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## Framework providing definitions, operational typology and review of EU strategies for rural areas

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**SHERPA**  
Rural Science-Society-Policy  
Interfaces

# **D3.2 FRAMEWORK PROVIDING DEFINITIONS, REVIEW AND OPERATIONAL TYPOLOGY OF RURAL AREAS IN EUROPE**

**31 MARCH 2020**



## D3.2 FRAMEWORK PROVIDING DEFINITIONS, REVIEW AND OPERATIONAL TYPOLOGY OF RURAL AREAS IN EUROPE

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## Executive Summary

This deliverable D3.2 aims at compiling the existing data, knowledge and policy framework on rural in the EU, so to provide an operational framework for SHERPA multi-actor platforms (MAPs) when they come at describing rural trends, challenges and opportunities in their respective areas.

The definition of rural and rurality is a longstanding issue which has been the subject of debates in the scientific literature for a while. While endeavouring to define 'rurality', attempts have been made -and still continue- to understand rurality, leading to various typologies of areas based on different quantifiable criteria. In that respect, demography, employment, and accessibility are used as main criteria in statistical categories, which are then used to map the boundaries of the EU rural.

To date, rural was not properly defined through its own characteristics, features and patterns, but was rather defined as the opposite of urban. To a certain extent, the definition of urban areas can be considered as the positive print gotten from the photo negative of rural areas. The conceptualisation of functional junction's interfaces between urban and rural (i.e. peri-urban, urban influence) contribute to think of territories as a rural-urban continuum.

From the 80's to the end of the 90's, the analytical lens to rural phenomena has changed in Western countries. The lens evolved from an approach of rural as 'society' to 'areas', reflecting major driving changes such as agricultural modernisation, the decline of the farming population, the demographic erosion in rural areas and the diversification of rural economy.

More than definitions, typologies (and related criteria) of the rural reflect a need for specific and complementary policy interventions, such as the territorial cohesion, the agricultural or the environmental policies of the European Union (EU).

Our literature review on institutional and related policy developments has identified specific EU and OECD documents and declarations which have had a significant impact on the 'policy fabric' of rural areas as a category for public policies. This exercise revealed a twofold longstanding conversation on past and future rural policies.

The first point lies in the historical roots of the EU integration, with the recognition of the cohesion policy's role to flank the agricultural policy -and the structural changes of agriculture- in order to reflect the demographic and socio-economic changes and trends in rural areas. The support to rural society (in the 80s) and to rural areas (today), brings back to the essence of the cohesion policy to reduce regional inequalities in rural areas -including in the less favoured, remote, and marginal areas- across the Community before 1992 and in the EU after this date.

The second point is linked to the nature of policy interventions towards rural areas. Despite successive influential declaration and reports for a broader rural scope and for an emphasis on the well-being of rural, the EU rural development policy has remained mainly agriculturally-driven (agri-centric influence) and to a less extent environmental-driven later on through enhanced agricultural practices.

From this review conducted on EU thematic sub-strategies, our report points out three types of EU strategies dealing with rural areas since 2000:

- i. Natural resources-oriented strategies are the most numerous among our review. Biodiversity, forests, green infrastructures, adaptation to climate change and soils have a scope on natural resources management and on land use in rural areas. Rural areas as physical spaces are considered as a geographical support for policy intervention focused on environment and natural resources.



- ii. Socio-economic strategies are less numerous under our review (employment, bioeconomy and digital strategies). These strategies scoped some of the trends and challenges facing rural areas: depopulation, unemployment, diversification of the rural economy, new rural jobs, remoteness, digital gap due to poor internet broadband, bio-economy opportunities, etc.
- iii. Geographic strategies are few under this review. Remoteness and long commuting distances shape the way how rural areas are experienced. This is particularly the case in mountainous areas where accessibility to urban centres and employment basins are considered as a physical handicap.

The key messages of this review on definitions, typologies and review of EU strategies dealing with rural are:

1. Rural policy responses do not mean only those of rural development policy only. Cohesion and Regional funds and their synergies should be made more explicit beyond their respective policy boundaries.
2. Rural development policy does not mean supporting mainly the agricultural sector and farm incomes but should, equally focus on rural society more broadly, the rural economy and rural environment.
3. A EU long-term vision for rural areas should be based upon the overarching objective of well-being in rural areas.



## Introduction

The definition of rural and rurality has been the subject of debate and numerous research papers for almost 60 years. While endeavouring to define 'rurality', attempts have also been made to understand rurality in space, leading to various typologies of areas based on different quantifiable criteria. This reflects a necessity for politicians and decision-makers, initially within the framework of land management policies and, second, within the context of public policies (agricultural and rural development policies, cohesion policy of the European Union).

The changing typologies reflect both the desire to monitor and to understand economic and demographic developments in rural areas as well as the social demand and citizens' perceptions of what rurality represents. However, typologies on urban and rural areas do also reflect on institutional arrangements and policy frameworks for spatial planning and areas development.

In this report, the references used in this report are primarily research works and documents relating to EU policies. It should be noted that the vast majority of the research works consulted on rural and rurality date from the period between the 1980s and the mid-1990s. From the 90s onwards, the number of scientific works on the "notion of rural and rurality" diminished and began to focus primarily on types of rural area rather than the 'definition' of rurality itself.

This report is divided into four sections. The first is a summary of the research works and debates relating to the definition of rurality and the criteria adopted. The second part presents the main typologies of rural area used at EU level. The third section reviews the main EU strategies dealing with rural, including the main milestones set by the EU and the OECD, the main EU policies on this, the pluriannual strategies of the EU and its sub-thematic strategies. This last section concludes with a discussion on the meaning of any EU policy framework for the rural and explore avenues for further developments.





## 1. From rurality to rural areas

### 1.1. The challenge of defining rural and rurality

Across the range of definitions, approaches and scientific positions on the subject of rurality, there is a consensus on the following two points. First, rurality appears to be an obvious notion which has persisted but which is difficult to define. Second, defining 'rurality' depends on: *i*) global contexts (i.e. the characteristics of the socio-economic systems of which the rurality is a part); *ii*) the discourse and political objectives pursued; and *iii*) the social representations of the different categories of stakeholders. In Europe, each country has developed its own definition of rurality, often as a response to a very specific political, administrative and social context, and in some cases as an output of regional classifications of other factors (e.g. population, accessibility). Approaches and definitions are rarely similar between countries (Depraz, 2007; Bontron, 1996). As a consequence, there is no European-wide or international definition of 'rurality' (European Commission, 2012).

Rurality was initially analysed by sociologists and geographers, with the focus from economists coming later. In the 1970s, in light of the difficulty to define 'rurality' at a national level and the impossibility of defining it at a European level, researchers tried to define 'rurality' through the identification of the characteristics of rural areas. Early work by sociologists and geographers tackled rurality through factors such as lifestyle, value systems and the relationship to earth and family. Thus, rurality was defined by three elements: the dominance of pastoral activities, specifics of value systems (role of the family, land ownership, tradition, etc.) and specifics of lifestyles (self-consumption, work, village solidarity, etc.) (Bontron, 1996). The rationale behind this definition is that such specificities lead to an extensive use of the land, thus resulting in habitat dispersion and a low population density.

Drawing on the identity of farming culture, this first definition was not operationalised for designing and implementing land management policies. It was quickly outdated due to the transformations taking place in the rural socio-economic environments. Research reported on the characteristics of rurality in a given area, from a spatial perspective, which had two consequences. First, it led researchers to characterise rurality as a social construct (Brunio, 2008) and that the identity of space depends on the actor who perceives it and what it means to them (Bodiguel, 1985). The meaning of rurality also depends upon the context (Van Eupen, 2012) and the criteria adopted in its definition (Chevalier *et al.*, 2010). Second, it highlighted a wide variety of the characteristics of rural areas.

Rural areas have undergone profound economic and social changes since the first implementation of agricultural policies aimed at modernisation and land management in the 1960s. As a consequence, rurality can no longer be defined solely according to agricultural activities and associated lifestyles. Although there is no consensus in the literature about the determinants of rural changes, two different drivers can be highlighted (Chevalier, 2010; Bruno, 2008): *i*) an economic, social and environmental decline except in zones benefitting from urban extension and land use intensification; and *ii*) a revival of rural areas due to their endogenous dynamics. These two visions reflect the co-existence of realities, and the diversity of rural areas and their trajectories.

### 1.2. Contrasting changes and constructs of rurality

For most European countries, since the 1990s, the analysis of demographic and economic data relating to rural areas shows a decline of agriculture in both economic and demographic terms (Plieninger *et al.*, 2016). The role of agriculture as an economic activity is in sharp decline in terms of GDP and employment, with rural areas being abandoned in terms of people and services. Over this period there has been a decrease in the proportion of farmers in the rural population, which is itself ageing and steadily falling as a proportion of the total population.



These characteristics indicate a process of decline. From the mid-1990s, other elements point to an inversion of the situation, referred to as “rural renaissance” in the literature: **i)** the economy of rural areas is becoming more diverse, witnessing strong growth in the tertiary sector (services and tourism); and **ii)** population growth due to the arrival of new inhabitants, in particular young people.

Several approaches have been adopted to identify new characteristics for rural areas, how these areas are sub-divided, and how they are classified. Rurality has been defined dichotomously as a contrast to urbanity, or as the negative of urbanity (i.e. anything that is not urban is rural) (Depraz, 2007). Initially, the distinction between urban and rural areas was based on a single criterion (e.g. population density, presence of agriculture). However, approaches combining several criteria have been adopted, as rural areas were recognised as complex and unable to be characterised by using a single criterion (Van Eupen, 2012). Criteria used to identify and categorise rural areas illustrate how they are perceived and public policy objectives.

Six types of approaches can be identified in the literature: **i)** the administrative (or statutory) approach, based on legal-administrative character; **ii)** the morphological (or demographic) approach, based on population criteria such as population density; **iii)** the locational approach, based on spatial relationships between urban and rural areas; **iv)** the economic (or structural, and functional) approach, based on criteria such as the share of agricultural GDP or the cost of services; **v)** the landscape approach, based on land-cover and climatic conditions; and **vi)** the combined approach, which used a combination of at least two of the other approaches.

### 1.2.1. Administrative approach

The administrative (or statutory) approach has been used mainly in the countries of Eastern Europe (Depraz, 2007). For example, in Poland, rural areas are defined as areas outside of the administrative boundaries of towns (Bański, 2006; Dymitrow, 2013). According to Bański and Mazur (2016), such an approach has limits, for example, areas neighbouring large urban agglomerations, which display more urban than rural features in functional, landscape and structural terms, will be classified as non-urban. In contrast, small towns might have strong functional relations with the neighbouring rural areas and display rural features (e.g. low density of population, low building density, high share of population employed in agriculture, high share of agricultural or forest land), which could qualify them as rural areas.

### 1.2.2. Morphological approach

The morphological approach has changed from the use of a single criterion to a combination of several criteria. The two criteria commonly used (depending on the country) are population size and population density. In France, for example, the INSEE (national statistical institute) uses population size to classify municipalities either as urban (with an urban area of more than 2,000 inhabitants) or as rural (without an urban area of more than 2,000 inhabitants). The threshold adopted varies from one country to another: for example, 5,000 inhabitants in Belgium and 10,000 inhabitants in Spain (Chevalier, 2008).

Other European countries such as Portugal, The Netherlands and some Scandinavian countries use the criterion of population density (Depraz, 2007). This criterion appears pertinent to avoid the distortions resulting from the different sizes in different countries. The OECD adopted the threshold of 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> to define three types of region according to population density (Serrano, 2014): **i)** urban region with more than 85% of the population living in municipalities of more than 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>; **ii)** semi-rural regions with between 50% and 85% of the population living in municipalities of more than 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>; **iii)** rural regions with less than 50% of the population living in municipalities of more than 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

According to Serrano (2014), the morphological approach is mostly used at national institutional levels in the EU, either alone or combined with other approaches. Deemed statistically robust, it nevertheless raises the question of the thresholds used by each country (Depraz, 2009).



### 1.2.3. Locational approach

The locational approach expresses definitions of rural areas in relation to urban areas or subjected to urban influence (Bański and Mazur, 2016). The main criteria refer to accessibility measures, such as the distance to urban centres or the daily commute of the population to their place of work. Distance to towns is also used as an indicator to characterise rural populations' access to a wide range of services and opportunities (Dijkstra, 2008). The categories of rural areas defined using a combination of these criteria essentially reflect the level of integration or isolation of rural areas in relation to urban areas.

### 1.2.4. Economic approach

The economic approach defines rurality according to the type of economic activity (specialised or diversified agricultural activities), and in particular according to the level of clustering or dispersion of these activities. The term 'urban' was first used to indicate the separation of the land as a source of income (Bibby, 2004). The characterisation of rural areas according to the economic approach is based either on criteria such as the share of the primary sector in GDP, average per capita income and service costs (healthcare and education), or on the application of a theoretical model inspired by spatial or territorial economics. The analysis conducted by Blanc (1997) illustrates how the construct of rurality depends on the model used. They identified three approaches: i) the spatial approach; ii) the functional or territorial approach; and iii) the constructivist approach.

The spatial approach (inspired by spatial economics) considers the location of economic operators in light of the availability of resources, distances and transport costs. This leads to a clustering of activities and services in order to achieve economies of scale while activities which do little to promote concentration will become scattered. This process will create a tiered area with centres and peripheries, depending on the level of concentration. Peripheral activities are not highly intensive and make use of natural resources while the labour force is relatively unskilled and undiversified. This approach defines rural areas as those excluded from the clustering process, and thus as peripheral areas.

The functional (or territorial) approach is based on the relationships between economic agents and proximity as factors conducive to economic performance and the upgrading of resources. In this approach, rural areas provide both specific resources and a potential for endogenous dynamics. The functional approach is common at transnational (EU and OECD) institutional level. Rural areas defined as a "regional interactional concept closely linked to urban areas" is the pivotal concept in the EU's regional policy. It is also the approach used in the typologies of the OECD, ESPON and EUROSTAT. For example, the typology developed by the French INSEE in 1999 and modified in 2010 is based on the number of jobs and the 'attraction' of the population living in rural municipalities to jobs in urban centres. The 2010 INSEE typology, called 'zoning in urban areas', defines rural municipalities as units where 40% of the resident population works in an urban hub: i) large urban areas, characterised by an urban hub with more than 10 000 jobs; ii) medium areas, defined as an urban hub with between 5 000 and 10 000 jobs; and iii) small areas, characterised by an urban hub with between 1 500 and 5 000 jobs (INSEE, 2010). This approach does not characterise rural areas but instead defines rural as being based on the area of influence of cities.

The constructivist approach is based on the representations of the groups of actors. Rurality will take on different meanings for farmers, who consider area as a working environment and resource, and for other residents to whom it represents landscape and a contribution to their quality of life.

### 1.2.5. Landscape approach

In recent studies, greater attention is paid to environmental aspects in the perception of rural areas and regarding the social demand for them (Bański and Mazur, 2016). This has led researchers to design new approaches to define rural. In particular, landscape and socio-ecological approaches have emerged in the



field of environmental geography, using land-cover data and climatic conditions to distinguish typical landscapes (Van Eupen, 2012). For example, criteria include building density, level of urbanisation, continuity of the built-up area and share of forest. Such criteria have sometimes been used within morphological approaches to enhance the definition of rural areas (Serrano, 2014; Bontron, 2015). For example, in the Netherlands, rural areas are defined according to different landscape criteria, the main one being building density within a 1 km radius (Serrano, 2014).

### 1.2.6. Combined approach

The combined approach usually links the criteria used in the approaches described above: locational and structural approaches (e.g. Rosner, 2008; Prieto-Lara and Ocaña-Riola, 2010; Copus, 2013), locational and landscape approach (Dijkstra and Ruiz, 2010; Berchoux *et al.*, 2019). Some countries also use such approaches. For example, in Sweden, urban areas (*tätort*) are defined based on both landscape and morphological features, requiring contiguous buildings with no more than 200 metres between houses, and at least 200 residents, to be considered urban.

In the EU SIMRA project, combinations of criteria were used to define marginalised rural areas (Price *et al.*, 2017). The characteristics used includes changes in classification of rural, and of the proportion of rural due to changes in population (see in Appendix 1 and 2).

## 1.3. Which 'new' rurality? Which rural development?

While the wide variety of approaches and criteria used to define rurality reflects the difficulty of the task, it also reflects the existence of profound endogenous changes (demography, diversification of activities, etc.) and exogenous changes (new social demand, globalisation, etc.), either current or future, prompting a review of what rurality is and will be. Research studies have highlighted the development of the tertiary sector in rural areas. This is the result of demographic change due to the influx of new residents (retirees and/or young people) and the development of tourism. The tertiary sector and tourism underpin the diversification of economic activities in many rural areas (varying in degree from one region to another). This dual trend represents a new vision of rural areas as a location providing services, leisure activities and a certain quality of life.

Public policies have gradually incorporated a phenomenon that researchers refer to as the 'de-agriculturalization' of rural areas (Perrier-Cornet, 2002), meaning a dissociation of the agricultural from the rural. The adoption of the concept of multifunctionality and its dissemination across a broad sphere (academic and professional) has contributed to this process of 'de-agriculturalization' (Brandt, 2003; Woods, 2011).

Within the concept of multifunctionality, three functions of rural areas can be identified: the productive function, the residential and recreational function, and the environmental function. These functions refer to the different uses of rural areas, which include: as a 'resource', referring to the productive function; as a 'living environment', referring to the residential and recreational function; and as 'nature', referring to the environmental function. Land considered as 'nature' corresponds to a definition of nature as a 'factory', a source of resources (water, soil, biodiversity, climate, prevention of natural risks, etc.), which must be protected and conserved (Perrier-Cornet, 2002). This function represents a vision of rural areas as producers of amenities and public goods.

The multi-functionality of rural areas is also reflected through the ecosystem services paradigm in which functions include regulating and cultural services as well as those of provisioning and supporting.

Parallel to the rise of the multifunctionality concept in the 90's, a new rural development paradigm emerged in both policy, practice and theory dimensions. Rural development appears there as a disputed and controversial concept or a heuristic device (Van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2001). These authors suggested that rural development came out timely after the crisis of the agricultural modernisation paradigm in Europe as a way



to figure out and to envision future perspectives for rural populations and rural areas. Diversification of the rural economy, new forms of rural entrepreneurship, pluri-activity, low-inputs farming systems, regional food supply chains, quality products strategies, multi-level rural governance and Leader approaches for instance, express the various trends that arise as new opportunities for making rural areas more attractive.

## 2. Typologies of rural area in the EU

Most European policies do not have a clear definition of rurality, yet planning authorities use typologies in their identification of areas in strategic planning and implementation of spatial policy. This section gives an overview of the main typologies used for the implementation of European policies and discusses the vision of rural they convey.

Constructing a typology of rural areas is not a neutral exercise. It involves dissecting and classifying areas into several homogeneous categories according to one or more criteria, ultimately producing entities which did not pre-exist. The entities created meet certain needs including: **i)** administrative needs to organise population management at the local level; **ii)** political needs to organise the types of power within the national space; and **iii)** organisational needs in terms of the collection of information which is essential for decision-making purposes (Chevalier, 2010). Constructing a typology means making trade-offs and choices. The latter are made according to the needs and problems for which the typology is constructed and are theoretical and methodological in nature.

In methodological terms, there are three elements used for constructing a typology: the criteria, the thresholds adopted and the spatial scale. The choice of criteria depends on the purpose and need of the typology. Thresholds (in terms of population size or surface area for example) will depend on settlement patterns and total area of each country, such as described in Section 1.2.2. The results obtained by applying the same criterion will differ considerably according to the thresholds used. The spatial scale varies according to the objective sought.

In general, two different levels will be used in SHERPA to analyse and classify rural areas at the national level: **i)** to define homogenous rural areas, the smallest appropriate territorial unit will be used, i.e. the local community (municipality); and **ii)** to analyse functional relationships, regional-level units will be used (OECD, 1994).

The spatial scale used for the typology depends on data availability. Typologies increasingly tend to adopt the scalar nesting method, such as in the INSEE or OECD typologies. This method involves creating a classification in two phases and using two spatial scales (DEPRAZ, 2009). First, there is a classification of the smallest local units according to a single criterion. These categories are then reclassified into new categories on a broader, regional scale. This results in categories such as 'essentially rural regions', 'relatively rural regions', 'essentially urban regions' that can be found in the OECD typology.

In theoretical terms, the typologies presented hereinafter adopt the same theoretical choices, which are the level of clustering or dispersion of the population and activities, and the rural-urban relationship.

### 2.1. The OECD typologies

The first OECD typology, published in 1994, was based on the criterion of population density (morphological approach). The two updates of the typology in 2009 and 2018 referred to the paradigm of the rural-urban relationship described above. This theoretical choice led to concepts and methods being developed and implemented when constructing the two typologies, in particular: **i)** the introduction of an indicator of remoteness from urban centres as a means of categorising areas; and **ii)** the construction of the concept of the functional urban area.



### 2.1.1. The 1994 typology

In 1994, the OECD proposed a typology of rural areas<sup>1</sup> based on the principle of scalar nesting, primarily using on two criteria: population density at local level to identify rural municipalities, and the percentage of the population of rural municipalities at regional level. The categories in this typology were as follows for Europe (OECD, 1994): at the local level with rural municipalities with a population density of less than 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and urban municipalities for over 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. At the regional level, the typology identified three classes: i) predominantly rural regions with more than 50% of the regional population living in rural municipalities; ii) relatively rural or intermediate regions with 15% to 50% of the regional population living in rural municipalities; and iii) predominantly urban regions with less than 15% of the regional population living in rural municipalities. The presence and size of urban centres modified the classification of regions. If a region classified as essentially rural included an urban centre with more than 200 000 inhabitants accounting for at least 25% of the regional population, it was categorised as an intermediate region. If an intermediate region included an urban centre with more than 500 000 inhabitants accounting for at least 25% of the regional population, it was categorised as predominantly urban.

In summary, this typology quantified the degree to which an area is 'rural', rejecting the dichotomy between rural and urban areas.

### 2.1.2. The 2011 typology

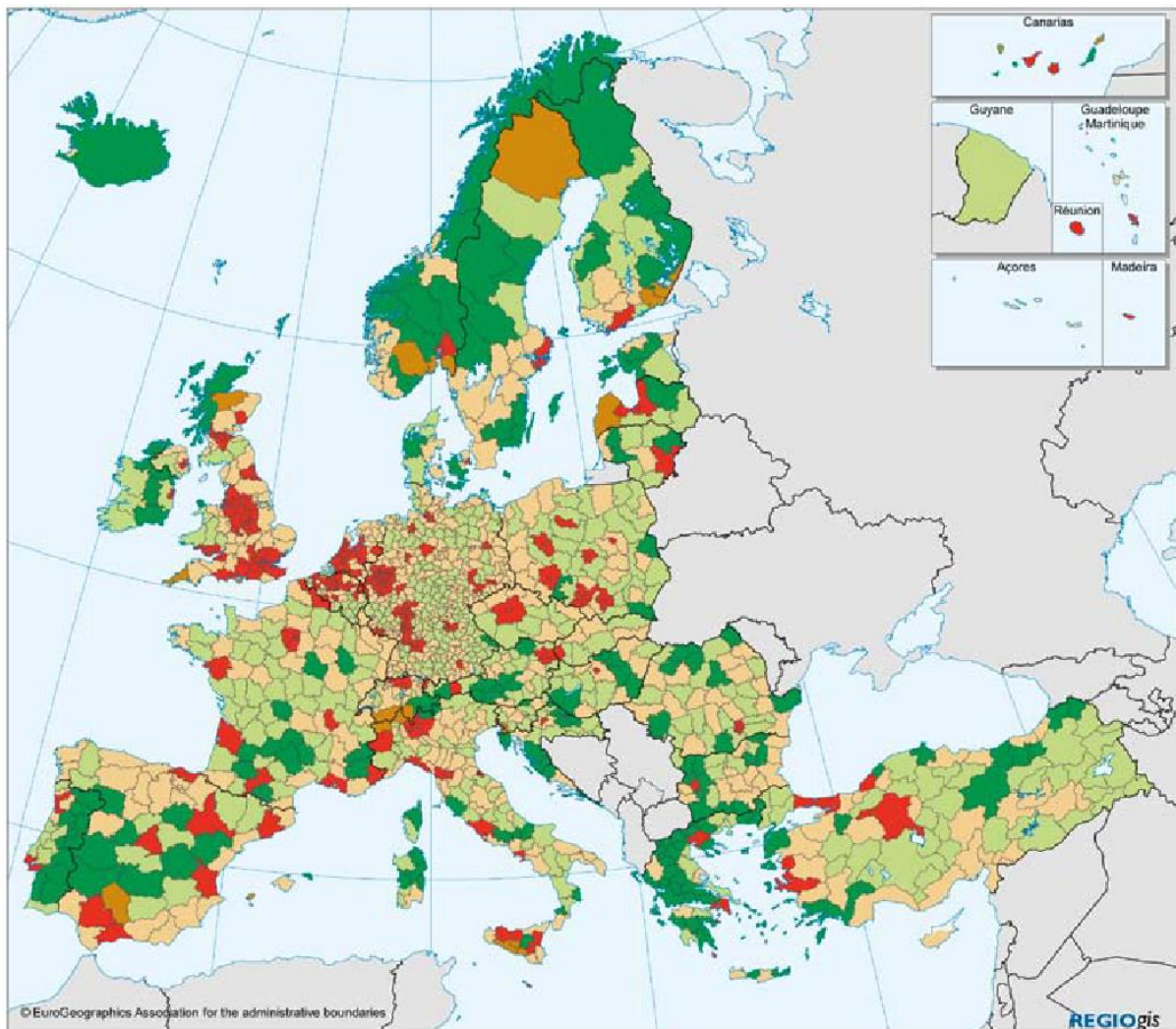
In 2011, the OECD typology was updated to include a model drawn from the work of Dijkstra and Poelman (2008). It was based on the hypothesis that remoteness of rural areas from urban hubs was a key determinant of the characteristics of these areas. They compared remote rural areas with those close to the cities using several variables and indicators including population density, per capita GDP, share in GDP, productivity, value added, etc., with the results showing considerable differences. For example, in rural areas outwith urban hubs they characterised such areas as having: an average population density half that in rural areas close to urban centres; per capita GDP three points lower than per capita GDP in rural areas close to urban centres; productivity in three sectors (agriculture, industry and services) is ten points lower than in rural areas close to urban centres; and the share of value added from the agricultural sector is higher but productivity is lower.

A region is considered close to an urban centre if half the population can reach an urban centre of at least 50,000 inhabitants in less than 45 minutes, and deemed remote if this is the case for less than half the population (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2008). Remoteness, or accessibility of rural areas, appeared to be directly linked to what the OECD refers to as a low-density economy, or rural. This results in economic structures displaying little diversification and unskilled jobs (OECD, 2018), although they can provide other opportunities for space-demanding activities, such as server farms to support digitalisation. By applying this indicator of remoteness to the categories defined by the 1994 typology, the new categories were (OECD, 2011): i) urban or predominantly urban regions; ii) intermediate regions close to an urban centre; iii) remote intermediate regions; iv) rural or predominantly rural regions close to an urban centre; and v) remote rural or predominantly rural regions (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> The typologies of rural areas were applied to the NUTs 3 regions of the EU, i.e. the regions with a population ranging from a minimum of 150,000 inhabitants to a maximum of 800,000.





Type of NUTS3 region

- Predominantly urban regions
- Intermediate regions, close to a city
- Intermediate, remote regions
- Predominantly rural regions, close to a city
- Predominantly rural, remote regions

Close to a city: at least 50% of the population of the region lives at less than 45 minutes travel by road to a city of at least 50 000 inhabitants. Results for Turkey are provisional.  
Sources: Eurostat, JRC, EFGS, LandScan, REGIO-GIS



Figure 1. OECD urban–rural typology, 2011, applied to European Union Member States at NUTS 3 level

### 2.1.3. The 2018 typology

In 2018, the OECD produced a new typology complementing the previous typologies by introducing the concept of ‘functional urban areas’ (OECD, 2018) to better reflect the link between rural and urban areas through access to the labour market and public services as well as environmental questions. In this new typology, a town corresponds to one or more local units where at least 50% of the population live in an urban centre. A functional urban area (FUA) includes a town and its surroundings consisting of less densely populated local units which are nevertheless part of the town’s labour market due to commuting, i.e. people

travelling from their place of residence to the labour market and/or to access services (healthcare, education, culture, shops, etc.) (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2019).

The typology differentiates three types of rural regions. First, rural areas within a functional urban area (FUA), which are an integral part of the commuting area of the urban centre and their development is fully integrated into the development of the latter. Second, rural regions close to a functional urban area, which are not part of the area's labour market, but flows of products and services still exist. The development of these rural regions depends on the development of the functional urban area. Third, rural regions far from a functional urban area, for which personal interactions outside these regions are limited and infrequent. The local economy depends on product exports from the primary sector.

The agricultural nature of the predominantly rural regions varies according to the share of agriculture in total employment (ranging from 40.5% in Romania to 3.2% in Belgium) and in value added (13.3% in Latvia and 1.4% in Germany) (OECD, 2018 and Appendix 4, 5, Figures 15-16). Remote predominantly rural regions are the most economically fragile due to their high level of dependence on primary activities and their low productivity. They are also most vulnerable to external shocks. Predominantly rural regions would appear to offer certain advantages concerning the population's well-being, in particular with regard to the environment. They are nevertheless at a clear disadvantage with regard to access to services, education, healthcare and safety.

### 2.2. The ESPON typology

The EDORA project (European Development Opportunities for Rural Areas) is a project within the ESPON programme, which resulted in the construction of a typology at the NUTS3 level, covering intermediate and predominantly rural regions. It is based on the 2011 OECD typology, refining the rural-urban relationship by taking into account the relationship between rural regions and a network of small and medium-sized urban centres (Copus and Noguera, 2010). The aim was to classify non-urban regions according to three dimensions: rurality and accessibility; economic restructuring; and socio-economic performance (accumulation or decline). The main characteristics resulting from this typology were: **i)** agricultural regions (23.2% of all regions) with 87% of its population living in regions in decline or with poor economic performance; **ii)** consumption countryside regions (50% of all regions) with 67% of the population living in regions displaying good economic performance; and **iii)** diversified regions with a market services sector (19.6% of all regions) with 66% of the population living in regions displaying good economic performance.

### 2.3. EUROSTAT typologies

For Europe, since 2011, Eurostat<sup>6</sup> has defined 'rural' using 1km<sup>2</sup> grid cells, with a two-stage process to, initially, identify the population in urban areas: **i)** population density threshold (300 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>) calculated for 1 km<sup>2</sup> grid cells; and **ii)** minimum size threshold (5 000 inhabitants) applied to grouped grid cells above the density threshold. The EUROSTAT typology adopts numerous methodological elements and theoretical hypotheses of the OECD work as they were conducted jointly.

To harmonise the collection and analysis of the statistics, EUROSTAT uses a three-level nomenclature of territorial units (NUTS):

- NUTs 1: regions with between 3 000 000 and 7 000 000 inhabitants;
- NUTs 2: regions with between 800 000 and 3 000 000 inhabitants;
- NUTs 3: regions with between 150 000 and 800 000 inhabitants.
- NUTS 3 regions are based on existing administrative entities. National governments can ask for the NUTS system to be revised to reflect changes at a national level (Eurostat, 2013), and three regular





amendments were introduced between 2007 and 2015, as well as an extraordinary amendment which came into force in 2015 (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/history>). Changes between 2013 and 2015 affected 185 NUTS 3 regions. Some such changes relate to recoding, and others include boundary changes or shifts (e.g. Poland, Netherlands, Germany, Finland and the UK), and new regions introduced, discontinued, split or merged (e.g. Poland, Germany, Ireland, France, Hungary). Such changes have led to an evolving record and representation of the socio-economic characteristics of the European area. The changes can be small with respect to their impact on the division of European space into rural and urban, but have implications for consistency of data and use.

- The EUROSTAT territorial typologies are summarised in Figure 2, extracted from the methodological manual of territorial typologies (EUROSTAT, 2018).

**Territorial typologies — an overview**

	Geographical level	Basic territorial typologies	Urban typologies	Coastal typology	Border typology	Island typology	Mountain typology
Regional typologies:	NUTS 1 regions						
	NUTS 2 regions						
	NUTS 3 regions	Urban-rural typology: predominantly urban regions; intermediate regions; predominantly rural regions	Metropolitan regions	Coastal regions	Border regions	Island regions	Mountain regions
Local typologies:	Local administrative units (LAU)	Degree of urbanisation (*): cities; towns and suburbs; rural areas	City definitions: cities; functional urban areas (FUA) = cities and their commuting zones	Coastal areas			
Grid typologies:	Grid cells (1 km <sup>2</sup> )	Cluster types: urban centre; urban clusters; rural grid cells	Urban clusters and urban centres				

**Key:**

- Individual codes and labels (based on geographical entity)
- Three categories per country (aggregated)
- Combination of individual codes and aggregation
- Two categories per country (aggregated)
- Technical level
- As defined in Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS).

(\* Within the degree of urbanisation typology the aggregation of cities with towns and suburbs is referred to as urban areas.  
Source: Eurostat Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003



Figure 2. Territorial typologies, extracted from the methodological manual of territorial typologies (EUROSTAT, 2018).

These typologies are based on the following elements:

- the population grid comprising cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> (presented above);
- the functional urban areas (FUA) and their commuting zones;
- the local administrative units (LUAs) which generally correspond to the municipalities, are used to define the local typologies such as the functional urban areas and commuting zones;
- an urban cluster consists of a cluster of contiguous grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> with a population density of at least 300 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum population of 5,000 inhabitants. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Urban\\_cluster](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Urban_cluster);
- rural areas are areas located outside the population grid cells identified as urban centres or urban clusters.

**2.3.1. The urban-rural typology**



The 'urban-rural typology' (EUROSTAT, 2018) classifies areas (at the level of NUTs3 regions) according to the level of urbanisation (Figure 3). The classification is:

- predominantly urban regions (over 80% of the population living in an urban cluster);
- intermediate regions (between 50% and 80% of the population living in an urban cluster);
- predominantly rural regions (less than 50% of the population living in the area corresponding to the part of the population grid not identified as urban centres or urban clusters).

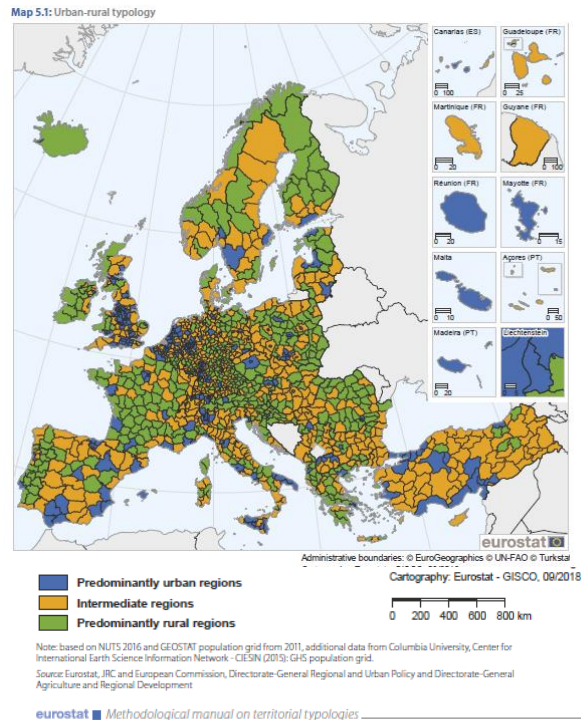


Figure 3. Urban-rural typology for Europe (Eurostat, 2018).

In 2016, the 1 348 NUTs3 regions (28 countries) were designated as follows:

- 367 predominantly urban regions (27%)
- 553 intermediate regions (41%)
- 428 predominantly rural regions (31%)

All three types of region are found in all European countries except for Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus. Since 2016, three NUTs3 regions classified as predominantly rural have become intermediate regions and three others classified as intermediate have become predominantly urban. The population in the predominantly rural regions rarely exceeds 30% of the total population, as shown in Figure 4, from the Eurostat methodological manual of territorial typologies (2018).

Appendix 1, Figure 12 shows the geographic distribution of the reallocation of NUTs3 regions to more urban, and more rural, with the introduction of the new classification system. As population, and patterns of development, change so attribution of a region as rural may change. For example, Appendix 2, Figure 13, shows a map of the changes in the percentage per squared kilometre (< 150 people per km<sup>2</sup>; 2010) per NUTs 3 is shown for Europe and the Mediterranean region (from Price *et al.*, 2017).

A revision to the urban-rural typology has also been tested and introduced by the EU. This simplifies the typology into two levels (urban and rural), with a threshold of population density of 300 people per km<sup>2</sup>, and



a minimum population threshold of 5 000 (Eurostat, 2011; [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural\\_typology](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology)).

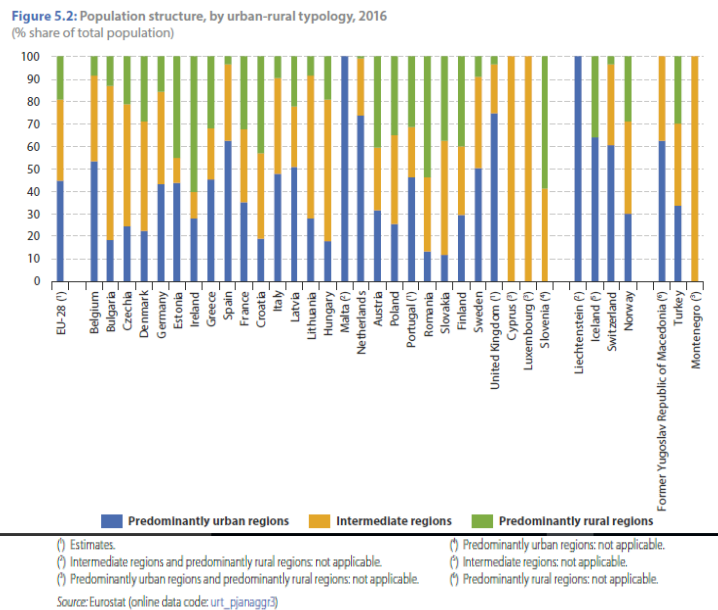


Figure 4. Population structure by urban-rural typology (% share of total population) (Eurostat, 2018).

The theoretical and methodological choices underpinning the 'urban-rural typology' are: i) there is no dichotomy between rural and urban areas, only degrees of urbanisation and rurality; ii) the level of population and activity clustering or dispersion is a key dimension and a discriminatory factor; and iii) the rural-urban relationship provides the analysis framework to categorise rural areas.

### 2.3.2. Coastal regions

According to the EUROSTAT methodological manual of territorial typologies, coastal areas are local administrative units bordering or close to a coastline. The coastline is the line where land and water surfaces meet. To harmonise the delineation of this line, the European Commission has adopted the use of the mean high tide. Coastal areas are defined on two levels: local administrative units (LAUs) and NUTs3 regions.

At the local administrative unit level, two types of area are identified: i) coastal areas, which is defined as local administrative units that border the coastline or local administrative units that have at least 50% of their surface area within a distance of 10 km from the coastline; and ii) non-coastal areas, which is defined as local administrative units that do not border the coastline and have less than 50% of their surface area within a distance of 10 km from the coastline.

At the NUTs3 level, two types of regions are differentiated: i) regions with a maritime border; and ii) regions where more than half the population lives less than 50 km from the coastline.

### 2.3.3. Mountain regions

These are defined according to the following criteria (Eurostat, 2018):

- regions where more than 50% of the surface is covered by a mountainous topography;
- regions where more than 50% of the population live in areas displaying a mountainous topography;
- regions where both the previous conditions are met.

Criteria to delineate mountainous topography are developed using a digital elevation model. Above an altitude of 2 500 m, all regions are deemed mountainous. Below 2 500 m, the criteria used are altitude, slope and slope radius. Below and altitude of 300 m, topography is added to the previous criteria (altitude, slope and slope radius) in order to incorporate specific characteristics of mountain regions in Scotland and Norway and along the Mediterranean coast.

Using these criteria, 323 of the 1 348 NUTS3 regions are classified as mountain regions (Figure 6), divided into two categories:

- 170 NUTS3 regions where more than 50% of the population live in mountain areas and more than 50% of the surface is covered by mountain areas;
- 148 NUTS2 regions where more than 50% of the surface is covered by mountain areas.

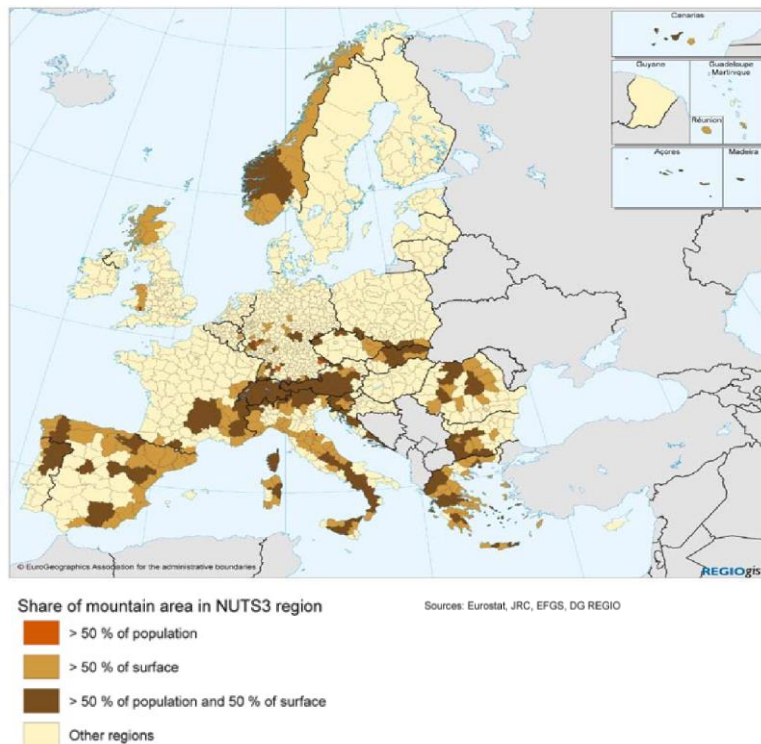


Figure 5. NUTS3 regions classified by mountainous area (extract from Dijkstra and Poelman, 2011).

#### 2.3.4. Disadvantaged areas, areas with a natural constraint and marginalised rural areas

Disadvantaged areas and areas with a natural constraint have been subject to debate regarding their eligibility under the CAP but are not included in the EUROSTAT territorial typologies. According to EU Regulation 1305/2013, Member States have updated their zoning areas under natural constraints, mainly taking account of biophysical criteria.

Disadvantaged areas are subject to natural constraints which affect agricultural production conditions through lower yields and higher costs. Since 1975, to reduce the rate and level of depopulation, maintain agricultural activity and conserve the environment, EU agricultural policy has awarded aid, referred to as compensatory allowances for natural handicaps (or CANH), to farmers in disadvantaged areas. These allowances are divided into three groups (Orshoven *et al.*, 2012):



- mountain areas: where the altitude, low temperatures and steep slopes represent difficult conditions or handicaps to agricultural production;
- intermediate disadvantaged areas: where the level of soil fertility is low, and the climate poses challenges to agricultural production, resulting in the level of production being weak. Population density is low in these areas, with further declines in their population threatened. Nevertheless, maintaining an extensive agricultural activity is necessary for the purposes of soil management;
- areas with specific handicaps: where it is necessary to maintain agricultural activity despite handicaps in order to conserve the environment and protect both the landscape and the tourism potential.

Following criticisms levelled at the compensatory allowances for natural handicaps, either with regard to their weak impact or their high cost, the EU initiated a reform aimed at redefining disadvantaged areas. Within the framework of this reform, the demarcation criteria of intermediate disadvantaged areas have been limited to two biophysical criteria: the soil and the climate.

For the 2014-2020 programming period, the three types of disadvantaged area are:

- mountain areas;
- areas subject to natural constraints (instead of intermediate disadvantaged areas);
- areas subject to specific constraints.

The rural development regulation 2014-2020 stipulates that EU Member States must redefine the areas subject to natural constraints according to biophysical criteria. Each State defines the areas subject to specific constraints, up to a limit of 10% of its surface area either by applying specific criteria deemed relevant in relation to the agricultural and territorial particularities or by combining these specific criteria with the biophysical criteria.

The aim of the reform of the definition of the areas subject to natural constraints is for those areas to be defined according to natural constraints which cannot be overcome by means of investment and technology. Several EU guides and documents present methods and advice concerning the application of the biophysical criteria and combinations thereof (e.g. Terres, 2014; Terres, 2016), and for what is referred to as 'fine-tuning' purposes.

Initially, this fine-tuning has been implemented with regard to the biophysical constraints. In the case of a municipality subject to drought, for example, if there has been investment in irrigation, the area benefiting from this investment could be deducted from the area subject to the constraint (Le Barh *et al.*, 2018).

Across all the territorial units adopted after this initial stage, a second fine-tuning process checked whether the technical-economic constraints have been overcome. In France, for example, the criteria chosen for this technical-economic fine-tuning were the standard output/ha, livestock density/ha of forage area, and the average yield of soft wheat per department (Le Barh *et al.*, 2018).

This reform will lead to several regions being withdrawn from the category of those classified as subject to natural constraints, while other new areas with natural constraints will be added.

### 2.3.5. Other typologies of rural areas

#### PeripheRuality Indicator (PRI)

In an article exploring the links between the degree of rurality in NUTS3 regions and the allocations of the rural development programmes (RDP), some Italian economists (Camaioni *et al.*, 2013) proposed a new measurement of rurality. Considering the outdated status of the urban-rural divide on one side, they reframe a set of indicators used against the RDP allocations. In that respect, they aggregate socio-economic data with geographical features of NUTS3 regions. Thereby, four major thematic have been scoped: i) socio-



economic indicators (7 indicators); ii) the role of economy (7 indicators); iii) land use (3 indicators); iv) geography/spatial dimension (7 indicators) over different territorial scales. Results were categorised through a NUTS3 regions clustering: peripheries, nature-quality regions, cities, remote regions, mixed-economy regions, shrinking regions, manufacturing regions. Detail of these indicators are provided in Appendix 11, Figure 19.

### **Rural broadband coverage**

In a study on broadband coverage commissioned by the European Commission in 2018 (IHS Markit *et al.*, 2018), a survey was carried out of EU households on the delivery of internet broadband by operators. The findings of the survey were reported at NUTS 3 level. One of the challenges raised by the researchers was to obtain comparable data of broadband coverage between rural areas.

A rural typology has been established as follows. Using the Corine land cover database, a database of population and land type in every kilometre square in the EU has been used to classify those with a population of less than one hundred per square kilometre as rural. This method was expected to distinguish between unserved and underserved populations by broadband operators in rural areas against a criterion of population density.

The study concludes that rural broadband coverage was lower than national coverage across EU Member states: *"In mid-2018, 87.4% of rural EU homes were passed by at least one fixed broadband technology and just over half of them (52.3%) had access to high-speed next generation services"*. (Markit *et al.*, 2018; p.6).

Further details about access to ICTs and the digital gap between urban and rural areas is provided in the sub-section 3.3, p. 32.

### **UN Statistical Commission - Method for classifying and comparing cities, urban areas and rural areas (DEGURBA)**

The UN DEGURBA method, released in March 2020, proposes a new method to define cities, urban and rural areas that could be applied globally. The method, called "degree of urbanisation" and based on population grids, classifies the entire territory of a country into three classes: 1) cities, 2) towns and semi-dense areas, and 3) rural areas. It has two extensions. The first extension identifies: cities, towns, suburban or peri-urban areas, villages, dispersed rural areas and mostly uninhabited areas. The second extension adds a commuter zone around each city to create a functional urban area or metropolitan area. This method has the advantage of being transferable globally, providing a definition of urban-rural based solely on demography (morphological approach), although it does not account for specific economic, social and environmental characteristics of rural areas.



### 3. Review of EU main strategies dealing with the rural areas

This section scopes the review of EU main strategies dealing with rural areas as follows. Those considered were the main strategic agendas of the EU, expressed through its multiannual policy framework, its legal acts and EU Communications that dealt with multiple rural dimensions (i.e. rural areas, rural society, rural economy, etc.).

Four intertwined layers of review are proposed to embrace both the institutional policy framework of the EU regarding rural, where it remained permanent and stable over time since 1988, and the specific policy orientations and strategies released by the EU through over successive time periods. This section covers:

- a. The main milestones which paved the way of EU Rural Development policies
- b. The main EU policies dealing with rural development
- c. The main EU multiannual strategies
- d. The specific thematic strategies of the EU dealing with rural

The EU policy framework was reviewed with respect to EU Regulations, EU Communication and working documents, and a literature review.

#### 3.1. Main milestones paving the way of EU policies for rural areas

The literature review on institutional and policy developments related to rural areas and rural development identified specific EU and OECD documents and declarations which have had a significant impact on the 'policy fabric' of rural areas as a category for public policies.

International organizations, the European Economic Community and then the European Union, think tanks, networks of researchers, practitioners and decision-makers have contributed to the production of communication declarations, and reports that contain specific recommendations for better public rural policies which correspond to the needs of their time.

Five key milestones were identified that paved the way of EU strategies for rural areas through rural development policies that have been adjusted and incrementally changed over time:

- Future of rural society (EEC, 1988)
- Cork Declaration (EU, 1996)
- New rural paradigm (OECD, 2006)
- Cork 2.0 Declaration (EU, 2016)
- Rural policy 3.0 (OECD, 2018)

Reference is also made to the proposal of a future Communication on 'A long-term vision for rural areas' which was announced by the European Commission in December 2019, and which is expected in 2021.



Figure 6: Principal milestones of rural development policy of the EU (in blue – those of the EU; in green those of the OECD; in dashed outline, the future Long-term vision for areas to be issued by the EC in 2021). (Source: authors).

### 3.1.1. The Future of Rural Society Communication (1988)

In 1988, the European Commission has released a Communication entitled 'The future of rural society' which detailed its vision for rural development under three headings: i) the economic and social cohesion in its regional diversity across Europe; ii) the 'unavoidable' structural change of the agricultural sectors that will impact the broader rural economy; iii) the protection of the environment (p. 5).

At that time, the Communication outlined two major trends affecting rural areas: i) the restructuring, the modernisation and intensification of agriculture and the split of the family farming model into various sub-models of farming; and ii) as a corollary, the rise of economic diversification in the rural areas through off-farm new activities or unconnected activities from agriculture.

Problems affecting rural society are those of a modern development threatening the stability and quietness of rural areas such as:

*"The problem is first and foremost one of land use in the face of competing interests, transformation of the countryside, threats to the stability of the environment, unplanned and scattered settlement of holidays homes and factory plants, and heavy seasonal influxes of tourists"* (p. 6).

Despite the diversification of the economy in rural areas, rural decline of population is a concern, as are maintaining minimum population, business and social activities in rural areas that have no opportunities to diversify their economy.

The vision for rural society acknowledges the need for a twofold European policy intervention towards:

- the farming community through direct aids to farmers (considered also as a social function);
- accompanying the agricultural adjustment through the structural funds in order to propose alternative job opportunities in rural regions.

A division of tasks is proposed between the farming policy (social policy intervention) and the rural development or the regional policy (structural funds).

Ten areas of the European Community action plan were proposed as follows:

1. the CAP,
2. the forestry,
3. protection of the rural environment,
4. energy and rural society,
5. regional policy,
6. action to help small businesses,
7. research and development,
8. new information and telecommunication technology,
9. education, training and social policy,
10. information and awareness.

This comprehensive agenda for rural society, the Communication does not use the term 'rural areas', was already implemented at that time through a policy mix including: EAGGF (CAP), forestry schemes, schemes for fisheries and aquaculture, ERDF, ESF, integrated measures, Community research programmes and Community loans instruments. The following statement from the Communication sets out the strategic scope:

*"Thus, the Community now has wide scope for action, by means of legislation or funding, to support or encourage rural development. It therefore makes sense to review present arrangements in their entirety and to adapt and amplify them with a view to achieving a strengthened and mutually consistent body of measures. This is the strategy recommended by the Commission here: it requires not only that direct and carefully targeted measures be taken, but also, to the extent possible, that the rural dimension be taken into account in all the Community's policies and measures."* (p. 31).





### 3.1.2. The Cork declaration (1996)

In 1996, the EC organised a European Conference on Rural Development in Cork, Ireland. This conference was an opportunity to discuss the “future rural development policy requirements of the EU for the year 2000 and beyond”. According to former Commissioner Franz Fischler (Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development), the conference had to address:

- *“the current and future challenges facing the EU's rural areas, and the type of European policies needed to meet them;*
- *the need for a fully-fledged, multi-sectoral and integrated rural development policy to cover all rural areas of the Union, and the main features of such a policy;*
- *the steps required to improve the implementation of existing European Structural Fund programmes, moving towards a genuine integrated EU rural development policy.* <sup>2</sup>

The conference concluded with a declaration untitled ‘A living countryside’ which stated new directions for upcoming EU Rural Development policy based on integrated and territory-driven approaches. The Cork Declaration pledged a genuine integrated rural development policy based on ten principles (see the table below).

The Ten Principles of the Cork Declaration (1996)	
1. Rural preference	6. Simplification
2. Integrated approach	7. Programming
3. Diversification	8. Finance
4. Sustainability	9. Management
5. Subsidiarity	10. Evaluation and research

Table 1: The Ten Principles of the Cork Declaration (1996)

The first principle, ‘rural preference’ statement is of particular relevance to this review:

*“Sustainable rural development must be put at the top of the agenda of the European Union, and become the fundamental principle which underpins all rural policy in the immediate future and after enlargement. This aims at reversing rural out-migration, combating poverty, stimulating employment and equality of opportunity, and responding to growing requests for more quality, health, safety, personal development and leisure, and improving rural well-being. The need to preserve and improve the quality of the rural environment must be integrated into all Community policies that relate to rural development. There must be a fairer balance of public spending, infrastructure investments and educational, health and communications services between rural and urban areas. A growing share of available resources should be used for promoting rural development and securing environmental objectives.”*

The Cork Conference and Declaration opened a new era for Rural Development policies by seeking “to raise public awareness about the importance of making a new start in rural development policy”. So far, Rural Development was considered as a flanking policy to the Common Agricultural Policy, i.e. through agri-environmental measures, compensation measures for disadvantaged areas and the LEADER scheme. From the Cork Conference and Declaration, the new ambition to substitute a rural

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_96\\_938](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_96_938)

preference for the agricultural preference was drawn from specific policy directions that go beyond the challenges faced by the farming sectors. They were to tackle depopulation (rural out-migration) and poverty, boosting jobs while improving quality of life and basic services in rural areas.

The Cork Declaration provided a vision for rural Europe, and for a rural policy through specific attributes and qualifiers: rural well-being, rural environment, rural services, rural communities, rural landscapes, rural economies, and even rural credit techniques.

Such ambition materialised in Rural Development policy as the second pillar of the CAP in 1999, with a dedicated fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and incorporated into successive EU Regulations for Rural Development and in the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) designed by Member States.

### 3.1.3. The New Rural Paradigm (OECD, 2006)

In its report released in 2006, the OECD suggested a shift from the 'old' rural paradigm based on agricultural policies towards a modern rural paradigm based on a diversified rural economy. The weight of the agricultural economy in the rural economy is put into perspective, as well as the influence of agricultural policies based on supporting farm incomes. The impact of farm subsidies on rural prosperity and rural well-being is reviewed in the OECD report.

The OECD report explicitly recognises that agricultural policies could no longer be viewed as rural policies, given structural changes and demographic and socio-economic trends affecting rural areas. In addition to adjustment policies targeting farmers, the OECD called on governments to adopt a new programmatic and strategic approach to the development of rural areas.

The foundations of the new rural paradigm are rooted in two principles: i) changes in the policy focus (a rural focus broader than an agricultural one); ii) adjustments to the governance structure through a multi-level governance approach. The differences between the new rural paradigm and the old approach is illustrated in the following table.

	Old approach	New approach
<b>Objectives</b>	Equalisation, farm income, farm competitiveness	Competitiveness of rural areas, valorisation of local assets, exploitation of unused resources
<b>Key target sectors</b>	Agriculture	Various sectors of the rural economy (e.g. rural tourism, manufacturing, ICT industry, etc.)
<b>Main tools</b>	Subsidies	Investments
<b>Key actors and stakeholders</b>	National governments, farmers	All levels of governments (supra-national, national, regional, local) and local stakeholders (public, private, NGOs)

Table 2: The New Rural Paradigm (2006). Source: OECD, 2006, p. 15.

### 3.1.4. The Cork 2.0 Declaration (2016)



Twenty years after the first Cork Declaration made it possible to introduce the multifunctionality of agriculture into the CAP (see Section 3.1.2), the European Commission organised a second conference in Cork.

The Cork 2.0 Declaration untitled 'Better life in rural areas' proposed 10 policy directions for an innovative, inclusive and integrated agricultural and rural policy:

1. Promoting rural prosperity
2. Strengthening rural value chains
3. Investing in rural viability and vitality
4. Preserving the rural environment
5. Managing natural resources
6. Encouraging climate action
7. Boosting knowledge and innovation
8. Enhancing rural governance
9. Advancing policy delivery and simplification
10. Improving performance and accountability

Among these ten points, the first one 'Promoting rural prosperity' is of particular importance. It states:

*"The rural potential to deliver innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions for current and future societal challenges such as economic prosperity, food security, climate change, resource management, social inclusion, and integration of migrants should be better recognised. A rural proofing mechanism should ensure this is reflected in Union policies and strategies. Rural and agricultural policies should build on the identity and dynamism of rural areas through the implementation of integrated strategies and multi-sectorial approaches. They should promote diversification and foster entrepreneurship, investment, innovation and employment."* (p. 6).

This declaration reflected on contemporary and new challenges for rural areas (e.g. the integration of migrants). Amongst the key new things compared to the 2016 declaration, is the concept of rural-proofing, as a commitment by governments to monitor and assess the impact of their policies on rural areas.

### 3.1.5. The Rural Policy 3.0 (OECD, 2018)

Rural Policy 3.0 is a framework to help national governments support rural economic development. Yet as described in Section 3.1.3, the New rural paradigm set out by the OECD in 2006 proposed a conceptual framework that shifted from an agriculture-driven approach (old approach) towards a broader rural scope (new approach). This shift has materialised through mainstreamed investment interventions rather than via farm subsidies, in order to promote competitiveness in rural territories beyond the farm gate.

According to OECD, Rural policy 3.0 is an upgrade of its 2006 new paradigm that build on following policy lessons:

*"1. Delivering improved well-being for rural dwellers (across economic, social and environmental dimensions).*

*2. Understanding the growth dynamics of low-density economies (distance to markets, role of the tradeable sector, and absolute advantages).*

*3. Deploying a range of policy instruments (investments, addressing market failures, and supporting social innovation).*

*4. Fostering a multi-sectoral approach that engages public agencies, the private sector and non-government organisations, and is inclusive of different population groups and places.*



5. Integrating delivery to enable sectoral policies that match the needs and circumstances of different rural regions.

6. Understanding that there is a spectrum of rural regions ranging from those in an FUA to remote which have different policy opportunities and challenges.” (p. 25)

Table 3 updates the 2006 new paradigm with a new objective of well-being, a policy focus towards low-density economies by type of rural area.

	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm (2006)	Rural Policy 3.0
<b>Objectives</b>	Equalisation, farm income, farm competitiveness	Competitiveness of rural areas valorisation of local assets exploitation of unused resources	Well-being considering multiple dimensions of: i) the economy; ii) society and iii) the environment
<b>Policy focus</b>	Agriculture	Various sectors of the rural economy (e.g. rural tourism, manufacturing, ICT industry, etc.)	Low-density economies differentiated by type of rural area
<b>Main tools</b>	Subsidies	Investments	Integrated rural development approach spectrum of support to public sector, firms and third sector
<b>Key actors and stakeholders</b>	National governments, farmers	All levels of governments (supra-national, national, regional, local) and local stakeholders (public, private, NGOs)	Involvement of: i) public sector - multi-level governance, ii) private sectors - for profit firm and social enterprises, and ii) third sector - non-governmental organisations and civil society
<b>Policy approach</b>	Uniformly applied Top down policy	Bottom-up policy Local strategies	Integrated approach with multiple policy domains

Table 3: The Rural Policy 3.0. (Source: OECD, 2018, p. 22).

### 3.2. Main EU policies on rural: Cohesion and Regional policies, and the CAP

Public policies reflect different visions of rural development. An initial vision of rural development, described here as ‘agri-centric’, sees agricultural activity as the primary activity, albeit with a multifunctional vision of agriculture encompassing the environment and the diversification of farm activities. A second vision of rural development sees it as local or territorial development, either by rejecting the particularity of rural areas or considering agriculture as one activity among several others without any particular status (Dechambre, 2007). The EU’s Regional and Agricultural policies reflect these two visions of rural development to different degrees depending on their implementation periods.

Since 1999, Regional policy has adopted an approach to rurality based on its relationship with urban areas (locational approach). Rural areas are not an object in their own right but are addressed as a component of a regional spatial entity, with criteria which apply to both rural and urban areas, such as GDP. In the wake of agricultural modernisation, however, rurality in the CAP has been increasingly associated with the protection of natural resources.



The rural-urban relationship has grown in importance in European policies since the end of the 1990s when a strong emphasis began to be placed on regional cooperation (Artmann, 2012). The notion of the rural-urban partnership has been incorporated into European policies, and rurality has been characterised as a constituent part of a global space which includes urban areas, not as a separate entity. The rationale behind this approach is that it is integrated and non-sectorial, which is necessary as most rural and urban problems are interdependent, and the dichotomy of urban and rural areas is of more limited meaning. There is a spatial continuum which goes between the levels of urbanisation and rurality. Further, the rural-urban partnership is not specific to one particular size of urban hub.

### 3.2.1. The Regional Development policy

In 1999, the European Regional Development policy (European Spatial Development Perspective, 1999) stated that its ultimate aim was to reduce regional disparities and ensure that the following three objectives were achieved in every European region: i) economic and social cohesion; ii) conservation and management of natural resources and cultural heritage; and iii) competitiveness of European territories. In particular, the notion of the rural-urban partnership is at the heart of the Study Programme on European Spatial Planning and the ESPON programme<sup>3</sup>. At the national level, several European countries have developed policy tools for rural-urban partnerships, such as the “*Metropolregioner*” in Germany, inter-municipal cooperation between “*Communautés*” in France, or national rural networks “*Redes Rurales Naciona*l” in Spain (Artmann, 2012). Regional Development policy is intended to be used as a tool to facilitate coordination between European policies (ESPD, 1999). One of the main orientations of this policy is to develop a polycentric and balanced urban system and to strengthen the partnership between urban and rural areas. It thus involves overcoming the dualism between city and rural areas.

According to the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESPD, 1999), a polycentric urban system (incorporating small and medium-sized towns) offers a suitable framework for the development of rural areas. It provides access to infrastructure, services and a larger labour market. Three types of rural areas are identified: i) rural areas where agriculture is intensive, and where the polycentric urban system helps to manage the pressure exerted on rural areas (land pressure, pollution or mass tourism in mountain and coastal areas); ii) rural areas with unfavourable agricultural production conditions and unable to deal with international competition, which must direct their development towards the diversification of their economy (quality production, renewable energy, tourism, cultural and heritage activities, etc.), requiring extra-regional ties, networks and contacts with new markets, as well as access to training and information; and iii) marginalised rural areas where extensification of farming and forestry activities would help protect nature.

Echoing the rationale of the rural-urban relationship, the OECD suggests three categories of spatial connection (OECD, 2010; Artmann *et al.*, 2012): i) metropolitan regions in which rural areas primarily provide services for urban regions; ii) networks of small and medium-sized towns with a more widely distributed economy where rural areas are semi-independent growth hubs; and iii) sparsely populated areas with urban markets where urban areas are not growth drivers and the regional economy depends on the resources and activities found within the rural areas themselves.

During the 2007–2013 period, three strategic objectives have been defined under the Lisbon Strategy of the EU on convergence (objective 1), regional competitiveness and employment (objective 2), and territorial cooperation (objective 3) (Council Regulation, 2006). During the 2014–2020 period, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) focused on following priorities: i) innovation and research; ii) the digital agenda; iii) support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); the low-carbon economy. In addition to these priorities, the regional policy funds were distributed according to three categories of region: i) more developed regions, in which at least 80% of funds are focused on at least two of these priorities; ii) transition

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<sup>3</sup> The ESPON programme has been funded by the EU since it was launched in 2002. It is in charge with producing spatial knowledge of the European regions for EU policy purposes.



regions, in which the focus is for 60-% of the funds; and iii) less developed regions in which the focus is 50%.

Ultimately these priorities are set by national or regional managing authorities in their operational programmes.

### 3.2.2. The Cohesion policy

In Cohesion policy from 1994–1999, rural development was indicated as one of the objectives (Objective 5) and mentioned indirectly within Objective 6 in relation to areas with a very low population density. The zoning used to determine eligibility for structural funds, in particular with regard to Objective 5b and Objective 2, resulted in a redistribution process deemed by the Member States to be less effective and less satisfactory (Faucheur, 2017). From 2000–2006, the policy raised the issue of regions displaying developmental delay and those encountering structural difficulties, including certain rural areas.

In the following programming period (2007–2013), Regional policy kept the primary objective of 'convergence' as 81% of the budget was allocated to the least developed regions with a view to invest, amongst other things, in physical and human capital as well as the protection of the environment. The second objective was the competitiveness of the regions, accounting for 16% of the regional policy budget. Regions not covered by the objective of convergence were eligible, with the Member States determining which regions in their country were authorised to request EU funds. The 2014–2020 cohesion policy presents 11 thematic priorities (cf. Table 5 in Appendix 9) and the redistributive dimension clearly reduced in favour of investment in promoting growth and employment, divided into three regional categories according to their level of GDP: most developed regions, transitional regions and least developed regions (Faucheur, 2017).

As a conclusion, there has not been any particular status for rurality in cohesion policy since 1999. The definition of rural areas is based on its relationship with urban areas. Therefore, as with urban areas, and on the basis of the same criteria, rural areas may or may not benefit from structural funds, as it also depends on priorities set by national or regional managing authorities in their operational programmes. The development of rural areas is a territorial development encompassing both rural and urban areas.

### 3.2.3. The Common Agricultural Policy

As explained in Section 4.1.2, rural development became the second pillar of the CAP during the programming period 2000–2006. The Göteborg Council held in 2001 confirmed a political direction towards multifunctionality in rural areas and less attention to market mechanisms (European Commission, 2008). The rural development regulation offered Member States the possibility of defining their own priorities within the framework of a set of measures to strengthen the agricultural and forestry sector, the protection of the environment, infrastructures and the diversification of activities.

During the 2007–2013 period, the objectives of the rural development policy were threefold: i) increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector; ii) enhancing the environment and countryside through support for land management; iii) enhancing the quality of life in rural areas and promoting diversification of economic activities (European Commission, 2008).

During the programming period 2014–2020, the second pillar of the CAP included six priorities. Some of the objectives are similar to those of other European structural and investment funds, such as the objectives of promoting social inclusion, reducing poverty and promoting economic development, but are applied to rural zones (Ecorys, 2016).

Each Member State of the EU developed a rural development programme (a single national programme or several regional programmes) (Ecorys, 2016), depending on its specific needs, which should include at least four of the following six priorities: 1) to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors as well as in rural zones; 2) to improve the viability and competitiveness of all types of



agriculture as well as to promote innovative agricultural technologies and sustainable management of the forests; 3) to promote the organisation of the food chain, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture; 4) to restore, conserve and strengthen ecosystems linked to agriculture and forestry; 5) to promote efficient use of resources and support transition towards a low-carbon economy resilient to climate change in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors; and 6) to promote social inclusion, the reduction of poverty and economic development in rural areas. These programmes are founded on a combination of measures selected from a 'menu' of European measures<sup>4</sup>.

Despite measures in favour of strengthening cultural and communication institutions and infrastructures, the majority of these measures continue to focus on agriculture and the environment. It remains an 'agri-centric' vision of rural development with a stronger environmental aspect. This confirms the status of the environment as an essential component of rurality, although its meaning is not clearly defined.

In its Communication and proposal for regulation on CAP Strategic Plans (European Commission, 2018), the EC suggested a new delivery model that gives greater flexibility to Member States when designing their CAP intervention for the 2021–2027 programming period. This shift derives from recommendations of external studies (Ecorys, 2016) which criticised the absence of explicit strategies to the CAP from its specific objectives to measures through an intervention logic. The CAP Strategic Plans to be designed by Member states would follow a similar approach to the preparation of rural development plans, which will then be merged into a single national strategic plan. Each Strategic Plan is expected to reflect a national strategy based on a SWOT analysis, needs analysis, an intervention strategy, targets and financials plans, governance and coordination system, ex-ante evaluation and a strategic environmental assessment (SHERPA, 2020).

### 3.3. The main EU multiannual strategies

This review covers EU strategies dealing with rural within three decades: i) the Lisbon Strategy (2000–2010); ii) Horizon 2020 (2010–2020); and iii) A Union that strives for more (2021–2027). These multiannual priorities and roadmaps published by the EC are considered in this review as 'meta-strategies' which encompass thematic and sectoral sub-strategies dealing with rural areas. In the following sub-sections, each of the meta-strategies is represented by a mindmap. Materials, references and evidence from the two first meta-strategies are complete and documented for the Lisbon Strategy, and almost complete and partly documented for Horizon 2020. However, at this stage the last meta-strategy, 'A Europe that strives for more', contains few details on both the sub-strategies dealing with rural and on the multiannual financial framework 2020–2027 (which is not yet adopted). Given its recent release and because of elements which will not be published until later in 2020, it was not possible to review this last meta-strategy. As a result, this document will introduce the rural sub-strategies connected to 'A Europe that strives for more' meta-strategy rather than provide a review.

The word 'rural' is used in various ways in these strategies: rural areas, rural populations, rural communities, rural jobs, rural businesses, etc. Rural also refers to rural development as the main policy framework through the CAP since 1999. This review considered the following EU documents: formal strategies and declarations having a strategic dimension on rural development, rural areas, rural populations, rural territories, rural jobs, rural businesses, such as: biodiversity, bio-economy, energy, climate change adaptation, coastal areas, the macro-regional strategy in the Alpine region, digital, employment, forests, green infrastructures and soils. These have been selected to illustrate the range of EU thematic strategies that have rural dimensions. These thematic strategies are sometimes but not systematically articulated within the CAP, the Cohesion fund and the Regional fund. For each of the strategies, this review has used: a text-mining appraisal and a definition of the term rural, if any; a description of the features of any definition of rural; and, a description of the characteristics and rural trends. The objective was to explore the linkages and articulations between the

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/110/second-pilier-de-la-pac-la-politique-de-developpement-rural>



'grand' EU policies such as the CAP, the Cohesion policy and the regional policies with the multiannual EU strategies and its sub-thematic strategies.

### 3.3.1. The Lisbon Strategy

#### General overview

- [An information society for all \(2000\)](#)
- [Working together for growth and jobs - A new start for the Lisbon Strategy \(2005\)](#)

The Lisbon Strategy was the development plan for the economy of the European Union for the period 2000–2010 (Figure 7). The aim of this overarching strategy was to make the EU more competitive and a knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. It was amended and re-launched in 2005 because most goals were not achieved, according to the midterm review.

The term 'rural' (and 'agricultural') does not appear in the first Communication about the Lisbon Strategy. Following the mid-term review, the second Communication was published in 2005. In this text, the term 'rural' appears four times, twice as 'rural development', once as 'rural areas' and once as 'rural communities'. Although the definition was not clear, it seems that rural was defined based upon its opposition to the city, which could illustrate a functional approach to rural areas.

Rural is shown as areas having a 'disadvantage of location' that need to take full advantage of the possibilities on the internet and broadband communications in order to overcome such disadvantages. Due to the non-binding character of the strategy, most objectives of the strategy were not achieved by 2010. In its closing review, the leaders of Member States recognised the limitations of the success of the Lisbon Strategy. However, the evaluation did not make any reference to the effects of the strategy on rural areas.

In summary, although there was no mention of 'rural' in the initial Lisbon Strategy, it is mentioned in the updated strategy. However, due to the focus of the Lisbon Agenda on growth and jobs, rural is depicted as disadvantaged due to its location. The city is the model of growth and employment, leaving rural as a deprived territory that should learn from cities.





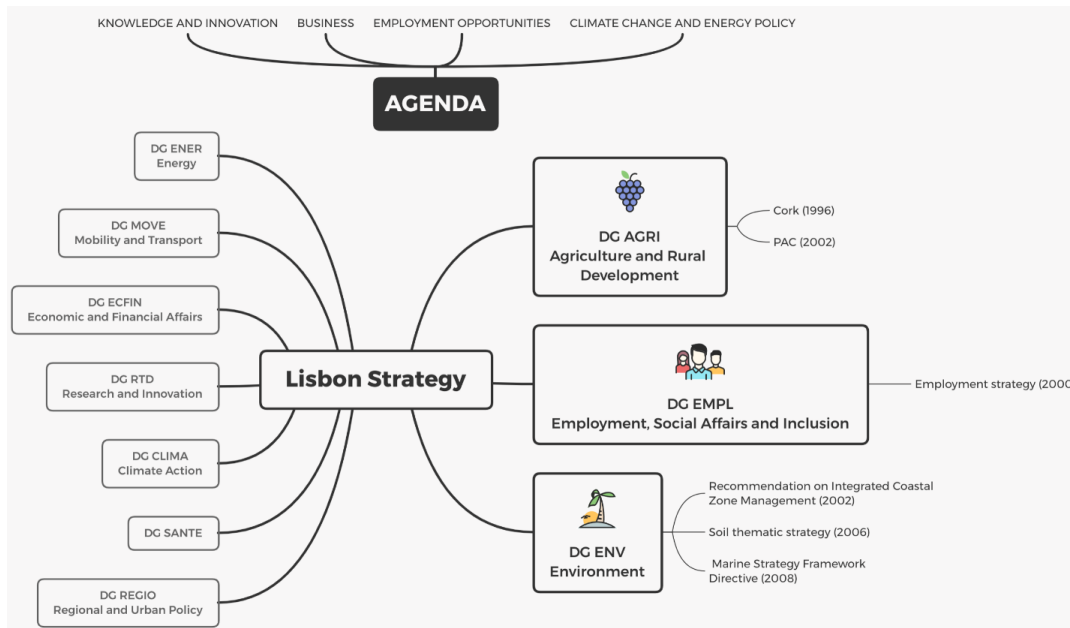


Figure 7: Map of the Lisbon Strategy

### Employment strategy

- [The birth of the European Employment Strategy: the Luxembourg process \(1997\)](#)
- [Communication on the future of the European Employment Strategy \(2003\)](#)
- [Employment in rural areas under the European Employment Strategy \(2003\)](#)
- [Employment in rural areas: closing the jobs gap \(2006\)](#)

The European Employment Strategy (EES) was launched in 1997 at the Luxembourg European Council with the aim of creating more and better jobs in the EU. This strategy was then strengthened with the meeting in Lisbon in 2000 that set out the goal of full employment by 2020 (70% by 2010). This strategy, with no legislative power, was the EU's main instrument for coordinating reforms in the area of the labour market. Since then, the first document underwent changes in orientation. A new strategy, based on the Lisbon Agenda, was re-launched in 2003 with broader guidelines for growth and jobs.

Although the term 'rural' (and 'agricultural') does not appear in the first employment strategy (1997) or the updated version (2003), the European Commission published two Communications dedicated to rural employment under the employment strategy. The following analysis focuses on these two documents, published in 2003 and 2006 respectively.

The first Communication about rural areas, published in 2003, had 20 occurrences of the term 'rural', referring mainly to rural areas and to rural life, rural tradition, rural society, rural policies and rural development. Although the definition of the 'rural' is not clear, it seems that here it refers to an economic approach of rural, related to the structure of employment and the proportion of people employed in the farming sector. Interestingly, the Communication calls for a categorisation of rural areas as a tool to frame specific rural policies, which would be based on the collection of statistics about employment structure.

The second Communication, published in 2006, had 114 occurrences of the term 'rural', also predominantly associated with 'areas' or 'regions'. Mention is also made of 'rural employment', 'rural economy' and 'rural development'. In this document, the definition of rural is clearer, referring to a morphological approach of rural, based on population density. It is defined as areas with low population density, the text referring to

the OECD typology of rural at the NUTs 3 level. This typology is based on the share of population living in rural communes, defined as those with less than 150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

In the Communication in 2003 reference is made to custodianship of land, and its role in ensuring environmental protection, animal welfare, agricultural product quality improvement, and the protection of cultural heritage, biodiversity and of rural tradition and culture. Such land management is provided by the farming population, thus maintaining a suitable level of employment is necessary to keep these services. However, rural areas are threatened by an exodus of people and the ageing of farming populations. Maintaining employment thus depends upon creating conditions to ensure that young people stay and set up activities, and that women are encouraged and enabled to be a meaningful proportion of that group of people. The text calls for policies to support agricultural employment (investment in agricultural holdings, installation of young farmers) and measures to open up new employment opportunities alongside farming (diversification of activities, incentives for tourist and craft businesses).

According to the communication in 2006, rural areas have higher unemployment rates than urban areas. Moreover, significantly rural areas (i.e. those with a very low population density) are the main regions suffering from high long-term unemployment rates. It is also claimed that there is a high level of hidden unemployment (underemployed amongst farmers and labourers), which could be reduced by using agriculture as a buffer during transition. However, the communication declares that rural areas suffer from an agricultural outflow, with agricultural employment expected to reduce. It is foreseen that there is a shift from full-time to part-time work with the consequence that most of the family labour is moving towards off-farm employment.

Due to the amendments to the employment strategy and its integration into the broader Lisbon Agenda from 2003, no previous specific evaluation of the strategy can be found. Concerning rural areas, the effects of the strategy were not evaluated but only how other policies had an influence on its targets. In particular, communication in 2006 included a section on the effects of the CAP and rural development policies on rural employment. These are described below.

According to the 2006 Communication, the Common Agricultural Policy has managed to keep outflows from the agricultural sector constant at around 2% to 3% per year, in particular through the introduction of direct aid which has played an important role in preventing depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas. Other measures (such as decoupling) have had a neutral effect with respect to employment, as they allowed a more efficient use of capital and land, leading to more economically sustainable activities. Obligations in environmental practices were expected to lead to a shift from production activities to land management activities, especially in marginal areas, although their impact is not certain. Adjustments in production structures have created new employment opportunities on the farm or have been absorbed by off-farm employment. Finally, there has been a very sharp rise in farm income in eastern European countries (+69% after accession) due to CAP instruments.

The same 2006 Communication acknowledges that rural development policies have had a more significant impact on maintaining employment than creating jobs. Similarly, they had better results on maintaining on-farm employment compared to off-farm employment, accompanied by an improvement in working conditions (e.g. a reduction in workload and hard physical work). Forestry measures have had a positive impact mainly on on-farm employment (e.g. small-scale and time constrained), and off-farm (e.g. local processing of basic forestry products). Measures for the adaptation and development of rural areas maintained and created on-farm employment. LEADER programmes led to the creation of direct employment (such as micro-businesses in agri-tourism, food processing and marketing) mainly in less diversified and less structured rural areas.

In summary, the initial Employment Strategy did not refer to rural, but it was later amended in order to take into consideration the specificities of rural. Initially, through the lens of an economic approach, this vision was modified in favour of a morphological approach. References to rural specificities (rural life, rural tradition, rural society) that were a key narrative in the first communication were no longer present in the second communication. This change in the vision of rural can be linked to the work of the OECD on rural typologies



at that time, which were directly adopted by the European Commission. As a consequence, special features of rural life have been removed from communications to be replaced by a more statistical approach, which was then translated into the policies.

The emphasis on agricultural diversification in 2003 was replaced by a focus on the agricultural sector in 2006, leading to positive results on maintaining on-farm employments but very limited results on creating new employment opportunities (especially off-farm). Overall, the Employment Strategy portrays a rural economy based on agriculture with low population density, for which there is a need to create employment opportunities for young people although the strategies did not have the expected effects regarding this objective.

### Coastal areas

- (2000) COM(2000)547, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on integrated coastal zone management: a strategy for Europe  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52000DC0547&from=EN>

The word 'rural' is mentioned sixteen times: 6 times for the Rural Development policy under the CAP; twice for the Rural Development Programmes; 3 times for rural areas: viable rural areas; "to improve conditions in rural areas", "abandonment of rural areas"; twice for rural depopulation as a significant issue for many coastal areas; once for (other) rural actors, whereas farmers were quoted previously; once for (demands of) rural services; and once for rural (and urban tourism destination)

A major theme in this Strategy is that of rural depopulation as a significant problem for many EU coastal areas: "*both in cases where the resident populations of remote coastal areas emigrate, leading to social and environmental degradation, and in cases where depopulation of interior areas leads to increasing concentration of population in nearby coastal*" (p. 16). The document also acknowledges the role of the CAP in this trend: "*In spite of intentions to improve conditions in rural areas, the focus of the CAP in the past on intensive production has sometimes been a factor in contributing to abandonment of rural areas.*" (p. 16). The Strategy for EU Coastal areas builds on an Action Plan supported by existing policy interventions (structural funds and the CAP). These specific actions are: promoting Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) activity within the Member States and at the "Regional Seas" level; making EU policies compatible with ICZM; promoting dialogue between European Coastal Stakeholders; developing best ICZM practice; generating information and knowledge about the coastal zone; diffusing information and raising public awareness; and implementation of the strategy.

The EU Strategy for coastal areas follows its commitment under the Agenda 21 international agreement (chapter 17) which defined an EU demonstration programme for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The EC recognises the difficulty of addressing inter-twined social, economic and environmental challenges affecting coastal areas, due to their diversity across the EU. This Strategy is driven by the need for new knowledge on coastal areas and for an integrated and flexible coordination amongst administrative bodies and stakeholders towards a governance system fit for coastal areas. The EU Strategy for coastal areas recommends a broader flexibility in its governance system. When outlining a governance of coastal areas based on partnership with civil society, the EC refers to existing policy instruments such as LEADER through the Rural Development policy, that are expected to be mainstreamed within EU policies.

### Soils strategy

- (2006) Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the regions  
Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection



[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020\\_en\\_3.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_3.pdf)

The word 'rural' is mentioned three times, twice linked to the rural development programme. Soil protection is to be fostered by the Rural Development Programme measures over time and successive Common Agricultural Framework policies. Reference to the word rural is made once in relation to the necessity to develop "a robust approach to address the interaction between soil protection and climate change from the viewpoints of research, economy and rural development so that policies in these areas are mutually supportive".

The Communication puts the emphasis on the creation of a specific European legislation regarding soil protection. The Rural Development policy would be the best way to implement this soil legislative proposal. This means that the challenges regarding soils are very high. All other environmental areas are affected, the functioning of the internal EU market is distorted, transboundary impacts are important, food safety issues are at stake, and soils have an important international dimension (UNCCD, UNCBD, UNFCCC).

In the text, soil degradation is mainly explained as a consequence of human activity. Risks described are those of erosion, compaction, salinization, organic matter decline and landslide. For this set of risks there is already a series of policies such as the rural development under the CAP, the good agricultural practice under the Nitrate Directive, other measures under the Water Framework Directive. Contamination and sealing are two other risks about which the strategy has ambitions to address through national remediation strategies. The text recommended the identification of risk areas at regional and national levels. In one point it refers to addressing climate change and soil protection interlinkages, calling for coherent or integrated policies that enable economic and rural development.

Although rural is seldom mentioned in the text of the Strategy, the significance of soils is understood in relation to rural areas and rural territories. The text delivers implicitly on the high challenge for the rural future, both in socio-economic and environmental terms. In the text, the Rural Development Programme and Common Agricultural Policy frames are the main tools for addressing soil protection in agricultural areas. The Cohesion policy deals with soil contamination.

### Adaptation strategy

- 2009: Livre Blanc, Adaptation au changement climatique: vers un cadre d'action européen  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/com/com\\_com\(2009\)0147\\_/com\\_com\(2009\)0147\\_fr.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/com/com_com(2009)0147_/com_com(2009)0147_fr.pdf)

The word rural occurs 5 times in the white book, twice by referring to rural areas and three times referring to Rural Development policy.

Rural and urban areas are both presented as places in which the use of nature may be more efficient to absorb and control climate impacts than physical infrastructures. In rural development policies, three axes are dealt with the improvement of competitiveness, the environment and the quality of life in rural areas. Specific action needs to be implemented: i) to take into account adaptation measures and management of water within national strategies and programmes of rural development for 2007–2013; and ii) to focus on how to integrate adaptation in the three main axes of rural development.

Rural does not appear in the strategy except from a geographic and a political point of view: rural areas and rural development within the Common Agricultural Policy framework. The specifics of rural societies are omitted from the document. The word local occurs twice, each time focusing on the necessity for cooperation across local, national and regional levels to adapt to climate change.



**Conclusion**

Rural is seldom addressed during the initial texts of the Lisbon strategy. However, the word rural appeared in most strategy amendments that were made about 2005, although there was no clear vision for the rural arising from these amendments. When employed, rural referred to rural areas and rural development. It was mainly shown as suffering from a 'disadvantage of location', especially regarding employment and the economy.

In the Lisbon Agenda, socio-economic strategies portray rural as an economy based on agriculture with low population density, for which there is a need to create employment opportunities, especially for young people. By comparison, the specifics of rural societies are omitted in most environmental strategies, with their implementation being mostly done through the CAP and so with an agricultural focus.

**3.3.2. The Europe 2020 Strategy**

- [Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth \(2010\)](#)
- [Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth \(2014\)](#)

The Europe 2020 Strategy was designed for advancement of the economy of the European Union for the period 2010–2020. The aim of this strategy was “smart, sustainable, inclusive growth”. The main targets were to raise the employment rate, to invest in R&D, to reduce greenhouse emissions, to increase levels of education and to reduce poverty. The priorities and sub-strategies arising from Europe 2020 are illustrated in Figure 8.

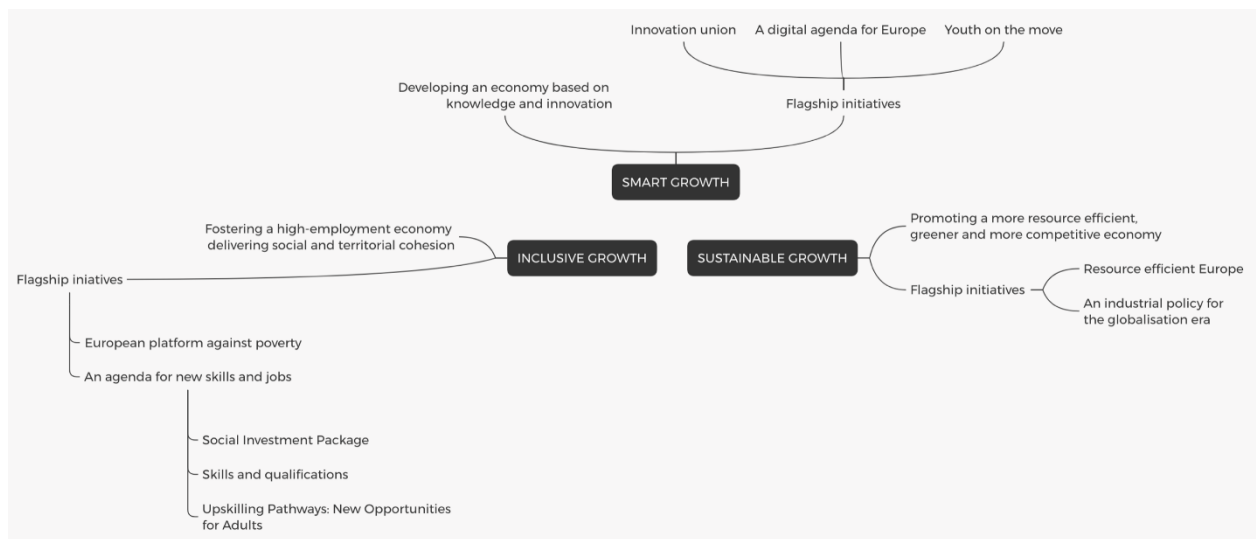


Figure 8: Mindmap of the Europe 2020 Strategy

**General overview**

In the Strategy, although the term 'rural' appears six times (four times as 'rural development' and twice as 'rural areas'), there is nothing specific to rural. The definition is not clear and there is no typology of rural in the text, but the word rural is used in association with 'agricultural' in most cases, and in contrast to high-skill service economies. This could illustrate an economic approach to rural. In the midterm review, the term 'rural' appears twice: 'rural lifestyles' and 'rural areas'. In this text, rural is only defined based on its opposition to urban. This could illustrate a shift to a more functional approach of rural.



In the strategy, rural is said to have an economy based on a 'traditional sector', in comparison to high-skill and service economies. Rural is characterised by a lack of innovation due to the existing lag regarding access to high-speed internet. Rural areas are reported as falling behind accessibility to high-speed internet services, which affects their ability to innovate, as well as their ability to conduct online dissemination of knowledge and online distribution of goods and services. Similarly, in the midterm review rural is characterised by the lack of high-speed broadband infrastructure, which strengthens a digital divide and fosters social exclusion of these areas.

It was expected that the strategy would reinforce territorial cohesion, increase digital access and foster innovation in rural areas through support of different EU instruments, mainly from the rural development funds. However, although more than 90% of actions in the flagship initiative of the 'Digital Agenda' were completed or on track, there are still gaps in infrastructure in rural areas. Moreover, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion have increased sharply in Europe as a result of the economic crisis of 2008, especially in rural areas.

Although the initial strategy refers to rural a few times, there is nothing specific to the rural in the overall Europe 2020 Strategy. Initially through the lens of an economic approach, this new vision illustrates a locational approach. This change in the vision of rural can be linked to the work of ESPON on rural typologies (see Appendix 7 and 8). The emphasis of the strategy on improving the digital economy did not reach the expected targets in rural areas, where the lack of infrastructure is still the source of a digital divide between urban and rural areas.

References to rural life, rural tradition, rural society that were missing from the first strategy have then been included in the midterm review. Otherwise, rural is described in terms of its potential contribution to the economy.

### Bioeconomy Strategy

- [Innovating for sustainable growth: A bioeconomy for Europe \(2012\)](#)
- [Review of the 2012 European Bioeconomy Strategy \(2017\)](#)
- [A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment \(2018\)](#)

The European Bioeconomy Strategy (BES) was launched in 2012 with the aim of producing renewable biological resources and converting them into vital products and bio-energy. This strategy, led by DG Research and Innovation, was reviewed in 2017 with the main conclusion that the scope of the actions would need to be re-focused. As a consequence, the strategy was updated in 2018 with the aim of accelerating the deployment of a sustainable European bioeconomy.

In the first Bioeconomy Strategy the term 'rural' appears 25 times. It appears only in combination with other words (such as infrastructures, development, regions, areas, livelihoods and landscapes) and is often associated in the same sentence with the words agricultural, coastal, industrial or marine. Although there is no clear definition of rural, it is differentiated from coastal and industrial based on their main economic sector: agriculture and forestry for rural, fisheries and aquaculture for coastal and bio-based industries for industrial. This can be associated with an economic approach of rural.

The term 'rural' appears 17 times in the midterm review, again as an adjective of development, livelihoods, actors or economy. The term 'rural renaissance' also appears in this document (also called counter-urbanisation in the scientific literature), which corresponds to the process of repopulation of rural areas due to their attractiveness for residential purposes. In the document, rural mainly refers to programmes or policies that were implemented by countries, and then in the assessment of the impact of such policies on rural economies and livelihoods. As with the first strategy, rural seems to be defined according to its economic



sectors: agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, fishery and bio-based business models, which reflects an economic approach.

In the updated Bioeconomy Strategy, 'rural' appears 41 times, mainly as rural area and rural economy and rural development. A few new mentions of rural appear, such as rural growth, rural renaissance and rural revival, illustrating a novel focus of the European Commission on rural in relation to its specific characteristics and dynamics. Rural is still mentioned in contrast to coastal and urban, defined according to their potential for the bioeconomy: agriculture and forestry for rural areas, aquatic for coastal areas and biowaste and wastewater for urban and peri-urban areas. The strategy still has an economic approach for the rural.

From an agricultural sector perspective, the first document argues that rural areas are characterised by a shortage of skilled agricultural and fishery workers, which has led to land abandonment. Forests appear to be closely linked with recreation, vibrant landscapes and products. In the updated strategy, rural is characterised by its agri-food sector, which is the main source of jobs and income in these areas. Rural areas are also described as remote, and it is argued that they are going through a period of profound economic, demographic and institutional transformation. A new narrative appears with reference to 'rural renaissance' and 'rural revival' due to a bioeconomy industry based on the use of local renewable resources. The narrative appears to have moved from a partitioned vision of rural, with a negative vision of the productive sector on one side (abandonment, loss), towards a positive vision of the recreative sector (vibrant), and a more inclusive vision of rural that would lead to its renaissance.

According to the communication from 2012, the strategy was expected to increase opportunities for a high and low-skilled labour force, to improve the knowledge base about the bioeconomy, and to foster innovation to achieve productivity increase, sustainable resource use and resilient systems that supply food, feed and bio-based raw materials without compromising ecosystem services. The midterm review affirms that the bioeconomy strategy has contributed to direct and indirect employment, mainly through the SME instrument (accelerator for small and medium enterprises), which are contributing to the development of a competitive and knowledge-intensive rural economy based on bio-refineries.

However, the review highlighted a lack of coherence between policies relevant for the bioeconomy. In particular, the approach was too sectoral and trade-offs between socio-economics and the environment were not taken into account. Regarding the sustainable management of natural resources and the reduction of dependence on non-renewable resources, the strategy has played an important role in providing scientific evidence on biomass supply (from land and sea, incl. waste) and biomass demand (food, feed, bio-based products and materials, energy, etc.), although there were only a few operational results.

Overall, the strategy has contributed to increased recognition from Member States and regions about the opportunities of bioeconomy for rural, coastal and marine/maritime development, and has catalysed the development of bioeconomy strategies at national and regional levels. The updated bioeconomy strategy is expected to create new food and bio-based value chains that can offer additional opportunities for agricultural and forestry production and activities in the rural economy. These new opportunities are foreseen to lead to a rural renaissance by creating attractive job opportunities based on the use of local renewable resources.

The Bioeconomy Strategy was a key policy of the Europe 2020 Agenda, and its focus on rural areas could have led to a clear vision of the rural. However, although it appears that the rural is envisioned through an economic approach, there is no clear definition and most policies refer to the economic sectors supported by the rural (i.e. agriculture, forestry). Overall, the lack of coherence between the strategy and other European policies prevented large and visible effects across the EU. Operational impacts were scattered through separate project initiatives, although the results were positive and encouraging regarding employment and the sustainable management of resources. One of the main impacts of the strategy was to draw attention to the opportunities of the bioeconomy for rural and coastal development. Building upon this increased recognition, the updated strategy showed a real drive for rural renaissance through the development of the bioeconomy.



## EU Energy Strategy 2050

- Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, The European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank, A Clean Planet for all A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy, 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050_en)
- In depth analysis in support of the Commission Communication Com(2018)773, A clean planet for all, A European long-term strategic vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050_en)

In 2015, the Paris Agreement set up a new objective of achieving carbon neutrality or zero net emissions as stated in Article 4: "*the Parties seek to achieve a global ceiling on greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, (...) and to make cuts quickly thereafter (...) so as to strike a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and anthropogenic removals by sinks of greenhouse gases during the second half of the century*".

The 2030 climate and energy framework published in 2014 defined new EU targets and policy objectives for the period 2021–2030. They have been readjusted in 2018 to better comply with the Paris Agreement: at least 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels), at least 32% share for renewable energy (originally 27%) and at least 32.5% (originally 27%) improvement in energy efficiency.

Both the Paris Agreement and the EU climate and energy framework create new opportunities for rural.

In the first document, the word 'rural' is mentioned twice in reference to rural areas and to rural population. In the second one, rural appears six times: rural development is mentioned four times whereas rural areas are mentioned twice.

In the first Communication, rural areas are seen as places where there is a potential to develop a green economy, especially in the field of biomass and other renewable energies. The constraint for rural areas is to have enough skilled workers to enhance this green economy in the context of depopulation in the most remote rural places. Nevertheless, the transition towards a green economy brings new opportunities in forestry, regarding biomass and other renewable energies.

The second text complements this issue by emphasizing the necessity to provide essential services to all rural areas (mobility, infrastructures, etc.) so as to maintain young people living in these areas. Green jobs are seen as contributing to local employment in rural areas, fostering social and territorial cohesion: "*The European environmental goods and services sectors employed 4.1m people in 2015, which is an increase of 47% compared to 2000*" (p. 231). At the same time, the fossil fuel extraction sector and energy intensive industries localised in the rural will be adversely affected by the low-carbon transition implementation.

The EU Strategy for the Alpine region

- **A European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region. (2015). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region. Version: COM(2015) 366 final - SWD(2015) 147 final [https://www.alpine-region.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/page/24/attachments/eusalpcommunication\\_en28072015.pdf](https://www.alpine-region.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/page/24/attachments/eusalpcommunication_en28072015.pdf)**
- **Study on macroregional strategies and their links with cohesion policy data and analytical report for the EUSALP (2018). Cowi et al.**





[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/cooperate/alpine/eusalp\\_links\\_cohesion\\_policy.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/alpine/eusalp_links_cohesion_policy.pdf)

Of the four macro-regional strategies of the EU the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) issued in 2015 is probably those having the most ties with the rural [the other three macro-regional strategies are the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) of 2009, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) of 2011, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) of 2014].

Rural is mentioned is twice: i) migration from rural areas, and ii) opportunities offered by mountains food products, quality products and service based on agriculture and the forestry sector. The study of the EUSALP macro-strategy mentioned above highlights the following findings. First, urban regions are dominant in the Alpine macro-region, except for France where a divide exists between urban and rural regions. Second, whether the Alpine region performs well in terms of employment overall, youth unemployment and long-term unemployment remain key issues in some countries (i.e. Italy), with heterogeneous trends across the Alpine countries. Third, the macro-region is experiencing a very high rate of internal migration, for example from rural or remote areas to urban centres. This trend is exacerbated in mountainous areas where fewer job opportunities are available, reflecting issues of remoteness and commuting distances as geographical handicaps.

Alongside with the Cohesion policy, rural development programmes are some of the main EU policy interventions reported in the implementation. Linkages between this macro-regional strategy with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Forest Strategy and the EU Rural Development Programmes are well documented. This is particularly the case of agricultural and forestry areas of the Alpine macro-region engaged under the EU biodiversity commitments.

### Biodiversity Strategy

- The Biodiversity strategy (2011); Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions: Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0244:FIN:EN:pdf>
- The biodiversity impact assessment (2011); working document of the Commission, summary of the impact assessment accompanying the communication  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011SC0541&from=EN>
- The Midterm review of the biodiversity strategy (2015); Report from the Commission to the European parliament and the Council, the midterm review of the biodiversity strategy to 2020.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015DC0478&from=EN>

Ten references to the word rural are made in the text of the Biodiversity Strategy (2011), mostly referring to rural development as an objective of the common agricultural policy framework, and 2 references dealing with rural areas, specifically the improvement of forest and aquatic ecosystem state and the promotion of the use of green infrastructure in rural areas. In the impact assessment (2011), the word rural is employed 5 times: twice related to rural development program and policy; once concerning rural employment; once with regards to the quality of life improvement in the rural; and once referring to the less favoured areas. In the impact assessment, biodiversity is more linked to the economics of rural than in the text of the Strategy. In the midterm review of the strategy (2015), the word rural occurs 9 times: mainly through rural development programmes and policies, but also linked with poverty.

The Biodiversity Strategy has 6 targets. All of these targets have an influence on the conditions of living in the rural areas. They are mostly linked to the environmental conditions of life. One target, to “*increase the contribution of agriculture and forestry to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity*”, referring to the CAP



framework and the Rural Development Programme is the only one directly connected to rural living. Among the 20 specific actions, Action 9 'Better target Rural Development to biodiversity conservation' directly concerns the purpose of rural development, and orientates rural development objectives towards biodiversity conservation.

Globally, the lack of progress in the field of biodiversity preservation is underlined in the impact assessment (2011) and later in the mid-term review (2015), and more recently in specific documents assessing the Green Deal. In the impact assessment, rural is more connected to socio-economic issues such as employment and quality of life. It is foreseen that biodiversity objectives will help the creation of new jobs in the medium term. In the mid-term review, although the word is seldom mentioned, rural areas appear as the places of biodiversity strategy implementation. The text refers to the slow pace of implementation of the strategy and the lack of progress, stressing that the poorest in rural areas will be those who suffer from this situation.

The mid-term review suggests that no significant improvement has occurred in the field of biodiversity in general: all ecosystem services are still being degraded in a continuous way. Some species and their habitats are being preserved through Natura2000 and Life+ projects, and these protected areas are increasing slightly in area. However, this increase is counterbalanced by more degradation in other habitats and species. National policies towards biodiversity are more numerous and they are being implemented, but this is insufficient to improve biodiversity and in particular, the state of ordinary biodiversity outside the Natura2000 sites.

Pollution is heavily impacting biodiversity on cultivated land, natural land, wetland, forests and water. Agriculture and forestry have not brought significant improvements in spite of specific policies and measures directed towards biodiversity preservation in the rural development programme, and through the implementation of forest management plans (forest strategy). Forests are increasing but with no biodiversity improvement except in Natura2000 sites. The review states that the rural people are the most impacted by this degradation.

The Strategy is 10 years old and the many assessments of biodiversity in the EU (2019) reveal more degradation than improvement. Land fragmentation in particular has increased, being responsible for the deterioration of ecosystems and threats to several species. Pollution of land and water has not decreased in spite of improved agricultural practices.

Land fragmentation is connected to the planning and urbanization trends in rural areas. This issue also relates to the green infrastructure strategy whereas land and water pollution refer more to the CAP. The lack of improvement with regards to the biodiversity of forests is difficult to analyse as the forest strategy was produced in 2013, and forest management plans are not all operational, although varying by country.

The main questions arise with the definition of rural throughout the strategy.

Are we talking about resources and a classification of resources in rural space? Do we talk about the economics of rural areas? Both of them are linked to the question of biodiversity. Biodiversity can be an asset for productive purposes, and it is related to the economics and the improvement of life conditions in rural areas. Talking about biodiversity preservation relates more to Natural 2000 places, where few specific and green jobs can be created to promote this preservation.

Different types of rural can be differentiated through these texts. Two are: i) rural where environment (e.g. rare biodiversity) is the target, providing room for job creation, addressing places with lower population density, and a high proportion of the land surface within official protection; and ii) rural where economics is the target, ordinary biodiversity being one of the productive means of eventually alleviating poverty.

### Digital strategies

- COM(2018)7118, Communication of the European Commission, European Commission digital strategy: a digital transformed, user-focused and data-driven Commission



[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategy/decision-making\\_process/documents/ec\\_digitalstrategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategy/decision-making_process/documents/ec_digitalstrategy_en.pdf)

- (2019) Declaration on smart and sustainable digital future for European Agriculture and rural areas <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/eu-member-states-join-forces-digitalisation-european-agriculture-and-rural-areas>

In the 2015 Communication, the word rural appears three times for rural areas. Rural areas are mentioned as poorly underserved areas regarding access to internet broadband and Information and Communication Technology. A lack of sufficient investment in Information and Communication Technology infrastructure and equipment is an obstacle to the provision of broadband services in rural areas. The EC Digital Strategy stressed the need to engage particular efforts to close the digital gap between urban and rural areas.

In the 2019 declaration referenced above, 25 European Member states signed a Declaration of cooperation on 'A smart and sustainable digital future for European agriculture and rural areas'. This commitment looked at taking actions to support digitalisation of EU agriculture and rural areas. It recognised the opportunities offered by Information and Communication Technology, drones, robotics, blockchains, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, and 5G in improving quality of life in rural areas. It stated: "*Digital technologies can improve quality of life for all inhabitants in rural areas and boost the competitiveness of European farms and rural businesses, including small ones. They can also strengthen the functioning of the single market and the socio-economic cohesion process*" (p. 3).

Despite the inclusion of rural areas within its scope, the declaration on 'A smart and sustainable digital future for European agriculture and rural areas' focuses mainly on opportunities offered by digital applications and technologies in the agricultural sector. Beyond the agricultural sector, the entire agri-food sectors are evolving quickly in a growing and promising area in which public and private investments in research and innovation are likely to make a difference on future market opportunities. In that respect, the use of the CAP and the EC research policy as the main EU policy interventions, can be used to meet this applied digital challenge.

### Soils strategy

- (2012) Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, The implementation of the Soil Thematic Strategy and ongoing activities

The word Rural occurs four times, each time linked to the Rural Development Programme within the Common Agricultural Policy. The word local occurs once, linked to local contamination.

The report notes the rural development programme strategy and CAP measures to enhance soil protection and prevent erosion, including measures to mitigate climate change, to adapt and to protect biodiversity (2007–2013). The text welcomes the greening of the first pillar of the CAP, and specific measures of the second pillar. Those are to protect soil against erosion and soil organic matter, no burning of arable stubble, and a ban on ploughing wetland and carbon rich land. It states that land degradation is getting worse in most regions of the EU, due to soil sealing, soil erosion (particularly under forest fires), soil salinisation, soil acidification, the loss of soil biodiversity mainly due to intensive human activity, and landslides. Land monitoring is well structured and provides regular assessments. The cohesion policy is responsible for the rehabilitation of industrial sites and contaminated land (2007–2013).

Regarding regulation, the Soil Framework Directive was not adopted. This was to address soil productivity, risks to human health and the environment, and opportunities for climate mitigation and adaptation. The text of the report does not provide explicit links to rural areas or to rural communities. It places emphasis



on the links between soil degradation, poverty and migration, and recalls that land misuse can lead to risks of geopolitical unbalances and to a global decrease in the amount of multi-functional land.

One specific aspect of soil is its transboundary aspects. These are represented by migration, off-site impacts of soil degradation, and distortion of the cost on the internal market with the situation of soils in one place potentially impacting on other places. Human activity is presented as the main driver of soil degradation. The report implicitly emphasizes some of the challenges facing soils in future. Through the assessment, it is apparent that the quality of soils will impact on rural attractiveness, with the state and uses of soils influencing local economics and its sustainability. Soil is one of the most strategic resources that can lead to the design of different types of rural activities, both agricultural and non-agricultural.

### Forests strategy

- 2013, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector  
[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:21b27c38-21fb-11e3-8d1c-01aa75ed71a1.0022.01/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:21b27c38-21fb-11e3-8d1c-01aa75ed71a1.0022.01/DOC_1&format=PDF)
- 2018, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – a New Forest Strategy : for forests and the forest sector.  
<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15384-2018-INIT/en/pdf>
- 2019, Council Conclusions on the progress on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy and on a new strategic framework for forests - Council conclusions (15 April 2019)  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39173/ccs-on-forestry-st08609-en19.pdf>

In the 2013 document, the word 'rural' is mentioned 20 times in the text of the strategy, more than once per page. The word rural appears regarding the contribution of the forest sector to rural development and with regards to the Rural Development policy, programmes and funding.

In the 2018 report, the word 'rural' is mentioned seven times in the report, in relation to rural communities, rural economy and development and the contribution of forestry to the well-being and balanced territorial development in the rural, the peri-urban and the urban areas. It is also mentioned in connexion with the Rural Development Programme and Policy Frame. In the 2019 document, the word 'rural' occurs three times in the conclusions. Those note that: i) forests are of high importance in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goal for rural livelihoods; ii) it is central to make use of the CAP tool within the rural development programme; and, iii) the development of the forest economy in connection to the bio-economy approach and green economy is promising in terms of competitiveness and jobs creation for the rural. In the text of strategy 2013, the forest sector is closely connected to rural in terms of: i) its areal extent as forests cover large parts of the rural areas; ii) their contribution to rural development and economy as forests and forest value chain bring many jobs for the rural communities and population; and iii) the environmental contribution they make to rural quality of life.

A main objective of the strategy is to enhance the sustainability of the forest sector, both in socio-economic and environmental dimensions. The text states that the overall situation is characterised by growing demands on, and threats to, forests. In terms of products, forests provide timber and a wide range of non-timber products plus recreational activities. Forests are also considered as a main source of renewable energy for which demand is growing. In terms of economics, they provide employment to more than 3 million people. In terms of environment, they produce ecosystem services, with high policy priority attached to the preservation of forest biodiversity.



The forest strategy is implemented through the Rural Development Programme. Forest management plans are funded by the Rural Development regulation and funds. They have specific objectives of their measure: i) to increase the forest surface and to improve economic viability and competitiveness of the forest sector by adopting specific forest measures at national level; ii) to promote sustainable management of forest and to improve wood mobilization; iii) to enhance climate change adaptation and biodiversity preservation including forest genetics conservation; and iv) to promote a Natura2000 guide for the forests within the rural development programme.

Agro-forestry measures did not meet the objectives during this period; restrictions come from administrative burden and the tenure of forest property. The promotion of good practices between the states and simplified administrative procedures could help the diffusion of appropriate measures and the design of action that meet most local needs for 2021–2027. The new CAP, through its subsidiarity, will help this process. The report (2018) states that from an economic point of view, the forest value chain is responsible for 3.6 million jobs during 2014–2020 with 200 million Euros of added value in the green economy, and wood replacing fossil sources of energy. This is in line with the objective of the bioeconomy strategy. In many national adaptation plans, forests are a priority. However, the 2018 report stated that over the period there is no improving trend in relation to forest biodiversity globally.

The forest strategy emphasizes the multifunctional role of the forests, in terms of socio-economics, economics and environment, including their contribution to rural living and quality of life. Forestry value chains are integrated in the green and bio economy frameworks, making the economic uses of the forest more sustainable. Forests are also social and recreational areas especially for the rural. The areas of forests are increasing, whereas forest quality is decreasing with associated losses of global biodiversity.

### Green Infrastructure

- (2013) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0249>
- (2013) Technical information on green infrastructure (GI) Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013SC0155>
- (2019) Rapport de la Commission au Parlement Européen au Conseil au Comité économique et social européen et au Comité des Régions, examen des progrès dans la mise en œuvre de la stratégie de l’Union Européenne sur l’infrastructure verte.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm)

The word rural is mentioned seven times in the document of the 2013 Green Infrastructure Strategy (GI), in connexion with urban areas, rural development programmes implementation and the multifunctionality of rural areas. The word rural is mentioned seven times in the 2013 document accompanying the strategy, mainly in project descriptions. In the 2019 report, the word rural occurs six times in the document: mainly in reference to Rural Development Programmes.

Green Infrastructure is essential for natural capital preservation, with most natural capital is located in the rural. The text links Green Infrastructure to biodiversity, ecosystem services provision and forest. Green Infrastructure is also essential for an agriculture sector that combats climate change, land fragmentation, soils pollution and erosion. Green Infrastructure forms part of risk disaster management strategies, both in



the rural and urban areas. It is also relevant to rural areas for many other purposes: socially, it contributes highly to the quality of life and helps preserve rural heritage features, and to employment in the field of green growth and economics.

The 2013 text on the Green Infrastructure Strategy promotes its integration in the main EU strategies. GI is integrated on the Common Agricultural Policy Frame (2014–2020), both in the first and second pillar. It is also promoted in other relevant strategies such as regional and cohesion, climate change and environmental policies, disaster risk management health and consumer policy. Some of the strategies in which it features concern rural areas and communities such as the Common Agricultural Programme, the EU territorial Agenda and environmental strategies such as the forest strategy and the biodiversity strategy.

The 2019 report presents the progress on the implementation of this strategy, placing emphasis on the contribution of the CAP and rural development programme to the implementation of Green Infrastructure at both farm and local levels. Although the term Green Infrastructure is not written in the agricultural policy, several measures and instruments targeting the sustainability of land use and climate action, contribute to Green Infrastructure. For example, ecological networks are a basis of European Green Infrastructure, such as Natura2000. These ecological networks are located most often in the rural but there is no reference to such geographic occurrence in the 2019 report.

### Adaptation strategy

- 2013, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the regions, the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change  
[https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/docs/eu\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/docs/eu_strategy_en.pdf)
- 2013, Commission Staff Working Document, Principles and recommendations for integrating climate change adaptation considerations under the 2014-2020 rural development programmes, accompanying the document, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the regions, the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change  
[https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/swd\\_2013\\_139\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/swd_2013_139_en.pdf)
- 2018, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:738:FIN>

In 2013, regarding the EU Strategy on climate adaptation, there the word rural was not mentioned. In the 2018 report, the word rural occurs three times (rural communities, rural development programmes). In the 2013 document accompanying the strategy on adaptation to climate change, the word rural occurs 61 times, mainly in relation to rural development.

The text of the adaptation strategy, 2013 makes no direct reference to rural. However, Action 6 promotes the facilitation of the climate-proofing of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Two priorities of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) concern climate resilience of rural areas: **priority 4**, restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems; and **priority 5**, promoting resource efficiency to a low carbon economy. These orientations have to be translated into the national regional and local levels. Some specific examples are provided at farm level. In the text, rural is the global picture for sectoral activities such as farming and forestry.

The 2018 report is about how the EU has developed its resilience against climate change through adaptation; it does not mention any rural issue instead relying on the sectoral approach to underline the progress that have been made in the field of adaptation. It notes that progress has been made on action 6 of the Adaptation



strategy, with €99 billion invested through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) on climate action, of which €7.5 billion have been invested directly towards adaptation.

In the 2013 document about how to integrate climate action into the Common Agricultural Policy framework, rural society does not appear per se. Adaptation is presented according to sectoral issues for rural areas: farming mainly and forestry. The CAP 2014–2020 is referred to as the main framework for dealing with rural areas adaptation. The report from 2018 shows that several measures and instruments of the CAP have been mobilised to integrate adaptation into the CAP and the RDP actions at farm level, for agriculture and forestry. Local adaptation remains uneven across the EU and mostly anchored in cities.

**Conclusion**

In all environmental strategies covered (soils, forests, biodiversity and green infrastructure), rural is seldom addressed and there is no vision for the rural arising from these texts. Rural is mentioned in some parts of the texts, environmental strategies and reports, with no clear elaboration on what it is, or what it means.

When mentioned, rural is in reference to rural areas, rural population and rural economy and development. The link between environmental targets and human development targets is mainly developed in the forest and the green infrastructure strategy. For biodiversity and soils, in the texts, there seems to be some difference between human economic and natural environmental dynamics.

For all of the resources (biodiversity soil and forest) the main levers for action to reconcile human activity and environment in rural lie in the rural development programme. The rural development programme provides potentially locally adapted series of measures selected by the EU Member States, and expresses how the rural environment can be actively connected to rural human activities. Implicitly, most strategies concerning rural appear to be dealt with through this strategy (CAP and RDP), although implementation of the EUSALP macro-region strategy also relates to the biodiversity strategy.

**3.3.3. 'A Union that strives for more' strategy**

**General overview**

The European Commission priorities for the 2021-2027 period have been encapsulated by the President of the European Commission (EC), Ursula von der Leyen, under a strategy entitled 'A Union that strives for more'. This meta-strategy encompasses six priorities as set out in the diagram below: i) a European Green deal; ii) an economy that works for people; iii) a Europe for the digital age; iv) promoting our European way of life; v) a stronger Europe in the world; vi) a new push for European democracy (Figure 9).

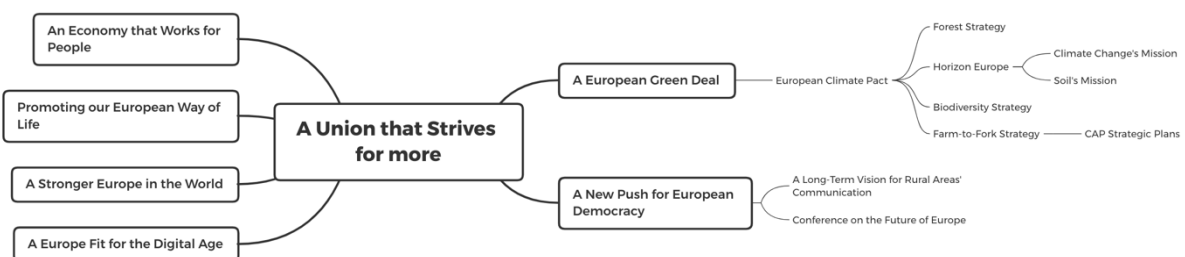


Figure 9: Mindmap of 'A Union that strives for more' strategy

Few details are available regarding this strategy. In the absence of any agreement on the MFF 2021-2028 to date (March 2020), this subsection describes the main lessons which can be drawn for the rural policy framework from the EC announcements, communications and mission letters to members of the EC since December 2019. Among the six priorities of the EC, two are particularly important and relevant for rural areas: the European Green Deal and 'A new push for European democracy'.



## The European Green Deal

- Missions letters to EU Commissioners (2019)  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner\\_mission\\_letters/mission-letter-frans-timmermans-2019\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-frans-timmermans-2019_en.pdf)
- A European Green Deal, COM(2019)640  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>

The European Green Deal was announced on 11 December 2019 by the president of the EC<sup>5</sup>, who vowed to deliver it within the Commission's first 100 days in office. Its aim is to achieve carbon neutrality at the EU level by 2050. Under the leadership of Deputy Commission President Frans Timmermans, a 50% to 55% cut in greenhouse gas emissions is envisaged. The commitments of the European Green Deal cover seven policy areas: clean energy, sustainable industry, building and renovating, sustainable mobility, biodiversity, farm-to-fork and eliminating pollution. The 'Just Transition Fund' announced on 14 January 2020 is aimed at supporting regions which are the most affected by the energy transition.

The term 'rural' appears in the European Green Deal communication through the section related to the European Climate Pact. It stated that European funds will help rural areas to achieve opportunities in the circular and bioeconomy. No definition of 'rural' through rural areas is provided (yet) in 'A Union that strives for more' strategy. The EC is expected to release a long-term vision for rural areas in early 2021.

The word 'rural' is either aligned with the rural development fund (the EAFRD) or perceived as an opportunity for circular and bioeconomy. As stipulated in the mission letter to three EU Commissioners, the 'rural' dimension of the EU strategy will also be developed through another priority: 'A new push for democracy'.

### A new push for European democracy

- Missions letters to Commissioners, (2019)  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-dubravka-suica\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-dubravka-suica_en.pdf)
- A strong social Europe for Just Transitions, COM(2020)0014  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/860380/Strong\\_social\\_Europe\\_just\\_transition\\_en.pdf.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/860380/Strong_social_Europe_just_transition_en.pdf.pdf)

The EC Communication 'A strong social Europe for just transitions' (2020) released on 14 January 2020 has proposed directions that indicate the way rural will be considered by the EC in the coming decades. The two paragraphs which follow are of particular importance regarding the rural:

**"Europe's demography is changing; today we live longer and healthier lives, thanks to progress in medicine and public health. As we do so, new needs and opportunities emerge. The silver and care economies provide new jobs for many, while ensuring that elderly people remain active or receive the care they need. Due to ageing and movement to cities, many rural areas in Europe are seeing their populations decline. The urban/rural divide is growing and can no longer be ignored. While technological change and the energy transition bring opportunities, they may not be enough on their own to bridge the gap between rich and poor, unless we support poor regions catching up with wealthier areas."** (p. 1)

**"Ageing is not the only demographic challenge. New household patterns such as higher number of single-person households, mobility to the cities leading to depopulation of rural areas, brain-drain or even**

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal_en)





*migration flows all contribute to a changing demographic landscape in the EU. To map the current situation, the Commission will present a **Report on the impact of demographic change** in the first quarter of 2020. The report will then be followed by a **Green Paper on ageing** in the fourth quarter of 2020 to launch a debate on long-term impacts of ageing, notably on care and pensions, and on how to foster active ageing. Acknowledging that the green, digital and demographic transitions affect different people in different ways, the demography report will also be followed by a **long-term vision for rural areas** in 2021. This long-term vision will aim at supporting rural areas to address their own unique set of issues, from ageing and depopulation to connectivity, the risk of poverty and limited access to services, social protection and healthcare.”(p. 11)*

Rural wording is used once in reference to demographic decline in rural areas due to the ageing of populations and their move to cities. The divide between urban and rural is a reminder of the challenge of not being ignored. Another divide mentioned is that between rich and poor, which is reflected in the difference between poor regions and wealthier regions, although recognising that areas can be heterogeneous, with extreme poverty within areas otherwise classified as wealthy, and vice versa.

The EC vision on rural areas focuses on rural areas as demographically challenged. In the statement above rural areas are perceived as synonymous with depopulation and ageing, lack of connectivity, risk of poverty, lack of services, social protection and healthcare. Both of these statements link rural areas to demographic issues that should be addressed through the next policy developments in 2020 and 2021.

### Conclusion

Given the very short period of time between the presentation of the new multiannual EU strategy 2021-2027 and this review of EU strategies dealing with rural, the observations should be treated with caution since no political agreement has been reached on these proposals.

## 4. Discussion on rural definition, typologies and EU strategies

### 4.1. From an agricultural legacy to a diversified economy: from rural society to rural areas

From the perspective of its relationship with urban areas, including the labour market, access to services and the diversification of economic activities, the word rural is increasingly assimilated with its residential, recreational and environmental functions. Although rural society was still prevalent in official documents in the 1980s (European Commission, 1988), it now only appears as rural areas. This may reflect the decline of the agricultural population and the structural changes triggered by agricultural modernisation.

The environmental function of rural areas relates to the management of natural resources that are gradually taken into account in public policies. It also relates to the social demand concerning rurality, such as rural tourism and living environment.

The different typologies of rural areas, and the research under review, converge in the following observations:

- the main criteria characterising rural is a low permanent population and a low density of activity;
- the economy of rural territories is either specialised in primary industries of agriculture, forestry or fishing and aquaculture sectors (in remote predominantly rural regions) or diversified around a service sector (in accessible predominantly rural regions);
- the diversification of economic activities in rural areas is the result of tourism and the arrival of new inhabitants. The latter are attracted by lower house prices than in urban centres and the quality of



life offered by an environment that is close to nature, and less exposed to pollution found in urban centres (air pollution, noise, traffic, etc.);

- remoteness is an important factor in how rural areas are perceived. The distance from and accessibility to urban centres affect employment, access to services and economic diversification.

While the socio-economic indicators (income level, employment rate, access to services) are generally lower in rural areas than in urban areas, rural areas offer a higher level of well-being with regard to housing and the environment.

Economic performance is strongly linked to the clustering of activities, and the diversification of economic activities in rural areas is conditioned by the presence of tourists and residents, who are attracted by the quality of life. However, this raises the question of the limits and sustainability of this diversification. That is, how can economic performance and low density be reconciled, and what alternative economic models could be implemented?

Certain aspects of the current situation can be expected to continue or intensify in coming years. This is particularly with regard to the need to conserve natural resources and the environment together, and to combat climate change by means of adaptation and mitigation policies. The aim is to change production and consumption methods and individual and collective behaviours.

Transport is a key element of the policies to combat climate change whereby individuals are being encouraged to adopt modes of transport creating little or no pollution, such as electric vehicles or suitable public transport. However, rural mobility is not considered in many public policies as most of the low-carbon alternative options are deployed in urban areas (ENRD, 2019).

The approach to rural areas in their relationships with urban areas is based on the flows between the two types of area, primarily daily population flows between rural areas (place of residence for quality of life) and urban areas (place of work as well as access to market and non-market services). This raises questions of the extent to which this system is viable and sustainable, given the need to change transport habits, and what conditions are necessary to ensure its durability in the context of fighting climate change?

It is acknowledged that rural areas are no longer exclusively farming- and forestry-oriented. However, certain elements suggest that one of the future prospects is the reintroduction of agriculture as a component of rural areas in a different format than the past. There is a wide range of arguments in favour of this tendency.

First, it should be recalled that social demand for quality of life in rural areas relates not only to the quality of the environment (no pollution, no traffic, aesthetic aspect of the landscape, etc.) but also to the quality of food products. Consuming local food products via short supply chains facilitates the traceability of products, which is seen as a guarantee of quality. Short food supply chains also provide benefits for both consumers and producers in terms of price. Moreover, the reduction of food miles (and associated pollution caused by the transport) over long distances might contribute to the efforts made to tackle climate change. In return, this could improve local and regional food resilience due to supplies from surrounding rural areas in the case of major disruption of the global food supply chains. If the logic of the locational relationship between rural and urban areas was extended beyond the access to services and to the labour market in order to also include access to local agricultural and food products (beyond niche markets), this would satisfy both the demand for food quality and the requirements of a green economy. The question is how, and in which conditions, does reintroducing agriculture into the rural-urban relationship contribute to the implementation of a green economy?

The objectives related to the environment, climate change and the quality of life (including food) reposition rural areas in a relationship of complementarity with urban areas rather than one of dependence. That raises the question of what these complementarities are, and how can they be put to good use.

While rural areas are generally assimilated with nature and quality of life, it should be recalled that they also display higher levels of poverty. In France, for example, a joint report prepared by the General Inspectorate



of Social Affairs and the General Council of Agriculture, Food and Rural Areas (Berthod-Wurmser *et al.*, 2009) suggested that monetary poverty in rural areas in 2006 was higher than in urban areas (13.7% compared to 11.3%). It would appear that the impact of this insecurity is exacerbated by remoteness. That raises the question of whether rural is still synonymous with poverty, and if so, why and how can this be remedied?

One of the sensitive issues related to rural areas, and particularly in remote rural areas, is the lack of access to basic services (healthcare, education, culture, etc.). This has a negative impact on well-being and on the local economy. Questions arising are how the costs of services can be reduced despite the low density of rural areas, and, how, and to what extent, can digitisation provide an answer?

The answers to these questions will define the outlines of rurality in the coming years. Closely linked to the environment, rural areas will assume new economic and environmental functions in the context of the push for a green economy and of the effects of climate change.

From a definition based on the sole activity of agriculture and a specific lifestyle, rural areas are now seen as composite areas, performing essential functions, such as production, residence, leisure and environmental conservation to meet the needs of several categories of actors. They are also perceived as innovative areas managing the complexity of socio-economic and environmental challenges. Therefore, can several types of rural be identified, not with regard to urban, but to characteristics per se of these ruralities?

### 4.2. An EU policy framework for rural areas still driven by agriculture

The review of the main milestones that have shaped rural development policies and strategies in the EU (section 3.1) revealed a twofold, longstanding conversation on past and future rural policies. The first point lies in the historical roots of EU integration, with recognition of the role of cohesion policy to work alongside agricultural policy, and the structural changes of agriculture, reflecting the demographic and socio-economic changes and trends in rural areas. Support of rural society (in the 1980s) and rural areas (in the early 2020s), are reflections of cohesion policy to reduce regional inequalities in rural areas across the European Community before 1992, and in the EU after this date. Section 2 of this review showed the risks of social and economic inequalities in rural areas (lower GDP per inhabitant, risk of poverty, etc.).

The second point is linked to the nature of policy interventions towards rural areas. Despite successive influential declarations and reports for a broader rural scope (see in Section 3.1), and for an emphasis on the well-being of rural (OECD, 2006 and 2018), EU rural development policy has remained mainly agriculturally-driven (agri-centric influence), and then to a lesser extent environmental-driven through enhanced agricultural practices. The changing role of agriculture in rural areas under a new rural development paradigm does not mean an 'expropriation' of agriculture from rural areas as new peasantries have also emerged (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000). Rather, it suggests a societal trends-driven hierarchy in which the centrality of agriculture in rural areas gives way to multi-polarised and multi-faceted places for agriculture.

Regarding rural interventions, the EU relies on its two historical structural policies: cohesion policy for developing a regional policy; and the CAP through a rural development pillar that mainly supports the agricultural sector. These two policies have their specific dedicated funds: the Cohesion fund, the ERDF, the ESF and the EAFRD for structural and investment funds, and the EAGF for the first pillar of the CAP. These funds have shaped and still shape EU policy interventions relating to rural since the 1980s.

Figure 10 shows the main policy measures shaped in the early 1990s by the CAP and the Cohesion policy to support specific objectives in rural areas: i) territorial cohesion through the structural funds and the farming policy for areas under natural constraints; ii) protection of the rural environment through the agri-



environmental measures; and iii) support to the community-led local development governance. These types of measures are still in place and have been complemented by others under the Cohesion policy and the CAP (e.g. areas under natural constraints, agri-environmental measures, LEADER).

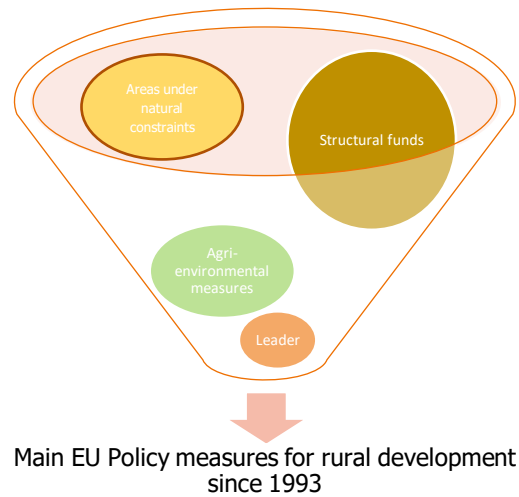


Figure 10: Main EU policy measures for rural development since 1993 through the CAP and the Cohesion policy. Source: Authors.

From the review of EU thematic sub-strategies above, there are three types of EU strategies which can be identified as dealing with rural areas since 2000: i) natural resources-oriented strategies, ii) socio-economic strategies, and iii) geographical strategies.

- i) Natural resources-oriented strategies are the most numerous in the review. Biodiversity, forests, Green infrastructure, adaptation to climate change and soils all intersect with natural resource management and on land use in rural areas. Rural areas as physical spaces are considered as a geographical support for policy intervention focused on environment and natural resources. The rural environmental perimeter is not new, as corroborated by the “rural environment” challenge identified in the 1980s (European Commission, 1988), and since confirmed with these various strategies reviewed in Section 3.4.
- ii) Socio-economic strategies are less numerous from our review (i.e. employment, bioeconomy and digital strategies). These strategies have scoped some of the trends and challenges facing rural areas: depopulation, unemployment, diversification of the rural economy, new rural jobs, remoteness, digital gap due to poor internet broadband, bio-economy opportunities, etc. Implementation of these socio-economic strategies go through the cohesion fund, the ERDF and the CAP.
- iii) Geographic strategies are not particularly evident from the review (Coastal areas, EUSAL macro-region strategy). Remoteness and long commuting distances shape the way rural areas are experienced. This is particularly the case in mountainous areas where accessibility to urban centres and employment basins are considered as a physical handicap. In the case of the EUSALP macro-region, the territory-based strategy is of particular importance when linkages with extra EU strategies (i.e. biodiversity, bio-economy and forestry strategies) can generate synergies.



The review of EU strategies enabled the identification of a number of assets and opportunities of rural areas, while describing challenges, weaknesses and threats facing them. Table 4 summarises the main positive features of the rural (assets, characteristics), and its negative ones (weaknesses and threats). Some of these features inherently express both opportunities and trends.

Positive features	Negatives features
Better environment	Depopulation
Better health	Unemployment
Provision of ecosystem services	Less favoured areas
Opportunities for new jobs in new sectors	Remoteness
Tourism	Loss of biodiversity
Biodiversity in farming and forestry systems	Soils degradation
Climate change adaptation	Poverty
Housing prices	Lack of basic services
Quality of life and well being	Lack of internet broadband

Table 4: Positive and negative features of rural extracted from the review of EU strategies dealing with rural. (Source: Authors).

Rural is a meta-category formed by rural sub-categories connected to specific challenges and therefore to specific policy objectives as mentioned above. Under the thematic strategies released over the last two decades, this review shows that many specific challenges in rural areas are connected to environmental and climate challenges. In that respect, the rural environment can be considered as a reservoir of natural resources providing environmental public goods to the society and the economy.

### 4.3. From definitions and typologies towards a vision for rural areas

As introduced in Section 1, it is difficult to agree on an official territorial definition of rural at the EU level due to the diversity of situations and contexts across rural Europe (van Eupen, 2012). As a result, there is no definition of the word 'rural'. As a consequence, it is used in generic terms, as an adjective for areas, economy, environment, life, society and communities.

Despite this gap, rural is mainly understood to be that which 'is not urban'. Rural areas are shaped by urban and functional features such as population density, degree of urbanisation and commuting distances. Rural is also a 'living playing field' for research and methods to delineate statistical boundaries between cities, urban and rural areas (European Commission *et al.*, 2020).

To an extent, the frame of reference for rural is similar in many typologies covered by the review of literature, and EU institutions and the OECD. Generally, they consider rural to be the opposite to urban, or as part of the urban-rural continuum. Most criteria refer to demography (population density), and to urban attraction and its influence on rural areas. In that respect rural is categorised through the lens of urban or the urban-rural continuum.

In policy terms, it is observed that the CAP, and cohesion and regional policy, differ in the understanding and use of the concept 'rural' due to its broad and complex nature (one more agri-focused and the other two urban or peri-urban focused). Regarding CAP interventions, Section 2.3.5, rural development programmes have been assessed as being as less 'rural' than in the official EU strategies and policy frameworks. Urban and intermediate regions would have been more supported than deep rural and peripheral rural areas under the rural development policy (Camaioni *et al.*, 2013).



A common understanding and clearer use of terms such as: i) agro-forestry and food development (sectoral), and ii) rural development (broader and related to many dimensions, including, but too not specifically, agriculture) might help structure methodologies for discussing a vision for rural areas. To avoid any methodological and statistic bias concerning the central focus of urban and peri-urban over rural, one option is to consider the grand challenges facing rural areas and rural populations towards 2030 and beyond.

Figure 11 presents a synthesis based upon the Rural Policy 3.0' OECD report, and the preceding review of EU strategies dealing with rural. From one overarching objective focused on the well-being in rural areas, this diagram illustrates the rural dimensions of rural society, rural economy and rural environment, aligned to their specific policy focus. A thorough exploration of intrinsic functions of rural areas might be needed to complete this understanding, through their objective, dimensions and policy focus.

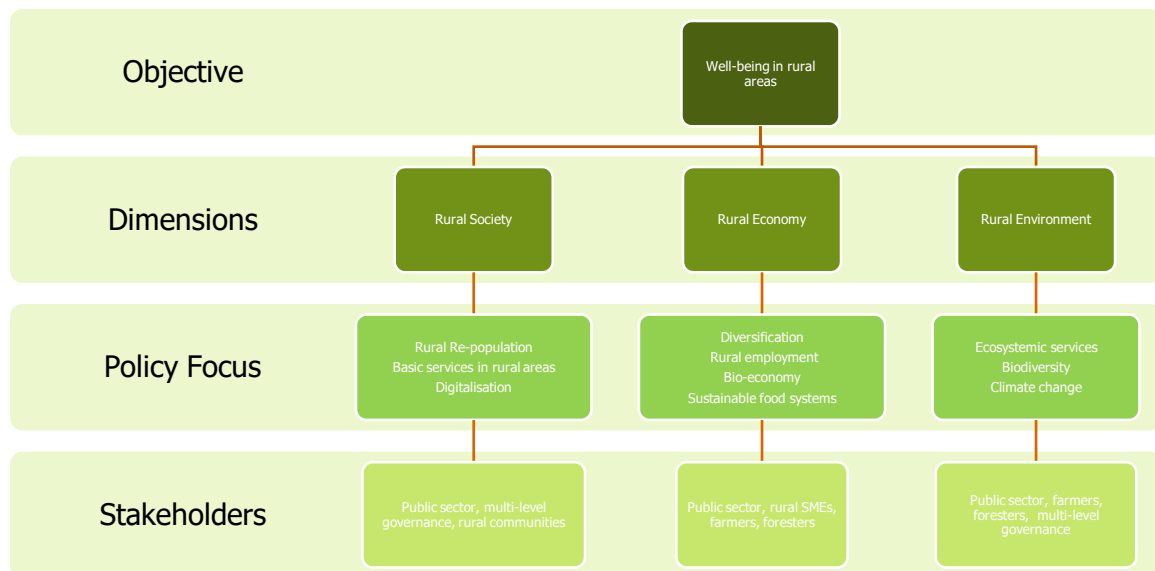


Figure 11: Dimensions and policy focus for well-Being in rural areas. Source: Authors.

The key messages of this review on definitions, typologies and review of EU strategies dealing with rural are:

- i) Rural policy responses do not mean only those of rural development policy only. Cohesion and Regional funds and their synergies should be made more explicit beyond their respective policy boundaries.
- ii) Rural development policy does not mean supporting mainly the agricultural sector and farm incomes but should, equally focus on rural society more broadly, the rural economy and rural environment.
- iii) A EU long-term vision for rural areas should be based upon the overarching objective of well-being in rural areas as illustrated in the Figure 11.





## 5. Conclusion

This framework providing definitions, typologies and a review of EU strategies dealing with rural is a compilation of existing data knowledge for SHERPA multi-actor platforms (MAPs) that will engage in discussion on rural trends, needs and future rural policies at their territory level.

This deliverable untangles the meaning of the term 'rural' from different nodal points, from definitions to typologies, from practice to theory, and from strategies to policies. Some of these nodal points are highly visible, e.g. the rural development policy, and others are hidden by some other strategies or policy framework.

This review did not aim to be exhaustive. According to the SHERPA work programme, further developments are expected under the SHERPA deliverables D3.3 and D3.4. Deliverable D3.3 will explore in-depth the rural trends and challenges in the territories of the MAPs, and D3.4 will propose a meta-foresight exercise envisioning the rural futures in these territories.

Additional research outside SHERPA will be needed on new criteria which embraces the states of rurality through its various dimensions on social, environmental and economics, to provide updated data to policy makers on the facts pertaining to rural areas.





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## 7. Appendixes

### Appendix 1: Reallocation of NUTs regions to more urban and to more rural

Figure 12 (a) shows the reallocation of NUTs regions to more urban, and figure 12 (b) the reallocation to more rural (Eurostat, 2011; [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural\\_typology](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology)).

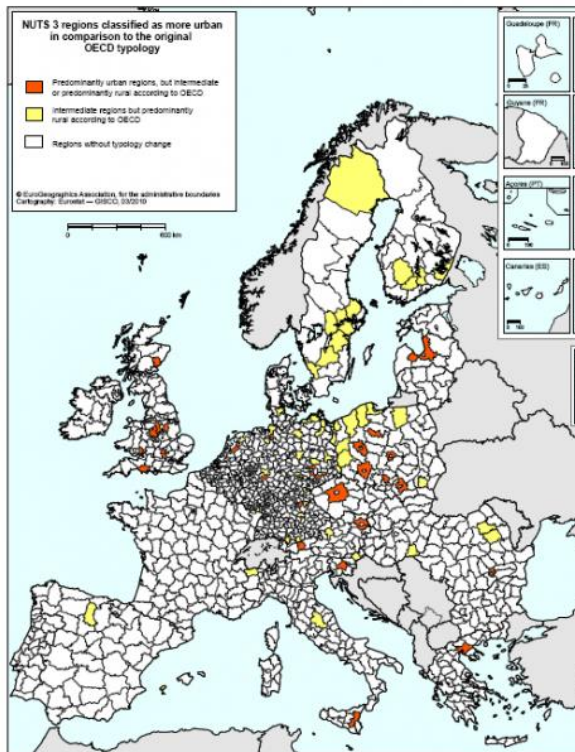


Figure 12 (a). Areas reallocated to more urban when revised EU classification of urban-rural typology is compared to OECD classification, applied to Europe at the level of NUTS 3 regions  
Source: Eurostat  
[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural\\_typology](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology)

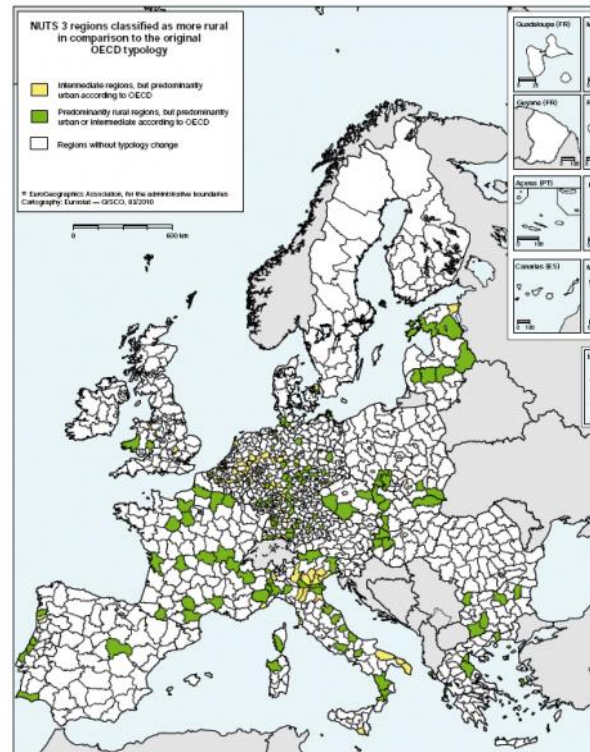


Figure 12 (b). Areas reallocated to more rural when revised EU classification of urban-rural typology is compared to OECD classification, applied to Europe at the level of NUTS 3 regions  
Source: Eurostat  
[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural\\_typology](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology)



## Appendix 2: Change in percentage rural area between 2000 and 2010 by region

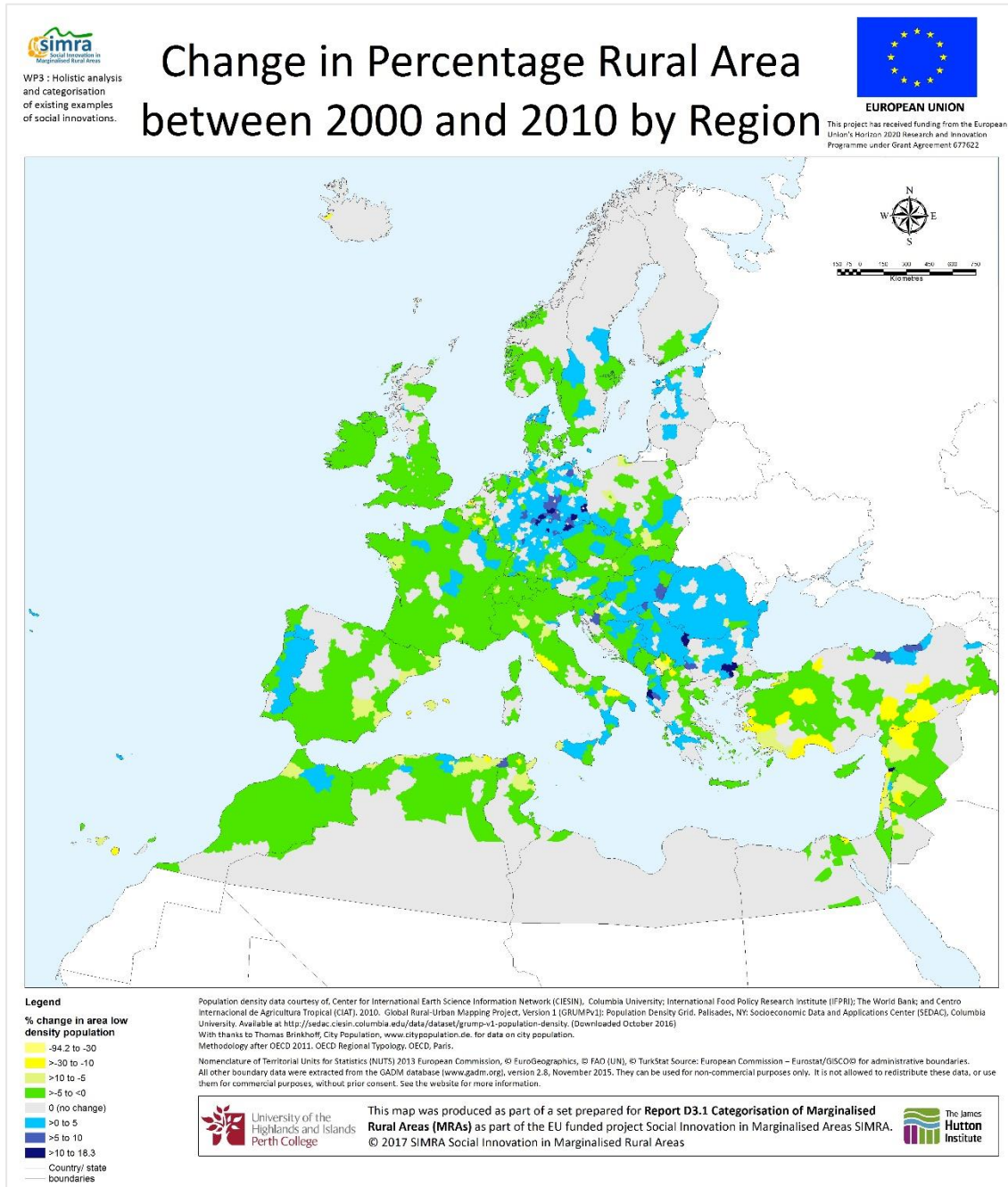


Figure 13: Map of changes in the percentage of 1km squares (< 150 people per km<sup>2</sup>; 2010) per NUTS 3 and local areas, for the SIMRA area of interest (Source: Price *et al.*, 2017; Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas; SIMRA).

### Appendix 3: Remoteness criteria in the OECD typology

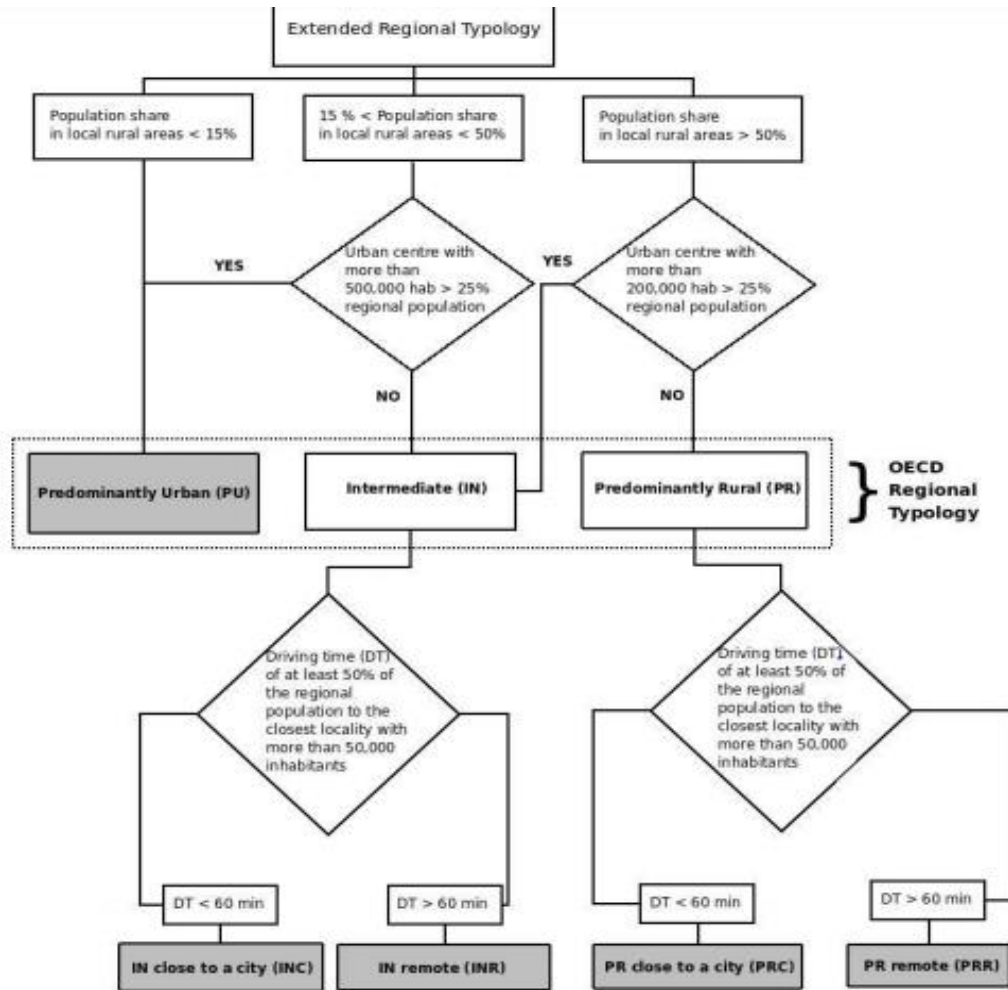
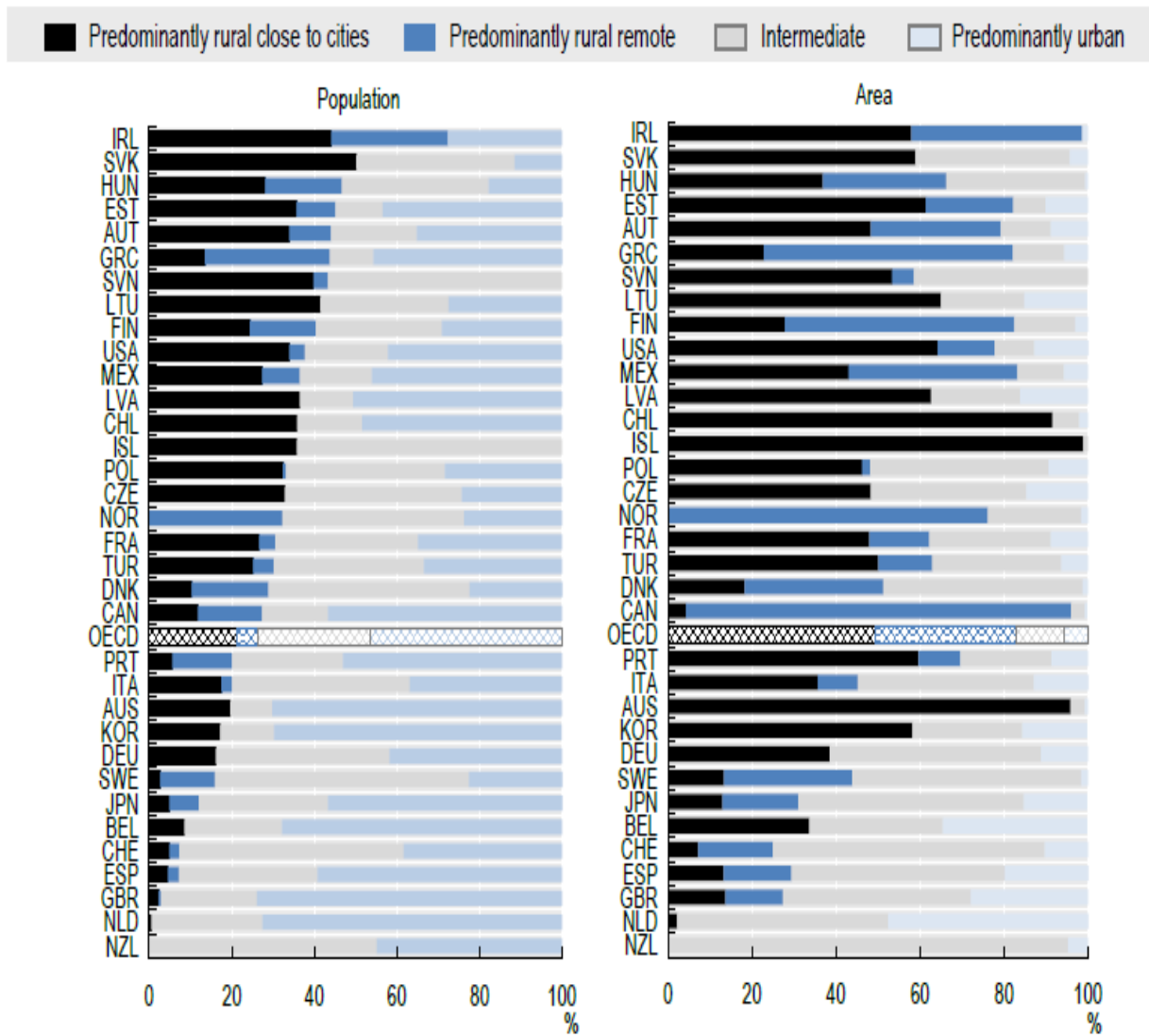


Figure 14: Extract from Dijkstra and Vicente, OECD, 2010



Appendix 4: Distribution of total population by region, OECD countries

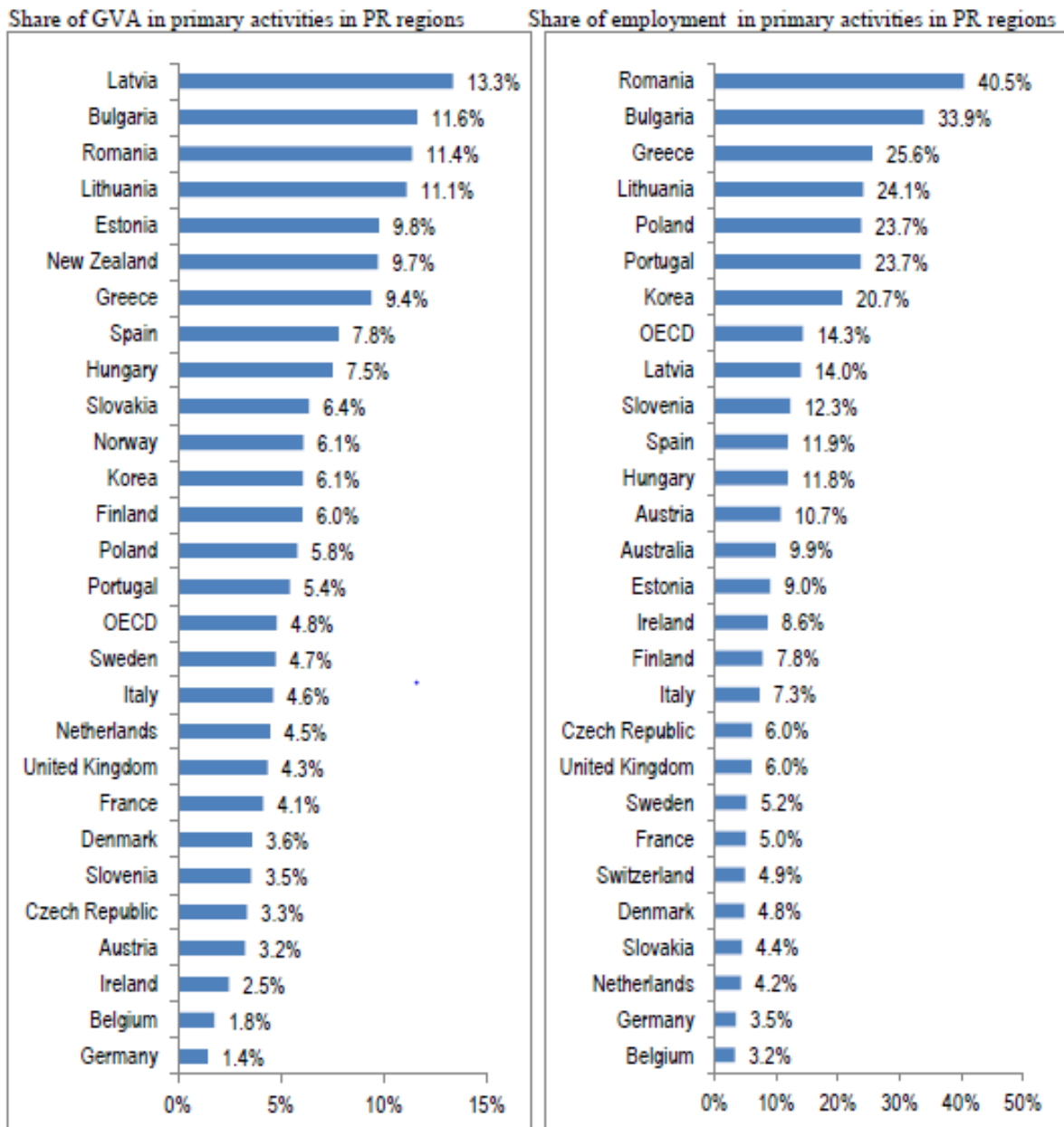


Source: OECD (2016), OECD Regional Outlook 2016: Productive Regions for Inclusive Societies, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264260245-en>.

Figure 15: Extract from OECD, 2018

**Appendix 5: Share of Gross Value Added and employment in primary activities: predominantly rural regions, OECD countries**

**Figure 2. Share of Gross Value Added (GVA) and employment in primary activities predominantly rural (PR) regions**



*Note:* \* Primary activities include agriculture, forestry and fishing

*Source:* OECD (2018) "Regional economy", OECD Regional Statistics (database).

Figure 16: Extract from OECD, 2018



## Appendix 6: Eurostat typologies

### Extract from Eurostat website:

In order to ensure a harmonised application of the typologies and allow for cross-referencing from other acts and programmes, Eurostat launched a legislative initiative called "Tercet", which is aiming at integrating the typologies into the NUTS Regulation. Tercet can be found on [EUR-Lex](#). This document includes much information about the background and the layout of the typologies.

The [consolidated version of the amended NUTS Regulation](#) is available on EUR-Lex. In depth-information on the typologies can be found in the [Methodological manual on territorial typologies](#).

Tercet only covers the most basic and most relevant typologies, as follows:

At regional level (NUTS 3):

#### Urban-rural typology

Classes:

- Predominantly urban regions
- Intermediate regions
- Predominantly rural regions

More info: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/rural-development/background>

Maps and data: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=urbanrural.urb\\_typology&lang=en](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=urbanrural.urb_typology&lang=en)

#### Metropolitan typology

Classes:

- Metropolitan regions
- Non-metropolitan regions

More info: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/metropolitan-regions/overview>

Maps and data: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=metropolitan.gen&lang=en>

#### Coastal typology

Classes:

- Coastal regions
- Non-coastal regions



More info: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/coastal-island-outermost-regions/methodology>

Maps and data: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=maritime.gen&lang=en>

At local level (LAU):

### **Degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA)**

Classes:

- Urban areas
- Cities
- Towns and suburbs
- Rural areas

More info: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/degree-of-urbanisation/overview>

Maps and data: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=degurb.gen&lang=en>

### **Functional Urban Areas (FUA)**

Consist of:

- Cities plus their
- Commuting zones

More info: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/cities/spatial-units>

Data: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/cities/data/database>

### **Coastal areas**

Classes:

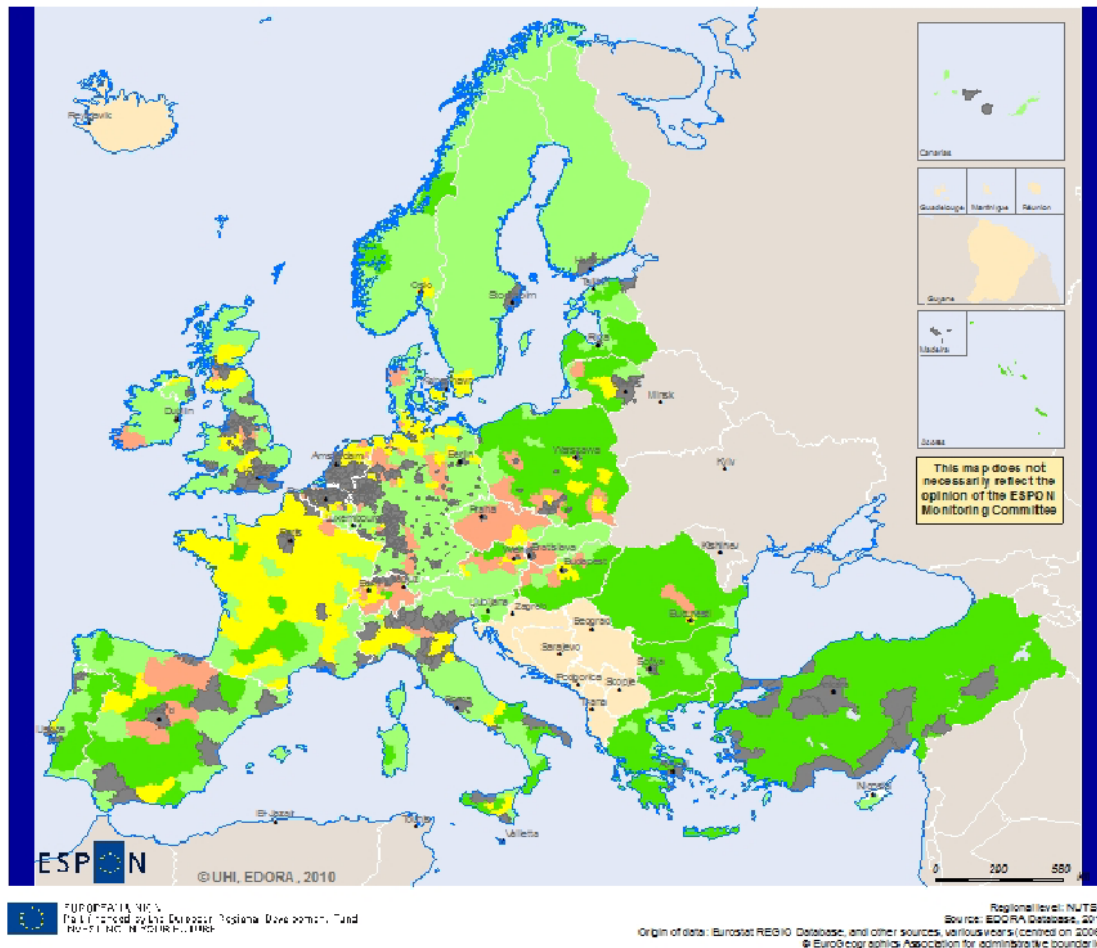
- Coastal areas
- Non-coastal areas

Data: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/coastal-island-outermost-regions/data/database>





## Appendix 7: Structural types in intermediate and predominantly rural NUTs3 regions



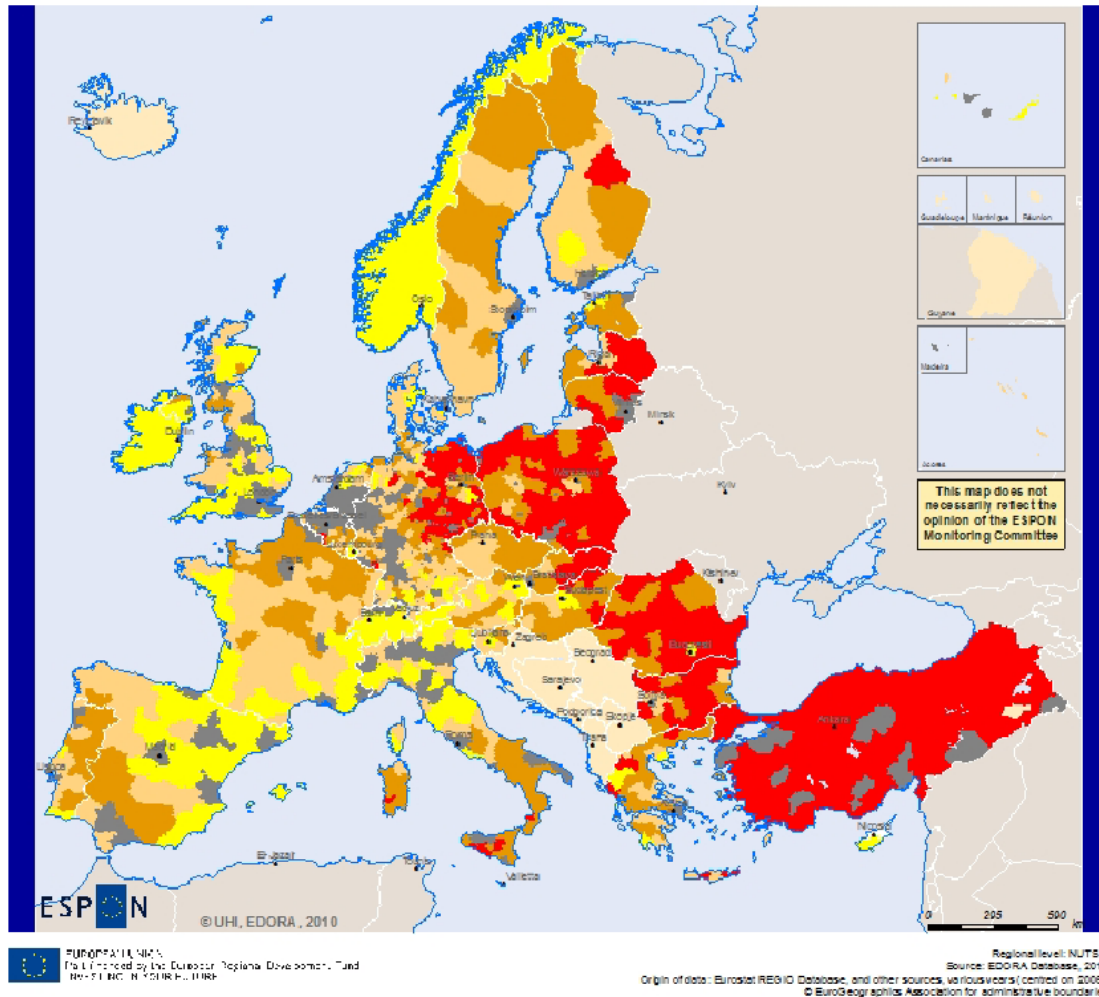
### Structural Types (Intermediate and Predominantly Rural NUTS 3 Regions)

- No Data
- PU Regions
- Agrarian
- Consumption Countryside
- Diversified (Strong Secondary Sector)
- Diversified (Strong Private Services Sector)

Note: A simplified classification procedure was necessary in CH and TR, due to missing data. However it is anticipated that acquisition of a wider range of indicators would not materially change the outcome.

Figure 17: Extract from EDORA (ESPON, 2010))

## Appendix 8: Performance types in intermediate and predominantly rural NUTS3 regions



### Performance (A-D) Types (Intermediate and Predominantly Rural NUTS 3 Regions)

- No Data
- PU Regions
- Depleting
- Below Average
- Above Average
- Accumulating

Note: The type allocation to TR and CH is based upon a reduced set of indicators, and should not be considered fully comparable with the typology for the EU27.

Figure 18: Extract from EDORA (ESPON, 2010)



## Appendix 9: Changes in Cohesion policy between 1994 and 2020

Period	Purpose, context	Objectives and/or priorities
1994-1999	To consolidate and increase efforts (with a view to increased integration at EU level following the signature of the MAASTRICHT agreement)	<p><b>Objective 1:</b> to promote the development and structural adjustment of regions displaying developmental delay</p> <p><b>Objective 2:</b> to reconvert regions or some of the regions affected by industrial decline</p> <p><b>Objective 3:</b> to combat long-term unemployment and facilitate integration of young people and people excluded from the labour market in the world of work, and to promote equal job opportunities between men and women.</p> <p><b>Objective 4:</b> to facilitate the adaptation of workers to industrial changes</p> <p><b>Objective 5:</b> to promote rural development by: a) accelerating the adjustment of agricultural structures within the framework of the CAP reforms and promoting the modernisation and structural adjustment of the fisheries sector, b) facilitating the development and structural adjustment of rural zones</p> <p><b>Objective 6:</b> to ensure the development and structural adjustment of regions with a very low population density.</p>
2000-2006	Ensure successful expansion	<p><b>Objective 1:</b> to promote development and structural adjustment in regions displaying developmental delay</p> <p><b>Objective 2:</b> to support the economic and social conversion of zones before structural difficulties are encountered</p> <p><b>Objective 3:</b> to support the adaptation and modernisation of education, learning and employment policies and systems.</p>
2007-2013	<p>-Focus on growth and employment.</p> <p>-Principle of concentration or resources in the poorest regions and states</p>	<p><b>Priority 1:</b> ensuring convergence between the member states and the least developed regions, as defined by a per capita GDP lower than 75% of the average level in the EU.</p> <p><b>Priority 2:</b> promoting regional competitiveness and employment. This priority concerns all regions of the EU with the aim of enhancing the competitiveness of the regions along with their attractiveness and employment.</p> <p><b>Priority 3:</b> ensuring European territorial cooperation based on the Interreg initiative while supporting cross-border and transnational cooperation</p>
2014-2020	<p>-Focus on results</p> <p>-Simplification</p> <p>-Reinforcement of the urban dimension and social inclusion</p> <p>-Concentration of resources in the poorest regions and countries</p> <p>- Concentration of efforts on four priorities: research and innovation, information and ICTs, competitiveness of SMEs and an economy with low CO2 emissions.</p>	<p><b>Objective 1:</b> to support research and innovation</p> <p><b>Objective 2:</b> to enhance access to information and communication technologies</p> <p><b>Objective 3:</b> to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs</p> <p><b>Objective 4:</b> to support the shift towards an economy with low CO2 emissions</p> <p><b>Objective 5:</b> to promote adaptation to climate change as well as risk management and prevention</p> <p><b>Objective 6:</b> to conserve and protect the environment</p> <p><b>Objective 7:</b> to promote sustainable transport and improve the networks of infrastructures</p> <p><b>Objective 8:</b> to promote sustainable, quality employment and worker mobility</p> <p><b>Objective 9:</b> to promote social inclusion and to combat poverty and any form of discrimination</p> <p><b>Objective 10:</b> to invest in life-long education, learning and training</p> <p><b>Objective 11:</b> to improve the efficacy of public administration.</p>

Table 5: Changes in Cohesion policy between 1994 and 2020.



## Appendix 10: Green infrastructures: EU policies and instruments

Policy Area	EU policies and instruments considered for Green Infrastructure	Possible Measures
EU 2020	EU 2020 strategy Innovation Union flagship initiative under EU 2020/Roadmap for a resource efficient Europe	Giving policy signal through COM Detailed follow-up on contribution of GI to eco-innovation Detailed follow-up on contribution of GI to resource efficiency (in particular land and ecosystems)
Environment Strategy	Seventh EAP	Incorporating GI into integrated strategies and planning with emphasis on health benefits
<b>Agricultural Policy</b>	CAP pillar 1 greening measure including cross compliance	Ecological focus areas, crop rotation, maintenance and restoration of permanent grassland and functional agricultural landscapes
	CAP pillar 2 EAFRD funding	Greening measures under Pillar 2 (agri-environmental measures)
	CAP pillar 2 training Advice, extension services, planning provisions Farm Advisory System	<b>Integration of green infrastructure into education and training and the re-establishment of rural areas.</b>
Forestry Policy	1998 EU forestry strategy and forthcoming forestry strategy	<b>Integration of Green Infrastructure into forestry planning and management</b> (defragmentation, restoration of forests)
Biodiversity and Nature	EU 2020 biodiversity strategy	Development and implementation of all targets, in particular links to action 5, 6 and 7
	Birds directive	Application of Article 3
	Habitats Directive	Application of Article 10
	Voluntary Scheme for biodiversity and ecosystem services (BEST) in EU overseas territories	Financing GI in EU overseas territories
Water policy	<b>LIFE+ regulation</b> Water Framework Directive / River basin Management Plans	<b>Financing GI projects</b> Applying GI in river basin management



	Floods Directive	
	EU Drought Policy	Better environmental options for flood management
Soil Policy	EU water blueprint Thematic strategy for soil protection Proposal for a Directive establishing a framework for protecting soil	Using GI solutions for building up resilience against droughts Natural water retention measure Soil-sealing guidelines
Climate change policy	EU strategy on adaptation	Integrated planning on soil issues Guidance on GI for adaptation
Cohesion Policy, including territorial cohesion and innovative financing	2050 low carbon roadmap Regional Policy (cohesion policy)  Technical Assistance for preparation of major projects (JASPERS) and innovative financing (Jessica, Jeremy etc.)	LULUCF Including GI in the ERDF, CF and ESF priorities Use of innovative funding for large GI projects Inclusion of GI into the programmes and implementation of macro-regional strategies as well as cross border transnational and interregional programme (e.g. Alpine Convention)
Transport and energy	Macro-regional strategies: EU strategy for the Danube region / Eu strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and forthcoming macro-regional strategy TEN-T and TEN-E	Include measure to limit fragmentation and improve connectivity in TEN guidelines
	EU White Paper on transport IA	Use GI for low-carbon transport planning
	Energy Policy	Urban GI as an example of energy efficiency in buildings
	Connecting Europe Facility	Integrate GI into implementation of TENS
Impact assessment damage prevention and remediation	Environmental impact assessment Directives (EIA)  Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA)	Implement revisions of the EIA Directive  Guidelines on including biodiversity and climate change in EIA and SEA
<b>Spatial Planning</b>	Environmental Liability Directive European Spatial Development perspective ESPON 2013 Programme	Assess GI as part of remediation Promote GI on all territorial levels  Promote GI as inter territorial tool
	EU Territorial Agenda	Use GI for integrated spatial planning
	Urban Strategy	Promote urban and peri urban GI solutions
Marine and Coastal Zones Policy		Applying GI on the marine environment



Use GI for integrated spatial  
planning  
Promote urban and peri urban GI  
solutions

Table 6: Technical information on green infrastructure (GI) Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital. Source: 2013.



## Appendix 11: Peripherality indicator' variables

Table 1. Variables adopted in the analysis grouped in 4 thematic areas.

	Variable	Definition	Year	Source	Mean	Standard Deviation
Socio-demographic features	Population	Resident population (000)	2010	Eurostat	386.00	462.34
	Population Variation	Average annual variation (in %) of the resident population	2000-2010	Eurostat	0.15	0.74
	Net Migration Rate	Ratio of the difference between immigrants and emigrants with respect to the average population, including statistical adjustments	2010	Eurostat	1.22	5.36
	Density	Ratio of the resident population on the total surface of a given area (in km <sup>2</sup> )	2010	Eurostat	456.23	1056.67
	Unemployment Rate	Unemployed population (aged 15-64) as % of the total economically active population	2009	Eurostat	8.36	3.82
	Young-age dependency ratio	Ratio of the number of people aged 0-14 with respect to the number of people aged 15-64	2010	Eurostat	22.45	3.71
	Aged dependency ratio	Ratio of the number of people aged 65+ with respect to the number of people aged 15-64	2010	Eurostat	29.02	6.39
Structure of the economy	GVA Agriculture (%)	Share of GVA from sector A (NACE classification rev. 2) on the total	2009	Eurostat	2.94	3.36
	Employment Agriculture (%)	Share of employment in sector A (NACE classification rev. 2) on the total	2009	Eurostat	7.22	9.43
	Employment Manufacturing (%)	Share of employment in sectors C-E(NACE classification rev. 2) on the total	2009	Eurostat	18.84	8.06
	Employment Services (%)	Share of employment in sectors G-U(NACE classification rev. 2) on the total	2009	Eurostat	66.43	12.36
	Per capita GDP	GDP in Euro per inhabitant (PPS)	2009	Eurostat	21,945	9,465
	Average farm size	Average agricultural area (in ha) per agricultural holding	2007	Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey)	42.74	52.57
	Average SGM	Average Standard Gross Margin (in ESU) per agricultural holding	2007	Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey)	41.13	42.13



	Variable	Definition	Year	Source	Mean	Standard Deviation
Land use	Artificial areas (%)	Share of total surface which is covered by artificial areas (urban fabric, industrial and commercial units...)	2006	CORINE-Eurostat	12.88	17.18
	Agricultural areas (%)	Share of total surface which is covered by agricultural areas	2006	CORINE-Eurostat	51.31	20.73
	Forests (%)	Share of total surface which is covered by forests and other semi-natural areas	2006	CORINE-Eurostat	32.82	21.90
Geography (spatial dimension)	Air Accessibility	The index is calculated by summing the population in all the other EU NUTS 3 regions, weighted by the travel time to go there by air. Values are standardised with the EU average (EU27=100)	2006	ESPON (Project 1.1.1)	92.94	37.55
	Multimodal Accessibility	The index is calculated by summing the population in all the other EU NUTS 3 regions, weighted by the travel time to go there by road, rail and air. Values are standardised with the EU average (EU27=100)	2006	ESPON (Project 1.1.1)	95.65	38.54
	Multimodal Accessibility Change	Relative variation (in %) of the Multimodal Accessibility Index	2001-2006	ESPON (Project 1.1.1)	10.11	12.22
	Distance from MEGA1	Distance from closest MEGA1 (centroid)	-	Authors' elaboration	264.95	257.70
	Distance from MEGA2	Distance from closest MEGA2 (centroid)	-	Authors' elaboration	203.48	174.76
	Distance from MEGA3	Distance from closest MEGA3 (centroid)	-	Authors' elaboration	153.42	140.80
	Distance from MEGA4	Distance from closest MEGA4 (centroid)	-	Authors' elaboration	108.86	85.05

Figure 19: Extract from Camaioni et al. (2013)







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