Thematic Topic Papers (TTPs) on Rural-Urban Cooperation – reflecting the the five thematic functional linkage domains addressed within ROBUST

ROBUST Deliverable 6.1

Vincent O'Connell   Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE)

November 2021

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Preface

In this paper, five chapters are brought together into one document to mirror each of the five ROBUST Communities of Practice (CoP) and to form a single set of thematic topic papers. A standalone section is devoted to each in a near-standard format. The paper is very much an exercise in contextualisation and synthesis for which the empirical foundation is to be found in the CoP Reports themselves (ROBUST Deliverable 3.2).

In the case of each of the five thematic topic areas, an analysis is offered under four sub-headings for each of which in turn a short explanation is provided as to the policy context, next follows a brief exploration of the territorial dimension and this is in turn followed by a brief outline of the particular governance related issues arising from the work of each CoP.

That in turn is followed by a brief bullet-pointed list of policy related matters arising, designed to serve as a conclusion and summary of what has been covered in the main body of the text. The last section here deliberately stops short of making specific policy recommendations as they are to be found grouped together elsewhere within the "Synthesised Policy Recommendations relevant to rural-urban interactions and interdependencies" (ROBUST Deliverable 6.3).

There next follows sub-sections on the Territorial Agenda 2030, where we have attempted a detailed interpretation of the text of the December 2020 agenda document itself as well as preparatory and supporting papers, in a more detailed and bespoke way with regard to each of the five CoP areas and hence chapters.

Finally, and as a sixth section, there follows some cross-CoP commentary on what are judged to be the most relevant and topical connections with a small range of key EU policy instruments. Conscious, at the same time, that the policy instruments discussed are applied and, in some cases, managed, at either the national or regional level.

Some overlap across and within chapters is inevitable, but repetitions have been kept to a minimum, other than in the five introduction sections where the duplication is deliberate.

We make no systematic or in-depth attempt to repeat or precis the findings within the CoP reports themselves, indeed we purposely set out to not do so. The work here has taken the form of a "gradual shaping of key project findings into a set of five '*Policy and Governance Thematic Topic Papers (TTPs) on Rural-Urban Cooperation*' which are intended to serve as "Policy and Governance guidance on five thematic functional rural-urban linkages". In reality they have been shaped not only by emerging findings arising from the work of the CoPs – and the related Living Labs – but also by developments in EU level policy itself as the project straddles the end of the 2014-20 budgeting and programming period and the beginning of the 2021-27 one.

The paper constitutes one of the deliverables within Work Package 6 of the ROBUST project and as such its principal focus is upon the policy dimensions of what it addresses. Its intended target audience is policy makers at EU, national and sub-national levels or anyone else with an interest in how policy might be contextualised in the context of rural-urban linkages and synergies between rural and urban actors, interests and places.

Thematic Topic Area 1: Business Models and Labour Markets

Introduction

Rural-urban cooperation and rural-urban linkages lie at the heart of ROBUST - in other words, the project works with a strong territorial basis and focus. That is reflected in this document and the areas it chooses to highlight. In order to help maintain that strong territorial focus and with the aim of helping ensure that we do not deviate into more general (or global) considerations as regards (new) business models we worked with the following considerations in mind:

- The sorts of (new) businesses – and models - that exist in areas where rural and urban meet – in other words, businesses physically operating across rural and urban territories in some way
- The particular opportunities for such businesses that arise from the rural-urban setting
- The threats faced by such businesses – in particular connectivity and territorial issues
- The sorts of (new) businesses – and models - that exist with a clear rural-urban dimension to their business model (albeit not one based solely upon geographic proximity)
- The support measures needed and best suited to the sorts of business operations described above

And

- How this is best responded to in policy and programmes – in reality or in theory

The four broad topic headings which shape this chapter to a large extent reflect the foci of the work of the relevant CoP as well as - we felt - sitting sensibly against the EU policy areas highlighted in later sections:

- Support measures and incentivisation mechanisms
- Innovation and social innovation
- Digitalisation and new technology
- Resource efficiency and management

Of central concern to the work and findings of the *Business Models and Labour Markets CoP* has been the ways in which interdependencies between rural and urban places, actors, and interests can serve to harness the development of new and innovative business models designed to better synergise those linkages and connections. In parallel, it has examined and explored the relationship between those interdependencies and the dynamic of regional labour markets. This is in many ways about reciprocity, with a strong focus on the mutual benefit of closer cooperation between rural and urban actors in the context of business start-up and growth, and the economic and social advantages to be gained in terms of economic activity and jobs.

It is also very much about putting these economic prospects into a clear territorial context by focusing on ways of doing businesses which as well as serving immediate economic purposes, in one way or more ameliorate relationships between rural and urban given the respective challenges that each faces and the assets and opportunities that each possess. In that sense the focus is upon new and different types of business models and jobs being developed as part of a broader strategic push towards balanced territorial development.

As will be repeated in the case of each of the five ROBUST CoP areas, it is important to ensure that the territorial dimension is clearly written into this exposition at each stage, and this is reflected in the document structure used here. The chapter contextualises and expounds the thinking which has emerged from within the Community of Practice as regards each of the four selected topic headings and hopefully makes a case for their relevance, importance, and hence inclusion, by providing a short commentary on each topic.

Given that the aim of this set of TTPs is to offer guidance, we have tried to provide information in a straightforward and useful way and have added suggestions as to how that information might be acted upon. Finally, we have provided a set of conclusions in the form of a short set of thoughts as regards challenges to policy-makers for each topic area, these are intended to act as a bridge into the project's policy recommendations as set out in ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

1.1   Support measures and incentivisation mechanisms

Context

The work undertaken within the ROBUST *Business Models and Labour Markets* CoP has orientated itself in a number of different ways to focus upon what is required by way of public policy interventions that can either directly support, or more generally incentivise, new and different means of developing business models or shaping labour markets in ways that might bring about stronger rural-urban linkages or optimise rural-urban synergies. It has in particular set out to capture ways in which policy makers might make a positive contribution to enrichening or accelerating the trajectories of such synergies.

This has been considered in a number of different contexts with which policy makers will be familiar, for example in the design and application of financial support to businesses or to regions more broadly - not least, but not exclusively either, through European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) instruments such as ERDF with its focus on regional development channelled through a given series of EU level policy prioritisations, or through the European Social Fund with its overt emphasis upon labour markets and jobs. That focus though also extends to business advice and start-up schemes, to State Aid regimes, to other financing mechanisms, (where the whole policy agenda around deregulation and market liberalisation will come into play), and indeed as far as fiscal systems – albeit, with a recognition that in this very last regard, EU competence is limited, and the national and regional level has more of a starting point role to play.

The Territorial Dimension

The role of EU ESIF funds has already been referred to, based on national and/or regional allocations and managed in large part at national or sub-national levels, ESIF support mechanisms have, in that sense, a territorial basis, indeed, of course they are designed to bring about "territorial cohesion" as well as economic and social cohesion. That "place" basis is clear enough but not necessarily particularly meaningful other than in the immediate (and important) sense that geographical location will determine the funds to which a place has access and the size of the financial envelope involved.

What perhaps brings greater meaning to the subject at a more practical level though is the ways in which that support is directly within national and regional borders and the way in which Operational Programmes are designed to support places of different kinds, rural, peri-urban, and urban within those programme areas. That will very much be in the gift of policy makers at different levels, designing localised versions of public funding support within an EU cohesion policy framework. Much of that

support will be earmarked to support development in priority topic areas such as entrepreneurship, small business support, technological development, the green economy etc and to that extent is "place-blind". That said, both the 2014-20 and 2021-27 EU cohesion policy programmes contain ringfences for support for urban areas and include specific mechanisms such as Integrated Territorial Investments with an express requirement for urban actors (and others) to shape programmes extending beyond city limits.

The picture is not and should not be limited to ESIF of course and rural development funding, channelled through the EAFRD programme budget and positioned within the second pillar of an ever-evolving Common Agricultural Fund (CAP) is a key and important player, not least in the context of LEADER grant-awarding arrangements but also in terms of direct support to rural and peri-urban (to varying degrees) businesses and indeed, support agencies themselves. There is then, a mix here of elements with more or less overt "place" starting point". Part of the challenge that the CoP set itself was to tease out some of that detail in the developing of its 20+ business model schema, inevitably it has arrived at a varied picture and work on a much larger scale would be needed in order to extrapolate meaningful trends etc, nevertheless it offers insights, and topical examples of the reality.

1.2   Innovation and social innovation

Context

Much of the focus when looking at business models in a rural-urban context has been upon new and innovative business models and the way in which these can be used to lever new commercial opportunities to the joint advantage of rural and urban actors be they as providers or recipients of goods and services. This focus on the new and developing is closely linked to new technologies as in the subsequent sub-section but is also about new ways of working, new market relationships and new ways of doing business based upon a reappraisal of the relative merits of particular geographic settings.

Social innovation as a distinct and different variant upon innovation per se is an established but at the same time evolving concept and policy field and is one where issues around co-created, inclusive models of doing business, with aims that extend beyond financial profit alone, often become clustered around broader considerations of arriving at some form of "wellbeing economy" – an evolving concept around which much of ROBUST's work and findings has come to be posited and hence a valuable point of coincidence.

The Territorial Dimension

Innovation occurs in both urban and rural areas. It is still common to see something of an over-association between innovation and the urban, with cities seen as "cradles of creativity" and similar, and emphasis being placed on critical mass of people, talent, and the comparative richness of what might be referred to as the "innovation ecosystem". That balance has been redressed to a degree by rural innovation initiatives, the development of rural innovation hubs and similar, and through EU level initiatives such as *Smart Villages* and the soon to be launched *European Startup Village Forum (*Startup Village Forum – Startup Village Forum (eustartupvillageforum.eu)).

Rural entrepreneurs arguably have increasingly improved conditions for establishing and running innovative businesses thanks to better connectivity, the evolution of digital technologies and changes in the ways businesses operate. They do not necessarily need to have a physical presence in city centres to be able to attract the required volume of customers and their employees are able to work remotely.

The last factor in particular, is closely related to the impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak of course which is, quite rightly, seen as an accelerant for this.

Innovative rural businesses will also search to capitalise on the natural assets of rural areas and at the same time try to reach customers located in urban bases often providing them with products and services that are not otherwise locally available. In this sense it is the provider/client relationship which very often provides the overt rural-urban dimension here, whether the business in question be innovative or new or not – the ROBUST focus has been on the former, but the point applies generally.

Public authorities can, and do, support innovative businesses through provisions within spatially based strategies and instruments, such as Smart Specialisation, where a single strategy will apply to a region as defined by administrative border or to a national area in the case of smaller EU member states. promoting short supply chains as well as social innovations, which establish and support new ways to operate businesses and to employ people.

1.3   Digitalisation and new technology

Context

The increased take-up rate and breadth of application of digital services and new technology is a common thread running across many – and arguably all – policy areas at EU, national and sub-national levels. It has come to the fore all the more over the lifetime of the ROBUST project with the adoption at EU level of the notion of a "digital transition" forming one half of the overarching "twin transitions" policy objective alongside a "green transition". The two are deliberately and purposefully entwined at policy level as they are in practice. In the context of the ROBUST project, they are also closely related with notions of how to bring about a wellbeing economy with a supra-economic focus on individual quality of life, and in this particular regard, the role that digital products and services might play in that process.

This has an added layer of relevance in the context of the work of this particular CoP insofar as the new business models which have been explored in detail are themselves in many instances based upon the development and exploitation of new technology and the ways in which they themselves might be used to improve rural-urban connections (as in connectivity) and linkages. It has relevance too at the labour market level and against a backdrop where many rural areas are seeing population decline and a seemingly ineluctable moving away of people, and especially young people, to urban centres, but where increasing levels of opportunity to work digitally and locally is being viewed as a viable means by which to arrest this out-migration, not purely of people, but of talent (human capital), and of local tax-take.

The Territorial Dimension

The scope and potential to link and connect rural and urban places, actors and interests using new technology as referred to immediately above lies at the root of the territorial dimension of what the CoP has considered in practice. Here the focus is upon the ways in which the digital might be used to overcome either the physical rural-urban "divide" itself or the ways in which it serves as a means to an end in developing and delivering upon a viable business model. It is also about exploiting to the utmost the sorts of advantages that a business located in one type of place might possess in terms of unique selling points and character, whilst at the same time being able to operate in the open market-place in a competitive way by expanding a sales base beyond the immediate geographic locale.

It is an approach which in some ways addresses existing rural and urban imbalances in business terms, it looks at how digital technology might enable a rural business to remain rural whilst at the same time retaining its ability to sell into urban markets etc. In that last sense it downplays the "territorial" dimension, making physical location of workers and operations of less importance, whilst at the same time retaining local territorial flavour in terms of what the business does and the local assets, character and resources from which the business draws its identity and function.

1.4   Resource efficiency and management

Context

From the starting position that different types of places, rural, peri-urban, urban (or whatever other demarcations one might choose to use), have different characters and assets, face different (to varying degrees) challenges and obstacles in terms of their labour markets and scope for business development, and that they all have viable contributions to make, policy makers will not be surprised to learn that a considerable focus has been placed upon trying to better understand the resources of a particular type of place and how these impact upon business models. Natural resources of a particular place can be themselves the starting point for a business – most obviously the case perhaps in the context of the food sector (well-represented across the CoPs business model, it will also apply to a range of cultural and leisure related business types where the physical setting is seminal to the business.

It will also apply when the direct exploitation of natural resources such as water, energy sources, minerals or natural products are the subject or product upon which the business is itself based and where local natural resources are in practice inseparable from the way in which the business (for profit or otherwise) actually functions. It follows then that the ongoing availability – and therefore management – of those, often finite, natural resources will be an inextricable part of the picture. This then links to another hugely significant policy area and represents a clear interface between environmental and economic concerns.

The Territorial Dimension

As implied immediately above, the territorial dimension here is difficult to decouple from the broader context and that is probably just as it should be. Coming at the subject through the lens of rural-urban relationships and interdependencies as the ROBUST project has done, brings valuable insight in immediately trying to contextualise an area of commercial activities where natural resources are used (exploited) across territories of different types. Archetypically, and this is true of the majority of examples from within the CoP, this will relate to rural natural resources being directly or indirectly used as the basis for business activities with a market base which is largely urban.

The way in which those natural resources - and here really now we are talking about them as "territorial assets" - are used and managed, has inevitably therefore been part of the CoP's exploration and it is no coincidence perhaps to see both circularity - and circular farming more specifically - posited amongst the range of different business model profiles and repeatedly returned to and highlighted as a key dimension of sustainable development. Circularity in natural resource management is a recurring dimension and at the same time the basis for business opportunities. And here again we can see congruence - and hopefully policy makers will see congruence - with the broader wellbeing economy model so strongly favoured by ROBUST partners as a credible and desirable framework to address rural-urban linkages and within which circular economy again features as a prominent element.

Governance

The work and findings of this CoP concerned itself with the ways in which governance arrangements can best be deployed to support new business models with an overt rural-urban dimension. This will apply not only to general governance arrangements in the broader public sector but also to the internal governance arrangements of businesses themselves. Noting, at the same time as saying that, that the broader public arrangements are likely to be territorially circumscribed whilst those applying to businesses themselves are unlikely to be constrained in the same way.

With regard to the sorts of support mechanisms that might most readily be expected to support the development of new and innovative business models with a rural-urban dimension, and to the broader development of the labour markets within which they do, or will, operate, we can expect to find similar multi-level and multi-sector (as in public/private/third sector) features as encountered across all ROBUST CoPs. We might also expect to find an explicit mix of territorial interests represented within such interests where they, for example, have responsibility for regional employment strategies, innovation and entrepreneurship strategies, or are part of the management arrangements related to European Structural and Investment Funds.

Governance in the sense of the arrangements relating to spatial planning processes has been specifically highlighted by the CoP as being of particular relevance. This is most likely to manifest in the context of the regulatory frameworks within which spatial planning regimes will tend to operate, with inbuilt requirements to comply with broader, published spatial development plans, to consult and involve stakeholders, and to maintain stated standards with regards to transparency and appeals processes etc. It is, on occasion, these spatial planning regimes, which have a remit spanning rural and urban areas which might in many other ways be treated separately in different strategies and policies limited to smaller administrative units, or where policy domains themselves are differentiated between urban and rural.

Challenges and questions arising for policy makers

- The role of public sector operators in supporting and incentivising economy activity with an explicit rural-urban dimension
- How, and by whom, synergy trajectories are best supported in the context of for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises
- How markets might best be developed and stimulated, in accordance with competition requirements, but at the same time so as to rebalance the location and flow of jobs, economic activities and financial capital between rural, peri-urban and urban places, actors and interests
- How best to understand and conceptualise business models with an overt dimension of synergising rural-urban linkages
- How varying territorial assets possessed by rural and urban areas can somehow best be brought together to better achieve mutual benefit in the context of new ways of doing business and the labour market
- How that might in turn be best reflected in the delivery provisions within – inter alia – EU cohesion policy *Operational Programmes* and CAP Strategic Plans 2021-27
- How business models with a rural-urban linkage and synergy dimension and an innovative nature are best understood and supported within the broader context of rural innovation
- The role of social innovation and social economy related initiatives such as the imminent *European Action Plan for Social Economy* in developing further work around new business models with a rural-urban dimension
- How digitalisation options might best be harnessed in the process of bringing new rural-urban related business model to markets or in extending their market share

The Territorial Agenda 2030 context

The Territorial Agenda 2030, new business models and labour markets

The main stated goal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030 hereafter) is 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:

The three priorities under the Just Europe objective of the TA2030 look to add a territorial dimension to such issues as economic and social development and bring in to play other EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights at the same time.

Economic and social development is highlighted at numerous points throughout the TA2030 text – clearly, both are directly connected to an efficient mix of business models and buoyant labour markets.

BALANCED EUROPE

In relation to this first priority regarding balance, the text specifically talks about the ministers' wish to support local, regional and national authorities to "cooperate on improving the quality for working, living and investing in all places and strengthening economic prosperity and global competitiveness throughout Europe" *(*PARA 52). So, here we have an overt reference to investment, to that happening in places of all types and to the rationale for doing so – broader prosperity and global competitiveness. Just how that is somehow to be balanced in terms of achieving broader territorial development isn't always made clear, what is clear though is that polarisation is deemed to be a threat to achieving such balance. There is reference here also to "concentrating tendencies" in territorial development – again antithetical to balanced development – and here the role of a managed labour market and a mix of new and not-so-new business models seems plain enough to see. Note too, as above, the focus upon investment – a point which is in turn linked to governance arrangements when the text calls for cooperation between public authorities to improve investment systems.

The text here also advocates a place-based approach to special types of territories, for example, coastal zones, islands, mountainous areas etc. in order to unleash their unique potential. The point about "unique potential" is relevant and echoes ROBUST's own thinking about the specific value-added that co-operation between rural and urban might bring – albeit that we will need ourselves to add rural-urban to the list of "special types of territories".

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

This priority as written in the TA203o text is closely related with the 'Balanced Europe" one as it also calls for evenness of territorial development and talks about lessening "inequalities between places", but it "zooms in" on the functional region level here as the title suggests.

We can see echoes in this section of the TA2030 of ROBUST's own findings as regards the synergy and synergising of rural and urban business operations, commercial marketplaces and labour markets when the text points out the complementarity of neighbouring places and the need for cooperation that would benefit individual businesses. Indeed, the text goes further and talks about how cooperation between places of different types can transform each into "motors for intra-regional growth". It is helpful too when thinking about the specifics of rural-urban functional linkages to find the term "peri-urban used in this section of the text.

There is also an emphasis here on the distinctiveness of different places and the diversity of "economic activities" to be found in different locations. We might easily extrapolate from that the need and desirability of tailoring business models (and the mechanisms to support them to succeed) to suit different locations and shaping regional/local labour markets accordingly – all of which in turn feeds into an underpinning "place-based approach". As for the "entrepreneurship" which may drive at least some of these economic activities, that also is recognised as having a different nature somehow related as to whether it occurs in an urban, a peri-urban or a rural setting.

The text goes further however – as we have seen immediately above – when it at the same time addresses the need to cooperate with other places of different types and in particular when it highlights the importance of "functional links between neighbouring areas". That last specific element might make us think about how ITIs and CLLD arrangements can be used to support and shape both emerging business models and labour markets.

Finally, the focus on integrated MLG reminds us also that both the support arrangements and similar relating to business operations and the ways in which labour markets function are impacted upon by broader governance arrangements and mechanisms – a point of obvious relevance to ROBUST.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

This priority within the TA2030 places a similar emphasis as elsewhere upon cooperation, but adds a specific transnational dimension. Labour markets are explicitly mentioned here as one of a number of contexts within which "joining forces across borders" can help achieve the critical mass needed to make impactful change. Interestingly, the text also specifies that one of the ways that critical mass might manifest is in promoting synergies. The spirit here is about making better use of (harnessing) development potential (Para 59), very much the lens through which the ROBUST New Business Models and labour Markets CoP has approached the development of – and support for – new business models. The text in this section goes on to suggest that the national level ministers involved will do work to help ensure that the impetus for such cooperation is somehow embedded in national, regional and local strategies – a dimension that sits well against our ROBUST's aim to see synergies exploited and cooperation supported within a larger policy framework with high-level backing and buy-in.

Interreg and European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) are referenced as instruments that can facilitate this cooperation, the first by establishing project-based co-operation, the second by developing more formal legal bodies – we might in turn choose to highlight the role of transnational research projects as well.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The three priorities of the Green Europe objective are also highly relevant for the topic of business models/labour markets. They represent an attempt to focus on the territorial dimension of the SDGs, the European Green Deal (including the circular economy element of it) and the *Europe fit for the Digital Age* policy instrument.

The provision of ecosystems and combating biodiversity loss take primary place within the Healthy Environment priority, which might, in turn, be extended to a consideration of how efforts to achieve this might be driven through new business models and how labour markets might be impacted upon as part of this process. All the more so as the same paragraph highlights the importance of what it refers to as "geographical specificities".

The paragraph on climate change and loss of biodiversity (65) talks about the risk they pose for the proper functioning of ecosystems. It recommends developing local and regional strategies for climate-neutrality which might include actions on strengthening the delivery of ecosystem services which serve to profit both local people and businesses. We in turn might reflect upon how new and adapted business models might be part of that broader effort - a point that the text itself seems to implicitly acknowledge when it talks about businesses as above, and about ecosystem services "generating income".

The paragraph which follows this one is about natural and cultural heritage and highlights the need to balance nature conservation and the creation of environmentally friendly jobs. This, we might, reasonably take as an example of an acknowledgment of the sorts of ways in which top-level concerns such as environmental conservation might lead to the creation of new and different sorts of job roles and opportunities within the broader labour market – it is a point that might easily be allied with a consideration about the new types of businesses within which such jobs might exist.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

This element of the text zooms back out to the desire to see "strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world", again looking to assert a territorial dimension, this time as part of the broader transition towards a place-based and climate-neutral circular economy. In this sense the economic dimension is centre-stage more so than anywhere other in the text.

Within the work of the ROBUST CoP, circular economy is itself posited as a business model type in its own right. Whether we see it (CE) as a model per se or whether circularity, managing material and energy flows, is more a precept within which numerous models might operate is a moot point perhaps, but for the TA2030 text it is clearly much more – it is to be a core characteristic of the economy overall transcending individual business models and the mechanisms to achieve them.

Transitioning economies is of obvious relevance to ROBUST given that labour market shaping and the ways in which individual businesses function are both clearly part of this process – as both cause and effect. Indeed businesses, and start-up businesses especially, are specifically referenced here and, pertinently from a ROBUST perspective, we are reminded that they will be shaped by their "local assets, characteristics and traditions … and innovation capacities". A link also to Smart Specialisation, therefore.

Innovation makes relatively few appearances in the text but here at least it is explicit – indeed Smart Specialisation Strategies are cited as a specific means to help bring about this broader transition. The reference to "capacities" chimes interestingly with ROBUST's own reflections on just what strengths and opportunities might exist in the context of rural-urban business models, and that in turn brings us back full circle to the notion of a place-based economy. More specifically in fact, economies in the plural - as the text is at pains to emphasise (para. 70) the multitude and diversity of local products, markets, business environments and entrepreneurship types that go to make up a plethora of diverse local economies, diversity which the text welcomes and undertakes to support.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

The TA2030 suggests that the competitiveness of places depends on the availability of accessible digital infrastructure including high-speed internet and mobile phone networks. It also emphasises how that infrastructure directly impacts upon the potential for e-governance and e-services.

We might think about how new business models - (and the support that might be made available to them) - on the one hand take advantage of digitalisation, and on the other hand of how they might drive forward the transition to a digital society. Such new business models might benefit from the availability of digital solutions themselves and/or in turn be the agents through which third parties are able to access goods and services. As far as the second dimension is concerned, it is relatively simple to see how such new business models can also be conceived of as part of a much broader process of equalisation and e-inclusion. The territorial dimensions as regards rural-urban here are presumably related to equalising levels of connectivity between two different types or territory or to taking advantage of digitalisation to overcome what would otherwise constitute barriers between rural and urban.

The focus of the ROBUST New Business Models and Labour Markets might have been on the first element of the three-part business, people, place as beneficiaries of digitalisation model as used in the TA2030 text – but, in reality of course the three are inextricably linked. In parallel to this, there are pretty obvious implications about the types of job roles that might exist in an increasingly digitalised marketplace and the sorts of skills needs in the labour markets to reflect the needs of employers if any one place is to maximise its competitiveness potential.

At the physical level, transport networks of all levels – from TEN-T to local roads have an impact on business opportunities as they provide both long distance trade connections and link places on a local and regional level as well. That has an obvious relevance for business operations and their feasibility and competitiveness. The text emphasises the importance of physical links for global trading. As regards transport links of a more local nature, the TA2030 text suggests that such more local and secondary links are of special importance for "towns, rural, peripheral areas, islands and outermost regions" – presumably it is cities that are excluded from this list. The point for the sorts of businesses that were focused on within ROBUST is presumably that such transport links make doing business between rural and urban areas feasible – indeed it may be the role of some of the businesses (and the models they use) is to provide such links as much as to be a user of them.

TA2030 – Fields of actions relating to the New Business Models and Labour Markets COP

JUST EUROPE	GREEN EUROPE
• quality of life	• climate change mitigation and adaptation actions as development opportunities
• services of general interest & development of businesses	• loss of biodiversity affecting local and regional economies
• demographic and societal imbalances – impact on labour markets	• Secure, affordable and sustainable energy
• digitalisation and the 4th industrial revolution	• Just transition
• employment and economic development – territorial disparities	• circular regional value chains
• interdependencies between places	• local business opportunities related to natural, landscape and cultural heritage
• global embeddedness	

ROBUST

The listed Fields of action show challenges that lie within various policy areas and should be addressed from the territorial point of view

In the case of the Just Europe part of TA2030, all seven fields of actions have a relevance to rural-urban business models and/or labour markets.

Quality of life enhancement is an underlying objective of all public policies. It is linked to economic growth, but the TA2030 text reminds us that growth itself doesn't necessarily deliver employment. The territorial dimension of quality of life and citizens' wellbeing is linked to disparities between places.

Services of general interest - accessibility, affordability and quality of public services are important factors contributing to the development of businesses. Differences in access to services of general interest in different places will impact upon the scope for development of businesses - for example the decisions taken by individual businesses regarding location or relocation, targeting new markets, or human resources. There's a potential to reduce these disparities thanks to new technologies that enable both individuals and businesses to access some services online. At the same time of course, we need to bear in mind that service providers are themselves a key part of many local and regional labour markets as employers in their own right.

Demographic and societal imbalances – ageing population and human migration patterns are cited within the TA2030 text as the two relevant factors here. As regards the rural-urban dimension the text's position is clear, highlighting depopulation of some rural areas and what it terms "concentration" of people towards urban areas. We might find that a little over-simplified but there are clear implications in terms of labour forces, business scope and potential, and the business model or models adopted.

Digitalisation and new technologies are reshaping both economic and societal developments and they are also an important element of new business models in the rural-urban context. However, the TA2030 text highlights intensification of concentration tendencies – a factor which will also apply in terms of the location of the high-tech companies that are the frontrunners of the digital transition.

Employment and economic development depend strongly on both global and local circumstances. Territorial disparities related to economic growth and employment result from diverse levels of competitiveness, innovation and investments.

Interdependencies between places – the text places an emphasis on economic concentration tendencies and as a result - increasing disparities between better-off (often metropolitan) and poorer (often rural) areas. That is not interdependency per se and a consideration of rural-urban relations and the synergies attached might help bring that back into focus.

Global embeddedness – global and local are closely intertwined. However, global developments and related potential or the challenges that they create don't have the same impact on the local situation in all types of territories.

With the arguable exception of the field of action relating to air, water and soil quality, there is a case to be made for a clear relationship between the Green Europe highlighted FoAs within the TA2030 and rural-urban business models and labour markets:

Climate change - climate change mitigation and adaptation actions relating to such fields as agriculture, bioeconomy, circular economy and renewable energy production have business potential in their own right.

Loss of biodiversity – which can particularly affect businesses involved in delivery of ecosystem services.

Secure, affordable and sustainable energy and just transition – these FoAs emphasise the importance of the sustainability, security and affordability of energy for businesses and local economies as a whole. The second point talks about the need to shift the economy to clean, renewable energy and low-carbon industry while preserving present quality of life levels.

Circular value chains – another field of particular importance for new business models in the rural-urban context. It presents new opportunities for businesses. However, the TA2030 suggests that urban areas are in a better place to develop the circular economy as other places might lack critical mass. There is no reference here to how rural-urban linkages can be part of CE solutions.

Natural, landscape and cultural heritage – they are important assets for local development and can create unique business opportunities.

Thematic Topic Area 2: Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Introduction

Rural-urban cooperation and rural-urban linkages lie at the heart of ROBUST - in other words, the project works with a strong territorial basis and focus. That is reflected in this document and the areas it chooses to highlight. In order to help maintain that strong territorial focus and with the aim of helping ensure that we do not deviate into more general (or global) considerations as regards the provision public infrastructure and social services (by which the CoP intends to convey services of general public interest) we worked with the following considerations in mind:

- The ways in which public services of universal/general interest are delivered across territories which comprise a mix of rural, peri-urban and urban areas
- The ways in which public physical infrastructure systems and services are delivered across territories which comprise a mix of rural, peri-urban and urban areas
- The ways in which service delivery and infrastructure provision impact upon relative wellbeing in areas of different kinds
- The opportunities and challenges presented by digital and virtual technology in the provision of public services across a mix of areas of different types
- The ways in which public sector interventions might be used to support a mix of public and private sector service provision extending beyond the universal/general
- The steps necessary to ensure access to public services and public infrastructure across rural-urban areas

And

- How this is best responded to in policy and programmes – in reality or in theory

The four broad topic headings which shape this chapter to a large extent reflect the foci of the work of the relevant CoP as well as - we felt - sitting sensibly against the EU policy areas highlighted in later sections:

- Digital and virtual service delivery
- Public services in the broader marketplace
- Mobility services
- Service accessibility

As the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has pointed out, physical infrastructure for public uses and universal services play an important role in meeting the need to develop new linkages, pathways and trajectories towards synergies between rural and urban places, interests and actors. This applies at both physical and virtual levels, and at both service delivery and governance levels, with regard to the last of which, the CoP's work and findings underline the importance of extensive stakeholder networking and representation from an exceptionally wide range of actors in both planning and communication processes.

Access to services and to infrastructure is closely related to considerations of wellbeing and quality of life, and is intrinsic to the functionality of a given area. Services of general interest and infrastructure

underpin this functionality, to which can then be added considerations around going beyond the essential to the desirable and, given ROBUST's area of focus, looking at how both urban and rural assets can be accessed by all.

A recurring theme in this area of work has been the challenges surrounding delivering public services in rural areas, this is in part driven by an ongoing consideration of how rural service levels and models compare to those made available to residents and businesses in non-rural areas. That comparison dimension is then allied to that of linkages between rural and urban and hence to shared use of publicly funded and delivered infrastructure and services. This, then, is overtly territorial in that it posits considerations of services and facilities against a geographic backdrop.

It is important that the territorial dimension is clearly written into this exposition at each stage, and this is reflected in the document structure used. The chapter contextualises and expounds the thinking which has emerged from within the Community of Practice as regards each of the four selected topic headings and hopefully makes a case for their relevance, importance, and hence inclusion, by providing a short commentary on each topic.

Given that the aim of this set of TTPs is to offer guidance, we have tried to provide information in a straightforward and useful way and have added suggestions as to how that information might be acted upon. Finally, we have provided a set of conclusions in the form of a short set of thoughts as regards challenges to policy-makers for each topic area, these are intended to act as a bridge into the project's policy recommendations as set out in ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

2.1   Digital and virtual service delivery

Context

There are clearly significant challenges in delivering public services and making available infrastructure for public use, of acceptable standards, across the whole of a geographic area for which a national, regional or local public authority might have responsibility. This applies all the more at times when public service budgets are under extreme pressure and has been brought all the more to the fore in the face of extraordinary circumstances such as the Covid-19 outbreak of 2020 which coincided exactly with much of the work that the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP had started to do in exploring this area of work.

A huge amount has been written and said about the ways in which the pandemic has served as a trigger for the acceleration in use of digital and virtual service delivery mechanisms, at a time when physical movement was highly restricted and public services extending well beyond health and care unable or struggling to continue to serve public needs as previously. The deployment of new technologies, and to varying degrees the infra- and super-structure to support such technology has no doubt happened sooner and quicker than would have otherwise been the case and brings huge topically to the whole subject.

All of which said, the provision of e-services and tele-services (and the language evolves here as rapidly as the technology it seems), is in no way a new policy area and much has been explored and implemented in this regard over a long period of time now. The drivers for this are various but include ensuring availability of services, the wish to increase participation rates in democratic processes, improving the speed and ease of access, managing and decreasing delivery costs, and making services more flexible and attractive in the hope and expectation that take-up rates will occur at appropriate levels. Whatever the initial motivation, or combination thereof, the advantages, disadvantages and

challenges are well-known - albeit ever-evolving, not least in the face of continuing and rapid technological development itself.

The Territorial Dimension

The use of digital and virtual technology as a means by which to deliver public services is a familiar subject area for policy makers – it pre-dates the Covid-19 outbreak by a long way as the CoP has been quick to acknowledge. From a territorial perspective it is closely related to the notion that by making services available in non-physical ways, what is otherwise a "gap" or "divide" between urban and rural service delivery can be made smaller and again that was being explored at the policy level long before Spring 2020.

It is in some ways an alternative to options about relocating or decentralising service delivery in a physical way as it reduces the importance of the physical dimension altogether – at least in the case of some forms of service provision and in some cases. It also has pertinence as a response to the increasing rates of multi-locality, where more people are dividing their time between two or more different places. Policy makers will already be familiar with some of the challenges that that presents in terms of determining which services are to be provided in such instances, by whom, and at whose financial expense – there are numerous fiscal dimensions at play here, as well as issues to be worked through in terms of joint-working across service providers in different places.

Again, brought somewhat into the public – and policy maker - eye in the context of access to health services during the Covid-19 outbreak at a time of sizeable urban to rural exodus, it also applies to many other areas of public service - including of course mobility, given the inherent dimension of movement between homes, often (not always) as the CoP references, in instances where people choose to divide time between an urban and a rural abode.

2.2   Public services in the broader marketplace

Context

As well as public services to which citizens are entitled to have access to varying extents and in differing ways, there are basic services delivered through the private or mixed market which are also within the ambit of ROBUST's investigations – e.g., shops, banks post offices etc. This stretches and bends what we might normally think of as "essential" in terms of services but accords well with policy maker's interest in that which matters to people, what influences their decisions as to where to live and work etc and how they might make judgements about their own standard and quality of life

There is a particular congruence perhaps with the *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)* with its interest and focus on what people value, what it is that makes them more or less likely to leave from, or move to, rural areas on a full or part-time basis, what make a place attractive and liveable. And it echoes too the concerns that policy makers within and beyond the LTVRA have with equity of availability and access and with legal requirements and policy commitments to deliver public services and how that melds in daily life with what for some might be thought of as "facilities" but for others are essentials.

The *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has highlighted food, and in particular local food, as an area in which a number of public service providers have sought to make supportive interventions in order to expedite policy aims around promoting shorter food chains, about healthier eating, about

supporting the local economy, and improving links and connections between urban and rural locations within a given territory/region. This support might take various forms, making available publicly owned space or buildings, subsidising, or waiving, the cost of same, organising and managing events and schemes, promoting and publicising initiatives and providing, or facilitating, access to energy, water and waste services.

The Territorial Dimension

In the case of the co-location of services in service hubs, what in essence is being described here are rural service hubs, the importance and potential of which are highlighted within the work of the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP. They become an alternative to an urban model where critical mass makes the provision of services (public and private) at a more local – and hence accessible – level less of a challenge than is the case in more sparsely populated areas. This is essentially about looking at clustering of services across public and private providers and is closely related to improving the quality of life of residents able to access essential and non-essential amenities, in turn impacting upon attractiveness and liveability of given geographical settings.

In the context of public interventions in local food initiatives, policy makers will easily be able to find examples of schemes designed to help rural and peri-urban producers sell into local urban markets, and to facilitate urban consumers in having access to high-quality local food, with all that both of those things imply about supporting local economies. This is clearly a market intervention as is the use of public food procurement schemes as a way to trigger greater use of local produce and to develop local resilience in terms of food security – another theme made all the more topical by the Covid-19 outbreak.

2.3   Mobility services

Context

In the sense that rural-urban linkages are at one obvious level about physical connections and the way in which people, goods, and services might move and be transported between and across territories of different types, mobility services are of obvious relevance to ROBUST, and unsurprisingly they featured prominently in the work and findings of the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP.

Not all mobility is about rural-urban connectivity obviously, a large amount of public transport infrastructure and mobility service provision relates to journeys wholly undertaken within either urban or rural settings or indeed to facilitate journeys of varying length which entail travel through multiple rural, peri-urban and urban settings where the start and end points are both urban or both rural.

And, of course, mobility is global in the sense that journeys beginning, ending, or transiting through parts of Europe do not necessary begin or end in the same continent. What they will all have in common however is that they will have a "first mile" and "last mile" – the most localised and granular dimension of the sort of mobility upon which the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has tended to focus.

The Territorial Dimension

EU policy work on the subject of transport/mobility will cover a wide range of different elements – not least climate-related challenges and the role of smart, clean, green transport, active mobility (primarily walking and cycling), multi-modal transport systems, public vs private vehicle use, modal shift from one form of transport to another, associated energy use, management of mobility markets (with all that

entails with regard to the European single market, regulation and competition), the accessibility and availability of mobility services, and – deliberately left until last – urban mobility.

This focus on urban mobility is long-standing and closely connected to the equally long-standing injurious impacts of urban transport systems in terms of pollution, poor air-quality, emission levels, congestion etc. More recently supported by initiatives such as SUMPs (Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans) and the role of urban (transport) nodes/hubs as part of the Europe wide TEN-T network, European level policy consistently singles out urban dimensions of mobility for attention.

Commuting has, unsurprisingly perhaps, featured amongst the CoPs areas of focus, describing as it does an archetypical form of mobility between urban, peri-urban and rural places. Policy makers will often approach commuting by public transport as a pivotal dimension of urban mobility, (albeit that by definition many of those journeys will entail travel beyond urban areas), and/or at commuting by private vehicles as an area to target in terms of encouraging modal shift to either public transport, to active mobility means, or a combination of the two. That has been explored within ROBUST and also looked at in the context of trying to quantify the positive environmental impacts of reduced commuting brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak, and at the same time forecast possible future trends in terms of future levels taking account of shifts of working patterns which may transpire to be temporary or permanent.

2.4 Service accessibility

Context

Making services accessible, and somehow achieving equality of access to services to all, is closely connected to the idea of delivering services in different ways – for example through new (and not so new) technology as described already. It is also though about developing and supporting the capacity of would-be service users to access services. This might apply in a physical way, ensuring broadband connectivity in order that on-line services can be accessed for example, but also by providing knowledge and learning services to ensure that services which are at least supposedly "available" are in reality "accessible".

It is no coincidence that many of the services being considered here are those thought of as "universal services", in other words they are designed for the use and benefit of all (often underpinned in law) when required and these necessitate special attention to be paid to ensuring that they are accessible to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who may struggle, and may therefore require more bespoke support, in order to achieve that accessibility. What the work of the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has highlighted is that disadvantage may be directly connected to physical location and that has been directly addressed and tackled in the work of the relevant ROBUST Living Labs.

Accessibility to services is inextricably linked to social cohesion, it coheres but it also contributes to wellbeing and complements policy objectives about equalisation (as in, for example, EU cohesion policy) and "levelling up" or similar, not solely in terms of services of course but also in the sense of access to goods, to markets and to social assets.

The Territorial Dimension

Access to services also has a clear rural-urban dimension insofar that it is about making accessible in rural areas, services which are often designed, managed, coordinated and in many cases directly delivered in more urban settings. At one level this directly relates to physical accessibility and designing

and delivering mobility systems and services in ways that make it possible to travel to receive services at a distance. It is, at the same time though about reducing that need to travel (and the time and cost implications of that travel are also important factors here), either by removing it altogether and replacing a physical service with a virtual one, as above, or by bringing those services physically closer, thereby reducing, but not removing, the need for travel.

This second dimension may be addressed by "outreach" provision of some type, by making service delivery peripatetic, and/or by establishing the sorts of rural service hubs already described. All have been experimented with in different ways, within ROBUST and beyond. A clear territorial dimension is also at play when public service providers consider a variation on the rural service hub model when they look to decentralise urban service delivery and relocate it to a number of selected locations in areas between the rural and the urban – for some the peri-urban – and where we will tend to see terms such as "sub-regional centres" being used to describe a model which takes services not to a front door or a screen in a home, but to delivery points (or hubs) in smaller (and from a rural resident's perspective, therefore, a closer) locations.

The development of either rural hubs or these "halfway houses" in smaller centres, both impact on rural-urban linkages, they shift the centre of gravity in terms of travel patterns, local jobs, local supply chains and as such are often developed as parts of broader regional development plans.

Governance

Openness to new ideas is pivotal to achieving success in governance arrangements the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services CoP* has concluded. This is many ways reflects a long-standing trend on the part of public service providers to reflect upon and explore new ways of working, often closely allied to, inter alia, aspirations of providing better quality public services, to better involving the public who these services are designed to serve in decision-making processes, to delivering better value for money, or in supporting marginalised communities and individuals. As well as breadth and depth of involvement, the CoP has also raised points about cooperation beyond the immediate governance arrangement, layering up governance arrangements especially in the context of inter-municipal cooperation with the pooling of financial resource, physical assets, and expertise and knowledge which that implies, noting that much remains to be done in this regard.

The CoP subject area under consideration here is large – if not vast – and that is reflected in the CoP's focus on the importance (and challenges) of involving a wide range of actors in complex and carefully coordinated multi-level governance arrangement. The quest for innovation in governance arrangement terms might, it has been suggested, extend to active participation in transnational knowledge exchanges, to cooperation between managing bodies of different types, and to liaison between the sorts of "anchor institutes" referred to as part of ROBUST's work on wellbeing and of which it is suggested that LEADER/CLLD LAGs serve as a pertinent example.

Challenges and questions arising for policy makers:
- The ways in which public services, to which people will often have a legal entitlement, are delivered in differing circumstances – rural and urban
- Ways in which public services can be decentralised and localised so as to better balance rural-urban relationships
- How the reshaping of public service delivery patterns can be optimised in the context of broader regional development plans

- The scope for further deployment of digital and virtual service delivery mechanisms – and their desirability from a user perspective
- How best to provide frameworks and guidance on government arrangements across a subject area with a huge number of variables and localised circumstances to be taken into account
- The extent to which physical travel (primarily characterised as commuting) between rural and urban areas might change in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, interruptions to public transport systems and services and the growing volume of opportunity to work remotely beyond urban centres
- Developing a better understanding of the nature and extent of increased multi-locality living which raises new challenges for both the provision and usage levels of physical infrastructure and for the delivery of public services
- Reappraising the significance of micro-mobility, first and last mile travel, and micro public transport services
- How to ensure continuing universal accessibility of services as service delivery is made more localised or more digitalised
- Support measures to ensure universal accessibility

The Territorial Agenda 2030 context

The main stated goal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is 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 <u>increasing imbalances and inequalities</u>

- A GREEN EUROPE (GE) that "protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition processes" with actions aiming to promote <u>sustainable development</u> and counteract <u>climate change</u>

Within each objective are three priorities:

The three priorities under the Just Europe objective of the TA2030 look to add a territorial dimension to such issues as economic and social development and bring in other EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights at the same time.

BALANCED EUROPE

In relation to this first priority regarding balance, the purposes and role of public services feature quite strongly in the document, even if they are not always explicitly referenced. The service dimension here is stronger than the infrastructure one – although there is an obvious need for infrastructure both to directly deliver services and to provide access to them.

"Balance" for the purposes of the TA2030 is very much about reducing inequalities between people and places – an obvious starting point for much public infrastructure and service provision – where for example, to use the text's own language "the well-being of citizens" is frequently the starting point rationale for public interventions. Indeed, disparities in public service provision in different places are underlined in one of the introductory chapters of the TA2030 paper entitled "why do we have to act?" as a key reason for needing a TA2030 at all.

This priority talks about quality of life and work with an obvious connection to public infrastructure and services such as education, healthcare or social services. Others – e.g., transport networks or digital infrastructure shape the conditions of both – life and work. We might also in this context think about the role of public services in minimising what would otherwise be a growing polarisations between the quality of life levels in one place as opposed to another – regional and zonal development and regeneration strategies spring to mind in this context.

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

This priority is closely related with the 'Balanced Europe" one immediately above as it also calls for an evenness of territorial development, but the focus here is specifically on the functional region level as the title suggests. The relationship between public infrastructure and functional regions is self-evident and indeed that functionality and the limits of functional regions is often in part determined by physical connectivity arrangements. In the ROBUST context of public service and infrastructure provision across rural-urban lines (If that is how it is to be perceived) it is useful to see specific reference to the "peri-urban" in this section of the text – presumably in an attempt to demonstrate the mixed and varied nature of areas within functional regions.

Again, the link to governance arrangements is overt even if the actual term is absent - the TA2030 text points out the complementarity of neighbouring places and asserts 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 puts it, to look beyond administrative borders to exploit the potential of functional areas which "break with existing administrative delineations".

The focus in this section of the text is such that it seems fair to conclude that the governance dimension of public service provision is actually more to the fore of its thinking than actual service provision. For example, the text also calls for an integrated multilevel governance approach.

This is all relevant to the work carried out by the ROBUST Public Infrastructure and Social Services CoP as regards how for example public service provision and public investments in physical infrastructure are shaped as part of broader development strategies. In this context the TA2030 points to the role of ITIs and CLLD mechanisms as a means to carry out measures designed to exploit functional links – in this instance between adjoining areas of different types of course. ROBUST's concerns go beyond physically adjacent places of course but the point remains perfectly valid in the context of place-based strategies.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

This priority brings us back to similar points about cooperation based upon complementarity as in the previous one, but in the transnational dimension this time. Public service provision is explicitly referenced as one of a number of areas where transnational synergies might usefully be promoted.

Whereas in the previous priority the focus was on ITIs and CCLD mechanisms as a way of developing functional links between neighbouring areas - here both Interreg and European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) are cited as instruments that can be used to facilitate this cooperation. That seem sensible given the long-standing perception of Interreg as being the single most important instrument where public authorities from different countries might come together and cooperate on issues and challenges of common interest and importance. The macro-regional reference is interesting

too in a ROBUST context serving as a reminder that governance and public service provision can take place against a large-scale geographical context within and across administrative areas with rural, urban and peri-urban features.

There is a practical point made here too in the TA2030 text about achieving critical mass through cross-border cooperation – a key consideration for many physical infrastructure works, not just in terms of where things are built and what they connect but also in terms or joint or multiple investment programmes.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The three priorities of the Green Europe objective also contain much that is pertinent to public infrastructure and services. The priorities focus on the territorial aspects of the SDGs, the European Green Deal, the *Europe Fit for the Digital Age* policy instrument, and at a more practical level on sustainable mobility and integrated transport networks, and on circular economy. Spatial planning is specifically referenced in the preliminary text to this section (para 62) and indeed at many points in the general preamble - (this text after all emanates from a group describing themselves as "the ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development") - the contribution it (the group of ministers) might make to the initiatives listed above is highlighted, albeit not returned to in any detail in the text that follows.

This first Green Europe priority specifically focuses on ecosystems, environment protection, climate change and biodiversity. As is true of a number of places within the preceding "Balanced Europe" priority – public infrastructure and services – with the exception of green infrastructure - are not explicitly mentioned, but they remain critical to achieving the objective of a healthy environment. E.g., transport and energy infrastructures which are also highly relevant of course in the context of rural-urban synergies. There is the one exception to the general rule outlined above – and the role of spatial planning as regards GI (an obvious connection to make after all) alongside other "relevant policies" as it is expressed, is referenced here.

Nature conservation is referred to here as part of a broader drive towards protecting and further developing Europe's natural and cultural heritage, but the role of public services in making that come about is not further explored in the text. Clearly nevertheless the role is a critical one and there is much that might be usefully teased out.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The immense impact that the drive towards a non-linear circular economy has already had and will inevitably continue to have on some public infrastructure sectors such as waste management or construction and energy renovation of buildings is pretty much self-evident. The management of material and energy flows to which the TA2030 text refers is very much amongst the public service provisions with which this CoP has concerned itself. The reuse and recycling of products if not undertaken as a public service itself, is very often the subject of publicly procured works for public benefit.

This priority has a subtitle: "Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world". It addresses the diversification of local economies necessary to improve resilience of places and resilience will be an

integral part of many regional and national level strategies allied to which public infrastructure investments are made and public services designed and delivered.

Clearly there is an important role for energy, building and transport infrastructure here alongside the management of broader regional strategies undertaken as part of spatial planning or other multi-actor place-based strategies undertaken in whole or in part by public services.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

The TA2030 text indicates the need for development of the digital infrastructure - high-speed internet and mobile phone networks in all places – and there is an obvious relevance here as regards the provision of such infrastructure by public services and how that sits alongside (or doesn't sit alongside) private sector investment and service provision in rural and urban areas in different parts of Europe. As per our earlier considerations as regards Just Europe – here again are the same issues about the role of public services in ensuring equality of access to different places and people.

The text also outlines how e-governance and e-services of general interest have a direct impact on the quality of life – without specifying the public sector nature of much of that, it seems reasonable to take it as read. These are elements of particular importance in the rural-urban context as they allow for new models of public service provision, especially in more remote – and therefore potentially more disconnected – areas as well as ensuring an evenness of public service provision regardless of location.

As regards physical connectivity – the text emphasises the importance of transport networks – from Trans-European Networks to secondary and local roads. It emphasises too the importance of that second dimension for rural-urban connectivity (what it takes as towns and rural areas). It furthermore contains an interesting commitment to invite spatial and transport planners to explore new models of mobility as a service at the local and regional level – an exact point of focus for the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP and an exercise which we may feel might usefully be extended beyond transport and spatial planners alone.

TA2030 – fields of action relating to the COP on public infrastructure and social services

JUST EUROPE	GREEN EUROPE
• quality of life and citizens' well-being	• climate change
• services of general interest	• loss of biodiversity and land consumption
• demographic and societal imbalances	• healthy quality of air, soil and water
• digitalisation and the 4th industrial revolution	• secure, affordable and sustainable energy & just transition
• global embeddedness	• circular regional value chains
	• natural, landscape and cultural heritage

ROBUST

The listed Fields of Action show challenges that lie within various policy areas and should be addressed from the territorial point of view as part of implementing the TA2030.

As regards the Just Europe part of TA2030, five of the seven proposed fields of action can readily be seen to have relevance for a consideration of public infrastructure and social services provision in a rural-urban context.

Quality of life – public infrastructure and social services are not explicitly mentioned in the TA2030 text as much one might expect, but, – as already explained in relation to the Balanced Europe priority that this field of action relates to – they are of paramount importance for living standards and individual wellbeing. In the context of the territorial dimension of quality of life, this part of the text references social disparities and social exclusion, which are often the starting point for the work carried out by social care services.

Services of general interest – almost a field of action on the CoP topic itself!! The TA2030 text refers to accessibility, affordability and quality of public services as factors contributing to quality of life and business conditions. From the territorial point of view, it emphasises the fact that differences in access to services in various places can drive service providers and companies away (and make certain places unattractive in terms of certain types of investment presumably) – this in turn impacts upon the nature and extent of public service investments and the public-private sector mix and balance of same. The potential role and impact on this situation of new technologies - and particularly digitalisation – is also highlighted here and mirrors the work of the CoP in considering just where public sector intervention is necessary or desirable.

Demographic and societal imbalances – another field of action of particular relevance – this time for social care and health services. It mentions such issues as ageing, the migration of people and the depopulation of certain areas. It underlines the challenges that they pose for public service provision, especially for those in remote areas that lack sufficient access to public services.

Digitalisation and new technologies – as mentioned earlier in the context of the sustainable connections priority – the TA2030 text emphasises the opportunities present here in terms of improving the situation, especially in remote places, as they allow for new models of public service provision.

Global embeddedness – Global dynamics, and development strategies in particular, impact upon public infrastructure and provision of services not only locally but at a physical remove. This field of action relates to the uneven distribution of potential and risks between various places in Europe linked to global developments. We might presumably consider both the positive and negative impacts of global events on the provision of public services and infrastructure more locally in this context.

As regards the Green Europe fields of action, again almost all have an immediate relevance for us in the context of public works.

Climate change – sustainable and environmentally-friendly public infrastructure can help in mitigating climate change. This field of action calls for place-specific responses and indicates new development opportunities linked to mitigation and adaptation activities. These might relate for example to renewable energy production or to the provision of transport services.

Loss of biodiversity and land consumption – the text draws out the linkage between increasing land take and land sealing and the loss of biodiversity that results and the severe risks for long-term living conditions that ensue. This is obvious territory for spatial planning and regional development strategies more broadly, produced wholly or in part by public bodies and the governance arrangements in which they are involved.

Healthy quality of air, soil and water – this field of action touches upon disparities in access to clean air, soil and water and the impact which that will inevitably have upon health and upon social inequalities. The TA2030 text underlines that these disparities exist between urban and rural areas within regions as well as between regions.

Secure, affordable and sustainable energy & just transition – There are two fields of action which we have combined here relating to energy production and infrastructure. The first emphasises the need for more sustainable solutions such as renewable energy as well as for diversification of energy production. It also points out that existing energy infrastructure is insufficient. It is interlinked with the next field of action relating to just transition – in this context, the transition from coal-dependence and heavy industry to climate-neutral solutions.

Circular value chains – as mentioned previously in the context of the circular economy priority - this field of action has an immense impact on public services – especially those relating to waste management and energy efficiency. However, the TA2030 text states that urban areas are in a better position to adopt and develop the circular economy as other places might lack critical mass – a point we might want to return to in the context of the CoP's more nuanced understanding of public infrastructure and service provision across rural-urban lines.

Natural, landscape and cultural heritage – the text indicates that infrastructure developments related to urbanisation, transport, intense agriculture, fisheries and other types of infrastructure can have a negative impact on natural/cultural heritage and landscape, especially if they are not properly coordinated on the local level. There is a positive side to this to which ROBUST might want to introduce into the debate for the sake of balance and roundedness.

Thematic Topic Area 3: Sustainable Food Systems

Introduction

Rural-urban cooperation and rural-urban linkages lie at the heart of ROBUST as indicated in the report's preface. In other words, the project works with a strong territorial basis and focus. That is reflected in this document and the aspects of the topic which it chooses to highlight.

In order to help maintain that strong territorial focus and with the aim of helping ensure that we do not deviate into more general (or global – and food systems are global) considerations as regards sustainable foods systems we worked with the following considerations in mind:

- The particular opportunities for rural-urban areas in the context of sustainable food – and in particular in terms of smarter, greener, local food production and supply
- The role of food strategies and policies in harnessing rural-urban linkages and developing trajectories for synergy
- The support needed for actors involved in sustainable food systems with in the rural-urban space and how this differs from other places
- The role of innovative practice in two particular areas, food branding schemes and public procurement of food
- How food production and consumption can be modelled to drive sustainable development of rural-urban areas
- How food production and consumption can be modelled to support and develop synergies between non-adjacent rural-urban areas
- How support through funding programmes is shaped to reach these areas as well as others
- How this is best responded to in policy and programmes – in reality or in theory

The four broad topic headings which shape this chapter to a large extent reflect the foci of the work of the relevant CoP as well as - we felt - sitting sensibly against EU policy areas in later sections of this paper:

- Food sustainability
- Food quality and safety
- Innovation
- Support measures and incentivisation mechanisms

Food (here and afterwards the one word is used as a shorthand for food, drink and agricultural produce in general) and rural are closely associated but ought not be regarded as synonymous. Not all food production happens in a rural setting and not all rural activity relates to food. Less still is food processing and food logistics to be thought of as the unique preserve of the rural - indeed a disproportionate proportion of that takes place in locations where the rural and urban coincide what, for some at least is the peri-urban. Nevertheless, the connection between rural and food is a strong and prevailing one.

From a territorial viewpoint, food chains are often posited as an example of a rural-urban connection or link with short (visible) chains perceived of as a key way in which the rural-urban interface is made visible to individuals, all the more so when contrasted to food supplies from a further (hence less visible) distance. That in turns relates closely to the perceptions that consumers have of food, its quality, value,

and the importance that consumers place on sustainable behaviours (including their own) at all stages of the food system.

At the level of EU policy, the adoption of a new, single food-system-wide policy in the form of Farm to Fork (F2F) in May 2020 is a hugely significant development and change, and one that occurred during the lifetime of the ROBUST project of course. By deliberately taking a food system wide approach F2F has mirrored the approach of the ROBUST CoP by not focussing only on food production but by looking across processing, logistics, marketing and consumption up the point of recycling food waste. This is holistic by definition, more cross-sectoral than it might appear at first glance, and an approach which posits sustainable food systems as part of the broader European Green Deal strategy with all which that entails with regard to arriving at a climate-neutral continent.

It is important that the territorial dimension is clearly written into this exposition at each stage, and this is reflected in the document structure used. This chapter contextualises and expounds the thinking which has emerged from within the Community of Practice as regards each of the four selected topic headings and hopefully makes a case for their relevance, importance, and hence inclusion, by providing a short commentary on each topic.

Given that the aim of this set of TTPs is to offer guidance, we have tried to provide information in a straightforward and useful way and have added suggestions as to how that information might be acted upon. Finally, we have provided a set of conclusions in the form of a short set of thoughts as regards challenges to policy-makers for each topic area, these are intended to act as a bridge into the project's policy recommendations as set out in ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

3.1   Food sustainability

Context

A key context with regard to food is its sourcing and production and whether that sourcing is sustainable and how resilient it is in times of crisis – and in this regard responses to, and building in future resilience in the face of, the Covid-19 pandemic is by now a very familiar theme to all policy makers. The emerging consensus seems to be that more localised food systems stood up well to an exceptional "stress test" and that where problems arose, they tended to be short-term and correctable, or were more related to challenges encountered in complementary sectors. Doubtless that will continue to be debated and circumstances and perceptions may yet come to shift.

Part of the consideration here, and within the work of the CoP, is the sustainability of what is actually done with that food, how it is produced, processed, transported – and across what sort of distance, how it is distributed and made available, its cost and how food waste is managed. That in turn is inextricably linked to the nature and viability of food businesses and how that can be driven by policy interventions and supported – or otherwise – through a range of policy instruments.

The Territorial Dimension

As has been alluded to in the introductory comments, there is a strong connection between the territorial and food in the sense of connecting producers and consumers; itself related to food chains, these often rely on models of linking rural food producers with urban consumers. It is in large part the strength of those connections and the localness of those connections in particular which is a key dimension in thinking about the sustainability of food supply.

This should however be approached with caution, not all food production is rural as previously stated and, more self-evidently perhaps, food is also consumed by rural residents who are food consumers in their own right and may not choose to rely solely on produce from a narrow local orbit. Urban and peri-urban agriculture is coming to be recognised by a growing number of policy makers as a subject worthy of attention in its own right, and is, in turn, an acknowledged dimension of the "localisation" of food with all which that implies in terms of reduced/ing food miles etc. Certainly, one common response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been to look again at the extents to which urban and peri-urban settings might be supported to become more, if not self-sufficient, than at least self-reliant in terms of food supply.

Urban food policies - territorial by definition, although the exact meaning of urban is variable – and addressed in some detail in the work of CoP, will often pick up on that dimension of production from within urban bounds whilst at the same time looking to take a more sustainable general approach to food production, consumption, waste and recycling.

3.2   Food quality & safety

Context

Although food in Europe is normally regarded as being of a generally high quality, safe and nutritious, there are much greater concerns that the systems within which it is produced, processed, stored, transported and sold are unsustainable. It is this fundamental concern which the EU Farm to Fork Strategy is designed to tackle by helping to bring about a "fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system". Its key intention is to help ensure that the entire food chain (from farm to fork, via as many stages as apply - production, transportation, processing, storage, marketing and sale to consumption), has a neutral or positive environmental impact. That does not however mean that considerations of food quality are no longer part of the debate, perhaps more that the focus is to a greater degree about desirability than necessity. Certainly, within the CoP's work there has been a focus on what people want to eat and drink and how that can be reflected and shaped in relationships between rural an urban food actors and interests.

The Territorial Dimension

The territorial and food are inextricably linked in the sense of terroirs and similar where a focus is placed upon the particular places in which food is grown and food produced. This is marked by an emphasis on the specificities of local growing conditions and/or on the production methods employed - again there is a particular correlation here with rural areas but not a total one.

The local specificity dimension referred to above is picked upon at an EU policy level by the use of Geographic Indicators schemes and similar. Here there is also a dimension of protective or restrictive with use of terminology often explicitly linked to geographic settings, usually rural. Food quality is built into the models used to arrive at urban food policies and similar as described above and as the CoP Report itself points out, such schemes as those considered within its own work will look to analyse and react appropriately to the interdependencies between the cities or city-regions to which they relate and to surrounding rural areas. (or at least, by way of a note of caution, usually with regard to those rural areas that surround are or proximitous) – other policies will extend to try and take account of non-proximitous relations if such interdependencies are identified.

3.3   Innovation

Context

Innovation in/and food is a well-developed area at the EU and other policy levels, in the case of the former not least through the work of EIP-AGRI and a number of other initiatives supported through the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and others. Without falling into our own trap of over-equating rural and food, many good and best practice innovations etc highlighted as part of rural innovation initiatives will be (and already are) food related. And indeed, the imminent *European Startup Village Forum* whilst being unequivocally about rural innovation across all sectors will no doubt feature much that is food-related.

The ROBUST *Sustainable Food Systems* CoP has come at innovation through two particular lenses, neither of which are so closely related to the set of technological innovation with which the EIP-AGRI for instance primarily concerns itself, but by looking at new and innovative use of public procurement regimes and at new and innovative food branding schemes which explicitly set out to go beyond the sort of Geographical Indicators schemes and similar described above.

The Territorial Dimension

Food branding and certification initiatives and schemes around the public procurement of food have been special focus areas for the work of this CoP. In both instances, work has been done exploring the ways in which either might be brought to bear to enhance rural-urban linkages. Both apply at a commercial, (financial), level and the second is a conscious attempt to better support and manage (food) supply and value chains, whilst the first extends the scope to promote the purchase and consumption of particular foodstuffs when a branding scheme is instigated by a relevant public authority to increase attractiveness and boost purchasing levels.

Also noteworthy, and of potential interest and value to policy makers, has been further work done looking at new ways in which data might be collected in order to better calibrate supply and demand levels for food between predominantly rural producers and predominantly urban consumers – either at the organisational and individual level. This new data related approach might then be applied to food strategies more broadly or to territorial development programmes more broadly still.

3.4   Support measures and incentivisation mechanisms

Context

The way in which Geographic Indicator schemes and similar driven at the EU level, or more localised and locally-driven food branding initiatives can be used as part of a broader basket of support measures for producers in particular places bringing particular products to market has already been addressed.

At the most general level, support under the EU Common Agricultural Programme (CAP), is an obvious starting point for looking at the ways in which producers might be supported under either pillar. The ROBUST project has coincided with the continuing evolution of CAP Reform and has in part coincided with what has become a transitional phase between the 2014-20 and the 2021-17 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) agreements and the provisions for CAP contained therein. Perhaps, what will transpire to be of particular relevance here is the "renationalisation" of CAP and the advent of national level CAP Strategic Plans. These plans are in part, but only in part, designed to give structure to the delivery of the quantitative targets set out within the F2F strategy, but will also, it is assumed, enable greater targeting of financial resource aligned more closely to national and sub-national priorities, -

needs and potential as determined at EU member state as opposed to EU level. That then, may serve as an opportunity to support rural-urban food initiatives to a greater degree than now occurs with a CAP scheme which the CoPs work to date suggests has until now been limiting in terms of both its geographic and sectoral application.

The Territorial Dimension

The CAP, as alluded to above, incorporates the rural development programme and to that extent is overtly territorial in highlighting the desire to support actors and the interests of one particular type of territory. In many ways it continues to be juxtaposed with the support that more urban parts of Europe receive under the EU cohesion policy programmes – a differentiation which for many seems deeply entrenched but which is antithetical to the rural-urban focus of ROBUST itself of course. With the launch of the *Long Term Vision for Rural Area (*LTVRA) in June 2021, rural proofing is now much more firmly back on the policy agenda and, if it can be assumed to be intended as a means of looking to assess impact across territories of different types, may yet turn out to be an invaluable lever in resetting this relationship between funding support, what money goes where, and for what purpose.

Support for the rural-urban dimension of sustainable food systems will likely continue to find itself constrained if it operates within funding arrangements which place boundaries around territorial areas of different types as demarcated on maps and, this is likely to be all the more the case if the model used is one that does not recognise gradations between rural and urban as opposed to using a simple binary model. It is exactly the need to work across these lines as opposed to being limited by them that much of the work of this CoP highlights.

Governance

The consideration of governance arrangements undertaken in the work and findings of the *Sustainable Food Systems* CoP has been closely informed by the focal points of ROBUST's Work Package 1 and its emphases upon network governance and how these apply to "new localities", and how these arrangements be applied to rural-urban linkages in particular. The focus has been on process, and on developing an understanding of the motivation to participate of those directly involved in governance arrangements designed to take forward agreed strategies or visions with regard to sustainable food systems. At the same time looking at the ways in which knowledge is shared by different actors looking to come together in new ways to try and shape sustainable food systems with a rural-urban dimension.

The CoP notes the emergence of new governance arrangements in at least some ROBUST Living Lab areas which have been deliberately designed to cover larger geographic areas encompassing both urban and rural locations. They also note the positive impact that this has had on occasion in triggering a more joined-up consideration of food related needs and food supply options across a rural-urban area, the net effect being to take better and more accurate account of the potential for local food supply across proximitous urban and rural settings. This might in turn lead to a deeper and more rounded form of cooperation based upon a better understanding of mutual interdependence and a greater willingness to co-create future food strategies as a direct result.

From that has evolved a detailed focus on the governance of food policies in different Living Lab areas and in which Living Lab members are invariably themselves directly involved, at the same time emphasising the need for a public-private mix within such arrangements, as well as the need to consult and engage with a broad range of further stakeholders as well – including from across a range of policy domains.

Challenges and questions arising for policy makers:

- How best to reshape and rebalance rural-urban linkages in the context of food, the opportunities and challenges arising from existing initiatives in this domain
- How to arrive at joint and inclusive strategies and visions for sustainable food systems in a given location with an overt rural-urban dimension
- The ways in which public and private sector interests can best be supported to cooperate in new types of governance arrangements related to food systems
- How policy frameworks can best be made congruent with each other across thematic and geographic lines so as to provide or support coherent and place-specific sustainable food systems strategies/visions
- The role of new and rural-urban related sustainable food systems in broader territorial strategies or plans
- How to align opportunities and prospects, relating specifically to rural-urban interdependencies in the process of developing CAP Strategic Plans 2021-27
- Optimal ways to support rural-urban food initiatives from within funding regimes operating with territorial restrictions or limits
- How to better deploy and extend the range and nature of certification schemes and similar, so as to better support the production and consumption of food in short rural-urban food chains
- How to better understand and support elements of whole food systems beyond production – e.g., processing, transportation, marketing and waste management
- Optimal ways to share knowledge and develop understanding about rural-urban food dependencies and schemes – e.g., through the use of public procurement schemes, branding initiatives and innovative network governance arrangements

The Territorial Agenda 2030 context

The main stated goal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030 hereafter) is 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 <u>increasing imbalances and inequalities</u>

- A GREEN EUROPE (GE) that "protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition processes" with actions aiming to promote <u>sustainable development</u> and counteract <u>climate change</u>

Within each objective are three priorities:
The three priorities under the Just Europe objective of the TA2030 look to add a territorial dimension to such issues as economic and social development and bring in other EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights at the same time.

We will look in vain for any direct reference to "food " in the text – indeed the word never appears, and "agriculture" is referenced only twice - once highlighted as an opportunity in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts that require new approaches to agriculture, once when cited as a threat to natural heritage and landscape when it is "intense".

BALANCED EUROPE

Despite the lack of overt reference, this first priority of the Just Europe section of the text talks about the quality of life and wellbeing of citizens and access to healthy and nutritious food is undeniably an important element of that. Indeed, we might argue that "balanced" territorial development is in one important respect at least about the supply of, and demand for, food. And certainly, the ways in which food production happens or does not happen in any one of a huge number of different ways is one factor in which territories are distinct one from the other - making one place different to another in other words. Those relationships between rural and urban places of different character are often manifest in the context of food supply after all.

As the ROBUST CoP knows full well, that set of complex relationships between places urban, peri-urban, and rural often includes practical arrangements related to the production, processing, storage, transportation, sale and purchase of food. We might also look to new CAP Strategic Plans in this context to see just where agriculture, fisheries and the environmental management related to both fits within broader territorial development strategies.

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

This priority is closely related with the 'Balanced Europe" one in calling for an evenness of territorial development, in this instance focusing on the "functional geography" level as the title suggests.

We will be particularly interested here in the way in which food production, processing and packaging, storage, transportation and sale and purchase forms part of a broader "functioning" reality in any one place. Presumably that interest will extend beyond any one region itself to encompass relationships with other regions with regard to which there are significant flows and relationships regarding sustainable food. This section of the text has specific reference to peri-urban areas which we might perceive of as exactly those areas where rural and urban come together and a considerable amount of food production and processing , storage etc. takes place and where food operations based on local provenance are often to be found.

The TA2030 text emphasises the complementarity of neighbouring places and the resulting need for cooperation and exploitation of synergies. Sustainable food systems are one dimension through which that might be analysed and demonstrated in detail - presumably both between neighbouring areas (and especially perhaps those areas between rural and urban areas where food production often occurs in high volumes – the peri-urban as above maybe), but also between non-adjacent regions where food flows nevertheless occur to significant extents.

The text also references the governance dimension – specifically the integrated multilevel governance approach dimension for which ROBUST has repeatedly called – it is interesting to see how that might in some places be brought about within the context of regional food and food security strategies. These might in turn take advantage of existing EU instruments such as ITIs and CLLD expressly designed to support functional linkages within and across functional regions or by other national, or more locally instigated, means.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

This section of the TA2030 text returns to the point from the previous priority about complementarity, but now adds the transnational dimension to that. It is couched in very general terms that might be applied in the context of sustainable food systems as much as in any other. We might indeed conclude that sustainable food systems fit the bill especially well here as a topic for further investigation given the persistently high volume of food transported across national borders.

To what degree we might conceive of those processes as being about integration and development brought about by cooperation as opposed to a rather more simplistic trading relationship between two distinct places is a point of debate. Clearly though, actors in different places with a shared interest in particular aspects of sustainable food systems, might usefully come together to learn from each other, to exchange knowledge and experience and to jointly explore solutions to problems or challenges they have in common in exactly the way that the *Sustainable Food Systems* CoP has itself suggested.

Interreg programmes which support transnational partnerships of actors with shared interests and European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) which are essentially a governance tool to enable formal legal arrangements across national borders are cited in the text as instruments that can facilitate this cooperation. Sustainable food is certainly within scope for Interreg purposes as the large number of past and present projects suggests, and it is presumably a perfectly valid topic for a joint initiative delivered under the EGTC instrument as well.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The priorities under the TA2030 Green Europe objective are arguably more tangibly connected with the topic of sustainable food systems than those under Just Europe as they underline the territorial dimension in relation to the UN SDGs, the European Green Deal (where the EU integrated food policy "Farm to Fork" sits of course) and the transition to a circular economy - circular farming being a topic that has already arisen within ROBUST.

This first priority - related to a Healthy Environment - focuses on ecosystems, environmental protection, climate change and biodiversity. Clearly these all have a clear connection with the production, processing, transportation and consumption patterns of food. In the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (about which in general the text itself has surprisingly little to say) we are well-used to debates around the nature of the relationship between measures designed to support agriculture and fisheries on the one hand and measures which set out to protect and / or enhance environmental conditions on the other. That interplay is at least implicit here and indeed agro-ecosystems warrant a specific reference in the text. That approach might in turn, if we so wish, be placed within the broader context of sustainable land-use which is how the TA2030 conceptualises it.

The text recommends a place-sensitive joint management of ecosystems and supports the development of nature-based solutions that provide responses to known challenges. For the text this is looked at very much through the lens of resilience and risk management – it does not specify as much, but it seems reasonable to posit food security as one of these known risks and challenges.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

There is no overt reference to food here but food, and materials ancillary to the food production process, are presumably as much a "product" as anything else. And of course, agriculture is itself a

major user of materials and energy. We also of course will have in mind the key contribution that local food production (and related elements of the food supply system) can make towards broader climate-neutrality aspirations and strategies in given places. Circularity can have an immense impact on food systems making them more local and regenerative and circular farming is gaining increased traction as a concept and practice.

This priority is subtitled, "Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world", and the text underlines the importance of local products and markets to diversified and resilient economies. The localness both of the food production process and the sale of food products into local markets is an obvious and key part of what makes a food system sustainable of course – equally obviously, it can make hugely significant contributions to the vitality and resilience of local economies. Local food also has a role to play in making those local economies diversified one from the other and reflective of local heritage, character, tradition and heritage – in other words there is huge scope here for local food as a "local asset"- the successful development of which is necessary to secure economic prosperity the text suggests. In short, although lacking in explicit reference, sustainable food systems as a topic sits here very well indeed.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

Again – food systems are not explicitly mentioned here, but obviously sustainable transport has an important role to play in food systems. Much as we might wish food miles to be minimised and for the localness of products to be as great as possible – transportation and related logistics are an integral part of the broader food system and increasing the use of friendly transport solutions in the food sector is just as important as in any other presumably.

Part of the focus of the ROBUST *Sustainable Food Systems* CoP is about ways in which transportation related to food systems might be minimised and local markets shaped, developed, and exploited to the greatest possible extent – indeed just how well this is achieved will be one key measure of just how "sustainable" such food systems are. Here we are invited to engage with a consideration of the sustainability of the transportation which remains.

Digital connectivity here also has an obvious relevance in terms of the ways that e-business can be used as a means to make businesses in the food sector viable just as much as might apply in other sections of the economy and the ROBUST CoP established and explored in that context how easy access to local quality food produce is an important "quality of life" determinant.

TA2030 – fields of action relating to the COP on sustainable food systems

JUST EUROPE	GREEN EUROPE
• quality of life and citizens' well-being	• climate change
• digitalisation and the 4th industrial revolution	• loss of biodiversity and land consumption
• interdependencies between places	• healthy quality of air, soil and water
• global embededdness	• circular regional value chains
	• natural, landscape and cultural heritage

ROBUST

The listed Fields of Action show challenges that lie within various policy areas and which the text argues should be addressed from the territorial point of view as part of implementing the TA2030.

As previously stated, food is not mentioned among them and agriculture appears only twice in the text within the Green Europe's fields of action. However, many fields of action relate to food directly or indirectly.

For example:

Quality of life – the TA2030 text talks about quality of life as an underlying objective of all public policies. As mentioned with reference to the Balanced Europe priority that also relates to quality of life, access to healthy and nutritious food is an obvious and important element of quality of life and individual wellbeing.

Digitalisation and new technologies – this is discussed as a general point in the TA2030 text but clearly impacts as much on food systems as on many other sectors – one need look only as far as the huge body of work on agricultural innovation for this to be evident. The TA2030 text is alive to the potentially negative consequences of a new industrial revolution - for example the concentration tendencies in relation to companies who introduce new solutions and the place where these companies are located – this point will no doubt bear further exploration in the context of food systems.

Interdependencies between places – the text points out their positive and negative effects. The negative ones are increased concentration tendencies and in consequence - growing disparities. Food is a need, dependency is therefore inherent and the relationships between rural and urban places is of course often very much related to food production and supply.

Global embeddedness –the text emphasises the two-way interrelations between the global and the local - that very much applies to food production and delivery- perhaps seen most clearly in terms of

supply levels and impacts on prices and availability of particular foodstuffs – and hence food security and how exposure to the resulting risks might be managed.

Climate change - This field of action calls for place-specific responses and indicates new development opportunities linked with mitigation and adaptation activities and it is here that we will find one of the two overt references in the text to agriculture – where it points out the new development opportunities that climate change mitigation or adaptation might bring to the sector.

Loss of biodiversity and land consumption – this point emphasises that they pose a risk for ecosystems, ecosystem services and quality of life and they have a negative impact on fertile soil. A point of obvious relevance to food production.

Healthy air, soil and water – Pollution and contamination pose a huge risk to food supply and quality. Healthy soil and water are of paramount importance for the production of healthy, nutritious food in an obvious and direct way. Maybe the only real surprise in this paragraph is that it manages NOT to mention food!

Circular value chains - as mentioned earlier in the context of the circular economy priority - this field of action has an immense impact on food systems. However, the TA2030 text would have it that urban areas are in a better position to develop the circular economy as other places might lack critical mass. That is a point we might want to explore a little more deeply in the context of food systems.

Natural, landscape and cultural heritage – this field of action advocates the sustainable use of resources - in this context comes the second reference to agriculture – in juxtaposition to the positive take of the first, this one highlights the risk to natural heritage and landscape posed by intense agriculture and fisheries.

Thematic Topic Area 4: Cultural Connections

Introduction

Rural-urban cooperation and rural-urban linkages lie at the heart of ROBUST - in other words, the project works with a strong territorial basis and focus. That is reflected in this document and the areas it chooses to highlight. In order to help maintain that strong territorial focus and with the aim of helping ensure that we do not deviate into more general (or global) considerations as regards culture, and more specifically cultural connections we worked with the following considerations in mind:

- Just how "culture" is best to be understood in the context of rural-urban linkages and synergies, all the more so as it is a term open to numerous interpretations and its meaning and application can be elusive as a result
- The sorts of ways in which cultural activity happens in ways that somehow connects rural and urban actors, interests, places and sense of place
- The particular opportunities for the cultural and creative sectors and industries (CCSI) that arise from a rural-urban setting
- How rural and urban interests are best balanced in a fair and equitable way in the context of culture
- The advantages, or otherwise, of applying "culture" to overlapping but distinct domains such as cultural traditions, landscape and ecosystem services
- The support measures needed and best suited to any of the above

And

- How this is best responded to in policy and programmes – in reality or in theory

The four broad topic headings which shape this chapter to a large extent reflect the foci of the work of the relevant CoP as well as - we felt - sitting sensibly against EU policy areas in later sections of this paper:

- The creative economy
- Heritage and tradition
- Support measures and financing
- Equality of access

The exact range and scope of "culture" has proved difficult to capture, not only in the context of the ROBUST *Cultural Connections* CoP, but also much more generally in work in this policy domain at EU, national and regional levels – with considerable variation in interpretation. What runs across all definitions and conceptions, however narrow or broad they might be, is that they include notions of the intrinsic value of culture ("art for art's sake") and of the contribution that cultural activity as producer, consumer or both is directly related to wellbeing - both in the sense of personal/individual wellbeing and in the sense of the health and character of places/settings.

That in turn raises a whole range of considerations around what might happen when activity across a mix of those places and territories is explored and experimented with in the ways that has been undertaken by ROBUST Living Labs.

It is important that the territorial dimension is clearly written into this exposition at each stage, and this is reflected in the document structure used below. The chapter contextualises and expounds the thinking which has emerged from within the Community of Practice as regards each of the four selected topic headings below and hopefully makes a case for their relevance, importance, and hence inclusion, by providing a short commentary on each topic.

Given that the aim of this set of TTPs is to offer guidance, we have tried to provide information in a straightforward and useful way and have added suggestions as to how that information might be acted upon. Finally, we have provided a set of conclusions in the form of a short set of thoughts as regards challenges to policy-makers for each topic area, these are intended to act as a bridge into the project's policy recommendations as set out in ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

4.1   The creative economy

Context

Cultural activities are increasingly being recognised as significant in terms of being an economic sector generating meaningful sums of money – and therefore exchequer contribution - as part of broader national and regional economies. This significance is to a degree undermined by inconsistencies in the judging the extent of what might be deemed to be in scope as far as definitions of "culture" are concerned. For the purposes of the Cultural Connections CoP the contextualisation includes tourism, an obviously significant economic activity and one that is indeed in many ways inextricably linked with cultural offers.

That should in no way detract though from recognising the actual and potential importance of local artists and cultural professionals in the more "traditional" sense of the term. Reference here to artists and professionals is a timely reminder also that the economic dimension is not solely related to financial turnover but also to a sector's capacity to generate and sustain jobs as parts of regional labour markets with all that that implies in terms of income and individual spending power.

Even where economic activity areas such as tourism and food are to be regarded as distinct sectors for "accounting" purposes, there is significant value for policy makers, as well as for practitioners, in developing a better understanding of the sorts of spill-over and cross-cutting effects and externalities between these differentiated "sectors". Indeed, the CoP itself has conceptualised this second dimension in terms of culture as an element "permeating other sectors and activities" - regardless of the exact way in which the notion is expressed, it reflects the interconnectedness of culture and things other, as well as the elasticity of the term itself.

The Territorial Dimension

A key consideration for the work of the *Cultural connections* CoP has been the extent to which the actual and potential economic role and contribution of the sector can be tied to relationships between rural and urban actors, settings and interests. That remains something of a moot point against a backdrop where the definition and understanding of culture remains so mutable as already referred to.

There is a common perception that much creativity in cultural terms, as much as in innovation more generally (see also, the guidance for policy makers in the context of the Business Models and Labour Markets CoP), is somehow the unique preserve of urban actors and interests, with venues, artists and

the supporting creative ecosystem very much concentrated in urban centres. The work and findings of the Cultural Connections CoP has gone some way to confound this predisposed, and often unchallenged, notion and redressed this balance by looking to capture elements and value within the rural creative economy.

In reality, the nature of "urban culture" and "rural culture" are neither wholly distinct nor static, and the movement of ideas, people and cultural products all serve to blur the lines and distinctions between the two in terms of economic activity and their character in general. Technology, and digitalisation have particular pertinence for policy makers in this regard and open up new possibilities in terms of what is created within the CCSI, where and by whom and how these are applied and exploited in an economic context.

4.2   Heritage and tradition

Context

Heritage and tradition have been part of the work and findings of the *Cultural Connections* COP since its inception. There is a lively concern here to not over-crudely characterise either urban or rural traditions and heritage and not to regard either as if they are not impacted upon by outside factors, and, to varying degrees, by long-standing flows of people, resources and cultural assets between rural, peri-urban and urban places.

Cultural heritage is often linked closely to the tourist/visitor economy which will then serve to place emphasis on the importance of preserving that which is already in place – or is judged to be. As is the case with so much that has been explored within ROBUST, impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have played a part here in bringing the interface between rural and urban into sharper focus. At an extreme, it has revealed an over-dependence upon tourism (often, but by no means always) closely entwined with heritage and tradition and reliant upon high-volume visitor figures.

The Territorial Dimension

What emerges, definitions of culture notwithstanding, is a picture of the scope for developing cultural and creative activity (economic or otherwise) in the context of the geographical setting within which it occurs, or from which it partly or wholly draws it meaning and inspiration. In that sense, we might think about local landscape, tradition and heritage (as in "patrimoine") and local customs and practices relating to food, fashion, performance style, and outputs across a huge range of artforms. This combines to develop local character and colour and by extension feelings of local identity and belonging.

Rural and urban both have value and meaning here as catch-all headings for capturing particular characteristics around which such cultural identities might be built, and place-specific cultural offers and identities shaped. At the same time, and critically, the CoP has been well-attuned to the potential risks of some of the things that "heritage" is often to taken to mean, especially in the context of what it describes as the "fossilisation" of rural areas where heritage, inextricably linked to history and what has happened or prevailed previously, is seen as desirable or even necessary to rural identity, and change is posited as a threat to that identity.

It is this "preservation in aspic" which is often deemed central to maintaining and protecting rural cultural identity and which might make it attractive from the viewpoint of the visitor economy (for want of a better shorthand), but which might at the same time prove limiting and constraining for rural communities, for rural cultural operators, and for rural places in general, as modern, attractive and

vibrant places to do business and to live. In other words, it becomes problematic when rural areas are rightly recognised not only as recreational areas but as places where many people choose to live and work as well.

This will concern policy makers with an interest in rural areas in general, with the liveability and attractiveness of present/modern rural areas, and with rural innovation and rural vitality in particular. This might apply most obviously in the context of the *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas* (LTVRA) with its focus on those who live and work in rural areas as opposed to those who "only" visit, but it causes concern too when considered in terms of the principles of the TA2030 (of which more anon) and of the interests and concern of the innovation, labour market, demographics, and balanced territorial development policy domains at EU, national, and regional levels

4.3   Support measures and financing

Context

The CoP has explored a number of ways in which the division and divide between rural and urban culture might be addressed and the ways in which rural-urban linkages might be extended beyond urban dwellers using rural areas as a recreational resource on the one hand and rural residents availing themselves of the critical mass of urban cultural offers on the other. This is in no doubt partly connected to where investments are made in cultural and creative endeavours and assets and the ways in which support and resource is distributed between actors and interests in different territorial settings.

It is, however. not only about the relative levels of investment in places of different types along a rural-urban continuum, but also about the ways in which support might be provided to explicitly expedite connections, linkages and synergies between rural, peri-urban and urban CCSI ecosystems. It is about the ways in which activity across rural and urban spaces is incentivised and how much of that most appropriately sits with public funding interventions as opposed to being left to the machinations of the commercial marketplace – in turn inextricably linked to the general and ongoing policy debate about the balance between open market activity and competition on the one hand and public "subsidy" on the other.

This might perhaps be thought of in the context of EU rural development funding, or indeed of support levered through EU cohesion policy programmes such as ERDF in cases where CCSI and/or heritage and landscape is recognised as an important element within regional development strategies and economies. And of course, it also applies at the level of sectoral funding support for cultural services, whether these take to the form of support to directly delivered public services with a cultural dimension, or in the form of direct grant support and similar to cultural sites, venues, operators or intermediaries.

The Territorial Dimension

The scope to develop forms of "place-based cultural offers" has been referenced already, a key question arising from which is the ways in which initiatives might be supported in financial terms or otherwise, and from whom or what such support might come. Clearly where there is a public sector dimension at play, there are inevitable decisions to be made about the siting of cultural services, the extent to which these are centralised or localised across rural-urban areas and the bases upon which decisions are made as to how finite resource is shared between different communities within a given geographic area.

The European Union Smart Specialisation initiative might also play its way into policy makers' thinking here – with regions (and in some cases EU member states) encouraged and supported to develop

innovation strategies focusing upon existing strengths and characteristics as is already being explored and developed by the Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems Smart Specialisation Platform ([Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems - Smart Specialisation Platform (europa.eu)](#)).

4.4   Equality of access

Context

The distribution and sharing of resources across rural, peri-urban and urban areas has been referred to already. Any considerations about the proportionality of distribution of finite resource will almost inevitably include some sort of consideration of the equality and fairness of funding decisions and any prioritisation given to particular places or those operating in (or in the interests of), particular places.

But the point applies beyond only thinking about resource distribution and is also about access to cultural services, activities and assets. This will be of relevance to a range of policy actors extending beyond those in the cultural policy domain alone (itself a shifting notion), given what has already been asserted in terms of the importance of culture and cultural connections as a contributor to personal wellbeing, as well as to regional economies and to regional or national development plans more generally.

Once considered in terms of equitable access to universal public services or in the context of what policy makers might set out to achieve in terms of quality of life indicator targets or similar - the breadth of policy application here hopefully becomes apparent. Indeed, the public service dimension might be taken a step further when it is borne in mind that access to cultural assets is not solely about their availability/existence but about having physical and or virtual access to such assets via transport, via broadband connectivity, via accessibility adaptations etc.

The Territorial Dimension

From a policy making perspective, equality of access and opportunity is both a domain in its own right and a cross-cutting dimension to be applied across all other policy areas. There are inequalities at play in terms of accessibility to local cultural assets when comparing and contrasting the situations in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, this sits largely within the province of the ROBUST CoP addressing *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* of course, but it applies, and deserves consideration in the more focused sectoral context of the *Cultural Connections* CoP as well.

Physical accessibility is related to both physical travel infrastructure and indeed to the physical accessibility of sites and venues once reached. This cuts in all directions, rural (and indeed remote rural) sites and assets require both physical transport infrastructure and mobility services which use that infrastructure to make them accessible, equally rural residents will want to see transport infrastructure and services in place to enable to them to gain access to cultural sites, venues and activities beyond the immediately proximate local area.

Issues with a clear policy dimension are raised here, for whose actual benefit is physical infrastructure and mobility services deployed to make rural cultural assets available? Are there in reality disbenefits to local residents and businesses, and if so, should (and does) that affect our thinking about who should pay for such infrastructure and whether it should be funded from the public purse – and, if so, to which agreed policy aims will it contribute?

There is also relevance, as the CoP itself found, in the ongoing policy debate about digitalisation and how this might be used as a means to increase and broaden accessibility. Digital access, at one level reduces or removes barriers in terms of physical accessibility, but does it at the same time change the nature and quality of the cultural experience? Arguably it does, and although the impact it has on participation levels might be a positive one, it may at the same time impair the very cultural asset it is attempting to make accessible whether this be a live city-centre cultural event, or one situated in a remote rural area.

Governance

As one of the guiding research questions which the *Cultural Connections* CoP set itself at the outset of its work, it asked how such connections might themselves inspire new types of network governance arrangements. At the same time, it concerned itself with the ways in which governance arrangements might valorise a more joined-up approach to cultural life in a more participatory way capable of formulating a more comprehensive shared vision than has often been the case to date. This is itself part of an effort to draw together a larger number of actors to arrive at inherently more connected and joined-up cultural strategies and similar, experimenting with the planning and coordination of these arrangements themselves within the relevant Living Labs.

The different versions of arrangements experimented with by the Living Labs varied in terms of the degree of existing formal structure upon which they built, from an established arrangement with a clear lead entity to an entirely new arrangement established from scratch.

Given the flexibility around just what culture is understood to mean, it is unsurprising that governance arrangements themselves are likely to differ given just how broad an interpretation of the term is employed in any given set of circumstances. What does seem to apply nevertheless though is recognition of the importance of such arrangements in helping to arrive at just such an understanding, albeit on a case by case and place by place basis.

Challenges and questions arising for policy makers:

- The ways in which culture is conceived of in terms of measuring its economic size and importance warrants further investigation
- As does the ways in which that economic contribution might be supported in order to increase in scale and significance
- The nature of what is often perceived of a "urban culture" and "rural culture" needs to be reappraised and rethought in light of shifting CCSI practice and existing stereotyping
- Evolving opportunities related inter alia to technological developments - and digitalisation in particular - need to be better understood and questions raised and addressed in terms of how this is best supported
- The ways in which local heritage, tradition and cultural activities can be reshaped as common assets across rural and urban areas
- And, partly as a result of the above, to give consideration to how best balance the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors in both rural and urban settings
- The role of the CCSI in local and regional labour markets and how that might be better supported through financial and non-financial support and incentivisation mechanisms
- And in particular where CCSI support most sensibly and fairly sits in the context of broad support mechanisms such as EU cohesion policy programmes or EU rural development instruments

- The relationship between the CCSI and public service provision more broadly in instance where they overlap
- The role of EU Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) and forthcoming Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability (RIS4) as a driver for innovation in the CCSI
- Barriers and obstacles to accessing cultural activities and experiences – and the ways in which they differ for rural and urban residents and businesses
- The role of technology – and in particular digital technology - in overcoming accessibility issues and any unintended consequences which might result from deploying such technology

The Territorial Agenda 2030 context

The main stated goal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is 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:

The three priorities under the Just Europe objective of the TA2030 look to add a territorial dimension to such issues as economic and social development and at the same time bring into play references to other EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

BALANCED EUROPE

Culture does not feature strongly in the TA2030 text and there is no overt reference to the way in which local tradition, heritage, landscape, language, customs etc. might serve as an important way of making one place distinct and different from others. Or indeed how these cultural level features might in reality serve as territorial assets as they doubtless do in reality and be used as a means to spread development potential more evenly.

However, this first priority does explicitly talk about quality of life, and it is easy enough to argue that culture is surely an element of that.

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

This priority is closely related to the 'Balanced Europe" one immediately above insofar as it also calls for evenness of territorial development, but in this section its focus is upon the functional region level as the title would suggest.

The text points out the complementary of neighbouring places and a need for cooperation and synergies but there is no reference here to culture as an example of a context within which this might

occur. Rather the text concerns itself simply with places and the ways in which governance arrangements might be organised in order to increase effective cooperation within functional regions as opposed to within other administrative boundaries. It is never made clear exactly what sort of function the authors have in mind as the subject of this cooperation though. There is however specific reference to the peri-urban which is helpful in the context of thinking about rural-urban.

There is also a reference to the "unique local characteristics" of difference places. We might choose to use that as a bridge to help us arrive at local culture and local cultural heritage as a strong element within local character and local identify. From that starting point it seems quite feasible to start building a convincing narrative about how drawing out interest in local heritage, culture, customs and traditions might serves as a way of connecting rural and urban places.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

The text here is written at a rather general level, on that basis it might be considered to apply to culture as much as any other specific subject area.

The text repeats its argument for complementarity from the previous priority, but it adds the transnational dimension to the more local setting. Albeit, mainly couched in general terms, cultural heritage is specified as a subject area suited to transnational cooperation through projects funded under the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC – Interreg) and the ministers go on to suggest that they will "take action" (just how is not clear) to ensure the embedding of such cooperation by securing their inclusion in regional development plans and similar – this is an intriguing proposal coming as it does from the Member State ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development. It is an undertaking to which the CoP members might look to at the implementation phase given that cultural exchanges and similar – the co-creation and touring of works and support for the internationalisation of cultural institutions etc. - are all well-established means to break down social fragmentation between (especially) adjacent cross-border areas and we might therefore look for some sort of prioritisation under future cooperation programmes.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Within this first of the three priorities related to the Green Europe objective we find explicit reference to the protection and development of cultural heritage – coupled with natural heritage and landscapes. The TA2030 text makes its position clear: "Europe's natural and cultural heritage is an important asset, to be protected and further developed. Areas rich in natural and cultural landscapes need to make best use of these assets". This is unambiguous language, and the text goes on to advocate strengthening awareness levels and empowering local and regional communities to "protect, rehabilitate, utilise and re-utilise" cultures and other unique values e.g. through using the EU's CLLD mechanism, a process which the ministers responsible for bringing the Agenda forward say they will themselves support to make happen.

What we seem to be seeing here is a conceptualisation of cultural assets as being a part of a wider healthy environment in any one place. In that sense they (depending on their nature – it is never wholly clear what sort of cultural assets the ministers have in mind) argue that cultural assets are worthy of protection from land-take, urban sprawl and deforestation. That approach brings culture and land-use into twin-focus in a very practical way at the same time drawing together two important strands from within ROBUST's work and findings.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The text points out that the transition of the economy to a circular and climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension. The authors suggest that the economic prosperity of places will depend in particular upon its local businesses alongside – amongst other things – its characteristics and traditions and its cultural capital. Again, this is all rather generalised but from the point of view of the ROBUST *Cultural Connections* CoP's work and findings we might suggest that there is indeed a role for culture and creative endeavour in regional economies and that part of that process will be to build upon the synergetic relationships between rural and urban places within those regions and beyond.

Just how that directly relates to the circular economy as opposed to more linear models remain open to further consideration.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

There is no explicit reference to culture within the text regarding this priority. However, it is clear enough that both elements here, digital connectivity and physical connectivity, are in practice very important for enhancing cultural connections between places and maximising the viability of cultural operations and the economic feasibility of cultural offers.

Digitalisation can help to bring the cultural life of neighbouring places together. As well as making the cultural offers of one place accessible to those in another – and indeed this is not restricted to physical proximity of course. Cultural institutions and coordination or linking agencies will often use digital connectivity, as part of audience development strategies, for the purposes of outreach and education programmes, and to extend the reach of their cultural offer in general. This might apply across rural-urban borders as much as across borders of any other type.

Efficient physical connectivity infrastructure – including both public and private transport networks might prove critical to the success or otherwise of fixed-site cultural attractions which are unable to draw upon a large enough local customer base to be viable – clearly if getting there is too unattractive prospect, many people will be dissuaded from travelling regardless of the quality and interest level of the destination site or activity itself.

TA2030 – fields of action relating to the Cultural Connections CoP

JUST EUROPE	GREEN EUROPE
• interdependencies between places • global embeddedness	• natural, landscape and cultural heritage

ROBUST

Fields of Action within the text list challenges that lie within various policy areas and which the text suggests should be addressed from the territorial point of view. There is a sole explicit reference to cultural heritage here where it appears alongside nature and landscape as a type of local asset.

As regards the Just Europe part of TA2030,

Interdependencies between places - at the foot of this section of text which mainly concerns itself with the knock-on effects of events in one place on another there is a reference to cultural resources. It sits within the body of a sentence about the danger of underutilising such resources in border regions where there are barriers to integration. Just what this means is difficult to discern but it seems to relate to isolation and insularity.

Global embeddedness - the text here emphasises the two-way interrelations between the global and the local and relates to the uneven distribution of potential and risks between various places in Europe linked to global developments. In the context of culture, we might speculate that some places will be more influenced by global trends than others where the cultural offer will be more traditional and local. That local distinctiveness – that specificity of character as both shaped by, and demonstrated in, culture – is exactly what we often come to most highly prize in terms of benefitting from an enduring cultural offer that is different from others. We might also think about how this issue of globalisation and resulting heterogeneity impacts differently – or to a different degree – in rural and urban settings

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With regard to the three Green Europe priorities, one is of self-evident relevance:

Natural, landscape and cultural heritage are posited as local and regional development assets that offer unique development opportunities. - a positive enough point There is a negative dimension here as well though and the text points out that changes in land and sea use as well as urbanisation and mass tourism are a threat to cultural assets.

Thematic Topic Area 5: Ecosystem Services

Introduction

Rural-urban cooperation and rural-urban linkages lie at the heart of ROBUST - in other words, the project works with a strong territorial basis and focus. That is reflected in this document and the areas it chooses to highlight. In order to help maintain that strong territorial focus and with the aim of helping ensure that we do not deviate into more general (or global) considerations as regards ecosystem services we worked with the following considerations in mind:

- The sorts of ecosystems and resulting services that exist in areas where rural and urban are proximitous
- The particular opportunities for such services that arise from the rural-urban setting
- The ways in which those services might best be protected and/or enhanced
- The sorts of opportunities that exist, or can made to exist, to bring about a greater beneficial role for spatial planning regimes in terms of rural-urban ecosystems
- The support measures and governance arrangements needed - and best suited - to bring about the outcomes described in the two points immediately preceding

And

- How this is best responded to in policy and programmes – in reality or in theory

The four broad topic headings which shape this chapter to a large extent reflect the foci of the work of the relevant CoP as well as - we felt - sitting sensibly against EU policy areas highlighted in later sections of this paper:

- Land use planning dimensions
- Support measures and financing
- Environmental management/enhancement
- Governance dimensions related to rural-urban ESS

This chapter differs from the others within this paper insofar as governance is one of the four topic areas addressed as opposed to being the subject of a distinct sub-section. This has been done because governance arrangements were themselves a core and recurring feature of the work undertaken by the CoP in its work and a focus for its learnings and recommendations.

Ecosystem services (hereafter ESS) have been perceived of within the ROBUST CoP as the ecological characteristics, functions or processes that contribute directly or indirectly to human wellbeing. In that sense there is from the outset a congruence here between what this particular CoP focused upon and the emerging theme of wellbeing that took on growing importance over the course of ROBUST's work. That same connection is reflected in the *EU Ecosystems Assessment* of May 2021 cited elsewhere in this paper when Commissioner Timmermans says in his foreword that "ecosystem restoration will be essential to deliver win-win solutions for climate, biodiversity and human wellbeing by 2030".

It is important that the territorial dimension is clearly written into this exposition at each stage, and this is reflected in the document structure used. The chapter contextualises and expounds the thinking which has emerged from within the Community of Practice as regards each of the four selected topic

headings and hopefully makes a case for their relevance, importance, and hence inclusion, by providing a short commentary on each topic.

Given that the aim of this set of TTPs is to offer guidance, we have tried to provide information in a straightforward and useful way and have added suggestions as to how that information might be acted upon. Finally, we have provided a set of conclusions in the form of a short set of thoughts as regards challenges to policy-makers for each topic area, these are intended to act as a bridge into the project's policy recommendations as set out in ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

5.1   Land use planning dimensions

Context

It is rare to read far into summaries of ecosystems and their services and the pressures which they face without encountering reference to "urban sprawl", "urbanisation" or similar. There is an inherent link then between the existence of nature and biodiversity and the ways in which that might be impacted upon by changes in land use so central to characterisations of rural and urban. Indeed, change in land use is invariably cited amongst the factors driving changes in individual ESS and therefore in the relationships - and degree of synergy - between them.

Given this focus upon land use and land use change, it is easy enough to see just why the role of spatial (land use) planning has become a central element within the works and findings of the ROBUST ESS CoP. From the perspective of policy makers, some potentially valuable ground has been covered here, with material here to stimulate further debate on the potential of spatial planning regimes to themselves become a positive driver for improving ESS, by supporting and shaping land use and land use management in particular ways and by better connecting concerns and priorities around physical development, environmental enhancement, multi-functional land use and by placing all this within a place-specific context, where land use decisions are made on a place by place as well as case by case basis.

This is no idyllic vision though, and as much as it is clear that ecosystems and services are no respecters of administrative boundaries, spatial planning regimes will invariably themselves operate within the constraints of such spatial delineations. That will need to be borne in mind, and expectation levels adjusted accordingly, but the critical role that spatial planning regimes can play in regulating development (not restricted purely to urban development/urbanisation!) and in managing green and blue landscape and land use in some of coordinated play has continuing significance.

Perhaps the key point for policy makers here though is the need – and potential resulting value – of working across policy domains. It is no great revelation to point out that there is no overt legal competence at EU level as regards spatial planning, but the *Territorial Agenda 2030* serves to fill what might otherwise be a gap in policy focus and compensates in that regard. What remains is the opportunity to make more coherent connections between policy in areas such as land use, resource management, climate adaptation, economic development and with more specific sectoral policy dimensions such as energy, transport, water and waste.

The Territorial Dimension

The policy area not included in the suggested list above is that of territorial policy, an obvious, but conscious, omission given that it sits better in this area of our text and secondly on the basis that it has the scope to serve an enveloping role in our consideration. This will link neatly to notions of the value of adopting a place-based, - or perhaps more the point here, place-specific, - starting and reference point. That in turn also aligns with the notion of spatial bundling as returned to later in this section. It also serves as a bridge into considerations about rural and urban areas themselves and the ways in which territories of different types are characterised and supported via policy instruments of different types. Not least of course in the context of EU cohesion policy programmes and the ways in which that manifests locally through national and sub-national management systems. It also applies, equally obviously, in the context of EU rural development programme and the scope that both might have in terms of optimising rural-urban linkages – and more pertinently still in the context of ROBUST, of optimising links within territorial areas containing both rural and urban settings.

With such an intrinsic link between geographic setting and ESS, a place-sensitive approach is clearly called for. There seems to be a fuzzy interface here between spatial planning and planning that is undertaken form other sectoral starting points – all invariably linked to the attainment of policy goals of course. There is also a variable picture emerging from ROBUST's work and findings as to the extent to which ESS considerations feature in the work of spatial planning professionals and to how that might best be optimised. In particular policy makers are directed towards a series of evolving conclusions about the multi-scale application of spatial planning to ESS considerations. In light of the cross-boundary nature of ecosystems and their services there is an attraction here in looking at how spatial planning might be applied at a larger geographic scale so that due account might be taken of ESS benefits at those larger spatial levels. Conversely spatial planning regimes operate within spatial constraints as has already been pointed out and these constraints might act per se to limit and circumscribe the scope for a broader, joined-up and more coherent approach.

Green Infrastructure warrants a mention in its own right as it has been perceived of here as a potential (and actual) tool in which ESS might be operationalised in a rural-urban context especially. Often conceived of as a spatial planning tool in its own right, its application in urban or peri-urban settings is strongly emphasised in numerous EU, national, regional and local policy strategies, policy instruments and plans of various types. With overt objectives to protect, restore, or enhance ESS in areas where they are under direct pressure and threat, GI initiatives have a key role to play in connecting rural and urban ecosystems and in making connections – frequently in the very obvious and physical form of corridors or similar – across territories/land of varying characters. And of course, in particular they are, amongst other things, intended to restore to more urban areas the rural characteristics – in terms both of landscape and ecosystems – lost through urbanisation or other forms of previous land use change however these might be labelled.

5.2   Support measures and financing

Context

Ecosystem services bring value, in that sense they have a value, and various schemes exist around the monetisation of that value – usually described under the umbrella heading of Payments for Ecosystems Schemes (PESs). Part of the work and findings of this CoP has been to explore and reflect upon the sorts of payment and compensation schemes that exist or might exist to make financial dimensions of ESS balanced and fair.

Payment and compensation schemes are used as a means by which land use and landscape change can be affected in ways which are, at least supposedly, planned, managed and monitored. It is often the use of such schemes indeed that makes these interventions financially viable and therefore possible, but they invariably involve complexity, the need to balance different – and arguably competing – interests and the need for scrupulous analysis of consequences, intended and unintended, perverse incentivisation's etc. Here too is complexity from a policy maker's perspective in terms of public and private sector interactions and the way that payments and compensations are designed into formal spatial planning processes.

The Territorial Dimension

There remains a strong tendency to see rural settings as the exclusive provider of ESS and urban areas solely as the recipients of same. One of the central tenets of the ESS CoP was that in reality the process applies in both directions, in different ways, in different places and at different times. Given that multi-directionality of flows, there is a sense in which ESS enable rural-urban linkages (bidirectionally) and synergies. In the more immediate terms of financial support, this implies a flow of capital between rural and urban, but again a flow that might apply in either direction or indeed within and across spaces which contain characteristics of both the rural and the urban.

As payment schemes are closely based upon measurement and assessment of the nature of the ESS being valued, there is a tie between the nature of ESS in territories of different kinds (rural, peri-urban, urban) and their monetised value. It is through this line of reasoning that the ESS CoP has come to conclude that PESs can serve as effective ways of generating rural-urban synergies, at the same time bringing added value by being applied across a range of different locations and landscape and by engaging with multiple stakeholders and interest groups.

This will in turn connect to the ways in which ESS are bundled, an aspect of the measuring process with particular relevance to ROBUST insofar as it is about grouping together the sorts of ESS that are identified in any one place – in other words, this is a spatial exercise – "place-based", albeit we should be careful with the language so that it retains clear and real meaning.

5.3   Environmental management/enhancement

Context

It is also in the context of the ways in which environments are protected and/or enhanced that it is possible to see scope for synergies within ESS, where for example a restorative action of one type will have an improving effect which in turn enables a further benefit or gain to be realised within a proximitous or more distant location.

It is undoubtedly the case that Nature Based Solutions (NBS) are coming to feature more centrally in policy making related to environmental management and enhancement (including, interestingly from a ROBUST rural-urban perspective, within the *European Union Urban Agenda*, where it sits alongside land use as the subject of one of a growing number of thematic partnerships). That in turn is at least a contributory factor in expanding the ambition level beyond protection alone to enhancement – an inherent dimension of ESS where the aim is increasingly not solely to restore the previous but to go beyond the previous – often by adding greater synergy as well as an onwards multiplier, a positive daisy-chain effect.

That is not to say that protection per se has been discarded as a notion of key importance within the policy maker's toolbox, it remains firmly entrenched as a principle within numerous schemes with a legal basis and highly refined impact assessment, monitoring and reporting dimensions, many well-established over a long period of time. Nevertheless, against a backdrop of increased ambition as embodied within the EU's *Green Transition* aspirations and *European Green Deal* policy framework, enhancement, and indeed enhancement at speed, is increasingly becoming a feature of plans and implementation measures at all geographic levels from the EU downwards – and indeed upwards, to the UN SDGS, UN Habitat goals and other global level agreements and commitments.

The Territorial Dimension

The landscape scale approach is relevant here in the sense that the geographic scale of what is done in terms of environmental management and enhancement is closely tied to the value of interventions at policy and practice levels. A broad geographic approach will very often equate to a cross-boundary approach and the desirability and/or need to plan and enact management in contexts such as flood risk management, river management etc, in ways that look across and beyond administrative delineations on a map and take full and accurate account of impacts across and beyond such lines.

The territorial dimension is here to the fore in the sense of land and planning for its use and indeed reuse. It is pertinent in the context of managing open space and landscape and of managing – and even managing down – soil-sealing etc. It appears on the policy agenda in many ways, whether it be about the preservation and management of open space and the public realm, be it about access and accessibility to land, the allied health and wellbeing benefits associated with such use, or in the context of space and landscape as a cultural and leisure resource. In those last regards, and others, it become much more a cross cutting (cross CoP cutting) theme for ROBUST and is itself directly connected to perceptions of what might be considered rural and what constitutes urban of course. In other words, and in short, environmental management – and the way in which that is itself shaped through land use decision-making - has a relevance way beyond ESS, whilst at the same being an intrinsic part of it.

5.4 Governance dimensions to rural-urban ESS

Context

The scope and desirability of including a broad range of stakeholders with interests in ESS related matters has already been alluded to in the context of payment services. Its relevance and value are in reality much broader given that ecosystems, biodiversity and resulting services are of interest to, and are important to, a huge range of actors, some in professional contexts, others much more at a personal level. One thing coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic situation upon which almost all policy makers appear to concur is that it has caused a reappraisal on the part of many people of the value of natural capital, of the rural areas in which that natural capital is most typically expected to be found (an over-association for ROBUST), and of the benefits of ESS in daily, human life (wellbeing, again, therefore).

That is propitious for ROBUST as it means that the relationships between rural and urban settings is much higher up the policy agenda, and much more in the general public eye for that matter as well, than was previously the case. It is often addressed through the lens of people flows and where people actually spend time and which proportions of their time – highly relevant given the focus within ROBUST on the growing phenomenon of multi-locality where time is increasingly coming to be split across

different places by a growing proportion of the population. Closely connected for many with the pandemic as has already been said, with strong connections to the large-scale exodus from urban centres across Europe at the time of the initial outbreaks, and subsequently linked with "the great resignation" and other manifestations, this increasing level of movement of people has implications for ESS and the governance arrangements relating thereto.

This is partly too about knowledge sharing and the drawing together of data and information, in many cases gathered for specific and technical purposes (not necessarily within the immediate grasp and understanding of more general level policy maker)s, so that a full and rounded picture of pressures, trend and potential of ESS can be arrived at. That in turn is connected to the ways in which governance arrangements are designed so as to enable, as opposed to hampering, that knowledge-sharing and multi-directional flow of information and understanding.

The Territorial Dimension

There is a connectivity here between the territorial scale at which governance arrangements are applied and the extent to which they themselves can serve as a driver for improving rural-urban relations through ESS. This applies in numerous policy areas and in that of spatial planning itself. Spatial planning regimes will invariably include dimensions around public engagement and public consultation, around (individual) citizen engagement and community engagement, and about fairness and equity in terms of the voices that are heard and listened to in the process of making decisions about land use. As ever, there will be concurrent issues around the exact meaning, meaningfulness, and quality of that "engagement".

Community partnerships and similar cooperative type mechanisms have been explored by the ESS CoP and serve as an example of an effective governance arrangement capable of bringing about enhanced ESS. This will tie to considerations about feelings of ownership of ESS in given locations, as well as to very practical matters concerning just who makes decisions about the sort of work that is done in terms of environmental management and enhancement as above, and indeed as to who is able to access what sort of financial support

Such governance arrangements are of communities, and hence of place, and in that sense territorial – representing a bottom-up approach in the sense that they are locally rooted, locally informed and locally focussed. The benefits that all that brings are something that policy makers will look to harness and replicate but at the same time will want to balance with the need to simultaneously think beyond the local.

Challenges and questions arising for policy makers:

- What does a place-sensitive approach to **ESS** mean in practice? How is that to be brought about in the context of a subject area that crosses multiple policy domains?
- There is a relationship and cross-relevance between EESs and spatial planning that often remains implicit – that might usefully be addressed as a challenge as well as opportunity for greater policy congruence
- The geographic scale and thence potential limitation of spatial planning as a tool to ameliorate **ESS** is an important consideration within the broader mix of factors at play here
- Multi-locality is a growing phenomenon and begs questions around how it is best managed and planned for by policy makers **in the specific context of ESS as well as more broadly**

- Key considerations here will include the provision of, and access to, public services, and how these **are** to be finance**d**
- The ways in which governance arrangements related to ESS can be used to harness deep and broad levels of interest in the subject in ways that are inclusive, representative and fair
- The whole subject and citizen and community engagement have a pivotal role to play in the context of **ESS**
- Policy makers might wish to harness senses of public interest, concern and even "agency" in the context of a subject that is high on the public agenda – all the more so in light of Covid-19
- Payment and compensations schemes are complex – and will become more so if a broader range of considerations and interests comes to be worked into their design
- This is particularly true in the context of PESs with a rural-urban dimension**,** where shifts and changes in land use and ESS related interventions in one place can somehow be recalibrated with effects in another**,** at the very same time likely shifting the balance and nature between rural and urban in any one scheme area
- This striving for balance is further exacerbated in any situation where the rural is over-characterised as **ESS** provider and the urban as **ESS** consumer – an oversimplistic view ROBUST suggests

The Territorial Agenda 2030 context

The main stated goal of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is 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:
The three priorities under the Just Europe objective of the TA2030 look to add a territorial dimension to such issues as economic and social development and bring in other EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights at the same time.

Ecosystems and ecosystem services feature strongly in the text. As we might expect, references are mainly to be found in the priorities and fields of action relating to the Green Europe objective, especially under its Healthy Environment priority. However, references to ecosystems can also be found in the sections of text under the first three priorities here – those under the Just Europe objective.

BALANCED EUROPE

This first priority is about better balanced territorial development to ensure quality of life and citizens' wellbeing in all places. Undeniably, the states of ecosystems and related quality of ecosystem services have an important role to play in ensuring quality of life and wellbeing in all types of territory. Our considerations of ecosystems are about balance in a slightly different way of course looking at the interrelationship between rural and urban ecosystems and the services they provide. How the

relationship between the two are best managed, monetised and monitored are all within the spirit of the broader approach taken within the TA2030 text itself.

FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

This priority is closely related with the 'Balanced Europe" above insofar as it also calls for evenness of territorial development and talks about lessening "inequalities between places", but it "zooms in" on the functional region level here as the title suggests.

The TA2030 text also points out the complementarity of neighbouring places and a need for cooperation and synergies. This is a particularly important point in the context of ecosystems as they don't respect administrative borders – a point which has clear consequences when designing for the delivery of ecosystem services. The TA2030 text is helpful here as regards the rural-urban context of the ROBUST CoPs work here in that it specifically references "peri-urban" areas – those, in other words, where ecosystems and their services which are in part at least impacted upon by the rural-urban mix of their nature are usually to be found and home to a considerable proportion of green infrastructure of course. The exact nature of the functions that the text envisages when it talks about "functional regions" is not 100% clear but there is no inherent reason why the functions in question should not include those ecosystem services provided within any one area.

The text very much addresses the sort of governance challenges related to the effective development of functional regions and in particular the sorts of coordination and networking that is required between areas within regions working across existing administrative borders. We can relate that easily enough to the sort of payment schemes and similar which are used in order to expedite the delivery of ecosystem services. The text highlights the potential contribution of EU level policy instruments such as ITIs and CLLD in supporting development across neighbouring areas – it would be enlightening to look at and for examples where ecosystem service development is included in current versions of instruments of both type.

INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS

This priority brings us back to similar points about cooperation based upon complementarity as addressed in the previous one, but this time at the broader and transnational, as opposed to more local, level.

Ecosystems being no respecters of national borders of course – this aspect of territorial development has a particular relevance for ecosystem services as they are often of cross-border character making such cooperation between regions and countries extremely beneficial and often even a necessary precondition of maximising service provision and minimising biodiversity loss.

Indeed, the text itself highlights the potential role of such cooperation to "diminish ecological fragmentation" and cites ecosystems divided by borders as an example of exactly where cooperation across territorial and maritime borders might bring about the required critical mass to achieve full potential. In this regard both Interreg and European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) are suggested as instruments that can be used to facilitate this work. Acknowledging that there are legal and administrative obstacles to such cooperation, it would be valuable to identify innovative solutions relating to ecosystems and examine the exact nature of the obstacles they might face and how these might be overcome.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The priorities under the Green Europe objective are more directly connected with the topic of ecosystems and ecosystem services as they underline the territorial dimension in relation to UN SDGs, the European Green Deal and the transition to a circular economy.

This first priority has a particular and self-evident relevance for ecosystem services. The text highlights the critical importance of 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 work carried out in the ROBUST *Ecosystems Services* CoP around governance of course. The text also references and indicates its support for the development of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure – although whether the ministers involved intend this support to be active or passive is not made clear.

The text also expresses a concern about the impact of climate change and loss of biodiversity on different types of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services. Interestingly, it also emphasises that the strengthening of the delivery of ecosystem services that are a source of income for communities and businesses can be an element of broader strategies for the sorts of climate-neutral "towns, cities and regions" which it advocates.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

This priority doesn't talk about ecosystems or ecosystem services in the context of the circular economy - perhaps unsurprisingly it concentrates more on materials than habitats and there is no reference to land itself as a finite resource which might also be reused and recycled for example – through circular farming perhaps or by habitat management schemes. However, in pointing out the broader aims of the circular economy approach in achieving carbon neutrality and making sustainable use of resources, it is not unreasonable that ecosystem services be part of the thinking here.

The text points out that the transition of the economy to a circular and climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension. It mentions "local assets" that promote prosperity of places and we can surely count (and perhaps argue for recognition of) well-functioning and resilient ecosystem services as one of these. All the more so, given that the text recommends developing local strategies for bioeconomy to make local economies more diversified and resilient. These strategies, we are reminded, should build on local assets, and we are surely right to include local (and less local) ecosystems and the services they deliver amongst those assets.

SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

The TA2030 text indicates that the competitiveness of places depends on the availability of accessible digital infrastructure including high-speed internet and mobile phone networks. It also emphasises how that infrastructure directly impacts upon the potential for e-governance and e-services. We might see no immediately obvious linkage here to ecosystems and the services they deliver but as the text goes on to talk about the role that such digital communication plays in e-governance and e-services we may not be quite so far removed as we may initially suppose. Of course, we might also think here about the

ways in which digital connectivity can be used as a means to measure and monitor ecosystem service provision more efficiently.

As regards what the text has to say about physical connectivity by transport – its focus is very much about the movement of people and goods. What might occur to us in this regard is that physical transport infrastructure has an obvious connection with land use and impact on landscape and habitat. It seems equally obvious that the environmental impact in terms of air, soil and water quality brought about by the building, maintenance and use of such physical transport infrastructure will impact directly upon ecosystems and the services they deliver. Although the text goes some way towards acknowledging that when calling for such transport systems to be as "environmentally friendly" as possible we might argue for a rather more ambitious stance here.

TA2030 FIELDS OF ACTION (FoA)

TA2030 – fields of action relating to the Ecosystem Services CoP

JUST EUROPE	GREEN EUROPE
• quality of life and citizens' well-being	• climate change
	• **loss of biodiversity and land consumption**
	• healthy quality of air, soil and water
	• affordable and sustainable energy & Just transition
	• circular value chains
	• natural, landscape and cultural heritage

The listed Fields of Action set out challenges that lie within various policy areas and which the authors suggest should be addressed from the territorial point of view as part of implementing the TA2030.

As regards the Just Europe element of the TA2030, ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services are not explicitly mentioned. Nevertheless, by extrapolation we might take the Quality of life field of action to be relevant. This, as well as citizens' wellbeing, is judged by the ministers to be an underlying objective of public policies. Shortages of natural resources is then acknowledged as one of factors adversely impacting upon quality of life and individual well-being. Disparities in access to such natural resources in different places is what is judged to bring a territorial dimension to the issue.

As regards the Green Europe area of the document only once is ESS specifically referenced - under loss of biodiversity and land consumption - However, many other points relate in practice we might argue:

Climate change - this field of action calls for place-specific responses and indicates new development opportunities linked with mitigation and adaptation activities e.g. in the field of bioeconomy. "Regulating Ecosystem Services" relating to climate are already widely acknowledged and understood of course.

Loss of biodiversity and land consumption – The text explicitly highlights these as risks for ecosystems, quality of life and the economy. Increasing land take and land sealing are cited as factors presenting particular risks to ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services as they inevitably reduce open spaces, biodiversity and fertile soil.

Healthy quality of air, soil and water – pollution and the contamination of soil and water are cited as causes of health problems and reduced quality of life. This point also highlights the disparities in access to clean air, soil and water between urban and rural areas in turn prompting one to reflect on the ways that ecosystem services are managed in areas where rural and urban combine or in ways to balance the interests between places of those two types – and of gradations between.

Energy – the two fields of action which we have linked here emphasise the need for sustainable, secure and affordable energy. The text recommends turning to renewable energy sources and low-carbon industry. Alongside more common renewable sources like sun and wind, biomass obtained from ecosystems can be a solution in this context.

Circular value chains – this FoA doesn't mention ecosystem (services) but we might make a connection between circular economy and ecosystem services as previously said. What is worth noting here from a territorial perspective is the suggestion within the text that urban areas are in a better position to develop a fully circular economy as other places might lack critical mass.

Natural heritage – this FoA advocates sustainable use of resources and warns about the overexploitation of natural assets including the maritime ecosystem. It also points out that changes in land and sea use are among factors that can result in fragmentation of natural habitats and ecological corridors.

EU Policy Instruments

6.1   A New Industrial Strategy for Europe

A *New Industrial Strategy for Europe* was initially published by the European Commission in March 2020, emphasising the importance of industry as a key element of the economy, posited as a "driver of progress and prosperity" and embracing the highest standards in terms of social values, the environment, and labour conditions. In large part, it is a revisiting of the purpose, importance and functioning of the EU Single Market, but it is at the same time a strategy for the future of large parts of the European economy as the title suggests.

The strategy was updated in May 2021, at the request of EU member states, in light of the Covid-19 outbreak and a desire to connect the strategy with recovery from the pandemic and to further accelerate the twin transitions (green and digital), and, in particular to better ensure that European industry might be made "more dynamic, resilient and competitive, through investments in that green transition". Interestingly, in its introduction to the updated version of the Strategy, the EC highlighted the territorial inequalities exposed by the pandemic and the need to address these.

By the time of the publication of the updated version of the strategy, and as part of the work done in terms of implementing the March 2020 version in the interim, the EC had developed models for fourteen "industrial ecosystems"- these included agri-food, culture and creative industries, tourism, energy-renewables and what it terms "proximity, social economy and civil security". The *Staff Working Document, Annual Single Market Report 2021*, published to coincide with the Strategy update includes an explanation that by proximity economy is meant "services and businesses fostering local and short value chains for mainly local production and consumption. Proximity businesses include local SMEs operating personal and contact services, small shops, bars and restaurants, repair, cleaning and maintenance services, etc. The proximity economy also acts as the 'last-mile' delivery of goods and services of most of the ecosystems to the local businesses and citizens. A proximity economy is also characterised by the presence of diverse set of enabling 'proximity hubs' such as cities and local communities, community initiatives and businesses clusters, and public private partnerships". All elements which resonate with various dimensions of ROBUST's work, especially that in local food markets, on new business models, on rural service hubs, mixed-market service provision, and the notion of proximity itself as a dimension of a broader wellbeing economy.

The overall *New Industrial Strategy* has been posited as a strategy to take forward industry as part of a broader competitive business environment, based very much upon the workings of the EU Single Market as above, with an appropriately up/skilled labour force, with sustainable practices, strong innovation capacity, with a greater reliance on raw materials from within (as opposed to beyond) Europe and where the EU itself would provide technological leadership and support smart specialisation.

The strategy recognises that pressure on natural resources is already leading to a more circular approach to manufacturing, and also makes an overt link with social fairness in the context of the growing strength and significance of the social (market) economy which drives growth which "goes hand-in-hand with improved social and living standards and good working conditions" (page 2). It recognises that to become more competitive at the same time as it becomes greener and more circular, industry will need a secure supply of clean and affordable energy and raw materials. That has clear

implications for the ways in which energy and raw materials are sourced and from where they are sourced.

The Strategy resonates with much of ROBUST's work and findings when it stresses the importance of stepping up investment in research, innovation, deployment and up-to-date infrastructure in order to help develop new production processes and create jobs. It points also to the importance of further developing the circular economy (the 2020 publication of the new Strategy was deliberately timed to coincide with the appearance of the Circular Economy Action Plan).

Circularity is a key element of the wellbeing economy model developed by ROBUST in an explicit rural-urban context, with proximity and circularity being key elements of the business model profiles developed within its work, as the *Work Package 3 Synthesis Report* (Deliverable 3.3) reminds us. Embedding circularity across the economy as the *New Industrial Strategy* calls for, aligns well with ROBUST's own conclusions, with circularity being posited as one of its five overlapping and inextricable dimensions of a new economic model, with the same synthesis report as quoted above, pointing out that "The circular economy requires a rethink in terms of market strategies and models that encourage competitiveness in different sectors".

Both share a focus on raw materials with ROBUST emphasising the need for "reducing demand for new raw materials" and the Strategy sending a clear message that "We need to revolutionise the way we design, make, use and get rid of things by incentivising our industry". The Strategy has started to develop responses to the ways in which policy actors can better understand strategic dependencies upon raw materials – its approach is primarily about dependencies extending beyond Europe, but ROBUST's own work indicates the need to take a rounder view and also consider dependencies across different types of territories   rural – peri-urban and urban - within Europe. ROBUST's own work extended beyond the economic, to also consider the ways in which decisions might be made as to how the use and exploitation of raw materials is approached not only in terms of their industrial/economic use but as part of ecological ecosystem services, a dimension that might usefully be worked back into the Strategy's own thinking.

In sum there is huge congruence and scope for greater cross-reference and synergy between an essentially economic understanding of industrial activity and a broader territorial, and wellbeing-centred, approach as to the contribution of industry to territorial cohesion in the round.

6.2   Circular economy and the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)

A circular economy (CE) model aims to extend products' life span and reduce waste generation through the sustainable management of material and energy flows. It opposes itself to a linear economy model where products simply follow the process of sourcing or manufacturing, consumption and disposal leaving therefore an environmental and carbon footprint. In CE, waste becomes a resource which can be reused, repaired, refurbished or recycled as part of a sustainable approach to the management of raw materials and natural resources enabling a considerable reduction of the environmental footprint. Circular economy continues to gain currency – at both policy and practice levels – bringing real opportunities in terms of enhancing rural-urban linkages. The life cycle of a product – for example foodstuffs - often links both types of territories as the bulk of them are sourced or produced in rural or peri-urban areas and consumed in urban ones. Effective measures therefore require the cooperation of these areas and appropriate governance arrangements. They also require a place-sensitive approach as making value chains and consumption more circular is not only a matter of technology, habits or

business organisation, but is closely linked to the nature and density of overall supra-local economic production and consumption systems, specific settlement structures and transport infrastructure systems and arrangements. In short, cross-sectoral place-based policy and strategy is needed to bring that together in a cogent way.

Circular economy initiatives are prominent in EU policy. Some of them flow from wider global commitments – mainly the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 12 is specifically related to circularity as it sets out to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns mainly through the efficient use of natural resources and reduced waste generation.

The first EU Circular Economy Action Plan was presented in 2015. It included measures relating to the whole life cycle of products from product design and production processes through consumption to waste management and supporting the market for secondary raw materials and water reuse. The document indicated main areas of concern: a need to increase the recycling levels of plastics, reducing food waste and reusing or recycling construction waste. It also flagged two categories of materials of particular importance - critical raw materials and biomass and bio-based products. It is important to note for our considerations that while introducing these sectoral dimensions, the 2015 Action Plan lacked a territorial approach.

A number of other significant initiatives appeared in light of this first Action Plan. The Circular Economy Partnership was created as part of the work of the "Urban Agenda for the EU", and the European Commission together with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) launched the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. It serves as a knowledge and practice exchange hub allowing stakeholders from all levels of governance to exchange practices and scale up successful solutions. Water reuse has also been one of the main priorities of the European Innovation Partnership on Water.

Subsequently two Circular Economy Packages were adopted in 2018 and 2019. The first one consisted of launching a monitoring platform to assess the progress made towards circular economic systems in Europe and introduced a number of initiatives relating to topics flagged before. These related to plastics, critical raw materials and an analysis of relations between chemical, product and waste legislation. The second included a comprehensive report on the implementation of the 2015 Action Plan and a number of sectoral initiatives relating *to, inter alia,* sustainable products, mining waste management, but also improving access to finance for CE projects and a report on Horizon 2020 R&I projects supporting the transition to circularity. Again, the above documents did not take the territorial dimension into account with the exception of the H2020 report where a number of projects referred to specifically addressed rural and urban areas mainly in the context of water management.

The 2019 implementation report concluded that this first EU Action Plan had been implemented, and it was therefore time to move onto a new chapter in the transition to circular economy in Europe. This coincided with the start of the term of office of the von der Leyen led European Commission and the launch of the strategic European Green Deal (EGD) in which were outlined current climate and ecological ambitions (December 2019). A new Circular Economy Action Plan draft was released in March 2020 and constitutes one of the EGD building blocks, but circularity also pertains to many other elements of the EGD: the Farm to Fork food strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy (both published May 2020), the zero pollution ambition and the energy and resource efficiency of buildings. This reflects the growing importance and developing sophistication of circular practices.

The new Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) of March 2020 focuses on sustainable products, reducing waste, and echoes previous documents by listing key products for circularity. Despite the rising profile and increasing number of nuances relating to circular models in European policy making, the territorial dimension is still rarely overt. The text only hints at a place-based approach in the context of waste collection systems that should "*take account of regional and local conditions ranging from urban to outermost regions*". It is also there to be teased out in one of the chapters of the CEAP in particular entitled "Making circularity work for people, regions and cities". What is lost sight of in this context is that the potential and actual value and benefits of the CE are universal and relevant to all places and not only urban areas and regions. The issue of a lack of a territorial approach in the new CEAP has been taken up by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), in its Opinion on the action plan; there the CoR calls for the development of a territorial pillar and an enhanced role for sub-national public authorities.

Bringing the circular economy closer to the Territorial Agenda 2030 would certainly be beneficial as the latter emphasises this need for a place-based approach and integrated territorial development. It is of note that CE constitutes one of the TA2030's priorities clearly stating that the transition of the economy to a circular climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension. It points out that local assets, characteristics and traditions, cultural, social and human capital as well as innovation capacities, competitiveness and creativity of businesses are important elements of economic prosperity. The text, however, disappoints by down-playing the role of the rural and peri-urban claiming that "*urban areas are better positioned to pick up* [circular economy] *than sparsely populated areas and inner peripheries which often lack critical mass*". In that sense it runs contrary to our opinion that only close cooperation between all types of territories, where materials and products are obtained from, manufactured, processed, consumed and disposed of, can bring the optimal level of change.

Circular economy has been widely supported by EU funds and programmes, mainly through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) – European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development at the more practical level – with the place-based context referred to above. At the research level, Horizon 2020 has financed numerous CE projects and from an environmental starting point, the EU LIFE programme has co-funded many pieces of work relating to all stages of the product life cycle from design to waste management including some projects with a specific focus on raw materials and priority sectors. Some of the projects overtly included a territorial dimension and related explicitly to rural and urban areas. This support – and with a stated territorial context - is due to continue in coming years with the European Green Deal confirming that "European funds, including for rural development, will help rural areas to harness opportunities in the circular and bio-economy."

6.3   Farm to Fork (F2F)

The Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy has been conceived of and presented as a key element within the broader European Green Deal (EGD) package and is to be looked upon as a long term vision of how we might move to a more sustainable food system, the European Commission suggests. It has an especially close relationship with the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, another key element of the EGD, and it is no coincidence that they were released on the same date - May 20 2020 – with an official EU press release covering the two. As an element of EGD, F2F is set out as a contributory tool to the overarching objective of making Europe a climate neutral continent by 2050 – a process in the context of which food is seem to have an obvious role. The timing of its launch also means that it was posited by the Commission as a key part of the start of the (Covid-19) recovery process. In turn that implies a desire to increase both

the resilience and sustainability (for which, read balancing the health of people, the health of the planet and economic prosperity) of food systems in the future.

At the same time as emphasising the contribution and importance of food systems in helping achieve climate neutrality, it is also recognised that those systems are under huge pressure from factors such as flood, drought, invasive species and pests and the various impacts of covid-19 itself, F2F is therefore also designed to tackle those issues. EU food policy to date has very much been conceived around the twin concerns of food safety and food security and the EC has been at pains to point out that these remain "cornerstones" of the new broader approach to food systems. All this matters more than it otherwise might because F2F also wants to keep firmly in view the fact that food systems are a huge economic opportunity and a major creator and provider of jobs - something seen as all the more important in the context of Covid-19 (economic) recovery.

The insistence on cross-system breadth has been a recurring theme within pronouncements relating to the new strategic approach – and in particular the Commission has repeatedly been keen to emphasise that F2F is not just about food production but describes a complete system through processing, distribution, marketing etc to sale within the retail and hospitality sectors and indeed as far as consumers. This is reflected in the document text itself with sections 2.1 addressing production, 2.2 focusing upon processing, retail, hospitality etc and 2.4, consumption. From the same notion of breadth comes recognition that F2F requires actions by a wide range of different actors from across the food chain.

The twenty seven timebound actions which go to form the annex of the plan are to be regarded as an "action plan" – with other actions also embedded in the main body of the text, where one will also find a range of what the Commission consider to be "ambitious, measurable and realistic" targets. Specifically, for the reduction of levels of food waste, pesticide use, of nutrient losses through fertiliser use, of antimicrobial sales for farmed animals and increases in organic farming levels.

This move to a sustainable food system is posited, like much else, as a transition, with again an inference as to the breadth and scale of change that is being called for, and, as a corollary to that, recognition that F2F will need to be implemented alongside other actions – and in particular the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy. There is also recognition that such a transition will require substantial levels of research - and innovation - and what the Commission considers a "substantive" budget is allocated to make this happen, drawn in the first instance from the Horizon 2020 EGD call, Horizon Europe, EAFRD and ERDF. Smart Specialisation also has a role to play in the development of clusters relating to agri-food - all this R&I and other knowledge is to be transmitted and exploited through a range of advisory and information services, including an enhanced AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and innovation Systems).

The strategy is to be moved forward by a range of initiatives (including legislative ones) to be introduced by the EU – these are largely the actions as set out in the annex and text, but other "external" EC actions will be expected to play a complementary role in addition. Progress is to be reviewed in 2023, with corrective measures introduced at that point as judged necessary.

The relationship with CAP in particular warrants further consideration – DG Agri has adopted a clear position that as well as specific new legislative actions, a reformed CAP has a role to play in implementing F2F (and indeed the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 as well). This role was initially set out within a Staff Working Document (SWD) – also 20 May 2020 – which foresaw complementarity between

the two new strategies and the CAP reform proposals as set out in 2018, and subsequently negotiated upon and finally adopted in June 2021.

CAP therefore has a key role in helping deliver the ambitions of the F2F – a position reflected in the "green (deal) architecture" as set out in the 2018 document. That role is also based on the financial contribution that CAP funding allocations within the 2021-27 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) might be expected to make – a very practical implementing role, therefore.

The SWD points up a number of areas where it suggests that the reform of CAP as proposed by DG Agri in 2018 fits the stated aims of F2F well – for example in terms of ensuring eve- increasing ambition in terms of setting environmental and climate related goals, using conditionality, making eco-schemes mandatory and within that ensuring that spending is ring-fenced, and that progress can be measured by collating data in a uniform way. Issues regarding animal welfare and the attainment of the target referred to above with regard to reducing the level of antimicrobial sales can also both be directly targeted within CAP it is suggested.

One further element, which attracted considerable attention on its publication, is the role that might be played by the new CAP national Plans in supporting F2F. To this end (and more broadly), the Commission has subsequently made recommendations to EU member states intended to form the basis for a series of structured dialogues, which can be extended beyond a set of considerations of how each member state will ensure that it meets the nine objectives of the new CAP but also as to how each will also contribute to the F2F (and EGD more broadly) targets on a country by country basis.

There is a final regard in which at least some are seeing a connection between the reformed CAP and the F2F, this relates to the ongoing measurement of the impact that F2F provisions are having upon both food security and the livelihoods of farmers – a task that is seen as suitable for being carried out within the broader CAP National Plan monitoring system.

Initial reactions to the F2F proposals were numerous, varied, and far from positive in some quarters - few extended far beyond cautious optimism. For example, many argued that the quantifiable targets are not as ambitious as they might be – whilst at the same time the target of reaching 25% organic farming levels for instance were regarded as being wildly over-ambitious in the case of many member states. Where, some asked, were the figures using which the targets have been calculated – if only for the sake of transparency, these should be made public they argued. Where indeed were the details about what is preventing the sought-for targets being attained, this is presumably known but is not within the published papers? For some there are any way too few targets – and highlight numerous issues in this regard such as animal welfare - and they express an overall sense of a missed opportunity, or indeed a lack of the ambition level that will be required to make the European Green Deal successful in meeting its objectives.

Concerns have also been raised that this is a very broad-brush with too little recognition that farming happens very differently in different EU member states – and indeed in some cases within member states. The specificities are lost sight of some suggested, and diverseness not taken into account. In reality, the fact that negotiation on targets will be undertaken with individual member states and take account of the current national situations is referred to in both the Strategy text and in the SWD, but many seemed nevertheless unconvinced.

In terms of potential impact, a number of commentators had also questioned whether the desire to achieve environmental goals has led to too little consideration of economic impacts. For instance, the stated ambition to reduce the proportion of arable land is seen by many as sure to have direct, negative economic consequences and it seems to them a very strange direction to take for when there is so much focus otherwise on (post covid-19) economic stimulus and recovery. Where, in terms of trade more broadly, some have challenged, is the sense in imposing still greater restrictions on Europe's farmers when the same restrictions do not apply to those outside the EU in countries with whom the EU had ongoing free trade agreements? Others point out that the EU is in reality obliged to accept the import of produce from other systems beyond the EU which would not be allowed to be produced in the same ways if that production was to happen within the EU. There are both trade and competition dimensions here as well they would argue but a lack of policy coherence on the part of the EU itself given that that is the case.

In the subsequent period of course much has developed, not least in the context of continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a broad consensus that food systems stood up to an extreme stress test rather well and that where problems arose these were primarily related to global level supply and transportation issues. The Commission is especially keen to take stock of lessons learned from the pandemic nevertheless and has in the meanwhile produced a contingency plan designed to ensure that there are no disruptions to either food supply or food security.

The Commission still intends to produce a legislative proposal for achieving its stated aims with regard to sustainable food systems. The European Parliament has put forward a resolution on F2F as recently as October 2021 asking amongst other things that greater attention be placed on the role of consumers, on the part played by non-food agriculture and pointing out, not the first time, that agricultural activity itself has injurious impacts on habitats.