Rural Dialogues

arc 2020
agricultural & rural convention

What is the state of play for rural Europe? Are rural places still lagging behind – forgotten, disadvantaged and in need of extra supports? Or is there a rural renaissance of sorts occurring, from smart villages to innovation hubs?

Pictures: Shared Meal for European Day of Sustainable Communities Romania (Cover and page 57): ECOLISE, Vineyards in France: Natasha Foote, Farmer: canva.com, Boerenlandbouw conference: Daniel Gomez, Feeding Ourselves Event: Eoin Campbell, Sylvia Kay: Daniel Gomez, Library and Gallery in Haverfordwest: Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins

Content

Rural Dialogues – Let's talk!

By Hannes Lorenzen and Oliver Moore

Let's learn from what has worked – despite the problems, rural Europe has in some significant ways been revitalised, thanks to the bottom-up and partnership programmes within Rural Development Measures of what is known as Pillar two of the Common Agricultural Policy.

What is the state of play for rural Europe? Are rural places still lagging behind – forgotten, disadvantaged and in need of extra supports? Or is there a rural renaissance of sorts occurring, from smart villages to innovation hubs?

Life is becoming increasingly unaffordable and, in many ways, unbearable in cities – rents and mortgages are increasing multiples of people's earnings, while commuting distances extend, with a range of life, expense and sustainability implications.

In some member states of the EU the trend of rural exodus continues, in others there are some moves towards living and working in rural areas. Why is there still so little dialogue between urban and rural people, farmers, consumers and environmentalists? Farmers often complain about unfair trading terms, bureaucracy and the perception people have of them, urban consumers seem increasingly to want both veganism and cheap chicken, and for rural areas through farming to do the heavy work on biodiversity and climate.

In rural areas there can be a deepening frustration at being left behind – of being neglected and looked down upon. There are many evident conflicts, but as of yet, by and large, we don't see these contexts as opportunities for change. With fewer farmers on ever bigger farms, there is more isolation rurally, and this impacts on good neighborliness and mutual help.

In this series ARC2020 highlights challenges and opportunities, acting as a sounding board for diverse fresh perspectives.

So what works for rural Europe?

Let's learn from what has worked. Despite the problems, rural Europe has in some significant ways been revitalised, thanks to the bottom-up and partnership programmes within Rural Development Measures of what is known as Pillar two of the common Agricultural Policy.

Though by no means perfect, this has supported rural communities, has targeted agri-environment and social inclusion via support from five consecutive LEADER programmes and later Community Led Local Development (CLLD) available in all structural EU Funds. Smaller, co-financed but also more targeted than the Pillar One of the CAP, Pillar two has supported organic farming, rural innovation and research via the EIP (European Innovation Partnerships), while Smart Villages have positively complemented these programmes.

In many regions around Europe, we see positive developments – so what can we learn from each other?

How and why does Austria have the highest percentage of young farmers in the EU – and is this in any way connected to the fact that a quarter of all agriculture is now certified organic there? So what does Austria do that's so successful to encourage young farmers and organic farming – and what can the rest of us learn from this?

Indeed, organic farming is quite the success story in what is otherwise a stagnant, threatened, and in many ways quite damaging agri-food sector. Organic

– which is not the the finished article by any means – is nonetheless growing, employing more and younger people, has a strong sustainability message (as shown here and here), while and consumers are more and more buying into what it means.

There are many more success stories too – big and small.

- The rural parliament movement emerged strongly in Sweden, and has spread around the Baltic Region, central and Eastern Europe and beyond.
- Germany's Wir haben es satt manifestation sees a broad coalition of farmers, consumers, environmentalists and animal welfare groups demonstrating against industrial farming and unfair payments of farmers each January.
- Greece sees disadvantaged regions like Karditsa transforming bankrupt banks into credit cooperatives and use ecosystems to lever far more sustainable growth.
- France has put strong steps in place to really reduce excessive biocide use, has seen enormous growth in organics, and has been emphasising agroecology in its CAP positioning.
- There dozens of new community gardens in Ireland, a country without a tradition of this.
- The GAS (Solidarity Purchasing Groups) consumer movement in Italy connects tens of thousands of people to rural realities on a daily basis and significant scale via food – as do AMAP cooperatives in France.
- The peasant rights and land access movement has a powerful advocate in Eco Ruralis and now ALPA in rural Romania.

It's also been fascinating to watch and learn from the rewilding that is happening in many parts of Europe – there is a dynamic tension in how this is unfolding in rural areas, with a range of interests and perspectives being represented. It's also worth noting that this is not necessarily new territory: we have emphasised the importance of nuance – including around the east-west divide in rewilding thinking – for many years.

In the countries of the Western Balkans that are not yet members of the EU, a wide inter regional governments' cooperation established between the governments in the region, called the Standing Working Group of South East Europe (SWG/SEE). This has created stability and innovation in the rural areas with view to joining the EU. SWG comprises seven Balkan countries, to provide advice on agricultural and rural development issues to ministries, administrations and NGOs. SWG also sees itself as a peace and democratisation project in the region and has promoted programmes such as LEADER and the promotion of small farmers and local projects together with the Balkan Rural Development Network.

There are of course many challenges, but it is important to learn from what's working, and to see if elements can be adjust and then applied in other locations.

What is problematic for rural Europe?

Of course, the picture is not all rosy - far from it. Rural areas in general and farming in particular are losing people to the cities. Consolidation, landgrabs, industrialization, monoculture practices of ever fewer farms is occurring – and increasingly through capital groups – not through other farmers.

The increasing gap in wealth and resources between rural and urban areas is one of the many contributory factors to the worrying rise of right-wing populism in rural Europe. The dominance of the narrative of competitiveness and growth on world markets is still central, whatever of the damage to the rural fabric and sustainable farming it causes.

With these pressures, depopulation continues in many parts of rural Europe.

While there is much justifiable bad press about the meat industry these days, there are problems all over with how to replace industrial food production.

The sea of plastic for export vegetable production in Huelva (Spain) is a stain on the landscape in many ways.

Intensive, monocultural horticultural enterprises have been heavily criticised for the appalling labour conditions many of them rely on.

The ongoing reports of labour abuses in the fruit industries of the Mediterranean rim reminds us that these areas are on the front line of huge global problems – the refugee and migrant crisis. Indeed, rural areas are often on the front line of the biggest of societal disasters – droughts and flooding from climate breakdown, the epidemic of loneliness, isolation and farmer suicide, and the place where the rapid rate of biodiversity loss is seen and really felt first-hand.

Coping with loss – changing landscapes, climate-induced alterations, fewer people, bird songs fading away – is a rural reality too.

Despite the rhetoric at institutional level, there has been no plan for transitioning towards resilient farming and rural areas. While how the CAP has been implemented has helped alleviate some of these stresses to an extent, this too needs to be critically analysed: why and how do important institutional players at member state level find it easy to blame Brussels yet often fail to use the CAP for the benefit of rural people? Why is it so often the national ministers via the Council that waters down the best elements of CAP, from an environmental, small farmer and rural development perspective? How are these ministers held to account?

We need to fully understand what's coming in the next CAP round, where indications are that Pillar 2 will suffer the deepest cuts.

CAP and Rural

The Pillage of Pillar 2

By Helene Schulze and Oliver Moore, published in the Agriculture Atlas 2019

At least 30% of EU funds under Pillar II have to be directed toward environment and climate goals. This Pillar is the only part of the Common Agricultural Policy that seriously deals with issues such as soil, water and air quality, animal welfare, biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and climate resilience.

The Common Agricultural Policy has two "pillars", or pots of money to draw from. Pillar I, which consists largely of direct payments to farmers according to the area they manage, has come in for a lot of criticism. Pillar II, which supports rural development policy, is seen as more useful. But as the agriculture budget shrinks, it is Pillar II that faces the bigger cuts.

The Common Agricultural Policy is not just about farming. Its second Pillar aims to promote "good practice", such as cooperation among producers and environment-friendly, climate-resilient farming methods. This "public money for public goods" approach is what distinguishes Pillar II from Pillar I. It is why Pillar II is widely regarded as the socially and environmentally ambitious part of the EU's farm policy.

Of the total agricultural budget of €409 billion in 2014–20, less than one-quarter, or €100 billion, was allocated to Pillar II. Co-financing by national governments bumped that up to €161 billion. How effective this money is at promoting sustainable rural development depends on the programmes that the national governments choose to support, and how much of their Common Agricultural Policy budget they allocate to it. Austria devotes 44 percent of its combined pot to Pillar II; France allocates a mere 17 percent. That means that Pillar II overall has had mixed results.

Pillar II is currently supposed to pursue three goals: competitiveness, sustainability and climate action, and regionally balanced development. These overarching priorities translate into six priority areas: knowledge transfer and innovation; farm viability and competitiveness; food chain organization, animal welfare and risk management; ecosystem conservation; climate mitigation and resilient agriculture and forestry; and economic development of rural areas.

One-fifth of the EU's population lives in rural areas. These are highly diverse, so Pillar II's flexible approach makes sense when drawing up programmes to suit local needs. It allows national and regional governments to pick and choose among an extensive menu of options, including for example start-up aid for young farmers, support for tree-planting, and funds to deal with natural disasters. The most frequent measures are physical investment, agri-environment-climate measures, and support for areas facing natural constraints such as difficult climatic conditions, steep slopes, or soil quality. The measures chosen must relate to the three overarching goals. For example, organic farming ticks all three boxes: it contributes to competitiveness, supports environmental sustainability, and helps develop the countryside.

Each government chooses a different approach. Ireland, for example, supports organic farming because it contributes to biodiversity, water management (including fertilizer and pesticide management), soil, resource efficiency and carbon conservation and sequestration. All these relate to Pillar II's environment and climate goals. Lithuania, with more than 40 percent of its population in the countryside but an ageing

farm population, promotes modernization and economic support of small and medium-sized farms that struggle to compete in the European market. It also encourages job creation, rural area and business development, and environmental measures. In the Netherlands, just 0.6% of the total population is classified as rural. The government's Pillar II funding focuses on stimulating innovation and environmental sustainability of its intensive, specialized and export-oriented farming industry.

Despite differences among countries, Europe shares some major trends and challenges. Rural areas are emptying out, and the people remaining there tend to be older. Young farmers are uncommon; prospective farmers find it difficult to acquire their own land. Small and medium-sized farms are being lost as big farms get bigger. Digital services are poor. A key task of Pillar II is to address such problems.

At least 30% of EU funds under Pillar II have to be directed toward environment and climate goals. This Pillar is the only part of the Common Agricultural Policy that seriously deals with issues such as soil, water and air quality, animal welfare, biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and climate resilience.

Current proposals call for the Pillar II budget to be cut by as much as 28 percent. In part this is to maintain direct payments to farmers in face of an overall drop in funding for agriculture. This has caused an outcry: Pillar II is widely regarded as the part of the Common Agricultural Policy that does the most good because it can be tailored to local needs and supports the public interest rather than giving handouts to individual farms or businesses. If Europe intends to focus on the many social, economic and environmental issues facing rural communities and shift towards climate-resilient agriculture, the second pillar must be protected.

Agroecology and The Social and Solidarity Economy

Stochastic System Collapse – The Social and Solidarity Economy Alternative

By Oliver Moore

Many argue that capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with the scale of change required. This may well be the case. However, building the social and solidarity economy (SSE), rather than blankly being anti-capitalist is, it is suggested here, a more useful way forward.

Anti-Capitalist? How about Pro Solidarity Economy?

Many argue that capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with the scale of change required. This may well be the case. However, building the social and solidarity economy (SSE), rather than blankly being anti-capitalist is, it is suggested here, a more useful way forward. At the very least, you get practice in how to do things differently; more optimistically, you build an alternative, fairer and more interconnected economy, one that could start to suck the marrow from the bones of our current neoliberal economy.

SSEs exist in numerous spheres, which are worth unpacking in some more detail – both for assessing their scale and for understanding their potential.

Organisations like RIPESS have been promoting the SSE for years – it waxes and wanes, ebbs and flows, but, undeniably, it is the main real world alternative to our current economic model, now that the added climate and biodiversity breakdown elements are added: it is emerging as THE thing that puts organisational and intellectual heft behind the movement to build an economy as if people and planet mattered.

RIPESS definition of the social and solidarity economy:

"The Social Solidarity Economy is **an alternative to capitalism** and other authoritarian, state- dominated economic systems. **In SSE ordinary people play an active role** in shaping all of the dimensions of human life: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental. **SSE exists in all sectors of the economy** production, finance, distribution, exchange, consumption and governance. It also aims **to transform the social and economic system that includes public, private and third sectors.** SSE is not only about the poor, but **strives to overcome inequalities,** which includes all classes of society. SSE has the ability to take the best practices that exist in our present system (such as efficiency, use of technology and knowledge) and transform them to serve the welfare of the community based on different values and goals.

(...) **SSE seeks systemic transformation that goes beyond superficial change** in which the root oppressive structures and fundamental issues remain intact."

Solidarity Economy Farming and Food

In food, Community Supported Agriculture is the most comprehensive SSE model, though the Italian GAS, French AMAP, and also two models from Japan – Teikei and the lesser known Seikatsu are arguably operating on a larger scale and are more impactful than the CSA movement at present. CSA involves farmers and eaters sharing the risks, responsibilities and rewards of production: eaters promise cash up front for a long period of time and get both a guaranteed supply and a say in what's produced, and how it is produced.

Typically, its food produced in an agroecological manner that's sought out by CSA adherents. Externalities – pollutions and costs borne by society and the environment – are more internalised, via closed nutrient loops, mixed farming and other techniques from the organic handbook. In other words, it's like a self-taxing system for the good of the living world.

Similarly, Landcare, Access to Land initiatives (like Terre de Liens), tech sovereignty farmer-to-farmer movements like Farm Hack, Láterier Paysan, and iterations of farm hack utilising digital Peer to Peer (P2P) and (neo) Commons movements and show that there is lots of potential in multi stakeholder initiatives sharing responsibility and resources – including EIPs (European Innovation Partnerships) utilising the more progressive aspects of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) show how we can collectively manage regions and what's produced in them.

Solidarity Economy Beyond Agri-Food

The focus here is on food and farming, but it is nonetheless worth assessing other sectors, as, ideally, co-ops working with co-ops is how a real alternative to the current economic model will emerge in a solidarity economy. In energy, contentious wind farm developments have become an accepted part of the local landscape when done through co-ops, with Denmark one of the most inspiring examples.

This is in part because with co-ops the members reap the benefits – not random external shareholders.

In work, sMart in Belgium shows how we can turn precarious freelance work into well-supported creativity, while Citizen Spring is connecting social enterprises up in Belgium too. There are numerous examples emerging from the collaborative economy, of shared and aggregated value via platform and open co-ops, with Enspiral one of the most promising. Meanwhile, from the anarchy of the Catalan Integral Cooperative (see also here, a commons primer on CIC here and their model of economic disobedience here) with its spawning of fair coin and other initiatives, we get a hint at what happens when the state itself is disassociated from, and people work together in a more thoroughgoing and radical fashion. Indeed, it is noteworthy that many of these initiatives see themselves as post-capitalist.

In this context, the Post Carbon Institute's report The Future is Rural goes into far more detail on the re-ruralisation implications of the moving past fossil fuel dependency – and it makes for fascinating reading. Similarly, the idea of cosmolocalism – of global plan development and local manufacturing (or, at least, local prototyping and regional manufacturing) works with the limits of just-in-time, fossil fuels and savvy use of shared frugal resources – see farm hack and Lálterier Paysan for more elsewhere in this article.

Much has been made of the potential of 3D printing for local rural prototyping, based mostly of 8×4 sheets of plywood; of distributed ledgers to help African coffee bean growers harness more of the value of their produce; of smart villages where digitisation meets mobile and/or clustered services and resources – and all of these can help rural area leapfrog into a far better near term future.

There is much more to be said on this area, and in how the ideas of co-ops and the concept of the Commons come together. Further reading is recommended on the P2P foundation website and wiki: The Commons, Global Commons, Land as a Commons, Commons Transition 2015, the Commons Manifesto 2019)

And while the answer is not kind men bequeathing things to others, aka philantrophy, it is interesting to see what happens when those who have earned big under capitalism lose faith in the purest expression of its economic mode: Riverford organics, the biggest organic veg box scheme int he UK, is now a worker's coop sinc eits founded Guy Singh-Watson handed it over:

The overall co-operative movement, from credit unions to agri coops, represents well over $3 trillion in turnover, 12.6 million in employment, and has over a billion people in total membership. Sure, many of these ignore the principle of co-ops working with other co-ops, but they could be seen as representing a baseline to build from, rather than the blank slate

of whatever comes after capitalism from a purely anti-capitalist perspective.

Learning from Separatism

And it's not just in Catalonia. There is a strong history – and current iteration – of co-ops harassing the means of production and distribution to essentially empower members and take resources from the state: when the state isn't doing what it's supposed to do, why not self-organise, self-tax, and self-develop collectively?

Mondragon in the Basque country is often cited as the best example, and it may well be, having as it does over 100 federated economic entities under its umbrella, over 70,000 employees and an annual turnover of billions.

But see also the history of the diary co-ops in Ireland, especially in the pre-independence period up to 1922. In this case, via a land war and subsequent land acts, Irish people wrestled the productive land back from colonisers, and then set up dairy co-ops to process and add value to the milk: they thus had seized the means of production and distribution – arguably an equally important move for achieving independence as the better known cultural, political and military efforts of the period leading up to 1922.

To this day, dairy farmers perform better economically than any other sector in Irish farming, and they remain the only agri sector with co-ops to any significant extent. The best example of a locally embedded dairy co-op in Ireland, the Carbery group, paid the highest prices anywhere in Ireland to members for milk during the tough years after quota ended in 2015, and continue to do so to this day. Barryroe – the main services town in the region from a co-op perspective – is also a model of local resource ownership, with hardware store, grain mill, agri-inputs, animal feed, machinery mechanics, supermarket and more all owned by the co-op, with preferential prices for members retaining cash in the local economy.

Then there is the co-op movement of Quebec – are you starting to notice a pattern? Ireland, the Basque country, Catalonia, Quebec – yes, the common thread is separatist movements. These are places where people were or are trying to disinvest in the state and re-invest into their own socio-economic and cultural spheres.

Emilia Romagna in its own way is also part of a separatist northern Italian movement – and the point is not whether these movements, especially in Italy and Spain – are actually correct or not. The point is they are regions where a critical mass of people wants to disinvest in the overarching state, they don't feel connected to. In this context, it's very interesting to note that about 40% of the Italian's region's economy now comes from co-ops working with co-ops.

Rural Space, Depopulation, and Agroecological Farming.

There is another consideration too: rural Europe is depopulated. Germany is already seeing socio-economic benefits – despite the media hype – from the million refugees who arrived there. In Spain, there are brilliant social and solidarity economy programmes where very low population rural regions have their needs assessed, while migrants have their skills assessed and upgraded, and the two are matched up. Canada has seen great success in their Community Sponsorship resettlement programme, with 200,000 people settled since 1978. Other countries are (slowly) learning from this community driven approach.

We will need to make the best use of all people and places in the adjustments that will come when just-in-time delivery system collapse because there will be millions more people on the move, cities will creek and rural spaces will need to take up the slack. Ideally, this will be with clustered and mobile products and services for digitally connected villages, as the smart villages initiatives tries to foster.

The role of agroecology

To get to grips with how land could be used better, let's start with the UN FAO definition of agroecology:

"Agroecology is a scientific discipline, a set of practices and a social movement. As a science, it studies

how different components of the agroecosystem interact. As a set of practices, it seeks sustainable farming systems that optimize and stabilize yields. As a social movement, it pursues multifunctional roles for agriculture, promotes social justice, nurtures identity and culture, and strengthens the economic viability of rural areas. Family farmers are the people who hold the tools for practising Agroecology. They are the real keepers of the knowledge and wisdom needed for this agenda. Therefore, family farmers around the world are the keys elements for producing food in an agroecological way."

For more, see our briefing notes on agroecology.

And where does organic and agroecological farming fit in in all of this? Agroecology is eminently more resilient and less fossil fuel-dependent than what's practiced now. There are dozens of articles on this website about this – see our agroecology section. See also this new report from the (very urban and not especially rural or agricultural) UK that states: "we are persuaded that the principles of agroecology best sum up how farming will need to change globally".

Agroecology is less fossil fuel dependent (especially re fertilizers); more knowledge and labour intensive, more adapted to extreme weather shocks, better at building soil organic matter, and far better for biodiversity, above and below ground (see here from IFOAM EU for more). Agroecological approaches are also more attractive to young and women farmers (see also here and here), and can feed even industrialized regions like western Europe. In short agroecology is how we can conceivably produce food in the context of climate breakdown and biodiversity loss.

It one of the ways we'll end up, in some capacity, moving back to the land in a context of climate and biodiversity breakdown.

To conclude, much is made of anti-capitalism and of system change, but how do we manifest something that works as an actual alternative to our current economic system? We need to add some substance to real alternatives. For now, the best option, the show in town as it were, is the social and solidarity economy. This is the thing that our energies, our resources should be invested in.

Peasants of Nature – French Initiative Reconciles Agriculture & Biodiversity

By Claire Bernardin

There are farmers interested in the environment, and environmentalists interested in farming...and now, there are environmentalists who have started to farm in a way that speaks to their values.

There are farmers interested in the environment, and environmentalists interested in farming...and now, there are environmentalists who have started to farm in a way that speaks to their values. Meet France's Peasants of Nature.

The Farming Context in France

In the Western French region "*les Pays de la Loire*", an idea emerged about a decade ago in the minds of some environmentalists. Faced with the dreadful, global, current loss of biodiversity, especially in agricultural landscapes – which accounts for 70% of the regional land – these passionate naturalists strived to preserve ecosystems through agricultural and environmental assessments and counselling.

A French law passed in 1976 related to the preservation of natural areas had led to the creation of protected areas and the successful preservation of a few specific species such as the storks. Nevertheless, did it go far enough regarding agricultural areas? "All the biodiversity indicators show alarming signals, but the ones regarding agricultural areas are the worst..." says Perrine Dulac, one of the handful of people who initiated the project and who currently manages it.

If the state of biodiversity was worrying, so was the farming demography. While relatively young by EU standards, the average age of French farmers is nevertheless 50 plus. In the coming years, half of the farmers who will retire will not be replaced and their land will thus be 'lost' to land concentration. 200 farms disappear every week.

Farming also faces a vocational crisis due to the impression that it is a profession full of loneliness, unhappiness and frustrations. In this context, renewing the farming population with people with an agroecological appetite, emerged as an appropriate way to build more sustainable food systems. Moreover, the growing demand for local, agroecological food, added an environmental impetus.

Peasants of Nature

Eventually the idea emerged in conservationist circles that the best way to protect natural areas could be to start farming themselves. Rather than struggling daily to have farmers change their practices or to manage natural areas, why not become farmers and, bring like-minded young people in too? This is where what became "*Paysans de Nature*" – literally, "Peasants of Nature" emerged from.

The main goal is to create new areas that support biodiversity, through the setting-up of new farmers. The initiative also helps current farmers who want to become active protectors of biodiversity on their land. It raises awareness about the link between biodiversity and agriculture, how the latter can either protect or erode the former: farm visits are organised regularly and contacts between farmers and consumers are facilitated in the local Community Supported Agriculture initiative (CSA).

It also involves the local citizens, who watch for land that is about to become available, for example.

Peasants of nature were firstly initiated to set up farms to protect nature. They do not need to be certified under the European organic label; however, they must follow at least its practices, with many adding extra ecological practices on top. Some are certified through the "Nature & Progrès" participatory guarantee system, some follow the biodynamic principles. Being a peasant of nature implies voluntarily leaving areas be 'non-productive'. For example, letting brambles grow, to allow an ecosystem to develop. This spirit originates from a strong culture of nature preservation among naturalists and a different vision of the human-nature relationships. They consider biodiversity for its intrinsic value, and that it does not have to be useful to humans to exist, an unusual approach in mainsteam farming up to now. Visions differed between these naturalists and the already-established farmers, or people without a naturalist background. The latter's main objective is to produce food, and they add some measures to enhance biodiversity on their land. Hence two charters were written, to include this diversity of profiles so that each farmer-to-be could find the spirit that suits him/her best : they sign up to become either "Paysans de Nature" or "Peasants engaged for biodiversity".

Which Biodiversity?

Which flora and fauna gets protected through the project? In the main, it is aimed primarily at wild species and their habitats, though it varies from area to area. In the marshy zone where the new farms first set up, black-tailed godwits *(Limosa limosa)* and Northern lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) are some of the star birds. In the woodier landscapes, '*le bocage*', European stonechats *(Saxicola torquatus)* and the typical shrikes *(Lanius sp.)* blossom.

Unfortunately, the impacts on biodiversity are not scientifically monitored. The effects on birds and how they come to live and nest on the lands are the simplest to observe. Interestingly, domestic biodiversity added up to the project. The new farmers mostly chose to work with local breeds and varieties of animals and plants, some on the brink of extinction: 'Maraîchine' cows, ancient wheat varieties, etc. That way, they benefit from the coevolution of the physical environment and its flora and fauna, as well as they promote the value of the area and its *'terroir'*.

The beginnings

The first naturalist to set up his farm in 2005 was Frédéric Signoret, president of the local Bird Protection League (LPO). He was later joined by Ludivine Cosson (see opening picture). They raise about 50 Maraîchine cows that graze 10 months a year and are only fed with grass and hay, along with some local breeds of horses and poultry. At least 70 new farmers have set up and engaged in the project, 15 of them in the Breton Marsh. Most are located in the West, and some other scattered in France, for example in the Jura mountains. A book compiling 27 of these experiences and presenting their farming systems was released last autumn. The land preserved only by the peasants referenced in the book accounts for 2000 hectares.

According to Perrine Dulac, there also are many other farmers following the same approach throughout the country, mainly "peasants engaged for biodiversity" that they do not necessarily know about. About three years ago, the expression "Paysans de Nature" was created, and the brand was registered in January 2017 in order to prevent any distortion of the phrase by other structures for greenwashing purposes.

The project was born among conservationists who belonged to the local LPO, and it is currently run by the *LPO Vendée and the LPO Pays de la Loire*. The project benefits from a dense and dynamic network of associations and citizens: in the Breton Marsh, the local CSA has hundreds of members; associations and cooperatives involved in peasant agriculture such as *Terre de Liens* and the *Coopérative d'installation en agriculture paysanne* share their competences and information to help new farmers set up. The main objective is obviously to set up new peasants of nature throughout the country, and to have the approach spread. The challenge is now to sort out all the tools that were built over the last decade and come up with a consistent and helpful guide for people that are willing to engage in the movement – and they are plenty!

Landcare Germany – Bringing Farmers, Conservationists & Policymakers Together

By Oliver Moore

With social media polarisation, the urban rural divide, fake news and host of other concerns, right about now seemed like a good time to try to create a face-to-face meet up of what can seem like increasingly disparate groups.

Did you know that 80% of the Bavarian landscape is managed by a voluntary team of farmers, conservationists and policy makers? This tidbit of information came from Bernd Blumlein of DVL – the German Land Care Association. It was heard at a rural dialogue event in Cloughjordan ecovillage, where ARC2020 has an office.

ARC2020 helped organise host and participate via Hannes Lorenzen and Oliver Moore. Led by the IEN (Irish Environmental Network) the event also involved Sonairte, the Organic Centre, Cultivate and Ecolise – the latter two both sustainability NGOs.

With social media polarisation, the urban rural divide, fake news and host of other concerns, right about now seemed like a good time to try to create a face-to-face meet up of what can seem like increasingly disparate groups.

And because we like a challenge, we decided to add in other rural groups too, groups that may sometimes feel farming voice dominates the rural debate – from community gardens to LEADER companies to think tanks.

To encourage this dialogue, we avoided the usual conference performance – a sequence of speakers facing a row of seated people, with conversation during the coffee break. Instead, we used café tables. We had short presentations which introduced three dedicated tabled-based conversation sessions. The tables were as mixed as we could make them to encourage useful conversation between people who might not hear from each other directly. So as an example a table might have one agri-extension (e.g.Teagasc, EIP, NOTS), one environmental (e.g. IEN, Transition Towns), one farming (organic and conventional, mixture of production types), one rural development (e.g. LEADER, business networks), one other (e.g. academic, media, think tank).

We opened with an appreciation of what rural areas can and do offer – from skilled people to carbon sinks – and then introduced an organisation dedicated to bringing conservationists and farmers together, called Landcare.

The Landcare movement

Landcare started in Australia and is thriving in Germany – especially in some of the federated states such as Bavaria.

Bernd Blumlein of DVL (the German Land Care Association) spoke about the 170 plus Landcare Associations (LCA) in Germany. These regional non-governmental associations link nature conservation groups with local farmers and local communities. Turnover is E20m a year, while 10,000 farmers, 2000 local authorities and 1200 NGOs are involved.

According to Blumlein, it started as a bridging exercise between conservationists and farmers while also maintaining “cultural landscapes together with land

users and municipalities and at the same time guarantee farmers an income".

DVL adds: "LCAs develop projects for specific landscape types including scientific measures, financial calculations and the implementation of agri-environment schemes. They apply for available funds on the state-level and supervise the implementation of activities, mostly done by local farmers, as well as monitor the project outcome."

LCAs are voluntary, and have parity between farmers, conservationists and local authorities. Farmers receive an extra payment, while the Federal States in Germany make the payments (more so than even the EU/Pillar 2). This reduces bureaucracy, which in any case is conducted in large part by the LCA/DVL.

In some federal states, such as Bavaria, it is particularly impactful. There, there are 62 LCAs, covering more than 80% of Bavaria's surface area. 2/3 of the state-supported landscape conservation measures are conducted via LCAs, which are performance-orientated.

The approach bears some resemblance to the regionally focused EIPs such as the BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment) initiative in north east Cork.

After lunch, (which coincidentally featured an amble down to a Norwegian teenage chamber orchestra recital in the community amphitheatre – life in Cloughjordan), we used what's called the Talanoa process. This approach to dialogue, originating from Fiji and other Pacific island cultures, is a very simple way to figure out the three things:

- Where are we?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we get there?

Expanding opportunities for engagement emerged strongly from this process: there are a number of fora already happening in Ireland such as Sustainable Energy Ireland groups, beef discussion groups, Irish Farmers Association Irish Environmental Network regional meetings, an emerging rural parliament initiative that will feed into the European Rural Parliament and more places to have these engagements.

A version of this article first appeared in the Irish Examiner Farming newspaper.

Agroecology and a Living Countryside in the Netherlands

By Sylvia Kay (Transnational Institute), Jeannette Oppedijk van Veen, Leonardo van den Berg, Sijtse Jan Roeters, Jolke de Moel, Hanny van Geel (all members of Dutch famers' organisation 'Toekomstboeren')

NOTE: This Perspective draws on a publication on land struggles and agroecology in the Netherlands, published in April 2019 in Dutch and English.

Much has been written about the 'Dutch agricultural miracle'. While the Netherlands experienced hunger and significant food shortages in the aftermath of the Second World War, it has transformed itself in little under 70 years to become one of the largest net exporters of agricultural products world-wide, second only to the United States.

Much has been written about the 'Dutch agricultural miracle'. While the Netherlands experienced hunger and significant food shortages in the aftermath of the Second World War, it has transformed itself in little under 70 years to become one of the largest net exporters of agricultural products world-wide, second only to the United States. Despite being one of the smallest countries in Europe, the Netherlands now supplies a quarter of the vegetables that are exported from the continent.

Furthermore, the Netherlands is a global leader in agricultural research and innovation (e.g. Wageningen University), food retail and processing (e.g. Unilever, Nutreco, Campina), and agricultural lending and investment (e.g. Rabobank). It is therefore not surprising that the Dutch government considers the agri-food sector to be one of its most strategic assets, with the Dutch agricultural model regularly championed as a global success story.

The downside to success – what is not said

Left out of this story are some of the downsides of the Netherlands' transformation into an agricultural powerhouse. It is true that – contrary to the large-scale farming model of countries such as the US, Canada, and Brazil – Dutch agricultural growth has been achieved on still relatively small but highly capitalised, hyper-efficient, high-tech farms. The deployment of modern techniques of agricultural management to these farms has allowed them to achieve remarkably high levels of productivity.

However, it is also the case that much vegetable production, for example of cucumbers, paprikas and tomatoes, takes place indoors in the highly regulated and artificially controlled environments of greenhouses. In addition to complaints about taste and provenance, there are also wider concerns about the impact of greenhouse production in terms of energy consumption, light pollution, and the transformation of entire regions – such as an area in the West of the Netherlands known as 'Westland' – to "glass monocultures". The rise of indoor vegetable production in the Netherlands is also closely associated with the displacement and undercutting of vegetable production in the South of Europe, such as tomato growers in Andalucía (pdf)

Too often, the deployment of 'modern agricultural techniques' is synonymous with a form of industrial agriculture, heavily reliant on the use of agro-chemicals. This has had profound negative environmental

impacts: agro-chemicals are responsible for 25% of groundwater pollution. It is also a model geared towards evermore intensive forms of production. The recent backlash against 'mega stallen' 'mega barns' of intensive indoor livestock rearing in the south of the Netherlands is one example of this. The intensification of production methods has heightened risks for both animal and human health. In the past two decades, the Dutch livestock industry has had to deal with multiple outbreaks of animal diseases including swine fever, foot and mouth disease, Q fever, and birdflu. Several people have been ill and have died as a result of Q fever.

More generally, there is a concern about the absence of a people-centred approach to farming. At the same time as Dutch agriculture has become increasingly capitalised over the years, farmgate prices have fallen dramatically with the withdrawal of price supports and production based subsidies. Relative costs of production have skyrocketed. As a result, many Dutch farmers are reliant on loans from the bank. This has led to a situation of high indebtedness: in 2012, the total Dutch agricultural debt was estimated at 42 billion euros – or 60,000 euros per farmholding. These debts are the cause of significant stress among farmers, leading many to give up and decreasing the appeal of farming for the next generation. This is reflected in the dwindling number of farms in the Netherlands which has fallen from 410,000 in 1950 to just 55,000 in 2017. In the past 35 years, the number of farms has halved. On average, 6 farmers exit agriculture a day.

A new movement for agroecology and human-scale farming

It is largely in response to these issues that a new generation of Dutch farmers are increasingly seeking out a different approach. The exact form can vary, but many find common cause in the movement for agroecology. Agroecology involves a different form of agricultural production, processing and distribution: one that seeks progress in the strengthening of local resources, markets, and knowledge and in a different relationship with nature and with citizens. In agroecological systems, there is an emphasis not just on food production, but also other values such as landscape preservation, biodiversity, a living countryside and nature.

Exact figures on the size and scale of these initiatives are difficult to come by but all indicators point to a growth in their number:

- Between 2013 and 2017, the number of organic farms increased by 14,6%.
- In the past 10 years, the number of CSAs has grown from less than 10 to over 90 farms
- The number of farms engaged in direct selling, processing, and on farm education has risen between 2008 – 2016 by 17%, 5%, and 84% respectively

The growth in agroecological initiatives is the result of both conventional farmers wanting to change their agricultural practices and new farmers who want to engage with a new agricultural movement from the outset.

A survey conducted by the Dutch small farmers organisation Toekomstboeren ('Farmers of the future') has brought into relief the profile of some of these new farmers engaging in the agroecology movement. It finds that these farmers are generally speaking relatively young (54% are under 40, 26% are between 40-49, and 29% are over 50) and majority (55%) women. In addition to a passion for farming, many are motivated by an effort to advance a more social and sustainable form of agriculture:

"I want a farm that is people-centred. I like to have people on my terrain."

"We want to live from the land and share this simple richness with others"

"I feel happy, free and blessed that I can live from the land in harmony with nature. I can see from the increase in biodiversity, in the growing numbers of butterflies for example, that nature benefits from the right kind of cooperation".

These ideals are often difficult to combine with participation in the mainstream food market. Many of them therefore choose to develop alternative marketing channels such as farmshops, box delivery schemes, or own-harvesting by consumers. Consumers who

engage in these marketing channels often share the values of agroecology and are therefore prepared to pay a higher price for their produce. This in turn allows agroecological farmers to make a living.

Still, many of these new farmers express the need for support in accessing land, practical agroecological knowledge, marketing channels, processing activities, and starting a new business. Despite the significant social and environmental benefits that agroecology offers, these initiatives receive very little – if any – financial or other support from current national or EU agricultural and rural development policy frameworks. Not surprisingly then, 84% of farmers interviewed in the survey indicate that agroecology deserves a stronger representation in policy formation and decision-making processes.

Get organised!

Increasingly, agroecological farmers are becoming organised in order to do just that. On 23 March 2019 more than 100 farmers met at the independent dairy farm 'The Eemlandhoeve', near Amersfoort, as part of the first "Boerenlandbouw" – "peasant farming" – conference. This was a full-day conference to share experiences, challenges and inspirations with on such diverse topics as access to land, the commons, schools of practice and regional knowledge exchanges, and plant-based fertilization techniques. One of the main outcomes of the conference was the formation of a federation of peasant organisations in order to better strengthen one another and help advance the agroecological movement in the Netherlands.

The importance of alliance building between farmers and other actors in society is increasingly recognised. The food sovereignty platform 'Voedsel Anders' ('Food Otherwise') brings together Dutch and Flemish organisations striving for a different food and agricultural system, with over 67 organisations signing on to the Voedsel Anders manifesto outlining a set of common principles for a more sustainable food and farming model. The platform has been extraordinarily successful in mobilising a diverse range of actors in high level conferences which brought together over 1,000 farmers, consumer groups, CSOs, activists and academics in 2014 and 2016. A new Voedsel Anders conference is currently planned for the beginning of 2020.

Connections are also being sought and are ongoing between initiatives in the Netherlands and those elsewhere in Europe. A Dutch delegation attended the Nyéléni Europe Food Sovereignty Forum in 2016 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania which brought together over 500 participants from 42 countries throughout the pan-European region. And currently, activities and research is being carried out as part of a joint project between Eco Ruralis, the European Coordination Via Campesina, IFOAM EU, Real Farming Trust, Terre de Liens, Transnational Institute, and Urgenci on strategies to strengthen access to land for agroecology in the EU.

Ultimately, it is only by fostering these kinds of connections, exchanges, partnerships, and dialogues within a broader framework of solidarity and friendship that proposals for a more regenerative agriculture and a living countryside can be turned into actions.

Beyond Digitalisation

Smart Villages – Turning Momentum into Support for Local Action

By Paul Soto and Enrique Nieto (Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development)[1]

In its legislative proposals for the future CAP Strategic Plans, the European Commission refers to "the development of 'Smart Villages' across the European countryside… in line with the Cork 2.0 Declaration" (recital 16) and proposes a target indicator (rural population covered by a supported Smart Villages strategy).

The momentum behind Smart Villages continues to grow – both within EU and national policy circles and on the ground among rural communities. The challenge is to translate this momentum into a policy framework that provides fast and flexible tools which meet the needs and expectations of rural communities in different parts of Europe. This will mean avoiding complicated structures and plans, mobilising what exists in each place – and supporting local action rather than words.

The Story so far – at the Policy Level

At a European policy level, the 'EU Action for Smart Villages' was officially launched in the European Parliament during the Spring of 2017 by the EU Commissioners for Agriculture (Phil Hogan), Regional Development (Corina Crețu) and Mobility (Violeta Bulc). It has received major support from the EU Parliament which promoted a 'pilot project on Smart Eco-social villages', as well as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

In its legislative proposals for the future CAP Strategic Plans, the European Commission refers to "the development of 'Smart Villages' across the European countryside… in line with the Cork 2.0 Declaration" (recital 16) and proposes a target indicator (rural population covered by a supported Smart Villages strategy). However, following the approach of enhanced subsidiarity to Member States – no new specific policy instrument or dedicated budget line is proposed. Therefore, Member States will have to make use of the existing toolkit of policy instruments for supporting Smart Villages.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Regional Development Committee in the European Parliament has proposed an amendment to the future ERDF Regulation recommending that a fixed percentage of the resources available for the jobs and growth goal equal to around 2 billion euros "shall be allocated to rural areas and communities taking into account provisions of a Smart Villages Pact to develop projects such as Smart Villages". It remains to be seen whether this proposal or any others like it will ultimately pass into EU policy.

So, the current situation is that there are a wide range of policy interventions and tools proposed in both the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation and in the future Cohesion Policy (especially under the 'Europe closer to citizens' objective) that could be used to support Smart Village type approaches. These include LEADER/CLLD, other forms of cooperation, knowledge transfer, investments in basic services, digital strategies, Integrated Territorial Investments, links to sustainable urban development plans and so on. In this context, policy makers across Europe have many legitimate questions about what Smart Villages actually means,

how it might add value to what already exists and how to develop and implement effective policies and supporting instrument in practice.

Meanwhile on the Ground in Rural Areas...

There is often a sense that global events are evolving so rapidly that it is difficult for institutions and policies to keep pace. The gap between laudable policy objectives and people's lives on the ground – in the face of declining services and emigration – is breeding all kinds of negative populism. But at the same time, rural communities in many parts of Europe are developing imaginative solutions in fields such as renewable energy, climate change, digitalisation, social care, mobility, circular economy and local food chains among many others. These communities are influencing the mainstreamed narrative that rural areas are simply victims and demonstrate that rural areas are suitable places for communities to initiate small-scale innovations and transitions which could ultimately benefit the whole of society.

Eamon O'Hara (ECOLISE) describes just some of these initiatives: "around 1 500 transition town initiatives, 15 000 ecovillages and over three million permaculture practitioners driving community-led sustainable projects across the globe. Specifically, in Europe there are also an estimated 2 500 community energy initiatives, 1 500 Slow Food Communities and about 7 000 community supported agriculture schemes feeding over a million citizens" according to estimates by ECOLISE.

Source: O´Hara, E. (2019). Transition presents an unprecedented opportunity for rural revival. Rural Dialogues. Arc2020, ECOLISE.

Harnessing the power of emerging and particularly digital technologies is a key driver of many initiatives but by no means the only one. Technological innovations are generally seen as a tool and not the end of the wider process of people-led social innovation taking place.

Interreg projects like ERUDITE have worked with and identified the key ingredients of "truly bottom-up digital transformation in rural areas". They show "that this is more than just speeding up the application of digital technologies; it is about ensuring that each rural village, town and region and their communities can translate the potential of digital technologies into economic and social opportunities".

Source: Peckham, C.& Stojmenova, E. (2019). ERUDITE & smart villages: co-creating the digital transformation of rural Europe. Scitech Europa.

The real potential of Smart Villages is to link the growing grassroots initiatives for a transition to 'le village du futur' (a term used by the pioneering village of Lormes in Burgundy, France) to the emerging policy momentum.

From Ideas to Implementation

Of course, many, if not most, of the grassroots initiatives mentioned above, predate and do not necessarily use the term 'smart'. So, it is quite legitimate to ask what this new 'label' can add to what already exists.

Over the last two years the European Network for Rural Development has organised a Thematic Group on Smart Villages which provided a platform for rural development stakeholders from across the EU to look at many of the local initiatives taking place across Europe and consider what policy support they need at different stages of their evolution (see again Eamon O'Hara's article in this series for some key recommendations). Based on ongoing multi-stakeholder exchanges and analysis of needs and experiences on the ground, a series of policy briefs were co-created to provide orientations about how certain existing policy interventions could be used to support Smart Villages.[2]

This work led to a series of recommendations – both about what to avoid and about how to maximise the added value of Smart Villages in different contexts.

What to Avoid

1. **Avoid over-defining Smart Villages**
   It is understandable that some Managing Authorities and local actors have argued that the first step must be to produce clearer, tighter definition of what Smart Villages are so that this can easily be translated into selection criteria and other rules for funding. However, after nearly two years of consultations, the analysis of good practices and some small-scale local tests, the "pilot initiative on Smart Eco-social Villages" arrived at the following quite broad proposed definition:

> "Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience and build on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic social and/or environmental conditions in particular by mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas. The initiation of Smart Village strategies may build on existing initiatives and can be funded by a variety of public and private sources".
>
> Source: Pilot Project on Smart Eco-social villages (2019). Smart Villages Briefing note.

   The pilot project argued that any definition must be deliberately broad and inclusive of all the grassroots initiatives described above precisely because the starting points, challenges, opportunities and resources available to rural communities are so diverse in different parts of Europe. As being smart is precisely about innovation and finding alternative solutions it would also be restrictive to try to define them ex-ante. Rather than arguing about a more precise definition at EU level, it is better to use the flexibility being offered in the new CAP Strategic Plans and develop criteria which are adapted to different national and local circumstances.

2. **Make full use of digital technologies but do not make them a precondition**
   It is often thought that Smart Villages are the baby sisters of Smart Cities and that their prime aim must be to catch up and close the digital divide between urban and rural areas. However, Smart Cities were originally conceived primarily in technological terms – big data, interoperability, artificial intelligence and the internet of things.

   Rural communities do not usually have the scale or knowledge base to become front runners in these fields. So being smart in rural areas starts with people's lives and then uses technology with and for them to develop practical solutions. Harnessing the power of digital technologies may well be the driver of Smart Villages in many parts of Europe but as the Pilot Project concluded "it is not a precondition for being smart". Rural areas have the potential to offer something different to urban areas and there are plenty of innovations in service delivery, energy, mobility and food systems which are not necessarily digital and should not be excluded.

3. **Avoid duplicating strategies and structures**
   The indicator suggested by the European Commission proposal for regulation of the CAP Strategic Plans refers to "rural population covered by a supported Smart Villages strategy". This may give the impression that the aim is to cover rural areas with yet another set of strategies on top of the LEADER/CLLD Strategies, Local Agenda 21 Strategies, community plans, village strategies and Smart Specialisation Strategies that already exist. In their presentations to the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages and to other stakeholders, European Commission officials have repeatedly made it clear that the aim is not to create additional layers of strategic documents or structures but to build on the policy landscape that exists in each country to provide agile and flexible tools that enable local action.

   The Finnish National Rural Network has organised a competition for Smart Villages which illustrates exactly this point. Lauri Hyttinen, Network Expert of the National Support Unit (NSU) Finland, says that

"our approach to the Smart Village initiative could be summarised by just two words: do something!".

"The purpose is not to find the village that can already claim to be the smartest. We want to identify those villages that are most eager to learn to become smarter. When applying, the villages were asked to identify the challenges they are facing, to outline their ideas about how to solve them, and to identify the key actors they will need to cooperate with, in order to achieve their goals". Source: Hyttinen, L. (2019). The Smartest Village in Finland. ENRD Rural Connections, page 34.

In a nutshell, everyone can be smart. It sounds simple – but it isn't.

How and Where Smart Villages Strategies can Add Value

So, if there is no precise definition of Smart Villages, they are not exclusively digital and they should not duplicate strategies or structures, how do we avoid the concept of Smart Villages becoming so general that it becomes almost meaningless?

From the discussions in the ENRD Thematic Group, it has become clear that the specific contribution that Smart Villages can make will vary from place to place depending on a) the existing policy landscape, b) the assets and social capital of each area. This will involve designing and adapting a toolkit of interventions from the different funds suited to each context.

However, it is possible to start to identify a number of fields in which the concept of Smart Villages can add value to existing tools and which might form the basis of criteria for deciding when and where to support Smart Village initiatives.

For example, **Smart Village** strategies referred to in the European Commission proposal for regulation of the CAP Strategic Plans should be based on a local vision for structural change and transition to a better future. But rather than aiming to provide a comprehensive blue print, they can complement what exists by supporting collective action to respond to a specific local challenge or opportunity in a particular field.

Secondly, this action should be driven locally by cooperation between civil society, public and private actors but it should also build alliances with key external players (e.g. researchers, public authorities, etc) and lead to more sustainable business models.

Thirdly, Smart Village strategies can add value by providing faster and more flexible support to rural communities for collective innovation from an initial idea to sustainable scale up. This may allow rural communities to venture into new fields previously considered outside the scope of local action (for example, sectors strongly influenced by central regulations such as energy, health, digitalisation, climate change and mobility among others.)

Finally, in terms of the spatial scale, Smart Village strategies should provide practical support to action a very local level in villages or groups of villages (i.e. sub-LEADER/CLLD). They should build on the assets of these communities but also strengthens links with urban and regional development.

The proposed Regulation for CAP Strategic Plans contain a number of potential interventions which could be used to translate these principles into practice.

- For the initial preparatory phases of Smart Villages, the most significant of these seem to be the extremely flexible interventions supporting cooperation, including LEADER/CLLD. If properly designed these could provide fast and flexible support for group formation, animation, capacity-building, training, technical advice, piloting, small scale investments and so on (see this ENRD policy briefs on cooperation and LEADER).
- These interventions can and should prepare the ground and 'business model' for larger scale investments from EU Cohesion Policy, financial instruments or national and private sources.

Over the next year the ENRD Thematic Group on Smart Villages will start working on the how to design and put in place these tools to support Smart Villages in different contexts.

We invite you to join the group and contribute to this exciting work by registering as member of the Thematic Group and sharing your experiences in the Smart Villages community on Facebook.

[1] Note: The contents of this article do not necessarily express the opinions of the European Institutions.

[2] See the orientations on how to support Smart Village initiatives.

Smart Villages: How to Make Them Really Work

By Edina Ocsko, Smart Village Network

The 'Smart Villages' concept was initiated top-down, without a precise definition at the beginning and little consideration about how it would add value to or complement existing policy tools and approaches.

This article contributes to the Rural Dialogues on 'Smart Villages'. We argue that the current definition of 'Smart Villages' and guidance on its implementation do not provide sufficient explanation on how smart villages are different from and add value to existing initiatives and policy tools. We believe that we need a novel smart villages policy framework that adapts to the needs of villages, rather than villages needing to adapt to existing policy instruments. Therefore, we propose practical steps to develop policies in support of multi-funded integrated smart village strategies that can help ensuring a real added value of the 'Smart Villages' concept.

The Story so far from a different angle...

The 'Smart Villages' concept was initiated top-down, without a precise definition at the beginning and little consideration about how it would add value to or complement existing policy tools and approaches. The nice-sounding 'smart villages' concept originated from Members of the European Parliament and has quickly found its way into EU political discussions through the formal support of the European Commission and three Commissioners.

Defining what 'Smart Villages' exactly are only became a concern once the concept had already enjoyed strong political support at the EU level. However, "*sewing the jacket to the button*" has proven to be a challenging task, and – even after several attempts to provide a definition, guidance and clarification at the EU level – the 'Smart Villages' concept still raises more questions than answers.

"Sewing the jacket to the (Smart Villages) button" has proven to be a challenging task.

Do we really understand what the added value of 'Smart Villages' is?

The work of the ENRD Thematic Group over the past year has led to a series of recommendations about 'what to avoid' when developing smart villages, namely to avoid (i) over-defining Smart Villages, (ii) making digital technologies a precondition, and (iii) duplicating existing strategies and structures.

The Smart Village Network – an independent bottom-up open network of villages, village groups and village associations established in 2018 – has made similar recommendations through the SVN blog already in March 2018 on how to define smart villages:

- It argued that "We need a definition that allows all villages to (be)come smart" and what 'smart' is will much depend on the specific social, economic and environmental context of the village (including its basic characteristics & challenges as well as assets & opportunities).
- The same article argued that 'smartness' should not be linked to digital (and other) preconditions in order to avoid excluding certain villages that otherwise might have innovative and relevant solutions to rural challenges (i.e. definitions need to be inclusive and flexible).

A year after publishing our article on the Smart Village Network blog, a draft EU definition of smart villages has been developed that "*is deliberately broad and*

inclusive" . The ENRD Thematic Group discussions also identified that we should "*avoid over-defining smart villages*" and "'*criteria' for smart villages need to be flexible and adapted to the specific and individual context of villages*" .

Current guidance does not explain satisfyingly how the 'Smart Villages' concept adds value to existing policy instruments.

However, current guidance still does not explain satisfyingly how the 'Smart Villages' concept is different from and adds value to existing policy instruments. The ENRD also concedes that the 'what to avoid' recommendations of its Thematic Group do not sufficiently clarify how smart villages add value: *"So, if there is no precise definition of Smart Villages, they are not exclusively digital and they should not duplicate strategies or structures, how do we avoid the concept of Smart Villages becoming so general that it becomes almost meaningless?"*

We should avoid reinventing the wheel

The Smart Village Network has organised meetings with the participation of its village members and also presented its views at external local stakeholder events. Our experience has been that people acting on the ground are highly interested in the new 'Smart Villages' movement and are eager to make the most use of it for their local communities. However, there is still a lack of clarity among them about how smart villages are different from things that they are doing already. LEADER Local Action Groups are particularly struggling to understand how the 'Smart Villages' approach adds value to their 'business as usual'. Most importantly, both the villages concerned, and national policymakers are craving practical advice and concrete suggestions on *what they need to do next and differently to contribute to the emergence of smart villages.*

Practical lessons from multi-funded CLLD could help us move one step closer to the successful planning and implementation of smart villages.

The answers and guidance provided to date are not sufficient. For instance, the ENRD Thematic Group's discussions conclude that one needs to "*design and adapt a toolkit of interventions from the different funds*": We have known for some time that multi-funded and integrated approaches to local development are crucial policy instruments. Many countries experimented already at the beginning of this programming period with designing and implementing multi-funded Community-led Local Development (CLLD); see for instance LEADER LAG Survey 2017 (ENRD), LAG Funding). It is essential that we now consider why genuine multi-funded approaches have not become widespread and what policy-makers and local stakeholders have most struggled with. It is the practical lessons learned that could help us move one step closer to the successful planning and implementation of smart villages.

The specific fields identified by the ENRD Thematic Group in which the concept of Smart Villages can add value to existing tools are generic; see Paul Soto & Enrique Nieto: Rural Dialogues (2017). One risks reinventing the wheel by saying that 'smart villages' add value by (1) developing strategies that are "*based on a local vision for structural change",* (2)*"supporting collective action to respond to a specific local challenge or opportunity" driven* (3) *"locally by cooperation between civil society and public, private partnership", and* (4) *"providing faster and more flexible support to rural communities for collective innovation".*

Many would argue that such values and concepts are not new at all in rural development (for instance, the same principles and concepts have driven LEADER LAGs and EIP Operational Groups for many years.) and we need to be more concrete on how smart villages should be planned and implemented in future rural development policies.

We have a smart village button … what should the jacket look like?

We do not claim to have found the "philosopher's stone". However, the Smart Village Network believes that 'smart villages' is a unique new policy opportunity that we can seize only if we can step out of our com-

fort zones, reflect on past experiences critically and provide practical recommendations that help us move forward.

Villages and village representatives should be much more engaged in EU and national-level smart villages policy design.

Firstly, we believe that – in the spirit of collective action – villages and village representatives should be much more engaged in EU and national-level smart villages policy design, beyond selected demonstration cases. Exchanging about demonstration cases is very important but not sufficient for engaging villages. Demonstration cases currently include the ENRD project examples through searching by 'smart village' and best practices and case studies developed by the Smart Eco-social Villages study that are not yet available publicly. Giving a voice to villages in policy-making as well as enabling exchange among them (including using innovative digital platforms) have been core missions of the Smart Village Network from the start (see our article of *April 2018* on "Villages need to have a say on what smart villages are" as well as the Smart Village Network Declaration). Awareness-raising among villages about the new opportunities has been limited and villages have not been sufficiently engaged in the process.

Secondly, we believe that a key to the success of smart villages implementation will be a genuine multi-funded approach where *single smart village strategies* are supported by *multiple funds.*

A key to the success of smart villages implementation will be a genuine multi-funded approach.

While LEADER is a crucial instrument, LEADER/ CLLD funding in itself is not sufficient to reach a real breakthrough in addressing current rural challenges. The main added value of the 'Smart Villages' concept lies in its potential to mobilise multiple funding sources for integrated rural development.

In our blog article on 'How to make smart villages happen?' of April 2019 we shared our thoughts on what practical steps need to be taken at different levels to implement a multi-funded and integrated policy framework to support 'smart villages'. In the blog article we argue that villages need incentives to adopt smart village strategies or start labelling existing projects, strategies and other instruments as 'smart'. Without a clear support framework and policy instruments they will just carry on with their business as usual.

Managing Authorities of various funds and programmes should get together as soon as possible.

Therefore, managing authorities of various funds and programmes at national and regional levels should get together (e.g. in the form of a smart village 'task force') as soon as possible and start coordinating with each other the design of a supportive policy environment. As the ENRD also suggests (see Paul Soto & Enrique Nieto: Rural Dialogues (2017)), strengthening linkages of rural communities with urban and regional development is important. Relevant stakeholders representing these sectors and relevant policy instruments would also need to be engaged in the discussions on smart village policies, to ensure an integrated approach.

In line with the partnership principle, villages, village groups (including LAGs), village associations and their representatives need to be directly engaged in the process of designing future programmes and policies. The European Commission should live up to its promise and guide and support any Member State that is willing to experiment with a genuine multi-funded smart village support framework.

The smart villages (pilot) funding should be poured into a single 'pot' so that village beneficiaries do not need to think which fund they are applying for.

In an ideal scenario, portions of different funds should be specifically devoted to support smart village strategies. This could be done through a pilot approach, setting aside only a relatively small proportion of the relevant funds in an experimental way. This smart village (pilot) funding should be poured into a single 'pot' so that smart village beneficiaries do not need to think which fund they are applying for and what specific rules apply. The 'demarcation and coordination of funds' should not be the concern of the villages, but should be ensured through effective coordination of

managing authorities (or intermediary bodies) in administering the 'pot' of smart village funds.

However, putting on paper such recommendations will not be sufficient for seizing the smart villages opportunity. The Smart Village Network has already started developing joint initiatives with its members to contribute to the design of practical smart village policy frameworks in specific local and national contexts. We will be happy to share future lessons from these actions for the benefit of the wider smart village community.

The contents of this article do not necessarily express the opinions of all the members of the Smart Village Network.

The Three Conditions of Sustainable Rural Digitalisation

By Gianluca Brunori

The importance of digitalisation has been remarked also by the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) as a goal in and of itself (Goal 9) as well as a tool with which to achieve the other Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Gianluca Brunori heads a new consortium funded under Horizon2020, called DESIRA**. DESIRA stands for Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas. 25 organisations will work together on the project until 2023, where the effects of digitalisation* will be assessed. Here he outlines the context for the DESIRA project. He argues that access, design and complexity are three conditions that define how rural digitalisation is unfolding, and if it is in line with the sustainable development goals. To this end, the DESIRA consortium will employ RRI – Responsible Research and Innovation approach and methods – to help improve the capacity of society and of political bodies to respond to the challenges that digitalisation generates in rural areas, agriculture and forestry.

Digitalisation has shaped the so-called 'third industrial revolution' and is leading to the fourth industrial revolution, based on Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). According a growing literature, IoT and AI will allow remote (or even self-) control of production, processing and logistic operations: swarms of drones and sensor networks will monitor the agri-environment and provide early warning signals for management; smart devices connected to huge databases will save resource use; distributed ledgers will secure transactions and allow full traceability along the chain; and 3D printing will relocalise processing capacity.

ICT applications will also enable circular agriculture and forestry concepts. Rural community problems such as mobility, access to market, resource management, health and social services, and education might be solved through a distributed use of data and devices, improving communication with service providers and local administrations.

The importance of digitalisation has been remarked also by the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) as a goal in and of itself (Goal 9) as well as a tool with which to achieve the other Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Scholars, as well as leading international networks, stress that radical technological innovation, and more specifically digitalisation, will be key for the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to have a real impact over the next decade.

Indeed, new digital technologies are "game changers", as they deeply reconfigure routines, rules, actors and artefacts that constitute business models, consumption and shopping styles, service provision, as well as learning processes and innovation. Digitalisation has deep repercussions on people's lives, generating winners (who benefit from the change), losers (who are marginalised by the changes), and opponents (who resist and elaborate alternative rules of the game).

The contribution of digitalisation to Sustainable Development Goals, and the distribution between winners, losers and opponents, will depend on three different sets of conditions.

The Three Conditions of Sustainable Rural Digitalisation

Access

The first condition relates to the distribution of physical, social and human capital necessary to get **access**

to digital opportunities. Non-adoption or late adoption may enlarge the gulf between social groups and territories, generating social and economic marginalisation. This type of threat is known as the *digital divide*. Agriculture and rural areas are domains where the digital divide has a high level of incidence. In rural areas, the risks of negative impacts are higher than in urban areas, as there are infrastructural, social and human capital reasons that contribute to create a deep digital divide between territories.

Digital divide risk. According to Eurostat, people living in rural areas usually recorded the lowest share of individuals accessing the internet on a daily basis. Less than two-thirds (62 %) of the EU-28 population living in rural areas accessed the internet on a daily basis in 2016, while this share is 72 % for people living in towns and suburbs, and 75 % among city-dwellers. In Lithuania, Portugal and Poland, a relatively low proportion – close to half – of the rural population made use of the internet on a daily basis in 2016, 42 % in Greece, and close to one third of the rural population in Bulgaria and Romania.

Design

The second type of conditions is related to the **design of ICT solutions** and to the changes (work, consumption, house life, care) they aim to generate. Robots are designed to reduce labour costs, e-commerce is designed to allow consumers to buy while staying at home. In this case, winners and losers are consequences of the unequal distribution of power and risks generated by the innovation itself. We can call them *design-related risks.* In this category fall issues such as obsolescence of human skills (and consequent losses of jobs), threat to privacy, surveillance, discrimination based on profiling, concentration of data ownership.

Digital design-related risks. According to a recent research, 9 % of all jobs across OECD countries are automatable. According to Frey and Osborne, the 'probability of computerisation' varies from sector to sector, being high (and affecting about 47% of present jobs) in sectors highly dependent on office and administrative support, sales and related, transportation and material moving.

Complexity

A third set of conditions is related to the **system complexity** that digitalisation generates. The more and more data, digital platforms, applications, tools and controls permeate our lives, the more legal and organisational skills, as well as leadership and social adaptation are required. The more the system is ready to adaptation, the better the outcomes of innovation. Failure of adaptation may generate unintended socio-economic consequences, which we may call *digital traps*. Examples of this are information overload, digital addiction, virality of fake news, cyberbullying, cybercrime, loss of human control of machines.

System complexity and digital traps. The speed with which information can spread though social networks may be a cause of social pathologies. "At least two dozen innocent people have been lynched in India this year after bogus rumors warning of child abductors went viral on WhatsApp" (The Economist, 28th Jul 2018).

To reap the benefits of digitalisation while minimising its costs, these conditions need to be governed. The key to success in this endeavor is to understand the mutual influences between technological systems and social organisation. Technological systems can be designed with an **awareness of possible unintended consequences built in, and legal and social systems can anticipate these consequences and improve their adaptive capacity.**

Research and Innovation are keys to this challenge, provided that they are carried out by "*anticipating and assessing potential implications and societal expectations with regard to research and innovation"* as the concept of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) implies.

Responsible Research and Innovation

There is evidence that the European Commission is at aware of this problem. The Horizon 2020 RUR-02 call represents a unique opportunity to strengthen

and promote the RRI approach and its methods by filling the knowledge gaps on digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas. In responding to the call, we built a team for the DESIRA consortium, to follow the four principles of RRI: *Inclusiveness*, *Openness* and *Transparency*, *Reflexiveness* and *Anticipation*, *Responsiveness*.

Diversity and Inclusion: Be sensitive to research biases, include diverse voices and make results beneficial to a wider community

Anticipation and Reflection: Think on the purposes and possible implications of your research and its outcomes and envisage all possible strategies and methods

Openness and Transparency: Share objectives, methods and, whenever possible and appropriate, results, and inform about potential conflicts of interests

Responsiveness and Adaptive Change: Be responsive to changes and external inputs, adapting your research plans to changing social values and expectations

Inclusiveness

Through a multi-actor approach – which actively involves agricultural advisory services, knowledge brokers, SMEs, policy makers, scientists, and several different end-users such as farmers, foresters, consumers and European citizens.

Anticipation

We want to carry out a participatory socio-economic assessment. DESIRA will identify the state, the trends and dynamics of digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas, foresee potential winners, losers and opponents, and assess the net impacts of the actual and future challenges.

Responsiveness

We will take the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030 as criteria for evaluation and for policy recommendations.

Openness

We will enable a wide public debate on the methods, results and implications of the assessment through an appropriate communication strategy. As digitalisation also changes the process of innovation, altering its processes and its speed, this project will be an opportunity of testing new learning and innovation practices based on ICTs.

Conclusion

Considering access, design and complexity, while employing a responsible research and innovation (RRI) approach, helps us better understand how rural digitalisation is happening. In this context, DESIRA aims to improve the capacity of society and of political bodies to respond to digitalisation in rural areas, agriculture and forestry in the coming years. To achieve this goal, we want to build a knowledge and methodological base that increases the capacity of a wide range of actors to assess past, current and future socio-economic impact – including gender differences – of ICT-related innovation. We will embody RRI into researchers', developers', users' practices and policies, and finally offer mechanisms and tools that will support decision-making to challenges and opportunities related to digitalisation.

DESIRA (Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas) project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 program under Grant Agreement n° 818194.

**Digitisation is simply a conversion of format from analogue. Digitalisation is about the processes, leverages, restructurings, impact and scale of digitisation. While the terms are often used interchangeably (and also with both the letter z and s interchangeably), in this article it is taken that the more over-arching notion of 'digitalisation' is what is being referred to.*

** ARC2020's Oliver Moore also works on the DESIRA project.

Intergenerational Issues

Intergenerational Collaboration in the Vineyards of Southern France

By Natasha Foote

Together, the two generations have struck a deal to help each other out. They have agreed to let the two budding young wine makers to look after their vines and produce their own wine from them.

Lack of access to affordable land is one they key obstacles to new farming entrants. The sector is suffering from a seriously aging population which puts the future of European small-scale farming at risk. How can we encourage more young people to get into the profession when access to land is so tricky? Natasha Foote talks us through the problem and explores one exciting approach on the vineyards of Southern France.

If you came down one weekend to the depths of provincial France, just outside the sleepy village of Cazuhac and up a little bumpy dirt track that seems to lead to the middle of nowhere, you are likely to find an improbable group of people in an even more improbable place.

Armed with spades and smiles, here you'll find a group of young professionals fresh from the local city of Toulouse who regularly turn out in force to lend a helping hand to their friends, Romaric Pouliquen and Florian Houard, who have taken on the task of tending to a 3 hectare vineyard in the hope of producing their own wine.

And that is exactly where I found myself one evening, weeding around old vines whilst marvelling at the fact that so many young people would give up their weekend to do something that, it's safe to say, is far out of their comfort zone.

But there's something even more special about this situation. These vineyards don't belong to these young farmers, but instead to François et Noëlle Bochkoltz, a local elderly Belgian couple who are no longer capable of tending to their vines.

Together, the two generations have struck a deal to help each other out. They have agreed to let the two budding young wine makers to look after their vines and produce their own wine from them.

It is the dream deal. For Romaric and Florian, it means they have the opportunity to follow their dreams of producing their own wine, but without the prohibitive start-up costs. For François et Noëlle, they relish the chance to offer the opportunity to a new generation of farmers, and are thrilled to find people that want to look after their land and revive their vineyards back to their former glory. For both, it offers a unique opportunity for intergenerational (and in this case, international) exchange and learning, and for the community it brings life back to the little village, revitalising the local area.

It also offers a special opportunity to reconnect the city with the countryside, offering a chance to interact with nature and escape the city for a few days which, alongside wine-making, is something that is close to Romaric's heart.

Romaric and Florian are just two of hundreds of young people I have met just this year who, disillusioned by the standard 9-5 and searching for a meaningful answer to our world's sustainability problems, are searching for that answer in agriculture. But what would possess young people to swap work shoes for

wellies, don dungarees instead of suits and picking up pitchforks instead of briefcases?

Inspired by his travels around the vineyards of France with his friend and partner-in-crime, Florian, Romaric set his heart on one day producing his own wine. But, with limited funds, this seemed like a far off dream.

Undeterred, the two decided to search for an opportunity to try their inexperienced but enthusiastic hands at wine-making, and set out to find land. It is then that Florian, in a twist of fate, landed upon a girl who already had an arrangement with a local couple who were no longer able to look after their 3 hectares of vineyards and were looking for a new collaborator to help them look after their land. She had caught a serious case of green fingers after successfully working in their vineyards for number of years, but was ready to move on to greener grass and find somewhere to plant her own vines.

And so Romaric and Florian jumped at the opportunity, and here they are today, successfully managing the couples' land in a ecologically sensitive way. And this year they have finally achieved their dream of making their own wine and we had the pleasure of sharing one of their own bottles around a barbecue at the vineyards after a long day of weeding.

This is undoubtedly an inspiring story, but is by no means an isolated incident – in fact, this is a trend that can be found increasingly over Europe.

And this couldn't come sooner. European farmers are an ageing population, with only 7% under the age of 35 and more than half of European farmers set to retire within 10 years. Many of these ageing farmers have no successors in their family, and have no identified successor outside of it. The question of who is going to be the next generation of European farmers is a pressing one indeed. Who will grow our food? Who will sustain rural economies and communities? Who will maintain open landscapes for everybody to enjoy?

Faced with an ageing farming population, it is true that the European Union is upping it's game in it's efforts to encourage young people to take up the baton, offering start up grants and subsidies to help young farmers get off to a strong start.

However, in an EU wide survey of more than 2000 farmers under 40 years old, access to land to buy or to rent was named as the **number one barrier to farming,** followed by lack of financial support.

So the questions is, could this type of arrangement be the solution to our ageing population? This type of win-win deal could be key to supporting the next generation of European farmers, enhancing the future competitiveness of European agriculture, guaranteeing Europe's food security for years to come, but also to reviving rural communities and encouraging intergenerational exchange.

At the moment, these kind of deals are usually struck up by word of mouth or by chance encounters, but developing a system matched young farmers-to-be with ageing generations of farmers willing to offer their land could enable thousands of young people to enter farming.

Not Necessarily Money – Farm Renewal and (Inter) generational Considerations

By Dr Shane Conway, Dr Maura Farrell and Dr John McDonagh – Rural Studies Research Unit, Discipline of Geography, National University of Ireland, Galway

European agriculture is populated by an older generation of farmers. Demographic trends reveal that 5.6% of all European farms are run by farmers younger than 35, while almost one third of all farmers are older than 65.

How do farms pass on between the generations in a way that respects the needs of older and younger people? Share Conway and colleagues argue for an approach that allows older farmers to maintain and sustain normal day to day activity and behaviour on their farms in later life, whilst also 'releasing the reins' to allow for the necessary delegation of managerial responsibilities and ownership of the family farm to their successors.

European agriculture is populated by an older generation of farmers. Demographic trends reveal that 5.6% of all European farms are run by farmers younger than 35, while almost one third of all farmers are older than 65. As it is a worldwide policy mantra that the survival, continuity and future prosperity of the agricultural sector, traditional family farm model and broader sustainability of rural society ultimately depends on an age-diverse farming population, this 'greying' of the farming workforce is a major concern.

An aging farming population, together with the steady decline in the number of young farm families is widely reported as a key factor in the demoralization of rural communities. It is becoming increasingly clear that a major challenge presents itself in the area of intergenerational farm transfer, so much so that generational renewal is one of the nine key objectives in future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform post- 2020.

Furthermore, the declaration by outgoing European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan at community award ceremony in Ireland last year that 'member states will not get approval for their plans in the future under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and you will not get your money, unless we have a very ambitious programme put forward by the Irish Government in relation to helping young people into agriculture directly or indirectly'. So tough measures are being touted to reverse the trend of an aging population in EU agriculture. Then Commissioner Hogan also added that future CAP policy would require a revamped early retirement scheme for older farmers to get more younger people involved in farming.

More than Money

This focus on financial incentives to stimulate and encourage the process we would suggest offers a very narrow focus on how to confront the issue. It overlooks what we would argue are key elements in understanding the farmer / farm relationship and its uniqueness therein. The sense of identity and worth that is inherent within this relationship is particularly important in the context of mental health and wellbeing and the growing challenges in this area for many rural inhabitants, particularly farmers. Another concern is the casting aside of a wealth of knowledge and experience, very much encapsulated in the last Early Retirement Scheme in Ireland demanding that farmers intending to retire under the scheme must 'cease agricultural activity forever' (ERS 3, 2007). This essentially pushed farmers to re-evaluate their self-worth upon retirement.

In short, we see this as amounting to a very short-sighted attempt to address the 'greying' of the farming population by taking a path, that may be successful on one level, but which may have major ramifications on many others due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of a 'farmer's world'.

Indeed, back in the 1970s, the late Dr Patrick (Packie) Commins stressed that farm retirement policy should not focus on 'economic objectives' alone, and should 'not ignore possible social consequences or wider issues of human welfare'. Unfortunately, however, such recommendations appear to have fallen on deaf ears over the past decades as there has been little or no regard given to the older farmer's emotional wellbeing in later life due to an excessive preoccupation with financial incentives to encourage the process of farm transfer and retirement.

"Farmers Don't Retire"

We conducted research with a comprehensive, nationally representative sample of the Irish farming population aged 55 and over, consisting of 633 questionnaires and 19 in-depth one-to-one qualitative interviews with farmers across a range of diverse regions, farm sizes and operations. What was extremely interesting in the findings is that money becomes a secondary consideration when it comes to retirement time, or time to pass on the farm to the next generation. Older farmers displayed a very strong attachment to their land and to their animals, and this bond was anything but easy to break.

Furthermore, we found that older farmers resist stepping aside from the farm on the basis of an anticipated loss of the recognition and social status that has accompanied their position as an active, skilled and productive farmer amongst their peers in the farming community. In fact, there appears to be a cultural expectation within the farming community that 'farmers don't retire', and those who do, are generally perceived to have a defeatist attitude or do so as they have no option due to ill health. Such findings indicate that the senior generation's reluctance and indeed resistance to alter the status quo of the existing management and ownership structure of the family farm and retire is undoubtedly strong within the farming community.

Hence the idea that tax exemptions, penalties or a new form of Early Retirement Scheme (ERS) will be a catalyst to disentangle such a bond is naïve and shows a real lack of understanding of the mindset and mannerisms of older farmers and the deeply embedded relationship they have with their farms.

Soft Issues are Hard Issues

Policy must not forget about, and disregard the older generation of the farming community when devising generational renewal in agriculture strategies, as it is this generation who ultimately have the power to decide whether intergenerational farm transfer occurs or not. Farming is a way of life for many of them and there can be detrimental consequences to their emotional wellbeing if they are cut off from their daily routines on the farm.

The so-called 'soft issues' i.e. the emotional and social issues involved, are more often than not the issues that distort and dominate the older generation's decisions on the future trajectory of the farm. Such issues have resulted in intractable challenges for succession and retirement policy over the past forty years. These really are the 'hard issues' in creating an age-diverse farming population.

Furthermore, the loss of older farmers from the farming sector can also create critical shortages of experienced personnel, which in turn can have negative effects on farm performance. The older generation hold an invaluable store of locally specific tacit and lay knowledge developed over years of regularized interaction and experience working on the family farm, that the younger generation have not yet accumulated. Such 'soil-specific human capital' as it is referred to in academic literature, is not easily transferable, communicated or learnable, and as a result, the family farm may be left in the hands of a young, inexperienced farmer, unable to make competent management decisions without the continued guidance and advice of the senior generation.

A cultural shift on the age-old problem of a 'greying' farming population requires well-informed and creative policy interventions and strategies that better understand the 'language of farming', and how painful it is for farmers to let go of their farms and their ingrained productivist self-image in later life in order to effect change.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations are set forth in our research geared specifically towards allowing older farmers to maintain and sustain normal day to day activity and behaviour on their farms in later life, whilst also 'releasing the reins' to allow for the necessary delegation of managerial responsibilities and ownership of the family farm to their successors.

These include devising 'farmer-sensitive' policy design and implementation. The services of a certified Farm Succession Facilitator, trained in accordance with an international best practice model, such as the one offered by the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) in the U.S.A. is also recommended. This could open lines of intergenerational communication within family farm households.

The International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) has been spearheading farm succession efforts across the U.S.A. since 1990. Previously coordinated by its founder John R. Baker, Attorney at Law at the Beginning Farmer Centre, Iowa State University and Co-Director of the International FARMTRANSFERS Project, and now by David Baker, Director of Iowa State University's Beginning Farmer Centre and Joy Kirkpatrick, Farm Succession Specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Dairy Profitability, the organization aims to support the sustainable transfer of farm businesses from one generation to the next as well as new entrants into farming.

One of the key activities of the IFTN is that they offer a 20-hour training programme on the various elements of farm transition and succession planning for professionals working with farmers who are interested in becoming a Certified IFTN Farm Succession Coordinator/Facilitator. A Certified Farm Succession Coordinator/Facilitator's role is not to come up with instant solutions, but instead they help guide and support families through the steps of the farm transfer planning process in an unbiased manner, directing them to the resources and strategies they need to achieve their shared vision and unique needs for continuing the farm operation into the future.

The establishment of a national voluntary organisation that represents the needs of the senior generation of the farming community, equivalent to that of younger people in rural Ireland. In the Irish case, that's Macra na Feirme. Such recommendations are directed at policy makers and key stakeholders who have the means and ability to deliver future interventions and programmes that sensitively deal with problematic issues surrounding this complex and highly topical area that is generational renewal.

There is still a perception out there that farmers don't retire because they have too 'easy access to direct payments' and accordingly continue to farm into their later years in order to maintain these payments. However it is not until policy can finally accept, and more importantly understand the psyche of the older farmer and the fact that their identity and self-worth are very much bound up in their farms, that generational renewal strategies will have the desired effect.

If policy continues to ignore the various human factors governing the behaviour patterns and attitudes of older farmers facing the 'twin processes' of farm succession and retirement, then there will continue to be extraordinary socio-economic challenges for younger people aspiring to pursue farming as a career. The economic and emotional needs of both generations must be catered for, and ideally policy for generational renewal should encapsulate intergenerational values and considerations. This may encourage the senior generation to approach the transition with greater enthusiasm and acceptance.

Anyone who considers such recommendations to be too idealistic, should remember that we all inevitably have to face the prospect of letting go of our professional tasks and ties in our old age. No one can avoid ageing and as our research in Conway et al. (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019) has identified, most elderly farmers opt to remain active and productive on their farms in later life instead of retiring.

Living Rurally - Climate, Migration, Culture and Transition

Ruralization: Finding Frontiers for Rural Regeneration

By Aisling Murtagh and Maura Farrell

The decline trend can also result in an age disparity, with rural demographics dominated by older populations rather than younger people. The age profile of European farmers in particular is an issue with a high proportion nearing retirement.

Repositioning rural areas in response to problems of decline means overcoming complex, interconnected challenges. The RURALIZATION project is exploring innovative ways to overcome issues of rural regeneration and support generational renewal. Aisling Murtagh and Maura Farrell from the Rural Studies Cluster, Discipline of Geography, National University of Ireland, Galway tell us more.

The Need for Rural Regeneration

The challenge of rural population decline and need for rural communities to become more attractive places to live and work is a concern for rural people and policymakers alike. It is discussed in policy statements such as the 2016 Cork 2.0 Declaration 'A Better Life in Rural Areas' and the 2018 OECD Edinburgh Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation. With a smaller population to serve, decline can threaten the development or preservation of services such as public transport and healthcare. Additionally, it makes new services, such as broadband provision, less economically viable to develop the supporting infrastructure creating a digital divide.

The decline trend can also result in an age disparity, with rural demographics dominated by older populations rather than younger people. The age profile of European farmers in particular is an issue with a high proportion nearing retirement. Limited job and education opportunities, alongside a social scene that lacks the vibrancy of cities can make rural places not just unattractive but also an unrealistic option for youth.

A downward spiral of decline starts to emerge. Nonetheless, when youth leave rural areas, it isn't necessarily forever, but realising the ambition to return can generally only occur if there are the work or entrepreneurship opportunities needed to sustain a livelihood. Farming as an option for rural youth has challenges stacked against it. Becoming a farmer can look unattractive compared to better paid occupations that offer potential for greater work-life-balance. But even beyond these considerations high farmland prices often means high capital investment is required to gain land access. Getting into farming through the family farm is the most realistic option, but this too is fraught with difficulties as many European countries face on-going succession and inheritance challenges.

Rural Advantages

Despite these issues however, rural areas have many attractive qualities that can appeal to new settlers, such as lower house prices, a clean environment and abundant places to connect with nature. This can attract commuters working in urban areas and temporary residents where the rural offers a second home or a highly quality of life. This is true especially in picturesque rural places or those close to cities. Nonetheless, this leads to challenges and some controversy, where those living in rural areas are less interconnected, eroding the strength of social bonds within the community. In areas where housing is not in plentiful supply, it can also make living there less affordable for existing residents.

For entrepreneurs, while basing their life in a rural area may have advantages similar to those mentioned above, doing business in rural areas can face challenges. In particular, access to appropriately skilled staff may be a barrier. Networks are crucial to doing business, whether working with others directly or through gaining access to key advice and information from being close to others doing similar things. Digital connectivity can help overcome this, but rural broadband quality can mean a divide remains.

The Bigger Picture

Looking outside rural areas themselves, there are also bigger issues that create a need for rural regeneration. From the European to global level, more and more people live in urban areas and this trend is expected to continue. But the urbanisation trend does not mean rural areas are a less important part of our society and economy. Indeed, for more balanced development it is essential that rural decline is averted and rural areas are revived to their fullest potential. This must all happen while supporting environmental sustainability and social inclusivity. The Europe 2020 strategy talks about how Europe must transform and take charge of the future direction of development towards 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'.

The Challenge of the Challenges: Reinventing the Rural

How we effectively overcome these many challenges remains a difficult question, while such challenges are complex and interconnected. Innovation to create new products and businesses, as well as improve productivity in the existing economy is thought to be crucial. This might be in sectors more traditionally associated with rural areas such as agriculture and forestry, as well as new sectors, such as the creative industries and bio-economy. But this relies on a number of different kinds of resources, both physical and human. It needs entrepreneurial skills that can for example explore green innovations to sustainably harness value from but also protect rural natural resources. Broadband can unlock economic opportunities for rural areas, opening new ways of doing things, such as remote working, or ways to improve productivity, such as 'smart' farming applications. New opportunities can then impact on the decisions of young people to return to their rural roots, while also attracting rural newcomers.

The challenge also goes beyond economic considerations, with attention to the social and cultural aspects of life that enhance how attractive rural places are also needing consideration. For example, where a critical mass of audiences is not available to sustain a cinema or theatre, transitory cultural spaces such as community festivals can add a dynamism to rural life.

Regeneration cannot aim to simply reverse what has declined either, with rural youth being a prime example. For instance, providing incentives to rural youth to relocate to rural areas is not regenerative if economic opportunities are not available for them to pursue, whether as employees or through self-employment. To create rural jobs in areas where existing industries have declined may involve exploring new economic sectors capitalising on previously untapped or under-utilised local assets. Or it may involve innovation that repositions an existing, declining industry or development of new resources that can avert decline.

A Counterforce: RURALIZATION

We need to reposition rural in response to the challenge of decline. We need to support circumstances that can drive regeneration creating attractive rural areas providing exciting opportunities to new rural generations. We need to develop novel options for policy makers and practical tools for rural actors.

The RURALIZATION project has been set up to look at ways to overcome rural regeneration issues and support generational renewal. RURALIZATION develops a novel perspective for rural areas to trigger a process of ruralisation as a counterforce to urbanisation. This is development towards a new rural frontier offering new rural generations stimulating opportunities for economic and social sustainability. The project is funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme and over the next four years it will develop knowledge, define instruments and strat-

egies that can support innovative rural policy making. In particular the project looks at the issues of access to land, new entrants into farming and newcomers to rural areas. RURALIZATION is concerned with farming, but also a wider range of sectors and cross-cutting activities that can lead to greater rural innovation, entrepreneurship and job opportunities.

Creating this new frontier is a complex task and RURALIZATION is designed to deal with this complexity. Rural areas are very different, from remote, peripheral places, to small rural towns and rural places close to urban areas. Decline is not universal; some rural places show promising trends. Rural places are not challenged or resourced in the same way. What works in one place may not in another. Policy interventions need to better reflect this difference making solutions specific to particular places. RURALIZATION will find inspiring examples of innovative instruments and strategies that support rural regeneration in areas that deviate from the general trend of rural decline. RURALIZATION will endeavour to understand how these innovations work in these places, but also look at how to make them transferable to other contexts. RURALIZATION will include a diverse range of rural area types in our research and compare like with like. The project will also use innovative methods to assess the dreams of youth for rural futures, which will then feed into a proposed set of renewed policy options.

Stay Connected

RURALIZATION brings together project partners and wider stakeholders that come from different perspectives yet hold complementary knowledge. This 'multi-actor approach' extends from the project partners directly involved, to the research carried out. The diverse project partnership of 18 organisations across 12 European countries includes universities, research institutes, SMEs and other practitioners such as five members of the Access to Land Network.

The project will find innovative practices that improve rural jobs and opportunities and develop detailed case studies on these. Finding and developing these innovative practices needs the involvement of stakeholders, such as farmers, young people and rural entrepreneurs. RURALIZATION is currently building a database to help connect with key stakeholders. To join the database, sign up here: https://www.ruralization.eu/contacto

For more information on RURALIZATION please visit: https://www.ruralization.eu/

The opinions expressed in this article reflect only the authors' views and in no way reflect the European Commission's opinions. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Best Immigration Practice can help Alleviate Rural Depopulation

By María Coto Sauras

Depopulation is one of the main challenges for Spanish rural areas. A large part of the rural territory has population densities of less than 10 inhabitants per km² , with just 5 inhabitants per km² in the most critical areas, the so-called 'Spanish Lapland'.

Many rural areas suffer depopulation, while there is a need for newcomers to a country to be accommodated and given purposeful activities. Some lessons from a thoughtful approach to better integration of immigrants in rural Spain, with lessons too for rural development more generally.

Depopulation is one of the main challenges for Spanish rural areas. A large part of the rural territory has population densities of less than 10 inhabitants per km² , with just 5 inhabitants per km² in the most critical areas, the so-called 'Spanish Lapland'.

Even if it is not a recent phenomenon, a particularly critical point has been reached in recent years. Depopulation is increasingly prominent in the political and social agenda, while numerous proposals, plans and studies launched.

The increase in immigration is considered to be one of the most significant challenge to have occurred in Spain in recent years. However, the extent of this immigration and its impact varies considerably from one area to another. In the case of inland rural areas, where great demographic change is taking place, the impact of foreign nationals is marked, due to the capacity of these spaces to retain these people in the medium and long term – one of the elements upon which demographic sustainability and revitalisation depends.

In these rural areas, the influx of foreign populations is primarily driven by specific and highly localised labour requirements or by the existence of reception programmes or initiatives linked to the fight against depopulation.

The promotion of the settlement of immigrant population in these sparsely populated areas is seen as a double opportunity: rejuvenation and revitalisation of these areas and development and improvement of the quality of life of the groups that settle there.

The experience of CEPAIM: Family Units and Job Opportunities

Among the range of initiatives to support the integration of immigrant populations into rural areas, it is worth highlighting the experience of the *Nuevos Senderos* (New Paths) programme of Cepaim Foundation.

Through this project, the foundation aims to provide a simultaneous response to the problem of depopulation experienced by different rural territories, as well as to the social and employment difficulties of many immigrants, who are also at risk of social exclusion in urban environments.

In view of this challenge, Cepaim promotes the geographical mobility of immigrant individuals and families from urban areas to rural areas in which they can play a role in revitalisation and development.

Cepaim's action is aimed at the immigrant population through 'family unit integration itineraries'. It works with the family nucleus on the understanding that *the*

social inclusion of the whole family strengthens and consolidates the inclusion of each of its members.

At the same time, the foundation is recruiting and selecting municipalities with *less than 10,000 inhabitants that have the capacity to offer real employment opportunities in either the public or private sector for one or more members of the family unit.*

After its long trajectory (Nuevos Senderos it is the continuation of Senderos, a Project that has been launched in 2002), CEPAIM team can highlight some key factors.

- The involvement of *mayors* in the process of integrating a family into a municipality, sharing information in both directions to understand the impressions and evaluations of each party involved, is considered fundamental.
- The *work that is carried out with families in the centres of 'origin'*, both in preparation for change and in selection, is also essential. Respecting the timetables of each family and supporting the evaluation and analysis of the pros and cons is essential to avoid hasty decisions and to maintain motivation. These actions favour both the family's social and employment integration into rural areas and their capacity to take risks.

It is essential to highlight the need for *follow-up and accompaniment of families* in this process of change, in order to detect any difficulties they may encounter in their new home and to support them as far as possible in resolving them.

Successful integration: some conclusions

The success of an intervention with these characteristics requires a long and studied process. The prior selection of people who are going to participate in the resettlement, as well as the host territories, takes on particular importance. In this sense, one of the key factors is the motivation of participants.

- In the case of immigrants, moving to a specific rural environment is done through a planned and meditated process, which allows advance knowledge of the particularities of the rural society and provides specific motivation for style of life there.
- In the case of the municipalities, openness and their ability to offer the person who integrates the necessary resources, together with the degree of awareness of the population regarding the need to be welcoming of new settlers and accepting of the differences is important.

In any case, these aspects can be reinforced through bidirectional efforts in which the focus is not only on the integrating immigrants but also on the host population.

The in-depth knowledge of the municipalities (resources, possibilities, etc.) on the part of the development agents taking part in these interventions is vital. It will engender the trust of the indigenous population concerning the people who are integrating, while effectively balancing the needs of the people who wish to settle and those of the municipality, guaranteeing a higher degree of success.

It is also important to stress the need to work hand-in-hand with local authorities and to influence, through training and awareness-raising, the openness and support of various *key players* (local police, teachers, local development agents, etc.) who can act as mediators in the integration process.

These are long processes in which it is essential that the immigrant knows the environment to be settled in. Likewise, experiences such as Cepaim's, emphasise the need for *all the members of the family unit* to follow a training programme covering a range of issues.

Invest in Rural Regions for Everyone's Benefit

The integration of immigrant population in rural areas must be conceived as one option in the search for solutions to deal with the phenomenon of rural depopulation – but it is not the only solution. Such interventions must be carried out *within a framework of integral planning aimed at tackling the different problems* – services, employment possibilities, communications and so on – confronting these areas and that are broadly part of the cause of the depopulation process. Others

relate to a range of cultural factors that may make the advantages of cities outweigh their disadvantages.

Apart from encouraging the arrival of new settlers, *it is also important to create the conditions for the indigenous population to want to stay, and even for encourage some of those who left to return*.

The fact that the installation of migrant population is understood as one piece of a broader and more comprehensive strategy necessarily implies networking and coordination with multiple agencies and institutions active in the same territory or with the same population.

More more see the longer report published by AEIDL, the European Association for Information on Local Development, written by María Coto Sauras.

Read this article in Spanish

Culture as Connection in Rural Europe

By Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins

Rural and urban places do have different cultural characteristics. Urban museums and malls are hard to replicate at village scale, just as farms and outdoor festivals find little space in the city. But, rather than seeing separate spheres, we should ask: How can rural and urban cultural offers be connected for mutual benefit?

Rural places are peopled places – and people have and need cultural life. Culture can include heritage and the arts, the activities we enjoy, the food we eat, and the language we speak. Since these things matter in all our lives, they matter for all the places where we live, too. But talk about rural renaissance can often miss making cultural connections.

From an urban perspective, it can be all too easy to imagine that rural culture is less dynamic, creative, or important. There are plenty of tired stereotypes about *un*cultured 'country bumpkins', and plenty of other perceptions of rural Europe as empty green space. Policymakers do remember rural people, but often as problems who leave, or grow ill and old. Meanwhile, important work towards sustainable agriculture and ecosystems can sometimes forget that rural lives are rich beyond the soil.

Rural and urban places do have different cultural characteristics. Urban museums and malls are hard to replicate at village scale, just as farms and outdoor festivals find little space in the city. But, rather than seeing separate spheres, we should ask: How can rural and urban cultural offers be connected for mutual benefit? We know that digital technology, media and mobility are already blurring rural-urban boundaries. What kinds of new cultural connections could be possible? We should also remember that culture can segregate, with different groups having divergent visions, and tensions and prejudices sometimes flaring. How can we find solutions to cultural *dis*connections?

ROBUST – Connecting research to practice in rural Europe

Fostering rural-urban dialogue calls for connections within and between regions. The Horizon 2020 ROBUST project brings researchers together with practitioners in a network of 'Living Labs' across eleven European countries. Four Living Labs – Mid Wales (UK), Tukums (Latvia), Lucca (Italy), and Styria (Austria) – have joined together to share what we are learning about cultural connections. After engaging with regional stakeholders, workshopping ideas, and exploring good practice, we recently released our mid-term report, highlighting three key lessons from our work so far.

Lesson 1: Coordinating cultural life is a practical regional strategy

Galleries, theatres and other cultural attractions in cities tend to be well-known, and they benefit from a central location and plenty of potential visitors. The cultural offer in rural places is more dispersed, and often 'off the beaten track'. Coordination is a practical way to address the disconnect. Put simply, coordinating cultural life involves connecting activities, events, and the people who enjoy them. Coordination could be as straightforward as an online events calendar, or as complex as a regional cultural strategy – like the one currently being developed in Tukums.

Tukums is a predominantly rural region within reach of Riga. The region's cultural attractions, activities and events are spread around multiple institutions and parish administrations. Because these local organisations have largely worked independently, the cultural sector in Tukums suffers from fragmentation. In response, stakeholders are now coming together to co-create the first ever cultural strategy for the region, supported by the municipal government. The aim is to reduce duplication, share resources, and build collaboration across the sector. Work began by identifying institutions to involve and mapping stakeholders. Progress so far shows that success comes down to a positive process for collaboration, including sharing good will, choosing an appropriate network structure, enabling dialogue, and sharing decision-making.

Lesson 2: Enhancing local and regional identity can build bridges

Identity differences between rural and urban areas can be hard to overcome. For example, rural residents in the shadow of a large or dominant city can feel left out of a shared regional identity. At worst, when identities conflict or turn parochial, 'other' people can be actively excluded. Building cultural bridges between rural and urban involves enabling positive, inclusive connections between people and places, and balancing what makes localities distinctive with what can be shared. Cultural activities can help enhance a sense of shared rural-urban identity across a region – as blossoming creativity in Styria shows.

When administrative boundaries changed a decade ago, residents in the new Metropolitan Area of Styria found themselves part of a region they did not automatically identify with. Graz is Austria's second city, with vibrant cultural amenities and a growing creative sector. By contrast, the surrounding region is rural, with small towns and remote villages. To build real cultural connections and help everyone feel part of cultural life in the region, Graz cannot be the centre of all activity. Festivals and the arts are two important ways that an attractive cultural offer is being grown in rural areas, too. For example, the La Strada festival, founded in Graz in 1997, now hosts productions within a 40km radius. CULTURE 24 began through a LEADER local action group, and works to network artists and creative professionals across rural locations. These examples show how connections can be made in both directions: La Strada started from the city and spread outwards; CULTURE 24 started from the country and forged links to the city.

Lesson 3: Valorising rural culture is part of sustainable futures

If rural places are to be attractive to live in, work in, and visit, then rural culture needs to be valorised. That means celebrating rural culture as a valuable part of the present, with a role to play in the future. When rural culture is undervalued, opportunities and initiatives that sustain local livelihoods can be easily overlooked. And, when rural culture is seen as stuck in the past, culture's role in sustainable futures gets closed off. The two lessons above already suggest ways to keep rural cultural life *alive* – the Northern Tuscan province of Lucca offers another bite.

Tuscany is synonymous with its landscapes and cuisine. The vistas of historical villas, hillside vineyards and olive groves that make Lucca so charming to visit were made by people, and need people to sustain them. Unfortunately, agricultural land has been increasingly abandoned in recent decades. In Lucca, growing local food is vital to conserving landscapes, maintaining traditional architecture, and keeping cultural knowledge alive. To develop a future vision for a sustainable region, local stakeholders are using food to profile what rural culture has to offer. By celebrating local food culture, market demand can be grown – along with opportunities for innovation. Local gastronomy festivals and events are one way to celebrate culture through food and show why rural skills and knowledge matter. But, one festival won't help if rural culture is neglected for the rest of the year. Hence, new food trail initiatives in Lucca are developing year-round links between producers, retailers and cultural venues.

Learning our lessons

From a coordination strategy, to an arts festival, to a gastronomic trail, these three lessons each offer different ways to strengthen cultural connections between rural and urban places. They also have some practical elements in common. First, to make connections happen, the right stakeholders need to be found and brought together. Second, the strongest connections are mutually beneficial – in other words, it goes both ways. Finally, keeping up connections takes forward planning, whether that means a structure, a strategy or a vision for the future. The examples above show that cultural connections matter. The work ahead is putting learning into practice.

Transition Presents an Unprecedented Opportunity for Rural Revival

By Eamon O' Hara

Concerns about climate change and environmental degradation have become an important new driver of community-led social innovation, covering diverse areas such as community energy, car-sharing and cycling schemes to community gardens, waste management and recycling, and sustainable housing.

After ignoring the warnings of scientists for years, it seems society is finally starting to wake up to the fact that a deep transition to a low carbon society is necessary. What will this mean for rural areas and community initiatives? And what's already happening in these places? Eamon O Hara of ECOLISE tells us more.

Beyond Cities

In the past, cities were often characterised as the "locomotives of economic development, and rural areas as carriages being pulled along in the wake of the great modern metropolis". However, as established models of societal and economic organization come under greater scrutiny in the context of climate and ecological breakdown, the potential of rural areas to deliver innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions is gaining in recognition.

Research projects such as SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) and networks such as ECOLISE are uncovering the fact that many thousands of rural communities are already engaged in a process of transitioning to a more sustainable, equitable future, where the focus on localization across multiple sectors is helping to revitalize local economies, improve wellbeing and quality of life, while also greatly reducing climate and ecological impacts.

Concerns about climate change and environmental degradation have become an important new driver of community-led social innovation, covering diverse areas such as community energy, car-sharing and cycling schemes to community gardens, waste management and recycling, and sustainable housing.

Community-Led Initiatives

The scale of projects undertaken varies considerably, depending on the local context and the experience of the community. In the community energy sector, for example, this can range from small-scale neighbourhood projects, such as the Energy Lucioles, a project in Brittany, France, to install 150 m2 of solar panels on a public building, to much larger projects, such as the transformation of the Danish island of Samsø (population 4 000) into a carbon-neutral net exporter of renewable energy.

These community-led initiatives have important environmental impacts, but are also helping to revive local economies and build social capital and resilience. The EU-funded TESS project, which assessed a sample of 63 community-based climate initiatives across Europe, highlighted their "large potential for climate change mitigation" but it also found that, "at least as significant as the direct carbon savings that many of these initiatives are achieving are the wider environmental impacts, the awareness-raising, the social co-

hesion, the creation of local livelihoods and retention of wealth in local economies and the feelings of empowerment that can come through working together to bring about change."

While it is difficult to quantify the number of existing initiatives, recent estimates by ECOLISE suggest there are around 1 200 Transition Town initiatives, 15 000 ecovillages and over three million permaculture practitioners driving community-led sustainability projects across the globe. Specifically in Europe, there are also an estimated 2 500 community energy initiatives, 1 500 Slow Food communities (focused on preserving traditional and regional cuisine and encouraging the farming of plants, seeds, and livestock characteristic of local ecosystems) and about 7 000 community-supported agriculture schemes feeding over a million citizens.

The Policy Practice Gap

However, despite this positive momentum, there is a real concern that policy is falling behind and not keeping pace with developments on the ground. Barriers and constraints are increasingly evident, often due to a disconnection between local, grassroot responses and policies and programmes developed at other levels.

In the absence of a supportive policy environment, there is a real danger that the opportunity for wider community engagement and social innovation will be lost, making it increasingly difficult to achieve positive change at the local level. The challenge, therefore, is to create a more favourable enabling environment:

- providing capacity building and tools for community planning;
- removing legislative and administrative barriers;
- integrating the use of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) with other EU and national funds;
- promoting opportunities to leverage private financing.

Learning from Denmark and Scotland

Some countries and regions are already making good progress in this regard, providing important insights as to how different elements of an enabling framework can be constructed. In Denmark, for example, where 70- 80% of existing wind turbines are community-owned and the rate of renewable energy generation by communities is one of the highest globally, we can clearly see the impact of supportive legislation on the community energy sector.

The Scottish government has also been supporting community-led climate action since 2008, with many positive benefits

The Scottish government's Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) provides grants and support for community-led projects that reduce local carbon emissions. Since its inception in 2008, the CCF has provided grants totalling £66.2 million to almost 1 000 projects in 549 communities across Scotland.

The projects incorporate a diverse range of activities: from community energy to energy efficiency improvements, to low-carbon travel options and community schemes to tackle waste. The current programme runs from 2018 to 2020 and provides grants of up to £ 150 000 per organisation, per year.

Analysis of data from 132 projects supported in the 2012-2015 period shows a total estimated lifetime emissions reduction of 179 796 tonnes of CO2, with an actual reduction during the projects of 54 209 tonnes of CO2. CCF-funded projects were shown to have many additional positive environmental, social and economic outcomes, including engaging with a total of 78 835 people, creating 188 full-time jobs, recycling 6 000 tonnes of waste and converting 45 000 m^2 of unused land into growing spaces. Participating communities are connected via the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN), a network of committed community organisations across Scotland engaged in activities to reduce carbon emissions. For more see Keep Scotland Beautiful

Deep Transition is Coming

As we approach the implementation of the Paris Agreement from 2020, and a new round of EU programming from 2021, all against a backdrop of rising public discontent with regard to government inaction on climate change, it now seems likely that we are finally moving into a period of deeper transformation,

as called for by scientists and climate campaigners for many years.

Communities and actors in rural areas are already positioning themselves to be at the forefront of this transformation, but more must be done in order to avert the risk of, once again, being pulled along in the wake of the great urban locomotives.

ECOLISE is the European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability.

Radical Old Ideas Gaining Ground in New Rural America

By Karen Hansen-Kuhn

Even by total rural population, the numbers are surprising: Texas has the most rural residents, at 3.8 million, followed by North Carolina and Pennsylvania. It's easy to see that those states, far from the red state stereotype, are politically diverse.

There are clichés of what rural America is: white, conservative and climate change denying. As so often is the case, the truth is more complex. There are opportunities too in the difficulties climate change presents, for rural communities to engage with the topic – and with each other. IATP's Rural climate dialogues, the work policy makers from heartland states are putting into the farm bill of rights, all of which can give heft to the green new deal movement, show how the countryside can innovate and lead on the matters that matter most.

Simple Myths and Rural Realities

One of the curious stereotypes of rural America is that it is driven by old fashioned, out of touch white men, mostly farmers, who reject change and long for a past when their choices were simpler. Like any generalization, there are elements of truth in that story, for some people, at some times, but it misses the boat both on that past and the present. Some of the most radical, comprehensive proposals today are emerging in rural economies, firmly grounded in a history of transformative change.

While farming has been the backbone of American rural economies for decades, even centuries, the current reality is more complex. Bryce Oates grapples with this situation in a useful article on measuring rurality, informed by census data. To start with, he points out that the states with the highest percentages of rural residents are Maine (home of Rep. Chellie Pingree, see below), Vermont (home of Sen. Bernie Sanders) and West Virginia.

Even by total rural population, the numbers are surprising: Texas has the most rural residents, at 3.8 million, followed by North Carolina and Pennsylvania. It's easy to see that those states, far from the red state stereotype, are politically diverse. In many states, the exodus of young people and deaths from an aging population have been matched or exceeded by inflows of immigrants, as well as urban people seeking affordable housing and calmer communities in nearby areas. Rural areas are also economically diverse. Farming is an important sector in most areas, but it's far from the only one, as rural economies employ more people in manufacturing, government services recreation and mining. Interestingly, the top economic sector is "not specialized," again reflecting the inadequacy of simplistic categories.

It is still true, however, that unemployment and poverty rates are generally higher in rural than urban areas. In addition to jobs, access to healthcare and infrastructure, including broadband, are concerns across the country. And the farm economy is in deep crisis, struggling with years of overproduction and low prices, and now the enormous market uncertainty caused by Trump's trade skirmishes with China.

The Green New Deal

The Green New Deal, famously initiated by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the student-led Sunshine Movement, calls for a visionary new approach to climate and justice, one that at least initially didn't spell out a clear approach to rural economies or farming. Since then, several important initiatives have emerged

to broaden the Green New Deal to focus on regenerative agriculture and farm justice. These include a letter led by Friends of the Earth endorsed by the National Family Farm Coalition, Pesticide Action Network of North America and 300 food, farm and consumer organizations, and a statement by more than 150 scientists on the need for agroecological solutions in the Green New Deal.

A few months ago, when I first mentioned the Green New Deal to a European colleague, he assumed I meant a New Green Deal, i.e., a new approach to environmental protection. But the Depression era New Deal it references emerged from a powerful collaboration between rural and urban Americans. It was not only a new government public works program to employ people and build national monuments, it was a frontal assault on the notion that markets would be self-correcting. Clearly, that approach failed to reach all Americans, especially people of color, but it was a significant shift in public policy and thinking. As New England organic farmer and thought leader Elizabeth Henderson explains in an article on agriculture and the Green New Deal, it was also the genesis of a system of supply management and parity pricing for agriculture that continued well into the 1980s. Today, she writes,

"For Sale" signs have replaced "Dairy of Distinction" on the last two dairy farms on the road I drive to town. The farm crisis of the 1980s that never really went away has resurfaced with a vengeance. In 2013, aggregate farm earnings were half of what they were in 2012. Farm income has continued to decline ever since. The moment is ripe for the movement for a sustainable agriculture to address the root causes."

Rural Climate Dialogues in a Polarised Era

Before we get to the elements of what those new policies could be, it's important to consider how to rebuild trust and a sense of community. One of the defining features of the Trump era is extreme polarization, both between political parties and between urban dwellers and "flyover country." Many initiatives are underway to try to build bridges with rural communities.

One apparent point of disagreement has been on the threat of climate change. In Minnesota, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Jefferson Institute hosted Rural Climate Dialogues in four communities, followed by a statewide convening. These built new connections among participants and led to some concrete new initiatives, such as the development of a state program navigator report to help people connect with the right programs on energy, health care, agriculture, and natural resources. As Tara Ritter, one of the organizers, explains,

These Dialogues are built upon the belief that, although rural communities have a lot at stake when it comes to climate change, they are often overlooked in climate conversations, and policy tends to center on urban and suburban perspectives. In many communities, this has led to a culture of misinformation and confusion that prevents publicly supported policy from emerging.

The Rural Climate Dialogues use the Citizens Jury method for community problem solving and leadership development. This approach, which brings together a representative sample of the community to study an issue in-depth and generate a shared community response, provides a productive, educational and inclusive way to address challenges."

Grappling with the Big Issues: Climate Change, Corporate Concentration and Fair Prices

In addition to, or perhaps in preparation for, a Green New Deal, other new initiatives are emerging to confront the challenges of climate change, corporate concentration and fair prices. Maine Rep. Chellie Pingree, an organic farmer and a leader on good food and farm policy in Congress, introduced a new policy initiative outlining five priorities on climate change and agriculture.

These five priorities are

- making soil health a top priority;
- protecting existing farmland and keeping farmers on the land;
- supporting pasture-based livestock systems;

- boosting investments in on-farm renewable energy systems; and
- reducing food waste.

Congress remains mired in controversy on most issues, so it's hard to know if these ideas will move forward anytime soon, but there could be support for funding for some issues that bridge political divides, such as measures to strengthen soils and increase support for on-farm energy. Progress on those areas, in turn, could lead to a fuller inclusion of rural priorities in the Green New Deal vision.

Corporate concentration in agriculture has increased dramatically over the last few decades, decreasing farmers' bargaining power, as well as restricting choices for seeds and other inputs. What's new is that the issue is rising up to national debates in a variety of ways. R-CALF, a national ranchers' organization, along with four cattle-feeding ranchers from Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Wyoming filed a class action lawsuit alleging that, "the nation's four largest beef packers violated U.S. antitrust laws, the Packers and Stockyards Act, and the Commodity Exchange Act by unlawfully depressing the prices paid to American ranchers." Those firms control 80% of beef processing in the U.S.

A Farmers Bill of Rights

Those issues and others were front and center at a series of events organized by Family Farm Action in March in Storm Lake, Iowa. Farmers and their communities gathered to call on Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement a nine article Farmers Bill of Rights which would aspire to, among others actions, enforce fair market practices, restore country of origin labeling for meat, and improve natural resource conservation rules. Family Farm Action organized a rally, at which speakers pointed directly to the devastation of farm country caused by U.S. agricultural policy designed to support fewer and bigger agribusiness corporations rather than farmers themselves. They called on presidential candidates on the campaign trail in Iowa to respond later that afternoon at the Heartland Forum, sponsored by the *Huffington Post*, *Storm Lake Times*, Open Markets Action and the Iowa Farmers Union.

New ideas on corporate concentration are emerging in Congress as well, including a moratorium on further mergers of agribusinesses introduced by Sen. Cory Booker. That bill, which has been endorsed by more than 80 food and farm organizations from across the country, would also establish a commission including farmers and ranchers to examine the problem and recommend changes in antitrust laws. It is a good starting point and has helped to elevate the issue in the press and in the political debate.

Many of the new debates on food and farm policy across rural America, including on a Green New Deal for agriculture, are grounded in concepts of resiliency, equity, local democracy and transformation [listen to this great podcast by IATP's Ben Lilliston for more on this]. So, for example, climate change not only affects crops but also farmworkers, many of whom are immigrants and people of color confronting historic and current discrimination.

The solutions must involve concrete improvements in farmworkers' labor and other human rights, as well as energy efficient housing and access to health care for everyone. Initiatives to improve soil health and expand renewable energy must also consider exactly who benefits from increased investment and how those efforts can strengthen local control and the local tax base. So, while it's great to hear political leaders finally talking about regenerative agriculture, it's really exciting that so many farmers and rural communities are leading the way in debates on comprehensive approaches to deal with equity and climate. That's the real New Deal.

Contributors

Hannes Lorenzen

Hannes Lorenzen was senior adviser to the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg from 1985 to 2019. Before starting his career in the European institutions, he carried out research, coordination and evaluation work on rural development projects with the Technical Service of the German Government. On the international level Hannes Lorenzen is co-founder of Genetic Resources Action International (www.grain.org) and co-president of the European Rural Development Network Forum Synergies (www.forum-synergies.eu). He is also co-founder of PREPARE, the "Partnership for Rural Europe" network for Central and Eastern European Member States (www.preparenetwork.org), serving as chairman and president until 2016. He co-founded ARC2020 and is its president since 2016. Closer to home, Hannes chairs a local rural development organization on his home island of Pellworm in North Friesland, Germany, which works o organic farming, renewable energy production, soft tourism and nature protection projects in a local dimension.

Oliver Moore

DR. Oliver Moore is the communications director and editor-in-chief with ARC2020. He has a PhD in the sociology of farming and food, where he specialised in organics and direct sales. He is published in the International Journal of Consumer Studies, International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology and the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development. A weekly columnist and contributor with Irish Examiner, he also works for the sustainability NGO Cultivate in Ireland and lives in Cloughjordan ecovillage, where he is on the board of the Community owned farm. He lectures part time in the Centre for Co-operative Studies UCC.

Helene Schulze

Helene is a contributor and coordinator at ARC2020, co-director of the London Freedom Seed Bank and contributor for various other publications concerned with the intersections between food, agriculture and social justice. She recently completed a Master's degree in Environmental Governance at the University of Oxford. There she wrote her thesis on seed sovereignty and biodiversity conservation in the United Kingdom. Her work focuses on agroecology, (urban) food justice, experimental and participatory policy-making and art-science collaborations for expanding the reach and potential of the food movement.

Claire Bernardin

Claire Bernardin is a French agronomist who specialised in agroecology and sustainable food systems. She has volunteered abroad on organic farms and in various NGOs that work on sustainable rural development. To raise awareness about environmental issues among students, she worked as a biology and ecology teacher in an agricultural secondary school. She currently is an independent consultant mainly in the field of impact assessments, to help sustainable innovations thrive around France."

Sylvia Kay

Sylvia Kay joined TNI in 2011 as a researcher working on issues around land tenure, natural resource governance, and agricultural investment. She has written various studies and policy briefs for TNI on land and water grabbing, the role of public policy in rural development, and different models of agricultural investment. She coordinated the Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty alliance and is currently involved in a new European project on innovative land strategies for agroecology.

Paul Soto

Paul Soto is currently Senior Policy Expert of the ENRD Contact Point where he coordinates the Thematic Group on Smart Villages. He used to be Team Leader of the ENRD Contact Point and the FARNET Support Unit. He was previously involved in the LEADER Observatories and URBACT. He was co-author of the EC Guidance on CLLD and was the manager of a LEADER local action group in Spain during LEADER I and II. The

ENRD serves as a hub for exchange of information on how Rural Development policy, programmes, projects and other initiatives are working in practice and how they can be improved to achieve more.

Enrique Nieto

Enrique Nieto is Senior expert on Territorial Development policies of AEIDL (the European Association for Information on Local Development). In that role, he is engaged on the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) since 2015 where he currently coordinates the Thematic Group on Smart Villages and carries out analysis of rural development policies for the European Commission and other stakeholders. Enrique has also been the Quality Officer of the communication team of the LIFE Programme during the last 3 years.

Edina Ocsko

Edina Ocsko is founder and director of the E40 group. Edina has been working with EU-funded European projects for more than 15 years in the fields of rural, social and economic development. She has worked for UK LEADER+ and the ENRD (European Network for Rural Devleopment) Contact Point, including as a leader of thematic activities on Smart and Competitive Rural Businesses and Social Inclusion. Edina is Hungarian national currently living in Brussels.

Gianluca Brunori

Gianluca Brunori professor of Food Policy and Bioeconomy at Pisa University, department of Agriculture, Food and Environment. Research activities focus on rural development strategies, marketing of local food and sustainability of food systems. Editor-in-Chief of the Journal Agricultural and Food Economics. Since 2009 an expert for the European Commission for agricultural research policies. Now leads the DESIRA Horizon 2020 project.

Natasha Foote

Natasha is currently working on Mazi Farm, an agroforestry project in Greece, where she researches innovative biological techniques and runs their blog in between helping on the farm. She has previously worked with the Pesticide Action Network UK and the Fermes d'Avenir agroecology tour of France before she decided to get stuck into some practical farming experience. She holds a BSc in Biological Sciences from the University of Bristol and an MA in Environment, Development and Policy from the University of Sussex, where she worked on food issues and alternative approaches to food production.

Dr Shane Conway

Dr Shane Conway is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Research Cluster at NUI Galway. Shane's research interests are in Rural and Agricultural Geography, with a particular focus on generational renewal in agriculture, the human side of farming and rural sustainability. He has published widely in peer reviewed academic journals and is currently leading Ireland's participation in the International FARMTRANSFERS Project. Dr Conway is also a member of the National Rural Network (NRN) research team at NUI Galway, where he has initiated and led the design, development and implementation of a number of multi-method communication strategies being employed by the NRN to highlight and promote projects funded under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), such as EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. Shane is a member of the Whitaker and Ryan Institutes at NUI Galway as well as the European Network for Rural Development's (ENRD) Thematic Group on 'Smart Villages'. He is also on the judging panel of Ireland's National Farming for Nature Award (edited).

Dr Maura Farrell

Dr Maura Farrell is currently a full-time lecturer in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Research Unit at NUI Galway. Maura's teaching reflects her research specialism in Rural and Agricultural Geography and her interest in processes of social, cultural and economic change for rural inhabitants. Maura is currently the Principal Investigator on the National Rural Network (NRN) Project and the more recent Horizon 2020, RURALIZATION Project. Dr Farrell is extremely active outside university life, having been appointed to committees and organisations both nationally and internationally. These include an appointment by the Minister for Rural and Community Development to the Monitoring Committee for the Action Plan for Rural Development and by DG-AGRI to an evaluation and reflection group for the LEADER Programme.

Dr John McDonagh

Dr John McDonagh is a Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Research Unit at NUI Galway. John has published a large number of peer reviewed journal articles and reports, given a number of invited papers, keynote addresses and other conference papers. Dr McDonagh was Principal Investigator on the FP7 funded project DERREG (Developing Europe's Rural Regions in an era of Globalization) and he is currently Principal Investigator on the BUSK project – Building Shared Knowledge Capital, funded by the Northern Peripheries and Artic Programme (NPAP) and the EU. His other research involvement includes being part of the NUI Galway research team that are lead partners on WP8 of the H2020 IMAJINE project that began in Jan of 2017 and also part of the NUI Galway research team (one of four partners) awarded the contract to run the Irish National Rural Network (NRN).

Aisling Murtagh

Dr Aisling Murtagh is a Postdoctoral Researcher with the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project at the Rural Studies Cluster, School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway. She has worked on a number of rural development related national and European research projects in areas such as cultural and creative industries, short food supply chains and food cooperatives. Before joining the RURALIZATION project she worked as Research and Development Officer with the National Rural Network where her work particularly focused on the LEADER programme.

María Coto Sauras

María Coto Sauras works for the Red2Red consultancy, Spain. Red2Red work on public policy, sustainability and rural affairs. Maria is an agricultural engineer (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid), with a background in rural development and sociology. Maria has been involved in programming, monitoring and evaluation of numerous Rural Development Programmes financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). At the local level, she has taken part in various evaluations associated with LEADER and has supported the drawing up of local development strategies by Local Action Groups. She collaborates on a range of analyses and tasks and has integrated, as a national expert, the team of the European Commission's European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development. Currently, she directs the department of rural development at Red2red, where she coordinates, technical assistance to the Spanish National Rural Network, technical assistance to the Rural Development Programme of the Region of Murcia and the evaluation of the Rural Development Programme of Castile and León.

Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins

Dr Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins is a social researcher specialising in rural and regional development in the UK and Central Europe. Her current research is part of IMAJINE and ROBUST – two major consortium projects funded by the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and working across sixteen and eleven countries respectively. Based at the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Bryonny is an affiliate of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD), and was recently recognised as one of the Welsh Crucible's thirty emerging research leaders in Wales.

Eamon O' Hara

Eamon O' Hara initiated and co-founded ECOLISE. He has been managing EU projects and initiatives on local development and the environment since 1994, both in Ireland and in Brussels where he worked with AEIDL and the European LEADER Observatory. In 2007 he lead the external communications team for the EU LIFE programme, with responsibility for coordinating the activities of 15 experts in communications and the environment. Eamon holds a bachelor's degree in environmental science, a master's degree in climate change and sustainable development and post-graduate qualifications in business administration, project management and rural development. He now lives in France.

Karen Hansen-Kuhn

Karen Hansen-Kuhn has been working on trade and economic justice since the beginning of the NAFTA debate. She has published articles on U.S. trade and agriculture policies, the impacts of U.S. biofuels policies on food security, and women and food crises. She started to learn about the challenges facing farmers as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, where she worked with a rural cooperative. She was the international coordinator of the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), a U.S. multisectoral coalition promoting just and sustainable trade, until 2005. After that, she was policy director at the U.S. office of ActionAid, an international development organization. She holds a B.S. in International Business from the University of Colorado and a master's degree in International Development from The American University.

Agricultural and Rural Convention – ARC2020
38, rue Saint-Sabin
75011 Paris
FRANCE

www.arc2020.eu

Fondation de France

fph Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme

arc 2020 agricultural & rural convention