



## Prepare Partnership for Rural Europe

### Webinar report– Rural trends and solutions

**Abstract:** Where is rural going? Is urbanisation turning into ruralisation? The webinar tries to look into trends, the cost of these trends and the readiness of change management in politics and decisionmaking. Digital and technological transition are key factors for the future of Rural Europe – possibilities, obstacles and equal availability are discussed.

### Introduction

We could analyse the webinar on trends through a non-limitative list of existing divisions in rural areas: urban and rural, rural within rural, big and small, climate and industries, welfare and poverty in a diversity of contexts and territories. Politics, sectoral interests, growth discourse affect the trends top-down, the climate change as an external factor. The state of play could be described in these different contexts by placing an icon on a scale 0-100%, eg. how much of the policies, discourse and funding are connected to urban, agriculture or big industries. Change is happening when the icon moves in a certain direction. Do we see evolving trends and can these be managed?

#### A story from my home area – The plum beyond the wall

**Gent Imeraj** – Albania

“Do we stick with stereotypes and existing norms or are we ready to look over the fence – to the other side of the garden for changes. Young people are”

#### Pathways to demographic adaptation

**Josefina Syssner** – Associate Professor, Department of Culture and Society - Linköping University

The presentation displays the potential of demographic adaptation policies to manage depopulation, that is, policy programs aiming at managing depopulation through adaptation, rather than through growth policies intended to foster population growth. The presentation concludes that local governments in shrinking areas ought to develop *local adaptation policies*, rather strategic than ad hoc. These policies, however, also need to be subjected to critical analysis. Please find suggestions on possible adaptation measures and and these policies could work in practice. Shrinking areas could learn from each other and local adaptation policies could be done together with citizens/NGO's.

<https://youtu.be/gCP8wXONJsw>

The diversity of rural areas is recognised and the need to see more inside in these realities is analysed. Josefina notes that research is at a certain level dominated by planning researchers and they tend to concentrate on urban issues. Should the planning perspective in research take a step towards policy perspective.



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### Resilient rural communities - How to shape change successfully in the European periphery?

**Alistair Adam Hernández**, Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association

Recording 21.00 - 34.00

In the context of social, economic and ecological change, villages in Europe face major challenges. Despite these developments, there are villages in remote regions, which, in the face of adverse circumstances, are successfully adapting to change processes and developing in a positive manner. What does it mean to be a resilient village and what characteristics does it possess as a complex social system? Can resilience in rural communities be managed and fostered and, if so, how?

Resilience in rural communities is not only the ability to resist and withstand difficult conditions. It is also the capacity to shape threatening process of change through creative responses:

- Especially dynamic, vibrant ... maybe resilient rural communities have specific characteristics and act collectively in diverse ways (model in the presentation).
- Building resilience is an on-going and long-term process, which involves continuity and tenacity. My case studies have been developing this for 10, 20 or nearly 30 years.
- The communities capacity to act is mostly translated through one or many key-organisations (Community enterprises, associations, foundations ...). Organisational development is an important area to support resilience building!

### "Communities, the European Green Deal and the climate emergency facing rural Europe"

**Robert Hall**, "Deputy Director, ECOLISE"

Recording 35.38-49.50

We are facing growing climate challenges with droughts, floods, storms, shifting growing zones, animal migration, loss of biodiversity, climate migration aso. Squeezed zones can't grow and can we manage the shifting growing zones? Transformative change is needed, how should we deal with social and climate justice, localisation, community commonin, restauration of natural systems? Is the Green Deal with its large budget supporting/ creating sustainable greener trends in Rural Areas and do member states align with the objectives?

### Is ruralisation becoming a trend in the covid context?

**Hanna Lakkala** - Finland Futures Research Centre, University of Turku

Hanna emphasised that during the pandemic in Finland many people are either a) remote working in their cottages and in general spending more time in rural areas (cottage culture strong here), or b) even moving to rural areas. Can we also see a "slow life" trend - people appreciating space, silence, nature. Away from crowds, pollution and cities, that also appear as unsafe during the pandemic. The digitalization (megatrend) can be seen as an enabler and driver of change. It is not likely that urbanization as megatrend will disappear of course, but the past months we have seen a counter trend (ruralisation trend)



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### Insight to the Long Term Vision of Rural Areas

**Alexandre Martin, DG AGRI**

Recording 57.00-1.09

Find below the European Commission presentation on the process and methodology on a long term vision for rural areas. Main challenges (demographic change, low income levels, limited access to services, low connectivity, feeling of being overlooked, limited resilience) and opportunities (key for ecosystem services bio- and circular economy ecological and digital transitions, increasing demands from society) are presented.

ENRD: The LTVRA Workshop Package is available currently in 13 languages, other language versions coming soon: <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/long-term-rural-vision-portal/resources/ltvra-workshop-package-for-nrns>

ENRD : You can find more information on ENRD Long Term Rural Vision Portal:

[https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/long-term-rural-vision-portal\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/long-term-rural-vision-portal_en)

### Digital innovation and rural areas: where do I fit in?

**Linda Randall**, Fellow Researcher, Nordregio

Recording 1.33-1.48

Same trends can affect different places in different ways. Tailor-made and customised solutions for different situations could be what we need. Digitalisation is a megatrend that will affect many of our activities and it is not really an option to stay out. The process or journey is more human than technological, it is about people supporting the transitions, it is about people living alongside the transitions and learning, adapting. All of this leading to increased digital capital. In research, it is quite known that locally anchored approaches still work best”

### Rural technologies at your service?

**Hannu Haapala & Liisa Pesonen** - FinAgEng Association for Rural Technologies

Recording 1.48-2.04

New livelihood is created in rural areas through the use of new technologies improve farm productivity and environmental performance. They also reduce the importance of location (living, working, making business) which may lead to new businesses and people moving to rural areas. We might see more farming on demand. The internet of things supports teleworking.

We need a holistic, inclusive, customised and where necessary adapted approach. We should build on strengths, in partnership and in a fair regulatory environment.



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### Discussion reports

#### 1. Discussion on chat

##### a. Discussion on local adaptation policies in a shrinking context

Could these measures be included - at national level and at municipality level?  
Could adaptation policies be used also for economic growth or recession?  
Can local policies be empowered to do this if there is a strong centralization movement in a state?

The notion of a dynamic cell or network of cells / units was introduced to empower a local community and potentially to be developed within local adaptation policy. A newbie, a new idea could start a growth story in a shrinking context leading to positive results. LEADER / CLLD (groups) are well placed to support pilot experiments, for new cells to be born and develop as well as finance transition. The process may be long if durable transformations or change are expected. We should not forget LEADER as methodology behind many successes through its participatory and partnership processes, included also in the local adaptation logic.

##### b. Growth squeezed and shifted zones:

Sometimes there is no where for the growing zones to go due to geographical limits. Are we able to adjust, to adapt to shifting realities? Are we able to adapt to changes in the nature, land and biodiversity in advance, along or react a posteriori?

##### c. Digitalisation and technology

IT is often in environments that support the use. What happens when the broadband is not great? Another aspect is the accessibility due to costs. It can be expensive in resource starved areas. Should we focus in the increase of happiness more than in economy?

Digitalisation has brought increased possibilities for communication, learning & knowledge-exchange, mobility, access to services and enhancement of working conditions. At the same time the implementation of technologies has not always been done in a responsible, ethical way. The ecological and social costs are too often not regarded. Technological solutions may become problems of the present. Technology dependence does not increase self-reliance of rural areas in these uncertain times.

#### 2. Discussion in breakoutrooms Recording 2.14-2.23

##### a. Discussion on trends

The room discussed on existing and upcoming trends. Climate change is obvious and adaptation will be needed. How is the shift moving northwards and which is the timescale? Access to water may become an



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existential threat. Also environmental problems arise – like deforestation or through chemicals. A mindset change towards greener and towards sustainable development goals is possible.

Depopulation leads to shrinking areas, economies and services – even though different on-demand services may rise. In the economy, capital intensive agriculture could prevail, while changes (climate) will happen in the production. Agricultural land may shrink. Communities empower themselves and the digital capital could support this. Rural poverty and lack of participation of youth/women in the decisionmaking processes are stagnating trends especially in candidate and pre-accession countries, but some positive developments are possible. Also some changes in cultural identity are possible.

Can we see a ruralisation trend coming helped by covid? Are the divisions urban-rural, but also between rural stakeholders

### **b. Discussion on managing the trends**

Can trends be managed was the starting and ending point of the discussion. Trends and counter trends were discussed. Urban, growth, profit driven discourse and thinking is setting the trends through power in policy planning and programming. There are counter voices / trends / local trends promoting decentralisation, less concentration, multi-locality or localisation thinking with issues like voting rights, democracy, taxes, local economies, local currencies. Was mentioned also poverty and inequalities which often leads to populism and democratic challenges. We have seen that poor people voting for Trump, rural for Brexit in the UK. Multi-locality can be demanding on space, infrastructure and complicated on voting and tax policies.

Climate change will necessary affect us in the future and policymakers and deciders must be ready to meet the challenges. Bottom-up can influence and lobby for the changes and show self-commitment at local/territorial level but politicians but decisionmakers make the change in the big picture. LEADER/CLLD program and now the Green Deal Smart Village processes can make top-down changes to existing status quo trends.

“Happiness instead of growth – Not more, but better“

### **c. Final Discussion – How do we see rural areas in 15 years?**

Comment speech by MEP Niklas Nienass, Co-chair of RUMRA&Smart villages Intergroup  
Recording 2.05-2.13

When we look to the future of rural areas, no one can fully predict what will happen. Things may not change from today – the concentration trend (to be viable in economic terms) leads to further shrinking. Or then one can make the change. Where do we want to go, how do we want to shape the future, do we increase self-commitment. Do we want shops, libraries, digital offices, robots or people doing the work? Do we want a world where people interact?



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- Some trends are created top-down. When LEADER was created over twenty years ago and supported by member states, it created and creates a lot of new energy, employment, networking, innovations and especially social capital. Can the Smart villages, the Green Deal processes supported by a long term vision lead to stronger inclusive, integrative trends or do we see opposition from member states / sectoral lobbies? The political will is a big part of trend building.
- Digital divide, digital capital, equality and accessibility were discussed. Is the inequality growing if digital infrastructure and capacities concentrates to certain areas and certain people. The capital tends to find capital - so with finances, social capital – and with digital. Digitalisation can be divided into infrastructure and skills/capacities and they need to go hand in hand. Investments on broadband are needed in rural areas to keep it vibrant. On the question how to ensure broadband connections in the rural areas, LEADER and commons were suggested in addition to existing national and European efforts.
- We should be open-minded but also critical to some technologies that can serve on one hand and take away on the other. Some can create profit, be important for food security but be harmful for the environment and biodiversity. Smart farming 5.0 program looks more now into sustainability and social issues.
- New innovations and technologies success depend on the end-users why a multidisciplinary approach is relevant. On capacities, peer-to-peer learning appears to be efficient.
- What is the cost for the national economy of shrinking, abandoned land and territories, devaluation of housing and infrastructure, lost jobs from concentration and exodus.

### Outside the webinar:

**Andrés Rodríguez-Pose:** The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it) 2018

"Persistent poverty, economic decay and lack of opportunities are at the root of considerable discontent in declining and lagging-behind areas the world over. Poor development prospects and an increasing belief that these places have "no future"—as economic dynamism has been posited to be increasingly dependent on agglomeration economies—have led many of these so-called "places that don't matter" to revolt against the status quo. The revolt has come via an unexpected source: the ballot-box, in a wave of political populism with strong territorial, rather than social foundations. I will argue that the populist wave is challenging the sources of existing well-being in both the less-dynamic and the more prosperous areas and that better, rather than more, place-sensitive territorial development policies are needed in order to find a solution to the problem. Place-sensitive development policies need, however, to stay clear of the welfare, income support and big investment projects of past development strategies if they are to be successful and focus on tapping into untapped potential and on providing opportunities to those people living in the places that "don't matter".



### 3. Survey results

#### Trends

"**Abandonment of traditional and sustainable agrarian activities** with high-quality productions and low demand for inputs. This causes abandonment, fire risk, loss of rural population, loss of associated knowledge and know-how"

"**Many young people, but also older ones are leaving.**" The young generations prefer to live urban areas" (urban attractiveness)

...However, there are also signs that **some people are returning** (trend accelerated after Covid 19) but this trend would need **to be monitored**" "People are finding that summer homes are viable places to work from due to Covid19"

"Due to **climate change and global warming**, cases of natural disasters such as flood and drought has started to occur more oftenly"

"**Awareness** about organic farming and natural production is increasing especially in the western parts of Turkey."

Inequality, urbanisation, post-corona, ageing, isolation...

Integrity of the systems: soil, water, fire risk, loss of biodiversity, loss of crops and adapted breeds,..)"

"**Agriculture has been exposed to significant and challenging changes.** ""Industrial"" profit-oriented agriculture causes a significant **reduction in small farms**, their ability to survive and finance development. It entails **cultural and demographic changes** in remote agricultural areas" with more emigrating from urbanized areas looking for a place to improve the quality of life..

"Consumers in urban areas started to search for more healthy foods with the effects of environmental movements that lead to **increasing trend of organic production.**"

**Main negative trends:** exodus (large sense)... leading to economic loss in land, housing, education (schools).

**Main positive trends:** technical / economic developments and a potential on people moving back to rural areas.

→ **There is place-based and territorial variation.**



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### Solutions

"Changes bring in to rural communities **modernisation** through demanding and applying massively information technology incl. agricultural production (e.g. precision farming), improvement of technical infrastructure and certain public services."

"**Digitalisation** of the services of rural youth are strongly developed..." "The most demanded is IT service which contributes to both needs: communication and labour (income generation)." Short supply chain of agricultural products has been invented by some initiatives through e-selling and direct distribution of agricultural products to consumers in urban areas by collective initiatives of rural producers.

Strengthen and integrate research, investment, innovation and cooperation with tools such as pilot projects, TEST spaces, training-entrepreneurship schools, territorial contracts, AKIS ...