

the subject), the topic will not be further addressed in this paper. The related content collected during the confrontations and addressing the topic “access to land” are detailed in the specific confrontation reports. A list of the most relevant aspects that came up during confrontation can be viewed in Appendix 22. An in-depth analysis of the situation related to access to land and the complete results of the extensively researched topic can be found in the report D6.1, D 6.2 and D6.3³ that were drafted in WP6 of the Ruralization project.

2.1 The role of rural newcomers and new entrants into farming

The ability to replicate or upscale innovative practices would clearly help to ignite and accelerate rural regeneration and development. Being able to transfer to a different context the success that an initiative was able to initially generate would clearly contribute to rural regeneration. One of the key findings of the confrontation process was that adequate human capital needs to be available in order to increase the chance for a successful transfer of the experience. In other words, **qualified human capital is the most critical factor for replicating a promising practice**. In the scope of this report, human capital will include knowledge, skills, experience and motivation of the involved individuals.

We often consider rural newcomers and new entrants into farming as catalysts, bringing along capabilities, required knowledge and skills. Through our research we can confirm that these actors can potentially awaken stagnating rural contexts. When a region was lacking the ability to fully economically, socially and culturally explore its potential these actors were frequently the ones bringing new life through their new ideas and concepts.

Although not only newcomers and new entrants are required to present the right set of skills for a successful practice transfer. Local and regional authorities, public and civil society organisations, as well as established rural dwellers are also to be equipped with the necessary skill set if a context ought to be successful in its endeavours. Those groups will be addressed later in this section and further in section 2.2.

The skills identified in the confrontations as required to create or replicate a successful initiative ranged from psychological, over social to intellectual skills. The skills are mostly acquirable but they can also be the result of personality and character traits. The skills requirements showed to be of individual or of group nature, meaning that either individuals or whole communities should be able to present the given characteristic.

Two of the frequently mentioned individual skills were leadership and pioneerism. When we consider leadership, collective and individual leadership skills are present. Leadership can take different colours and was addressed with different terms such as the “activist” (NC2, NC3), one who sets up and organise the critical mass necessary to get an initiative going, the “activator” (NE7), meaning the fiery and self-motivated person who puts ideas further, the motivated and engaged community member or the “power-horse” (NC7, SC2), with

³ D6.1 Typology of actions based on analysis of current innovative actions and discussion with stakeholders; D6.2 Report on legal and policy arrangements in 28 member states; D6.3 Technical report on quantitative analysis of land holdings and land market trends.

endurance and idealism to move projects further. The leadership role was also described in a more processual way, sometimes representing the capability to facilitate territorial interaction and to orchestrate stakeholders' actions (NE8). Leadership was frequently paired with the qualities of pioneers. Those were praised for being able to start-up new enterprises (NC5), know trends (NC3, NE7), and have the capacity to "initiate a snowball effect" for innovative projects (NC5). Furthermore they are described as visionaries who are able to share this vision in an engaging form to gather support and bring it to more concrete actions.

But one of the most critical skills appears to be business competencies. Under this category some of the mentioned skills were entrepreneurial mindset (SC1, SC5), technical abilities such as financial aspects (NE2, NE6), being a good organiser, knowing how to structure a fundraising initiative or planning the roll-out of an idea in the form of a project (NC6). In addition, business acumen would ask for social and interpersonal skills such as being able to act as networkers and facilitators (NE8). Networkers bring personal relations and connections to other social circles. Those connections, as brought up in one context (NC3), carry business potential and might be missing in rural areas where there are no such established networks yet. Facilitators can build links between seemingly diametrically opposed opinions (NE4), thus fostering collaboration and engaging stakeholder groups within the rural community. To foster collaboration, further social skills were frequently mentioned such as mediation and counselling (NE6, SC1).

Since many of the practices contained agroecological and community oriented approaches to farming, further knowledge in those areas were also listed in many contexts as critical skills. For instance, knowledge about agrobiodiversity and alternative farming practices. Even though this knowledge was claimed to be generally critical for a sustainable transformation of the agricultural landscape, the *de facto* prevailing demand for organic farming education in rural areas was estimated to be smaller than in intermediate areas (SC4), or rural areas closer to urban centres (NE7). This was partially attributed to the fact that the demand for organic farming education is mainly generated by new entrants into farming, who have a stronger presence in those less isolated rural areas; but also to less marketing options.

Summarising, rural newcomers and new entrants into farming are estimated in many contexts as being more qualified and gifted with the required skills to foster innovation than conventional rural dwellers. Nonetheless, these actors cannot achieve success with their efforts if they root their projects in socially infertile soil. This means that the community where an initiative shall be installed has also to fulfil some requirements. The presence of a "strong" community was also identified in the majority of the confrontations as a critical factor leading to success, "strong" communities were described as communities where well-functioning networks are present and interpersonal relationships among its members are well established. In section 2.4 of our learning we will address the measures to support collaboration and to build strong communities.

The fertile ground for innovative initiatives is also defined in many contexts by the quality of the human capital in public services and authorities. Civil servants, local and regional government employees ought to be able to provide support for project initiators in a diverse range of topics. The requirements were both related to technical as to interpersonal skills. Among others, the technical skills include good knowledge of the administrative processes and the capacity to act as advisors in those matters, and being able to run government programs locally and help to apply for project calls. Specific knowledge about local food systems and agricultural methods were also identified as critical skills to support the initiators of innovative farming projects. The interpersonal skills were related to the counselling function to support individual and collective initiatives. When considering the varied needs that a group of farmers would present when planning to establish themselves as a collective, the array of support needed also requires informed counselling. The key qualities of a counsellor would include not only technical skills, but an ability to support initiation of a project team.

In addition to human capital in the form of skills and knowledge, the second most frequent common critical factor was the active engagement of local authorities. It was clear that practices which succeeded in creating a positive impact on the community and the surrounding areas were having at least some support from local politicians and local governmental institutions.

Most frequent barriers encountered by newcomers and new entrants

Frequently one of the first mentioned barriers for the transferability of a practice was the lack of innovation supportive human capital described above. Since many of the skills can be acquired or transferred via training or practising, we will address the lifting of this barrier in section 2.4 when we discuss the measures to increase knowledge sharing and improve education and training in rural areas.

Other critical factors that were identified as being either absent or difficult to make available in rural contexts are listed below and comprise the most frequently identified barriers for rural newcomers and new entrants into farming and classified as very relevant by the researchers for more than 60% of the confrontations⁴.

Farming infrastructure

Supporting the establishment of new entrants on human-size and locally-oriented farms requires important efforts to change the farm/land structure. One major obstacle for new entrants is the lack of infrastructure in the form of buildings and specific machinery, that would allow a more innovative production. Bundled services to conceptually help them to bring products to market, such as marketing, communication, certification, logistics consulting, are also lacking. Few infrastructures exist to transform and sell food locally, and the creation of this type of infrastructure requires major investments that are not always available.

⁴ The relevance of the barriers were defined via survey among the 15 researchers involved in the confrontation process.

Digital connectivity and other living infrastructure

To facilitate settlement of newcomers and new entrants in rural areas, as well as their access to services and information, it is necessary to invest in the digitalization of rural areas. This is not only meant in the strict sense of creating interconnectivity infrastructure such as high volume and speed internet access, but also to create more specialised jobs. Specifically relating to farming, digital connectivity is becoming more and more important, due to the expansion of their application in the primary sector itself, in terms of monitoring, the use of sensors, automatization, etc. Beside broadband internet access, other facilities such as housing, schooling, and entertainment are also required. Especially housing on the proximity of farmland is considered a scarce good in most of the cases. This is also due to the fact of limiting and strict rules regarding obtaining a permit to divide an existing farmstead into various housing units. Suitable public transport in rural areas as a minimal requirement for families to move in, as well as to allow for members of community farms to collect product were mentioned as a barrier.

Regulations and subsidies policies

Heavy and strict regulation appears to be one of the common barriers that severely limit innovation in agriculture no matter where in Europe. CAP direct payments are seen as a very relevant constraint for the promotion of sustainable food systems both from a social and environmental perspective. Strict regulation for animal farming (husbandry, slaughter, nitrate overload of the soil), food processing (specification for food labs and equipment), limits to the development of regional specialties (e.g. certification procedures) and small-scale production of artisanal food are just examples of the areas where regulators are hindering innovation. The fact that regulations are actually the same for big farms and agro-industry as well as for small farms/small scale artisanal processing aggravates this fact. Some other concerns regarding exogenous barriers relate to the organic certification systems. Most small-scale farmers considered them to be too complex, bureaucratic and expensive. Beyond representing a bureaucratic and economic burden, the criteria used by the current certification are considered obsolete and should be updated to include items such as the origin of the production, the impact of the production method on the environment and carbon print of the supply chain.

The CAP direct payments were considered not really helpful and sometimes even a constraint to the promotion of sustainable food systems, both, from a social and an environmental perspective. For some regions those payments are promoting massification and the production of goods of low demand, thus generating excessive production and subsequent destruction, instead of promoting biodiversity and sustainable development. One reason could be a lack of political will at European and national level. But also the lack of knowledge from the farmers, due to the complexity of the process, accounts for the fact that many possibilities to collect subsidies are widely unknown. Even if a small scale farmer

knows the existence of the subsidies they often prefer to don't apply for them due to the complex bureaucratic procedure.

Access to a viable market

One of the main barriers for the successful implementation of some agro-ecological projects relate to the commercialisation of added-value products. The lack of an existing market, or in other words the access to the demand for higher valued products, is a key barrier for producers in more isolated rural areas.

The proximity to urban centers clearly favours the development of organic farming since it offers the access to the urban population that have not only the desire for differentiated products but also the necessary income to pay for the additional quality. In the absence of such proximity, other forms of selling channels that allow for specific targeting of selected consumer types, would be necessary, such as green public procurement by local municipalities.

Other barriers very often mentioned but perceived as most relevant in less than 60% of the confrontations are the following:

Food illiteracy

Rural and predominantly rural contexts are consistently defined as having less awareness and providing less education in terms of alternative food systems. This condition came consistently across the various confrontations where the demand for higher quality products - such as organic and artisanal produced food - was a critical factor, being therefore considered a barrier for the successful implementation of alternative and innovative farming practices. The influence that the lack of awareness and education has on food demand is increased by the evidently diverging and weaker buying power prevailing in rural areas compared to urban areas. This fact was also highlighted in the previous section and as such has also an impact in the development of the rural gastronomic scene.

Handling public administration bureaucracy

In addition to the information overload on the one hand, and the lack of knowledge of available grants on the other, there is the problem of identifying and understanding the calls for proposals. There is also a basic need for this information to be well articulated, so that it is not necessary to search in numerous different places, organising access to the tools in an effective way. Even if one succeeds in receiving a grant, one of the most prominent obstacles in all the sessions was the lack of support and accompaniment for those people, especially after the first year in which they start a business and when they run the highest risk of failure. In other words, long-term support is missing.

Furthermore, there is a significant bureaucratic barrier when applying for aid, if we consider the southern and eastern European countries. The problem is partially due to the lack of

access to information and knowledge but also to the lack of confidence that young people and rural citizens have towards dealing with public administration.

Rural associations and networks such as LEADER groups emphasise the excessive time spent on the justification of subsidies and management of calls for proposals, as opposed to the lack of time spent on communicating the existence of subsidies and providing aid in a more direct way. Furthermore, farmers usually have to work a lot and therefore have only little time to spend on proposals.

Lack of political will to support innovative farming

The government support in all levels and from all instances is not required only in financial form. Especially political will to create the base and support for various undertakings was identified as a critical factor and mostly a barrier, because of its absence in the local context. As mentioned before, the lack of organic farming educational programs, as well as support to undertake such training is not only the result of missing financial support, but partly a consequence of the lack of political will to foster alternative, agro-ecological farming. The effort would be more efficient if a cooperation would be applied between farmers associations, existing conventional educational centres and school managements, that is supported by local, regional, or national guidelines.

Proposed measures to increase the presence of rural newcomers and new entrants into farming

So clearly, to increase the presence of rural newcomers and new entrants into farming in rural areas, some of the barriers need to be worked on and the attractiveness of rural areas need to be increased. We will therefore discuss measures that could provide this effect and attract this type of people to come to rural areas.

Commoning and collective farming to tackle the lack of farming infrastructure

To improve the availability of agricultural infrastructure and meet some of the various challenges that new entrants encounter to establish in agriculture, commoning and cooperation on a small scale could provide a way to fulfil some of these needs. Material capacity - such as machinery- as well as the know-how, logistic-services, distribution and direct selling support for farmers goods could be reached by means of collaboration or creation of a shared services provider. The available legal forms to support the collaboration among farmers varies from country to country. An exchange at higher political and juridical level should be entailed in order to identify the most efficient legal forms and make them widely available within European member countries. This legal form should ensure the eligibility for CAP subsidies.

The benefits of collective farming would make access to land easier. Collectives will have a larger capacity to pool money from various individuals and/or taking over larger farms. The increase in financial power also facilitates the access to appropriate equipment by sharing the investment. In terms of knowledge, collectives will have more individuals from where to draw the knowhow and working power. The cooperation has the potential to relieve challenges related to being new to the agricultural work and the agricultural world in general, and overcome the start-up fears, mutualising difficult or time-consuming tasks.

The concept of "territorial farms" was explored as a viable solution for predominantly urban areas. Territorial farms in this sense were farms established in urban surrounding areas and dedicated to cover the needs of this specific urban community. These collective farms could be managed by an array of stakeholders interested in the maintenance of agricultural land in the vicinity of urban agglomerations. These farms would be available to receive the new entrants, offering them the possibility to establish in the area. The territorial farms could also serve as farm incubators and make available food processing facilities for artisanal food production activities. The farms could become an experimental site for emblematic actions to improve the biodiversity and environmental management of the area.

In this regard, the collective could respond to new entrants' aspirations of questioning traditional models of setting up in agriculture. In this practice, the farm becomes a shared enterprise whose conduct and future are decided among individuals who have equal status and power as associates in the farm. Among critical tools identified to support the development of farm collectives, there were:

- Communication tools to develop the ability to dialogue, such as information and training on how to organise and conduct meetings to achieve the set strategic as well as tactical objectives. Even basic knowhow such as how to set frequency, agenda, speech distribution, rotating organising responsibility, etc.
- Tools on governance, to help collectives adopt agreed-upon and operational statuses and value charters, work on responsibility repartition, develop decision-making processes that satisfy the group, create conflict-resolution mechanisms, etc.
- Tools on financial and technical aspects of working as a group (e.g. schemes to collect/count work time of associates; tools to know how to share investment, risk, equipment; juridical tools to set up a collective enterprise etc.).

Investment in internet and digitization in remote rural areas

Another key factor is the internet and the digitalisation of services, especially for entrepreneurs, and to attract younger and innovative people. Young generations need access to broadband internet as well as a functional mobile internet. The availability of fast internet facilitates the installation also of the currently *en vogue* working nomads: urban dwellers working remotely and bringing their knowhow and their consumption power to rural villages. The Corona Crisis⁵ pushed the establishment of remote work, which can be a huge potential for rural areas, if they provide this minimum infrastructure. Remote workers

⁵ Worldwide pandemic on SARS-Covid 19, affecting Europe from march 2020 until the publication of this report

can be important for farmers, especially for organic farmers, because, as mentioned already above, they usually have a higher income, and therefore can afford to buy the more expensive organic products. Additionally, if more remote workers come to a certain area, the potential for direct marketing rises, which is usually more profitable for farmers than selling their products to retail companies.

Beside the availability of fast internet, social infrastructure such as personal, health and school services (kindergartens, schools, shopping facilities and doctors), a good level of public transportation and more up-to-date housing prove to be a way to make rural villages more attractive. The public sector has a crucial role of providing these structures especially in more remote rural areas.

Remote rural areas usually have a lower level of social infrastructure than urban or suburban areas. Nevertheless it seems to be crucial to provide an infrastructure which has at least a certain minimum standard to address newcomers needs.

Increasing rural attractiveness

Taking into account the high share of farmers retiring in the coming years, we also realise that local authorities need to better observe the demographic evolution of the population in their specific districts, taking advantage of the potential higher interest that newcomers show for farming and rural development. This should result in a consequent increase in the supply of services as required by this segment, thus increasing the attractiveness of rural areas for the settling of new generations and avoiding emigration of youth.

Efforts should be increased, to make rural businesses, professions and lifestyles better known in general, and especially among the younger population. Collaboration with schools should be strived to achieve this aim.

Considering that the technological revolution has also reached the primary sector, it is considered that some rural areas will not have enough skilled labour available in the future. Rural areas need to be presented to young generations as a place of modern technology and modern jobs. The actors of the various primary sector industries could work in collaboration to implement those measures to promote rural areas image and reputation as an attractive living and working environment.

Working on the social fabric

The social fabric in small villages is densely knotted and newcomers have a hard time finding the adequate social context to establish first contacts. It was proposed that crash courses, the type of “how to live in the country” should be offered as an opportunity to learn the specificities of the local society, giving newcomers a hands-on opportunity to experience the way of life they want to adopt. Such a course, or other types of organised

encounters, would provide for an opportunity to meet, establish first contacts and build connections with locals. Social relations are built by experience, therefore events that facilitate potential candidates to see, hear, smell and feel the countryside could have a positive impact in their decision to move in. Visiting farms, newcomer cafes and other events at regular cycles could promote the building of more connections and expand the patterns of innovation in rural areas. Potential candidates must meet the ones that already live and work in rural areas. Also students of all levels could be invited to be part of organised farms and company visits, to be present and participate in classes of rural professions as well as in offering practical professional orientation and vocational tests. As discussed earlier in this section, the social fabric is an important element when addressing the characteristics of “strong” communities. Therefore, personal connections between older and recently established farmers are also part of this fabric. It would be therefore interesting to create a database of older farmers and new entrants, create activities to make them interact so that the relationship is already existing a long time before one retiring farmer starts to think about his or her retirement.

Tackling bureaucracy and the rigidity of support programs

The agriculture business is complex and time-consuming. Small farms are less equipped with human resources and are therefore less prepared to perform activities that are not directly related to the core business. A way to solve this shortage of time is to offer external support to perform the non-agriculture-related activities, tailored to the startup phase going through until the retirement and succession phase. The availability of this type of counselling and advice varies strongly from country to country and from region to region, and is sometimes already offered as a public service or by civil society organisations (e.g. churches, NGOs). This type of social counselling and consultation is time consuming and requires skilled staff that are not widely available, as already mentioned earlier in this paper. An initial way to tackle this problem would be to make a database available. A compendium of all existing services available, their type of offer and conditions to receive them. Often the lack of the service is not the problem, but the difficulty to find out who or which organisation could help.

On another note, it cannot be neglected that the nature of farming business is of strong interfamilial relation and activity. This fact can cause intense tension and the availability of external mediation/help to manage social and human dynamics in the long term could alleviate the problem. When considering collective farms, events like the entry or exit of associates also often causes interpersonal stress and require support from a counsellor. Most of the time financial means to pay for the service are not available, particularly if the group is going through a transformation period.

In addition to the time consumption related to all activities not contributing directly to the resolution of the farming routine, the benefit from performing those activities can be demotivating. If we consider the level of bureaucracy required for the process of applying for subsidies, and put this in contrast to the set of values that most of the new entrants and newcomers share, the application for subsidy is more a constraint than a help. The financial help offered to farmers by the state should allow farmers more individual scope of action,