

**Communication paper
of the international organisations
partner of the European Countryside Movement**

The European Countryside Movement calls on the European Commission to produce a White Paper on rurality

**European Countryside
Movement**

International Association Rurality-Environment-Development - RED
Association of European Regions for Products of Origin - AREPO
European Association for Rural Development Institutions - AEIAR
International Association of Family Movements for Rural Training - AIMFR
European Committee of Property Owners - CEDIP
European Council for rural law - CEDR
European Greenways Association - EGWA
European Leader Association for Rural Development - ELARD
European Network of Outdoor Sports - ENOS
European Federation of Rural Tourism - EUROGITES
European Association for Mountain Areas - EUROMONTANA
International Federation of Equestrian Tourism - FITE
Peri Urban Regions Platform Europe - PURPLE
European Rural University - URE



The European Countryside Movement calls on the European Commission to produce a White Paper on rurality

In 2014, the international partner organisations of the European Countryside Movement adopted a memorandum entitled «The future of the rural territories is key for the success of the European Union: without their contributions, the Europe 2020 Strategy is doomed to failure!»¹.

In that call for the recognition of rural territories as partners in inclusive, sustainable and smart growth of the EU, the European Countryside Movement asked the European Commission to draft a White Paper on rurality. This communication paper clarifies the need of that request regarding the objectives of the Treaty, especially territorial cohesion and overall harmonious development², as well as the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy around inclusive, sustainable and smart growth.

Why a White Paper on rurality ?

The territorial importance of rurality in the EU makes it a major part of the European project. Twenty-first century rural areas are made up of a diversity of multi-sectoral and multi-actor territories whose assets go beyond just the primary sector.

- ▶ *Rural areas, including peri-urban ones, host 58% of the population of the E.U. and 56% of its jobs. 80% of the European territory is rural or semi-rural³. Rural Europe today has evolved. Its economy is diversified. Agriculture remains a vital economic and territorial activity, but the secondary and tertiary sectors (services, tourism, SMEs, technological and industrial sectors,...) play a major role in terms of economy and employment*

The added value and the potential for creativity that rural areas can bring, in all their diversity, are significant. But the contributions they can make to the inclusive, sustainable and smart growth aimed at by the Europe 2020 Strategy are under-recognised and under-exploited. Taking rural areas into account as development and innovation poles would strengthen their involvement in EU programmes and make the most of their potential. The objectives of the Strategy will be only achieved by making rural territories partners in European growth and innovation.

- ▶ *Current European policies fail to develop all the potential of the rural territories. The ways in which European measures are implemented in national and regional policies very often generate a shift of financial resources towards densely populated areas.*
- ▶ *The various European Partnerships for Innovation should be open more to all aspects of rural development.*
- ▶ *New technologies have an important role in realizing rural potential, as they reduce some of the limitations imposed by location. They allow networking and offer new methods for delocalising and personalising of production. However, to achieve this aim of “smart territory”, it is necessary that rural areas are equipped with appropriate infrastructure and smart platforms in a comparable way to urban ones.*

¹ Attached

² Article 174 of the Treaty on the functioning of the E.U. : « In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas,... »

³ AP Context Indicators – 2014 update – DG Agri

The expected development of E.U. policies must ensure rural-urban balance and the well-being of its peoples ⁴. The vitality of rural areas is essential to this well-being of both rural and urban populations. Current development systems generate significant regional imbalances and these are growing. This loss of cohesion - social, economic, territorial, - takes many forms, as do rural areas, but it generates tensions within and between territories. More adequate responses must be made at relevant territorial scales to generate or to support local dynamics of development.

- ▶ *Isolated rural areas are suffering from increasingly aging and male proportions within their population mix. Peri-urban areas are experiencing loss of farmland or are suffering from an imbalance in the ratio of commuter / local workers.*
- ▶ *Difficulties in transportation and movement are also manifest in very different ways in different rural areas according to their circumstances. That diversity also applies to issues around human migration which serve to reinforce imbalances, whether this be people leaving less dense areas or moving out from urban centres.*

The inequality of residents and local stakeholders in terms of access to public services is growing. The same applies with the quality of the basic infrastructure necessary for development, such as high-speed broadband.

The falling levels of health, transport and safety services gives rural inhabitants cause for concern and frequently results in a feeling of abandonment: this is a common observation in rural territories albeit felt in varying degrees in different types of rural areas. This feeling can in turn lead to a more general feeling of alienation from the European project more broadly.

- ▶ *That imbalance is especially damaging in economic, social and cultural terms, as Europe has turned more and more to developing a digital society in which the ability to communicate is essential to produce, to sell or to consume.*

The implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and rural development policy in the current programming period illustrates the limits of the E.U. approach. Preparatory work for the post-2020 programming period will begin in 2016-2017. It is important that genuine consideration be given to rurality so that policy post-2020 genuinely takes account of rural areas.

- ▶ *The content of the operational and rural development programmes has shown that new integrative tools such as CLLD or ITI, have not been sufficiently implemented by the Member States or Regions. The inclusion of financial measures for rural development within the second pillar of the CAP has also raised tensions with agricultural stakeholders. The timings of multiannual European programming work nowadays provides only a short interval of time for urgently carrying out a thorough review of the place of rurality and its potential in the EU.*

⁴ Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union

- ▶ **Noting that the realities and the prospects of rural areas do not comply with the objectives expressed in the Treaty on European Union and in the Europe 2020 Strategy as regards territorial cohesion, harmonious development and sustainable, inclusive and smart growth,**
 - ▶ **noting that the potential of rural areas, with their diversity, is insufficiently recognised or exploited in support of these objectives,**
- the European Countryside Movement calls on the European Commission to produce a White Paper on rurality as a strategic step and a urgent need for the success of the broader European project.**

**The future of the rural territories is a stake
for the success of the European Union:
without their contributions,
the Europe 2020 Strategy is doomed to failure!**

Rurality :

a pillar of the E.U., neither urban annexe nor just farming

Rural territories :

a potential for growth and a variety of actors

The European Union from 2014 focuses its policies and financial resources on the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

But, while there is urgency relative to challenges, is the EU acting effectively to mobilise the energies and strengths of all its territories?

56% of EU employment and 59% of its population are located in rural, including periurban, territories. Rural and periurban areas produce wealth and added value. Their vitality and the consideration of these territories as poles of development and innovation are essential to the well-being of rural and urban populations, and to the sustainable growth and harmonious and balanced territorial development of the whole of the EU. That is how regions will meet the results targets of the EU 2020 Strategy.

Rural Europe today has evolved. Its economy is diversified. Agriculture remains a vital economic and territorial activity, but the secondary and tertiary sectors (services, tourism, SME, ...) take a major role in terms of employment.

To think that the objectives of the strategy will be achieved without realising the potential of all rural areas is illusory.

So, the partner organisations of the European Countryside Movement and their members :

*** call all the European Authorities :**

- ▶ to an explicit recognition of rural territories as poles of development and innovation contributing to the 2020 Strategy, in a balanced relationship with the urban poles;
- ▶ to promote the implementation of the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), based on the experience of the bottom-up Leader method, during the 2014-2020 programming period, in view to deliver greater economic diversification, job creation and local level capacity building in the rural territories;
- ▶ to be attentive to the place and role given to rural actors and territories in the rural-urban strategic visions. Periurban areas have a particular role in this relationship, given their importance in terms of local agriculture, landscape quality, environmental management, employment and social cohesion. The conclusions of the RURBAN project are to be integrated in the new regional policies of the E.U. and its members.

*** call the European Parliament to launch a major work on rurality, with the establishment of an intergroup devoted to the development of the rural territories, including peri-urban areas;**

*** call the European Commission to write a White Paper on rural realities in the European Union.**