

be broader in their scope of support and favours initiatives leading to diversification and innovation.

An additional, more human resources consuming solution on the local level, could be that communities or regions provide help for the farmers in the form of a professional office to apply for national and international funds. This office or agency would compose applications in cooperation with the local farmers, so that they can concentrate on their daily business. This possible solution would require the will of elected officers to dedicate funds on innovative agricultural businesses. Nevertheless it could be a more effective way for communities to invest on gathering funds than spending their own limited funds directly on local farmers. Local councils could also function as "dissemination antennae" for relevant information. In the form of advisory offices, or field workshops, the figure of the rural development agent could be activated and enhanced.

At regional or national level there should be efforts put into increasing the viability of small farming in opposition to favouring scale, for instance by differentiating the subsidy program for big and small farms. Also, subsidy schemes to support farmers in the transition to new approaches, in the diversification of their offering, in favouring innovation and risk taking should be put in place. Especially the starting period where lots of (financial) insecurities are present needs to be bridged.

#### *Increase access to education on alternative farming and food systems*

The desirability of a transition from conventional to agroecological farming is not only due to technical and economical reasons but also to the increasing importance of socio-cultural aspects, such as animal welfare and environmental impacts. It is therefore of relevance to support new entrants into farming in their effort of transitioning to alternative farming methods. Although not being the focus of this section, it is relevant to state that this subject is also relevant for farm successors. Taking advantage of the greater interest younger generations are showing to alternative ways of farming it would be wise to increase the offering of appropriate and stately financed training facilities. There should be an effort to close the gap between offer and demand for agro-ecological education for all age groups. In line with the financial challenges many (starting) farmers face, the idea of paid internship and wider support during the formation period could have a positive impact.

Education and awareness building is also required to increase food literacy, providing training and developing information campaigns to increase the knowledge about alternative food systems, food sovereignty and food security. This would increase the awareness of the population about new forms of agriculture such as cooperative, community-supported agriculture, and the individual responsibility towards regional and organic food. Those measures could accelerate the transition to sustainable growth and rural regeneration.

## 2.2 The latent innovation potential of farm successors

We have explored the important role that rural newcomers and new entrants into farming play in the process of implementing innovative, regenerative initiatives. The other important actor in the process of developing rural life in rural and predominantly rural areas are the farm successors. New entrants and newcomers less frequently establish themselves in those more remote rural areas. We identified many obstacles that this new generation of farmers are experiencing and have come across proposals on how to support them. They are the ones that have the internal conditions to continue to develop the agriculture business they will inherit from their families. New generations have the innovative potential inherent to the younger population. The majority have come into contact with different realities than their parents, have developed different skills and acquired different knowledge. This makes them susceptible to developing different dreams and aspirations, as we have seen in D 4.5 Ruralization report<sup>6</sup> which documents a wide array of foresight activities undertaken to find out the ingredients for alternative futures in different types of rural areas in Europe.

If we want this group to be able to explore their innovative power, combined with their farming knowhow, it is necessary to work on the removal of the barriers that are limiting their innovative capacity and preventing their motivation to maintain and to develop the farm business they will inherit.

Farm succession is a complex process. It involves not only the young generation's motivation, but also the economic and legal aspects of farm inheritance as well as psychological, social and cultural aspects of family inheritance. It is therefore important to pay attention to the interest of both the successor and the retiring farmer. This dual focus is critical and should be considered under multiple perspectives: economic (e.g. the viability and the attractiveness of the farming activity), social (the needs of retiring farmers), emotional ( re-defining the continuing role of the older farmer on the farm), legal and organisational (e.g. farm ownership).

Within this complexity, the critical factor identified for maximizing the potential of this group as rural changemakers was appropriate training and information. Again this will be generally discussed further in the section 2.3 of knowledge sharing and building of human capital but some specific factors will be addressed in the section.

The lack of governmental pension schemes for farmers in some countries was considered a very important negative factor impacting the decision of successors about taking over their parents' farm. This fact was also mentioned as one of the main barriers for farming cooperatives, since in this setting the lack of a regular pension after stopping the activity is not backed by support from a potential successor. The non-existence of farmers' retirement and pension plans reflects the reality that farmers need a different approach. The focus on 'retirement' in the normal sense of exit and ceasing work activities is generally not appropriate in a farming context. Farming is a way of life and farmers may want to stay involved in the

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<sup>6</sup> Tuomas Kuhmonen (2021)

farm after succession, which can also benefit its future. Farmer's retirement is more a "stepping back" than a "stepping away" is this need to be considered when designing a solution for succession.

Farm succession is impacted by many different factors across time, such as a young potential farmer gaining an initial interest in the profession, to the technical aspects of farm legal transfer. The findings presented here, both the barriers and measures to address these, are reflective of a set of cases and their exploration in new contexts. They are therefore not comprehensive, but nevertheless provide useful insights into the issues impacting current levels of farm succession and the potential policy measures that could help overcome these obstacles.

### Barriers identified to farm successors

#### *Farming as an economically viable livelihood for successors*

Successors need to view farming as an attractive profession that provides a financially viable livelihood. In a number of confrontations the issue of farm viability and the wider economic resilience of farms emerged as a key barrier inhibiting greater levels of farm succession. Dependence on subsidies and low commodity prices are issues particularly highlighted in the Canary Islands context (SC1). In the Slow Succession, Slow Revolution case in the Uelzen context (SC2) economic viability and financial security emerged as critical factors. Assessment of the ELIINA project in the west of Ireland context (SC5) brought to light the strong need for transformative change to *support the economic sustainability of farm livelihoods and the survival of the family farm.*

#### *Farming as a socially viable livelihood for successors*

The challenge of farming providing a viable livelihood for successors is also social and linked to difficulties retaining young people and potential successors in farm families and rural areas. The issue of rural exodus is identified in the confrontation of the farm diversification at succession case study in the Canary Islands context (SC1), with the need for better services and social opportunities important to retain youth in rural areas. The presence of rural educational institutions emerged as important in both confrontations exploring the training in 'nature professions' case (the Timis area - SC3 and the Niedersachsen context - SC4), also showing the importance of education opportunities to retain youth in rural areas.

Another part of the challenge is to attract potential successors back to rural areas when they do leave to pursue social and economic opportunities elsewhere. In the confrontation involving the ELIINA project in the west of Ireland context (SC5) it was shown how children in farm families leave rural areas to access education and work in other places. This can then also mean the skills and wider life experience gained may not have a role in the more traditional family farm. This creates a role for innovation and diversification on farms to

make farming a more attractive profession that can draw on a range of skills, which also should improve farm viability.

#### *Traditional gender norms*

Farming must be seen as a viable livelihood for the male and female successor equally and this is currently a challenge. The gender imbalance in the farming profession is also an issue impacting the viability of farming as a livelihood. Women may not see themselves, or be seen as by others, as future farmers because of traditional gender norms in the farming profession. The confrontation involving the ELIINA project in the west of Ireland context (SC5) suggests that there is potential to improve levels of farm succession by also improving the gender balance in the next farming generation.

#### *Looking beyond the successor to support the successor*

The confrontations show in different ways how focusing only on the perspective of the successor will not effectively address the need for greater succession levels to support generational renewal in farming. Attention is needed to the farm, the successor and the existing farmer. Issues relating to the successor and farm viability have already been discussed above in relation to how farming needs to be a financially and socially viable occupation for successors to take it on. The confrontations also showed another key part of the process needing attention –the existing farmer.

The confrontations highlighted both social and financial issues related to farmer retirement and the consequent impact of these issues on levels of succession. Existing farmers also face financial challenges on retirement if they do not have adequate retirement income, which can delay the move away from their profession. The results of the Slow Succession, Slow Revolution case explored in the Uelzen context (SC2) identified the issue of retirement income and lack of government farmer pension schemes as a barrier to succession. Retirement can also bring a feeling of loss of professional status and result in breakdown of the natural social connections created by farming activities. This can result in issues such as social isolation and mental health challenges. Farming is often a deeply ingrained way of life and farmers may want to retire in the traditional sense of ceasing work and prefer to stay connected to farming. However, strong involvement of the original main farmer can also have a negative effect for the successor if they feel they lack autonomy in running the farm, as identified in the Uelzen context (SC2). Nevertheless, it is important that an older-age friendly environment exists to support the farmer stepping back. This is a strong point made in the west of Ireland Irish context (SC5).

### **Overcoming obstacles: measures to address the barriers identified**

#### *Measures to support farm innovation at succession*

Increased levels of innovation on farms provides an opportunity to harness the latent, untapped potential of a farm and realise a more sustainable farm business. Farms can be

a place of social, cultural, environmental and more technical or economic innovation. Directly supporting farm innovation emerges a key objective in helping address the issue of farming not providing a viable livelihood for successors. Two case studies and their confrontations explored specific areas of farm-based innovation - the traditional food cultures explored in the Slow Succession, Slow Revolution case in the Uelzen context (SC2) and the community connected farming of CSA Hof Pente in the Timis area (SC3). In the Slow Succession, Slow Revolution case (SC2) one of the key outcomes was specifically the need for financial support for farms in transition to support innovation and entrepreneurial risk taking.

The exploration of the farm diversification at succession case in the Canary Islands context (SC1) resulted in a range of emerging areas of innovation and diversification potential, such as developing farm-based activities in other economic sectors (e.g. tourism, energy, creative economy), changing the farming system to a more economically resilient approach (e.g. diversification into organic production), or extending operations up the supply chain (e.g. adding value to farm produce). These cross-sector intersections provide important spaces for innovation to support increased farm viability, which in turn should help to make farming a realistic and attractive livelihood for successors. Policy measures in this area could also target particular groups who are under-represented in farming, such as female farmers.

#### *Measures to support human capital development to support succession*

Paired with the above measure, human capital development is also important. The confrontation exploring the farm diversification at succession case in the Canary Islands context (SC1) points to the need not just for financial grants, but also paired with wider human capital development, such as enterprise management and digital skills to help any financial investment support building an economically resilient farm business. More broadly, the importance of focusing on human capital development is also emphasised in the training in 'nature professions' and CSA Hof Pente confrontation in the Timis area (SC3). The focus of the ELINA project on both business issues and succession in tandem is supported as an approach in the west of Ireland context (SC5). So in addition to business training, succession information and support would also be an important part of human capital building paired with financial grants supporting innovation at succession.

#### *Measures to support the needs of the existing farmer*

The confrontations on the ELIINA project in the west of Ireland context (SC5) and the Slow Succession, Slow Revolution case in the Uelzen context (SC2) both point in particular to the social and financial needs of the existing farmer looking to step back or retire from farming. In Uelzen retirement income and the lack of government pension schemes emerged as a key barrier. In the west of Ireland (SC5) it was highlighted how the issue of loss of social