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Background paper for the Rural People's Declaration of Candás Asturias

This background paper describes the methodology and process that led to the Rural People's Declaration of Candás Asturias draft and presents some of the documentation used in the process. The draft paper was produced from materials collected in (8) national Rural Parliaments (Declarations), 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 a webinar, reformulated and language checked. The process culminates in a three-day European Rural Parliament in Candás where the Rural People's Declaration is agreed by the delegates.

Four main categories of messages came out of the process:

1. **Valuing and thinking rural** - Urban and growth thinking dominates political discourse and national development policies at national and European levels to the detriment of rural people and places who become marginalised. The distance between politicians, decisionmakers and rural actors is visible in politics, policies, actions and communication. The development potential and economic added value provided by rural people and resources is not fully recognised. Civil society is under-represented in policy processes both within the European Union and nationally, where stronger 'rural' voices can also dominate the debate, often even within rural decision-making.

"Is growth criteria dominating the rural development, eg. financial and employment criteria? A question from the public stated what is enough? Is it not enough to keep the community lively, active and worth living?" Swedish Rural Parliament, May 2018

"France has fallen in an urbanisative ideology".

"Even the national statistics institute took "rural" off in its terminology"

"All territorial laws have been inspired by centre-periphery thinking and this should be challenged" Ruralisons –"let's ruralize" "be rural" - event, where the creation of the French Rural Parliament was decided, June 2019

"There is concern that the historic and current neglect and continuing decline of some areas is not recognised" Scottish Rural Parliament Declaration, November 2018

2. **Quality of life** – The quality of life is weakening in rural areas due to the megatrends of centralisation and centre-periphery thinking, reducing rural service provision, including administration, education, health and transport services. This creates a spiral of decline leading to an exodus of people, brains and enterprises, which leads to even fewer services and creates unemployment, poverty, isolation and devaluation of property; this in turn leads to further population decline. Rural people assert the right of rural areas and communities to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations. We ask for concerted efforts by rural stakeholders, people, politicians and decisionmakers to stop the spiral of decline by strengthening rural services and supporting diversified rural economies through flexible regulations and decentralisation. Authorities should ensure social inclusion and provide high quality resources for the elderly, infirm and other persons in need of care.

"In the municipal reform small villages were not listened in relation to service providing and lot of the activities depend on the grassroot" Estonian Rural Parliament, June 2019



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"Out of 2300 students, 80% come from elsewhere, 60% stay in the area, whereas young people leaving to study elsewhere, only 1% come back" **Tarja Lukkari, Case Kainuu University of Applied Sciences, Rural researchers event, Finland, August 2019**

"Raise awareness of employers in the private and public sectors about remote working and creation of appropriate infrastructure to ensure remote working" **The 4th Latvian Rural Community Parliament Declaration, July 2019**

"Establish a support mechanism and business environment where additional conditions (credit policy, equity in infrastructure and service costs) encourage and support starting entrepreneurship outside main cities, incl. providing additional territorial eligibility criteria for financing start-ups outside cities" **The 4th Latvian Rural Community Parliament Declaration, July 2019**

- Rural policy, programmes and financing** – The lack of real rural policy and the sectoral management of rural issues create unnecessary complications at all levels of administration. The rural grassroots are not sufficiently part of the national and local rural policy processes in many countries and sectoral interests dominate the overall interest. Remote areas in general, villages, rural communities, small municipalities and small towns are often forgotten in programming and in the political and policy discourse, despite being the places of social, cultural and local economical interaction between people, entrepreneurs and local administration. There is a lack of real connection between decisionmakers and rural citizens; the European and national structures are often too big to effectively engage the grassroots. LEADER does not cover all of Europe, nor do all the territorial LEADER-strategies by LAG's include community activities. In countries where LEADER strategies include community development aspects and where local or territorial rural community NGOs work, the connection between decision-making and people is slightly better.

A SMART Villages for Rural Communities Intergroup has been created to connect civil society and policymakers, suggesting to act as the voice of rural communities to the European Parliament. It also promotes a smart Rural Agenda with a holistic, cross-sectoral and integrative approach with many suggested activities. The European Rural Parliament welcomes the initiative, which supports the ideas and work done by national rural development NGOs, national Rural Parliaments, LEADER-groups and the European Rural Parliament. We look forward to future cooperation within the smart Rural Agenda to fulfill these objectives.

LEADER/ Community Led Local Development should remain the main rural development methodology and structure for territorial-based or place-based development through earmarking and ringfencing within the Common Agricultural Policy and other EU programmes, especially in the preparatory phases for the latter. We support the creation and strengthening of people and community friendly initiatives and programs, like ERASMUS for NGOs and WiFi4EU, and including simple community participation options in other sectoral programs e.g. environment, social inclusion, and research. Social indicators should form part of the overall evaluation. We also call for simplicity and flexibility in the regulations and financing for rural development support systems.

"It is necessary to develop an effective mechanism for consultations and coordination between government institutions, responsible for different aspects of rural life" **Croatian Rural Parliament, June 2019**



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"Government policies should take a balanced approach to integrate the three dimensions of sustainability of rural areas – social, economic and environmental" **Croatian Rural Parliament, June 2019**

50 people from different countries discussed with the stand personel on actual policy issues. The strongest voices claimed for a "real rural policy reflecting the rural reality in local development (services, digitisation, infrastructure, education) to stop exodus while supporting local economy strategies" **Networkx event Brussels, April 2019, PREPARE interviews.**

"We strongly advocate a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development, pursued by bottom-up and territorial partnerships, as expressed in the LEADER principles" **Regional Balkan Rural Parliament (Western Balkan countries and Turkey), June 2018.**

- 4. Doing together at all levels** – Most of rural development activity happen locally by locals. Local "smart" strategies and partnerships are important. We support different forms of cooperation between local actors, including contractual solutions, project-based activities and multi-level partnerships of public, private and civil society actors. Territorial, sub-regional, regional, national and European policies should support this approach. Authorities should provide a flexible regulatory framework and financial support where needed.

The local actors voice and advocacy should be recognised and be more present in policy programming and research. National rural development NGOs have long been providing services for local people, communities, entrepreneurs and advocating for integrated rural development. Some of the NGOs combine informal LEADER-network and Communities networks. The family of national Rural Parliaments is growing. The resulting messages, policy suggestions and action plans are in some cases included in national rural development programmes and some activities arising from these are financed from national budgets.

"Partnerships are prosessual arrangements, well suited on negotiations over values. Disadvantage: they produce a surplus of possibilities and are also subject of complexity"

"Contracts are something fixed for future and for specific issues whereas partnerships are promises on a more open and functional future" **Research event report MUA Ähtäri Finland, Klaus Brønd Laursen, August 2019**

"We urge that governments perceive the process of rural development is one of broad and open partnership between public, private and civil sectors; that they use that partnership to enlist the energies and resources of rural communities in the process of their own development" **Regional Balkan Rural Parliament (Western Balkan countries and Turkey), June 2018**

Through several pilots LEADER group Mansikka developed community initiated and led local partnerships, diversified services and created jobs through large stakeholder tables including local actors, administration, research and financing (*"Do not start partnerships by building the walls, start with activities, networking and services"*). **Leader Group Mansikka Finland: Increased vitality through central villages and partnerships, August 2019**