



ROBUST RURAL-URBAN UPDATE

Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST) is a European research project that advances our understanding of the interactions between rural and urban areas. Its main premise is that strong, mutually-supportive linkages between rural and urban areas are key to realising smart, circular and inclusive development for a sustainable Europe. ROBUST kicked off in June 2017 and will run until May 2021. The project brings together 24 European partners representing both research- and practice-oriented organisations. They work with 11 regional Living Labs and five Communities of Practice.

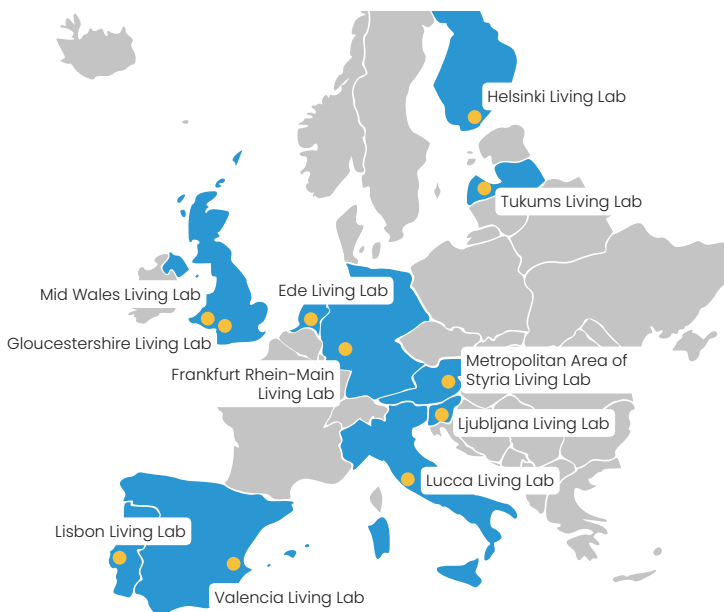
Living Labs

ROBUST Living Labs operate in 11 European countries. They bring local stakeholders together to develop and test new ways to solve problems specific for the region.

Living Labs are analysed through the lenses of:

- New Business Models and Labour Markets
- Public Infrastructure and Social Services
- Sustainable Food Systems
- Cultural Connections
- Ecosystem Services

Researchers and practitioners involved in ROBUST collaborate in five Communities of Practice that are built around these themes. Communities of Practice provide a structured forum for sharing real-time experiences and findings from the ROBUST Living Labs.



Mid Wales Living Lab

Mid Wales is a rural region without a dominant urban centre and with ambiguous boundaries. The Mid Wales Living Lab brings together researchers at Aberystwyth University with partners from the Welsh Local Government Association to ask: **How can positive rural-urban connections be grown at a distance from the city?**



Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins

Models of city-led growth are not always the answer in this part of the UK. These models also leave us stuck with the assumption – historically put forward by academics and policymakers alike – that predominantly rural regions like Mid Wales will always be left behind, or at least disadvantaged in some way. While it is easy to put Mid Wales in a box marked ‘rural development’, and to seek funding based on being a ‘problem’ region – it is rather more difficult to amplify and align its opportunities to national policy objectives. The Mid Wales Living Lab gives us real opportunities to understand our region in new ways, and to turn that knowledge into practical action.

Living Lab Agenda

As a rural region, Mid Wales faces major challenges: remoteness, limited infrastructure, access to markets and services, the changing agricultural economy, and the future after Brexit. How can we tackle these through rural-urban connections?

The Mid Wales Living Lab has three overall aims. First, we will bring regional stakeholders together to shape a strategic vision for Mid Wales. Second, we will identify and test how smart development can better inform regional economic growth plans and projects. Third, we will assess how rural-urban connections can add value and be used in new initiatives.

We work using action research – research that helps to improve practice – and facilitative and participatory techniques. Our discoveries are shared through three ROBUST Communities of Practice.



Through the Public Infrastructures and Social Services CoP, we examine current challenges and opportunities for service delivery.



Food is a key industry in Mid Wales. We share ideas with other European regions through the Sustainable Food Systems CoP.



As part of the Cultural Connections CoP, we explore how the Welsh language can be a cultural resource for smart development.

Next Steps

The Mid Wales Living Lab is currently working with local authorities through the WLGA Rural Forum to co-design a 'Vision for Rural Wales' manifesto. This will reflect local challenges and – most importantly – imagine alternative futures. But the vision is just a start. Our main task is to work together to find ways to translate vision into reality.

We will run two regional workshops in 2019 to experiment with future scenarios for Mid Wales. Then, we will bring those experiments to life through case initiatives, and by engaging with key regional projects. The Welsh language has a big role to play, and throughout our work, we'll explore how language can help make for inclusive growth in Mid Wales.

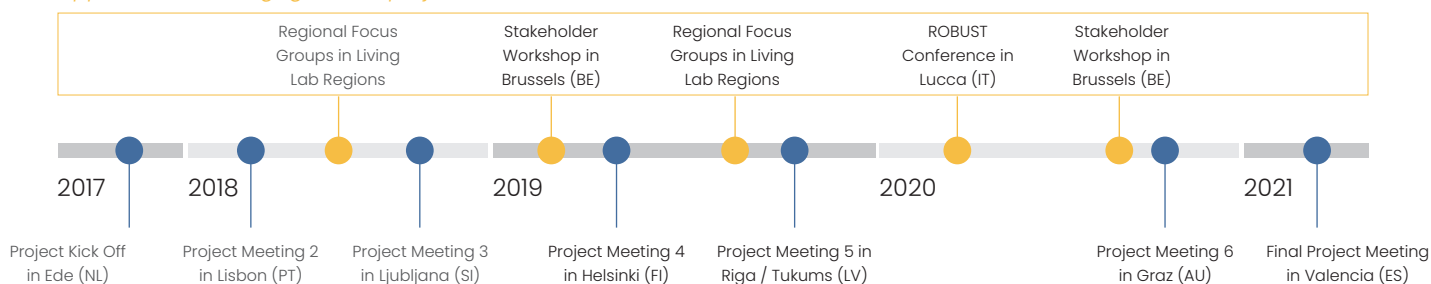
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ROBUST Project Timeline

Opportunities to engage in the project



Learn more about ROBUST

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To learn more about the ROBUST project and to get the latest information about cutting-edge research on rural-urban issues visit www.rural-urban.eu



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