

PURPLE 2020 Report

A short message from the President

Dear All,

Welcome to our annual activity report for 2020. It was a year that felt like no other and much of what we had initially planned and envisaged was overtaken by events. For example, I much regretted - and I know I was not alone - not being able to meet colleagues old and new at our scheduled General Assembly in Frankfurt, and I missed other opportunities to meet with political colleagues, officers and attend various events in person as well. Nevertheless, PURPLE adapted, as did so many others, and where it was possible to re-channel our energies we did so – it was gratifying to see the increased number of responses we made to consultation exercises for example, and good to see the PURPLE NEWSFLASH appear so regularly. And, of course, we became much more adept at online meetings enabling us to hold two General Assemblies and various Working Group and Lobby Group meetings despite our inability to meet in person.

One positive effect of the pandemic was to cause many people to reflect on the shifting relationships between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, and to recognise the importance of the peri-urban, whether they use the term or not; that at least is to be welcomed. Our December 2020 General Assembly adopted the first iteration of a paper which I think, and hope, will stand us in good stead as we explore the various ways in which peri-urban areas and actors can drive forward the recovery process, at the same time winning recognition for the critical broader role that peri-urban areas play.

In that sense I look forward to a year ahead which will no doubt not to be a full return to what had gone before, where we might take forward our amended PURPLE Work Plan, build on what we have achieved during 2020, and finally meet each other again face to face.



Helyn Clack

Key Achievements:

- General Assemblies go virtual
- PURPLE Coronavirus responses
- Finalising the Work Plan 2020-22
- A busy year for the Lobby Group
- Working Group activities
- EU Strategy for Sustainable and Smart Mobility
- The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas
- Other European rural matters
- Voices of Culture
- The ROBUST project
- Engaging with the EU Farm to Fork Strategy
- Territorial Agenda 2030 and a new Leipzig Charter
- Circular Economy Action Plan papers
- PURPLE on CAP Reform
- Governance and meetings

General Assemblies go virtual

If there was ever a year when we were obliged to rethink how we do things, 2020 was it. We held our two General Assemblies on-line for the first time and successfully dealt with all the formalities required by our AISBL constitution. We were able to have our new three year Work Plan adopted and to update our Activity Plan for the year as well as adopting a revised operational budget and putting in place a number of key plans for 2021.

PURPLE Coronavirus responses

One topic dominated the year - inevitably. PURPLE responded by moving its meetings online, but also by producing an initial paper which set out to capture the impacts of Covid particular to peri-urban areas and how these might be addressed in the network's future work. It isolated a number of thematic areas including mobility systems, the management of public space, people's working/workplace habits and explored the possible future impacts and opportunities related to them, against a background where the relationships between peri-urban, urban, and rural places and actors came much more strongly to the fore than previously in public debate. The resulting iterative document was approved for use by the General Assembly in December 2020.

In addition to this, the General Assembly requested that the version of the 2020-22 Work Plan be refined (see following item), and that more detail on potential Covid impacts be written into the Annual Activity Plan (AAP) for 2020, this was done and the revised version of each document subsequently approved, as detailed below.

Lastly, the Lobby Group looked at opportunities for peri-urban regions in the context of the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) as national plans continued to evolve, and carried out an exercise looking to see how sub-national peri-urban actors were involved - or not - in the drafting of National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) and tracked this in a newly created resource area within the PURPLE website.

Finalising a new PURPLE Work Plan and AAP

The Working Group began work in late 2019 on developing a draft of a three-year Work Plan to replace the one which was due to expire at the end of that calendar year. That work was completed shortly before the year-end with the intention that it be submitted to the Executive Board for approval in 2020. That meeting was in fact cancelled due to the Covid outbreak and the paper was instead submitted direct to the June 2020 General Assembly. For the first time, the accompanying Annual Activity Plan (AAP) included a list of focus areas for activities mapped against key European Union policies, against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the proposed Priority Objectives within the 2021-27 cohesion policy and funds. The Work Plan itself was further revised at the request of the June GA so that it took explicit account of the initial impacts of the pandemic and so that it was more closely aligned with the 2020 AAP - both the Work Plan and AAP 2020 were approved subject to these revisions and additions being made – work which was completed by the end of July.

A busy year for the Lobby Group

Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic the Purple Lobby Group very much intensified its levels of exchange and co-operation over the past year. Several meetings took place virtually and a comprehensive series of consultation responses and similar were realised (see separate document) - a volume far in excess of previous years' numbers. The year always promised to be a full one in light of the adoption of the European Green Deal (EGD) at the end of 2019 as a follow up to the EU-2020 Strategy and it was an ideal time to establish a new, regular update mechanism for Lobby Group members – the PURPLE NEWSFLASH, of which the first twenty issues had appeared by the year-end. 2020 was always going to be a key year for policy making therefore with both the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions in particular opening several consultations and asked for input to shape new - and adapt existing - regulations and directives etc. so as to implement this new framework strategy. Selected highlights of this work are detailed in separate sections of this report.

Working Group activities

Following the successful launch of three Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), the previous year, PURPLE Working Group members were somewhat restricted in taking forward many of their plans for and in 2020. Its meeting plans for the earlier part of the year had to be revised and online gatherings of the main group were convened later in order to focus on future funding opportunities, on the PURPLE Coronavirus reflection paper (see above) and on taking forward the group's work with peri-urban charter signatories. Despite limitations, the group were able to successfully start work on pursuing funding applications under both the EU LIFE programme and the Horizon 2020 call related to the European Green Deal. With regard to work with the charter signatories, plans for a General Assembly in Poznan which would have involved the signatories alongside PURPLE member regions were well advanced before being finally put on hold pending a lifting of travel restrictions.

Strategy for Sustainable and Smart Mobility papers

Peri-urban mobility is one of the five topic areas within the 2020-22 Work Plan (see above), and the Lobby Group followed developments with interest as the EU began the process of developing a comprehensive "EU Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart mobility" due for adoption in 2021. PURPLE submitted a comprehensive response to the EU public consultation exercise in September 2020 in response to the roadmap published in July. The response addressed lessons from the Covid crisis, climate and environmental dimensions of mobility and overcoming existing barriers to sustainable transport, as well as making over forty specific observations on aspects of immediate and particular relevance to peri-urban places and actors.

European Year of Rail

The EU has announced that 2021 is to be the *European Year of Rail*, to be coordinated within the EC by DGMOVE. The PURPLE Lobby and Working Groups have looked at the possibilities this might present in terms of highlighting the critical importance of peri-urban areas within local, regional, national, and transnational railway systems and services. To this end it contacted DGMOVE late in the year and announced its intention of organising a public event in late 2021 with the working title of "The year of rail in practice: recognising and reinvesting in peri-urban systems and services" with the request that it be included within the official programme of events. On Dec 2nd, at the 34th PURPLE General Assembly, Vice-Marshall Wojciech Jankowiak, gave a further boost to this initiative by delivering an address on the subject of the Poznan Metropolitan Railway, as a valuable example of a safe, reliable, and affordable rail transport system connecting peri-urban and other areas within Wielkopolska.

Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

PURPLE took an active part in the preparation of an EC Communication establishing a “*Long Term Vision for Rural Areas*” (LTVRA). Vincent O’Connell successfully applied to become one of c45 members of a “Thematic Group” made up of interested parties from across Europe. Its work focused on shaping a foresight study together with the EU’s Joint Research Council, producing a series of potential scenarios for the future. PURPLE’s particular concern was to ensure that the diversity of rural (including peri-urban) areas was recognised and that the importance of rural-urban relationships was not lost sight of. The group met on-line three times over the period Sept-Dec 2020, whilst PURPLE also took the chance to respond to the parallel consultation exercise submitting a substantial position paper calling for a comprehensive “Rural Agenda” to sit alongside – and be given equal weight with - the EU’s Urban Agenda initiative, a call we have been making consistently over the past four years.

European Rural Networks (ERN) and European Countryside Movement (ECM/MER)

PURPLE continued to participate in both the European Rural Networks (ERN) Steering Group (SG) and its Assembly, attending both the 13th SG and 7th GA in 2020. All ERN meetings took place as webinars with limited opportunities for networking. The ERN brings together the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) network with its Assembly acting as a forum for debating all aspects of the Rural Development Policy 2014-2020. There were also two online meetings held by the ECM/MER in 2020 in both of which PURPLE took an active part, these looked at ways of taking forward calls for a comprehensive Rural Agenda and for a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas which goes beyond words to actions.

Voices of Culture

PURPLE’s application in late 2019 to take part in the “Voices of Culture structured dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector”. was one of forty selected from almost 180 submissions. Vincent O’Connell took part in a symposium and workshop meeting held in Alfeld in February 2020 and subsequently authored a chapter entitled “*The role of culture in rural, peri-urban, in-between and/or un(der)used non-urban areas*” which formed chapter 1 of the final report. This was presented as part of a top-level expert meeting with three DGs of the European Commission held in late April, this meeting was initially envisaged as a networking event in Brussels, but inevitably, ultimately took place on-line with reduced numbers.

The ROBUST project

The Horizon 2020 ROBUST project continued over the course of 2020. The first EU level project in which PURPLE is a full partner - began in mid-2017 and has been extended by six months so that it is now due to finish in November 2021. The project looks at rural-urban linkages with an overall goal “to advance the understanding of the interactions and dependencies between rural, peri-urban and urban areas....”. PURPLE participated in the full project meeting scheduled to be hosted in Graz but in reality, taking place virtually in September. That coincided with the second formal project review exercise which was passed without any issues arising, and was approved by the EU alongside the successful submission and approval of PURPLE’s second partner report/claim. That now leaves the way clear for the final year of the project, during which PURPLE is due to lead on the submission of a number of key deliverables including policy briefs and a set of policy recommendations.

The Lobby Group and the Farm to Fork Strategy

The Lobby Group contributed to the consultation exercise launched in preparation for the EU’s attempt to arrive at a comprehensive food strategy that covers the whole food system as an integral part of the European Green Deal (EGD), - what came to be known as the “Farm to Fork” strategy. PURPLE submitted an online response to the published roadmap, a keystone of PURPLE’s input was the need to not over-associate food production with rural areas and the rural economy, it pointed out the importance of peri-urban agriculture and the need to include support for peri-urban food-related concerns in regional development plans and in EU cohesion policy.

Territorial Agenda 2030 and the new Leipzig Charter

Both these key EU policy instruments were published late in the calendar year under the aegis of the German EU presidency - the first replaces its 2011 predecessor, the second is an update of a document which appeared in its initial form in 2007. The PURPLE Lobby Group had carefully followed the development of each over the preceding twelve months and more. As neither takes the form of an EC Communication or Regulation, the opportunities to engage were slightly different than normal. As early as January 2020, PURPLE prepared and submitted a response to a bespoke questionnaire on the TA2030, and also prepared an outline position paper

on an early draft of the Leipzig Charter 2.0 text. This paper focused on the peri-urban dimensions of what PURPLE saw as both the opportunities and risks related to an updated strategy for the sustainable development of cities.

Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) papers

The EU CEAP was updated in 2020 as part of the European Green Deal. Given its existing, and still growing, importance in EU policy, the PURPLE Lobby Group has been keen to track, and to try to shape, developments. With this in mind, it produced a discussion paper based upon group exchanges in April and also submitted a contribution to a consultation exercise on the CoR Opinion on the same subject a month later. Both highlighted the urgent need to not look upon CE as solely an urban phenomenon/opportunity but rather to look at the ways in which contributions might also come from peri-urban and rural settings. It was also argued that CE should feature more prominently in the sorts of regional development strategies for which PURPLE member regions have responsibility. Accordingly, we ought to be looking to the public sector as well as to business, to drive place-sensitive work PURPLE asserted, adding that peri-urban areas might serve as valuable pathfinders in this regard.

PURPLE ON CAP reform

PURPLE’s Vincent O’Connell accepted an invitation to participate as a panellist in a “Round Table on the future of CAP: a vision for rural areas”, a session held as part of the Agritravel and Slow Travel Virtual Expo event in September 2020. He spoke alongside Mr Herbert Dorfmann MEP, Maria Gafo from DG AGRI and representatives from both ELARD and COPA-COGECA. As well as giving a brief overview of PURPLE’s history and purpose, O’Connell pointed out the importance of agriculture in peri-urban as well as rural areas, and that there is a huge amount of economic activity taking part in both types of territory which is not about agriculture and that this needs to be recognised within the second pillar of a reformed CAP designed to support rural development more broadly. He highlighted the critical role of peri-urban actors and locations in a new whole food system approach as set out in the new F2F policy and how the new CAP Strategic Plans – in part intended to achieve F2F targets - will need to both reflect and involve regions, (peri-urban and otherwise), in their design and delivery, something that current experience suggests is not happening to an adequate degree

Governance and meetings

Two General Assembly meetings took place during the year, both virtually, as explained above. There were two “standard” Working Group meetings held towards the end of a year during which more communication was carried out by email updates as opposed to within physical or virtual meetings. Plans for follow-up new-style “thematic” Working Group sessions with regard to:

- Peri-urban agriculture - led by Flanders
- Peri-urban transport - led by South Moravia
- Peri-urban landscape- led by Wielkopolska, were all held over until it was possible to meet in person.

The Lobby Group continued to do most of its work by e-mail exchanges, but two virtual meetings were convened towards the end of the year with plans in place to hold shorter, more frequent online meetings in the future.

The table provides an overview of formal PURPLE meetings of different types held over 2020.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
General Assembly						16						02
Executive Board				20 (postponed)								
Working Group										22	20	
Lobby Group											04 23	

A short explanation as to the intended purpose of each type of grouping within PURPLE is provided here for reference.

General Assembly: consists of political representatives from all member regions. The General Assembly manages the network and meets twice a year, normally this happens once in Brussels and once in one of the member regions. These meetings usually coincide with a PURPLE conference or event on peri-urban issues.

Executive Board: currently consists of six political representatives from the member regions plus an ex officio Treasurer. The Executive Board is elected by the General Assembly to administer PURPLE. It is principally responsible for the overall political steering of the network, setting the political agenda and defining the overall vision of PURPLE.

Working Group: consists of officers and experts from member regions who meet regularly in Brussels to plan actions and events and to share experience.

Lobby Group: consists primarily of Brussels-based officers in the representations of member regions. The Lobby Group coordinates PURPLE’s Brussels contacts and actions and monitors EU policy development.