



A policy briefing on current prospects, challenges, and obstacles regarding place-based synergy governance

ROBUST Deliverable 6.2

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November 2021



ROBUST receives funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727988. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author(s).

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PREFACE

This paper is intended to provide guidance on how governance arrangements (GAs) might best be used to bring about greater synergy between rural and urban places, actors, and interests, based on the work and findings of the ROBUST project. It is directed at the level of policy making and policy work more generally, across a wide range of contexts in which these rural-urban relationships might occur, as well as with regard to policy relating to governance itself.

In order to do this, it draws heavily upon the work that has been undertaken within Work Package 5 of the ROBUST project where the focus has been upon exploring the practical application of GAs themselves in a rural urban context, and then places that into a broader policy context. It also draws upon work carried out within Work Package 1 of the project where considerable initial conceptualisation work was done and key concepts developed, and upon Work Package 3 of ROBUST where eleven Living Labs, and five Communities of Practice (CoPs) have explored a range of applied GAs for various purposes, all with a dimension around rural-urban linkages and synergies. We also draw upon work that has been done in Work Package 4 where particular emphasis has been placed upon the sorts of cross-sectoral interactions between rural and urban actors which characterise network collaboration and cooperation across a range of topic areas

Given the close coincidence between the whole subject of governance and its multi-layer nature, it is not by chance that much of the content of the paper is pitched at the level of EU policy and how this might be cascaded to apply in reality at national and sub-national levels.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this paper, we have adopted the definition of governance as used within other elements of the ROBUST project, and in particular within Work Package 5, where it has served to shape and inform the regional and thematic workshops undertaken at both partner and project level and indeed the European level workshop held in early October 2021. It is reproduced here in full for clarity and transparency:

“A new, negotiated, multi-stakeholder process and a collaborative system of decision design and decision making, characterized by significant degrees of self-governing, with attendant resources commitments and shared power, where there is sufficient common cause and a pragmatic understanding that to achieve the requisite capacity and agency requires appropriate institutional and organizational arrangements beyond the established architecture of power, control and authority, notably that of government” (Douglas 2006).

We add one caveat/clarification to the text above, insofar that has emerged over the time of the ROBUST project, when looking at GAs across the eleven Living Lab areas, that some governance bodies were/are already well-established with extensive track records of delivery in the ways described elsewhere in the definition text. These examples are no less governance bodies for not being new,

bearing which in mind, we have included them in our thinking, not wanting to run the risk of otherwise overlooking valuable existing practice.

In common with the work done in Work Package 5, we have also drawn heavily upon the findings of Work Package 1 of the ROBUST project which arrived at key conclusions around the central importance of “network governance” and captures its essence thus: “Network Governance: Deciding together Good rural-urban government enables participation. Partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors should mean deciding together and delivering better. Together, we can design for shared systems and services that respond to everyone’s needs”. (ROBUST Deliverable 1.5 “*The ROBUST Conceptual Framework: A Guide for Practitioners*”, Page 3).

Further, this paper makes no apology for directly echoing the characterisations that came out of Work Package 1 of ROBUST given that those are, in many ways, what the eleven Living Labs sought out to test and explore further, namely:

Five features of networked governance:

- Groups from different sectors and scales are brought together in an ongoing partnership
- They negotiate with each other
- The partnership is formalised somehow, such as through a committee or with monthly meetings
- The partnership has the autonomy to make decisions (although there will be external limits to what it can do, such as national laws and allocated budgets)
- There is a public purpose involved

And, arguably, of even greater relevance, given that this paper is itself structured as guidance, the four identified “ways to make network governance work”:

- Enable participation by building local capacity
- Facilitate communication between partners and participants
- Encourage reciprocal exchange and information sharing
- Establish mutual goals and shared working practices

Again, in common with Work Package 1 findings and suggestions, this paper also endorses the conclusions reached there (*ROBUST Deliverable 1.5, Page 12*), that ROBUST’s work builds upon and contextualises an extensive body of existing work on GAs by emphasising the need to not over-differentiate rural and urban, by; understanding that rural-urban relations are two-way and mutually beneficial and, by; focusing on rural-urban synergies to signpost positive ways forward.

The project set out, as the *Work Package 3 Synthesis Report (Deliverable 3.3)*, reminds us, to “*identify, if possible, factors, instruments and governance arrangements that foster synergistic rural urban relations in a region and across regions*”. It is that fostering dimension and the roles that GAs might play in that process, which is our focus here, and that aspect of fostering to which we would particularly draw the attention of policy actors.

In essence, then, this paper sets out to take much of what has already been posited by ourselves and others in terms of effective GAs and apply these to a given territorial context - the rural-urban - with all that has already been alluded to, and will be returned to, and amplified, with regard to the dangers of over-simplifying, under-estimating, or simply misunderstanding what rural-urban might mean in reality.

2. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN THE RURAL-URBAN CONTEXT

Concepts in common use by policy makers such as territorial cohesion, balanced territorial development and the increasingly avowed need to adopt a “place-based approach” when devising both policy and the instruments designed to bring about successful attainment of policy aims, have all in part served to bring rural-urban relations more into the spotlight in the recent past. Given, at the same time, that the value and accuracy of any simple, binary, model of rural and urban is coming increasingly to be questioned by policy makers and practitioners alike, the whole subject of relationships, interfaces, linkages, and dependencies between territories of different types is highly topical at the point in time at which the ROBUST project comes to its close – November 2021.

At an EU level, the lifespan of the ROBUST project has seen a new multi-annual financial framework (MFF) adopted, a new set of Cohesion Policy regulations approved and new mandates of the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions (CoR), European Economic and Social Commission (EESC) as well as a new European Commission under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen, with a new framework strategy, the European Green Deal. It has also, of course, coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and with other major global geopolitical developments. At the EU level more specifically again, it has also coincided with (alongside much else) the publication of the EC Communication on a *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)* and the adoption by the EU Council of Ministers of a *Territorial Agenda for 2030*. The combined effect is an evolving re-examination of different places/territories and their relative assets, values, potential and futures – often entwined with considerations of a general process of seeking to bring about twin transitions (“green” and “digital”) whilst leaving no-one (and no place!) behind.

The focus on place and place-specificity has come about in large part in parallel with a growing acceptance that administrative borders do not correspond with territorial reality, in other words that functionality transcends such lines on the map, that places that fall within different administrative blocks are not only connected, but are interdependent, and that boundaries are themselves anyway less than a fixed thing and will on occasion vary given the particular context in which they apply. GAs are a significant element of this picture given that they are the processes by which so much that happens within and across boundaries is determined.

The ROBUST European level workshop on rural-urban GAs held in early October 2021 recapitulated a number of key principles which ROBUST echoing the work of other now suggested should apply to rural-urban related GAs, in similar vein it highlighted a number of known challenges.

The principles highlighted included:

- Ensuring fair and equal access to, (and funding) for rural and urban communities in the context of the governance of public service delivery
- Taking due account of, (and measuring), benefits rural to urban and urban to rural in governance arrangements – (how we capture and balance benefits and achieve as many win-wins as possible)
- Ensuring individual citizen (and representative group) involvement in rural-urban governance arrangements
- Reflecting the importance of applying spatial planning policy fairly when determining what gets built/developed and where and how they are accessed (physically)

The challenges which ROBUST’s work had identified by that stage included:

- Balancing leadership on the one hand, with full and equal participation in rural-urban governance arrangements on the other
- Balancing rural and urban interests – equal and inclusive – “equal voices or lip service?”
- Learning from what we know does not work in rural-urban governance – and what we can learn from that
- Imposing rural-urban co-operation – experiences of forced co-operation (usually by legislative or regulatory frameworks)
- Understanding trade-offs and synergies – thinking about how what happens in one place impacts upon others (and vice-versa) and working that into our governance structures and mechanisms

These are repeated here and set out in full, given that they were (and are) intended to serve as a bridging point between principles and challenges that might apply to GAs in general but are now contextualised into those with a particular importance or pertinence when thinking more specifically about GAs with a rural-urban dimension. The ROBUST experience in general and the October 2021 workshop’s conclusions both indicate that all the listed factors ought to be included in considerations from the earliest possible stage of developing a rural-urban GA.

3. THE INNOVATION DIMENSION

Clearly - hopefully clearly - the thrust of much of the work that has been undertaken in the ROBUST project has been about being innovative in developing rural-urban GAs. This certainly applies in the context of the eleven Living Labs where new forms of GAs have been devised and developed in order to harness new opportunities or to respond to new challenges or circumstances. That has to a degree been borne out of perceived necessity, and it has been the impacts of rural-urban inequalities which has led to “the need for new thinking and governance innovation” (*ROBUST Work Package 3 Synergy Report, Deliverable 3.3*). This then is a reactive starting point in some cases at least, but it sits alongside other motivations rooted more in the desire to improve, to better support, to shape and to pre-empt, and as the same ROBUST report reminds us, to establish better rural-urban linkages and optimise rural-urban synergies. This is complex we are further reminded, partly because of variations in local settings and circumstances, but also because some dimensions of the innovation at GA level will have an overt aim to improve rural-urban linkages whilst others will not.

The same sense of being innovative at the governance level emerges from various aspects of the work done across the five ROBUST Communities of Practice, looking, for example, to identify ways in which GAs can be used to support new and evolving business models, or to support new approaches in valuing rural as well as urban cultural assets, or in rebalancing the relationships between rural and urban ecosystems or rural and urban food systems. Here, and elsewhere though, as well as applying GAs to innovation, it is often the ways of working themselves - in this regard, the GA processes - that are themselves new and innovative. This is particularly the case in the context of the work analysed and synthesised within ROBUST’s *Work Package 4 report (Deliverable 4.3)* where we read “coordination

between organisations (e.g., Territorial Pacts for employment) and cooperation within initiatives or organisations (e.g., LAGs) are a source of innovation (commercial, organisational, and social) between areas and that in turn involves new () relationships”.

This innovative dimension will often relate to the range and mix of actors involved and to the ways in which they are supported to become involved and engaged. A point which applies all the more when the mixture entails bringing together actors from different sectors (whether by this we mean either sector as in public/private/third, or from different policy/professional/topic areas [e.g., spatial planning/environmental/transport/food/culture]). It is these sorts of “cross-sectoral interactions” which in turn connect to the notion of synergising these interactions. Such attempts at achieving/optimising synergies are in turn made manifest by the attempt to take particular actions in one arena which then impact upon others – one key way of doing that is by bringing together actors within GAs. In the context of the analytical work carried out in Work Package 4, rural-urban relations are enhanced by developing new strategies, the innovative nature of which is in part defined by the nature of the collaboration and cooperation within the GAs used in their construction.

Policy actors then, might be alert to the overt need for, and desirability of, being innovative - of working in new and different ways. In doing so they might want to consider in advance, (and set out aspirations in terms of), the added value to be gained by amassing a more complete set of actors in GAs, to bring together new and different network governance arrangements in other words, and use this as an explicit reason for adopting such an approach. As work done within the ROBUST Living Labs has demonstrated, this can be done in various contexts, for example when bringing together private and public sector operators to cooperate on circular economy initiatives, by forming new alliances to give direction to regional food strategies, or, by having research institutions and civil society operators collaborate on environmental conservation schemes (For greater detail see Section 2.3 of the *ROBUST Work Package 4 Synthesis Report, Deliverable 4.3*).

4. GUIDELINES IN PRACTICE

There are universal principles at play here and points which need to be taken into consideration regardless of geographic setting or the subject area in which the GA is to be applied. In short, general principles apply! They ought not be ignored, far less discarded, because they have universal applicability. The particular challenge which ROBUST has set itself however is to layer upon those broad considerations, the specificities and distinct challenges faced when planning GAs with a rural-urban dimension.

It may also be noting at this point that the Covid-19 pandemic occurred during the middle and later stages of the ROBUST project, and whilst this caused major disruption to the project’s work in many ways, it also meant that ROBUST’s experimentation and analysis regarding rural-urban GAs was taking place at the same time as a much broader re-evaluation of the relative assets, functions and potentials of places of different types, was being carried out by policy actors at all levels, looking in particular at recovery and future resilience strategies. There is congruence there between ROBUST’s explorations and experimentations and the much broader state of affairs where in light of Covid-19 impacts all sorts of rethinking and resetting was occurring in the framework of “building back better” or similar notions.

4.1 Contexts and settings

To whom might ROBUST's work and findings with regard to rural-urban GAs be relevant or useful? We suggest there is a broad range of contexts which might serve as a starting point for serious consideration of the rural-urban dimension of the ways in which governance happens. In terms of the contexts in which we might expect to find GAs with a rural-urban setting, the five ROBUST Communities of Practice (CoPs) gave us a pre-ordained structure to work within. Now, of course there is no reason why governance bodies and arrangements on the ground and beyond ROBUST should exactly mirror our five CoP topic areas. When we sought out existing GAs, or the contexts and settings where we might want to apply our own Living Lab experimentation, our experience was that most concerned themselves, singly, or in combination, with:

- spatial planning,
- transport,
- environment,
- economy,
- energy,
- social policy & health,
- culture,
- sport & recreation
- The management of funding programmes – which might cut across one or more of the above

In other words, the ROBUST guidelines might apply to GAs in any of the sectoral contexts listed here. Each brings its own challenges, and each will operate with its own established ways of working, preferred professional styles, regulatory frameworks etc. And of course, it may well be the case that innovative rural-urban GAs are themselves established in an explicit attempt to join up two or more of these subject areas where this is felt to be necessary or desirable.

4.2 The territorial dimension

How, then, to arrive at an approach and model for GAs which is broad enough to encapsulate multiple factors and be applicable in a multitude of contexts with a clear rural-urban dimension, whilst at the same time being able to produce something with a clear and precise focus on rural-urban related governance arrangements as opposed to governance more broadly?

By way of a checklist approach, we suggest that in terms of thinking about what the shape of an effective rural-urban GA might look like, the challenge which presents itself is to be able to arrive at GAs:

- with an organisational structure that goes beyond traditional governing institutions working within set geographic borders (municipality/city councils/regional parliaments etc.)
- composed of multiple stakeholders (very often from multiple levels of public administration)
- that have their own delegated or assigned tasks/competencies
- and decision-making authority
- with a clear and shared intention to cooperate for a common cause (or causes with common elements at least)

And that checklist might be expanded in the case of rural-urban GAs to include:

- Some sort of place-based approach/mechanism to ensure that the rural-urban dimension is overt as opposed to absent or tacitly assumed
- arrangements to ensure that the stakeholders “come from” or “are of” different types of territories (urban, peri-urban and rural) - with the added complexity both of structure, size and interests which this might apply
- equality between all stakeholders and, again, with urban-rural balance as an important/overt issue here

And, by way of contextualisation, this will apply across GAs of different types be they:

- a) Broad public (sector) governance bodies
- b) Thematic “agencies” or similar
- c) Output-specific groupings
- d) Private-public partnership working arrangements

4.3 Actors engaged and the dynamics involved

With regard to the particular dynamics or actors involved in rural-urban GAs It seems pretty much self-evident that there will be multiple actors involved, often representing different levels of public administration. or simply entities of different size and with varied levels of administrative capacity (e.g., a core city in a metropolitan area as compared to small rural municipalities). There is a key and obvious factor to highlight here - real or assumed - that the bigger entities involved in a GA tend to dominate, especially given that they often have a bigger financial share/stake. We might link this of course to the broader subject and nature of multi-level governance (MLG) which in large part this is about - BUT it is not synonymous. What needs to be kept closely in view in the ROBUST context is any situation where these larger and better resources entities represent (overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally), a particular territorial interest – rural or urban, as that is where any territorial imbalance is most likely to manifest.

One or more entity involved in the GA might push for different priorities that correspond with their local or immediate aims, in other words the common cause/purpose referred to above can quickly start to become strained and this will need to be mediated in some way. We found this “inequality of power” dimension strongly characteristic of rural-urban GAs – tricky of course, partly because of “political” sensitivities, partly because there may well be a feeling that those who contribute the most in terms of resources and capacity have some legitimate right to a greater degree of influence compared to others, or to at least adopt a leadership role. That dynamic might in reality act to undermine the initial purpose of an equal arrangement. It has raised interesting, allied, points, upon which policy actors might wish to reflect, in terms of the roles of “honest brokers”, mediators or similar “neutral” bodies with a stated function to identify and counter-balance any perceived inequality in decision-making, - and just how such roles might be worked into the design of the GA itself. Parity of power/influence is a defining factor of governance for some at least but it ought not to be assumed, in reality it probably needs to be planned for, supported, and monitored.

4.4 Capturing the particular challenges around rural-urban GAs

Given what has already been said, policy makers might therefore anticipate and plan for particular complexity within rural-urban GAs that arises as a consequence of:

- The extent of multi-stakeholder involvement – particularly given that stakeholders might have markedly different interests or priorities
- Urban and rural policy to date having created situations where urban and rural interests are perceived of as competitive one with the other, if not, in extremis, oppositional
- The direct involvement of different multi-level stakeholders who are likely in our experience to approach issues with different scale remits/foci (regional vs. local) and to bring different degrees of “representativeness”
- Stakeholders having different levels of resource capacity (including inequality in access to EU or national funds), power and administrative capacity (often related to their size or administrative level), and where larger players dominating the structure is highly characteristic
- The involvement of different type of stakeholders – political/strategic and sectoral (e.g., a city council alongside an energy agency or farmer/producer group representative)
- Working with a mix of stakeholders whose starting point is sometimes sectoral/topic based and in others more overtly place-based
- The fact that these different stakeholders are quite likely being asked to work together for the first time, whilst having very different working styles. To a degree a universal point, but one likely to be exacerbated in a rural-urban context where they are less likely to have coincided with each other previously
- The voluntary or informal character of cooperation across administrative borders (which by definition rural-urban linkages almost always are), making such cooperation vulnerable to disengagement in the absence of formal, or even legal, commitment
- And where the voluntary or informal character of the cooperation means there is limited ability to enforce measures
- And where very practical issues may come to the fore, with, for example, GA members based in remoter rural areas expected to travel (and meet the cost of travel) to meetings in urban centres

4.5 Considering the benefits and counting the cost

Why does it matter? What can, or does, go wrong if rural-urban GAs are absent or don't work as well as they might? During the course of ROBUST, various Living Labs and Communities of Practice weighed up what was at stake and explored the dangers and consequences of not optimising rural-urban GAs

- Inequalities in development of whatever kind - the bigger and/or more powerful leaves others behind - this serves to increase gaps, deepen divides and runs directly counter to policy ambitions around equalisation, levelling-up or “leaving no-one behind”
- Cross-boundary problems are not solved in an effective and efficient way – this takes on added resonance at a time when there is a growing recognition that challenges are not constrained by administrative borders, and neither are their possible solutions
- Cross-boundary investments (sometimes explicitly designed to tackle challenges acknowledged to exist at a cross-boundary level as immediately above) are often difficult to establish and manage given legal and administrative complications

- EU and national level cross-boundary funding investments are themselves invariably inherently connected to the policy goals they are seeking to achieve with limited scope to customise to local circumstances
- Incoherent spatial development – e.g., neighbouring municipalities don't agree on large-scale or combined investments with the result that efforts lack coherence, duplicate or overlap, fail to make economies of scale savings, are more limited in impact than they might otherwise be, or, at worst, are simply ineffective because they apply to too small and restricted a geographic area
- Economic opportunities related to scaling-up are missed, such as the use of combined purchasing power where it is more cost effective to make common energy purchases, for example, or where a public procurement exercise requires a particular critical mass level to make it a viable mechanism
- A lack of effective rural-urban engagement and GA resulting therefrom may lead also to less adept access to, and use being made of, EU funds. This might particularly apply in the context of instruments such as CLLD, or Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), [where cross-boundary working is a designed-in element of what is required], and to the development of projects within Policy Objective 5 of 2021-27 EU cohesion policy where rural-urban cooperation is a stated aim
- Missed opportunities in terms of mutual learning on the part of a huge range of different actors from across different types of territories, and where GAs serve as hugely useful opportunities for improving shared knowledge and mutual understanding. It is the GAs themselves that often directly trigger increased synergies and serve to strengthen links in mutually beneficial forms. Their absence is a serious loss or disadvantage, therefore.

5. APPLYING ROBUST LESSONS LEARNED IN SELECTED EU POLICY CONTEXTS

Four particular EU policy instruments/initiatives are addressed here. In each case, we suggest that the work of ROBUST on rural-urban governance has direct relevance and its findings might be used to inform further development in each of the four ongoing areas highlighted. In this section of the paper, we set out to highlight the prospects for applying ROBUST's work and findings in the context of four selected EU level policy initiatives/instruments all of which are designed, in different ways, for use and application at the national and sub-national level.

In the cases of both the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) more detailed and precise recommendations as to their current and future applicability, and value in the context of rural-urban linkages and their governance, are to be found in the Work Package 6, *Synthesised Policy Recommendations, Deliverable D6.3*.

The first and last items addressed below apply in the context of EU cohesion policy with the emphasis upon territorial cohesion alongside social and economic cohesion, the TA2030 has an overt territorial starting point as the name suggests and the same applies to the LTVRA – clearly its starting point is territory and communities of a particular type (rural), but it is rich in references to, and implications for, the rural-urban as will be made clear.

5.1 The EU Code of Conduct on Partnership

If one thinks of governance arrangements in the context of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the EU Code of conduct (CoC) on partnership (ECCP) is an established and well-known instrument of direct relevance and use – indeed adoption of the principles and practices contained therein can be extended well beyond ESIF if there is appetite to do so. (a point returned to in the Work Package 6, *Synthesised Policy Recommendations, (Deliverable D6.3)*). Intended to ensure multi-level governance and to mobilise partners who might otherwise not be involved, the CoC is designed as a practical tool to be applied by EU member states to decision-making processes with an emphasis upon who is involved.

The principles laid down by the CoC include representativeness (of those involved in GAs), transparent selection procedures, a broad mix and range of parties being involved, a focus being placed on the sorts of representatives otherwise unlikely to be involved, and calls for support in terms of institutional capacity building for those same partners or others as applicable. Clearly much of that can be readily applied in GAs with a rural-urban dimension albeit that is not its express purpose or focus. One might nevertheless, for example, easily enough contextualise any under-representation of rural actors and voices as opposed to urban ones within the broad ECCP. Equally, one might use it as a trigger to explore whether there is territorial unevenness in GAs, and, if so, whether some form of capacity building might usefully be utilised, and, if so, what form it might most valuably take.

The ECCP lends itself well to a consideration of rural-urban GAs insofar that it is designed for use in ESIF, itself based on a “territorial” model of funding allocations – where funding is allocated to places. In that sense it is place-related, but at the same time it is an allocation structure based on administrative boundaries, the limitations of which are so often a key factor and obstacle in optimising rural-urban linkages and the synergies that might accrue therefrom.

If the use of the ECCP were to be extended to cover either or both the Next Generation EU programme and the development of (national) strategy plans for CAP (using EAFRD funding), as some have suggested, then interesting further scope reveals itself for a better balanced territorial approach which is more place-based as opposed to place-related. In the case of national level CAP plans in particular, the application of the CoC principle in an overtly rural context may arguably redress imbalances in terms of the extent and depth of the involvement of rural actors and interests and their capacity to engage in an optimal way, in CAP plans but in other GAs as well with a more pronounced rural-urban dimension.

5.2 The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

One key and highly topical policy context in which we might consider ROBUST’s work and findings on rural-urban governance is the EU *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas* (LTVRA). The European Commission *Communication* and accompanying papers were published during the lifetime of ROBUST in June 2021 consisting of:

- Communication (29pp)
- Annex (13pp) Rural Action Plan (RAP)
- SWD Part 1 (46pp) analysis exercise, first part
- SWD part 2 (67pp) analysis exercise continued
- SWD part 3 (82pp) outline of EU interventions, plus Foresight Exercise
- SWD synopsis report (24pp) of public consultation exercise
- Factsheet (2pp)

Governance is referenced to several times in the various published papers, and it is of note that as early as on Page 3 of the main Communication text we are reminded that *“Balanced territorial development, anchored in place-based approaches and the involvement of all governance levels, as outlined in the recently adopted new Territorial Agenda of the EU, is necessary to make the most of the potential of rural areas”*. (Communication text, Page 3). It is striking that the reference here is to *“balanced territorial development”* as opposed to rural development alone, and in that way the text mirrors ROBUST’s emphasis on looking at territories of different types *“in the round”* as opposed to in isolation – a very welcome and valuable approach.

The text quoted above also refers to making the most of the potential of rural areas, and, indeed, Commissioner Wojciechowski when launching the *Communication* talked of the *Rural Pact* and *Rural Action Plan* elements of the LTVRA, as both being designed to *“make rural areas strong and prosperous”*, that is perfectly reasonable in what is, after all, a vision for rural areas. To that thought however ROBUST would add the observation that it is not solely about somehow improving rural areas alone, but is also about how cooperation across territories of different types might make all areas strong and prosperous. A point we will continue to make and would encourage others to take up.

That observation in turn reflects a key ROBUST proposition that strong and prosperous rural areas bring benefits for all, not only themselves. That mutual benefit will be to the fore of any thinking about rural-urban governance arrangements and the LTVRA statement comes as a very welcome and timely intervention, therefore.

The importance of governance arrangements is underlined in numerous places throughout the LTVRA texts, and we are reminded that governance was itself one of the two identified drivers used as axes for modelling four scenarios as part of the foresight exercise, and where: *“Each one (scenario) illustrates a possible future for rural areas in 2040, depending on whether they attract new inhabitants or not, and on the quality of multi-level governance. The scenarios also address rural-urban interdependencies”* (Communication text, Page 9). The last quoted sentence is, self-evidently, hugely pertinent to the work and findings of ROBUST of course.

The MLG reference is also telling though - it represents one (but only one) particular dimension of the GAs which ROBUST has explored and developed. A closer reading of the text actually suggests it was the extent of citizen involvement in decision-making and the degree to which decision-making was arrived at by collaborative and collective means which formed one of the axes here. What might be reasonably extrapolated then, is that getting these two factors right as opposed to wrong will be a key determinant of what rural areas looked like in the future, an observation very much in line with ROBUST’s own conclusions.

That point is amplified if we return to the Communication text itself again; *“Enabling all individuals to take active part in policy and decision-making processes, involving a broad range of stakeholders and networks as well as all levels of governance is key to developing tailor-made, place-based and integrated policy solutions and investments”*. (page 10). Here we find echoes of what ROBUST has itself concluded in terms of the need to think beyond *“vertical”* MLG and also consider the breadth of actors involved from across different interests and places, and to give thought as to how that *“enabling”* is to be made to happen and how taking part might be extended to taking active part.

The inclusion of the notion of a *“Rural Pact”* within the LTVRA brings topicality and a timely impetus to considerations of the ways in which rural and non-rural actors and interests might come together and agree to some sort of ongoing collaborative agreement designed to achieve maximum mutual benefit. We are told that *“A Rural Pact will be developed with all levels of governance and stakeholders*

supporting the shared goals of the Vision which are proposed in this Communication. 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". (Communication text Page 14). What seems to be foreseen then is something with both depth and width, with a genuine local – and therefore, presumably, localised – dimension and therefore place-sensitivity.

As a “common framework”, there is flexibility here one imagines and hopes, and the possibility to allow for different sorts of rural-urban linkages as might apply in different geographic settings, where both rural and urban will be used to describe a range of different things and where the relationships between the two – proximitous or otherwise – will also vary. The Communication text continues *“It will contribute to increased synergies, complementarities and coherence between the EU, national, regional and territorial policies and interventions”*. The Rural Pact, in other words, seeks to synergise both at policy and practice levels and might therefore pick up upon some of those synergy trajectories that have been developed as part of ROBUST’s work and to which rural-urban GAs have a direct contribution to make. It both reflects some governance related goals (involving stakeholders at all levels), and at the same time will presumably become a governance mechanism in its own right - acting as the catalyst and framework for drawing up Rural Action Plans (RAPs), within which hopefully the rural-urban dimension will be made explicit, and the value of rural-urban linkages recognised. This all raises a number of questions, and the Rural Pact is returned to in greater detail in the Work Package 6 report, *Synthesised Policy Recommendations, (Deliverable D6.3)*.

There is considerable cause for optimism here given that the LTVRA text itself very helpfully underlines the importance of rural-urban linkages themselves and why they matter when the Staff Working Document (at page 101) reminds us that: *“They shape up in a space where urban and rural dimensions are physically and/or functionally integrated, blurring the distinction between urban and rural, and crossing traditional administrative boundaries. These linkages can express themselves between a city with an urbanised core and a peri-urban area or within a wider functional area covering a central city and adjacent rural hinterland....”*. The quoted text draws out at least two points of particular resonance to the work and findings of ROBUST – the shifting and changing, hence blurred, nature of the distinctions, and indeed physical lines on a map between what is judged rural and what is judged urban and the lack of coincidence that these “lines” have with administrative borders and jurisdictions. That in turns directly relates to much that has been written in Work Package 1 with regard to “absolute” and “relative” space etc and where the challenges of designing systems of governance to reflect relational space is highlighted (ROBUST Deliverable 1.1, section 5.6).

In short, there is huge congruence here between what ROBUST has concluded with regard to rural-urban GAs, and considerable scope to work the detail of the project’s work into the implementation phase of the LTVRA. With regard to the Rural Pact in particular there lies the opportunity to plug in thinking about linkages across different types of territory from a very early stage.

5.3 The Territorial Agenda 2030

The first extract from the LTVRA text reproduced in the previous section above itself includes a cross-reference to the December 2020 Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030), helpfully bringing the latter into play as a touchstone and contextualisation for rural-urban linkages and synergies as being fundamentally a “territorial matter”. The TA2030 is intended as a guidance tool, signed up to by all EU member states by Government ministers, with the principal stated goal to bring about a “better future for all”. It has two objectives:

- A JUST EUROPE (JE) that “offers a future perspectives for all places and people” with actions aiming to counteract increasing imbalances and inequalities
- A GREEN EUROPE (GE) that “protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition processes” with actions aiming to promote sustainable development and counteract climate change

Within each objective are three priorities:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Balanced Europe | • Healthy Environment |
| • Functional Regions | • Circular Economy |
| • Integration Beyond Borders | • Sustainable Connections |

There are numerous cross-currents between what the TA2030 has to say about each of these six priorities and the work on rural-urban GAs which has been carried out within ROBUST. The greatest congruence *prima facie* sits within the *functional regions* and *sustainable connections* areas, but in reality, there is applicability across the piece, as one might expect given the universal relevance of governance – in fact the TA2030 goes so far as to say that the “quality of () governance processes is an important cross-cutting principle for local, regional, national and European development” (*Art 22*), whilst at the same time noting disparities in that quality. There is an emphasis on integrated MLG to which a rural-urban dimension might easily be applied, and the potential of increased e-governance is underlined, a point which can readily be contextualised in terms of physical accessibility to GAs as much as to public service delivery for instance.

There is congruence also with ROBUST’s emphasis upon wellbeing, with the Article (22) quoted from above going on to say that “it (the quality of government and governance processes) matters for the well-being of society and is a prerequisite for long-term sustainable increases in living standards, investments, social trust and political legitimacy”. The importance of “Continuous capacity building” at all levels” (*Art 22*) is also emphasised, to which ROBUST might add, not only at all levels, but across all actors from places of different types. (a point which might be drawn out more strongly and which we return to in the Work Package 6 report, *Synthesised Policy Recommendations, (Deliverable D6.3).*)

The TA2030 text points out the complementarity of neighbouring places and a need for cooperation and synergies in relation to accessibility and access to public services. Indeed, it goes so far as to highlight the need for “decision makers”, as it terms it, to look beyond administrative borders to exploit the potential of functional areas which “break with existing administrative delineations” (*Art 49*). That point directly reflects ROBUST’s own concerns and conclusions as previously explained. The macro-regional reference in the context of cross-border integration is interesting too in a ROBUST context, serving as a reminder that governance and public service provision can take place across a large-scale geographical context within and across administrative areas with rural, urban and peri-urban features.

The text makes reference to ways in which governance arrangements might be organised in order to increase effective cooperation within functional regions as opposed to within other administrative boundaries. Although it is unstated exactly what sort of function the authors have in mind as the subject of this cooperation, their specific reference to the peri-urban is helpful in the context of thinking about rural-urban and echoes much of ROBUST’s own work and findings across the five Communities of Practice when looking at the need for mutually beneficial cooperation in larger areas across boundaries. There is reference too to the “unique local characteristics” of difference places, a point which policy makers might reflect upon when considering the GAs appropriate to ensuring that this localness is not lost sight of. The TA2030 text goes so far as to suggest that: “We will take action to encourage decision

makers at all governance levels to unleash the unique potential of territories with specific geographies” (Art 48). ROBUST would no doubt welcome that hugely and add our encouragement that that action addresses the governance arrangements themselves as well as any implementation actions.

The text also highlights the critical importance of environmental ecosystems for long term sustainable development and the resulting need for them to be well-functioning and resilient to allow for the provision of ecosystem services, to mitigate climate change and to combat the loss of biodiversity. It goes on to point out the importance of joint management which is very much in line with the conclusions reached within ROBUST itself and from which direct examples might be drawn.

Application of the TA2030 principles and priorities is currently being taken forward by six pilot actions designed “to inspire joint actions across Europe, (and to) demonstrate, test and develop practices which contribute to achieving Territorial Agenda priorities”. Each might consider ROBUST’s work and findings with regard to rural-urban GAs given its cross-cutting nature and the recognition that “Governance structures can determine the optimal mix of investment priorities and achieve the necessary vertical and horizontal coordination to design and deliver integrated development strategies”. (Actions putting the Territorial Agenda into practice | Territorial Agenda 2030 | A future for all places)

5.4 Engaging citizens for good governance in EU Cohesion Policy

Citizen engagement is one recurring dimension of the work done by ROBUST on rural-urban GAs. In this particular regard therefore, work being led on by DG Regio looking at the ways in which citizens and civil society can contribute the good governance of EU cohesion policy is of relevance and interest. A background note provided in support of a public event held in February 2020, ([narrative.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)) resonates with various dimensions of ROBUST’s work and findings which in the case of some Living Labs have been directly or indirectly linked to the actual or potential management of EU cohesion policy programmes.

We find here, for instance, reference to growing recognition of the need to “do more” in terms of increasing and improving engagement, - not least in the context of the subsequently launched Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The paper highlights some of the challenges of engaging civil society in GAs, which ROBUST has itself encountered, and highlights the importance that this places on public authorities in terms of helping build capacity and being more participatory – a key note it shares with ROBUST’s own conclusions from within Work Package 3 for example.

Given that the cohesion in question here is in part “territorial” cohesion, it is perhaps surprising to see no reference to place or territory here – albeit there is a nod to the ECCP as at 5.1 above. It would be good to see greater account of that place dimension in this work going forward and just how the sort of engagement in GAs to which DG REGIO refers, might be applied in a place-sensitive way with rural-urban being a potentially interesting test bed for some of that work taking due account of ROBUST’s work and findings.

6. IN CONCLUSION: TAKING A ROUNDED VIEW

In light of all that has been said so far, it might be useful to conclude by offering some sort of summative framework for potential use when considering what has been addressed with regard to rural-urban GAs. We might, for example, think about the different dimensions that may go to make up a rural-urban GA as follows:

- Organisations – using the quadruple helix as set out below
- Individuals / citizens

At which early point we might consider whether any or all of its members are part of a GA to specifically represent rural or urban interests, or whether one or more might in practice do so even if that is not the stated purpose of having them involved? That interplay between the “place-representative” and any other basis for involvement is important to be clear about from the outset, and for all involved to have a shared and clear understanding of as well.

In terms of the standard quadruple helix model, we might wish to ask ourselves where the policy (and other) relevance and starting point might lie in terms of the rural-urban dimension of GAs. Any of the considerations in the following lists might at the same time serve as a way to better understand and capture the motivation (or rationale) for actors from any one of the four sectors to become actively involved in rural-urban GAs in the first place. That in turn can be used as a guide in determining the optimal make-up of a rural-urban GA.

The Public sector perspective - where there might be interest in:

- Open government – transparency, accountability, arising out of equal and fair processes
- Engaging with citizens to:
 - shape policies
 - set budgets and agree funding (participative budgeting)
 - carry out joint monitoring/scrutiny
 - Build and share accountability (and possibly risks)
- Shared decision-making. Involvement. Participatory approaches and processes. Shared responsibility. Moving beyond citizens as consumers
- Shared investment and return
- Involving other quartiles in policy making and decision making

The research perspective - where there might be interest in:

- Understanding individual’s motivations for wishing to be active
- Understanding what people feel strongly about and why
- Developing and testing models for citizen engagement – what works and what doesn’t?
- How to engage with marginalised groups
- How to balance interests fairly – what works and what doesn’t

The civil society perspective - where there might be interest in:

- Representing people/individuals/communities
- Representing interests/sectors
- Providing a voice for the otherwise voiceless
- Challenges around representativeness and extent of reach

The business sector perspective - where there might be interest in:

- Influencing regional and local development – plans and practice
- Business (needs)- led funding regimes – shaping, managing, funding decisions
- Balancing interests re planning/land use/ public investments etc
- Developing multi-sector delivery mechanisms with GAs attached

Next, and in order to pre-empt obstacles and to take account of known challenges, policy makers might pause to consider the nature of rural interests and urban interests and ask themselves as a starting point and on a case by case and place by place basis:

- Just how different one from the other those interests are, and are perceived to be ?
- How distinct any differences are, and whether they are opposed or competitive?
- What the balance between rural and urban actors is likely to be in terms of a) scale and b) power
- Whether there are distinct rural and urban interests and actors within each quartile of the helix?
- Whether there are actors who already, or potentially, represent (interests of) both?
- If so, whether they are deemed by all to be “honest brokers”?

And finally, we might consider the sorts of existing policy contexts or policy instruments with a rural-urban dimension to which we might wish to apply a ROBUST-informed approach to GAs – or where at least we might want to test and/or apply ROBUST’s work and findings and where it seems reasonable to suppose that the prospects for doing so are most immediate:

- Metropolitan governance arrangements
- Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs)
- Community-led local development (CLLD)
- Interfunds/interfonds of different types
- Functional (economic) areas
- Smart Specialisation Strategies
- Other national or regional level policy/tools/instruments/actions covering both rural and urban areas