



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Lettuce Grow – digital platform for local agriculture

Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA)

1. Brief Description

Lettuce Grow is a new digital platform (still underdevelopment) for selling food products that was created with the goal to stimulate the Portuguese local economy. It is a solution created by two foreigners living in Portugal who identified a need: promote the agricultural production, fair trade and consumption of local products.

As they are still developing the digital platform itself, Lettuce Grow developers are not yet able to state what exactly will constitute this tool and how it will work. Nevertheless, they intend to establish a relationship between urban-rural areas by connecting SME's to local businesses in the vicinity. The solution is achieved through the connection of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with consumers, allowing the consumers to find the freshest, high-quality, locally produced farming products.

Although they are still developing the platform and connecting with their future business partners, Lettuce Grow developers intend to be online in a few months. At present, there are no farmers or SMEs associated with the platform (no data available yet), but their first target is to get 34/40 farmers and about 100 SMEs in the platform.

The platform will allow any type of agricultural product to be sold, as long as it is locally produced and from a small to medium size scale producer. As for the product quality guarantee, Lettuce Grow will work on the basis of the soft regulating market principle.

Lettuce Grow developers aim, in the future, to apply only a 5% fee on each transaction made on the platform so that the larger part of the profits (95%) are given to small scale farmers and SMEs. However, profit distribution will start with a 50%-50% proportion and will evolve to the 5%-95% proportion as the number of platform users increases.

By giving back, in the future, 95% of the profits to the farmers, the developers of this initiative aim to help rebuild the Portuguese economy and reverse the desertification of the rural areas, whilst bringing back the value of the small scale Portuguese farmers.

Further this year, Lettuce Grow plans to launch the platform linking SMEs, farmers and consumers within the Lisbon and Setubal area. The project is based in Start-Up Sintra and benefits from Sintra's Mayor full support to launch a pilot within Sintra's territory. In parallel, Lettuce Grow is developing strategy to reduce food waste. The idea is to implement a system for collecting and donating food that can no longer be legally placed on the market, but is still good for consumption.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

In the context of urban-rural relationships, Lettuce Grow aims to “empower the Portuguese small-scale farmers, SME's and agricultural co-operations by connecting them directly on our platform”. For that, Lettuce Grow developers identify the following challenges regarding their project:

- > Small farmers are not able to “run off” their products because it is cheaper for the large distributors, who dominate the market, to import in large quantities instead of buying locally;
- > To shape new forms of collaborative actions through the empowerment of small-scale agricultural actors;
- > Reverse the desertification of the Portuguese rural areas;
- > Reduce import of agricultural products and;
- > Although biophysical conditions are good for agriculture, there are a lot of small farmers that are not able to support the agricultural activity.

These challenges can be seen as very generally, but they represent the vision the Lettuce Grow developers have at the moment. Maybe, in the future, with the platform developed and working, these challenges will be adjusted to more specific ones.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

Lettuce Grow is not really creating new localities yet, but it has the potential to create some through (i) the generation of new local economies and/or (ii) the strengthening of a balanced proximity economy.

Generate new local economies by increasing the flow of local products, fostering close relations between those who produce and those who consume, establishing short marketing channels between small farmers and consumers by using the platform as an ICT channel. Strengthen a balanced proximity economy, which stimulates entrepreneurship in rural areas and the autonomy of small agricultural producers.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

Lettuce Grow developers intend to promote smart development through the following aspects:

- > Digital-based platform that interconnects farmers, SME's, consumers, and co-operatives, serving as a channel of communication;
- > Provide clear information about the product's origin, type of production mode, location of plantation and distribution;
- > Foster knowledge and awareness on existing local agricultural production;
- > Increase food availability at a low price;
- > Shared profit and stimulation of entrepreneurship.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

It is not possible, at this moment, to identify the impacts that Lettuce Grow has on the local economy and on people's lives. This is due to the fact that the project is still being developed. However, it is possible to highlight the sustainable principles that this project have that intend, in the future, to contribute to the better quality of life of small scale agricultures (and of consumers) which in its majority have non-fair precarious jobs and incomes. Also, with the food collection and donation system, it can help to decrease food waste. In general, the Lettuce Grow conceptualisation can be a good example of project to help achieve food security.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Being still in a very early stage of the project (digital platform still being developed), and as presented before, there are no farmers or SMEs associated to the platform, it was not possible to gather data regarding users or producers or to gather data of any other kind.

Table 1 identifies a collection of indicators that will allow, further, to better analyse and assess the project in relation to its contribution to the rural-urban connection.

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Lettuce Grow

Data / Indicator	Source
<p>CHARACTERISTICS/CONTEXT/ DIMENSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €/year • Clients/consumers (Nº) • Working team (Nº by function/job) • Spatial distribution of the consumers (urban-rural linkages) • Area of cropped land 	To be collected with Lettuce Grow developers
<p>BENEFICIAL RELATIONS</p> <p>(Maintenance of agricultural activity; Creation of employment; Development of the local economy; Stimulating entrepreneurship; Landscape maintenance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nº and type of activities developed to ensure beneficial urban-rural relations and local economy • Nº of new jobs • Stimulating entrepreneurship: replication, franchising, increasing scale • Landscape valorisation: organic farming versus traditional 	To be collected with Lettuce Grow developers
<p>RURAL-URBAN PROXIMITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residence of the consumers • Residence of the farmers • Flow of products/activities between territories 	To be collected with Lettuce Grow developers
<p>NEW TECHNOLOGIES</p> <p>(in particular ICT/digitization)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital elements (existence of) • Dependence on digital elements. 	To be collected with Lettuce Grow developers
<p>INNOVATION</p> <p>(social, technological or a mixture of the two)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative/distinctive element • Nº of initiatives that used the same element 	To be collected with Lettuce Grow developers

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

The information available concerning Lettuce Grow was collected, as presented in *section 6. References*, from its website, other web references and an interview to obtained more detailed information regarding the project.

The data available collected to perform the present *Rapid Appraisal* is only subjective, being the objective data to be collected with Lettuce Grow developers in the future, as showed in Table 1.

6. References

<http://www.lettuce-grow.com>

<https://www.publico.pt/2017/10/29/p3/noticia/lettuce-grow-a-nova-plataforma-para-pequenos-agricultores-1828745>

<http://betbuzz.pt/startup-world/startup-world-startups/lettuce-grow-real-fruits-and-vegetables-right-the-way-you-want-them/>

<http://linktoleaders.com/start-ups-nacionais-no-web-summit-fazem-ambicionam/>

<https://thenextbigidea.pt/startups/lettuce-grow>

Telephone interview with Daniel Lind, one of the developers of the initiative

7. Mapping of governance institutions and actors

Farmers

SME's

Distributors

End consumers

Cooperatives

People/entities receiving part of the profits¹

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