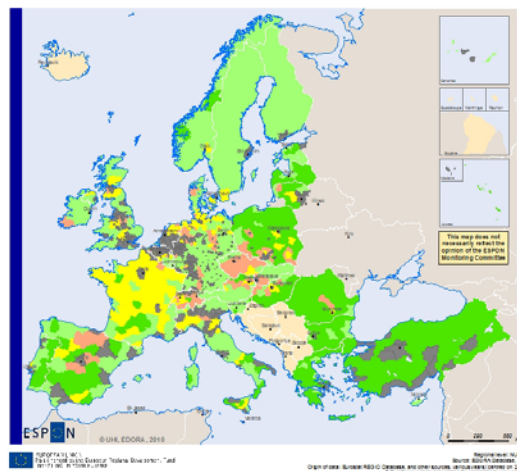


Project number: 5913
Funding source: ESPON (EU)

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Project dates: Jan 2009 – Dec 2010

European development options for rural areas



Key external stakeholders:

European Spatial Planning Observatory (ESPON), DG Regio, DG Agriculture.

Practical implications for stakeholders:

- EU policies need to be tailored to regional challenges and opportunities. This necessitates greater coordination between sectoral policies through integrated development plans.
- EU policies need to reflect diverse local contexts within which 'common' policies are implemented.
- The territorial cohesion policy is critical to enabling rural regions develop their potential. It is important that the potential of linkages to other types of regions is also developed.

Main results:

- Climate change within the context of increasingly neo-liberal systems of governance is considered the primary driver of change within the EU in the period 2010 - 2030.
- Of four scenarios developed by this project the one that envisages Gradual climate change + deregulated market economy is considered the most likely to come to pass.
- Assessment of this scenario by a panel of rural and policy experts suggests that it will give rise to greater levels of regional differentiation.

Opportunity / Benefit:

This research developed a new typology of rural regions in Europe highlighting the diversity of opportunities and challenges facing the communities in these areas. The study also formulated series scenarios that outlined the potential implication of medium term trends, particularly policy responses to the challenge of climate change.

Collaborating Institutions:

NORDREGIO

Teagasc project team: David Meredith
External collaborators: Dr. Andrew Copus, NORDREGIO

1. Project background:

The over-arching aim of the project was to develop a better understanding of the economic development opportunities and challenges facing diverse types of rural areas in Europe. The European Spatial Planning Observatory (ESPON) funded this research as a means of developing the knowledge based used to support policy stakeholders. The underlying demand for such knowledge is to facilitate targeted policy development, relating (inter alia) to job creation and social change. Understanding gained during this project contributed to the evolution of the Territorial Cohesion Green Paper, the Fifth Cohesion Report, discussions on forthcoming reforms of the CAP post-2013, and the pursuit of the Lisbon and Gothenberg agendas.

Three key issues were identified at the outset that were fundamental to the project specification;

- The need to better understand patterns of differentiation between different kinds of rural area,
- The nature of the different opportunities for development which each of them faces,
- The way in which such opportunities depend upon, and may be strengthened by, interaction between rural and urban areas.

These issues were pursued through the development of a work programme comprising:

- A detailed review of key drivers of rural change
- The development of three key narratives of rural change
- The production of a spatial typology of rural change
- The development of future perspectives of rural change
- An assessment of the policy implications of the research findings

Teagasc was allocated responsibility for the development of the future perspectives work package. The aim of this research was to develop future perspectives of rural regions through the use of foresight techniques. These perspectives were used to assess the implications of likely future developments for the rural regions defined in the EDORA typology.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

- What are the key drivers of change that will impinge on the future development of rural regions in Europe?
- Given these drivers of change, what future scenarios for rural regions might be envisaged?
- Which scenario is most likely to shape rural development trajectories in the period 2010 – 2030?
- What are the implications of this scenario for regional cohesion in Europe?

3. The experimental studies:

The purpose of this research, taking a 20 year perspective, is to look ahead and consider how current trends and emerging issues pertaining to globalization and climate change might shape rural regions and their potential for development. Further to this, we seek to assess, using expert evaluations, the consequences for balanced regional and rural development of such developments.

This type of research falls firmly into the area of future studies and, more specifically, foresight activities. With growing appreciation of the risks associated with uncertainty, policy stakeholders are increasingly looking to future orientated studies to provide a framework to guide strategic development initiatives. Foresight initiatives are generally used as part of strategic business planning and, increasingly, policy development as a means of considering the longer-term implications of contemporary trends and issues.

There are a variety of approaches to foresight. This research applies a foresight approach based on systematic methods incorporating a progressive perspective by which we refer to identifying ways of overcoming the challenges presented by contemporary issues such that the future prospects for rural regions are not constrained.

4. Main results:

- Policy responses to the potential negative impacts of climate change combined with increasingly

neo-liberal systems of governance are considered by a group of rural policy experts to be the primary drivers of future change within the EU.

- Of four scenarios of the future developed by this project, the one that envisages gradual climate change + deregulated market economy is considered the most likely to come to pass.
- There is an expectation within this scenario that agriculture will shift towards the para-productivist model of production wherein food production systems are structured around natural or environmental potential.

5. Opportunity/Benefit:

The primary benefit of this research to the key stakeholder is support for the development of initiatives and policy in the area of territorial cohesion.

6. Dissemination:

Copus, A. Meredith, D. Dax, T. and Shucksmith, M. (2011) Development Opportunities for European Rural Regions. Paper presented at What Future for Cohesion Policy? An Academic and Policy Debate. Sava Hoteli Bled, Slovenia, 16th - 18th March 2011, Regional Studies Association.

Meredith, D. (2010) The Future for Rural Areas of Europe. Paper presented at Rural Regions in Europe: Territorial Potentials and Main Challenges. December 13th – 14th 2010, Maison de l'Europe, Luxembourg, ESPON.

Meredith, D. (2010) Scenarios and policy requirements for future development of rural regions. Paper presented at Rural Policy for the globalized post-recession European Countryside, 3rd December 2010, Norway House, Rue Archimede 17, Brussels.

Main publications:

Meredith, D (2011) Rural Development in the European Union: Scenarios for Change IN Kahila, P and Hörnström, L. (Ed) *Development Opportunities in Rural Europe*. Nordregio, Oslo.

Meredith, D (2010) Future Perspectives of Rural Development Opportunities in the European Union. IN Copus, A. (Ed.) Final EDORA report to ESPON. University of Highlands and Islands: Inverness.
http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_AppliedResearch/edora.html

Meredith, D (2009) Future Perspectives on Rural Development in the European Union. Rural Economy Working Paper.

7. Compiled by: David Meredith
