Proposal for a post-2013 European policy on rural territories

Abstracts
Urban poles and rural poles

A European rural model based on the enhancement of rural society, a territorial approach, cooperation and positive relationships between town and country.

You will find hereunder some abstracts from the proposal adopted by R.E.D. in May 2008 within the general scope of European considerations on the post-2013 period, while looking to the more long-term development of the E.U. and its rural and urban components. The full text is downloadable in French, English and Spain on the website www.ruraleurope.org

1. The rural world: advantages and challenges

Rural areas: a diversified reality within Europe

Rural areas are characterized by a very great diversity of situations, ranging from remote areas falling prey to depopulation and decline, to areas on the periphery of towns facing growing pressure due to the expansion of urban centres. The diversity of cultures and much of the natural, architectural and historical heritage that makes up European identity are rooted here. References to territory and inter-generational cohesion are traditionally strong in the rural world.

They are places of activity, of culture, of production of goods and services. They also contribute to the well-being of society as a whole by responding to its calls for space in nature, diversity of landscape, leisure activities, living and working environment. They are key players in the development of the regions and States of the E.U., but weakened by the reduction in the working population engaged in agriculture.

According to the OECD definition, based on population density, rural regions represent 91% of the territory of the EU of 27. Moreover, the statistical report on rural areas published by DG-Agri in 2006 points out that 56% of the population live in rural areas (19% in predominantly rural areas, and 37% in significantly rural regions). These regions generate 45% of the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the EU of 25 and 51% of the employment. The agricultural and food sectors combined represent a large share of the EU economy, accounting for 14.5 million jobs (7.25% of total employment).

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2. The need for a European rural strategy

The potential for endogenous creation of viable employment in rural regions in the secondary and tertiary sectors depends first and foremost on the availability and quality of services and public amenities: roads, high speed railways, logistics centres, training centres, water distribution, electrical power supply (at the same rates as elsewhere), landline and mobile telephony, high speed and indeed very high speed internet access, relative proximity of an airport... The European rural policy must include measures enabling rural regions to equip themselves so as to be economically competitive. The opening-up of borders has made this a matter of urgency as competition is causing the demise of activities ill-equipped to withstand it.

The great dispersal of enterprises and job creation initiatives also call for specific mechanisms to be put in place to provide locally-based assistance in the areas of training, support and cooperation, particularly for very small businesses (micro-enterprises).

The polycentric urban model and lack of cohesion

Polarized as they are by very small towns, and sometimes larger ones, rural areas find themselves in a "trade off" situation in relation to more populated urban territories. Often, however, rural areas are minoritized in decision-making processes. Cohesion policies are consequently all too often devised and implemented at scales and levels hampering the recognition and emergence of rural territorial plans and development projects. An analysis of cohesion at level NUTS III suggests an even greater infraregional disparity between Regions stigmatized as a result of this.

In the polycentric development model proposed, notably under the European Spatial Development Perspective ((ESDP), only urban entities (towns, agglomerations...) are today truly identified as poles of development. It is therefore a commonly held opinion that the development of rural areas is dependent upon and conditioned by urban dynamics and impacts.

Consequences :
- peripheral urban spread without any open spaces or « conurbations »:
  - sometimes random town and country planning/land use
  - a commonplace perception of ‘urban living’, where vast areas of business parks and residential areas must be crossed before reaching a town or city centre;
- concentrations of different types of housing in so-called ‘out of town’ areas where social tensions can run high (difficult ‘mix’ of populations, inadequate public amenities and services);
- population migrations to neighbouring rural areas (which often become rural suburbs and ‘dormitory’ with no cultural or social attachment to the area;
- daily pendular ‘commuter’ migrations between home and place of work.

Also to be considered is the widening gap between rural territories which benefit from, or suffer, urban spread (by reason of geographical proximity, mobility or transport infrastructures), and those penalized because of the remoteness of where they live. This in itself warrants a specific approach to rural development, alongside existing policies.

In order to prevent such trends - exacerbated by structural reductions in agricultural employment and ageing of the population - resulting in urban over-concentrations causing further social and environmental problems, action must be taken to promote the setting-up in rural communities of partnership-based structures for local management and the fostering of collective and multi-sectorial actions and initiatives.

Never has the need been greater for a specific European policy for rural territories, based on mutual dynamics and a balanced relationship between urban and rural areas. This is a vital prerequisite for ensuring territorial cohesion within the European Union, and its successful enlargement.

Its implementation, via various Community intervention funds in aid of rural territories, must be modelled on a European rural strategy harmonizing the various general guidelines and programmes already in place.
3. Rural poles: a strong and essential component of cohesion

In the polycentric model based only on urban poles, the dynamics of social, economic and territorial cohesion are thus ill-served considering that one of the initial characteristics common to the European States is to have rural areas with a strong cultural and social expression inhabited everywhere.

Unless the power and potential of initiative for development of rural territories is recognized, their driving force (socially, economically and territorially) for sustainable development will be lost. It is therefore essential that balanced socio-cultural, economic territorial exchanges be organized between rural territories and urban poles without delay.

This cohesion cannot only be expressed between the Regions of the European Union. It also has to be translated in practices, within each and every Region, enabling its territorial - both urban and rural - components to define and pursue their development objectives. For the sake of territorial cohesion, the rural areas of Europe must be associated, on an equal footing with urban poles, in the construction and implementation of development strategies of the Regions and States of the European Union.

The recognition of rural territories as poles of development, and not merely as areas of open countryside and farmland, is a prerequisite to establishing mutually beneficial exchanges between urban and rural poles and to mobilizing urban and rural actors so that they can work together.

Rural territories, once recognized as poles of development, will be able to respond as partners, within programmed and prospective approaches, to crucial urban and societal issues and concerns. They will then also be able to welcome new populations and offer them real status as inhabitants. They will similarly be in a position to cater for new activities, either in their own right and with local resources, or through interrelations with nearby urban poles and the development plans in which they participate.

As far as town and country planning and territorial land use are concerned, this multi-polar approach is also a response to the ongoing sprawl of urban centres. Appropriate and coordinated planning between urban and rural poles also ensures that green belts between more highly concentrated areas are safeguarded.

Concept and definition of a rural pole of development

A rural pole of development is an inhabited territorial area where social, economic and residential changes come about within the framework of an integrated and prospective development project. A rural pole is not an entity, or an agglomeration (village, group of villages, small town), but the rural territory as a whole, and must be viewed as such.

A territorial development plan can be regarded (by analogy with the corporate world) as a business plan for the territory concerned. It defines short-, medium- and long-term targets, development guidelines, and the human and material resources required to achieve the set objectives.

In today’s world, the formulation and implementation of a territorial development plan must be participative. Civil society, public and private actors, must be partners in such an undertaking. Local participative development in France and the European Union’s LEADER programme are among the mechanisms setting out this approach, although similar approaches do exist in other States.
4. Objectives of the European rural territories strategy

**A basic principle:**
Development of the U.E. depends on urban poles and rural poles of development, with their own specific identities and strategies, but which are in positive interrelation.

**Overall challenge:** mobilising both political resolve and expression on the basis of the following affirmations:
- Through their contribution and potential in terms of sustainable development, rural territories are key partners for the construction of Europe.
- The functions of rural territories are fast-changing and therefore call for specific support and other accompanying measures (engineering, training, ...)

**An ambition:** to have rural territories become real poles of development, in a strong and balanced interrelation with urban poles, so as to achieve the long-awaited cohesion at E.U. and regional level.

Rural territories must be recognized as fully-fledged poles of sustainable development and not merely as open green spaces of farmland. Equally important is the need to ensure that people can and want to continue living in them. This must be the key focus of the European strategy and be clearly expressed so that urban and rural actors can be mobilized and converge in their efforts. The formulation and implementation of development projects, as part of a comprehensive approach based on territorial plans and projects where farming, forestry, the natural environment, culture and heritage - by reason of their function or characteristics - play a vital role, are critical factors in this regard.

Rural development and cohesion policies MUST go hand-in-hand to ensure coherence from the European level right through to local level. This is of particular importance in the new Member States and in structurally handicapped territories.

**Objectives of the European rural strategy**

The objectives proposed for the future European policy on rural development are:
- territorial cohesion of the European Union ( alleviation of disparities, dialogue between rural territories and urban poles, maintenance and improvement of public services, amenities, transport and communication infrastructures);
- consolidation of local economies (safeguarding existing activities/jobs and creation of new ones, preferably endogenous, to overcome the problems of depopulation/rural exodus, structural unemployment, daily travel/commuting);
- public/private partnerships, within a given territory and development strategy with shared objectives;
- creation/strengthening of knowledge-sharing networks between rural regions;
- redeployment of multifunctional farming/agriculture in step with society, with fair play for services provided and integrated planning and use of agricultural structures;
- preservation of biodiversity and the environment from a sustainable development perspective;
- combating climate change, global warming and natural disasters;
- enhancement of rural heritage and cultures in their diversity;
- greater citizen participation through bottom-up methods of governance;
- capacity-building of local institutions and populations, primarily in terms of initiatives;
- integration of young people and women onto the labour market, as salaried of self-employed workers.

As regards the optimization of resources, these should be first and foremost allocated to:
- access to the basic services and amenities needed for economic development and personal self-fulfilment;
- innovative undertakings;
- thematic actions offering maximum cost-effectiveness while addressing the priority needs of territories, as defined by the Member States and Regions according to European Union guidelines;
- partnerships and actions in synergy with towns (urban poles);
- capacity-building of research-development poles.
5. Methodological principles of rural development

Analysis of the policies pursued in rural areas for many years now shows that the creation and/or rejuvenation of rural poles of development are dependent upon the following basic methodological principles and guidelines:

- Territory and master plan
- Participative and integrated development
- Collective implementation and local partnerships
- Overarching material and immaterial investments
- Cooperation between rural territories and networking
- A culture of assessment

6. European structural funds and territorial development

Territorial development strategies are implemented thanks to support from the following structural funds for territorial development:

- the European Fund for sustainable Rural Development and Territorial Agriculture (EFRDTA)
- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- the European sustainable Urban Development Fund (EUDF)
- the European Social Fund (ESF)

As regards implementation of the rural development strategy, the intervention of the aforesaid European Funds ensures coherent development of rural poles of activity.

Coherence of the measures funded by them is guaranteed through their justification in relation to the objectives set out in a Rural Development Pole Strategy (RDPS).

Cohesion and integration of measures via the Rural Development Pole Strategy (RDPS) and governance by the European Territorial Development Grouping (ETDG)

As a new instrument of territorial cohesion, modelled of the concept of the ETCG, the role of the European Territorial Development Grouping (ETDG) is, for a given territory, to facilitate and to accompany actions which contribute to strengthening social, economic and territorial cohesion. Transcending the experiences and procedures of the ETCG and Leader Local Action Groups (LAGs), this instrument of cohesion would be mandated, more particularly, to implement the territorialised programmes and projects co-financed by the European Union, be it via the EFRDTA, ERDF, ESF,.
EFRDTA European Fund for Rural Development and Territorial Agriculture
ERDF European Regional Development Fund
EUFD European Urban Development Fund
ESF European Social Fund
ETDG European Territorial Development Grouping