

SESSION 4 - *Workshop A - Rural Regions*

General

- There is no common definition of rural areas that can apply to the whole of Europe. The perception of rural regions varies from country to country; it also varies depending on whether someone lives in a rural region or in a city.
- The main features of rural regions have changed; a straightforward association of rural with agricultural regions is no longer possible and urban and rural regions can no longer be easily distinguished.
- Policymakers require an efficient tool for TIA that can give quick answers to their questions. However, there are doubts if the ongoing TIPTAP project can really deliver such a tool.
- In particular, the challenge of disentangling the combinational impacts and synergistic aspects of overlapping and interpenetrating trends and policies will be problematic for the TIPTAP approach to TIA.

Main development trends and challenges in rural regions

- There is not a single pathway of rural change, but many. Broadly speaking the main “narratives” relate to the changing role of access to urban areas, globalisation, and the increasing duality of farming styles (productivist or post-productivist). Trends in any particular rural region depend very much on: (i) what type of rural regions we are talking about; (ii) external factors, e.g. accessibility; (iii) endogenous characteristics.
- Recently, no obvious big breaks or new trajectories in trends can be perceived.
- The key question therefore is if policy could actually avert any negative trends?
- In many European regions the economic crisis has affected small towns in rural regions more than large cities.
- The economic downturn will probably show much better how robust rural economies actually are.

Relevant sector policies influencing development of rural regions

- The two main EU policies with direct impact on rural areas are the CAP and Cohesion Policy.
- The Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, Territorial Cohesion debate etc have a more indirect impact. The way in which such policies are interpreted and implemented depends on the broader national policy setting (transport, social welfare etc) and traditions.
- Budgetary shifts among the different CAP pillars or in the different axes of CAP Pillar 2 may imply strong impacts on the European rural regions as more intensive or more specialised forms of agriculture may be favoured. Different ways of relating to the environment could depend on these shifts and thus affect in variable ways different rural regions.
- In relation to CAP there are some important questions that should be looked into: (i) How would reduced funds in CAP Pillar 2 impact on the European territory? (ii) Is CAP actually the best means to promote rural development? (iii) Does CAP help or hinder rural development?

Elements of regional sensitivity

- Due to economic and social diversification in rural regions, one of the main challenges of the TIA tools is to assess the joint effect of several policies on the territory that include “core” rural policies such as CAP with other sectoral and transversal policies that also have impacts on the territory.
- Rural areas continue to be disadvantaged by ageing population and reduced accessibility. Both of these factors should be considered to create development opportunities in rural areas. The more accessibility is enhanced the more population will remain in rural areas or return to them.
- The interaction of accessibility (transport, ICT and services) and demography is creating a typology of rural areas in which more accessible rural areas are gaining population and quickly diversifying their economic and social structure and more remote rural areas keep losing population and remain dependent on agriculture
- There are also emerging opportunities for new job opportunities in the rural world due to the fast growth of renewable energies.
- In particular, rural regions could become producers of new means of energy and further develop green energies/technologies.