OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION IN RURAL AREAS: EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

Policy Lab for Spain, 12 December 2019

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This Knowledge Dossier is the is the result of the joint work of the EUKN Secretariat and partners from the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA). It combines secondary research and policy analysis with findings from the Policy Lab event. A comparative perspective of the Spanish and other European contexts is presented in order to delve into the challenges and opportunities for innovation of small and medium-sized cities in rural areas.

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Background

On 12 December 2019 in Madrid, the EUKN organised a Policy Lab with the Spanish *Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and the Urban Agenda* ('Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana')[1] on the opportunities for development and innovation in European rural regions. Taking place in concomitance with the 25th UNFCC Conference of the Parties (COP25), the event represented an opportunity to explore the drivers of and possible solutions to the accelerating phenomenon of depopulation which has been affecting differentially smaller cities and towns all around rural Europe. Bringing together experts and experiences from Spain as well as Slovenia, the Netherlands, and other European countries, the Policy Lab generated key learnings around the factors of success and failure for governance to address the depopulation of rural small and medium-sized cities and towns. In line with COP25, the Policy Lab investigated the responsibilities and opportunities for governance to innovate and adapt in the face of global environmental change, specifically focusing on the linkages between climate change, human productive activities, and the rural-urban nexus.

The phenomenon of rural depopulation or *deruralisation* represents a policy puzzle to the whole European continent. Higher and higher portions of Europe's dramatically ageing population are concentrated in rural smaller cities and towns and, as service provision and coverage retract, these rural areas may enter into vicious cycles of decline.[2] In fact, many of the challenges of the EU's "sparsely populated and underpopulated areas... are very much related to demographic change", with underlining consequences for local economies which "tend to grow much less than the EU average or to stagnate altogether".[3] Nonetheless, different policy experiments suggest that broadband ICTs, tourism and agriculture "could provide new opportunities to boost the economic prosperity" as well as wellbeing and environmental sustainability of these areas.[4] The aim of the Policy Lab was precisely to explore these opportunities, learning from practice and the comparative experience of various EU countries.

Key Objectives of the Policy Lab

The focus of the event verted on the challenges of and opportunities for national policy in different European countries to revitalise rural areas and small- and medium-sized municipalities vis-à-vis the depopulation phenomenon. The **key objectives** identified were:

1. Understanding the drivers of depopulation in rural centres at the European level according to experiences of countries and how these are affecting the well-being of the inhabitants of such areas;
2. Promoting the exchange of knowledge, identifying cases of governance success as well as governance failure in rural revitalisation experiments;
3. Analysing innovative solutions for revitalisation in rural nuclei as a strategic objective for achieving territorial balance.

Policy Questions

Along these lines, a series of policy questions were formulated to help guide the debate. These were:

1. **Governance reform**: what is not working? What are the current institutional gaps?

2. **Links with national, regional, global agendas as well as with the Urban Agenda for the EU**: how can the instruments of such strategic frameworks support the revitalisation of rural areas?

3. **Relationship with global urbanisation and deruralisation trends**: how do efforts fit into the discussion of 'systemic' and 'integrated' sustainable development? What is the role of governments in either confronting or incorporating these inevitable processes in their sustainable development strategies?

Policy Relevance for Spain

According to the United Nations (UN), within 20 years, two thirds of the global population will be urban, mostly living in larger cities.[5] As recognised by the *Spanish Urban Agenda*[6] (February 2019), Spain has already reached this percentage. In fact, as of 1 January 2018, the 80% of the 46,659,302 inhabitants of the national territory is concentrated in urban areas, representing only 20% of the total territory. This makes Spain one of the countries with the highest percentage of urban population within the entire European Union (EU). Of these, 25% live in urban agglomerations of over one million inhabitants and 17% in the largest cities, while rural areas, which occupy more than two thirds of the territory, present a notable demographic gap.

As uncovered by the 2017 report[7] by the *Depopulation Commission* of the *Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces* (FEMP), the demographic gap between the rural and urban areas widened again in 2015. Population loss affected the entire country between 2015 and 2016, although it was mainly concentrated in smaller municipalities vis-à-vis more populated cities, where the demographic decline was better withstood.

Despite the fact that both small-sized and larger urban areas experienced good growth rates between 2001 and 2016, of 18.8% and 16.2% respectively, approximately half of the Spanish municipalities are at risk of extinction. According to official data from the *National Statistics Institute* (INE), of the 8,125 villages that exist, 4,955 have less than 1,000 inhabitants.

Among the main causes of depopulation are demographic aging, reduced generational succession, low birth rates, and limited livelihood and employment opportunities. This reality creates important territorial imbalances. According to INE, more than 22 out of the 50 provinces are affected, with 14 of those being in a critical situation, and with more than 80% of their municipalities facing the risk of depopulation. However, severe aging does not solely affect rural areas. It is, today, one of the defining characteristics of Spanish demography. The population aged 65 and over has not stopped growing since 1998, currently representing 18.7% of the total population and expected to reach 25.6% within 15 years. The number of people over 80 years old is also on the increase, a phenomenon known as the 'aging of aging'. By 2050, it is estimated that the working-age (16-64) and children (0-15) populations will shrink while the elder population will triple that of children.

In recent years, the phenomenon of depopulation has severely accelerated and has come to determine what is now known as "*Empty Spain*" or "*Emptied Spain*". In order to address this imbalance in the territorial and demographic map of the recent decades, some measures have been put in place to promote the revitalisation of rural Spain. An example was the creation of the *Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge* in 2017. Recognising the puzzle posed by the imbalances in the population pyramid, the Commissioner set the objective to define an ambitious *National Strategy against the*

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5   UNDESA (2018). 2018 Revision of the World Urbanization Prospects.
6   Agenda Urbana Española (2019). More information available from its dedicated website: www.aue.gob.es.
7   FEMP (2017). Documento de Acción. Listado de medidas para luchar contra la despoblación en España. Depopulation Commission, April 2017. Retrieved from:
http://www.femp.es/sites/default/files/multimedia/documento_de_accion_comision_de_despoblacion_9-05-17.pdf.

Demographic Challenge in the medium and longer term. By identifying transversal objectives which directly affect the Spanish territory, the Strategy also aligns itself with the strategic framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda as well as the 2030 Agenda. The transversal priorities are as follows:

1. To ensure full territorial connectivity, with adequate coverage of broadband internet and mobile telephony throughout the territory, in line with the *European Digital Agenda 2020*;

2. To ensure adequate provision of basic services to the entire population in conditions of equity, and adapted to the characteristics of each territory;

3. To incorporate the demographic impact and perspective within the development of investment laws, plans and programs, favouring territorial redistribution in favour of greater social cohesion;

4. To enhance regulatory and administrative simplification for small municipalities in order to facilitate the management of town halls;

5. To eliminate stereotypes and to enhance the image and reputation of the territories being worst affected by demographic risk;

6. To improve mechanisms for greater public-private collaboration, promoting the incorporation of demographic factors in the private sector's social responsibility, and to convert all territories, without exclusions, into scenarios of opportunities;

7. To align action plans and the purposes of the Strategy with the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Given the above, the Strategy represents a critical opportunity for the scope of the Spanish Urban Agenda, in line with the objective of promoting an integrated, systemic and holistic approach to sustainable urban development and the well-being of citizens.

Programme

09:30 – 10:00	Reception and Registration
10:00 – 10:05	Welcome and Introduction
	Javier Martín Ramiro, General Director for Architecture, Housing and Land, Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and the Urban Agenda
10:05 – 10:10	Welcome by the EUKN and programme explanation
	Mart Grisel, Director EUKN EGTC
10:10 – 10:30	The challenges of depopulation in Spain
	Ignacio Molina de la Torre, Director of the Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge
10:30 – 11:00	Other EU experiences: Findings from Germany, France, and Latvia
	Mart Grisel, Director EUKN EGTC
11:00 – 11:30	Slovenia: The challenges rural depopulation poses for spatial planning at the national level
	Boštjan Cotič, EU Project Manager, Urban Planning Institute
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee break
12:00 – 12:30	URBACT: Enhancing the Vitality of Small Cities
	Mireia Sanabria, Internationalisation and Local Development, URBACT Lead Expert
12:30 – 13:00	Spain: Opportunities to face depopulation from the perspective of development and innovation in agriculture
	Dr. Jose Luis Palma, Lawyer of the State Council and associate lawyer of the Gómez-Acebo Pombo law firm
13:00 – 14:00	Panel Discussion (Q&A)
	Moderated by Mart Grisel
14:00 – 15:00	Lunch
15:00 – 17:00	Breakout Sessions
	1. Social infrastructure and the economic-productive sector
	Mart Grisel, EUKN Director
	2. The rural-urban continuum and agriculture
	Eulalia Elena Moreno de Acevedo Yagüe, D.G. Urban Planning and Territorial Planning of Extremadura
	3. Digitalisation in rural areas
	Antonio Alcolea, S.G. for the Promotion of the Information Society, Ministry of Economy and Business
	4. Tourism and tradition
	Luis Ángel Collado Cueto, Professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid, Faculty of Economic and Business Studies
	5. Climate change and the rural-urban nexus
	Amanda del Río, Technical Director of Global Nature Foundation

Welcome and Introduction

Javier Martín Ramiro, General Director for Architecture, Housing and Land, MITMA

In his welcome speech, General Director for Architecture, Housing and Land, Javier Martín Ramiro, punctuated how rural depopulation has become a shared burden among different regions in Europe, thus revealing critical synergies. Nevertheless, as Mr Ramiro defended, the deruralisation of small towns and cities remains a problem that *can* –and *should*– be approached and addressed:

> "[...] in the past few years we have witnessed small towns slowly becoming empty, experiencing a destabilising feeling of resignation to the abandonment of rural areas throughout the country... However, we want to approach this event as an opportunity to learn from each other and find concerted solutions to a challenge we hold in common."

Mr Ramiro argued that much attention is devoted to solving problems affecting large cities, somehow in isolation from the rural-urban continuum. He contended that thanks to the application of innovation and technology to urban planning, development alternatives can be harnessed to address the deruralisation challenge too, holistically and including multiple sectors. He made reference to the series of environmental puzzles compounded by climate change as a result of the thermodynamic nature of cities which fails to approach production and consumption patterns circularly. In this spirit, Mr Ramiro stressed the need to conceive and plan for cities as part of their territory and "not as islands in themselves". The vision of and approach to spatial development "cannot be reduced to the scope of human settlements...[...] we need to view territory as an ensemble of nuclei", he continued, urging for a more integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-scalar approach to the urban.

He called on the audience to work together towards a strategy to reverse the depopulation of rural towns, advocating for a societal compromise which includes the public and private sectors alike in order to generate *systemic change*. Throughout Europe, governments and the civil society are experimenting with practices that demonstrate the feasibility of generating alternative models of rural development, allowing for the recuperation of livelihoods and local economies. He continued:

> "technology allows us to replicate the innovative solutions implemented in big metropoles and transfer them to smaller settlements. By capitalising on the strategic capacity of territory and on innovation, small towns and cities can be part of the equation, becoming spaces where the key challenges of our time are fought."

According to Mr Ramiro it is "an oxymoron" to fight the battle against climate change without including rural towns and small cities in the transition.

Upon announcing the programme for the day, EUKN Director, Mart Grisel, took the opportunity to thank the diversified panel of experts and participants. Mr Grisel called for a critical exchange of experiences and ideas on how to navigate the challenges posed by demographic change in rural Europe as a defining aspect of future discussion on spatial planning and territorial cooperation post-2020. In fact, he underscored:

> "[...] this phenomenon is not unique to Spain, and it is fundamental for Europe to identify the common drivers and possible solutions in order to either reverse or adapt to it."

The challenges of depopulation in Spain

Ignacio Molina de La Torre, Director of the Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge (ES)

Ignacio Molina de la Torre, Director of the Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge, was invited by Mr Grisel to contextualise such challenges in the Spanish territory. Throughout his presentation, Mr de la Torre underlined how rural depopulation represents a global theme and not just a locally felt one.

Illustrating the trend of demographic change in Spain over the past 20 years, Mr de la Torre graphically showed how this complex phenomenon is not determined by processes that are exclusively rural or urban in nature, but rather by their trade-off and nexus. Inevitably, policy measures addressing rural depopulation need to reflect the rural-urban continuum and territorial interdependence. In a century "where Spain's population dramatically grew, urbanised areas are actually losing population", with small towns and municipalities being the most intensely affected during the last decade.
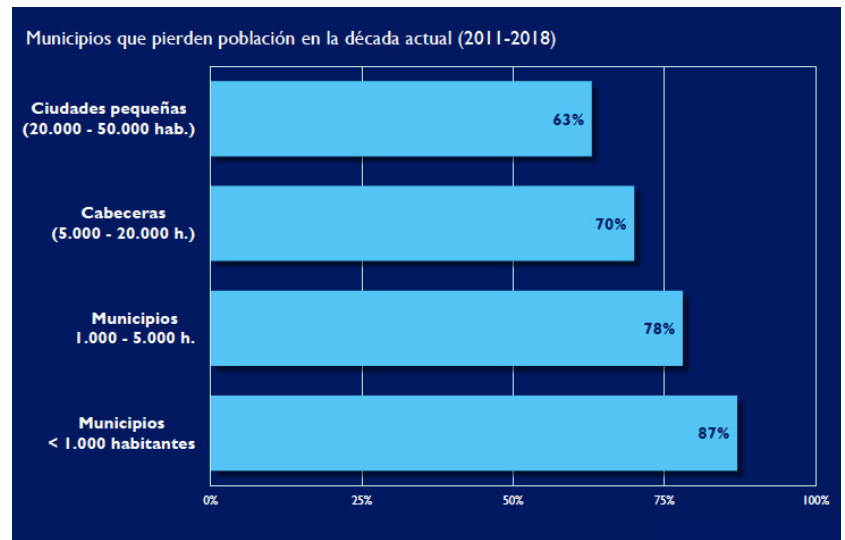

Figure 1: Spanish municipalities losing population in the current decade 2011-18. Source: Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Function (MPTFP), based on INE (2019).

As Mr de la Torre reported, internal migration shaping the rural exodus affects the natural dynamic of demographic change and is, in turn, affected by other demographic transitions such as aging (with a spike in centennial population) and defeminisation.

From his presentation and statistical evidence, it was possible to visualise the territorial expansion of depopulation and the perimeters of the so-called *Empty Spain*, where intermediate and small nuclei are situated. Mr de la Torre contended that, while there are some common drivers, the deruralisation phenomenon in Spain exhibits different dynamics and is strongly bound to the local context of each affected municipality. Interestingly, he pointed out, "[...] we can take low density as an indicator of poorer quality of life. [...] this is especially relevant when looking at associated phenomena such as aging". In fact, with rising life expectancy and the notable growth in centennial population, aging population groups in rural Spain are increasingly abandoning their municipalities to migrate to bigger cities where they have better social assistance and access to services. An accompanying phenomenon is the defeminisation of rural areas, that is, the percentage of women leaving is higher than that of men.

Figure 3: Map of Population Density in Spain. Source: MPTFP, based on INE (2019).
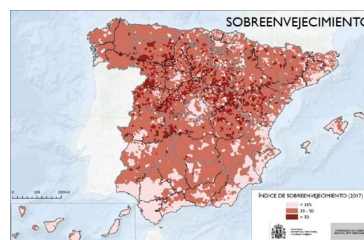

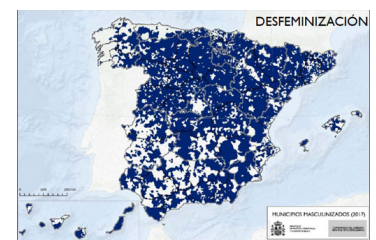Figure 4: Map of Over-Aging in Spain. Source: MPTFP, based on INE (2019).

Figure 2: Map of Defeminisation in Spain. Source: MPTFP, based on INE (2019).

Taking stock of these puzzling trends, the Spanish government decided in 2017 to launch the *National Strategy to fight the Demographic Challenge* as a long term and *participatory* roadmap to face depopulation transversally[8]. Mr de la Torre highlighted that the Strategy includes autonomous regions and local provinces, envisaging multi-governance as well as a multi-sectorial and multi-scalar approach. The Strategy has established an inter-ministerial workshop involving minsters from 17 different national ministries, a workshop involving the National Committee of Local Administration, a workshop consisting of Autonomous Communities and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, and different civil society and expert meetings. The multi-level governance underpinning the Strategy sees one general objective as well as seven transversal ones which are collectively meant "to promote administrative and normative simplification...and to change the culture around the stereotypes around urban-rural living", Mr de la Torre emphasised. Along the proposed lines of action envisaged by the Strategy, in order to face depopulation, three main objectives have been set:

1. Guaranteeing the functionality of territories affected by deruralisation and low density;
2. Enhancing their competitiveness and facilitating entrepreneurship as well as new economic activities;
3. Encouraging the stabilisation of rural population.

Marking a "milestone on a long-term path", in March 2019, when its *General Guidelines* were agreed, the Strategy entered its second phase. More concrete action plans to be officially approved will now have to be formulated. Necessarily, this requires framing partnerships that are intergenerational while bridging the rural with the urban, the public with the private, and the different institutional realities of Spain.

Transposing this agenda onto the global level, Mr de la Torre remarked how "the Strategy aligns itself with the Spanish Urban Agenda, [...] as the connection between both is essential to face the demographic challenge, as well as with the 2030 Agenda, directly linking to 7 SDGs and their associated targets", reflecting an integrated vision for the sustainable development of the Spanish territory. Zooming out, in fact, the morphology of demographic change affecting rural Spain can be contemplated as a meta-phenomenon together with other global processes such as globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change which directly affects Europeans. These "turbulences", as Mr de la Torre defined them echoing the words of the new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen[9], are high on the agenda of the European Union.

Other EU Experiences: findings from Latvia, France and Germany
Mart Grisel, EUKN Director (NL)

As the next expert, Mr Grisel presented a broader outlook on the European continent as "a land of small and medium sized cities and connected functional areas". As revealed by a study[10] conducted by the EUKN for the 2015 Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, small and medium-sized urban areas (SMUAs) have been at the core of the urbanisation of Europe, which has been considerably more polycentric than anywhere else in the world. As Mr Grisel pointed out, while prominent in the EU territory, "SMUAs are largely unexplored in terms of social, spatial and economic trends due to the lack of

8   The Strategy, among other agreements, was adopted on 17 January 2017 at the VI Conference of Presidents, which is the highest political body promoting cooperation between the Spanish state and the Autonomous Communities. Retrieved from: https://www.mptfp.gob.es/en/dam/es/portal/politica-territorial/autonomica/coop_autonomica/Confer_Presidentes/17-01-17-ACUERDOS_CONFER_PRESIDENTES.pdf.pdf.
9   Ursula von der Leyen (2019). Discurso de apertura en la sesión plenaria del Parlamento Europeo. Versión pronunciada. Estrasburgo, 16 de julio de 2019.
10   HESPI and EUKN (2015). Challenges of Small and Medium-Sized Urban Areas (SMUAs), their economic growth potential and impact on territorial development in the European Union and Latvia. *Research report to support the Latvian EU Presidency 2015*. Retrieved from: https://www.eukn.eu/fileadmin/Files/Presidencies/2015_Latvia/Final_Report_26.05.2015_EXEC_SUMMARY.pdf.

comparable data on settlements with less than 500,000 inhabitants".

Elaborating on the findings from UN-HABITAT's report *The State of European Cities 2016,* Mr Grisel contrasted the distinct nature of cities in Europe with fast urbanising centres in Africa, Asia, and the Latin American sub-continent. European cities, he reported, are much lower in both density and size:

> "the average density of a European city is 3,000 inhabitants per km^2... [which is] the minimum required to sustain efficient public transport [...] while cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America are much more compact with densities ranging between 4,000 and 8,000. [...] Similarly, European cities are relatively smaller in size with only two cities, Paris and London, considered megacities vis-à-vis other regions with the number of megacities worldwide almost tripling from 10 to 28 over the last 25 years."

From a regional point of view, the European model for urban development is increasingly being hampered by demographic trends related to the aging of the population as well as migration. In fact, "we are the only continent shrinking in population", he commented. Showing statistical trends in the degree of urbanisation of Europe by area (**Figure 5**) calculated by EUROSTAT[11], Mr Grisel highlighted the fact that, rural areas are dramatically losing population, clearly reflecting the Spanish situation (**Figure 6**).
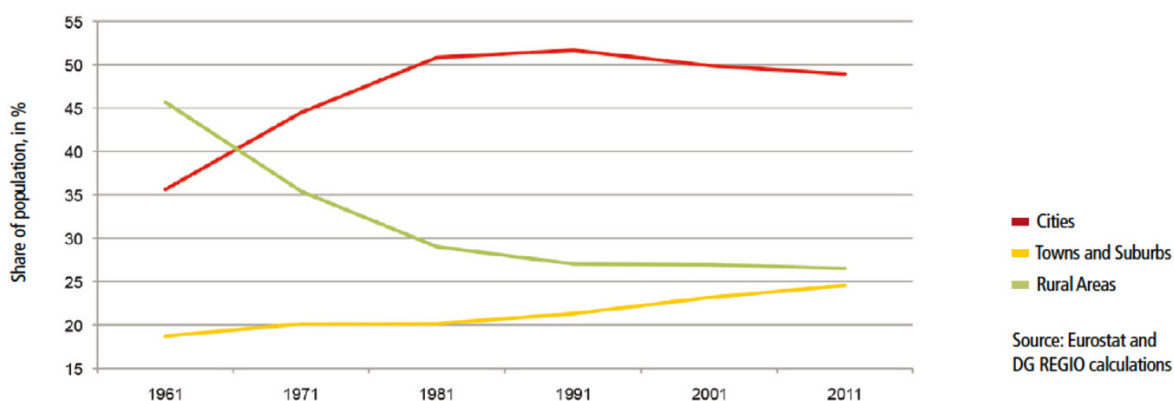
Figure 5: Population by degree of urbanisation in the EU-28, 1961-2011. Source: DG REGIO (2016).
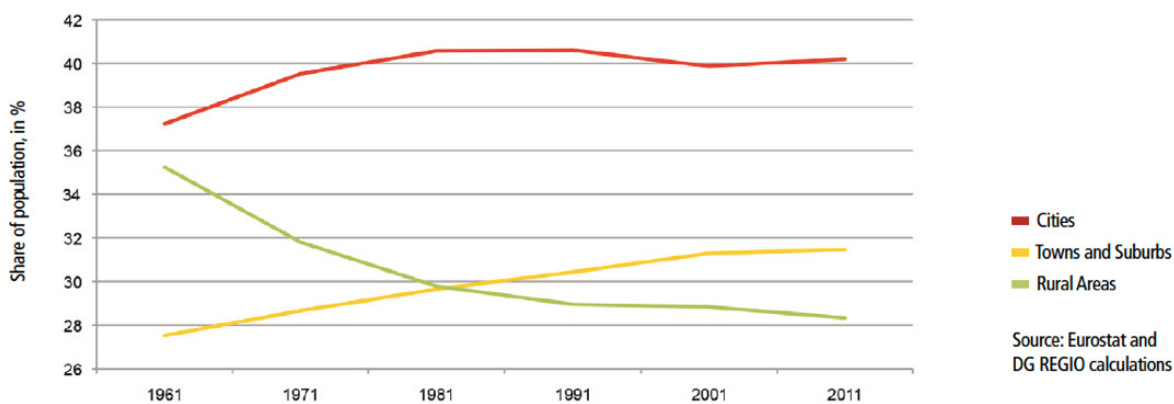

Figure 6: Population by degree of urbanisation in Spain, 1961-2011. Source: DG REGIO (2016).

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11   DG REGIO (2016). The State of European Cities 2016: Cities leading the way to a better future. European Commission. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/cities-report/state_eu_cities2016_en.pdf.

To give a snapshot of the spatial configuration of European SMUAs, Mr Grisel visually showed the deruralisation of Germany and France, remarking that maps usually show a partial perspective as a result of different definitions of small and medium-sized city employed by each country.

From a policy perspective, the emerging challenges are manifold and interlinked. They are compounded by demographic aspects such as the exodus of the youth as well as by economic, institutional and geographical ones which have determined the deterioration of rural infrastructure, industrial decline, and limited capacity and funding. The urgent need for reform in light of this puzzle and its political repercussions are clear: "one can look at the social unrest in France as well as Spain bred as a result of popular feelings of abandonment and negligence towards the rural", Mr Grisel contended.

Nevertheless, Mr Grisel stressed that no *one-size-fits-all* should be adopted in fighting rural depopulation in the different contexts. On average, SMUAs seem to perform better than larger cities in terms of offering better quality of life, affordable housing options, and presenting lower unemployment rates; yet, considerable differences are observed within individual countries depending on contextual variables as well as size, geographic location, and socio-economic profile.

Mr Grisel then problematised the central question for the day as being: "do we fight depopulation, or do we go with it?". In other words, he interrogated whether concerted efforts should be geared towards repopulating abandoned areas or national and local governments should accept this decline and control it through planning. Illustrating concrete examples of both strategies from Europe, Mr Grisel presented the approach mainstreamed in the Netherlands, where rural depopulation is facilitated by controlled outsourcing of services to larger cities which "somehow adopt smaller cities' residents". Conversely, in countries such as Latvia, Germany and France, government efforts have been consistently put into the revitalisation of local economies, cultures, and livelihoods. At the national level, for instance, Mr Grisel reported that France has propelled explicit policies[12] that encourage the revival of economic activities as well as inter-institutional cooperation between central government and small municipalities (the so called "*petit centralités*", where 57% of French live) as part of macro-regional development.

Given the global nature of the demographic transition and its interdependence with processes such as globalisation and climate change, if the depopulation of rural areas cannot be reversed sustainably, the alternative is to facilitate it. He identified and compared a series of elements of two hypothetical strategies: one of growth and one of controlled decline. According to the growth strategy, any policy measure should consider three essential dimensions: the socio-economic composition of rural areas to capitalize on local capacity and natural capital; the connectivity of the territory; and institutional collaboration and inclusion of non-usual suspects across multiple sectors and scales. On the other hand, for the controlled decline strategy to work, the need is to re-think concepts such as quality of life, tourism, and 'small village island', thus revalorising the availability of green spaces, eco-friendly alternatives and traditional agriculture while also capitalising on the advantages brought by digital technologies to facilitate more remote forms of living.

On that note, Mr Grisel left the floor to Boštjan Cotič, EU Project Manager and Researcher at the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia.

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12   CGET (2019). Petites centralités: Entre desserrement urbain et dynamiques macro-régionales. Retrieved from: https://www.cget.gouv.fr/sites/cget.gouv.fr/files/atoms/files/en_detail_synthese_petites_centralites_web.pdf.

Slovenia: The challenges rural depopulation poses for spatial planning at the national level

Boštjan Cotič, EU Project Manager and Researcher, Urban Planning Institute (SI)

In contextualising the Slovenian case, Mr Cotič geographically positioned Slovenia within the European continent as a very small country counting 2 million inhabitants sparsely distributed throughout the national territory. Mr Cotič pinpointed the peculiar morphology of Slovenia as an extremely decentralised country, made of connected networks of urbanised small centres.

As Mr Cotič interestingly showed by comparison with Spain, people's values strongly reflect the urban-rural reality of the country:
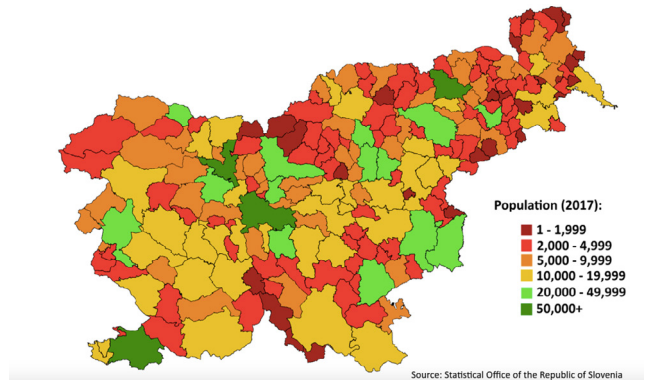

Figure 7: Population Density in Slovenia, 2017.
Source: SURS (2017).

"[...] when asked where they want to live, Slovenian consistently respond 'in a garden house in the village' compared to any other type of housing typical of more developed urban centres."

Similarly, they have strong values related to the protection and preservation of soil and the natural environment as well as to "village living". According to a longitudinal study conducted between 2003 and 2018 on the social values of Slovene public opinion on space and the environment by SICRIS [13], the large majority of Slovenians "would prefer protecting farmlands even if that meant blocking housing developments" and "would not like to have at least a big city in the country contrary to typical European trends".
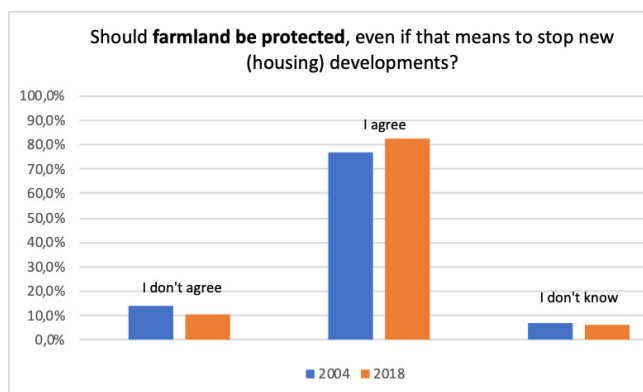
Figure 8: Social values related to farmland protection, 2004-2018, SI. Source: adapted from SICRIS (2018).
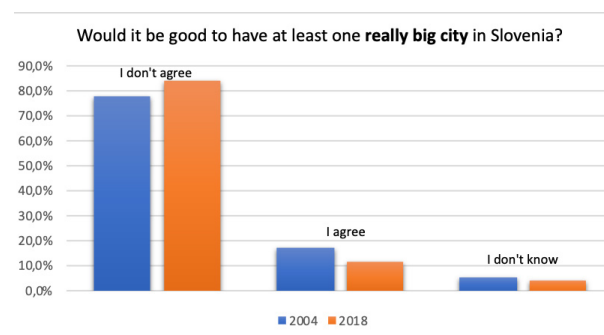
Figure 9: Social values related to urban living, 2004-2018, SI. Source: adapted from SICRIS (2018).

Nevertheless, as Mr Cotič revealed, depopulation is also dramatically affecting Slovenia. In fact, as of 2016, about 59 human settlements in the country were completely depopulated [14]. To address this and associated

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13   SICRIS (2018). Public Opinion Research of Social Values on Space and Environment: Longitudinal Study between 2003 and 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/en/research/institute-of-social-science/national-research-projects/V5-1732.
14   SURS (2017). Annual Report 2017. Državna statistika v letu 2017.

spatial trends, in 2004 the *Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia*[15] was launched. The Strategy pointedly approaches the territory from a polycentric perspective which is reflected in how infrastructures and other key services are distributed in the territory. Showing the map of five main Slovenian urban centres (Ljubljana, Koper, Kranj, Maribor, and Celje), Mr Cotič illustrated how transport infrastructure has been developed to connect these centres and the smaller settlements in their functional urban areas (FUAs): "the only areas seemingly neglected are indeed mountains", he concluded.
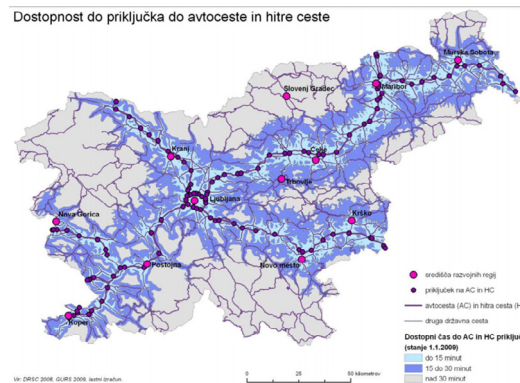

Figure 10: Map of transport infrastructure in Slovenia. Source: Pogačnik, Zavodnik Lamovšek, and Drobne, (2009).

Conversely to Spain, were depopulation has more severely affected small municipalities, in Slovenia larger cities have *de facto* been more distressed by the phenomenon. As Mr Cotič considered, this partly reflects the expansion of their FUAs and the re-suburbanisation process underway in the last decade. Nevertheless, since 2015, the process seems to be reversing as a result of immigration from other Eastern and South-Eastern European countries. Adding to this complexity, Mr Cotič observed, is the progressive expansion of the functional urban areas of these cities. This has been especially relevant for cities such as Koper, Maribor, and the capital Ljubljana, which have grown exponentially from 2000 to 2015.
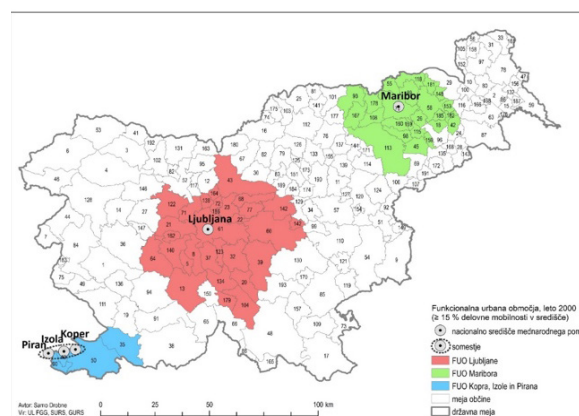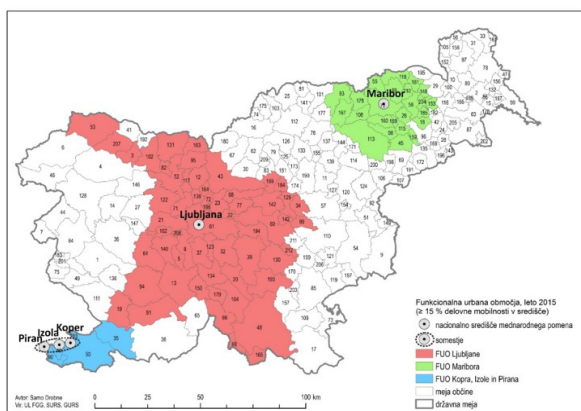
Figure 11: Expansion of FUAs, 2000-2015, SI. Source: Fikfak and Drobne (2017).

Analysing the re-suburbanisation trend at the Ljubjana city level, which is compounded by factors ranging from greenfield and brownfield development to tourism and job migration, Mr Cotič reflected on the context-specificity and trade-offs at stake when understanding spatial planning.

Mr Grisel echoed Mr Cotič's final comment, stressing how this complexity was grasped by the Leipzig Charter and is being picked up again by the work of the 2020 German Presidency of the Council.

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15   Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy (2004). Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia. Spatial Planning Directorate - Office for Spatial Development. Retrieved from: http://www.esponontheroad.eu/dane/web_espon_library_files/686/sprs_eng.pdf.

URBACT: Enhancing the Vitality of Small Cities
Mireia Sanabria, URBACT Lead Expert (ES)

The fourth expert, Mireia Sanabria, was then introduced to give a more technical presentation on the URBACT project *'Vitality of Small Cities'*. As URBACT Lead Expert for Internationalisation and Local Development, Ms Sanabria has been closely involved in the project, which aims to promote the integrated sustainable urban development of smaller cities in different European regions.

As Ms Sanabria observed, much of the Union's "policy attention is often given to larger cities as focal points for urban economic development and innovation". The assumption is that, with the potential for agglomeration and a significant investment in infrastructure, larger cities will always have distinct advantages over smaller cities. Nevertheless, this thesis does not take into account the spatial distribution of local economies in Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) grouped around smaller cities that make up the majority of urban settlements in Europe, in other words, the European rural-urban continuum. Ms Sanabria remarked:

> "the small cities context is fundamental now more than ever. [...] given the spectrum of participatory initiatives and expanding scope of the urban realm in the face of global challenges, the implementation of solutions starting from the local level is key. [...] For this reason, to enhance the vitality of small cities and their connected areas should be as important as the competitiveness of larger cities".

In discussing more detailly the backbone of the project, Ms Sanabria characterised it as a "multi-level, multi-thematic, multi-partnership experiment" still in its pilot phase and which could, therefore, "highly benefit from critical feedback from the Policy Lab's experts and participants".

The project was contextualised by Ms Sanabria as reflecting the URBACT method of vertical and horizontal integration, which specifically exemplifies one of URBACT's key strand of activities: *knowledge capitalisation*. As part of this strand, three main URBACT networks were responsible for the overall development of the project: *RetaiLink*, *City Centre Doctor* and *Agri-Urban*. The three action networks respectively deal with "reviving experiential retail to enliven small city centres"; "creating attraction through community engagement in public spaces"; and "enhancing the local urban economy through the development and advertisement of local produce". Through their combined efforts, these networks have asked "how to leverage innovation and technology for the revitalisation of small cities [...] in the face of inevitable global transitions such as migration, aging, climate change, the technological revolution, etc. [and] in view of the new EU programming period 2021-27."

Their joint work culminated in a multilateral conference held in Barcelona in October 2018, where 150 delegates from small cities across Europe met to synergise efforts towards recognising the role of small cities as the foundation of the territorial equation in Europe. The conference findings[16], which are available on URBACT's website, precisely recognise the imperative role of small cities in a growing European economy and served as a platform to systematise learnings on and from small cities in Europe.

In fact, the conference provided a basis to launch the *Vitality of Small Cities* project as a "framework of support available to smaller cities in the EU, especially related to accessing regulation, funding, and understanding global trends", Ms Sanabria explained.

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16   URBACT (2019). Vitality of Smaller Cities in Europe: A Priority for the European Union?. *Conference Report*. Retrieved from: https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/informe_versio_bona_digital.pdf.

She recounted the project is now in its "engagement phase". Indeed, the first phase determined the "focus of enquiry" to be developed along four main lines:

1. identifying the drivers of depopulation from a socio-political angle within different European regions presenting and a categorisation tool;
2. pinpointing transferrable solutions and support tool to different local contexts based on good practices;
3. identifying specific instruments provided by the EU and by singular MS;
4. distinguishing opportunities for European small cities to enhance their vitality by learning from and sharing with each other.

Based on these, a methodology has been developed with a view to mobilising strategic partnerships and engaging different urban stakeholders, from local collectives to national policy makers. The designed methodology envisages baseline as well as case studies realised through visits, interviews, and experts' reviews for four Member States and sixteen small cities, according to different profiles and criteria. Mediation and verification, as Ms Sanabria clarified, is undertaken by tasked URBACT working groups and a Project Board which mirror the multi-level and multi-thematic nature of the project.

As this phase comes to an end, the "results phase" will be activated. Here, Ms Sanabria recapped, the project will aim to develop a series of transferrable and scalable tools such as a "vitality health check tool for small cities", "case studies to inspire others", as well as a "catalogue of support instruments at EU and MS level".

Positioning the project within the wider European urban policy landscape, Ms Sanabria expressed the wish for it to be used by different operational programmes and networks including but not limited to URBACT, the Urban Development Network (UDN), Horizon 2020, LIFE, etc. in support of the sustainable development of small cities.

Spain: Opportunities to face depopulation from the perspective of development and innovation in agriculture
José Luis Palma, Lawyer of the state council and associate lawyer of Gómez-Acebo Pombo (ES)

Closing the panel by zooming-in on the Spanish case again, José Luis Palma, lawyer of the State Council and associate lawyer of Gómez-Acebo Pombo, framed the deruralisation issue by looking at the transformation of Spanish agriculture and the agro-industrial sector. Mr Palma allegorised agriculture to be seen as a productive manifestation of territory in its historical dimension, and thus 'the State' as transitioning from the *agrarian state* to the *urban state*, accompanied by the rural exodus, and eventually to the *environmental* or *sustainable state*.

In the agrarian state, the political regency would always reward its citizens with land, thus encouraging ruralisation and agricultural activities. During modern times, as Mr Palma advanced, rural development was also sustaining the bourgeoisie and the rising of the middle class until the 19th century. Here, the failure of the agrarian reform led to a paradoxical phenomenon where farmers would gradually leave rural areas for cities while continuing cultivation of the land. In fact, half a century before people would talk of *Emptied Spain*, entire municipalities started materially disappearing as land workers and their families migrated to urban centres.

Thus, the idea of *population sufficiency* ("suficiencia poblacional") emerged to describe the idea of a minimum requirement of population needed to maintain infrastructure. As Mr Palma explained, this contributed to the transition to the urban state in the 20th century. Partly, Mr Palma argued, this transition in Spain was also considerably accelerated by the incorporation into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986. Having to conform to the Community's requirements, Spain entered a new productive dimension of the land incentivising the extinction of small chains of production and the consequential loss of culture behind the land while at the same time incrementing productivity thanks to industrialisation and the promotion of monocultures. However, with the need of diversifying agricultural produce as a result of new social demands as well as awareness about the unsustainability of industrial large-scale agriculture, a new defining phase is looming: the environmental state.

As part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), there is an urgent call to go back to more traditional, environmentally friendly ways to cultivate the land and preserve biodiversity, translating these (old) new demands onto the rural world. Promoting re-ruralisation and rural livelihood, the CAP 2015-2020 seeks to prioritise agricultural sustainability over profitability while animating the competitivity of small producers through direct payments as well as the encouragement of interprofessional organisations, 'associationism', and the establishment of farmer cooperatives as a new juridical form.

Nonetheless, rural depopulation continues advancing at a fast rate, reflecting the failure of the CAP not to provide effective support –cultural as well as economic– to the youth in a time when young generations are increasingly attracted by cities for employment. Moreover, in Spain, land continues being exploited as the primary industry for export given the globalised interface of agricultural production and the international value of Spanish produce. Yet, in order to make the transition towards the sustainable state, the agri-food sector will need to be revolutionised and the socio-cultural values associated with rural living to be breed again. As Mr Palma contended, the revalorisation of rural livelihoods for Spain will also have an important effect on manufacture workers and their families, who could relocate to rural areas where main manufacturing industries are located if provided with quality infrastructure and services. To address demographic change in rural Spain and reverse it, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects must be considered at once, holistically and future-looking, Mr Palma concluded.

Panel Discussion

As moderator of the panel discussion, Mr Grisel touched back on the critical role for agriculture to address the sustainability puzzle and the need to reform in light of the climate crisis. Offering the example of the Netherlands, where the agri-food sector is a major contributing force to GHG emissions, Mr Grisel noted that a range of efforts, especially those dictated by the European community, such as the expansion of Natura 2000[17] areas to farmland are addressing the complex linkages between agriculture and climate change. Mr Grisel interrogated Mr Palma around the conditions necessary and potential consequences for sustainable agriculture to revitalise rural Spain. Mr Palma reiterated how this represents

A range of efforts [...] dictated by the European community [...] are addressing the complex linkages between agriculture and climate change.

17   For more information see: EC (2018). Farming for Natura 2000: Guidance on how to support Natura 2000 farming systems to achieve conservation objectives, based on Member States good practice experiences. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/FARMING%20FOR%20NATURA%202000-final%20guidance.pdf.

a critical challenge of our production-consumption system, with countries increasingly waking up to the need of incentivising a societal transformation starting from the food we eat. With the European Green Deal just recently announced by the new Commission and its premise on *eco-conditionality*, the agricultural question has been recognised as one of the most demanding challenge for Europe's sustainable transition.

Revitalisation based on "branding as a holistic process which mobilises different sectors of society" [...] has proven quite successful.

Addressing Ms Sanabria, Mr Grisel asked whether URBACT, through its pilot projects and experimentations had been able to observe practical alternatives and sustainable solutions working for small cities. Ms Sanabria contested that RetaiLink designed an interesting approach to small cities' revitalisation based on "branding as a holistic process which mobilises different sectors of society", which has proven quite successful for small communities wishing to revalorise local economies and social infrastructure such as education.

Another interesting angle, Mr Grisel commented, is given by the atypical case of Slovenia where FUAs seem to cover almost the entirety of the territory. In such a polycentric country where the rural and urban world are so connected, Mr Grisel asked Mr Cotič how stereotypes around rural and urban living are overcome and whether this could be transferred to other countries. Mr Cotič replied that multiple factors should be considered if intervention promoting re-ruralisation were to be implemented. In fact, as explained by Mr Cotič, policy feedback cycles can result in unplanned scenarios:

> "to promote decentralisation to small urban centres the Slovenian government has set a minimum requirement of five thousand inhabitants in order to have an independent municipal administration [...] and now cooperation and networking among Slovene municipalities is disappearing".

Interestingly, Mr Grisel noted, in the Dutch case, the opposite process has taken shape whereby small municipalities tend to merge more and more often by centralising access to key services and infrastructure. From a point of governmental efficiency, Mr Grisel contended, for such experiments to work "there is a constant need of building local capacity, matching public services and infrastructure to population needs".

Encouraging an interactive discussion, Mr Grisel opened the floor to participants' questions to the panel. Aša Rogelj from the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia intervened by commenting that the urban-rural nexus and its reflection at the national governance level is also crucial. In Slovenia, for instance, Ljubljana's FUA is growing year by year while small cities absorbed into its network face a number of bottlenecks. Rural areas and towns should be more than food providers, they should also be able to offer quality services and livelihood to their inhabitants regardless of the sector in which they work, argues Ms Rogelj.

The reflection of the urban-rural nexus at the national governance level is also crucial. [...] Rural areas and towns should be more than food providers.

Building on this point, Mr Grisel asked Rick Brouwer from the Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations in the audience to better elucidate the Netherlands' approach to controlled decline in rural areas. As Mr Brouwer pointed out, rural small cities in the Netherlands are often located in central regions while the fastest depopulating areas are located along the border with Germany and Belgium. The government's current strategy is one of coping and adaptation, that is, to reform regional and local economies and

service provision to ensure vitality in so-called "attraction centres". As Mr Brouwer noted, a 360 degrees economic approach is necessitated where digitalisation is to play an increasingly important role.

Gonzalo Rodríguez-Carmona, from *Start up Village*[18], underscored that rural areas are not simply agricultural hubs, they are also industrial ones. In a way, he continued, stereotypes and biased imaginaries around rural living are based on our own misconceptions. He asked about the usefulness of Rural Employment Programmes (PER) as a tool to handle depopulation and whether minimum-income policies could help. Replying to Mr Rodriguez-Carmona's point, Mr Palma pointed out that besides PER subsidies, investment in infrastructure is fundamental.

> **Rural areas are not simply agricultural hubs, they are also industrial ones. [...] stereotypes around rural living are based on our own misconceptions.**

José Manuel Gómez Giménez from the Technical University of Madrid (UPM) commented that, as a result of fictious data, people tend to make interpretative bias on the idea that Europe has no big cities. In fact, if one is to consider mobility flows within FUAs, the picture begins to change, he noted. A more controversial situation is encountered when smaller cities are far away from the main FUAs.

Another participant from the audience contextualised the experience of polycentricity of the Basque Country as similar to that of the Netherlands, where the government has favoured the expansion of FUAs. Nevertheless, he noted, it is necessary to standardise definitions in order to make comparisons. According to the European Commission's reading of urban centres as counting with at least 50,000 inhabitants, the Basque Country would be fully rural, while *de facto* not characterisable as rural according to Spain's reading of rural areas in that it counts less than 2,000 inhabitants and is largely dependent on agriculture. In this sense, applying a metropolitan –if not regional– view, as introduced by the Leipzig Charter, might be more adequate. Mr de la Torre highlighted the oxymoric nature of land planning, while global demographic processes, including the projected population explosion in the African continent, will have major impacts on the European territory. Going beyond endogenous growth, he continued, the Basque Country will have to capture talent or else it will disappear.

> **It is necessary to standardise definitions. [...] applying a metropolitan –if not regional– view, as introduced by the Leipzig Charter, might be more adequate.**

Mr Palma agreed, explaining that many of the policies implemented in the 1970s failed as they created "artificial villages" where the sense of personal belonging and the social fabric traditionally making up small towns could not be replicated. Nevertheless, Mr Palma highlighted, migration has become an important force for which migrant workers have gradually replaced Spanish people working the land, buying acres and establishing their families.

Another question from the participants addressed the issue of young skilled workers abandoning rural areas for cities and foreign countries, the so-called 'brain drain', especially in poorer provinces such as Extremadura. As reiterated by Mr Grisel, solutions to depopulation need to be tailor-made to the specificity of the local economy, culture, and territory – which becomes even more critical in provinces with special legal regimes. Adding to this, Mr Palma voiced that the brain drain especially occurs when educational facilities and other types of social infrastructure close down: "a point of non-return for the rural make-

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18   Programme funded by the European Commission and promoted by Spain to support entrepreneurs in rural areas in accessing opportunities to start and sustain their businesses.

up" with the domino effect on "knowledge networks falling to pieces as kids go to schools and then universities in other areas".

Before closing the panel discussion, one of the moderators and General Director of Urban Planning, Land Management and Transportation of the Junta de Extremadura, Eulalia de Acevedo Yagüe, lamented how agriculture has come to have "a bad name", which makes it difficult to change stereotypes associated with it. However, she stressed, revitalisation through agriculture has brought many successes as in the case of vineyard tradition in Galicia and it would be worth for different municipalities to come together to concert strategies. In this regard, Mr Cotič pointed to an unorthodox approach implemented in Slovenia, where the government co-funds revitalisation projects together with local administration departments, especially with the police and spatial planning units.

Recapitulating on the collective debate, Mr Grisel identified some of the key tensions emerging from different approaches to rural depopulation. On the one hand, some governments favour adaptation through regulation vis-à-vis counter measures such as revitalisation including through technological innovation. On the other, Europe represents a special case compared to other regions in that small and medium-sized cities fulfill an important functional role and are a necessary element of the territorial balance equation. The session closed and Mr Grisel invited participants to break into their assigned Working Groups after lunch.

Europe represents a special case [...] in that small and medium-sized cities fulfill an important functional role and are a necessary element of the territorial balance equation.

Breakout Sessions

In the afternoon, participants were divided into five working groups delving into the different dimensions of deruralisation to reflect on the identified **Policy Questions**, starting from the unusual suspects: smaller cities and towns in rural Europe. Set up in the format of thematic brainstorming, each working group was led by a moderator expert in one of the selected areas:

1. **Social infrastructure and the economic-productive sector** led by Mart Grisel, EUKN Director;
2. **The urban-rural continuum and agriculture** led by Eulalia de Acevedo Yagüe, D.G. at the Urban Planning and Territorial Planning of Extremadura;
3. **Opportunities for the digitalisation of rural areas** led by Antonio Alcolea, S.G. for the Promotion of the Information Society, Ministry of Economy and Business;
4. **Tourism and tradition for the revitalisation of rural territory** led by Luis Ángel Collado Cueto, Professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid, Faculty of Economic and Business Studies;
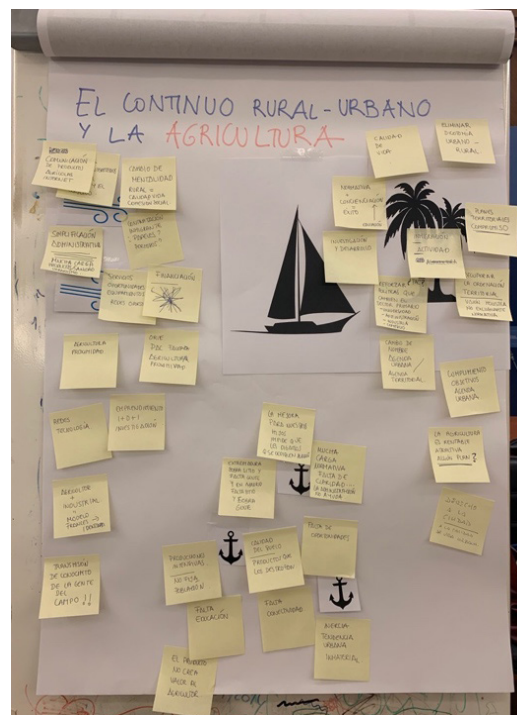

Figure 12: Brainstorming with the sailboat method. Agriculture Working Group.

5. **Climate change and the urban-rural environment** led by Amanda del Río, Technical Director of Global Nature Foundation.

To dig into these dimensions, moderators made use of EUKN's brainstorming tool par excellence: the 'sailboat method', previously known as 'speedboat method'. As a visually dynamic way to guide constructive discussions towards identifying both challenges and solutions to a problem at hand, the sailboat method helped unpack the complexities of rural depopulation and envision possibilities to leverage innovation and systemic change. As a three-step process, this method used icons, namely, the *sailboat* (representing the current situation), the *island* (representing the most ideal outcome), *anchors* (representing hindering factors) and *wind arrows* (representing positive forces for change) as metaphors to discuss –with a solutions-focused approach– the drivers of the depopulation and positive forces for the sustainable development of small cities in rural areas. By doing so, it was possible to point to governance and policy solutions already present or which should be promoted.

Social Infrastructure and the Economic-Productive Sector
Working Group 1

Slightly deviating from the allocated topic and method, the group decided to have a more in-depth discussion contextualising the development and provision of social as well as economic infrastructure and services within the framework provided by the Urban Agenda for the EU and the Spanish Urban Agenda. By focusing on the governance aspect of these strategic urban agendas, the group addressed a series of cross cutting issues such as the contemplation of the urban-rural continuum and of functional urban areas which encompass small towns and cities in Europe.

> **In the ideal island envisioned [...] small towns and cities could be repopulated by boosting local economies.**

Participants offered examples from their respective countries, showing how similar policies aimed at reducing population shrinkage resulted in small city programmes which combined multiple level of governance (from the federal or central government to civil society) as well as different sectors (from the redevelopment of infrastructure to the provision of health and education). For instance, the *Initiative for Small Towns* in Germany seeks to promote decentralisation through integrated urban development. Based on a coordinated funding scheme to empower small cities in their competitiveness, networking and cooperation, the initiative also promotes experimentation and learning through a 'small city academy'. Other multilevel governance initiatives were mentioned for other countries. For example, in Spain, the *National Housing Plan*, which promotes urban regeneration and inclusive housing, is developed collaboratively by the Central Government with the Autonomous Regions and Municipalities. In the Netherlands, "regional deals" between State and municipalities are also tailored to the local DNA, with co-funding schemes in which municipalities themselves participate.

Regardless of decentralisation efforts, the group reflected, smaller towns are completely disappearing in several rural areas. The question of how to manage vis-à-vis reverse the retreat from territory without losing the important function held by rural thus emerged. In the ideal island envisioned

> **Systemic thinking in territorial planning and governance: this is the underlying force for change.**

by the group, small towns and cities could be repopulated by boosting local economies and providing adequate social and physical infrastructure, from transport to health and education facilities. Essentially,

this would involve closing the urban-rural loop via shortened food supply chains and the redevelopment of peri-urban regions towards circularity. Here, the group stressed, "functionality becomes a key term of reference", necessitating systemic thinking in territorial planning and governance: this is the underlying force for change.

The Rural-Urban Continuum and Agriculture
Working Group 2

The group imagined an ideal island where the dichotomy between the urban and the rural is eliminated. In fact, as "we all come from the rural", this disconnection becomes unnecessary. This is an island with improved quality of life and greater social cohesion, where regulations are in place to protect education and promote awareness of the value of agriculture and associated activities as part of the fight against depopulation. Here, research and development, immigration, and political commitment as well as continuity in spatial planning help recover a holistic conceptualisation of territory and of socio-economic and territorial policies as integrated rather than disconnected. It is an island where "the Urban Agenda becomes the Territorial Agenda", reflecting the notion that the territory necessarily encompasses the urban. Policies targeting the agricultural sector are no longer siloed but rather link to all aspects of liveability, from functioning and accessible social and economic infrastructure and services to the built environment. Rural living is thus revalorised and empowered, and residents of rural towns and cities can fully exercise their "right to the city".

> **The dichotomy between the urban and the rural is eliminated [...] as "we all come from the rural".**

Preventing the realisation of this vision, several anchors were pinpointed by the group. From excessively burdensome bureaucracy to stereotypes associated with working in agriculture, as well as intensive and unsustainable monocultures that are depleting the soil while also damaging farmers' livelihood. Similarly, the lack of access to education and the absence of connectivity with the urban, underlay by a feeling of inertia, become impediments to reaching the island.

Yet, participants were quickly able to recognise positive winds of change that could help remedy the situation. Above all, they highlighted the manifold opportunities that can be capitalised on thanks to digitilisation and the application of technology, including improved communication and marketing to revalorise agricultural living and produce. With this transformation, an associated shift in values and identity associated with the rural could be renewed. Another positive force is the influx of migrants, that should be facilitated as much as possible, including through administrative simplification. Indeed, if financing is often thought to be quintessential, the availability of funds has not prevented depopulation: provision of and access to services, infrastructure and opportunities are also fundamental. So is the revamp of local agriculture ("agricultura de proximidad") and shorter food chains that give identity to the territory but got somehow lost with globalisation and the export economy. According to the group, together with the simplification of bureaucratic procedures, other key forces to be stimulated are entrepreneurship, transmission of knowledge, and capacity-building, especially among the youth.

> **Policies targeting the agricultural sector are no longer siloed but rather link to all aspects of liveability [...] and residents of rural towns and cities can fully exercise their "right to the city".**

Digitalisation in Rural Areas
Working Group 3

The group departed from a hypothetical situation of extreme rurality: a remote, sparsely populated island, where equal opportunities for and access to digitalisation are given to rural residents vis-à-vis urban ones. Additionally, digital services enable rural residents to participate into decision-making. In fact, while digitalisation does not automatically solve the depopulation puzzle, it becomes a key instrument to address some of its ramifications, including alienation from public services and infrastructure as well as political neglect.

While digitalisation does not automatically solve the depopulation puzzle, it becomes a key instrument to address some of its ramifications.

To make this a reality, certain obstacles need to be navigated. In the first place, remoteness is usually accompanied by lack of connectivity both in terms of physical infrastructure and a stark socio-economic divide compared to main urbanised centres. On the one hand, the absence or limited access to quality infrastructure makes investment in digitalisation not attractive; on the other, the digital divide in knowledge and opportunities contributes to further isolating rural communities. The group also reflected on potential side effects if digitalisation was applied to rural areas. For example, the automation of jobs could further disconnection from working the land. From a more social perspective, another by-product could be individualisation to the detriment of social cohesion.

In spite of this murky scenario, several favourable winds were discerned. The increasing social demand for digital capacity, knowledge and access is creating momentum for making it participatory. As applied in the economic-productive sector, digitalisation can also pave the way to entrepreneurship and the establishment of specialised rural start-ups bridging the rural-urban divide by bringing innovation to traditionally remote and detached sectors.

Participants highlighted that the digital transformation as applied to governance critically requires greater horizontal and vertical integration between different public administrations and other stakeholders, from civil society to the private sector. Thus, transparency and corporate social responsibility could be enhanced. Information and promotion of 'the rural' via online channels could also attract investments and lead to experimentation in depopulated areas, which could become "a sort of rural laboratory" for innovation linked to the land.

Tourism and Tradition
Working Group 4

In the ideal rural island, participants pictured a type of tourism linked to local resources encompassing the tangible and intangible as well as the natural and cultural alike. Based on the revalorisation of indigenous and autochthonous knowledge and tradition, tourism becomes the engine of local development and territorial balance, fixing population on the territory and restoring "rural pride and identity". This island is characterised by gender equality, with women

Based on the revalorisation of indigenous and autochthonous knowledge and tradition, tourism becomes the engine of local development and territorial balance.

fulfilling key roles in the revalorisation of local culture and economy. Benefits accruing from tourism activities are reinvested in the local territory and communities, in line with sustainability principles. Visitors are encouraged to adapt to and respect local ways of living, learning from them.

Development efforts should be future proof and take into account the feedback cycles between climate change and tourism activities.

Different hindering factors and transformative forces to counter them were reported by the group, particularly in relation to the growth of rural tourism in recent years. This trend, indeed, has been equalled to supplying more accommodation options, not necessarily revaluing nor investing in rural heritage and livelihoods. It is essential to have strategies addressing the short, medium and longer-term which are developed in collaboration with all actors, taking into account their human and financial resources/capacities. Nonetheless, projects such as Natura 2000 in Europe can be considered an important step to reverse this, in that they protect the natural environment while encouraging and reviving human activities and heritage which depend on it. Capacity building is another positive force which could help make the most out of available financing instruments and subsidies for rural activities. As the group pointed out, this was a one of the weaknesses of the LEADER[19] programme which offered to finance rural activities (including tourism), without providing much training and knowledge building to actually develop them. Moreover, when thinking of promoting rural tourism, it seems that the supply of accommodation has not been matched by investment in the more intangible system needed to promote it. From leisure activities to the rehabilitation of physical and cultural heritage as well as the preservation of local flora and fauna, financing should follow a more holistic and integrated logic.

Even more importantly, development efforts should be future proof and take into account the feedback cycles between climate change and tourism activities, so as to promote resilient, climate-friendly activities. This strategic approach, according to the group, should permeate all aspects of governance, encouraging integrated planning and inter-generational thinking. For this to obtain, digital technology could be used to encourage communities' engagement and access to the necessary services and infrastructure to develop and benefit from tourism.

Climate Change and the Rural-Urban Nexus
Working Group 5

As imagined by the group, the island provides the fertile ground to achieve climate resilience and sustainability in its widest sense, encompassing all of its dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. This vision implies a society that is inclusive, which produces and consumes in a way that

Connectivity, physical and virtual, is a key trait of the island.

is circular and eventually carbon-free. Governance is participatory, and especially in relation to natural resource management (e.g. water), citizens involvement is supported through the application of new technologies.

Connectivity, physical and virtual, is a key trait of the island. Nevertheless, mobility systems would always be married to sustainability principles, so that energy smart, carbon-free, and healthy transport can be accessed by residents. Teleworking and a more efficient use of public space would also be promoted to

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19   More information available at: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/leader/leader/leader-tool-kit/the-leader-approach/en/the-leader-approach_en.html.

reduce time spent on commuting. In this island, all 17 SDGs are within reach thanks to smart city planning.

However, as participants reflected, the current model of production and consumption under the neoliberal capitalist system is not compatible with environmentally friendly living. People are not educated to the environment and are generally not aware of the feedback cycles between the natural world and human activities. Moreover, policies impacting on the environment are usually "generalist

There is growing awareness about the need to act and transform systems of production and consumption.

and top-down", not taking into account the perspectives of communities more closely living with and depending on nature. Because of this, at the same time, the private sector does not reflect these values nor the environmental costs and benefits of certain productive activities, made all the more difficult by the generational gap of people in power and people most affected by decisions. As for other themes, the group individuated limited funding and administrative burden as barriers to transitioning towards climate friendly alternatives.

Against this background, there are seeds of hope. Communities on the ground are already experimenting and/or going back to more sustainable lifestyles in touch with nature. As evidenced by youth and other movements worldwide marching for the climate (e.g. Friday for Future; Extinction Rebellion; Fossil Free Universities; etc), there is growing awareness about the need to act and transform systems of production and consumption. This is increasingly being scaled up at higher governance levels and also reflected in policy and legislations (e.g. the European Green Deal and proposal for Europe's Climate Law). Experimentations such as those promoted by the Urban Agenda for the EU around circularity and nature-based solutions are good examples of processes that could facilitate sustainable transitions. On a more practical level, the group noted, efforts towards measuring, monitoring and reporting on sustainability are a promising development.

Conclusions

At the end of the day, moderators were asked to report back on the constructive discussions separately held in each of their working groups. After the key learnings from each thematic debate were presented, common threads emerged. All the explored dimensions of deruralisation were unpacked by participants from an integrated, multi-scalar and intergenerational perspective, where the territorial, socio-economic and environmental elements exhibited strong interlinkages and trade-offs. The concept of urban-rural continuum was thus transposed to the future, with all working groups envisioning the application of technology and smart planning to underscore its functionality and resilience for the economy, people, and the planet.

Figure 13: Moderators reporting to the plenary.

Governance experiments such as those promoted by the Urban Agenda for the EU as well as more institutionalised attempts to codify this integrated outlook into EU legislation are a reflection of increasing awareness of the interdependence between local and global social and environmental ecosystems. Nevertheless, fragmentation remains as to the most appropriate response to fight vis-à-vis control demographic change in rural Europe. With this reflection, María Teresa Verdú Martínez, replacing Ángela de la Cruz Mera, Deputy Director General of Urban Policies from the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and the Urban Agenda closed the event, thanking all participants and experts to contribute to such a compelling debate, hoping the day served as a platform to further synergies, learning and exchange among countries and (smaller) cities.

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