

Added Value of Networking



Walloon rural areas in 2040 – A Foresight Process

Basic information	
NRN:	Walloon NRN
Theme:	Good practice
Coordinator:	n/a
Partners:	Members of the Walloon Network for Rural Development 'Working Group'
Beneficiaries:	
Resources:	n/a
Period:	06.2012 – 01.2013
Main element of networking:	Exchange of relevant experience and know-how amongst stakeholders
Other elements of networking:	Effective stakeholder engagement Building common understanding of common policies

Background

This Walloon NRN established a foresight exercise to identify potential scenarios, which may impact on the future of Walloon rural areas. This exercise was undertaken by a Working Group (WG) of the Walloon Network for Rural Development between June 2012 and January 2013. A foresight exercise does not attempt to predict the future, instead it explores potential future scenarios while asking what factors may influence them. Imagining the possible developments should allow those involved to act to mitigate or benefit from them and therefore it is very much a learning process to identify potential action.

Main activities

The methodology for this exercise has consisted of diagnosing current developments, major continuing trends and possible shifts in these trends. The process consisted of three distinct phases:

1. The WG listened to a number of **experts** from different fields describe their vision of future trends, problems and the tendencies in their sector to develop a common knowledge base.
2. The WG worked sector by sector to construct **partial** (or sectorial) **scenarios** by considering in each instance the factors, which impact upon the development of this sector. Each sector was the focus of a day's work, an interim written account, and a final validation by the WG.
3. Four **global scenarios** were developed by selecting two key variables and using these to develop



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the sectorial scenarios, extracting those elements which could provide content to the **global scenarios**, and also to be able to make recommendations in terms of **regional public policies**.

The WG identified two key variables which it considers crucial to the development of Walloon rural areas up to the 2040 horizon. These two external factors were:

- *Environmental policies* – nature conservation policies, the fight against pollution, the struggle against climate change.
- *Socio-economic models* - regulation of the process of widespread globalisation either of a strengthening of economic liberalisation or a return to a social and collectively-driven regulation of the economy.

The WG then developed these variables over a range of different scenarios taking into account the current trends considered below. This allowed the WG to consider various turning-points and choices:

1. Climate regulation fails to be implemented.
2. The position of Europe gradually decreases compared to emerging countries.
3. Public support for agriculture progressively weakens and family-based agriculture diminishes.
4. Industrial and service sector development is focused in large cities and export-dependent high-technology industries.
5. In the rural metropolitan regions suburbanisation continues and even becomes generalised to the benefit of wealthy urban populations.
6. Social disparities between urban and rural zones become more marked according to their advantages of proximity.
7. The question of biodiversity has gained in magnitude.
8. Climate change becomes the focus of increased concern because its manifestations are increasingly obvious.

The WG therefore imagined that at the beginning of the 2020's an economic and climatic crisis leads to relatively radical decisions on climatic policy and economic regulation with the following possible scenarios identified and their impact on rural areas in Walloon explored.

Scenario A: European countries enter into an aggressive contest with emerging economies by sacrificing a large part of their social model in favour of development based on technological competition. In environmental terms, the gamble is that climatic change is unavoidable and difficult to mitigate and that technological innovation will bring about adaptation, notably through advances in energy and agriculture (GMOs). This scenario favours growth in the classical sense (GDP).

According to this scenario, Walloon in 2040... Rural Wallonia takes on a completely fragmented and disjointed appearance, a cohabitation of cheerfully chaotic gentrified residential zones, industrial and logistical zones, natural reserves, of agricultural ranches, of landless farms, of wind turbine parks. The

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multiplicity of uses, their pronounced mobility, the marginalization of certain social classes, all create a situation in which conflicts are widespread. In some regions, some violence has become common, which initiates security measures. But some degree of prosperity remains, not without glaring inequalities, but fairly well concealed by this spatial mess which provides gaps into which temporary and precarious dwellings become established, together with unidentified activities.

Scenario B: Climate change is so acute that natural resources and global environmental goods are a priority and Europe plays on its specific advantages to bring about the protection or promotion of resources by economic measures. The rural space has value both as a conservatory and provider of resources whose management is principally undertaken by its economic stakeholders. A particularly useful tool is payment for ecosystemic services.

According to this scenario, Walloon in 2040... The rural population, which stabilised from 2030, is more concentrated in the towns, while increases in the population have taken place in urban areas, where substantial investments in renovated dwellings have been made. The rural space is divided into three types of zones: agricultural with intensive crops and extensive rearing supported by ecosystemic payments, energy-production zones and natural conservation zones. Eco-villages are scattered throughout the territory in which wealthy peer communities have organised themselves in well-managed spaces, with populations which enjoy organised transport. Living in the country has become a luxury and a privileged lifestyle. The situation is more critical in urban areas with an increase in population that has not been met by housing provision. The contrast between the ever-more chaotic cities and an « ecologised » and expensive countryside gives rise to anti-ecological forms of violence.

Scenario C: Sees the constitution of large regional economic blocs which negotiate their respective place in the world order on the basis of international agreements on shared growth. Each region defines its development model and its key environmental challenges. Europe bases itself on a socio-democratic model which protects its industry and its agriculture. The environment is important, but every region manages its own resources. Growth is moderate, but quite well distributed. The adaptation to changes is undertaken step by step in response to the challenges faced.

According to this scenario, Walloon in 2040... The face of rural Wallonia has changed profoundly: it is a space in which economic and industrial activity has assumed an important role; rural centers have become more active and the zones of economic activity have multiplied. Villages which are more remote from the main centers have undergone a certain decline and a few regions have been left out and undergone a certain depopulation. It is there that “heritage and landscape spaces” have developed, and become centers for local tourism. The strictly rural space is therefore exclusively composed of marginal zones and temporary transitional areas. It no longer has any cohesion. The co-ordination of public policies and of the relative autonomy of the communes gives rise to numerous political and social conflicts.

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Scenario D: Is a clear break with the competitive growth model. It presupposes a degree of abandonment of growth in favour of a model of accepted restraint and technical innovation based on reduced consumption of resources, a careful preservation of the environment, and more localised management. Global public goods (biodiversity) are not ignored but it is on the regional/local scale that we attempt to constitute resilient areas. This is a scenario of a “mosaic planet”. Technology plays an important role but the techniques are markedly diversified, in contrast to the « universal » technologies in scenario A.

According to this scenario, in 2040... The Walloon rural areas have become a mosaic of diversified techno-ecological zones. Local governance is a determining factor and sanctioned by successes and failures. There is a great diversity of situations and models of development, at times based on autonomy, at others on relationships on urban stakeholders who provide the market for food resources.

Main results/benefits

Based on this work, the Walloon Rural Network is able to formulate strong institutional recommendations for preparing the future of rural areas in Walloon.

Success factors

The success factors of this initiative have included identifying and engaging with appropriate experts to build the knowledge base of the working group, encouraging radical thinking around the potential future scenarios of rural areas in Walloon and developing the ‘Foresight’ model for use in this rural context.

Added value of networking

Networking brought together all the members of the working group, built strong relationships and trust between members and so enabled them to work creatively and innovatively together.

Contribution of the NSU

The NSU has developed and delivered this initiative.

Contribution of the partners

The partners included the members of the working group and the experts involved. They all contributed their time and expertise to support the delivery of the process.

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Additional information

n/a

Pictures

n/a

Last Update

May 2013