



# CORDIS Results Pack on rural innovation

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

February 2021



## Developing real solutions for smart and resilient rural areas in Europe



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# Editorial

## Developing real solutions for smart and resilient rural areas in Europe

Almost one third of Europeans live in rural areas that make up over three quarters of the EU's total land area. These areas contribute an enormous amount to European societies and culture and are also a key arena in the fight against climate change and for better resources management. This CORDIS Results Pack features nine EU-funded projects that have been working hard to nurture rural innovation potential and positively contribute to the EU's long-term vision for rural areas.

Whilst all too often the cities and other urban areas are touted as the bastions of innovation with rural areas being consigned to the background, this is in fact far from the truth. Rural innovation potential is actually high and powered by a strong natural resource base and community spirit, a smart utilisation of tacit knowledge and the use of cooperation and social innovation to overcome barriers, such as weaker infrastructures and services. Rural areas have a crucial role to play in ensuring the stewardship of natural resources, as well as mitigating the effects of climate change, all ultimately enabling the transition to a truly green and sustainable Europe. For rural people to play their part, rural communities need to be smart, resilient and attractive places to live, work and visit.

### The challenges faced by rural areas

Rural areas in many European countries have experienced a population drain in recent decades as young people flock to the cities for education, employment and cultural opportunities. Consequently, for those who choose to remain in rural areas, they often have to deal with fewer economic opportunities, lower incomes, threadbare basic services and a digital gap that tends to increase inequalities.

COVID-19 has also shed new light on the vulnerabilities and interdependencies of both rural and urban communities, with many reports of city dwellers returning to rural regions with increased appreciation for more space and fresher environments. Meanwhile, rural communities have consistently helped throughout the crisis by maintaining a supply of essential goods and services, such as food and local recreational spaces, to all citizens. Rural areas have also faced major difficulties, including fewer possibilities for teleworking, poor online connections that hinder the homeschooling of children and even more pressure on their already stretched basic services, including healthcare provision. Whilst rural areas could indeed benefit from a counter-migration and more local food and tourism, whether this will be a sustained trend is hard to predict and in itself would not be enough to ensure rural areas achieve their true potential.

### An EU emphasis on rural innovation

This is where the European Commission's plan for the development of a long-term vision for rural areas (EU rural vision) comes into play, officially proposed in July 2019 (as part of the Commission's key upcoming priorities) with its consultation process launched in summer 2020. This aims to mobilise policymakers, rural actors and citizens more broadly to encourage their participation in a dialogue on the future of Europe's rural areas and the place they have in our society.

The end goal will be to provide a holistic vision up to 2040 that will allow for the development and implementation of innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions tailored to rural regions in light of the climate crisis, the ongoing digital transformation and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The important role of EU-funded research

Many EU-funded projects under the Horizon 2020 programme have already been applying their skills and expertise to address the issues faced by rural areas outlined above and enhance their potential to seize opportunities and contribute to Europe's future. It also goes without saying that more projects will follow in their footsteps due to the launch of the next EU research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe. Together, all of their results will contribute to fulfilling the ambitions to be laid out in the Commission's EU rural vision.

# Helping rural businesses square the circular economy

Rethinking their business model can be the key for companies in remote areas to seizing new opportunities. The LIVERUR project provides them with a practical toolbox for changing the way they (net)work, gearing their business towards the circular economy and improving quality of life in rural areas.

Rural entrepreneurs often face a double disconnect – from large markets, and also from other local actors. Closing these gaps can enable them to access new markets while giving a boost to the circular economy.

The EU-funded LIVERUR (Living Lab research concept in Rural Areas) project helps rural actors create the right connections by providing them with a range of concrete tools for making their business more sustainable.



These tools form part of the innovative Regional Circular Living Lab Business Model Concept (RAIN), which is currently being implemented in 13 pilot regions across Europe. The regions set up 'living labs', where users, including scientists and practitioners, connect in real-life settings to identify innovative solutions to challenges through co-creation.

## Diverse challenges

"LIVERUR involves regions facing diverse challenges, such as island and mountain communities, with activities ranging from agritourism and artisanal food production to traditional handicraft. They cover different languages, cultures and traditions, but all

share the same goal of protecting and improving their way of life in a rural environment," says Pablo Cano, director of the International Project Office of the Catholic University San Antonio of Murcia, and LIVERUR coordinator.

The RAIN concept helps them design sustainable and innovative business models adapted to their individual

challenges. "This has been of particular importance in the context of the pandemic, which has pushed rural entrepreneurs to look for innovative solutions," Cano notes.

The project has highlighted the importance of creating new connections: "Many actors within the LIVERUR pilot regions are physically close, but they are not collaborating outside of their traditional business activities or supplier networks," he explains. LIVERUR helps to close these gaps by involving local actors in the co-creation of solutions.

## A new organic dairy strategy

How does this work in practice? Take the example of Terceira Island in the Azores, Portugal, one of the pilot regions. Accounting for 30% of national milk production, dairy farming plays a key role in the Azores' local economy. At the same time, the region faces challenges including vulnerability to climate change and the low use of technology.

The pilot living lab, which involves a wide range of partners coordinated by the local TERINOV Science and Technology Park, aims to increase the quality and sustainability of the local milk supply chain. BioAzórica, an organic dairy cooperative and project partner, used the RAIN tools to map strengths and challenges and define activities addressing them. The partners are now working towards the launch of an organic dairy production pilot which will propose a new business model for organic dairy production and cover all technological aspects of the process, as part of a regional strategy to boost organic farming.

## An online community

To enable interested parties to join or create their own living labs, an online platform has been set up. The RAIN Platform will enable them to connect with each other, access the toolbox and receive support to develop solutions adapted to their specific needs. "We hope to establish a wider community of rural entrepreneurs and also to get them closer to the policymakers," Cano concludes.

The RAIN Platform will continue to be a truly valuable tool for rural entrepreneurs and companies after the LIVERUR project officially concludes in 2021.



*We hope to establish a wider community of rural entrepreneurs and also to get them closer to the policymakers.*

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### PROJECT

**LIVERUR – Living Lab research concept in Rural Areas**

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### COORDINATED BY

San Antonio Catholic University of Murcia in Spain

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### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773757](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773757)

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

[liverur.eu](https://liverur.eu)



# Thinking outside rural-urban boxes

Rural and urban spaces interact in complex ways. The ROBUST project explores how these linkages can be strengthened to maximise mutual benefits.

While working from home during the pandemic has made many consider a move to the countryside, it has also brought the digital divide into sharp focus: for many children in rural areas, remote learning has not been an option. COVID-19 has created new opportunities for combining the perks of urban and rural lifestyles while highlighting the urgent need to overcome the traditional division between urban and rural spaces.

There is huge potential for improving quality of life across rural communities, towns and cities and their peripheries by exploring

the multiple connections between them. The EU-funded ROBUST (Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies) project mapped out pathways towards this objective by identifying key areas in which these relationships can be given a boost.

“We advanced our understanding of the interactions between rural, peri-urban and urban areas and identified practices that foster mutually beneficial relations,” explains Han Wiskerke, professor and chair of Rural Sociology at Wageningen University and ROBUST project coordinator.



## Challenging assumptions

As a first step, the project team developed a framework for conceptualising these interactions. Challenging the assumption that rural and urban areas have inherent boundaries and characteristics, the document sets out three key concepts for thinking and working outside these boxes: new localities, meaning real areas in which people live, work and collaborate, which can span urban-rural territories; network governance, meaning joint decision-making by local actors at various scales and partnerships between sectors; and smart development, essentially focusing on what each area can do best.

The framework was then translated into a guide for practitioners, which provides advice on how to apply these concepts on the ground.

## Communities of practice

The project works with partners in regions across Europe where these linkages are studied in action. These ROBUST Living Labs, 11 in total and representing a range of rural-urban settings throughout Europe, develop and test new ways to solve problems in a specific geographic region.

Their findings are shared in so-called Communities of Practice which are organised around rural-urban key themes such as public infrastructure, sustainable food and cultural connections. "The project delivered a vast number of very practical examples, such as 20 types of rural-urban business models," says Wiskerke.

The project also compiled over 20 good practice examples of how public infrastructure and services can be delivered equitably

for both urban and rural citizens. These include for instance cooperative housing, smart ride sharing and local food hubs.

## A situation in flux

The impact of the pandemic has fed directly into the project's outcomes. "Whilst the project's schedule was heavily impacted by COVID-19, we quickly managed to study the effect of the pandemic on rural-urban relations," Wiskerke notes.

The project's study on multilocality in Finland is a case in point. Multilocality, which refers to people living temporarily in different places, is a common phenomenon in the country: an estimated 2.4 million Finns are seasonal rural residents. The pandemic has further driven this trend, shining a spotlight on the importance of adapting governance to these lifestyles, for instance by adjusting taxation.

To help turn the field studies and data collected into replicable use cases, the project team is now working on models of successful governance applicable in various local settings. "Many of the examples and lessons learnt could feed into the long-term vision for rural areas that is currently being developed. This means that ROBUST can positively contribute to EU policymaking," Wiskerke concludes.



*We advanced our understanding of the interactions between rural, peri-urban and urban areas and identified practices that foster mutually beneficial relations.*

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### PROJECT

**ROBUST – Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies**

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### COORDINATED BY

Wageningen University in the Netherlands

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### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/727988](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/727988)

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

[rural-urban.eu](https://rural-urban.eu)



# Leading by example: Boosting rural entrepreneurship in Europe

Most of us have a role model we look up to when we need to make important life or business-related decisions. So why should rural entrepreneurs be any different? By highlighting success stories and providing guidance, the RUBIZMO project hopes to revitalise Europe's rural regions.



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Rural entrepreneurs who believe in the bioeconomy need a helping hand. Access to funding, skilled employees and innovation support networks are just some of the challenges they face in a market dominated by large actors. They also live in regions at a turning point brought about by the likes of global competition, automation, changing markets, environmental challenges... and even COVID-19.

"Now is the time to rethink our approach to rural development and kick-start a new dynamism and perspective," says Justin Casimir, project leader at the Research Institutes of Sweden (RISE). Well aware of the current situation of Europe's rural regions, Casimir and his partners under the EU-funded RUBIZMO (Replicable business models for modern rural economies) project choose to see opportunity.

So how do you find light at the end of the tunnel? RUBIZMO's answer is simple: nurturing a few successful pioneers to lead the way by example. "Many citizens, from both urban and rural areas are thinking about starting their own business in rural areas. They want to get closer to nature and in line with their values. RUBIZMO helps them take this step with more information and confidence, thanks to the Virtual Library: a tool providing a snapshot of different types of successful businesses," explains Casimir.

value chains and provides guidance to develop existing networks and create new ones."


Perhaps one of RUBIZMO's main innovations lies in its fresh look at rural regions, not just focused on agriculture, but examining three interlinked sectors: food, bio-based value chains and ecosystem services.

## Tools for entrepreneurs and their supporters

Easily accessible by anyone with basic IT skills, the Virtual Library essentially provides inspiration. We could mention, for instance, Fiusis in Italy. In 2007, the company initiated the construction of a plant using local virgin wood pruning to create sustainable heat and electricity. In another sector, Blue Lobster inspires with a new digital marketplace enabling local fishermen to sell their fish directly to their customers. The 'Airbnb of the fishing industry', as Casimir likes to call it.

But the Virtual Library is not the only tool created by RUBIZMO. The team also devised a Transformation Support Tool, which guides entrepreneurs in shaping their own business model. The tool highlights the main hurdles to overcome and can be used directly by the entrepreneurs, although it's better to use it alongside support from a business advisor.

"We have two other tools for supportive bodies. The business environment guidelines will guide local, regional and national public agencies or policymakers on how to align their local business environment with the requirements of different types of business models. This tool is still under development and will be implemented in the form of participative workshops. For example, it will provide a guideline on how to increase the capacity to attract funds for innovative and emerging business models in rural areas," Casimir adds. But what about the final tool? "It's the Cooperation Toolkit. It offers a comprehensive mapping of existing networks in the food, bio-based and ecosystem services

  
*Now is the time to rethink our approach to rural development and kick-start a new dynamism and perspective.*

The RUBIZMO team is still hard at work to provide insights, free access to resources and training tools that will at least play a small part in the success of future rural entrepreneurs. In the long run, Casimir hopes that the project will inspire them through the Virtual Library examples while engaging business advisors, regions and other actors in supporting the development of innovative businesses in rural areas. Is this the beginning of a whole new kind of rural dynamism? Only time will tell.

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#### PROJECT

**RUBIZMO – Replicable business models for modern rural economies**

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#### COORDINATED BY

RISE in Sweden

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#### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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#### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773621](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773621)

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#### PROJECT WEBSITE

[rubizmo.eu](https://rubizmo.eu)



# How to help rural social innovation thrive

Rural regions are a fertile ground for social innovation. RURATION has investigated how social innovators in these regions operate, the impact they're having and what could be done to help them thrive.

The fresh air and quiet of Europe's rural areas increasingly come at a cost. With each year that passes, living conditions seem to deteriorate in the structurally weakest of these regions. Shops disappear, local bars can hardly maintain profitability, post offices close down, and job opportunities become scarce. But grassroots resistance is growing. It just needs a little help and guidance, which the project RURATION (Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action), undertaken with the support of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions programme, aimed to facilitate.

"Europe sees an abundance of innovative initiatives by people we have come to call 'social entrepreneurs'. These are actors who, with support from fellow campaigners, have set for themselves the goal of promoting innovative problem-solving approaches for common problems in their region. But it has come to our attention that many such initiatives fail in the face of unforeseen hurdles, even though they were promising," explains Gabriela B. Christmann, professor and head of department at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space.



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With RURATION, Christmann, 10 early-stage researchers as well as other academic members of the consortium, wanted to investigate under which conditions social innovators operate, how they organise solutions, how they network and empower residents,



*Our policy recommendations address not only one, but four policy levels: the municipal/regional level, the state level (for federal systems), the national level, and the EU level.*

and what impacts they have on rural development. But most importantly, they wanted to find out how these innovators can be supported in their problem-solving activities – which is also one of the key targets of the European Commission.

The project specifically focused on seven European regions: Phthiotis in Greece, Baixo Alentejo in Portugal, Mühlviertel in Austria, Uckermark in Germany, Pilski in Poland, Sjælland in Denmark and the Mid-West of Ireland. Each case brought up different stories of social innovators, such as

CareBright in Ireland – a social enterprise which cares for people with dementia – and ADC Moura in Portugal which creates new forms of social activities for the inhabitants of the small village of Moura.

The message for policymakers is clear. Informed support programmes and strategies are helpful as long as they are tailored to the respective phases of the innovation process. The project also recommends capitalising more on creative development instigated by local residents, to better understand mechanisms of social innovation, to set lower thresholds for funding amounts, and to promote the de-bureaucratisation of EU support. Following these steps could lead to a great leap forward in a field where very little research is available. But that's not all there is to RURATION, as Christmann points out.

“Another innovative aspect is that our policy recommendations address not only one, but four policy levels: the municipal/regional level, the state level (for federal systems), the national level, and the EU level. RURATION can thus contribute to policies of integrated territorial development,” she says.

There are some lessons to be learnt by social enterprises, too. The key one being that communication and networking are key to successful social innovation processes, and so is the need for adequate resources. As Christmann concludes: “Innovation occurs in exchange, in co-creation, in co-working, in intensive networking, and in governance processes.”

## The right nudge

In its 4 years of research, the project team analysed social innovation actions in these regions and used what they learned to provide recommendations for action. The RURATION policy paper entitled ‘How Social Innovation can be Supported in Structurally Weak Rural Regions’ shows very concretely what support and financing strategies can be used to promote socially innovative solutions and create more favourable regional development in structurally weak rural areas.

“The most important insight from our research is that social innovations in rural areas take place in processes typical of the rural context,” Christmann adds. “They can be described in four specific phases: a latency and problematisation phase; an emergence phase involving the planning and realisation of a novel practice; an adjustment phase; and a stabilisation and dissemination phase. There are specific critical junctures in each phase that could lead to stagnation or, indeed, a rupture in the process.”

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### PROJECT

**RURATION – Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action**

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### COORDINATED BY

Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space in Germany

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### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-MSCA-ITN

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### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/721999](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/721999)

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

[ruration.eu](https://ruration.eu)



# Placing small farms under the microscope

The SALSA project has closed a long-standing gap in research by looking into the status of small farms in different regions of both Europe and Africa. Its findings should help these farms live up to their true potential.



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Thirty reference regions, 25 of them in Europe and five in Africa. That's how thorough the SALSA (Small farms, small food businesses and sustainable food security) project's 4-year investigation of small farms has been. Since 2016, the project consortium has been interviewing small farm owners, mapping entire areas and identifying the characteristics of food systems with a focus on specific products. All this with one question in mind: What is the contribution of small farms to sustainable food and nutrition security across a wide range of food systems?

This question had been pending for a long time, as assumptions used to prevail over actual data. "The knowledge gap before SALSA was enormous. We didn't know how many small farms there were, what and how much they produced, where the produce went, who benefited, or even which small farms needed to keep existing," says Teresa Pinto Correia, SALSA coordinator and professor at the Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development (MED), University of Évora in Portugal.

To fill these knowledge gaps, the project team tested three hypotheses: the first, whether small farms are a relevant source of sustainable food production; second, whether small farms are providing food and income for themselves and not solely for commercial purposes; and finally, whether small farms are increasing the overall food system's diversity and thereby contributing to the latter's resilience.

they do, as Pinto Correia points out. "We estimate that small farms could potentially cover 100% of the regional demand and generate surplus in 44% of the 109 regional product food systems analysed, especially in Africa (71%), southern Europe (46%) and eastern Europe (36%). In northern Europe, small farms could cover up to 20% of the regional demand in 80% of the food systems analysed. This lower figure could be explained by the lower number of small farms studied in such regions."


## A mapping of small farms

"We proceeded with our investigation by focusing on the regional level where many different types of farms coexist," Pinto Correia explains. "We asked ourselves what was going on in this or that territory and combined social and hard science approaches to come up with precise estimations of the distribution and production of small farms. We also brought a detailed understanding of the food system as well as the role and conditions of small farms."

SALSA categorises small farms in five subtypes: 'part-time provisioners' which produce more for self-provisioning than for the market (11% of the sample); 'conventional strugglers' which inherited farms, have low income and depend largely on the farm for household food consumption (32% of the sample); 'conventional entrepreneurs' which organise themselves into mainstream cooperatives for market integration (26% of the sample); 'business specialised' which have the highest income through specialised production with high added value (23% of the sample); and 'business diversified' which are wealthy, new to farming, strongly entrepreneurial and have a diversified production and portfolio of buyers.

The contribution of small farms to the food system was also investigated. "We analysed 109 regional food systems for single key products and found that small farms contribute to the regional food system partially with food that never reaches the formal market. Then, from the food market perspective, small farms contribute to the availability of food in each region in two ways: a contribution to regional availability – namely, for households and communities – and increased diversity of food types and sources resulting in higher resilience," notes Pinto Correia.

One doubt the project clears up relates to whether or not small farms really matter in the grander scheme of agriculture. And



*Small farms contribute to the availability of food in each region in two ways: a contribution to regional availability – namely, for households and communities – and increased diversity of food types and sources, resulting in higher resilience.*

Building on their findings, the project team has provided a set of policy recommendations whose dissemination will continue over the next few months. They identified relevant governance arrangements to get there, as well as future pathways for stakeholders. These should help small farms thrive, evolve and eventually live up to their enormous potential.

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### PROJECT

**SALSA – Small farms, small food businesses and sustainable food security**

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### COORDINATED BY

University of Évora in Portugal

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### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/677363](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/677363)

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

[salsa.uevora.pt](https://salsa.uevora.pt)



# Social innovation for stronger rural regions in Europe

Social innovation in marginalised rural areas takes on a new dimension thanks to efforts under the SIMRA project, which has been the first big project to closely study social innovation in rural areas. The project's theoretical framework, databases, solutions and recommendations could prove life-saving in regions heavily impacted by climate change and limited economic opportunities.

Marginalised rural areas across Europe commonly suffer from weak regional economies, transport, infrastructure and housing, as well as ageing populations – all this in the already challenging context of climate and demographic change. The Mediterranean region is particularly exposed, with additional pressures from overseas migration to urban areas. Local populations are increasingly abandoning some areas.

Reverting this worrying trend was the key objective of the EU-funded SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) project. Since 2016, the 26-strong project consortium has been thinking outside the box. They've been in search of social innovation ideas that would revitalise rural regions in general and Mediterranean ones in particular.

"The situation in some rural areas of the Mediterranean region is deeply concerning," says Maria Nijnik from the James Hutton Institute and SIMRA scientific coordinator. "In places we see failures of markets and the state. This has left civil society with no other choice than taking the lead in providing services such as child and healthcare, education and training, and volunteer firefighting. However, strong systems and different forms of 'informal solidarity' keep slowing down the promotion of innovative social practices."

Social innovation is, by definition, a response to societal challenges that are traditionally not well addressed by markets or existing public institutions. But how does it currently contribute to addressing the challenges facing marginalised rural areas? Before SIMRA, we just weren't sure whether or not social innovation in these areas had the desired outcomes and impacts.

## An opportunity to go by the (new) book

"SIMRA has advanced the understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development. We found out how to boost these sectors to enhance societal well-being. All in all, we have created new theoretical and context-specific knowledge, provided a proper definition of social innovation, and used these to evaluate actions on the ground," adds David Miller from the James Hutton Institute and head of SIMRA management and administration.

SIMRA's whole approach is based on case studies. Project partners investigated 24 regions and seven innovation actions



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so as to provide actual solutions addressing challenges faced in marginalised rural areas. Topics include the likes of forest management, social farming, local development, energy, child and healthcare, and social networking. Project partners effectively built a systematic collection of empirical evidence of the driving factors, processes, outcomes and impacts of social innovations across Europe, North Africa and the French Caribbean.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. "We built the first spatial database characterising marginalised rural areas. This goes

along with a unique database of over 400 examples of social innovation in rural areas – 243 of which have been fully validated with stakeholders using the SIMRA definition and criteria of social innovation," Miller explains.



*SIMRA has advanced the understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development.*

Taken together, all the knowledge gathered by SIMRA partners is set to serve as a basis for policy and best practices over the coming years. It's an unarguable demonstration that strong social capital can actually contribute positively to development, whereas weak social capital undermines civic engagement and good governance. Transformative social innovation is not an option – it's a must.

Policymakers and practitioners looking to put social innovation at the heart of rural areas will find help in the project's sets of recommendations, evaluation manual and master course. Meanwhile, the SIMRA team will continue to engage with social innovators and their initiatives and hope to contribute to the development of communities of practice in social innovation.

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**PROJECT**

**SIMRA – Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas**

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**COORDINATED BY**

James Hutton Institute in the United Kingdom

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**FUNDED UNDER**

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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**CORDIS FACTSHEET**

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/677622](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/677622)

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**PROJECT WEBSITE**

[simra-h2020.eu](https://simra-h2020.eu)



# Introducing agricultural models 2.0

The agricultural models that have shaped the EU's Common Agricultural Policy over the past few decades are slowly becoming less than ideal for current circumstances. The SUPREMA project successfully investigated their weaknesses while providing a roadmap to make them better suited for the challenges ahead.



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Citizens want healthy diets and food at a reasonable price tag, while farmers rightfully demand a fair standard of living. So far, the EU has got along just fine in this delicate balancing act, and that's in part thanks to agricultural projection models. But our climate is changing. We're just not so sure what we'll be able to produce in a few decades, how and at what cost and this is a pressing concern for the future of rural areas.

As Floor Brouwer, research scholar at Wageningen Economic Research and executive coordinator of the EU-funded SUPREMA (SUpport for Policy RElevant Modelling of Agriculture) project, puts it: "Current models are unable to deal with the increasingly complex environment and the broadening of the required scope of analysis." In other words, there is a growing gap between what policymakers need to maintain a viable agricultural sector and the capacity of the models they've been using so far.

So, what can we do to close this gap? “We wanted to create new linkages between existing models – be it land use, food supply chain, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) greening or climate mitigation – as well as to strengthen existing ones,” Brouwer says. “Once this was done, we improved the performance and capacity of these models, both individually and as a linked system, to integrate new policy challenges.”

## On track to 2050

Essentially, the project explored possible future directions for agricultural modelling by means of scenario applications. They conducted a medium-term assessment of European agricultural policy pathways until 2030, as well as a long-term assessment of climate change goals until 2050. “The 2030 assessment focuses on the likes of greening the CAP and healthy diets, while the one for 2050 investigates issues such as the climate mitigation challenge, land use-related greenhouse gas emissions, and the mitigation potential of European agriculture,” Brouwer explains.

Based on these assessments, the team could develop a roadmap pointing at future viable directions for agricultural modelling within the EU. The latter draws inspiration from the feedback of policy experts, value chain experts and the scientific community, and covers an extensive range of issues. These include recommendations to meet future global food demand, face

environmental constraints such as water and land availability, as well as strategies to create a bio-based economy, all issues that matter for rural development more broadly.

With all this work now completed, consortium partners have been focusing on training sessions over the past few months and will continue to do so at least until early 2021. As Brouwer points out: “We want researchers to be able to use our economic models, but we also intend to spread the word about new developments and enable all stakeholders to better understand model outputs.”

All in all, SUPREMA's improved implementation of agricultural models showcases the potential and limitations of agricultural models to answer present policy needs and requirements related to future EU agriculture. Meanwhile, the project's roadmap – an updated version of which will soon be presented to the European Commission – will provide a range of valuable options to make existing models future-proof.



*We wanted to create new linkages between existing models – be it land use, food supply chain, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) greening or climate mitigation – as well as to strengthen existing ones.*

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#### PROJECT

**SUPREMA – Support for Policy RElevant Modelling of Agriculture**

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#### COORDINATED BY

Wageningen Research in the Netherlands

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#### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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#### CORDIS FACTSHEET

[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773499](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773499)

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#### PROJECT WEBSITE

[suprema-project.eu](https://suprema-project.eu)



# Introducing IMAJINE, an ambitious project that aims to address territorial inequalities in Europe

A significant body of evidence has highlighted that inequalities between European regions are growing rather than converging and this has increased since the end of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. The EU-funded IMAJINE project has set out to address these challenges through an interdisciplinary approach integrating numerous perspectives, from economics to human geography, political science and sociology.

Begun in January 2018 and due to end in December 2021, comprising 16 participants from 13 countries and coordinated by the United Kingdom's University of Aberystwyth, IMAJINE (Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe) has been working hard to

develop integrative policy mechanisms for tackling territorial inequalities in Europe.

Now entering its final year, the project has already notched up some important findings with regards to rural areas.



Specifically, they've found that rural-urban income inequality overall has decreased across Europe but less so for the poorest rural households and that there are many rural-urban disparities within regions that are often disguised by official statistical methods.

## The importance of migration in territorial inequalities

On top of these insights, they've discovered that migration functions as an informal mechanism by which individuals negotiate and alleviate rural-urban inequalities, including through exploiting differential property costs for social mobility, remittance and expertise flows and finally, 'crisis counterurbanisation', where during times of hardship, urban dwellers return to their roots (or move for the first time) in rural areas. These findings are the result of detailed studies on the relationship between migration and inequality, featuring residents and immigrants based in Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Wales.

The IMAJINE team also pointed out that tensions among rural communities can emerge due to in-migration flows from urban areas, a phenomenon anecdotally reported many times throughout the pandemic as rural inhabitants worry about infections rising in their region due to an influx of urban dwellers hoping to improve their lockdown experiences.

## A new focus on COVID-19

With regards to the pandemic, IMAJINE shifted its focus to better understand how COVID-19 would impact territorial inequalities within Europe. The team found that the economic and social effects of the pandemic have hit the poorest people and most economically deprived regions the hardest in the countries that have had the highest incidences of cases. They found that in

countries with relatively low incidences of COVID-19 overall, cases tend to be concentrated in one or two cities or regions, such as in Finland where the majority of cases have been confined to the Helsinki region.

But the results of IMAJINE's research show that even though clusters tend to begin and grow in wealthy urban regions, when the virus does reach less affluent (and often rural) regions, they are more severely hit, indicating that early action to contain COVID-19 geographically is important in limiting the severity of an outbreak.

Alongside the consolidation of all of their other results, the IMAJINE team has continued throughout 2020 to further analyse the geographical spread of the coronavirus, looking specifically at the impact of prosperity and rurality on the severity of the outbreak.

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### PROJECT

**IMAJINE – Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe**

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### COORDINATED BY

Aberystwyth University in the United Kingdom

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### FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

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### PROJECT WEBSITE

[imajine-project.eu](https://imajine-project.eu)



# Introducing NEWBIE, a project that is injecting innovative new business models and entrepreneurship into European agriculture

To grow and prosper, European agriculture requires a steady flow of new entrants into the sector. However, new entrants often face a significant number of hurdles to overcome in order to develop sustainable farming businesses. The NEWBIE project has come forward with a dedicated toolkit to help them, as well as the development of dedicated support networks to promote innovative business and entry models to get them off to a flying start.

For an industry or economic sector to survive and thrive, new blood is required to inject fresh ideas into the mix, which then of course stimulates and powers innovation. Agriculture is no different, but for those who are keen to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into farming, as either a first-timer or inheritor, a full-time career or even a part-time vocation alongside other activities, there are some pretty big barriers to overcome first.

## First the challenges, then the NEWBIE solutions

Securing access to land is difficult due to rising land prices and leasing rates, especially in regions where new entrants will compete with established farmers. In a chicken-and-egg paradox,

access to capital to launch a new venture is often hindered by the need to acquire land first. Newcomers could also experience difficulty in accessing crucial information needed to launch their business and may also be unaware of or struggle to enter established markets and integrate into existing supply chains.

This is where NEWBIE (New Entrant netWork: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture) comes to the forefront. The 4-year EU-funded project set itself the task of helping new entrants to agriculture overcome these hurdles and establish their sustainable farming enterprises. The project team have done this by fully assessing the barriers to entry in nine European countries and one of their big findings was a need for modern, up-to-date and practice-oriented agricultural education that is regularly adapted when necessary.

NEWBIE has also worked on a set of 'practice descriptions' to facilitate new entrants into agriculture, all of which have been written to be easily accessible, and a multilingual umbrella toolkit, one for each participating NEWBIE country, that provides a collective online space where useful information for new entrants is collated and then subdivided into user-friendly sections to assist them with their ideas and business development.

## Celebrating NEWBIE successes

The project can count many successful cases of new entrants benefiting from the support provided to them. One example is the 'Snowdonia Shepherdess', whose entry into farming was supported by a unique fellowship scheme that granted access to a landmark trust tenancy in the Welsh uplands.



Another great case study is that of a 22-year-old Bulgarian farmer who was highlighted by NEWBIE due to his successful business model focused on brand amplification and an online store that gives him better access to the EU's vast market. Finally, two successful Irish NEWBIE farmers also recently won distinguished awards as part of the 'Irish Country Living, Women in Agriculture Awards 2020'.

NEWBIE has also worked to spur their charges forward by organising and hosting their own awards, one for each participating country.

With the project due to end in December 2021, the team have now entered their last year and will work to consolidate their final results. Moreover, NEWBIE will leave behind a strong legacy and its tools and materials will no doubt help many more new entrants into the world of agriculture to fulfil their ambitions.

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**PROJECT**

**NEWBIE – New Entrant netWork: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture**

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**COORDINATED BY**

Wageningen Research in the Netherlands

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**FUNDED UNDER**

Horizon 2020-FOOD

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With the European Green Deal, the European Commission aims for the EU to be completely carbon-neutral by 2050. This is an enormous ambition, and innovative EU-funded frontier research, as showcased in this Results Pack, will play a vital role in the development of the cutting-edge research and technology needed to achieve it.



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