

**Rurality
Environment
Development**

international association **R.E.D.**



**Proposal
for
a post-2013
European policy
on rural territories**

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

*A European rural model which improves the contributions of rural territories
to the main stakes and objectives of the European Union.*

RURALITY-ENVIRONMENT-DEVELOPMENT

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Proposal for a post-2013 European policy on rural territories

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

A European rural model which improves the contributions of rural territories to the main stakes and objectives of the European Union :

- 2020 European strategy,
- social, economic and territorial cohesion,
- simplification of procedures and value added of European policies,
- governance and participation,
- food security,
- combatting global warming and climate change.

1. The rural world : a diversified reality, multiple assets

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.

According to the OECD definition, based on population density, EU-27 rural regions represent :

- 90 % of the territory
- 54 % of the population
- 42% of the Gross Value Added
- 53% of the employment.

Beside that economic elements, the main assets of the rural areas :

- food production capacities, with a quality often marked by local conditions,
- richness in small enterprises, notably in craftwork sector,
- capacity to satisfy to societal demands for natural and cultural leisures,
- their heritage and landscape diversity,
- their richness in biodiversity and natural resources,
- their space availability
- their capacity of innovation for living democracy.

Places of activity, of culture, of production of goods, energy and services, rural territories also contribute to the well-being of society as a whole by responding to its societal calls; they are essential actors for developing regions and countries of E.U., even if weakened by the decrease of active agricultural population.

Challenges are not less :

- physical accessibility and remoteness of decision and research centres,
- technological gap and reduced services to the population,
- climate change,
- biodiversity loss and pollution,
- incoherence of sectorial policies whose territorial impacts have been incorrectly foreseen,
- gradual consumption of rural space, especially agricultural soils,
- aging of inhabitants, specially in agriculture, disaffection of the built heritage.

2. The need for a European rural strategy

An analysis of how the Common Agricultural Policy has evolved, including the adjustments made under the 2007-2013 programming, shows that this policy cannot be the sole instrument for development of rural territories. Declining employment in agriculture is a priority concern for rural territories, amply warranting the maintenance of a common agricultural policy. However, the multi-functionality of agriculture, despite its effective contribution to rural development, cannot in itself provide all the answers. Other socio-professional sectors must in fact be mobilized for there to be sustainable, diversified and balanced development of rural society.

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.

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. That enlarging gap weakens one of the bases of European civilisation, built on a centuries-old equilibrium between rural and urban populations and activities.

In order to prevent 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. In that sense, rural vitality is also factor of peace and social cohesion.

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.

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 of development : a strong and essential component of cohesion

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.

A rural pole of development is an inhabited territorial area, rural or predominantly rural, 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, but the rural territory as a whole, and must be viewed as such. Its development is guided by a territorial plan.

That territorial development plan defines short-, medium- and long-term targets, development guidelines, and the human and material resources required to achieve the set objectives. Civil society, public and private actors, must be partners in such an undertaking. 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 at E.U. and regional level.

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; a participation of the cohesion policy is of particular importance for the projects 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 :

- ▶ consolidation of local economies by safeguarding and creating activities and jobs, preferably endogenous,
- ▶ public /private partnerships, within a given territory and development strategy with shared objectives ;
- ▶ territorial cohesion by the alleviation of disparities, the maintenance and improvement of public services and transport and communication infrastructures ;
- ▶ 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 salaried or self-employed labour market.

5. Methodological principles of rural development

Creation and/or rejuvenation of rural poles of development are dependent upon the following basic methodological principles and guidelines :

Territory and master plan

Territorial development plans are built upon a common political ambition and a community of economic and social interest which are then reflected in integrated sustainable development projects. These include accompanying measures and support for various projects under a multi-annual programme.

Participative and integrated development

Territorial development plans must be established in consultation with all those concerned with the immediate and future outcome of it. This principle of participative involvement in sustainable development plans is moreover enshrined in numerous existing programmes (e.g. Natura 2000,...). The need now is for political, administrative and financial conditions whereby a more comprehensive multi-sectorial approach encompassing all of the activities and needs of a given territory can be put into effect. This necessarily calls for effective dialogue at various (territorial) levels.

Coherence between development measures

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

To facilitate their implementation and coherence between European territorial aids on a territory, a new instrument is to be proposed by the Commission :

the European Grouping of Territorial Development (EGTD)

Transcending the experiences and procedures of the Leader Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (ETCG) (European Territorial Cooperation Grouping), the role of the European Grouping of Territorial Development is, for a given territory, to facilitate and to accompany actions which contribute to strengthening social, economic and territorial cohesion. This instrument of coherence would be mandated, more particularly, to implement the territorialised programmes and projects co-financed by the European Union, be it via the Rural Fund, ERDF,... As a reminder, the adoption of the concept of "Local Action Groups" by the Commission was crucial key in the success of Leader approach. In order to give efficient tool for territorial cohesion, the Commission should take similar initiative by the EGTD.

To enlarge the partnership, the EGTD would be assisted by a Council of the EGTD. The Council's members would be from one hand institutional partners of the EGTD and from the other socio-economic and associative actors on the territory. Its main tasks would consist in designing the development pole strategy and programming its actions.

Collective implementation and local partnerships

Another key component of territorial development planning and implementation is local community involvement. This will also serve to open new avenues of cooperation between public and private institutions and make for dynamic collective interaction. The importance of a local approach must be reaffirmed. This implies local democratisation and governance with local needs and concerns being expressed by the local actors themselves, thus also providing access to development opportunities (creation of technical teams for rural territory animation). Importance must also be attached to consultation between public/private sectors, as well as between local partners and other administrative levels.

Overarching material and immaterial investments

Making the most of endogenous resources - while respecting territorial specificities - is a major consideration when it comes to investment and innovative undertakings in rural areas. It is important, however, to highlight here the importance also of immaterial investments (animation, training, technical assistance, implementation of collective approaches), particularly those relating to research and development.

Coopération between rural territories and networking

Forms of cooperation and exchanges between rural territories are a key factor here too for the development of European rural networks. Cooperation is of the utmost importance to ensure active involvement in skills acquisition, knowledge-sharing and continuous training.

A culture of assessment

Instilling such a culture among rural territory actors should ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of territorial development projects, as well as of the sustainability of processes already under way.

6. European Fund for Rural Development and Territorial Agriculture (EFRDTA)

The rural development policy will concern all rural areas of the European Union, including very low density areas, mountain areas, but also those on the periphery of rural areas closely interacting with towns. Its implementation will be based, according to the aforementioned principles, on rural poles of development. The measures eligible will have to meet the strategic objectives defined by these poles in harmony with the strategies deployed at other territorial levels.

Next to a Fund helping market activities of agriculture and forestry, the EFRDTA finances the rural development policy.

Assisted for its implementation by an Observatory of rural territories, that rural policy is built up around 3 stakes :

- ➔ **stake 1**
formulation and implementation of integrated projects for the sustainable development of rural poles ;
- ➔ **stake 2**
adaptation of farms and forestry holdings within the overall context of territorial development ;
- ➔ **stake 3**
training, engineering and knowledge-sharing.

Stake 1. Sustainable territorial development

Constituents of stake 1 :

- to devise and support the implementation of integrated projects for the sustainable development of rural areas.

In the spirit of the « Leader » approach and participative local development policies, the priority focus of projects will be a multi-actor approach bringing together those involved in projects (or territorial charters) developed at the initiative of local communities and supported by local groups (GEDT), on the basis of the general guidelines laid down by the States or Regions in keeping with those of the European Union.

The territorial approach is an essential prerequisite here: farming and forestry are the structuring activities, and the environment and landscape the foundation. The **management of nature and green spaces** (strict or specific management, use of alternative forms of energy,...), provided it is consistent with integrated development plans and projects, is an integral part of this stake 1.

Implementation :

- the funding of projects should be subject to contracts negotiated at local community level, with programming at 'nationwide' level in consideration of different areas of life, ...
- aid to innovation, engineering, training, exchanges, networking (stake 3) is an essential complement to these approaches.

Stake 2. Support for and adaptation of farms and forestry holdings within the overall context of territorial development

Constituents of stake 2 :

- to assist farmers and foresters in adapting to the requirements of integrated sustainable development, rural territory development trends and new town-country relations and interactions;
- to foster the inclusion and involvement of farm and forestry holdings in the development of poles of competence and in multi-actor development chains.

Aligning the expectations of European citizens and the responses of farmers and foresters is a key factor for ensuring the success of a rural development strategy. What people expect when it comes to agriculture hinges on the three functions of production, environmental action, and territorial and social animation/revitalisation. It is farming and forestry harmonising these three functions that must be promoted if the sector is to safeguard its future as a structuring component of rural territories.

This agricultural model must therefore allow for the efficient and cost-effective production of food or energy within a competitive context, as well as services relating to landscape and natural heritage preservation, the conservation of historic buildings and sites, the development of agri-tourism and other rural activities.

Measures :

- Measures designed to provide training for farm and forestry holding operators, as well as guidance and assistance in administrative and other matters, including the transmission, creation and diversification of farms and forests, as part of territorial development approaches.
- Measures designed to provide income and other forms of support to ensure the viability and profitability of farm and forestry holdings by integrating them in poles of competence and, through aid schemes fostering innovation, the creation and distribution of quality products, in qualitative spatial restructuring and development projects.

Stake 3. Training, engineering, knowledge-sharing,

Constituents of stake 3 :

- the creation and strengthening of knowledge-sharing networks between rural regions;
- greater citizen participation through bottom-up methods of governance;
- building up the initiative capability of local institutions.

Measures proposed for the attention of all actors actively engaged in rural territories :

- measures to support training mechanisms (development of training schemes - backing for education and training establishments);
- actions to promote networking (knowledge-sharing, horizontal, transnational and inter-regional cooperation, dialogue between territories, European institutions and Member States) ;
- thematic actions within a proactive approach focusing on insufficiently explored topics;
- actions to support rural development engineering, development training and research.



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