



Background paper for the ERP Manifesto and policy suggestions December 2019

This background paper describes the methodology and process that led to the Manifesto update and gives additional information on some manifesto points. The draft Manifesto November 2019 was produced from materials collected in 10 national Rural Parliaments, other event reports coming from European Rural Parliament (ERP) partners, and surveys/social media campaigns organised by the Europe for Citizens financed ROAD-project over the last two years. The draft was discussed in 3 webinars, reformulated and language checked. The final version from January 2020 takes also into account messages from 22 workshops and six field visits undertaken at the 4th ERP in Candás, Asturias, Spain 6-9 November 2019.

The following changes have been made to the Venhorst Manifesto from 2017:

- A Preamble including the core message, the vision and the commitment is added.
- Specific references to geographical, ethnical or specific rural categories have been removed and dealt with in this background paper and the Manifesto has been restructured.
- Recent developments in rural policies have been taken into account.

Rural areas are of crucial importance to Europe. They cover 80 % of EU territory, are home to about 57% of its population and produce over 46 % of GVA (European Parliament Resolution of 3 October 2018 on addressing the specific needs of rural, mountainous and remote areas (2018/2720(RSP)).

The voice of rural people, villages, communities and small entrepreneurs has been and is weak in rural development, programmes and policies. Villages have taken action themselves through diverse activities, networking, projects and partnerships. Villages have organised themselves as NGOs, whether they are local, regional, national or European to cooperate and have a voice. At national level, national rural parliaments have taken the role to connect governments and villages. It has proven to be an excellent tool for increased cooperation, action and participative democracy. The first national rural parliament was held in Sweden in 1989 and the family is growing. At European level pan-European village organisations and the informal European Rural Parliament network (2013) connects to EU-institutions. The message has been the same from the very beginning – integrated cross-sectoral development together with all actors, meaning rural policy or Rural Agenda. LEADER-CLLD is proven to be the best tool for implementing integrated activities based on territorial strategies. Villages and communities should be part of these strategies.

Rural people welcome recent developments related to smart villages and efforts to involve citizens. From politics to action is still a big step to take. Also, the cuts suggested to the CAP and the power given to member states in the implementation of the rural development programmes may lead to unwanted results in the eyes of rural people, villages and communities.

Find below comments and additional suggestions from the 4th ERP, events and webinars related to the different Manifesto points.

Nature and content of the Manifesto

There has been comments on the nature of the Manifesto. There is a general agreement that the Manifesto should be updated every second year including recent developments. It should not contain references to geographical, ethnical or specific rural areas eg. islands or mountains. A division can though be made between remote rural areas and rural areas close to cities. Villages and small towns have also their own Manifesto points. Some wanted the Manifesto to be more positive and more concentrated on solutions.



Change and risk management

Europe will have to face changes now and in the future. New technologies – including artificial intelligence and digitisation can bring opportunities and possibilities for rural areas. The challenge is to what degree new technologies and highspeed internet are made available for all of rural Europe. The extensive use of chemicals, some pesticides and antibiotics is a health risk in general. Plastics and microplastics pollution are a severe threat for sustainable development and information is not sufficient. Climate change will be affecting food production and bring food security risks. Immigration due to warming, drying and water supply problems will increase and needs to be tackled.

Research

Research is not explicitly mentioned in the manifesto; yet, it is implicit in much of the Manifestos content. Many of the principles and best practices in respect of participatory and action research chime with the Manifestos content, particularly in respect of partnership (statement 9), civil society networks (14) and education (27).

Research, particularly participatory and action research, has an important role to play in rural development. It is important that researchers engage with communities / stakeholders – allow scope for research ‘subjects’ to be research ‘participants’. The co-creation of knowledge, via participatory research, requires that researchers have the appropriate skills to engage with people

Reversing the spiral of decline Manifesto point 6

“Where possible, also attract or make easier for families and young retired to move in. They can play a very important role in the life of villages”.

Policy framework and supportive context Manifesto points 10, 11

According to Article 174 of the TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) the EU has an obligation to develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion, and to pay particular attention to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. The “Rural Agenda” in partnership and cooperation is what villages and communities have been promoting for a long time. National village organisations followed by national rural parliaments (the first in Sweden 1989) and the European Rural parliament since 2013 have promoted integrated rural development - reflecting well the actual discussions and policy developments towards a Rural Agenda. The Rural agenda or a “Pact for villages” like the Amsterdam Pact for Smart cities was initiated by MEPs Lambert van Nistelrooy and Frank Bogovic and presented at the 3rd ERP in Venhorst November 2017. The Agenda was developed in the RUMRA Intergroup and led to the European Parliament resolution of October 2018. As announced at the 4th ERP the development of the Smart Village program is in progress. A new European Parliament (EP) Intergroup on Smart Villages for Rural Communities was launched in July 2019, at the initiative of MEPs Franc Bogovic and Engin Eroglu. We ask for an inclusive partnership approach to fulfil the TFEU article 174 obligations.



https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/smart-villages_en

Very remote areas, islands and mountainous areas have not been specified in the Manifesto recognising though that issues of mobility, services and employment are more pronounced. Citizen engagement often crystallises in third sector engagement providing services to the ‘hard to reach’, therefore we need support for social innovation and empowerment of these organisations (see SIMRA database to access the project’s selection of best social innovation practices: www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/simradatabase/).

In her political guidelines for the new Commission, President Ursula von der Leyen expressed her will for European citizens to play a leading and active part in building the future of our Union.

The Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira said at her confirmation hearing that “all citizens, wherever they are, can feel that they are part of this project and ...to let communities know they are not left behind.”

A big part of the decisions related to rural areas and their development come from EU and affect as such rural citizens. More power is now intended to be given to the member states in the CAP implementation and that will necessarily affect rural people and villages – in good or bad. The 28% suggested cut in pillar II, and the sectoral thinking supported by lobbies does not give the right sign for rural people and villages.

EU and research agree that good governance include citizen’s engagement. Many studies suggest that some activities are best dealt with by locals who know best their area, in cooperation with relevant authorities (Eg. care of elderly). Villages and communities are active in social activities, but also in environmental or economical activities. To support this a supportive context must be provided (**Manifesto point 10**). The ownership and commitment increase and bring added value.

There is a need of a clear, simple fact-based communication from EU to the grassroots level about EU, the Commission initiatives and results of its rural policy actions. The grassroots is not necessarily reached by dialogue groups mostly composed by professionals. The best placed intermediaries could be LEADER groups or Community/Village organisations, municipalities close to the rural citizen. Ministries, Regions, RD networks are sometimes too far from rural realities.

Nothing will change unless there is a paradigm change towards an integrated cross-sectoral partnership thinking. Therefore, we welcome the EU efforts to be more participative and inclusive, hoping that member states follow the example. There is still a long way from words to action.

Poverty and exclusion Manifesto point 12

People, communities and CSO’s are already playing an extensive role in fighting poverty and exclusion. This role should be recognised and supported. Citizen engagement often crystallises in third sector engagement providing services to the ‘hard to reach’, therefore we need support for social innovation and empowerment of these organisations. We acknowledge the needs of Roma communities in many European countries, who are among the poorest and most excluded of all Europe’s rural people. No ethnic group should be object of any discrimination.



Climate change Manifesto points 13, 14

Green Deal: The EC President Ursula von der Leyen expressed on the 11th of November 2019 the EU commitment to fight climate change. This would mean including "green" measures in all EU-policies. We look forward to seeing what actions and activities will be included in the RDP's and how rural people, villages, communities and NGO's can contribute.

"Community Led Approaches to climate action and rural regeneration should be included in the Manifesto. Business as usual is not an option. The challenge of transitioning to a Low Carbon Climate Resilient Society requires not just action at national and international levels but, most importantly, it requires ongoing, long-term, deep engagement at local community level. Community led initiatives across Europe and elsewhere are actively envisioning creating and living within alternatives that are rooted within sustainability equality and social justice. These initiatives must be supported and become the basis of a new normal if Europe is to achieve its ambitious targets on climate action and sustainability."

Natural resources Manifesto point 13 (25)

Management and benefits - "Local natural resources are more and more managed by outside interests and benefits are not directed to local people, communities or the local economy. These outside interests are not always concerned about local sustainable and environmental values. Local values are not worth much, when big scale interests come in play. There is need for more influence over the exploitation of natural resources and the distribution of benefits"

Citizen energy communities: The rural areas of Europe must lead the energy model and the energy transition. Democratization and energy sovereignty is possible with (renewable) energy or citizen energy communities. The decarbonization of the European economy must have rural areas, facilitating not only economic resources, but also more favourable legislation by member states.

The legislative framework for "energy communities" has been introduced into European legislation by the Clean Energy Package (known also as "the Winter Energy Package").
In this regard the term: "an energy community" is used in the context of:
- "citizen energy community" (CEC) in the Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on common rules for the internal market in electricity (recast) and
- "renewable energy community" (REC) in the Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast), known as "the RED II".
'Citizen energy community' - a legal entity: which is based on voluntary and open participation, effectively controlled by shareholders or members who are natural persons, local authorities, including municipalities, or small enterprises and microenterprises. The primary purpose of a citizens' energy community is to provide environmental, economic or social community benefits for its members or the local areas where it operates rather than financial profits. A citizens' energy community can be engaged in electricity generation, distribution and supply, consumption, aggregation, storage or energy efficiency services, generation of renewable electricity, charging services for electric vehicles or provide other energy services to its shareholders or members.

See more: www.europeanruralparliament.com



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Youth Manifesto point 15

Young rural developers held their 2nd European Rural Youth Parliament (ERYP) in Candás 4-6 November 2019. The ERYP is a network by rural Youth for rural youth under the ERP umbrella. Youth prepared their own Declaration with 10 action points.

<https://www.europeanruralparliament.com/index.php/youth>

“Agriculture and rural tourism are no longer enough to sustain the rural economy. Research and Development, as well as the diversification of the rural economy, have become more urgent”.

“The current food system is increasingly putting pressure on the environment, worker rights and the viability of small farmers. The lack of generational renewal is hindering the modernisation and adaptation of the agricultural sector in order to address economic, climate, and social challenges”.

“Many young people struggle to see the potential in rural areas and rural youth activism is weak. There is a lack of confidence in the ability to make changes and to be heard by local, regional and national authorities. Youth engagement is focused on recreational and sport activities instead of civic or political activities. Activism with the lack of support and information about civic engagement and political awareness raising activities lead to short term and non-sustainable impact”

“We demand transparent decision-making processes at all levels, especially on urgent policies, including climate change actions, international relations and solidarity, which are directly affecting the young generations”

Elderly Manifesto point 17

Look at an UN-report on elderly in rural areas, supporting common action by villages, communities and local authorities in partnership.

<https://www.europeanruralparliament.com/index.php/archive/european-rural-parliament-2018-19/road-documents>

Small and family farms Manifesto point 19

“The production and consumption of local/regional food should be increased in general and practiced through canteens, hospitals, schools and other institutions because they are a way to build accessible, local/regional food chains. We valorise local/ regional varieties, culinary traditions and knowledge-holders. Food quality criteria, transparency of the chain and traceability of the products should benefit local producers and consumers. Support should be given for regenerative local/regional food systems including Community Supported Agriculture and other community-supported initiatives which preserve (agro)biodiversity, combat climate breakdown and promote a just transition.”

“We want to emphasise...the need to bolster the proliferation and expansion of small family farms across Europe & detail their contribution to local economy and employment. We need attention not just on artificial intelligence but rather to collective intelligence. The more people we have actively engaged in rural areas, the greater the collective capacity to keep them lively and fruitful. We want to move from a narrative and philosophy of competition to one of cooperation. Similarly, innovation needs to refer not just to technological innovation but also social innovation”



The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas on 17 December 2018. It aims to protect the rights of all rural populations including peasants, agricultural and rural workers and indigenous peoples, while also recognizing their contribution to sustainable development and biodiversity and the challenges they face.

Read also FAO's position. "FAO welcomes the adoption of the declaration. Rural people have been consistently left behind - they make up the vast majority of the world's poor, generally have lower wages and less access to water, energy, social protection and other services that are essential for their sustainable development. This is an opportunity to change this reality," said Carla Mucavi, Director of the FAO Liaison Office to the United Nations in New York..." <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1175208/icode/>

Villages and small towns Manifesto points 20, 21 (24)

Digital and technological development brings new opportunities and solutions to rural areas, benefiting hopefully all rural areas of Europe. A good internet connection is a prerequisite to many of the suggested solutions to keep rural areas alive. It is needed for business, for teleworking or -studying and for on-line services. Closing village schools has been a trend all over Europe, quite often decided on political basis and not on economic basis. Schools, kindergartens and existing social services are necessary to have thriving villages. Active villages have registered themselves as NGO's to enable fundraising, provided services with contractual or partnership arrangement, or even created village companies to save the schools and services.

Smart Village concept can help refresh political and public attitudes to rural areas. It does not need totally new funding and programming structure. But the concept of Smart Villages can be used to fill gaps and promote exchange. LEADER is a good method and the existing structure can be strengthened to benefit villages and small towns. Smart villages activities should be included in local development strategies.

Gaps will remain if territories are not covered by LAGs, LAGs do not have village strategies or national rural development programmes are not including village/community development.

Rural-Urban connections Manifesto point 22

Whereas in policy and discourse rural is less present, we see urban areas as an economic space with benefits for both in terms of mobility, communications, food, housing and energy with a lot of potential to generate commercial and social synergies.

Local and subregional economies Manifesto points 23 (13...)

Local economic activity is crucial to keep villages and communities alive. Many of the manifesto points deal with this issue. It is about entrepreneurship in different forms, partnerships, contractual solutions, cooperation and giving a supportive political and regulatory context. It is also about having the right physical, digital and technological infrastructure. Mobility, energy solutions, high-speed broadband, are all contributing to local economies. Community planning and local economy plans are good tools for integrated local economy development.

Simple start-up funds should be available for new rural entrepreneurs. Specialised rural innovation centres could support the creation and development of smaller rural enterprises. Europe has many post-industrial



areas that need to re-orientate their businesses and activities, could networking be increased between these areas?

LEADER-CLLD Manifesto point 24 (28)

LEADER-CLLD should be mainstreamed. Real integrated development should be accompanied by good governance and clear coordination of different ESI funds. LEADER-CLLD and (smart) villages should be better connected and additional funds allocated.

“We should insist about the necessity to reinvent the functions of animation, dynamization, and technical assistance to promoters and collective projects; LEADER is a good laboratory for innovations and transitions.”

Services and infrastructure Manifesto point 25

“Mobility is a major cross-cutting issue. When it is lacking, it has substantial negative impacts on individuals, households, communities and rural development. It should be recognised as a right for every person to have affordable, accessible transport across rural areas. Such mobility should be eco-friendly and have shared connection and integration with other services. Rural mobility should be mandatory in all national rural development policies, indicating the minimum level of service for all types of areas and defining responsibilities for their provision. The targets and obligations in national policies should be migrated downwards to local development plans and programs, again with defined responsibilities for delivery. These policies should recognise the strong linkages between better rural mobility and climate change, as rural mobility will remain heavily dependent on travel by car until suitable alternatives and connectors are universally provided. A mix of stakeholders must be involved nationally and locally, with (i) the public service responsible for investing and infrastructure; and (ii) rural communities supported and given the space, empowerment and respect to develop and implement initiatives with competence and sustainability. Rural mobility schemes tend to be small in nature with substantial community and volunteer input. Procurement processes need to be simplified, appropriate and proportionate, and should not override or frustrate what the community is seeking to achieve”

Communication and digitisation Manifesto point 26

Digital technologies are key enablers for the evolution of rural transformation. Technology is a tool to achieve the desired objectives of the Manifesto, especially in terms of communication, job opportunities and diversity of culture. It may help bridge the gap between urban-rural. Digital technologies should be mentioned as an enabler to transform the rural economy and rural society. There are some ERP 2019 Manifesto articles where digital technologies have direct application: 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 19, 20, 25, 26, and 29.

EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies Manifesto point 28

“Rural development is all about people! Collaboration and learning from each other out of borders and regional consideration. Cooperation initiatives should be part of the CAP and LEADER approach and its values should be mainstreamed out of the EU borders, especially to the neighbourhood countries”.



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“There is a need for joint declaration for Western Balkans to support and accelerate the processes with starting LEADER approach implementation in these countries; In Turkey there is a need for stronger support from EU to the NGO, civil sector development”.

“The rural networks of the Western Balkans as representatives of CSOs supports that European integration processes need to be further strengthened both nationally and, in the region, in particular through a more integrated institutional approach of the BRDN. Bilateral supporters and donors should be encouraged to support this process much more than ever before”.

“European values and successful approaches in Black Sea Region is a milestone for ensuring EU integration. LEADER is an instrument for collaboration and learning from each other out of borders and regional consideration”.