other words create synergy among all the institutions in the management of forestry, natural resources, and the landscape in the territory, with perhaps coordination by a regional entity. Organizations in the sphere of influence within an integrated system require coordination activities, collaboration, and minimization of conflict (Brouwer, Woodhill, Hermati, Verhoosel, & van Vugt, 2015; Kang, 1984; Mosher, 1976). Position or power imbalances between organizations can permit the stronger to ignore the weaker in strategic negotiations. In addition, distrust by one organization can disrupt communication channels and the sharing of information. The chapter discusses governance and consensus domain further in the section on solutions, recommendations, and strategic planning.

In this section, the chapter will justify aspects attributed to the density of communication and cooperation between agencies in the same sphere of interests or region. Webb and Shivakoti (2008) and Kang (1984) identify additional interorganizational aspects with some duplication of ideas such as the maintenance of linkages to the local level and local users (residents), devolution of authority through institutional overlap, conflict reduction, financial and administrative support, preoccupation with differences in organizational performance, the relevance of natural resource management, collective action, market forces concerns, and clusters of interest. Interorganizational communication and relationships can be improved through a strategic planning process that increases the participation of stakeholders at all levels of governance, while minimizing decision-making inequalities between governmental and nongovernmental institutional leaders and local residents concerned with improving their management capabilities, livelihoods, and economic situation (Bouwma, van Apeldoorn, & Kamphorst, 2010; Koehnen & Cristóvão, 2006).

The results section, which is the main focus of the chapter, will present information surrounding the 5-point scale ratings by the presidents of the associations of common lands and will then interpret the information. The chapter also identifies responses to two open questions concerning organizational objectives and projects implemented in the community. Additional observations are related to participation in meetings, international seminars, and interviews. In closing, the chapter describes the strategic planning process and finishes with a conclusion to identify improvements for the performance of these associations as well as community networks.

BACKGROUND: METHODOLOGY

The exploratory research study used a case study design that has been recommended by McNabb (2004), Cresswell (1994), and Isaac and Michael (1981). The purpose of the research was to describe and assess interorganizational communication and relationships by focusing on the answers by the presidents of common lands associations, as well as interviews and the collection of information at meetings and a

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