

TERRITORIALL.

the ESPON magazine

Rural areas: an eye to the future

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Editorial



Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC Director

Europe is mobilising all forces to pursue a recovery plan with grants and loans at the ultimate value of EUR 750 billion (NextGenerationEU). The Member States have submitted their proposals, but the implementation will be challenging. Bureaucratic obstacles, lack of administrative capacities and potential resurgence of the pandemic could derail the strategies. Do we have enough firepower for this war?

The Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, **Elisa Ferreira**, in her exclusive article for TerritoriALL, explains that we do. And the Minister of Environment and Climate Action of Portugal, **João Pedro Matos Fernandes**, outlines the efforts of the Portuguese Presidency to make Europe more resilient and socially responsible.

Part of this future is the long-term vision for rural areas, described by Vice President **Dubravka Šuica** in the opening interview of our thematic dossier. Ms Šuica aspires to capitalise on all European policies and the Conference on the Future of Europe to create new momentum for rural areas.

The linkages between the EU's cohesion policy and the rural areas are highlighted by two Members of the European Parliament. **Francisco Guerreiro**, Vice-Chair of the AGRI Committee, asks for a universal basic income to support an ecological transition. And **Andrei Novakov**, member of the REGI Committee, explains how rural areas can benefit from the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe, one of the largest programmes under the NextGenerationEU instrument.

The long-term vision for rural areas is just the beginning and not the end of the debate, underlines **Enrique Nieto**, from the ENRD. And this edition of TerritoriALL hosts articles that already carry some innovative ideas for nurturing the debate, such as the "Territorial Contract" put forward by **Stefano Palmieri** and **Peter Schmidt**, presidents of the ECO and NAT sections of the EESC, and the "Rural Semester" proposed by **Marion Eckardt**, President of the ELRD. **Eugenio Giani**, President of the Tuscany Region, comes up with ideas for how the potential of rural areas can be harnessed to make them suitable places for innovation opportunities, while **Guillaume Cros**, CoR rapporteur on CAP reform and agroecology, proposes a new legislative initiative to ensure resilient and sovereign food systems. **André Viola**, President of CEPLI asks the EU to ensure local

authorities will be actively involved in the implementation of the programmes and initiatives related to recovery.

'The pandemic has helped us to rediscover places that were left behind', says Professor **João Ferrão** in his inspiring interview. And two members of the ESPON Monitoring Committee, **Marie-Lorraine Dangeard** and **Jan Edøy**, provide interesting case studies from France and Scandinavia on ways that the rural areas can adapt in the new era.

Miguel Freitas, Professor at the University of Algarve, describes a new national programme to increase the resilience and valorisation of rural areas. Territorial resilience is a key word for recovery; And Professor **António Manuel Figueiredo** helps us to understand its implications for spatial planning.

So are rural areas the new places to be? That seems to be the conclusion of **Andreea China** from the ESPON EGTC and **Fatima Bacharel** from the Portuguese Ministry of Environment and Climate Action, who present the challenges but also the opportunities that the COVID-19 crisis triggered for rural areas, based on the recent joint policy brief by ESPON and the Portuguese Presidency.

The pandemic also heralds new opportunities for communication – as the launch of the TerritoriALL online magazine in May 2020 proves. **Agnes Monfret** and **Claudio Nichele** from the DG Regio and our colleagues from Interreg Europe, Interact and Urbact explain how the crisis made them change their models and priorities to help adapt to a digital era.

Furthermore, this third issue of TerritoriALL takes us through the challenges faced by European lake areas, the climate impact of spatial planning, the role of eco-clusters as governance tools, the approaches to involving older people in policymaking, new ESPON research to scale social consequences of the pandemic, the aspirations of the upcoming Slovenian Presidency and much more.

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The way into the future

The semester of the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union is based on five strategic pillars: a more resilient Europe, prepared to face crisis situations; a more socially responsible and solidarity-based Europe that cares for all, especially the most vulnerable; a green Europe moving towards climate neutrality; a more digital Europe that invests in innovation and is guided by ethical principles; and a global Europe sustained by multilateralism and international partnerships for the common good.

These five areas are aligned with the European Green Deal, but above all they are aligned with the future we want for Portugal and for the Portuguese people.

It is time to act.

Portugal was the first country to commit to carbon-neutrality by 2050, at the 22nd Conference of the Parties in Marrakech.

Our political guidance was structured by a long-term vision, but with immediate action, around three interconnected axes: the promotion of the territory and its habitats, the circular economy and the decarbonisation of society, and the energy transition; their ultimate goal is the creation of well-being and wealth.

The long-term vision emphasises the territorial dimension in all strategic documents, mirrored in the national programme for land use planning policies, the guidelines of the action plan for the circular economy, and the landscape transformation programme aimed at the vulnerable forest territories most affected by fires.

The target set by Portugal to achieve carbon neutrality implies reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 85 % in comparison with 2005 and ensuring a capacity for agricultural and forestry carbon sequestration of the order of 13 million tonnes. As Portugal is one of the countries potentially most affected by climate change, ensuring sustainable and resilient agriculture and forestry and combating desertification are the greatest challenges that we face. However, these challenges are also an opportunity to build the foundations of a 'new economy'.

We have the privilege of being part of a historical moment of transition between a linear economic model and a circular model, when consumption behaviour is changing. This involves a profound transformation of society as we know it.

The work developed with ESPON – European Territorial Observation Network during the Portuguese Presidency on the long-term vision for rural areas reinforces the scientific evidence on the positive impacts of a public policy framework anchored in the territory.



The territory must be at the centre of public policies. We cannot continue to produce sectoral policies as if the territory were just a homeland where phenomena happen, but rather we must perceive the territory as an agent of transformation. We must also know how to make the most of the territory, and be aware of its limits.

Experience has shown that, whenever we apply knowledge and innovation to processes and interventions, we gain in employment, social and territorial cohesion. We also gain in social justice and biodiversity. Overall, we gain in the balance between the well-being of our collective life and the enhancement of territorial values.

This is a process that involves challenges and, above all, opportunities, and only with everyone's contribution will it be possible to make this transition in a fair and cohesive way. We have no time to hesitate. This is the way into the future. The future is today.

João Pedro Matos Fernandes is the Minister for the Environment and Climate Action of Portugal



Elisa Ferreira

Now is the time for territorial, smart and ambitious investments!

Europe's response to the crisis is unfolding a once-in-a-generation investment to rebuild our common future. As a consequence, there are many new opportunities for territorial development. Teleworking and digitisation have been expanding over the last year, providing a tremendous opportunity to rethink our patterns of development.

In the recent past, a few large urban centres in Europe have acted as providers of growth and jobs, hubs of innovation, and service centres for the broader economy. This key role has been essential and welcome, but the new growth of teleworking and the new digital economy opens the door for smaller and medium-sized centres to equally play this role for their benefit and the benefit of their regions.

Could this be Europe's territorial moment? An opportunity for the next generation in our Union?

We must make sure that we put together substantial new investment levels, digital opportunities and territorial knowhow to redraw the economic map of Europe to the advantage of all our regions.

Half the funding of 2021-27 for a smarter and greener economy

In the 2021-27 cohesion programmes we are setting aside around half of the funding for ambitious investments in a smarter and greener economy. That is around 80 billion for innovation and digitisation, and around 100 billion in green projects. Investments in digital infrastructure, e-skills, e-inclusion and e-governance, business development, green public transport, renewable energy and smart grids, and

much more, mainly in the least developed parts of Europe.

These investments must be smart and they must be ambitious, but most of all, they must be territorially smart. In particular, there are two challenges.

Smart and green transformation starts with cities

Cities are centres of economic activity, of knowledge generation and innovation, of citizen and community engagement. Cities play a key role as service providers for the surrounding areas, and this is particularly crucial for small and medium-sized cities.

And this is why cities will have access to considerable

“ **Smart specialisation is not just for cities. It is highly relevant for rural areas. Here we need a new concept of innovation** ”

investments. In particular, 8% of the European Regional Development Fund - around 16 billion euros - is set aside for local development projects led by local decision makers. Moreover, we have created a new instrument: the European Urban Initiative, to finance innovations and experiments, scale up successful prototypes and disseminate lessons learnt.

The role of ESPON

This new model of development requires a territorial approach and territorial intelligence, to allow tailoring the technology to the needs of the area. ESPON with its evidence, and network of experts from across Europe can play a pivotal role, providing territorial data, innovative methods and territorial impact assessments, based on decades of experience in territorial analysis.

For example, ESPON's recent findings show that smart city solutions so far have been largely dominated by technology "push". This is something we need to balance with policies that support market and community "pull", reflecting the needs of the citizens.

Smart villages - and innovation in rural areas

Smart specialisation is not just for cities. It is highly relevant for rural areas. Here we need a new concept of innovation. Not just science-based innovation, but a broader narrative: Innovation to manage environmental transition and environmental risks; innovation to manage social transition, including demographic challenges.

Cohesion policy already has many successful examples of innovation building on local activities

and local culture. One particular opportunity is agri-food, since the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector tends to show lower levels of innovation than the overall economy.

And, since over 40% of EU rural regions are also cross-border regions, we must also remember

the new "Interregional Innovative Investments", that link innovation systems across borders.

Another welcome development is the "EU action for smart villages". Working with the local community, we seek to improve access to services, develop short food supply chains and develop renewable energy sources.

The European Commission encourages Member States to support Smart Villages by investing in broadband, IT training and SMEs outside the farming sector. We should strengthen small and medium-sized centres and rural areas.

All these areas, from rural innovation, and interregional innovation, to smart villages require investments. But it also requires something more: territorial intelligence. Every territory is a different world, with different conditions, different opportunities. Investments must be driven from the bottom up.

In essence, the territorial dimension will be crucial to ensure green and just recovery for all European regions. We rely on ESPON to provide evidence to support our effort to design a future for all places.



Elisa Ferreira is the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms

Thematic dossier





**Rural areas:
an eye to the future**

interview

Dubravka Šuica



A Long Term Vision for Rural Areas to turn changes into opportunities

Dubravka Šuica is coordinating the work of the European Commission in preparing a long-term vision for rural areas, that will be presented in the coming weeks. In her interview to TerritoriALL she explains how the EU can make use of all available resources to ensure the challenges and concerns of rural areas will be addressed.

ESPON: Election results in the United States and Europe created an impression that populism finds fertile ground in rural areas. Do you share this view? Are rural areas the 'places left behind' by EU policies? What is the European promise for people living in rural areas?

Dubravka Šuica: Populism usually finds fertile ground in discontent, and our recent report on The Demographic Landscape of EU Territories demonstrates how much political attitudes and electoral behaviours may be shaped and influenced by age and place of residence. Democracy is not static. It constantly evolves.

I regularly say that **our democracy must be "Fit for the Future"** to strengthen our representative democracy and to meet the various challenges ahead of us. This is what the Conference on the Future of Europe is all about – putting citizens at the heart of policymaking. This includes the 137 million EU citizens living in rural areas. Almost 40 % of those who replied to the public consultation organised in preparation of

our upcoming long-term vision for rural areas said that they felt left behind by society and policymakers.

This perception and the factors that drive it need to be tackled. **My promise to people living in rural areas is that we will address their challenges and concerns**, by building on the emerging opportunities of the EU's green and digital transitions and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and by identifying means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth in rural areas.

ESPON: Between the goals set by the Common Agriculture Policy and Cohesion Policy, why do we need a Long Term Vision for Rural Areas?

D.S.: Our ambition with the long-term vision is to bridge gaps and build synergies between all European policies for the very benefit of rural areas. It goes way beyond any particular policy or fund. It is not only about helping rural areas or providing funding, but more about the way we look at rural areas and, perhaps more importantly, the way they look at themselves. And that is the value added of the long-term vision.

To create new momentum for rural areas, using the flexible and adaptable framework that the cohesion policy provides us with to address, for example, demographic challenges in a targeted and coordinated manner, but also the common agricultural policy, with its rural development dimension, or Horizon Europe, with research and innovation. The point is to **make best use of all the resources available** to support the social and economic development of rural areas and make them vibrant, dynamic and attractive. I am confident that this vision, which is supported by an action plan, will equip us with the tools to encourage these regions to become confident, innovative and competitive and to improve the quality of life of their citizens.

ESPON: Our latest research shows that shrinking rural regions face complex and diverse development challenges besides depopulation. The same research shows that 40 % of rural areas are growing and sometimes are really attractive. How is the long-term vision going to take these very different territorial contexts into account? What will be the specific messages for each of them?

D.S.: Europe's rural areas are very diverse. Variations in natural and climatic conditions, geographical features, historic and cultural developments, demographic and social changes, national and regional specificities, and economic prosperity mean that no two rural areas are alike. From the demographic point of view, some regions will face sharp population decline, while others will experience steady population growth. To identify and anticipate the various demographic trends in EU territories, we

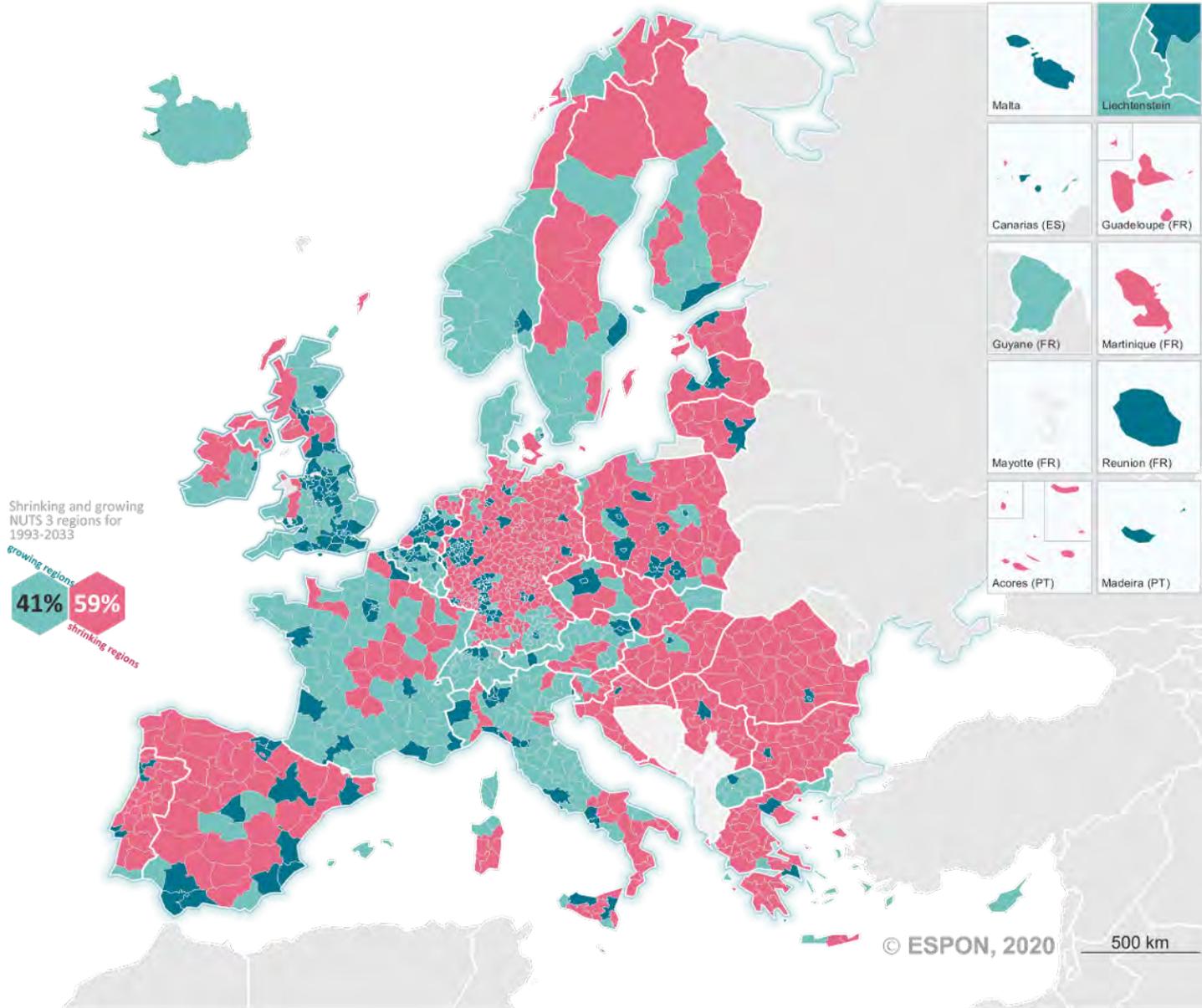
produced a report on the impact of demographic change in Europe in June 2020, and more recently launched our Atlas of Demography. This diversity calls for locally designed responses and solutions that correspond to each territory's specific needs and possibilities. It also means that territorial development strategies should address rural areas according to their individual characteristics and in relation to their environment. Changes to society, including the latest changes caused by COVID-19, should be turned into opportunities for rural areas. We need to avoid an asymmetric recovery and ensure that all of the EU's territories have the means to bounce back equally from the pandemic. This is what we will try to do with our long-term vision: create a better future not for the rural areas, but with them, while of course ensuring that these areas maintain the essential character that makes them so special.

“ **Our ambition with the long-term vision is to bridge gaps and build synergies between all European policies for the very benefit of rural area** ”

ESPON: According to the public consultation's findings, people identify lack of infrastructure as the main problem of rural areas. Still, at the same time, they say they prefer to live there because of the 'quality of life'. Do you think that these two statements contradict each other?

D.S.: Not at all. The EU's rural areas are a core part of the European way of life. They are widely recognised and valued for food production, management of natural resources, protection of natural landscapes, and recreation and tourism. And this is the very reason why many Europeans are worried about the erosion of rural infrastructure and service provision, including access to healthcare, social services and education, or about shrinking employment opportunities or limited transport and digital connectivity. Our objective is to address these challenges and concerns and to pave the way, with the actions we will propose, to fostering territorial cohesion and creating new opportunities that will attract innovative businesses, provide access to high-quality jobs, promote new and improved skills, ensure better infrastructure and services, and leverage the role of sustainable agriculture and diversified economic activities.

Dubravka Šuica is Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography



A new pathway is emerging for the prosperous future of rural areas

Rural areas: the new places to be

The ongoing and rich discussion about the future of rural areas cannot be taken out of the current context, as the pandemic has created new habits for living, working and interacting. Although hit heavily, Europe was not hit evenly by the shock waves of the pandemic. Alongside the challenges, the pandemic also created new opportunities, especially for the overlooked or forgotten territories.

Smart adaptation to unexpected challenges has become the new mantra.

However, to create the correct image and design adequate and place-sensitive policies, we must understand the long-term processes and challenges



Fatima Bacharel



Andreea China

that rural areas are facing, as these important functional and structural transformations shape and alter the various aspects of living and working in rural areas.

“ **Smart adaptation to unexpected challenges has become the new mantra.** ”

The territorial diversity across Europe was shaped by the (innovative) responses to complex socio-economic and spatial changes. These responses enabled some territories to grow, while others have been (or will be)

experiencing demographic decline. Despite this variety, some differences and perpetuated processes that are associated with east-west and north-south divides have been preserved.

Evidence from ESPON (see Maps 1 and 2) suggests that these dynamics are the result of long-standing trends.

Looking at past and future demographic developments, it is expected that the share of population living in shrinking rural areas will decrease from 36.1 % in 1993 to 29.2 % in 2033.

Since the 1960s, many of the local administrative units, especially in East-Central and Southern Europe, have experienced prolonged periods of population decrease, while a smaller number, located in Western and Central Europe, exhibited a continuous population increase. When looking at the chronology of shrinkage, the east-west divide is evident, as in western parts shrinkage mostly peaked between 1961 and 1981, whereas in most post-socialist areas (in the east) it peaked after 2000. The most affected territories in Europe, where more than 8–10 % of the population was lost over a decade, were the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, many parts of Croatia, the former German Democratic Republic, Greece, Italy, Portugal or Spain.

Understanding different drivers of shrinkage

Depopulation is seen as a long-term and, often, irreversible trend that is driven by an imbalanced age structure /natural decrease or by outmigration. However, in reality, depopulation is a result of more

“ **it is expected that the share of population living in shrinking rural areas will decrease from 36.1 % in 1993 to 29.2 % in 2033.** ”

profound, layered and complex processes that are driven by, national, regional or urban-rural interactions, or by Europe-wide or globalised flows. Based on this idea, regions with similar characteristics were clustered together as follows (see map), generating a more detailed understanding of the challenges that need to be addressed.

However, population shrinkage is not linked to only economic decline, and unfavourable demographic processes can be both cause and consequence of wider socio-economic challenges in an area. Primary industries play a significant role in rural area economies, and, although their contribution to the economy is usually lower, agricultural production is still important, as it generates many of the

employment opportunities. Poor economic performance or adaptation was more intensely displayed in rural regions with mono-industrial profiles, affecting the job market (which is dominated either by a shortage of recruitment prospects or by high unemployment rates).

For many reasons, these territories were unable to retain their population, given the unlimited movement possibilities that have appeared over recent decades. In addition, although one of the effects of the pandemic has been the reversal of some migration trends, especially in South-East Europe and even in rural areas, these trends will not be sustained in the long-term, if there are no

“ **population shrinkage is not linked to only economic decline, and unfavourable demographic processes can be both cause and consequence of wider socio-economic challenges in an area.** ”

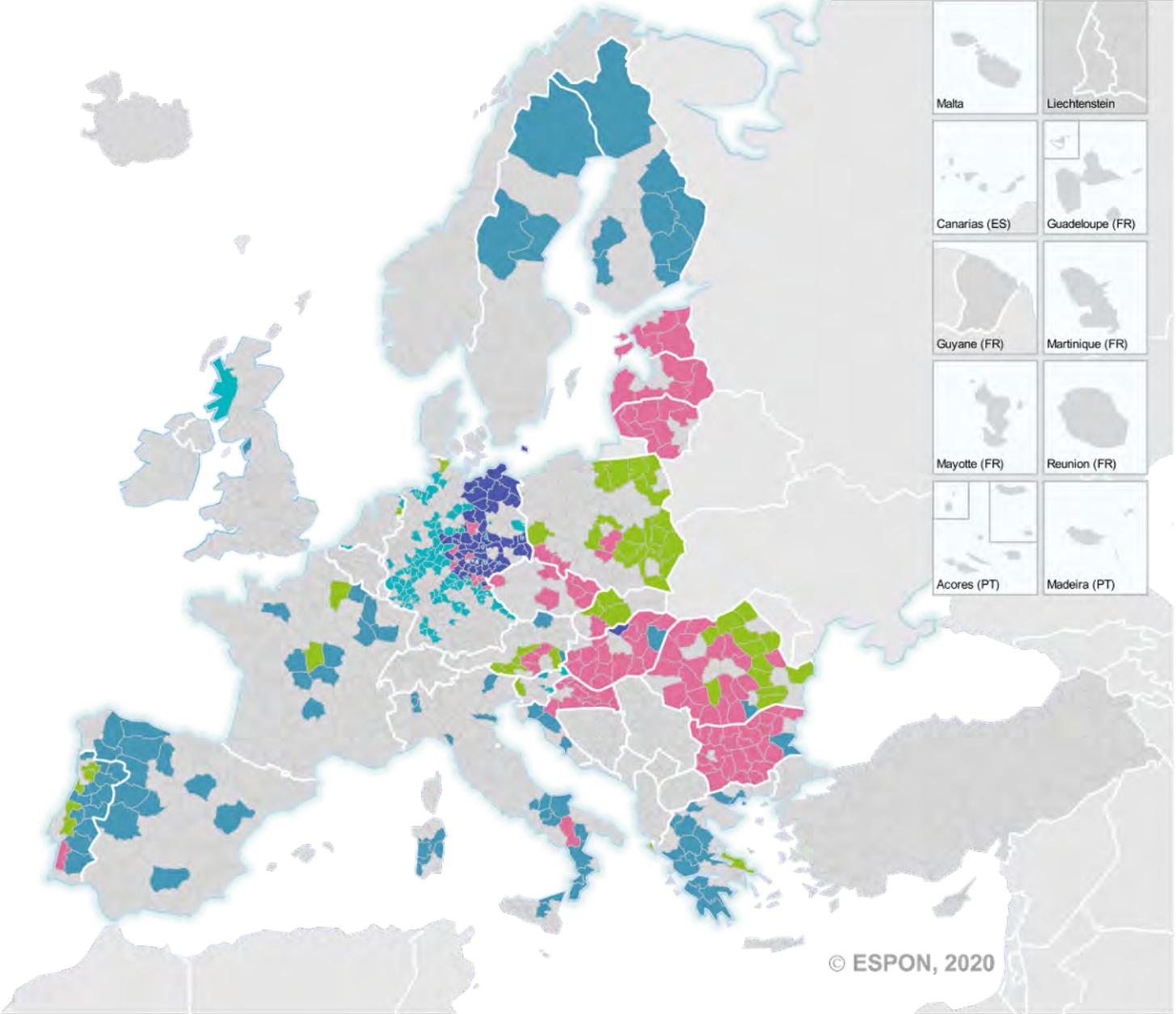
opportunities to enhance the quality of life. Aspects of ensuring a higher quality of life:

Providing adequate access to main services of general interest

This is not only an indicator of the degree of territorial connectedness but also an indicator of the quality of life- determined by looking at easy-to-reach and cheap access to different types of services. Ensuring the quality and quantity of service provision (education, healthcare, public administration, etc.) is a challenge that all rural territories are facing, but especially the shrinking ones. This is happening because of depopulation, but also because service provision (especially healthcare, education and social) has been under increased pressure, worsened by a lack of specialised staff or underequipped service units.

Accessing the potential of innovation

The insufficient availability of (good-quality) local services underlines the need to supply an adequate connectivity infrastructure, which refers to both **transport infrastructure** (specifically the provision or better organisation of public transport services) and **digital infrastructure**. There are still many households in (remote) rural areas that do not have access to broadband, making the situation increasingly complicated when a high share of the population experiences a form of digital illiteracy. Furthermore, in such rural areas, the capacity to



Complex shrinking clusters (NUTS 3 regions)

- agricultural, very low income regions with severe legacy and active shrinking
- industrial, mid-income regions with severe legacy and active shrinking
- agro-industrial, low income regions with moderate, mostly legacy shrinking
- servitised, mid-low income regions with moderate legacy shrinking
- industrial/servitised, mid-income regions with moderate, legacy shrinking

Clustering complex shrinking - NUTS 3 regions by number (%)



attract new investments in high-tech, **innovative**, industries is limited, as is the composition of the local labour market or the regional sectoral specialisation. As the technological industry 4.0 transformation is already visible, regions have to find new ways to cope with the socio-economic transformations in response to increasing competitiveness.

Tackling the effects of climate change

Climate change has also a very quantifiable dimension, as its social and economic effects are already felt by populations across the EU. Assessing how the four main natural hazards have affected the European territory paints the following picture: floods and storms have contributed to nearly 76 %, while droughts and earthquakes have contributed to 24 % of damage and losses. ESPON evidence reveals that coastal and mountainous areas, as well as those along major rivers, experienced the highest economic impacts of natural hazards; out of which, more than 170 shrinking rural regions are registering a higher average economic impact, situation which could further increase disparities between regions in

territories with high vulnerability levels (like Bulgaria, Greece, Italy or Romania).

Now is the time to act on building a prosperous future for rural areas

In the context of an increasing awareness of new possibilities associated with changes in technological, market and social contexts, the search for a prosperous future for rural areas demands a global, smart and structured approach, looking at European diversity, capitalising on innovation and seizing opportunities. Sparsely populated rural areas could become increasingly interesting, as the risk of spreading COVID-19 is lower in these areas. Remote but well-connected areas could become interesting locations, as they offer the possibility of telework while enjoying the slow rhythm of living. However, all this could be done only by linking policies to citizens' and territories' needs, in a supportive dialogue, using territorial evidence to support EU and national specific strategies.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 recognises that policy responses need to have a strong territorial dimension and coordinated approaches, while acknowledging and using both the diversity and the specificities of places. In this respect, the Territorial Agenda 2030 identifies a list of necessary actions, clustered in cross-cutting domains, which are all relevant to rural areas.

The place-based approach, linked to the cross-cutting domains and fitted under the common principles laid out in the Territorial Agenda 2030, can significantly increase the coherence and effectiveness of policy responses. It is clear that some of these responses will need to be tailored to some specific territorial needs.

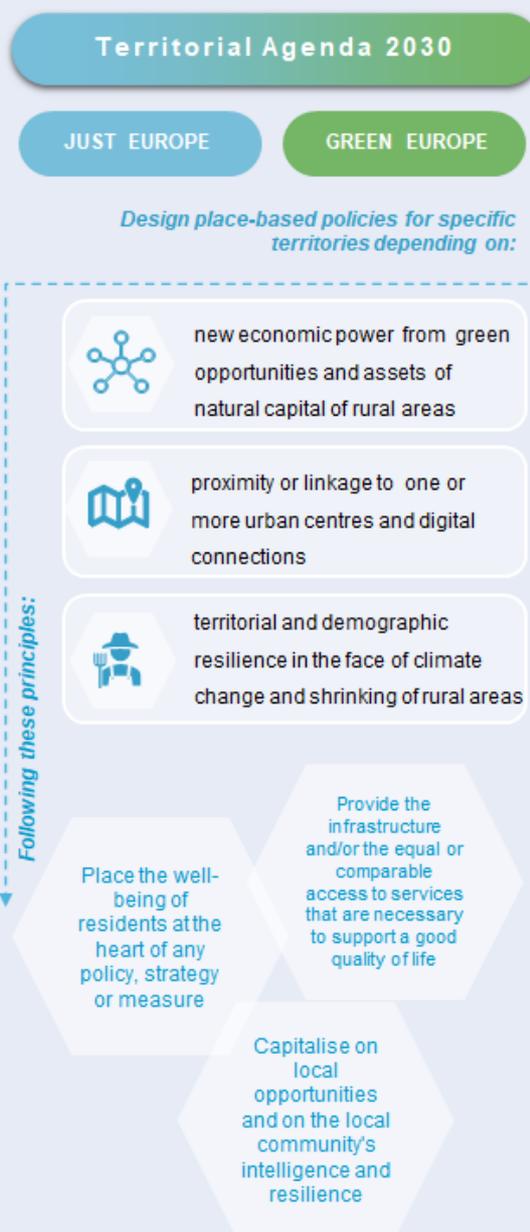
In addition, the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030, through the designated pilot actions, is a promising experience, focused on the territorial and governance models and perspectives.

Rural areas offer a diversity that suits all tastes.

Rural areas: moving, but not too fast.

Rural areas: developing, but not too slow.

Possible recipe for designing place-sensitive policy actions



*Fatima Bacharel is a Senior Officer at the Directorate for Territory Portugal
Andreea China is Senior Project Expert at ESPON EGTC*



The EU cohesion policy needs a universal basic income

Francisco Guerreiro

Nowadays, the environment is a priority in the agenda of EU institutions, especially when we talk about the positive impact that rural areas can have on fighting and adapting to climate change.

Rural areas are fundamental to tackling climate change and that is why the farm to fork and biodiversity strategies, alongside other programmes, such as the common agricultural policy, are more eco-friendly than ever (this does not mean that they are eco-friendly enough in my opinion, but let us consider for the sake of argument that they are). We urgently need to change the way we produce goods and services in these regions, especially in agriculture, because it is still a very conservative industry and it lacks the proper environmental and economic impact analysis.

So, we need to push the ecological transition to another level. We need to go deeper. That is why we cannot talk about ecological transition without debating social and economic inequality. In rural areas, this is key to shifting towards a more decarbonised and fair society. If citizens do not have an income, in addition to public infrastructures and services, they are unable to make eco-friendly choices and will be conditioned in their educational and professional mobility investments.

But that is not all. These citizens will also be stuck in this steady but constant exodus that has been happening for decades because they lack economic

opportunities. Such opportunities are mainly found in big cities and coastal areas.

Some say that, if Europeans have a decent and constant income, a more decentralised governance model, infrastructures and services, this will inevitably

“ ***If citizens do not have an income, in addition to public infrastructures and services, they are unable to make eco-friendly choices*** ”

lead to a better and more dynamic social elevator , which is fundamental to guarantee prosperity in all regions and nations.

However, I believe there is still a major debate to be had in this complex economic and social equation. It circles around implementing a universal basic income (UBI) in key areas of Member States. First, we need to debate the topic and its findings, as there were several pilot projects around the world with some interesting results. Second, we need to plan several pilot projects in EU Member States and then assess what we need to change in our social and economic model to expand this income to more citizens.

Nowadays, work in these rural areas is often very fragmented, seasonal and focused on a handful of activities, especially on agriculture, so we need to make it more diverse. Therefore, we need more infrastructures and better internet access , roads, railways and public services, such as hospitals, schools and universities. In addition, the investment made in decarbonising rural areas will most likely increase technological unemployment and economic inequalities - jobs are being automated and are becoming more and more precarious.

We need an economic and social tool that guarantees that citizens can enjoy more freedom and independence, and can remain in or move to rural areas without being restricted by their income, which comes mainly from work. Quality of life will probably be better in a less crowded and less polluted area if citizens can earn some income from work, part- or full-time, in addition to earning monthly UBI.

There are several ways we can subsidise these pilot projects. These include using local or regional coins, financed by municipal, national or even, in the future, European budgets, and rethinking our social and economic model to make the social state more efficient and less bureaucratic. This does not imply the end of the social welfare state; on the contrary, it will be a much-needed upgrade.

We must urgently start UBI pilot projects in rural areas, so that we can truly understand how citizens, given the resources, can move and develop all regions of the EU and make a real cohesion policy.

Francisco Guerreiro is Member of the European Parliament, Vice president of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development





Rural areas are entitled to the EU's cohesion and crisis response

Andrei Novakov

Rural areas not only represent the smallest building blocks of regional policy but are also subject to unique challenges that require a policy response.

From my perspective, they often fall through the cracks of regional policy, which leads to economic downfall, depopulation and lack of prospects. To add to this, the pandemic made it even harder for public funding to reach rural areas because of the need for emergency response to the crisis elsewhere.

At the same time, lockdowns and teleworking quickly placed rural areas in the spotlight as an alternative to urban centres.

Such trends across the EU are the perfect trigger to shift the EU's policy focus to rural areas even further. It is also a good opportunity to rethink the role of rural areas in the long-term development of the EU.

So far, in my time serving as a Member of the European Parliament, I have had two major opportunities to work on legislation that concerns rural areas: as a co-rapporteur on the Common

🗨️ ***A very significant improvement [to the REACT-EU] was the extra focus on cross-border rural areas*** 🗨️

Provisions Regulation (CPR) and on the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) mechanism. These pieces of legislation address two separate funding needs: economic, social and territorial cohesion, and COVID-19

recovery. One of my priorities was to underline the focus on rural areas in the legislative texts so that Member States plan for targeted investments in the EU's villages.

For example, thanks to the will of the European Parliament, the rules governing the EUR 330 billion cohesion policy explicitly say that 'In order to address effectively the development challenges in rural areas, coordinated support from the Funds and the EAFRD should be facilitated. For REACT-EU, the focus on rural areas is also clearly visible: 'Furthermore, Member States should continue to pay special attention to people living in rural, border, less developed, insular, mountainous, sparsely populated and outermost regions, as well as in areas affected by industrial transition and depopulation and, where appropriate, use the REACT-EU resources towards supporting those people.

Most importantly, the provisions are not simply declarative. As a result of these policies, funding for rural areas has to be mentioned explicitly in the partnership agreements under the CPR and in the programme amendments under REACT-EU.

The European Parliament improved the REACT-EU proposal

We had a record short time to finish REACT-EU, while at the same time we wanted it to be a textbook example of recovery through cohesion policy. The agreement of 18 November 2020 between the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union achieved this goal.

The European Parliament managed to negotiate two



major improvements to the original European Commission proposal: retroactive eligibility as of 1 February 2020 and selection of operations for support during 2023 (instead of 2022). These changes will improve the use of the funding by allowing the inclusion of implemented measures and by giving more time for implementation.

A very significant improvement was the extra focus on cross-border rural areas: As the temporary closing of borders between Member States has led to significant challenges for cross-border communities and businesses, it is appropriate to allow Member States to allocate the REACT-EU resources also to existing cross-border programmes under the European territorial cooperation goal.

How could rural areas benefit from REACT-EU?

Member States could direct REACT-EU funding to rural areas in a few very important fields: teleworking and e-healthcare, healthcare infrastructure, local business support, and short-term work schemes for employees and the self-employed. Such a combination of targeted measures would **reduce the risk of people leaving villages** in search of better opportunities. At the same time, such investments **attract young families and professionals**, which helps to revive rural areas.

Finally yet importantly, **REACT-EU operations have a co-financing rate of up to 100%**. This will ease the access of rural areas to REACT-EU because limited local budgets may not provide co-financing for any of the measures.



Because I grew up in the Bulgarian village of Momina Klisura, rural areas are close to me, both emotionally and professionally. My personal attachment to those areas complements the legislative work in the Committee on Regional Development.

Andrei Novakov is Member of REGI committee, EPP Group Coordinator, CPR and REACT-EU co-rapporteur



The future of Europe will depend on how we deal with rural areas



Peter Schmidt



Stefano Palmieri

The EU enjoys incredible territorial diversity, and we need to make sure that people are able to make the most of the inherent features of the areas in which they live. Now more than ever before, the COVID-19 crisis has shown that no EU citizen should be left behind and disadvantaged, for example in terms of access to public services, especially in health, housing and employment opportunities, simply because they live in one region rather than another. Here, territorial cohesion comes into play, aiming for more balanced and sustainable development, in accordance with the territory where one lives.

That is why the Treaty of Lisbon called on the EU and Member States to pay particular attention to reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions.

EU rural and urban territories are not developing evenly. It is critical to foster policies that curb this trend, ensure a fair and sustainable transition to a wellbeing economy in all areas and promote population rebalancing. For years, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has stressed the need to reduce the development gap between different territories. In a recent own-initiative opinion on '[An integrated approach for the EU's rural areas, with particular emphasis on vulnerable regions](#)' the EESC has drawn attention to those regions currently threatened by stagnation, depopulation or desertification.

The damage caused by having swathes of deserted countryside in Europe is not just economic but also social, environmental and cultural.

It is therefore critical to deal with two equally severe forms of degradation: on one hand, the excessive pressure on air, water and soil due to the concentration of economic activity in urban areas, and, on the other hand, the abandonment of large areas of territory, whose biological and landscape diversity is declining irreparably.



The EESC proposes a 'territorial contract' between urban society and the rural world, participatory and adapted to the characteristics of the territories



The new *Territorial Agenda 2030* aims to tackle these disparities among regions, including in rural areas. The new agenda was adopted in December 2020, when organised civil society contributed its opinion on 'the Revision of the Territorial Agenda of the EU, the Leipzig Charter and the Urban Agenda for the EU'. It refers to 'Better balanced territorial development utilising Europe's diversity', whereby all sectors must take action to encourage neighbourhoods, communities, municipalities, counties, regions and Member States to coordinate their responses to



global societal challenges and to improve working, living and business conditions in all places.

Rural areas, which play a critical role in economic and social cohesion, in regions' resilience, and in the contribution of countless services from various local ecosystems, including food production, should, hand in hand with urban areas, strengthen their socio-economic prosperity, innovation capacity, positions in global value chains and global competitiveness across the EU, to achieve a sustainable and inclusive **wellbeing economy**, in line



The damage caused by having swathes of deserted countryside in Europe is not just economic but also social, environmental and cultural



with the objectives of the European Green and Social Deal, the Next Generation EU recovery package and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Civil society's contribution is crucial in this context, and the EESC has always supported a bottom-up approach and the empowerment of communities to come up with solutions. Local civil society, workers and business actors as well as citizens need to be engaged to unlock the immense potential of

rural/urban communities, and to co-design and foster their sustainable development.

The EESC proposes a **'territorial contract' between urban society and the rural world**, which should be participatory and adapted to the characteristics of the territories, and should preserve their historical, cultural and natural heritage.

We call for a **holistic approach for a sustainable urban/rural development** that precludes policies and institutions from operating in isolation. For this, institutional coordination, integration and alignment are key (linking rural and urban policies with all other relevant policies, such as food, climate, biodiversity, poverty reduction, land use, transport, infrastructure, services of general interest, new activities based on the circular economy and the bioeconomy, immigration, and the creation of employment and high-quality jobs). The EESC will also actively contribute to the EU's long-term vision for rural areas that is being developed by the European Commission (expected in June 2021).

Stefano Palmieri is the president of the Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion Section, EESC

Peter Schmidt is the president of the Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment Section, EESC



CAP reform and a Green Deal: an unmissable opportunity to promote agroecological practices



Guillaume Cros

The **Occitanie** region is largely made up of rural and mountainous areas. Indeed, almost **58 % of the population live in municipalities with fewer than 10.000 inhabitants**. Among the many challenges identified, a better territorial balance is a central concern for the regional authorities, a spatial planning is one of the major powers of the French regions. The Occitanie Region is developing a policy of proximity, promoting in particular the 'little towns', which are essential for the economic and demographic



The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis in our territories have motivated the Occitanie region to implement a regional version of the European Green Deal.



development of these rural areas, while ensuring that they are preserved.

The region also invests, alongside the EU, in supporting agri-rural areas by:

supporting small farmers in our territories in order to keep rural areas alive;

controlling land and its price to facilitate the establishment of young farmers;

helping farmers in areas with natural handicaps.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis in our territories have motivated the **Occitanie** region to implement a regional version of the European Green Deal. Adopted in 2020, this regional transformation plan aims to build a new, more resilient model, in line with the EU's Green Deal.

The food component is a key element of this regional green deal. With the support of EU funds (in the context of both the recovery plans and the next programming of the European Structural and Investment Funds), the Occitanie region intends to promote generational renewal for farmers, to reduce the use of pesticides and to strengthen the production of local plant proteins to achieve protein self-sufficiency by 2040.

It also wishes to **support organic production and strengthen short supply chains** (by developing logistics for regional agrifood businesses). Finally, the Occitanie Region wishes to enable all inhabitants of its region to have a healthy diet by combating food insecurity.

To provide against emergencies caused by climate change, more needs to be done. Therefore I made a commitment in 2018 to promote the transition to agroecology at European level.

I'm proud that my proposal to include quantified environmental targets in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans Regulation was taken on board by the European Union local and regional authorities. In its opinion on CAP reform adopted in 2018, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) proposed five quantified environmental targets to be achieved by 2027 by each Member State, namely:



30 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in the Member State;

doubling of the land area used for organic farming in the Member State, compared with 2017, or at least 30 % of the agricultural area;

minimum 30 % reduction in the use of pesticides in the Member State, compared with 2017;

gradual and planned end to cage rearing throughout the EU;

guarantee that 100 % of surface water and groundwater will comply with the Nitrates Directive, without exemptions, in the Member State.

I'm pleased to note that these targets were also taken on board by the European Commission in the Farm to Fork strategy, but I fear that these goals will not be achieved without a deeper CAP reform.

To go further, I proposed to draft an own-initiative opinion on agroecology, which was adopted by the CoR in February 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the necessity for '**resilient, sovereign food systems**'.

CoR members voted for several operational proposals, which traverse CAP reform, EU legislation, and local and regional policies. They include:

a new directive on **agricultural soils** to halt the decrease in organic matter content, stop erosion and prioritise soil life in agricultural practices, to be proposed by the European Commission;

further promotion of the development of **short supply chains and small-scale processing** of agricultural products;

the expansion of **protected agricultural areas**, creation of agroecological demonstration farms, and tools for monitoring the implementation of the agroecological transition;

EU legislation to **ban genetically modified or mutagenic seeds** and to stop importing agricultural products that do not comply with EU social and environmental production standards;

safeguarding animal welfare and mitigating climate change by changing the current scale of livestock farming to the human scale, ensuring as much free range as possible and self-sufficiency in feeding animals;

reducing **VAT on organic, local and seasonal products** along with 'local' meal vouchers and the introduction of a significant percentage of such products in public catering.

I hope that these requests will be heard by the EU institutions before it is too late.

Guillaume Cros, is Vice President of the Regional Council of Occitanie and rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions on CAP reform and agroecology

Author's photo : EU, Patrick Mascart



How to harness the potential of rural areas to make them suitable places for innovation opportunities?



Eugenio Gianì

In her speech during the closing session of Rural Vision Week, Commissioner Elisa Ferreira predicted that a bright future awaits rural areas, stressing how the current health and economic crisis may open up new possibilities and opportunities if we are able to design a new vision for the future of rural areas.

The new 2021–2027 EU programming period has begun, carrying with it a great deal of expectation twinned with the acknowledgment of the many challenges ahead, especially for rural areas, **particularly in the two ‘meta-trends’ of inequality and technological innovation** identified by the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, which permeate all other trends and indeed all aspects of human life.

The Regional Government of Tuscany Region took the opportunity to put forward its viewpoints on the occasion of the consultation regarding the communication on a long-term vision for rural areas that the European Commission is due to adopt in the second half of 2021.

In Tuscany, we believe that policy tools allowing for innovative practices and solutions not only must have a special focus on those sectors that are vital for our rural territories and economies, but – in order to be effective – primarily need to reach a socio-economic environment ready and prepared to exploit them to the full.

To do so, a twofold strategy has to be fostered:

We need to stop adopting compensatory approaches along the urban–rural dichotomy and start seeing rural areas as places of opportunities beyond only agriculture. We should rather address their basic

needs and exploit their full potential through place-sensitive, tailor-made policies able to leverage local assets, enable them to take advantage of globalisation trends and, ultimately, attract more people and investment.

We need to accompany the push for innovation that comes from the macro challenges covered by the European Green Deal and the Digital Europe programme, which have been further amplified by the pandemic.

“ **one of the most relevant tools to foster innovation in rural areas is the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability** ”

Rural areas are places where innovation can flourish, but we must nurture it and provide the right tools and a level playing field in relation to other territories.

One of our first concerns is to make sure that new digital services can be easily available, ensuring that broadband infrastructures cover all areas where there are currently weaknesses.

As demonstrated by the pandemic, availability of material and immaterial endowments is essential, but often not sufficient. Other elements – creating room for experimenting, and removing the isolation that may affect rural communities – can help rural areas to be more attractive and rural communities to become

active innovation agents.

The EU offers several new and consolidated opportunities and tools to foster innovation potential and for better connecting rural communities, such as enabling local innovators to get together and find peers, knowledge and opportunities outside their traditional innovation ecosystem.

For example, one of the most relevant tools to foster innovation in rural areas and help rural communities to support their innovators is the **European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability**, but new tools are taking shape, such as Horizon Europe partnerships, the European Innovation Council and Digital Europe.

At the same time, in order to break down silos and raise the innovation potential of rural communities, it is of paramount importance to support a broader adoption of public-private partnerships to create new synergies among sectors and more investments in education, training, social services and security. Valid initiatives adopting a multisectoral approach in different areas that are worth continued promotion are Smart Villages, Digital Innovation Hubs, LEADER initiatives, bioeconomy strategies and Living Labs, just to name a few.

“Tuscany Region since 2012 has engaged with enlarging the discussion around innovation in rural areas outside the regional borders. We created an informal platform – the network of European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry (**ERIAFF**) – where regional and local authorities can discuss and make synergies to help their territories to collaborate and circulate innovative ideas. Today, we have more than 80 partners.”

Building on the experience gained from participation in the ERIAFF network, in 2016 Tuscany promoted the **S3 High Tech Farming Partnership** with the aim of reinforcing inter-regional cooperation among regional innovation ecosystems that are harnessing the potential offered by their Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation to specifically target the farming sector.

“ **Rural areas are places where innovation can flourish, but we must nurture it and provide the right tools and a level playing field in relation to other territories.** ”

These initiatives are intended to ensure that proactive public policies are in place to ease the flow of ideas and break down sectoral and territorial barriers, enabling the many innovators that are already developing solutions and entrepreneurial activities to bring more benefits to rural areas.

In that respect, the main suggestion from the perspective of a public administrator is to make sure that national, regional and local authorities take advantage of already existing initiatives and experiences, identifying EU champions that may help or inspire local innovators and forerunners in making the difference, and helping our long-term vision for rural areas to become a reality.

Eugenio Gianni is President of the Tuscany Region





Which future do you want for rural areas?



Marion Eckardt

Last year, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) conducted a survey; its main question was which future do you want in your rural area? The survey was open from May to August 2020 and was translated into 20 languages (this was the limit of the programme). ELARD received answers from 3 436 people across 26 countries.

It was possible to get so many answers in such a short time and with limited resources because ELARD works with and supports local action groups around Europe. The response rate showed where the action was, namely at the local level.

Three conclusions were drawn from the results.

The first conclusion is that rural citizens ask for **basic services and employment opportunities**.

In the overall survey, 80.2 % of respondents chose 'greater job opportunities and decent employment' when asked 'Looking 15 years ahead... what three things would you like to see happen?'. In second and third place came 'accessibility to services comparable of those in cities' and 'transport', respectively. Interestingly, when asked which services are asked for most, basic, public services, and not consumer services, are the ones that rural citizens still require. When asked about the most valued local services, the following, in order of priority, are what rural people need and value the most:

healthcare

education

care services for the elderly and dependents

connectivity

affordable housing

The absence of these services is most probably what makes rural people feel left behind. Taxes are paid just the same in rural areas, but what happens to our

societal contract when services are not delivered to the same extent? Hopefully, digitisation will help us to overcome some shortages of public services in rural areas. Combinations are possible, but there will always be a need for the presence of real people, for example those providing care services.

However, the feeling of being left behind is obvious. The second conclusion of the survey is that it is time to change the narrative.

Rural areas are not dependants of urban areas. On the contrary, both urban and rural areas are necessary to create a viable Europe, and it is important to engage with those involved rurally to understand and describe the reality of rural areas.



We believe that a rural semester can provide a new, holistic development for all areas.



We believe that the pandemic has shown, with desired clarity, that we live in functional territories in which all players and geographical areas are equally important for our resilience.

However, we have not been able to turn this into policy that invests as much in rural citizens and places as in urban ones. It is time for change.

ELARD's vision is "a viable Europe through local democracy and participatory approaches in all rural areas and beyond." Over the past year, we have therefore been active in developing Europe's long-term vision for rural areas. It has been a fantastically rewarding process that has generated many good ideas that can be built on.



We from ELARD would especially like to highlight the paper **Rural Semester as a Tool to Deliver a Truly Holistic Policy to Rural Areas**, which we and others involved developed with the Jacques Delors Institute.

We are proposing a rural semester for the following reasons.

Rural areas are the basis of our resilience, collectively and individually. They shelter resources that will become more and more precious.

Most Member States focus on spending European funds (European Regional Development Fund,

“ **Taxes are paid just the same in rural areas, but what happens to our societal contract when services are not delivered to the same extent?** ”

European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund or European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) in rural areas, but not on designing specific measures or regulations for people, enterprises or services fit for low-density places.

There is a weak coordination between national and sectoral policies for rural areas.

There is a lack of suitable and common criteria for success.

We believe that a rural semester can provide a new, holistic development for all areas

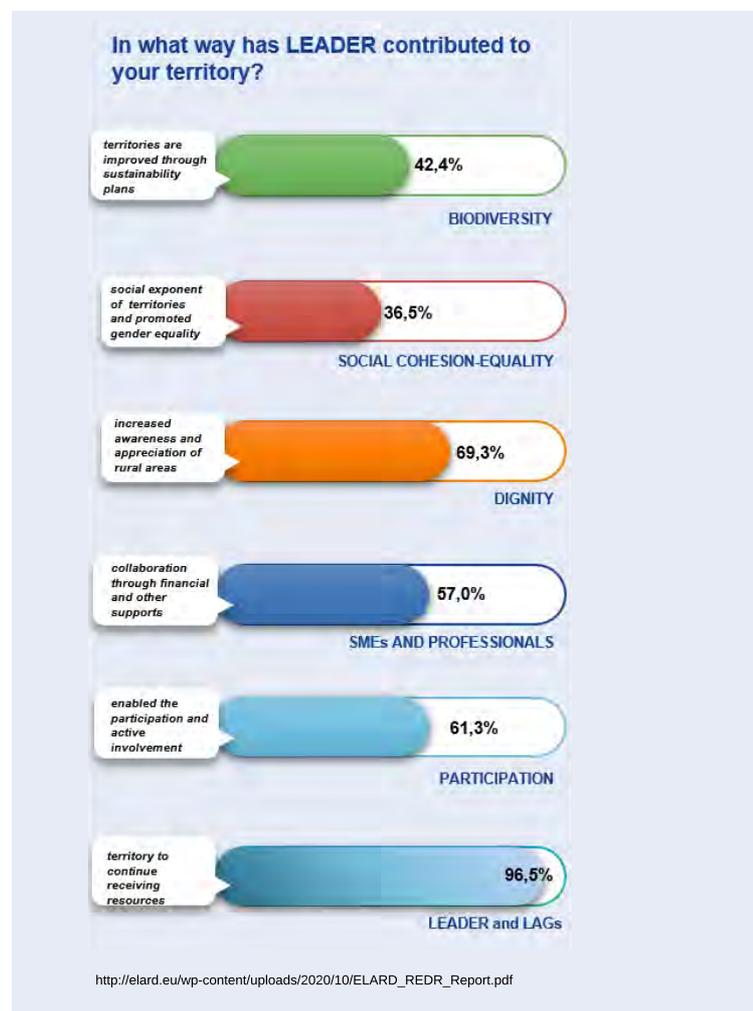
The only **holistic methodology** so far has been the community-led local development (CLLD) multifunded

approach. Survey responses signified an immense support for LEADER/ CLLD as a tool to deliver on the needs and possibilities of each rural areas; therefore, the third conclusion is that the LEADER method should be used as the multilevel governance tool it is.

Some 97 % of the survey participants were very positive towards LEADER and CLLD, and those included not only people working in local action groups. Survey respondents were mostly from civil society, the private sector and the public sector, even if around 20 % were working in a local action group office. From this we can see that LEADER/ CLLD reaches all the way to our rural citizens, and brings Europe closer to its citizens. We should invest more in this possibility.

Our proposal is to seize the opportunity that the pandemic has given us, use the new awareness of most decision-makers and citizens that functional rural-urban areas form the basis for resilience of our union, and start working towards implementing a rural semester.

Meanwhile, in our local areas we will keep building the European family together with our colleagues.



Marion Eckardt is President of the European Leader Association for Rural Development (ELARD)



Taking action to spur growth in French rural areas: the rural agenda



Marie-Lorraine Dangeard

The Territorial Agenda 2030 provides an overall framework for territorial cohesion and a future for all places and people; it **encourages all stakeholders** to take action for a more Just and Greener Europe by addressing social, environmental and economic disparities inherent to a global economy, rendered even more acute by the COVID-19 crisis.

This article seeks to share an ongoing experience to

“ **One of the strong points of the rural agenda lies in its governance: a political signal was sent out by the appointment of a dedicated Secretary of State in charge of overseeing the agenda’s implementation** ”

step up the pace of measures taken to spur growth and innovation in more vulnerable rural areas of France by breaking down silos and diversifying approaches in order to maximise opportunities and bridge spatial inequality gaps.

While living in the countryside is widely regarded as likely to improve one’s quality of life, remnant bottlenecks entailing **unequal access to core services prevent many rural areas from making**

the most of their assets; during the COVID-19 crisis, these handicaps were felt particularly hard.

The prevalent mode of intervention for supporting territorial cohesion is through medium-term contracts agreed between state and subnational authorities at different levels, complementary to each other; rural contracts are part of these agreements. They seek to ensure convergence and consistency of funding by coordinating the technical, financial and human means for supporting, in a place-sensitive manner, integrated territorial projects around a set of core provisions.

In the context of the yellow vests movement and the subsequent ‘great national debate’ in the first months of 2019, a number of rural stakeholders felt that the pace of contract deployment was not fast enough to bridge current inequality gaps in their areas. They advocated that **a French version of the European rural agenda** be adopted. The authorities decided to take action along those lines: at the joint request of the ministers of territorial cohesion and of agriculture, a team of elected representatives was invited to develop the content of this agenda through a broad consultative process.

One of the strong points of the rural agenda lies in its **governance**: a political signal was sent out by the appointment of a dedicated Secretary of State in charge of overseeing the agenda’s implementation. Strict monitoring methods were set up, such as a special interministerial committee taking stock of



progress twice a year, and referrals in all ministries and at departmental level, with a responsibility to ensure that sector-based policies take rural areas into account. Through departmental roadmaps, referrals also provide feedback on the targeted support required to facilitate access to core services in view of specific territorial challenges.

The **181 measures** of the rural agenda are structured around five axes aiming at breaking down silos and

“**one third of the French population lives in rural areas, and over the past two decades the population has been increasing more rapidly in rural than in urban municipalities**”

making rural areas drivers of change. They are diversified in terms of both methods and policy scope. These measures tend to be extremely concrete (e.g. improving broadband coverage, transport provisions, access to public services with the “*Maisons de services au public*” and facilitating the reopening of small retail businesses).

Some reforms have already produced tangible results: for instance, a change in the statistical definition of

rural areas led to increasing the rural population from 22 % to 33 %, entailing a change in the perception of their economic weight. The successful uptake of experimental trials aiming at strengthening local expertise or networking practices also points towards changes in the way stakeholders envision life and work in rural areas tomorrow.

What next? Since its adoption in September 2019, the rural agenda **has gained political clout: 60 % of its initial measures have been completed after 18 months**. The agenda has delivered results in accelerating broadband deployment and reinforcing policy mainstreaming, but more progress is needed in other areas, e.g. for restoring a better-balanced offer of medical services and creating more job opportunities.

High hopes are placed on the investments of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to further boost the agenda’s efforts towards a more just and balanced spatial future for rural areas.

Marie-Lorraine Dangeard is senior expert at the European cohesion policy division - General directorate operational and strategic support



Reinventing Scandinavian Mountains



Jan Edøy



Erik Hagen

Empirical evidence for Territorial Agenda 2030, Pilot Action: Small places matter

Scandinavian mountainous areas have seen population decline over a number of years, as is the case for many European mountainous regions and rural areas. Yet some local communities have set out to define and pursue for themselves another development path.

As the EU and partner countries have reviewed their policies to promote a more **sustainable, territorially balanced and place-based development**, through both the adopted Territorial Agenda 2030–A future for all places and the forthcoming communication on the long-term vision for rural areas,

“ **four adjacent Scandinavian municipalities have found means to break the vicious circle of rural decline. Joining forces, they reinvented their role and position within a substantially larger territory.** ”

This bottom-up initiated local project will be promoted as part of the empirical evidence for the Norwegian-led Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot action ‘Small places matter’.

Winter tourism was introduced in Scandinavia at **Sälen** in Sweden in the 1930s and across the border in **Trysil** in Norway in the 1960s. Forestry and sawmills were historically the major sources of employment in the region, but the mechanisation of logging led to a crisis in the economy during the 1950s and 1960s. The crisis

led to a search for new employment and business possibilities. Experimentation started with winches pulling skiers uphill, and they could then enjoy the downhill ride. On the Swedish side of the border, owners of a large construction firm were important innovators in the early phase. They developed Lindvallen in **Sälen** as a place where their employees could spend their holidays. On the Norwegian side, a few forest owners were the leading entrepreneurs.

The two places emerged as destinations for ski-based tourism, with ski slopes, lifts, cabins and restaurants, located just across the border from each other, but with little cross-border cooperation until 2005. There was then an initiative to organise a project within the Interreg Sweden–Norway programme to reduce energy consumption on both sides of the border. The project resulted in considerable energy savings by the participants, including hotels and the operators of ski slopes. In addition, firms learned the benefits of sharing their experiences across the border on issues that had been business secrets, such as the technicalities of producing snow.

In **Trysil**, Danish tourists enjoying their winter holidays emerged as an important market, in addition to Norwegians from the Greater Oslo region. In **Sälen**, the growth in customers was not satisfactory because of the long drive from Stockholm. In 2008, an owner of a restaurant in **Sälen** introduced the idea of constructing an airport to attract more Swedish and European visitors. His idea gained support, but it was ambitious to construct an airport in a region with only 25 000 inhabitants. The future of the idea depended on cooperation between politicians and businesses in four SITE municipalities. The politicians agreed on a common vision of constructing an internationally leading cross-border tourist destination: Scandinavian

Mountains. The airport was necessary to make this vision a reality. The plans for an airport matured, Swedish authorities granted the necessary permissions and, when a combination of private and public funding was secured, construction started in 2016.

There was a shared understanding that constructing an airport was, in itself, not enough to create a leading destination. A programme backed by Interreg Sweden–Norway funding was set up to prepare for international visitors. Small businesses offering dog sledging, elk safaris and skidoo trips were among those targeted. An environmental audit scheme was introduced to reduce negative environmental impacts. New infrastructure including roads, water supply and waste treatment was a necessary part of the planning for more visitors.

In 2019, there was an expectation that the Scandinavian Mountains Airport, together with the

🗨️ **The population in the region quadrupled during the high season for tourism. The local economy was boosted for some years and the population in the region increased for the first time in more than 60 years.** 🗨️

upgrading of a wide range of services for visitors, would result in prosperity, and a lack of qualified labour was depicted as a problem. Then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in March 2020 and the area suddenly faced new challenges.

Nevertheless, in the long-term perspective, the SITE region has achieved something that is in fact rather extraordinary. Over the years, this thinly populated rural border region has created a new industrial path. A new industry has been created without the benefits of being related to existing industrial activity in the region, something that is rather unique. The SITE region was a pioneer in winter tourism in Scandinavia, with no other destinations to learn from in the early phases of creating the new path. The entrepreneurs were locally embedded, and used specialised local competences, such as producing snow, preparing slopes and packaging 'of products for different markets.

Today, challenges to diversify the economy to become less dependent on tourism have emerged in the aftermath of COVID-19 hitting the tourism sector hard. Needless to point out, there is no quick fix to this problem, but various tools are available, and future success is dependent on how they are combined and used.

Altogether, we note that the boom or gloom of small places is high up in the European political agenda, driven by major issues such as social and economic equality, new patterns of work and leisure in an increasingly digital world, and a green economic paradigm in the making. However, to benefit from these structural dynamics, places such as the SITE region will be dependent on their permanent ability to reinvent their role and position within a wider territory, supported by other tiers of government. Policymakers at all administrative levels must strengthen their ambitions and commitment to a successful implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 to deliver results in both the shorter and longer terms for all small places and territories in Europe.

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Bjørn Terje Andersen and Bjørnar Sæther
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Landscape transformation programme: An institutional innovation model



Miguel Freitas

The new European forest strategy reinforces a holistic view of forest spaces and ecosystems that is linked to the climate transition and the European biodiversity and bioeconomy strategies, extending objectives to new territorial, environmental, industrial and energy policies.

However, from an operational point of view, the common agricultural policy strategic plan has very limited flexibility, given the multiple objectives imposed on this instrument and the negotiating strength of the agricultural dimension. The Recovery and Resilience Facility, despite being transitory, is really the novelty, and may be an opportunity to strengthen forest investment.

The Portuguese forest coexists with two main phenomena – rural fires and desertification processes – resulting in the loss of ecological, landscape, economic and social values. Investment levels have been insufficient, recovery rates are much slower than degradation rates and the complexity of biophysical phenomena and the irreversible loss of natural capital are not taken into account.

The functional segmentation in land use, the concentration of exploration in high-productivity areas and the rejection of grazing have left extensive territories without active management and without critical mass for recovery.

In this context, with diverse territories marked by agroforestry landscapes in a ‘state of need’, under the constant threat of climate change and requiring a deep transformation towards resilience and economic

viability, it is necessary to reinvent processes of land use and planning at the landscape scale. This promotes the joint management of private land and the active management of public and community areas, as well as the complementarity and multifunctionality of agroforestry systems and the prospect of a new urban–rural relationship, where an innovative approach and integrated territorial intervention programmes are essential, resulting in dedicated models of governance.

In this perspective, the landscape transformation programme, aimed at territories in which there is a high risk of fire, encourages various levels of intervention, from landscape design as a reference for a new economy in rural territories through grouped management models aimed at specific

“ **The key to the success of the operations is the adhesion of the owners, and a context of trust and credibility must be created among the people** ”

microterritorial contexts to fuel management around population centres and forest reparcelling, with a view to increasing the physical size of rural properties in the minifundia.

The decentralisation of initiatives is essential, and priority must be given to the territories where the governance model seems more mature, where



historical fire modelling shows that there is a greater probability of fires breaking out and where the risk of loss of forest heritage is higher.

The local governance of the projects differ with the context and the diversity of those involved present in the territory. It should have a bottom-up perspective, starting from the forestry or agroforestry integrator agents (formal or informal): forest intervention zones, wasteland management entities, producer

“ ***The Portuguese forest coexists with two main phenomena – rural fires and desertification processes – resulting in the loss of ecological, landscape, economic and social values*** ”

associations or cooperatives, and forest management entities and units, among others, which are associated with each of the territories according to a coherent plan of territorial aggregation.

The key to the success of the operations is the adhesion of the owners, and a context of trust and credibility must be created among the people. Among the adherents, there are those who want to transfer the management right to the management entity and those who want to keep the ability to decide.

The programme, targeted at forest territories from a multifunctional perspective, can have an

extraordinary scope, as it opens perspectives for new interactions, at various levels, between different players in the territory, and should be read, above all, as a new model for institutional innovation in rural forest.

This new dimension of territorial governance should be expanded and articulated with common agricultural policy measures through an agriculture–climate programme, particularly for the payment of silvo-pastoral services and the promotion of improved biodiverse pasture areas, and with incentives for the use of agricultural, forest and wild resources with the potential to generate processing activities from natural-based options.

On the other hand, it is essential to revitalise urban centres from ‘village condominiums’ that are active in the definition of innovation projects in the smart village perspective and associated with a programme of energy communities, which allow the operation of proximity service networks and recover built heritage.

The programme should also be associated with the implementation of a strategy of testing and dissemination of knowledge, based on the promotion, installation and coordination of living labs and actions to promote entrepreneurship, socioeconomic growth and business, to generate, from ecological transition models, start-ups, which are new companies and new organisations, or diversify and upgrade the activities developed by existing companies and institutions.

Miguel Freitas is Professor at the University of Algarve



Rural networking to build a Long Term Vision for Rural Areas



Enrique Nieto

In early 2020, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced the launch of a process that would lead to the development of a 'Long Term Vision for Rural Areas'. Since this announcement, the European Commission, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and numerous rural stakeholders and organisations have conducted a series of activities to capture citizens' visions for Europe's rural areas for 2040. These efforts seek to provide crucial input to the development of the Commission's Communication on a long term vision for Europe's rural areas, foreseen to be adopted in June 2021.

It is important to note that the publication of the Commission's Communication will signal the starting point, rather than the end, of a pathway to empower and support rural areas to meet the aspirations of their communities as they move towards 2040.

An important milestone in this process was a large-scale public consultation launched by the European Commission in September 2020. This collected the views and inputs of more than 2 300 respondents (from individual citizens and organisations). Also in September 2020, the Joint Research Centre, with support from an ENRD **Thematic Working Group**, initiated a participatory foresight exercise to develop four plausible **future scenarios** for rural areas in 2040.

In parallel, the ENRD supported the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development in the development and application of a workshop package '**Welcome to our rural!**', designed to provide an opportunity for groups of citizens to explore their ideal vision for the future of their own

rural area. Around 3 000 stakeholders from 19 Member States engaged in this exercise and submitted 166 contributions to the Commission. These inputs will complement those of other stakeholder organisations, Horizon 2020 projects, Eurobarometer polls, evaluation reports, etc. The most recent milestone was the '**Rural Vision Week: Imagining the future of Europe's rural areas**' organised by the ENRD in close cooperation with the European Commission. This online event brought

“ **The publication of the Commission's Communication will signal the starting point, rather than the end, of a pathway to empower and support rural areas to meet the aspirations of their communities as they move towards 2040.** ”

together more than 550 participants to hear plenary interventions and updates on preparatory work for the vision, and to discuss relevant topics in eight thematic workshops and 11 stakeholder-led fringe events.

Some of the stakeholder messages emerging for the 2040 Rural Vision

Rural Europe is highly differentiated, and the nature of that differentiation should be captured and reflected in any EU-level vision. The vision needs to address the wide diversity of rural places



and support the delivery of tailor-made responses that are adapted to their specificities. Stakeholders stressed the importance of shaping the vision through inclusive bottom-up processes, and also involving vulnerable groups (women, migrants, etc.).

A more holistic approach to rural development is needed. While the importance of agriculture for the future of rural areas is widely recognised, stakeholders also stressed the need for rural policies to address 'non-traditional' issues related to, for instance, service delivery, innovation and entrepreneurship, which are also important for ensuring a vibrant and resilient future for rural areas. Many stakeholders also pointed to the need for establishing a base level of infrastructure and services to support the functioning of the 'rural welfare state'.

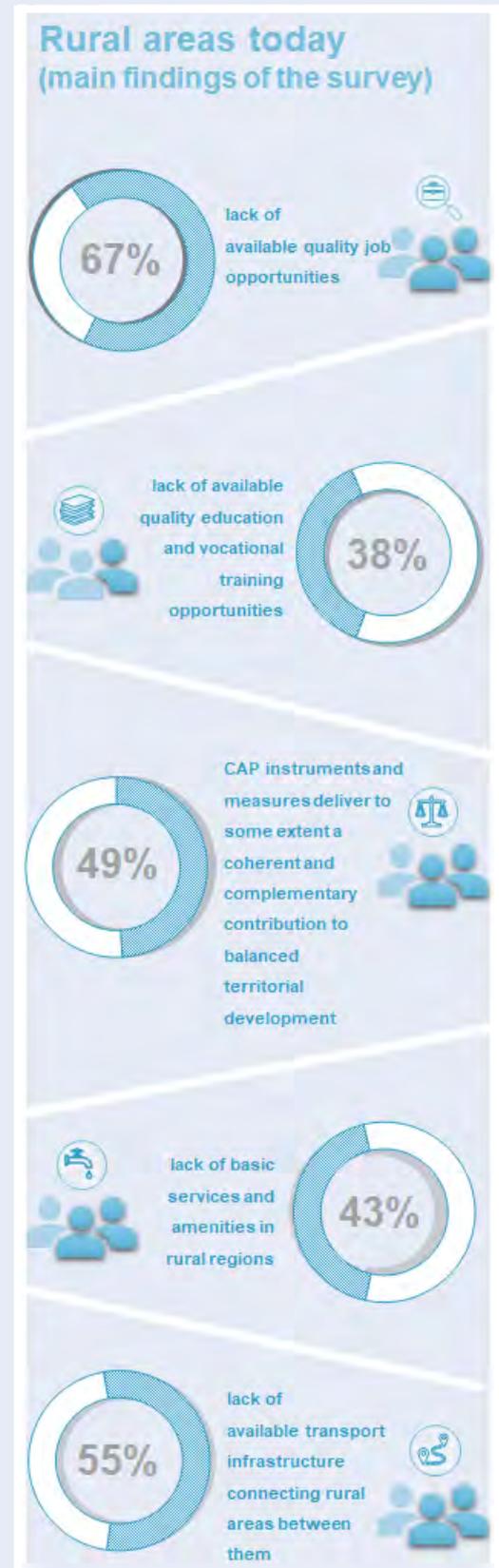
A green transition to a low-carbon, circular economy offers many opportunities for rural areas. The European Green Deal was seen as an essential step forward, but putting it into practice will require a major change in environmental awareness among all actors and finding better ways of valuing ecosystem services. Coordinated action is required at many levels to change attitudes and extend good practices.

The vision needs to be future-ready and build a stronger culture of social and technological innovation. Actions were suggested to ensure digital infrastructure is available, skills are developed, and local innovation and knowledge are supported in rural areas. Local hubs, advisory services in the wider rural domains and investing in new models for businesses and public services are outlined as key.

New regional and local territorial models supporting partnership and more open and resilient communities are needed. Stakeholders stressed the importance of rural-urban partnerships based on an equal footing. Similarly, improved rural-rural linkages, cooperation and partnership have also been suggested as ways to overcome issues of scale and lack of critical mass in rural areas. Brokers, animators and hubs could act as agents of change, boosting vertical coordination between local actors and those external to the territory, aligning bottom-up and top-down knowledge and capacities.

What should be done to achieve the vision?

Many of the actions recommended by stakeholders



for realising the vision are framed in the short and medium terms rather than the longer term, and there is a general expectation that change should start now. The following are some of the key ideas and stakeholders' proposals discussed during the 3rd meeting of the ENRD Thematic Group and the Rural Vision Week:

Overarching goals that inspire action and change the narrative. The vision needs to contain a broad set of goals that provide a common direction and motivate rural actors. Objectives should be translated into measurable, operational and trackable targets and milestones. They should be part of a flexible, decentralised approach that empowers countries and rural communities to decide on the best way of responding to the diverse challenges and opportunities they face and provides the tools for them to do so.

Strategies, plans and programmes. The vision needs to be translated into some form of strategy (or agenda) and action plan at EU, national, regional and local levels. Some countries are already producing integrated rural strategies, such as Ireland's rural development policy 2021-2025 ([Our rural future](#)) and the French [Rural Agenda](#), which can inspire others.

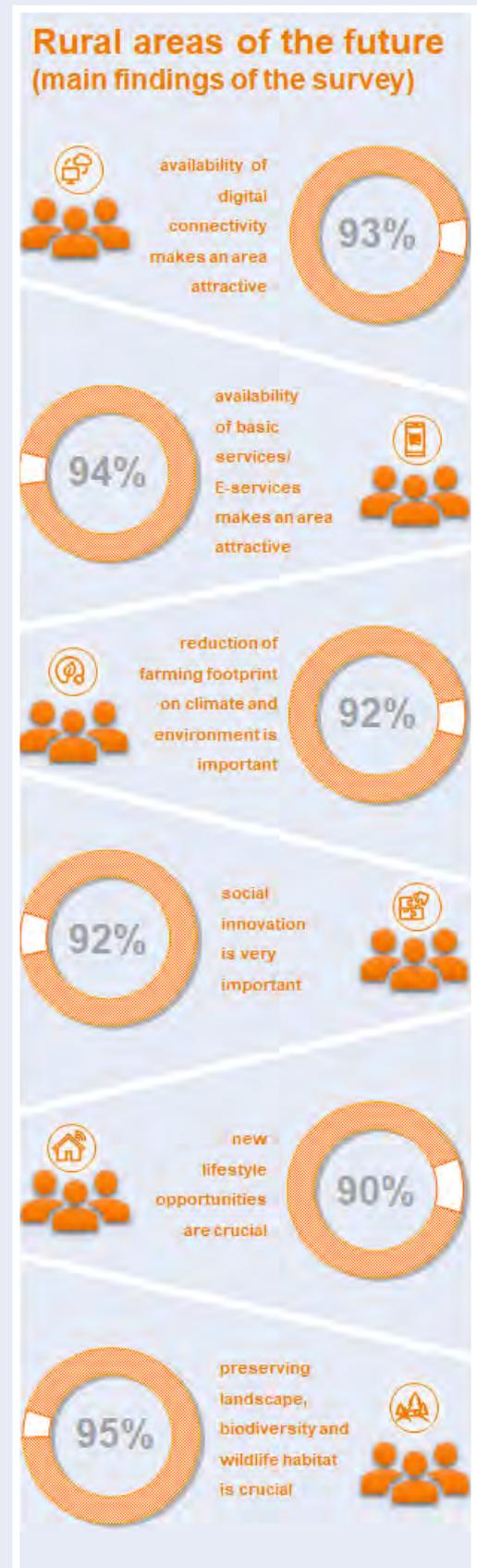
Stocktaking, rural proofing, and tracking achievements. A 'stocktaking' exercise of plans and programmes approved at national and regional levels for the coming period was also suggested. There is also a need for a regular system for the *ex-ante* proofing of policies in rural territories and *ex-post* assessment of the achievements.

Clear governance and leadership. Many stakeholders pointed to the need for clear political leadership and high-level coordination to bring about change and ensure that action is taken. The level of political commitment and leadership given to the European Green Deal could serve as a model.

Better policy design, alignment, coordination and resources. There was reference to possible interdepartmental rural task forces in public authorities at all levels and involving stakeholders. The idea of ensuring the integration of rural concerns into the European Semester process also attracted interest.

Rural intelligence, data and capturing the differences. One idea suggested was for the creation of an EU Rural Think Tank or Observatory to collect data and improve knowledge about rural areas.

Building the capacity of local communities and creating the enabling conditions or helping them manage a green, digital and fair transition. Among others, suggestions included flexible, accessible, ring-fenced local budgets, less red tape, support for animation, knowledge advisory services, innovation hubs, skills, mentoring, targeted action for young people, basic infrastructure, and access to services and networking.





Rural areas:
an eye to the future

João Ferrão



The pandemic may help us re-discover places that were left behind

Interview to Maria João Rocha

João Ferrão is a research professor at the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon, former Secretary of State for Spatial Planning and Cities (2005-2009) and former Dean of the University of Lisbon for society and local communities (2013-2017). He was national coordinator of several international research projects and networks (European Commission and European Science Foundation).

For those who work with him, João Ferrão is a free thinker about territorial strategies, but also the man "on the ground", the geographer who communicates directly with people.

In a time of change, TeritoriALL noted his thoughts about the challenges of the territorial agenda.

The motto of the ESPON seminar is Green and Just recovery. Can we say that smart economy means using these factors intelligently in favour of territorial resilience, cohesion and development?

The EU advocates a transition towards a place-based circular and carbon/climate-neutral economic model. This is a crucial endeavour. Yet, a "smart" economy requires more than this. It is an economy that recovers the original meaning of the Greek word *oikos* (house, household), knowing that in an increasing globalised world our home is the Earth. It is an economy that favours objectives such as territorial resilience, cohesion and sustainable development. It is an economy that is sufficient in terms of production, decent in terms of labour, and wise in terms of consuming resources. The smartness of an economy lies in its purposes, in the way it operates, in



what makes it meaningful and lively.

What is the influence of the breaking of the hypermobility paradigm on territorial organization and mobility?

The pandemic, by halting or hindering the prevailing patterns of people and goods hypermobility, had direct consequences: the spread of remote working, greater emphasis on short supply chains, the proliferation of and B2C e-commerce solutions, the increased role of urban micro logistics, etc. All these solutions already existed; however, they have undergone a major acceleration. What is new is their combined effect and the awareness that neighbourhoods, cities, regions and countries can become more self-reliant while remaining open to other spaces and to the world at large. The interrelationships between the geography of places, the geography of physical circulation and the different virtual geographies are changing. The challenge is to know how to stimulate mutually advantageous relationships between these various geographies for the benefit of all, and not only of those who have the required skills.

Do you believe that the "return to the land" can also bring a new look to rural areas?

The pandemic period brought new perceptions, favouring areas with lower population density, greater proximity to nature, better environment, quietness and pleasant public spaces. As a result, the demand for housing in peri-urban areas and in medium-sized and small cities increased, and tourism demand intensified in rural areas with low population density. A positive context has thus emerged for these different areas to the detriment of large cities. But residential mobility in Portugal is low for two main reasons: the high percentage of families with bank loans for house purchase and the low rate of new job creation in small towns and remote rural areas. In addition, in recent years public services (health, education, post office, etc.) have been closed in rural areas with low demographic dynamism, which have thus become less attractive, and the percentage of people in remote work, although growing, is still relatively low. It is likely that peri-urban areas with environmental and landscape quality and medium-sized cities with good accessibility will

become more attractive as a consequence of the pandemic. But it is very unlikely that rural areas and small cities in demographic and economic loss will be able to benefit from this cycle of new perceptions about areas that seem less exposed to the effects of external risks such as pandemics.

How can we make the pandemic experience an instrument of territorial cohesion, where All places matter?

All places matter but, according to citizens' perceptions, some matter more than others and the capacity of local, regional and national policies to reverse this situation is rather limited. Portugal still has a generation of urban residents who maintain close ties with the birthplaces of their parents. The pandemic may act as a powerful factor in



All places matter but, according to citizens' perceptions, some matter more than others and the capacity of local, regional and national policies to reverse this situation is rather limited.



'rediscovering' the value of places that have been left behind due to lack of opportunities, in particular job opportunities, and which have become recorded in the memory of those families as places that are pleasant to spend holidays in but not to live in. The effective use of the potential of all places must, therefore, be a challenge for everyone: central government, local authorities, families, NGOs and businesses.

What is the role of medium-sized cities in darning the links between metropolitan areas and rural areas?

Medium-sized cities do not necessarily have to play an intermediation role between metropolitan and rural areas. Given the consumer markets they represent, the labour force they account for, the qualified facilities they have and the specialised services they provide, the main geostrategic mission of medium-sized cities is to leverage urban-rural

systems at regional level. At the same time, they should gain scale by organising themselves into networks with other medium-sized cities, forming lasting regional, national, cross-border or transnational partnerships around a selected number of themes or problems. The relationship of medium-sized cities with metropolitan areas is complex, volatile and largely uncontrollable. The increasing functional integration of medium-sized cities into a metropolitan system has positive, but also perverse consequences. The outcomes of this integration will depend on the asymmetrical interactions between the two parties involved. This is why ensuring an adequate degree of both interaction and relative autonomy is key. A medium-sized city overly dependent on interactions with a metropolis will have a subordinate development. A medium-sized city with few interactions with a metropolis will tend to a marginal position.



it is no longer enough to develop effective and efficient solutions. The pandemic, is a very clear warning that structural changes are needed in today's societies and economies



The issues of food security, the proximity of services and the autonomy and sustainability of supply chains have come to the center of the debate. Is this a result of the pandemic or has it just highlighted its relevance?

The pandemic brought visibility and acceleration to already existing trends. What is new is the social and political recognition of the importance of some of these trends, the resulting redefinition of policy priorities, and the combined offer of solutions that were previously developed in a fragmented manner in space and on a case-by-case basis over time. The elements of the political agenda are not necessarily new, but the agenda is new in terms of its main goals and modes of governance. The concepts of transition and transformation become increasingly prominent. This suggests that it is no longer enough to develop

effective and efficient solutions. The pandemic, like all other global systemic risks (financial crises, climate change, severe loss of biodiversity, etc.), is a very clear warning that structural changes are needed in today's societies and economies.

What can be done to transform expressions such as bottom-up and territorial governance into actions based on the effective participation of citizens in the development of their territories?

The pandemic and the multiple discourses that it has generated reveal the importance of scientific knowledge and the urgent need to make this knowledge understandable to ordinary citizens. On the other hand, the pandemic coincided with a period where different forms of resentment by groups and communities who felt abandoned found an echo in populist and xenophobic discourses. Participatory planning was developed as a way to avoid overly technocratic forms of intervention by public authorities that citizens did not understand and therefore did not accept. Giving people a voice and listening are basic requirements of a mature democracy. Yet participation must cover all stages of the policy cycle: agenda-setting, proposal-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This will only be possible if there is information available that is understandable by ordinary citizens and if those citizens are proactively included in decision-making processes. It is from the everyday life of ordinary citizens that fairer and more inclusive territories are built, appreciated and better appropriated.

Maria João Rocha is communication advisor for Directorate General of Territory in Portugal





Citizens and territories should feel the impact of NextGenerationEU funds



André Viola

In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, Local Intermediate Authorities have once again demonstrated their ability to act quickly with citizens and their communities.

At a time when all economic and human resources must be directed towards the recovery and revival of our societies, the European Confederation of Local Intermediate Authorities (CEPLI), the largest network of local intermediate authorities, that brings together more than 839 counties, provinces and departments, wishes to remind us that a Europe of Member States can only be built and developed by relying on the diversity of its territories.

For this reason, all CEPLI members have decided to support a **manifesto** proposed by the Diputación de Barcelona to recall that, if Europe wants to succeed in its bet for recovery, local intermediate authorities must participate in the deployment of NextGenerationEU (NGEU) funds.

CEPLI members and signatories of the manifesto represent local intermediate authorities from several EU Member States: Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain.

These are local authorities historically enshrined in the institutions of the Member States, in their constitutions.

In this text, which is intended to appeal not only to the European institutions, but also to the Member States and the regions in Europe, the local intermediate authorities wish to highlight the historic solidarity that the EU has shown in initiating the European Recovery Plan, a plan that should help to overcome the economic and social crisis caused by

the coronavirus pandemic and, at the same time, lay the foundations for a modern and more sustainable Europe.

The EU's long-term budget, together with NGEU, is now a reality that offers a courageous response to the major challenges ahead.

This is why local intermediate authorities fully support this ambitious, generous and rapid EU response.

Such an impetus must, without delay, be accompanied by action on the part of the Member States and by local dissemination to the populations and territories in order to strengthen the link between the European construction and a proximity federalism in which local governments play a central role.

“ **The investment effort must be visible to citizens as a key element in improving their living conditions at a time when the health crisis is hitting the most vulnerable populations hard** ”

This territorial level of intervention plays a central role in several ways.

Local authorities have been working on these areas for a long time. They share a common vision of the future in the framework of the EU Urban Agenda and are able to develop comprehensive policies, which is



essential to ensure the added value of the extraordinary funds. These local authorities have a central role to play in:

linking the commitment to energy efficiency in buildings and housing with cutting-edge urban regeneration strategies;

accompanying those strategies with major investments in public transport and micromobility solutions that have an impact on citizens' habits; or

stimulating the digitalisation of the productive fabric in parallel with the strengthening of the technological capacities of workers.

At a historic moment for an EU that has to face an unprecedented situation, the manifesto voices a concern: if local authorities cannot translate the priorities of the European Commission and the national recovery plans of the Member States into strategies adapted to the reality of each territory and based on global approaches, the transformative capacity of the European funds will be clearly weakened.

The investment effort must be visible to citizens as a key element in improving their living conditions at a time when the health crisis is hitting the most vulnerable populations hard.

The manifesto also underlines the fact that this crisis accentuates an urban social divide that has been growing since 2008, as well as aggravating the territorial divide by reducing the chances of rural areas that already have fewer opportunities.

The intensity and inexorable progression of this double divide, both social and territorial, are different

in each Member State of the EU, as well as between their territories. However, thanks to their knowledge and broad vision of the territories, local intermediate authorities are on the front line in addressing this double divide, which is why we believe that cohesion is an essential issue.

The dramatic COVID-19 crisis has revealed (or reminded us) that local intermediate authorities are an indispensable level for understanding and interpreting this crisis. They must therefore also constitute a level for implementing the European response.

Why deprive ourselves of the intervention capacities of such a level at a time when Europe needs maximum efficiency in its policies?

The manifesto expresses three main expectations of the EU, but also of the Member States and all institutions involved in the implementation of the long-term budget of the EU, associated with NextGenerationEU (NGEU):

That the EU and its Member States recognise local governments, and in particular local intermediate authorities, as strategic allies in implementing funds and initiatives for recovery, transformation and resilience and, in particular, in developing NGEU funds (as well as those promoted under the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework), so that no one, no territory and no local government is left behind;

That Member States ensure that local governments are allocated new generation funds for recovery, transformation and resilience, to promote a new generation of integrated and innovative local policies and strategies, in line with the EU Urban Agenda and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as to guarantee the rights, security and opportunities of territories and populations, now and in the future;

Finally, that Member States ensure that effective and permanent mechanisms for dialogue are put in place with local and intermediate authorities in their respective countries, so that they can influence the planning, implementation and monitoring of the respective recovery plans through the promotion of new mechanisms of shared governance.

CEPLI would like to invite European citizens to contribute alongside it by making proposals to build a Europe with resilient territories.

We propose that they join us in our reflection by participating and speaking at the workshop that we will organise on the occasion of the 2021 edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities, entitled 'The future is in your hands'.

André Viola is President of the Aude Departmental Council in France, and the President of the European Confederation of Local Intermediate Authorities



The macroregional strategy for the Adriatic–Ionian Region: a common vision, a shared mission



Mathilde Konstantopoulou

Following the end of the Sixth Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), which was held virtually under the auspices of the Slovenian Presidency of the EUSAIR, a new era has emerged. EUSAIR, which brings together four EU member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) and five aspiring countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), is at a crossroad in terms of its decisions and actions. The strategy, at this year's forum with the adoption of the Izola Declaration, has also welcomed a 10th member, namely San Marino.

The European Commissioner for Regional and Urban Policy, Elisa Ferreira, in her opening message at the Sixth EUSAIR Forum, said that **if we want to go somewhere fast we go alone, but if we want to go far we move forward together**. EUSAIR is attractive and challenging, and new Member States and neighbouring countries wish to join the strategy. It covers a sea basin and hinterland area presenting geographical specificities and territorial diversities and offers potential for innovative ideas and projects to flourish in the region. Yet two questions remain: what can we offer to the EUSAIR strategy and what does the strategy offer us?

To begin with, the lack of funding for the strategy (one of the three NOs principles that have been predominant in the macroregional strategies' rationale since their foundation) has delayed implementation and created scepticism among key implementers and potential stakeholders. The top-down design of the strategy led to increasing difficulties at governance level, as the bottom-up approach was missing, and implementers at local, regional and even national levels were invited to think out of the box, plan in a different territorial dimension

(the macroregional one), adopt new practices, cooperate in a wider sense and deal with innovative proposals. They were summoned to promote strengths that they did not know existed in their territory; were asked to combat the weaknesses and emerge with a macroregional aspect of implementing projects; encountered challenges that they could not understand or deal with in a comprehensive, integrated way; and faced threats that they had to eliminate to enhance the territorial potential of their region.

Today, 7 years after the official commencement of the strategy's implementation and at the dawn of the new programming period, 2021–27, EUSAIR is mature, robust and concise. Having recovered from its initial setbacks, EUSAIR can design and implement projects, attract newcomers, create a brand name for the Adriatic–Ionian region and establish its presence in

“ **the strategy, apart from its cohesion role, plays a crucial part in fostering the EU enlargement and enabling the partner countries' accession to the EU** ”

the wider region united by the shared sea.

EUSAIR has a characteristic that is unique and challenging: partner countries of the strategy are candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans. Thus, the strategy, apart from its cohesion role, plays a crucial part in fostering the EU enlargement and enabling the partner countries'



accession to the EU. Alignment of administrative procedures, capacity building, knowledge transfer, know-how, aid to institutional reforms and legislative framework adaptation comprise the steps gradually taken and the reforms required for the Western Balkans' European perspective.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has affected the region and the strategy in various ways, with diverse repercussions. Meeting people in the region, exchanging ideas, getting together to prepare common activities, finding ways to pull together resources for the strategy, including more stakeholders in its implementation and increasing the visibility of the strategy were seriously hindered by the borders being closed as a result of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the post-COVID-19 era addresses a more resilient, competitive, successful Adriatic-Ionian region. We managed to turn weaknesses into strengths and disadvantages into advantages while finding innovative ways to interact, empowering stakeholders at all levels of governance, profiting from the technological tools at our disposal and, most of all, renewing our commitments to the strategy and its partners.

In addition, **we are exiting the humanitarian and health crisis at a decisive standpoint:** we are currently preparing the operational programmes and the partnership agreements for 2021–27 at national level, and it is the right moment to include the priorities of EUSAIR in our sectoral, regional and cooperation programmes. This concerns the 'embedding process', which was initiated with the Catania declaration and has recently reached its final formulation. The EUSAIR governance structures have recognised and decided on 'emblematic priorities'

of the strategy that need to be incorporated into the programming documentation of the new period, paving the way for the elaboration and future implementation of projects of macroregional added value and impact in the region. Taking this initiative a step further, **'flagship actions' were identified for each pillar of the strategy** (blue growth, transport and energy, environmental protection and sustainable tourism), and operational programmes are invited to include under their priority axes, within specific objectives and activities, references of identified projects that will be eligible for funding within the new programming period. The above constitute the chain of activities for the 'embedding process', which will increase substantially the operational ownership of the EUSAIR, along with the political ownership of the strategy that was already elaborated, granting our strategy the visibility, recognition and operability for its future activities.

To conclude, in the upcoming period of the European Green Deal and the digital transition of the EU space, EUSAIR can and will succeed in its goals and objectives by concentrating on the 'embedding process', improving the effective operation of the EUSAIR governance structures (national coordinators, pillar coordinators and Facility Point project partners) and by revising its action plan, making room for the EUSAIR enlargement, for innovative approaches to project ideas and projects and for elaborating the vision and mission of EUSAIR that have made it so attractive, challenging and promising.

Mathilde Konstantopoulou is Deputy National Coordinator for the European Structural and Investment Funds Project Coordinator at EUSAIR Facility Point, Greece

Why we need new evidence to better address the social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic



Nicolas Rossignol

ESPON's first attempt to contribute to the policy debate about the impact of COVID-19 was to investigate if territorial features could somehow explain how the virus has been circulating across European territories. The study on the geography of the COVID-19 outbreak, introduced in the November 2020 edition of this magazine, revealed a clear pattern of what happened between February and July 2020 by considering the interaction of network and proximity logics, as well as super spreading events as accelerators.

«Covid is not an equal opportunity killer» (Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize in Economics, August 2020)

However, after this first wave and irrespective of the strictness of sanitary measures taken at national and regional levels, infection rates surged again in autumn 2020, which resulted in EU Member States reverting

💡 **Policy makers at all levels of governance require new territorial evidence** 💡

to different forms of containment measures, including lockdowns. Unlike the first wave, in spring 2020, the second COVID-19 wave has affected European regions and countries more evenly. COVID-19 and the sanitary measures taken to contain its spread have already had various disruptive impacts on people's lives and on how cities, metropolitan areas and regions function.

Containment measures resulted in abrupt changes in the way people work, study, shop, socialise and move around. The outcomes of these measures have been detrimental in many ways, resulting in, inter alia, people losing their jobs or having to make ends meet with a reduced income, being socially isolated, and/or having to balance work and teaching their children at home. From this point of view, the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be yet another way to reveal persisting territorial inequalities between European regions.

Already, effective impacts are being assessed and some evidence has emerged: Eurofound's survey on the impact of the pandemic on people's living conditions and financial situation in Europe has revealed that close to 10 % of the respondents became unemployed after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with rising numbers among the self-employed (13 %); almost 6 out of 10 were forced

to ask for financial support to make ends meet; and young women were the most likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic.

Since the onset of the pandemic, various institutions and academics have tried to analyse its development and, particularly, its potential economic impacts. The ongoing and fast-paced development of this crisis, though, makes data gathering a particular challenge, especially gathering comparable up-to-date data that would allow a pan-European analysis. Policymakers at all levels of governance require new territorial evidence to be able to develop policy measures to cope with the immediate effects of the pandemic in the short term and to manage its long-term impacts. This evidence needs to encompass analyses not only of the economic impacts but also of the pandemic's ramifications for social cohesion and for environmental quality.

Against that background, ESPON decided to do its bit in delivering such territorial evidence. A new applied research has just been launched aiming to analyse further the geographical patterns of the COVID-19 pandemic from its onset until as far as possible into 2021 and to focus on the social consequences, including their territorial dimensions, an aspect that has so far not been addressed by pan-European research at regional and local levels (see map next page for a first policy reading done in the latest ESPON study).

Implemented with the support of the Committee of the Regions, the European Confederation of Local Intermediate Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions and Eurocities, this study will gather new data to measure the effective direct and indirect social consequences of containment measures taken in response to the pandemic in European regions and cities. Capitalising on the COVID-19 crisis as a window of opportunity, this new project will also highlight emerging and innovative measures adopted by cities and regions.

Through this, we expect to better inform policy making on all levels of governance in the recovery from the crisis set off by COVID-19. Let's meet up in the next edition of this magazine to share with you the first results of this exciting new project.

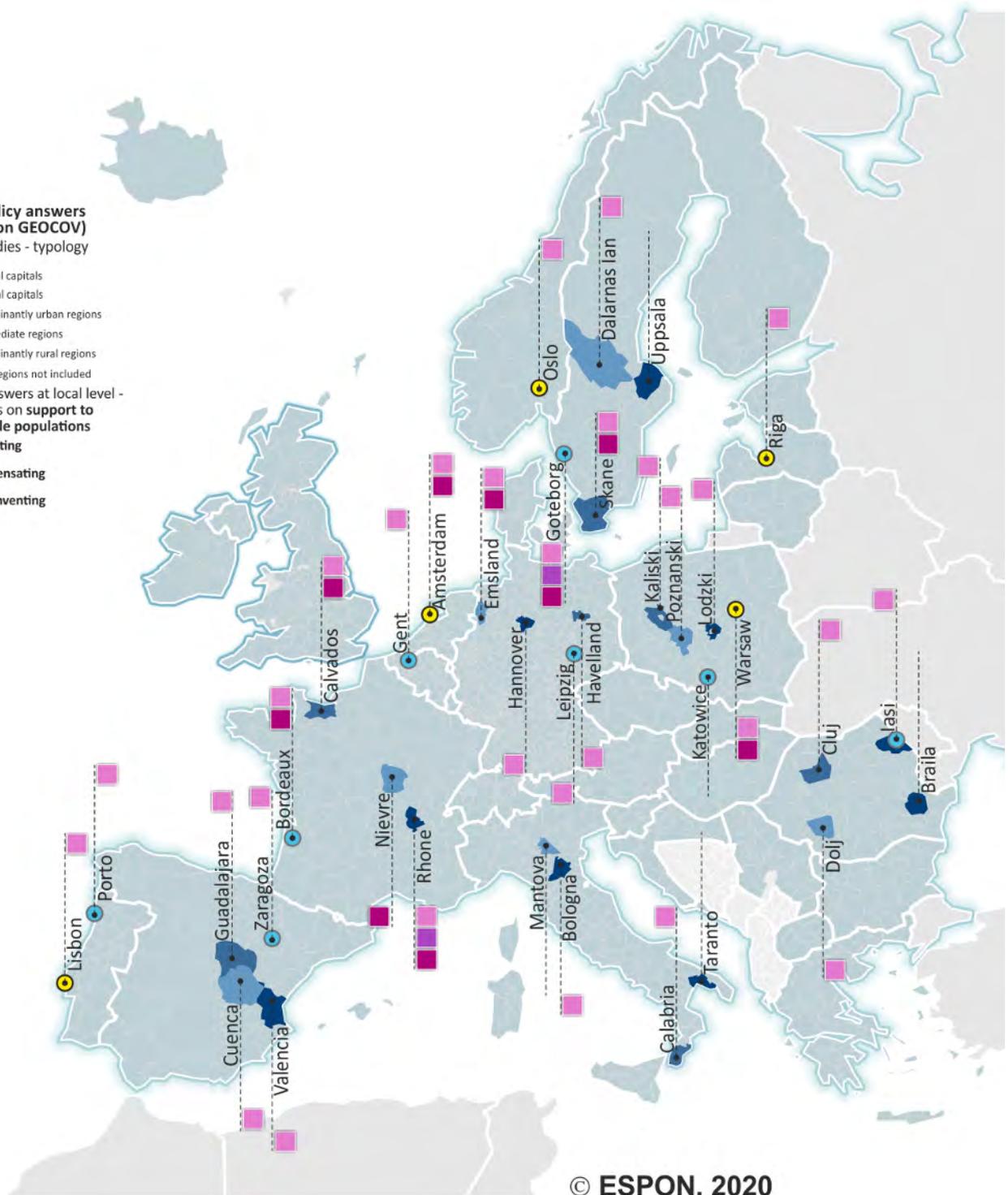
Nicolas Rossignol is Head of Unit Evidence and Outreach at ESPON EGTC

**First policy answers
(selection GEOCOV)**
Case studies - typology

- National capitals
- Regional capitals
- Predominantly urban regions
- Intermediate regions
- Predominantly rural regions
- Other regions not included

**Policy answers at local level -
measures on support to
vulnerable populations**

- Mitigating
- Compensating
- Circumventing





Older people's interests in policymaking: a lesson from COVID-19?



Piera Petruzzi

Member State governments have begun to release more optimistic data about the spread of COVID-19 infection, the numbers of vaccinations administered and intensive care unit admission rates. Some heads of government even envisage that wearing masks may be unnecessary in the next few months.

The recent attempts by some media to understand the real impacts of the crisis, in terms of the numbers of people who have died of COVID-19, suggest that we have entered a new phase: there is light at the end of the tunnel and we are trying to determine what really happened over the last year and a half.

Officially, COVID-19 has killed over 3.4 million people around the world. However, according to recent statistical modelling published by The Economist, which estimated how many deaths have gone uncounted, the virus has killed around 10 million people.

The virus has killed people of all ages; however, the vast majority of victims have been older with underlying health issues. Looking at Europe's ageing population, a trend that will continue in the coming decades, with projections suggesting that the

proportion of people aged 65 and above will rise to 24 % by 2050, the importance in policymaking of designing our environments in an age-friendly way and considering older people's interests is evident.

We have recently observed some promising approaches towards ageing. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2021–2030 to be the Decade of Healthy Ageing. In a conference on ageing in November 2020, the idea of turning ageing

“ **The virus has killed people of all ages; however, the vast majority of victims have been older with underlying health issues.** ”

into an opportunity and 'launching a Silver Deal, just like the Green Deal' was advocated by cities and well received by participants.

Germany, Portugal and Slovenia signed a trio presidency declaration on ageing in December 2020.

The three countries are jointly advocating urgent adaptation to demographic change and mainstreaming of ageing-related matters in all policy areas. The declaration is an important achievement in terms of strengthening the rights of older people. It stresses a human rights-based approach to ageing well, in order to ensure that increased life expectancy is accompanied by continuing good health and economic conditions.

Furthermore, the European Commission has launched a consultation on the Green Paper on Ageing. The green paper sets out the key issues related to ageing and discusses possible ways to anticipate and respond to the socio-economic impact of Europe's ageing population. In parallel, the Council of the European Union approved the **Conclusions on mainstreaming ageing in public policies** in March 2021.

In the recently published policy brief **'The ageing revolution: towards a European Silver Deal?'** (), ESPON stressed some key recommendations for cities, regions and countries.

Being ambitious and facilitating healthy and inclusive ageing is the starting point in the formulation of long-term strategies on ageing. While developing strategies on ageing, policymakers should be supported by European, national and regional mechanisms, including funds and a dedicated network for the exchange of good practices.

Amsterdam, Barcelona, Gothenburg, Greater Manchester, Hengelo, Nantes, Oslo and Zaragoza have implemented inspiring projects and initiatives on

“ **Being ambitious and facilitating healthy and inclusive ageing is the starting point in the formulation of long-term strategies on ageing** ”

ageing. Within the ESPON targeted analysis 'ACPA-Adapting European cities to population ageing: policy challenges and best practices', researchers have produced a policy handbook that provides examples of such initiatives, including details of transferability, means of implementation and policy impacts. The policy handbook Supporting the WHO's decade of healthy and inclusive urban ageing is available in six languages (Dutch, English, French, Norwegian, Spanish and Swedish).

ESPON recommends a flexible, tailor-made approach

to policy development related to ageing. We do not all age in the same way: old people are not a homogeneous group. Different groups may be at greater risk of disadvantage and may not have the opportunity to age well because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

Raise awareness across the whole of society of what ageing means and how it can be supported. Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, in her opening speech at the ESPON Conference Week on Ageing 2020, said that ageing is also about embracing opportunities.

More than ever, user involvement is key to developing age-friendly cities and territories in line with people's needs. This requires the regular consultation of older people about their wishes and needs.

Ageing should be a subject on all sectoral agendas; the European Council's Conclusions on mainstreaming ageing in public policies are promising in that respect.

Piera Petrucci is Senior Project Expert European Outreach and Targeted Analyses at ESPON EGTC





Development challenges for lake areas in the EU



Károly Fekete Éva Geletáné Varga

In addition to the fact that 90% of the readily available freshwater on the Earth's surface is found in lakes, they also represent important areas for the protection of biodiversity and the conservation of seminatural ecosystems. The utilisation of lakes significantly changed in Europe in the second half of the 20th century, similarly to other developed areas of the world.

Traditionally, lakes were used mainly for fishing and navigation, but these functions changed as tourism and recreation became more important in welfare societies. In addition, lakes also have to meet the increased societal demand for water, for drinking, agricultural and industrial purposes.

Moreover, owing to their environmental characteristics, lakes and the associated ecosystems are also considered high-risk areas regarding the impacts of climate change.

A geographic feature of lakes arising from their physical characteristics is that they are often located at administrative boundaries, which has impacts not only on environmental and ecological dimensions, but also on social functions.

Many lakes serve as country borders or they belong to several administrative units (counties or regions) within the same country, circumstances which inevitably lead to institutional and administrative fragmentation. Therefore, it is difficult to govern and manage lakes in an integrated way based on cooperation and consensus even in terms of hydrology, environment, transport or tourism.

The World Lake Vision, revealed at the third World Water Forum in Japan in 2003, sets out the principles for sustainable use of lakes, including:

Policy development and decision-making for lake

management should be based on sound science and the best available information.

Citizens and other stakeholders should be encouraged to participate meaningfully in identifying and resolving critical lake problems.

Good governance, based on fairness, transparency and empowerment of all stakeholders, is essential for sustainable lake use.

It is necessary to adapt to climate change as effectively as possible. It is essential to ensure that the sensitive environmental balance between social and economic activities related to the lakes is maintained. In addition, there is a need for social welfare and economic competitiveness.

For the effective integrated management of all these challenges, smart governance of lakes and their regions is required, which should be based on sound knowledge bases, as well as on institutional and social cooperation. However, in order to apply this territorial approach and to identify and manage problems in time, specific tools are required, and broad cooperation is needed at local, regional, national and EU levels.

There are several endogenous examples of integrated management of certain environmental and social needs of large lakes. These address some lake-management tasks carried out at local or regional level. In addition, tasks related to large lakes can even provide good examples of cross-border institutional cooperation.

For example, the water transport system of Lake Constance, crossing the borders of three countries, is based on institutional cooperation and resilience. At the same time, experiences show that strengthening institutional cooperation and collaboration, or



promoting bottom-up initiatives, is not always enough to meet the challenges and development needs due to the specific ecological, environmental, social and economic characteristics of lakes. Addressing these challenges also requires external resources and territorial policy interventions in order to overcome administrative and institutional fragmentation and to establish a long-lasting community of interests.

Certain developmental aspects of large European

🗨️ ***For the EU territorial policy, which considers environmental values as a key asset for the future, the integrated development of European lakes can be a priority not only from an ecological point of view*** 🗨️

lakes are not simply integrated territorial management issues, but they may also require higher-level interventions, even addressing national or EU interests, owing to the environmental value and social utility of lake areas

At the same time, these interventions need integrated regional monitoring, including all related circumstances and relevant knowledge. With the help of thorough and comprehensive cost-benefit analyses, it can be proven that the cost of preventing ecological and/or socio-economic disasters is lower than the cost of the recovery required afterwards.

For the EU territorial policy, which considers

environmental values as a key asset for the future, the integrated development of European lakes can be a priority not only from an ecological point of view, but also because of the services that lakes and their regions provide to society. In addition to the field of recreation, lakes provide a range of other services required for maintaining the functions of society.

As a result of the above mentioned specific challenges that European lakes are facing, the regional managers of Lake Balaton in Hungary, Lake Constance in Germany and Lake Vänern in Sweden, as stakeholders, decided to propose the spatial progress and integrated development opportunities of large lakes in the EU as a subject for ESPON targeted territorial analysis.

We intend to use the results of the **ESPON LAKES** project, which started in autumn 2020, to make recommendations and proposals for EU spatial policymakers in order to promote the common integrated management of large lakes in Europe.

Lakes are special territories with special needs. Therefore, they require specific interventions, like other EU territories with geographic specificities (e.g. islands and mountains). The importance of specific interventions will increase in the future, with special regard to the environmental and social impacts of climate change

Károly Fekete is Researcher and Éva Geletáné Varga is project manager at the Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency



Leaping from a primary to a quaternary sector in a rural EU border area



Sandra Spule

What are employment options for young people in the rural areas of Latvia? The peripheral region of Latgale, located next to the EU external border with Russia and Belarus, showcases that the fourth industrial revolution offers means for retaining the younger generation in the region.

Over the past 30 years, the overall prospects for the region's development have been grim mostly because of the negative side effects of the restructuring of the economy. In addition, the 15 years after Latvia joined the EU and the European Single Market in 2004 were not easy. Although the restructuring of the economy and joining the EU had an overall positive effect in Latvia, for Latgale it also meant a further acceleration of the initial negative side effects.

Supported by the EU Common Agricultural Policy, the traditional employer of the region—agriculture—proved that it could grow with fewer hands than before, whereas not all other industries managed to stay afloat to compensate for the job loss in the agricultural sector. As a result, many people had to leave the region, and often the country, in pursuit of employment. Therefore, between 2009 and 2019, Latgale lost one fifth of its population, with rural areas depopulating most rapidly.

Do the fourth industrial revolution and related quaternary sector activities provide hope to the peripheral and predominantly rural regions, such as

Latgale? What does the development mean for the region? What preconditions are necessary? Are there already any signs of uptake?

The good news is that the fourth industrial revolution often disregards geographical specificities, and it is becoming clear that employment in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector does not require attachment to a certain location. As also evidenced by the COVID-19 global pandemic, jobs in

“ ***The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit have shown that many people have appreciated the possibility to return home, and if remote job options remain, regions such as Latgale can at least reduce depopulation*** ”

the quaternary sector, similarly to many other office jobs, can be set up anywhere with stable and good internet access.

This provides an opportunity for young people to consider staying in the region and for those who have left the region to return. The COVID-19 pandemic and



Most importantly, they serve as regional knowledge centres, providing appropriate and timely education that corresponds to the ever-growing regional labour market needs of, inter alia, the quaternary sector. They are expected to boost regional productivity. In 2019, the total value added per person employed in ICT in Latgale was EUR 17 322, which was only half of the national average for the industry but considerably higher than the average regional productivity.

Although intelligent and talented young people are the main resource of the ICT industry, the role of appropriate hard infrastructure should not be underestimated.

This includes a high-speed and volume internet connection, coworking spaces and at least one high-quality office building. These are the main market failures in the region for which public support, including the EU strategic investments, is irreplaceable for enabling conditions to nurture the first signs of ICT growth.

Everyone in Latgale is expected to benefit from the fourth industrial revolution as it mitigates the side-effects of its peripheral location.

The knowledge spillover effect will soon also be visible in other technology-intensive sectors of the economy, starting with the few high-tech industries of Latgale and ending with more traditional industries, such as wood processing and metal working, that have been substantially technologically upgraded in recent years. Overall, it is expected that everyone in these sectors will benefit.

Brexit have shown that many people have appreciated the possibility to return home, and if remote job options remain, regions such as Latgale can at least reduce depopulation.

Everywhere in the world, businesses in the ICT sector look for young, smart people who are able to learn, and Latgale is no exception. In 2019, around 1 000 people in Latgale were employed by 279 companies in the ICT sector.

Although accounting for only 1 % of the total regional employment, since 2014 it has annually grown by 10%. For comparison, employment in the 'traditional' sectors of the region, such as agriculture, wood processing and metal working, continues to downsize, which is also due to the technological revolution and intensification, and might also add to the need for more ICT services. This signals a potential for establishing more ICT companies in the region. The quaternary sector is growing rapidly all over Latvia. The national added value by ICT has increased by 77 % from 2014 to 2019, while in Latgale by 102%.

As acknowledged by the ICT companies, their main determinant for settling in Latgale are the two regional universities, namely Daugavpils University and Rezekne Academy of Technologies. They attract smart and ambitious young people wishing to affiliate themselves with the region.

Sandra Spule is Analyst & Policy Adviser in Spatial Foresight (Luxembourg)





Measuring the climate impact of spatial planning



Pauline Riordan

Because of its broad reach, spatial planning plays a key role in the transition to a zero-carbon society and economy. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are a lever for accelerated climate action in the Irish Regions and provide a long-term spatial framework for sustainable development - and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions - in local development plans in Ireland.

Global to Local - Spatial Planning as a lever for tackling climate change

Climate change is a global challenge that requires a coherent response at national, regional and local level. As an island in the north Atlantic, Ireland is already feeling the effects of climate change, with more frequent extreme weather events, rising temperatures and sea levels, and towns and cities at heightened risk from flooding.

As it stands, Ireland is not on the right trajectory, even with COVID, to meet our EU emission reduction targets of 40% by 2030. In response, the Irish Government has declared a “climate emergency” and the National Climate Action Plan sets out a decarbonisation pathway to 2030, and a net zero target by 2050.

Spatial planning plays a key role in putting Ireland on the right path. By planning properly, we can promote more efficient use of land, increase public and active transport, build sustainable communities and a green economy. Project Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework integrates climate action into all regional

and local land use planning policies, supported by Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the current review of local City and County Development Plans.

Comparing pathways to zero carbon: Case Study County Meath Ireland

County Meath is in the commuter catchment of Ireland’s capital city of Dublin and has experienced rapid population and economic growth with increased commuting patterns and traffic congestion, leading to



By planning properly, we can promote more efficient use of land, increase public and active transport, build sustainable communities and a green economy.



increased emissions from transport and land use change. Meath’s Climate Action Plan highlights the need for good planning if the County is to achieve its national emissions reduction targets and is integrated into the Draft Meath County Development Plan, which will set out a spatial framework for future development to 2027.



reduction targets.

But how can we improve what we cannot measure? There are many ways to measure GHG emissions with no universally agreed method for quantifying the climate impact of spatial planning policies across different territories. EMRA launched the QGasSP project to learn from the latest research and develop a methodology that will allow planning authorities at national, regional, and local levels to quantify and forecast the GHG impact of their spatial planning policies in a consistent manner.

The project will deliver a web application and modelling tool for planners that can be integrated into the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This integration will allow development of alternative scenarios to support the plan making process.

The service providers are working with stakeholders in Meath, Dublin's Energy Agency Codema and Ireland's National Transport Agency (NTA) to develop the QGasSP tool with a focus on quantification of emissions from buildings, transport, and land use change.

Once the local baseline data is available, the GHG quantification of different policies can then be completed by planners in Meath to test climate mitigation strategies in their spatial plan, to identify and monitor new 'Decarbonisation Zones' and to avoid 'locking in' unsustainable high carbon land use and transport patterns.

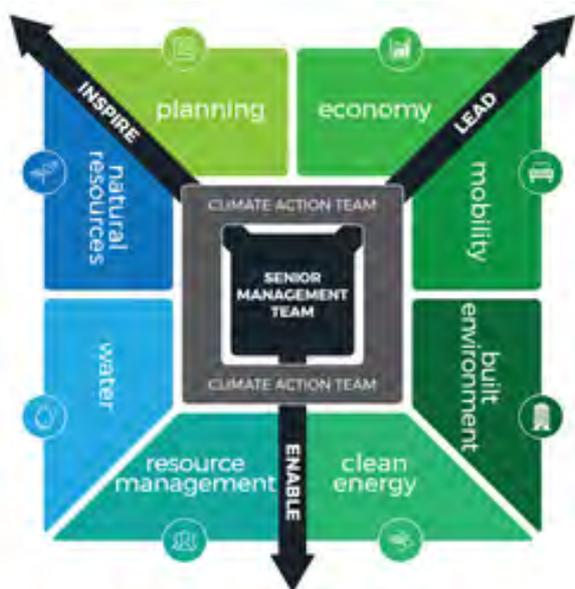
Climate action as a driver for growth

The outputs of QGasSP are eagerly awaited in Ireland, where a recent National Climate Objective sets a more ambitious roadmap of 7% emission reductions per annum up to 51% by 2030. The tool will be used by planning authorities to compare alternative pathways to climate neutrality, to build political will for the transformative change that is needed over the next decade and to position climate action as a driver for growth.

By integrating climate action and aligning spatial plans at all levels with EU priorities, it is hoped to leverage European Green Deal opportunities and advance the creation of 'green' jobs and sustainable food and energy production and ensure a just

"If you can't measure it, you can't improve it."

Meath is one of 12 local authorities in the Eastern and Midland Region. The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is committed to tackling climate change and prepared the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, which sets the spatial policy framework to 2031 in our Region and requires that local authority Development Plans undergo assessment of their impact on GHG emissions and include measures to monitor progress towards



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*Photos: Meath County Council
www.meath.ie |*



Functional areas as emerging geographies: how to define and measure them



Zintis Hermansons

The understanding of different functional geographies has grown exponentially through the introduction of improved and enlarged lists of territorial typologies. Territorial typologies are the main building blocks that help to further define specific patterns or directions of interactions among people and the places around them.

Although some time ago territorial typologies were products of research discourse, since 2018 the amended EC Regulation on NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) has provided a clear legal framework at the European level on what can be considered an 'urban area', 'rural area' or 'coastal area' (Tercet typologies).

Methods used to analyse and distinguish between territorial typologies have also progressed; for instance, the 'degree of urbanisation (Degurba)' method has recently been **endorsed at the global level by the United Nations Statistical Commission.**

Nowadays, different types of functional and soft cooperation areas may be identified across European landscapes: functional urban areas, functional rural areas, functional cross-border areas, functional transnational cooperation areas, labour market areas, areas of land-sea interactions, areas of green infrastructure, macroregions, island areas and neighbourhood areas, among others.

The **preparatory study** for the 17th session of the Conference of the Council of Europe of Ministers

Responsible for Spatial Planning identified more than 20 types of functional areas (2017). There are clear benefits in defining and understanding functional areas in terms of policy planning and territorial governance. Recently, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development released a manual on **how to delineate functional areas in all territories** (2020), which showcases benefits for better policy design, delivery and evaluation.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has spurred research in detecting **mobility functional areas**, which are areas of intense human mobility; the idea is to help policymakers to avoid unnecessary large-area or

“ ***functional areas reflect national and intraregional contexts and thus should not necessarily be a 'European product'*** ”

national lockdowns in the future.

In the context of the aforementioned two important issues that arise in terms of the policy planning: a) can one think of uniform functional areas that can be comparable across European countries? b) what kind of socioeconomic data can be accessed about functional areas?



Territorial coverage and the availability of clear delineations on functional areas that could be consistently applied to European countries would be desirable, as this would improve statistical comparisons and benchmarking and provide deeper insights on development trends (*European Harmonised Labour Market Areas* is a fine example).

However, practice shows that functional areas reflect national and intraregional contexts and thus should

“ **The COVID-19 global pandemic has spurred research in detecting mobility functional areas, which are areas of intense human mobility** ”



not necessarily be a ‘European product’; national and regional approaches to defining functional areas must be taken into account.

Luxembourg is an illustrative example of a mismatch between reality and how the country is seen from the ‘European perspective’. According to the Tercet framework, the whole country of Luxembourg is deemed a functional urban area.

This is in some ways correct but disregards the fact

that the actual functional urban area of Luxembourg city encompasses surrounding territories of Belgium, France and Germany, from where thousands of workers commute daily to Luxembourg.

Data on functional areas are scarce, especially when it comes to pan-European data. This is mostly because functional areas are in many cases defined at the level of local municipalities.

To address this problem, ESPON has developed a web tool that allows the disaggregation of NUTS level data into smaller territorial units, thus providing access to hundreds of estimated demographic and socioeconomic time series indicators for several types of functional areas.

The upcoming 2021 Population and Housing Census round will provide new avenues for updating the most fundamental datasets on functional areas and expanding our understanding on territorial development trends across different places in Europe.

More importantly, the enlarged data sets that will be available on EU-wide 1 km² grids will allow much more flexible, accurate and detailed statistical analysis at functional and cross-border levels.

Zintis Hermansons is Project Expert - Project Development and Coordination at the ESPON EGTC



Eco-clusters as governance tools



Jacopo Riccardi



Thijs Fikken

Europe's urban-maritime regions are vibrant areas and often establish an interface between cities, industrial activities, recreational activities and nature. Historically, land that is close to seas and rivers has provided these areas and their inhabitants with economic opportunities. European ports play an indispensable role in ensuring the cost-efficient distribution of goods to and from European consumers and producers.

European urban-maritime regions have their own specialisations. Coastal areas in the north-west of Europe are home to some of the biggest ports in the world in terms of processed cargo. Ports in the Mediterranean region are generally smaller in size, but play an important role in passenger transport. Some ports focus on bunkering services, whereas others specialise in container transshipment or cruises. Ports in mainland Europe service a large hinterland, and island ports often cater for the local market.

Port activities can also have negative impacts on urban-maritime regions. They can pose a threat to the environment and can lead to congestion along the region's infrastructures. Guaranteeing economic growth while minimising the negative impacts on the environment will be one of the core challenges for European urban-maritime regions in the coming 10 years. It is a challenge that can only be overcome when regional stakeholders from industries, government and academia join forces – in other words, through effective eco-cluster developments. The question 'how can effective eco-clusters be

developed?' is at the core of the ESPON European Research for Maritime Eco(nomic) clusters governance Strategy (ERMES) targeted analysis.

The challenge described previously is a good example of the need for organisation in a complex and ever-changing society. With the societal and economical changes taking place over the past 100 years, traditional models of administration and governance have to be revised. There are realities that have changed little (e.g. the municipalities as entities) and others that have profoundly evolved (e.g. the universities). These dynamics have been affected by



Cluster governance strategies can help local administrations and businesses to structure their cooperation and gain socio-economic benefits



the increasing coexistence between national and European interests, especially in terms of law. Governance, understood as the exercise of authority, management and control, is the tool that adapts traditional methods to societal evolution and the challenges of new markets.

Cluster governance strategies can help local administrations and businesses to structure their cooperation and gain a range of socio-economic benefits. Although they seem synonymous, words



such as agglomeration, network or cluster have different nuances. A cluster combines spatial dimensions and cooperation. It is characterised by spatial proximity, socially embedded links and interactions that are associated with economic benefits. A cluster consists of businesses from different parts of the value chain that are located in the same place, have horizontal relationships and interact with education, research and development,

🗨️ **Guaranteeing economic growth while minimising the negative impacts on the environment will be one of the core challenges for European urban-maritime regions in the coming 10 years** 🗨️

and other neighbouring organisations. There is no single governance model, just as there is no single cluster model.

The **ERMES** targeted analysis examined European realities in the development of maritime eco-clusters. The addition of 'eco' in this project refers to both the ecological (sustainable) and economic values that cluster governance can bring. **ERMES** provides the

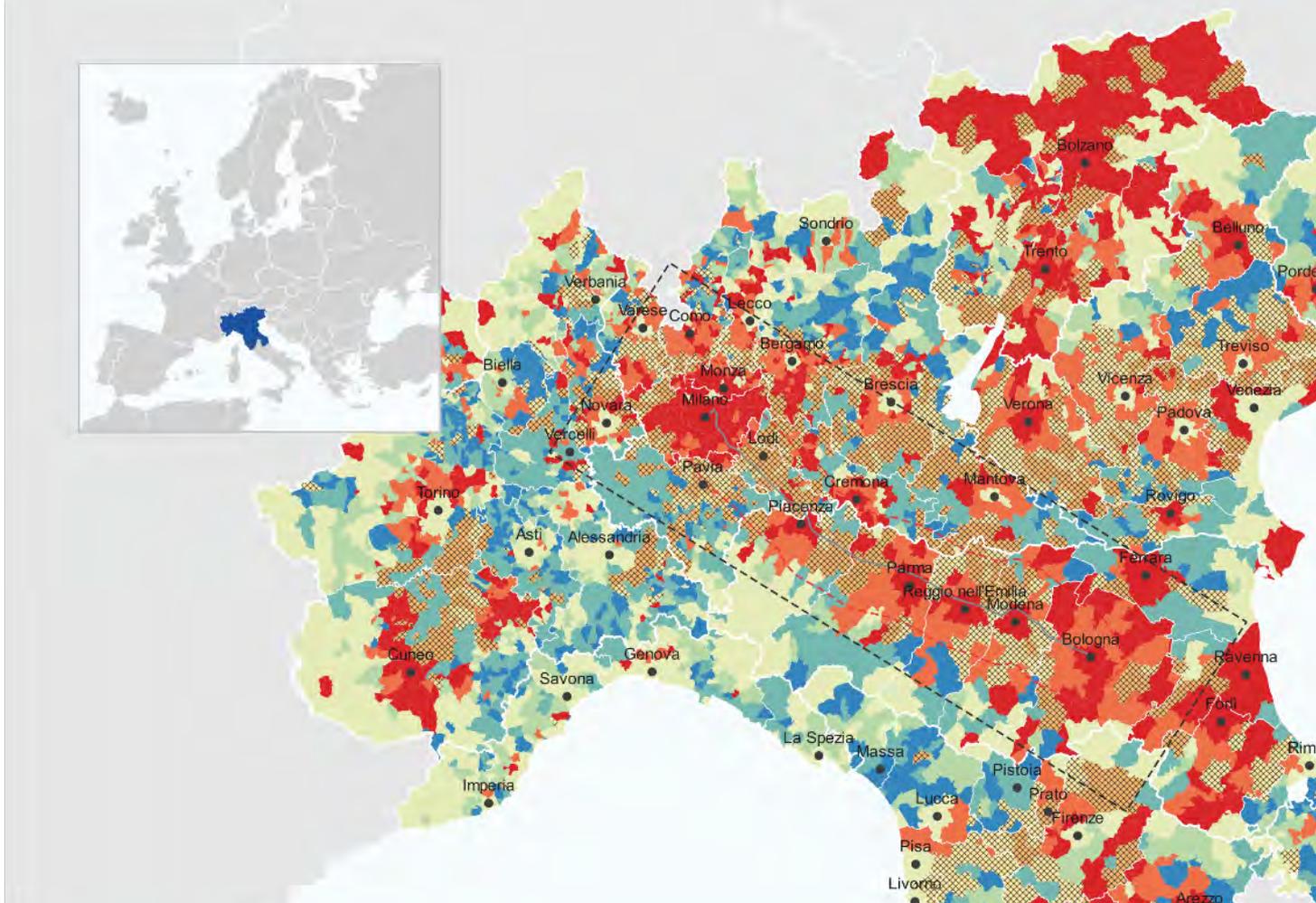
framework of a multilevel cooperation, which involves public bodies, the business system and the academic world.

The goal is to propose innovative tools that make the cooperation fluid and mutually advantageous. To unleash the socio-economic potential that the ports and maritime sector can offer to a region, it is imperative that relevant stakeholders (public, private, academic, etc.) commit to a shared, integrated and sustainable ambition.

This will provide a vision for actions to be targeted towards, allowing for the alignment of resources that stakeholders can offer to benefit the development of the region. However, a study, a project or an analysis must not be limited to reiterating the need for collaboration between institutions, companies and centres of knowledge. They must start from the statements of principle to take the leap from a generic level and obtain lines of concrete actions, which, once implemented, can allow their evaluation in economic terms.

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Thijs Fikken is consultant on regional & urban development at Ecorys (lead project team ERMES)



European Year of Rail 2021. Connecting places and people



Valeria Fedeli

The year 2021 is the European year of rail. To remind citizens and policymakers about the crucial roles of railways in connecting places all over Europe, a special train, named the Connecting Europe Express, will travel through 26 European countries, stopping in more than 40 cities, between September and October 2021.

A series of conferences will take place along its route; their aim is to discuss the new role of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) framed within the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. By implementing an action plan based on 82 initiatives inspired by the European Green Deal, the EU aims to reduce emissions by 90 %.

By 2030, high-speed traffic is expected to double, and by 2050, a fully operational, multimodal TEN-T for sustainable and smart transport with high-speed connectivity should be in place, making interurban mobility sustainable, available for everybody and everywhere. This will also increase connections between the places and people of Europe.

While trying to get out of the most consistent mobility crisis ever experienced after the Second World War, in

late December 2020 the EU confirmed its effort to build cohesion and reduce regional disparities.

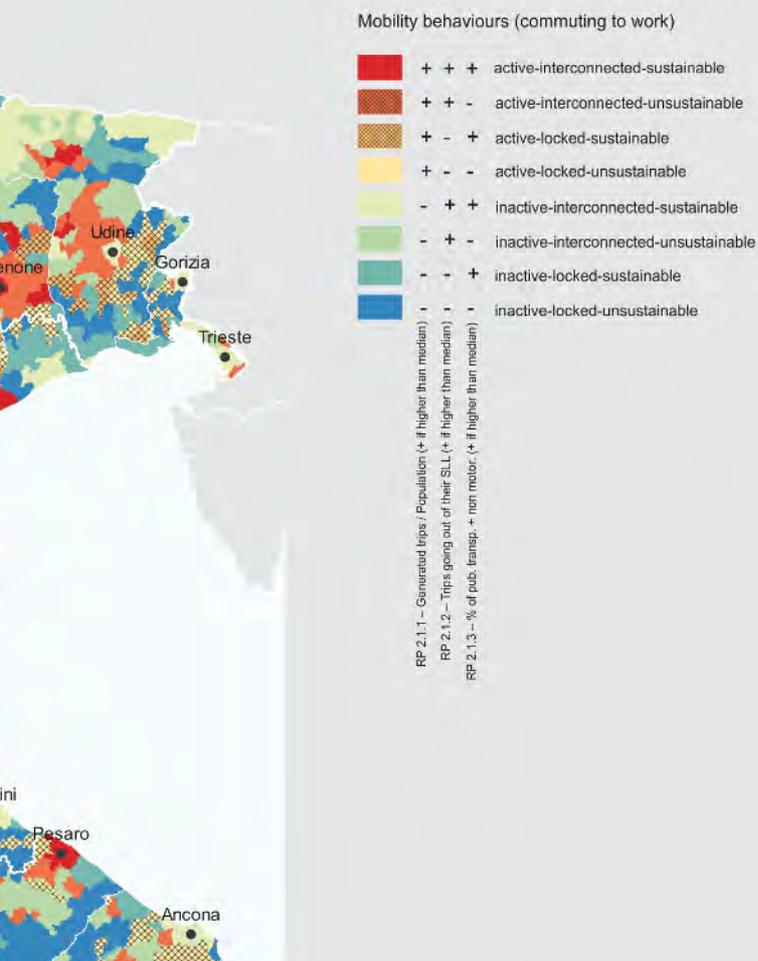
It designed a strategy that improves connectivity and includes more than just intermodality and coordination between Member States: It also calls, for example, for cities that are nodes of TEN-T to put in place their own sustainable urban mobility plans by 2030.

High-speed rail (HSR) networks now link some of the most dynamic urban cores in Europe, such as Paris–London–Brussels–Amsterdam, but a long list of projects are still to be completed, such as Rail Baltica, Lyon–Turin, Basque Y, Vienna–Bratislava–Budapest and Seine–Scheldt.



Main infrastructural corridors in Europe are in fact crossing and supporting some of the largest and dynamic urban regions in Europe





In 2021, a major revision of the TEN-T policy is expected, which will be based on a public consultation that should be completed in May 2021. Interesting positions have been expressed in this respect by some of the local protagonists of TEN-T policy so far; see, for example, the recommendations expressed by the Rhine–Alpine Corridor EGTC, which, on the one hand, highlighted the importance of coordinating infrastructural policies with spatial planning and interregional cooperation, and, on the other hand, stressed the crucial role of polycentric urban regions and cross-border regions.

The example of the inter-regional alliance for the Rhine–Alpine Corridor, founded as an European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation in April 2015, clearly shows the need for matching infrastructural policies with a territorial vision and strategy, working on new scales of action that are more representative of contemporary processes of socio-spatial-economic change.

Main infrastructural corridors in Europe are in fact crossing and supporting some of the largest and dynamic urban regions in Europe, allowing them to develop into further integrated functional areas. Moreover, as the Rhine–Alpine EGTC shows, infrastructural corridors can and should activate new 'spatial imaginaries and political subjectivities'.

That is the case in the Milano–Bologna urban region, where the **ESPON IMAGINE** project has investigated the role of 'infrastructures as regionalization machinery' by exploring the direct and indirect impacts of the consolidation and development of one of the oldest and most strategic infrastructural corridors of the country in a modern technological space, through the introduction of HSR line.

Even if it is difficult to show a correlation between HSR presence and economic growth, data show, for example, new localisation trends in creative and cultural activities in the intermediate cities along the HSR corridor. Simultaneously, they highlight how the reinforcement of the infrastructural corridor, if not framed under a territorial cohesion strategy, can invest in places and people that do not necessarily

"benefit from urban centrality (economic development, access to services, comprehensive infrastructure support) but [are] impacted by the spatial effects of urban extension that are the counterpart to increased agglomeration in cities, receiving various surpluses such as increased traffic, waste and pollutants, and are subject to new forms of dispossession and violence" (Addie et al., 2019).

The Milano–Bologna urban region now has a great opportunity, as do many other HSR corridors: the year of rail, the European Green Deal and the smart and sustainable mobility strategy offer the unique opportunity

to experience a new capacity to support urban regions

to take advantage of the implementation of new transport mobility policies

to develop a regional imaginary that is able to turn infrastructural corridors into the basis for a new spatial imaginary and

to feed a new governance and policy design framework.

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Measuring digitalisation in regions and cities, matching the targets of the 2030 Digital Compass

Anke Schuster Marek Bobiš

The COVID-19 pandemic has convinced even the fiercest critics of digitalisation that the use of digital tools and services has become essential and that digitalisation alleviated the immediate shock of the pandemic and economic crisis on citizens. Accordingly, the digital transformation in Europe has now become a top policy priority for the EU institutions as part of the green and digital twin transformation.

When it comes to local and regional levels, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) prioritises conveying the need for digitalisation to the CoR members and relevant stakeholders. The CoR therefore highlights the concept of digital cohesion as an essential additional dimension of the traditional concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion enshrined in the Treaty on European Union. The CoR's **EU Annual Regional and Local Barometer**, last published in October 2020, emphasised the immense needs in terms of infrastructure development at local and regional levels. Before the pandemic, the gap in digital infrastructure between rural and urban regions was significant: 85 % of urban households had access to high-speed internet (30 Mbps) vs 56 % of rural households ().

On 9 March 2021, the European Commission put forward a communication entitled 2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade (COM(2021) 118). The communication sets up a vision for the digitalised economy and society by 2030 that is based on four pillars and outlines very ambitious targets. The targets are set at national and EU levels; therefore, they need to be translated into more

granular and detailed objectives to be achieved at local and regional levels, including the way they will be measured.

But how do we actually measure the degree of digitalisation of cities and regions? Not only for infrastructure, but also for, for example, services provided online? Which factors would distinguish a digitally literate, or so-called smart, city or region from a 'beginner' city or region in terms of digital transformation? The CoR has been tackling these questions since the beginning of 2020, together with the European Commission and statistical experts of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. We are jointly developing the local and regional digital

💬 ***The CoR highlights the concept of digital cohesion as an essential additional dimension of the traditional concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion*** 💬

indicators framework that will help cities and regions to develop and steer relevant policies, meet commitments and support access to different financing opportunities. This framework maps cities and regions in **five broad categories**:

local digital infrastructure, local digital skills and capacity building, local digital economy and services, (governance and digital single market and context



indicators. In addition, CoR is actively participating in the development of the ESPON Digital Innovation in Governance and Public Service Provision project as a member of the Strategic Advisory Group. The project aims to analyse digital innovation in governance and public service provision in 150 cities across Europe.

As part of the framework of this cooperation and within the initiative of Living-in.EU – a movement to

📍📍 ***We are jointly developing the local and regional digital indicators framework that will help cities and regions to develop and steer relevant policies***



boost sustainable digital transformation in cities and communities in the EU – ESPON, Open & Agile Smart Cities, the European Commission and the CoR have been developing a **joint DIGISurvey** to map the current state of play of digitalisation in cities. The aims of the (replicable) survey are to provide policymakers with comparable information on digital transformation in their constituencies and to inspire digital transformation processes.

It will look at different aspects of digitalisation, divided into four parts, by gathering information on digital innovation strategy and procurement, data management, citizen engagement and the impact of

the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey, launched on 7 June, will be available during June and July 2021, with the objective to analyse results over summer.

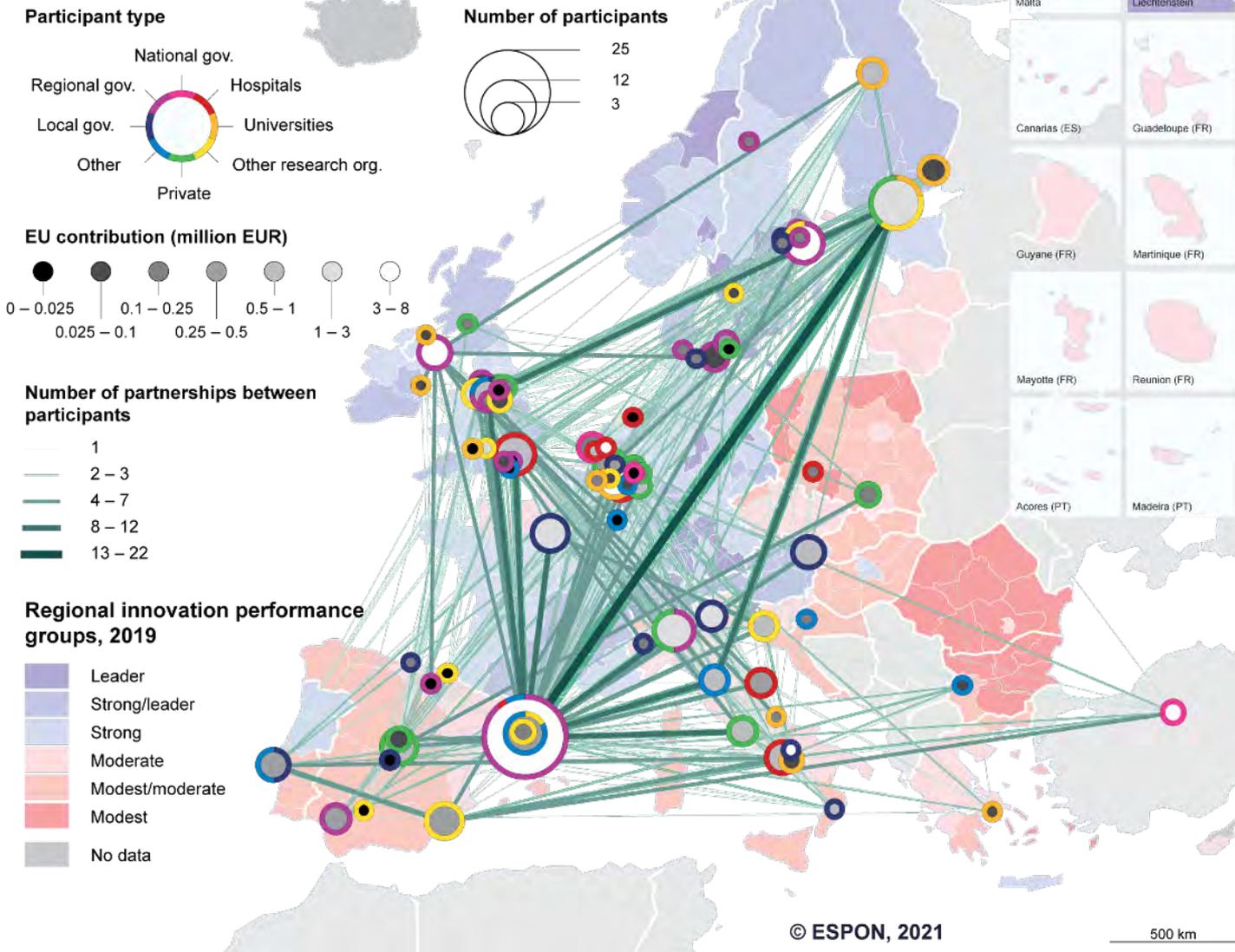
The first results from the survey, and links to the 2030 Digital Compass, will be discussed at the next meeting of the **Broadband Platform** with members of the CoR who represent local and regional authorities. ESPON experts will participate and illustrate the significance of achieving digital cohesion.

The CoR is also running a study and a survey on changing business models, in particular with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises, as a result of the pandemic, and on how local and regional authorities can support businesses in their recovery. The study includes case studies on successful cooperation between businesses and local and regional authorities from eight European regions, which the CoR hopes can inspire other regions.

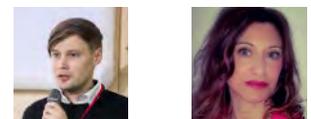
The survey aims to reflect on the perceptions of regions, cities and/or chambers of commerce on the situation and needs of small and medium-sized enterprises with regard to digital transformation and to collect evidence on the challenges that business and authorities are facing. The study and survey results will be presented at a **webinar on 23 June 2021**. Interested parties are invited to email econ@cor.europa.eu for further information.

Anke Schuster and Marek Bobiš work for the ECON commission secretariat of the Committee of the Regions

Participation intensity and network dynamics in EU funded joint cross-border PCP and PPI projects in digital healthcare, 2013–2020



Driving and scaling-up innovation in cross-border digital healthcare from the demand side



Martin Gauk **Angela Emidio**

The ESPON Thematic Paper “Working together to deliver better digital healthcare” addresses several areas where territorial cooperation has become an increasingly important consideration, among them, in the also field of public procurement.

According to the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat, 2020), healthcare expenditure amounted to 10 % of gross domestic product in the EU in 2018. A significant portion of the healthcare sector’s expenditure is used for procuring eHealth

services and products; therefore, it plays an important role in shaping the relevant supply and demand market. If some of this purchasing power is combined through partnerships across borders and used strategically to procure innovative solutions, the healthcare sector can invert the current tendency of the specifications for digital-oriented solutions to be dictated only by the large players in the private sector, and can put itself in the driving seat of digital innovation.

Hence, to successfully engage in procuring innovative digital solutions, healthcare providers must make use of networking and cooperation. Healthcare providers are natural candidates for jointly procuring digital innovation, not only because they currently face common needs, but also because they can pool expertise and the necessary purchasing power to facilitate procurement, and attract innovators, in particular high-tech start-ups and innovative SMEs. In addition, joint and collective procurement arrangements introduce clear benefits, as they bring about economies of scale. This enables digital innovation to have a bigger impact, as it can be deployed by several procurers, thus also ensuring increased interoperability and reducing administrative costs.

To procure digital solutions, healthcare providers should determine whether these solutions already

“ to successfully engage in procuring innovative digital solutions, healthcare providers must make use of networking and cooperation. ”

exist on the market or innovation is necessary. By using the modernised EU public procurement directive (Directive 2014/24/EU), for example, healthcare providers can make optimal use of collective purchasing arrangements to respond to unmet needs, creating greater benefits for patients regardless of where they live and improving the public service experience beyond merely satisfying primary needs.

Healthcare providers must increasingly consider 'how to buy', as opposed to 'what to buy'. This opens up the discussion about whether or not the procurement of a digital innovation will lead to higher quality and efficiency and deliver the expected eHealth solution or service as well as wider social benefits as set out in the relevant policies.

The EU's research and innovation programmes – 7th Framework Programme, the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework and Horizon 2020 – have been supporting this type of networking and territorial cooperation by funding projects in which groups of procurers from different countries around Europe are jointly implementing pre-commercial procurement (PCP) or public procurement of innovative solutions (PPI), and coordination and networking projects that prepare the ground for future PCP or PPI.

Healthcare providers are natural candidates for jointly procuring digital innovation. This is exemplified by the fact that the majority of EU-funded PCP and PPI projects have been related to the health sector, and

all of them include an international dimension.

Altogether, the EU has supported 13 joint PCP, 3 PPI and 5 combined PCP and PPI projects on digital healthcare with EUR 61.1 million (total investment of EUR 82.7 million), which have benefited over 200 procurers. Some 38 % of the of the procurers were public bodies (excluding research organisations and higher education establishments), 18 % were university hospitals, 17 % were other research organisations, 16 % were for-profit organisations and 11 % were other types of organisations.

Most active joint PCP and PPI procurers have been organisations located in regions with strong innovation performance in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and in regions with moderate or even modest innovation capacity in Italy and Spain. These procurers have managed to implement most projects, absorbed the majority of the available EU funding and established international procurement networks that will hopefully remain effective and grow for years to come (Map 4).

Together with boosting territorial cooperation, these public procurement tools have proven to enhance the cost efficiency of digital products and services by considering life-cycle costs over the long term and boosting performance. Studies have shown that innovation procurement leads, on average, to cost savings of 20 % on public procurement expenditure (which constitutes about one fifth of gross domestic product in Europe, or around EUR 2.4 trillion a year).

Savings may also occur because of reduced staff requirements resulting from digitalisation, thereby making healthcare providers more resilient and sustainable. They also open a route-to-market for new economic operators (especially SMEs), helping operators to bring products to the market stimulate enterprise growth.

Marting Gauk is Project Expert - Data, Toolbox and IT at the ESPON EGTC

Angela Emidio is Senior Contract Management Specialist at the European Investment Bank

One Year On Planet Pandemia



Communicating Cohesion Policy on Planet Pandemia One year on



Agnès Monfret



Claudio Nichele

Like most organisations, when the pandemic hit, we went from denial to acceptance and, swiftly, had to adapt. In several instances we turned the challenge into an opportunity that put us on a greener and more digital path -truly walking together at forced speed Europe's twin transition.

Of course, first came the painful technical hurdles to overcome. The new digital ways to explore and master. Within our team, with Commission and EU partners, and with our partners across European regions and cities. But very soon came the realisation that digital formats allowed us to reach more people, not fewer. To interact more, not less. To be more responsive, and not less responsive.

Without travelling, commuting and polluting. All the more so as the circumstances required to communicate on the immediately needed legislative adjustments, then top-ups, to cohesion policy instruments to address the health and economic crisis and create the financial conditions to help

regions and cities recover.

But beyond the political imperatives, what was to be done with ongoing and planned **campaigns** for large public audiences, most of them with significant physical presence implications? What was to be done with the biggest EU event on cohesion policy in town every year, the European Week of Regions and Cities, which in 2019 had attracted to Brussels some 10 000 participants from across European regions and beyond?

First, we decided to defer any major decision, opting resolutely "to be optimistic, as it does not seem to be much use being anything else", in Churchill's words. So we proceeded with the deployment of the digital elements of the traditional May to September EU in my region campaign, notably the online quizzes, stories and post cards, and called upon our partners in the regions to either deploy the famous open project days where feasible or defer them, or else switch where appropriate to digital formats (e.g.

virtual visits to museums). Similarly, we maintained but postponed and enhanced the online elements of our Green Trip campaign, which was already targeting the younger generation (Gen Z) online (#DingDongEU).

For this, we relied on 15 Belgian, German, Greek, Lithuanian and Portuguese local influencers challenging their followers on YouTube and Instagram. We delayed our ultra-local campaigns in 15 regions in France, Greece, Ireland and Italy by a few months but put this time to good use to significantly rethink the delivery mode, abandon the interactive outdoor displays and turn to more media partnerships. In doing so, we **tripled** the reach compared with the first 35 local campaigns, deployed in 2018–2019.

For the **18th edition of the EURegionsWeek**, after long keeping the two options open (physical or digital format), we decided, again in Churchill's warlike words, not to waste a good crisis and went fully digital, with only residual physical elements for TV-show high-level sessions. Needless to say, this was a learning experience and a big adventure, but one we do not regret.

The 2020 edition set many records, with an unprecedented number of partners' applications (650+), number of selected sessions (500+), length (3 weeks) and number of participants (12 000), and a daily growing number of viewers through the online replay function. To walk the green talk, we even compensated for the carbon footprint of our data consumption by financing the planting of 145 trees in Portugal.

Learning from this experience, the 19th edition, in October 2021, is designed from the outset in a fully digital format, including an immersive exhibition hall and proper online networking functionalities. And when the pandemic is over, there will be no return to the old physical-only normal. The event will always be at least hybrid, not least to reach out to more participants and save on carbon emissions.

So has COVID-19 been some kind of blessing for communication? We all miss human interaction, but the answer is, to some extent, yes. The pandemic has forced us to rapidly and radically evolve in a way we would never have contemplated.

And none of this would have been possible without our internal communication efforts to monitor staff morale and engagement and do our utmost to maintain a deep sense of purpose and European commitment among staff – be it to help with digital and wellbeing tips and tricks, to humanise teleworking from home (from pages for parents with children at home to photo, recipe and music sharing) or by mingling internal and external communication through our home-made series '**Stories from the Regions**' to showcase inspiring examples of European solidarity that will help restart Europe together.

very soon came the realisation that digital formats allowed us to reach more people, not fewer. To interact more, not less

The pandemic has forced us to rapidly and radically evolve in a way we would never have contemplated

*Agnès Monfret is Head of DG REGIO
Communication Unit
Claudio Nichele is Team Leader of DG REGIO
Internal Communication*

Image: Claudio Nichele

Communication in time of pandemics - INTERACT experience



Kevin Fulcher

When COVID-19 arrived in Europe, our main challenge in communicating the Interact programme came from fundamental changes to the way we work. Interact offers training and knowledge sharing for Interreg programmes and others. One of our principal service delivery methods was events, bringing people together from across Europe to exchange and learn from each other.

Usually, these in-person events have long lead times. We book venues months ahead of the event being delivered, as our target audience needs time to ensure time out of the office can be managed, make travel arrangements, etc.

With a purely digital offer, our service delivery lead time has reduced to mere weeks from concept to delivery. These lead times were our main communication window, so they have almost disappeared. In this new reality, ensuring the right

“ **With a purely digital offer, our service delivery lead time has reduced to mere weeks from concept to delivery** ”

information reaches the right people quickly is more important than ever. We now rely even more on the networks and informal working groups than ever before.

More specifically in communication terms, our events page is now more focused on helping people find the right information quickly. More events can be viewed at one time, and more information is available without clicking. Our primary outreach method (Newsflash email) is now monthly, responding to the shorter notice period and the ease with which people can now join events much later than would be possible for physical meetings.

Our in-person events were also our chance to exchange with programmes and to network. They helped Interact stay up to date with what problems programmes were facing, and helped us maintain our

relationship with our key audiences. In losing this, we are now even more dependent on more intensive one-to-one discussions and programmes reaching out to us. The short coffee breaks at events were a chance to reset for the next session, and for us to spend 5 minutes with colleagues from INTERREG to understand their work, and any needs or challenges.

With the ease and confidence we now all have in communicating by video, better communication with programmes is helping us to deliver better services. We are also aware we need to fundamentally rethink the way knowledge and services are signposted. With so many meetings, having information readily and easily available is more important than ever.

In a way, a benefit of having the new programme period so close is that Interact will be able to take these lessons forward into the next period and build our new communication environment around this reality. While it is easy to envisage a rush of in-person events as soon as the epidemiological situation (and green passports or similar) allows, the benefits of short online meetings have established themselves.

Whereas our online learning portal, established in 2018, was an experiment for us, and a niche service for those willing to learn online, it is now a more standard service model. The number of courses added in the past 12 months reflects a greater movement to hybrid learning. Asynchronous learning and presentations, which enable more focused use of time when everyone does come together, have become a standard approach for many events.

In addition to the new approaches, new skills in communicating will also stay with us – confidence and competence in video recordings and online engagement is a norm, not an exception. The flexibility to rapidly deploy interventions, rather than requiring 2 months to schedule something, will also likely mean that Interact is better able than ever before to respond to urgent programme needs as we all face the new regulatory environment.

Kevin Fulcher is the Interact Communication Manager

Interreg Europe communication during the COVID-19 pandemic



Petra Polaskova

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way the Interreg Europe programme communicates. Physical events and face-to-face networking were no longer possible. The shift to the online world led to many adaptations for both our programme and our projects.

Below is a timeline with some of Interreg Europe's adaptations to this exceptional context.

March 2020: We started working from home and advised our projects how to move their meetings online.

May 2020: The first final conference (Cult-RInG project) took place online.

June 2020: The special online edition of the Europe, let's cooperate event focused on the role of interregional cooperation in the COVID-19 recovery.

July 2020: The SCALE UP project proposed a methodology for online study visits.

November 2020: We engaged our community with 30 stories of cooperation and promoted project results despite COVID-19.

April 2021: We opened a new call for additional project activities that are linked to the COVID-19 recovery.

Four communication actions helped Interreg Europe to tackle the challenges emerging from the COVID-19 crisis.

Moving activities online: Interreg Europe projects depend highly on face-to-face meetings, so it was quite a challenge to move their activities online. Thanks to the programme's guidance and their own creativity, the projects adapted their exchange of experience methodologies for peer reviews, study visits and thematic meetings to online formats. Our Policy Learning Platform also moved thematic seminars, policy discussions, matchmaking meetings and peer reviews online.

Promoting COVID-19 solutions: The COVID-19 pandemic affected many policy areas that are covered by the work of Interreg Europe projects. We asked the projects to tag their good practices and policy solutions that were relevant to the COVID-19 recovery or submit new ones to our good practice database.

To share this information with all interested policymakers, we created **a special COVID-19 page** as a repository of the relevant good practices, news and events.

Offering flexibility: As a result of the pandemic, our projects' activities stalled for a while. To keep their

implementation on track, the Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee approved measures for additional activities and flexibility. For example, our projects could purchase equipment for online meetings, produce videos for their online study visits or request pilot actions more quickly than before, especially if they were relevant to the COVID-19 crisis.

Connecting with the community: Interreg Europe's community of project partners and stakeholders could not meet face to face for over a year. We did our best to keep the partnerships alive on social media, for example through an active Facebook group for projects and by posting engaging visuals on Instagram. When hosting online events, we have been live-tweeting on Twitter to interact with our followers.

After a year of adaptation, we are happy to say that these four actions helped us keep the interregional cooperation going when it was needed more than ever.

A 'new normal' for communication?

The pandemic forced us to rethink our communication methods and draw lessons for the future.

Online activities had been a standard part of Interreg Europe's communication methods mix well before the pandemic. For a year now, we have been testing new tools and formats to make our online events even more accessible and engaging. High participation and satisfaction rates confirm that we are going in the right direction.

We were also happy to find out that many projects' online solutions turned out to be largely as effective as their traditional face-to-face meetings. So, online activities might find their place among future projects' exchange of experience methodologies.

However, people do miss the face-to-face side of cooperation. The 'new normal' for communication is likely to take a hybrid form, combining face-to-face meetings with online activities for remote participants.

Petra Polaskova is Coordinator of Communication and Contact Points at the Interreg Europe secretariat

How to hold an international event when everybody is stuck in their homes?



Jenny Koutsomarkou

Imagine the impact of the pandemic on an EU programme that finances and enables exchange and cooperation – and therefore travelling – between cities. Travel restrictions across Europe and restrictions on in-person meetings have been in place for over a year. Certainly there have been worse aspects of the pandemic, but when it touches your own core business all you want to do is stand up and make the most of what exists out there to encourage the talking, networking and working. That's what URBACT did.

Most of our communication platforms and tools have been digital and online for years now, as it is a Europe-wide programme. But, during the pandemic, no one and no tool can replace the atmosphere, vibes and interaction a large in-person event offers.

In 2019, we started to prepare the fourth summer university to strengthen the skills of 350 people in participatory and integrated policy-making. This would take place in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in July 2020. In early 2020, compelled by the pandemic, we decided to adapt and experiment for the first time with an entirely online training event, an e-university.

Online fatigue was starting to set in at that moment, so instead of a full 2-day physical event we organised eight 2-hour modules over the course of a month. To make it dynamic and diverse, we opted for a mix of live studio sessions, plenaries and small working groups, allowing interaction among participants. And we used, for the first time, a new audiovisual platform to meet our needs. Our approach was to lead by example, and show our city beneficiaries the myriad of possibilities with online distance learning.

Communication-wise, our objectives were twofold: attract as many participants as possible and retain them in the programme throughout the whole month, and increase traffic to our newly developed URBACT toolbox for city makers.

Before the event, the campaign started with a dedicated web page containing the programme, biographies of experts and speakers, a live chat, and resources pages with relevant training materials and links to the URBACT toolbox. Social media helped us raise awareness with video teasers and the hashtag #eUniversity2020.

During the event, besides the speed-networking sessions, plenaries and working groups with online whiteboards such as Miro, participants were also invited to interact on Twitter with the #eUniversity2020 Twitter challenge. The most active

participants were celebrated at the closing plenary.

After the end of the event, all the live sessions, presentations and materials with links to the toolbox were made available on the e-university's web page.

Results-wise, we won the bet: 350 people attended all the modules throughout the month of September 2020. Four times more unique visits to the toolbox were recorded during the e-university, and there have been more than 1 500 downloads of tools.

As the cherry on the cake, at the participants' demand we organised a follow-up e-university alumni event on 3 March 2021. This was an online gathering, full of networking and inspiring talks, with 300 participants to catch up on how they had been using the tools they learnt about during the initial training.

A year after the beginning of the pandemic, things have not returned to 'normal' in most countries. We are still planning online events for the course of 2021, one of them being the URBACT City Festival planned for 15–17 June 2021. Open to local governments and urban professionals, the #URBACTfest will demonstrate how practices are transferred from one city to another and how changes are possible even in the context of COVID-19. Unlike the e-university, targeted towards URBACT beneficiaries, the city festival is open to anyone interested in urban policy and making cities better places to live.

Although the digital transition is not always easy, with technical hurdles, we have learnt from our mistakes and we are still learning by testing. We want to share what we have learnt with others, to help them save time and get better at organising and communicating in online meetings. That's the purpose of the **URBACT toolbox** and the guide on '**Hints and tips for online facilitation**'. And for more customised assistance, three URBACT digital support experts can further support URBACT beneficiaries in designing their online meetings.

In this new reality, we embrace the benefits of not travelling too much (fewer public-funded plane trips, less CO2 emissions, more time spent with our families, well-prepared online meetings) but we look forward to seeing our city community gather again as before, in person. A balance between the two will be there to find once the pandemic is over

Jenny Koutsomarkou is Partnership Officer at URBACT

Upcoming ESPON events Transnational Outreach

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions,
all events will take place **online**

Blue Growth: From Marine & Maritime Services towards new drivers for economic & territorial change

24 June 2021

ESPON conference organised by the Greek Authorities of the Ministry of Development & Investments within the ESPON-TNO project will focus on the development of a sustainable Blue growth and its potential role as a driver for change in Greece and the Mediterranean in general.



Roundtable on Maritime Spatial Planning in Denmark

8 September 2021

The roundtable is an event for researchers and national, regional and local stakeholders dealing with coastal planning for a sustainable and integrated development.



UN Sustainable Development Goals and Regional Restructuring Estonia

11-12 October 2021

Event focused on regional restructuring for sustainable development, green deal, energy transition and developing scenarios for energy transition; looking at integrated analyses of socio-economic change and potentials for regional development in monofunctional energy producing regions.





Territorial resilience: meaning and main implications for spatial planning

António Manuel Figueiredo

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across regions and territories has been varied in terms of health effects and lockdown procedures. The impact of the health problems combined with the pre-existing economic and social conditions in each territory has generated a very complex array of pandemic territorial dimensions. Understanding the geography of the pandemic effects is still in progress. There is a huge opportunity to look at this in depth, particularly if the study of the mobility of people is aided by new data concerning the tracking of human flows before, during and after implementation of the lockdown restrictions.

At least as far as the planning of the new programming period in Portugal is concerned, regions (planning regions), intermunicipal communities (NUTS III) and municipalities are fighting against the uncertainty of the future in the aftermath of the pandemic. There is now a new and vibrant literature on what will be the main trends of change generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This literature covers a very large number of themes and typologies of change. From the effects on global value chains, particularly relevant to more open territories, to the reconfiguration of labour processes and commuting flows, there is a vast number of potential trends to target and anticipate in the new programming period, not ignoring a wide array of sociological effects (consumption, housing demand, public space demand and others).

However, the promising help of international literature does not eradicate the problem of the uncertainty of the aftermath. The change trends

identified by this flourishing literature must be considered in the context of local conditions, and this is not an easy task. Territorial resilience is at the heart of the green and just recovery goal.

When analysing regional, intermunicipal and local strategies submitted to public hearings and participation, one word emerges as a strong common denominator. That word is 'resilience'. The use of this word is so widespread that one may ask if it is just a fashionable term. In the world of spatial planning, the dissemination of fashionable vocabulary is very common. In my view, the diffusion model of knowledge among spatial planning researchers and practitioners is a good example of this.

💬 ***The use of the word resilience is so widespread that one may ask if it is just a fashionable term*** 💬

Curiously, in Portugal, the word 'resilience' (of communities, of people and, by extension, of territories) began to be used in relation to the preventive approach to rural and forest fires, which, as is well known, had devastating and tragic effects, including resulting in deaths, in the second half of the 2010s in some Portuguese regions.

Resilience is now mentioned beyond the preparedness of local communities to tackle forest fires. Resilience is now invoked as a spatial planning reaction to pandemic issues. Low-density territories



(not only in demographic terms but also in terms of entrepreneurship supply and industrial fabric) were the first to invoke resilience as a strategic priority. Its use was a direct consequence of the forest fires. However, soon, other territories, including higher-density territories, began to present resilience as a priority in their strategies for the new programming period. In these cases, resilience was the key to proactive adaptations to learning by managing pandemics.

The concept has also been reinforced through the formulation of Portugal's national programme submitted within the framework of Next Generation EU. The title of the programme is Plan for Recovery and Resilience. The resilience rhetoric has now reached the national planning stage.

However, it seems to me that the fast dissemination of the concept does not mean that it is well internalised by economic and spatial planning. There is a lot of work to do in order to build a regional and local project design capacity that is able to turn the highly invoked concept into an effective way to tackle the problems and challenges encompassed by the concept of territorial resilience.

Using, for example, the concept proposed by Brunetta et al., territorial resilience is seen 'as an emerging concept capable of aiding the decision-making process of identifying vulnerabilities and improving the transformation of socio-ecological and technological systems (SETs)'. The main challenge of the emerging concept comes (I agree with the authors) from the trespassing (in celebration of the work of one my intellectual mentors, Albert O.

Hirschman of the analytical barriers between different disciplines. Trespassing, and not only surpassing, is the point. It is also interesting to compare the pandemic-led resurgence of the resilience concept with previous conceptualisation efforts.

The definition of territorial resilience proposed by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report (2019) – 'the ability of a system to absorb disturbance preserving the same functioning structure, the capacity of self-organization and adapt to stress and change' – helps us to understand that the principal challenge for spatial planning derives from the holistic approach required by the concept.

I think that is what is happening now with regard to the generalised invocation of territorial resilience in Portugal, observed in the preparation of the new programme for 2021–2027. Spatial planning systems and actors have a lot of work to do regarding

the metrics of being a resilient territory (what indicators should support the design of projects and programmes),

the selection of disciplinary approaches to make projects more robust,

the definition of the personal, institutional and local capabilities to be improved and (iv) the governance problems to solve in order to achieve effective resilience.

Sometimes, it seems that, independently of the paths we follow, the same big questions and our inability to solve them stand before us. When discussing how to turn territorial resilience into an operative approach, some of the big spatial planning challenges reappear: integration, management of interdisciplinarity, multilevel coordination and governance.

For current discussions of territorial resilience, as in so many other times, my experience as a spatial and strategic planning reflexive practitioner tells me that we should act and not be paralysed, although some key questions remain to be solved. As Bent Flyvbjerg showed us in 2001, intelligent social action requires not only 'episteme' (universal truth) or 'techné' (technical know-how), but also 'phronesis' (practical wisdom or prudence). That is a good way to end this short article.

António Manuel Figueiredo is Assistant Professor at Porto School of Economics, University of Porto (retired) Head of Strategy and Innovation Board of Quaternaire Portugal



Setting up the ESPON 2030 Programme: heading towards the finish line

A contribution from the ESPON Programme Managing Authority

The last few months have been particularly intensive when it comes to the preparatory work for the next programming period. The Joint Working Group in charge of drawing up the ESPON 2030 Programme accelerated its efforts and, with the valuable inputs from the public consultation, was able to move forward to discuss a final draft version in its June meeting.

A lot of fine-tuning is needed to find a balanced thematic approach that will provide sufficient evidence and knowledge to address the main territorial challenges that we are facing and will face in the next few years, without dispersing the efforts on too many fronts.

The first Thematic Action Plans

An agreement in principle was established, and an initial indicative list of seven broader themes for the Thematic Action Plans (TAPs) was established. The list

was based on the accumulated ESPON evidence, and they are intended to be mentioned in the ESPON 2030 programme. The themes identified cover the territorial challenges validated by the public consultation, and connect to the main European policy priorities and objectives. When the partners of the ESPON 2030 programme have agreed to submit the programme to the European Commission for approval, three to four themes out of this list may already be subject to consultation in parallel with the approval process.

Ongoing needs management

More work is needed to further scope the themes of the TAPs and identify any additional themes, with regard to the identification of policy needs and knowledge gaps, and decrease the overlaps between them and with already existing or ongoing evidence production.

- Raise the awareness of policy makers, practitioners and scientists about the specific thematic work-streams ESPON will be opening to support policymaking
- Support the ESPON EGTC and the MC in shaping the TAP scope and content by identifying the specific activities to be implemented on the broader TAP theme
- Create a platform for exchange between policy makers/ practitioners and scientist to ensure a common understanding of the frame of the policy questions



- Engage in an exchange with policy makers at all levels on the general policy needs that could be addressed and in which way
- Engage in an exchange with scientists on the state-of-the-art of the existing territorial research and collect proposals for programme research activities

To accomplish this task, the ESPON 2030 programme intends to engage with programme stakeholders, including scientists, on an ongoing basis. The programme will shift from a more cyclic needs assessment at certain points of the year towards an ongoing and comprehensive needs management (Figure 1). This will comprise a series of actions that identify the needs of the different stakeholders. The management of ongoing needs will be targeted to cover both the needs for evidence and the needs for knowledge activities and, in this way, will shape and focus and the specific activities included in the TAPs.

All key players will be involved in this ongoing exercise: the **Monitoring Committee** (MC) will have a guiding role in identifying thematic areas that are relevance to territorial development, the **ESPON Contact Points (ECPs)** will have a supportive role in identifying the needs in the specific countries, and **scientists and researchers** will be invited to provide inputs on the territorial evidence that is available outside ESPON and the persisting evidence gaps that the ESPON activities would be most suited to address.

Thematic Action Plan consultation process

As previously mentioned, TAPs will be subject of public consultation – the **TAP consultation process** (Figure 2). This represents the core aspect, and one of the most innovative aspects, of needs management in the new, inclusive approach of the ESPON 2030 programme.

The **objectives** of the TAP consultation process are:

to raise the awareness of policymakers, practitioners and scientists about the specific thematic work streams that ESPON will be opening up to support policymaking;

to engage in an exchange with policymakers' at all levels on the general policy needs that could be addressed and the ways in which they could be addressed;

to engage in an exchange with scientists on the state-of-the-art territorial research in the related fields of each TAP and to collect a wide range of proposals for programme research activities that would ensure the relevance and added value of ESPON evidence production;

to create a platform for exchange between policymakers/practitioners and scientists to ensure a common understanding of the frame of the policy questions, the policy context of evidence application, and appropriate stocktaking of existing evidence and research methodologies;

to support the ESPON EGTC and the Monitoring Committee in shaping the TAP scope and content by identifying the specific activities to be implemented under the broader TAP theme.

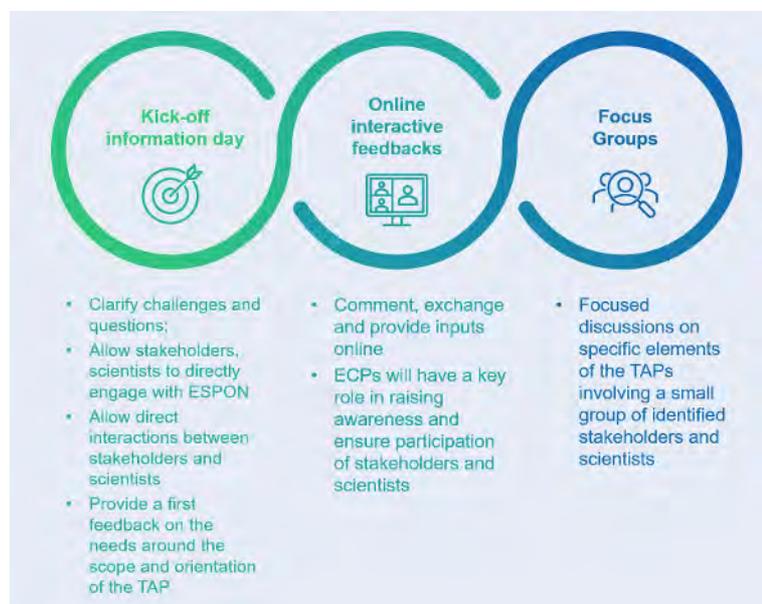
The consultation on the TAP will be organised as a process rather than as one single event, and will include several steps.

Kick-off information day: it will be public, widely promoted and open to all interested potential contributors (from policy and scientific fields); it will target all potentially interested policymakers,

scientists, students and members of the general public.

Online interactive feedbacks: stakeholders and scientists will be able to comment, exchange and provide inputs online. ESPON Contact Points will raise awareness of this continued consultation processes in their respective countries and further activate policy and research networks at national level to contribute to the overall consultation process. The information collected through these exchanges will be compiled and structured to prepare for more in-depth discussion in dedicated focus groups.

A series of specific focus groups: these will deepen the discussion on certain elements/aspects and involve a small group of identified stakeholders and scientists. The purpose and the composition of each group will be carefully designed to maximise their expected outcomes and avoid conflicts of interest when gathering ESPON representatives, policymakers and potential future service providers.



Next steps

The Joint Working Group intends to finalise the discussion around the final draft of the Cooperation Programme and agree on the themes of the first Thematic Action Plans that will be covered before the summer break. Despite the uncertainty around the final date for the approval of the programme, which is linked to the entering into force of the new legislative package, the Joint Working Group has decided to go ahead with the preparatory work to ensure the necessary continuation between the two programming periods.

For these reasons, the Managing Authority, following the advice of the Joint Working Group, should not launch the public consultations of the first three or four Thematic Action Plans most probably before the next ESPON week in November 2021. In addition, depending on the process of approving the ESPON 2030 Programme, the Joint Working Group is working towards starting the implementation of the programme around June 2022.



Policy Brief on rural areas: More than just a publication



Fatima Bacharel



Andreea China

Since the first days of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of European Union, ESPON and the Portuguese team have met regularly, expecting to bring and exchange, for the following six months, a multitude of experiences. But the way we communicate has changed radically during the pandemics, replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual ones, making everybody aware of possible constraints that could appear. However, confidently using smart technologies to overcome the distance, the teams were able to establish a strong connection, even virtual, in order to share ideas and communicate.

From an initial shy contact, at institutional level, the way we communicate got easier in our search for finding an innovative process and outcome of the collaboration between ESPON and a member state's presidency to the Council of the European Union.

The process for developing a Policy Brief was started, and the first foundational layer was created by using the big pool of data and territorial evidence provided by ESPON. Actually, looking within this significant amount of data, we chose to focus on the **future of rural areas** and attend the priority of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of European Union. But one question arose: **how to match rural areas needs and the evidence, calling on board relevant partners and stakeholders to work on a territorial approach?**

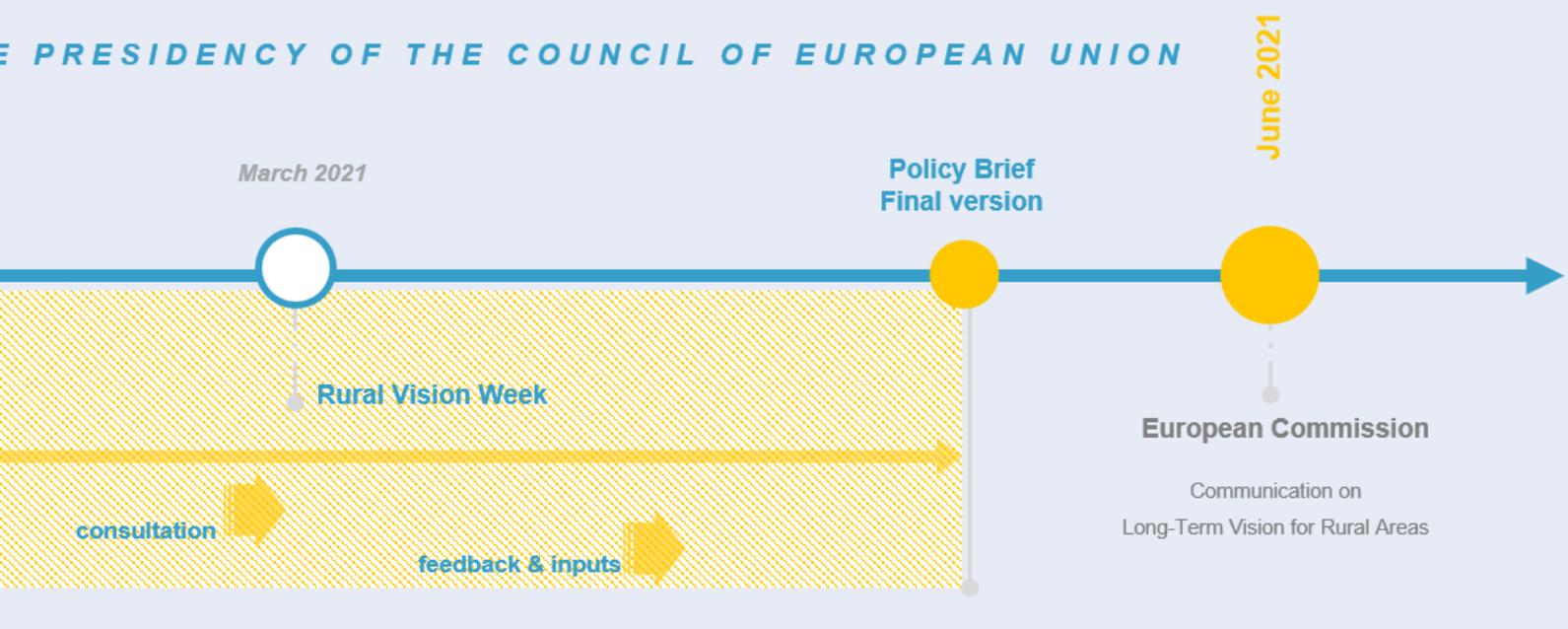
Looking back, we think that that was the trigger question that created the **opportunity / motivation / action trilogy**.

If the emergence of the **opportunity** was obvious, this was also supported by the context created by the European Commission, which is developing the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). A vision that is pursuing an integrated approach looking at several critical thematic fields such as agriculture, climate action, employment, connectivity and digital transformation, cohesion, education, research, and innovation.

Thus, by aligning our visions we have set our main **motivation: recognizing and illustrating the prosperous future that rural areas could have, focusing on the territorial dimension**, and going beyond usual approaches like demographic shrinkage, investing in agriculture, or sustaining basic functions for living (water, raw materials, and food supply).

We felt that raising the awareness on the cultural and natural capital so necessary for sustainable ecosystems services, biodiversity patterns, landscape identity and Europe's cultural diversity, history, and attractiveness, is vital for the LTVRA and could make the difference for these.

But how to put this into **action**?



The answer was simple: using the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA 2030) structure, putting priorities into action and advice policies into recommendations. After listing relevant ESPON evidence under Territorial Agenda 2030 framework, we then searched for policy responses for the long-term development of rural areas, policies that indicate the distinct territorial dimension and lead to **action**, translating the TA 2030 in the political debate on the future of rural areas.

The first step and **the main challenge** was to prepare a structured working paper, demonstrating the connections and linkages between ESPON territorial evidence and European objectives and TA2030 priorities, **all to be discussed within an intersectoral debate**.

Presented as a draft version, the Policy Brief was one of topics up for discussion within the **Territorial Agenda Working Group** meeting, **involving European Institutions, as DG Agri and DG Regio**. We can now say that was forcefully one of the key factors that contributed to the success of our mission.

That was really the **kick-off of a true and dynamic debate**, which produced several interactions, reactions, resulted in the endeavor to harmonize all the important contributions received.

Then, two more important milestones were hit: meetings of the **National Territorial Cohesion Contact Points and of Directors-General**, where the subsequent drafts of the Policy Brief were presented, fuelling national level debates. Within these contexts, a required bottom-up approach was provided by the, relevant for rural areas, TA2030 pilot actions, which have presented their plan in demonstrating, testing, and developing new practices and initiatives to achieve territorial development.

With this process of building up the ESPON - PPEU Policy Brief on Territorial evidence and policy advice for the prosperous future of rural areas, we believe that a common path for European rural areas was developed and laid before, a path that can be continued by other presidencies.

Actually, from this experience, the result – the Policy Brief, is neither’s ESPON, nor of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of European Union but is the joint creation/product of what **we have built together**, with important contributions of all member states and European institutions that care about the future of rural areas.

This is a call for reaching a common understanding as base for long-term cooperation and coordination on all levels, because only together we can make the new future of rural areas happen!

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Outlook of the Slovenian presidency



Blanka Bartol **Tomaž Miklavčič**

In the past year, our habits and activities have changed dramatically, to an extent that was hardly imaginable before. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have changed our daily routines, and our daily living space has shrunk to our homes, neighbourhoods, cities or regions.

More than ever before, we have realised how places that we call home shape our lives and how this affects our quality of life: the diversity of public spaces and good cycling infrastructure as an alternative to other forms of traffic; accessible, high-quality green areas that enable city dwellers to relax and recreate in a close-to-natural environment; efficient digital infrastructure in rural and urban areas supporting work and schooling at home; and sufficiently large and bright apartments in which we have spent more time than ever before. These concepts are therefore worth putting higher on the policy agenda.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 sets out improving the quality of life and wellbeing of all as an underlying objective of all public policies and an important prerequisite to overcome the increasing regional imbalances and inequalities among people. Promoting the territorial agenda motto 'A future for all places' strongly advocates improving the quality of life. The COVID-19 pandemic will be overcome, but major and more long-lasting challenges will remain. As also stressed in the Territorial Agenda 2030, we have to act and it is time to act now. The issues, such as reduction of imbalances and inequalities, traditionally addressed in spatial planning by supporting balanced and polycentric territorial development, and

addressing the growing ecological problems and territorially specific effects of the climate change, are equally as crucial for quality of life as for economic growth and prosperity.

Quality of life is a red thread of the Slovenian presidency in the field of territorial cohesion. It aims to support its further development and use of the concept in territorial development policies. With the strong support of the ESPON European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation, territorial quality of life will be tackled in the policy brief prepared based on the completed applied research and the working paper.

“ We are discovering that an adequate response can occur only if there are strong cross-sectorial approaches ”

Some additional events and activities have been planned, such as a testing the use of the quality of life concept in a spin-off project for the Slovenia–Italy–Croatia cross-border area.

Slovenia will hold the Presidency of the Council in the second semester of 2021. It will conclude the Trio Presidency with Germany and Portugal. The Territorial Agenda 2030 was endorsed by the ministers responsible for territorial development, and the New Leipzig Charter was endorsed by the ministers



responsible for urban matters during the German Presidency. This gave new impetus to intergovernmental cooperation on territorial and urban development during the Portuguese Presidency. After a successful start, the six territorial agenda pilot actions, which were specially designed as the agenda's implementation mechanism, are now in full swing.

Tackling different challenges in various types of territories, the pilot actions are promoting place-based approaches and policy coordination in multilevel policy framework, and they will provide interesting and transferable results for other territories and stakeholders. Encouraged by their work, we shall look forward to keeping pace and introducing new topics while establishing new partnerships to address territorial challenges and priorities.

The priorities of Europe's spatial development are not only being realised through the implementation of the pilot actions. Many projects and other activities in different thematic areas are implemented in Europe. Some of these practices will be presented in September 2021 at an international conference in Maribor, Slovenia, dedicated to the discussion on the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. By showcasing projects, we would like to stimulate the uptake of the principles and priorities that the Territorial Agenda 2030 sets, enabling national and regional authorities, municipalities, cities and other stakeholders to translate policy concepts and priorities into territorial realities. We need to

communicate policy goals more clearly and showcase examples that can support us in pursuing this. We all hope that the conference will be an inspiring event where we will, hopefully, be able to meet in person.

The New Leipzig Charter is a document that paves the way for integrated urban development for just, green and productive European cities, neighbourhoods and regions. Multilevel governance is crucial for a balanced polycentric urban system that will secure jobs, services and infrastructure to serve all inhabitants in urban and remote areas. The ministers responsible for urban matters will meet during the Slovenian Presidency to reach an agreement on the further development of the urban agenda for the EU by following the principles of the New Leipzig Charter and its implementation document.

In addition to preparing the Ljubljana Agreement, the Presidency will focus on housing and green aspects of cities. Access to suitable housing and green spaces is a basic condition for ensuring that people are safe and satisfied and have a high quality of life, especially in urban areas. Slovenia will emphasise the importance of housing and green areas in urban and spatial policies.

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