



## RESPONDING TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY - ADVOCATING FOR PLACE-BASED RESILIENCE FUNDING FOR RURAL AREAS IN THE HORIZON EUROPE PROGRAMME

### RECOMS Policy Brief

#### Summary

We acknowledge the progress that has been made by the [Climate-Adapt](#) platform as part of the wider EU Adaptation Strategy in recognising the value of local place-based knowledge through the city-based Covenant of Mayors initiative. We support a similar initiative within the Climate-Adapt platform that will also recognise the value of local and indigenous knowledge systems and place-based decision-making within rural areas in response to the climate emergency. This can be achieved by an increase of research funding towards localised rural resilience research in order to provide a greater rural presence within the Climate-Adapt platform. The research should be transdisciplinary with a specific focus on understanding local conditions and bridging local knowledge systems with institutional environmental management to support just and sustainable futures. **We advocate for the future Horizon Europe programme's clusters to develop rural resilience research that can be implemented into the Climate-Adapt platform.**



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### *About rural resilience and why it requires more emphasis*

In 2015, 28% of the EU population lived in rural areas, and by 2030, the rural population is expected to rise by a further 2.8 million<sup>1</sup>. Rural communities are affected by multiple factors amplified by the current climate crisis such as extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and changing rainfall patterns affecting nature-based livelihoods. Also, changing land use, fragile rural economies, demographic changes and out-migration are ongoing trends in rural areas influencing their resilience to the climate crisis. Therefore, resilience-building requires a place-based approach with a strong focus on understanding and assessing the local socio-ecological conditions and realities, with further support for bottom-up initiatives in rural contexts.

Policy makers often ask citizens to be resilient, essentially asking communities to accept more liability and responsibility for the future of their local place, however this increased responsibility is not usually reflected in an increase of local decision-making capacity. A community cannot be truly resilient unless it can genuinely influence the future of its place, moving beyond the traditional, static and tokenistic participation of planning consultations<sup>2</sup> to meaningful representation whereby they can influence the present and future of their place. Understanding knowledge exchange between actors for building resilience requires a local contextual approach, in which we can begin to understand the rules and norms that shape which voices and interests are presented in decision-making contexts.

### *Place-based approach for supporting rural resilience*

Place-based approaches are increasingly emphasised in building sustainable futures. This is crucial for addressing and enhancing resilience in rural areas as place-based approaches recognise unique local contexts including; local resources, assets, capacities, knowledge and preferences. Therefore, adopting a place-based approach can serve as a departure from technocratic, top-down solutions that overlook local conditions<sup>3</sup>. The advantages of a place-based approach are that they also take into account local and indigenous knowledges that are a necessity for resilience building. The over-reliance on technical expertise and scientific knowledge in isolation to tackle sustainability challenges is now being questioned. Local and indigenous knowledge bases and inclusion of a plurality of actors in collaborative governance processes can provide solutions and relevant knowledge but also increase legitimacy and acceptance of formal decision-making<sup>4,5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission - Joint Research Centre. 2018. Territorial Facts and Trends in the EU Rural Areas within 2015-2030. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/territorial-facts-and-trends-eu-rural-areas-within-2015-2030>

<sup>2</sup> Balducci, A., Boelens, L., Hillier, J., Nyseth, T., Wilkinson, C. (2011). Strategic spatial planning in uncertainty: theory and explanatory practice. *Town Plan. Rev.* 82, 481e501

<sup>3</sup> Grenni, S., Soini, K., & Geertruida, L. (2019). The inner dimension of sustainability transformation: how sense of place and values can support sustainable place - shaping. *Sustainability Science*

<sup>4</sup> Reed, M. S. (2008). Stakeholder participation for environmental management: A literature review. *Biological Conservation*, 141(10), 2417-2431

<sup>5</sup> Tengö, M., Hill, R., Malmer, P., Raymond, C. M., Spierenburg, M., Danielsen, F., ... Folke, C. (2017). Weaving knowledge systems in IPBES, CBD and beyond—lessons learned for sustainability. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 26-27, 17-25

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**Emerging insights from current research in RECOMS Marie Curie ITN - Resilient and Resourceful Communities Horizon2020 Project**

<p><b>Project</b></p>	<p><b>Knowledge governance and community resourcefulness in nature-culture interfaces</b></p> <p>A case study of knowledge processes and social values in High Coast/Kvarken UNESCO World Heritage Site (Sweden/Finland)</p>	<p><b>Cultural heritage as a transformational asset for local resilience: Place-based sustainability projects</b></p> <p>A case study of place-based sustainable land use practices within an old crofting site of Invernesshire (Scotland)</p>
<p><b>Insights</b></p>	<p>Recognition of the importance of cultural aspects, history and different actors' lived experience in rural communities is crucial in legitimate decision-making.</p> <p>Local knowledge beyond ecological aspects must be considered in environmental management as cultural and social knowledge(s) contribute to place-based expertise and shape actors' relationships to the area.</p> <p>Division between local and expert knowledge systems can be artificial and recognizing the plurality of knowledge sources in decision-making helps unpacking and overcoming contested views and values.</p> <p>Different place-based values underline actors' relationships to the area and actions taken in relation to it. Therefore, bridging and weaving knowledge systems and recognising diverse values become a key component in just and sustainable land-use and environmental management.</p>	<p>Place-based resilience sustainability projects can increase understanding and shared knowledge of local sustainability issues.</p> <p>This knowledge and understanding can motivate citizens to influence their local place (e.g. alternative uses of land). These can also be linked to local policy opportunities to drive change.</p> <p>Participation in sustainability practices in some instances can motivate citizens to create future local, small-scale sustainability activities.</p> <p>Insecurity of tenancy over land can limit the success and future of local, place-based sustainability practices.</p> <p>Place-based projects can increase the involvement and motivation for different demographics (young people, seldom heard groups) to become involved in sustainability practices.</p> <p>Provides an alternative to normative, industrial farming practices. Seeing first-hand that alternative practices are possible can lead to transformative thinking/behavioural change.</p> <p>Cultural heritage can be an asset which can have a transformative effect on how local citizens view their place ecologically and also can assist in strengthening community cohesion.</p>

There is also a disparity in local representativeness within EU rural areas, where local representation can feel far away for some EU citizens compared to others. For example, Scotland has one of the most centralised systems of local government in Europe with the fewest number of elected representatives per head of population. The area in Scotland

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covered by Argyll and Bute would be served by ten councils in Finland<sup>6</sup>, highlighting that local representation and democratic deficits are wildly inconsistent across Europe. Furthermore, often rural resilience sits under rural development policy which has a focus on economic development rather than directly addressing the intertwined social- ecological challenges.

There is a need for a more local context-specific approach in rural areas rather than the prevailing tendency to work from general resilience indicators, often based on measurements from a multitude of places that have different challenges and differing needs. Therefore, working with local communities and actors to ensure that the unique social-ecological challenges they face are effectively met is crucial. Lessons can still be learned from in-depth place-based case studies that can inform future place-based research and policy-making.

### *Recommendations*

The examples above show that place-based rural resilience research deserves more emphasis on a horizontal level as well as being embedded into specific programs within the frame of Horizon Europe. Therefore, we recommend the following considerations:

- In the Strategic Plan of the Horizon Europe<sup>7</sup>, within the Cross-sectoral solutions for decarbonisation section's 4.2.3 Develop sustainable infrastructure, services and systems for smart and sustainable communities and cities, specifically highlight rural resilience along with resilience in cities.
- Emphasise rural resilience segments also in the Mission Areas either in Mission Area for Adaptation to Climate Change, including Societal Transformation or in Mission Area for Climate-neutral and Smart Cities.
- Supporting rural resilience and its key role in maintaining environmental systems and mitigating and adapting to climate change should be further highlighted within both Cluster 3 of Civil Security for Society and Cluster 6 of Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment.
- We welcome Cluster's 6 targeted impacts behavioural and socio-economic research on rural parts as well as the establishment of governance models enabling sustainability where place-based innovations are specifically mentioned. However, we feel stronger emphasis is needed on rural segments and relevant place-based research in other clusters and mission areas, as well. Therefore, we recommend its integration particularly in terms of climate change and social resilience.

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<sup>6</sup> Revell, P., Dinnie, E. (2018) Community Resilience and Narratives of Community Empowerment in Scotland. Community Development Journal. 1-19

<sup>7</sup> European Commission. 2019. Strategic Plan implementing the research and innovation framework programme Horizon Europe. URL: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/pdf/horizon-europe/ec\\_rtd\\_orientations-towards-the-strategic-planning.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/pdf/horizon-europe/ec_rtd_orientations-towards-the-strategic-planning.pdf)

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- Encouragement of small-scale stakeholders and knowledge holders' participation in Horizon Europe projects can serve as local knowledge practice mobilizers and empowerment of local communities.

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