



RURALIZATION

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RURALIZATION

The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms

D6.1 - Innovative land practices for an agricultural transition and rural regeneration: documenting and analysing current practices

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Version 1.0

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Executive Summary

This report aims to summarise, analyse and understand the huge variety of innovative land practices that are contributing to rural regeneration and to a process of ruralisation across Europe. It is based on an inventory of 64 land practices, from training programmes for individual farmers, to attempts to influence national policy impacting land use and land transfers, that have been gathered by partners in the RURALIZATION project consortium.

The report has six sections.

Section 1 sets out the aims of the report, and the context within which these innovative land practices are operating - namely the dominance of the agro-industrial model, with its negative impacts on individuals, society, the land and the wider environment. It shows that some farming practices contribute to a process of ruralisation, and some detract from it.

It also outlines the two key challenges that new entrants to farming face: that of gaining access to land, and then, crucially, maintaining that access. It discusses the differences between different European regions, and then the different actors involved in land use. It notes that there are many different “protagonists” who can influence decisions and action on land, and that the interplay between these protagonists often causes a particular outcome.

Section 2 sets out the methodology of the study, noting in particular that there is an overrepresentation of cases from North Western Europe in the inventory. Cases were added to the inventory where they focused both on a particular land issue (access to land, transformation of the use or maintenance of a certain use of agricultural land), *and* on supporting socially and ecologically sound agricultural practices. Institutional and practitioner stakeholders were engaged with the findings of the first draft of the report, and their feedback is incorporated the next drafts.

Section 2 also goes into depth on the key concepts referred to throughout the report, namely

- **Access to Land** - seeing it as a continuous process, that starts before and continues after physical access is gained.
- **Innovative Land Practices** - defined as practices that enable both access to land and the emergence of new models of management of agricultural land, in ways that seek to influence positive change in farming, the environment and wider society. Many of the most innovative practices also actively engage with the complexity of the land system.
- **Agroecology** is defined as agricultural practices that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and oriented towards social justice.
- **New Entrants** is mostly taken to mean new farmers with no farming background, although it is recognised that there can be some grey areas between new entrants and successors, who may also be agents of change on the farms they inherit from family.
- **Rural regeneration** - aims to go beyond reversing rural decline, by reviving or reinventing parts of the rural economy, culture, and environment.
- **Capital frameworks** - the report refers to the seven capitals in the community capital framework (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built capital), and recognises that they all intersect.

These concepts and the broader context then inform the proposal of an analytical framework, the first part of which is shown in a diagrammatic representation of the land system. This diagram sets out the institutional regulations and relationships between the different actors in the land system, and explains why and how some practices and new institutions intervene in this system. One central reason for their intervention is the fact that the impact of land use on several dimensions of the society goes far beyond the landowner and the land user.

The second part of the framework aims to show the different types of action or activity that the innovative land practices use. This is set out as a theoretical “access to land pathway”, with 5 “blocks” describing realms of action:

0 - upstream (pre land identification) support to new entrants

1 - organising farmland accessibility

2 - prioritising sustainable and multifunctional land uses

3 - securing access to land for individual farmers

4 - downstream (post land access) support to farmers

Some of the practices in the inventory operate across all of these blocks, while some focus their attention on a single one.

These two frameworks allow the report to analyse the innovative land practices both as specific practices in the context of their wider land system, and also as practices operating at some point on the access to land pathway. This latter analysis allows for some more general conclusions when practices at each block on the pathway are examined together.

Section 3 then goes on to begin analysing the practices according to this access to land pathway framework. For each block of the pathway it includes concrete examples and general analysis and discussion about the opportunities, challenges and impact of each type of activity. It then synthesises all of the practices against the whole pathway, noting that most practices operate on one or two of the blocks only - but that those who focus on collective land acquisition tend to be involved in most or all of the blocks. The assumption could be made that these practices’ involvement in the management of land as “a common”, through collective acquisition tools, brings the actors of the practices to work on all blocks of the pathway in order to: ensure both a long term and a sustainable use of the land acquired; build on their practice to initiate a transformation of land governance; increase their level of activity and the types of acquisition they can make.

Section 4 identifies the main results of the analysis, namely that:

- The type of land, and the way it is currently used is a key driver. The practices identified do not act equally on all types of land. In particular, land that is currently owned or farmed by someone “close” to the practice is more often involved. That closeness could be in terms of the type of farming or closeness to networks. This also means that new strategies may be needed to influence land that is currently used for agro-industrial farming.
- Land is a social object with human capital as a central lever. Multiple partners are involved in the practices identified, with non-profit organisations and public agencies emerging as key actors. The land innovations both rely on and generate human capital, most of it locally anchored. The practices also leverage a great deal of social capital,

working within, building and relying on networks to build a wider community of people working to change the land system.

- Land is a lever for rural regeneration. The practices contribute to rural economies both by supporting the creation of jobs, and by preserving the natural resources that local economies need to flourish.
- Land is a lever for generational renewal. By creating the conditions for new entrants to farming to access and maintain their access to land, the practices support the next generation of farmers. They both do this through practical programmes and direct support, but also by improving the general environment that new entrants will exist in.

Section 5 considers how best to support and scale up the impact of innovative land practices, in the light of these findings. It proposes four main “building blocks” for change:

- 1. Strengthening human capital to promote the success of these practices.** Many of the key actors in this system would benefit from resources being directed to support training, knowledge transfer and skill development. This includes the NGO and non-profit actors, existing and potential farmers, and local authority officials.
- 2. Adapting land regulation to new entrants and taking into account the fact that land is no longer necessarily part of the capital of the farm in new land management models.** Recognising that the current land market is both secretive and inaccessible, many of these practices aim to take land out of the market, often through collective ownership. However, to scale-up these practices, land markets should be more strongly regulated with concrete aims towards agricultural transition. Collective ownership transforms the status of land, extracting the land from the overall capital of the farm—meaning that new financial models are needed that don’t rely on the land itself acting as security—and inducing a professionalisation of farmland management.
- 3. Boosting the role of local authorities in acting on land in favour of the transition of agricultural models.** The role of local authorities varies across Europe, but they often have wide ranging powers to influence land use—and interests in doing so, particularly in terms of local food production. Local authorities should play a more active role in the use of public land, supporting the creation of food projects and considering their ability to compulsorily purchase land.
- 4. Changing the CAP framework so that it fosters access to land.** The CAP, for aiming at a more ambitious transition of agricultural models, could be reshaped in a way that would limit land concentration of farms (which reinforces the competition on land) and possibilities of having landowners or retired farmers perceiving subsidies (which limits land mobility) and would favour small and multifunctional farms. This would require a new orientation of first-pillar aid schemes towards agroecological practices and active farmers as well as a new orientation of second-pillar aid schemes in order to finance more ambitious agri-environmental measures and to participate in the financing of reinforced networks that work in favour of access to land (by relying on the variety of European practices).

Section 6 is the conclusion. It summarises how much successful innovative land practices rely on human and social capital, and how relevant the local context is to the relative success and impact of the practices. It summarises the recommendations or building blocks for change in section 5.

It also looks ahead to the next phase of this work, which will focus on emergent land innovations, including more in-depth analysis, through a series of “actions” on land issues and projects. It will be an opportunity to interrogate the findings of this phase of the work, and to further explore the recommendations for change, adding more detail about how they may be implemented. Phase 2 will also offer the opportunity to further develop the access to land pathway.

Finally, section 6 looks at research gaps and recommendations for further research. These include:

- 1 - Analysing land markets’ dynamics and social organisation of land transfers with a specific focus on new entrants’ issues.
- 2 - Analysing the conditions of success of innovations at each stage of the access to land pathway.
- 3 - Analysing issues related to inequality of access.

In summary, this report shows that access to land for agroecological farming is a complex, multifaceted and interconnected issue. It shows that multiple actors are working in many ways to create solutions, and that these solutions also need to be multifaceted in nature. It offers pathways towards policy solutions for those wanting to support the transition to a more socially and ecologically just farming system.