



A MANIFESTO FOR FUTURE POLICY MAKING ON LINKAGES AND DEPENDENCIES BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL ACTIVITIES

ROBUST Deliverable 6.4

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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).

1. Any simple **binary model of rural and urban** as a dichotomy is insufficient to capture, understand, or develop meaningful policy or policy instruments with regard to territories of different types. There is considerable diversity between places that might fall under either one or other broad heading.
2. Simplistic differentiation between rural and urban serves to underplay, (or ignore), **relationships and interdependencies between all sorts of different rural and urban places, interests and actors, proximitous or not**. ROBUST provides policy actors and practitioners with up-to-date (and evolving) examples from different types of places/territories across Europe and policy contexts which demonstrate the dangers of applying over-simplified categorisations and labels to places of varied nature, of overstating differences, and of ignoring congruences and the scope for greater synergy arising from taking a more rounded spatial perspective.
3. **To be different in territorial terms, is not necessarily to be divided**, and even more so, is not to be opposed. Differences can be starting points for mutually beneficial cooperation and opportunities to capitalise upon dependencies. This is not to deny or downplay differences and distinctions between places of different kinds, these are real and bring real value, but are not inherently oppositional. Nor are these points of distinction or difference static or homogenous, so, there is a need for a place-specific and place-sensitive approach in all work that is done on rural-urban linkages and dependencies.
4. Any approach treating rural and urban as clear-cut, unnuanced and distinct policy areas is limited and self-limiting. All too often, urban policy and rural policy will exist in separate orbits, lacking any sense of interrelatedness and operating without either overt regard one to the other or acknowledgment of the fact that places and interests are linked and interdependent in a complex web of different ways. What is needed as an alternative to this current situation is **greater cross-sectoral policy coherence taking due account of the territorial dimension** – including the rural-urban – as well as mechanisms whereby policy actors integrate their policy interventions on a case by case and place by place, basis.
5. Although both urban policy and rural policy are well-established disciplines at EU and national levels in particular, **rural-urban interaction is very often not on the political agenda at all**, or considered worthy of explicit consideration or reference. That will need to change, and policy actors will need to better understand the reality and importance of rural-urban linkages and interdependencies. That will, in turn, facilitate more coherent and more inclusive policy interventions reflecting the needs and ambitions of places of different types, at the same time recognising the distinctiveness of the challenges faced in those different places.
6. This implies a clear need for **better coordination between policy areas relating to rural, peri-urban and urban places** (and any other gradations applied as typologies such as *Degrees of Urbanisation* evolve). There is a need for policy actors to actively seek out better understanding of the causal and indirect effects, impacts, positive and negative externalities, and unintended consequences of introducing policies and instruments primarily designed to serve the interests of one type of place.

7. At the same time, a better coordinated approach should actively **seek out the “synergies” and added value to be gained from cooperation and coordination between rural and urban actors** and interests. This remains very much an open and ongoing area for exploration as ROBUST has demonstrated, particularly in terms of distinguishing different kinds of **synergy trajectories** and how these might best be prioritised on a case by case and place by place, basis.
8. One mechanism, with considerable scope for greater use in assessing the potential impact of planned policy interventions is **rural proofing**. Policy actors have at their disposal here an established tool which they might employ to consider the effects that any policy intervention might be expected to have on other places, actors, and interests of any type. Carrying out such proofing exercises should be developed and regularised as part of foresight analyses, as well as forming part of public consultation events and trial pilots etc. but applied in all directions, and not the rural one alone. In reality therefore, it is a **multi-directional series of territorial proofing exercises** that one requires policy makers to adopt in the future.
9. The work that has been carried out in each of the focus areas of ROBUST - the “thematic domains” explored in its five communities of practice - has been done in such a way that the findings in each area can be disaggregated from the project’s overall findings, providing policy-makers with readily contextualised findings. Each can usefully be revisited and built upon in the future. Working in these discrete thematic areas has enabled us to bring **direct relevance in different policy areas – for example, cohesion, innovation, enterprise, transport, environment, food, culture etc.**
10. At the same time though, overlaps, congruences and recurring themes and findings across these different policy areas should serve as a reminder of **the multi-faceted nature of rural-urban linkages and synergies which is often referred to, but far less often explained or presented in a coherent way**. The whole subject of rural-urban linkages and synergies is a complex one, bringing out different dimensions of those complexities enables us to reach a wide range of overlapping conclusions. That complexity should now be better taken into account, and better understood, not only by coming at the subject through the lens of numerous policy/topic areas, but also by approaching it by considering the multiplicity of actors and driving forces involved, across the public, private and third sectors.
11. Attempts to bring about better linkages, and to optimise synergies, between rural and urban places, actors and interests do not take place in **isolation from other interventions with other purposes and objectives**. At a general level, this underscores the need for joined-up interventions which are complementary to each other as opposed to being in anyway contradictory or over-complicated and fragmented. ROBUST’s work has served as a reminder of at least some of the ways in which those multiple interventions might be managed in a connected way to arrive at **mutual gain for all concerned**, whilst at the same time providing concrete examples that might be drawn upon to replicate those successes.
12. The timeline of ROBUST 2017-2021 has coincided with a general shift in policy terms from looking at development in terms of (GDP) growth to looking at development in more holistic terms. That ongoing development segues very well with ROBUST’s evolving orientation around notions of a **wellbeing economy**. ROBUST’s work brings added value to this ongoing debate and can, and should, be used going forward. It can be capitalised upon in future more detailed explorations, and used to steer and guide future policy to support inclusive transition processes which leave no-one, and no place (or type of place), behind.

13. ROBUST's model around supra-economic wellbeing and the elements that go to make up a viable foundation economy model underscore the need for policy makers, at EU and national levels in particular, to create a framework within which a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy can be developed and supported across all parts of Europe and all types of territories across Europe. One key part of that process will be the development of appropriate indicators for a **wellbeing economy and for wellbeing more generally**, building in part upon the work already done, for example, in the context of the European Commission's periodic economic, social and territorial cohesion reports.
14. The reference to the economic, social and territorial cohesion reports is partly made as a bridge to EU cohesion policy. With the Covid-19 pandemic shifting focus as much to resilience and recovery as to growth or development, ROBUST's work brings potential richness and territorial context to ongoing debates about the key purpose of **EU territorial cohesion policy investments** at early stages of the seven-year programming period 2021-27. It can be drawn upon for examples of, and lessons learned from, in-regional and interregional cooperation between territories of different kinds – rural, peri-urban and urban, - and the sorts of cross-sectoral arrangements at both governance and delivery levels that are needed for optimal results.
15. ROBUST's ongoing focus on the territorial dimension in its work over four and a half years can also be drawn upon by policy actors in the context of the **Territorial Agenda 2030** (TA 2030). That series of commitments on the part of all EU member state governments to bring a more place-based approach to the fore in looking to achieve a green Europe and a just Europe – a "future for all places" as the TA 2030 puts it – is hugely congruent with ROBUST's work.
16. ROBUST findings might be fed into the TA 2030 pilot actions, and work done across all five of its Communities of Practice and eleven Living Labs has contributed to understanding how the agenda's priorities and objectives might be implemented in practical terms in territories of a particular type (rural-urban). That might be of added value at the exact time when closer links between the TA2030 and the EU Urban Agenda are being developed, as a timely reminder that **TA 2030 ambitions are not the sole preserve of urban actors and interests**.
17. The use of **Living Labs** has been a key feature of ROBUST. Their work carried out across ten member states has added to the evidence base of place-specific experimentation exercises with overt rural-urban dimensions. Predominantly associated with urban actions, and much more rarely with peri-urban or rural ones, ROBUST has successfully demonstrated the **scope to deliver Living Labs across rural-urban areas** and in a range of different topic areas.
18. It has also demonstrated that such Living Labs will often need to be run over the medium- to long-term as opposed to the more usual three-five year timeframe if their full value is to be extracted, understood and communicated. There is need for **more and longer-lasting living lab experimentation across (often blurred) rural-urban settings**, thereby creating more "safe spaces" where researchers, policy makers and practitioners can establish common ground in cooperating on issues of shared interest.

19. ROBUST has brought a focused territorial lens to bear on the considerable existing body of theory and research on **governance arrangements** . It has opened the door to a more place-specific application of established principles, underlining their place-sensitivity and revealing the specific nature of the challenges faced when looking to establish and maintain governance arrangements which set out to balance rural and urban interests of different kinds. It has also underscored the need for an inclusive network approach to such governance arrangements and the fact that to achieve all which is required is very **often an evolutionary process requiring an extended timeframe**.
20. **ROBUST's work on governance arrangements** has also highlighted the importance of securing multiple commitments to governance arrangements from different actors at different levels, to at least some of the complexities around leadership and equality of access to governance processes, and to the need for local ownership - all, we suggest, highly relevant to the developing notion of **"Rural Pacts" within the EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas**.
21. ROBUST's conclusions as to **the need for inclusiveness, openness, transparency and equity in governance arrangements**, can readily be applied to considerations of **the policy making process itself, and the decision-making arrangements it uses**. There is valuable common ground here in the contexts of meaningful citizen engagement, public consultation and involvement and the careful management and balancing of different inputs from different sectors and actors with different (not necessarily contradictory) interests.
22. Also pertinent at the level of citizens and communities are the ways in which policy actors might want to **support more joined-up and more informed relations between rural and urban places, actors and interests at the knowledge level**. They might usefully consider the ways in which knowledge might be exchanged between these different "constituencies" in the same way as ROBUST has done in arriving at findings across five thematic domain– thinking of how the respective environmental, cultural or innovation/business-related assets of different types of rural and urban places might come to be better understood by others and by themselves.
23. Cross-sectoral cooperation is a critical factor in successfully **supporting place-based innovation and experimentation** of the type seen in ROBUST's Living Labs. The place-specificity of the rural-urban space and its related linkages provides bespoke opportunities to develop new business models, cultural connections, innovations in food systems and public service delivery and to capitalise on distinct features of ecological ecosystems at the rural-urban interface
24. There is, then, a **territorial dimension to innovation**, shaping the ways in which new products, services and ways of working might be developed in places of different types. Individual **Smart Specialisation Strategies** apply to given regional or national geographies, but might also be recontextualised, and in some way clustered, by territorial type with a stronger accent on the rural urban linkages and interdependencies within each

25. The **Long Term Vision for Rural Areas** (LTVRA – Rural Vision) is a development of major significance which has evolved over ROBUST’s lifetime and is entering its implementation phase as the ROBUST project comes to an end. ROBUST has been directly involved in its evolution and should continue to be so, given the considerable overlaps in focus and topic. Indeed, as the European Economic & Social Committee’s Opinion prepared as part of its contribution to the LTVRA, “towards a holistic strategy on sustainable rural/urban development” (Oct 2021) puts it: **“Projects such as ROBUST should be further developed and should lead to tangible changes”**.
26. ROBUST has explored various **synergy trajectories, each representing particular (and place-specific) potential in relation to LTVRA’s guiding notions and aspirations** (strong, resilient, prosperous, connected rural areas). They have shared an approach where prominence has been given to rural residents, businesses and public authorities, and their social, environmental and economic interests and ambitions, in thinking about current challenges and future possibilities.
27. Both ROBUST and the LTVRA have underscored the need to consider rural interests and rural policy alongside non-rural ones in a fair, equal and balanced way. The future development of the LTVRA can draw directly upon ROBUST’s work and experiences in **devising models for improving rural wellbeing in the “territorial round”, taking account of non-rural interests and priorities at the same time as rural ones whilst not in any way subjugating the latter to the former**.
28. The LTVRA, has operated with a clear focus on the importance of the availability of, and access to, **infrastructure and universal services in rural areas**. Exactly the same central focus has emerged from within ROBUST and its evolving model of services as being at the heart of a wellbeing economy and being a critical pre-requisite for realising synergy potentials in the context of rural areas and their interactions with non-rural ones. In both instances, **services and infrastructure operate as a basic foundational asset for making rural areas liveable at the same time being a defining factor in their relationships with areas of other types**, impacting directly upon the quality of life for rural residents, businesses and visitors.