

RURALIZATION

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

New rural life in Europe: The RURALIZATION Compendium

Summary of results
from the "RURALIZATION" research project



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1 Dear Reader!

With this compendium we would like to present the results of the EU research project RURALIZATION.

The compendium is aimed at rural development practitioners. Are you an elected official or municipal employee in a rural area? Do you work for a civil society organisation in rural development? Are you a farmer or entrepreneur? Are you involved in rural development on a voluntary basis? Or do you work for an umbrella organisation such as the farmers' association, the chamber of commerce and industry or a municipal umbrella organisation?

This compendium was written for you. As practitioners, you know best how successful rural development policy works.

Together with you, we would therefore like to find out how the results of the RURALIZATION project can be translated into policy and practice. You have probably received this compendium via one of the organisations involved in the project, which has asked you for a comment or interview and will be happy to receive your comments. (If not: feel free to look at www.ruralization.eu and contact your national partner organisation of the project).

The RURALIZATION project

Rural areas in many European countries suffer from decline. Demographic change, especially the ageing of society, has an enormous impact, as young people, especially well-educated ones, move away. The European Union however strives for good living conditions in everyone of its regions. Therefore EU regional and rural policy tries to counteract this trend. Many support programmes, public investment strategies and concerted actions have been launched, some of them successful, but still there is considerable room for improvement. New ideas and strategies are sought.

The EU Commission finances scientific research about fundamental policy issues. Funding is given to international groups of research institutions that respond to thematic calls and are chosen among several competitors. In this context the RURALIZATION project led by TU Delft in the Netherlands was granted funding 2018. The project is about "The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms", i.e. the contribution that "new generations" can play in the development of rural regions, especially in the agricultural sector.

The map shows the RURALIZATION consortium with 18 partners from 12 countries.



Half of them are universities or scientific institutes (purple):

- TU Delft (Netherlands), City and Spatial Planning
- NUIG Galway (Ireland), rural development
- CNRS (France), rural development
- University of Debrecen (Hungary), Agricultural Sociology
- MTA (Hungary), Social Sciences
- University of Calabria (Italy), Department of Political and Social Science
- University of Warsaw (Poland), Geography and Rural Development
- ILS (Germany), Urban Development
- University of Turku (Finland), Economics / Futurology

The other half consists of civil society organisations (green):

- Teagasc (Ireland), agricultural administration
- Pro Vertes (Hungary), Nature Conservation Administration
- Eco Ruralis (Romania), rural NGO
- Kulturland eG (Germany), land stewardship organisation
- Terre de Liens (France), land stewardship organisation
- De Landgenoten (Belgium), land stewardship organisation
- XCN (Spain / Catalonia), land stewardship organisation
- Shared Assets (United Kingdom), think and do tank

The last six organisations are united in the European network "Access to Land" and are specifically concerned with securing land for organic farms. They were chosen as partners because they have first-hand experience with agricultural new entrants and with agricultural land markets.

Procedure and contents

In terms of content, the RURALIZATION project ties in with numerous EU predecessor projects on rural development issues. The special contribution of RURALIZATION lies in the investigation of the role of "new generations" in rural areas. New generations bring new ideas, skills and resources. The hope is that they can stop rural decline and initiate new, positive developments.

Rural regions vary greatly across Europe. We have tried to find out which approaches could be transferable to different types of rural region. In order to understand the particular contribution of the "new generations" to rural development, the project looked at three different aspects:

a. Trend analysis

Under the guidance of futurologists from the University of Turku in Finland, future trends in rural areas were analysed in order to understand how rural society might evolve.

In addition, the "rural dreams" of the young generation between the ages of 18 and 30 were surveyed, both in urban and rural areas. This group will have social and political responsibility in 15 years. Where would young people like to live then? What kind of lifestyle do they want to live? How do they want to earn their money?

When the two are evaluated together, it becomes clear which type of rural area (close to the city or remote) benefits from which trends and is attractive to which group of young people.

b. Case studies

Across the 12 project countries, we have intensively studied 30 case studies where new generations contribute to rural development. We looked at both peri-urban and remote regions to identify the characteristics of each rural situation.

We have divided "new generations" into three groups:

- **Rural newcomers** are people who come to the countryside from outside the region - mostly from the city - to work or do business there. (Retirees or commuters to the big city are therefore not included here).
- **New entrants** into farming are people who start a new farm without being family farm successors. In many cases they are newcomers, but sometimes they come from the neighbourhood.
- **Farm Successors** are people who take over a farm from their parents as part of a family farming business. They also belong to the "new generations" potentially implementing new ideas and impulses on the farm.

c. Access to land

In the run-up to the project, it became clear that many agricultural initiatives fail because of lack of access to farmland. The land is too expensive, too fragmented, sold too quickly, owners cannot be found, one does not hear about sales - there are many reasons.

Some countries regulate their agricultural land market, but it turns out that this regulation is tailored to existing family farms or agribusinesses and severely disadvantages new entrants who could make an important contribution to rural development.

Against this background, we have compiled 64 practical examples with which these problems are countered in individual cases. However, the insight remains that the agricultural land market is currently a major obstacle to rural start-ups practically everywhere.

We will present the results of these three focal points in this compendium. We hope they will be a basis for a lively debate on better rural policy.

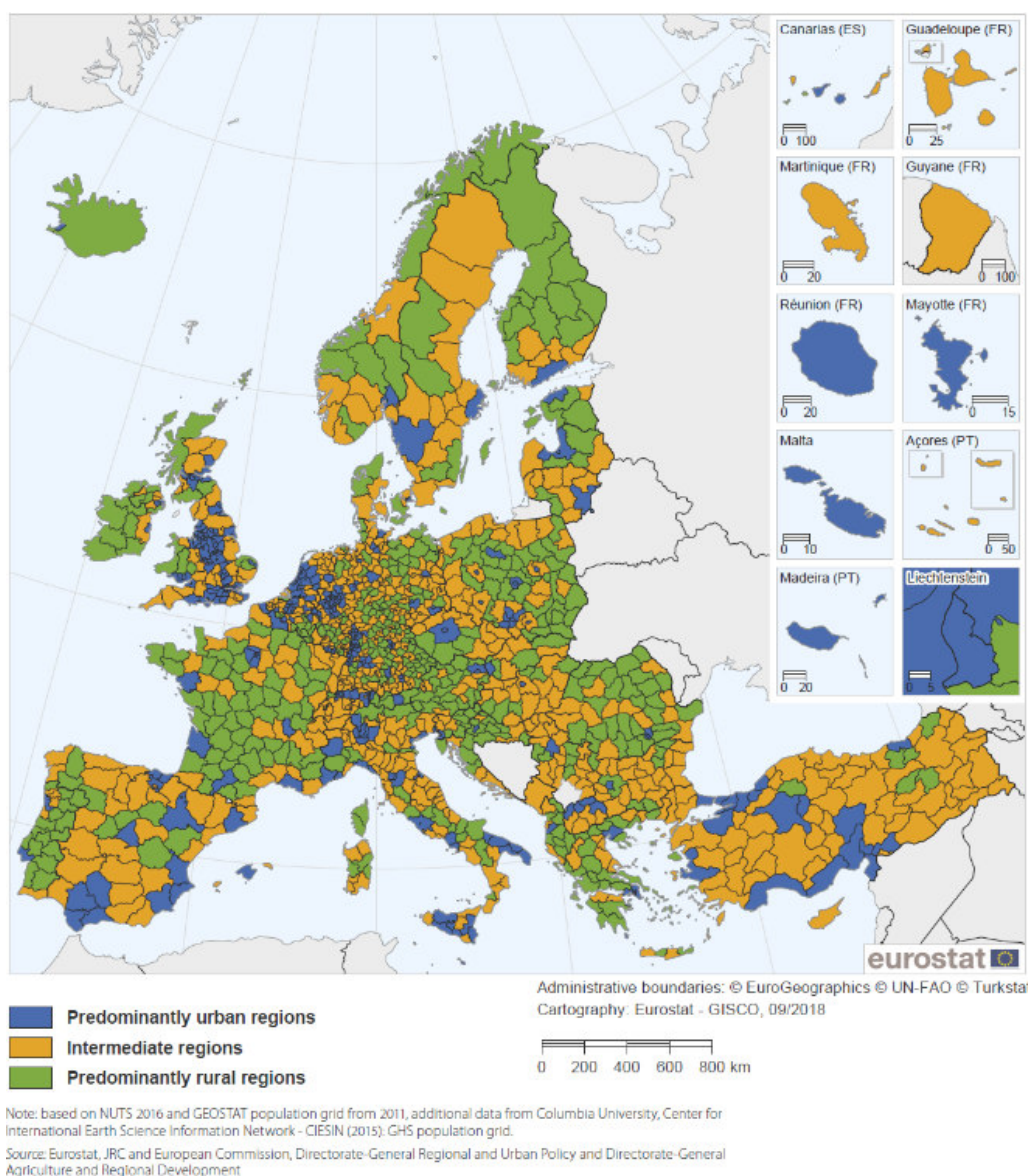
First, however, we would like to give a brief introduction to the academic discussion on rural development. It is interesting to see how social scientific concepts have determined rural policy in the past, but how these concepts have also evolved in recent years.

2 The academic view

The development of rural areas and their villages is being researched by various scientific disciplines, especially sociology (for questions of coexistence), economics (economic issues) and political sciences (decision-making processes, funding opportunities). These scientific disciplines are represented in the consortium of our research project. Often, they are research institutions that study the topic of "rural development" across different disciplines.

What is rural anyway?

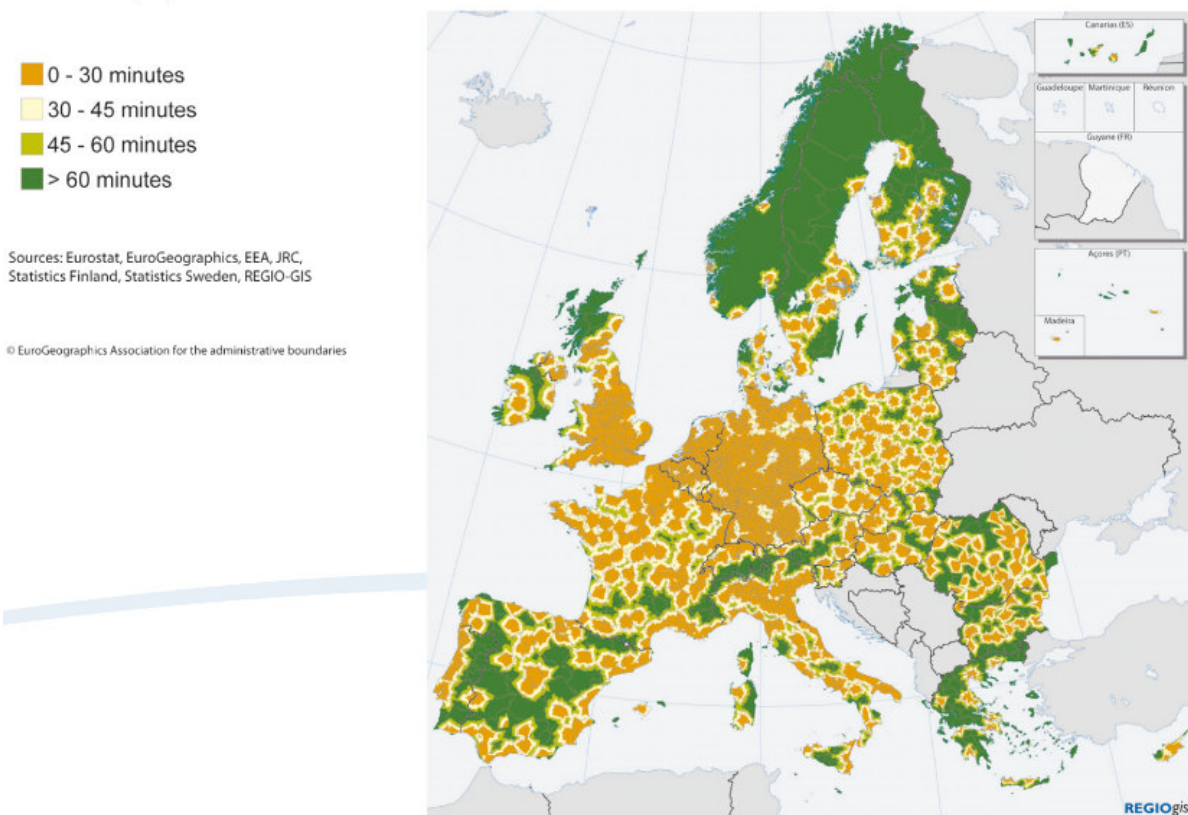
How does "the countryside" differentiate itself from urban areas? Of course there are external definitions such as the number of inhabitants, population density or the distance to the nearest larger city. The European statistical office EUROSTAT divides the European regions (NUTS3 regions) into the categories urban, intermediate and rural on the basis of population density. The following map shows the distribution.



EUROSTAT also distinguishes between "peri-urban" and "remote" regions; peri-urban regions are those where at least 50% of the inhabitants can reach a city of at least 50,000 inhabitants within 45 minutes by

car. The map shows which areas in Europe belong to which category. Remote regions (light and dark green) are found in particular in Scandinavia, but also in the mountainous areas of the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Carpathians, as well as in Spain, Portugal or Greece.

Accessibility by road to cities with at least 50 000 inhabitants



However, rural areas can also be defined culturally. Rural is thus what is commonly understood in a society as rural life as opposed to urban life. From this point of view, rural life is a cultural concept that changes over time and has positive or negative connotations. This also includes an understanding of the tasks that rural areas have to fulfil (e.g. food for the cities), as well as value judgements about the people in the countryside from the urban perspective or from the perspective of the country dwellers themselves.

In the EU project EDORA, a predecessor project of RURALIZATION, four different types of rural areas were distinguished from a social perspective:

- Agriculturally shaped areas - here, the agricultural industry with its upstream and downstream sectors plays a key role.
- Consumption countryside: these areas are characterised by people who move to the countryside to raise children or to spend their retirement, but who do not work, but only consume.
- Diversified, industrial rural areas: small industrial enterprises are the mainstay of the economy.
- Diversified, service-oriented rural areas: the service sector (crafts, trade, care, education, culture) is the main economic pillar.

The EDORA definitions are thus socially and economically delimited.

In RURALIZATION we take both perspectives as our starting point: rural space is defined both externally (we follow the EUROSTAT criteria) and culturally, socially and economically.

Rural decline and rural recovery

In order to understand the effects of rural development through the influx of new generations, we make use of a number of scientific concepts, which we briefly introduce below.

We understand the decline of rural regions not only as economic decline. It begins with young and well-educated people migrating to the cities, leaving the poorer, less educated and older people behind in the countryside. In this way, the country loses the carriers of its development. Rural recovery therefore also benefits from social and cultural impulses. A focus on new jobs and employment opportunities would be too narrow.

Furthermore studies have shown that a process of rural recovery takes time and may require decades. Good policy addresses numerous factors and pursues a multi-dimensional and coordinated approach. RURALIZATION wants to contribute to the development of such approaches.

Resilience

The term resilience emerged in the 2000s. It refers to the resilience of people, organisations or even regions to crises, i.e. their ability to cope with disruptions and catastrophes. In an undisturbed environment, criteria such as employment, economic strength and quality of life are appropriate characteristics of rural development. In an insecure environment, however, it is equally important to have a high level of resilience and to be able to deal with crises. Here it has been shown that especially "underdeveloped" rural areas have a high level of resilience, as they are already adapted to cope with suboptimal conditions.

Depending on how resilience is defined, it can present a more conservative or progressive framework. This is why we also introduce the resourcefulness concept that can be used in conjunction with resilience. A region is capable of development if it has the conditions to change and take advantage of emerging opportunities. The world and society are constantly evolving. If a region can respond creatively to changing circumstances and take advantage of opportunities, then it is, in this understanding, capable of development.

Rural innovation

Usually, innovations are understood as new products and technical processes. In the context of rural development, however, it is primarily about social, organisational and cultural innovations. It is about inventions and behaviours that change social and economic life. The "learning rural area" is driven by entrepreneurs and civil society initiatives that try out and demand new things. Policy can support such initiatives.

Not only entrepreneurs are innovative in rural areas. Civil society initiatives also contribute innovations. A neighbourhood shop, for example, can help bridge cultural differences in the village and bring people together who are otherwise strangers to each other, especially rural newcomers and long-established residents.

Moderation and mediation play a decisive role in the countryside as to whether innovative initiatives can develop. The reason probably lies in the tighter social fabric of rural life. Rural business start-ups are also dependent on moderating support.

Rural newcomers can be important innovation drivers in rural areas because of the knowledge and skills they bring with them. This is especially true not only for the young but for those who move to the countryside at a later stage in life. With their professional experiences they can often make a greater contribution.

Seven types of community capital

This leads us to the last concept. Things like education, work experience and social skills are summarised by the term "human capital". In RURALIZATION we apply this in a very broad sense to better understand case studies and processes of rural development. Capital is all the "treasures" that local people can draw on to develop their rural areas. These include:

- Natural capital: biodiversity, scenic beauty, fertility of soils, cleanliness of water and air
- Human capital: knowledge and skills of the residents
- Social capital: people's social skills, for example social cohesion and solidarity, constructive handling of conflicts
- Cultural capital: identity and self-image, living tradition, cultural diversity, creative club life
- Financial capital: public and private funds or the possibility of obtaining such funds
- Political capital: contacts and relationships with political decision-makers
- Building capital: existing building fabric that can be used as residential and commercial space or for community projects.

These seven types of community capital broaden the view of the preconditions and the possibilities of self-determined rural development in a region.

Research has shown that a successful development process usually involves several types of capital. The development of one quality of capital often leads to the development of another quality of capital in a mutually reinforcing process.

How does such capital accumulation work?

- For example, let's say a new mayor is elected. She has contacts in the regional government (political capital) and applies for funding (financial capital) for an external facilitation process to settle an old dispute in the community.
- The facilitator succeeds in reaching an understanding among the conflict parties by having the parties work out a joint regional development plan (social capital). Part of the development plan is the expansion of a village community centre (building capital).
- A regional theatre group is invited to the community centre after a proposal by the facilitator. Together with interested citizens, they develop a play about the village history and perform it in the community centre. A theatre group is formed that works on a next play (cultural capital).
- The community is also setting up a village shop in the community centre, as the former village shop closed more than 20 years ago. The community leases the shop on favourable terms to a recent rural newcomer with commercial skills (human capital). The tenant sets up a corner of the shop as a café so that customers can linger and meet each other (social capital).
- Attracted by the new, constructive mood in the village, two more families settle there, appreciating the rural environment (natural capital), buying vacant buildings (building capital) and renovating them with their own funds (financial capital).

Various examples have shown that such processes usually start with *social* and *cultural* capital. The self-confidence of local people and their ability to cooperate are key to positive rural development.

3 Trends and dreams

If rural areas are to recover in the long term through the influx of new generations, then it is crucial who these future people actually are, what concerns and wishes they themselves have and how they envisage their rural life.

Now, one cannot predict the future. Nevertheless, futurology has developed as a scientific discipline in recent years. It tries to narrow down the spectrum of possible futures by observing the past and the present.

Futurology works with trends and scenarios. Trends are current developments for which it is recognisable that they are very likely to continue into the future. Scenarios are different future developments that result from these trends. In addition, futurology deals with young people's ideas about life, i.e. their "dreams", because they provide information about which values and ideas the generation that will shape society and the economy in the medium and long term wants to realise.

Scientific futurology does not aim to predict the future. Rather, it wants to improve the basis for decisions that have to be made today. If one of three possible scenarios is the most desirable, then one can try to set the course today so that this scenario becomes reality and not the two less desirable ones. Futures research thus enables politicians to make well-informed decisions. For the economy and civil society, it shows development paths that are helpful or also threatening and to which one can adjust.

The University of Turku in Finland has undertaken a foresight analysis in 20 European regions as part of the RURALIZATION project. It is divided into three parts:

- In a trend analysis, trends were elaborated that influence rural areas and particularly affect rural renewal through new generations.
- In a comprehensive survey, rural dreams of the young generation were collected and evaluated.
- In a regional evaluation, the results of the previous two points were discussed with committed actors and checked for practical coherence.

We now want to present the results.

The trend analysis

Trend analysis distinguishes between three different levels of trends. Overarching developments that are felt equally in all European regions are *megatrends*. Developments that are clearly felt in individual regions but not in all are *trends*. Developments that are visible but whose relevance is not entirely clear are called *weak signals*.

The change of trends over time is an important issue. Weak signals can become trends, trends can become megatrends and vice versa. In the trend analysis, a distinction was therefore made between medium-term and long-term trends. Medium-term trends have an impact within the next 10 years, long-term ones in 10 to 30 years.

The trends identified in RURALIZATION were collected in two ways. On the one hand, publications of international trend research were evaluated for Europe, supplemented by publications in the national language for individual regions. Secondly, the RURALIZATION partners were asked to write down and classify all trends for their own home regions that seemed relevant to them.

In this way, 1,560 trends were initially named. This list naturally contained many overlaps and was reduced to a "long list" of 195 distinguishable megatrends, trends and weak signals. The trends found were then intensively evaluated according to social, regional or national criteria, and their positive or negative interactions were worked out.

The long list of trends was later reduced again and summarised in the form of 60 trend cards that everyone can work with independently. The cards in playing card format are available in a short and longer version on the website www.ruraltrends.eu as graphic files in English.

The following table first shows the top 20 trends from the "long list" of 195 trends that affect rural areas the most. Some of these have negative impacts, some have positive impacts. The impacts are not clear-cut; most trends can have both positive and negative impacts, depending on the context of the affected region.

Short and Medium-term trends (1-10 years)	Long-term trends (10-30 years)
↓ Urban-rural divide	↑ Climate change
↓ Rural decline	↑ operational size growth
↑ operational size growth	↓ Urban-rural divide
↑ Climate change	↓ Rural decline
↓ Domestic and transnational migration	↑ Ageing of the rural population
↔ alternative cropping systems	↔ alternative cropping systems
↑ Ageing of the rural population	↑ Digitisation
↓ Diversification or specialisation of the farms	↓ Domestic and transnational migration
↓ High land prices	↑ Sustainability
↓ Diversification of the regional economy	↑ Entry barriers for young farmers
↑ Entry barriers for young farmers	↓ Diversification or specialisation of the farms
↑ Digitisation	↑ Renewable energies
↓ Decrease in the number of farm residents	↓ High land prices
↑ Renewable energies	↑ Environmental awareness
↓ Problems with the successor to the farm	↓ Decrease in the number of farm residents
↓ Relevance of agricultural policy	↑ Land and resource scarcity
↓ Mobility and accessibility	↓ Diversification of the regional economy
↓ Agricultural obsolescence	↑ Productivity and competitiveness
↓ Concentration process in trade, processing and public administration	↑ Loss of biodiversity
↔ Decline in agricultural employment	↔ Decline in agricultural employment

*Legend: ↑ Trend gains importance in the long term
↓ Trend loses significance in the long term ↔ Trend remains constant*

As this is a Europe-wide evaluation, the list only contains trends and megatrends, no weak signals. Weak signals are only regionally effective.

The short- and medium-term trends in the left-hand column have predominantly negative effects on rural areas. This is not surprising, since the difficult situation of rural areas in the present is a result of processes that are currently effective and will not disappear any time soon.

In terms of long-term trends, however, we notice that trends with a positive effect on rural areas are increasing.

In first and second place of the more immediate trends are the urban-rural divide, i.e. the further increasing inequality of living conditions between urban and rural areas, and the rural decline, i.e. the deteriorating social and economic situation in rural areas. But both trends are declining in the long term. In the long-term list, they land in 3rd and 4th place, indicating that the pace of deterioration is already slowing down and a counter-development is taking place.

It is no surprise that the importance of climate change as a megatrend will increase in the future. Reducing emissions and adapting to climate change and dealing with its consequences will rise from the current 4th place to 1st place.

Farm size growth in agriculture is a trend that is set to increase. There are no discernible processes that could stop this trend altogether. However, this does not mean that small and diversified farms do not have a future. The diversification of farms through versatile and alternative farm branches is an important trend (8th and 10th place), as is the diversification of overall economic activities in rural areas, which takes place in parallel with agricultural size growth. Unlike size growth itself, trends towards diversification are declining and only end up in 11th and 17th place in the long term. Regionally, however, this may look different, as all the statements in this table do.

The development of alternative farming systems is also an important current trend that will retain its importance in the long term (rank 6). These include, for example, organic farming, agroforestry systems, permaculture and regenerative (soil-building) agriculture.

Rising agricultural land prices, on the other hand, are a current problem which will decrease in significance in the future (from 9th to 13th place). The decreasing number of people working in agriculture overall will also be less of a problem in the future. Other agricultural trends across Europe are problems with successors and the ageing of the agricultural population. However, these two trends are no longer represented in the long-term top 20.

Migration is the fifth most important medium-term trend. In the long term, its importance drops to 9th place. Migration generally summarises the inflow and outflow from rural areas. If rural decline (rank 2) is gradually halted, then it stands to reason that migration out of rural areas will also decline. As far as in-migration is concerned, this refers both to in-migration from urban centres to the countryside and to the integration of refugees and other international immigration. Here, too, the trend analysis says that the importance of immigration will decline overall. This does not contradict the fact that, for example, the integration of refugees can be a significant task.

Barriers to entry for young farmers are a problem and will remain so; the trend analysis does not see a quick remedy here. This does not mean that there are no regionally successful strategies to facilitate entry. But it will not solve the fundamental problem.

Another problem of increasing importance in the future is the age structure in rural areas. The proportion of old people will continue to increase. However, this trend does not only have disadvantages either. Old people have an independent income with their pension, and services for them as well as the orientation of infrastructure to their needs can create numerous jobs.

Digitisation of all areas of life is already an important trend today, and its importance is clearly increasing in the long term (from rank 12 to 7). Digitisation basically has rather positive effects on rural areas, as it helps to equalise urban and rural living conditions.

Another trend with growing importance is renewable energies in rural areas. The decarbonisation of the economy and the accompanying regionalisation of energy supply are creating new earning opportunities with wind and solar energy, and money flows are being redirected to rural areas.

At the end of the medium-term list are other trends of decreasing importance. Surprisingly, this includes the role of EU agricultural policy. This may be because the share of spending on the agricultural sector will tend to decrease due to other social and environmental tasks. It also reflects a general decline in the importance of the agricultural sector for rural areas.

Mobility and accessibility are also issues of decreasing importance. On the one hand, digitalisation makes mobility less important, on the other hand, community initiatives and/or autonomous vehicles can offer flexible and cost-effective solutions.

The trend towards ever larger economic units in rural areas (for example agricultural trade, slaughterhouses, dairies, bakeries) and the concentration of administrative services is also decreasing in

the long term. Digitisation and an increasing demand for products from small farms will make smaller and more flexible units possible again.

In contrast, there will be some new trends in the top 20 in the long term. First and foremost is the transition to sustainable management at all levels of society. It is surprising that this trend does not yet play a leading role. In fact, the talk of sustainability in most areas does not yet correspond to social reality. It is also about a profound change in human behaviour patterns and social structures that can only be realised in the long term.

Environmental awareness is also one of the long-term increasing trends with a positive influence on rural development. Of negative influence, unfortunately, is the increasing impact of the loss of biodiversity and natural habitats. This is also surprising, because on the surface, much is already being done with species conservation programmes. In fact, however, experts agree that these programmes are not effective in addressing the main causes of biodiversity loss, which lie in extensive intensive agricultural use. The problem remains largely unsolved to this day.

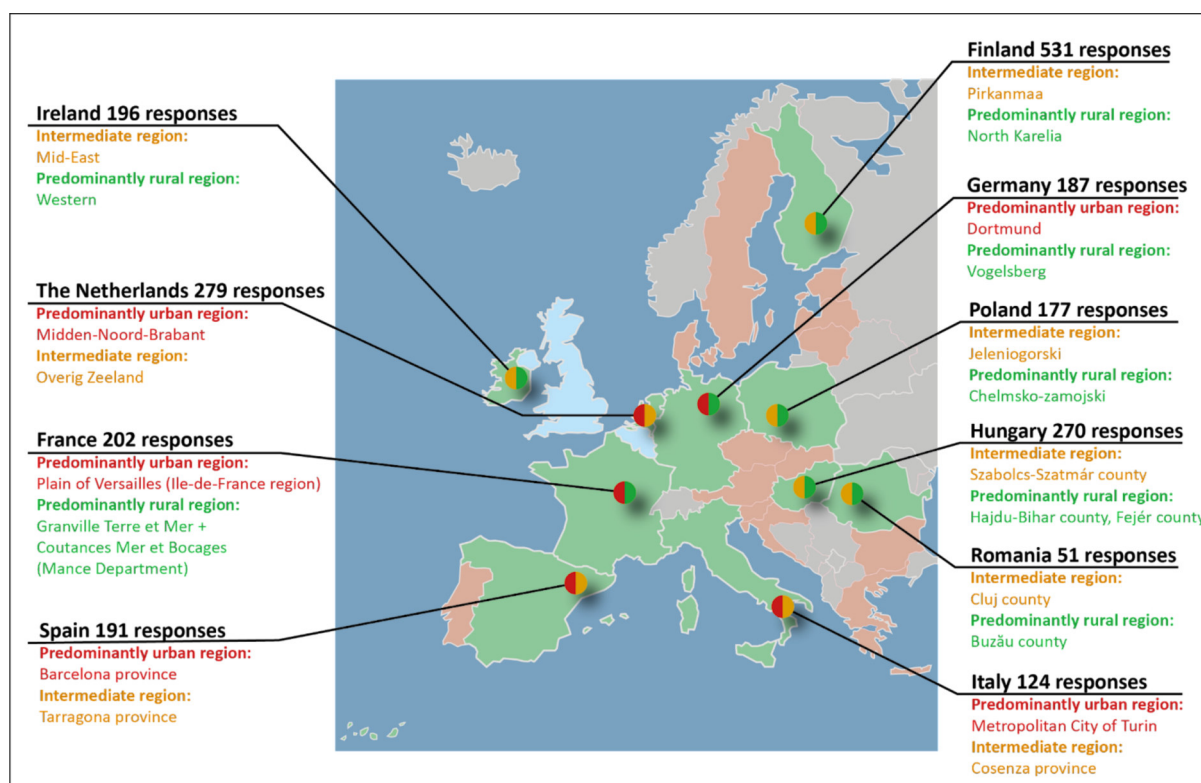
Land and resource scarcity will continue to increase due to new demands on the land - just think of renewable energy, construction sealing or irrigation needs. Economic sectors, ecology and recreation are increasingly competing for these resources.

This is accompanied by an increasing role of productivity, competitiveness and the assertion of rural actors in the market. Protected niches will disappear, traditional structures and behaviour patterns will dissolve. Businesses, initiatives and entire regions will compete with each other more than before for customers, ideas and bright minds. This does not necessarily have to be a disadvantage either; it also opens up new development opportunities for creative regions. Uncreative regions will be left behind, but they too can learn.

Rural dreams

The rural dreams of the young generation aged 18 to 30 were identified in a broad survey. Of course, rural dreams strongly depend on the region in which they are asked. Dreams of young urbanites differ from dreams of rural youth, and dreams in the Netherlands are certainly different from dreams in Poland.

Initially, therefore, 20 regions were selected, two in each of the 10 member states in which the RURALIZATION project is represented. The following map shows the regions and the number of questionnaires evaluated.



In the selection, care was taken to ensure that different regions from the urban, intermediate and rural categories were represented in each case.

The RURALIZATION partners arranged contacts with young adults of 18-30 years from the selected regions and worked out an online questionnaire with them in the respective national language, in which the young people were asked to imagine themselves 15 years into the future, i.e. in the year 2035.

The survey took place in April-Sept.2020, i.e. at the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic. The selection of the survey participants was made subjectively by the RURALIZATION partners and is therefore not representative. However, according to the University of Turku, this does not diminish the value of the results, as it is hardly possible to achieve representative results in the field of futurology anyway. The order of magnitude of the numbers is relevant for the significance of the results.

The participants were asked to record their wishes for the future on three topics:

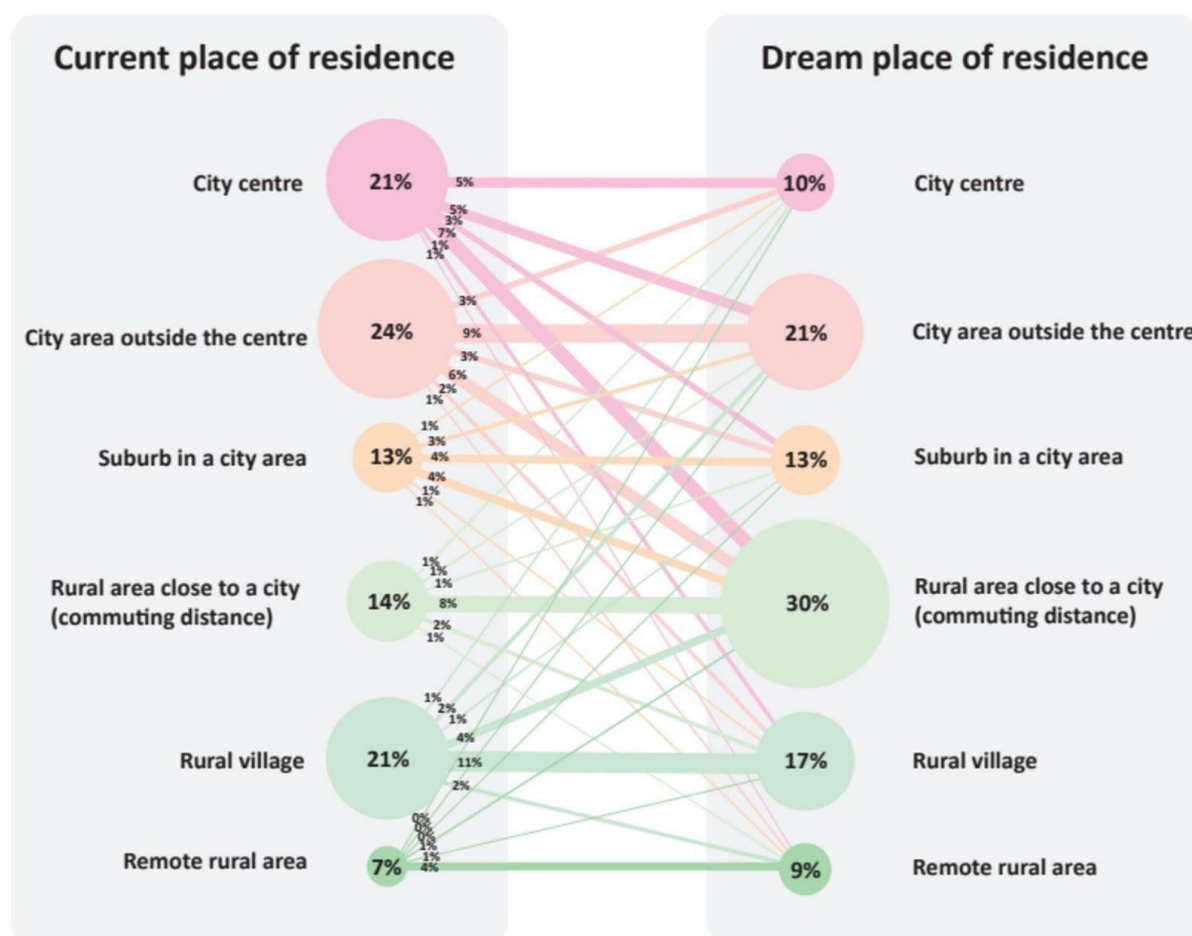
- How will you earn money, what will your work be like? (livelihood recipe)
- In which region and in what kind of flat or house will you live? (accommodation recipe)
- What will your lifestyle be like? (lifestyle recipe)

In total, over 2,200 online questionnaires were answered in the 20 regions. The national partners compiled the results, translated them into English and forwarded them to the University of Turku, which analysed them in summary form.

Six different options were offered for the question on place of residence: City centre, district outside the centre, urban suburb, rural area close to the city (commuting distance), rural village, remote rural area.

Between all these categories, there are migratory movements between the current place of residence and the place of residence dreamed of in the future. Rural areas close to the city (commuting distance) were the clear winners: they can more than double their share of residents from 14% to 30%, i.e. more than double the number of people who are currently living there would like to live there in 15 years. The remote rural areas can also improve their share from 7% to 9%. The other four regions are losing inhabitants, most strongly the city centres. Villages are also losing inhabitants, mainly to the benefit of rural areas within commuting distance of cities. The strongest migration takes place from the city centre to the rural areas within commuting distance.

The following figure shows the further migration movements in detail.



This evaluation is not representative, as the selection of respondents was not random, but was arranged by the RURALIZATION partners. However, it shows tendencies and orders of magnitude.

Overall, there is a clear trend from the city to the countryside, and especially to areas close to the city. This means that we can assume a continuing influx of young people into rural areas for medium and long-term rural development.

Certain trend profiles go hand in hand with the different places of living:

- Young people who would like to live in the city centre later on imagine a mobile, international, eventful, creative, successful city life.
- Those who want to live outside the centre in the city tend to think of contacts with neighbours and a life of mobility, internationality and personal development.

- People on the urban fringe see their place of living as the centre of their activities, want to be responsibly involved in the neighbourhood and live there peacefully and safely and pursue regular work.
- The popular rural areas within commuting distance attract people who value nature (water, pets, home, garden) and for whom family life is more important than career, although a good job also plays an important role.
- In rural villages, independent, often nature-based occupations and the social relations of village life are paramount; the availability of farm buildings and opportunities for self-sufficiency with the family are also important.
- The remote rural areas clearly attract nature lovers who want to build houses or farms on their own, keep animals, cultivate a garden, often work independently of location and live sustainably.

In general, it is also evident that within the age group of 18-30 year-olds surveyed, the younger ones (in education) tend to dream of city life, while the older ones (with a family perspective) dream of rural life.

Trends by country and region of residence

In an evaluation of the trends found in regional workshops in 8 countries, clear differences between the countries emerged:

- In Finland, the trends towards second homes in the countryside, remote work and affordable rural housing are at the top of the list.
- In France, it is about changing the food system, environmental protection, cultural heritage and community projects.
- In Germany, environmental protection, sustainability and a better quality of life are at the top of the agenda.
- In Ireland, it is about remote work, community action, village centres as well as a gradual change in gender roles.
- Italy sees environmental protection, cultural heritage, circular economy projects and food tourism in the foreground.
- In Poland, it is about rural tourism, community projects, cultural heritage and farm diversification.
- In Romania, the focus is primarily on problems and opportunities arising from the ageing of the rural population. Self-sufficiency, transparent regional marketing and alternative food are also on the agenda.
- Finally, in Spain, rural trends are mainly about cooperatives, dealing with the ageing of the rural population, introduction of the circular economy and the opportunities arising from regionalisation.

In a further evaluation, the participants in the regional groups were classified according to their preferred residential areas in order to identify the trends that were significant for them:

- People who want to live in the city (three areas combined) find alternative food systems especially important, but also remote work, cultural heritage, cooperatives and local identity.
- In rural areas within commuting distance of the city, the focus is on community projects, alternative food systems, environmental protection, rural tourism and rural handicrafts.
- As expected, the villages are about the classic image of "rural life" close to nature, plus cultural heritage, community projects and alternative food systems.
- Remote rural areas are about remote work, community action, environmental protection, cultural heritage and the search for quality of life.

Further connections were worked out in the workshops. For example, it became clear that remote rural areas are more dependent on public infrastructure for their development than areas close to cities, which the state has to provide.

In general, the more diversified a rural region is, the more likely it is that the dreams of the young generation can be realised.

In summary, the trend analysis and the inventory of rural dreams paint a hopeful picture. Digitisation will mitigate various problems of rural areas in the medium and long term. This goes hand in hand with the desire of a fairly large proportion of young people to move to the countryside later on. Rural areas within commuting distance of the city are the most attractive, but village life with its lively social structures as well as remote rural areas with their development opportunities for nature lovers and community projects are also experiencing increasing attractiveness.

The major megatrends such as climate change, ageing of the rural population, but also sustainability, environmental awareness and renewable energies each offer risks but also opportunities for rural areas that can be seized by politics, civil society and business. At the agricultural level, farm size growth will continue, but farms will diversify more and alternative farming systems will gain in importance. Here, too, there will therefore be versatile development opportunities.

Trends and the Covid19 pandemic

The current situation of the Covid19 pandemic² accelerates megatrends and triggers negative consequences also for rural areas. At the same time, this is making national and regional political influence (for example closing borders) on society and the economy increasingly important. Regional, local conditions are gaining in importance, which benefits rural areas.

The Covid19 crisis is changing our coexistence, our culture and our working environment in many ways. Large metropolitan areas are particularly vulnerable to the spread of the pandemic; they are more vulnerable and nervous than rural areas. Closed restaurants, gyms, cinemas and clubs - life in the big cities was suddenly empty. The crisis is therefore also the engine of a new urban exodus (wealthy New Yorkers or Parisians move into second homes outside the city) - especially since more and more regions were already dependent on local services before the crisis.

In the crisis, rural areas can grow in importance. The winners in the future could be those regions, small towns and villages that take an offensive approach to change and shape it optimistically. Quality of life, education and civic engagement are important location factors in rural regions.

Technological progress with digitalisation and automation can accelerate but also narrow the gap between booming cities and regions and shrinking and isolated regions. The need to catch up in the area of digitisation is a key factor here. Many rural regions lack a fast internet connection. Remote working and home schooling were difficult for many people in the countryside during the pandemic.

Another factor will be whether people will continue to work at their place of work in the future, which makes residential locations away from the large and medium-sized cities increasingly interesting. Real estate in rural areas is increasingly in demand. In the post-crisis period, the urban-rural relationship is likely to change somewhat.

Of course, agriculture also faces challenges during the pandemic. The closure of restaurants as buyers, the lack of availability of harvest workers and the high demands on transport and processing logistics for perishable food became visible as risks.

Climate change, renewable energies and bioenergy as well as the ageing population are crucial megatrends that are very important for rural areas and agriculture in the future. There is a lack of young people in agriculture who are also potential successors. Here it is necessary to find political frameworks and local strategies that keep people in their home regions or attract new young people.

Specific regional trends - farm size, farm diversification/specialisation, land prices, farm population, young farmers, diversification of the rural economy, alternative farming systems and the digital economy

² Text by Kati Volgmann, ILS

- have a decisive influence on agricultural development. The increase in average farm size has been driven by technologies, economies of scale and policies in many European regions. This, in turn, has had an impact on farmland prices, difficult access to land for young farmers and declining farm populations.

The five new trends on the top 20 list of the most important long-term trends - transition to sustainability, environmental protection, competition for resources, competitiveness and the loss of biodiversity - clearly show how important it is to take care of nature and soil in the future. The challenges for agriculture in particular also offer opportunities. Only sustainable, environmentally aware and resource-conserving agriculture can be fit for the future.

4 Newcomers, new entrants and successors

The 30 detailed case studies of the contribution of "new generations" to rural renewal are a central building block of the RURALIZATION project.

As explained above, we distinguish three groups under "New Generations":

- Rural Newcomers are people who - mostly from the city - move to the countryside for the first time and become active there professionally or as entrepreneurs. (People who move to the countryside without taking up employment there, such as pensioners or commuters to the big city, are not included).
- New entrants into farming are people who start a new farm without being family successors. In many cases they are newcomers, but sometimes they come from the countryside themselves.
- Farm Successors are people who take over a family farm from their parents in the normal course of succession. They also belong to the "new generation" potentially implementing new ideas and impulses on the farm.

Statistically, newcomers to the countryside or new entrants to agriculture are not recorded, and there is practically no available data on origin and numbers at EU level. There are regional statistics on in-migration and out-migration of residents, but they do not distinguish between the occupational orientation of the newcomers.

Therefore, we will look at the case studies below. They have been selected according to how clearly they demonstrate the influence of the three groups on rural renewal.

The map provides an overview of the examples. The map can be accessed interactively at <https://ruralization.eu/map-case-studies/>.



Blue symbols on the map indicate examples of new entrants, yellow symbols indicate newcomers and red symbols indicate farm successors. We would like to introduce them in the following.

New entrants into farming

Farmstart Network (UK)

The UK agricultural workers' association (Landworkers' Alliance) has been organising Farm Start projects across the UK with affiliates since 2015.³ Farmstarts are a new entry route into farming. They offer people the opportunity to try out their farming and growing ideas in a protected environment, while building the knowledge, skills, confidence and experience they need to start their own farm or market garden.



Farmstarts provide access to land and equipment, routes to market, and business support, training or mentoring. Through this support, Farmstarts remove much of the financial risk and stress from new entrants in the early stages, so they can focus on finding out what kind of business suits them best.

There are currently eight "Farmstart" projects in England, Scotland and Wales; a further project is being set up. The network serves to exchange experience and information. In addition, training and mentoring programmes are offered and a manual "How to start a Farmstart" has been developed. With very little funding and institutional support, the Farmstart network has created a movement of farm start-ups.

Martynika farm (PL)

Martynika⁴ is an agro-tourist permaculture farm with a focus on organising workshops in agriculture and crafts (including permaculture, pottery, recycling, stove building and preservation of traditional plant species of the region). The farm was founded in 2013 in the village of Jaroszkówka (western Poland) by in-migrants from the city of Warsaw. They renovated the farmhouse and established a farm with agriculture, tourist accommodation and a wide range of workshops for children and adults.

In practice, however, farming activities proved to be more demanding than expected, so they initially focused on developing agro-tourism and workshops. In order to integrate into the local community, the owners took part in various activities, for example housewives' circles and village development projects.

In the meantime, the operators are concentrating again on converting to an organic farm and setting up marketing. The example shows that entering agricultural production requires very good preparation and that off-farm sources of income can be important at the beginning.



³ <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/farm-start-network/>

⁴ <http://ps://farmamartynika.pl/>

Community supported farms (NL/BE)

The two farms Herenboeren Land van Weert (South East of the Netherlands) and De Wassende Maan (West Flanders) show how citizens can be involved in the ownership of a farm.



Land van Weert is a 20 ha farm supplying vegetables, fruit and meat exclusively to 200 household members. The members are co-owners through a local cooperative. They pay a one-time contribution of € 2,000 and a weekly contribution. The farmer is employed by the national umbrella organisation "Herenboeren Nederland"⁵ and is seconded to the local cooperative. Herenboeren supports local initiatives with a structured approach in setting up their own farms of this size and accompanies them during their use. The approach is oriented

towards ecological standards, but is not officially certified. Land van Weert is one of the first local farms.

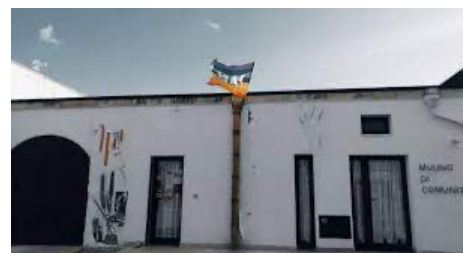
De Wassende Maan⁶ (the waxing moon) is a Flemish pioneer of organic farming with citizen participation. The farm has been run since 1986 by a cooperative where the farmers and transport and shop staff are employed. It currently has 400 members who have to subscribe to at least 3 shares of € 290 each. They get a 3% discount on their purchases. There is also a non-profit association that owns part of the farmland and runs workshops on biodynamic agriculture. The products are marketed through a subscription box and the farm shop; but you do not have to be a cooperative member to subscribe to the box or buy in the shop.

Casa delle AgriCultura - Tullia e Gino (IT)

The association and the cooperative of the same name "Casa delle AgriCultura - Tullia e Gino"⁷ were founded in the small village of Castiglione d'Otranto in Apulia in southern Italy. The initiators promote projects and activities of sustainable development to enable people to stay in their region. The basis is nature-based agriculture, promotion of biodiversity, preservation of endangered varieties and the use of fallow land. The association was founded in 2013.

Since then, the operators have promoted many measures and events to raise awareness of organic farming in the local community. The very successful "Green Night" event, which focuses on the theme of sustainable agriculture and local food markets, is attended by 30,000 people. The association also conducts activities for the inclusion of migrants, elderly and disabled people.

In 2018, a cooperative was established that was able to cultivate about 15 hectares of fallow land with traditional grains and vegetables. With crowdfunding, a regional grant and a bank loan, a community mill was built to improve grain processing on site. The products are marketed through short supply chains. More farmers were won over to grow traditional varieties through purchase agreements.



⁵ <http://ps://www.herenboeren.nl/>

⁶ <https://www.dewassendemaan.be/>

⁷ <https://www.casadellegriCulturetulliaegino.com>

Association Plaine de Versailles (FR)



In the early 2000s, the "Association of the Plain of Versailles"⁸ was founded to protect agriculture in the west of Paris, where urbanisation was spreading and threatening farmers, farmland and the quality of life associated with it. It was one of the few French initiatives by farmers to resist urbanisation.

In the organisation, farmers and civil society work together with community representatives to raise local awareness of agricultural issues. The association mediates between the different stakeholders. It works for rural revitalisation and

against the decline of agriculture:

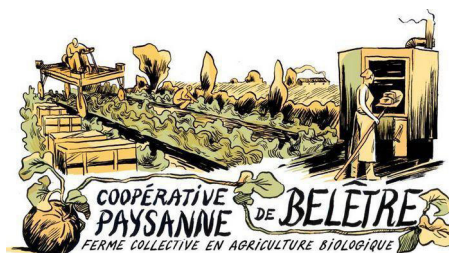
- by supporting new entrants and food producers,
- by developing shared values and connections between different local actors,
- through the promotion of political support,
- by promoting local self-sufficiency through diversified agriculture and local food structures based on diversified small businesses.

However, the association continues to face challenges. Coexistence between farmers and urban dwellers remains difficult (even more so after the Covid19 pandemic), and bringing conventional farmers and urban stakeholders together has not been fully successful.

Farm collectives (FR)

Farm collectives are farms that are managed by more than one family. In France, there are special legal forms for this. Three farm collectives were examined for the case study:

- Champ Boule in the Pyrenees⁹ is an "Agricultural Grouping for Collective Cultivation" (GAEC) with 5 members who cultivate 40 ha with vegetable crops, goat and cattle husbandry.
- Belêtre¹⁰ on the Loire is a "Cooperative Production Company" (SCOP) that produces cereals on 60 ha and vegetables on 3 ha. The cereals are processed in their own bakery and marketed as bread.
- Toussacq¹¹ south-east of Paris is a "Cooperative Interest Company" (SCIC) with 8 independent farmers producing arable crops, vegetables, dairy products and bread on 83 ha.



The interviews revealed the strengths of such farm collectives:

- they enable new entrants to enter agriculture
- they allow more control over the value chain
- they facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life
- they avoid social isolation in rural areas
- members share workload and investments
- they exchange knowledge
- they support each other in administration or in setting up marketing

⁸ <http://ps://www.plainedeversailles.fr/>

⁹ <http://ps://fermedechampboule.socleo.org/>

¹⁰ <https://cooperative.beletre.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.leschampsdespossibles.fr/la-ferme-collective-de-toussacq/>

Farm collectives have positive demographic and social effects on rural areas. Their members have more time to engage in local life and social networks. They diversify farms and the economy by creating local jobs and supply chains.

There is much that policy makers can do to better support farm collectives. There are problems with the recognition of communities in the granting of subsidies, problems with building law for housing in outdoor areas and also mental and financial problems with the transfer of farms by older farmers to communities.

Gut Wulksfelde (EN)

The large farm Gut Wulksfelde¹² is located on the outskirts of Hamburg in northern Germany in a booming urban region. The estate belongs to the city state of Hamburg. The Senate decided in 1989 to lease the estate on a long-term basis under the condition of organic farming. In a tendering process, a young five-member operator group prevailed, which today manages the farm in the legal form of a limited liability company (GmbH).



Gut Wulksfelde today manages 460 ha of arable and grassland areas, some of which border on nature reserves. A variety of products are produced, processed and marketed directly. These include a market garden, a farm shop, a demonstration bakery, a café and restaurant, and an organic delivery service. There is also a public kindergarten and a petting zoo for families. The

estate employs 230 people, most of whom are involved in processing, marketing and social activities.

The farm is embedded in a scenic and touristic region, which is also used for local recreation. The farm organises farm festivals and harvest events in the local community and offers educational opportunities in the environmental field. The farm uses renewable energy and takes measures to reduce its energy consumption.

Gut Wulksfelde shows how many skilled jobs a large and diverse organic farm can create. In Germany, an average of 2.9 agricultural workers are employed per 100 ha, in Wulksfelde 50 workers are employed per 100 ha. Economic and ecological goals are not contradictory. The prerequisites are sufficiently large farmlands, proximity to a large city (and thus a target group) and political will.

¹² <https://www.gut-wulksfelde.de/das-gut/>

The Rural Professional Association in North Savo (FI)



The Rural Professional Association¹³ in the region of Nordsavo in central Finland was founded to promote training in agriculture and forestry, to attract new entrepreneurs and skilled workers to the rural professions, and to expand the networking of actors in this field, because rural professions are no longer so familiar to young people and their teachers.

Through a broad network ranging from primary production to large industrial enterprises, the association organises farm and business tours, presents rural professions in schools, organises internships and advises schools on curriculum development. Every year, 3,000 pupils and teachers take advantage of these opportunities. Public events such as the Rural Entrepreneurs Gala or the Harvest Festival in the provincial capital positively highlight the work in agriculture and forestry.

Rural professions are deliberately presented as equally suitable for women and men. Female professionals are shown as role models in events, brochures or websites of the association. The message is: skilled workers in agriculture and forestry contribute to the regional economy, to the quality of life in the region and to nature.



Young farmers in Hungary (HU)

In the context of the auction of 1.7 million ha of formerly state-owned land in Hungary by the National Land Fund, about 30,000 farmers acquired land in 2015 and 2016. Among them were 1,200 young farmers. They acquired on average about 4 ha of land at the market price of €3,500/ha, which is still twice the statistical farmland price in Hungary. The rental prices are around 140 €/ha.

In two counties in eastern Hungary - Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg - we interviewed 20 young farmers under the age of 35 who had started or taken over a farm in recent years. It turned out that "successors" and "new entrants" can hardly be distinguished in Hungary. Almost all of them have a family connection to agriculture, for example, they were offered land by relatives, their grandmother left a cottage in the countryside or the family had agricultural knowledge. Almost all of them farm in one way or another with inherited resources and see themselves in a family tradition, even without taking over a farm directly from their parents.

Most of the founders are full-time farmers, the majority have been able to increase the size of their farms to 100 ha or more and now work with salaried employees. All of them have at least a secondary school degree, some have an academic degree, and are thus far better educated than resident farmers.

Although many are close to a nature-conserving view, they predominantly farm conventionally or traditionally, following the farming methods of their ancestors. Organic certification, postmodern values, diversification of production or a "smallholder" self-image are rare among Hungarian farm founders. Nor do they engage in product processing or direct marketing. They are also far away from collective forms of organisation.

If they are innovative, it is by implementing things they learned in agricultural studies from a business perspective. However, they share with their colleagues from other countries the problem of access to land; although they have good information about the land market and good access to advice through their local involvement, there is simply too little land becoming available.

¹³ http://www.maaseutuammattiin.fi/in_english

Dávid Deilinger and other new entrants in Hungary (HU)

The case is analysing the ways how young farmers respond to the challenges of starting a new farm business.

Family influences are the strongest motivators for young farmers, even if older generations have not directly influenced them in starting their own farming activities. Further vocational training, which is already a consequence of family practices, is an additional motivator.

New entrants usually have an external source of income: we found teachers, entrepreneurs, plant protection experts, but many other backgrounds as well. It is also typical that they have a very strong personal commitment, usually related to family traditions, less frequently to ethical concerns.

These farms are very much dependent on different forms of subsidies, usually on payments from projects. As a result of it, these farmers are more frequently diversified: they engage in energy production, food procession, or rural tourism. Even when the farm business becomes economically the owners still keep their original employment, especially if it is linked to agriculture, like consultancy on plant protection or agents of any kind of agricultural projects.

Usually new entrants, if they can build up a successful farm business, become prestigious figures of the local community and role models to show how to farm.



Also the management of a large agricultural company can be an entry to farming. As an example, Dávid Deilinger (29) has been managing director of Hajdúszoboszló Búzakalász Agrár Zrt. near Debrecen in eastern Hungary since 2019. The company grows sunflowers, fodder maize and wheat on 1,500 ha.¹⁴ The black earth soils of the Puzta are extremely fertile. The company's predecessor was founded in 1956 and converted into a limited liability agricultural company in 2010.

The company also operates a traditional wood distillery with copper kettles and stainless steel refineries. Private individuals who deliver a minimum quantity of 120-150 litres of mash can have their own schnapps distilled.

Dávid Deilinger, awarded "Farmer of the Year" in 2019, is a graduate of the University of Debrecen, has worked as a physiotherapist since 2016 and also teaches fire and occupational safety and pálinka cooking.¹⁵

Dávid is socially active in many ways. He supports children with cancer, the Children's Clinic Foundation, the hunting club, the Hajdúszoboszló Civil Guard and donates to the Reformed Church.

His example shows that even large enterprises in the legal form of a legal entity can offer an entry opportunity for new entrants from outside the family, and that such enterprises can also operate in a way that is innovative and oriented towards the common good (here, above all, in social terms).

¹⁴ <http://buzakalaszrt.hu/>

¹⁵ <https://agraragazat.hu/hir/az-ev-agrarembere-2019-szantofoldi-novenytermesztes-deilinger-david-mezogazdasag/>

Successors

Maximising organic production systems (IE)



In 2018, a group of Irish organic farmers joined forces with researchers and agronomists to establish the EIP-AGRI Maximising Organic Production Systems (MOPS) project.¹⁶ The project aims to improve organic horticultural production in Ireland through short supply chains and the creation of a community farming system.

The project uses economies of scale from the production of eleven owner-operated organic horticultural farms of different sizes, which produce as if they were a single agricultural enterprise. Together they supply farm shops, online and farmers' markets, wholesale markets, speciality shops, restaurants, private outlets and supermarkets.

The interviews in this case study showed that family succession is still the most important way to enter organic farming in Ireland. The project links older and younger organic farmers for intergenerational knowledge exchange and thus improves the viability of organic farms, also for the benefit of rural development.

Cydr Chyliczki, Ludwik Majlert's farm and Rysiny farm (PL)



Three family farms focus on the production and processing of organic food on the outskirts of Warsaw. Cydr Chyliczki¹⁷ (picture) produces cider from traditional apple varieties of the region and markets it to restaurants and shops all over Poland. Ludwik Majlert's farm¹⁸ as well as Rysiny's farm¹⁹ produce diverse vegetables, flowers and sprouts that are sold ex-farm.

In addition, the farms are also social meeting places, for example with "dinner in the field" events, guided tours for local schools and kindergartens, and the small restaurant at the Rysiny farm. The Rysiny farm processes and sells products sourced from other farmers in the region (for example bread). All three farms are very labour-intensive and depend on the cooperation of foreign seasonal workers.

In order to support such enterprises, the following recommendations for action were elaborated:

- safeguarding farmland in the immediate vicinity of towns and cities
- The integration of several parts of the supply chain and non-agricultural branches of the business (directed at similar businesses)
- A pro-immigration policy
- and the reduction of institutional difficulties in starting and running a family business (addressed to national authorities).

¹⁶ <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/eip-agri/eip-agri-blog/maximising-organic-production-systems-mops/>

¹⁷ <http://cydrchylizki.pl/>

¹⁸ <https://www.majlert.pl/>

¹⁹ <http://rysiny.pl/>

Diversification on the occasion of the successor (BE)

During farm succession, more and more successors choose to diversify their farm. Two examples in the Flemish Ardennes in eastern Belgium show how products are refined for which customers pay higher prices and/or how risks are spread to increase farm security.



Organic farm Te Muizenhole (picture) converted the farm from conventional to organic farming, using GPS-assisted mechanisation. The beef cattle breed was changed to better suit the organic approach. The son focuses on cultivation with innovative technology. The father is still active and works in sales, marketing and administration.

The organic farm De Speiboerderij²⁰ added dairy goats to the existing dairy farm and expanded domestic production and sales after the succession of son and daughter. The farm is currently run by three people, with the father responsible for the cows and the successors for the goats, production and sales, and administration.

Ecological and multifunctional successors in Sicily (IT)

An increasing number of successors in small and medium farms chooses to adopt strong multifunctional and agro-ecological approaches. The study of Sicilian successors shows that this is a way to deal with the more relevant problem successors have to face, that is the transfer of farms that are already structured by past generation's decisions on farming trajectories based on very location and crop-specific land.

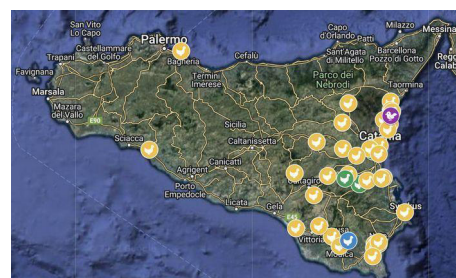
The adoption of new models allows to change the senior generation management without resorting to massive fund for new investment. As a general strategy, they innovate by drawing on local biodiversity (ancient crops and indigenous breeds), by internalizing value added activities (food processing, short supply chains, on site and online sales) and by offering new services (education and agri-kindergarten, recreational activities, social agriculture, production of renewable energy, agri-wellbeing, rural tourism).

A positive result is that these successors are able to diversify products and processes in order to rely on different sources of income. Moreover, this process of broadening the range of activities is often done by networking, which generates an increase in social collaborative connections among different local actors.

As an example, the producer group Le Galline Felici²¹ (the happy chickens) is a network of currently 43 independent organic farms in Sicily that was founded in 2008 to support each other in the development of their businesses. The name is derived from the happiness of caged chickens released at the end of their lives and is emblematic of the happiness of farmers who overcome their loneliness in cooperation.

The community produces citrus fruits, vegetables and processed products and markets them directly via delivery to central and northern Italy and as far as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany.

Le Galline Felici use local biodiversity (ancient crops and native species), internalise value-adding activities (food processing, short supply chains, local and online sales) and offer new services (education and farm kindergarten, leisure activities, community supported agriculture, renewable energies, rural tourism). Agricultural diversification simultaneously creates personal networks and contacts between local actors.



²⁰ <https://www.despeiboerderij.be/>

²¹ <https://www.legallinefelici.bio/>

Slow succession, slow revolution in Catalonia (ES)

The project Cultures Trobades²² was launched in 2008 by the organisation "Slow Food Terres de Lleida" and works to preserve traditional seeds and endangered domestic animal breeds in north-eastern Spain.



One particular success story is the Catalan goat, which is protected by its own organisation. Other topics include historic olive varieties and grapevines. Organic farmers and restaurants in the region support the initiative and together they are shaping a slow but steady regenerative movement that was started back in the late 1970s by pioneers of organic farming in the region.

The moment of succession seems particularly suitable for the adoption of ecological innovations. Successors value self-management and independence. Problems for the development are conservative attitudes of the transferring generation, a lack of cooperation culture, a lack of knowledge about food in the local society or a lack of support from the public administration.

Cultures Trobades has contributed to the diversification of agricultural production in the region, disseminated local knowledge, improved the protection of the natural environment and generated higher social awareness.

The agricultural school in Coutances (FR)

The region around the town of Coutances in Normandy, known for Mont St.Michel, is an intensive agricultural region, supplying a third of France's milk and a considerable proportion of its fresh vegetables. At the same time, the region is characterised by a high proportion of rural newcomers who hardly interact with the long-established farmers.



The agricultural school in Coutances²³ under the French Ministry of Education was founded in 1968 to support new approaches to rural development through qualified vocational training. The institution was an initiative of the town (8,500 inhabitants), which provided a plot of land. The majority of graduates do not come from their own farm. The school offers an agricultural high school, an agricultural technical school and in-service adult education. It currently has 700 students, 170 teachers and 75 ha of experimental plots where students can conduct cultivation experiments.

The school emphasises broad and practical training. Suggestions from the participants are translated into new job profiles, for example training to become a "bread-producing farmer" (paysan boulanger) is offered. Organic knowledge is part of the curriculum, but the school is not committed to organic farming. With various events, the school tries to build bridges between the world of the newcomers and the long-established.



²² www.culturestrobades.cat

²³ <https://www.campusagri.fr/>

CSA Pente farm (DE)

CSA Hof Pente near Osnabrück in West Germany²⁴ is a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm with 300 members that receive seasonal and regional food produced on 37 ha of land according to biodynamic standards. They also feel collectively responsible for the cultivation, as the cultivation decisions are made jointly. Many members also enjoy the social community on collection day and use the farm for local recreation.

The farm offers a wide range of educational opportunities. There is a kindergarten and an accredited school on the farm, where teaching and learning follow a holistic approach. The educational offers are closely linked to the agricultural activities on the farm. Particularly noteworthy are the contributions to soil care (for example, through management by horses) and biodiversity (crop diversity in the fields).

The Pente CSA farm is a rather small farm that contributes greatly to regional and seasonal food, biodiversity and the local community, and has created many jobs per hectare.

Vibrant agriculture and forestry in the Uusimaa region (FI)



The vocational training projects ELINA I and II in the province of Uusimaa²⁵ under the auspices of the farming advisory organisation Proagria South Finland focused in 2015-2021 on agricultural and forestry investments, generational renewal issues and improving the profitability and competitiveness of farms, taking environmental aspects into account.

Different organisations provided information on farm succession. Farmers were able to develop their individual future plans in small groups and discuss their farm succession process with peers. The project, supported by agronomists, improved networking and peer learning.

The Winegrowers' Association of the Mór Wine Region (HU)

The Mór region west of Budapest is one of the smallest but best-known wine regions in Hungary. The winegrowers' community of Mór²⁶ was founded in 1995 after the change of the political system, when many small winegrowers' farms had emerged in the region as a result of land privatisation. The community operates on 600 hectares of vineyards and has 820 members in the five villages of Mór, Csákberény, Zámoly, Csókakő, Söréd. The main goals of the winegrowers' community are to create a network between wine producers and tourism in the region, and to support family farms with successors.



Most residents have a connection to wine and vineyards, so winemakers are seen as a kind of promoter of the local heritage. Moreover, this economic sector is important for the local economy. In the last ten years, an intensive generational renewal has started in the region, initially in the family farms. In the meantime, some young farmers have also moved to the region and started new farms. The generational renewal, both in the family farms and in the region as a whole, is leading to a more environmentally conscious attitude among farmers and can contribute to a new ecological approach to farming.

²⁴ <https://hofpente.de/>

²⁵ <https://www.proagria.fi/hankkeet/elina-ii-elinvoimainen-maatila>

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1407963862565937>

Registered Agricultural Partnerships (IE)

Irish agriculture is particularly challenged by ageing, land fragmentation, small farm sizes, financial viability and rural farm isolation. Registered Farm Partnerships²⁷ are one of several cooperative farm structures designed to improve this situation. Typically, an older farmer joins forces with a newcomer (son/daughter or from outside the family). There are now over 3,000 such partnerships.



Registered partnerships receive tax incentives. They play a key role in succession planning for family farms and offer young farmers the opportunity to join their parents' farm at an earlier stage and be formally recognised. The case study interviews also showed that the younger partners often bring in farming innovations, improving the viability of the farm. The state extension organisation has developed the model and also published an information brochure on it.²⁸

Newcomers

Remote work in rural Ireland (IE)

With remote work, the work is done far away from the traditional workplace, for example at home, in a co-working space or even as a "digital nomad". In this way, personal wishes regarding the quality of life can be taken into account in (residential) location decisions. In rural areas, remote work can help to create jobs, promote economic diversity, encourage women to return to work and increase social capital.



Grow Remote²⁹, a non-profit Irish social enterprise now operating in 4 countries, supports teleworkers with job search, networking and organisational issues. Technology is important, but career progression, legal requirements and many other factors also play a role. Grow Remote supports teleworkers by organising local groups and providing some funding. In this way, remote work can also serve as a springboard for community and business development.

Artystyka, an ecotourist farm (PL)

Artystyka³⁰ is an ecotourist farm founded in 2005 in the village of Nowa Bystrzyca (south-west Poland) by two newcomers from the city of Wroclaw shortly after graduating from university. Because of their artistic background, they decided not only to renovate the farmhouse and start a business, but also to organise art events for locals and visitors from Wroclaw. They were able to build relationships with the local community by combining sincere respect for the local context with new perspectives, for example through art installations involving local



²⁷ <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/diversification/registered-farm-partnerships/>

²⁸ <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/a-guide-to-transferring-the-family-farm.php>

²⁹ <https://growremote.ie/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4PcOZ8xMsA&t=51s>

³⁰ <https://www.artystyka.eu/>

residents, workshops on making cosmetics based on local herbs, or personal development workshops for and with local women.

The ecotourism activities were also developed in partnership with the resident population. In addition, the farmhouse and barn were renovated in harmony with the local cultural landscape. The case study shows that combining respect for the local context with an awareness of one's own values can help newcomers to put down roots in rural areas.

The conversion of vacant stables for commercial purposes (NL)

In the Netherlands there is an increasing number of vacant stables on farms. This leads to a decrease in the attractiveness of rural areas, also for new settlements. The redevelopment of vacant stables for commercial purposes offers a solution here, as renovations and new uses bring new life to dilapidated buildings and can create jobs in rural areas.

The Green East in Raalte³¹ (province of Overijssel) and Mouthoeve in Boekel³² (province of Noord-Brabant) in the east of the Netherlands are examples of renovations of vacant stables on farms.

Green East is a centre for start-ups in the agri-food sector. It hosts several start-ups with highly skilled jobs that would otherwise not have settled in Raalte and attracts mainly young people to the area. Mouthoeve is a shopping centre with authentic craft shops on the edge of a village. It houses a large number of small businesses, most of which are owned by female and/or young entrepreneurs who would not otherwise have settled in Boekel.

Both examples have managed to attract new entrepreneurs, create jobs and generate enthusiasm in their respective localities. Planning law makes it difficult for Dutch municipalities to convert vacant stables for commercial purposes. However, these examples show that with a positive environment, a convincing concept and 'flexible' local policies, the redevelopment of vacant stables for commercial purposes is possible and these projects can contribute to the revitalisation and regeneration of rural areas.

Cultural festivals: positive image for peripheral regions (NL)

The Oldambt region around the city of Groningen in the north-east of the Netherlands has recently suffered from population decline and a negative image. However, in the last ten years, four high-quality cultural festivals have been developed in or relocated to the region, which could improve the image and attract more residents, businesses and jobs in the long term. The symphonic open-air concert Pura Vida, the street music festival Waterbei, the Hongerige Wolf festival for music, dance, theatre, film and literature, and the experimental arts festival Grasnapsky (pictured) all have different histories and objectives. So far, the festivals have attracted many visitors to the region, which has had a positive effect on tourism and the image of the region. Although the festivals are not specifically aimed at younger generations, they mainly appeal to people in their 30s and 40s.



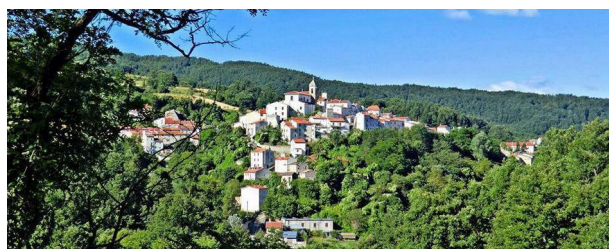
The festivals are mostly bottom-up initiatives of local citizens and newcomers, supported by the regional government. The newcomers feel welcome in Oldambt. This case study is most transferable to other spaces with an active population, a particular history and supportive institutions.

³¹ <https://thegreeneast.nl/>

³² <https://www.demouthoeve.nl/>

Castel del Giudice - a community as an active player (IT)

Castel del Giudice is located in the Apennine Mountains in central Italy, which are areas characterised by population decline, ageing and high youth unemployment. The municipality of 324 inhabitants (2018) has only a narrow budget but a high planning capacity. The municipal council has proactively and financially supported the establishment of an organic apple farm³³ on 40 hectares of fallow land; a public-private enterprise has converted the vacant primary school in the village into a care facility for elderly and disabled people; the abandoned stables were transformed into a widespread hotel with a restaurant and wellness area that are managed by another public-private company .³⁴



In the second phase, the municipality also promoted a community bee-keeping, an agricultural micro-brewery, a community cooperative and a concept for the restoration and rehabilitation of uninhabited houses and public spaces.

All these projects are based on the leadership and initiative of young people from the region. Castel del Giudice shows how natural and rural resources can

be conserved based on a participatory approach. Each initiative was launched in partnership with the local council, the local community and other key sectoral stakeholders.

Granville Terre et Mer: Local development through personal networking (FR)

Granville Terre et Mer is a rural area with a medium-sized town on the Normandy coast. Starting from an institutional identity based on shared experiences, values and practices, a cooperation has been gradually built there, mainly based on a network of informal, personal relationships. Themes are balance, a place for young people, social and professional integration, the ageing of the population, environmental protection, economic and cultural developments, housing... The concept of shared meaning is essential for all.



Everyone, whether native or rural newcomer, participates equally and in a complementary way. The motivation comes from integration into these networks, which is based on shared values and commitment. The networks include farmers (newcomers, successors) or people with an agricultural background who share common values. For all of them, it is about experience, training and/or personal history and background, with two ideas at the core: meeting the needs of the local population and welcoming newcomers while improving the local quality of life.

Rohrlack village (DE)

The village of Rohrlack is located in the county of Prignitz in Brandenburg, a structurally weak rural region in eastern Germany. After reunification, the infrastructure was in a desolate state and people were resigned.

In the meantime, a strong local network exists in Rohrlack, built on three businesses: a social institution for 40 disabled people with an attached farm, an organic bakery and a delivery service for organic



³³ <https://biomelise.it/bio/>

³⁴ <https://www.borgotufi.it/>

food (Landkorb GmbH & Co. KG). In the beginning, there were two rural newcomers from Berlin who carefully and with a lot of expertise got involved in the village. In a monthly meeting, projects, perspectives and problems were discussed together.

The example shows how rural renewal can be initiated through a social institution that combines housing and work opportunities. Building a strong local network enables synergies for all stakeholders, including the local population. The economic development is based on organic farming and ecologically operating businesses. The project is based on a local network of actors and strong regional ties, integrating marginalised groups, creating an innovative form of citizen participation and thus contributing to social cohesion.

Producer-Consumer Cooperative LANDWEGE (DE)



LANDWEGE eG (eG = registered cooperative) in Lübeck in northern Germany³⁵ aims to market regional and organic food directly and to bring producers and consumers closer together. LANDWEGE is considered an organic model project for living regionality. It is a producer-consumer cooperative, which means that both agricultural producers and consumers are members. It comprises 30 ecologically certified farms within a radius of 100 km around Lübeck. The cooperative markets the products of the member farms through five of its own natural food shops in

Lübeck and Bad Schwartau, and also operates a bakery, a kitchen and a delivery service.

LANDWEGE has existed since the late 1980s and today has 1,200 members. 130 jobs have been created in agriculture, processing, marketing and sales. In addition to the cooperative, there is the non-profit association Landwege e.V., which sees education for sustainable development, especially for children and young people, as its central task.

The case study shows an alternative form of operation that relies on strong interaction between consumers and producers. Marketing and distribution are focused on bringing organic farming and food to the region. New organic farms have guaranteed access to the market.

The "Come Home" project in the municipality of Punkalaidun (FI)

In 2018-2020, the "Come Home" project in the municipality of Punkalaidun in south-western Finland tried to find new ways to make internal migration positive. The project, funded by the local LEADER group, was a continuation of an earlier, successful project on the integration of asylum seekers. The project included marketing and communication activities to raise awareness of the municipality and to attract potential newcomers and returnees. First, older people were motivated to move back to the region of their childhood. Then families with children were another target group. The cooperation between the municipal administration and the local church community was particularly interesting. The Lutheran parishes of the Finnish state church, which are involved in far-reaching networks and structures in the rural communities, have hardly been on the rural development agenda so far. Through the project, the church congregations became more involved in local development in Punkalaidun.



The key aspects were a positive attitude and targeted public relations and communication through various channels. Within this framework, local people were also able to identify with the positive

³⁵ <https://www.landwege.de/home>

qualities of their home and thus market them further. The sense of community was strengthened and cooperation between local actors improved. The recruitment of a good project coordinator was also important. As the developments in migration behaviour can only be observed after a longer period of time, it is still too early to assess whether the goal of migration back to Punkalaidun has been achieved.

Entrepreneurs as newcomers in Hungary (HU)

In Eastern Hungary there are two types of newcomers in rural areas: The motives of the first group are oriented towards social reasons. The motives of the second group are ethically based (rural idyll, traditions, healthy environment, a sense of locality or a mixture of all these factors).

In the case study, we focused on the latter group. The newcomers interviewed are middle-class entrepreneurs who choose to reside in rural areas to start a business. For work or services, some continue to commute to the city. Usually, the newcomers can draw on existing capital and resources, but they also often use a combination of funding opportunities to build a diversified rural business. In most cases, the businesses have an online shop and also a cross-local network, even if the business is located in the rural area.

Local networks are not the rule, because entrepreneurs are often cut off from the local community. If there are several newcomers in one place, they form their own networks, which can also lead to tensions among the locals. Nevertheless, overall there is very little cooperation between the different newcomers. The more connected the business is to the community and the more open the newcomers are to the community, the more likely they are to be accepted and respected within the community.

Confrontation: Can the examples be transferred?

Now, one may object that all these beautiful examples are unique to their region and cannot be transferred to other regions.

RURALIZATION conducted 20 international "confrontations" on this question. In each case, a successful project was invited (mostly online) to another region and confronted there with a group of practical actors who were interested in the project approach, perhaps to implement it themselves. They discussed the transfer potential for the new region, the concrete implementation possibilities and the problems likely to arise.

The result showed, of course, that every solution has to be adapted to the situation on the ground. Moreover, since rural development is a multi-layered process, there are no solutions that can be implemented by any actors on their own. On the contrary, successful projects are characterised by intensive cooperation between different actors and/or institutional levels. This ability to cooperate was a characteristic of all successful processes and was also elaborated in the confrontations as a condition of transferability.

The transfer of successful examples can succeed if the local community takes a cooperative and pragmatic approach. The best breeding ground is an atmosphere rich in ideas, shared enthusiasm for the goal and courageous trial and error.

It also became apparent that cooperation between private initiatives and the public sector is usually necessary for a transfer. The public sector is rarely the initiator, but committed mayors, council leaders or administrative staff can support initiatives from business and civil society or effectively moderate a local development process. They can assist private initiatives with competence, expertise and political contacts and create the social conditions for successful implementation.

The innovation contribution of rural newcomers and new entrants

Human capital, i.e. knowledge, skills, experience and positive motivation, is the decisive contribution that rural newcomers and new entrants into agriculture make to the development of rural areas. They are able to set new impulses, get stagnating regions moving and act as catalysts for more far-reaching processes.

Of course, not all rural newcomers have this potential. An active personality profile with pioneering spirit and leadership, perseverance, idealism, also social coordination skills and entrepreneurial spirit is optimal. Of course, professional experience and expertise are also important. Most of these skills can be learned and trained.

The confrontations repeatedly revealed characteristic obstacles to the work of rural newcomers and new entrants into agriculture. In the agricultural sector, these include access to land and also available residential and farm buildings for setting up a new farm. And a regional basic supply of schools, doctors and public transport is also a prerequisite for successful development, especially for families.

But then there are also a number of political obstacles, for example a building law that makes it difficult for agricultural community businesses to set up. The regulations of the Common Agricultural Policy with its area-based payments favour already existing and large farms and give small farms and start-ups dramatically unequal starting conditions. Regions hardly use their leeway for deviating regulations in favour of new entrepreneurs. Access to agricultural training and marketing channels are other key factors.

Agricultural cooperation and community farms can solve some of these problems; this requires good social skills on the part of all those involved. In some urban areas, publicly owned farms lay the foundations for a local food supply and help new entrants to start their own business. On a social level, municipal governments can facilitate the entry of newcomers and new entrants with a welcoming culture and many more approaches; this aspect will be elaborated at length in our Handbook for Municipalities.³⁶

The contribution of farm successors to innovation

While newcomers and new entrants tend to settle in rural regions close to cities, in remote rural regions innovative successors to farms play a greater role in rural development. Information and training are key factors to support farm successors.

Successors are part of a family tradition that can be both supportive and restrictive in the development of new potentials. In order to tap the innovation potential of farm successors for rural areas, the situation of the previous generation must therefore also be considered. In some countries, there is no regulated old-age provision for the transferring generation. It is assumed that they stay on the farm and support the successors in their work.

This can be helpful, but can also restrict the successors in developing innovative ideas. Potential successors with good ideas might decide against taking over the farm because they cannot realise their own ideas in the presence of their parents. A material retirement provision for the relinquishing generation that allows them to live independently off the farm could therefore promote rural innovation in remote areas.

Traditional gender roles also make it particularly difficult for female farm successors to take over. The vast majority of farm owners in all European countries are still male. Non-family successors who take over a farm as new entrants have an easier time implementing innovations because there are no family ties; and here the share of women might be larger.

³⁶ [EIP-AGRI Focus Group New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. Final report May 2016.](#)

Conclusion

In general, the confrontations showed that successful examples can never be directly transferred, but have to be developed from scratch in each region. However, they can very well serve as a source of inspiration and a model. Examples from areas close to the city were sometimes met with a shake of the head in rural areas because the rural value background was different, like the prevalence for organic, vegetarian or vegan food. However, the basic concern of the project was always accepted.

Differences in values also emerged when it came to the question of cooperations and community farms. Agricultural cooperatives in conventional farming are entered into for pragmatic and material reasons. In contrast, farm collectives of start-up farmers, most of whom practise organic farming, include aspects of shared living. In the conventional rural world, therefore, there is often a mistrust towards alternative farms. In the eastern member states, moreover, collective farms still evoke the painful memories of the forced collectivisations of the socialist years. Reservations about new community forms can only be dispelled through good examples and personal acquaintances.

Cooperating, building bridges, working in networks - all success stories show characteristics of collaborative action. Cooperation is needed between the conventional and the ecological world, between newcomers and residents, local politics and administration, civil society and business.

Agroecological approaches generally still lead a niche existence in rural areas. The integration of agroecology into conventional training content and professional school curricula can help to reduce mental barriers and gradually gain acceptance and support.

Policy can also provide concrete support in the field of education. The extensive knowledge that established projects have developed can be passed on through partnerships, learning platforms, advisory services or by including it in the curriculum of regular agricultural schools. In some countries, there are networks of demonstration farms for alternative farming systems that offer visits for agricultural practitioners. Farmers are financially compensated for their time spent on these visits.

The language problem stands in the way of the exchange of experience at European level. Translation services or the involvement of multilingual advisors as professional mediators are needed.

Our examples show the great potential that new entrants, newcomers and innovative farm successors offer for the development of rural regions. Policy can remove existing obstacles, establish a welcoming culture and thus do much to tap this potential.

5 Access to land

A separate part in the RURALIZATION project was dedicated to the issue of access to land. The practices of the participating land organisations had repeatedly shown that agricultural start-ups face significant difficulties when they are looking for land on which to start their project. Without land, there is no agriculture.

However, the proportion of land becoming available on the land market, so-called land mobility, is low in most countries, so that only a small amount of land comes up for sale or lease; in Germany, for example, it is 0.2% per year, which means that the average piece of farmland is sold - in theory - every 500 years.

In addition, most land sales are settled by the local residents among themselves; one does not hear about sales. The transparency of the land market is low. If a plot of land does come up for sale, the land price is usually so high that the purchase could only be refinanced from the yields of the land over several generations. Throughout Europe, land prices have risen massively since the beginning of the world financial crisis in 2008. One reason are financial investors investing in land. And banks hardly grant loans to new entrants who cannot show a successful existing business.

It is therefore nothing short of a miracle that, despite all these circumstances, a growing number of farm start-ups are still taking place in Europe. The difficulty of access to land means that such start-ups usually begin on a very small area, for example as a market garden with 1-2 ha of land (the average size of a European farm is 16 ha).

A European research group first pointed out this problem in 2016.³⁷ In its reform proposal for the EU agricultural policy, the EU Commission then made agricultural start-ups an issue: one of the 10 main objectives of the new agricultural policy 2023-2027 is "Promoting generational renewal: increasing and maintaining the attractiveness for young farmers and new farmers and facilitating sustainable business development in rural areas". For the first time, "new farmers" are also addressed here.

Each European region has been required to present an inventory and concept of how to address this issue as part of its strategic plan for implementing EU agricultural policy. (The analysis of these plans submitted in early 2022 forms a separate part of the RURALIZATION project).

Access to land was considered in two ways in the RURALIZATION project. On the one hand, the functioning of the land markets in the different EU countries forms a framework that is designed differently and opens up better or worse access opportunities for new entrepreneurs. On the other hand, within this framework there are numerous initiatives that develop and test new access routes in the national context. We would like to present the results of both approaches in the following.

The big land market comparison

In all member states of the European Union there is a distinction between owned and leased land. Both categories of land are predominantly in the hands of private owners in all member states. Public ownership by the state, municipalities or churches plays an important role in some regions, but never a dominant one. In most Eastern European states, collective forms of ownership were created during the socialist era, which were dissolved after the fall of communism. The land was reprivatised.

In the Alpine region, in south-eastern Europe, but also in Scotland and Ireland, there are still open grazing areas in common ownership, which are fed jointly by local farmers (commons).

For historical reasons, the proportion of leased land in the EU countries varies greatly; across Europe there are countries with high and low shares of leased land. Ireland and Portugal have the lowest share of leased land with about 20 % each, followed by Poland and Slovenia. Other countries with a rent share of less than 50 % are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Spain and Great Britain. Bulgaria, Slovakia and also

³⁷ <https://escoladepastorsdecatalunya.cat/>

France have lease shares of over 80%. The rest are in between. The shares have increased in some cases and decreased in others over the past 10 years. The EU average is 55 %.

The land market itself is regulated very differently in the countries. This has a considerable influence on access opportunities to land. In the analysis of the 28 EU states, three major groups emerge:

- Countries with a largely unregulated, price-driven land market
- Countries with a modified market
- and countries with a highly regulated market where price takes a back seat to other criteria as a criterion for land acquisition.

The legal regulations on land tenure also vary greatly. There are countries in which the right to lease is a component of free contract law and has not been regulated separately. Lease duration, lease price and termination options are freely agreed between the parties involved. Then there are countries that regulate the tenancy market in order to grant farmers certain minimum conditions for successful farming. Here, for example, lease contracts may only expire after the harvest has been harvested, there is a notice period of several years, or the lease price may not exceed a certain level.

Finally, there are countries that give tenants a very high degree of security, such as in France. Here, the landlords' options to terminate the lease are severely restricted, and the price structure is also predetermined. If a child of the family takes over the farm, the owner cannot terminate the tenancy despite the new manager. The tenancy can only be terminated if the owner wants to manage the farm himself. To do so, however, he needs official permission. This is to prevent owners from taking up farming only out of financial interests.

The same goes in Belgium (Flanders), but here the strong protection is no longer in favour of the farmers, as 2/3 of the owners are avoiding a farmer tenant on their land. A high degree of protection of the farmer is not necessarily linked to high degree of access to land.

There are also different regulations regarding the inheritance of land. In some countries, the normal law of succession applies, with the consequence that several children inherit jointly and the land is divided or sold as a whole. Both are problematic for the successor who wants to continue the farm: his parcels are reduced in size or lost altogether.

Therefore, many countries ensure that viable farms remain in existence. For example, a farm may only be inherited as a whole, and the children who do not continue the farm receive a settlement based on the farm's yield.

In some post-socialist countries, the land has been transferred back to communities of heirs with so many members that the owners are no longer able to act. The clarification of ownership would cost more money than the sale of the land would bring in. Such land falls fallow or can only be used for agricultural purposes with great uncertainty.

In Central and Eastern Europe, there is little legal protection for tenants, which favours large farms. In Scotland, which is still dominated by large landholdings, crofting, a long-term tenancy for smallholdings with access to common grazing land, has developed in the remote Highlands and Islands. The tenancy can be inherited, but crofters are not allowed to live more than 20 miles from their farm and must manage the farm themselves. This is overseen by a Crofting Commission. This system creates opportunities for new entrants: in 2018, 200 new crofters were able to take over a farm.

Examples of land market regulations

Regulations outside the land market also influence access to land for new entrants. Planning law, which regulates land use and the designation of new building areas, has a central influence on the scarcity and price of farmland in all countries, especially around growing cities. Due to higher tax revenues, cities and municipalities usually support the designation of farmland as building land.

Recently, however, there has been a shift in thinking in some places and more attention is being paid to the environmental and social value of farmland in the community. The Spanish region of Catalonia passed a law to this effect in 2017. In the Czech Republic, high fees have been charged to the landowner for converting arable land into building land since 2011. In Germany, a strict ecological compensation regulation means that additional farmland must be taken up for the designation of ecological compensation measures when building land is designated. Here, landowners can invest their sales proceeds in new land purchases in a tax-saving way, which further increases land prices in regions close to cities. In Poland, a municipality that designates building land must pay compensation of between €25,000 and €125,000/ha to the higher authority, depending on the quality of the soil.

Another instrument of land policy in all countries is land consolidation. In Western Europe, the great era of land consolidation is over; today it is used more for ecological purposes. In the Czech Republic, the instrument is currently being used intensively. In the historical past, land consolidation was used in connection with land reforms to provide farmers, often also refugees, with land. Currently, the instrument no longer plays a role for new entrants to agriculture.

In various countries, for example in Germany, France or the Spanish provinces of Asturias, Catalonia and Galicia, there is the instrument of "land banks". A public organisation can buy farmland with the help of a right of first refusal and hold it temporarily to resell it to farmers. In Spain and France, this instrument is explicitly used to support agricultural start-ups.

All in all, our country analyses come to the conclusion that no EU country currently has instruments at its disposal with which new agricultural entrepreneurs can be provided with land in a targeted manner. However, there are instruments that could be applied in this sense if this were politically desired. From the point of view of agricultural start-ups, remote regions are particularly interesting, as land prices are generally lower here and demographic developments mean that there are also more buildings for sale.

In the RURALIZATION project, we took a closer look at various regions from this aspect.

In Scotland, quasi-feudal structures prevail to this day, and the concentration of land has even increased due to wealthy investors. The Scottish Land Commission is working on a reform and in this context also on access opportunities for new entrants.

In northern Sweden and Finland, even the indigenous Sami population is struggling with the problem of access to land. Forestry, mining and infrastructure projects claim traditional land that is also of cultural value to the Sami. 90% of the land on the Finnish side belongs to the state, so it is not the market but politics that decides on land use, and here the Sami have worse relations than many other stakeholders.

The Alentejo region in southeastern Portugal is traditionally characterised by large-scale land ownership. After the Portuguese revolution in 1974, many young landless people left the region to seek their fortune elsewhere. In the past decades, several new entrepreneurs have settled there, some of them organic farms with direct marketing to Lisbon, but also "lifestyle farmers" from the capital who spend their weekends there and are not interested in the local population. The demand for small farms is high, land is expensive, and a cultural upswing in village life is not discernible through this development.

In Southeast European rural regions - Romania, Bulgaria - access to land for new entrepreneurs is made difficult by corrupt administrative structures. Well-funded and well-connected investors have an advantage, potential new entrants do not get a chance. The subsidy structure of the EU's agricultural policy contributes significantly to the attractiveness of this land acquisition. The mountain regions that are less interesting for investors are more accessible to new entrants in Southeast Europe, such as in the Bulgarian regions of Smolyan and Kardzhali in the south of the country.

In Poland, access to land for farmland start-ups is difficult because private owners hardly sell their land. 80 % of owners have inherited their land and an equally high percentage plan to pass on their land to their children. Since the area-based EU payments in Poland are higher than the usual rent, most owners keep their land and cultivate it on the side for self-sufficiency instead of leasing or selling it. Below the rent level, land is informally given to the neighbour for cultivation, but the premium application is made

by the owner. Land also has a high value in Poland as a risk provision for the family in bad times. This is also reflected in the fact that land prices for less fertile land have increased more than for fertile land in the past: the ideal value of land ownership is important.

In principle, new entrepreneurs in Central and Eastern European countries have also been able to gain access to land since the 1990s in the context of the privatisation of former state-owned enterprises. But de facto there were privileges for existing tenants (successors to large farms), the sizes of land offered were too large, and in many regions corruption and political connections played a role. Therefore, mainly large farms have benefited from the privatisations. At present, only small areas are left in most countries; for these, some concessions are now granted to new entrepreneurs. In eastern Germany, for example, there have been tenders with reduced land sizes specifically for organic farms and start-ups since 2015.

Overall, it can be seen that the functioning of the land market in connection with EU agricultural policy in most regions can hardly be reconciled with the interests of new entrepreneurs and new entrants. Since the EU agricultural premiums are higher than the rental prices in many regions, existing farms can lease additional land at zero cost, while start-ups have very high additional start-up costs. The lack of transparency of the land market and the subsidised growth of existing farms make entry even more difficult.

The usual succession within the family also cements the existing male dominance among farm managers; at 20%, the proportion of female farm owners in Europe is still below the proportion of women at the management level of European companies.

Sixty-four approaches

There are numerous attempts to solve the problems of access to land outlined above through innovative approaches. We have collected and documented 64 solutions from 12 countries. We would like to briefly present the most important ones.

Basically, there are three approaches to improving access to land for founders and new entrants:

- On the supply side, one can ensure that more land comes up for sale or lease.
- On the demand side, it is possible to improve the founders' position in the market by lowering prices or strengthening purchasing power.
- Finally, one can improve the market structure as a whole by, for example, creating more transparency or reducing entry barriers for buyers.

It is important to note that farmland ownership is not necessarily restricted to private property. In several examples hereunder, farmland is owned by a community or by a regional or local authority. Such forms of public or common ownership can provide better accessibility to new entrants.

To structure the diversity of approaches, we have sequenced the 64 examples on an "access to land pathway" with five stations:

- A) Support for farmers in the start-up phase
- B) Improving access to the land market
- C) Influencing the type of management
- D) Securing land for individual farms
- E) Long-term stabilisation of the farms

A. Support farmers in the start-up phase

A first effective measure on the part of policy-makers and civil society is to support farmers willing to start up in the preparatory phase. This includes any kind of training, including the creation of a positive agricultural job image, as well as networking with like-minded people.

Founders often fail because of illusory ideas of what it means to run a farm. But there are social prerequisites that make founding a farm much easier. In addition to many years of familiarity with the agricultural world, this is above all local integration. Family successors grow up in the social context of their village and thus have good starting conditions for access to farmland and for many other questions of farm development.

Rurbans

But new entrants can also find access to these social references. For example, the association "Rurbans"³⁸ organises a shepherding school in the Spanish Pyrenees. The school offers training in the shepherding trade, but also arranges direct contacts with shepherds who are about to give up and are looking for a successor. Shepherds who are giving up or taking over are given intensive support during the handover process. Of the 202 students at the school so far, 94 have gone into shepherding professionally. The work of Rurbans is set against the backdrop of major succession problems in traditional shepherding in the mountainous region of the Pyrenees. The abandonment of shepherding leads to the scrub encroachment of mountain meadows and thus to the disappearance of biodiversity. Only young shepherds can stop this decline.

CIAP

Another innovative example are incubator farms, where a new farm can be incubated in a protected atmosphere. These solutions have developed particularly in France and England. The cooperative CIAP³⁹, for example, has enabled 200 new entrants to start a farm in the Pays de la Loire region of central France between 2012 and 2019. Most of these farms are organic farms with direct marketing on a relatively small area.

CIAP offers the new entrants the use of various test areas for one year. On these plots, they can try out their cultivation concept in practice, set up marketing and, in parallel, look for permanent land for their farmland start-up in the region. A partner farm serves as a mentor, accompanies the project and provides social contacts. Investments made during this trial year are financed by CIAP and initially remain the property of the cooperative. If the farm successfully moves to other land after one year, the new entrant buys the cooperative's inputs. This purchase can also be delayed for another year. The cooperative also helps to conclude lease contracts and to apply for EU premiums if the founder, as a new entrant, is not yet eligible for premiums. In the training year, the labour office can grant support payments for the business start-up.

The members of the cooperative are farmers, citizens, municipalities and local support associations. Through the cooperative, communities can set their own accents in the development of local farms, for example by looking for founders who contribute to the local food supply.

OrganicLEA

Near London, there is a cooperative called OrganicLEA⁴⁰, which is also organised in the Farmstart network described above. OrganicLEA offers a nine-month training course in which a concrete farm is set up, initially on land provided by the organisation, and then successively on land found during the

³⁸ <https://escoladepastorsdecatalunya.cat/>

³⁹ <https://ciap-pdl.fr/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.organiclea.org.uk/>

training. These new areas are either provided by OrganicLEA or found by the participants themselves. OrganicLEA also accompanies the further development of the business and offers marketing opportunities via a vegetable box and weekly markets. At the end of 2017, 34 founders had set up new small businesses.

B. Improve access to the land market

Access to the land market first requires available land, and this is where a first group of initiatives comes in. The amount of agricultural land is steadily decreasing due to sealing and building development (especially in peri-urban areas). In some European regions, however, farmland also lies fallow because owners speculate on building development, because the land is too small or too infertile, or because owners are unable to act. These obstacles can often only be solved by overarching measures such as land consolidation or a change in property laws. In some places, citizens' initiatives can prevent the development of farmland that is important for agriculture.

Moëlan-sur-Mer

In the municipality of Moëlan-sur-Mer in Brittany, for example, 120 ha of fallow land in their area was identified, mapped and its agricultural potential assessed. Owners were then asked to either farm the land themselves, lease it to an active farmer or sell it. The French legal situation gives municipalities the possibility to oblige owners to do this. In this context, the municipality also worked to ensure that the land was used for ecological and regional agriculture.

Per l'Horta

The citizens' initiative Per l'Horta in Spain⁴¹ was able to achieve, through many years of work, that the urban sprawl of the traditional vegetable growing areas around the city of Valencia was stopped. More than 2,000 hectares of land were preserved for local agriculture, which tends to be organic and regional, by changing the city's zoning. Per l'Horta has also brought about a change in public thinking about the value of regional farmland.

RED TERRAE

Another group of projects is concerned with transparency in the land market and tries to bring landowners directly together with farmers or new entrants. In Spain, for example, the organisation RED TERRAE (Network of Municipalities for an Agroecological Land Reserve⁴²) has been working with 40 municipalities since 2010 to develop a national database that records fallow or available land for predominantly agroecological operations, especially land owned by municipalities. This is done in the context of an overarching strategy for sustainable community agriculture. RED TERRAE promotes the establishment and further development of regional organic farms and also advises landowners and founders on the conclusion of long-term lease agreements. In this way, 142 ha of land have been conveyed to 57 farmers so far, some of whom are new entrepreneurs.

Bristol food producers

In the Bristol food producers project⁴³ in the southwest of England, committed citizens have joined forces to regionalise the city's food system. In this context, they also mobilise land for farms by providing guidance to landowners who want to lease their land to regional producers. The organisation keeps an up-to-date register of interested producers looking for land.

⁴¹ <https://perlhorta.info/>

⁴² <https://www.tierrasagroecologicas.es/>

⁴³ <https://bristolfoodproducers.uk/>

Contact forum farm handover

In Germany, an annual national networking meeting between young farm seekers and older farmers who can imagine a non-family farm transfer has existed under the name "Kontaktforum Hofübergabe"⁴⁴ since 2016. The two-day meeting is part of the annual organic young farmers' meeting. Farm seekers and farmers handing over farms can get to know each other personally and work on the basic difficulties of handing over farms outside the family in a moderated setting. Some farmers attend the contact forum for several years to prepare for their farm handover.

C. Influence the type of management

Numerous initiatives, especially in the field of nature conservation, strive for a more ecological use of certain areas and realise this with contractual agreements and financial support. This concerns ecologically sensitive areas such as nature reserves, FFH areas, landscape conservation areas, but also areas for drinking water production. Nature conservation initiatives usually support organic farms in gaining access to land, as such farms can more easily meet nature conservation requirements. Suitable farms can sometimes lease large areas of land in nature conservation areas at favourable conditions on a long-term basis.

ADEPT Foundation

In western Romania, for example, the ADEPT Foundation⁴⁵ takes care of the preservation of the open cultural landscapes in Transylvania. ADEPT carries out mapping and develops management plans for ecologically sensitive areas. On the other hand, the foundation arranges contract nature conservation programmes for farmers in these areas and supports them in marketing regional products with special origin labelling. It also helps to develop tourism offers with accommodation facilities on farms. ADEPT has so far worked with 2,000 farmers and supported about 20 start-ups.

D. Secure land for individual farms

Organisations that buy up farmland and then make it available to (mostly organic) farms on a long-term basis make up a large part of the case studies. Many of these organisations are members of the European Platform for Access to Land, some of them are direct partners of the RURALIZATION project (Terre de Liens, Kulturland, De Landgenoten, XCN).

These organisations are developing new ownership models for farmland, with which land is removed from the land market in the long term and is given over to regional and ecological management. Conceptually, these organisations belong to the social movement of "commoning", i.e. the development of new common goods. Depending on the national legal framework, the form of ownership found varies. Mostly it is a communal form of ownership in which many people can participate financially, or a foundation. The organisations purchase farmland and finance the purchase from donations, endowments or participations of many supporters.

Municipalities that tender land in their public ownership for leasing to organic farms or start-ups also belong to this category.

Kulturland eG

One example is the Kulturland cooperative⁴⁶ in Germany. It was founded in 2013 and by the end of 2021 had a good 1,000 members who had contributed €6 million in capital. This enabled the cooperative to secure around 400 ha of land for 26 partner farms. The cooperative works all over Germany. Its members

⁴⁴ <https://www.oeko-junglandwirte-tagung.de/tagungen/kontaktforum-2020/>

⁴⁵ <https://fundatia-adept.org/>

⁴⁶ www.kulturland.de

mostly come from the vicinity of the supported farms. They subscribe to cooperative shares in order to support a farm from which they obtain food. 85 % of the members support a specific farm.

With the collected capital, the cooperative buys land and leases it to the farmers on a long-term basis under three conditions: organic farming, 10 % nature conservation areas and the implementation of regional activities, for example work with school classes or direct marketing.

The members of the cooperative receive no interest on their contribution and no participation in the increase in value of the farmland, because the land is never to be sold again. However, the members can cancel their shares annually and receive the nominal value paid out again. Recently, the cooperative has also started to take care of non-family successors and has developed a pension scheme for retiring farmers.

Terre de Liens

The organisation Terre de Liens⁴⁷ in France was founded in 2003 and works in a similar way. However, its goals are broader. In each French region there is an independent regional group as an association that does public relations work and works to ensure that all people recognise their responsibility for the preservation of land and peasant agriculture. Regional groups of Terre de Liens also conduct educational and advisory events for agriculture, work with communities on local food strategies or support farmers in regional marketing.

At the centre, however, is the acquisition of ownership of agricultural farms. The land and farm buildings are purchased by a national structure, the Foncière Terre de Liens. Members subscribe to limited partnership shares in the Foncière. By 2021, 18,000 members had acquired 7,000 ha of land for 250 farms and collected €120 million in shares for this purpose. The French tax system, which grants tax relief for investments in solidarity-based and social economy, was also helpful here, so that a participation in Terre de Liens is also interesting from a tax point of view. There is also a charitable foundation that accepts donations.

Ille-et-Vilaine

The time lapse in buying land is another specific problem for new entrepreneurs in accessing land. Sellers want to sell quickly, but newcomers must first develop a concept for new land and organise financing. Existing farms can react faster and therefore have an advantage when buying land.

The county (département) of Ille-et-Vilaine in Brittany, France, has set itself the goal of supporting agricultural start-ups that want to farm organically, sustainably, diversified or at least with high added value for the region. To this end, the department works with the regional office of SAFER, the French organisation that monitors and approves land purchases regionally. SAFER takes over suitable land as an intermediate owner in order to settle start-ups. The costs of land acquisition and management are borne by the county. Once the start-up has developed its concept and secured its financing, the land is sold on to it. Between 2007 and 2017, 29 farms with a total of 221 ha of land were newly established in this way, creating 47 agricultural jobs. The success rate of intermediate ownership was 93 %, which means that the founders for whom the land was held were almost always able to find financing for the subsequent purchase of the land. In this regard, it is important to know that land prices are still significantly lower in France than elsewhere, at €8,000/ha, due to the regulated land market.

APAEFF

Finally, there are also initiatives that support new entrants by advising them on how to conclude long-term leases and thus gain access to land. For example, the Association of Young Farmers of Ibiza and Formentera in Spain (APAEFF)⁴⁸ first built up a database of fallow land that was no longer being used

⁴⁷ <https://terredeliens.org/>

⁴⁸ <http://apaeef.org/>

on the islands due to tourism development. It then contacted landowners and arranged long-term leases with organic farms. In parallel, farmers are advised and certified organic by the organisation according to EU standards. The association also takes care of the marketing of the products in cooperation with the Ecofeixes cooperative.

CLAS Cymru

In Wales, the community land advisory service (CLAS Cymru)⁴⁹ works to help citizens access public land that can be used as community gardens. The organisation, which originated from a citizens' initiative, works together with municipal administrations, higher authorities, other initiatives and agriculture. CLAS Cymru identifies suitable land, negotiates temporary or long-term use agreements with municipalities, clarifies issues related to development planning and mediates the land to farmland start-ups or to citizens' groups who take over its use and maintenance. In this way, 350 projects have been supported so far. In the community gardens that emerge from this, people meet and share their knowledge about growing vegetables and ornamental plants or even planting biodiversity areas.

E. Secure land for the long term through farm stability

Access to land is of little use if the agricultural project fails after its establishment due to marketing difficulties or similar problems. Any strategy that secures the viability of farms in the long term is therefore also a strategy of securing land.

Community supported agriculture

One example of this is the form of community supported agriculture. In this form of organisation, which is currently spreading rapidly⁵⁰, the harvest of a farm is pre-financed by consumers. They pay a monthly contribution to cover the living costs of the farmer or the farmer collective and the other costs of the farm. In return, they receive all the farm's produce free of charge. In winter, a cultivation meeting is held and it is agreed what is to be produced the following year. For farmers, this means there is no longer any financial risk in the event of poor yields. When yields are good, the community benefits from nature's abundance. Compared to normal marketing channels, there is less food waste; community members can decide for themselves which products they still want to use and which end up on the compost heap.

Community supported agriculture mostly takes place on small farmlands and is limited to vegetable production. However, there are also large farms with dairy cattle, milk processing and arable farming. The farms are extremely diverse, as the community members want to have a wide range of food. Sometimes the members also help with the cultivation themselves. Community supported agriculture is organised in different legal forms.

ASAT

In Romania, the association for the support of peasant agriculture ASAT⁵¹ advises young farmers on taking over or setting up new farms that want to market directly, especially near cities. The network has also developed because many consumers do not trust organic certification in the supermarket. Between 2014 and 2020, up to 30 small producers were supported in marketing. The association has also organised a social fund to support individual farms in case of unforeseen problems and organises the exchange of experiences among farmers.

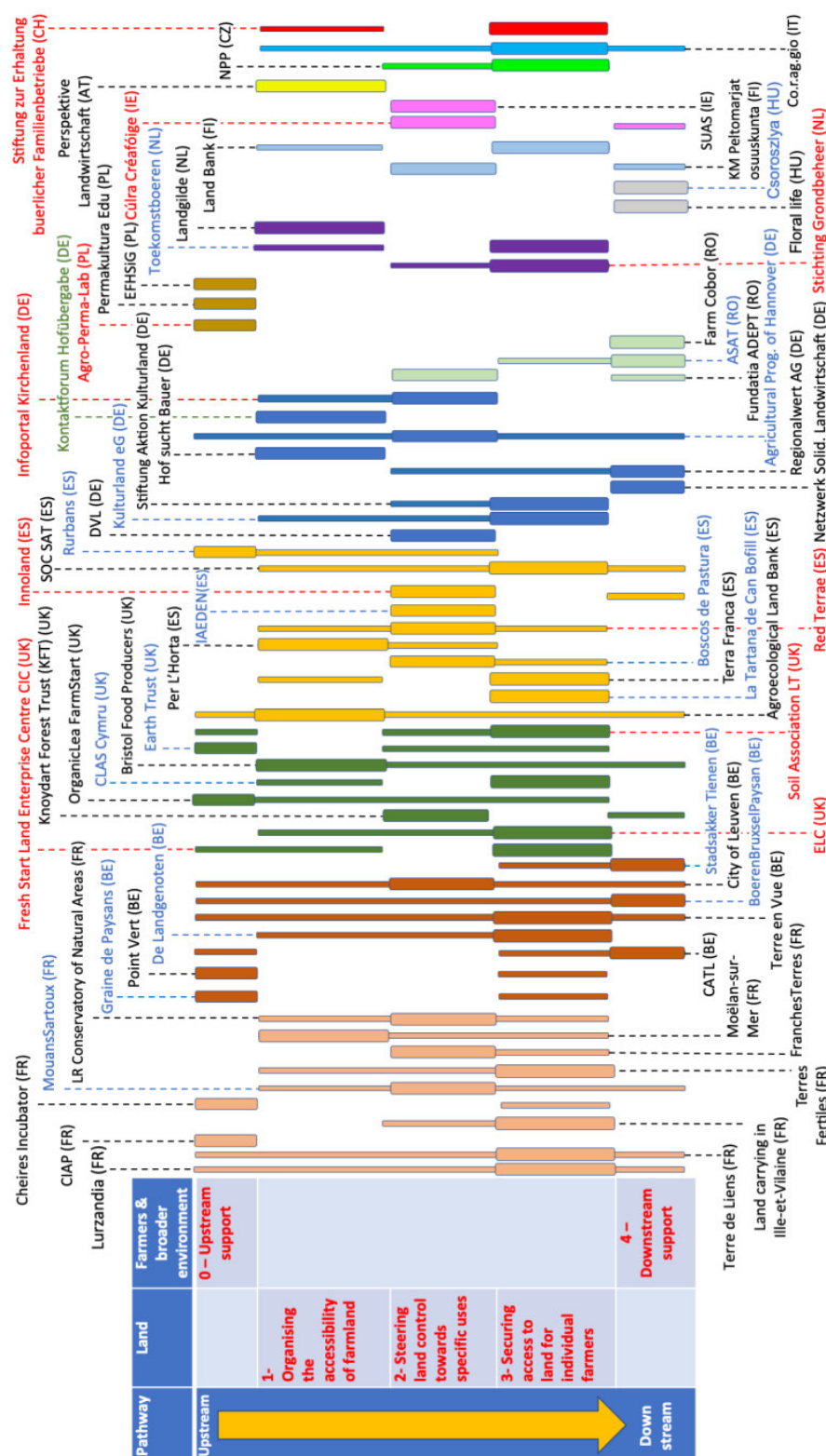
⁴⁹ <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/clas/wales>

⁵⁰ see for example <https://urgenci.net/>

⁵¹ <https://www.asatromania.ro/>

Concluding overview

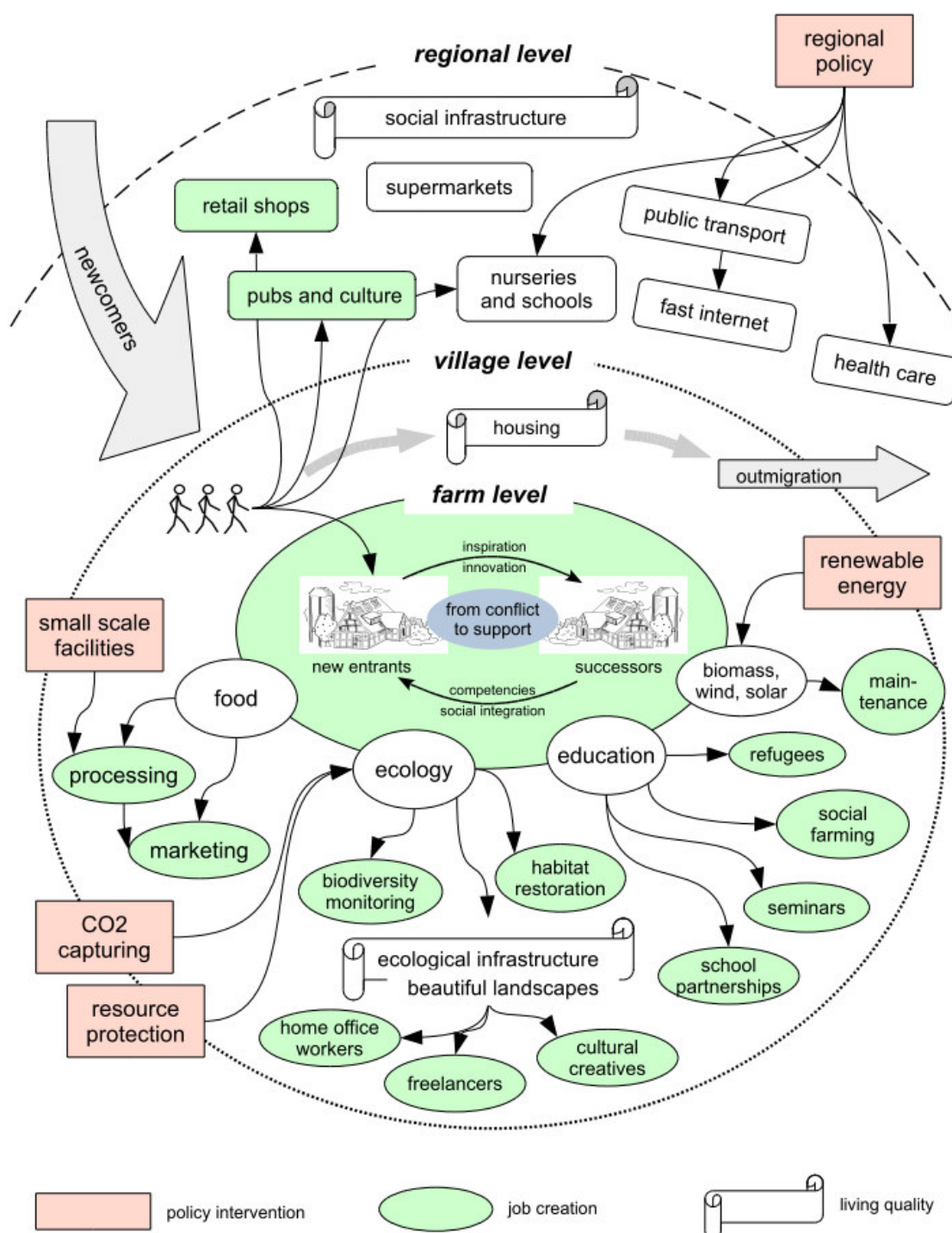
The five levels of support in accessing land in the 64 case studies are summarised again in the graphic below. The English description of the five levels corresponds to points A to E in the preceding text. The examples are colour-coded by country. For each example, the level at which it is mainly active is shown. Most organisations cover several levels. For each case study there is a detailed English description in the appendix of the final report D6.1 of the RURALIZATION project.



6 Summarising the concept

The vision: multifunctional farms initiate multiple jobs

In many of our case studies we observed that multifunctional (mostly agroecological) farms play an important role in the Ruralization process. How come? They offer a cornucopia of synergies with upstream, downstream or side activities which offer many more job opportunities. The graphic shows an overview.



Starting at farm level, traditional successors and new farming entrants both can benefit from cooperation and mutual support. New entrants bring inspiration and innovation whereas local farmers have the social network and long-time professional experiences. Furthermore they know the place and control resources, most notably access to land.

On the basis of multifunctional farms (an innovation which new entrants may contribute) many professional side activities can be developed. The graph shows a dozen options in the realms of food, ecology, education and renewable energy. Beyond creating job opportunities some of these activities further enhance the local quality of life like landscape architecture and ecological restoration of habitats (bottom of graph). The commercial viability of these opportunities depends on the overall political frame and hence can be supported by regional policy.

Besides creating jobs rural newcomers (top left) are also local residents who utilise public infrastructure (nurseries, schools), develop community and cultural activities and may offer services to the local community. A minimum of social infrastructure in turn is essential to enable them to make their living, especially public transport, education, health care and most of all fast internet. This again is a task which must be provided by the state and its regional policy.

The narrative: New rural life in Europe

Finally, in the RURALIZATION project we asked ourselves whether a common pattern emerges in the trends and case studies studied. This gave rise to the "RURALIZATION narrative": a short, ideal-typical story about how new rural generations positively influence rural development.

Rural areas in 21st century Europe

How are rural areas doing in 21st century Europe? Many regions are not doing well. The countryside is depopulating, young and qualified people are moving to the cities. There, in industry and services, are the better-paid jobs. The city offers encounters, stimulating lifestyles and cultural diversity.

Moreover, nature and landscape have become monotonous. In the land consolidation of the last century, meadows everywhere were drained, hedges and roadsides removed, birds and insects decimated. Small farmers are giving up, those that remain are growing, their fields are getting bigger, machines are controlled by satellites, farm animals are no longer accessible, and there are also fewer and fewer jobs on these farms - measured in terms of area.

As the young move away, the old are left behind in the village. Schools and shops are closing, doctors and public transport are being reduced, cultural activities are declining. More people are moving away. Why should people stay here? It is a vicious circle of rural decline.

A new generation moves to the countryside

But for some years now, the picture has been changing. A new generation is moving to the countryside, has dreams, is looking for places to live and is creating new jobs. What moves this generation?

They are young and young-at-heart people who carry within them the longing for a holistic life. They want to live and work in harmony with their values. Quality of life, community and family are more important to them than material prosperity. For them, quality of life includes living close to nature and in harmony with the environment, especially for growing children.

For this new generation, rural areas offer better conditions than the city. In particular, they find proximity to nature there. They find community in the manageable social relations of villages. They find spacious living space with a garden and thus the opportunity to fulfil their dream of living. In remote regions, property prices are significantly lower than in the cities, and there are opportunities for self-sufficiency, so that even a lower income is sufficient to live on. They find meaningful work opportunities in line with their values.

Even among the old-established themselves, more and more people share the values of this "holistic generation". And some who grew up in the countryside are returning from the city.

What is this new generation doing differently?

For the new generation, the country is not just a place to live. They seize the opportunities that the country offers for a wealth of projects and life plans. Rural newcomers bring skills, ideas, their own networks and capital to the countryside. They revitalise old buildings or build new houses. Families, children and the older generation live together and in close proximity.

Versatile, mostly ecological farms are at the heart of the new rural life, because many interactions emanate from these farms. They create an ecologically diverse landscape with a high quality of life, where biotopes and disappearing species have their place again. They produce food that is in demand locally and can be traded in direct producer-consumer relationships. They organise social and cultural activities and invite, for example, kindergartens and school classes to the farm.

These versatile farms create the conditions for further newcomers to follow on from these activities. Jobs and projects are created in the field of food processing, in the field of nature conservation and landscape management and in the field of tourism. Renewable energies are another mainstay with great potential for value creation.

New, collaborative solutions and jobs are also emerging in the field of social infrastructure, for example village shops, car-sharing projects, coworking spaces or social centres. To build all these projects, the new generation uses its self-management skills, its community skills, its urban-rural relationships and its access to knowledge and also capital.

The new generation has values that distinguish them from the rural majority. Perhaps these values even tie in with the values of the older rural generation. Since a meaningful life in community and a life of respect for nature is more important to them than prosperity and luxury, they prefer ecological agriculture and solidarity-based forms of economy and life.

Their initiatives and projects organise themselves in networks, support each other and generate an upward movement of jobs, culture and self-determination that is good for the country.

What are they experiencing?

So now this generation comes to the countryside with its plans. What do they experience there? People who move to the countryside have spent many years developing their dreams of rural life. They exchange ideas, visit different regions, spend their holidays there, visit friends and finally find the right property. Those who grew up there and feel drawn to the new generation make contact and network.

Not all rural regions are equally attractive for such plans. Nature and landscape should be intact. Families need social infrastructure, especially schools. Elderly people need good health care. For some, proximity to the city is important in order to pursue their work. Remote regions with their favourable real estate prices are suitable for community projects and for newcomers who can earn their income regardless of location.

And of course there are also difficulties. First of all, there is access to land. The market for real estate makes it possible for the new generation to buy houses and settle in the countryside. But acquisition opportunities for farmland are limited and prices have become unaffordable in many places. For agricultural projects, which are at the heart of the new rural renewal, access to their central resource, land, is therefore very difficult.

There are many regional approaches to this problem in Europe, but their development is still in its infancy. In this context, the new generation must also fight against the EU's common agricultural policy. Although it grants subsidies for organic production methods, its area-based payments favour large farms over small ones and existing farms over new entrants. In addition, existing farms have an information advantage on the non-transparent land market and their local social integration makes it difficult for new entrants to get started.

Socially, too, the new generation experiences not only open but also closed doors in the countryside. Sometimes rural newcomers show different values and habits and are a foreign body in village life. They start families without getting married, eat vegetarian food, listen to different music and have different ideas about life. In these cases rural newcomers and residents need a lot of patience, understanding and tolerance for each other.

When things go well, however, there is much to learn from each other. The best of both worlds - innovation and drive here, local knowledge and experience there - can give Europe's countryside a new lease of life if both sides learn from each other and work together.

Policy recommendations

In the Ruralization project we documented and described a process of rural recovery by generational renewal. To support this process we derived the following policy recommendations.

1. Welcoming the change: new generations make a difference

The Ruralization case studies show in much detail how new generations revitalise remote as well as intermediate and periurban rural regions. The “Ruralization process” brings newcomers from the cities to the countryside in what can be understood as a migration movement, with much of the same issues to resolve in terms of cultural differences etc.⁵² Also the local (native) youth brings change and new directions. This change is frequently driven by “holistic” values like personal fulfilment or an “alternative” lifestyle.

The new rural generations contribute competencies, ideas, different sources of capital and a refreshing external view to the locality, valorizing peculiarities of the place which to the local residents in their daily lives may not be obvious.

However this contribution is only helpful if it respects local people, traditions and self-esteem. It is a slow process to build up local networks of residents and newcomers which include civil society, business and public administration. Finally this leads to an improvement of social, economic and ecological quality of rural life on the spot which successively attracts more newcomers and motivates emigrated locals to come back. Luckily this ends up in a virtuous circle of development.

The “new generation effect” is threefold: *newcomers* (and returnees) engage as business and civil society entrepreneurs; *new entrants* into farming establish multifunctional or agro-ecological new farms; and traditional *family farm successors* get inspired by innovations and benefit from ideas from their new colleagues.

2. Looking for the weak signals: find place based strategies

Our trend analysis has shown that the majority of prevailing megatrends - like globalisation or urbanisation - is rather disavouring the countryside while smaller trends and especially the “weak signals” can have a more favourable impact, especially to remote areas. Weak signals are behavioural phenomena which are not yet significant or widespread - in contrast to trends or megatrends - but can become so in the future. In fact the more remote the area, the more positive we found the potential impact of weak signals.⁵³

This supports strongly the insight that there is no universal development solution - like “digitalisation” or “bioeconomy” - that fits to all rural areas. Instead the more difficult challenge is to find specific development strategies for every specific rural area and develop place-based strategies which tie up to the local situation.

All the places we studied have their personal story and their specific past, mostly with strong relations to regional, national and European history. Collective feelings of pride, identity, sorrow or trauma may

⁵² The [MATILDE manifesto: The Renaissance of Remote Places. 10 theses on migration and resilience in European mountain and rural regions. April 2021](#), compares to Ruralization findings in many ways.

⁵³ Ruralization deliverable D4.5 Summary report of the foresight analysis: trends, dreams and assessments, p.23

reside closely connected. Many of the (remaining) farms in the Western countries do exist since centuries.

It is in this context of uniqueness that place-based strategies are developed by engaged changemakers. They need not be rooted in this past personally; sometimes their strength and contribution is precisely the external view on the local strengths and weaknesses. They succeed in mobilising local potentials to create something new, relating to the past. Or in other words: creating new progressive projects that connect to old pathways and traditions.

The role of the “weak signals” in this context means turning from the past to the future. New strategies don’t have to be a continuation of the past; on the contrary, in a declining region, this would guarantee for continuous decline, like the strategy of continued specialisation and automatisisation in farming which is rational for the individual farm but leaves no connecting point to side activities.

The “new” strategy is one that finds inspiration by listening to an approaching future, and it’s by trends and weak signals that this future knocks on the local door, especially in remote regions. Unexpected developments like a COVID crisis, minority (but growing) ideas like vegan nutrition, counter-intuitive attempts like farm collectives, revolutionary approaches like degrowth or the non-monetary care economy, or even anti-megatrend ideas like digital detoxing are weak signals that may be harnessed for a new local path of development.

It’s entrepreneurial spirit that has a sense for trends and weak signals, rather than public administration. But this doesn’t give a prevalence to commercial business solutions. Social entrepreneurs and civil society activists equally show entrepreneurial spirit, and it’s frequently civil society first that turns new trends into practical activity, followed by science, and later business that creates a market on these developments.⁵⁴ It’s necessary to give “the new” a chance, by welcoming uncommon worldviews, policies, practices or actors.

External support and subsidies can basically help regions to harvest their endogenous potential. However public policymakers are faced with the challenge to “pick the right weak signals”. They must know perfectly the contexts, the territories, the local society, the local stakes which are variable according to regions, geographical areas and national cultural and political histories. They may benefit to this behalf from cooperation with civil society.

3. Multi-level and network governance: concerted action is needed

The EU’s Long Term Vision on Rural Areas (LTVRA) from 2021 acknowledges that “balanced territorial development, anchored in place-based approaches and the involvement of all governance levels, is necessary to make the most of the potential of rural areas. ... More integrated rural strategies are needed using multi-level collaborative governance and participatory approaches ... including the LEADER, CLLD and smart specialisation programmes.”⁵⁵ Multi-level governance builds on synergies between EU, national and regional/local level strategies which are identified in communication. An example is the EU Rural Pact as part of the implementation package of the LTVRA, connecting stakeholders from all levels in a very large moderated discussion process.

⁵⁴ Think of the case of modern wind turbine design which was developed in the Tvind school in Denmark 1978.

⁵⁵ [SHERPA Discussion paper: empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes. Dec.2022, p.12f.](#)

More locally, in the perspective of *network governance*, many of our case studies show how engaged rural newcomers become changemakers who, acting in a network, propose and initiate changes that are later on taken up by elected officials and bureaucrats. Politicians' role remains important especially when it comes to formal requirements like permissions or financial support but civil society and the economic sector can have a decisive political role in terms of innovation and initiative. Governance entails building common values between the different stakeholders for the medium and long term.

Cooperating, building bridges, working in networks - all our success stories show characteristics of collaborative action. Cooperation is needed between the conventional and the ecological world, between newcomers and residents, local politics and administration, civil society and business. "Organising concerted action to reach specified objectives" was a recurring proposal to remove difficulties in our rural dreams analysis across all types of rural areas. The participation of young people in the process is important as they are highly concerned by the future. National and EU level networking helps local authorities and civil society organisations to exchange knowledge and build up political capital. Local food councils can build up trust among stakeholders, a prerequisite to overcome scepticism.

4. A focus on cultural and social capital

Of the seven sorts of community capital - natural, human, social, cultural, financial, political and built capital - research has shown that for successful rural development the cultural and social capital endowments frequently are at the beginning and at the heart of the process. The SIMRA project found that social innovation builds on social capital and leadership. Support to changemakers and community empowerment are two main approaches to success. Capacity building takes time but is a crucial investment which may need pump-priming and facilitation.⁵⁶ Such processes can be supported by moderation, education and training.⁵⁷

This was confirmed in many of our case study findings. In fact in most cases the human capital of individual changemakers - sometimes even single persons like in Rohrlack (Germany) - with their abilities of leadership and communication stood at the beginning of a process, gathering supporters, keeping a project going and surpassing obstacles that others would have resigned to. However this would not go on without the resonance of the local people and their ability to cooperate and contribute, i.e. without cultural and social capital.

Cultural and social capital differs from country to country because the history is different. It is important to note that these intangible types of capital can not be augmented quickly like built or financial capital but have to be accumulated in slow processes of relation and trust building.

5. Support agroecology and multifunctional farming

Disclaimer: It is true that the Ruralization project has a bias towards agroecology given the fact that a third of our consortium members are part of the "Access to Land" network that shares experiences in agroecological transition and generational renewal.

⁵⁶ [SIMRA Policy brief: How policy can help bring about social innovation in rural areas. Jan.2020, p.8ff](#)

⁵⁷ [Rural NEET Youth Network: Youth and Mobility in EU Rural Areas. Policy Brief March 2022, p.9](#)

Nevertheless there are many good reasons to consider sustainable (agroecological, permaculture, organic) and multifunctional farming practices as natural allies for a Ruralization process:

- They respond to environmental risks.
- They make it possible to produce more added value per hectare and so to maintain medium and small farms, thus favouring generational renewal.
- A diversity of farming activities produces a diversity of farm related commercial, educational or ecological activities which create more job opportunities and social attractiveness.

The graphic visualisation of the Ruralization vision (ch.6 above) shows this potential of multifunctional farming in much detail. Food processing, short circuit marketing, environmental services, educational activities or renewable energies are developed on-farm or in close proximity. Furthermore these farms tend to create positive externalities in terms of landscape quality or community building which attract more newcomers. This in-migration in turn stabilises local infrastructure like schools, public transport and medical care.

In Ruralization we found that many new and young farmers are interested in sustainable, agroecological farming approaches. Similarly, the NEWBIE project (not susceptible to ecological bias) found that 24% of new farming entrants were motivated to “improve environment” while this was 6% among existing farmers, whereas existing farmers had 24% motivation to “work outdoors” while this was 2% among new entrants. This was the one major difference while in all other criteria the groups performed similarly.⁵⁸

Besides there is clearly higher female participation in newcomers’ and new entrants’ professional activities than in traditional businesses.

6. Facilitating the transition: local authorities hold the key

Local agriculture has a direct influence on the quality of life in a community, on landscape, biodiversity, climate protection and local supply. Creative municipalities have therefore found ways to influence the development of farming structures in their neighbourhood.

Municipalities can create a welcoming culture for newcomers and new entrants into farming, removing social barriers and making it easier for young and qualified people to arrive. Engaged mayors or council teams provide contacts, open doors and create acceptance where needed. These social contacts are also a key to accessing the land market by new entrants.

For rural areas close to cities we identified the strategy to “encourage and support local, small, niche and experimental actors and actions” to overcome root causes of difficulty in realizing rural dreams futures.

Urban food councils can develop an engaging vision for regional food sovereignty, involving young people in the process, and develop strategies for local procurement. The next step then leads from food action to land action, analyzing the local land market and providing publicly owned land to farmers who use it for the common good.

Rural municipalities usually have limited money, but they can influence local social relations. Our case studies have shown that this influence may be crucial in supporting positive rural regeneration.

⁵⁸ [NEWBIE: policy recommendations. December 2021.](#)

7. Local regulation and investments: further options for local authorities

Besides soft facilitation strategies municipalities can act towards agroecological change with “hard facts” in their role as regulators, infrastructure investors and land owners.

In the domain of regulation it is mainly the spatial planning department that can influence land use structures by (not) “developing” farmland to residential or infrastructure uses. Admittedly this competence is usually not used to the benefit of farming, and attempts to save farmland from development have a very hard stand against competing interests, the city itself being the beneficiary of residential taxes and jobs created. But there are cases for a change in mentality, appreciating the existence of community connected farms in the neighbourhood as ingredients for living quality and local food procurement, like in the case studies of Grenoble (FR) and Hannover (DE).

Local farms can be supported by the municipality sourcing catering for schools, kindergartens and administrative canteens locally. Municipalities can influence the direction of farm development by using their voting right (or authority?) for approval procedures, e.g. in the case of stable buildings. Biodiversity structures are improved by municipalities e.g. by restoring public roadsides.

Our identification of measures to exploit opportunities emerging from the trend analysis showed regionalized priorities for public action:

- In rural areas close to a city it is a good idea to support local marketing facilities like farmers’ markets. “Landings strips” for newcomers can be paved by way of a welcoming culture. Educational facilities are specially needed for families.
- In rural villages, besides marketing and landings strips as above, public transport plays an additional role. Furthermore municipalities have a higher responsibility to invest in needs-based infrastructure.
- In remote rural areas the landing strips still are of importance. Additional ideas are social hubs to support networking, supporting multiple sustainable energy sources, and targeted funding for newcomers.

The many options for local public action are elaborated in much detail in our handbook for local authorities.

8. Improve access to land by land market regulation and transparency

The biggest problem for agricultural start-ups is access to land (next to access to capital). This was confirmed in many Ruralization case studies as well as in the NEWBIE project⁵⁹ among others. Land is scarce and expensive, and land markets are non-transparent and dominated by active farmers or financially strong investors. The financial crisis of 2008 and other factors have caused a run to farmland investments boosting land prices in Europe (with exception of France and Sweden) to levels way above their capitalised earnings value that would allow farmers to finance land purchase by crop yield.

We documented and analysed land market regimes in 27 EU countries. The quality of land market data varies a lot by country and is generally unsatisfying (there is no comprehensive land price survey), and there is hardly any European data on land ownership structures.

Somewhat successful land market regulations operate on several levels:

⁵⁹ [NEWBIE: policy recommendations. December 2021.](#)

- Appropriate national regulation of the land market can have a positive effect by keeping non-agricultural investors away from the market. Land can be secured by public intermediate holders (land banks) if no suitable farmer is available at the time of sale.
- The lack of transparency of the land market - how do I find out that land is being sold or leased?
 - can be improved through more transparent ownership and lease data, land and farm exchanges, networking with other founders and also by local social integration.

The community of Moelan-sur-Mer eg. identified 120 ha of unused privately owned farmland and conveyed it to new entrants on the basis of private leases.

Changing land market regulation is an ambitious policy endeavour, given massive monetary interests concerned and the high emotional correlation of private land property. So pragmatically many activists turn to work-around solutions within the existing system.

9. Rethink public land ownership and support farmland access

We documented and analysed 64 pragmatic solutions that try to improve land availability to new or agroecological farmers.

A basic approach is to recognize that farmers need long-term rights of land use but not necessarily legal land ownership. On the contrary, working on leased land may save scarce financial capital for productive uses compared to acquiring land. (The lack of financial mortgage security must be compensated by other strategies however.)

A recently emerging strategy is the provision of farmland by “intentional lease” through public, semi-public or civil society land owners. The scarce supply of land is increased with targeted land allocation by municipalities, nature conservation foundations, national trusts, churches or even motivated private owners. They lease out their land motivated by aspects such as local supply, climate- or conservation-compliant management.

Some municipalities or cities have their own land, which they lease to farm start-ups. Others bring unused inner-city land into horticultural use in connection with social projects. In some regions, there is unused land in the outskirts; municipalities support aspiring farmers by bringing viable land parcels together. In France and the UK, there are farm incubators where prospective farmers try out their skills and marketing ideas on test plots with local support.

It must be stated that even small plots can cause a large effect if they help a new entrant get started in the first place, or if they are used for a farm incubator project catalysing a new farm to start every couple of years, or if they cause the conversion of a larger farm to agroecology by motivating the farmer to test new ways of production on the municipal plot.

In this context it is a challenge to municipalities to change their attitude towards farmland ownership from considering it a burden to manage or a financial asset to sell, towards a unique resource to maintain (or even increase) which works for the common good. Public land can constitute a central lever to influence local farming structure and quality of living.

Besides public land ownership there are innovative land stewardship organisations that acquire land with private donations or shares and lease it out to agroecological farmers on a long-term basis. Examples are Terre de Liens (FR), Kulturland eG (DE), Terre en Vue and De Landgenoten (BE), all members of the

Access to Land network. Alongside with securing land these organisations engage firmly in public educational activities and support their partner farmers with advice and networking.

10. Farm succession as key moment for change

The moment of family farm succession is a key moment in every “farm biography”. The young generation rarely continues their parents’ path without adding new ideas. This can be conversion to organic farming (as in our case study Te Muizenhole in Belgium) or entering into multifunctional farming, but also reducing complexity for more specialisation.

From a local perspective it can make a large difference to know these windows of opportunity beforehand. Succession is prepared over many years and might turn out differently if there are good communicative relations with the local community. Successors can prepare a different path of farm development if they can be confident of moral and practical support in starting community-related activities like short circuit marketing or educational activities.

A still largely unconsidered option in most conventional farming families is extra-familiar succession in the case that no family successor is taking over. In Germany, since the 2000s, lack of family successors has superseded lack of economic viability as the primary reason for farm renunciation.

Extra-familiar succession recurs to the notion that a farm has a sort of own identity in “place stewardship” which can be detached from family ties. The process of handing over entails social, legal, financial and emotional challenges but the promise is to maintain the farm’s identity for coming generations. This complies to a basic understanding in family farming (which is reflected in national legal regimes privileging farms in heritage).

Potential successors often need to wait ca. 10-15 years before their parents retire and pass on the farm. This presses new generations to look for opportunities outside the farming sector. A scheme based on thinking on the processes of succession should find procedures and ways to support this. Programmes should be developed to allow young farmers to start farming, and take interim responsibilities of other farms (than of their families) at their own.

11. Adapt the EU structural policy framework

The continuous transition from mono- to multifunctional rural areas suggests that generational renewal should happen across sectors. Young farmers also depend on non-farming sectors in rural areas, both around agriculture and not, that make them a good place to work and live in. Priority could be given to newcomers engaging in food processing, marketing and organisation of short food supply chains, tourism activities (linked to agriculture), biodiversity monitoring, food craft, research etc. Such recognitions are largely missing in the analysed CAP strategic plans.

The SIMRA project stresses that “silos created by different funds and institutions need to be broken down to enable joined up action at the community level. Policy makers from EU to municipal level must realise that their silos of policy formation and delivery are often inappropriate for the needs of rural communities, who find the different rules and administrative arrangements overly complex and frequently inappropriate for the joined-up actions ... Enabling policy architectures need to be designed,

so that the different European Structural and Investment Funds in particular cohere in ways that make sense to practitioners on the ground.”⁶⁰

Furthermore in the national and regional implementation of EU directives, existing leeway must be used to promote agricultural start-ups and regional food systems. Public administration staff who are in charge to implement EU directives on NUTS1 level have a tendency to stay on the safe side of past, tested and proven interpretations whereas the preceding EU level negotiation process of the directive may have provided options for innovative solutions to be concretized regionally.

Restructuring and improving the CAP as well as the European Policy implies the recognition of the two meanings of rural: that linked with agriculture, farming and access to land and that of "rural territory" related to places of lower density inhabited by a non-farming population close to farmers but whose visions and interests are not always shared. Rural policy must try to reconcile agricultural policy with overall regional, territorial and urban-rural relations policy.

12. Reform the CAP to provide a level playing field for start-ups

Nowhere in Europe there are currently really suitable policy conditions for agricultural start-ups. This is mainly due to a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that still supports larger farms with area-based payments and disadvantages smaller and regional structures through national and regional regulations in the areas of investment, processing and marketing.

It is a political task to end the structural disadvantage of new entrepreneurs. On the contrary they need preferential starting conditions to be able to make their contribution to the revitalisation of rural areas, to make them more sustainable.

A large part of CAP first pillar per hectare payments is capitalised in higher land prices and results in a lower supply of land on the market. In some EU regions the area-based payments exceed lease prices so it is profitable to “harvest subsidies” instead of making land available to other farmers. Already available instruments that may limit capitalisation (land price and rental increases) include redistributive payments, degressivity, capping, a shift from direct payment to the CAP Pillar II support, environmental payments and environmental conditionality of direct payments⁶¹; but these instruments are contrary to substantial lobbying interests to sustain the status quo of the mainstream farming system.

The area-based payments of the CAP constitute a double drawback for new entrants: they boost farmland prices on the one hand and are hardly claimed for income support due to their preferred farm structures on the other. Many new entrant farmers in CSA, etc. start with horticulture on small surface and can only marginally claim per hectare payments.

Our analysis of CAP strategic plans with respect to the implementation of the new CAP Objective No. 7 “attract and sustain young and new farmers” shows how differently ambitious the issue is approached at national level.

Beyond the general support of young farmers which is commonplace by way of some terminated payments after farm succession, most national CAP plans either do not define “new farmers” at all or provide incoherent definitions. Based on RURALIZATION insights, we suggest providing a coherent and clear framework for supporting *all* new farmers, given their impacts on rural regeneration. Considering

⁶⁰ [SIMRA Policy brief: How policy can help bring about social innovation in rural areas. 2020, p.12](#)

⁶¹ [Baldoni, E. and Ciaian, P., The capitalisation of CAP subsidies into land rents, 2021](#)

the shortage of succeeding farmers or new entrants into farming, it is not a wise strategy to make it unattractive for people aged 40 and over to start with farming. This is seconded by NEWBIE: “The removal of age limits is consistent with research, which has shown that new entrants can be of any age, often entering farming later in life; that is, after they have had time to accumulate the resources to establish a farm.”⁶²

Concerning farm size a general CAP philosophy of “people rather than hectares” would be in line with Ruralization findings. A contradiction between incentivizing farm size increases and generational renewal on the other is often voiced. The shift of funds from pillar I to pillar II within the framework of SO7 is one suggestion. Support measures could aim explicitly at women, immigrants or collectives, encouraging that the farming community becomes more diverse. Special support schemes for collective farming where citizens/associations are involved in the ownerships (e.g., community-supported agriculture, crowdfarming) should be tested. Another supplementary idea is support to agricultural labourers. And instead of excluding micro farms from payments, regulation could try to encourage a shift to small non-subsistence farms.

Finally CAP plans are widely regarded as complex and bureaucratic, with a myriad of rules, regulations, and administrative procedures that can be difficult for young and new farmers to navigate. Simplifying the CAP as well as its plans could help reduce administrative burdens, improve transparency, and increase participation, particularly among young and new farmers who may lack the resources to navigate the current system.

⁶² [NEWBIE: policy recommendations. December 2021](#), p.4