Territorial Integration

A summary of the webinar:
The Collective Quest for Resilience.

“Bio-Regional Territorial Approaches to Rural-Urban Integration in Combating Climate Change.”

30th June 2021

UN-HABITAT,
Global Solution Division
Policy, Legislation & Governance Section
Urban Practices Branch

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“The Collective Quest for Resilience. Bio-Regional Territorial Approaches to Rural-Urban Integration in Combating Climate Change. ”

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Introduction

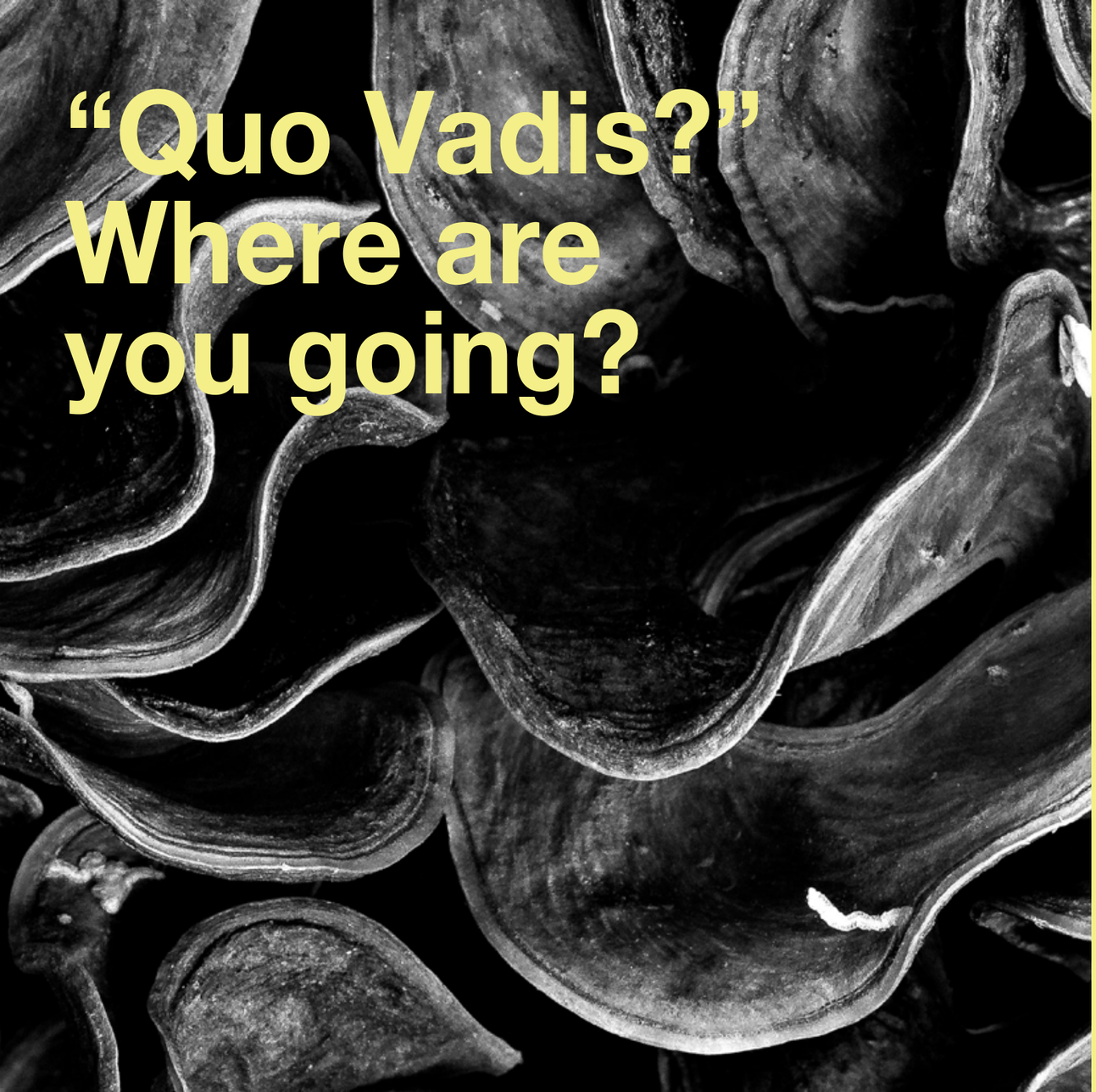
Globalisation – an all-purpose word – is a broad and vague notion that reflects the global exchange between nations of goods, services, capital, and now, even data. It has succeeded in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, but for quite a number of years now, it has been called into question and even started to recede. (1)

It is probably impossible to deglobalize completely the global economy, but the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its limitations in the inequality of the distribution of food supplies, medical equipment, and lately vaccines, calling for re-localisation of food supply chains, trading, and policy approaches.

The most likely outcome among the 'globalisation – no globalisation' continuum lies in an in-between solution: regionalisation. The success of the European Union (EU) or the Regional Comprehensive Partnership in Asia (ASEAN) illustrates that regionalisation is possible. Scaling it down to bio-regions, that is areas with similar ecological characteristics and micro-climates, can enhance the socio-economic territorial development of bio-regions, address resilience to combat climate change impacts and deliver greater urban-rural integration.

The complexity of interconnected challenges both globally and within the urban-rural continuum is enormous, ranging from: the adverse effects of climate change, diseases, food supply chains, equal opportunities, infrastructure, education, quality of life, and cultural experience to name but a few. The smaller scale of bio-regional territorial approaches to rural-urban integration could produce a greater long – term resilience and aid deglobalisation processes.

Deglobalisation – regionalisation



“Quo Vadis?” Where are you going?

The multitude of crises caused by climate change, biodiversity loss, shortages in food production, and most recently a global pandemic, call for revising conceptual frameworks of territorial development. At the global scale, this implies further deglobalisation, and calls for regional solutions, with recognition of geographical characteristics and bioregions, aiding the quest for self-sustainability.

The issue of territorial integration is complex and multifaceted. Spatially, territories are characterised by natural environments such as seas, forests, and rural areas, as well as the built environment. The challenge of urban-rural connectivity spans from natural, human, social, manufactured, cultural to financial capitals. At the policy levels, both domains continue to feature as separate entities (yet often within one territory), hence there is a call for integrated policy solutions.

The current post-COVID-19 recovery is not leading the world to a #BuildBackBetter #GreenRecovery, which is a worrying trend. How do we respond to ‘Quo Vadis?’ ‘Where are we going?’ Are we going to return to the ‘old normal’ or move towards a ‘new normal’?
We are honoured to have input from world-leading thinkers and experts giving their thoughts and reflections on transformative change.

“The issue of territorial integration is complex and multifaceted. ”

Dr Sandra Piesik
UN-HABITAT

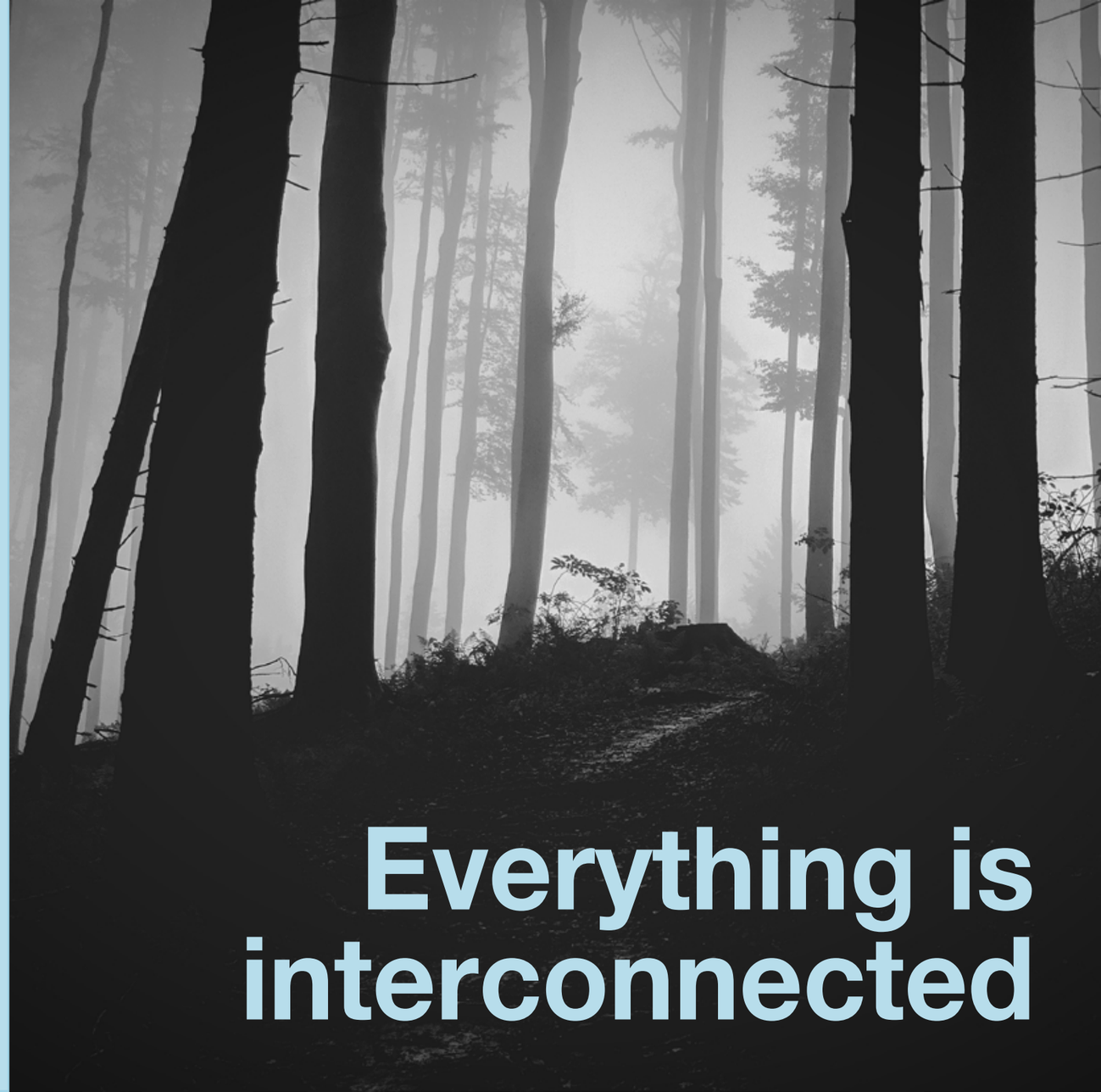
Dr Remy Sietchiping
UN-HABITAT

COVID-19 recovery brought a renewed focus on health, with an estimated over 90 percent of all reported cases in urban areas, which have become the epicentre of the pandemic. (2) The issue of territorial governance and integration of cities with their surrounding areas is gaining much-needed momentum, emphasising the importance of systems-based approaches, and the interconnectivity of issues in relation to health, food systems, nature-based solutions, and biodiversity.

UN-HABITAT work is, in particular, focused on equity, fairness, and justice, and to meet this ambition we all need to work together.

“Urbanization and rural transformation can no longer be addressed separately, and the processes must be mutually reinforcing.” (3)

Relevant UN-HABITAT document: Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles. Framework for Action (GPFA) to Advanced Territorial Development (2019)



Everything is interconnected

Perspective transformation

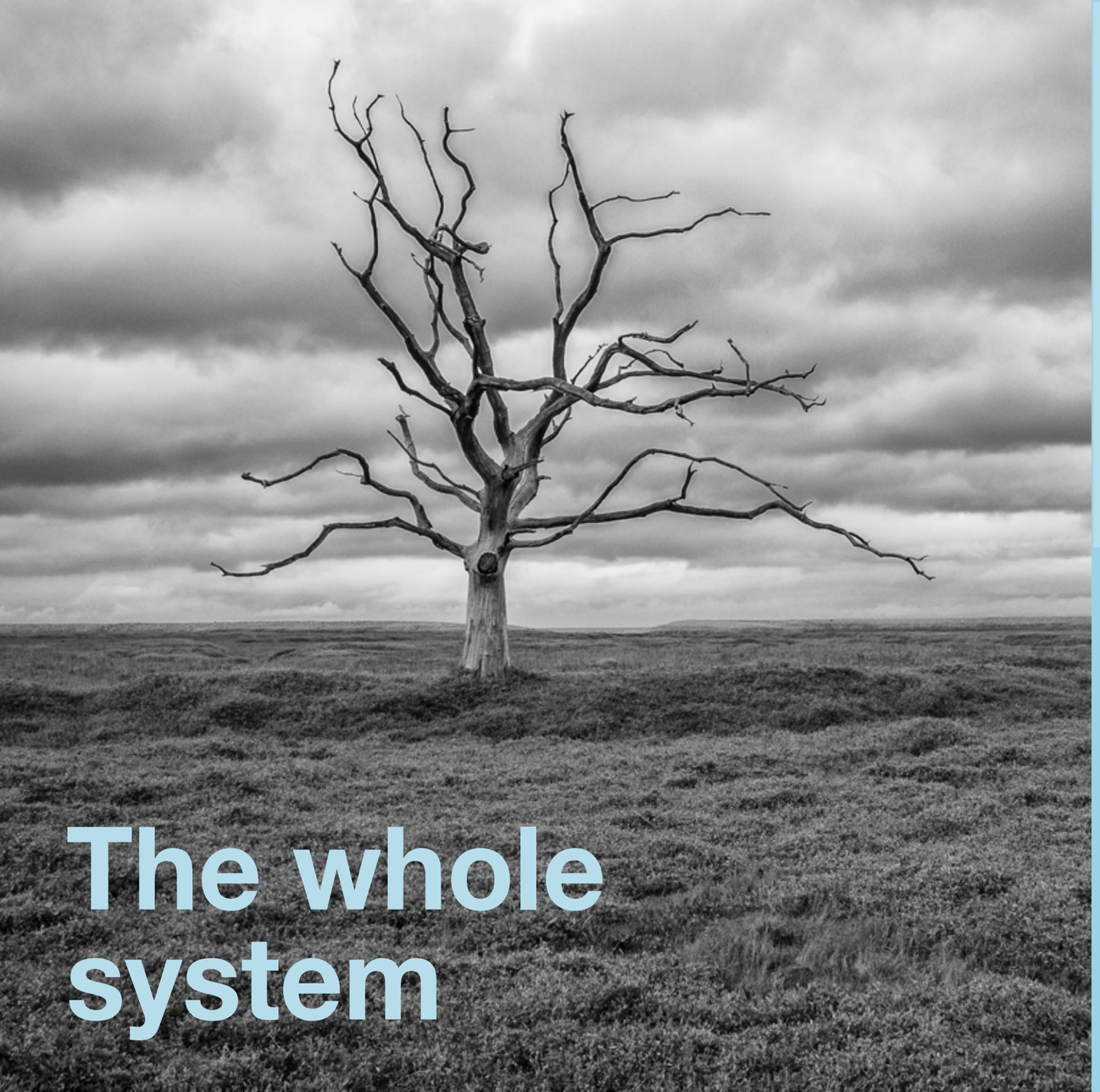
“As we move forward, can we define and design a unified approach to human settlements as the vision for the future?”

The foresight perspective commends a more transformational standpoint, especially in the context of assessments published by climate change scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and ecosystems scientists of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), both stating that we have a narrow window of opportunities to have an affect on socio-economic activities in order to prevent the worst consequences happening from 2030 onwards, and if we fail we are locked into a very unfortunate future.

In the context of climate change and in the context of urban-rural integration, “we might be trying to seek the right answers but to the wrong questions”. The current discourses on climate change are focusing more on immediate solutions to existing challenges, but we also need to focus on a transformation that replaces our current extractive paradigm to a regenerative future, which is absolutely necessary for humanity’s survival and, in fact, long-term abundance and prosperity. With this urgent need to effect a transformation in our socio-economic activities, we have to maximize our opportunity and preparedness within the technological paradigm shift on which we are on the cusp. Hence, cognizant of the transformation of the climate change discourse (from being an environmental to a developmental, to now an existential problem), the urban-rural nexus would optimally lead to an evolution to a new settlement paradigm that merges many aspects of the two settlement paradigms to evolve towards an optimal world beyond 2030, one which would be characterized by permanent global resilience. As we moved forward can we define and design a unified approach to human settlements as the vision for the future.

Dr Youssef Nassef
UNFCCC

To make progress, three stages of thinking and approaches are recommended: The first, framed as the “do less harm” phase, is replicating, transferring, and learning from good practices and frontier technologies within existing systems in the short term. By mid-decade, in the second “do no harm” phase, the emergence of new businesses and industries will reframe what we understand by urban-rural linkages and how to redefine human settlements. In the final post-2030 phase, we will not operate within the system but disrupt it, trying to capitalize on the capacity of human activities to become regenerative. “The best way to anticipate the future is to create it.”



The whole system

"Recommended is to redefine urban-rural linkages, looking from the whole system of the one planet approach within the context of climate change and sustainability."

Dr Zitouni Ould-Dada
FAO

Cities consume about 80 percent of the total energy produced around the world, they also consume about 80 percent of the food produced, generate about 70 percent of the global waste, and emit 70 percent of the global energy-related to greenhouse gas emissions. People in cities are suffering from a double burden of malnutrition and undernutrition, as well as obesity. Further, COVID-19 revealed how cities are vulnerable to disruptions and shocks, especially in terms of food security. Recommended is to redefine urban-rural linkages, looking from the whole system of the one planet approach within the context of climate change and sustainability.

Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic do not differentiate between geographical locations or where people come from. We are in the global system of one planet, composed of what we define as cities and rural and peri-urban areas. Recommended is a long-term approach, defining what kind of areas people envisage to living in, and how, in parallel, we can respond to climate change, biodiversity, inequality, food security, jobs, etc.

We need to adapt our mindset to a global and a l ong-term setting.

Cities and climate change is not the only challenge that needs to be addressed; as we have discovered from the current pandemic health and well-being are absolutely critical to people. We often talk about green cities, smart cities, rural areas, but we should also talk about 'smart people' we need to be smart on how we are going to prepare ourselves for these challenges.

Relevant FAO initiative: Green Cities Initiative (4)

Cultural resilience

Ms Sneška
Quaedvlieg-Mihailović
Europa Nostra

“The green transformation cannot be achieved purely through green technologies; it is also a cultural transformation”.

The collective quest for resilience is a pressing call, in which we need to join forces and voices to fight multiple crises and emergencies facing our societies in Europe and all over the world.

Multifaceted crises have affected individual and collective well-being and have severely impacted all sectors of our societies and economies, with the cultural and heritage sectors amongst the hardest hit, but at the same time, they have visibly demonstrated their resilience, creativity, and the capacity to convey much needed messages of solidarity and togetherness.

These unprecedented challenges are calling for unprecedented mobilization to find adequate responses and to redefine our priorities.

The green transformation cannot be achieved purely through green technologies; it is also a cultural transformation.

The New European Bauhaus (5) initiative brings about this cultural transformation in the context of the European Green Deal (6), in addition to The European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (7) initiated by Europa Nostra, which brings cultural and natural heritage as well as a territorial dimension to the heart of the European Green Deal. The paper correlates environmental aspects of the European Green Deal such as circular economy, the renovation wave, renewable energy, energy efficiency, farm-to-farm policies, and provides concrete and operational recommendations for policymakers at all levels as well as heritage stakeholders across Europe.

Cultural heritage could be a vehicle for transformative change to a healthier, greener, smarter, and fairer future. To achieve this, all climate strategies must incorporate social and cultural aspects, and it is also vital to foster a more balanced implementation in urban and rural areas through capacity building and experience sharing.

Relevant Europa Nostra publication:
The European Cultural Heritage Green Paper

Localisation of approaches

Ruritage's main goal is to boost sustainable growth in rural areas. To do so, the project identified six systemic innovation areas that include: pilgrimage - cultural roots, local food production, art and festival, integrated landscape management, migration and social inclusion, and resilience.

The project shares "role models" of successful experiences of rural regeneration as well as replicators so local territories and communities can learn from, and develop their own paths. The public call for replicators has provoked strong interest around the world from rural communities.

The cultural and natural heritage offers rich opportunities for rural regeneration. Building social and human capital, and also financial capital is a win-win process in this perspective. Many actions need to co-exist at the same time; the availability of all stakeholders to take advantage of the opportunities is crucial. It is pivotal to have key stakeholders at the local level with leadership and influence to ensure financial, political, and technical coordination.

Ruritage provides methods, tools, and examples, but final implementation depends on local resources and stakeholders, and there is great external interest in utilising them at the regional level. It is necessary to build networking between rural territories, as well as rural and urban areas.

A dichotomy between urban-rural areas has been observed, and we need to go back to a more unified view mentioned earlier and counter traditional unbalances between rural and urban areas, and avoid considering rural areas as minor, because they have an existential role in the sustainable growth of the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that there are many opportunities in rural areas that could be exploited. Disperse cultural events, health, and well-being through experiencing nature and culture, local food production, and mutual exchange by bringing food from rural areas to cities, but also bringing cities to local farms. Regional cultural tourism can also boost new opportunities for sustainable growth of rural areas.

"Rural regeneration has to be built locally."

Professor Simona Tondelli
University of Bologna,
Ruritage H2020 (8)

Territorial understanding

“Communities are the real boundary spanner, because they span administrative borders and add community centred vision and mobilisation, not only of actors but also of citizens; they have a collective power, that we need to sustain and exploit.”

Mr Alessandro Rainoldi
Joint Research Centre,
European Commission

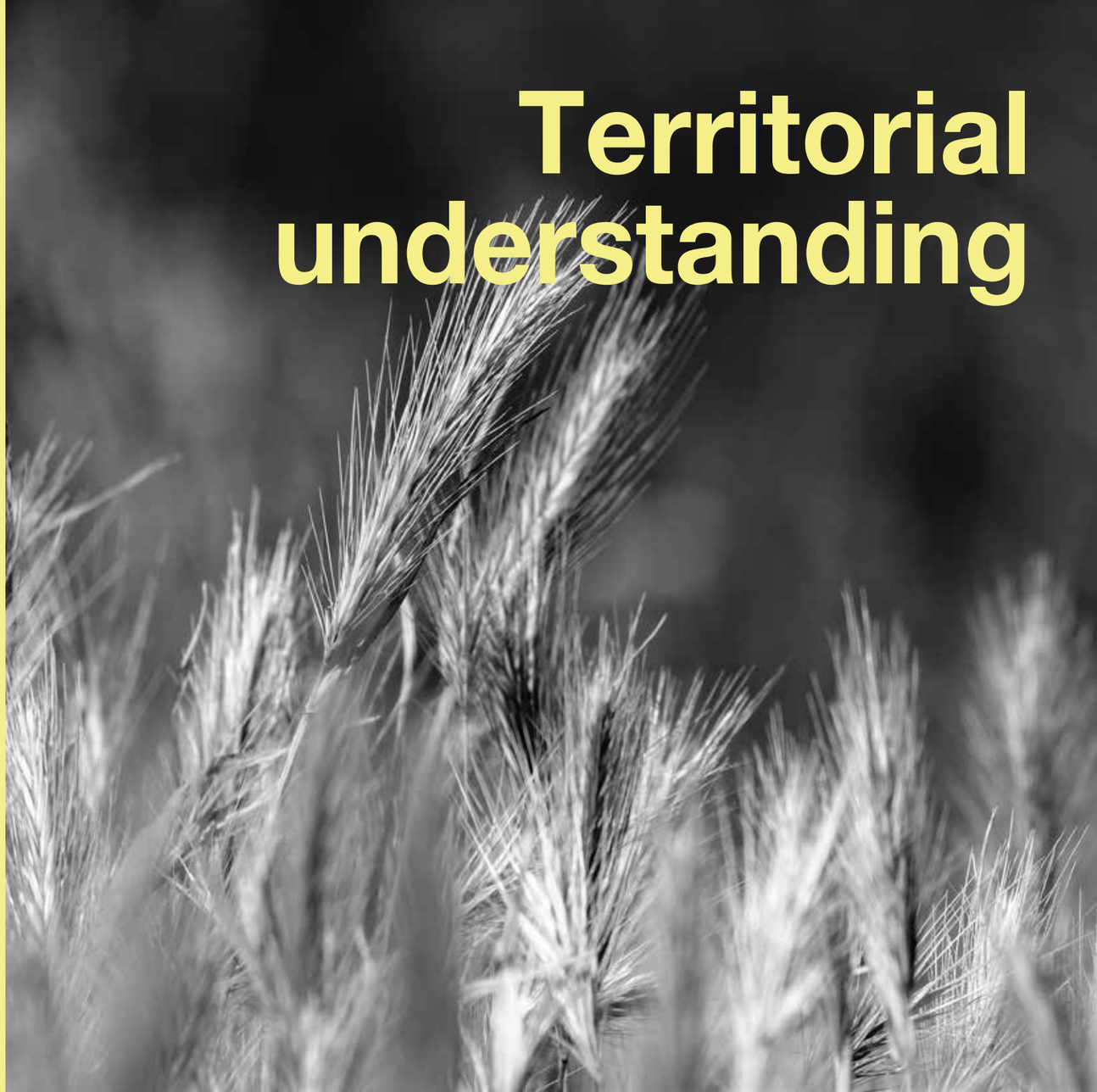
The Joint Research Centre provides scientific evidence and knowledge service to policymakers. Science provides information on territorial characteristics and understanding from the deepest granularity to the definition of urban and rural areas, their functions and population dynamics, which can help shape a genuine territorial overview, which is not based on administrative boundaries or political considerations. In addition, territorial modelling can connect urban and rural areas under strategic functional frameworks such as corridors, and offer a synthesis of the territorial articulation of the economy, society, land use, etc.

Institutions offer an important aspect to how we can turn our considerations into policy and actions, and how we can integrate urban and rural constituencies into policy frameworks. Policy alignment across territorial levels and between cities and rural communities is critical in order to combine approaches to actual territorial challenges and solutions.

Communities are the real boundary spanner, because they span administrative borders and add community centred vision and mobilisation, not only of actors but also of citizens; they have a collective power, that we need to sustain and exploit.

Communities can identify assets, potentials, and enable innovation. Through the community vision, we can add knowledge, which is inside the community anyway, and build further on top of scientific knowledge, experience, and evaluation of what has been achieved in the past. This combination of knowledge can therefore be integrated into a consistent territorial vision, which can go beyond urban and rural.

The global agenda for sustainable development acts as common language and enables different territories to work together across regions and continents. It adds enormous power and potential to the challenge of building up a cross-cutting response to societal challenges mediated by local visions, allowing the creation of a worldwide community of practice that eliminates territorial dichotomies and calls for the deployment of a joint and genuinely collaborative effort towards sustainable development and namely against climate change.



Collective experience

The New European Bauhaus initiative is an ambitious project started by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in September 2019. It intends to build a bridge between science and technologies on the one side, and arts culture and design on the other, in order to meet the expectations of the citizens for the new forms of living together. The initiative pays attention to how we want to live together after the pandemic, and includes cultural experiences, as well as how we can build a recovery that improves our lives. It focuses on the built environment as well as other places where we are experiencing changes. It aims to respond to the European Green Deal, transforming Europe into a climate-neutral continent, and to do so, the initiative has three fundamental dimensions: sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetics, to be incorporated in the transformation processes.

There are many initiatives that address these three components in separation; the New European Bauhaus aimed to integrate these three dimensions, ensuring that in addition to sustainability, the ‘green’ transformation will be accessible to all and inclusive, bringing aesthetics and quality of experiences for people, a sense of place, which goes beyond functionality, and something which often gets forgotten in re-defining places where people live: the value of places.

During the “Design Phase” it initiated a broad conversation about moving to a real transdisciplinary approach, and aimed to involve everyone in the conversation about people’s experiences, which involved input from more than 2000 people and organizations, looking to build a community of 200 partners as of now.

At the same time, the initiative ran an open prize for successful examples of the integration of the values in different sectors with new ideas. Later, about 2,000 proposals were collected, and based on these processes, the initiative has now built up a community of partners. In the next phase, the participatory nature of the initiative will continue to be a strong dimension. It will deliver, through collaboration, the conclusion of the design phase, implementation plan, policies, concretized financial, and other support mechanisms.

Mr Xavier Troussard
Joint Research Centre,
European Commission

“Bringing aesthetics and quality of experiences for people, a sense of place, which goes beyond functionality, and something which often gets forgotten in re-defining places where people live:
the value of places.”

Conclusion

Dr Zitouni Ould-Dada
FAO

The answer to the critical question on the starting point for the re-definition of urban-rural linkages and a more unified territorial approach is in a different perspective. We are experiencing fast changes, and if we look into the future and ask what these linkages would look like, we need to look at them as “one system”, because things are interconnected in real life; we can no longer consider isolated policies, strategies, and looking at the rural landscape that is marginalised and different from cities: development has to be inclusive. If we want to develop together globally, then we have to look at policies that can integrate everyone, that can look at all aspects in terms of inclusiveness and sustainability because all the challenges we are facing are cross-cutting, they touch everyone: drought, water shortages, health aspects, employment, etc - they crosscut across the board.

We need to change this mindset and start looking at things as interlinked because this is what is happening in the real life. What it means in practice is that where we put policies in place, when we involve people through consultation, when we want to design new policies, want to make a change, then we have to look across the board? Cities and rural areas are, of course, interlinked because there is a constant flow and exchange between the two. We need to think differently, that we are all interlinked; everything we want to do will have to find some synergy and convergence because, by the end of the day, we are all trying to address the well-being of people, so we have to think across the border more globally.

End Notes References

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Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles. Framework for Action (GPFA) to Advanced Territorial Development (2019)
The European Green Deal (2019)
The European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (2021)

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