

# RURAL EUROPE TAKES ACTION

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No more business as usual

The seven clouds on rural resilience carry a broad range of challenges, opportunities and urgency for action and change in rural Europe.

Economical, social, environmental and generational principles are inter-linked in these clouds.

To transform rural economies and communities into more resilient and fair systems some of these areas for action are more important in one or the other cloud for action, which we try to illustrate in this visual.

LOCAL  
AND  
CIRCULAR

COHESION  
AND  
DEMOCRACY

NETWORKS  
AND  
FRAMEWORKS

# CLOUDS OF RURAL RESILIENCE

LIFTING  
BORDERS AND  
MAKING PEACE

LAND ACCESS  
AND LAND  
STEWARDSHIP

LEARNING  
AND  
VITALITY

SEEDS  
AND  
SYSTEMS

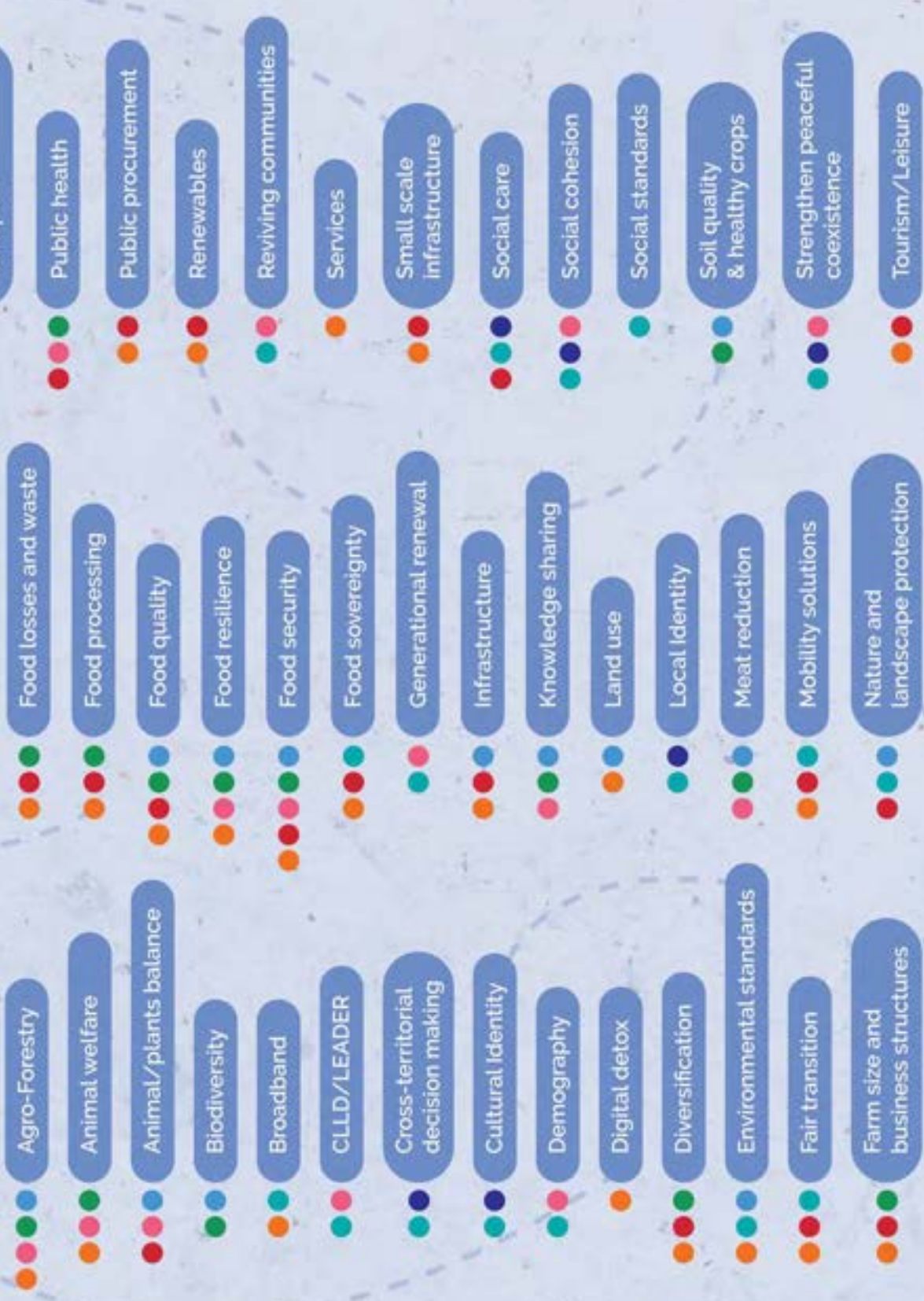
FROM VISIONS TO ACTION

Agro-Ecology

Food councils

Packaging, logistics,  
transport







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No more business as usual





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# FOREWORD



 DACIAN CIOLȘ

Member of the European Parliament,  
Former European Commissioner for  
Agriculture and Rural Development

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## A WAKE-UP CALL FOR OUR RURAL, AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD POLICY

Sometimes, history is made fast. The resilience of our rural areas and our farming is being dramatically tested these days. The COVID pandemic has revealed the value of our rural areas, where we can be more in touch with nature, while being obliged to keep our distance from each other. Having sufficient good food for all has become central. The war on Ukraine is testing us as Europeans, including the Union's rural, agriculture and food policies. We suddenly sense the fragility of our food system, emotionally as well

as economically. Food prices, food security, food sovereignty are crucial questions. How to feed the poor and maintain supply for countries dependent on food imports? We know that we must find solutions now as the food system is under pressure and there is no time to waste.

But let us not forget: this is only the tip of the iceberg. The underlying danger for our common future is still there. It concerns farmers and citizens alike. If we want rural Europe, our citizens and our farmers, to take a brave step towards a resilient

rural, sustainable farming and fair food system, we must find a new deal between people and nature, preserving biodiversity, water, fertile soils, establishing a clever rural infrastructure, - and feeding people. That way we may manoeuvre safely around these icebergs.

Achieving food security for our continent has been on the EU's agenda since World War II. Today we have to take a fresh look. More is no longer enough. Where, how and for what are the key questions. Local, regional, fair, climate friendly, efficient



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*“Achieving food security for our continent has been on the EU’s agenda since World War II. Today we have to take a fresh look. More is no longer enough. Where, how and for what are the key questions. Local, regional, fair, climate friendly, efficient and without waste are the answers.”*

and without waste are the answers. Our expectations on rural areas and food have evolved tremendously - but so have our duties and responsibilities. We must work on policies which are fair for farmers and local communities; we can take more care of animals and biodiversity, preserve traditions and cultures, but also attract and support young people to find their place on farms, in villages and towns. Now is the time to look back from their future, and to take action where we are. Europe will only be fit for the future if we wake up

and embrace the challenges as they stand before us.

This new book on rural action in Europe gathers the positive and optimistic energy of European citizens in times of crises. It urges political decision-makers to take action for a more holistic approach to rural, farming and food policies, beyond business as usual. I invite you to read their stories, to be inspired and also to take action and to reflect on their policy conclusions.

The pandemic crisis, the war on Ukraine, the looming climate

emergency are pushing us all to reinvent Europe and our policies, in partnership with all rural actors, including our neighbours who wish to join a peaceful and civic project. This book goes beyond dreams, wishful thinking, or visioning. It is an expression of the strength of civil society and of partnership between Europeans.

As we are called by the European Institutions to sketch out our visions for the Future of Europe, we see that rural Europe is ready to act. You may wish to join the effort.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This book is dedicated to European citizens who struggle for a more resilient, peaceful and democratic Europe beyond current policies and borders.

It is offered to all who contributed to this policy guide for the rural future with their experience and precious time, so that we could gather this treasure of collective intelligence:

the rural movements and activists, farmers, municipalities, bakers, young people, elders, cooks, seed savers, educators, and last but not least people in governments and administrations at all levels of engagement and responsibility.

We hope to offer stimulation and guidance for political decision-makers and administrations, to back up their

ambitions to transform the current framework of isolated policies into an integrated Common Rural, Agricultural and Food Policy for Europe.

We are grateful for the trust and continued support of our funders, [Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme](#), [Fondation de France](#), [Heinrich Böll Foundation Brussels](#) and [Porticus](#).



Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer  
pour le Progrès de l'Homme



HEINRICH  
BÖLL  
STIFTUNG

PORTICUS

# RESILIENCE AND PEACE

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A war changes everything. The suffering of the Ukrainian people in cities and villages is inconceivable. The exodus of millions fleeing their homes is disastrous. And the social, economical, environmental and geopolitical consequences are incalculable. For decades many of us have taken peace for granted. War was on the news, somewhere else, not our reality. Now it is.

Many of us have also taken for granted that food supply in Europe is secure and that farming can continue based on imported fossil energy and fertilisers. But we now know that this is not so. It is not just the war on Ukraine bringing this truth to the surface. It is the urgency of the global climate crises, biodiversity loss and the depletion of natural resources pushing us to find less external resource-reliant farming practices and a more resilient rural economy. With our struggle for resilience and peace we are now fighting on two fronts.

Working on this book, we were amazed at the energy and creativity of people in rural Europe striving to achieve transition towards a more resilient agriculture, a circular economy, qualified use of digital modernisation and a more inclusive rural infrastructure. With

the beginning of war on Ukraine we were touched by the spontaneous solidarity with displaced people. Both challenges - the people fleeing from war, and people struggling for transition - may be our chance to make peace with each other and with the planet.

The new reality of war in Europe, and the uncomfortable truth that nature can no longer wait for us to take action, demand radical policy and behavioural change. As we must cope with both crises at the same time, we will need determination in our political struggle. We must reject any rollback to business as usual - such as taking the war on Ukraine as a pretext to give up on climate and EU Green Deal ambitions, which is now suggested by the agri-industrial lobby and ministers of agriculture. Food security for Western Europe will not be achieved by ploughing CO<sub>2</sub>-absorbing permanent grassland, or doubling down on the feed, fuel and fertiliser requirements of a very intensive agri-food system. There are other approaches. Once again the need for a more holistic approach to farming, food policy and rural development becomes apparent.

This book offers incisive and inclusive proposals for political and practical rural action now. We have

***“What we have gathered is not a wish list of what should be done, nor a vision of what could be. It is what people are doing right now to make their farms, workshops and villages fit for the future.”***

asked farmers, village movements and municipalities, bakers and seed savers, artists, young people and elders, cooks and educators, and people in governments and administrations this question: “what kind of rural action are you taking to move and improve rural Europe now?” What we have gathered is not a wish list of what should be done, nor a vision of what could be. It is what people are doing right now to make their farms, workshops and villages fit for the future. It is what they expect from their governments and the European institutions to help them succeed. And it may show how important it is to cross borders and offer bridges to achieve and sustain peace in Europe.

Hannes Lorenzen  
May 2022

## DIARY FROM THE FUTURE

# A JOURNEY TO SUNNBERG, AUSTRIA

Diary entries from 10 to 15 September 2050

BY ROBERT LUKESCH

### APPROXIMATION

My journey to Sunnberg turns out to be extremely pleasant: by speed train to the provincial capital, then by the hourly express train to the district town, which lies in one of the alluvial valleys of the pre-alpine hilly landscape. To cover the last few miles to Sunnberg I get on one of the hill buses, which cruise each of the four clover leaf-shaped circular routes with fixed stops at hourly intervals, but also with branch-offs to stops in side paths. If I had been pressed for time, I could have called for an autonomous hill taxi via the regional app. Each municipality runs a small fleet of hill taxis, ranging from two- to five- to eight-seaters; even small trucks can be hired if booked a few days in advance.

### BEAUTY EMERGES

I am stunned by the enchantingly beautiful landscape around Sunnberg, with rolling hills and valleys, diversely structured into fields, meadows, pastures and forests; the visitor's eye is entranced by tree-lined fields, wild fruit hedges, dry stone walls, flower-strewn strips along the paths for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, which also ensures farmers' access to fields and woodland.

After a few conversations with farmers who live on the main square for the weekly market I realise that the landscape did not present itself in such beauty at all times. The decisive turnaround only began when CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) payments were linked to labour and the reference to area was made degressive. Significantly



1. Travel to Sunnberg by hourly express train

higher premiums were granted for the first 20 ha. organic farming has been set as the default mode of production and thereby as the basic condition for any subsidy or premium. The transformation from CAP to ERAP (the henceforth *Uncommon European Rural and Agricultural Policy!*) triggered a revival of small and medium-sized farms whereas one-sided mass production simply no longer paid off. More diversified and labour-intensive production options have become more rewarding, meeting the growing demand for high-quality products from agriculture, aquaculture and extensive livestock farming. Landscapes don't lie: agricultural steppes have evolved into flowering gardens.

***“Organic farming has been set as the default mode of production and thereby as the basic condition for any subsidy or premium.”***





2. Landscape diversity: Vineyards and pastures  
3. Healthy and diverse organic food

## THE TASTE OF BEAUTY

I take my lunch in the inn where I have booked my room. Virtually all the inns and restaurants in and around Sunnberg are committed to organic food. The menu only indicates what does NOT come from controlled organic production! During my entire stay in pretty Sunnberg, I did not experience any inn or restaurant that does not have the trinity of organic, regional and seasonal written on its banners. Believe me, you can READ that commitment in the features of the landscape and TASTE it by its fruits.

## ECO-FRIENDLY REGULATIONS

Most innkeepers have invested into their businesses in recent years, following national construction regulations which have been thoroughly revised some time ago. Certain building materials such as polystyrene insulation elements are now banned. The use of biological, renewable, climate-friendly building materials, energy and water saving devices and provisions to protect the employees' health have become a basic requirement for subsidies. To complement the advice provided by the companies offering the services, there are public advisory centres in every district which building applicants can consult on building plans and materials, energy supply and building services or matters related to health and security.

## RURAL RENAISSANCE

Similar principles apply to agriculture and forestry. After organic farming and equivalent practices became a basic requirement for all kinds of public support, including decoupled payments, in the EU's Rural and Agricultural Policy 22 years ago, unexpected cascading effects unfolded: some farmers gave up more quickly than expected, but were immediately replaced by the next generation or by new entrants who felt spurred on by the new framework conditions.

The boom in new rural businesses that now set in surprised everyone involved. Only the partly excessive land prices and the financing of the start-ups threatened to act as a brake. However, this was defused by the combined effects of generous start-up subsidies and the instrument of regional land banks. Regional land banks have emerged in a short period of time in most rural areas of the country. They were established by the municipalities in partnership with local banking institutions, individual companies and socio-economic interest groups, and offer financing models as well as professional advice in all municipal offices.

Start-up counselling is now an integral part of a wider service offered to all newcomers and immigrants. Not every concern can be dealt with by the counselling centre in the municipality - but people seeking advice are reliably directed to where they can find competent support.



4. Small scale decentralised solar energy plants

## HOW EVERYTHING PLAYS TOGETHER

Already during my first walk in the village, I had noticed that there are very few vacancies: unused shops are made available to traders or associations for pop-up activities for little money. Local artists and the youth scene also make their mark here, provocative yet inspiring.

The growth of suburban shopping centres stopped some time ago. Building gaps in the settlement core were closed by the municipal council. Properties on the outskirts were bought back from the regional land bank after business closures; the land got renaturalised. Commercial building permission processes are overseen by a tripartite advisory board made up of representatives from local authorities, social and environmental interest groups and citizens chosen by lottery.

The key role in the coordination of planning levels and funding instruments is accomplished by the *coordination office for sustainable development, circular economy and climate protection* set up at NUTS III level, the smallest administrative unit defined by the EU.

The office acts on behalf of a regional development association in which the political forces and institutions of the region work together. Contentious issues are resolved through a sociocratic process by which the winning solution is the one with the lowest number of 'resistance votes'.

## LIVING DEMOCRACY

Sociocratic methods are also used for citizen polling. The wording of questions is prepared by citizens' councils, whose members are drawn randomly from the list of inhabitants older than 16 years. The citizens' council also ensures that the poll is prepared by comprehensive and fair information campaigns and public discussions.

Many residents refer to a particular vote that took place about 25 years ago: the question was whether some new road construction projects that had been planned for many years should be cancelled or drastically downsized so that the funds that would be freed up could be used to create cable broadband coverage in the entire settlement area at record speed, no matter how far from the local centres. The only exceptions were to be 'digital detox' areas designated by the local communities, where no internet or mobile telephony was wanted. The reduction of road construction projects was linked to corresponding measures for public transport. Broadband expansion in rural regions was primarily promoted by private-municipal partnerships issuing bonds as a regional financial investment opportunity. Sociocratic forms and procedures of discourse and decision-finding help us to complement representative democracy with direct and deliberative participation. Hate campaigns and fake news no longer find fertile grounds to thrive.

## LOCAL ECONOMY, CLOSELY NETWORKED

Inspired by conversations with the mayor, councillors and experts I decided to visit some local businesses: an oil and grain mill, a chocolate factory, a spice manufacturer, a fruit distillery, a pasta factory, and even a packaging company that exclusively uses biogenic and recyclable raw materials. They all run direct marketing shops, where a wide range of local food and culinary specialties are available, not only those that are produced on site: farms and crafts work together. All parties involved use e-commerce .

## PEOPLE AS RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Seeds and seedlings are traded at local markets and in the neighbourhood. Changes in seed management regulations facilitate the breeding and propagation of robust varieties of vegetables, herbs and fruits that were previously thought to have disappeared altogether. Private initiatives, institutional research, and teaching institutions complement each other in this endeavour. Rural vocational schools, cooperative and regionally funded 'fablabs', agricultural universities, farmers, processors and consumer initiatives team up to reconcile nature with human interference. Research and practice are two sides of the same coin.

## A LIVABLE LAND

Further afield, there are a number of companies operating on a global scale that produce cutting-edge technology (electronic components, control systems), and there are also traditional craft businesses like a shoemaker, a vinyl record manufacturer, a producer of ceramic material for renovating listed buildings, all of these employing highly qualified people from the region and newcomers attracted by the high quality of life and leisure. The aforementioned regional land bank, in association with municipal and cooperative initiatives, ensures that housing remains affordable, with access to green space guaranteed for all. To encourage people to

*"The regional land bank, in association with municipal and cooperative initiatives, ensures that housing remains affordable, with access to green space guaranteed for all."*

grow their own food in and around their private areas, the maintenance of all green spaces is mandatorily tied to organic standards.

## EFFECTS

The region produces far more energy than it consumes. Plenty of local energy cooperatives (mainly photovoltaic users) have formed. Renewable energy production is tied to building permits. Depending on the type and location of a building, precautions must be taken for energy-saving construction, solar power generation and thermal use of solar energy. Even asphalted road and parking lots have to serve for photovoltaic purposes if possible.

In fact, the region is not only climate positive, absorbing more CO<sub>2</sub> than it produces, it also features a balanced demography and age pyramid. The icing on the cake: for some time now, biodiversity indices are on the rise!

## AS THE END OF MY JOURNEY LOOMS...

How time flies! An excursion to a nearby aquaculture facility - where a biotope is run with the residual heat from one of the thermal spas in the area, producing fish, shrimp, wasabi roots as well as ginger, turmeric and other delicacies - is the crowning glory of my stay in Sunnberg. Feed for fish and shrimp are obtained from crops from the surrounding agriculture and from by-products of the food industry.

Now it is time for me to make my way to the next stop of the self-driving hill bus, as my train home will be leaving soon. But even if I miss the connection - so be it; I can wait for the next one, treating myself to another hour in the station café, with a sweeping view out over the landscape.

# CLOUDS OF RURAL RESILIENCE

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## FROM VISIONS TO ACTION



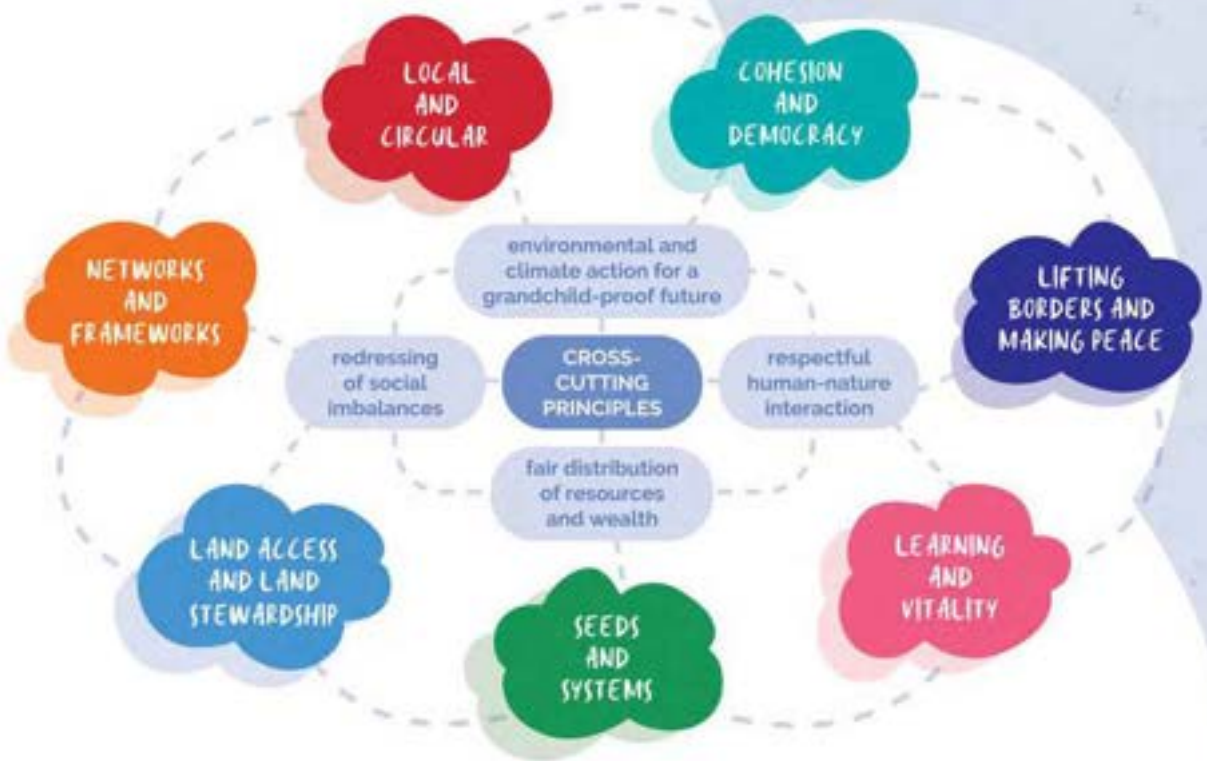
1. Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and Zen master

*"If you are a poet, you will see clearly  
that there is a cloud floating  
in this sheet of paper.  
Without a cloud, there will be no rain;  
without rain, the trees cannot grow;  
and without trees, we cannot make paper.  
The cloud is essential for the paper to exist.  
If the cloud is not here, the sheet  
of paper cannot be here either.  
So we can say that the cloud and  
the sheet of paper inter-are."*

Thich Nhat Hanh

*"During the Vietnam war the Buddhist monk urged Americans to stop bombing and offer reconstruction aid free of political or ideological strings. Banned from returning home to Vietnam he led a courageous life in France as a Zen teacher*





Peace and resilience *inter-are*. Our **Seven Clouds** have been our hubs for understanding the complexity of rural life in the wider Europe; the connection between the many restricting and enabling factors for economic, environmental and social transition in rural communities in times of many urgent challenges. Taking a look from these clouds may help in shaping a new orientation of European and national policies in times of war and climate change. Between the clouds we find **cross-cutting principles**: a fair distribution of resources and wealth; the redressing of social imbalances; environmental and climate action for a grandchildren-proof future, and a more respectful human-nature interaction. As you will see in the stories that follow, these principles are central to the tales of rural action we have gathered, across and within all sectors.

Our clouds reflect a diverse community of actors from 25 countries of the wider Europe. We took a view on what is most needed and what is already possible.



2. Equality and non-discrimination are addressed at a lecture organised by Fundación Cepaim. See story "New paths to rural development" on page 57



3. Innovative cultures bring new life to rural regions, here: [Obelisk Hemp Farm, Latvia](#)

Issues around energy, livestock and direct payments of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are now very much in the limelight. We chose instead to focus on topics that need more space: agroecology, which integrates food systems into a rural perspective, and circular economy. And although these stories were for the most part collected before the conflict in Ukraine broke out in late February 2022, an agroecological approach remains pivotal to facing this latest crisis. We have deliberately not drawn any analytical or selective border between action of civic or private initiatives, governmental or

public interventions, nor between the rural and the agricultural side of the equation. For too long this kind of separation has made policy dialogue and action difficult, and progress slow.

European rural policy has for far too long been just the little brother of the CAP, the second pillar of a heavy, subsidy-driven policy - and the forgotten relative of European regional and cohesion policy. The latter still mainly serves an urban agenda. Rural and village movements have challenged the political constriction of rural and farming for many decades. EU community initiatives and programmes like

LEADER and Community Led Local Development (CLLD) have initiated partnerships and cooperation beyond the farming/rural or urban/rural rifts. These programmes have lost their dynamic and innovative energy due to mainstreaming and administrative burdens. For too long they have been seen as "our money lost" by the farming community.

All the seven clouds we propose are equally important: they are distinct, yet also overlapping and floating into each other. You may take them as seven snapshots to better know the rural world. The large visual in the front cover with it's - undoubtedly





4. Coming together and mutual exchange at "Cultivate" ecovillage in Ireland

incomplete list - of keywords is an approach to this complex web.

Community life in rural areas depends on the **NETWORKS AND FRAMEWORKS** that support our productive and recreational activities. These include hard infrastructure – we speak about housing, education, health, mobility, places to meet and cultural sites – as well as basic and more specialised services. They also include the societal software of norms, regulations, plans and policies, with the digital transition posing comprehensive and unprecedented challenges to citizens and policymakers. In turn we rely on

the **LOCAL AND CIRCULAR** economy to weave the socio-economic fabric that allows us to lead a full life and to prosper resiliently over generations. The glue that holds all this together is social **COHESION AND DEMOCRACY**, two forces to be renewed and maintained, taking into account the specific features of rural areas and the specific contributions they are able to make.

At the heart of our clouds is **LIFTING BORDERS AND MAKING PEACE**, bridging rifts between sectors, territories, cultures, within and beyond the limits of the European Union. Rural areas are increasingly shaped

by global trade and consumption patterns, yet historically these places shaped regional food culture, **SEEDS AND SYSTEMS**. Our food systems, like all of our clouds, will depend on the astuteness and finesse of fusing the local with the global, the rural with the urban, nature with technology, in short: rural knowledge sharing, **LEARNING AND VITALITY**. Finally, much wisdom is to be found beneath our feet, in responsible patterns of land use, **LAND ACCESS AND LAND STEWARDSHIP**. After all of this, let us keep our heads up, and our feet standing firmly on the ground.

Because that is where life goes on.

CHAPTER

1





# NETWORKS AND FRAMEWORKS

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## WE NEED AN AGROECOLOGICAL SCAFFOLDING FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

*Infrastructure and services must be closer and more adapted to the real needs and talents of rural people. The initiatives here show the importance of the commons as we build from networks to grandchildren-proof frameworks. Relevant regulatory environments need to be adapted to small-scale business and local economies. Specific support must be provided for small-scale farming, processing, short supply chains, and knowledge sharing. Community-centred values must be at the heart of all infrastructure and services, digital or otherwise.*

The production of local bread requires small infrastructure facilities



1. 'Bread time' in Markthalle Neun, Berlin

## MUCH MORE THAN OUR DAILY BREAD

The Free Bakers

GERMANY

*The Free Bakers Association (Die Freien Bäcker) was founded in 2011 as an independent professional organisation of artisan bakers and confectioners in Hanover, Germany. Through their work they promote the preservation and improvement of soil fertility, the cultivation of heterogeneous wheat populations and regional organic value chains.*

 BY THE FREE BAKERS

We want to preserve our sovereignty and credibility as food artisans. We want our craft to be suitable for our grandchildren - a creative, meaningful cultural technique. "Suitable for our grandchildren" means, among other things, being able to contribute to an ecologically and socially-just change in the agricultural and food sector with our businesses in regional value chains.

The subheading of our association's name - "It is Time for Responsibility" - refers to the economic and ethical

guiding principle of "honourable craftsmanship". For us, this means developing our knowledge and skills in such a way that we are able to produce food for the region from regionally and agroecologically produced raw materials. This includes refraining from external industrial inputs and committing ourselves to the common good and fair corporate culture.

"External inputs" for us include so-called convenience products (baking premixes or industrially produced dough pieces) or isolated

*"We want our craft to be suitable for our grandchildren."*

additives, such as technical enzymes or emulsifiers, which significantly simplify the production process, shorten it and change the properties of the baked goods and technology - which displaces manual work. In other words, it forces the manufacturer to adapt the raw material to the machine rather than the production method to the raw material.

## 7 AREAS OF ACTIVITIES

- 1 Events, for example on topics such as:  
Preservation and further development of artisanal production methods, i.e. the production of baked goods without technical (exogenous) enzymes.  
Production of bread and baked goods from old, regionally adapted grain varieties and organically bred varieties.  
Comparison of the influence of different milling methods on the processing and baking qualities of individual cereal varieties.  
Groundwater protection, wheat cultivation and quality requirements of the baking trade.
- 2 Technical exchange between members at events organised by the association or directly between individual farms.
- 3 Joint public appearances (with or without baking table and oven), for example at church congresses, the Slow Food trade fair and the Südback or the Schnippel Disco of [Slow Food Youth](#) as part of the "We have had enough" demonstration in Berlin.

- 4 Development and implementation of new event formats to present our craft and its importance to the public, such as the 'Baker's Festival of Diversity' or 'BrotZeit' in Markthalle Neun in Berlin-Kreuzberg.
- 5 Participation in various civil society networks working on the interconnections of our value chain, i.e. in ['Meine Landwirtschaft'](#), a broad, social alliance of 50 organisations or in the initiative 'Konzernmacht beschränken'.
- 6 Organising and carrying out joint actions, such as our current project BODEN-BROT 2021 and the action "SAAT GUT BROT - more diversity in the field and on the plate", to support organic plant breeding and the preservation and development of highly diverse crops.
- 7 Political advocacy in pursuit of the aims of the association, on issues such as reducing bureaucracy, creating fair framework conditions for craft enterprises.





2. The Free Bakers logo

## SOIL - AN EDUCATION CAMPAIGN FOR FOOD TRANSITION BY THE FREE BAKERS

The Free Bakers got involved in soil because one of the most fundamental prerequisites for us to be able to bake healthy bread every day is the preservation of soil fertility. But soils, their humus content, and thus their fertility are in increasingly bad shape. As a professional organisation with the motto "Time for Responsibility", we do not want to tell the next generations that we knew about the state of our soils but did nothing. We are currently expanding the effective cooperation of bakers, millers, farmers - with the aim of preserving and improving soil fertility. Soil experts advise the project. Following courses in 2022 and 2023, qualified "Soil Ambassadors" will be available to conduct workshops via our [Atelier Nahrungsmittelwende](#) initiative, on the topic of soil for the training and further education of food artisans in vocational schools and businesses.



A CONVERSATION WITH ANKE KÄHLER, MASTER BAKER AND BOARD MEMBER OF THE FREE BAKERS

## SOIL BREAD

We believe that rural and urban crafts can only survive if our businesses become a place of encounters and learning, where people discover what is really important for their life and future. It is not enough to bake and sell delicious bread. Healthy, living soils are important, which is why we organised the Soil Bread (Boden-Brot) campaign to give people an idea of how important it is to preserve and nurture the fertility of our soils.



*“We draw people’s attention to the values of craftsmanship, to fair food chains and to active citizens.”*

3. The Free Bakers visit their French counterparts, Paysans Boulangers, Bourgogne 2019

In a way, we sensitise our customers every day to the personal and political environment in which we work and they live, so that they also carry our movement further. When it comes to the prices of artisan baked goods, which are usually higher than those of industrial products, they choose to support us and get quality products and good ideas in return.

## **SANDWICHED BETWEEN UNFAIR COMPETITION AND REGULATIONS**

We feel like we are sandwiched between unfair market competition at the bottom and unfair production regulations at the top. The industrial baking industry has all the comparative advantages of size, it uses standardised raw materials and many types of additives. We have all the disadvantages of standards tailored to industrial production. These rules have not been adapted to the possible risks of our small-scale artisanal production methods.

With lower production volumes and higher labour costs, we are disproportionately burdened by these over-regulations, which hardly help to fulfil the goals they are supposed to serve. As competent, independent and socially responsible craftspeople, we are disenfranchised and penalised by rampant bureaucratic regulations.

Nevertheless, we can hold our own as independent bakers. Our supply chains and ingredient lists are short. Nothing goes into our breads and pastries that does not belong there. With our know-how, we are able to produce tasty, healthy food with raw materials from agroecological value chains.

## **WE WANT TO MOVE POLITICS AND CONSUMERS**

With our ideas and values, we want to move politics and consumers. Among other things, we demand

from politicians: stronger and better participation by the craft sector in the legislative process. Also, the formation of expert groups that review existing laws and regulations and develop practical regulations according to a graduated risk and hazard potential. And finally, support in the reconstruction of regional processing structures (i.e. mills, dairies, slaughterhouses, vegetable washing plants) as well as the establishment of sustainable vocational training across value chains.

Fair competition includes the creation of a regulatory framework that obliges companies to consistently determine and present the externalised costs of production, manufacture, storage and transport of goods. Labour intensive handicraft enterprises with the highest personnel expenditure ratios must be relieved by socio-ecological tax reform. Not least because they are the ones who provide a large number of social services.





## MUCH MORE THAN OUR DAILY BREAD

As far as the necessary measures for the preservation and development of handicrafts in rural Europe are concerned, we need the establishment of independent regional centres for handicraft enterprises and farms. For the purpose of coaching, we

need professional development and knowledge transfer from industry-independent research and development as an interface between craftspeople and authorities. This can promote dedicated cooperation in local food chains, which are so often mentioned in visions and strategies for rural development. This would also help to attract, retain and strengthen young

people in rural crafts. At the moment, young people are often not able or willing to start or take over a craft business. Instead of making it more difficult to set up a business in the crafts sector by imposing countless requirements, start-ups that meet defined framework conditions in terms of economically, ecologically and socially sustainable development should be promoted. The food trade, just like rural agriculture, is of great importance for an agroecological, generation-appropriate, and resilient economy. So, we Free Bakers bake much more than our daily bread - we draw people's attention to the values of craftsmanship, to fair food chains and to active citizens.

4. The Free Bakers marching for good food for all, regional craft bakers, biodiversity, and peasant farming

## THE BAKWERT PROJECT

**BAKWERT** stands for "value and acceptance of heterogeneous wheat populations in agroecological food value chains". The BAKWERT project aims to generate regional organic value chains consisting of organic farms, organic mills and organic artisan bakeries. Climate change, with its strongly fluctuating environmental conditions, puts cultivated plants under increasing stress. There is a growing need for plants that can react dynamically to pronounced drought, heavy rain or disease pressure. A promising approach is the cultivation of highly diverse wheat, also called "heterogeneous populations". In order to stimulate and support farmers to grow wheat populations

there must be a chance that the average lower yield of wheat populations will be compensated by a higher price on the market. The creation of added value needs cooperation along the entire chain from the field to the bakery.

The BAKWERT project aims to promote the cultivation of population cereals, short distance marketing, milling and processing into bread and direct selling to final consumers. Heterogeneous winter wheat populations are being cultivated in the German states of Northern Hesse, Lower Saxony, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria and tested with the participation of organic mills and bakeries.



5. Farmer bakers of the cooperative GAEC La Billardière

# FARMERS AND BAKERS

Fournil de la Billardière

📍 Cérizay, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, FRANCE

*Youry, Cécile and Ludovic are farmer bakers or Paysans Boulangers. Together they run a cooperative farm in Cérizay, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France - GAEC La Billardière - with the help of a part-time worker, Rosy. They grow cereal crops for the on-farm bakery, as well as aromatic herbs.*

🔪 BY PAYSANS BOULANGERS YOURY, CÉCILE AND LUDOVIC

The idea was born in Brittany. Cécile and Youry initially wanted to grow organic vegetables. Then Youry discovered Paysans Boulangers and trained as a baker. But bread, vegetables and young children proved too much for the couple to juggle. "As we got the

bakery off the ground, we soon realised we wouldn't be able to grow vegetables," explains Cécile.

They started by building an oven. It was located strategically close to Cécile's parents farm. Her parents were beef farmers close to retirement. In 2011 Cécile's brother

Antoine took over the farm and the herd of Blonde d'Aquitaine cattle. At the same time Cécile and Youry began to rent 5 hectares for vegetable production, on the condition that the land was organic. Gradually the entire farm - land and later herd - was converted.



6. Farm shop La Billardière  
7. Locally produced bread by La Billardière



*“These farmer-bakers do not own a tractor. They borrow almost all their machinery from a local cooperative.”*

Youry found land to rent from a farmer who was retiring. Meanwhile, Ludovic also wanted to start farming. In April 2017, he joined Cécile and Youry as an apprentice for a one-year trial period. After 18 months of learning to work together and getting all their administrative ducks in a row, in October 2018 the three associates established the cooperative farm as an agricultural cooperative, or GAEC.

## ROTATION AND REGENERATION

On 20 hectares of rented land the farmer-bakers produce buckwheat, rye, a dozen varieties of modern wheat, and Rouge de Bordeaux heritage wheat. They alternate einkorn wheat and spelt in a two-year rotation.

The members rotate their 20 hectares with Antoine, Cécile's brother, who has 110 hectares for his herd. They also organise informal land swaps with neighbours. Three years in, however, yields are dwindling. Not all of the land is suitable for planting, and the soils must be regenerated. And so, starting in 2023 they will divide the land used for growing

grains for bread by three. It means they will have to buy some of their wheat and reduce their diversity of grains, at least for a while.

## RAISING COMMUNITY

To this day these farmer-bakers don't own a tractor. They borrow almost all their machinery from a local machinery cooperative (Coopérative d'Utilisation de Matériel Agricole, or CUMA).

As well as farming equipment, the CUMA is a source of community – as are the local CSAs. In the early days they knew few local farmers. “We had no prospects. We just had our idea

and wanted to sell from the farm. "People came to us," remembers Cécile. "It was also the right time because organics were developing here." They were very much in the right place at the right time: the Cérizay CSA was starting, and a second CSA was en route.

Another lifeline to local community was CIVAM (Centres d'initiatives pour valoriser l'agriculture et le milieu rural) which helped the associates to tap into the network of farmers around them. Within CIVAM they started a regional group of farmer-bakers. The day they built their oven, a dozen people came along to the farm to learn how to build a brick arch.

Training initiatives are supported by other organisations too. France has a separate social security system for the farming sector (Mutualité sociale agricole, or MSA) whose local office assisted with specific training on subsidies for the purchase of equipment. Other training support has come from Atelier Paysans, a collective for sharing agricultural

skills and tools, which has supported tool-building and welding workshops.

### FUTURE-FOCUSED FINANCING

The three associates started out with little financing. Determined to avoid a debt trap, they chose not to take out a loan. Today their turnover is €100,000. Their CAP subsidies, represented by an organic farming payment of €7,000 to €8,000, is set to decrease now that conversion to organic is complete. The European Rural Development Fund (ERDF) financed 40% of works to convert a building into a processing facility. To date, their investments have been in labour-saving equipment, such as a kneading machine. Now and for future investments, the focus has shifted to saving time. But there are always compromises to be made. A new mill, for instance, would save both time and the bakers' backs, but an initial investment of €30,000 to €40,000 is beyond their means for now.

### FARMERS WANT TO EARN A DIGNIFIED LIVING FROM THEIR WORK

Agroecological farmers do not want to depend on subsidies, notes Ludovic, but to earn a dignified living from their work; they should be given the means to do so. CAP payouts do not correspond to the kind of agroecological farming they are working towards. Consumers, meanwhile, should be made aware of the importance of food, in terms of quality, origin and so forth. "It seems to me that this work, the way we are doing it, is viable and allows people to access to healthy produce," he adds.

*"Agroecological farmers don't want to depend on subsidies, but to earn a dignified living from their work."*







g. ASAT producers' market

## CSA AND THE BUILDING OF A FOOD COMMONS

ASAT Network for Community Supported Agriculture



ROMANIA

*CSAs can transform the way producers and consumers relate to food as a local commons. Yet it is no easy task to open the eyes of urban consumers to the benefits of small-scale agroecological production – let alone to bring them into a partnership with food producers. In 2008, a people-powered network of producers in Romania set out to do just that.*

 BY BRÎNDUȘA BÎRHALĂ, NETWORK CO-FOUNDER

## BUILDING RURAL- URBAN PARTNERSHIP THROUGH CSA

The Romanian network for Community Supported Agriculture farms (ASAT) began as a pilot project, with the goal to embed the concept and practice of Community Supported Agriculture in the EU's newest member state. ASAT blossomed into a formal association in 2014.

At grassroots level, members of ASAT work tirelessly to mobilise urban consumers around small-scale food producers - emphasising the need for solidarity economy models, and encouraging and maintaining local economy partnerships. Within our network, new producers are provided training in the CSA model from members who volunteer their time, and peer-to-peer learning.

Part of our journey too has been networking and learning from

sister networks in the EU, a process supported by EU funding. We are a member of [URGENCE!](#), a source of international exchanges and support.

So far, we have organised 22 CSA producers and their consumer groups, to feed over 10.000 people with fresh agroecological veggies for the duration of at least a season. Although most active in the cities of Timisoara and Sibiu, the work is nation-wide - we have always been open to developing CSA partnerships in major cities and towns in Romania. Its reach fluctuates of course, depending on the availability of local agroecological producers.

## MISSING SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FARMERS' MARKETS

Romania lacks coherent policies to support short supply chains and the local rural-urban economy.

Small- and medium-scale producers are often forced to comply with the disadvantageous requirements of supermarkets - or go out of business. Fruit and vegetable imports have skyrocketed since Romania joined the EU in 2007.

One in every three vegetables must now be imported to satisfy demand - despite the available land and climate favourable to domestic production. It also takes business away from farmers' markets, as retail outlets gobble up ever more of the trade in fresh produce.

Local farmers' markets are a vital component in the short supply chain. But public policies favour the development of supermarket chains. A positive impact could be generated by having producers themselves be represented on the boards of farmers' markets, and thus bring these outlets closer to producers' needs. The access to the market is made very difficult by expensive stall rents, infrastructure is much less accommodating for both producers and consumers in open-air markets during extreme weather periods (very cold winters, very hot summers) and so, there is an unequal competition with the retail sector.

***“CSAs can transform  
the way producers  
and consumers relate  
to food as a local  
commons.”***



10. An ASAT producer with his crop of vegetables

## FROM NETWORKS TO FRAMEWORKS

These are the main areas of activity needed to further promote sustainable rural development

**1** Recognition of our national network as a short supply chain model and access to funding to be able to replicate it in more places around the country, to enable the inclusion and support to more small-scale producers and awareness-raising for a broader swathe of urban consumers.

**2** Better farmers' markets for a level playing field. As a first step, producers should be represented on the board of farmers' markets. Local authorities should provide or subsidise distribution spaces that are more accommodating to the needs of producers, and more inviting for consumers.

**3** Public support for ASAT producers to build cold storage units for their produce. Storage capacities need to be made available to small- and medium-scale producers. Whether public storage or owned by producers' groups, the requirements to access or build these storage spaces need to be realistic for all types of producers.

**4** Processing facilities at farm level would be much more developed if the standards and minimum requirements for public support were adjusted to accommodate small- and medium-size producers.

Processing units at farm level would bring an increase of higher value local products which can be distributed via short supply chains.

**5** Supporting community-supported farming models (ASAT and social inclusion agriculture projects). A key example is funding the costs of animating these community development models. Another important example is funding training costs for organic farming internships.

**6** Recognition of ASAT as a quality certification system, which would increase the score for obtaining funding in the short supply chain.

**7** Increasing access to healthy food for people from disadvantaged/vulnerable backgrounds, including people with health problems, by supporting social vouchers, with which they can buy products from small producers, ASAT, social gardens.

**8** Promoting public procurement of local vegetables and fruits which comply with various quality and ethical criteria.

**9** Funding for education targeted at the development of alternative food systems.

11. ASAT produce at the market





12. Fresh vegetables at CloughJordan food hub. See page 114 for more about this rural project



## FARMERS GETTING AHEAD OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



*Technology isn't neutral, and digital isn't a panacea. How digital infrastructures emerge, and are or are not embraced by farmers and rural areas is revealing. Do digital technologies enable or constrain creative people in rural areas, including on farms? How can we ensure they help farms and places blossom?*

 BY MATTEO METTA, RESEARCHER ON DIGITALISATION AND CAP POLICY ANALYST

Agriculture is more than a one way production chain from farm to fork. Farmers nurture our society by working with land, plants, and animals, but they are also nurtured by human relationships in all their forms and connections with nature.

Digital innovations in agriculture must be assembled and

disassembled to care for the social fabric of rural areas and enrich their diversity. Digital may bring gains in efficiency, but at what socio-ecological costs? For whom? Why? We need to operate, assemble, and bring together the digital dots connecting agriculture with rural algorithms, codes, and the wider environment, before these

are homogenised by giant agri-tech corporations.

Here digitalisation can be a blessing or a curse. For instance: In agritourism, rural hosts offer farm stays on international booking platforms. But these platforms filter destinations using urban-centric criteria (i.e. distance to an urban





13. "Smart" and "precision" farming: Drones may spray less, but still pesticides

*"It is about revalorising the existence and work of farmers in rural areas, helping them to live and work rurally - rather than replacing them."*

centre, air conditioner). Farmers need skills, human resources or technical solutions to manage and navigate among the multiplicity of booking channels.

In direct food selling, farmers use online forms and spreadsheet apps to simplify orders and deliveries, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. But small farm holdings also have to provide the socio-technical 'add-ons' of digitalisation: data security, storage capacity, efficient logistics, point of sales equipment, financial accountancy, online marketing and customer relationships.

In social farming, multiple actors within this complex farming system use online portals and databases to help build a dynamic network with multiple functionalities. These digital tools can be used to geolocalise social farmers, or match them with other actors: people with disabilities, funders, health organisations, tutors or health operators, formerly incarcerated people, refugees and asylum seekers, victims of violence against women and LGBTQI+. Digitalisation can streamline and simplify the often troublesome and long administrative operations behind social farming but it can also become

the market medium where social farmers must compete with unfair food prices that set questionable environmental and price standards over ethical and social justice considerations.

## REVALORISING RATHER THAN REPLACING FARMERS

Digital agriculture with rural considerations means challenging the idea that the (hard) art of farming is a thing of the past. It is about revalorising the existence and work of farmers in rural areas, helping them to live and work rurally - rather than replacing them with digitally-enabled automation and mechanisation to supposedly fight climate change, remove labour exploitation, or eradicate hunger.

Farmers' unions are championing and promoting digitalisation in genetic engineering, risk management and insurance, use of inputs (pesticides, fertilisers, water), and more. What are the implicit values and paradigms shaping these innovation trajectories? What are the consequences - for territory, identity and competitiveness - of replacing ancient olive tree varieties with others more adapted to data-driven machinery operations? What are the ethical and health consequences of expanding the size of the farm or the herd to adapt and spread out the investment costs for smart livestock technologies (i.e. monitoring emissions or remotely managing operations)?



14. Environmental friendly farming methods allow more biodiversity

## SUPPORTING ACTION BY FARMERS

Diversified farmers are already acting to assemble and operate in an ad-hoc socio-cyber-physical system built around their multifunctional roles. More needs to be done with regards to:

- Nurturing socio-economic relationships: with local restaurants, school canteens, children, musicians and artists, nature conservationists, tourist operations, forest workers, tourists, accountancy.
- Designing and adapting cyber-mediators: improve digital infrastructures, make scalable and accessible platforms and technologies that respond to the socio-economic needs and address governance, climate, gender, and environmental challenges in rural areas.
- Restoring the connection with physical environment: by revalorising the material world and life around a diversified agriculture, such as improving waste management, revamping forestry, coastal and mountain infrastructures, and protecting biodiversity.
- Overcoming the socio-technical requirements of digitalisation: i.e. by offering alternatives to digital technologies, which reduce energy requirements, generational tensions or exclusions, displacement of services, obsolescence of skills and knowledge.
- The era of digitalisation is fast developing. We need to learn technical and political lessons from the recent past before moving forward on data security, interoperability, technological sovereignty, path dependency, etc. Learning and improvement can happen with a transdisciplinary approach and at different levels and areas.

- In research and development targeted to diversified agriculture, with multi-stakeholders projects like the knowledge platform for local food in France ([Réseau Mixte Technologique \(RMT\) Alimentation locale](#)), which is gathering 30 research organisations to work on the interoperability of multiple short-food supply chains. More research and technology development going in the direction of digitalisation for farm diversification, multifunctionality, and rural resilience is needed.
- In policies and legislation at European, national, and regional level, like the CAP or initiatives of the [European Data Strategy](#), including the funding from the [European Digital Programme](#) or the provisions of Data Governance Act (DGA). Regional or national laws on agritourism, social farming, and direct selling can be aligned, upgraded or better enforced with the potential functionalities of digitalisation.

On the ground, in the sky: with programmes that promote skills development, fast internet, accessible satellite services that create opportunities for individuals, communities, and companies to leverage locally-driven digitalisation initiatives.



## SIMPLE TOOLS FOR SOLIDARITY

Fuori di Zucca

Perugia, ITALY

*Fuori di Zucca shows how the adoption of simple tools can drive sustainable digitalisation in agriculture to challenge food market concentration and provide citizens with high-quality food at a fair price. Republished with permission from Horizon 2020 project DESIRA (Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas).*

 BY MATTEO METTA, RESEARCHER ON DIGITALISATION AND CAP POLICY ANALYST





**F**uori di Zucca (Out of Pumpkin) coordinates a Solidarity Purchasing Group (GAS) in the centre of the Italian city of Perugia. Founded in 2016, the non-profit association is currently composed of 80 consumers and 10 producer members. It strives to promote the concept of food sovereignty in all its dimensions, including the direct relationship between consumers and producers, sustainable and ethical production, and fair value-chain distribution.

Digital tools facilitate the social and physical exchanges between consumers and farmers.

The Solidarity Purchasing Group is led by the consumers, coordinated by volunteers. This is an essential point, explains project coordinator Domenico Lizzi. Consumers are the first actors who commit to active participation, ongoing dialogue and a trust-based relationship with the local producers. 100% of the purchase price goes directly to the farmers. The

farmers are local and small-scale, and follow ethical and sustainable farming methods. The organic label is not a prerequisite for Fuori di Zucca; They produce organically and consumers actively participate along the chain.

OPPOSITE  
15. Food distribution organised  
by Fuori di Zucca

THIS PAGE  
16. Food is bringing people together





## HOW DOES THE SOLIDARITY PURCHASING GROUP WORK?

In Fuori di Zucca, the purchasing transactions between consumers and producers are intermediated by a voluntary group of young activists by the means of two online tools: WhatsApp and Google Forms. These two easily accessible tools allow volunteers to centrally manage data, standardise procedures, and reduce the costs and risks of errors in transactions.

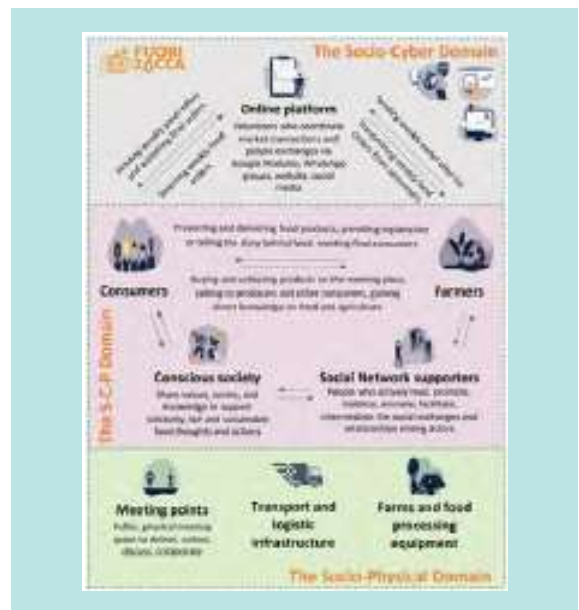
Tasks include:

- 1) preparing the list of food offers with farmers;
- 2) placing orders;
- 3) accepting orders;
- 4) sending orders to the producers;
- 5) distribution.

There are additional tasks such as communicating that new producers have joined the group, or that additional products are available in the panel list. Every Friday, a WhatsApp message containing a Google Form is sent to all members. Consumers have time until the following Monday to select products via the Google Form. Order confirmations are sent by email. On Wednesday evenings, consumers can collect and pay for their products and meet the farmers.

Fuori di Zucca is not just an online platform coordinating fair and sustainable purchases. The association mobilises a peer-to-peer network, where members of civil society, policymakers, producers and consumers can interact around a common mission: food sovereignty. This is done both via digital (i.e. Facebook page, website, WhatsApp groups) and socio-physical means (i.e. organising group discussions, movie screenings, food fairs).

Figure 1 displays the various social, digital (or cyber), and physical entities in the domains composing the system 'Fuori di Zucca'.



*"A peer-to-peer network where members of civil society, policymakers, producers, consumers can interact around a common mission: food sovereignty."*

Indicators	2017	2018	2019	2020 (Until Oct)
Total consumer expenditure (EUR)	5,843.46	15,571.56	27,262.63	31,799.83
Average weekly expenditure per consumer (EUR)	14.36	15.00	20.30	25.77
Average number of consumers who make weekly orders	14.54	24.14	31.23	34.28

## THE ROLE OF DIGITALISATION IN FUORI DI ZUCCA

From 2016-2017, email was the main tool used by Fuori di Zucca to coordinate purchases. After the pervasive adoption of WhatsApp in smartphones, emails were replaced by WhatsApp groups and messages (2017-2020). Each tool has its pros and cons. For instance, orders via WhatsApp groups were weak in terms of structuring data collection, data analytics, reducing error risks, respecting people's privacy, and streamlining the volunteers' work with the growing demands and number of members.

These challenges were overcome by combining WhatsApp messages with a link to Google Forms as

discussed and agreed by the members. The following results proved that this combination was successful not only in terms of better management of transactions but also in terms of increasing expenditure and orders, which are vital for the sustainability of the group.

It is important to highlight that digital tools are not the only factor contributing to this progress. Domenico explains that these results can also be due to the position of the meeting point, the number of producer members, the range of products in the panel lists, the stability of consumers' place of residence and lifestyle, and so on.

The number of purchases or the volume of expenditure are not the only parameters to assess the relevance of this Solidarity

Purchasing Group. Social, cultural, and moral aspects need to be considered, such as promoting consumer awareness of food seasonality, education about traditional food recipes, and transparency about the origin of food products. Whether by digital or socio-physical means, Fuori di Zucca plays an important educational and governance role in sustainable food consumption and production.

Behind each digital tool, there is a system of values, views, knowledge, and infrastructure to be developed. Fuori di Zucca shows how the adoption of simple tools can drive sustainable digitalisation in agriculture that challenges food market concentration and provides citizens with high-quality food at a fair price.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pouring a large quantity of small, multi-colored seeds (green, yellow, and white) into a large pile on a surface. The seeds are falling from the hand, creating a stream. The background is a blurred, textured surface, possibly sand or a similar granular material.

CHAPTER

2



# LOCAL AND CIRCULAR

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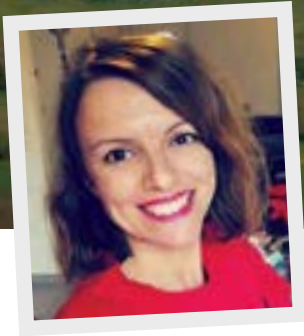


## WE NEED STRONGER LOCAL GOVERNANCE AUTONOMY TO BUILD REGIONAL ECONOMIES

*Here are initiatives taking action to create new space for their circular economy so that new governance and economic models can emerge at the local level with people and the planet at their centre. Praising the local economy is not enough: set against a recently re-nationalised CAP, local economic integration must be supported rather than the sectoral policies currently applied by the EU and member states.*



2



1. Aerial view of Plessé
2. Aurélie Mézière, Mayor of Plessé

## CREATIVE MUNICIPALITIES BRINGING PEOPLE INTO AGRI-FOOD POLICYMAKING

PAAC - Local Agricultural  
and Food Policy

Plessé, Pays de la Loire  
FRANCE

*Faced with the urgent threat of encroaching mega farms, the municipality of Plessé in France decided to take agricultural affairs into their own hands. In France, agriculture lies outside the administrative remit of the village. But the elected officials of the municipality refused to sit by and watch village life disintegrate.*



A CONVERSATION WITH AURÉLIE MÉZIÈRE, MUNICIPALITY OF PLESSÉ

At the policy level, the agricultural question should not be solely the competence of the region. Villages should be involved in order to roll out concrete proposals in the territories and to support the farming sector.

Moving beyond the Common Agricultural Policy, Plessé is pursuing its own Agricultural and Food Policy (known as "la Politique agricole et alimentaire communale - PAAC"). With the price of farmland and farmhouses skyrocketing due to property speculation, and 40% of local farmers set to retire in the next five years, the municipality decided to take action in order to preserve all of the 90 farms in the village. Our ambition is to provide broad-reaching support for farmers, to facilitate succession, to showcase the essential work of farming, and to preserve and protect resources in the local area.

In late 2020 we formed a committee of local residents to support the PAAC at village level. Twelve elected representatives sit on this Committee for Farming, Food,

Environment & Biodiversity, along with 26 committed citizens or VIPs (Volontaires Investis à Plessé).

The committee includes but is not dominated by farmers, reflecting the need for a transversal approach to rescuing the local farming sector. A variety of projects make their way onto the agenda. Elected officials strive to ensure that their committee colleagues have a good overview of the issues at hand. At the heart of these proceedings is the common good.

It is the local residents who are proactive in the PAAC. The municipality plays the role of a facilitator. Everyone in the village has a role to play and their own specific skill set. The question is, how can these skills be put at the service of the different projects? The more people who are involved, the more 'ambassadors' there will be for local committees.

As well as involving local residents from a variety of backgrounds, it is important to include the younger generation. The municipality is also conscious of the need to



3. Plessé electoral list 2022  
4. The PAAC committee

*"Instead of handholding, we encourage citizens to take themselves by the hand."*

bring dissenting voices into the debate. France's recent experiment in a citizens' climate convention demonstrated the importance of pedagogy over demagoguery.

The committee receives no external funding. It has however received support from CAP44, the regional branch of a national network that promotes small-scale farming by providing support to new entrants and existing smallholdings.

## POLICY ENABLER

### L'ÉTABLISSEMENT PUBLIC FONCIER DE LOIRE-ATLANTIQUE

Farms and housing can now be financed by new funding from the regional land agency, which is to become available over 8 years to local municipalities in Loire Atlantique, the department to which Plessé belongs. This working capital is financed by a tax (*taxe spéciale d'équipement*, or TSE) paid by every citizen in France, of which 70% will go to local municipalities.



## SIX FOCUS AREAS FOR ACTION

As members of the Committee for Farming, Food, Environment & Biodiversity, we identified six areas of focus for our work.

### 1 MAINTAIN THE NUMBERS OF FARMS

We have the ambitious objective to not lose a single farm in the village over the next six years. To achieve this, we pursue the following activities:

Support for the handover of farms if assistance is needed. Every farmer in the village got a written message asking him to contact the mayor's office in case he wants to quit farming.

Succession cafes: If in the village there are 2 or 3 farms set to be abandoned at the same time, perhaps they can be pooled together. We hope to work on this collectively.

Local land agency: The municipality can already pre-empt and purchase residential property. We are developing a local land agency to help the municipality to pre-empt and purchase farmland. The PAAC will be the justification for every pre-emption.

### 2 SUPPORT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE, DIVERSE AND SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Plessé is livestock country, and we want it to stay that way. The area's agronomic potential lies first and foremost in meadows and spring crops. Nonetheless we have to accommodate the diversified farming models proposed by new entrants. The Local Food Plan (*Plan Alimentaire du Territoire* or P.A.T.), led by Redon Agglomération (the grouping of local authorities), shows a marked deficit of fruits, vegetables and other types of food in this area. New entrants have opportunities here. To achieve this, the mayor's office connects new entrants in the area with other farms with a similar energy.

*"A particularity of Plessé is that there are no large farms."*



5. New entrants cafe

### 3 FOSTER SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS

Short supply chains are booming at the moment with newcomers to the area, new regulations on supplying canteens, and above all the existing dynamic in the village. Plessé is working on a municipal food authority. It is considering a farmers' shop, a local grocers that would attract more new entrants. It is also exploring how to make the Sunday market more attractive. An agricultural authority, directly managed by the municipality, is a commercial tool that can benefit people.

### 4 PROTECT LOCAL RESOURCES

Water is life. The quantity and quality of water are increasingly of concern to local residents. Much can be done at village level. We have already established a woodland survey. We are monitoring tap water quality with the considerable support of the "Sans Pesticides" collective, while also raising awareness of pesticide use. It will be necessary to pivot towards organic farming systems.

## 5 SAFEGUARD FARMLAND

If we want farmers in the future, the first step is to safeguard farmland. We are keeping a watchful eye over land transfers in Plessé, in order to give priority to new entrants and to maintain a cardinal role of the land: feeding people. For this we use *Vigifoncier*, an information service operated by a network of regional development agencies known as *SAFERs* (Sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural). The SAFER agencies have an exclusive right of pre-emption on farmland. The farm is a whole - a place to live and work. If we start separating the buildings and houses, we are fighting a losing battle. If we do nothing, we will be conquered by farmland speculation. As a bastion of Confédération Paysanne, we have some of the cheapest farmland in France. Plessé can influence these developments. One lever is to mobilise the land authority's working capital (see box "policy enabler"). Another lever is the local land authority (see *focus area 1*).

## 6 SPREAD A POSITIVE MESSAGE ABOUT LOCAL FARMING

Plessé is a large village with a lot going for it. A main draw is the long-standing dynamic of smallholders in the village. The *CUMA* cooperatives, mutual aid, sharing, togetherness: these are important for quality of life for our farmers. It is a social legacy to be safeguarded and passed on to future farmers. Agriculture is important in a rural setting because it feeds the area. It feeds the health of the area, it is biodiversity, water, hedgerows. Farming is the main employer, providing jobs that can't be relocated. Implicitly, we started from agriculture. To further increase the positive image of farming we will produce a film to showcase the richness of our farming community as well as the energy of local groups, shops and craftspersons in Plessé. Energy creates energy.

## MUNICIPALITY AS FACILITATOR

In terms of policy, the PAAC has not encountered any obstacles to date. Indeed, the approach is of interest to many other municipalities.

Municipalities often limit themselves to the scope of their authority. But at this scale, the municipality can play the role of a facilitator of initiatives. We have to serve as a volunteer in what we do and not just think of getting re-elected.

We have everything to prove here. Our local agricultural policy is a trailblazer. Even today, few villages are working on this transformation of farming. We will move forward step by step with the local residents involved in the committee.

Our PAAC is a municipal project and therefore not THE solution but a solution that should be communicated to other territories that will each adapt it to their own circumstances.

Victory is still a long way away. But instead of the sorrow of a village with no farmers, we much prefer living farms.

6. Motherly love  
7. Plessé Sunday market







## A SHARED SPACE FOR FOOD TRANSITION

Sustainable Food  
Consortium

Redon, Brittany, FRANCE

*There is much to be learned from what doesn't work. Here is the story of a group of food activists who came together in Redon. We hear in particular about the political, bureaucratic and agro-industrial barriers they faced, and draw some learnings from this.*

 XAVIER HAMON, CONSORTIUM CO-FOUNDER

In 2018 we created the Sustainable Food Consortium in Redon to develop our sustainable food practice. A grouping of citizens and elected representatives from diverse professional backgrounds, we created a local network to address unmet

needs. Intended as an alternative to France's Chamber of Agriculture - the state body sorely out of step with the agroecological transition - and in response to a vague and under-resourced Local Food Plan (*Plan Alimentaire Territorial*), our objective

was to create a food transition hub to which each member of the food community would bring their know-how - thereby giving the people a voice. We would create a shared space for food transition, and an incubator for ideas on how to build it together.

## A CONFLUENCE OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND INITIATIVES

The Consortium was an attempt to harness the alchemy of a local farming and food festival, Fête de la vache nantaise. Held once every four years in celebration of a local heritage cow breed, the festival brings all of society's issues into focus in a single territory, while incorporating the indissociable elements of transition: climate, environment, social, economy, culture, education, 3rd sectors, democracy.

Once every four years is not enough. We wanted to keep the spirit of the festival alive. Basing our actions on practice rather than ideology or regulations, we would honour specificities incompatible with industrial norms. And finally, we would programme a season of food culture to keep alive our culinary heritage.

## FACING REALITY

The Consortium was formed to face the realities of change. We have chosen to take action to transform our territory. Our ambition was to bring local actors together around our common humanity. As well as the organisers of the Fête de la vache Nantaise (a group called Pas Bête la fête), these actors were slow

food cooks (Alliance Slow Food des Cuisiniers), agricultural and catering colleges (Université des Sciences et des Pratiques Gastronomiques - USPG, and ISSAT: Lycée professionnel Agricole de Redon), heritage breeder organisations (Fédération des races de Bretagne, Conservatoire des Races animales en Pays de la Loire - CRAPAL) and the conurbation authority (Redon Agglomération).

The dominant development model poses questions for all actors with a professional interest in sustainable food. Thanks to the Consortium's multi-sector makeup, we were able to analyse sectors and draw up an action plan to develop our own tools for food transition at a human scale. However, the drawback of such a diverse make-up is that there can be a lack of shared ambition between actors.

## NO FOOD POLICY

Despite the fact that the Redon conurbation authority is part of the Consortium, there is a lack of political support. Redon's many working groups and committees on food, within various 'consultative' bodies, water down the issues and are disconnected from food professionals on the ground. Indeed, local food policy is de facto dictated by the Chambers of Agriculture and the agri-food industry, and we have been pressured to include these interest groups in the Consortium.

***"The dominant development model poses questions for all actors with a professional interest in sustainable food."***

### OPPOSITE

8. Bringing local actors together around our common humanity

### THIS PAGE

9. Meeting of Alliance Slow Food des Cuisinieres, a co-founder of the consortium



## MONEY MATTERS

We are largely self-funded. The Redon conurbation authority provided marginal funding as well as support in structuring the Consortium. At regional and European level, co-financing was approved for a feasibility study. However, both at local and regional level, we were refused funding for the running of the network.

The Consortium needed funding and emancipation, not charity. The feasibility study came to a bitter

***“The job of the local authorities is to provide for the common good - including food and farming!”***

conclusion: due to a lack of funding, the project had to be put on hold. This funding was indispensable to pay for three full-time members of staff to get the project off the ground. The reason the local authorities turned down the application is telling: the Chamber of Agriculture wasn't part of the project; neither was the agro-industry. It seems the Sustainable Food Consortium was too bottom-up.

The job of the local authorities is to provide for the common good - including food and farming!

## THE POWER OF THE LOCAL

Local territories are where people still come together. Territories can have a systemic, cross-cutting overview. Each territory has unique and specific strong points. These

are places of direct dialogue and discussion. At the local level, we are speaking to individuals rather than organisations. We can share the complexity of people's circumstances and together reach a consensual outcome. Citizen chambers of food should be created, or citizens should be part of the process of electing representatives on food issues.

We must recreate social ties and political dialogue between citizens, sectors and organisations (unions and political groups) within new agoras or citizen organisations. We must recreate conditions for living together in our town halls, theatres, streets, community centres, trade union centres and any space that can foster connections between people in public spaces.

10. Creating a food transition hub by bringing food and sharing know how







11. In the Gaia Terra sunflower field

# INSPIRING CHANGE TO EMPOWER LOCAL ACTION

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Progetto Gaia Terra

Rivignano, Udine, ITALY

*Progetto Gaia Terra is a community project in rural Northern Italy that is rethinking everyday practices and our impact on the planet.*

 BY STEPHANIE MAOURI, PROJECT VOLUNTEER

Our action involves community based and cooperative farming by forming substantial links with local farmers, enabling an exchange of skills and resources on the basic principle of sharing. Specifically, Gaia Terra is providing its services to local farmers in exchange for food that would otherwise be thrown away due to its physical form or due to excess production. In this way

we are minimising food waste in a sustainable way.

From the way we eat, to the way we communicate with each other we try to address inequalities, respect, and connection to nature, while influencing the people around us to be more aware of their actions. Like that, we are linked to other people in our local area, get to know their stories and share similar values

in order to enlarge our community and make cooperation easier and beneficial for more and more parties.

We mostly collaborate with farmers within a close radius but we also collaborate with organic farmers elsewhere in Italy, after we have visited their farms to experience first hand how they are treating the land and the people working on it.





12. Gaia Terra aims for self-subsistence, growing crops for a complete dish

13. Artisan produce from Gaia Terra

## LOCAL IS RADICAL

The project started in 2017. We understood that we are not alone in feeling that action is required urgently, and we had to take power into our own hands and start from the individual level in order to influence change on larger levels. We are supported by volunteers which help bring the project forward.

The principles of Gaia Terra hope to inspire action and change that will empower local rural action. They are simple, and flexible. We adapt to the circumstances around us but always bear in mind the consequences of our actions. We support farming that focuses on maintaining biological diversity within an ecosystem, protects the environment by minimising erosion and degradation of the soil, optimises biological activity within the land by allowing microorganisms to flourish, all falling under the category of organic farming. The fact that we get our food

grown in healthy conditions, favours our own nutrition and helps us to live healthy lives, and be rich in nutrients, minerals and taste.

For improving the soil conditions, we promote natural techniques to enhance the quality of crops, like using our compost and used coffee grounds to reinvest nutrients into the soil and feed the microorganisms. In this way we also help and invite pollinators such as birds and bees to retain the well-being of the ecosystem as well as promote a circular economy where the life of products is prolonged.

For our fresh vegetables, we collaborate with local farmers to promote a labour exchange for products where we give a helping hand in cultivating the fields and

in exchange we get the fruits and vegetables that could not be sold either because of their physical form or because of excess supply. By creating food webs, we build community economies where we trade goods. We aim at self-subsistence and for now our own crops allow us to serve a complete dish: with vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats and carbohydrates, derived from our 3 products: white sorghum, soy and sunflower from which we extract the oil.

The main obstacles we face have to do with the fact that some policies are short-sighted and have as a main priority economic prosperity. Also, too many bureaucratic procedures make it difficult to obtain grants.

We are also part of a Solidarity

***"We give a helping hand in cultivating the fields and in exchange we get the fruits and vegetables that can not be sold."***



14. Debora Sbaiz, founder of the Gaia Terra project

Purchasing Group, that is a group of families who together buy from ethical and licensed producers and treat the land and workers in a certain way. The 'Solidarity' is created by the volunteer time of the group members in the various tasks: maintaining relations with the producer, opening the order, collecting the money, distributing the product. All this goes hand in hand with the cultural growth of the group, and therefore evenings are organised to study certain issues on ethical consumption and low impact farming (for more about Solidarity Purchasing groups, see the "Farmers getting ahead of the digital divide", story on page 29.

We believe in local and circular

economy, re-dimensioning human-nature interaction, and fair distribution of resources, while increasing options for humankind; for all these, a global collaboration is needed in which principles are rethought and sustainability comes in the forefront of decision making.

## EVERYTHING IS CIRCULAR

More funds should be available to local farmers to ensure that their growing practices are optimised and help local farmers who are treating the soil and the people respectfully.

Support is needed from local

agents, to provide more assistance for organic farming which is a more efficient method of storing nitrogen in the soil leading to greater soil quality and improved biological activity.

It is important to ensure the absence of pesticides, present in conventional farming. Create more networks in which organic local farmers can exchange products and make this the norm, in order to let individual farmers specialise in their fields and ensure food security in the age of climate change. More initiatives could be laid out to inform people about Solidarity Purchasing Groups, in order to invite more people to share values and make collaboration easier.




15. Cargonomia assists a local family in testing the resilient mobility of cargo bikes

## CREATING ALTERNATIVES, CREATING COMMUNITY

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Cargonomia

 Budapest and Zsámbok  
HUNGARY

*A conversation with Logan Strenchock, co-founder of Cargonomia, a cargo bike delivery service and community collective based in Budapest, and farm worker at Zsámboki Biokert, an organic market garden in the village of Zsámbok, 50 km outside Budapest. Among other activities, Cargonomia delivers food boxes from the farm to customers in the city. Cargonomia is now establishing a second base in Zsámbok village.*



A CONVERSATION WITH LOGAN STRENCHOCK



**C**argonomia officially was launched in 2015. It came out of the idea: how can we connect the farm, bike messengers and a bike workshop? But we have many more discussions about participation and autonomy in decision making in the type of city, community, country you want to live in.

## FEET ON THE GROUND, HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

We do a mix of very hands-on, practical activities like teaching people how to be more confident in repairing their own bicycle, or how to grow food in an urban setting. But also, we have more conceptual or theoretical discussions about the type of transition we hope to see and some of the challenges associated with transition in our community. When we get into some of the degrowth transition theory, it is much more complex and it requires a wide ranging viewpoint. But it also requires some very clear discussions about what it means on the ground level as well. And luckily, within our team, we are a good mix of academics and practitioners and people who wear both of those hats and more.

One thing that is possible through our cooperation with [Zsámboki](#)

*"I think there are many people in both places who you wouldn't really define accurately if you said 'city person' or 'rural person'."*

[Biokert](#) market garden is delivering the food boxes from the farm to people's homes in the city with cargo bikes. The farm is 50 km from Budapest. The food boxes go into the city in a van; there is no real way around that until trains accept local freight cargo. Once the boxes get to the city, a large number of them can be delivered to the final destination by bike. It can be much more efficient than a van delivering to individual addresses.

## RURAL- URBAN DIVIDE?

Most of our outreach activities have taken place in the city. But that has shifted since the pandemic started. For the last two and a half years, the majority of our activity has taken place in the countryside, connected to the activities of the market garden and the opportunities that the garden as a learning space presents. Over time, we developed a programme for hosting trainees within our organisation. They spend at least one to two days per week in the garden, or on the site of another small garden which we are developing: an experimental permaculture and agroecology space across the street from the market garden. We as Cargonomia have at least once or twice per year organised bicycle repair workshops in Zsámbok village.

We try to challenge this notion of a separating distinction between rural dweller and urban dweller, basically by bringing these groups together in some sort of fun physical learning

activity. Political narratives capitalise on this distance. I think there are many similarities between the two groups. Both can learn from each other. I think there are many people in both places who you wouldn't really define accurately if you said 'city person' or 'rural person'.

It was a strategic decision on our part to think about establishing a base in the village to complement the base that we have in the city. There are not a lot of resources for projects to take place, so we had to bring standalone projects here. We are very good at working without money. We have proven that we don't need to rely on money to thrive.



16. Traditional Hungarian village houses



## PARTICIPATING IN THE COMMUNITY

This is why we purchased a 117-year-old house and an almost 2.000 m<sup>2</sup> plot of land. This is the other garden we are hoping to establish with a bit more space to experiment. One of the other benefits of having this new village headquarters is that we could potentially participate more in actual municipal life. If you are just coming and going, it is really hard to gain the trust or respect that you would need to say that you are part of the community.

We need people to participate more in the communities they live in. People have a romanticised vision of wanting to go to the countryside: but it shouldn't just be a privileged decision because they have financial

security, they can work from home, or they want to buy into the peace and calm that the rural area can offer. I expect a lot from this stakeholder group because we know the type of systemic change that we need, we know the broken parts of destructive capitalism. You can't wait for alternatives to happen; you have to create them yourself.

We do not earn income from what we do. We do not have a specific fundraising necessity to support our projects. We rely on our own knowledge and our own social network. Operating like this has its challenges, especially in finding new contributors over the long term. Of course, we are operating within traditional markets, which are very exploitative and, you know, in the ways in which money is used

*"You can't wait around for alternatives to happen; you have to create them yourself."*

in exchange, quite ruthless as well. Finding space to survive within these is a challenge.

We probably do not get things done as fast as a corporation would with paid employees, but we have not faced an obstacle which we could not overcome. The way we work is based on our close personal relationships. That is one of our strong points. We have to adapt each year to the new challenges of maintaining this type of organisation. In 2018 we launched the first public cargo bike sharing scheme in Hungary - these are our bikes, which we purchased

17. Logan keeps an eye on Cargonomia trainees Perrine and Enora as they gain confidence with the stirrup hoe



or built, and that we lend to people for free. We are working now with the 9th district on a proposal for a pilot project for a district sharing system. We are pursuing funding through the Visegrad fund.

## GREENWASHING AND CO-OPTING OF POLICY

We are wary of greenwashing and co-opting of social programs and environmental programmes, especially as they relate to “development for the sake of development” and changing the face of Budapest in the name of financialising or monetising the commons.

The calculated investment in cheap tourism in Hungary, especially through the development of low

cost travel, has had significant social impacts.

There is so much space right in the city centre which is unused, which could be filled with civic initiatives, like local food distribution points, or workshops where people can access and share tools. And at the same time, there is the constant building of infrastructure that nobody asked for, which is based completely on real estate speculation. It has been a pretty difficult one-two knockout punch with price increases and two years of Covid. Civic initiatives face the challenge of paying the rent each month or moving further and further out of the city. We had a space in the city until November 2020 and we left because it became too expensive. During lockdown, the owner decided to increase the rent quite drastically.

## CARGO BIKES ON EVERY CORNER

Cargo bikes belong in every group dwelling in a city. That is the type of policy that we have to advocate for. Compared to the amount of overhead to maintain infrastructure for cars, you could put cargo bikes on every corner in the city and still have enough money to keep the lights on. It would be really nice to see some sort of family mobility policy which supported cargo bikes. The electric assist cargo bike has certainly much less of a resource impact than an electric car. It is certainly helpful in increasing the viability of a cargo bike for the elderly and those who might not be able to pedal on their own. But at least in Pest, the flat side of Budapest, a non-electric assist cargo bike is fine.

18. Cargonomia delivers boxes of colourful produce weekly from Zsamboki Biokert to loyal customers in Budapest and the surrounding area





CHAPTER

3





# COHESION AND DEMOCRACY

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## WE NEED PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE AND COMMUNITY-LED REGENERATION

*Be more human and give people a chance. Social cohesion and democracy grow in a spirit of common interest and respect. The communities in this chapter are reframing tired tropes about rural areas, welcoming and proving that solidarity and inclusive dialogue help us to live together in harmony. We urgently need dedicated space and resources for meaningful dialogue and collective decision-making in rural governance.*

# RIGHTS, RESPECT AND REVITALISATION

The Welcome Village

Riace, ITALY

BY ROBERT LUKESCH, AN AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

1. "Riace, land of welcome" sign in Riace Marina, 2018



Domenico 'Mimmo' Lucano's fate is a clear-cut case of fortune not favouring the brave. Once lauded third best mayor in the world for his welcome policy in Riace, a village on the Calabrian coast, he was removed from office in his third term, arrested on contested charges, and temporarily barred from his village. After a raucous trial-by-media, Lucano was eventually handed down a prison sentence of 13 years and two months. Most of the trumped-up accusations have since been dismissed by the courts of appeal. It seems Lucano's real crime was rocking the boat on immigration policy.

## THE REDYNAMISATION OF RIACE

Riace is a village of 1.800 inhabitants and a tale of two cities. Riace Borgo is the picturesque ancient stone settlement on the hillside, once part of Magna Graecia, when it was known as Ryakion; Riace Marina stretches along the coastline.

On 1 July 1998 a boat was stranded off the coast of Riace Marina. Aboard were 218 women, men and children of Kurdish origin from various Middle Eastern countries, abandoned by a tout after cashing in some €2.000 per head. An ad hoc group of volunteers, among them the teacher Mimmo Lucano, started to organise shelter and food for the stranded people. After spending many days with the refugees in their makeshift dwelling, and later in a pilgrims' guest house made available by the bishop, the

local helpers started to connect the dots: Riace Borgo had many unoccupied houses due to a steady stream of emigration to wealthier parts of the world; the Kurdish refugees needed houses. Taking inspiration from an experimental project in the village of Badolato a little further up the coast, the volunteers - who would go on to found the *Città Futura* association the following year - started to contact the diaspora to ask for permission to use or purchase their houses to

accommodate the newcomers. The diaspora agreed, and thus started the process of redynamisation of Riace Borgo.

In 2004 Lucano was elected mayor of Riace on a local citizen list. Over the years, the migrants continued to come to the *paese dell'accoglienza*. Arrivals peaked at 800 per year in 2014-15. By 2018 there were still 300 migrants arriving per year, even as Italy clamped down on asylum seekers and their conditions worsened day by day.



2. Villaggio globale di Riace, August 2018



***“There is no alternative to the welcome policy.”***

Against this current, Riace encouraged the newcomers to actively participate in rebuilding and refurbishing the Borgo. The *villaggio multiculturale* was a hive of artisanal activity, inhabited by potters of Kabul, embroiderers of Herat, chocolatiers, glassworks, woodworking, the Global Interweavings textile workshop, and The Dragon of Islamabad - a crafts boutique. Newcomers revived abandoned olive groves, and the municipality acquired an oil mill to process the fruits of their labour. The nursery and elementary school, which had closed down simply because there were no more children around, was reopened and new staff hired, composed of Riacesi and newcomers.

Financing all these investments was no easy task. Basic funding came from the national budget in the form of a €35 payment per refugee, and from specific support for the project. Banca Etica in Padua provided credit. Meanwhile tourism was booming as curious visitors flocked to see the Welcome Village, and holidayed and shopped there. German filmmaker Wim Wenders shot a half-hour film (*Il volo*) and called Riace the ‘true utopia’. To bridge the funding gaps caused by delayed disbursements from public budgets, Riace and some neighbouring communities established a local complementary currency whose banknotes featured the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and local martyrs to organised crime.



3. Domenico (Mimmo) Lucano in a moment of reflection on the village square in Riace

## AN UNWELCOME POLICY

Meanwhile, political winds blew stronger in the welcoming face of Riace. Successful integration was distinctly unwelcome, it seemed, amidst the surging climate of xenophobia and hate cultivated by populist parties and political charlatans. In 2016, a whirl of inspections, investigations and indictments began that led to Lucano’s dismissal and arrest two years later. Snared by the complexities of Italian bureaucracy surrounding subsidies, he was also accused of ‘promoting illegal migration’ and ‘mediating sham marriages’. Later released, Lucano was barred from entering Riace for more than one year. A cacophony of smear campaigns in some mass media and social media heralded the Kafkaesque verdict of the courts on 30 September 2021: Lucano was to be imprisoned for welcoming people in need. At the time of going to print, his appeal process was still pending.

The municipality also sat in the

dock, as did 20 members of Città Futura - now labelled a ‘criminal organisation’. Refugees were transferred against their will into mass accommodation and allowed little or no contact with the outside world. Little remained of the Welcome Village they had built together. “In the villages that are depopulating, becoming ‘ghosts’, only immigration can reverse the trend with respect to the demographic decline. There is no alternative to hospitality. There is no alternative to the welcome policy, and the one I adopted as the mayor of Riace was the right one, as the facts show,” concluded Lucano in a February 2022 interview with the *Globalist*, as he awaited the verdict of another appeal.

We need Mimmo Lucano. We need the Welcome Village. We need its spirit, its message and its achievements: a gigantic effort to combine the integration of refugees seeking protection with the revitalisation of an emaciated community. Not just one, but tens, hundreds, thousands!



4. A family enters the village of San Muñoz in Castilla y León

## NEW PATHS TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Nuevos Senderos



SPAIN

*How can immigrants and their families contribute to rural development? When these migrants are motivated to move to underpopulated areas, they are supported with integration into the local community. And when the host community - municipality and local residents - is motivated to welcome migrants, they can offer real employment opportunities.*

 BY THE NUEVOS SENDEROS PROJECT TEAM

A benchmark in integrating migrants in rural areas, the [Nuevos Senderos](#) (New Paths) programme demonstrates that carefully matching families to the right communities can be one viable solution to rural depopulation.

Through our 'family unit integration itineraries', we work with the family nucleus on the understanding that the social inclusion of the whole family strengthens and consolidates the inclusion of each of its members.

Over 20 years we have helped 79 migrant families to resettle in rural areas (156 adults and 184 children; often single-parent families). In that period we have assessed 571 families for relocation; managed 143 job offers from municipalities; and worked closely with 185 municipalities of

under 10.000 inhabitants, in regions across Spain.

Our programme is run by [CEPAIM foundation](#) (Acción Integral con Migrantes Convive), which works to promote an intercultural model of society with full access to citizenship rights for migrant persons. Nuevos Senderos is the continuation of the Senderos project launched in 2002, which was defined as a good practice by the European Commission.

## BIDIRECTIONAL BUY-IN

Each family's move to a rural location is a planned and mediated process. It requires the active participation of the newcomers, local communities and municipalities alike.

We respect the timetables

of each family, and provide the participants with information and training in preparation for their move. This favours the family's social and employment integration, as well as their capacity to take risks. Participants often have innovative business ideas adapted to the needs of the territory - and may even have experience in their country of origin. Yet they lack their own resources, and are excluded by bureaucratic barriers. Many families do not have a member with a driver's licence, which is essential in their new home due to the lack of public transportation. Basic training in digital tools is also an important service they can benefit from.

The local community must be open to new settlers and accepting

### 5. Cooking up social cohesion





of differences. Municipalities, meanwhile, should be able to offer newcomers the necessary resources. Local jobs must be available in the public or private sector. Temporary work, often advertised at the last minute, is incompatible with the protocols of the project, which aim to minimise the risk of haste in starting a new life. Follow-up and accompaniment of families is an essential part of this process of change. Qualified personnel is essential. In the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has limited the ability of the various parties to come into contact as part of this process.

### **POLICY PRIORITIES FOR NUEVOS SENDEROS**

In the framework of the CAP or other Community Funds, access to aid and economic measures should be improved to promote self-employment in commercial activities that can support the objectives of the project: inclusion of families, and rural development. We are in contact and have political influence with territorial development agents and regional and local authorities.

### **REVERSING THE EXODUS**

Apart from encouraging the arrival of new settlers, it is also important to create the conditions for the local population to want to stay, and even to encourage some of those who left to return. We need more housing, as well as habitable

conditions in available housing. Such interventions must be carried out within a framework of integral planning aimed at tackling the different drivers of depopulation - services, employment possibilities, communications and so on. Additionally, cultural factors may make the advantages of cities outweigh their disadvantages.

### **RURAL PROOFING**

The integration of immigrant populations in rural areas must be conceived as one option in the search for solutions for the phenomenon of rural depopulation - but it is not the only solution. As one piece of a broader and more comprehensive

strategy, the process necessitates networking and coordination with multiple agencies and institutions active in the same territory or with the same population. In this sense, the coherence and optimal coordination of all the actions that converge in rural areas continues to be a major challenge. We need a holistic approach to rural development, i.e. a mix of policies that act in a synergistic and coordinated manner.

The territory must be effectively integrated into all sectoral policies. Part of each sector's budget could be ring-fenced for rural areas. Through a "rural proofing" mechanism, laws, procedures, plans and programmes, as well as the corresponding budgets, should adequately integrate the interests and needs of rural areas.



6. Young people without family ties become "fruit sellers for a day"

# REGENERATIVE GOVERNANCE

Resilience.Earth

Catalonia and rural Spain

*Resilience.Earth is a non-profit cooperative committed to community resilience and regenerative design as fundamental tools for social and ecological transformation. In engaging rural communities, it builds from a feminine, indigenous and decolonial perspective. A conversation with Erika Zárata, senior consultant at Resilience.Earth, who accompanies communities and administrations to develop more regenerative models of governance.*

 A CONVERSATION WITH ERIKA ZÁRATE

7. The Resilience.Earth team



We see the work we do as a process to decolonise and reconcile structural violence, and transform it into something that is regenerative and nourishing for our communities and ecosystems, making them more equitable and resilient.

## WARMING THE FIELD FOR CITIZEN-LED GOVERNMENT

A gentle way to start is by doing interviews with key actors and mapping out the different players, the more visible ones and also the invisible ones. By analysing the community mapping, we can detect the diversity of the rural community, and are able to create a commission tasked with representing the voices of that diversity. They are the knowledge holders and they help us design the process best suited and adapted to the needs and the context of that land and its people.

About seven years ago in Spain there was a shift in local politics away from party politics to independent grassroots groups running for office. We have gone through a couple of municipal elections like that, and this is starting to warm the field for public administration deeply interested in citizen-led governments.

Resilience.Earth works at the territorial level. When one municipality in La Garrotxa started working with us, others wanted it too, regardless of their political leaning. The funding we are able to apply and obtain for these municipalities



8. Nourishing the resilience of communities and ecosystems as main goal of Resilience.Earth

was small, but it made it a bit easier for local administration to carry out participatory processes. However, the next challenge, of course, is how to generate meaningful change from the participative processes.

## RECONCILING TENSIONS OF DEEPER SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

There is a need to link community-led local development with community-led climate action. Story mapping and dialogue can unlock communities' imagination and help them see the pathways to climate action.

How to approach this kind of work? If you're looking at reconciling the tensions of deep systemic problems instead of trying to fix or resolve them, it changes how you think

*"I'm amazed how they are able to bridge differences - now they can see, respect, understand and empathise with each other."*

about and do community-led local development work. We accompany people to think about the challenges of their community. In these spaces it is so important to have public administration, private sector, general community and civil society. After you do interviews and create the commission, you can do a first public event.

Hours of preparation go in to make sure that the diversity of voices is represented. We live in rural areas, where almost a quarter of the population are from migrant





9. Creating a space of permeability - open to other people who want to participate

communities, mostly from Senegal, Gambia and India, and also China and Romania. These communities are often excluded (intentionally and unintentionally, and as a result of structural violence) from these dialogue spaces. We pay extra attention to make sure, that these communities are able to participate and think about their community, reflecting upon the most visible problems, to the structural and strategic problems, and to the essence of the cultural paradigm.

The structural level is key. At this level, what people are asking for, and what we are trying to accompany them to build, is an Open Governance Structure - it looks different in each community, but certain features are quite similar: a space with designated people that is also permeable and open to other people participating if they choose to; the designated people are representative of the diversity and are a kind of community voice to accompany the public administration to make sure that their decisions are truly responsive to all the needs that have been detected.

## OPEN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE EXISTS

We have been accompanying communities for 5 years now in community-led policy design at the development level, practical level, evaluation level. We translate what communities say into policy language.

We are just closing a regional strategic plan linking all 21 municipalities in La Garrotxa. There was over 11% active participation in the construction of this Evolutive Strategic Plan for Territorial Resilience. The beauty of this plan is that it was not just a document that the regional government funded, but rather a process which engaged everyone involved to present strategies, objectives and actions that they would lead and even finance or put human power into. This strategic plan is not led by the public administration; it is stewarded by everyone.

There is also a plan in the tourism sector in the neighbouring community going into its second year. I am amazed how they are able to bridge differences - now they

*“This strategic plan is not led by the public administration; it is stewarded by everyone.”*

can see, respect, understand and empathise with each other. There is real dialogue.

## FUNDING

Local and European funds are difficult to access here, especially if you are a small rural organisation or community. The funding available to us is almost exclusively from the provincial government. While greatly needed and appreciated, this funding is often insufficient to fully pay for community-led assessment and planning processes that move us towards more open governance structures and the collective stewardship and implementation of community development projects. As a non-profit co-op, we often co-fund these processes with our annual surplus, should we have any, or use our small bank of paid community service hours that each co-op worker is allotted to accompany and support rural grassroots organisations and communities who don't have the money to pay for such services usually.

Two things would be helpful to improve funding: accessibility to funding and raising awareness of policy in relation to funding. Also, there could be support at local or regional level to facilitate climate officer roles.



10. Workshop at Lišov Museum, with participants from Slovakia and the UK

## GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE

Lišov Museum

Lišov, SLOVAKIA

**CONVERSATION WITH JAKUB DVORSKÝ, WHO DECIDED TO MOVE BACK TO HIS HOME VILLAGE OF LIŠOV IN CENTRAL-SOUTHERN SLOVAKIA, AND FOUNDED AN NGO TO BRING THE AREA BACK TO LIFE.**

This is a very challenging region. There are not many job opportunities; the infrastructure is not very good, so people are leaving. In the past there were around 800 inhabitants in Lišov. Today we have around 250; almost half are Roma people.

We set up the NGO in 2015, and opened the [Lišov Museum](#) in 2017. Our first idea was to run a project through ERASMUS and share knowledge related to international crafts and skills, forestry management and natural building materials. The first activity

was the restoration of a 1916 house. We managed to involve several volunteers, craft workers, researchers and teachers from different European countries. The house is now used partly as a museum, partly as an ethnographic house. It was inhabited until 1995.

*“The village is slowly growing. The grandchildren are starting to come back.”*

We were then thinking about what could be the next project. Slovakia is strongly linked to the Celtic culture. So in 2016 and 2017 we built a Celtic roundhouse here as a representation of Celtic life in Europe. Again we involved several organisations, participants, volunteers from different European countries. It was a presentation of traditional skills and used natural materials.

The third part of the museum is a mask gallery. A collection of 400 masks from around the world was donated to the museum. With these

three parts of the museum, we managed to bring in local people, support the local economy and raise the attractiveness of this place.

We now also have a museum shop selling local products. Local producers can sell their products and it brings customers and producers together. It is also a good opportunity for our students, who can do workshops with different craftworkers, farmers, producers, artists across the region. And it is a benefit for the museum.

Now we are working on an 1887 house which will be used as a small coffee shop. That is what we need here, for the social aspect: people can meet there, get something to eat, talk. It is also creating a job in the village. We are very happy that the village is slowly growing. Houses

are bought by craft workers and artists. But also the grandchildren are starting to come back. They find out, that the rural areas are still alive. The region is a leader that is helping other communities join this idea. The network is growing and getting bigger. At the beginning it was mainly about creating a place where people can come from abroad and learn traditional skills from the region. But then things started to connect with each other.

## INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS AS A BOOSTER FOR OUR OWN PROJECTS

What was really helpful before we started our own activities was to gain

11. Lišov Museum from the outside





## GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE

practical experience abroad. When I was 17, I went to Cyprus on a student exchange, and after college I worked as a project manager across Europe and Africa. That is something I can say to young people: if you have a chance, just go! Travelling is really very important; it can really open your eyes. Young people can be inspired by this. When we started, it was quite complicated. We always had to knock on the door. It was hard dealing with the bureaucracy at national level. Especially when you are starting as a young person without anybody behind you, it is so complicated. Especially in Slovakia where corruption is a big issue. As a small new organisation, it is quite complicated to start.

I am lucky to have worked in different LEADER projects with

different organisations across Europe. I always had a very good experience. It was different when we started here. I was disappointed that the LEADER programme did not help us. Then after our organisation developed, they came to us asking: "Can you do this for us?" I said: "Sorry, when I was asking for your help, you closed the door - and now you want to eat the top of the cake?"

We found partners thanks to different schemes such as ERASMUS. It was very helpful; you can share your knowledge; you can get advice from partners. Most of these partners have similar experiences, with different funds, different policy levels. If we didn't have partners abroad it would have been impossible to do something like this.

## GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE

Be more human! And give young people a chance! When they want to do something, give them support. Because when you close the door, most of them will leave. This is a big issue here in Slovakia. And for the policymakers: they are sitting on the money. In the EU programmes, there is a lot of money - but please use it. This is also an issue here - we give money back to the EU because we did not spend it. So if there are people who want to do something, help them!

*"Be more human!  
And give young  
people a chance!"*

12. Christmas market at the museum, with local producers



## DIARY FROM THE FUTURE

# "MAN AS A FISH" - NORTH FRIESLAND

BY HANNES LORENZEN

### LIFE BELOW SEA LEVEL

The view of the Wadden Sea from above at low tide is always breathtaking. The solar-powered air taxi glides almost silently over the finely branched sea veins, the tideways, where the sun's rays sparkle and the shrimp trawlers are still calmly making their way. I notice the new mussel beds and circular algae plants that have recently expanded considerably both in the Wadden Sea in front of the dikes and within the island. Only the small white and black dots of the sheep on the green dike are still a familiar sight.

The sea is smooth as a mirror today, but the weather forecast warns of a rapidly approaching severe storm and possible new flooding of my home island. Such announcements would have caused panic on the island twenty years ago, because Pellworm lies one metre below sea level. For a long time, the dikes protected the island from flooding. Now they can no longer do so. Like the island itself, they now serve as an important breakwater off the North Frisian North Sea coast.

The strong storm surge of 2033 had washed over Pellworm's sea dikes for the first time, temporarily submerging the entire island by four metres. With wind speeds in gusts of up to 200 kilometres per hour from the northwest, the water level in the German Bight swelled within a few days and caused considerable damage in Hamburg and the coasts of North and East Frisia. But the early warning from the weather service had given the residents of Pellworm enough time to get to safety on the decentrally distributed floating life rafts.



1. Pellworm, North Friesland from the air

Instead of raising the dikes even further at great expense, the German coastal states had decided as early as 2027 to build the novel life rafts throughout the flood-prone North Sea area, thus implementing the so-called flexible response strategy against the more rapid than expected rising sea level. The rescue concept also included the terps on which the old farms have stood six metres above sea level for centuries. Some of them were raised and secured with additional escape rooms. For all lower-lying houses, they are now the life rafts, which float up in case of flooding and are equipped with sufficient shelter and provisions.

*"Has the North Sea  
lost its menace?  
No, it is just unstoppable,  
we have become even more  
a part of it and it of us."*

2. Rising North Sea: Island bus connection  
to the ferry during storm



## LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND THE FLEXIBLE RESPONSE STRATEGY

The taxi lands on a water basin near the lighthouse. From here I can easily reach our farm on foot. The traditional thatched roof is still as beautiful as ever, despite the extensive work we have had to do to stabilise it against extreme storms. Thatch is now a much sought-after raw material, especially in the building industry, since the drainage and flooding system works.

Because of increasingly frequent extreme weather, from long-lasting droughts to torrential rains, a new type of irrigation and drainage system was developed on the island, with which the high and low water levels can be optimally balanced with the help of wind, solar and hydrogen pumps. The island community was able to make the necessary investments because it has made a name for itself worldwide as a research centre for local adaptation to climate change. Farmers and research communities here have agreed to develop new types of combined land and water management. Salt marshes with a special salt-resistant flora and fauna have re-emerged within the dikes and have attracted worldwide attention. On a limited scale, however, a unique combination of animal husbandry, grain production, horticulture and the production of algae and seafood became possible, thanks to novel desalination processes and the use of specially developed crops.

Our farm also now includes a research and conference

centre. International experts meet here to exchange ideas on renewable energies, agriculture, nutrition, health and many other topics. For this week's workshop I have prepared the topic: "Man as a fish - living with water." It is about a new relationship between man and nature in a rapidly changing living environment. Adaptation to changes in nature and a deeper understanding of natural processes have been the focus of our research for many years. Perhaps the long series of global pandemics, the increasing migration flows, and war in and around Europe have also changed our view of nature and of ourselves profoundly. Flooding has long been commonplace in many parts of Europe, whether from rivers or the sea. Tourism experienced an unexpected boom in the years when the flexible response to rising sea level was introduced. The Wadden Sea National Park, founded in the 1980s, and the biosphere reserve that followed later, gained in attractiveness through the flexible response to increasingly unpredictable weather conditions, not only for nature lovers, but especially in the field of applied climate research, education, and protection and development measures in the European and global coastal regions. The combination of unique nature experience and intensive research, a participating marine researcher told me, increasingly blurs the distinction between work and holiday time for her.





3. Sheep on a Pellworm lowland

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

As far back as the 1980s the island of Pellworm made a name for itself as a pioneer in the field of renewable energy, for example with the construction of Europe's first solar power plant and a contribution to the World's Fair 2000. With a renewable energy producer association founded and financed solely by islanders, Pellworm achieved the status of a CO<sub>2</sub> sink just a few years later by completely supplying the island's needs with renewable electrical energy from wind, sun and biogas. The biogas plant was redesigned from scratch after the original subsidy expired. Today, all biogenic waste is converted into electricity and heat. The electricity is used to generate hydrogen, which is now used to operate the ferry, which used to be equipped with diesel engines, emission-free.

## OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

Initially, this development was hindered and delayed by various economic and political conflicts of interest. For a long time, many farmers resisted conditions and adjustments that were supposed to serve nature conservation or consideration for the rapidly developing

tourism. Necessary changes mostly remained blocked on the party-political stage. External investment in upmarket tourism and rapidly rising property prices made housing unaffordable for the island's young people, craftsmen and start-ups. But with the amendment of the Coastal Protection Plan and the implementation of German and European regulations to reduce greenhouse gases in agriculture and new support programmes to protect biodiversity, farmers on the island made a demanding transition that is now considered exemplary.

A new regulatory law and the new subsidy programmes of the federal government and the EU were of great importance in this process. Support is now only approved if a holistic concept for optimal circular economy, local marketing, and best possible sustainable use of locally available resources has been worked out in the community, and if the applicants from the relevant economic sectors have agreed on close cooperation. Also, building laws no longer allow new construction on cultivable land, or the use of water resources, without a concept for energy-saving conversion and renewal of existing buildings and resources. Approval procedures and funding decisions, however, have been considerably accelerated in return.

## INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY WITH REGARD TO THE EU GREEN DEAL

Ultimately decisive for the successful transformation of the island economy under increasingly unpredictable climate conditions was the generous EU funding for education and cooperation projects that applied from 2028 and the flexible use of the various funds within the framework of local projects and investments. Even during the 2022-2027 funding period, the EU Commission and the national states made adjustments in the funding programmes to enable this flexibility. Thus, the framework conditions for an integrated rural development policy with regard to the strategies of the originally rather non-binding EU Green Deal had become considerably more effective in favour of local community projects.

The funding goals must be defined and controlled by the community itself, instead of adapting to public funding goals that do not make sense on the ground. Whereas for a long time private investors and local councils were rather hostile to each other and blocked each other, now, with the support of mediators, cooperation and communication methods, a sustainable change from competition and demarcation to joint cooperation is possible. It is also helpful that complicated accounting procedures at the funding agencies have been simplified and transparency about different interests and joint solutions has become the basis for negotiations and decisions.



## MAN AS FISH, MAN AS SHEEP, MAN AS GOOSE

I have now arrived at the farm. The weather is still calm and there is no sign of an approaching storm. The hedges and trees that provide wind protection for the garden have hooked themselves firmly under over the years, or so it looks, because the many storms have caused them to lean at an angle to the east so that the wind can sweep over them. In the garden, the workshop participants have already made themselves comfortable and prepared a European paella - as they call it - with mussels, crabs, seaweed and the Pellworm rice (which grows particularly well here, thrives in the slightly salty inland waters and binds an astonishing amount of CO<sub>2</sub>). We sit down to enjoy the meal.

Aha, the weather app corrects itself. The storm from the north-west has moved on over Norway and the feared surge in the German Bight has failed to materialise. So it remains calm and we can explore the island tomorrow in peace on the hydrogen-powered island barges, which travel via the developed canal systems just like in Friedrichstadt or Amsterdam - quickly ordered on the spot via the barge app, of course.

Has the North Sea lost its menace? No, it is just unstoppable. But we have become even more a part of it and it of us. This is also true of the wild geese, which caused the farmers of Pellworm headaches for many years because hundreds of thousands of them gorged themselves on everything that grew on the island for a long time. They are now visiting in much smaller numbers because they have made themselves at home in Siberia, which has become much warmer. Man as fish, man as sheep, man as goose - what exactly distinguishes us from them in terms of life that is constantly changing?

*"The funding goals must be defined and controlled by the community itself, instead of adapting to funding goals that do not make sense on the ground."*

4. Wind energy plants and flooded pastureland



CHAPTER

4



# LIFTING BORDERS AND MAKING PEACE

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## WE NEED INTEGRATED RURAL POLICY TO STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS

*Building peace and trust is at the heart of the European project. The initiatives here acknowledge that in order to reconcile interests, we must first reconnect people, places and economies. They bridge language and religious barriers, reach out through invisible walls inherited from past conflicts, by simply coming together, listening and learning from each other. Those fleeing war must be guaranteed not only safety but also fair social and working conditions. Rural development programming must cross borders and include EU neighbour regions.*





1. Trebnitz Castle and grounds

## THE ART OF BRIDGING BORDERS

Trebnitz Castle & Academy  
of Village Heroes



Müncheberg, Brandenburg  
GERMANY

*Trebnitz Castle, home to the Academy of Village Heroes and Brandenburg's village movement, is an extraordinary place of civic encounter and political education at the German-Polish border.*



IN CONVERSATION WITH ILONA TKOCZ, DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMY OF VILLAGE HEROES,  
AND DARIUSZ MÜLLER, DIRECTOR OF TREBNITZ CASTLE.

Rural Brandenburg, part of former East Germany, is historically shaped by large farming structures of Prussian landlords and 20th-century land reforms. Its village communities faced strong trends of depopulation after reunification. However, with Poland nearby, and Berlin not too far away, the region has successively attracted investments and people, as well as a trend of urban dwellers rediscovering village life.

The Academy of Village Heroes is based at the [Trebnitz Castle Association](#), which was established in 1992 to promote the emancipatory development of adults, children and young people through educational opportunities by orchestrating multi-national exchanges.



2. Working group at the German-Polish Youth Agora

## BRIDGING A GAP IN DEMOCRACY

Village Heroes are people who dare to take their destiny into their own hands. With the Village Heroes project we try to strengthen democratic action skills so that people gain confidence in their own actions. For this we need two things: qualification measures

*“We train people in taking their own needs and interests seriously, and develop competences to communicate with politicians.”*

that are geared to their individual needs and training in constructive communication, so that they can dialogue with political decision makers on a level playing field.

The strength of the villages has always been in the local competence of self-responsibility and self-administration. But this local competence is unfortunately not sufficiently valued and supported. With the municipal area reforms of past years, local self-government has been taken away from many villages, turning them into dependent incorporated parts of municipalities and towns. As a result, the honorary village leaders and honorary mayors very often lost the right to vote in the next higher body, the municipal or city council. This has created a gap in democracy directly at the grassroots level,

which is a fundamental problem. The message is: your knowledge and your needs are not important to us. Political interest in democratic participation turns into frustration and disappointment. Resources and potentials that lie in the local competence of self-responsibility remain unused.

This is precisely why we offer various formats of political education. With workshops and seminars we train and prepare people in taking their own needs and interests seriously, and develop competences to communicate with politicians on a level playing field. This helps close the administrative democratic gap which unfortunately exists. We offer a platform for exchange and self-empowerment to shape the development of Brandenburg's rural areas.



## AGORA WITHOUT BORDERS

One of the key objectives of the educational work at Trebnitz Castle is the intergenerational exchange of experience and knowledge across national and cultural borders. It promotes emancipatory attitudes among young people and adults, as well as responsible action both individually and collectively towards fundamental rights. The spectrum of educational work spans discussion forums and workshops, topical ecological, economical and political themes and oral history projects that focus on democracy and the future.

Particular value is placed on how the participants can take a practical approach to everyday life. The [Friedenswald](#) (Forest of Peace) is a focal point for international youth exchanges that deal with life in the German-Polish Oderland region, the

future in Europe and topics relating to intercultural dialogue.

The German-Polish Youth Agora began in 2010, and provides a creative and innovative form of political participation for young people from the border area. Working in bi-national groups, the youth involved reflect on specific cross-border problems and suggest possible solutions, which they then present to experts, politicians and decision-makers of the region. One example of what the Youth Agora has achieved is a small music festival in Müncheberg, the German-Polish Andreasfest in Trebnitz.

### “TELL ME ABOUT YOUR BRANDENBURG...”

The academy organises a series of seminars on the impact of narratives about “village life”. It is a storytelling

exercise which invites urban and rural inhabitants of Brandenburg to share their visions and expectations for the region. Eliciting tales of interpersonal relationships in the village, attitudes, values and work in times of rapid change of rural reality, the exercise reveals differences and tensions between city dwellers and rural people. It also offers a new way of communication and exchange about the future of rural Brandenburg. In this context, strengthening the

*“The youth reflect on specific cross-border problems and suggest possible solutions, which they then present to experts, politicians and decision-makers of the region.”*



3. German-Polish Youth Agora 2016.  
4. German-Polish Youth Agora 2011



sense of belonging is an important cornerstone for the process of new village development concepts. Good communication both internally and externally plays an essential role in this process.

Another project is a democracy workshop, in which the participants inhabit a fictitious abandoned village as a group. Using elements of play theory, the process of establishing the village aims to investigate democracy in its elemental form, as a means of social cohesion, in which the young people decide for themselves, how the village ought to be ruled, how the resources provided should be used, and how the education and health system should be built and the wealth distributed.

*“There used to be a very sharp border between Brandenburg and the Wielkopolska region, and that is slowly changing.”*

## A PLACE FOR THE ARTS

The Trebnitz Castle Association offers international and intercultural workshops for children and young people in fine arts and theatre, photography, film, circus, music, dance and writing. In partnership with the ‘Children need Music’ foundation, children from disadvantaged social backgrounds have the opportunity to actively make and experience music. Trebnitz Castle and grounds have become more and more a place for art. The emerging Gustav Seitz Centre is dedicated to the legacy of

20th-century German sculptor Gustav Seitz, but also to contemporary and sculptural art. More than 100 artists applied to take part in a two-week ‘plein air’ that resulted in the exhibition “Who is afraid of figurative sculpture?”

The historically important landscape gardens around the castle were revitalised by a group of committed locals known as the “Park Heroes”. In 2011 they began to develop the gardens into an open space for local recreation, with a nature trail and opportunities for sports and cultural activities, as well as an international meeting place.



5. Plein air 2012  
6. Plein air 2019





*"If we want to see this process continue, we must take good care of civil society, regardless of the differences."*

7. Workshop with the Children  
Need Music foundation, 2015

8. Music workshop with composer  
Rolf Zuchowski, 2015



## RURAL CROSS-BORDER ENGAGEMENT IN GERMAN-POLISH RELATIONS

There used to be a very sharp border between Brandenburg and the Wielkopolska region, and that is slowly changing. More people speak Polish in Brandenburg and more people speak German in Wielkopolska. Partnership and cooperation is growing in the field of environmental protection, culture and in economic terms. In some towns and villages in the Oderbruch

region we expected to lose 20 to 30 percent of the population but it has grown instead. The border region has become a German-Polish integration area on an equal footing, which will enrich the people on both sides, economically and culturally.

In this spirit, in 2019 Trebnitz Castle initiated a celebration of 30 years of democratic development in Poland including the regional government of Brandenburg and the Marshall Office of the Polish region of Wielkopolska. This opened an opportunity for people from the Polish government (members of the Law and Justice

Party, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość or PIS) and the opposition to discuss political and development questions off the record, which has become difficult in Poland in recent years.

If we want to see this process continue, we must take good care of civil society, regardless of the differences. We must invest in political and intercultural competence, so that the border disappears while the common ground grows. We need many more meeting places, platforms for encounters and Trebnitz Castle is such a place."



## A MODEL PROJECT FOR LEADER

“For the Märkische Seen LAG, the village heroes project was a model project to test LEADER for the development of functioning structures in the area of civil society. Following the regional funding from the state of Brandenburg, we were able to use LEADER funds on a one-off basis. It was a good start, but to continue and expand the project we needed financial support to make it permanent in the long term. For constructive and sustainable processes in the villages, we need a critical mass of committed people, and with the academy we have been able to qualify numerous people who work voluntarily in their villages.

However, I have to say that in some ways LEADER is not living up to its potential and is in danger of losing its dynamism. Ultimately, too much LEADER money flows into purely investment measures, whereas we need to invest more in communication and social encounters, in shaping good processes. We are confronted with so many administrative restrictions, that some people have turned away from the programme. In the increasingly complicated administration and management of LEADER, we feel a growing mistrust in our abilities, when it should be the other way around, a trusting support and empowerment of the people who care about their rural future.”

*Grit Körmer, Strategic Team and board of Brandenburg Village movement*

## THE ANTIDOTE TO DISEMPOWERMENT

The point of action of Trebnitz Castle, the Brandenburg village movement and its projects, is to empower rural people to understand and participate in local and regional political decision-making, which has an impact on their daily lives and their future. Situated in a border region and focusing on intergenerational cooperation and young people, Trebnitz Castle is a hub for political and cultural encounters, which contribute to personal, social and political development and cooperation, which can become an antidote to administrative disempowerment and individual depression. Such a hub, a space for self-empowerment and cooperation needs more specific support in rural development programming and educational support structures, especially in border regions of the EU.

g. The Park Heroes and their insect hotel, 2016





10. Boban Ilic, Secretary General of SWG

## EUROPEANS AT THE FENCE

Standing Working Group (SWG)  
for Regional Rural Development  
in South-East Europe



INTERVIEW WITH BOBAN ILIC, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE STANDING WORKING GROUP FOR REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

**T**he Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development (SWG) has just celebrated 15 years of governmental and civil society cooperation in the Western Balkans with a European perspective. Was it worth the effort?

Yes it was. We did it with a spirit of inclusion and cohesion in a region which had been torn to pieces by the war. We did it with deep concern to preserve peace in spite of ongoing tensions. And we had the feeling of joining a unique project of

cooperation and solidarity between Europeans."

*Do you still believe in joining the EU?*

To be honest, I am not sure anymore. Currently there is no serious sign for even starting accession negotiations. Too many premises



11. Boban Ilic at SWG Agriculture Policy Dialogue  
 12. Bogdanka Gjorshoska project leader SWG



and promises were made by the EU which did not materialise. Macedonia (nowadays North Macedonia) was told that an agreement with Greece on a new name would open negotiations. We Macedonians made that deal but there is still no accession perspective. Now Bulgaria claims that we did not even exist until 1945, and the EU remains silent. Our prime minister has resigned. He was elected with a pro-European agenda. When stepping down he said that his agenda was not carried by the Macedonians anymore. It seems that Western Europe is sleepwalking through our region just like before World War I. With no possibility to

***“We are ready for an ambitious Green Agenda for our region, for preservation of biodiversity and economic transition to face climate change.”***

join the EU, authoritarian regimes like China and Russia become increasingly influential in the region.

*But it seems SWG and your partners are not giving up?*

No we are not. Should we? We keep struggling against those trends. The majority of the people in the Balkans are pro-European. We will continue to work on our integration agenda with the EU. We owe it to our farmers and villagers. We believe in the potential of our women, our

youngsters, and our elders. We want to preserve our natural resources and our beautiful landscapes. We can offer Europe a lot if the EU, its Member States and their leaders would look beyond their national interests and personal careers. We are ready for an ambitious Green Agenda for our region, for preservation of biodiversity and economic transition to face climate change. We support short local food chains and we strengthen





THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE  
13 & 14. Agriculture Ministers at the Green Agenda for Western Balkans Conference in Tirana 2021

cooperation between farmers, environmental movements and consumers. So even if the EU is not too interested in our region, we definitely are.

*SWG has made a lot of efforts to enhance territorial and cross-border rural development. Is that still possible with growing new tensions in the region?*

Since the breakup of former Yugoslavia our region has been full of borders - physical, historical, mental, religious and economic. Our project is to build bridges, so people can cross and forget about these borders. People, goods, experience and ideas must freely flow through the region, between governments, officials, business people and civil society. SWG within its capacities supports that flow. For a long time cooperation was not fashionable in the region. With our cross-border and area-

based projects, people experience how it works. We learn from and use the good methods and practices of the EU while waiting for our chance. LEADER, CLLD, AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems), organic farming, and EU food quality standards are of great importance to us, even if we are still guests at the fence.

*If your region was in the EU, what kind of action, practical or political, would be your priority?*

I would first of all establish rural educational and capacity-building hubs for women and the young. They are so ambitious to start their own businesses. I would establish a new supportive infrastructure for farmers and craftsmen so that they can get a fair income for their products and services, use smaller processing facilities, make use of more adapted services and a better

*“We learn from and use the good methods and practices of the EU while waiting for our chance.”*

social infrastructure. I would not only try to keep people from leaving, but try to attract people to move from the cities into the countryside, with infrastructure and services, after seeing the potential of rural tourism and fostering love for the place.

*And politically?*

We have our own ideas of Europe while waiting. I believe the CAP, as it is now, does not fit our needs. We need much more diversified support measures for quality food chains, processing and marketing, rural tourism, rather than per-hectare payments without any social or environmental ambitions, and much more space for cooperation. The pandemic has shown us how vulnerable our food chains are and how quickly people can lose their jobs if we have no resilient local and regional infrastructure. Again, I believe we need more cross-border cooperation and a territorial approach for rural development. Even if the EU is slow in taking this approach seriously, we use the Berlin process [see link in Appendices: “Links”] and the Open Balkan initiative to make our own reforms, including bridging national disputes and physical barriers. Maybe once the EU wakes up and discovers that we are still here, then we will have some good new European rural policies to offer.



**BY THE STANDING WORKING GROUP FOR REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

**WESTERN BALKANS**

*The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development in South-East Europe is an intergovernmental organisation acting as an umbrella network with the main objective to support and prepare South-East European countries for accession to the EU.*

The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development (SWG) helps farmers and rural inhabitants to grow socially and economically. Actions are taken to safeguard local confidence, ensure quality of services and products provided, support environmentally responsible production practices, and help maintain the conditions necessary for thriving rural communities. SWG focuses on enhancing regional

cooperation and the development and competitiveness of rural areas in the Western Balkans. We insist on a bottom-up approach: since 2012 we have facilitated Area-Based Development (ABD) as a regional framework. The idea and concept is based on analysis and identification of the specificities of an area, addressing area-specific problems through an inclusive, participatory, integrated and flexible approach with particular support for the common initiative.

*“We are addressing area-specific problems through an inclusive, participatory, integrated and flexible approach with particular support for the common initiative.”*

## BROKEN BORDERS AND BROKEN TIES

During the process of the breakup of Yugoslavia, broken borders led to broken human and social ties, and to the breakdown of economic ties among stakeholders within cross-border areas. Over a short period of time, well-developed connections within one unique region fell apart and were restricted by newly established borders and administrations. We now need to re-establish those important social and economic ties. Cross-border regions, with mainly rural populations and economies, mostly related to

*“Regional cooperation is our philosophy and policy guideline in all our activities.”*

extensive agriculture, have re-emerged on the map.

SWG is facilitating this action in close partnership with local stakeholders from selected cross-border regions of the Western Balkans. The public sector is represented by local self-governments, development agencies and tourism organisations. Local tourism and agriculture entrepreneurs and civil organisations are involved as well. At the national level, governments of the Western Balkan countries provide support at the policy level.

In the period 2013–2015, seven cross-border regions were established within the ABD: Drina-Tara (involving municipalities from bordering region of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro), Drina-Sava (Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), Prespa (North Macedonia and Albania),

Sharra (North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo\*), Pchinja-Krajshte (North Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria), Krsh (Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) and Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna (Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo\*).

## REGIONAL COOPERATION IS OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our action was enabled at the grassroots level by social consensus of concerned parties from two to three countries/territories in each of the defined cross-border regions. The assessment of needs at regional level was followed up by stakeholder group meetings. The stakeholders actively participated in the creation of the framework in the form of a Strategic Development Plan for each of the seven cross-border regions. Regional cooperation is our philosophy and



15. & 16. West Balkan Ministers at Green Agenda Meeting, Tirana 2021 with SWG Minister Frida Krifca (center) and colleagues

*\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence*



*“With our 15-year experience of joint and cross-border development we feel prepared for a democratic and sustainable future.”*

policy guideline in all our activities. These activities have been supported and funded by the governments of the Western Balkans countries and territories. At the specific cross-border regions actions have been supported by local self-governments. At the EU level our action has been supported by [DG NEAR](#) through a multi-country programme and by different donors such as the German government development agency ([GIZ](#)), and the United States Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)).

## BOUNDARIES DISCOURAGE PEOPLE

The main obstacles for regional rural development are the administrative and formal boundaries which stem from the sovereignty of newly established countries. Those boundaries discourage people and, in some cases, disable the reestablishment of communications and broken economic ties, as well as improved cooperation among entities which have been depending on each

other. In some regions a post-conflict situation remains - mainly in those cross-border regions that were strongly affected by the war in the 1990s.

People in the Western Balkan region wish to see accelerated progress in the reestablishment of communications and broken economic ties, as well as improved cooperation in human and social relations. We expect the most positive impact from open borders within the Western Balkan region and of course with the EU. With our 15-year experience of joint and cross-border development we feel prepared for a democratic and sustainable future.

## EXPLORE BALKANS

Eco-tourism and slow travel are the visitor experience of the future. [Explore Balkans](#), a project launched in 2020, offers eight cross-border tours in the largely undiscovered region of the Western Balkans, by bringing together stakeholders in adventure and gastronomy tourism in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. These territories are home to beautiful nature, varied landscapes, and towns and villages with a rich heritage.



17. Eco-Tourism offers by Explore Balkans

# CONNECTING RURAL BORDERLANDS

Carpathian Civil Society Platform



HUNGARY - SLOVAKIA - POLAND -  
UKRAINE - ROMANIA

*The Carpathian mountains connect Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine and Romania. These remote mountainous borderlands have similar characteristics and face similar challenges, such as increasing poverty and social exclusion. Civil society is still weak, but a civil society platform for the region is gathering energy for change.*

*At the time of going to press, the south-eastern gateway to the Carpathians - Ivano-Frankivsk (180 km from the Romanian border) and Lviv (70 km from the Polish border) - had been bombed by Russian forces.*



BY SÁNDOR KÖLES, CHAIR OF CARPATHIAN FOUNDATION-HUNGARY,  
A CO-FOUNDER OF THE CARPATHIAN CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

18. Carpathian mountain landscape Romania



War is moving closer to Western Ukraine. It is impossible to know when a stray missile or drone will hit one of the NATO member countries with unforeseeable consequences.

Throughout history, the Carpathian mountains have been a natural refuge for people fleeing war and conflict. So it is now. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are arriving in the still relatively safe western part of Ukraine, which is also the route to the West (the EU) along the East-West border, the dividing line between EU and non-EU countries. This places a huge burden on border regions in Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. So far, nearly 3 million refugees have arrived, who need to be cared for, and their number grows daily. However, the communities and hundreds of civil society organisations in the Carpathians are spontaneously showing solidarity with them; not only words but taking action.

## CARPATHIAN EMERGENCY FUND FOR UKRAINE

To support local communities and civil society organisations that are on the frontlines since the beginning of the war, the Carpathian Foundation, which works in the bordering areas of the Carpathian region, has launched the [Carpathian Emergency Fund for Ukraine](#). Its goal is to provide financial support to local civil society organisations (CSOs) in the border regions, that are helping the most vulnerable and most underserved



19. Roma village in Western Ukraine

*“The refugees are not a faceless mass. Each person has their own sad or even tragic story, and the local people understand this.”*

groups of refugees, such as Roma people who are coming from mainly rural areas, and children. The Fund wishes to support local schools that accept refugee children and hire Ukrainian-speaking teachers for them.

The refugees are not a faceless mass. Each person has its own sad or even tragic story, and the local people understand this. This contributes to deepening solidarity at the local, regional, and perhaps at the European level and strengthening the ability to self-organise. This should remain with us when the war ends; it gives us the energy and tools to act in the post-war situation.

## OUR COMMON GROUND FOR COOPERATION

Lots of effort is needed to climb the mountain of regional solidarity, social cohesion and democracy in the Carpathian borderlands of Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania. Driven by the common vision of 135 CSOs to foster a vibrant, pluralistic, and rights-based civil society in these remote mountainous areas, the [Carpathian Civil Society Platform](#) and Hub offers a framework for cooperation between grassroots CSOs working with local communities and vulnerable groups. The Platform is a cross-



***“There is a lack of systemic solutions for integrating the development potential of the borderlands.”***

border organisation attached to the geographically, historically, culturally and sociologically contiguous territory of the Carpathians, which is our common ground for cooperation and actions.

Obstacles to transnational cooperation include language issues, lack of funding for transnational cooperation (especially for CSOs which operate in mountainous areas, and are not so well prepared to absorb huge EU funds), lack of knowledge and capacities to cooperate across borders, weak project design and project management skills.

Our main aim is to coordinate and synergise the often isolated efforts of CSOs, and amplify the effect of their activity at local, sub-

regional, and Carpathian levels. We generate, disseminate, and mainstream innovative solutions to environmental and socio-economic problems, in order to free up their innovation capacity to better serve their constituencies and articulate the needs of mountain communities.

### **MOSTLY NICE WORDS**

Disharmony, and sometimes conflicts between the local, sub-regional, inter-regional, national, and EU levels, are not conducive to creating an enabling environment for civil society actors.

There is a contradiction, for example, between EU policy (mostly nice words) on the importance of civil society, and national policies, which

in practice undermine and, in some cases, intimidate civil society actors. This leads to the shrinking space of civil society, induces apathy for public affairs, dramatically reduces social cohesion and solidarity, and deepens mutual mistrust between state and societies.

In the case of the Carpathians, there is a lack of systemic solutions for integrating the development potential of the borderlands, including the lack of integrated strategies based on unified resources. This is linked to a low level of community-driven development solutions and a low level of inter-sectoral cooperation (public/private/non-governmental entities). This can be considered to be one of the basic problems in implementing the vision of the socio-economic development of the Carpathians. The other problem is the lack of cooperation and joint strategy between national governments of Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Ukraine.



20. Peasants in traditional elegant robes  
21. Workshop of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform



22. Community Led Local Development (CLLD) in Metsavan

# COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURS

Community-led  
local development

ARMENIA

*Community-driven, inclusive and sustainable local development, and citizen-led innovation in remote areas, are a focus of territorial development programmes run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia, Moldova, Turkey and other EU neighbouring states.*



AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTA MARCZIS OF UNDP, ON HOW TOOLS SUCH AS LEADER AND CLLD CAN BE SHARED WITH CIVIL SOCIETY.

**Y**ou launched one of the first community-led rural development initiatives in Armenia in 2021 in a remote high-mountainous rural region. How were people at the grassroots level involved?

We work with members of the local community from more than 100 villages and a few tiny towns. Last year we ran a local awareness campaign. Our ‘community coaches’ visited every village last summer, to see and understand places, and to talk to people. Today, some 200 local people, farmers, teachers, representatives of local businesses and civil society, people from public authorities and institutions are active in our initiative and participate in deciding on development steps, and that number is increasing every day.

*How is the project supported?*

Funding, methodology and democratic approach comes from the EU’s European Neighbourhood Instrument. The programme has been approved and signed by the Armenian government. Implementation is facilitated by international organisations. Regional decision-makers and local municipalities are active in following the implementation process closely.

*Is the time for running the project limited?*

There are two risks to the sustainability of the initiative: the border conflict in Armenia, and the risk that the EU pilot project will not be continued after 2024.

*What future changes in policy would have the biggest positive impact?*

The introduction of CLLD is a great tool for sustainable local development in rural areas, and it is popular with the local people. But it always takes time to adapt new approaches to development policies and programming tools in any country. When I worked in Moldova,

***“There are two risks to the sustainability of the initiative: the border conflict in Armenia, and the risk that the EU pilot project will not be continued after 2024.”***



23. Armenian shepherds  
24. Young women in Metsavan LAG





there was a two- to three-year gap between the successful LEADER pilot and the establishment of the national LEADER programme. That was too long. Positive impacts come from longer-term interventions, and continuity. A three- to four-year project is not enough to change attitudes, legislation, or programming. Increasing local self-organisation and people's trust in Europe should not be risked by project periods that are too short.

*"People's trust in Europe should not be risked by project periods that are too short."*

25. UNDP team and the mayor of Ditavan

## THE INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE SHOP / ANOTHER CROSS BORDER INITIATIVE OF EUROPEAN ARTISTS

The [International Village Shop](#) is a shop with many shops where goods from rural communities are made and traded. It is self-initiated, collaborative and trans-local.

Some shops are temporary, others permanent. They take on the shape of market stalls, honesty boxes, trading tables, cupboards and fold-out boxes. Most shops can be found in villages, but versions of it also open in urban art spaces.

The goods in the shop are a mix of existing local products alongside "New Village Goods" which have been made especially for the International Village Shop and travel between places. These travelling products range from Horsemilk Soap from Friesland (NL) to Frogbutterpoons from Upper Franconia (DE), Caravan Pots from Ballykinlar in Northern Ireland, to Ittinger Ei from Kartause Ittingen (CH), and Ohner Linen (DE).



26. International Village Shop run by Myvillages in the Art House Graz, AT, 2021

The International Village Shop began as a joint initiative by [Myvillages](#), [public works](#) and [Grizedale Arts](#) in 2007. The website went online in 2010 to collate the different counters of the shop and to give insight into the making and distribution of local goods. The shop is now run by Myvillages.

CHAPTER

5





# LEARNING AND VITALITY



**WE NEED TO SUPPORT ALL FORMS OF LEARNING TO FOSTER THE CAPACITY AND CREATIVITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES**

*Rural policy must support learning in and beyond the classroom. We need to tap into the vast human creative potential to address the challenges of our time. Rural development policy must support practical training, capacity building, the cultural and creative sector and exchange of good practice (FARMERASMUS). Mutual respect between urban and rural communities is built on collective learning and listening to diverse voices. We must learn to think in an ecosystem to build solidarity and cooperation between humans and nature.*





1. Apprenticeship pottery

## LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The Creative World of Apprenticeship

Styria, AUSTRIA

*An Austrian Local Action Group (LAG) introduces school goes to the Creative World of Apprenticeship. In custom made work boxes the students learn crafts by doing, with the guidance of local entrepreneurs.*

 BY ROBERT LUKESCH, DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

Styria (Steiermark) is one of the nine Federal States located in the south east of Austria. The area where this initiative sprung up is its eastern part, where the Alps roll out towards the Pannonian Basin, featuring a hilly, diverse landscape with a mosaic

of meadows, woodland, orchards, vineyards and valley fields where corn and pumpkins grow. The Local Action Group [LAG Zeitkultur - Oststeirisches Kernland](#) was founded in 2007. It stretches over 16 municipalities with about 43.000 inhabitants. Graz,

Austria's second largest city, can be reached in less than one hour, and the Austrian capital Vienna within two hours.

Despite the attractive environment and pleasant living conditions, the area suffers from structural

weaknesses, a decline in the economic power of settlement centres, a constant drain of youth towards the urban agglomerations and a thinning out of basic services and infrastructures in the rural parts in contrast to the district centres.

In its quest to trigger relevant changes, the Austrian LEADER Local Action Group Zeitkultur Oststeirisches Kernland sought an answer to the pressing need for skilled labour on the one hand, and to the tendency of local youth to leave the area to pursue their careers on the other.



2. Apprenticeship: container Panorama - an overview of the variety of possible offers

### WORK BOXES FOR HANDS-ON CAREER DAYS

The LAG embraced the idea of 'work boxes' - originally designed and built by an initiative of designers and craftsmen around the turn of the century in Western Austria - and developed further together with local entrepreneurs, vocational trainers and students. After a series of conceptual workshops among LAG members, the action started in 2014 with twelve work boxes. This expanded to 25 work boxes - all of them representing different crafts.

These work boxes are cubicles, containing modular elements, which, once unfurled, illustrate the main features of a particular craft (from hairdressing to carpentry, from cooking to pastry making, from gardening to printmaking), but also serve as workbenches on which simple artefacts can be crafted. The work boxes are used during

practical career orientation events in secondary and primary schools, where the students get to learn with the guidance of local entrepreneurs. Since 2014, 8,500 teenagers got involved, accompanied by 500 local entrepreneurs, who participated as volunteers in these career orientation days.

Gradually broadening its original scope the LAG started a mentoring programme for entrepreneurs to better harness the internship time for young interns and trainees. Employees of local enterprises have signed up to a training programme for mentors, organised in cooperation with Chance B, a third sector organisation and social entrepreneur located in East Styria.

Most recently, together with Chance B, a freight container is being adapted as a 'mobile work room' containing the work boxes, a workspace, a kitchen, niches for

flexible space expansion and a communication area. The trailer can be used as a crafts workshop, an art studio and a stage for creative performances, and can be moved by a truck from one place to another, expected to stay on one spot for one or two weeks. With the trailer project the Creative World of Apprenticeship reaches out to young people ingloriously acronymed as NEET (not in education, employment or training).

### A SOLUTION BROKER FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

The young people get the opportunity to spend trial days in the local entrepreneurs' businesses and are not seldomly hired as apprentices after leaving school. The institutional players in the economic chamber, schools and labour market services support the action and appreciate

the LAG as a solution broker, because the activity unfolds in the space between these institutions rather than within the specific remit of any of them.

The LAG understands itself as a promoter of social innovation. It promotes the Creative World of Apprenticeship through a finely woven fabric of projects financed from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and regional (Styrian) funding schemes. The LAG office hosts a library with publications ranging from philosophy and social sciences to hands-on technical guidance for socially and environmentally sustainable practices. Both the LAG chairman - the former mayor of a small municipality - and the LAG manager - acting as such since the founding days of the LAG, are strong expounders of LEADER as an instrument for enabling and fostering social innovation.

The manager of the 'Creative World' sits in the LAG office, backed up by the LAG manager. Today the project is managed in cooperation by all 15 Styrian LEADER areas (LAGs).

## POWERFUL LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The Creative World of Apprenticeship offers the possibility to go beyond the framework of usual school lessons and the routine job orientation days in classrooms. The students as the main players design and produce a piece of work on their own, supported by local entrepreneurs, with the school teachers acting in an organising role.

Each event feels more like a happy get-together than an ordinary school day. It has been observed that these events have extraordinary effects through the learning experiences they generate outside classrooms.

The action has ramified into a host of further forms involving school children between the age of 8 and 15 as well as adults with difficulties accessing the job market. The Creative World has spawned a network of active and retired entrepreneurs, school principals and teachers, officials of labour market and stakeholder organisations, municipal administrations and regional policymakers. Moreover, similar projects have been kicked off in other Austrian regions and EU member states.

*"The Creative World of Apprenticeship offers the possibility to go beyond the framework of usual school lessons and the routine job orientation days in classrooms."*



3. Apprenticeship hairstylist  
4. Apprenticeship "Culinary World"







5. Breakfast at Hooga Guest House

# DIGITAL NOMADS, URBAN-RURAL CO-EDUCATION

ABCD Innovation Centre

ARMENIA

*ABCD Innovation Centre is a non-profit organisation catalysing change and development based on utilising the existing gifts and capacities of young people and their communities. They are implementing projects aimed at empowering young people, developing their communities, helping community members to understand the role of humanity in the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development.*



A CONVERSATION WITH VAHE DARBINYAN, CO-INITIATOR OF THE ABCD INNOVATION CENTRE

In 2015 we initiated our first activities in Kalavan village. By 'we' I mean the [ABCD Innovation Centre](#), a community based rural development organisation based in Armenia. The key word is "community based". We design and implement various innovative and participative projects aimed at developing small remote villages in Armenia.

Originally the main goal was to attract tourists to the village. A map of resources revealed a set of potentials but of course we also faced challenges. How can advantages and disadvantages be matched? What is the unleashed potential? We facilitate the discussion, but the

decision should come from the local community. Why is this important? Because otherwise they don't have the ownership over their project. Solutions should guarantee that all local stakeholders can benefit from them.

## COVID AS A TIPPING POINT FOR CREATIVE CHANGE IN OFFERS AND ATTITUDES

During COVID we had to face a huge crisis in tourism; people were not travelling and we could not welcome international tourists. This started to cause negative socio-

*"We design and implement various innovative and participative projects aimed at developing small remote villages in Armenia."*

economic impacts on the village. We had to do something.

The idea of creating co-working space started with a demand that was not being met: affected by COVID restrictions, urban people started to look for working space outside the

6. Hooga Guest House from outside



cities. The offer of local households renting rooms was not really attractive: no office space and sometimes only an internet connection somewhere in the corridor.

So the idea was to match this rising demand with local needs to rent rooms and sell local products. This finally led to the project of the Hooga co-working space: a well-equipped workplace and overnight accommodation offered by local providers.

## DIGITAL TRANSITION BEYOND TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To generate a benefit for the region you have to create a project with an intersectoral approach. You have to provide both hard and soft skills, meaning in this case: the infrastructure (space, internet) and the accompanying activities tackling the community and social aspects such as boosting interactions

between the local community and the digital nomads with urban backgrounds.

These interactions can be manifold: the offer of hiking tours, social or cultural events. And urban people can offer activities for locals too, for example language training, music classes.

When you are living in a place, you are getting used to it – you think that everything is bad in your village, but when someone comes and you look at your village from their perspective, it creates a shift in your own mindset. We understood that we should work on this component to change people's mentality. It is nothing if you are telling them but it is another thing when they observe, digest and change their mindset themselves.

*"When you're living in a place, you're getting used to it - you think that everything is bad in your village, but when someone comes and you look at your village from their perspective, it creates a shift in your own mindset."*

- 7. Over night stays at Hooga Guest House and private providers
- 8. Hooga co-working space







9. Welcome sign at the residence of Porto di Terra

# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BEYOND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Porto di Terra

 Sicily, ITALY

*Porto di Terra is a non-profit organisation with a mission to experiment in agroecology and permaculture through sustainable community life, non-formal education, small scale food production and eco-tourism.*



A CONVERSATION WITH CARLOTTA EBBREO, CO-FOUNDER OF PORTO DI TERRA

We started the Porto di Terra project as a collective in 2012 living on a friend's farm. We work with the principles of permaculture and agroecology, and aim to be a space for people to experiment with forms

of economy, education and culture. In 2015 we founded the non-profit organisation. Since 2016 we have managed a building surrounded by five hectares in the Madonie National Park, Sicily.

There are seven people, mostly women, between the age of 29 and 34 on the management board, and we have around 100 members this year in the organisation.



10. Open doors at the residence of Porto di Terra

11. Artistic activities in the community

## NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AND ADULT LEARNERS

There have been different levels of our work in education since day one, including non-formal education for youth that we are developing both in local workshops and in the frame of European partnerships, especially the Erasmus Programme. We work a lot in non-formal education for sustainability with people of different ages; Learning specific things about living in the countryside or sustainable farming, natural building or other issues, but also exchanging good practices with other organisations. We really believe in the idea of non-formal and learning by doing methods. It is a kind of multi-aspect learning - not only about farming aspects but also about working in a group and how to think in an ecosystem.

We are taking part in a project developing pedagogical methodologies, methods and materials for working in outdoor education and education for agroecology, for both teenagers and adults.

*"We work with the principles of permaculture and agroecology, and aim to be a space for people to experiment with forms of economy, education and culture."*

## BECOMING PART OF COMMUNITIES

Our path is based on two parallel approaches that have emerged over time. First of all: networking. We started step by step, working in the permaculture regional network, and throughout all our different activities we began creating strong collaborations with other organisations in the region. At the same time, we started working with organisations in the country and the rest of Europe, that are focused on local food systems, permaculture and agroecology.

In our region of small villages in the countryside, becoming part of the local community, and building a community is a long and beautiful process. At the beginning, when we arrived in this area, we were

complete strangers. Through learning how to live in this place, how to take care of these mountains, how to take care of the water, and how to cultivate land we became more than strangers; this is also a process of integration on a personal, on a human level.

From arriving and starting to work here, to deciding to live here, settling in this area, and doing everyday life, we started to have everyday relations with local people, asking them to share what they know and learning from them. This allows us to now participate more in the daily life of this place. We are part of the local network, step by step we are becoming part of the local community of this rural area in a different way, taking a new role. It was unusual for people from outside to come to these areas.



12. Terezie Daňková organising children's entertainment at the rodeo

# WRANGLING FOR LAND RIGHTS

Hoslovice Ranch Rodeo

Southern Bohemia  
CZECH REPUBLIC

*Farming is a labour of love for Terezie Daňková. But the rodeos she hosts on her 450 ha. ranch "Hoslovice" in Southern Bohemia are her true passion. Her daughter Bárbara Vondroušová revels in the chance to showcase her wrangling skills at these events. Bárbara is brave, determined and brims with confidence: astride her horse she can handle 200 cows with ease. Yet her mother's struggles as a woman farmer have left the young cowgirl terrified to take the reins on the farm.*



A CONVERSATION WITH TEREZIE AND BÁRBORA, OWNERS OF THE HOSLOVICE RANCH

**T**erezie: I could not survive with my farm just feeding cows. So I decided in 1994, when we started to farm, that we would do events

too. Turning to spring pasture is the happiest day of the farmer's year. I started doing it 17 years ago. It is held every year on May 8th. For the

new calves it is the first day they go to grass. It is a very old tradition. The second popular event on my farm is the rodeo. In the Czech Republic a





13. Terezie Daňková supervises the roping of a calf on her ranch

14. Roping a calf on the pastures at Hoslovice Ranch

rodeo showcases the farmer's work on the pasture: cutting the calves from the cattle and bringing them to another place, roping them, and so on.

Hundreds of people come from all over the Czech Republic. Only five or six people come to our events from the village. I'm working as hard as I can to connect with local people but it is hard. It is difficult for them to accept a woman who is boss. But thank God there is a small group in our village that is happy we are here. This group is led by our new mayor and his daughter. And it is amazing.

*Bárbara:* Solidarity is the main thing. And cooperation. You have to cooperate with the village to arrange events.

***"I need certainty. The certainty of farming on my land."***

*Terezie:* Money is not an obstacle. If you want support it is there. I asked for regional support and I was quite successful. Twice I had cross-border support because we cooperate with Deggendorf Youth Centre in Bavaria. Sometimes it is a lot of paperwork but I'm not complaining.

I don't need a subsidy for the rodeo. I need certainty. The certainty of farming on my land. The most important problem in the Czech Republic is fragmented land ownership.

*Bárbara:* You can choose the people you work with but you can't choose who owns the land around your farm. You need land that is farmable.

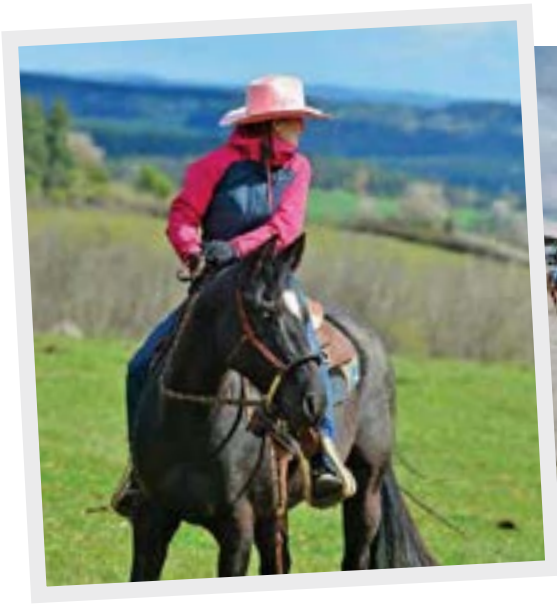
*Terezie:* I have to negotiate with 119 landowners. There are not enough days in a year. And there is not enough of my energy. My daughter can tell you that my energy is not infinite.

*Bárbara:* And that is why I don't want to do it. I'm 22 and I've experienced too many times having to stand in between my mother and someone shouting and screaming, so that they don't hurt her.

*Terezie:* Bara is the Czech junior rodeo champion and one of the best cowgirls in the Czech Republic. And because of this policy she is lost - she may be lost - to farming. She could be a farmer for the Czech Republic to be proud of, to show to the world - look! This is a 50 kilo blond beauty who is able to sit on a horse and move 200 cows wherever she wants.

*Bárbara:* I can ride a horse. I can drive a tractor. I can do the computer work. And I'm studying economics. But I don't want to be a farmer because of the way people treat us.

*Terezie:* In the Czech Republic, you can rent land for a month! Politicians won't tell the landowners what they



15. Barbora Vondroušová on her mare, Duck

16. Rodeo events at the Hoslovice ranch attract tourists and visitors

can do with their land. Landowners have freedom. And I, as a farmer, have a vote. If you want to take better care of the fields, the soil, you have to link landowners to this problem.

*Barbora:* I recently moved from our village to Prague, to study economics. The problem I see is, that people don't know any more how much work it is to produce the meat or the food on their table. That is why landowners are not willing to cooperate. I think it is really important to make people think about this again. It needs a programme, a project. For example a group of people around my age from farming families: we could explain how it works to secondary school students. Go around the schools with videos, a PowerPoint presentation, and get it across to people that farmers' work is hard work.

*Terezie:* And honourable work.

*Barbora:* Honourable and essential for them to survive.

*Terezie:* If I had known in 1994 that after all these years I would not be able to fulfil a lot of my dreams of how to farm because of the impossibility to reach a consensus on this land, I don't know if I would have had the strength to start.

*Barbora:* Well I don't. I see it every day of my life. I'm terrified. I've seen so much hatred from our neighbours, from farmers, from landowners, from everyone.

*Terezie:* I am not asking for more financial subsidies, I am quite satisfied with how much money we get from the public budget. I am asking for - and I know from other countries that this support exists - conditions on signing leases for farmland. You can't

*"I can ride a horse. I can drive a tractor. I can do the computer work. And I'm studying economics. But I don't want to be a farmer because of the way people treat us."*

ask farmers to rent land for a year. It is not a farming way of thinking. The farmers that are farming for the 20 years ahead will win. Not the farmers that take everything from the soil each year.

*Barbora:* How are we supposed to survive? For people in the urbanised areas of this country, we are the ones using their money to...

*Terezie:* ...enjoy our lives. And our earnings!

*Barbora:* ...to enjoy our lives. And we are, for them, the thieves of their money.

*Terezie:* I'm not asking for more money. This is what I am asking for: not to be some subsidy receiver, but to be a proud farmer.



17. Building a shade structure using natural building techniques

# DOCUMENTING GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

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Cinergies Co-Op

 GREECE

*Cinergies is a social cooperative that gives a voice to radical actions, ideas, and projects that seek to bring about sustainability. Part of a growing social and solidarity economy movement in Greece, Cinergies produces audiovisual and other content, and empowers through educational activities. Even though this co-op often works in rural areas and for rural grassroot initiatives, the work transcends the urban-rural divide.*

 BY CINERGIES CO-OP





18. Collectively chosen code of conduct for the 2017 Portugal Heterotopia tour\*

## A VOICE FOR RADICAL NEW WAYS IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

To put it simply, the social cooperative was enabled by the realisation that something needed to be done to respond to the multiple crises that Greece, and Europe, were experiencing. The voices of all people striving to build a better world needed to be heard, as these voices were (and still are) rarely heard in more established media.

During the economic crisis, people strived to imagine radically new ways of thinking, doing and organising.

*"Each member brings a different set of knowledge and expertise to our mission of integrating arts-based and documentary film experience with research, education and social communication."*

Many sought to create grassroots initiatives in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Our co-founders were fascinated by all the changes they were observing and started documenting them in 2013. One person was conducting her PhD research on the back-to-the-land movement at that time. Another one was exploring experimental storytelling methods by covering

key moments of change. The co-founders of the cooperative are Kostas Mavrias, Giannis Koutouzis, Karina Benessaiah, Thomas Ginnis and Andonis Vasilakakos. Each member brings a different set of knowledge and expertise to our mission of integrating arts-based and documentary film experience with research, education and social communication.

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\*Youth and community organisers from Greece, France, Portugal and Italy lived communally for 15 days in a newly created permaculture project, New Loops, close to Faro. For more rural innovations see [heterotopias.net](http://heterotopias.net)

A lot of our documentary film media focuses on rural transformations driven by small-scale initiatives in Southern Europe. Our transmedia documentary [Heterotopies.net](http://Heterotopies.net) documented various sustainability initiatives (including eco-communities, alternative schools, permaculture etc.) that have occurred in rural areas in Greece, Portugal, Italy and France. The name Heterotopies was inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopias which refer to alternative places - with a different way of doing things - that already exist alongside mainstream society.

## BARRIERS FOR ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The cultural and creative sectors operate in an ever-changing environment which challenges practices, business models and market balances. Fragmentation of the market limits circulation of European creative works as well as the capacity of the sector to organise. Domination (70%) of non-EU players in the streaming and platform economy adds to difficulty in funding, negatively affecting the long-term sustainability of enterprises in the cultural and creative sectors. Additionally, most of the policies at EU level, such as the Media strand of the Creative Europe programme, favour already established entities, raising high barriers of entry for smaller organisations.

The Greek Film Centre, which has been underfunded for more

than a decade now, is struggling to fund a limited number of films per year excluding experimental/contemporary formats such as interactive/transmedia narratives.

Many of the projects of the cooperative have been enabled by EU funding - and more specifically ERASMUS funding - that allowed us to travel and meet like-minded grassroots organisations and to host volunteers. Unfortunately the lack of funding for alternative media and grassroots actions at national level is a reality, and EU funding has been really helpful in that regard. Our cooperative also has had funding from foundations and put in a lot of self-funding to realise projects close to our heart.

## MEDIA SECTOR REFORM FOR DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND TRANSPARENCY

The European market for creative and audiovisual works can be reformed further by lowering the barriers of entry for small enterprises, especially in the third sector (social economy). Examples include reforming the Media Europe funds to remove the requirement of having had a successful distribution in more than one country for small scale creative and media organisations, and more generally create favourable conditions for entry of new applicants, especially in the non-fiction and transmedia formats. Overall, the market needs a more unified approach in handling



19. "Heterotopies" transmedia-documentary collecting stories of people affected by and resisting the effects of the multidimensional crisis.

*"Reforming the media sector is extremely important for greater diversity, inclusion and transparency and to give voice to individuals and organisations that are usually silenced."*

rights and distribution to overcome fragmentation as well as extensive funding and subsidies for the European creative sector, to counter the market domination of Non-EU players such as Netflix and Amazon.

Increase in funding is also required in Greece to support the production of more and diverse content, but also in supporting the third sector where Cinergies is offering its professional services to support grassroots organisations and institutions.

Reforming the media sector is extremely important for greater diversity, inclusion and transparency and to give voice to individuals and organisations that are usually silenced.

CHAPTER

6

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# SEEDS AND SYSTEMS

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## WE NEED TO EMPOWER PEOPLE AND TERRITORIES TO REBUILD FRACTURED FOOD SYSTEMS FROM THE BOTTOM UP

*Food must be addressed as a system, and food systems must be addressed within a wider rural policy framework that enshrines the right to food and the right to seeds and supports small producers. By empowering communities to build sustainable local food systems - including new models based on cooperation for the common good - policymakers will be helping to build local economic resilience and taking action to combat climate change and biodiversity loss.*



1. Introduction round in Community Garden Bostanie, Skopje during the first gathering of the Balkan Seeds Network in North Macedonia, September 2021

## SEEDS OF COLLABORATION

Balkan Seeds Network

SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

*A network of scientists and seed savers' organisations is tapping into the rich biodiversity and agricultural heritage of South Eastern Europe to stimulate resilient food systems, and establishing a paradigm of collaboration for the Balkan region.*

 BY THE BALKAN SEEDS NETWORK



We are the Balkan Seeds Network - a network of seed scientists, grassroots, nonprofits coordinating seed banks, farmers, gardeners, public research institutes and educational institutions formed in 2020 and expanding in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia, supported by the professional know-how of the Austrian seedsavers network Arche Noah.

The abundance of biodiversity and agricultural heritage among Balkan countries provides opportunities to explore and highlight the value of local, traditional or organic food for consumers and farmers. Local genetic resources are well adapted to low input agriculture, and can help to address the challenges of climate change, food sovereignty and food security.

Focusing on our shared geographical, social and cultural heritage, as well as community needs, we support each other in our common mission for conservation, enrichment and sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources (PGR). We provide a robust cooperative framework within which to collectively address our common goals, needs and problems - for the common good.

We also promote organic agriculture and agroecology. Translating science into practice, we support participatory and organic breeding and selection for adaptation to low input and organic conditions. We strengthen the linkage between ex situ, in situ and on-farm conservation of PGR. We do



2. Diversity of bean varieties

*“Local genetic resources are well adapted to low input agriculture, and can help to address the challenges of climate change, food sovereignty and food security.”*

not support GMOs, New Genomic Technologies (NGT), or patents on life.

Both seeds and information are exchanged in our network. Partners are already supporting each other by sharing expertise. For example, Arche Noah, Austria, held webinars to train our network on EU Seed Policy, and Frame of Life shared know-how on seed hygiene with SITO Seeds (see page 111). Networking has led to new collaboration opportunities in areas such as EU seed policy, community seed banking and organic breeding. Some of our members were invited to join The Global Bean Project (see page 113) through the network and are now part of it. The European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity (EC-LLD) has invited us to its annual forum to plan activities around seed reform and other key issues, and has offered support in knowledge sharing and participatory research.

Farmers' seeds and farmers' rights are really important, so we advocate for these, ensuring a voice for our sector in the decision making process at national level, and safeguarding

our common traditional farming and culinary practices. The [EU Green Deal](#) framework with the [Farm to Fork](#) strategy at its heart can provide opportunities for farmers who are part of fair and environmentally-friendly local food systems that preserve biodiversity. Farmers' varieties can be an important part of the EU policy response to climate change due to their tolerance and ability to adapt. However, the new CAP is unlikely to contribute to significant development of organic farming in the EU, unless draft CAP Strategic Plans are significantly improved in several Member States (according to a November 2021 analysis by [IFOAM Organics Europe](#)).

Building on existing connections, the network started as an initiative of [AEGILOPS](#), the Greek Network for Biodiversity and Ecology in Agriculture, within the framework of the [LIVESEED HORIZON 2020](#) project (Boosting Organic plant breeding and seed in Europe, 2017-2021). We received crucial support from [Arche Noah's](#) project [Balkan Beets](#).





3. Field visit during the Balkan Seeds Network's first gathering. Production of organic beans in Crničani

## LEGISLATION ON ORGANICS, PATENTING AND GMOS

Although the new EU Regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products (2018/48) opens up a space for biodiversity to re-enter farms, since it enables organic farmers to save, produce and sell local plant genetic resources that are diverse (organic heterogeneous materials, or OHM), and organic varieties to be researched and bred, still this remains a very small step towards the needed change.

The patent system needs to be amended to facilitate diversity in plant breeding and access to genetic resources. Patent rights and the way they are granted leads to decreasing diversity in breeding endeavours and poses threats to plant breeding. Access to genetic resources is essential, nevertheless specific liberties of breeders and farmers are lost with the patentability of plant-related inventions.

EU GMO policy must be strengthened, in particular as regards consumers' right to know, freedom of choice for breeders, farmers and processors and the democratic scrutiny of EU GMO decisions. EU deregulation of the regulatory regime for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) derived from genome editing and other new GM techniques will threaten consumers' right to know what they chose or eat, freedom of choice for breeders, farmers and processors and scrutinise democratic EU GMO decisions.

## SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND REFORM SEED MARKETING LEGISLATION

In terms of policy changes, we need support for collaborative and participatory research, and for the creation of community seed banks. Training of farmers and seed breeders must be sustained.

The current reform of the EU Seed Marketing Legislation must support, rather than discriminate against, intra-specific and intra-varietal diversity. This would support adaptation to climate change, the transition to a more climate and environmentally friendly agriculture, local seed and food production, farmers' rights, and healthier diets. It should also truly recognise and support the multiplicity of seed systems, and offer more choice to the full spectrum of farmers and growers.

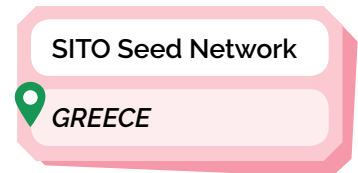
The right to seeds is grounded in international law, in particular the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas ([UNDROP](#)), and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). The scope of the seed marketing legislation should be delineated by a strict definition of seed marketing limited to commercial activities targeting professional seed users. Peasant seed systems must not be regulated by seed marketing rules. Rules on seed health and quality control mechanisms should be adapted to the health risks and to the specific circumstances and scale of seed marketing.

***“EU deregulation of the regulatory regime for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) derived from genome editing and other new GM techniques will threaten consumers' right to know, freedom of choice for breeders, farmers and processors and scrutinise democratic EU GMO decisions.”***



*One member of the Balkan Seeds Network is the SITO Seed Network, an umbrella organisation in Greece that is working to regenerate common seed heritage.*

 **ANASTASIA VASILEIADOU,**  
CO-FOUNDER OF THE SITO SEED NETWORK



**B**iodiversity is at the heart of what the SITO Seed Network does. We promote traditional seed varieties by seeking collaboration with amateur gardeners as well as professional farmers (groups and individuals) who trust the potential of traditional seed varieties and want to enrich diversity on their farms. We also cultivate and distribute seeds for free.

## SEEDS OF HERITAGE

Although we are quite a young organisation, our roots run deeper. SITO was founded by 12 people who have collaborated for decades in seed initiatives, meeting each other at national and international seed festivals held by Peliti Community. We have created the first online seed

database in Greece. It contains over 100 varieties so far, and allows us to share the traditional seed-keeping knowledge and practices of farmers and gardeners all over Greece.

4. Holy Monastery of St John the Baptist. A community with 30 years of experience in seed saving, supporting people from all over the world by offering seeds.

We aim to serve as an open learning and connecting initiative. Our members focus on filling knowledge gaps around maintaining quality seeds from traditional seed varieties (farmers' varieties), as well as informing the public and authorities about their importance for health and nutrition, food sovereignty and the environment. Teachers ask us for seeds and support to build school gardens. Most of our members collaborate with the local Regional Directory of Primary and Secondary Education to organise seed events where pupils take part, producing seedlings that are then distributed for free.



5. Producing seedlings for free distribution

## EVOLVING LEGISLATION

We stay up-to-date on the EU seed marketing legislation reform with the help of activist groups such as Arche Noah and [NO PATENTS ON SEEDS!](#) This allows us to set common priorities and goals for our network in shaping future rules around seed trading in favour of biodiversity. In turn, we aim to inform the public and farmers on the obstacles and opportunities of the current legal framework.

Seed exchanges can be deemed illegal under the current EU seed marketing legislation. Farmers' varieties cannot meet the strict criteria for seed marketing (uniformity, stability, distinctiveness) due to their rich genetic base that allows them to adapt locally.

The increasing number of patents on plants and seeds threatens the access to basic resources in food production and agriculture, creating artificial monopolies. If this continues, big companies will be increasingly able to determine the "super seeds" grown in the fields, further decreasing agro-biodiversity.

Together with European partners, we participate in campaigning and awareness-raising to support free circulation of traditional variety

seeds. Through advocacy our members try to connect decision-makers with the people and groups whose work enriches agro-diversity. At national level, we are a voice for the seed movement and organic farmers on issues such as new GMOs.

EU Regulation 2018/848 on organic production opens up a small space for change. Individual organic farmers contact us for information on the new legislation, and request training in seed production. These farmers see the opportunity to enhance biodiversity and expand their activities with new possibilities for traditional varieties, also known as 'organic heterogeneous material'.

## DEEP AND GROWING ROOTS

Our connections with other grassroots organisations are crucial. Our website was partly funded by the [Community Seed Banks Academy](#). We are part of the Balkan Seed Network (see page 108) and the Global Bean Project (see box beside).

The local actions of our member groups have gained the attention and trust of municipalities which provide spaces for events. There is a recent proposal to facilitate planning a show garden with traditional seeds outside a public building in Athens.

At European level, the Erasmus+ programme could play a key role in education on the links between biodiversity related to traditional variety seeds, with sustainability and climate change.

***"Seed exchanges can be deemed illegal under the current EU seed marketing legislation. Farmers' varieties cannot meet the strict criteria for seed marketing (uniformity, stability, distinctiveness) due to their rich genetic base that allows them to adapt locally."***



## FREE THE SEEDS

At EU level, further reform of seed legislation is needed to enable the circulation and distribution of traditional seeds without bureaucratic burdens. European patent law in biotechnology and plant breeding must be recast so that conventional breeding, genetic material and plants are excluded from patentability.

As regards national policy, the current seed marketing legislation must be interpreted following the good example of other countries such as Denmark to allow amateur seed keepers to distribute farmers'

seeds and sell to non-professionals. The contribution of traditional varieties to address biodiversity loss, climate change and soil erosion is significant. As long as the current legislation is applicable, national authorities can take light steps within their jurisdiction to prevent further damage.

Collaboration with research institutes must be supported at national level to train farmers on seed saving and seed hygiene. Local, regional and national policy must communicate the value of traditional seeds through education programs in schools (nutritional value, health, climate change, cultural heritage).

*“EU Regulation 2018/848 on organic production opens up a small space for change. Individual organic farmers contact us for information on the new legislation, and request training in seed production.”*

## THE GLOBAL BEAN PROJECT

The [Global Bean project](#) was initiated in 2022 by the [Foundation for Future Farming](#), which, since 2005, has run the [Global Plot - 2000m<sup>2</sup> for all!](#), an educative public global garden project and network promoting highly diverse crop and legume cultivation in 10 countries.

Bringing together 42 partner organisations across Europe, as well as Kenya and India, to cooperate and share knowledge in the years ahead, Global Bean spotlights the power of pulses in food production. Legumes diversify crop rotation and improve soil fertility and biodiversity. They are excellent sources of protein, reducing or replacing meat consumption to the benefit of human health and the environment. Hundreds of varieties of beans, lentils, peas and other pulses are the basis of rich and diverse regional cultures and traditions of European kitchens and gardens and new innovative food products.



6. The Global Bean logo



7. Cloughjordan Community Farm and Cloughjordan from the sky

# FEEDING OURSELVES

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Cloughjordan Community Farm

North Tipperary, IRELAND



A CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER MOORE OF CLOUGHJORDAN COMMUNITY FARM

We established and have run a member owned community supported agriculture (CSA) initiative in the Irish midlands. We began in 2009, and have grown to also include year long internships, training,

education, events and now also a digital farmers market.

Why do we do this? Well, when everything is collapsing everywhere, you may as well try to build something new somewhere. It can

be disempowering looking around feeling helpless, feeling like there is nothing that can be done in your own life, your neighbourhood, or beyond. As we eat every day, this is a practical way to do something that



8. Apple festival

is both personal and operates on the wider, community level. And it shows what can be done - any village or town could have a horticulture holding on its edge, providing tonnes of agroecologically produced vegetables, as well as a social hub for the community and its visitors.

We see many changes as a result of our initiative - and the changes themselves evolve over time. Personally, I thought I was a quite good seasonal eater until I got involved in the farm. Now, out of season vegetables just seem alien.

I don't get involved on the ground as much as I should, but when I do, I appreciate more the reality of the work involved. So, the last time I helped with the harvest, a lot more 'holy kale' - that is, kale pre-tested by insects and thus with some holes in it - was picked and went into the crates for delivery to the distribution point.

I emailed the members explaining why we weren't discarding this kale - it is not for compost, it is even better nutritionally (true story) so it is a very practical, healthy way to fight food waste in your daily life. No one seemed to complain, and there was none left at the end of that day.

## **TWO GRASSROOTS COMMUNITIES CAME TOGETHER**

On 8 acres of a 67 acre ecovillage, on the edge of a small town in the Irish midlands, called Cloughjordan, a team of 15 or so main volunteers and paid workers, along with a team of international learners (between 4 and 10 depending) run the Community Farm. We have one or two farmers - depending - and a set of task areas, from production, to distribution, to volunteering to education,

where there are active volunteers. Membership is made up to 70-90 family units, ranging from one person to couples with children.

Our community farm has two grassroots - a group of people who came together, settled and built somewhere with a shared vision (the ecovillage community) and a group of local people and other incomers who were receptive, indeed supportive, of the farm (Cloughjordan village). A mixture of these two communities came together and crowdfunded the initial costs for set up. At all stages, there have been both ecovillage and local town members of the farm - not just ecovillage. People donate their time, sometimes their skills, sometimes also cash up front. Arrangements for farmland have been made with landowners, including currently with the ecovillage itself.





9. Early morning weeding

## FINDING SUPPORT IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS AND A KINDRED NETWORK (IN AN UNHELPFUL POLICY FRAMEWORK)

The agri-food policy framework hasn't been especially helpful, but the European Solidarity Corps ([ESC](#)), and some social enterprise funding ([Rethink Ireland](#)) have helped. Businesses with a social remit, such as Patagonia, have sometimes also invested small grants, in this case for agroecology equipment.

*“We are a small agroecological farm but the social good of this isn't supported significantly - Irish agri-food policy is mostly for big producers.”*

Our local LEADER company has been one of the most active nationally but is limited in the type of things it can support. LEADER has focused not on direct production support but on support for related activities; with LEADER support, we purchased equipment to hold outdoor events on the farm, and at festivals we attend. This included a solar light, BBQ equipment benches, tables and gazebos.

It is also important to mention the kindred organisations we engage with - [the Irish Seed Savers](#), [Talamh Beo](#) (Irish iteration of la Via Campesina), [CSA Network Ireland](#), local NGO

[Cultivate](#), the [Environmental Pillar](#), Centre for Co-operative Studies [UCC](#), and the Cloughjordan Ecovillage itself. These all engage with us and we help each other.

## SUPPORT SMALL AGROECOLOGICAL FARMS

We are a small agroecological farm but the social good of this is not supported significantly - Irish agri-food policy is mostly for big producers. We would like to see a small farmer scheme in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan.

This new CAP will see Producer Organisations in Horticulture needing turnover of 2.5 million Euros to be recognised - this is massive and of no use to smaller entities, even when taken together as an overall figure. On a landscape level, group certification in organic agriculture, with appropriate per hectare payment rates, could really work for smaller producers and encourage new entrants.

Social farming as an approach would suit us, but the model here in Ireland prioritises the traditional family farm. This has been a significant roadblock. We would hope to see adjustments to the social farming approach to include different models.

Overall, we need a wider rural policy framework that recognises the range of public goods enabled - young people's training and access to land; local resilience; and building local economies, as specific examples.



The Open Food Hub at Cloughjordan Community Farm

10. Open Food Hub coordinator Davie Philip (left), communications officer Sarah Coonan and market coordinator Mel White

*The Open Food Hub is an initiative of Cloughjordan Community Farm (CCF) enabled by community-owned software platform The Open Food Network. It is a response to the needs of the community farm to give members access to a wider variety of food and to add value to produce and distribute surpluses. It also enables farmers and producers in the wider region to access local markets, and consumers in rural areas to secure locally produced, healthier food options and other regional artisanal goods.*

**BY DAVIE PHILIP, HUB COORDINATOR**

While individuals are generally aware that action around food consumption is an important facet of climate action, the potential to amplify and drive change in consumption habits is multiplied

when communities come together to create an alternative distribution model, providing leadership and making those individual changes both more accessible and meaningful.

The Open Food Hub is a highly

replicable model that enables communities to strengthen food security and local economic resilience through the production and distribution of local food. It is enabled by the open source community-

owned software platform developed and maintained by the Open Food Network (OFN). This was first established in Australia ten years ago and is now a distributed, collaborative organisation run by committed advocates of food sovereignty from all over the world.

OFN now operates in over 20 countries, many of these in the global south, with national and local

hubs providing local producers and consumer co-operatives access to the online marketplace and a suite of digital tools to manage their food enterprises. Digital farmers markets run in this way - by the movement not via external, extractivist funding - help make markets in rural areas more viable. Farmers only bring what is pre-ordered, in fact pre-sold. So no standing around the rain, wasting time

and money. As farmers' markets and other local food outlets were being closed due to pandemic restrictions, CCF joined a group of farmers and food coops from across the country to establish [OFN Ireland](#) as a cooperative to bring the online platform to Irish producers and communities in September 2020. A growing number of food hubs and outlets across Ireland are using the platform.

## THE OPEN FOOD HUB AT CLOUGHJORDAN COMMUNITY FARM

Our Open Food Hub is located in a light industrial unit in the WeCreate community enterprise centre on the edge of the Community Farm and has three main functions:

- 1 Maintaining an online farmers market for the wider region of North Tipperary.
- 2 Providing training and support to the regenerative, community led and cooperative food initiatives
- 3 Incubating new local food initiatives and supporting rural livelihood diversification.

Training and support is offered through the hub to farmers, producers, food coops and emerging food hubs across Ireland to help strengthen local economies and reduce climate impacts through local food.

## FOOD HUBS - A LIFELINE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Food hubs traditionally manage the aggregation, distribution and marketing of produce primarily from local and regional producers, strengthening their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.

Food Hubs utilising digital platforms like the OFN have emerged as a lifeline for small producers to maintain and grow markets while also giving people the option of better, fairer ways to source their food directly from growers, farmers and producers. Climate, biodiversity and global food systems are deeply entwined - from the environmental impact of production processes to the carbon output associated with long supply chains. Building sustainable local food systems is therefore a key driver of climate action and one in which communities can take a leading role.



11. Farmers deliver pre-ordered vegetables

*“Farmers only bring what is pre-ordered, in fact pre-sold. So no standing around the rain, wasting time and money.”*

Empowering communities to establish Food Hubs and ensuring they have the support and tools to enable local distribution of quality, sustainably produced food shortens impactful and vulnerable long supply chains, leads to an increase in consumption of local food, builds stronger local economies and minimises food waste.



## A MODEL FOR REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

Cloughjordan Community Farm established the Open Food Hub (OFN) with funding secured in December 2020 from Rethink Ireland, who provide capital and support to Irish social innovations. We were inspired by the Food Hub in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, one of Ireland's leading food production and education facilities running since 2004. The Cloughjordan Open Food Hub acts as a model for regional Food Hubs enabling communities to

strengthen food security and local economic resilience with a focus on the distribution of local food. The hub is the distribution point of the '[North Tipperary Online Farmers Market](#)' which launched on OFN Ireland in July 2021.

The hub has become a centre of education providing training and mentoring to farmers, producers and other food hubs across Ireland through the 'Open Training Network'. There are now 14 other regional Food Hubs in a Community of Practice that the Food Hub facilitates. Funding has been secured to extend and maintain

the Open Training Network to serve the emerging cooperative and community-led food sector.

Food hubs and platforms like OFN allow communities and producers to work together to rebuild fractured local food systems from the bottom up. They also enable action to be taken on reducing food waste, raising awareness of the importance of seasonal consumption and regenerative production methods, reducing food miles, addressing issues of food inequality and exclusion, supporting local economies and regional resilience.

12. Cloughjordan Open Food Hub in action

*“Communities and producers work together to rebuild fractured local food systems from the bottom up.”*





13. Access to pastures - one commitment of the "Ethical Pact" partner breeders must meet

## FACILITATING FARM TO FORK

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Small farmers' slaughter facilities

FRANCE

*Small slaughterhouses have almost disappeared in France, but there are new cooperative and farmer initiatives trying to revitalise local or regional food chains to improve animal welfare and improve farmers' margins in the food chain.*

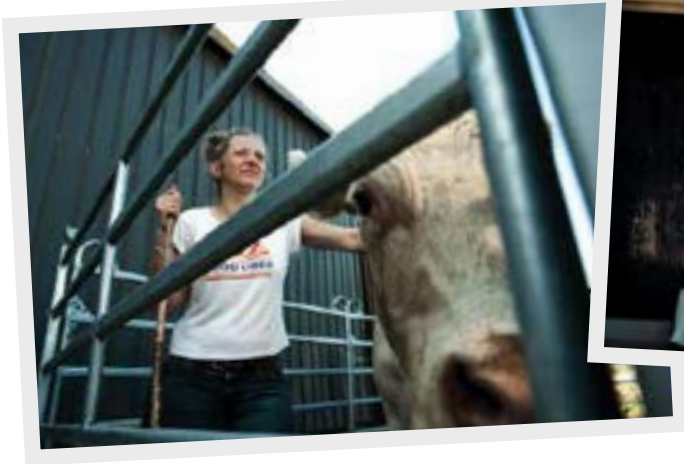
**AN INTERVIEW WITH JACQUES ALVERNHE, A CONSULTANT FOR ALTERNATIVE SLAUGHTER METHODS AND PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR SMALL FARMERS SLAUGHTER FACILITIES (ASSOCIATION POUR DES ABATTAGES PAYSANS)**

### WHAT'S WORKING? THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL ANIMAL PROCESSING UNITS

Currently, an emblematic project is [Le Boeuf Éthique](#), a private company

which has been in action since August 2021. This is a mobile unit for large cattle, consisting of several trucks that travel from farm to farm. It is integrated into a private meat chain. The size and investment cost of this mobile slaughterhouse, as

well as its economic model, make it an innovative and pioneering tool but very difficult to reproduce. It is not designed to meet the needs of farmers in short supply chains, who are generally the types of farmers interested in alternative slaughtering



14. A Charolais cow entering the mobile unit

15. Emilie Jeannin, president and founder of Le Bœuf Éthique

solutions, in particular on-farm slaughtering. This is why 30 farmers are considering alternative technical and organisational solutions: the mobile slaughterhouse, a rolling unit that carries out the entire slaughter process; and a slaughterhouse where the carcasses are transported to after the animals are killed on the farm.

On the basis of these two principles, the construction of projects takes different forms depending on local situations and the expectations of farmers, including:

- slaughter boxes simply connected to 'classic' slaughterhouses;
- mobile slaughterhouses serving several animal reception areas;
- slaughter boxes attached to mobile slaughterhouses;
- fixed slaughterhouses without stalls and therefore only supplied by slaughter boxes.

However, technology is not the only axis on which farmers' initiatives are based. The organisation of work and the economic model are essential levers for proposing alternatives and solutions for small local slaughterhouses. While the assumption of governance of slaughtering tools by farmers is the indispensable basis for any initiative, farmer involvement can go much further. In particular, farmer-cattlemen can take over the operational side of slaughtering, thus mastering the entire process and all the links in the chain, and marketing pieces of meat that are perfectly traced and controlled from their farms.

On the other hand, this positioning of farmers as labourers leads to an economic system within these slaughterhouses that allows them to get out of the race for tonnage and the pressure on slaughter rates and thus facilitates the good treatment of animals and consideration for humans.

Several slaughterhouses have been taken over by farmers over the last two decades, applying these principles, such as in Die, France. They now provide clear proof that it is possible to make a living from small slaughterhouses, well below the commonly accepted thresholds of profitability. And a very large number of alternative projects (fixed, mobile, box, mixed) are based on these organisational models. It is therefore the combination of technology and human organisation that is at the heart of the success of relocated slaughter initiatives. These systems obviously guarantee respect for the animals and transparency for consumers.

***“Farmer-cattlemen can take over the operational side of slaughtering, thus mastering the entire process and all the links in the chain.”***





16. Near-natural cattle husbandry

17. Le Bœuf Éthique's mobile unit consists of several trucks that travel from farm to farm



## SUPPORTING SMALL-SCALE ANIMAL PROCESSING UNITS

The main difficulty, in my opinion, lies in the way European regulations are applied, and in the fact that they do not take into account the capacities of these small slaughterhouses. But let's be clear, it is not a question of imagining that this slaughter could be subject to derogations, certainly not. Consumers must be guaranteed that the meat from these slaughterhouses is just as safe as any other meat. It is a matter of finding the regulatory frameworks that support small structures for their balance and survival.

***"The regulations are much more demanding for the small slaughterhouse than for the large one, without any justification."***

For example, the regulations oblige all slaughterhouses to carry out, at their own expense, analyses of carcasses to check their sanitary quality. These analyses are carried out on the basis of samples taken from 5 animals of the same species every 5 days of slaughter. For example, for a slaughterhouse that slaughters 100 cattle per day, it will have to pay for the analysis of 5 carcasses for 500 slaughtered animals, i.e. 1% of its animals. But a small slaughterhouse that slaughters 5 cattle a day will also have to pay for 5 analyses but for only 25 animals slaughtered, i.e. 20% of its animals.

It is obvious that the financial burden of these analyses is much greater for the small slaughterhouse

than for the large one. At the same time, should a small slaughterhouse be required to check 20% of its carcasses while a large one checks only 1%? In this case, the regulations are much more demanding for the small slaughterhouse than for the large one, without any justification. And the economic impact of this situation is not neutral.

If I was to think about political support needed - i.e. within the national strategic or rural development planning, it might be wise to grant aid to cover the additional costs of having their animals slaughtered in peasant slaughterhouses, provided that the concept of peasant slaughter is clearly defined. In this way farmers' slaughterhouses could compensate for the costs of applying the regulations and, on the other hand, farmers would be stimulated to go to farmers' slaughterhouses.



18. Granville Community Kitchen Garden

## DEMOCRATISING FOOD

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Granville Community Kitchen Farm

London and Hertfordshire, UK

*Granville Community Kitchen has many components: a community food group, an urban patchwork farm and now, a stake in a larger farm. Being in the city and outside it, a wide range of food democracy and access issues are broached creatively.*

### A CONVERSATION WITH DEE WOODS

**G**ranville Community Kitchen emerged about 8 years ago as a response to deeply entrenched deprivation manifesting as food insecurity. We started cooking meals, teaching people to grow their own food in our community

food garden, and skills around food as business. We support people's food needs, but also food literacy and food democracy. We are a small community group who wants to work with our community to provide access to good food, agroecologically

produced food, bringing in the food and farming knowledge of our very diverse community.

In terms of access to food, food aid is not a solution; we need to take control of our food supply chain. We have an urban patchwork farm where

*“We are starting off on 2 acres and hoping to expand, with some agroforestry and some horticulture.”*

we are growing food on different plots of land within our highly urbanised area. But we recognise that we need a farm. We have been searching for land for several years and finally hit the jackpot last year!

We will be working with the [Soil Association](#), who have a land trust - land left to them by people in their wills. They support farmers to come onto land as new entrants to farming. But for the Soil Association it is the first time that they are working with a community organisation rather than a farmer. What's unique about Granville Community Kitchen is that we are not traditional farmers. We are a community-led organisation that happens to have three members

who have farming or horticultural experience. So we do have the knowledge and skills to actually set up a farm.

It is [Woodoaks Farm](#) in Hertfordshire, a 350 acre farm. The difference with this farm is the farmer is still alive! The farmer was a conventional farmer, growing arable crops, using fertilisers. And now they want to see that change, in terms of agroecology. So it is a living lab. We are not taking on a lot: We are starting off on 2 acres and hoping to expand, with some agroforestry and some horticulture.

The issue for most farmers in the UK, in London, is access to land. We would never be able to buy

land in or around London, so we are looking to rent land: at least a 10-year agreement to begin with, but ideally we should have a minimum of 30 years to allow the project to be financially viable. In the US there are states giving 99-year leases to community-led farming projects. At the moment we have 10 years which is really good because a lot of farm projects have five years or less.

We have support at local authority level, between the Hertfordshire County Council, the Greater London Authority (GLA), and then the local authorities. Our farm bridges the gap between the rural and the urban. We are the first real farm to be set up in London's Green Belt in the last five years, if not more. It is accessible by tube, or a short bus ride - which we love because of our strong education strand. It makes it easier for us to take groups of people out to the farm.

19. Volunteers working in Granville Community Kitchen's patchwork farm





## INTEGRATED FOOD POLICY

The UK is lacking in any sort of integrated food policy. Food is pigeon-holed into environment, or health, in terms of the wider aspects of food-growing and all the social, health and wellbeing aspects. Because of Brexit, we now have new agricultural legislation that includes agroecology. We are getting the Department of Environment and Rural Affairs to look at peri-urban and urban farming, particularly within agroecological systems, as something that can contribute to the supply chain but also to food resilience.

There has been a Food Strategy Consultation. We have been strongly

involved in action around getting the right to food into legislation. The GLA recently commissioned a report on London's food resilience. Food production came up as a major issue that needs to be worked on in terms of policies to support agroecology.

Education is missing from the GLA policy: horticultural education and jobs. Farming needs to be made sexy as a career. But that raises some of the issues within farming: workers and farmers are underpaid. Food is not valued properly. There needs to be some work around living incomes and the price of food, so that everyone can access it and the farmer has a proper livelihood. Food needs to be looked at as a system.

Even though the UK is out of the EU, we are still connected. Trade is

*“EU Regulation 2018/848 on organic production opens up a small space for change. Individual organic farmers contact us for information on the new legislation, and request training in seed production.”*

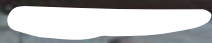
important. We hope to set up direct trade, and just trade, to supply our solidarity veg box scheme, as well as the markets that we are hoping to develop. Community to community, we support each other.

20. Good Food Boxes from Granville Community Kitchen



CHAPTER

7



# LAND ACCESS AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

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## WE NEED A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK TO ENSURE FAIRNESS AND RESILIENCE

*We need a paradigm shift to conceive food production and nature conservation as one and the same. We need to end land concentration and speculation, and enhance access. Targets and criteria for land use must enhance resilient production methods and conservation practices that honour local, traditional and indigenous knowledge. Caring for the land is caring for each other. We need to decolonise our approach to land and move away from extracting resources at the expense of humans and the living environment.*





1. Farmers and brothers of the Cățean Farm

## THE HAY, THE COW'S SOUL AND THE FAMILY

Cățean Farm

Rotbav, Brașov,  
Transylvania, ROMANIA

*Cățean Farm carries 300 years of history. What is the secret of such perseverance? Cows, grass and hay, cheese and value adding, tenacity, technology and tradition all play a role in these remote parts of the Transylvanian mountains.*



A CONVERSATION WITH FARMER GEORGE CAȚEAN

As three brothers we started in 2006, and it took us 10 years to be thriving and viable. The three of us decided first to study, and to return to run the farm together with a

veterinarian (Silviu), marketing (me), and athletic (LONUȚ) background. LONUȚ also breeds and trains horses and is a name in Romanian sport. But our farm is the heart of it all,

we master the work on the farm and beyond together. Our great-grandparents and grandparents had much tougher times, going through two world wars with thirty

## THE HAY, THE COW'S SOUL AND THE FAMILY

sheep, a cow and a horse. But we also struggled quite a lot. There was not much support at the start but much competition instead, such as for land. We stood against a German investment fund company arriving in the region with €5 million cash. It was difficult to keep up and to convince the local government to support us.

### LOTS OF LOCAL ACTIVITY INTEGRATION

At our farm it all comes together. Permanent grassland and hay are at the heart of the cheese. Sheep and cows freely graze half the year and get the hay from that place in winter. Our animals are healthy and live much longer. The meadows preserve a great plant diversity and capture CO<sub>2</sub>. For us cows or sheep are not machines. They have a soul. And in a sense they are part of the family.

We raise animals from local breeds that have adapted to the climatic conditions of the area. We produce 80% of our animal feed

- mostly lucerne and a mixture of local fodder plants. Apart from reducing the number of agricultural works that have a harsh impact on the environment, these also have a great capacity for storing carbon and nitrogen, and they maintain the cultural landscape. We are in a High Nature Value (HNV) area known for its high level of biodiversity. This is why we are concerned with investments that focus on making the best of the existing natural assets.

A good choice of technology was made to fit our farm. We cannot possibly manage both the farm and the food produced on-farm, plus good storage and marketing. That needed quite some choice of investments. But concerning external help needed, without a certain playful kick of technology we cannot attract young people. They love clever tractors and the joystick, and we like the tools helping us to make healthy and tasty cheese.



*“Sheep and cows freely graze half the year and get the hay from that place in winter. Our animals are healthy and live much longer.”*

2. Selling at a local market
3. sheep grazing on the farm land





4. Local cheese specialties

## BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS AND OPTIMISTIC OPPORTUNITIES

We are confronted with excessively bureaucratic and discouraging administrative processes. That is often frustrating and eats up time. We need people in politics and administrations who have solid practical experience in real life. We need people in politics who have a sense for our culture, an inclusive economy and empathy with living nature. It must all go together

*“We need people in politics who have a sense for our culture, an inclusive economy and empathy with living nature.”*

to make sense. So the political framework for rural Europe needs exactly that: a more inclusive support framework for funds so that farmers and rural people find practical solutions in their villages and farms.

The main obstacles the farm faces include excessive bureaucratic, cumbersome, discouraging processes run by local authorities, often biased on political grounds.

Additional funding sources need to be available that are customised to the needs of small and medium-sized farmers in mountain areas, who face specific major challenges; support for the recognition of quality products and their proper positioning on the market, so that consumers understand their real value and the additional production costs. More young people need to be involved in agricultural and non-agricultural activities, contributing

to the economic diversification of the rural areas. Therefore it is necessary to make living and working in rural areas more attractive for the young generation. And also a welcoming environment and proper instruments for the integration of newcomers is important in order to reverse the depopulation of rural mountain areas.

The new EU vision on agriculture and rural development must encourage the use of local products and environmentally friendly agricultural practices and a consolidation of this type of integrated farm model to ensure food security and a strong food network at EU level. The rural population should be informed about innovation opportunities, know-how, new technological breakthroughs in order to integrate new technologies in our rural economy.





5. Mushroom picking by co-consumers

# AGROFORESTRY; BIODIVERSITY; NATURE

Freixo do Meio Users  
Cooperative

Foros de Vale de Figueira,  
Alentejo, PORTUGAL

*Montado do Freixo do Meio is working to change our relationship with the land through food production that is agroecological, local, responsible and conscious. The farm is a testing ground for a collective management model of a small part of our planet.*

 BY FREIXO DO MEIO, USERS COOPERATIVE

Our experiment in Community Supported Agriculture began in 2015. It is a food community called "CSA Sharing the Harvest", currently made up of 180 families and 7 farmers. As a next step we founded the [Freixo](#)

[do Meio Users Cooperative](#), an integral consumption coop established in January 2018, with its roots in the CSA Sharing the Harvest community: employees, consumers, inhabitants, farmers, neighbours and other users.

*"It is impossible for us to compete with prices of food produced by the extractivist model."*

## SUPPORT FROM CONSUMERS, NOT POLICY

At the local level, we have a good relationship with the municipality, participating in the Acorn Week and the construction of the Food Strategy for the Municipality, among other initiatives.

However, regional and national policies for agriculture have favoured extractivist models of land: low food prices at the expense of the natural

system, the health of consumers, and workers' dignity. Covid in Portugal has revealed how our country's industrial agricultural models have almost systematically used labour from far away countries under degrading conditions. It is impossible for us - and for any model of non-extractivist food production that respects nature - to compete with prices of food produced by the extractivist model. Our support has been formed by

consumers, not national or regional agricultural policies. Despite this agricultural policy, some European funds have made it possible for us to research new forms of production, soil recovery, and climate change mitigation in the territory we manage.

## NOT SUITED FOR COMPLEX SILVOPASTORAL SYSTEMS

As a multifunctional farm that produces and processes a wide range of products in small and medium quantities, as a way of making some profit from an extensive

*"The Montado is a silvopastoral system well adapted to the difficult soil and climate conditions of our Mediterranean region."*



system without destroying it, we often feel the constraint of laws designed for large production units, with the same level of bureaucratic work and taxation, without adaptation to smaller units.

The Montado, a silvopastoral system well adapted to the difficult soil and climate conditions of our Mediterranean region, is a system that produces food while preserving biodiversity and other ecosystem services. It is also a system that is declining and needs our protection. However, European legislation is not suited for complex silvopastoral systems that need their own management. This legislation only conceives food intensive productive systems and systems exclusively dedicated to conservation, or strictly livestock versus strictly forestry systems.

Some of the rules for having the right to receive subsidies, in the context of production in the Montado, go against its preservation, preventing farmers from management practices that they know to be the best adapted to this system.

The system for supporting research in companies is too bureaucratic and the transfer of funding to them takes so long that only big companies that do not need this support have the structure to receive it. The public procurement system for canteens was recently changed, but it is still quite restrictive, enough that it is very difficult for a company like ours to supply food to school canteens or for them to order products from us.

## FERTILE GROUND FOR PROGRESS

There are a number of areas where progress could be made, if we had more tailored policy options available. These include:

- Production and transformation rules that suit small to medium companies and multi-functional farms.
- Programs that support production suited to the Montado and/or silvopastoral systems.
- Simpler support programs for farms and a faster return of the values invested by the companies. A public procurement system for canteens that facilitates sustainable farms in becoming their suppliers.

*“European legislation is not suited for complex silvopastoral systems that need their own management.”*

All this would be possible if European, national and regional policies were designed with the intention of producing food while preserving the land. The first change to policy would be a paradigm shift from conceiving food production and nature conservation as separate things to become one and the same.

OPPOSITE  
6. The Montado silvo-pastoral system, explained to co-consumers

THIS PAGE  
7. Explaining the agroforest to co-consumers







8. Peatland in Co. Kerry, Ireland

## FOR PEAT'S SAKE

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*RE-PEAT is an international youth-led organisation, with members in the Netherlands, Italy, UK, Ireland, Germany, Estonia. Some of us study peat at a university level, some of us work with peat “in the field”, and many of us are simply peat enthusiasts.*



A CONVERSATION WITH RE-PEAT, A YOUTH-LED ORGANISATION WORKING TOWARDS A PEATLAND PARADIGM SHIFT.

*"We believe in collaboration,  
and the moss-like power of connecting.  
Peatlands embody the potential for worlds to collide,  
cuts to heal,  
and walls to be lost in soil.  
They are the partnership between water and earth,  
the underworld, the surface and the sky.  
To be alive and dead  
and the future.  
They can connect people, creatures and identities  
Encourage crucial exchanges  
and submerge the trenches."*

From the [RE-PEAT Manifesto](#)

In December 2019, Bethany Copsey and Frankie Turk, two of our founding members, were at an action camp on industrial fertilisers in Germany. On an excursion we learned that 5-6% of greenhouse gas emissions (including CO<sub>2</sub>) are caused by degradation of peatlands, whereas on the other side intact peatlands store more CO<sub>2</sub> than forests do. We thought: 'Wow - how could we have not heard about this before?!' and realised others also probably did not know. So, we started telling our friends about peatlands, then beyond. Our first event was in May 2020.

## A CREATIVE AND HOLISTIC VOICE

Much of our role is about raising awareness and appreciation for peatlands. We also see an interesting role in reaching out to people who

are interested in climate change, agroecology, or other environmentally minded initiatives, and bringing awareness and appreciation of peatlands. Our contribution to the existing peat world - from whom we have and continue to learn and be inspired from - is bringing a strongly creative and holistic voice, looking at innovative ways of highlighting how important peatlands are.

We also try to connect peatlands to other issues like land ownership and trade imbalances. Decolonial thinking is important to us and we emphasise it as an organisation, but recognise that decoloniality is a constant learning process.

## CONNECTING PEOPLE

There is a mix of interests and perspectives in the group, from conservation science to the

reimagination element - to name a few, we are super curious and eager to get involved across disciplines. We are a youth-led group, but we see the importance of intergenerationality. Initially we set out as an Amsterdam-based group having in-person discussions in January and February 2020. With the pandemic we went online and became Europe-wide, with quite a lot of representation from various countries including the Netherlands, Estonia, Ireland and the UK.

## GRASSROOTS GROWS GRASSROOTS

We are all volunteers and it is a very grassroots organisation. We have taught ourselves a wealth of skills over the past few years - including building the website and making graphics and images. We have never had funding for these activities, so it is self-discovered. Quite a few of us had experience with other grassroots organisations on climate activism, and this helped; we brought a lot of the ideas on structure, vision, hierarchy etc. from these groups into RE-PEAT.

## THE WORLD OF POLICYMAKING FEELS EXCLUSIVE

We are primarily driven by interest and pure passion for peatlands. We want to be able to help influence policy, but it has often felt like a high threshold, not fully understanding how highly complex policies are



9. Peatland illustration by Frankie Turk

*“We will keep asking ourselves how we can best engage with policymakers.”*

formulated. It felt exclusive in certain ways, likes who's involved and who's given a voice in those spaces. The exclusivity is not necessarily intentional, but the dynamic of policymaking is very specific and makes it feel that way.

Our collection of stories, '[The Peat Anthology](#)', was an effort to influence the CAP for more focus on peatlands. We took a narrative approach as opposed to a more traditional CAP policy briefing and this was wonderful as we gathered great stories from a variety of peatland actors, but it did not draw a strong response from policymakers. This is perhaps a demonstration of a continuing learning process in how to best engage with both the public and policymakers.

However, we do want our engagement to be a reflection of our

own skill-sets, so we will keep asking ourselves how we can best engage. With more peatland policy being proposed, and as our network grows, we do see more opportunities for us to get involved. We, as RE-PEAT, would like to see more transparency in policy. We tend to rely a lot on organisations like [Birdlife](#), who interpret and communicate policies, but the policy itself could be more accessible.

## **WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY OPENING AND CLOSING... AND OPENING?**

The momentum that rose around the CAP 2023-2027 reform may have spawned something like local engagement. Simultaneously, the

UK is creating its own policy around peatlands post-Brexit so there is some hope there and somewhere to focus action. This is something we explored with our series, the [UK Anthology](#), where we took various issues and their intersection with peatlands as our starting point. These were initial conversations that we are keen to continue.

There are other interesting policy avenues too, such as the Nature Restoration Law. Another key avenue is at the individual member-state level. The Netherlands for example is exploring alternatives for peatlands - I think it is largely driven by fears around land subsidence. This demonstrates the different interest groups and concerns that could result in greater paludiculture practices.

The CAP should be really important for helping farmers and providing financial incentives towards paludiculture rather than draining peatlands.





10. Josefina Skerk, member of the Sámi Parliament

## THE LONG NOW

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Sámi Parliament  
Environmental Programme

📍 SWEDEN

*From the Sámi perspective, all matters are environmental matters.*

🎙️ A CONVERSATION WITH JOSEFINA SKERK, FORMER VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SÁMI PARLIAMENT

I am proud of the [Sámi parliament](#) for creating the Environmental Programme - called *Eallinbiras* in Sámi. It is more of a life programme. We are trying to convey the Sámi culture to inspire others to have a

more sustainable view on life. And to push towards a policy that is more sustainable and has more of a long-term perspective on things.

The programme was initiated in 2008. It differs from many

environmental programmes in that it has a very wide scope. It speaks about the emotional connections that we have to nature, and the need to care for nature, to care for ourselves. It has a very clear decolonised view



11. Early morning in September, a Sámi elder is out hunting moose

*"The Environmental Programme speaks about the emotional connections that we have to nature, and the need to care for nature to care for ourselves."*

on Sámi and indigenous culture. And it is also poetic and beautiful. It is a mix of these really interesting and important ideas on how to raise the value of Sámi traditional knowledge, Sámi culture, traditional livelihoods, but also really concrete things: it goes all the way down to recycling!

## LAND AS LIBRARY

There is a story I like to tell when I'm explaining Sámi culture. My favorite time of the year is the moose hunting season. I have no particular

blood lust. But it is the time when I can follow my elders around because they are out all day in the forest. A lot of the time I just carry their backpacks. We sneak through the land and when we are passing all these places, the stories come. They are the kind of stories that do not come when you're sitting around the kitchen table. You have to be out there. You have to pass that creek, and then they'll tell you the story about their Aunt Anna who did something here. You have to pass those kinds of plants, and they'll tell me what the moose eats, and how it moves through the terrain, and how to manage various types of situations. And also stories connected to spirituality, to culture, building materials for traditional buildings, handicrafts...

Our language very recently became a written language. Before that, our traditional stories - our history - was preserved through the

land. Every family has their specific traditional land. The land turns into a library.

That is why when a developer comes and says: "We are just gonna take this tiny piece of land..." - There is no money that can compensate. If it is lost, it is lost. I will have nothing to give to my kids. There is no economic value that you can really place on it.

## CARING FOR THE LAND IS CARING FOR EACH OTHER

80% of the world's biodiversity is on land that is owned, controlled or managed by indigenous peoples. We are really, really good at biodiversity and keeping land resilient because our traditional livelihoods depend on large unexploited land areas. That is the foundation of traditional Sámi culture. And values carried from generation to generation: not leaving traces, not taking more than you need, giving back.

Caring for the land is just as important as caring for each other - because it is caring for each other. You're making sure that your coming generations will have a place to be, and to be able to continue to be Sámi. So I think the programme fits right into this.

We want strong rural societies. The difference is that our perspective is very long. So when there is a decision to be made on a new mine, for instance, we want to be certain that this is a good decision for many generations ahead.



12. Sami lifestyle and culture is threatened in many ways, including by the Green Deal

## POWERFUL PROCESS

The working group to get the programme established was not just made up of politicians; we had broader representation from the Sámi society. I remember the amazing meetings we had with people from different backgrounds, on what was important to them to have in the programme. There was a lot to process from these meetings, when it comes to building a sustainable Sámi society. They were so powerful. I wish we did more of that actually. I'm trying to push for something similar to come back into the system.

*"We do not have a voice. Mostly we have no ownership rights."*

## CULTURE AS A RESOURCE

It was very dangerous and it was shameful to be Sámi for a long period of history. Like all indigenous peoples we have a partly very tragic history and a lot of division.

Generally the policy problem is that we do not have a voice - we should have the right to much more of a say when it comes to what is being done with our traditional territories. But mostly we have no ownership rights to anything. So whether it is private owners or state owners, they do more or less as they please.

This is rapidly destroying the foundation for the Sámi culture. And today it is really, really sad: Sweden's efforts to mitigate climate change have become part of this problem. They are building huge windmill

parks up in our territory to produce their green energy. It means cutting down ancient forests at a wide scale. The Green Deal sped things up. There is a new law being passed about consultations with the Sámi people but that isn't enough. It is not even hitting the minimum standards that the international community has put in place to ensure that states are not actively discriminating against indigenous peoples.

Sweden has generally been very positive in trying to hinder climate change - which is great - just too bad that they are not building things in the south where the people with the power and the money are. They are building them up here. It is easier to take our land than theirs.

Sámi culture is too rarely recognised as a resource and something to be inspired by.



*"Sámi culture is too rarely recognised as a resource."*

We are communicated with as troublemakers. But the international community is more and more opening their eyes to the value of indigenous cultures - I mean it was even in the Paris agreement. So it is going to get better.

## GREYSCALE SOLUTION

When it comes to Sámi culture we are really waiting for good policy. Because policy is the greyscale solution to a greyscale problem. Right now we are forced to take things to court - and there have been a lot of

court victories for the Sámi people - but this tends to be a bit black and white when it comes to solutions. And I think we can figure things out that are much better for everyone and less time consuming as well, if politicians dared to address these issues.

## RIGHTS-BASED POLICY

Policy needs to ensure self-determination for the Sámi people. What's needed is to build a better mechanism for decisions being taken on lands and waters in the Sámi traditional territory. Then, we can construct something that has these building blocks, that comes from the Environmental Programme, about sustainability and long-term

perspectives, while still ensuring strong societies with healthy economies.

Sweden is almost using our traditional territory as a colony, in the sense that there is a lot of forest industry, hydropower, and mining. We are producing over 95% of Europe's total iron ore production from Sámi territories and nothing comes back. There are poor communities in the Sámi traditional territory. So I think one part of the policy is the indigenous rights but the other part of the policy is to enable more of the profits to stay in the north so that we can have the kind of future and current situation that we really deserve.

But since only about 10% of Sweden's population lives up here, there isn't a great political motivation

13. Sami reindeer herder



to make those kinds of changes either. What happens when societies are torn apart? They become too unequal. That is laying the groundwork for a lot of trouble. We need to see how we can build societies that are tightly knit and equal.

### CLIMATE JUSTICE

When it comes to European policy, if we talk about the Green Deal for instance, it is really important to think about climate justice. And to carry the justice aspect, the rights aspect, into other arenas - for example the EU is working on forestry policy right now. Because there are people living in all of these areas. And a lot of the time they are minorities that are not quite heard in their respective societies.

What the EU does has an effect on other indigenous peoples around the globe. There are a lot of European economic interests involved in building hydropower in the Amazon for instance. This causes huge conflicts and indigenous peoples being murdered by corrupt states, but still the projects are funded by European banks or pension funds or other actors. Just as with climate change and emissions, we should also think about the effects the EU has in other places, in other rural areas of the world.

### A QUESTION OF STATUS

People seem to think urbanisation is a god-given thing, but it is the effect of policy. Policy could just

as well be used to strengthen rural areas and make them more attractive. Politicians could just as well communicate the value of rural areas. To be someone, to become someone you have to move away - too often that is communicated to the youth. But it doesn't have to be like that.

Wouldn't it be nice if the EU or local or national politicians did a campaign to embrace the status of rural people, the people who stay? I do believe in attitudes. The kind of lives that we value. What is considered successful today - we are destroying the planet by striving after that.

*“What the EU does has an effect on other indigenous peoples around the globe.”*

14. Reindeer husbandry is inextricably linked to the Sami way of life





15. Vast single crop sunflower fields in the Carpathian basin

# SHATTERING THE CHAINS OF RURAL REPRESSION

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*Drawing on five years of research, Péter József Bori and Noémi Gonda have investigated land grabbing and the making of an authoritarian and populist regime in Hungary. They have spoken to farmers, economic and political actors, researchers and activists, about how the chains of rural repression can be shattered right there, in the countryside. At the time of going to press the results of the April 2022 elections were unknown; however another term under Viktor Orbán would likely further entrench today's feudal rural dynamics and further alienate Hungary's smallholders.*

*BY PÉTER JÓZSEF BORI AND NOÉMI GONDA, RESEARCHERS IN RURAL POLITICS*



Natalia Mamonova of the [Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative](#) has posited that in many authoritarian and populist countries, rural regions play host to a strange contradiction: they simultaneously contribute to mass support for authoritarian populist leaders, while also providing opportunities for emancipatory movements to arise.

Viktor Orbán's regime has radically transformed the Hungarian countryside over the past decade. Today, the countryside is more concentrated, more exclusionary than ever before, and primarily favours large landowners and government-friendly oligarchs.

## LAND GRABBING AND "LAND PEACE"

A key term to understand here is 'land grabbing'. The term is commonly applied when looking at harmful and unfair land acquisition in the Global South. Often, transnational companies (i.e., Bayer) or countries rich in capital but poor in land and water resources (i.e., the Gulf States), acquire land in countries with abundant resources, but little capital (i.e., Ethiopia). While sold to the public as the necessary means to development, these acquisitions regularly violate human- and indigenous rights and have harmful social and environmental impacts. The process often enriches these countries' political elites, through bribes and lobbying.

After 2010, land grabs in Hungary occurred with slightly different

methods and for different purposes. Most lands were leased and sold to wealthy Hungarian investors with a political objective: to enrich the regime's political and economic supporters. As such, a somewhat symbiotic relationship exists between the economic elite and the regime. The former relies on the government for its wealth acquisition through corrupt public procurement deals and speculation through land auctions; while the latter depends on the economic elite that owns most rural news sources to distribute its pro-peasant and fear-mongering propaganda.

In 2020 Viktor Orbán unassumingly described this symbiosis when he said that 'today, in Hungary, there is land peace'. So how exactly did he achieve "land peace"? First, between 2011 and 2013 the government facilitated a tender to lease out state-owned land whose 20-year agreements with previous lessees were coming to an end. Instead of making these plots available to local farmers, approximately 80 percent of all advertised lands landed in the hands of government-friendly oligarchs. Official tender documents were classified and upper lease limits were raised from 300 to 1,200 hectares.

In a tragic symbolic move, the lease of Kishantos - a state farm and



16. Farmer protests in front of the Hungarian Parliament, 2005

folk high school that had promoted organic agriculture for more than 20 years - was auctioned off, ploughed and sprayed with chemicals by the new landowners. As a result of these unfair auctions, [József Ángyán](#), the professor responsible for FIDESZ' progressive Rural Strategy, resigned as secretary of state. Ángyán has since devoted himself to uncovering subsequent land grabs and exclusionary land deals.

The culmination of these political land grabs was the intensive land privatisation programme of 2015 that announced the auction of 380,000 hectares of state-owned land. Once again sold as a strategy to attract young families to the countryside, the auctions mostly favoured large landowners. Lessees of land were

*"The economic elite relies on the government for its wealth acquisition through corrupt public procurement deals and speculation through land auctions."*

given priority in making offers, which proves that the 2011-2013 tenders that favoured oligarchs were preparing for this move; maximum limits per individual were raised from 1.200 to 1800 hectares, meaning a family of multiple landowners could amass many thousands of hectares; and often the asking price of plots was set at staggeringly high rates that local farmers could not match.

## THE MAKING OF A MODERN DAY FEUDAL SYSTEM

Under the cover of a deliberately chaotically managed refugee crisis, in 2015, 80 percent of auctioned lands were bought by FIDESZ interest groups, large agro-industries

and foreign investors. As a result, today, Hungary has Europe's third most concentrated agricultural land structure: almost 32 percent of all plots are over 500 hectares and are owned by 0,3 percent of all landowners - closely matching numbers from 19th century feudal Hungary. Since 2010, the number of farms has shrunk by one third, from 351.000 to 234.000 in 2022.

Adding to the complexity is the existence of so-called *integrators* - large companies owned by the country's wealthiest businessmen - which supply farmers with pre-harvest input (i.e. manure, pesticides, seeds), only to buy back their produce post-harvest, often at unfavourable prices. These contracts regularly leave farmers in inescapable dependency.

## OLIGARCHS, ORGANIGARCHS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

That such an agrarian system doesn't favour small family farms and the countryside is clear. The existence of absent farmers (individuals who own land in multiple areas with no presence in the localities) means that most of this land is under intensive and industrial-scale agricultural use - or speculated upon, waiting to be sold at high prices. Single crops such as wheat and sunflower dominate the landscape, when in fact the Carpathian basin could play host to rich and diversified food production.

Though there is an increasing presence of organic farms, these are similarly owned by wealthy oligarchs - or, more precisely, "organigarchs" - and the produce is primarily for export. Small farmers are restricted to local markets, but even there have to compete with cheap imports.

Unfortunately, the European Union plays a crucial role in facilitating such a system. Land grabs with speculative purposes that began in the late 1990s and accelerated under Viktor Orbán's regime are facilitated by Single Area Payments. As national

*"Hungary has Europe's third most concentrated agricultural land structure."*

17. József Ángyán: Hungarian agricultural engineer, agricultural research engineer, university professor



governments decide the distribution of CAP subsidies, autocratic regimes such as Hungary and Poland exclude precisely those farmers that the CAP is supposed to protect. Yet, all hope is not lost.

Despite such an uneven playing field, agricultural initiatives that are able to bypass these top-down barriers are mushrooming in all corners of Hungary, begging the question: is there a chance for emancipation from authoritarian populist rule to arise from this very same countryside?

*“Single crops such as wheat and sunflower dominate the landscape, when in fact the Carpathian basin could play host to rich and diversified food production.”*

## REDEFINING HUNGARIAN FOOD PRODUCTION AND DEMOCRACY

We argue that there is. Reforming our ways of producing food constitutes one way of bypassing these barriers as it also contributes to radically reforming the undemocratic systems that govern us. Indeed, alternative farming practices such as community supported agriculture (CSA) or food basket communities require establishing supportive (and hopefully equitable) relations

between producers and between producers and consumers. In order to achieve this, however, we must first rethink what we mean by sustainability, emancipation and democracy: for whom, by whom and at what costs? For example, while the pandemic has had positive impacts in this sense - such as increased buyer-consciousness, improved community engagement between farms, but also between farms, buyers, and local communities - the Orbán regime's propaganda of 'promoting local' has also hijacked these claims through authoritarian and nationalist underpinnings.

There is a slippery slope from sustainability to pseudo-sustainability, from emancipation to pseudo-emancipation. Sustainability must

18. Industrial agriculture in north-west Hungary







19. Hungarian Grey cattle (Hungarian: 'Magyar Szurke'), an ancient breed of domestic beef cattle indigenous to Hungary

mean environmental sustainability which requires rethinking our ways of living with the land, but also social justice, equity and democracy. Emancipation must mean the process of building caring collectives around our commons, well-being, and affective relations - within the human and non-human worlds alike.

## ALTERNATIVE FARMING AS A DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

During our research we spoke to farmers<sup>1</sup> implementing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA); regenerative animal husbandry; permaculture; agroforestry; market gardens and basket communities. The variety of farming models matched

the variety of people pursuing them: young intellectuals-gone-rural; multi-generational family farmers; emigrants returning home; and people who chose to make a living in the countryside, despite growing up in poverty in the very same place.

Despite their differences, on their respective paths towards emancipation, they were all mobilising strategic alliances, creating counter-knowledge, as well as reclaiming emancipatory subject-positions. The trauma of forced collectivisation during the Socialist era means that today, many Hungarian farmers prefer to work independently and alone. While this is understandable, the increased pressure caused by land concentration means that cooperation is one of the few avenues

for small- and medium-scale farmers to survive. Cooperation is therefore a strategic alliance, and something many of our interviewees rely on to re-think sustainability and democracy in the countryside. Alliance often happens locally, by sharing tips, tricks and best-practices with neighbours and other like-minded growers. Sometimes CSA initiatives source some of their products from other nearby farmers as a strategy to balance out product shortage. But we live in a digital age, and many farmers provide support to each other even from opposite sides of the country, through Facebook groups, message threads, webinars and so on.

These platforms are crucial in producing counter-knowledge. While official policy and formal education often lag behind - or purposefully

<sup>1</sup> As most of our respondents requested anonymity, we will not name concrete initiatives here.



20. Could diversified and alternative farms be the key to democratic reform?

ignore - alternatives to conventional farming practices, our interviewees build bastions of this knowledge. Their ability to connect with other farmers within and outside of Hungary means they can access, experiment with and share new (or old!) ways of producing.

And finally, almost all our respondents claimed emancipatory subject-positions. They were all farmers but of a different kind: the kind that understands the co-constitutive relationships between environmental sustainability and democracy and who denounces the ways through which authoritarian populist politics are harmful for food security. Some were involved in local politics, research, environmental activism or community building initiatives.

Of course, there are ambiguities everywhere. Some of our respondents pursue alternative agriculture on lands that were bought through speculation

in the 1990s by their parents. Others combine agroecological ways of thinking about farming with exclusionary views on minorities such as the Roma population. This is why it is important to agree and be clear on what emancipation and sustainability should look like - they cannot be used as avenues for exclusion, marginalisation and authoritarianism. Many farms we visited embody a new way of thinking that challenges today's embedded rural structures, and recognises that not everything is black or white, right or wrong, friends or enemies - as populist politics like to suggest. Albeit slowly, emancipatory initiatives are growing

and spreading. They share knowledge and reinvigorate communities that are based on visions of sustainable, healthy and local consumption. They question oppressive regulation, and sometimes manage to bypass it. Bit by bit, like raindrops on a stone, they might just help erode the authoritarian regime of Viktor Orbán through providing the basis for democratic change.

History has shown us time and again that emancipation does not only come from grand acts. Small acts of resistance, reworking and re-signifying can constitute the building blocks of the radical change that many of us are thirsting for.

*“The increased pressure caused by land concentration means that cooperation is one of the few avenues for small- and medium-scale farmers to survive.”*



## DIARY FROM THE FUTURE

# RURAL FICTION 2050 - "LOVE LETTER FROM AN ELDER"

BY OLIVER MOORE, ECOVILLAGE CLOUGHJORDAN

Munching away on this sweet little carrot, here on a haybale on our community farm, nestled comfortably in middle lands, I find myself chatting with you younger folks about how we got here - to this place of agroecological enabling.

### THE RAGING 20s

The 2020s seemed quite intense in retrospect. That first proper pandemic was a sign, and then the war - people realised depending on fertiliser, animal feed and fossil fuels had real consequences. Young people had already started to get very animated - the beginning of the great amplification and simplification. Thanks to a relentless power surge from fearless youth, buoyed on by a range of strange calamities, and brutal realisations, we snapped into action as if a chronic emergency was an immediate one. Which of course it was.

There had been clues, but we were hindered in our learning. We had credit unions and coops - pretty big ones actually - community land trusts and CSAs, and they worked, in good times and in bad. But venture capitalism rewarded pointless risk taking, and someone or something else always footed the bill. Already, by the early 2020s, the real impacts were coming home to roost - gas price fluctuations made relying on mineral fertiliser risky, then impossible. Re-ruralisation happened quite fast in the end. Mass migration and working from home eh?

Agroecology worked well with more people in the countryside. Its time had started to come. We still had cities, but the countryside got busy. Big cities came from fossil fuels, so when they stopped, we found that life could be lived anywhere. Like the energy sources - wind and solar - life could be lived more diffusely.

It is hard to compartmentalise, from this 2050 holistic co-mindset. So, broadly - modelling and mapping meshed with a sort of library approach to tools, technology, access, and wellbeing (formerly 'wealth'). We could use what was needed, but we stopped owning things. Blockchain, protocols and in the end, fully homomorphic encryption are how we did that digitally.

### ABUNDANCE IN SUPPOSED CONSTRAINT

In any case, the EU Green Deal of the 2020s helped, but the force of global youth drove it. Unable to purchase property, in debt, with precarious bullshit jobs despite education, embarrassed at the idea of holiday flying in a climate crisis, ashamed at how their parents' generation almost blew it, certain of the collapses - they just loved, raged and really, really simplified. There was at least one thing we got right, and I think it helped them blossom.

*"Land opened up, youth went rural, onto community owned farms with food hubs - and seed saving farms were now everywhere."*





1. Increased flooding as one consequence of climate breakdown

Young people became monastic, frugal and fun - and found an abundance in the supposed constraint. They showed true compassion, all things considered. They were the best thing about us. Land opened up, youth went rural, onto community owned farms with food hubs - and seed saving farms were now everywhere. Here we had polycultures, natural membranes, micro-climate pockets made with fruiting hedges, all in 20 m<sup>2</sup> plots which helped a lot with the extreme winds. We had much to do to deal with climate breakdown, from the soil building to flooding swales. Foods tasted vital - every type of carrot tasted completely different, not like back in the 2010s with its bounty of the bland.

## HEALTHY ACTIVE PEOPLE AND PLACES

Now, every village has life - and local veg. It was as simple as the self-work and reflection that had become a standard part of learning. The full range of social goods that local agroecological food production - sorry, I still use some of these old-fashioned productivist words - local agroecological *enabling* - can offer were recognised and rewarded.

Long, fractious, fraught food supply chains for perishables started to stop in the 2030s. For the durables, exploitative pricing disappeared - there was nowhere left

for the externalities to hide. Anything else would have just been a continuation of the theft by our forefathers. That stopped. Global quality of life equalised from the mid 2030s.

Healthy active people and places abounded, there was a blossoming of biodiversity in edibles and in the other flora and fauna around these crops. The whole living world was now recognised. We were becoming solar punks, cosmic surfers, fractal designers - and also quite mindful eaters as it happens. Sometime in the 2030s then, we nailed it. We realised that cultural and living world diversity was core to safe survival. It started on the farms and fields, then into the towns and villages, and then slowly crept into the cities. It was on rooftops and in warehouses, on wastelands and in home gardens. We were many, from all over. And, we were growing.

## LEARNING AND SHARING

On our community farm here, we focused on the 50 crops and dozens more plants and invertebrates, all manner of flora and fauna, the living entities it made sense to have around us. We connected to the bigger local fields for cereal crops in the late 2020s, which we developed from heritage seeds. Everywhere did things differently - some drew from the milpa, or terra preta, or forest gardens; the 'three sisters' from Mayan agriculture



2. Predictive scenario development programmes have proven to be a helpful tool

were adapted to different conditions in different locations. Some were still able to do regenerative livestock-based systems, where space and geography allowed. We shared and we learned.

Wherever things grew - biology and appropriate technology - tools for conviviality as they called it in the 1970s - did the job. It was human scale, with minerals and chemicals treated with judicious care. It was even possible to bring together seeds, soil, sensors, satellites and citizen science at times. We used what we had - it was all hands on deck.

All the planning rules - for living and working, eating and relaxing - were adjusted to encourage local making of the good stuff - the nuts and berries, the fruits and vegetables, even the small amounts of the meats and milks that were still carefully consumed. Pickles and picnics, chutneys and chow downs, all the edibles and eateries were different now - but still somehow already so familiar. When we ate in our communal canteens, along with the food, the 20 bottles of drizzles and sauces, the 20 more liqueurs and tinctures, and all the rest that were always available in this supposedly frugal time, came from the land around, from the hedges and herb gardens, from the fields and foraging edges.

Local and regional processing of healthy mixed foods flourished with our abundant countryside. There were a lot more crops, and there weren't any biofuels, or huge fields for animal feed. That faded away in the late 2020s. So what did we do after the orgy? We collectively constructed an ethical life around pleasure. It was really simple. Foundational - and tasty.

Some called it freedom, some mutual aid; others social innovation or resilience - whatever it was, it was broad and deep, like mycelium and its microcosmic connections underground. The sudden supply shocks and worsening climate breakdown - and the colonialism reparations of the mid 2030s - were key. They lifted up the living standards - as we used to call them - everywhere, rapidly. "Total liberation" as they called it. Ideas like 'debt forgiveness' were taught in the hedge-techs as examples of the pernicious embeddedness of colonial language: how did we convince ourselves we could 'forgive' those whose stuff our ancestors, our parents and even our younger selves, had taken, hoarded, and gotten rich from - for centuries? We should have asked for forgiveness ourselves!

## ECONOMY, TECHNOLOGY AND MOBILITY

Yes, space was tight but we used our space wisely - we broke down barriers between wild nature and productivity, while also letting nature-based economies and a cascading of natural world flourishing emerge - keystone species certainly helped with this. We had to pare back without causing a complete breakdown. While things were actually breaking down!

So we developed some amazing tools and medicines, distributed technologies that were designed globally - collectively - and manufactured locally, based on what was to hand and circularisable. Our predictive scenario development programmes helped a lot. These modelled metaverses in what we used to call parallel universes - thanks to string theory! How did we not realise so many others were tapping into this in their past dreamtimes? It cut down on travel needs a lot. And it certainly saved time and made places more robust.

SUVs disappeared, then all cars were electric and things you always shared. Then you just did not see them anymore. All mobility was by foot, bike or communal. Now when we travelled, we began to take our time, we stayed and we learned, and we brought back knowledge to our kith and kin. Economies became relations of equal exchange and global solidarity. Simple, wasn't it?

## TOIL, TROUBLE AND TRIUMPH

But it was difficult too. There were mass movements of millions of people, who we had to bring into our lives properly. There was fierce flooding and devastating drought, massive social strife over the necessary and useful things ('resources'); there was a cascade of cataclysmic moments. We lost so much. I find it hard to talk about it sometimes and won't now. There was only so much community-owned agroforestry set-ups and the like could do to stave off the rising tides, the loss of coastal ports, the hordes of desperate people, the partial societal breakdown.

Without the huge Marshall Plan style rebuilding and redistribution of 2035, we might not have made it. Money changed meaning, once fiat currencies and blockchain technologies hybridised - global planning made the old idea of profit and loss, money and hoarding, redundant. Money sort of dissolved if not in use.

We wavered sometimes. Crises in the 2020s saw the wealthy and the desperate - one profiteering, the other stuck - double down on an intensive fossil fuel answer, even when that had caused the problem. Some authoritarian strong men emerged, and sometimes people opted for fear over love, familiar bonding over optimistic bridging.

### 3. Mixed culture in an agroforestry plot



Every continent was involved: the RUNASUR indigenous movement and Pink Tide in the Americas, huge social innovations, poverty alleviation and de-capitalism in China, Raspberry Pi micro computers all over India, the agroforestry stage of the Great Green Wall in Africa.

Without the then elders realising the errors of their ways, the 2030s might have seen huge intergenerational strife. But, in our reality iteration, we managed to make it - with self-work, deep listening, compassion, co-learning, remodelling, co-owning and redistribution. We had already lost so much with the tech and transport failures in our overheating planet. We were enormous and global yet so vulnerable... Where did our surrogate memory go? Our songlines have been fractured somewhat, but we have been tapping into all kinds of everything to revive our energy. Listening and learning. Did the planet-wide biodiversity and climate agreements finally come together to usher in an agroecological future for all? Or was it the mass global downing-of-tools and worldwide strike that did it? I see you're interested in hearing more. Let me mindfully finish this very sweet carrot and we will continue our story in a minute.

*"We managed to make it - with self-work, deep listening, compassion, co-learning, remodelling, co-owning and redistribution."*





# TAKE POLITICAL ACTION NOW - FOR RESILIENCE AND PEACE

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*The war on Ukraine has changed Europe. But has it really? Peace was never a given, but esteemed to be our standing achievement, just like the often cited European values, democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity. They have been so attractive to many of our Eastern European neighbours that they have taken every risk and effort to become part of it. Have we honored that courage and expectation and are we prepared to play our own part for resilience and peace?*



If we look for a moment only at rural Europe and the European policies in force there, the war seems not to have changed much. There was much concern about interrupted imports of fertilisers and animal feed from Ukraine to the EU, worries about the pig and poultry sector, about rising food prices and open world markets. But the EU's agricultural, food and rural policy seems to be staying where it is, even though the war, like the pandemic and the climate crisis, has revealed its immense vulnerability and dependence.

True, not everything can change in a day. But there are moments like the beginning of a new programming period for the Common Agriculture and Cohesion Policy and the "Future of Europe" process that call for a step back and a fresh thought. Can we really continue to pay the bulk of CAP

money to farmers based on hectares? Imagine Ukraine joining the EU in a few years as promised; should we pay oligarchs or Western European land grabbers for owning land?

Today subsidies to farmers can make up more than half of their income. The historical reason is to

keep them 'competitive' on the world market. But this will make them even less so. What about investing the CAP budget into a new rural infrastructure allowing farmers, seed savers, bakers and all artisanal producers to establish a resilient food system in a circular economy, renewable energy



1. Civil Society and farmers' organisations at the European March "Good Food - Good Farming", Brussels 2012  
 2. Marion Eckart from ELARD (L) and Paul Soto of ENRD (R), at the occasion of the launch of Forum Synergies' book "Rural Europe on the Move" at the European Parliament, 2020





3. Happy pigs' assembly

and short supply chains? What about ceasing to see rural areas through the lens of primary production only, and considering them as the diverse and multifold spaces which they actually are or ought to be, home to industries, crafts and services, towns and villages, land devoted to production and leisure as well as nature protection? Rural areas are wholesome spaces and only policies which take this wholesomeness into account will be supportive to rural areas where thriving societies live, work and evolve. We have gathered examples of how it works. The moment to start a new integrated rural policy is now.

What about investing much more into the self-organisation and empowerment of Europe's strong civil society? The war has shown that, more than ever, civil society takes action on its own. When refugees

began to flow into Poland and other neighbouring countries of Ukraine, civil organisation was much quicker and more efficient than governmental action. Empathy and solidarity were neither prescribed nor paid; they were simply there. Why not offer better structures and unbureaucratic support for bottom-up action groups and socio-ecological initiatives?

What about educating young people, many now Ukrainian refugees, on how they can make peace grow in a resilient and self-organised environment, respecting the rules set by limited natural resources and climate change? We cannot continue to consume energy, land and water outside the EU and hide the impact of our consumption patterns from the equation.

We can neither hide the appalling amount of food waste, nor the wasteful long-distance transport

of food throughout Europe. Rural and farm policy must boost local or territorial circular economy and energy saving. That is part of the plan to make Europe less dependent. Europe will be a promoter of peace if it reduces its climate and biodiversity footprint and plays fair on global markets.

The reflexive reaction of the European Commission and EU member states to the war was particularly disappointing. Within days some political leaders - as if waiting for the opportunity - were ready to pass over ambitions to act on climate change and biodiversity loss, questioning their own Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy, even calling for the ploughing of set-aside land to attain "food sovereignty". Fortunately, there has been a fight back from civil society organisations and some EU institutions.



4. Flax harvest in the Lesach Valley, AT

## POLICY CHANGE AT A SNAIL'S PACE

Since the European Conference in Cork in 1996, there has been a long sequence of policy statements and political declarations on rural policy from EU Institutions and civil society organisations ([European Rural Parliament](#), [ELARD](#), [ARC 2020](#), and [Rural Voices Report](#)). They all fundamentally point in the same direction: More dedicated integration of European, national and territorial policies is urgently needed. But very little has changed. It is a rather common excuse for business as usual that policy change can only happen if sufficient data and evidence is gathered for a reform. This was and is the case in climate change policy debates and it is true for rural policies. In fact, there are already enough fine data and objectives available at OECD, in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in the Green

Deal, Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies. The major shortcoming is that over 25 years the implementation of the goals expressed in Cork 1 and 2 has advanced at a snail's pace.

## OUR VIEW FROM THE CLOUDS

The inspiring stories we have gathered from across rural Europe around the seven thematic clouds show how many rural actors and organisations are already creatively using every tool at their disposal to overcome the challenges they face and seize the opportunities open to rural areas in a green, digital and social transition. They also suggest that civil society is responding faster than policy to the transformations taking place in society and provide insights into some of the repercussions of this delay on the ground.

Our wide range of stories from 25 countries back up the overwhelming evidence from many research studies about the great diversity of rural Europe and the fact that it is not possible to design one policy to fit all conditions, especially if rural policy is treated as merely an annex to a longstanding agricultural policy. The policies for remote rural areas which strive to keep young people from leaving Romania have to be quite different to those for peri-urban areas in the Netherlands suffering from population pressure and rising land and property prices. Integrated rural programmes have to be based upon a sound analysis of rural (and urban) territorial dynamics, the participatory identification of the needs of people in different types of territory, and policies targeted to respond to them.

There are several examples of Member States and regions that have developed promising interventions based on such an analysis (i.e. Castilla

la Mancha in Spain). However, this first step of identifying the needs of different types of rural areas, based on both, analytical research and consultation with stakeholders, seems to be conspicuously absent from many current rural development programmes, including those underway in National CAP Strategic Plans. As this book goes to print, there still seems to be much business as usual underway for the coming programming period. Policies and public support must be targeted towards the people, areas and rural infrastructures that need them most.

## MULTISECTORAL AND COORDINATED POLICY

The longstanding declared ambition to establish a “fully fledged multisectoral rural development policy” means the capacity to respond to the needs

and opportunities across all seven thematic clouds of this book (and other possible fields) in a coordinated and integrated way. In practice, local stakeholders like LEADER Local Action Groups, trying to create youth employment, are often bound in a very complicated policy and administrative setting: housing, schools, cultural and transport services for young people are all under pressure - with no back up from larger scale national or EU investments or policy. There is also more than sufficient evidence (see the European Commission’s recent [Communication on a Long Term Vision](#) below) that “genuine integrated rural development” requires a series of preconditions which go beyond the box-ticking exercises applied in current sectoral policies - including some types of rural proofing.

The ENRD Thematic Working Group on “rural revitalisation” is

analysing these preconditions in order to develop a simple tool that can be used to screen existing and future policies. Some of the preconditions identified so far include: high-level political leadership and commitment to bringing together all the key sectoral policies that affect rural development, a clear division of responsibilities between sectoral departments, effective coordination mechanisms, transparent targets for the different priority fields (i.e. the clouds in this book), earmarked budgets for rural areas for each field, agreed lists of actions in each field and a participatory monitoring mechanism. These conditions need to be present at all relevant levels of government - starting at the top EU level and continuing with national, regional and local levels. Once again, these conditions can be checked and improved in both current and future programmes.

5. Farmers, breeders, bakers, and brewers at the European conference organised by Anders Borgen, in [Kalo Organic Agricultural College, Denmark June 2019](#)







6. Discussing development of cereal populations in situ at Kalø conference

## ENABLING AND EMPOWERING RURAL PEOPLE

The litmus test for all rural development policy must be that it not only responds to the needs and aspirations of rural communities but also that it enables and empowers them to act in ways that contribute to societal well-being. In fact, the action stories presented here provide many examples of how rural communities achieve remarkable results despite the complexity and difficulty of accessing many policies that are supposedly there to support them. This situation needs to be turned on its head by making a series of structural changes which place rural areas and rural communities onto a much more favourable playing field.

Several countries and regions are already experimenting with policies of this kind (France, Ireland and Castilla la Mancha, to name but a few). Their

actions include: preferential tax rates for the people living in certain types of rural area, favourable investment criteria and co-financing rates for these areas and for projects meeting certain criteria (i.e. accessible small scale infrastructure for local producers), simplification, reduced thresholds and additional technical assistance and capacity building, umbrella schemes, simplified cost options, flexible rules and incentives to encourage rural-rural and rural-urban cooperation, ensuring that national legislation enables community initiatives, on energy/digital/mobility, short supply chains and sustainable agriculture etc.

The forthcoming CAP Strategic Plans and Cohesion Policy Programmes should include these elements if they are to contribute towards the [Long Term Vision for Rural Areas](#). Stakeholders should be involved in the assessment of whether they do so in practice.

## A LONG TERM RURAL VISION 2040 - TOO LITTLE TOO LATE - BUT MAYBE THE START OF SOMETHING BIGGER?

Based on many of the opinions and declarations mentioned above, a vast amount of research and a substantial exercise of stakeholder consultation, the European Commission in June 2021 published a Communication on a Vision for rural areas in 2040.

A Communication does not in itself constitute an integrated Rural Agenda which has been demanded by so many organisations and stakeholders (including the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions ([COR](#)), the European Rural Parliament, the international association Rurality - Environment - Development ([RED](#)), the European LEADER Association for Rural Development, and many more). In addition, the Communication was launched late, when most of the regulations for the 2021-27 programming period for EU funds had already been approved and while EU Member States were already in the process of preparing their plans and programmes.

However, the Communication does announce an Action Plan, a series of Flagship initiatives and the launch of certain structures which - if they are sufficiently well resourced and manage to attract the involvement of stakeholders - could contribute to building a more ambitious and innovative Rural Agenda in at least four ways:



7. Plenary of the European Parliament, Brussels

First, by improving the fit and implementation of this round of programmes. The Communication says that “Member States should therefore seize the opportunities offered by the CAP Strategic Plans and the Cohesion Policy Programmes for the 2021-27 period to prompt sustainable and integrated rural development. In addition, they should use the very significant potential of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), InvestEU, and other EU programmes as well as the European Investment Bank. This needs to be carefully monitored.

Secondly, by further identifying the gaps and what needs to be done in specific areas to overcome them. Prime candidates for attention by stakeholders are the actions

programmed under Specific Objective of the CAP Strategic Plans for securing “vibrant rural areas” (SO8) and the new Cohesion Policy Objective of “Europe Closer to Citizens” (PO5) as well as all the territorial instruments such as LEADER, Smart Villages, Integrated Territorial Interventions, INTERREG and Sustainable Urban Development Strategies. If the systems and procedures are put in place to ensure that all these instruments pull in the same direction and really empower rural actors – this will be a considerable step forward.

Thirdly, by using this information as the basis of a stocktaking exercise planned for mid-2023 and the preparation of a set of “reflections on enhanced policy support action

and financing for rural areas as well as the way forward to be publicised in the beginning of 2024”. This can be the opportunity for really putting in place more ambitious and innovative policies for sustainable agriculture and food on the one hand and integrated policies for a “rural renaissance” as demanded so many times in the past by rural actors (ARC2020, the European Rural Parliament, RED, etc).

Finally, to value the role that rural areas can play in a green, digital and social transition, these more ambitious policies need to be recognised and integrated into the broader discussions that will take place in the debate on the Future of Europe.

## A RURAL ACTION PLAN

The Communication on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas has launched a "Rural Action Plan" which includes 30 flagship initiatives. In isolation, these initiatives are a drop in the ocean compared to the scale of the structural changes required now. However, if the flagship initiatives are sufficiently well resourced, attract enough stakeholder involvement and, in particular, are linked together, they could become significant building blocks for the beginning of a genuine shift in the way rural areas are treated in EU policy.

The 30 flagship initiatives deal with a number of the critical levers for rural development (such as the energy

transition, sustainable mobility, climate action, digitalisation, the social economy, the role of women, social inclusion, entrepreneurship and the social economy - many of which are also touched on by our action clouds. However, there are several more cross-cutting initiatives which deserve additional attention.

## A RURAL PACT

The Communication states that "a Rural Pact will be developed with all levels of governance and stakeholders supporting the shared goals of the vision". The Pact will provide a common framework for the engagement and cooperation

of a wide range of actors at the EU, national, regional and local level". A number of EU institutions including COR and the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) have already started to discuss and issue opinions on the Pact, and a major conference is planned in June of 2022 to fill it with content. Will it simply become another manifesto of good intentions signed by a series of key institutions and organisations concerned with rural development?

Or could it act as a dynamic force for building alliances between traditional rural stakeholders and other key players in the fields that affect rural development such as health, education, mobility, digitalisation and many more?

8. Anders Borgen, Danish breeder for cereal populations at Kalo workshop







9. The Bulgarian [Green Association](#) organising the "Green Summit"

## RURAL REVITALISATION, PROOFING AND OBSERVATORY

The Communication says that "the Commission will set up a one stop shop platform for information on existing projects and finding possibilities for rural communities, rural project holders and local authorities alike to collaborate." Will this simply become another static website or can it evolve into a powerful tool for supporting the stakeholders involved in the Rural Pact? The Communication also states that "as part of the better Regulation Agenda a rural proofing mechanism will be put in place. It

will draw - among other things - on territorial impact assessments and a better monitoring of the situation in rural areas." When will such mechanisms be put in place and will it already be possible to "proof" the emerging CAP Strategic Plans and Cohesion Programmes and to make recommendations to the Member States to encourage them to support the vision?

Furthermore, "A Rural Observatory will be set up with the Commission to further improve data collection and analysis on rural areas". When will this happen and how soon can it start to produce tools and information to support the Pact, the Revitalisation Platform and the Proofing Mechanism?

## RESETTING THE "FUTURE OF EUROPE" PROCESS

Since the failure of the process for a European Constitution, ambitions of European Institutions and governments of the Member States for more European Integration have crumbled. The so-called intergovernmental process has continued to practice business as usual and provoked even further disintegration and renationalisation of common policies, as the latest reform of the CAP shows.

The new process on the "Future of Europe" is an opportunity and a risk at the same time which could mobilise the collective intelligence or deeply disappoint civic engagement for a more democratic and integrative Europe. To help it become an overwhelming success, we offer a draft **regulation for an Integrated Rural Development Policy** as our contribution to the Future of Europe, using our view through the seven clouds as burning glass to discover the potential for rural vitalisation and renaissance, thus revealing a broader European territorial strategy covering urban-rural linkages as well as the role of coastal, mountain, island territories.

Many of these ideas were already gathered and published in the 2010 [ARC Communication](#) which was offered to the European Commission for negotiations of the 2014 CAP reform. Most of the proposals and data are still valid today and should not further remain in the drawers of the European Commission.

# INTEGRATED EUROPEAN RURAL, AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD POLICY (ERAP)

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## AN UNWRITTEN REGULATION

### REGULATION (EU) 2028/001 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 1 January 2028

**establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the European Rural and Agricultural Policy (ERAP) and financed by European Fund for Rural and Agricultural Development (ERAF) and from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and repealing Regulations (EU) No2021/2115 and (EU) No1307/2013**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 42 and Article43(2) thereof

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national and regional parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the Court of Auditors,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Having regard to the communications provided by European Civil Society organisations, the European Rural Parliament, local farm and food councils and local municipalities;

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure,

Whereas:

- (1) the European Commission communication of 1. November 2025, entitled “The Future of Rural Europe,” and its farming and food policies, sets out the challenges, objectives and orientations for the future European Rural and Agricultural Policy (ERAP), as integral part of the European Cohesion Policy besides the Social and Employment Policy and the Regional and Urban Policy;
- (2) these objectives and orientations are set to prepare the steps for transition from the former CAP to an integrated policy framework which shall lead the rural economy into economic, social, environmental and climate resilience and establish effective democratic governance and unbureaucratic coordination mechanisms with all relevant sectoral departments, including agriculture and food, regional and urban policy.

- (3) the focus of this policy lies on empowering all rural actors to contribute to the wellbeing of society as a whole, and rural communities in particular;
- (4) the vulnerability of a highly concentrated, mineral oil and import dependent farming and food system in Europe has become apparent during recent pandemics, geopolitical military conflicts, climate disasters and subsequent large refugee and migration flows into the European Union;
- (5) territorial and local strategies need to be applied in farming and food systems which reduce the risk of interruption of flows of energy and fuels, feed and food from global markets so as to guarantee a resilient and reliable food supply to all citizens;
- (6) in times of climate change, biodiversity loss and the depletion of soil fertility and water resources setting the rural economy, farming and food supply at high risk, policy integration and cooperation between all rural stakeholders must be put at the highest political priority;
- (7) direct payments to farmers or landowners based on hectares or decoupled production have proved to be inefficient regarding the necessary policy response to the above mentioned challenges;
- (8) markets for agricultural and food products need to be managed by establishing a rural infrastructure which strengthens competitiveness and fair distribution of added value and income on a local and territorial level;
- (9) this regulation aims to establish a new rural infrastructure which responds to the needs of all citizens and sets organic, regenerative (and equivalent) standards as the rule for farming. During the transition period, support will be targeted to move from the current system to future agro-ecological-social criteria for receiving public support. Resources can therefore be targeted at rural infrastructure which supports sustainable farming practices, local/ regional value chains, training, communication and governance.

### **Subject matter**

This regulation establishes a new integrative European policy framework for rural development, farming, food system security, and natural resources management.

### **Article 1**

#### **General principles and rules**

1.1 The European Rural and Agricultural Fund (ERAF) is one of the financial instruments of European Cohesion Policy, besides the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional and Urban Fund (ERUF) and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and other relevant financial instruments. The European Commission has established governance mechanisms at EU level for ensuring that all relevant policies that affect rural areas are designed and implemented taking account of the needs of rural citizens. It will monitor the programmes of the MS to ensure that the specific role of each Fund in territorial governance is respected. It will manage the synergetic utilisation of public and non-public funds to ensure strong and well-coordinated support for the rural economy; sustainable food and farming systems; energy; built and natural environment; mobility; digitalisation; education; health; social inclusion; shelter to refugees, and the integration of new citizens into our societies at the level of each Member State.

- 1.2 The European Rural and Agriculture Policy (ERAP) determines policy interventions in
- a. the social and economic development of rural areas;
  - b. use and resilient maintenance of land and water resources;
  - c. the development of sustainable rural value chains.



1.3 The European Rural and Agricultural Fund (ERAF) is the financial instrument to provide a framework and incentives to achieve the policy goals of the ERAP. The management of the ERAF is the responsibility of the Directorate General of Rural and Agricultural Policies (DG RURAG).

1.4 Support from ERAF for rural and agricultural development activities fall under the following categories:

- (a) Co-funding of investment projects (with co-funding rates varying from 30 to 100% according to contextual influence factors, the level of cooperation involved and the type of beneficiaries addressed).
- (b) Cost reimbursements calculated on standard cost factors (i.e. applicable for investments into capacity development measures, basic services and infrastructures including broadband etc.) and for investments into adaptation to the production rules as laid down in pts. 3.1 and 3.2 and income foregone due to natural disasters.
- (c) Subsidies and allowances calculated on the basis of production factors (land, biological resources, water, labour) under consideration of economic, social, geographical or environmental constraints.

1.5 The national and regional programme authorities can choose between two alternative delivery modes (the CLLD/LEADER switch):

- (a) The minimum version foresees an obligatory CLLD/LEADER measure with an endowment of at least 5% of the national ERAF budget (see pt. 2.3.(a)).
- (b) The extended version foresees additional measures under articles 2 and 4, and can be partly or entirely determined to be managed by Local Action Groups (individually or in cooperation).

1.6 Any support by the ERAF is contingent on conditionalities.

- (a) To benefit from ERAF support, land maintenance, production and processing methods have to comply with the world-wide standards for organic production and processing or corresponding recognised equivalent production methods by 01 January 2030.
- (b) Other conditionalities including and beyond those stipulated in Art. 12 to 15 of the past regulation 2021/2115, in the European and national context of the National Strategic plans.

## Article 2

### Support to the social and economic development of rural areas

Support from ERAF can be provided in three forms:

- a. investments into infrastructures and services, production or protection facilities;
- b. investments into individual and organisational capacity development;
- c. investments into cooperation systems.

2.1 Support for investments into infrastructures and services, production or protection facilities (capping of support at 100.000 EUR for farms, 200.000 for SMEs including accounting farmers, local authorities and other public beneficiaries).

- (a) Support for productive investments into business-start up and renewal (SME and farms) (Cooperation projects benefit from higher co-funding rates than individual projects).
- (b) Support for investments into increased resilience, disaster prevention and environment- and climate-friendly provisions and practices of SME, farms, public and civil society organisations.
- (c) Support for structuring investments into local and regional economic systems (Preparation and implementation of actions supporting the local and regional circular economy, carbon neutrality, cascading and other resource-saving processes).

- (d) Support for investments into IT connectivity (broadband, IT advisory and maintenance systems) (preference is given to community-based IT network construction and management schemes, but open to all kinds of investment types due to the urgency of the fitting-out).
- (e) Support for investments into cultural amenities and activities;
- (f) Support for investments into preservation and use of the natural and cultural heritage;
- (g) Support for investments into improving local and regional eco-mobility systems.

2.2 Support for expenses for individual and organisational capacity development (training, knowledge exchange, networking, dissemination of information, technical advice, coaching etc.).

- (a) Cost reimbursements for people making use of capacity development opportunities;
- (b) Cost reimbursements for employers investing in the qualification of employees;
- (c) Support for investments in learning and training centres and facilities, locations to meet and exchange and the design of training courses and curricula, civic dialogue, mediation and conflict management;
- (d) Support for the preparation and implementation of learning, training, exchange events, study tours, conferences etc.

2.3 Support for investments into cooperation systems (partnerships, business cooperation, civil society initiatives, platforms and networks etc.)

- (a) Support for the preparation and implementation of CLLD/LEADER with the obligation to earmark at least 5% of the ERAF budget.
  - (i) Support for the making of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and of the Local Action Groups (LAG);
  - (ii) Support for the implementation of local development projects while implementing the LDS;
  - (iii) Support for LAG activities not directly attributable to individual projects (animation, management, networking, evaluation etc.) with a maximum endowment of 25% of the LAG budget;
  - (iiii) Support for the preparation and implementation of inter-regional and transnational cooperation projects with partners from other LAGs or similar partnerships within or outside the European Union, with a minimum endowment of 5% of the CLLD/LEADER measure budget;
- (b) Support for the preparation and implementation of projects of the EIP operational group.
  - (i) Support for EIP operational groups on economic/technological innovation projects (investment into economic capital);
  - (ii) Support for EIP operational groups on social innovation (investment into social / institutional capital);
  - (iii) Support for promoting publicly recognized quality schemes and their use by rural businesses (SME and farmers);
- (c) Support for producer groups, producer organisations or interbranch organisations pertaining to rural (agricultural and non-agricultural) value chains;
- (d) Support for investments into exchange, networking, and action platforms, coordinating agencies and business support facilities including smart village strategies, incubators, co-working spaces, integrative actions in support of newcomers irrespective of their origin and status etc.;
- (e) Support for civic dialogue and mediation of conflicting interests of stakeholders in rural development interventions;
- (f) Support for other forms of cooperation.

**Article 3.**

**Adaptation, use and resilient maintenance of land and water resources**

3.1 General rules for land management:

- (a) By 01 January 2040 the world-wide standards for organic production and processing or equivalent practices (such as regenerative farming, etc.) are considered as the legal ground for farming, agro-forestry and forestry production and processing along the value chains. Time-limited exceptions and recognition of equivalent standards may be granted by the competent European and national authorities on the basis of evidence-based justifications.
- (b) By 01 January 2030 all other land use practices and aquaculture are bound to the world-wide standards for organic production, processing and land maintenance (green space, parks, gardens, cemeteries, railway tracks, leisure facilities etc.). Time-limited exceptions or equivalent practices can be issued by the competent authorities on the basis of evidence-based justifications.
- (c) During the interim period leading up to the new rules the Commission will monitor the programmes of the MS to ensure that all forms of support is targeted to supporting farmers and other rural actors to making the transition

3.2 Compliance rules for land management, the production of plants for food and non-food crops and for wood, of livestock and fish (aquaculture) are established as conditions for receiving support from the ERAF (in the Annex to this Regulation):

- (a) These rules regulate the increasing use of agro-ecological practices and the decreasing use of unsustainable land management practices and the use of chemical substances in fertilisation, plant protection, animal health, and animal feed; they also set a regulatory framework for crop production and animal husbandry (mandatory crop rotation, extensive livestock production (animal-land ratio per hectare etc.);
- (b) These rules also define thresholds and bans for active chemical substances produced, used in the EU or exported in non-EU countries; and production restrictions concerning nature conservation, biodiversity protection, wild collection and hunting, climate gas emission limits, public health issues, land planning and access to land requirements for new entrants and young farmers in the remit of environmental and other (social, spatial development etc.) policies.
- (c) By 01 January 2030 support from the ERAF is mandatorily tied to the world-wide standards for organic production and processing or equivalent practices (such as regenerative farming, etc.). Time-limited exceptions and recognition of equivalent standards may be granted by the competent European and national authorities on the basis of evidence-based justifications.

3.3. Annual area-based decoupled payments for all active farmers are designated to guarantee a minimum level of agricultural income, as well as to comply with the objective of ensuring a fair standard of living for farm workers and the wider agricultural and rural community.

- (a) Basic income support is provided to all active farmers and farm workers.
  - (i) Decoupled payments are indexed with a farm labour factor (FTE) (whose algorithm is defined in the Annex);
  - (ii) Decoupled payments are tripled for the first 5 ha and doubled for the first 20 ha;
  - (iii) Basic income support to farmers is mandatorily capped at 100.000 EUR;
  - (iiii) On a facultative basis, basic income support can be made degressive beyond 25.000 EUR;
- (b) Complementary redistributive income support for sustainability is provided according to economic, geographical or environmental productivity disadvantages.
  - (i) Young farmers are entitled to receive top-up payments for the first five years after starting business which corresponds to the double of subsidies granted under the basic payment scheme (which means six times the basic rate for the first 5 ha and four times for every ha until 20ha). The young farmers' subsidy is capped with the amount payable for 20 ha.



- (ii) Payments can be granted to active farmers in respect of designated areas with geographical or environmental constraints as supplements to the basic income support. These annual payments also have to be indexed with a labour factor (FTE) as stipulated under p. 3.3.(a) (i);
- (c) Complementary payments are provided for specific contributions to the common good.
  - (i) Payments can be granted to active farmers in respect to mandatory requirements pertaining to environmental and climate protection as supplements to the basic income support. These annual payments also have to be indexed with a labour factor (FTE) as stipulated under p. 3.3.(a) (i);
  - (ii) Payments can be granted to active farmers in respect to eco-schemes and measures aimed at enhancing biodiversity, soil and water quality, emission reduction, animal welfare, public health etc. These annual payments also have to be indexed with a labour factor (FTE) as stipulated under p. 3.3.(a) (i).

#### Article 4.

##### Support for the development of sustainable rural value chains

4.1. Support for the development of agricultural, food and forestry value chains (capping of support at 100.000 EUR for private enterprises and at 200.000 EUR for cooperation projects, whereas 100.000 EUR remain as max. support for individual cooperation partners).

- (a) Support for cooperation and partnerships to produce, certify and distribute seed and planting material and to promote animal breeding for organic production and recognised equivalent purposes;
- (b) Support for participatory research and breeding of genetically diverse plant and animal reproductive material which responds to the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss;
- (c) Support for cooperation and partnerships to produce, clean, store and distribute leguminous plants for crop rotation practices and animal feed;
- (d) Support for cooperation and partnership between farmers and artisanal food producers along the food production chain on local and regional level;
- (e) Support for investments into value chains of energy plants, subject to prioritisation of the production of food for human consumption;
- (f) Support for investments into forestry value chains including wood and non-wood products;
- (g) Support for investments into value chains of renewable raw materials;
- (h) Support for quality improvement and waste reduction in the food chain;
- (i) Support for water storing and water saving irrigation systems;
- (j) Support for the preparation and implementation of culinary partnerships (i.e. the revival of local plant and animal products and recipes) and of local food councils in the context of rural-urban cooperation;
- (k) Support for actions pertaining to crops of specific interest such as stipulated in Art. 42 of the current regulation 2021/2115 (fruits, vegetables, apiculture, wine, olive oil, hops, cotton or other sectors such as listed under Article 33 of the current regulation).

4.2 Support for the development of value chains not or not directly deriving from primary production, such as crafts, industries, tourism, gastronomy, leisure and other services (capping of support at 100.000 EUR for private enterprises and at 200.000 EUR for cooperation projects, whereas 100.000 EUR are fixed as max. support for individual cooperation partners).

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This still unwritten regulation is work in progress.  
Any provocative effect on European or national policy makers is intended.



Inauguration of the "Avenue  
against Land Grabbing" organised  
by farmers and civil society

# EPILOGUE: ECHOES OF THE FUTURE

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As this book goes to print we inter-are between the ongoing severe impacts of the war on Ukraine, the massive exodus of the Ukrainian people, and the overwhelming solidarity Europeans have offered to the millions of displaced and separated families.

Have we been sleepwalking for too long about the rising East-West conflict, as the historian Christopher Clark suggests? Western Europe stumbled into World War I in the Balkans and has ignored ongoing tensions for many years. The war on Ukraine and earlier in the South East of Europe was and is our common affair. It is a warning and a chance for all Europeans to prepare a more peaceful future. Rural Europe is able to contribute to this goal.

This book carries the expertise of a broad range of European rural movements and competent authorities which can contribute to peace and resilience. It is also a call upon the [European Conference](#)

[on the Future of Europe](#) to give specific attention to our policy action proposals drawn from the encouraging action stories of this book. All who have contributed also urge the EU Member States of the EU to adapt their National Strategic Plans to the new challenges and to actively involve our neighbours as equal Europeans in this exercise.

European democracy then will be stronger and will continue to play on the side of solidarity and cooperation. We must include those who now feel left behind or disrespected, so that they cannot be taken in by nationalistic or xenophobic slogans of autocratic would-be leaders. Also the rift between big and small, rich and poor must be tackled so that empathy, solidarity, respect, hospitality and hope have a chance.

The real change happens in cooperatives, local initiatives, municipalities, local action groups and trans-border and area-based

development projects. In the end it is all about empowering rural people to act responsibly, in full conscience of their rights and duties as citizens and members of the global society.

As the Ukrainian people were welcomed with empathy and hospitality, this book is largely done voluntarily, just like most of the work that farmers, women and men of crafts and enterprises, food cooperatives, social initiatives and civil society networks perform when they make extra miles to deliver their products to processors and consumers, or when they sit down in dialogue groups with their government departments and the European Commission. This extra work has often not been sufficiently respected and valued. Voluntary work should be honoured with resources to master the challenge of making a peaceful transition to sustainable, fair and prosperous rural areas of the future. Together we will make it.



## LINKS

Here are the links from organisations, publications or initiatives mentioned in the text, in chronological order.

References to other organisations have been added in some cases. Clicking on the QR code you will directly access to this list on Forum Synergies' website.

## FOREWORD, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, RESILIENCE AND PEACE

Fondation de France:

[www.fondationdefrance.org](http://www.fondationdefrance.org)

Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme: [www.fph.ch](http://www.fph.ch)

Heinrich Boell Foundation: [www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de)

Porticus:

<https://www.porticus.com/en/home>

## DIARY FROM THE FUTURE: A JOURNEY TO SUNNBERG, AUSTRIA

NUTS - Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background>

## CLOUDS OF RURAL RESILIENCE - FROM VISIONS TO ACTION

Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and Zen master:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch\\_Nh%E1%BA%A5t\\_H%E1%BA%A1nh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch_Nh%E1%BA%A5t_H%E1%BA%A1nh)

CAP Pillar 1: Direct payments:

<https://www.europarLeuropa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/109/first-pillar-of-the-common-agricultural-policy-cap-ii-direct-payments-to-farmers>

CAP Pillar 2: Rural Development Policy:

<https://www.europarLeuropa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/110/second-pillar-of-the-cap-rural-development-policy>

Obelisk Farm: <https://www.obeliskfarm.lv/>

Cultivate: <http://www.cultivate.ie/>

## 1. NETWORKS AND FRAMEWORKS

### MUCH MORE THAN OUR DAILY BREAD

Freie Bäcker:

<https://www.die-freien-baecker.de/>

Slow Food Youth: <https://www.slowfood.de/wirueberuns/slowfoodyouth>

Meine Landwirtschaft:

<http://www.meine-landwirtschaft.de>

BAKWERT:

<https://www.weizenviefalt.de/news/>

Atelier Ernährungswende: <http://www.atelier-ernaehrungswende.org>

Weizenviefalt:

<https://www.weizenviefalt.de/news/>

### FARMERS AND BAKERS

CSA: Community Supported Agriculture: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community-supported\\_agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community-supported_agriculture)

GAEC: Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun:

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupement\\_agricole\\_d%27exploitation\\_en\\_commun](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupement_agricole_d%27exploitation_en_commun)

la Billardière:

<https://www.fournildelabillardiere.fr/>

CUMA France: <http://www.cuma.fr/>

CIVAM: <https://www.civam.org/>

Mutualité sociale agricole (MSA):

<https://www.msa.fr/lfp>

Atelier Paysans:

<https://www.latelierpaysan.org/>

European Rural Development Fund (ERDF):

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-regional-development-fund-erdf\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-regional-development-fund-erdf_en)

## CSA AND THE BUILDING OF A FOOD COMMONS

CSA: Community Supported Agriculture: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community-supported\\_agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community-supported_agriculture)

ASAT: <https://asatromania.ro/>

URGENCE!: <https://urgenci.net/>

## FARMERS GETTING AHEAD OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Réseau Mixte Technologique (RMT)

Alimentation locale:

<https://www.rmt-alimentation-locale.org/>

European Data Strategy:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy_en)

European Digital Programme:

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>

## SIMPLE TOOLS FOR SOLIDARITY

DESIRA:

<https://desira2020.eu/the-project/>

DESIRA Article "Digitalisation, Short Food Chain and Sovereignty": <https://desira2020.eu/2020/10/27/article-digitalisation-short-food-chain-and-sovereignty/>

Solidarity Purchasing Group (GAS):

<https://incampagna.eu/en-it/static/group-shopping#>

## 2. LOCAL AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

### CREATIVE MUNICIPALITIES - BRINGING PEOPLE INTO AGRI-FOOD POLICYMAKING

Commune de Plessé:

<https://www.commune-de-plesse.com/>

L'EPF de Loire-Atlantique (L'Etablissement public foncier de Loire-Atlantique):

<https://agence-fonciere.loire-atlantique.fr/>

CUMA France: <http://www.cuma.fr/>



**CAP44 (ADEAR de Loire-Atlantique):**  
<https://www.agriculturepaysanne.org/CAP44-ADEAR-de-Loire-Atlantique>

**Vigifoncier:** <https://www.vigifoncier.fr/>

**Safer (Société d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural):**  
<https://www.safer.fr/>

### A SHARED SPACE FOR FOOD TRANSITION

**Fete de la Vache Nantaise:** <https://www.facebook.com/vachenantaise/>

**Pas si bête la fête:** <https://www.facebook.com/Pas-si-b%C3%AAtela-f%C3%AAtela-147313195366084/>

**Alliance Slow Food des Cuisiniers:** <https://alliance-des-cuisiniers.fr/lassociation/>

**Université des Sciences et des Pratiques Gastronomiques - USPG:** <https://uspg.bzh/>

**ISSAT: Lycée professionnel Agricole de Redon:** <https://www.issat.info/>

**Fédération des races de Bretagne:**  
<https://www.races-de-bretagne.fr/>

**Conservatoire des Races animales en Pays de la Loire - CRAPAL:**  
<https://www.crapal.fr/>

**Redon Agglomération:**  
<https://www.redon-agglomeration.bzh/>

### INSPIRING CHANGE TO EMPOWER LOCAL ACTION

**Progetto Gaia Terra:**  
<https://www.progettogaia terra.com/>

### CREATING ALTERNATIVES, CREATING COMMUNITY

**Cargonomia:** <http://cargonomia.hu/>  
**Zsámboki Biokert:**  
<https://www.zsambokibiokert.hu/>

## 3. COHESION AND DEMOCRACY

### RIGHTS, RESPECT AND REVITALISATION

**Article Globalist syndication:** <https://www.globalist.it/news/2022/02/16/mimmo-lucano-non-ce-alternativa-alla-politica-dellaccoglienza/>

**Città Futura association:**  
<https://www.riaccittafutura.org/>

### NEW PATHS TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

**Fundación CEPAIM:**  
<https://www.cepaim.org/>

**Nuevos Senderos | Biblioteca:**  
<http://nuevossenderos.es/biblioteca/>

**Revista La Artesa:** <https://www.cepaim.org/publicaciones/revista-la-artesa/>

### REGENERATIVE GOVERNANCE

**Resilience Earth:** <https://resilience.earth>

### GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE

**Lišov Museum:**  
<http://lisovmuzeum.sk/en/home>

### DIARY FROM THE FUTURE: "MAN AS A FISH" - NORTH FRIESLAND

## 4. LIFTING BORDERS AND MAKING PEACE

### THE ART OF BRIDGING BORDERS

**Trebnitz Castle:**  
<https://www.schloss-trebnitz.de/en/>

**Friedenswald (Woods of Peace):**  
<https://www.schloss-trebnitz.de/en/friedenswald/>

**Schloß Trebnitz Bildungs- und Begegnungszentrum e.V.:** <https://www.politische-bildung-brandenburg.de/veranstalter/schloss-trebnitz>

**Oder Youth Council:**  
<http://www.oderjugendrat.eu/>

**Dorfbewegung Brandenburg, Netzwerk Lebendige Dörfer:**  
<http://www.lebendige-doerfer.de/>

**LAG Märkische Seen:**  
<https://www.lag-maerkische-seen.de/>

### EUROPEANS AT THE FENCE

**SWG (Regional Rural Development Standing Working group in South Eastern Europe):** <https://seerural.org/>

**AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems):**  
[https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/default/files/eip-agri\\_brochure\\_knowledge\\_systems\\_2018\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/default/files/eip-agri_brochure_knowledge_systems_2018_en_web.pdf)

**The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans:** <https://popups.uliege.be/2593-9483/index.php?id=172>

**DG NEAR (Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations):**  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directorate-General\\_for\\_European\\_Neighbourhood\\_Policy\\_and\\_Enlargement\\_Negotiations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directorate-General_for_European_Neighbourhood_Policy_and_Enlargement_Negotiations)

**GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit):**  
<https://www.giz.de/en/html/index.html>

**U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID):** <https://www.usaid.gov/>

**Explore Balkans:**  
<https://explore-balkans.com/>

### CONNECTING RURAL BORDERLANDS

**Carpathian Civil Society Platform:**  
<https://karpatnet.eu/the-platform>

**Carpathian Foundation - Statement on the war in Ukraine:**  
<https://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/statementonthewarinukraine>

**Carpathian Emergency Fund for Ukraine:**  
<https://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en/statementonthewarinukraine>

## COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURS

**UNDP (United Nations Development Program):** <https://www.undp.org/>

**EU-LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/EULEAD4LoriTavush>

**EULEAD4Lori&Tavush:**  
<https://twitter.com/LEADLoriTavush>

**AEIDL (European Association for Information on Local Development):**  
<http://www.aeidl.eu>

## THE INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE SHOP

**International Village Shop:** <https://www.internationalvillageshop.net/about/>

**My villages:** <http://www.myvillages.org/public-works>  
<http://www.publicworksgroup.net/home>

**Grizedale Arts:** <http://www.grizedale.org/>

**I love to be a farmer:**  
<http://www.ichbingernebauer.eu>

## 5. LEARNING AND VITALITY

### LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

**LAG Zeitkultur - Oststeirisches Kernland:**  
<http://zeitkultur.at/>

**CHANCE B Group:**  
<https://www.chanceb-gruppe.at/>

**European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF):** [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-guarantee-fund-eagf\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-guarantee-fund-eagf_en)

**European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD):**  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-fund-rural-development-eafrd\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-fund-rural-development-eafrd_en)

## DIGITAL NOMADS, URBAN-RURAL CO-EDUCATION

**ABCD Innovation Centre:**  
<http://www.abcdinnovationcenter.com/>

**Hooga Guest House / Kalavan:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/HoogaHouse/>

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BEYOND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

**Porto di terra:** <https://www.facebook.com/portoditerraproject/>

## WRANGLING FOR LAND RIGHTS

**Ranč Hoslovice:** <https://farmahoslovice.cz/>

## DOCUMENTING GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

**Cinergies Co-Op:**  
<https://www.cinergies.coop/>

**Heterotropies:** [http://heterotropies.net/#banner\\_glwsses\\_CLOSE](http://heterotropies.net/#banner_glwsses_CLOSE)

## 6. SEEDS AND SYSTEMS

### SEEDS OF COLLABORATION

**European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity (EC-LLD):**  
<https://liberatediversity.org/>

**IFOAM analysis:**  
[https://www.organicseurope.bio/content/uploads/2021/11/IFOAMEU\\_policy\\_CAP\\_externalbriefing\\_17112021.pdf?d](https://www.organicseurope.bio/content/uploads/2021/11/IFOAMEU_policy_CAP_externalbriefing_17112021.pdf?d)

**Paper on the future of plant breeding:**  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1720088](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1720088)

**Farm to Fork Strategy:**  
[https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy\\_de](https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_de)

**A European Green Deal:** [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

**IFOAM Organics Europe:**  
<https://www.organicseurope.bio/>

**Greek Network for Biodiversity and Ecology in Agriculture:**  
<https://www.aegilops.gr/index.php/en>

**LIVSEED HORIZON 2020 project:**  
<https://www.livseed.eu/>

**Arche Noah, AT:** <https://www.2000m2.eu/global-bean-project/>

**Arche Noah project Balkan Beets:**  
<https://www.arche-noah.at/wissen/projekte/balkan-beets>

**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas:** <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694>

**SITO Network:** <https://sito.gr>

**Peliti Community:** <https://peliti.gr/>

**NO PATENTS ON SEEDS!:**  
<https://www.no-patents-on-seeds.org/en>

**Community Seed Banks Academy:**  
<https://www.communityseedbanks.org/>

## GLOBAL BEAN PROJECT

**The global bean project:** <https://www.2000m2.eu/global-bean-project/>

**Foundation in Future Farming:**  
<https://www.gfar.net/organizations/zukunftsstiftung-landwirtschaft-foundation-future-farming>

**Global Plot 2000m<sup>2</sup>:**  
<https://www.2000m2.eu/>

## FEEDING OURSELVES

**Cloughjordan Community Farm:**  
<https://cloughjordancommunityfarm.ie/>

**European Solidarity Corps:**  
[https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en)

**Rethink Ireland:** <https://rethinkireland.ie/>

**Open Food Network Ireland (OFN Ireland):**  
<https://openfoodnetwork.ie/>

**Irish Seedsavers Association:**  
<https://irishseedsavers.ie/>



**Talamh Beo:** <https://talamhbeo.ie/>  
**CSA Ireland:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/245019725582313/>  
**Cultivate:** <http://www.cultivate.ie/>  
**Environmental Pillar:**  
<https://environmentalpillar.ie/>  
**Centre for Cooperative Studies:**  
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ccs/>  
**Cloughjordan Ecovillage:**  
<https://www.thevillage.ie/>  
**Open Food Network:**  
<https://openfoodnetwork.org/>  
**North Tipperary Online Farmers Market:**  
[https://openfoodnetwork.ie/north\\_tipperary\\_online\\_farmers\\_market/shop](https://openfoodnetwork.ie/north_tipperary_online_farmers_market/shop)

## FACILITATING FARM TO FORK

**Le Boef Éthique:**  
<https://www.leboeufethique.fr/>  
**Article Le Monde: Aux portes du Queyras, des éleveurs ont redonné vie à l'abattoir de Guillestre:**  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2020/02/27/aux-portes-du-queyras-des-eleveurs-ont-redonne-vie-a-l-abattoir-de-guillestre\\_6030975\\_3244.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2020/02/27/aux-portes-du-queyras-des-eleveurs-ont-redonne-vie-a-l-abattoir-de-guillestre_6030975_3244.html)

## DEMOCRATISING FOOD

**Granville Community Kitchen Farm:**  
<https://granvillecommunitykitchen.org.uk/good-food-box/>  
**Soil Association:**  
<https://www.soilassociation.org/>  
**Woodoaks Farm:**  
<https://woodoaksfarm.com/>

## 7. LAND ACCESS AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

### THE HAY, THE COW'S SOUL AND THE FAMILY

**Căţean Farm:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/FermaCatean>

**High Nature Value (HNV):**  
<https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/high-nature-value-farmland>

## AGROFORESTRY; BIODIVERSITY; NATURE

**Freixo do Meio Users Cooperative:** <https://en.freixodomeio.pt/the-cooperative/>

## FOR PEAT'S SAKE

**Re-Peat Europe:** <https://www.re-peat.earth>  
**Re-Peat Manifesto:** <https://www.re-peat.earth/re-peat-manifesto>  
**Peat Anthology:** <https://www.re-peat.earth/the-uk-anthology-series>  
**BirdLife International:**  
<https://www.birdlife.org/>  
**UK Anthology:** <https://www.re-peat.earth/the-uk-anthology-series>

## THE LONG NOW

**Sami Parliament:** <https://sametinget.no/about-the-sami-parliament/>

## SHATTERING THE CHAINS OF RURAL REPRESSION

**Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI Europe):** <https://www.iss.nl/en/research/research-networks/emancipatory-rural-politics-initiative>

## DIARY FROM THE FUTURE: RURAL FICTION 2050 - "LOVE LETTER FROM AN ELDER"

**Long Term Vision for Rural Areas:**  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en)

## POLITICAL ACTION NOW - FOR RESILIENCE AND PEACE

**Rural Europe on the Move, Forum Synergies, 2019:** <https://www.forum-synergies.eu/rubrique134.html>

**Communication on a Long Term Vision:**  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en)

**European Conference on the Future of Europe:**  
<https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>

**European Rural Parliament:**  
<https://europeanruralparliament.com/>

**ELARD (European Leader Association for Rural Development):** <http://elard.eu/>

**ARC2020:** <https://www.arc2020.eu/>

**Rural Voices Report:**  
[https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/rural-voices-report\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/rural-voices-report_en)

**ENRD:** <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

**European Committee of the Region (CoR):**  
<https://cor.europa.eu/en/about>

**RED:** <http://www.ruraleurope.ovh/en/accueil-2/>

**European Economic and Social Committee:**  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en>

**ARC 2020: A Communication from Civil Society to the European Union Institutions on the future Agricultural and Rural Policy, 2010:** <https://www.arc2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/ARC-Communication-EN.pdf>

**Kalø Organic Agricultural College, DK:**  
<https://videndjurs.dk/en/kaloe-organic-agricultural-college>

**Green Association, Bulgaria:**  
<http://greenassn.com/>

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## EPILOGUE: ECHOES OF THE FUTURE

Wir haben es satt/ Meine Landwirtschaft

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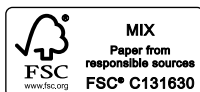
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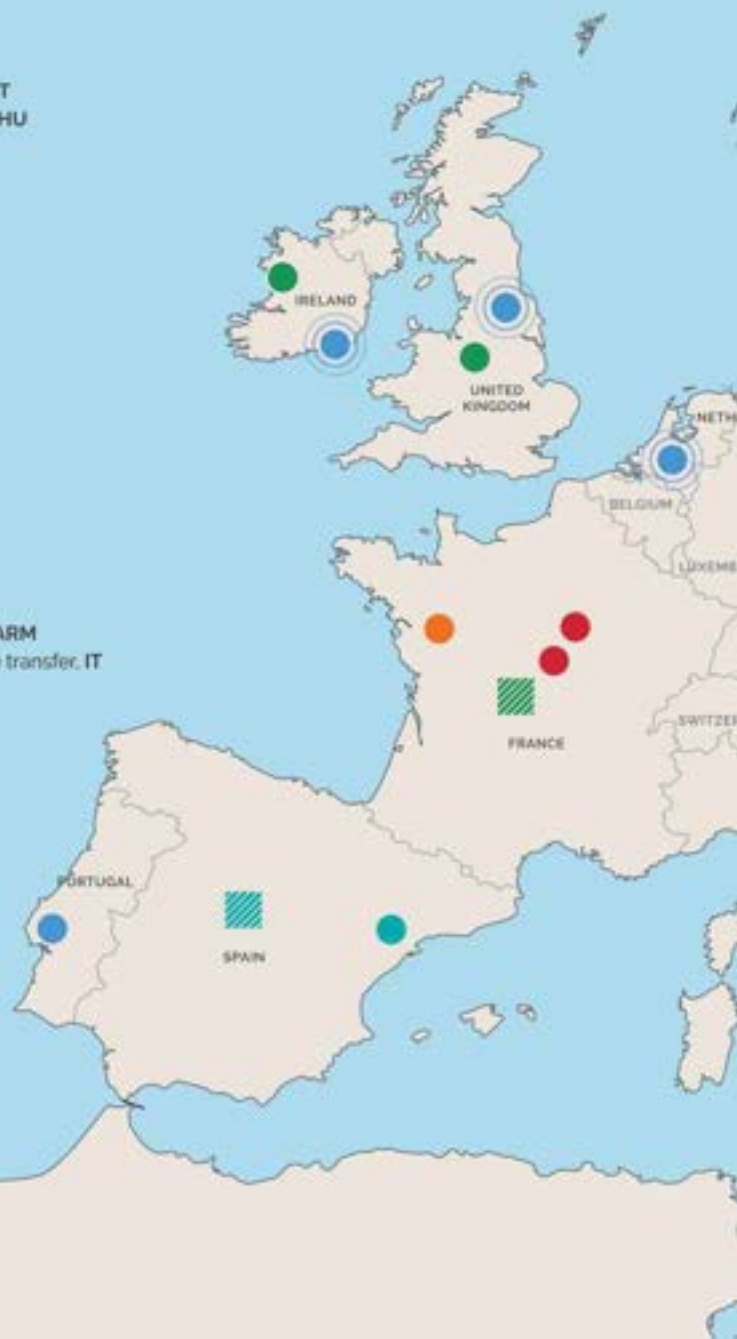
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Transnational /  
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Network /  
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# RURAL EUROPE TAKES ACTION!

This map highlights the projects, initiatives and networks in Europe that already take action in one or the other way. The choice of actions is selective and not representative - but worth further experimenting, expanding and spreading! The colours guide you to the seven clouds - the main topics representing the complexity and diversity of European rural regions.





This book is a policy guide for the Future of Rural Europe.

Consider these pages a political echo from the future. They reveal the power of European civil society and the collective intelligence and imagination of numerous rural experts, policy makers and practitioners.

We invite you to travel 30 years in time, back and forth. We offer snapshots and imaginings of how rural Europe is responding and will respond to the serious challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and a new war. And we set policy milestones for a new fundament of rural policies of the future.

We have gathered a dazzling mosaic of innovative and resilient practices across 25 countries to imagine a larger and a more open Europe. Crystallising from those practices a spectrum of policy action proposals, we present to you the 'Unwritten Regulation on an Integrated European Rural, Agricultural and Food Policy'. In the Future of Rural Europe, we see the space for this regulation well before 2030.

*Rural Europe Takes Action* is a game changer. No business as usual accepted. We have our heads in the clouds of possibility, and our feet firmly on the ground. Join action-takers across Europe as we embrace the change!

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