

RURAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS - INPUT IN RURAL ATTRACTIVENESS DEFINITION

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Abstract

Rural development is associated with a variety of contexts. The attractiveness of the countryside forms a summary view of the factors that allow us to talk about the needs of the rural people to make the countryside attractive and economically viable for both locals and tourists. Within the framework of the PoliRural project, the attractiveness of rural areas is considered as a basis for the development of regional development policy. In the initial stage, the definition of rural attractiveness was based on the literature analysis and survey results. The aim of the study is to make improvements to the definition of rural attractiveness based on the contexts of rural development, regional development and rural typology. The study is based on an analysis of the literature, the needs of the pilot regions and the evaluation of selected policies. As a result, recommendations are made to policy makers. A mixed research method approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to update the initial definition of rural attractiveness. The study conceptualizes the attractiveness of rural areas as a context-based, politically determined and everyday social construct. There is no single definition of rural attractiveness in this sense due to the diversity of cultural, social, territorial, different scales and economic conditions. However, there is reason to talk about a set of factors and contexts that need to be taken into account when designing rural development policy.

Key words: rural, development, contexts, attractiveness.

Introduction

Rural attractiveness is a concept that provides a framework for promoting rural development. However, trying to define it does not turn out to be an easy task. The concept of rural attractiveness is vague. This ambiguity is determined by the social and political nature of the definition.

The initial definition is as follows: 'Rural attractiveness encompasses sustainable rural communities with access to high quality public services, a thriving and diverse local economy where agriculture related activities are complemented by sustainable tourism and other forms of employment. There is an attractive, ecologically rich and accessible countryside in which the environment and biodiversity are conserved and enhanced' (Melece, Kogut, & Shena, 2020).

The development of vision and definition of rural attractiveness is an ongoing process executed in several stages, each of which is based on the results of other PoliRural's work packages.

The original definition was based mainly on the contexts of agriculture, business and new entrants, which is largely the focus of the PoliRural project. An analysis of the different needs and policies of the regions has shown that this is not enough to cover rural diversity. The concepts influencing the attractiveness of rural areas were chosen – rural development, regional development, and typology of rural areas.

Analysing the understanding of the mentioned concepts, we come to new contexts that supplement the original definition and are essential for the understanding of the attractiveness of rural areas. Politics, different scales, economics of individual and group behaviour, leadership, public service

quality issues, symbiosis of different development approaches, cultural context, multifunctional place-based understanding, manifestations of territorial diversity in rural typologies can complement and create new accents for existing rural attractiveness. The different rural typologies point not so much to the commonalities of rural areas as to their differences. These differences should be respected in the development of common policies for different territories.

The aim of the study is not to create a new definition, but to broaden the understanding of rural attractiveness, assess the factors / contexts of rural attractiveness and provide guidance to policy makers.

The study has several parts. The first section focuses on rural development and regional development issues, and rural typologies based on a literature review. The second section evaluates rural attractiveness based on previous research in the project. In the third section, the interpretation of rural attractiveness is based on the analysis of pilot area policy. The fourth chapter summarizes the study's findings and recommendations for future changes in rural attractiveness.

Materials and Methods

The research approach envisages an extended evaluation of the literature and context evaluation in the activities of the PoliRural project in order to find additional input for broadening understanding.

A mixed research method approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to update the initial definition of rural attractiveness. Literature review was conducted using qualitative research methods: 1) the systematic review approach, using the descriptive and comparative methods

(Thomas & Harden, 2008); and 2) integrative review approach including diverse data sources, which enhance a holistic understanding of the topic of interest (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). A common approach to the interpretation of meanings of textual data is carried out by means of content analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Content analysis outcomes allow one to claim a certain degree of generalization of the findings, particularly in literature review and pilots analysis. Evaluation results were interpreted through statistical analysis.

Pilot statistics and analysis data are based on EUROSTAT, except for regions outside the EU. Regional classification data come from a variety of sources, including EUROSTAT, the OECD (Typology of Rural Areas). Data from other actions of the PoliRural project are used for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Based on the research approach, the literature analysis focuses on rural development concepts, revealing related contexts and areas. The literature review is structured by emphasizing several points of view (Figure 1).

Literature review

Rural attractiveness is closely related to rural development, regional development, and cultural contexts. In turn, rural development and regional development are connotations of development. The understanding of development is rooted in the cultural context and public perceptions that have changed over time, forming different theories about development. The concepts under consideration are also conditional in politics. The understanding of rural development is characterized by the diverse differences of rural areas, which are reflected in different rural typologies.

The concept of rural development has a dual nature. Nederveen Pieterse (2010) defines

development as improvement of situation and the organized intervention in collective affairs. Gradually development is becoming a multilevel, multiscale series of efforts, simultaneously taking place at different levels. The concept of development has historically been centred on the economics and as such is associated with socio-economic growth. Growth is not always the objective per se, but a means for achieving well-being, according to the social, economic, cultural and political conditions of particular populations in specific places (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, & Tomaney, 2017).

In modernity context development theory moves towards actor-oriented, interpretative approach; thinking of plurality, polycentrism and multipolarity is getting more wide spread. In the 21st century, development is more determined by multiple modernities (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010, 2016).

Rural development is closely linked to rural understanding - rural areas and regions. Different territorial and policy approaches require different regions to be defined and distinguished. They are always linked to the purpose for which they are intended. Regional types are receiving particular attention by policy makers due to policy developments in relation to EU Cohesion Policy, the Treaty of Lisbon and the description of the European goal of territorial cohesion (EUROSTAT, 2018).

OECD rural areas are defined on the basis of the following criteria: population density and distance from major urban centres. Rural areas can be further characterized according to various additional criteria stemming from different aspects of rurality - geographical, social, economic and cultural, resulting in different geographic coverage, with important policy implications (Diakosavvas, 2006).

Following the OECD approach, several classifications of rural areas were created, including

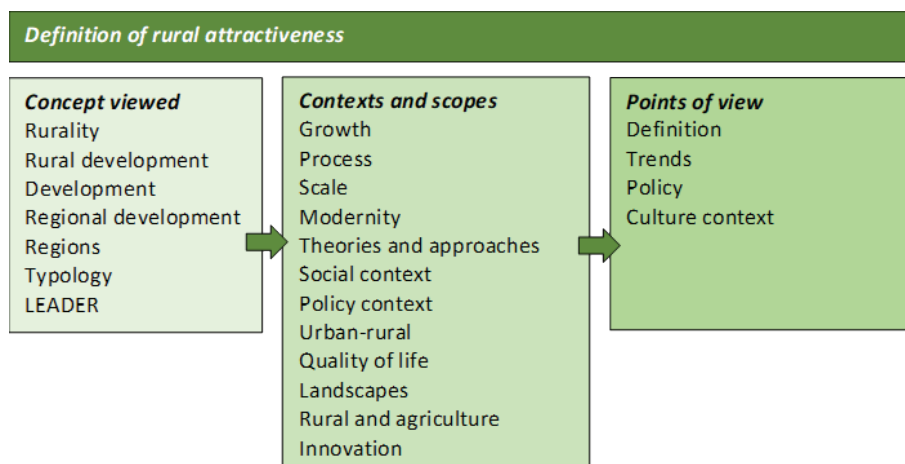


Figure 1. Concepts link with contexts.

Source: Created by author.

the normatively regulated EUROSTAT classifications. By analysing different typologies, we obtain a mosaic of territories that can be viewed as a conglomerate of diversity, depending on the criteria we select.

The concept of rural development is traditionally associated with rural-urban dualism, but in a political sense with the dualism of rural and agricultural policy. The new urban-rural relationship is far more complex than the traditional simple reciprocal exchanges between cities and villages (ESPON, 2005). The literature emphasizes mutual interdependency, interconnection making urban-rural continuum. It is often not so easy to draw the line between urban and rural, especially in suburban areas.

This is also reflected in politics. Re-territorialisation is an important dimension of what the OECD postulates as the 'New Rural Paradigm' (NRP) in Europe. According to the OECD, this paradigm includes a new, multisectoral, place-based approach to rural development that claims a need for closer links between the rural and urban economy, and to see rural development as a close interplay with regional development more generally (Horlings & Marsden, 2014; OECD, 2006). The trend is that agriculture policy has a modest impact on the future viability of rural areas. Rural development is no longer identified as a sectoral policy. A one-size-fits-all approach to rural policy does not exist. The heterogeneity of rural areas 'challenges and potentials call for tailor-made policies (Diakosavvas, 2006).

Long-term challenges – digitalization, climate change, biodiversity conservation, COVID-19 affect our needs, policy choices such as Green deal, COVID recovery package, CAP reform and changing the value system. The changes are becoming more pressing especially in recent times, when a new long-term rural development policy is being developed in the EU.

Rural development is seen not only as a specific business, but rural life can invoke a sense of community, of working together, and social change (Steiner & Atterton, 2015 p. 43).

In NRP context it is emphasized the role of local solutions in the development of potential, the development potential of each region, and the role of institutions and governance in local development. Exogenous policy action is seen as a way to trigger endogenous changes (Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). However, neo-endogenous development can only be successful if it is people's ability to develop sustainable structures, and in doing to establish a balance that, on the one hand, facilitates all forms of innovation, creativity, new ideas and visions in acting, and, on the other hand, maintains necessary stability (Neumeier, 2011).

There are two basic approaches to regional policy: space blind versus place-based policy. The space

blind policy applies to the entire area and does not take into account local differences, while place-based focuses on the needs of a particular place. Despite the prevalence of both approaches, there is a great deal of inertia towards respect for local development (Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012).

The EU's LEADER program is an example of such an endogenous place-based policy that has developed since the 1990s. The approach has received positive reviews in promoting rural development at local level. Despite the wide territorial spread and the use of the approach not only in rural development, but also in other policy instruments, the implementation of LEADER approach is assessed ambiguously, especially due to weak performance for LEADER added values, creating innovations and bureaucracy (Courades & Brosei, 2018).

Inequalities between regions have been growing in recent decades, according to the OECD (OECD, 2018). New ways are being sought to address this issue, as past experience has not worked. The role of personal motivation in development processes, individual and collective role in development, the concept of culture in space and social environment, alternative development perspectives - all this results in new research directions – behavioral economics. Economic geography, political economy has returned to look for answers to the question of how individual and collective behaviour determines the results of regional development (Huggins & Thompson, 2016; Lee, 2017). Currently, the economy is reintegrating ethics in development conceptualization.

Rural development is associated with 'Quality of life' (QOL), which includes many material and immaterial aspects. It should be emphasized that QOL does not simply refer to income-related living standards of individuals (the economic aspect), but is a broader concept that also includes the surrounding environment, physical and mental health, education, leisure, recreation, social belonging, and so forth (Brauer & Dymitrow, 2014).

Rural development concepts are related to several contexts and areas, the most important of which are: politics, territorial scales, social and cultural contexts, quality of life. Rural development can be seen as a political and socially rooted concept at the same time. This is reflected in the definition of rural areas and rural areas at different scales, in the development of classifications, in the definition of policy approaches, and in the changing perceptions of what rural areas are and what contexts and areas they cover. QOL is such a concept that is highly socially conditioned and characterizes the attractiveness of the countryside.

Tracking change of rural attractiveness definition

The definition of rural attractiveness adopted by the PoliRural project is in a changing environment, which

Contexts	Factors of attractiveness	Wellbeing & quality of life
Growth Process Scale Modernity Theories and approaches Social context Policy context Urban-rural Quality of life Landscapes Rural and agriculture Innovation	Quality of life Territorial capital and rural assets Knowledge and innovations Ecosystem services Multifunctionality of agriculture and farm diversification Social aspects of rural areas Social innovations and innovative activities	1. Material living conditions; 2. Productive or other main activity; 3. Health; 4. Education; 5. Leisure and social interactions; 6. Economic security and personal safety; 7. Governance and basic rights; 8. Natural and living environment; 9. Overall experience of life.
Pillars of attractiveness		Categories of attractiveness
1. Availability of public and other services 2. Recreation and/or social activities 3. Living conditions, quality of life and standard of living 4. Demographic and human capital 5. Business economy and innovation 6. Social and cultural aspects 7. Environment and biodiversity		Quality of life Social capital Cultural appeal Natural capital

Figure 2. Contexts, factors of attractiveness, wellbeing and 7 pillars.

Source: Created by author based on D4.2, 2020; D1.1, 2019; D1.7, 2021.

means that its accents can be modified according to the needs of the project. The original definition was based on a number of areas that emphasized the link between rural and agricultural areas. Attractiveness factors were analysed in detail in the project (Melece, Kogut, & Shena, 2020). QOL was noted as one of the most important. It is highlighted by the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (Eurostat, 2017) that the wellbeing and quality of life concepts have a framework encompassing nine dimensions. Based on the analysis, 7 pillars (D4.2, 2020) were created in the project, which served as a basis for assessing the needs of the pilot regions. Four categories were defined (D4.2, 2020).

It was acknowledged that the original definition of rural attractiveness was insufficient and had little impact on the wider rural context. The contexts of rural attractiveness analysed in this article are derived from the concept of rural development and regional development. All these contexts and different areas form the basis for a socially acceptable definition of territorially specific attractiveness.

The initial vision of rural attractiveness includes communities (social environment), sentiment (attitudes based on social and economic characteristics), quality of life – social, environmental and economic characteristics, future perspectives rooted in current trends.

Despite the different divisions, the most important is the distinction between services and infrastructure, business environment, natural and social environment (Figure 2). It is in these areas that there are territorial differences.

The project identified the needs of 12 pilot regions. The analysis of rural attractiveness factors was performed in the study based on the needs of pilots. Priority needs and their relevance to the seven pillars of attractiveness and the four categories were compared.

Category QOL in this sense is understood as the availability of services and living conditions. In the broadest sense, QOL includes all capital, assets, and all pillars. These four categories / contexts allow you to look at the pillars related to the diverse needs of pilots. Priority needs were related to pillars and categories / contexts. Of the 32 needs, the needs mentioned for the every pilot were summed up in each pillar. From these needs, the most significant ones were selected, which are the most represented in the particular pillar. The number of pilots who marked this priority need was then looked at. Finally, the needs are related to categories / context (Table 1).

From this it can be concluded that material values, access to services, and business are more important. Cultural appeal is a little overlooked. From the policy spectrum, the “old” policies related to infrastructure, services, employment, and prosperity dominate. “New” policies aimed at new challenges – climate change, transition to circular economy, bioeconomy, green economy, innovations are more characteristic of the 5th and 7th pillars.

In terms of rural attractiveness, there are inequalities between pillars and categories. In terms of new policy challenges, natural and social capital, business and new environmental technologies are becoming key drivers of rural areas.

Table 1

The most important needs, pillars and categories

Pillar	No of needs per pillar	Scarce number of priority needs of pilots	The most important priority according to the number of pilots	Number of pilots for the most important priority	Category/ context
1	7	35	Infrastructure and public transport system, connection with urban – rural areas, main cities	11	Quality of life
2	3	14	Leisure and recreation activities for diversified population	6	Cultural appeal
3	6	22	Wellbeing of all inhabitants, enhance quality of life	5	Quality of life
4	4	17	Employment for elderly people	6	Social capital
5	7	32	Transition to Circular economy, bioeconomy, green economy, innovations	8	Social capital
6	2	11	Gender equality	6	Cultural appeal
7	3	15	Adaptation to climate change, low environmental impact	8	Natural capital

Source: Created by author based on D4.4, 2020.

Pilot area missions' statements from the PoliRural project were also assessed. The goal needs to be compared to the pillars of attraction. Analysing several deliverables and different approaches to the grouping and selection of needs, the missions defined by the pilots, the overall conclusions are as follows: there is evident dominance of Pillar 5 and the weak representation of social and cultural issues (Pillars 2 and 6). These examples show how different regions value different aspects of rural attractiveness.

Pilots' policy evaluation

As part of the PoliRural project, 12 pilot regions each carried out an evaluation of a selected policy. The study sought to answer the question – what has the evaluation of policies given to the understanding of the attractiveness of rural areas? To answer the question, the evaluations of the pilot's regional policy were analysed. PoliRural is characterized by different regions. According to the NUTS classification, they cover regions from the local administrative units (LAU) to the national level (NUTS1). The same is true of the policies chosen. According to the OECD classification of regions, four types of regions are represented (Table 2).

The choice of policies was free, but was based on the basic principles developed by PoliRural, in the same way as the evaluation was based on methodological guidelines. As a result, a common regional evaluation structure could be obtained to answer this research question.

All regions had opted for policies under pillar 5 “Economic activity and innovation”, five also address needs related to pillar 7 “Environment and

biodiversity”, and only two regions were related to pillar 6 “Social and cultural aspects of rural areas”, which broadly reflects the needs of the regions analysed in the previous section. LEADER activities were selected by seven pilots, which indicates the evaluation of bottom – up and place – based policies. Other policies focused mainly on the national / regional level, which represents a top-down and space-blind approach.

The most of pilot policy evaluations was recognized as an effective, relevant and coherent policy. Despite the total pilots' positive assessment, there are a number of cases that demonstrate shortcomings of effectiveness of policy implementation, such as pre-financing difficulties, changing tax and regulatory conditions, late start program, routine work, problems with community involvement. Regions' mentioned problems related to the program coherence: organization and coordination with the various stakeholders' procedures, co-operations knowledge transfer between offices and advisors, poor coordination, delay in the implementation of projects. Relevance is mostly noted as meeting local needs, but it is mentioned that there is a lack of sustainability, there is uncertainty about the future. The analysis of weaknesses reveals the necessary improvements and accents for future action, in particular with regard to the coordination of policies between different levels and institutions, on the one hand, and the actions of policy makers, on the other; between the space – blind and top – down approaches to the nature of institutions and respect for space.

The concept of rural attractiveness and the different contexts are used in the evaluation of pilot regional

policies. Although rural attractiveness has played a role in policy evaluation, it is often not readable from pilots.

The wording of policy objectives provides insight into the contexts of rural attractiveness. In general, more emphasis is placed on economic development issues. Here are some examples of keywords: competitiveness of local companies, diversification of the rural economy, quality of life, services, well-being, employment, living conditions, tourism, agriculture, digitalization, innovation, start-up, entrepreneurs, young people, road infrastructure and investments in business, public infrastructure, new entrants, social inclusion, rural environment, ecosystems, climate changes and natural resources.

In terms of pilots, the differences are significant. For example, Flanders focuses on the landscape as a factor in rural attractiveness, Central Bohemia on 10 dimensions of rural development, Hame on young people and business, Galilee on digitization, Vidzeme on business development and rural diversification, and Ségobriga on agriculture and tourism.

These examples illustrate territorial differences and rural development needs. In addition, it forms different profiles of regions, not only resulting from formal classifications but also from policy perceptions. However, it is not possible to draw summary conclusions about the common features of the regions, their dependence on different classifications due to the small number of participants. This requires more research, which is not the task of this work.

Findings and recommendations

The study performed an update of the definition of rural attractiveness based on additional literature

analysis, tackling change of existing attractiveness development and evaluation of regional pilot policy.

The definition of rural attractiveness is influenced by public perceptions of the countryside and science-based understanding rooted in societal values and policy objectives. People make decisions about living in the countryside based on social, economic and local considerations. At the regional level, attractiveness becomes more of an economic indicator, a set of characteristics that becomes less emotional, more formalized.

Regions are focused on visions that reflect different values and views on the attractiveness of the countryside. This raises the question of whether diversity is not a basis for talking about different understandings of rural attractiveness.

The analysis of the pilot policy showed differences in the pillars of rural attractiveness. This raises the question of the different needs of the territories and the political instruments for addressing them, on the one hand, and the differences between the rural communities itself, on the other.

The attractiveness of rural areas can be seen as dual - as a socially conditional and political process that works in a complementary and mutually influential way. Existing changes in perceptions of rural development issues and new challenges determine the need for policy changes, which in turn have an impact on how rural attractiveness factors / contexts are viewed.

When developing CAP policy in the EU, or at national or regional level, agriculture should be seen in the broader context of rural development, including different funds that respect and complement territorial

Table 2

Regions by NUTS and OECD classification

Pilots	NUTS regions	NUTS policy pilots	OECD classification
Flanders	NUTS1	NUTS1	Predominantly urban
Monaghan	LAU	LAU	Predominantly remote
Cuenca	NUTS3	LAU	Predominantly remote
Vidzeme	NUTS3	NUTS3	Predominantly remote
Mazowieckie	NUTS2	LAU	Intermediate close to city
Central Bohemian Region	NUTS2	NUTS2	Intermediate close to city
Slovakia	NUTS1	NUTS1	Intermediate close to city, Predominantly rural close to city
Häme	NUTS3	LAU	Predominantly rural close to city
Central Greece	NUTS1	NUTS1	Predominantly remote
Apulia	NUTS2	NUTS2	Predominantly urban
Gevgelija-Strumica	LAU	NUTS1	not available
Galilee	does not apply	does not apply	not available

Source: Created by author based on EUROSTAT, 2018; Dijkstra & Poelman, 2011.

differences and diverse approaches to stimulating rural development. Human scale, leadership role, individual motivation influencing institutional capacity, policy coordination in rural areas, emphasis on community and social issues, sustainability of ongoing processes affecting quality of life and wellbeing are important emphases to be included in future policy actions. The attractiveness of the countryside is like an 'open chest' in which we can put what we want to keep, what is socially and politically acceptable, and take out what we want to use. We put the contexts of rural attractiveness that are in common, but we use what is important for each region.

Conclusions

1. The original definition of rural attractiveness does not need to be changed, it is broad enough.
2. The contexts of rural development and regional development are important for a common understanding of the attractiveness of rural areas.
3. The cultural context of the regions is important, influencing their values, needs and potential policies.

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4. The study conceptualizes the attractiveness of rural areas as a context-based, politically determined and everyday understanding social construct.
5. There is no common definition of rural attractiveness due to the diversity of cultural, social, territorial, different scales and economic conditions.
6. There is a reason to talk about the set of factors and contexts of rural attractiveness that must be taken into account when formulating rural development policy.

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