

JUNE 2022

PURPLE and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

The Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE) welcomes the EC Communication on a Long-term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) as a critically important step in achieving a better-balanced political approach to territorial development. It wishes to put on record its support for policy initiative which sets out to enhance understanding and recognition of the vital role played by rural areas and actors of many different kinds.

PURPLE's raison d'être is rooted in achieving recognition of peri-urban places where rural interests are an inherent component part of regional development and where rural and non-urban interests not only can be, but must be, better-aligned and better understood for the benefit of all. PURPLE's view is that rural-urban linkages form a vital part of any debate about rural futures – and, indeed that these territorial linkages are often (not exclusively), most obviously manifest in peri-urban settings.

CONTEXT

- Whereas the Peri-urban Regions Platform Europe (**PURPLE**) is a transnational network of regions who consider themselves to be peri-urban in part, or in whole: to be, in other words, places where the rural and urban co-exist
- Whereas **PURPLE** has long advocated a *Rural Agenda* which would operate as a counter-weight to the Urban Agenda of the EU, and serve better to promote and represent the assets, interests, value and reality of peri-urban and rural areas
- Whereas **PURPLE** has been a participative member of both the Steering Group (European Rural Networks' Steering Group) and the General Assembly (Rural Networks' Assembly) of the European Network for Regional Development (ENRD) since its inception in 2012, and where it serves as a member body representative of the interests of regional and local authorities (government)
- Whereas **PURPLE** President, Mrs Helyn Clack, was an author contributor to the 2016 Committee of the Regions brochure entitled "*The need for a White Paper on Rurality from local and regional perspectives*", suggesting that "a White Paper on Rurality and an EU Rural Agenda ... would serve as a strong signal that the challenges faced by rural areas of all kinds (including peri-urban territories) must also be taken into account at EU level"
- Whereas **PURPLE** Secretary General Vincent O'Connell was, in 2020 and 2021, a member of the ENRD Thematic Group on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, a group of about fifty individuals from across Europe responsible in part for the shaping of the *foresight exercise* which came to shape the June 2021 Communication *A Long Term Vision for Rural Areas*, and its accompanying annex and three-part Staff Working Document
- Whereas **PURPLE** has been a partner within the H2020 project ROBUST (Rural-Urban Outlooks; Unlocking Synergies - Grant Agreement no: 727988), which has analysed rural-urban linkages and synergies at both practice and governance levels over the last four and a half years and is the focus of the final section of this paper

POSITION STATEMENT

- PURPLE values the LTVRA as an important addition, (and in many ways, a corrective), to an ongoing policy landscape of critical relevance where urban voices have long been the loudest and most powerful.
- PURPLE regards the LTVRA as a unique opportunity to redress past inequality and partiality, and to bring the interests of rural people and places more centre-stage as an antidote and balance to any existing urban-centric narrative
- PURPLE sees huge complementarity between the aims, purpose and objectives of the LTVRA and the principles and priorities set out within the Territorial Agenda 2030 and asks that these complementarities and cross-currents are made more overt
- PURPLE is opposed to over-simplistic definitions of “rural” and “urban”, and any crude binary typological model. Both urban and rural areas - in the broad sense of the terms - , contain different types of places with different assets and needs
- What PURPLE considers to be the peri-urban is often included as part of what others prefer to conceptualise as “rural areas”, in other instances it is more readily associated with the urban – for example when “swept up” within headings such as “metropolitan” or “functional urban areas”. This need not be a point of contention, but the fluidity here needs to be recognised
- Although in no way blind to the challenges faced by rural areas (and others), PURPLE prefers to take “an assets-based approach”, looking at how overcoming challenges can further enhance, recognise and reward the valuable role already played by rural areas/actors as opposed to perceiving of them only as places that compare disfavouredly to non-rural ones
- PURPLE is convinced that a vision for – and the future of – rural areas is not a matter of concern to rural areas, actors and interests only. It should be regarded as part of a larger European territorial mosaic with within which rural, peri-urban, and urban all form parts of a larger connected and interdependent whole which should operate for universal benefit
- The process of arriving at the LTVRA Communication and its subsequent implementation actions have brought rural matters into much stronger focus across multiple policy fields than was previously the case. This is hugely welcome, but needs to continue, and to not be a temporary step in a larger, and ever-evolving, series of visioning and policy-making exercises
- For that reason, and others, PURPLE continues to advocate for a concrete “Rural Agenda” to sit alongside the EU Urban Agenda (UAEU), with equal status and comparable implementation tools, in order that this work might be safeguarded for the future and fully embedded
- PURPLE recalls that the LTVRA initiative is rooted in considerations around demographic trends and in recognition of the overwhelming need to ensure that all European citizens are actively involved as part of larger participative and democratic processes
- Whilst recognising that agriculture plays -and sustainable agriculture will continue to play - a vital role in the rural (and the peri-urban) economy, the two are not synonymous. Not all agriculture is rural, but more tellingly, not all rural economic activity is agricultural
- There are important differences between rural, peri-urban and urban places, activities and interests but to be different is not to be divided. PURPLE is extremely cautious about notions

of “rural-urban divide”, very much aware that its own peri-urban regions are themselves territories where rural and urban communities and interests co-exist

- Balance is key: inherent within that balance is equality, perhaps most obviously manifest in the context of governance arrangements and their decision-making processes at EU, national, regional and sub-regional levels
- It manifests also in the way in which resources are directed and investments made; most obviously, given the territorial context here, in the structure and management of EU cohesion funding and other support mechanisms
- Enhanced complementarity across support mechanisms is required – multifunds and similar mechanisms, peri-urban ITIs and CLLD arrangements have a particular role to play at the rural-urban interface – what for PURPLE is the peri-urban
- PURPLE was especially pleased to see multiple references to rural-urban linkages in the Opinion on the LTVRA adopted by the *Committee of the Regions* (CoR) in January 2022
- The same *CoR* Opinion also emphasises interdependencies between rural and urban areas, the importance of improving transport connections with both peri-urban and rural areas, and the need for better rural-urban balance to underpin territorial models – all points which PURPLE has itself made in previous consultation exercises and similar
- In similar vein, the Opinion on the LTVRA adopted by the *European Economic and Social Committee* (EESC) in March 2022, also contains a very welcome specific reference to peri-urban areas as one specific type of area to be considered as part of any rural vision
- PURPLE is hopeful that the forthcoming *European Parliament* (EP) Opinion on the LTVRA will make similar points in recognising the diversity and distinctiveness of different kinds of rural areas, including what PURPLE might more consider peri-urban, and the roles each might play
- The EP *Working Document* on the Opinion makes the absolutely critical point that as “an exercise on territorial cohesion”, the LTVRA has a relevance beyond rural territories alone
- PURPLE especially welcomed the EP’s recognition of the need for new business models to optimise future rural prosperity and would like to see more in this context and others on the scope for rural-urban linkages (physical and other) with genuine mutual benefit
- The EESC report already quoted from also raises similar questions to those that PURPLE has itself asked in terms of the proposed relationship between LTVRA content and action and the CAP – and especially CAP Strategic Plans - CSPs
- PURPLE welcomes the refreshed emphasis being placed upon rural proofing. As advocates for peri-urban places and actors where rural and urban characteristics and interests co-exist, PURPLE member regions are especially attuned to territorial impact assessment of this kind, and very much aware of its critical importance as part of policy-making and evaluation
- PURPLE is a supporter of the Rural Pact and is especially keen to see that such pact-type arrangements are operationalised across rural, peri-urban and urban areas and are not solely considered internal to rural areas alone
- PURPLE concludes that the work to date in arriving at and implementing a Rural Action Plan is a hugely valuable opportunity to recalibrate policy-making and policy-implementation at all territorial levels and wishes to continue to play an active part in its ongoing evolution

APPENDIX

PURPLE, THE ROBUST PROJECT AND THE LTVRA

<https://rural-urban.eu/>

The LTVRA evolved during the lifetime of the ROBUST project and PURPLE, partly in its role as a project partner, was directly involved in its development. PURPLE was responsible for the delivery of key written outputs within ROBUST and made a number of particular points with specific regard to the peri-urban as well as to rural-urban linkages more broadly in the context of the LTVRA.

The Staff Working Document (SWD) accompanying the LTVRA (see especially pp101-107) itself made reference to ROBUST when citing the “interactions and dependencies between rural, peri-urban and urban areas and contemporary governance approaches” synthesis report (Deliverable 2.4) in the context of the governance arrangements relating to rural-urban linkages; a critical dimension of any rural vision PURPLE would suggest. ROBUST is also cited under the SWD’s telling sub-chapter heading “Rethinking what’s vital to society brings opportunities to revalue rural areas”, a notion which neatly captures the spirit of much of what ROBUST concluded in terms of recognising both the actual value and future potential of rural assets.

The focus of the cited section of the SWD is upon the relationships between different types of rural and urban areas – of which the peri-urban of course constitutes a key example – and points out, as has PURPLE, that “Places are connected and interdependent in many ways”. It points out that lines between different types of areas are becoming all the more blurred in the face, for example, of multilocality” where greater numbers of people are coming to spend increasingly more time divided between locations of different types – drawing upon ROBUST case studies such as that carried out in the PURPLE member region of Frankfurt/Rhein-Main.

Part 3 of the SWD concerns itself with the relationship between the LTVRA and other areas of EU level policy and makes two specific references (both p135) to the peri-urban in the context of mobility and better supporting “connectivity between rural and peri-urban areas with metropolitan/urban areas ...”, a form of wording that goes some way to obscure the importance of rural – peri-urban connectivity regardless of the urban dimension, where, for example peri-urban settings act as sub-regional hubs for the delivery of public services to rural communities – a point brought out much more strongly in ROBUST work which appeared after the LTVRA Communication was published in June 2021.

A few pages later (p139) the same SWD authors turn their attention to cultural policy and highlights the importance and value of (supporting) rural culture. It specifically cites the Voices of Culture structured dialogue exercise and its report published in April 2020 on “*the role of culture in non-urban, rural and peri-urban areas ...*”¹ in fact a reference to the chapter authored by PURPLE Secretary General Vincent O’Connell.

PURPLE was also especially gratified to see specific reference to the ROBUST project within the EESC Opinion on the LTVRA where it suggests that: “The Commission needs to fast-track and mainstream many of the valuable lessons learnt from its Horizon research projects ...” and where it goes on to include a link to the ROBUST project website.

¹ [VoC-Brainstorming-Report-Role-of-Culture-in-Non-Urban-Areas-of-the-EU.pdf \(voicesofculture.eu\)](https://www.voicesofculture.eu/VoC-Brainstorming-Report-Role-of-Culture-in-Non-Urban-Areas-of-the-EU.pdf)

Within the four deliverables (bold capitalised headings below) written by PURPLE as part of the work package within the ROBUST project which concerned itself with policy, the following specific points were made with regard to the LTVRA and to the peri-urban. These are offered here as an addition to the more general points in the previous section of this paper.

THEMATIC TOPIC PAPERS (TTPS) ON RURAL-URBAN COOPERATION

Where it is stated 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”

“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”.

“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.”

And where policy actors are asked to consider:

“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”.

“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”.

A POLICY BRIEFING ON CURRENT PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES, AND OBSTACLES REGARDING PLACE-BASED SYNERGY GOVERNANCE

Where policy actors are asked to consider/remember that:

“arrangements to ensure that the stakeholders “come from” or “are of” different types of territories (urban, peri-urban and rural) - with the added complexity both of structure, size and interests which this might apply”.

“governance and public service provision can take place across a large-scale geographical context within and across administrative areas with rural, urban and peri-urban features”

SYNTHESISED POLICY RECOMMENDATION RELATING TO RURAL-URBAN INTERACTIONS AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

On the Rural Pact

- If (a) common framework approach is indeed the one adopted, it will need to be broad enough to allow for a range of different pacts, of different types, to be applied in different places - presumably this is already the intention
- That then allows for a series of more localised pacts to be established shaped within an agreed framework, which will look to give both shape and flexibility
- If that is indeed the intended model, then the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) might serve as a working example of such a guiding framework
- A model of pacts between rural and non-rural actors and interests would have the advantage of bringing in thinking about linkages across different types of territory at a very early stage of the process in line with many other elements of the LTVRA

On Rural Revitalisation

- Rural revitalisation will not be achieved in a rural vacuum, it is to be brought about by revitalising rural areas as part of a broader territorial mosaic across Europe
- Under this model the distinct assets, character and contribution of rural areas will come to be fully recognised by both rural and non-rural actors and interests
- ROBUST's work and findings have served to underline the importance of rural-urban linkages based upon inter-dependency and the scope to increase synergies between the two
- Those rural-urban linkages and interdependencies are themselves part of the rural character, rooted firmly in the realisation that linkages should be designed and supported so as to bring about greater mutual benefit

On rural innovation

- ROBUST's work and findings have highlighted the importance of developing innovation in a rural-urban context
- Rural innovation is in reality not a rural-only concern, successful innovation will, in various ways, be dependent upon cooperation between rural and urban actors and interests
- Innovation is over-associated with the urban, with cities posited as "cradles of innovation" and similar, that is to ignore and underplay the large amount of innovation taking place in rural and peri-urban areas

On functional rural areas

- Functional areas is a term and a concept which tends to be used to describe areas of mixed territorial types which are linked for the purposes of one or more function
- In that sense the notion has a relevance and potential congruence with ROBUST as a means to better explain how (perhaps more to the point here, "where"), rural-urban linkages exist

On Rural Proofing

- Rural proofing mechanisms bring the opportunity to consider in a detached way what the effects of doing things in one place (or type of place) are likely to be upon other places/types of places, and using that assessment to decide whether and how to proceed further in any one given direction
- There is a congruence here with work on rural-urban linkages and interdependencies, given the inherent dimension of thinking about territories of two different types simultaneously
- In that sense much of the work done by ROBUST can be conceived of as having proofing elements written into its design and practice, where consideration is given to consequences and impacts in different settings

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

Which includes the following articles:

“Any simple **binary model of rural and urban** as a dichotomy is insufficient to capture, understand, or develop meaningful policy or policy instruments with regard to territories of different types. There is considerable diversity between places that might fall under either one or other broad heading”.

“Simplistic differentiation between rural and urban serves to underplay, (or ignore), **relationships and interdependencies between all sorts of different rural and urban places, interests and actors, proximitous or not**”.

“Although both urban policy and rural policy are well-established disciplines at EU and national levels in particular, **rural-urban interaction is very often not on the political agenda at all**, or considered worthy of explicit consideration or reference”.

“Policy actors have at their disposal here (rural proofing) an established tool which they might employ to consider the effects that any policy intervention might be expected to have on other places, actors, and interests of any type. ... (this should be) ... applied in all directions, and not the rural one alone. In reality therefore, it is a **multi-directional series of territorial proofing exercises** that one requires policy makers to adopt in the future”.

“Attempts to bring about better linkages, and to optimise synergies, between rural and urban places, actors and interests do not take place in **isolation from other interventions with other purposes and objectives**. At a general level, this underscores the need for joined-up interventions”

“ROBUST has explored various **synergy trajectories, each representing particular (and place-specific) potential in relation to LTVRA’s guiding notions and aspirations** (strong, resilient, prosperous, connected rural areas). They have shared an approach where prominence has been given to rural residents, businesses and public authorities, and their social, environmental and economic interests and ambitions, in thinking about current challenges and future possibilities.”

“Both ROBUST and the LTVRA have underscored the need to consider rural interests and rural policy alongside non-rural ones in a fair, equal and balanced way. The future development of the LTVRA can draw directly upon ROBUST’s work and experiences in **devising models for improving rural wellbeing in the “territorial round”, taking account of non-rural interests and priorities at the same time as rural ones whilst not in any way subjugating the latter to the former**”.

“The LTVRA, has operated with a clear focus on the importance of the availability of, and access to, **infrastructure and universal services in rural areas**. Exactly the same central focus has emerged from within ROBUST and its evolving model of services as being at the heart of a wellbeing economy and being a critical pre-requisite for realising synergy potentials in the context of rural areas and their interactions with non-rural ones. In both instances”