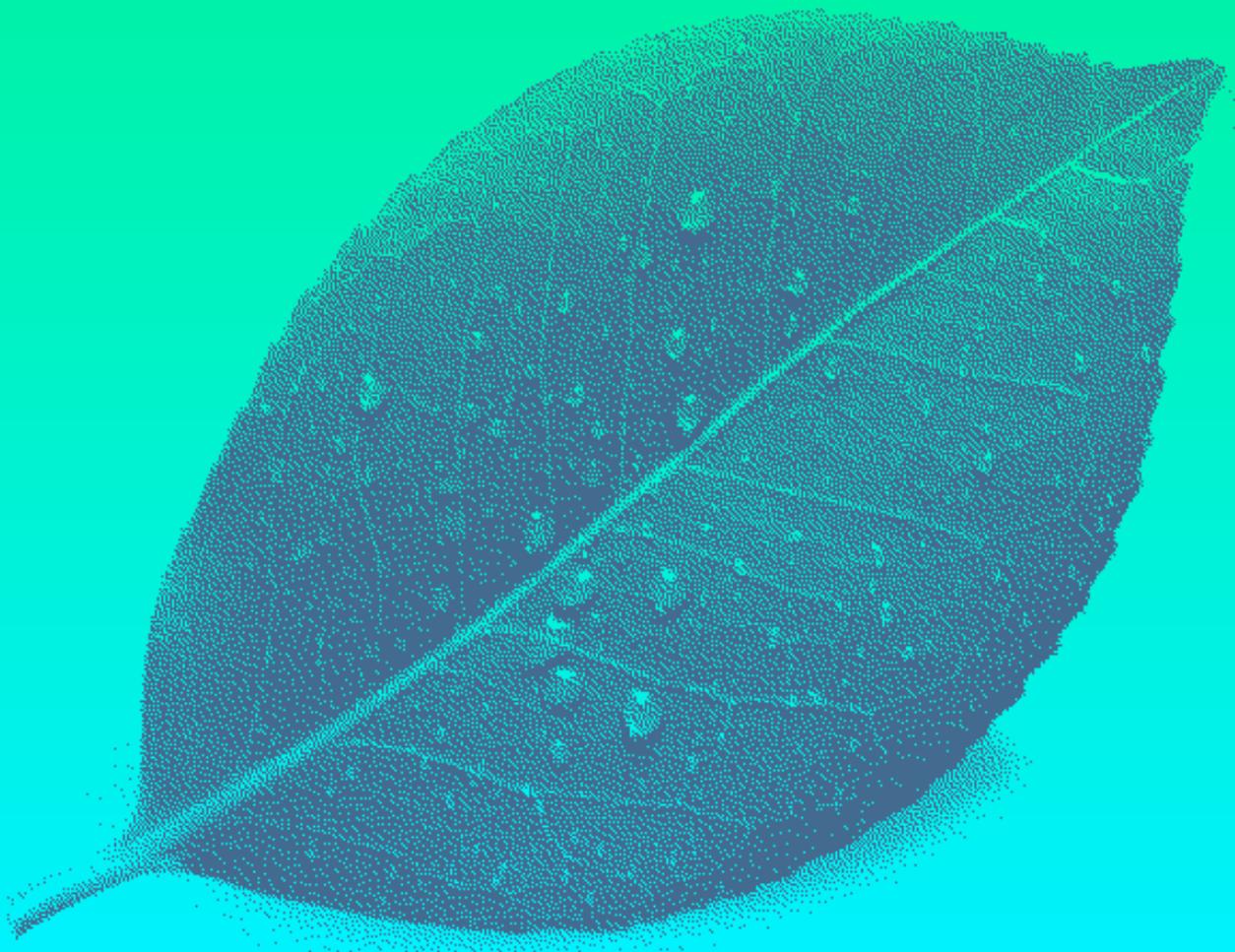


Chapter V

Sustainable system (connections)



Urban-rural linkages, which inevitably evolve over time, are influenced by economic, geographic, and demographic factors. For the quality of our lives, it is decisive how we are connected to each other. Real connections are forming the base of human life, and connections has to be based on real communication. The ways of communication are changing, and it is not always given naturally how and with whom are we connected, and what is the purpose of our connections. Connections are often about exchange, but how do you find like minded people and how do you come to exchange? Exchange is often helped by digital and online platforms as well. Exchange can happen directly, between two or more participants, but it can also happen in a group, in a network of people, with a common interest and / or a common goal, but who often are not in a regular direct contact with each other.

Shortly, networks are important, and experts are often saying, we are in a network age. In the time of social media, experts very often speak about the importance of digital networking. Yes, they are important, they can be a powerful tool too, if their usage is based on real life connections.

In connection to sustainable rural development, we find the following connections worth the mention: connection within the community, regional connections, urban-rural connections, international connections, and transport.

1. Connections within the community (between people):

Direct connections between citizens can form a base for development:

- Citizens groups and associations by economical sector.
- Citizens groups and association by age groups, interest. Here in the participation of young people is of special interest, because:
 - They are the future in rural areas as we have to reduce the of depopulation. It is important, that young people who are from rural areas decide to develop their life, and it is equally important, that young people from urban settings decide to move to rural settings.
 - o They are more open to technology and innovation, and they also have cooperation and partnership skill, all these can be utilized.
 - o Often they are full of motivations, dreams, plans and they can have enough enthusiasm and knowledge to solve problems.
- Citizen groups can be also formed by gender: For example a women group can be a base for the empowerment of rural women, but also a starting point of different types of rural women local development initiatives. Groups of men are more rare, than women groups, but these can be also a good form of starting local activities, finding like minded people, etc.

Besides informal, direct connections, there are different tool at community level, which can be used in the course of creating new directions, planning, decision making:

- These are different forms of participatory democracy. In these different workshops connections can be created among different key actors (decision makers, local business, farmers, and community groups.)
- As a decision maker tool SWOT analysis can be also used as a tool.

When you decide to start some program, which can be targeting mobilizing and / or knowledge sharing you can also use recent technology, social media, online platforms, etc. Looking for and sharing best practices can be both:

- a source of information
- a base of networking.

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If you are interested in details in tools and methods, which can be used in community development please see the chapter: Recipes for Sustainable and Resilient Local Development

2. Regional connections

It can be a good way for rural development at a wider level, when rural – Rural connections are established. These can be a part of for example of enlarging and scaling up of different types of rural sustainable development initiatives.

Participatory Regional Rural Development Strategy (PRRDS) involves the following steps:

1. Current situation.
2. Analysis of common problems, possibilities and ideas in villages and towns.
3. Diagnosis of the situation.
4. Action plan to solve problems, to start new programs.
5. Action plan.
6. Budget needed.

The creation of a Participatory Rural Strategy can happen in different stages as well, in case of limited resources. You can start with the involvement of one (or more) actors, and you can start with a well defined area.

Participatory Strategy has to be supported by a group of actors representing the territory that is composed of key economic, social, cultural and associative agents of the various municipalities and that, with their attendance at the technical work sessions, have shown their interest in participating in the definition and application of this strategic document. To facilitate their active participation and the effective construction of the Strategy, the intervention of these agents has been articulated through various workshops that have been grouped according to different thematic areas:

Topic areas	Sectors
ECONOMICAL AREA	Agriculture and Livestock Cooperativism Tourism SMEs
SOCIAL AREA	Commerce Tourism Vulnerable groups Socio-cultural (sustainable consumption, waste management)
ENVIRONMENTAL AREA	Environment friendly agriculture sustainable consumption creation of "edible forests, parks" sustainable consumption waste management
INSTITUCIONAL AREA	Decision makers and other institutional key actors.

You can see, that sometimes you can find the same topic under different areas as well. For example sustainable tourism is a social, but also an economical activity, which serves environmental purposes as well. Final objective of the proposed process: to improve the relations and communication between rural towns in rural areas working together looking for their common sustainable development.

3. Urban – rural connections

Rural-urban linkages are an important part of our life.

Often people may work in rural areas but live in neighbouring urban areas and vice versa. People do decide to move from rural settings, and some people also decide to move to rural settings. This creates a challenge for maximising learning spaces and opportunities and also sustainable livelihoods.

The geographic, economic, social and cognitive differences between urban and rural populations has generated misunderstandings and concerns. As a response to this distancing cities and rural areas are now seeking to invent new types of relationships that are more balanced and supportive. Such relationships include the re-localization of the urban food supply, urban investment in rural areas, the provision of urban services to local farmers, partnership or contractual agreements between urban and rural areas, but also experimental forms of food production (for example small scale agriculture, agro-ecology, and community supported agriculture) and the contribution of city representatives in agricultural policies. Here we have had a preference for analyses of new forms of relationships between urban and remote rural areas.

One of the important factors of urban – rural connections is the mobility. There are different possibilities for development mobility. Some of them, like car sharing are serving directly Sustainable Development.

- Improving of mobility infrastructures.
- Environmental mobility infrastructures linked with eco-tourism (greenways, cycle paths, etc.).
- Public transport (including transport on demand projects).
- Car sharing and car-pooling initiatives.
- To facilitate transport to young people (reducing population decline)

4. International connections dedicated to rural sustainable development

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About the Sustainable Development Goals you can inform yourself more in detail in chapter: Sustainable Development

International connections can be a very important factor in the realization of sustainable development.

Infrastructure, transportation, health, climate change, energy, food chains etc, are all topics of the SDG's, which are the most of the interest of rural settings.

There are different knowledge sharing and development networks of bigger cities across Europe and the world concerning sustainable development. For example the different green cities initiatives.

It is also possible, that villages build networks for the realization of sustainable development. The topics of such co-operations can be:

- Social inclusion in rural areas
- Community based agriculture
- Generational change-over
- Revitalisation of rural areas among entrepreneurial innovation
- Living Lab
- Learning good practices from each other
- Study visits
- Creating common interest groups, which can have contact with each other
- Creating common "challenges"

For rural communities it is important issue, how to move around. A definition of sustainable mobility is that used by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as part of that organization's Mobility Project:

5. Sustainable mobility

Sustainable mobility is the kind of mobility that meets the needs of society to move freely, gain access, communicate, trade and establish relationships without sacrificing other essential human or ecological requirements today or in the future.

Right of people to mobility: the right to have adequate, quality and safe mobility is one of the basic rights of EU citizens, which has been constantly declared by development and transport policies both on pan-European and national states levels. Such mobility not only ensures equal economic and social opportunities for all (possibility to carry out economy activities, access to education and jobs...), but also their social inclusion and access to other elements of quality of life. We know, that the ability to fully use such proclaimed right depends on geographical (e.g. configuration of terrain, distances to mobility destination), personal (e.g. income of someone to buy a car or pay for transport ticket, driving licence) and joint public elements (e.g. level of transport infrastructure development, number of transport lines and transport companies available in certain territory).

When we consider to developing, using Sustainable Mobility, we have to know that its principles are the following:

1. Preserve the natural environment

The environment should not be degraded by transport-related activity.

2. Maintain human health and safety

Transport systems can have a direct impact on health and safety.

3. Meet the travel needs of the population

People need reliability and choice of modes in an integrated system that provides for those of all abilities and financial means.

4. Support a good economy

Transport needs to support an economy that improves the well-being of all people, with due regard to social equity.

5. Minimize transport costs for access and mobility

Reducing the cost of mobility and access will improve the ability of transport disadvantaged people to make use of available social, cultural and economic opportunities.

6. Minimize infrastructure costs

Transport systems need to be planned in a manner that their infrastructure and services can be funded in the long term, and that best use is made of investments.

7. Maintain energy security

Transport can play a significant role in helping to decouple support of a good economy from increasing demand for fossil fuels.

8. Ensure long-term viability of the transport system

Transport infrastructure and services need to be continuously maintained; and as an integrated system, all components must work together for optimum effectiveness.

All measures related with Sustainable Mobility have to be included in a participatory planning process in order to obtain a Sustainable Mobility Plan (SMP):

(Sustainable Mobility Plan)SMP is a strategic document, which can be developed by participatory process as well, includes:

- Mobility needs and problems analysis in the cities/towns.
- Diagnosis of the current mobility situation.
- Action plan with several measures to solve those problems and needs.
- Proposal schedule and budget of actions.

Usually, only medium and big cities have this kind of strategic plans, but a strategic document in towns and villages of rural areas could be very interesting to solve their mobility problems and needs. If the cost of this kind of document is too high for one little town, one option is a Sustainable Regional Mobility Plan for all the area, and implement it jointly.

The use of guidelines about the development and implementation of SUMPS (prepared by the European Commission) could be very useful.

5.1. Examples of sustainable mobility measures in Rural Areas:

Improving of mobility infrastructures.

Often the biggest problem of mobility of rural areas is the lack of good and complete net of mobility. If rural areas have a SMP or Sustainable Regional Mobility Plan, that document can help to know the priorities about infrastructures investments.

Still, interestingly there are some options which can give special possibilities for rural settings:

Environmental mobility infrastructures linked with eco-tourism (greenways, cycle paths, etc.).

In order to link mobility and connections, sustainable tourism and economic development of rural areas, a solution could be this kind of infrastructures:

- Greenways are old disused railway lines that have been recovered and reconditioned for use by walkers and cyclists. Exploring them is a different, enjoyable and environmentally friendly way of getting to know rural areas, its culture and its landscapes. This is an alternative ideal for all ages, which respects the environment and brings together sport and the great outdoors.
- Public transport on demand: We can solve the cost effectiveness problem using alternative solutions for less population areas.
- Car sharing and car-pooling initiatives. Car sharing is a model of car rental where people rent cars for short periods of time, often by the hour. They are attractive to customers who make only occasional use of a vehicle, as well as others who would like occasional access to a vehicle of a different type than they use day-to-day. The organization renting the cars may be a commercial business or it can be an ad hoc grouping, or even voluntary service or simple citizen to citizen help.

That two initiatives is more usual in urban areas because of the number of citizens, the distance of the journeys and the potential users, but with some fits, It can be an innovative measure also for rural areas.

5.2. Internet, work and mobility:

Telework or home-office means the use of information technology and telecommunications to replace work-related travel. Teleworking allows employees work at home or at a local telework center one or more days per week using communication tools, such as such as phone, fax, modem, Internet teleconferencing, e-mail or IM, to perform work duties from a remote location.

This means less travelling and still the possibility of employment in rural settings.

However, simply translating office-based work into solitary working from home or from smaller groups within a network of rural areas, is not without difficulties. Historically it has always been the case that considerable social and organizational problems arise when new technology is introduced into existing working situation.

Such social and psychological barriers to teleworking, therefore, may well undo all of the good which teleworking systems can bring to rural areas. These factors must be investigated and overcome before efficient teleworking systems will have a hope of bringing the expected benefits.

Internet shopping

Internet shopping is often considered to replace normal shopping because individuals

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If you are more interested in possible Rural products, please go to the chapter: Agroecology.

increasingly shop digitally. Indeed, online shopping has been found to have substitution effects on in-store shopping. But probably for rural settings it is more important to keep (or establish) basic shops in the settlements. Still, internet shopping could be interesting in rural areas not only to buy products, in case the shops are so far from less populated areas, but also to sell rural products around Europe.