

ENRD webinar

3rd Thematic Group meeting on the Long Term Rural Vision

Rural#2040 Highlights report

A total of 54 participants from 20 EU Member States attended the [third meeting](#) of the Thematic Group (TG) to help build the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) announced by the President of the European Commission.

Participants listened to a preliminary description of the Foresight Scenarios developed by the JRC and took stock of the main messages that have been coming out of the work carried out so far on the LTVRA. Break-out discussions were organised to identify and exchange ideas about the 'common strands and the step changes needed to ensure the future LTVRA becomes a reality for rural communities across Europe'.

Following this, participants discussed the opportunities for taking some of the key ideas and messages forward at the upcoming virtual ENRD [Rural Vision Week](#) (22-26 March 2021).

Event Information

Date: 27 January 2021

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 54 participants attending in a personal capacity - including experience from MAs, NRNs, European organisations, the European Commission, Local Action Groups (LAGs), stakeholder organisations and researchers.

Outcomes: Update on the Foresight exercise and exchange on the step changes needed to ensure the future LTVRA becomes a reality.

Web page: [3rd TG meeting on Long Term Rural Vision](#)

Progress in the Foresight Scenarios

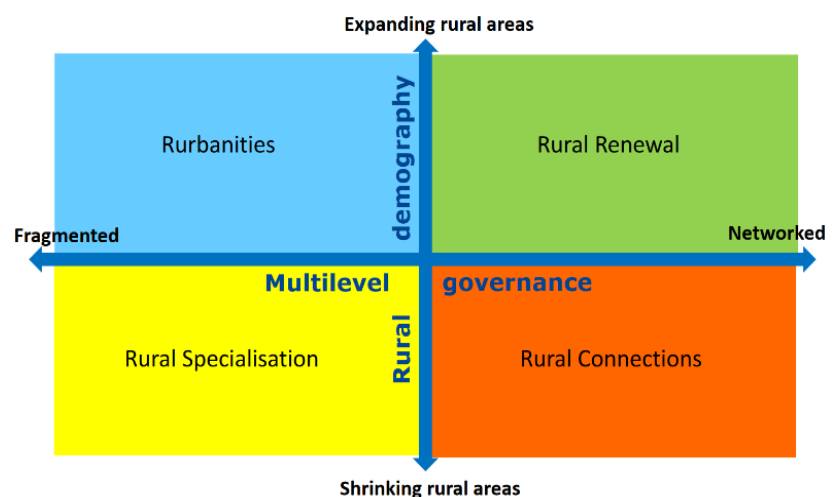


[Anne-Katrin Bock](#) (JRC) described the four scenarios that have been developed by the JRC on the basis of the inputs and ideas provided by TG members in previous meetings. She explained that the scenarios have to be distinct and provide plausible and consistent stories about the future, to be able to offer useful insights for the LTVRA. Four titles were suggested for the scenarios:

- i) **Rurbanities**, for rural areas with fragmented multilevel governance that are attracting people who essentially want to continue an urban lifestyle;
- ii) **Rural Renewal** for areas with networked multilevel governance that are attractive primarily because of their environmental and social attributes;
- iii) **Rural Specialisation** for rural areas with fragmented multilevel governance whose population is shrinking and that specialise in providing cities with the goods and services they require, and
- iv) **Rural Connections** for rural areas with networked local governance whose population is shrinking but maintain interconnected hubs of economic and social activity.

After a brief round of comments during the meeting, Anne-Katrin invited TG Members to provide further comments to help improve and develop the final scenarios by 5 February 2021.

Figure 1: Draft Foresight Scenarios



Taking stock of the main messages from the work so far on the LTVRA



Mario Milouchev (Director, DG AGRI) posed a series of questions to help stimulate the brainstorming around the development of the LTVRA. These were drawn from views collected from stakeholders through various channels such as the open public consultation and the roadmap exercise. He highlighted that policies which are relevant for rural areas are multi-dimensional and fall under competences of various Directorate Generals in the EC or National/Regional Ministries (e.g. dealing with agriculture, cohesion, education, mobility, or energy). In this context, he suggested that mainstreaming **rural proofing** could be considered as a way to ensure that rural needs and interests are reflected in the design and implementation of the wide range of policies affecting rural people at different levels. He emphasised that much more reflection is needed on the specific arrangements for better coordination, follow-up, and reporting (including a consideration on a possible role of the **European semester** for the rural areas).

Mario Milouchev referred to the suggestion for creating an **EU-level Rural Observatory** that could identify innovative ideas and trends, collect data and conduct structured analysis to improve the design of rural policies. He argued that policies should not be designed on the basis of ‘average’ data. The **OECD** has shown that there are major differences between rural areas depending on their accessibility to cities and that tailor-made intervention strategies are needed in each case. He argued that the availability of quality **data** disaggregated by **rural typologies** is crucial for designing policies at the right spatial scale which are adapted to the needs of each territory. New data collection techniques (high spatial resolution or geo-referenced data) can also play an important role.

Mario Milouchev said that the future LTVRA would require actions and commitment from the European Commission. The relevant national, regional, and local authorities are key partners in designing and implementing policy for rural areas and should also play their role. One possibility would be to invite Member States to pay particular attention to rural areas, for example either through specific **rural action plans** or by having dedicated chapters on rural matters in broader national plans or strategy documents. The European Commission might also carry out a **periodic assessment** of the actions implemented at its level and, if needed, adjust the path proposed for 2040. A **regular report** might follow a periodic cycle. The speaker also mentioned that there is a broad consensus that LEADER remains the most suitable instrument to address rural issues in an integrated way at local level. However, there is a need to smooth the implementation of **multi-funded CLLD strategies** and consider further possibilities for advice, facilitation, technical assistance and running of the LAGs as well as reinforcing networking among them.

Finally, after their adoption, one might carry out a **stock taking exercise** of the main programmes in different Member States for the 2021-2027 programming period to draw conclusions that help MS to improve future support to rural areas. He argued that the path to the LTVRA in 2040 would start with small and real changes and actions using the instruments which are available now. Many of these suggestions were discussed further in the break-outs described below.

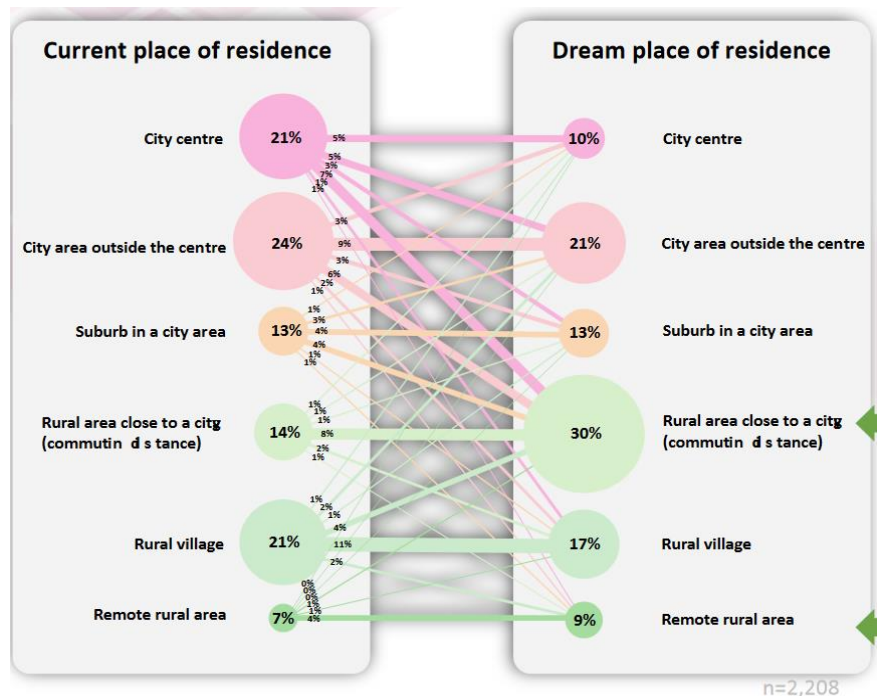
Youth Visions for the future



Maura Farrell (Ruralization H2020 project) presented the results of their projects’ work on the dreams of young people.

Their analysis indicates that rural areas (close to cities and to a lesser extent remote) are growing in popularity among young people and have the potential to attract new residents (See figure 2). However, the ‘older’ cohorts (25-30 years) are more attracted to rural areas than younger ones. This is a reflection of the life-cycle process, with young people initially moving into cities to study and find their first employment. Those attracted by rural areas within the 25-30 years old category, often have a family, at least a secondary education, a job and/or are entrepreneurs. COVID has changed the dreams of 30% of the young people surveyed who are now more attracted by rural life.

Figure 2: Dream Inventory - Destinations



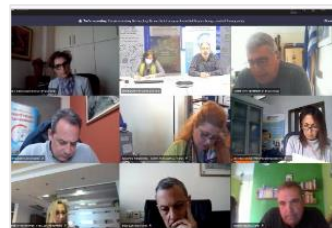
Source: Ruralization H2020 project

National Rural Networks in action



Maria-Christina Makrandreou (NRN Greece)

introduced the first outcomes from four focus groups organised by the NRN with stakeholders from different types of rural areas (mountains, islands, plains, mixed). Participants highlighted their expectations for the future, mainly about equivalent access to public services as in cities (education, health) income and employment opportunities. They identified actions to achieve their future vision focusing mainly on the agricultural sector and children's needs (e.g. education, summer camps). They also argued that standard 'horizontal' policies are not adapted to the particularities of each rural area and need to be more targeted. Finally, they stressed that the EU LTVRA needs to be translated into 'local visions' which reflect the aspirations of rural communities.



Common strands and step changes required for achieving the LTVRA

Participants split into three break out groups and discussed the following questions: i) how to deliver a truly holistic policy for rural areas; ii) how to assess and track the progress towards the LTVRA and iii) how rural and urban citizens can be engaged in the implementation of the LTVRA. This led to a very wide ranging and rich debate. As the questions and many of the comments are closely related, for the purpose of this highlights report, all the messages from the three break outs are integrated and clustered into the following key points.



1. Overarching goals which inspire action and change the narrative. The LTVRA needs to contain a broad set of goals which provide a common direction and motivate a wide range of actors to seize the opportunities that are opening for rural areas. Participants mentioned the importance of 'thinking big' and building on the momentum of the digital and green transitions and the advantages of rural areas in terms of 'well-being' that have become more apparent during the COVID crisis. There is also a need to 'bust the myths' that rural is simply the 'periphery' of the city or in some way in opposition to farming. Participants stressed the contribution and importance of rural areas to the whole of society and recommended communication activities to change the narrative. The ENRD Rural Vision Week event could contribute to that.



2. SMART objectives, measurable targets, and milestones. The broad principles and narratives need to be translated into concrete human centred issues that are meaningful to people everywhere - such as access to comparable quality of services, digital connectivity and skills, mobility, housing, youth, energy and so on.

Participants said that cross-cutting objectives should be SMART and translated into measurable, operational, and trackable targets and milestones, such as Green Deal Targets. But participants also argued that these should not be constraints imposed from above. They should be part of a flexible, decentralised approach which empowered countries and rural communities to decide on the best way of responding to the diverse challenges and opportunities they face and provided the tools for them to do so.



3. Strategies, plans and programmes. If it is to lead to real change, the LTVRA will need to be translated into some form of strategy and action plan. In the short run, many argued that this will have to rely on making the most of the EU policy architecture that has been developed for the 2021-2027 programming period. This will then need to be translated into national, regional and even municipal levels. There were references to several countries that have developed rural strategies and plans which could serve as models (e.g. France, Finland). Participants referred to the possibility of developing models, tools, and templates for developing plans at different levels (following the example of Agenda 21). At EU level, the direction for action could be guided by an overarching EU Rural Agenda.



4. Stocktaking, proofing, and tracking results. As outlined by Mario Milouchev, one immediate step would be to follow up on the suggestion for some 'stock taking' exercise of plans and programmes approved at national and regional levels for the coming period. This could be followed by specific guidance for improvements for subsequent periods. There were many comments about the need for a regular system of ex-ante proofing and ex-post assessment of (territorial) impacts of policies and legislation as well as tracking results. However, the general opinion seemed to be that proofing on its own was not enough and will simply become box ticking if it is not backed up by strong leadership.



5. Governance, leadership and who does what. Picking up on Mario Milouchev's point about the wide range of EC Directorate-Generals, national Ministries, and departments responsible for policies which affect rural areas at all levels, many participants expressed the view that little will change without the necessary political leadership.

There was a recognition that both the CAP and Cohesion Policy have a strategic role to play in the development of rural areas but that neither is sufficient on its own. Some also argued that the Green Deal had illustrated the advantages of a higher level of coordination to bring about change



6. Policy alignment and coordination. In addition to clear leadership, there needs to be effective mechanisms for coordinating policies. There was reference to interdepartmental rural task forces. The idea to systematically integrate rural concerns into the European Semester process gained interest. This process sets the framework for economic policy coordination across the EU and provides country specific recommendations relevant for national policy and also for the deployment of the Multiannual Financial Framework funding and the Recovery and Resilience Plans. Some participants expressed their interest in further exchanging on this possibility outside the TG.



7. Rural intelligence, data and capturing the differences. The view was expressed that existing definitions for rural areas do not capture the many ruralities that exist in Europe, their relative importance and changing ways in which they interweave with urban realities and traditional sectors such as farming and agro-food. Suggestions for improving intelligence and data on rural issues included the ideas for an **EU Rural Think Tank or Observatory** linked to science-society-policy platforms and knowledge hubs of different kinds across Europe.



8. Enabling and empowering local action. A common thread running through the entire discussion was that the LTVRA should be meaningful for people at local level. Any top-down policies emanating from it should above all create the conditions and provide the tools for rural communities to respond to the challenge and opportunities they face. TG members made many suggestions: flexible, easy access, ring-fenced local budgets, more resources for strategic animation, outreach and project development work, local knowledge and innovation hubs, understanding the central role of municipalities and their partnerships with civil society and particularly strengthening the involvement of young people.

Next steps and further information

[John Grieve](#) (ENRD CP) introduced the plans for the upcoming ENRD '[Rural Vision Week](#)' focused on imagining the future of Europe's rural areas. This will take place over the week of 22-26 March. It will provide an opportunity to discuss the final results of the on-line public consultation, the foresight exercise and other building blocks of the LTVRA and to exchange on stakeholder's ideas and views, contributing to the preparation of the LTVRA. There will be an opportunity for TG members to be involved in a series of thematic workshops, self-organised 'fringe workshops' and in a virtual marketplace. The messages coming out of all these activities for the LTVRA will be presented to a final high-level panel of EU Commissioners.

ENRD Portal on the Long Term Rural Vision

TG members and rural actors are encouraged to consult the relevant information and knowledge sources, as well as to send ideas and material for the ENRD [web portal on the Long Term Rural Vision](#).

Long Term Rural Vision Portal

