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1. Value-based Alternative Food Systems: Quality Assurance and Sustainable Practices Beyond Certification

Actor Relations in the Urban Agricultural Supply Chain: Insights from Greater Bandung, Indonesia

Oral

Dr. Kinanti Safitri¹

1. Universitas Abdurrah

Urban agricultural activities are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of actor relationships within the agricultural supply chain. These relationships are shaped by varying political-economic power and interests. This study aimed to explore the dynamics of actor interactions within the supply chain of export-scale agricultural commodities. A qualitative approach was employed to analyze actor relationships across the entire supply chain, from production (upstream) to consumption (downstream), focusing on commodities marketed for export. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, involving a total of 43 informants. The findings revealed that actors within the agricultural commodity supply chain are interlinked to respond to market pressures, particularly in terms of agricultural standardization and certification. However, these actors often assume multiple roles simultaneously, reflecting disparities in resource and capital control among them. Such disparities lead to asymmetric power relations, where actors with fewer resources and capital are dependent on those with greater resources and capital, enabling the latter to dominate multiple roles within the supply chain.

Keywords: Urban Agriculture; Supply Chain; Actor Relations.

Balancing trust and formalization in quality assurance: the case of direct purchasing network

Oral

Dr. Maija Ušča ¹

1. Baltic Studies Centre

Alternative food systems, such as direct purchasing, seek to foster close relationships between producers and consumers while ensuring food quality and sustainability. These systems often introduce formalized quality assurance mechanisms to establish credibility and transparency, particularly when expanding. However, as consumers become more familiar with farmers and their production practices, trust strengthens, sometimes leading to a gradual loosening of formal controls. This shift presents a paradox: while formalization reassures new participants and helps maintain standards, trust-based relationships can reduce the perceived need for rigid oversight.

This paper examines these dynamics through a case study of a direct purchasing initiative—a self-organized network of organic farmers and consumers, centered around designated product distribution points. The network has transitioned from strict formalized quality assurance (organic certification system) to a more flexible, trust-driven model. The analysis explores how trust and formal mechanisms coexist, their interaction, and the challenges of maintaining inclusivity and transparency in a system that serves consumers with differing needs. The findings reveal that even within a relatively small alternative food network, consumers' expectations and needs regarding quality assurance vary significantly. Some trust specific farmers and rely on direct relationships, while others prefer formalized mechanisms to feel confident in their purchasing decisions. This diversity creates a complex landscape where farmers and consumers must navigate multiple layers of accountability, trust, and institutionalized control. The study highlights the need for adaptable models that balance trust and formal oversight, ensuring that alternative food networks remain both transparent and inclusive as they evolve.

Keywords: quality assurance, direct purchasing, organic agriculture

Building Resilient African Food Systems: Lesson's from Malawi's Seed Certification Process

Oral

Mr. Henry Hunga ¹

1. University of Malawi

Following the reforms and adoption of market-oriented policies, the African seed sector accounts for 3.5% of the global seed market at US\$1.5 million. This required enhancement and investments in mandatory certification processes using quality tests. However, there have been reports of counterfeit certified seeds in the Malawi market. Therefore, this paper sought to confirm the existence of counterfeit hybrid maize seeds in the Malawi market. Using a mystery shopper approach, 37 hybrid maize seed samples were bought from agro-dealers in the Mchinji, Dowa, and Lilongwe districts and followed by eight reference samples from the parent seed companies of Bayer and SeedCo in the Lilongwe district. Quality and genetic purity tests were run on the samples. Results show that only 35% of the agro-dealers were licensed by the government. Quality tests showed that the seeds were within the acceptable range for germination, moisture content, and purity percentage. However, genetic purity test results showed that only 2.7% of samples matched the reference seed sample, and the rest exhibited heterozygosity. This calls for mandatory genetic purity tests for certified maize seed value chains.

Can upscaling certified organic ever be deep? Reflecting on a theory of change to grow the organic vegetable farming sector in Flanders

Oral

Dr. Louis Tessier¹

1. Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture Fisheries and Food

The proposed presentation aims to extract generalizable insights on contemporary strategies for scaling up agroecological practices through economic arrangements that involve the commercialization of certified organic products. It begins by summarizing the key outcomes of a comprehensive participatory process with various stakeholders, which led to the development of a Systems-based Theory of Change (ToC) designed to sustainably expand the organic vegetable sector in Flanders, Belgium. Essential components of this ToC include: i) the identification of leverage points within the food system, ii) strategic interventions proposed to target these leverage points, iii) the actors responsible for and those impacted by the actions, and iv) the ‘external factors’ that, according to participants, could either enable or hinder the proposed strategy. Using an analytical Marxist lens to explore political struggles in capitalist societies, it becomes apparent that the strategy mainly focuses on a local struggle for situational power (moves within a fixed set of rules) and, to a lesser extent, institutional power (choosing the rules of a given game), while largely neglecting the issue of systemic power (what game should be played). This is not entirely unexpected, given that organic-certified agriculture is often viewed as an inherently green capitalist model. In order to advance participatory action research methodologies in this study area one might wonder whether certain methodological adaptations could have led to a more transformative outcome.

CLUSTER AU: A Collaborative Model for Sustainable Urban Food Production and Supply

Oral

Mrs. Laura Cabrera Téllez¹, Mrs. Gina Sánchez León¹, Mrs. Gina Gonzalez Fuquen¹, Mrs. Nathaly Rivera Alcázar¹

1. Bogotá Botanical Garden

Urbanization is accelerating globally, posing challenges for food supply systems. Bogotá, like many Latin American cities, faces food security issues due to inefficient distribution, dependence on imports, and urban expansion distancing production from consumers. In response, we propose the Urban Agriculture Production Cluster (CLUSTER AU)—a model for fair and sustainable urban food production and supply, developed with urban farmers (huerteros), ODA restaurant, and Cityhuerta, facilitated by the Bogotá Botanical Garden (JBB).

CLUSTER AU operates through co-creation laboratories, fostering Integral Production Agreements (API) between producers and consumers. These agreements define production volumes, sustainability practices, and fair prices, ensuring environmental and social benefits. They also include a risk-sharing mechanism: in case of crop failure, producers issue early warnings to inform stakeholders about the situation, its management, and evolution. If the harvest is lost, consumers (restaurants) commit to covering a percentage of the loss, recognizing the shared responsibility in sustainable food production.

For restaurants, this model contributes directly to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) reports, reinforcing their sustainability commitments. For huerteros, while API-generated income may not fully support their families, it dignifies urban agriculture and provides a meaningful economic return that strengthens their livelihoods. CLUSTER AU is scalable to other urban contexts, offering an alternative to conventional supply chains. However, long-term success requires institutional support, adaptive management, and stakeholder participation to address challenges like climate variability and economic shifts.

This presentation will outline the methodology, key findings, and policy implications of this innovative approach to urban food systems.

Enablers and barriers to PGS participation by Vietnamese vegetable farmers

Oral

Dr. Robert Home¹, Dr. Christian Grovermann¹, Dr. Lina Tennhardt¹, Dr. Hoi Pham Van²

1. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), 2. Center for Agricultural Research & Ecological Studies (CARES)

Organic Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) certification offers smallholder farmers an affordable way to secure premium prices for their organic produce. The benefits of PGS membership go beyond organic certification to include community and individual empowerment, social cohesion, collective infrastructure, access to credit, and access to markets. PGS vegetables have been promoted in Vietnam to supply a growing demand for safe vegetables, so organic PGS should offer an attractive option for farmers. However, the number of PGS farmers in Vietnam is not growing as expected, and has even fallen in some areas. The aim of this study is to explain this paradox by investigating the factors that influence the adoption of organic PGS certification. We followed a mixed methods approach, which combined farmer interviews, a farm survey, and systems analysis workshops. The results show that PGS significantly improves farm profitability and agroecological performance but at the cost of increased labour and lower yields, which are not always compensated by a price premium. Overall, the study shows that organic PGS can make vegetable production more economically viable and more agro-ecologically sustainable if solutions are found to reduce labour demand and create market channels. At the systemic level, lack of understanding of organic agricultural systems and PGS principles was found to be a barrier, while peer-to-peer exchanges were found to encourage participation. Identifying the major challenges for PGS in Vietnam can promote the development of future interventions to promote PGS and may inform measures to promote PGS in similar low- and middle-income countries.

Examining Local Food Procurement Practices: Sustainable Purchasing Practices in Long-term Care Homes in Ontario, Canada

Oral

Dr. Sara Epp¹

1. University of Guelph

The 626 Long-term Care (LTC) homes in Ontario, Canada, are responsible for the care of approximately 77,000 residents with diverse medical needs. LTC homes within the province employ more than 100,000 individuals including registered nurses, personal support workers and dietitians. The LTC sector is heavily regulated by the provincial government, and individual homes must adhere to the Long-term Care Homes Act (2007). These regulations include guidelines for funding related to staffing costs, programming and raw food budgets and clear requirements for reporting on such spending. Given strict budgeting guidelines within the sector, it is often assumed that spending habits, particularly related to food are rigid, with limited opportunities to diversify menus or food procurement practices. While funding and staffing are important considerations, this research sought to explore food procurement practices in LTC, with a focus on local food purchasing. Working with 14 publicly funded LTC homes, this research analysed food purchasing budgets and spend both before and after a local food purchasing priority was set. It was determined that once a local food purchasing priority was set, budgets did not increase to meet food purchase targets, aspirational targets were exceeded and resident perceptions of food quality increased. The impacts of local food are often studied from the lens of food security and sustainability of the agri-food sector at a more small-scale level; however, this research situates local food within the broader public sector, demonstrating opportunities for a significant shift in our conceptualization of local food purchasing and more broadly, sustainable purchasing practices.

Exchange and experimentation: community seed banks strengthen farmers' seed systems in Northern Malawi

Oral

***Dr. Emilie Vansant*¹, *Prof. Rachel Bezner Kerr*², *Prof. Helle Sørensen*³, *Mr. Isaiah Phiri*⁴, *Prof. Ola Westengen*⁵**

1. Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, 2. Department of Global Development, Cornell University, 3. Department of Mathematical Sciences, University of Copenhagen, 4. Biodiversity Conservation Initiative (BCI), 5. Department of Plant Sciences, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the cultivation of local crop varieties persists despite a political environment that favours commercial seed system development to address seed and food insecurity. Community seed banks (CSBs) are emergent alternative/complementary development initiatives, yet there remains limited empirical research on their role in farmers' seed systems. In Malawi, where maize is a sociopolitical currency, we use maize seeds as a means to examine how CSBs may support farmers' seed systems. Through 60 semi-structured interviews with both CSB members and non-members, we collected quantitative and qualitative data on maize seed access opportunities, farmer preferences, and patterns of seed adoption/discontinuation. Interviews show that while CSBs play a negligible role in farmers' maize seed supply, they can strengthen seed sharing networks through auxiliary social and economic services. CSB members report higher levels of satisfaction with local maize over commercial maize, suggesting CSBs can expand farmers' frame of reference through events that encourage exchange and experimentation. Local power dynamics can affect CSB accessibility; initiatives to expand CSB operations must therefore address the inherent exclusivity of CSBs as membership-based institutions. These findings invite future research on CSB viability and the potential of decentralized development interventions to improve farmers' seed security in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This presentation will use this case study as a point of departure to discuss how the key take-aways can be applied to different geographical contexts. What can we learn from Malawi's community seed banks? What is fundamental to the sustainability of these community-driven initiatives?

Exploring geographical indications and localized agrofood systems in the Global South: The territorial valorization of Galápagos Islands coffee

Oral

Dr. MATTHEW ZINSLI¹, Dr. Rafael Villota²

1. Auburn University, 2. Universidad San Francisco de Quito

The rapid growth of geographical indications (GIs) in the Global South in recent decades has been associated with wider movements towards food localization. This has been framed by proponents as an opportunity for marginal producers to create value, define quality, and control production, yet critics have cautioned that powerful, extralocal actors can easily appropriate the value associated with the 'local.' However, both proponents and critics have tended to explore these initiatives through the Anglophone framework of global value chains and/or supply chains, which see the 'local' as a network of production, distribution, and consumption detached from territory. In contrast, the Francophone framework of the localized agrofood system (SYAL) grounds analysis in a multidimensional conceptualization of territory, but this approach has seldom been applied to GI systems in the Global South. This study draws on qualitative analysis to address a recent case in which a GI was employed to reconfigure and reconstruct a localized agro-food system for coffee grown on the Galápagos Islands of Ecuador. We apply the SYAL framework to analyze the implementation of this coffee GI, paying attention to the interaction of territorial factors that shape the construction of locality, the valorization of territory, the engagement of collective actors, and the role of law and institutions. We find that in the project, both public and private actors emphasized the valorization of the islands' renown. Yet in doing so, they neglected to valorize producer identities or know-how, build a strong collective organization, and institutionalize rules that were viewed as legitimate. We conclude by arguing that GI initiatives in the Global South can be made more effective in producing positive outcomes and more equitable in the distribution of those outcomes through greater scholarly and policy attention to knowledge, identity, and legitimacy.

Food Circles of Trust: Exploring the Online Goodies from Transylvania Network

Oral

Mrs. Teodora Capota¹, Mr. Horia Simon²

1. Babes-Bolyai University, 2. Transylvania Gastronomy Club

The local food ecosystem in urban areas today comprises a set of initiatives that align with the concept of alternative food networks. Although supermarket chains, which dominate the urban food landscape, have increasingly incorporated islands of local products into their offerings, these products remain quantitatively marginal and often impersonal in nature.

In response to the limited accessibility of local products, alongside farmers' markets, producer fairs, grocery stores, and small specialty shops, new sales models have emerged that establish a direct connection between local producers and consumers. These models successfully integrate principles of sustainability, equity, and quality, relying on core human relationship values, with trust being a fundamental element.

This study examines the case of an alternative food network based on the Finnish REKO model, namely Online Goodies from Transylvania. This initiative consists of an association of 30 producers who effectively meet the food supply needs of a consumer base ranging between 3,000 and 4,000 individuals. The network provides a diverse selection of food products, including baked goods, dairy products, cheeses, cured meats, fresh fruits and vegetables, dehydrated vegetables, pasta, and pastries.

The network operates within a closed system, structured around a dedicated Facebook group where both producers and consumers are members. Deliveries of pre-ordered products take place twice a week at four designated locations, with producers remaining at each location for 45 minutes to distribute the goods.

From Movement to Policy: The Social Dynamics and Tensions in Defining Regenerative Agriculture

Oral

Mr. Nicolas Goncalves¹, Dr. Tea Lempiala¹

1. University of California Merced

Key words: regenerative agriculture, socio-technical transition, quality assurance.

Regenerative agriculture has emerged as a value-based alternative to industrial farming, aiming to reduce carbon and water footprints while restoring soil health and biodiversity. Despite growing attention, it remains a decentralized movement with no standardized definition and limited public awareness. In the U.S., California recently led the first national effort to define regenerative agriculture. Over nine months, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) engaged civil society and stakeholders in public listening sessions to reach a formal definition, which is expected to guide future policies and create quality assurance for producers and consumers.

Our research examines the social and institutional dynamics behind the CDFA's definition process. Grounded in socio-technical transition theory and the Multilevel Perspective (MLP) framework, we analyzed interactions among key actors. Our dataset includes notes, recordings from the listening sessions, and 40 interviews with farmers, CDFA board members, and other stakeholders.

Preliminary findings show broad agreement on defining regenerative agriculture, but distinct, sometimes conflicting, interests emerged among actor groups. Interestingly, while a shared opposition to industrial agriculture unites stakeholders, tension exists over whether organic certification should be incorporated into the regenerative label. Ultimately, this tension seems to hinder the emergence of regenerative agriculture, as it splits social acceptance and validation of an alternative food production system. Our research contributes to studies on transitions and field emergence, highlighting internal contestations that affect the quality assurance process in value-based alternative food systems.

Green or roasted coffee? How a collective of organic producers challenges the quality construction by overseeing quality attributes, relational approaches and knowledge

Oral

***Prof. Xiomara Quinones Ruiz*¹**

1. Institute of Sustainable Economic Development, BOKU University

This research examines the conditions under which quality conventions in coffee can be revised. It shows how value is captured by a collective of Colombian producers who monitor coffee quality attributes, engage in relational approaches, and build knowledge with international buyers. Interviews were conducted with selected organic producers in Santa Marta, Colombia, and European buyers. Based on the good relationship between the producer organization staff and a German buyer, the collective's director suggested exporting roasted coffee in addition to green coffee. Although roasting at origin is not common in coffee exports, in the case analyzed, existing hesitations were abandoned. Eye level relationships, trust based on a relational approach and knowledge were key to achieving collective quality construction and subsequent value capture by the producers. Over time, these producers have improved their material quality techniques and become more familiar with the places where their coffee circulates and is valued, allowing them to influence the commercial spheres of the coffee business. The discussion is not about changing quality conventions, but about how quality conventions are institutionalized and the narratives behind them.

Local, French and sustainable? Defining “good food” in a cooperative supermarket in Lyon

Oral

Ms. Zofia Pędzich¹

1. Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań, Poland)

The vision of a sustainable future involves going beyond the dominant system of mass food production. One response to this challenge has been the rise of alternative food networks, which seek to reduce supply chain intermediaries and foster direct relationships between producers and consumers. Cooperative supermarkets are one such initiative, combining economic accessibility with participatory governance and collective labor. My study focuses on a cooperative supermarket in Lyon, where members contribute a minimum of three hours of work per month to gain access to lower-priced local produce. Through participant observation – including active engagement as a worker – I explore how sustainability and food quality are defined within this setting. How do economic constraints, localism, and social relationships influence people’s understanding of “good food”? By analyzing these dynamics, I wanted to understand the motivations behind food choices in cooperative models and explore how they reflect broader imaginaries of a sustainable future.

Key words: alternative food systems, cooperative supermarkets, sustainability, locality

Mapping the types of Alternative Food Networks in Scotland

Oral

Mrs. Nsongurua Inyang¹, Dr. Katrin Prager¹, Dr. Shadi Hashem¹

1. University of Aberdeen

In recent years, Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) have gained increasing traction for their role in promoting diverse sustainability dimensions; social, economic, and environmental. In the last decade, numerous AFNs have emerged in Europe and gained recognition in research, yet little attention has been given to profiling AFNs.

The objective of this research is to audit the current AFNs and characterize them based on how they present themselves and the services they provide. A desk analysis was carried out on over 300 alternative food initiatives. This research distinguished between 8 types of AFNs: Farmers markets, box schemes, physical farm shops, online-only farm shops, hybrid farm shops, community supported agriculture (CSA), cooperatives and digital platforms. Results indicate that hybrid farm shops are the most dominant forms of AFNs in Scotland. AFNs in Scotland cluster in the Central Belt, in the Southwest, in the region around Fife and to a lesser extent in the Northeast. Some AFNs were difficult to classify as they combined two to three different types in one. In terms of how they present themselves to consumers, multiple sustainability related claims have been identified. These claims include, soil conservation and biodiversity, equity and fair trade, no use of chemicals, reduced food miles and food waste as well as promoting nutrient rich food, health and wellbeing of consumers. Study concludes that social sustainability attributes were most dominantly exhibited by AFNs in Scotland. AFNs can reach their full potential with an adjusted governance framework and appropriate resourcing.

Keywords: Alternative Food Networks

Navigating Rural Transitions through Values-based Territorial Food Networks (VTFNs)

Oral

Dr. Gusztáv Nemes¹

1. HUN-REN KRTK

As alternative food systems evolve, traditional distinctions between conventional and organic, certified and non-certified, local and global are increasingly blurred. Values-based Territorial Food Networks (VTFNs) offer a conceptual framework to understand and support food initiatives that operate beyond certification schemes, integrating ethical, territorial, and networked dimensions. VTFNs emphasize (1) ethical values, including social justice, environmental integrity, participatory governance, and economic fairness; (2) territorial embeddedness, focusing on place-based food economies and community-driven food governance; and (3) networked collaboration, foregrounding the role of diverse actors in shaping sustainable food systems.

This paper presents the European Territorial Quality Mark (ETQM) as a case study of a hybrid quality assurance system developed through a long-term action research process in Hungary. Unlike state-led or market-driven certification schemes, ETQM is rooted in rural development associations (LEADER groups) and operates independently of political, state, or EU institutions. It combines codified rules and certification mechanisms with community-based governance, emphasizing participatory approaches to defining and maintaining food quality. By bridging formalized quality standards with local trust networks, social learning, and collective identity, ETQM illustrates how VTFNs can create alternative pathways to quality assurance that reinforce regional food sovereignty and resilience.

Through this case study, we examine the tensions and synergies between institutionalized and informal quality assurance systems, exploring challenges such as power dynamics, co-optation risks, and self-exploitation. Our findings highlight the potential of participatory, territory-based food governance to navigate rural transitions, offering insights for scholars and practitioners interested in bottom-up, values-driven models of food system transformation.

New Conventions and Standards in Animal Welfare Governance

Oral

Prof. Bruce Muirhead¹, Prof. Hilde Bjørkhaug²

1. University of Waterloo, 2. Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Farm animal welfare (AW) is no longer a domain owned by agriculture. Perceptions of what good animal welfare is have expanded in breadth and intensity in recent decades, and are debated by both the wider population and experts. According to Fraser (2008), this conversation revolves around whether good animal welfare is understood as the animal's basic health and functioning, affective states and the ability of an animal to live a natural life, where "the pursuit of any one does not necessarily improve animal welfare as judged by the other criteria." (3) Animal welfare has also become a commodity for sale, which could be reflected in more recent private sector AW standards and auditing that have become an important parallel world to formal governmental regulation. This has taken place very strongly in agrifood supply chains and retailing (Hatanaka et al., 2005) and is being identified as a key driver of changing farmer practices and culture. We are inspired by the theory of conventions, where a convention can be understood as a practice that is carried out on the basis of legitimized and justified attitudes justified in "orders of worth." Our contribution will focus on how AW has been responding to various pressures partly from the forces adumbrated above that are driving the development of new private AW standards in the food chain as an increasingly complex terrain of regulation. We explore empirical data from egg and poultry value chains and discuss how competing conventions on animal welfare are legitimized and financialized by actors in the food system.

Plant-Based Foods: A Possible Alternative for Future Sustainable Food Systems?

Oral

Mx. Luiza Graciela Gonçalves¹

1. Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro

The plant-based food market has been promoted as a sustainable solution to the environmental and social challenges of the global agri-food system. However, this discourse hides contradictions within the corporate-environmental regime, where large companies reconfigure consumption without transforming the structures that perpetuate inequalities and environmental impacts.

Based on the analysis of two Brazilian companies in the sector, “Fazenda Futuro” and “Incrível!”, this research investigates whether plant-based foods truly represent a viable alternative for new sustainable food systems. Drawing on food regime theory and the economic sociology of Karl Polanyi, we explore how the plant-based market incorporates discourses of innovation and sustainability, while integrating into the logic of the global agri-food system. Small producers and agroecological networks face economic challenges and power concentration, while large plant-based companies may reinforce an exclusionary, market-driven model.

This dynamic raises questions of equity and justice: who benefits from this transition and who is left behind? The plant-based market often appropriates demands for sustainability without promoting structural changes that favor agroecological networks or independent producers. Alternative systems based on values, such as agroecology and participatory certifications, persist but remain marginalized. Thus, this research highlights the need to strengthen democratic governance in food systems, ensuring that plant-based foods are not just a new corporate commodity but part of a sustainable, accessible, and socially just transition.

KEY-WORDS: Food Systems; Food regimes; Plant-based market.

Strengthening AKIS and ISS: stakeholder engagement for innovation implementation in rural areas

Oral

Dr. Naomi diSanto¹, Dr. Loretta Moramarco¹, Prof. Teresa Del Giudice², Prof. Roberta Sisto³, Prof. Vincenzo Fucilli¹

1. University of Bari Aldo Moro, 2. University of Naples - Federico II, 3. University of Foggia

In the European Union, scientific and political discussions have increasingly focused on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKISs). These systems play a crucial role in examining the various stakeholders in the agricultural sector, as well as their communication and collaboration in driving innovation (Knierim et al., 2015). To achieve the objectives for which they were established at the local level, AKISs are integrating Innovation Support Services (ISS) to enhance coordination and knowledge exchange (European Commission, 2021). The aim of this study is to evaluate the ISSs of AKIS in Campania, a region of Southern Italy, which is making significant progress in agricultural innovation and has become a key area for the development of these services. The evaluative question guiding this study is: How can the participation and consensus development of these ISSs be increased? To address this question, the study follows the logical framework for evaluation, starting with a context analysis to provide an overview of the situation. A Social Network Analysis will be conducted to identify stakeholders, and participatory approaches will be structured around a backcasting method. The idea behind using backcasting is to hypothesize a desirable future scenario and analyze the expected implementation of innovation support services. The innovative aspect of this study lies in the limited existing knowledge regarding the evaluation of ISSs structures. Conducting evaluations at this early stage can play a crucial role in identifying necessary adjustments and paving the way for more effective outcomes and greater impact from these services in the future.

The practice of sustainable bread: the case of an alternative wheat-to-bread initiative in Hungary

Oral

Dr. Gabor Kiraly¹, Ms. Karola Király-Gál¹, Dr. Gyöngyi Jankuné-Kürthy¹, Dr. Krisztina Miskó¹

1. Institute of Agricultural Economics

A multifaceted crisis challenges our current food system, threatening food security, environmental stability, and societal welfare. Moving towards food provision based on sustainable farming practices and value chains requires transformative changes. Alternative food initiatives are often perceived as innovative, experimental, and collaborative efforts aiming to tackle failing food production and consumption systems while promoting a vision of sustainable food. The emergence of these initiatives stimulates continuous research interest, resulting in a wide variety of themes, perspectives, and methodologies being applied in studies on alternative food initiatives.

This study presents a novel approach by integrating value chain-oriented research with a systemic and practice-based approach, providing a comprehensive analysis of an alternative wheat-to-bread initiative in Hungary. This initiative is based on a community of farmers, millers, and bakers bonded by a shared view that sustainable, fair, and healthy bread production cannot be achieved through conventional agriculture and industrial food production. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how sustainability is practiced by revealing the meanings, materials, and relationships mobilized around artisanal sourdough bread production and consumption. The methodology of the study followed a two-stage design. First, a participatory mental mapping exercise provided insights into the links between barriers and enablers in the context of sustainable wheat-to-bread value chains. This was followed by qualitative interviews to understand how community members' practices facilitate sustainability performance within the initiative.

Our findings demonstrate that shared values, collaboration, trust, experimentation, and co-creation are the primary factors that maintain the practice-based criteria for artisanal sourdough bread production. Understanding these factors can contribute to the discourse regarding the role of alternative and value-based food initiatives within the food-centric domain of transition studies.

The Role of Informal and Formal Systems on Seed Security in Malawi

Oral

Mr. Henry Hunga ¹

1. University of Malawi

Since the early 1990s, most African countries adopted policies supporting the formal seed system. The objective is to improve access to improved varieties and replace the informal seed system. However, studies of the impact of the policies on seed security are limited. Using the Living Standards Measurement (Integrated Household Survey), Agriculture Production Estimates Surveys, and focus group discussions, we examined the policy implications on smallholder farmers' seed sources and availability in Malawi. However, results show that informal sourcing has increased from 68% of households in 2004 to 97% by 2020, while recipients of subsidised seeds decreased from 75% to 10%. Certified seed availability has averaged 54% for maize, 0.6% for rice, 9% for groundnuts, 2% for cotton, 8% for sorghum and beans, 14% for pigeon peas, and 31% for soybeans. FGD results reveal that poverty, unavailability, and poor quality affect the adoption and use of certified seeds. As such, inclusive policies supporting formal and informal seed systems may help improve access to high-quality seeds.

The role of small slaughterhouses on meat's quality assurance for alternative food systems in Switzerland

Oral

Mrs. Louisa Malatesta¹

1. Anthropology institute, University of Neuchâtel

Key words: alternative food system, meat production, slaughterhouses

Since the 1960s, the centralization of the agricultural sector has had a major impact on slaughterhouses, moving them further away from towns and making the death of farm animals invisible. Although it is an essential stage of meat production, the slaughter of animals remains therefore hidden in the shadows. In the Swiss Jura, a mid-mountain region, there are still many small slaughterhouses adjoining butchers' shops, something that is becoming rare in Switzerland and Europe. These 'traditional' facilities are responsible for slaughtering the livestock, whose meat is then sold to affiliated shops or through various alternative food systems. While butchers claim that the size of slaughterhouses and their proximity to the point of sale ensure superior meat quality, more so than regional labels, my observations show that the slaughter stage is not given greater prominence by customers. Sometimes even, meat sold in short distribution channels, is in reality slaughtered in large, decentralized slaughterhouses, far from the 'traditional craftsmanship' image conveyed by the sale outlets. In other words, a separation is drawn between slaughtering and rearing. In this presentation, I propose a reflection on what defines quality 'regional' meat and a 'short circuit' in meat production. I will also show what parameters underpin the success and quality of these places - both institutionalized and informal - that integrate slaughter and butchery, and which, surprisingly, do not.

Trust over Certification: the role of Italian Food Coops in value-based alternative food systems

Oral

Dr. Giovanna Sacchi¹, Dr. Tiziana Pagnani¹, Prof. Filippo Brun¹, Dr. Teresina Mancuso¹

1. Università degli Studi di Torino

Problem Statement

As industrialised food systems continue to dominate, alternative food networks are emerging to reconnect consumers with local, sustainable food practices. Food Cooperatives (Food Coops) exemplify value-based alternative food systems that rely on trust, community engagement, and collective action rather than solely on traditional certification schemes. This study explores how Italian Food Coops ensure quality and sustainability through democratic governance, participatory decision-making, and direct producer-consumer relationships, offering an alternative model to formal quality assurance mechanisms that remain understudied.

Research Questions and Objectives

1. How do Italian Food Coops ensure quality and sustainability?
2. What governance and participatory mechanisms support trust and accountability in these cooperatives?
3. What are the motivations and behaviours of members engaging in Food Coops?

Addressing these questions, the study contributes to discussions on value-based food systems and self-organized sustainability initiatives.

Methods

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review with primary data collection. A structured survey was conducted among about 2,300 members of seven Italian Food Coops operating for at least two years: Camilla (Bologna), Mesa Noa (Cagliari), Oltre Food Coop (Parma), Stadera (Ravenna), Le vie dell'Orto (Arezzo), Alveare (Conegliano), and Edera (Trento). The survey explores governance structures, member motivations, sustainability practices, and (informal) quality assurance mechanisms. A cluster analysis was performed to segment members based on engagement levels and purchasing behaviours, providing deeper insights into consumer typologies. Quantitative analysis provides statistical insights, while qualitative responses enrich our understanding of cooperative engagement.

Results

This study's findings reveal that Food Coops ensure quality and sustainability through participatory governance, member education, and direct engagement with producers. Instead of relying solely on formal certification schemes, they maintain high standards through trust-based accountability and cooperative oversight.

Value-Based Alternative Food Systems: Quality Assurance, Sustainable Practices, and Rural Transitions in the SAARC Region (2000–2024)

Oral

*Dr. Qamar Ali*¹

1. Virtual university of pakistan

change of food classifications beyond conservative certification outlines is critical for guaranteeing sustainability, food safety, and rural financial resilience. This paper discovers the value-based substitute food systems in the SAARC region (2000–2024) by probing quality assurance devices, sustainable agrarian practices, and rural changes. Using World Bank, IMF, and WDI data, the paper measures six key variables: agricultural value-added, access to formal credit for agriculture, organic and sustainable farming land, rural employment in agriculture, and food price index, with food security and nutrition quality (DV). The study climaxes how non-certified yet sustainable food systems, regenerative farming, and rural service models donate to food security, economic constancy, and ecological well-being. The results specify that investment in substitute food schemes positively effects rural service, enhances diet security, and calms food values, despite financial and climatic trials. Furthermore, official credit accessibility significantly moves smallholder farmers' change toward sustainability. The study also discourses the role of government rules, cooperative models, and developing financing structures in grading alternative food schemes. By mixing quantitative data from global monetary organizations and discovering the socio-economic sizes of rural food systems, this research delivers policy approvals for fostering sustainable agriculture beyond certification. This study donates to the discourse on functional rural commodities, sustainable economies, and other food networks by linking the gap between agricultural strategies, market dynamics, and community-driven food safety strategies in the SAARC region. The visions presented here serve as a basis for investors, officials, and academics to develop plans that enhance quality assurance, economic feasibility, and environmental flexibility in food production schemes.

Keywords: Alternative food systems, sustainable agriculture, rural transitions, food security, SAARC, quality assurance, organic farming, financial inclusion, regenerative agriculture, climate resilience.

2. Land Reform and Community-Owned Land for Liveable Futures

Land Fragmentation: Is it a Curse or a Blessing for Small Family Farms?

Oral

Prof. Temur Gugushvili¹, Dr. Gvantsa Salukvadze²

1. International Black Sea University, 2. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

This article investigates the intricate factors shaping family-farm dynamics in rural Georgia, emphasizing the interplay between land fragmentation, agricultural practices, and socio-economic transformations. Situated within the broader context of the post-Soviet transition, the study examines how the remnants of a centrally planned economy and the emergence of a nascent market economy have reconfigured land ownership structures, access to resources, and the adaptive strategies employed by rural households.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research triangulates qualitative and quantitative data, drawing on in-depth interviews with family farmers, spatial analysis of land ownership patterns using GIS, and secondary data sources. This comprehensive methodological framework enables a nuanced understanding of how rural livelihoods evolve within the constraints of fragmented agricultural landscapes. Particular attention is given to various forms of capital—natural, financial, social, and human—in shaping the adaptive capacities of family farms and fostering entrepreneurial innovation.

The findings shed new light on how land fragmentation influences the development of agricultural structures and characteristics. Crucially, the study reveals that the implications of fragmentation extend beyond agriculture, exerting a profound impact on the broader development trajectories of rural areas. By situating these dynamics within the historical and contemporary realities of rural Georgia, the article contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and agrarian change, offering critical insights into the socio-economic and structural challenges facing transitioning rural economies.

Land ownership concentration among investors, private owners, and nature conservation groups in Saskatchewan, Canada

Oral

Dr. André Magnan¹, Dr. Emily Duncan¹

1. University of Regina

The province of Saskatchewan is considered Canada's breadbasket, with nearly 40% of its farmland. In recent decades, farmland ownership concentration and financialization have garnered significant attention. Average farm size has grown considerably and a number of corporate mega-farms have emerged. Investors have likewise accumulated substantial portfolios of land. We analyze land titles records for all rural land in the province to quantify ownership concentration among three key groups: farmland investors, private owners (including family and corporate farms), and nature conservation organizations. With data from 2002, 2014, 2018, and 2023, we provide a longitudinal analysis on patterns of ownership change and concentration. While investors have garnered the most public and media attention as accumulators of farmland, we suggest that significant land accumulation is also driven by private owners and nature conservation organizations. The shifting ownership of Saskatchewan rural land has implications for competing land uses such as intensive agriculture, recreation, hunting, and Indigenous ceremony.

Key words: farmland; financialization; concentration

Searching for Community Empowerment: Success and Scotland's Community Rights to Buy

Oral

Dr. Carey Doyle¹

1. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC

A cornerstone of Scottish land reform are the Community Rights to Buy, comprising four Community Rights to Buy under the 2003 Land Reform Act (as amended) and 2016 Land Reform Act. These rights are designed to support community-level democratic control over land in the public interest, with the policy goal of 'community empowerment', and include first right of refusal on a property sale as well as forced sale. This paper contributes to knowledge by providing descriptive statistical data on Community Rights to Buy over their 22 years of operation. Drawing on this data, as well as related work (Coombe 2023), and four years of practical experience working with community groups and decision-makers on applications for Community Right to Buy, this is conceptually framed by understandings of success; exploring success rates, 'shadow' success, community success, and policy success. In synthesis the paper develops a conceptual contribution to understandings of community empowerment praxis, speaking to tensions between democracy, law and operationalising the commons.

The Rise (and Fall?) of Natural Capital and Forestry Investment in Scottish Land: Land value trends and factors affecting land value formulation.

Oral

Dr. Ian Merrell¹, Ms. Lorna Pate¹, Mr. James Glendinning¹, Ms. Hanna Wheatley², Ms. Bryony Nelson¹

1. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC, 2. Scottish Land Commission

Scotland has an ongoing land reform agenda that aims to create a less concentrated pattern of landownership (having the highest concentration in all of the Global North), by fostering more community-ownership and increasing the diversity of landowners. However, despite this backdrop, the years between 2020-21 saw land values in Scotland reach historic highs, driven by large institutional investors. This recent interest in Scottish land as an investment opportunity has threatened to actually increase landownership concentration into the hands of High-net-worth individuals and financial institutions, grabbing the headlines of news outlets and causing public outcry.

Except initial news articles and early analysis (Wightman, 2023; McMorran *et al* 2022) suggesting that institutional investors were driven by natural capital opportunities (i.e. creating and selling carbon credits) and commercial forestry, little was known about motivations for buying land and how value was being derived. In successive years from 2022 to 2024 we have interviewed land agents operating across Scotland to track trends in land values and motivations, as well as how their factors for valuing land (especially marginal land particularly well-suited to natural capital) are changing. This paper presents this qualitative enquiry which tracks the rise (and potential fall) of land values for these purposes. It demonstrates how generous grant schemes and financial incentives, external factors and (somewhat conflictual) land use policies drove significant demand with very limited supply. It also demonstrates how this landscape changed in subsequent years which dwelled demand and/or the ambitions of institutional landowners.

Towards a democratic appropriation of public farmland: emerging debates and policy initiatives in Flanders on land-driven farm transitions

Oral

***Dr. Hans Vandermaelen*¹, *Mrs. Griet Celen*², *Dr. Elke Vanempten*³**

1. Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO) & Ghent University, 2. Flemish Land Agency (VLM), 3. Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO) & Vrije Universiteit Brussel

In recent years, historical public landownership in Flanders (Belgium) has re-emerged as subject of public debate and policy development (Vandermaelen et al., 2022). Farming communities, urban grassroots movements and scholars have been successful in dismantling the depoliticised climate in which public institutions have been privatising their agricultural assets for decades. Progressing through the different phases of repoliticisation processes (Kenis & Lievens, 2015), this debate is now moving from a phase of criticism and deconstruction to one of building counter-hegemonic discourses. In this context, a further decline in public landownership is sometimes seen as an opportunity to expand landownership of community land funds such as *De Landgenoten* and *Terre-en-Vue*. This idea, however, not only encounters scale-related and financial constraints, it also raises critical questions to find farming and urban communities in a position of having to mobilise scarce resources to obtain land that is already in public hands (Vandermaelen, 2023). Considering that public landowners are electorally accountable for the decisions they make, unlike private landowners (Christophers, 2018), an alternative strategy is to enhance democratic governance over existing public landownership.

This contribution will take stock of emerging debates and policy initiatives in Flanders that are democratising decision-making on public landownership and land use. We will focus on governance structures and policy instruments aimed at facilitating agroecological transitions of farms, consider the interplay between the governance of public landownership and private landownership, and explore how this could bring a more strategic impetus to community landownership and land acquisition.

Keywords: public landownership, governance, farm transition

‘Is here his’? Cultural norms and community land ownership – a study of the Ashanti region, Ghana.

Oral

***Dr. Adwoa Ofori*¹**

1. University College Dublin

‘For the Northerner he has left..... he has gone; but if he isn’t getting land to farm on, what is he staying here for; is here his?’ (Community Member ANR5; Ananekrom, October 2017 – translated from the Ashanti language Twi).

Land in Ghana consists of state land and customary land. Within the customary land set-up, those indigenous to a traditional area have rights to parcels of land in that locality. Non-indigenes access land through contractual arrangements. The question is how such mechanisms impact land ownership and by extension livelihoods. This paper examines community land ownership from a cultural/traditional perspective with Ghana as a case study. Using the loss of access to land through large-scale land acquisitions, it interrogates the role of cultural/traditional norms in community land ownership and the impacts.

A case study of the Ananekrom and Dukusen communities in the Ashanti region was undertaken. These localities were inhabited by indigenes and non-indigenes. Using a random sampling technique, interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken with community members. Purposive sampling was used to carry out interviews with officials at the Asante Akim North District Assembly, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Agogo Traditional Council.

The research found that the culture played a significant role where ownership, impacts and livelihoods were concerned. Overarchingly, the cultural/ traditional norms protect the indigenous group and ancestral links to an area are necessary for community land ownership. Though this heightens vulnerability for non-indigenes, it ensures sustenance for future generations of the indigenous community.

Keywords: land; culture; Ghana

‘Tell me, where do the children play?’ The silent enclosure of the Flemish countryside

Oral

Dr. Jeroen Adam¹

1. Ghent University

Through a micro-level study of a Flemish village, this presentation will demonstrate how a silent enclosure has happened from the sixties onwards in which non-farming populations have increasingly been deprived of common access rights to agricultural land. It will be argued that these informal common rights acted as crucial bridges between the village and the surrounding rural area and intimately connected farming and non-farming populations. In addition, it will be demonstrated how this silent enclosure is also a socio-political transition in which autonomous decision making at the level of the village about access to land and a diversity of land uses has withered away and been replaced by formal state law that is considered abstract and alienating.

Through this analysis of the silent enclosure of the Flemish countryside, I wish to open a discussion on the limits and possibilities of autonomous and democratic decision-making regarding land access and the future of the countryside in general. How can certain common access rights be reinstalled? How can connections between farming and non-farming populations be strengthened? How can we go beyond reductionist and modernist paradigms in which rural space is uniquely imagined through its productivist usages?

3. Generational renewal, sustainable farms, and rural futures

Breaking barriers to sustainable farm succession: the strategic potential of public land

Oral

***Dr. Hans Vandermaelen*¹, *Mrs. Anne-Marie Vangeenberghe*²**

1. Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO) & Ghent University, 2. Flemish Knowledge Institute Farm Succession (Kenniscentrum Bedrijfsopvolging)

A strongly ageing agricultural sector and a laborious rejuvenation characterise many European regions, including Flanders (Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, 2024). High farmland prices and a lack of farmland protection (Monllor & Mardiles, 2024; Laridon, 2024) represent two decisive factors severely hampering the generational renewal and hence sustainability of (family) farms. In recent years, Flanders has witnessed a growing awareness for public landownership. With over 7% of all farmland publicly owned, 1 in 5 professional farmers working more than 10% on public land and a high average age of current users (Vandermaelen et al., 2024), the topic also emerged as an opportunity for supporting generational renewal in agriculture. On farms operating (partly) on public land, public institutions hold a key success factor in farm succession. However, the reality is that many public institutions are selling their assets, making future access to land uncertain and jeopardising sustainable farm succession. This contrasts sharply with the long-standing agricultural benefit these lands have played as a source of security, enabling factor for sustainable land use and a welcome reduction of financial burdens on successors. With our contribution, we seek to explore and substantiate public land policy as a strategic contribution to generational renewal in agriculture. We believe public land and public land policy (still) holds the potential to increase the viability of farms upon generational renewal, which creates opportunities for supporting sustainable farming practices and agroecosystems.

Keywords: farm succession, public land

Concerns and barriers surrounding the farm succession process – perception versus reality for beef farmers in Ireland

Oral

***Dr. Michael Hayden*¹, *Dr. Brian Leonard*²**

1. Maynooth University, 2. University College Dublin

Generational renewal is widely acknowledged as key to the survival and sustainability of the European agricultural industry. In Ireland and many other European countries an aging farming population, and the lack of succession planning by farmers, are significant concerns regarding the future of the industry. Farm succession is a complex and multifaceted process with the literature highlighting one of its main barriers as a reluctance of older farmers to retire and pass their farm onto the next generation. Such resistance is undoubtedly a huge issue in terms of generational renewal of the industry, however, it is important to understand that there are many sources of concern for farmers that can act as barriers to developing a succession plan. In this context, the objective of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the concerns and barriers surrounding the farm succession process. Discussions on the topic of farm succession, which took place during semi-structured interviews and consultation meetings with 30 beef farmers in Ireland as part of an intervention programme to support farmers in succession planning, reveal that the source of such concerns appear to stem from two broad areas: *successor identification concerns* and *financial and legal concerns*. While acknowledging that such issues cause genuine concern for farmers, we argue that overcoming them may not be as difficult as some farmers may imagine. Hence a distinction between what constitutes *real concerns* versus what constitutes *perceived concerns* in the farm succession process emerges. The evidence gathered suggests that where farmers engage the services of professional advisors to discuss farm succession, many of those concerns can be alleviated.

Imagined Futures of Generational Renewal in Farming: An Evolutionary Economics Perspective on Japan and Ethiopia

Oral

Prof. Zenebe Uraguchi¹

1. Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest, and Food Sciences (HAFL)

Generational renewal in farming presents challenges in countries like Japan and Ethiopia, shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional dynamics. This paper critiques generational renewal through the lens of evolutionary economics, emphasizing the interplay of innovation, adaptation, and institutional change.

In Japan, the farming sector is constrained by path dependency, where historical policies and entrenched practices have failed to adapt to the demographic crisis of an aging farming population and urban migration. Efforts to attract youth into agriculture, including financial incentives and technological innovations, prioritize preserving the existing system, limiting transformative change, and deterring youth engagement. Similarly, bounded rationality—stemming from constraints in the ecosystem of support, including access to land, finance, and market opportunities—affects decision-making, reinforcing the status quo.

In Ethiopia, generational renewal is compounded by challenges. The fragmentation of land, resulting from land redistribution policies, limits farming viability for youth. Land ownership insecurity, particularly for women, exacerbates these challenges, creating an environment where farming is viewed as a precarious career. The realities of climate change adaptation, including unpredictable rainfall and declining soil fertility, add stress to agricultural systems. The feminization of agriculture, driven by male migration, creates barriers for women farmers, who face limited access to resources and decision-making power. Despite government-led initiatives in subsidies and skill development, these efforts reinforce outdated structures, neglecting institutional reforms. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates historical and policy analysis, stakeholder interviews, comparative case studies, and surveys to capture the perspectives of rural youth and assess institutional adaptability. The study argues for adaptive policy interventions that embrace flexibility, promote innovation, and move beyond preserving the existing order. By aligning generational renewal strategies with evolutionary adaptation, Japan and Ethiopia can transform their agricultural systems into resilient and inclusive sectors capable of sustaining intergenerational participation in farming.

Keywords: generational renewal; evolutionary economics; agricultural transformation

Intergenerational cohabitation in rural alpine areas: the case of South Tyrol

Oral

Dr. Alessandra Piccoli¹

1. Free university of Bolzano

Alto Adige is characterized by a strong agricultural identity, with 56% of the population residing in rural municipalities, although only 8% is connected to agricultural activity, producing about 5% of the regional GDP (Chamber of Commerce). A characteristic feature of the region is the very strong predominance of family farms, albeit in a context of intensive agro-industrial agriculture and in an area that has the highest GDP per capita in all of Italy (ASTAT). Fifteen percent of South Tyrolean children live with at least one parent and grandparents, in an intergenerational environment (Ministry of Health).

The proposed contribution aims to investigate the role of the new generation that, within this context, takes control of family businesses and communities between tradition and renewal. The empirical data are based on several researches conducted between 2022 and 2025 with different focuses, but all oriented to the knowledge of the South Tyrolean agricultural world: women pioneers in sustainable agriculture, family farmers in the apple sector, producers of wines from resistant varieties for a lower impact agriculture. From each research study it was possible to extrapolate a point of view on the intergenerational relationship in the hand-over to the next generation, with a focus on cohabitation on the same farm, which characterizes almost all family farms in the region.

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Intergenerational Dialogue: new policies for Agrarian Social Regeneration in Spain

Oral

Dr. Neus Monllor Rico¹, Dr. Antony Fuller², Mr. Dirk Madriles Helm¹

1. Amaterra, 2. University of Guelph

The generational renewal (GR) of farmers in Europe, and specifically in Spain, is facing significant challenges. Data shows that the cohort of young people dedicated to agriculture is steadily decreasing, while an increasing number of farmers are approaching retirement without a clear successor. This demographic shift threatens the sustainability and future of agriculture in rural areas.

Evaluations of current policies highlight inefficiencies in addressing these challenges. A 2017 European Court of Auditors report emphasized the lack of a clear intervention logic and measurable results in EU support for young farmers. Recently, a 2023 European Parliament proposal introduced new strategies to address some of these issues.

Recent approaches focus not only on supporting young farmers but also on addressing the needs of the exit generation—the experienced farmers retiring in the coming years. The choices of the exit generation affect not only the resources available for the incoming generation but also the potential for agrarian social regeneration and the environmental practices adopted by future farmers.

This paper explores agrosocial policy approaches in Spain aimed at strengthening the connection between these two generations. The authors introduce the concept of Agrarian Social Regeneration, viewing it as a circular pathway that fosters intergenerational exchange.

To ensure a sustainable rural future, it is vital to facilitate dialogue between both generations, addressing social, economic, legislative, emotional, environmental, and cultural factors. These policies are essential to securing a healthy, inspiring and sustainable agricultural system in Spain's rural areas.

Interlinking factors influencing three main rural future challenges: depopulation, farmer generational renewal, and sustainable farming.

Oral

Ms. Petra Benyei¹, Ms. Francisca Blanco-Moreno², Ms. Laura Calvet-Mir³, Mr. Daniel Iglesias¹, Mr. Daniel López-García¹

1. Instituto de Economía Geografía y Demografía (CSIC), 2. EVALMED. Departamento de Sociología: Metodología y Teoría. Facultad de CC. Políticas y Sociología. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 3. Institut Metròpoli, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Rural depopulation, lack of farmer generational renewal, and industrialized agriculture's environmental impacts are pressing challenges making rural areas more vulnerable and food systems less resilient. These challenges seem strongly connected, as family farms with sustainable farming models have historically settled populations in rural areas due to their economic and cultural attachment to the land. Moreover, there is a demonstrated relationship between biophysical degradation and family farming decline. Finally, some evidence suggests that women farm managers adopt more economically and environmentally sustainable farming models than men. Still, most previous research has looked at these challenges separately, and there is a generalized lack of gender perspectives on these issues. In this presentation, we will present the results from a systematic literature review that focused on comparing three bodies of literature: one investigating the factors determining farmer generational renewal, one looking at factors determining population retention and return to rural underpopulated areas, and a final one exploring factors determining farmer adoption of sustainable farming practices. We used the Scopus database to get hits for the three topics identified: renewal, sustainability, and settlement. We limited the search to scientific articles or book chapters published in English between 2013 and 2023. Although still in a preliminary phase, we will present the interlinkages, contradictions, and synergies between the factors determining these three pressing rural challenges, hoping to spark lively discussions about the role of these factors in shaping transitions towards liveable rural futures.

Leveraging findings from European research projects to build a framework for teaching digitalisation for sustainable agriculture

Oral

Dr. Fabio Lepore¹, Dr. Livia Ortolani², Prof. Gianluca Brunori¹

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa, 2. Council for Agricultural Research and Economics - Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy

Generational renewal is a crucial challenge for the future of agriculture and rural areas. Although young farmers are often considered more open to innovation, their contribution to the transition to sustainable models could depend on access to appropriate training. Digitalisation offers tools for improving the economic, social and environmental sustainability of agriculture, but specific skills need to be acquired to fully exploit its potential. In addition to knowledge of agronomic practices, ICT and innovation management expertise are becoming increasingly relevant.

This contribution presents the experience of a postgraduate university course developed as a legacy of the European project H2020 DESIRA (*Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas*). Starting from its theoretical background and capitalising on the insights gained from the research activities within it, our work aims to define a framework for transforming the results of international research projects into effective and replicable educational pathways, focusing on digitisation for sustainable agriculture; in line with the SDGs. Currently in its first year of operation, it was anticipated by two years of experimentation as a higher education programme, allowing us to test a teaching model that aims to respond to the challenges of the future of this sector.

This study aims to contribute to the debate on the role of specialised educational pathways in facilitating generational turnover in agriculture. In a context where production, environmental and economic challenges require increasingly advanced skills, innovative educational models can support new farmers in developing competences that are fundamental for the sustainability of their businesses. Integrating advanced knowledge into practical applications can foster a more effective transition to resilient and sustainable agricultural models. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary and innovation-oriented approach can enhance the attractiveness of the sector by providing new generations with tools to understand and lead the change.

Network governance and generational renewal in the Almond production in mediterranean area: the Sicilian case

Oral

Dr. Livia Ortolani¹, Mrs. Milena Verrascina¹, Mrs. Serena Tarangioli¹, Dr. Silvia Baralla¹

1. CREA PB

Network Governance aims to create consensus among stakeholders and facilitate collaboration to co-deliver public services (Molina and Rhodes, 2002). It is widely recognized that collaboration and cooperation can improve trust and mutual understanding (Cohen 2018) and this idea led to the development of several collective interaction models in rural development policies with different specific goals but in an overall vision based on promoting network governance of rural areas (Secco and Burlando 2017). Among the solutions/paths to be pursued, Generational Renewal can support the capacity to develop interpersonal dynamics and increase the collaborative capacity of social network in which a farmer is embedded (Coopmans et al, 2021), contributing to the success of network governance and social innovation.

The sicilian case we are proposing is exploring the opportunities given by generational renewal in the almond sector in Sicily. Starting from the analysis of different collaborative models (producers organization, collective labels - PDO, IPG, Slow Food, others), network contracts, food districts, other public funded projects, some active experiences of almond production have been identified. In January 2025 a field research was conducted, based on semi-structured interviews, in order to understand the role of younger generations in the promotion of a typical crop that, until 10 years ago was mentioned by the literature as at risk of disappearing (Frattaroli et al. 2014) and today is considered a low impact and sustainable crop in the area of reference and an investment opportunity by private companies as prices and consumption are growing (Ollani et al. 2024).

Frattaroli, et al. (2014). The disappearance of traditional agricultural landscapes in the Mediterranean basin. The case of almond orchards in Central Italy. *Plant Sociology*, 51(2), 3-15.

Ollani et al. (2024). Recent Innovations on the Reuse of Almond and Hazelnut By-Products: A Review. *Sustainability*, 16(6), 2577.

Projets d'enseignement supérieur de jeunes issus de familles maraichers dans la ceinture verte de General Pueyrredón (Buenos Aires).

Oral

***Ms. María Virginia Nessi*¹**

1. UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES

L'insertion scolaire dans l'enseignement supérieur est souvent présentée comme une option de formation pour les jeunes générations de familles dédiées à la production agricole. Ainsi, les formations agricoles sont un moyen de technification face au progrès technologique et à la spécialisation au sein de cette branche. Dans le cas particulier du maraîchage argentin, la technification s'est accentuée au cours des dernières décennies à la suite de la restructuration des années 1990. Par conséquent, la spécialisation de l'horticulture est évidente dans les différentes tâches liées aux différentes instances de cette production et qui requièrent différents types de technification.

C'est pourquoi cet article cherche à étudier les projets éducatifs au niveau de l'enseignement supérieur des jeunes liés au maraîchage argentin dans le Partido de General Pueyrredón, tant au niveau universitaire qu'au niveau technique. L'hypothèse est que la spécialisation dans le maraîchage signifie que les jeunes sont à la recherche de nouvelles options et de nouveaux intérêts dans les carrières de l'enseignement supérieur, tant au niveau universitaire qu'au niveau tertiaire. Pour ce faire, une méthodologie qualitative basée sur des entretiens approfondis menés entre 2017 et 2022 sera utilisée.

Revisiting the land access barrier in farm generational renewal. Land concentration and family farm structural adjustment, a quantitative study

Oral

***Mrs. Ana Villán Delgado*¹**

1. Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals (ICTA-UAB) Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona

Family farming necessitates generational renewal (GR henceforth) to be sustainable. Limited access to land has been pointed out as the principal barrier for aspiring young farmers who wish to join the sector worldwide, even for those whose families already own and run a farm.

This land access barrier is defined as a limitation to acquire enough farmland for consolidating an economically viable farm. Thus, it is consistently framed as a problem of scarcity of available lands, and scarcity of credit amongst youth to buy or lease it. Accordingly, the solutions proposed in academic and policy spheres are based on mobilising land markets and giving youth priority access, both through direct subsidies for land acquisition and subsidies for farm modernisation to increase their competitiveness and purchase power.

A quantitative analysis of agricultural census data between 1982 and 2020 in Castilla y León (Spain) unveils a discomfoting feedback loop: while farmland surface has remained the same in the last three decades, it has increasingly become concentrated on medium-large family farms, especially on those managed by youth. Yet, while young farmers' holdings have never been so large in surface and economic dimensions, the land access barrier has not decreased but intensified. Moreover, the structural adjustment models adopted in these farms are associated with environmentally unsustainable development strategies.

Based on these results I argue (1) that the land access barrier stems not from land scarcity, but from an unsustainable agricultural development agenda in which family farms must grow forevermore to remain economically viable, and (2) GR policy instruments that fuel land concentration and business-as-usual farm development exacerbate rather than solve the structural barriers to the generational renewal of European family farms.

Revitalizing Spanish Agriculture: The Innovative Network of Farm Incubators for Generational Renewal

Oral

Mr. Gil Mercader¹, Ms. Laura Megías²

1. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2. Red de Espacios Test Agrarios de España

Generational renewal in agriculture in Europe is declining amidst ongoing trends of farm concentration and modernization (Jepsen et al., 2015; van der Ploeg et al., 2015). This trend is particularly evident in southern European countries, where family farm succession—the most common pathway into agriculture—has been decreasing. Large agricultural enterprises and agrifood companies are absorbing small, family-oriented farms that struggle to remain profitable (Sutherland, 2023; Zagata & Sutherland, 2015). While the entry of new farmers may seem unnecessary under this agroindustrial treadmill, there is an urgent need for ecologically skilled farmers to support a transition to sustainable agriculture (Carlisle et al., 2019). ‘Newcomers’—individuals entering the agricultural sector without prior farming connections—may represent one of several important new farmer groups playing crucial role in this transition (Creaney et al., 2023; Monllor i Rico & Fuller, 2016). Often innovative and committed to sustainable practices, these newcomers encounter significant challenges related to access to land, markets, and financial resources. Addressing these barriers requires new governance structures and public initiatives (Skrzypczyński et al., 2021; Stoker, 2018). In Spain, the Network of Farm Incubators (RETA) exemplifies a social innovation project aimed at integrating newcomers into the agricultural sector through farm incubators. This initiative helps overcome the obstacles faced by these individuals, enabling them to successfully establish viable businesses while adopting sustainable farming practices (Monllor & Megías, 2020). By supporting newcomers, RETA contributes to a more diverse and resilient agricultural landscape in Europe.

The next generation of Irish farmers – Attitudes and Plans

Oral

Dr. Mary Curtin¹, Dr. Caroline Murphy¹, Dr. Una Woods¹

1. University of Limerick

Our focus is on the future generation and the occupational intentions of those who are both current and past students within the Irish agricultural sector. The most appropriate way to collect data on this cohort was to target those undertaking a specific type of agricultural education in Ireland known as the 'green cert'. The data was collected in 2022/2023 and the survey had 160 respondents. The survey was noteworthy in having a uniquely narrow target group and specifically examined gender also. Liepins and Schick (1998) examined farm education in terms of gender and extended Shortall's (1996) argument that education is an example of wider social and cultural institutions, providing different experiences and opportunities for men and women. It was these considerations that informed the specific survey questions. The survey was conducted through Qualtrics and analysed in SPSS. The survey was nationally representative and distributed to all genders. Thematic areas of interest include familial relationships, attitudes to farming, farm skills, sustainability, farming as an occupation, support for female farmers, the farm education model, patriarchy and the future.

The role of ethical values during the intergenerational transfer of farms.

Oral

Ms. Ludivine Cartelle ¹, Dr. Mikael Akimowicz ², Dr. Sophie Thiron ¹

1. University Toulouse Jean Jaurès, 2. University of Toulouse

Farm intergenerational transfer is a burning issue for the sustainability of the agricultural sector. In France, approximately half of farm heads are expected to retire in the next five years. However, the lack of attractiveness of the profession triggered by the increasing size of current farm structures, the sometimes-contradictory societal demands decrease, and the precarious incomes resulting from an agricultural business is a barrier for younger generations to start farming. Moreover, the farm transfer process is often locked down by traditional agricultural organizations whose visions of agriculture do not necessarily align with those of young farmers.

In this communication we explore the ethical values within which farmers' decision-making is embedded. The research relies on semi-structured interviews with pairs of farmers involved in 6 farm transfers in southwestern France around the metropolitan area of Toulouse.

The results show an existing tension between the values of the transferring and settling generations on diverse topics such as the utilization of technology, the place of the family within farm systems, the societal role of agriculture. These results highlight the difficulties to transfer farms when representations do not align and raise the issue of the role of emotions during the farm transfer. In particular, they advocate for a psycho-social support that would complement the technico-economic advice that farmers receive during the design of their farm project and the negotiation of the farm transfer.

The role of policy in shaping sustainable generational renewal: Takeaways from Land Access Policy Incentive research

Oral

Dr. Julia Valliant¹, Ms. Marie O'Neill¹

1. Indiana University

Similar to Europe, young and “beginning” farmers of the United States appear to be more inclined than older farmers to manage their farms in ways that build livable futures. Younger farmers’ farms are more likely to regenerate regional food systems and address climate threats. Due to the promise of young farmer entry for agriculture and rural communities, ten U.S. states offer incentive policies to facilitate young farmers’ entry. The policies’ shared aim is to catalyze transfers of farmland and its management to “beginning” farmers. They succeed in meeting several targets surrounding generational renewal, access, tenure, and young farm viability. However, a drawback is that they are broadly not designed for, or used by, farms that pursue agroecological or food system change. Instead, they almost exclusively facilitate handoffs of monocultural commodity grain farms to younger farmers who proceed without adding value to the management or product mix, which can be environmentally and economically unsustainable. Our research with the policies’ creators and 1,100 farmers and landowners who have enrolled in “Land Access Policy Incentives” explains these policy problems as well as potential revisions, to better serve multifunctional outcomes. My talk will compare these U.S.-based findings to those from related European policy assessments (eg. Balezentis et al, 2019, Bradfield et al 2023, Korthals Altes 2023) and highlight bright spots revealed by the research. While the U.S. policies are meeting demographic goals, they also have the potential to be changed to serve agri-food goals of a livable future.

Key words: Generational renewal, farmland dynamics, policy

Women New Entrants' realities, motivations and perspectives towards farming entry: the case of Galician (Spain) agricultural sector

Oral

Ms. Guillermina Fernández-Villar¹, Dr. Mar Pérez-Fra², Dr. M. Dolores Vázquez-Castro³, Dr. Eduardo Corbelle-Rico¹

1. Land Laboratory, Higher Polytechnic Engineering School, University of Santiago de Compostela, 2. Department of Applied Economics, Higher Polytechnic Engineering School, University of Santiago de Compostela, 3. Department of Functional Biology, Higher Polytechnic Engineering School, University of Santiago de Compostela

In recent years, significant changes such as the decrease in the number of farms, the increase in their average size, and the ageing of farm owners have redefined the structure of the agricultural sector in many European regions. Whereas the traditional family farm entry pathway is doing its worst, the number of people starting their agricultural career without previous experience is actually taking another course. These so-called new entrants or newcomers (NEs) have no direct family or professional background in farming, but they stand out by bringing skills and experience in diverse areas of knowledge.

This qualitative research targets the motivations and barriers that women NEs face during their farming entry process, as well as their attitudes and expectations related to the future in the sector. Starting with a sample of 87 NEs obtained from previous quantitative research in Galicia conducted during 2023 and 2024, we interviewed the women from the sample during the beginning of 2025.

Results show similarities with the rest of beginning farmers but also certain remarkable specificities. In Galicia, despite livestock farming is the main activity encompassing almost 70% of the total value of the sector, NEs are more likely to choose vegetable productions – specially women, who also show a deeper environmental sensitivity-. This increased alternative entry pathway means nowadays a significant option to enter the sector for the latter, as the abovementioned traditional farm entry pathway has been associated with a patrilineal pattern, leaving wives and daughters aside from farm ownership in favour of sons.

‘We are not at the same point’: exploring farmer identity construction among successors, potential successors, and new entrants

Oral

***Mrs. Federica Consentino*¹, *Prof. Iuri Peri*¹, *Prof. Gianluca Brunori*², *Prof. Ruth McAreavey*³**

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Catania, 2. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa, 3. School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University

Generational renewal in agriculture is a complex and multidimensional process that significantly impacts the long-term sustainability of farms and rural development. The low rate of generational turnover presents critical challenges, effecting the resilience of rural economies, food security, and environmental sustainability. Recent research highlights that farmer identity is a crucial factor influencing young people's decision-making and actions when entering the sector. While most studies focus on successors and inheritance, this research differentiates between successors (who have already inherited), potential successors (who may inherit but have not yet done so), and new entrants (who do not have a family agricultural background). Grounded in identity theory, this study explores how young individuals develop their sense of self as farmers or potential farmers, emphasizing relational, contextual, and symbolic influences shaped by their backgrounds and experiences. The research employs a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with 20 participants from Sicily (Italy), all living and working in rural areas affected by demographic decline. Findings reveal how symbols, identity standards, multiple identities, and external validation shape young people's perception of what it means to be a farmer, with interpretations differing across the three groups. By framing generational renewal through the lens of farmer identities, this research provides a new perspective for reflection among policymakers. Recognizing the diverse pathways through which young individuals engage with farming can help design more inclusive and adaptive policies, fostering both innovation and continuity in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Generational Renewal, Farmer Identity, Agricultural sustainability

**4. Intersections of life
and work in agriculture:
Exploring how to create
livable ‘presents’ and
futures**

A Critical Comparison of Farmer and Non-Farmer Suicide Rates in Ireland Using Coronial Data

Oral

Dr. Joseph Firnhaber¹, Dr. David Meredith¹, Dr. Anne Markey²

1. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, 2. School of Agriculture & Food Science, University College Dublin (UCD), Dublin, Ireland

Agriculture is a dangerous occupation, with challenging working conditions that pose significant mental health risks. Studies of Farmer suicide from around the world often report higher rates than in many other occupational groups. In Ireland, farmer suicide has drawn increasing media attention and public funding in recent years as one of the most important mental health issues faced by farm communities in Ireland. However, studies of farmer suicide rates are methodologically inconsistent.

To address existing methodological gaps, this study critically established a close match between reference populations for both our numerator (farmer deaths by suicide) and denominator (total farming population) to identify if there is a significant difference between suicide rates among the farming and the general population in Ireland from 2007 to 2020.

We identified a statistically significant difference between the suicide rate in the farming (11.9) and non-farming (10.1) populations. However, this difference was driven largely by high suicide rates from 2007 to 2013, and increasingly converged with the general population suicide rate, with no significant difference in rates between 2014 and 2020.

We discuss how these findings illustrate the importance of methodological rigour in order to provide policymakers with an accurate evidence-base, and worrying similarities between ongoing socioeconomic changes and the unstable period that may have affected the high farmer suicide rates around 2013.

A Multidimensional Approach to Assessing the Attractiveness of Work in Agriculture: Evidence from Romania

Oral

Dr. Alin Croitoru¹

1. Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

Like many countries, Romania is grappling with the dual challenges of an aging agricultural workforce and the limited appeal of agricultural employment to younger individuals. This situation raises concerns about the sustainability of agricultural activities and suggests a deficient selection of individuals entering this field. In this paper, we propose a multidimensional model for analysing the attractiveness of agricultural work among the general population, considering how factors such as income, work environment, and healthcare for those employed in this sector are evaluated.

Working within the broader framework of the SafeHabitat Horizon project, our study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how the general population in Romania perceives agricultural work and how it is evaluated in comparison to other occupations. Utilizing data from a series of focus groups with stakeholders in the field of agriculture, as well as data from a sociological survey conducted in 2024, which includes over 700 participants, we aim to determine how various risks associated with agricultural work are assessed by the general population. Additionally, we explore the relationship between these assessments and the evaluations of the attractiveness of this employment sector. Logistic regression models are employed to test statistical relationships between variables and identify specific factors that affect individuals' assessments of the attractiveness of work in agriculture.

In this way, we aim to contribute to public policies that are more closely aligned with social realities, thereby garnering wider support within society for programs designed to strengthen health and safety in agriculture.

Agricultural aesthetics: visual appeal in farmers' discourse on agri-environmental farming practices

Oral

Dr. Anda Adamsons-Fiskovica¹, Dr. Mikelis Grivins¹

1. Baltic Studies Centre

With a few exceptions the literature on the factors guiding on-farm practices has only marginally observed and captured the role of aesthetic considerations in farmers' decision-making and perception of their daily work. Literature on good farmer/farming and adjacent strands of research primarily look at this aspect in terms of self-identity and peer recognition in the light of the dominant aesthetic norms of cultivated land, along with landscape aesthetics at a larger scale beyond a specific farm plot. But there is a less explicit focus on the role of micro-scale aesthetics in contributing to farmers' appreciation of their work and environment and to social sustainability of farming more generally. Drawing on the literature discussing environmental and agricultural aesthetics we contend that the sensual visual experience of farmers' routine work represents an important part of their lifeworld, going beyond the merely rational and pragmatic view of farming. Building on a set of 19 in-depth interviews with horticultural farmers in Latvia on their views on and experiences with agri-environmental practices such as green manuring, cover cropping, and intercropping, we conduct an inductive qualitative (thematic and discourse) analysis with regard to the contexts in which aesthetic arguments are evoked by farmers and the attributed role of visual appeal of their land, crops, and work in the pursuit of farming activities. We focus on the specific terms attributed and the inclusive and exclusive criteria applied to aesthetics, along with the multi-dimensional view on the perceived objects (static & processual) and scales (spatial & temporal) of aesthetics in farming. We highlight the close entanglement of tangible things and intangible actions in farmer's subjective accounts of farming aesthetics. We also argue that there is a range of trade-offs between aesthetics and other agronomic, economic, and environmental qualities when it comes to on-farm decision-making.

Are ‘Good Farmers’ safe farmers? Evaluating the role of identity on safety behaviours

Oral

Dr. Mohammad Mohammadrezaei¹, Dr. David Meredith², Dr. Joseph Firnhaber², Dr. John McNamara

³

1. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, Ashtown, Dublin,

2. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, 3. Farm Health and Safety Knowledge Transfer Unit, Teagasc

Farm health and safety (FHS) is not embedded in farming culture, where risk-taking may be socially valued and seen as what a ‘good farmer’ performs. As a result, the most commonly used approaches to promote farm safety behaviour, such as awareness raising, formal education, regulations, and engineered solutions, have not sustainably addressed the gap between farmer’s intentions to adopt safety behaviours and their actions to do so.

This study applies the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explain the gap between farmers’ safety intentions and their safety actions. We draw on data collected from a nationally representative sample, N=381, of farmers operating family farms in Ireland. The survey consisted of six vignettes, based on real-life fatal incidents reported by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), and questions on farmers decision-making in these risky situations. Through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), we examined how Subjective Norms (SN) and the perception of Good Farmer Identity (GFI) were key influences that impact Attitude (ATT), Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), Risk Perception (RP), and Intention (IN), thereby mediating the transition from intention to action.

The findings establish that SN and GFI perception are key factors influencing farm safety behaviour, both through their indirect effects on ATT, PBC, RP, and IN, and direct effects on behaviour by mediating intention. Farmers may intend to act safely but are less likely to do so if safety is not viewed as a trait of a ‘good farmer’. The study highlights the importance of community-based FHS initiatives to reshape GFI perceptions and promote a farm safety culture.

Keywords: Farm Safety Behaviour, Good Farmer Identity, Theory of Planned Behaviour

Care farms in Poland and social sustainability of farming

Oral

Prof. Wioletta Knapik¹, Mrs. Katarzyna Zajda²

1. University of Agriculture in Krakow, 2. Center of Social Innovations, University of Lodz; Department of Rural and Urban Studies and Sociology of Social Change, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz

Care farms can contribute significantly to rural development by strengthening the non-agricultural service sector within agriculture, leading to more diversified income for farmers. Care farms can be particularly economically attractive to smallholders. The activity of these entities contributes to social sustainability of farming.

The presentation analyses the creation of a model for the functioning of care farms in Poland. The results of survey research conducted (using the CATI technique) on a sample of 500 farms, 240 local government units, 857 adults caring for seniors, and 1,000 older adults will be presented.

The conclusions concern their attitudes towards care farms as a social innovation. Despite the indisputable social and economic advantages of care farming, multiple barriers hinder or prevent the initiative. Social barriers include public awareness of ageing, old age, the needs of older people, and the need to build cooperative networks for comprehensive social and care services for older people. Another barrier is the lack of legal and administrative solutions for establishing care farms and organised care and therapeutic efforts. The project results are commented on the social and economic conditions of Polish farmers, farm workers, and their families, along with the attractivity of agriculture.

Based on this project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is working on a law on care farms.

Key words: care farming, elderly population, social innovation

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Farm Typology Assessment in EU countries

Oral

Dr. Laura Girdziute¹, Dr. Anastasija Novikova¹, Dr. Algirdas Justinas Staugaitis¹

1. Vytautas Magnus university

Agriculture plays a crucial role in shaping the European economy and society toward a sustainable future. In the coming years, European farmers will encounter various challenges as they strive to produce both food and non-food products while actively contributing to this transition. These challenges span multiple areas, including climate change, resource scarcity, infrastructure limitations, and evolving food demand and dietary habits (Bock et. al., 2020). In this context, it is important to know that are the main profile in European countries, and how the well-being of farmers is varies among them. This study aimed to identify current farmers profiles in selected Countries (Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Estonia and France) and to assess wellbeing elements and factors for identified farming profiles. To achieve this goal study explored the expert evaluation method, surveying Experts from selected countries). The study revealed that mostly countries recognize 4 currently established in EU farming profiles, such as: Adaptive – diversified, Intensive – specialised, Patrimonial – tradition and family, and Corporate. The overall farmers well-being of corporate and Intensive – specialised was evaluated with the highest scores, while the overall wellbeing of Adaptive – diversified profile was identified as lowest.

Financial and mental health challenges in agriculture: Key informants' perspectives on farmers' ability and willingness to seek help

Oral

Ms. Sarah Ruszkowski ¹, Dr. Florence Becot ¹, Dr. Andrea Bjornestad ², Dr. Carrie Henning-Smith ³

1. Pennsylvania State University, 2. South Dakota State University, 3. University of Minnesota

Heightened levels of stress and anxiety are more prevalent among farmers compared to those working in other occupations. A growing body of literature has examined farmers' engagement with support services that aim to address their risk of and coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety. This research has extensively focused on farmers' engagement with support for mental health, with a notable focus on their willingness to engage in such services. Rarely has this body of work engaged with support for farmers facing financial concerns, even though these concerns are a main source of farmers' stress. In this paper, we leverage data from 59 interviews with 64 key informants in three US Midwest states to begin to understand farmers' willingness and ability to seek help for financial and mental health challenges and how these two dimensions compare (1. ability versus willingness and 2. support sought for financial versus mental health challenges). We found that key informants described farmers as more willing to seek help than they were able to seek and obtain help and that they were most willing to engage with financial support. We also found that many of the factors that explain farmers' willingness and ability to seek help are the same for mental health and financial support. This article offers practical insights into avenues that could simultaneously address both farmers' willingness and ability to seek help. Future research should explore how key informants perceive the level and adequacy of training around financial support programs and their roles and responsibilities in this type of support.

Impacts of Migration and Social Networks on the Persistence of Family Farms in the Face of Climate Change in Nepal

Oral

***Mr. Akanimo Udoekong*¹**

1. University of East Anglia

Studies have reported a gradual decline in the number of family farm units, which have historically been responsible for most of agricultural production. The persistence of family farms is determined by different factors including the availability and willingness of household members to commit long-term to the profession. Many researchers have studied impacts of climate change on farm productivity and the environment in Nepal, however, there are few studies examining its social sustainability effects. This paper aims to explore the impacts of social networks and climate change-driven migration on farm families based on 55 semi-structured interviews with farmers and technical experts in 3 provinces of Nepal. It documents areas in which social, economic and environmental sustainability interact to affect the stability of farming households. It considers the roles of migration and social networks in influencing long-term interest and commitment to farming and the perceptions of farmers about the future of their farming enterprises. This study revealed that the presence of social networks and migration tend to produce mixed outcomes for farm families. For instance, while remittances have helped support innovation on the farm, the exodus of people has multiplied labour cost and triggered a decline in interest as agriculture is no longer their sole source of livelihoods. Climate change is not only impacting farm profitability and the environment but is also the social structures of farming communities.

Money flows between farm business and farm household – a gendered perspective

Oral

Ms. Anna Kröplin¹, Dr. Sandra Contzen¹

1. Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest, and Food Sciences (HAFL)

As is the case worldwide, Swiss agriculture is a male domain, and women are often confined to the role of farmer's wife. Due to different aspects such as education, traditional values or laws Swiss farm household are closely linked to the farm business with exchanges in money and (unpaid) labor etc.

Until now, no database exists on the financial flows between the farm business and the farm household and on the corresponding money-management systems of farming couples. To shed light on this research gap, 28 qualitative interviews were conducted with women on Swiss farm, differing in the way they are involved in farm business. The interviews provided an in-depth look at the distribution of monetary resources between the farm business and farm household.

The initial results of this work in progress show that different systems are applied for the distribution of money between the two spheres. Often, the money earned with the farm business and from an off-farm job is used to pay all expenses, from both, the farm business and farm household. Especially married women with a high workload on the farm, are in high risk of financial dependency, if there is no arrangement regarding salary. The risk might be mitigated with a clear separation of business and household, and the women generating and saving money on their own.

This research on money flows between farm business and farm household reflects the complex interface of these two spheres and the possible effects it may cause and highlights the importance to better understand the intertwining of household and enterprise.

Keyword: money-management-systems, resource distribution, farm business – farm household interface

New Entrants in Organic Agriculture: Work Sustainability Challenges

Oral

Dr. Emna KHEMIRI¹, Dr. Claire Lamine², Dr. Adelaide Nascimento¹

1. Université Paris Saclay, INRAE UMR SADAPT, AgroParistech, 2. National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment

The issue of work sustainability in agriculture is now a central concern considering the sector's transformations (Magnano, Falasconi & Giordano, 2024; Volken & Bottazzi, 2024). The concept refers to working conditions that allow workers to maintain their health, develop their skills, and preserve their employability throughout their professional careers (Gollac, Guyot & Volkoff 2010). Our research focuses on the challenges of work as a means of questioning the sustainability of organic agriculture (OA) at the scale of the rural Ardèche region (France) in the context of a multifaceted crisis affecting OA (market conditions, climate change, limited state financial support, etc.). Based on semi-structured interviews with twelve farmers, we aim to explore the following research questions: After overcoming the initial challenges of setting up their farms, what work-related difficulties do newly established “outside the family framework” organic farmers face? What work strategies do these farmers implement to overcome these challenges and navigate crises? The analyses show that new organic farmers « outside the family framework » prioritize short supply chains to stabilize their income and develop local mutual aid networks, making their work more sustainable. However, sustainability also depends on economic, environmental, and family factors, with the latter playing a crucial role in the long-term viability of farming projects through the material and psychological support provided by the family to the farm operator. This presentation will be discussed in the light of our previous qualitative surveys (Dupré et al. 2017) and will provide a more detailed analysis of the sustainability of work based on the different types of working conditions of farmers recently surveyed in Ardèche.

Key-words: work, sustainability, organic agriculture

Queering Farm Work and Social Sustainability

Oral

***Mx. Prisca Pfammatter*¹**

1. University Bern

In agriculture and rural studies, the social dimension of sustainability has often been overshadowed by economic and environmental considerations. A growing body of research is starting to address this knowledge gap leading to the recognition of the centrality of work as well as gender for social sustainability (i.a. Janker et al., 2019; Janker & Mann, 2020). However, most of this work is conceptualized through the lens of traditional family farms thus reinforcing binary constructions of gender and work.

Emerging research (i.a. Leslie, 2017; Mejía-Duwan & Hoffelmeyer, 2024; Smith, 2019) illustrates how diverse identities and experiences are critical to shaping sustainable agricultural futures. I thus engage with queer farming communities to explore their lived realities, experiences and visions for farmwork. By conceptualizing social sustainability and agriculture as performative (Butler, 1988), I further explore how queering practices—such as reconfiguring gender, sexuality, and kinship structures—create space for alternative ways of organizing farmwork.

Preliminary fieldwork on Swiss-based farms reveals both internal contingencies within queer farming communities—ranging from homonormative reproductions of the family farm to radical queer-anarchist collectives—and broader shifts in the relationship between gender, work, and sustainability. Queer farmers often redefine work by decoupling performance from income and/or monetizing reproductive labor. Further queer farmers at times question and refuse knowledge systems, farming practices, and infrastructures that are historically shaped by cisheteropatriarchal norms. Yet, in questioning these structures, queer farmers at times also reproduce them, revealing the complexities of navigating alternative agrarian futures.

By situating queer farming within broader debates on social sustainability, this research expands understandings of who can farm, under what conditions, and how agricultural livelihoods can be made more livable. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions on work, gender, and the future and presents of socially sustainable agriculture.

Retirement: a surrounded isolation in farming households in Valais

Oral

Ms. Lorry Bruttin¹

1. University of applied sciences (HESTS), School of Social Work, Sierre, Valais

In Switzerland, farm managers — mostly men — stop receiving federal subsidies for their exploitation once they reach old age insurance age, namely 65-year-old. This change imposes deep reconfigurations within agricultural holdings, including within social and gendered dynamics. Yet, these transformations are still underexplored (Contzen, 2017; Mesnard, 2023)

To which extent and how does the stop of federal subsidies shape older farm managers' experiences and redefine social and gendered dynamics within their households (Bessière, 2008) and what mobilization strategies do they develop in response to these transformations?

To address these questions, I am conducting an ethnographic study in the canton of Valais, a region characterized by small-scale mountain farming. The methodology combines life history interviews with retired farmers and semi-structured interviews with members of their household. This empirical approach is also informed by my own experience as a member of a farming household.

The analysis of the agricultural context highlights the discriminatory effects of Swiss old age policies. Combined with solid identity-based attachments in a mountain farming system historically shaped by a strong intersection of life and work ethic, these effects reshape family and local solidarities. Life stories interviews reveal a striking paradox: although older farmers are surrounded by their social environment, their support network remains limited and fragmented.

Adopting a feminist perspective (Harding, 2004), this study highlights the centrality of women's invisible labor in farm managers' experience of reaching old age insurance age, as well as the tensions and opportunities it generates. It further questions the limitations of informal support systems and their impact on social sustainability (Janker, Mann, & Rist, 2019) within farming households—both in the present experience to retirement and in shaping the future of the farm.

Robots and salaried workers: from substitution to attractiveness

Oral

Dr. Théo MARTIN¹

1. INRAE

Since the 1920s, robotics has drawn on a science-fictional imaginary of the end of human labor. Robotic milking of dairy cows developed as a response to the difficulty of finding workers to milk cows. Farmers' difficulty in finding work on the market is one of the main explanations given in the scientific literature for the deployment of milking robots. This work is based on a cross-sectional analysis of 41 interviews conducted between 2020 and 2022 in two dairy areas in France. The interviews were carried out with farmers, the majority of whom were equipped with a robot. We show the tension between, on the one hand, a discourse on the replacement of salaried labor by robots and, on the other, the emergence of new working conditions that are more attractive to salaried labor. Firstly, we will show that the new time organisation of work facilitates salaried employment by making the rhythm of work in dairy farming more similar to that of other contemporary workers. With robotised milking, the working day starts later and ends earlier. Secondly, the milking robot allows greater control over work, enabling farmers to monitor workers from a distance. This article dismantles the myth of substitution, demonstrating how certain technologies can promote salaried employment, even though agriculture has remained on the periphery of the salaried system.

Stress frequency and its effects on the wellbeing of Irish male dairy farmers

Oral

Dr. Diana van Doorn¹, Dr. David Meredith²

1. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, 2. Teagasc

Introduction

This research explored the relationship between stress frequency and wellbeing among Irish male dairy farmers. European policy increasingly prioritises farmer mental health, focusing on occupational, familial, and personal stressors, and highlighting stress reduction key to improving wellbeing.

Methodology

This study analysed longitudinal data from male dairy farmers (n=199), at baseline (2018/19) and Week 52 (2019/20). Stress was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, and wellbeing by using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Descriptive analyses and adjusted standardized residuals (ASR) were used to explore the patterns and relationships between stress and wellbeing.

Results

By Week 52, more farmers reported low stress frequency (27.6%) compared to baseline (18.1%). Moderate stress frequency increased from 56.8% at baseline to 65.8% at Week 52. Very high stress frequency remained unchanged (2.5%). Whilst low stress frequency and 'excellent' wellbeing had a significant association at baseline (ASR 3.0) and Week 52 (ASR 2.6), no significant link was found between high stress frequency and poor wellbeing.

Discussion

Stress was prevalent but did not consistently lead to poor wellbeing, suggesting other factors like resilience, or social support may mediate its effects. A small group of farmers experienced ongoing high stress frequency, placing them at high-risk for mental health issues. It is critical that support measures are developed that are effective in engaging with these farmers. Many stressors in farming tend to be structural in nature, i.e. farmers have little control over input or output prices, food certification standards or the product specifications of processors and retailers. This reduces autonomy and increases job demands of farmers who are already confronted by high levels of uncertainty associated with weather and climate. Creating 'liveable futures' requires a social sustainability policy that addresses both individual and systemic needs.

Sustainable Intensification: Is Anyone Addressing the Social Impacts?

Oral

***Mr. Oliver Nell¹, Dr. Michelle Worosz¹, Dr. Audrey Gamble¹, Dr. Brenda Ortiz¹, Dr. Rishi Prasad¹,
Dr. Leah Duzy²***

1. Auburn University, 2. Compliance Services International

Sustainable Intensification (SI) in agricultural systems seeks to maximize productivity while increasing ecological health. It is a contentious concept, as some skeptics claim that it is impossible to pursue each of these goals equally. Moreover, some point out that social impacts seem to be left out of the SI discussion entirely. This study draws from literature on sustainability, SI, environmental ethics, and political economy to identify trends in how SI is conceptualized and operationalized. Next, we use the “Future of Farming” (FF) as a case study to identify areas in which the social impacts of conventional production align with or differ from the social impacts of SI more broadly. The FF is a transdisciplinary research and Extension project focused on the adoption of climate-smart technology in Alabama, USA row crop production. Data comes from interviews ($n=23$) conducted with farmers participating in a cover crop incentive program that is part of the FF project. Thematic analyses of these data was used to identify trends related to the farm-level decision-making of medium- to large-scale, capital intensive production, as well as farmers’ perceptions of sustainability and stewardship. Findings suggest that the ground-level social impacts of both conventional agriculture and SI approaches have similar outcomes and are similarly unaccounted for by proponents of these practices and systems. They also suggest that the growth imperative inherent in political-economic systems requires that participating actors, regardless of their personal values, prioritize economic outcomes, even if they are clearly at the expense of environmental and social outcomes.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable intensification, social impacts

The ethical dilemmas of doing research with survivors of farm accidents

Oral

Prof. Sarah (Sally) Shortall¹, Dr. David Meredith²

1. Newcastle University, 2. Teagasc

Many farming organisations and agricultural outreach services have made videos of survivors of farm accidents who speak about how their injury happened. The motivation for doing this is to use the videos as learning tools in the hope that it prevents further injuries happening on farms.

For SafeHabitat, a Horizon Europe funded project, we decided to make videos with survivors of farm accidents. However, when we began to consider the ethical issues, we realised there were a number of complex considerations. Interviews were conducted with survivors of farm accidents who had made videos to further consider these questions.

This paper focuses on three key questions. First, we explore the evidential basis for the effectiveness of videos of survivors as a learning tool. Second, we consider why the survivors made the videos and how effective they believe they were. Third, we look at the basis of social science research ethics, which tends to focus on doing no harm to the individual involved in the research. We argue that in the case of interviews with a member of the family farm, the potential ethical implications for the wider family members should also be considered.

The Political Economy of Labour Matching - Evidence from Swiss Viticulture

Oral

Ms. Celestina Heepen¹, Prof. Eva-Marie Meemken¹, Dr. Patrick Illien¹

1. ETH Zurich

Migrant workers are essential for labour-intensive horticulture in higher-income countries. Demographic changes, rising wages in migrant-sending countries and stricter migration policies are making migration less attractive. As a result, higher-income countries are increasingly facing labour shortages. This paper challenges prevailing narratives by examining workers' and farmers' perspectives alongside institutional factors shaping hiring and employment. A holistic approach, currently lacking, is crucial for improving labour matching in European horticulture. We use Swiss viticulture as a case study, where farmers can pay higher wages but face more restricted access to foreign workers than in the rest of Europe and address three key questions: (i) How do farmers meet labour demand? (ii) What role does viticulture play in workers' employment strategies? (iii) How do formal and informal institutions influence labour matching? We employ constructivist Grounded Theory, which is ideal for exploring phenomena insufficiently explained in the literature by building theories in an iterative process grounded in data. Our analysis drew on 28 semi-structured interviews with farmers, workers, and stakeholders. Preliminary findings reveal that workers are motivated by a connection to nature, the cultural aspect of wine, or a sense of belonging to the agricultural workforce, while wage perception depends on the workers' situation and comparison points. Farmers, meanwhile, prioritise hard-working labour recruited through various pathways to ensure the profitability of their farms. These insights highlight the critical role of institutional factors and the need to challenge dominant narratives to promote more sustainable labour practices in viticulture and beyond.

Towards the livability of diversified farms

Oral

Ms. Maeva Mailliard¹, Prof. Julien Blanc¹

1. Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris

Diversification appears to be a way of securing income and increasing farms resilience in the context of climate change. For farmers, it is also a question of reclaiming a set of living conditions. However, diversification raises issues of work organisation and tends to increase the risk of mental burden for farmers. Based on an ethnographic study carried out on a group of agro-ecological and lightly mechanised farms in central France, this study focuses on livability of diversified farms. While this very specific type of farms reflects a lifestyle choice and a reappropriation of peasant's way of life, the path towards sustainability and livability appears far to be straightforward. Using a heuristic tool co-built with the farmers during the research process - the 'intensity diagrams', we managed to highlight and discuss with them how their different activities were structured in space and time in a context of intersection of life and work. It shows a search for activities balance on several scales: yearly, weekly and daily, interlacing a diversity of issues. Using a daily life perspective, we will first present the general results of this research. We will then focus on two key farmer's livability strategies : work and domestic organisation on the one hand, ways of involving their body on the other hand. These strategies highlights how farmers are already inventing lifeable path, from body to farm sustainability.

Keywords : ethnography, work organisation, diversified farms

Women's Work and Land Reform in Zimbabwe: A Feminist Political Economy of Social Reproduction.

Oral

Dr. Newman Tekwa¹

1. South African Research Chair in Social Policy, University of South Africa

While the future of work in Africa is increasingly becoming an important area of research, a feminist political economy of social reproduction holds potential to illuminate the gendered and geographical nature of women's work in a context of a radical land reform. Time-use surveys data was gathered across three study area, two land reform and one non-land reform site. This was complemented with in-depth and focus group discussions in the land reform sites with participants drawn from participating female and male-headed households. While literature on women's work is accumulating, this has not been extended to integrate a feminist social reproductive lens on African rural women's work in a context of land reform. The none or malrecognition of social reproduction by the State makes the latter an agent of depletion—a gendered form of structural and everyday violence on women. While liberating, radical land reforms, of their own, do not necessarily improve the care burden of women. This is compounded by the debt crisis crippling many countries of the global South.

Key words: Women's work, land reform, , Zimbabwe.

Young farmers' views on the attractiveness of farming

Oral

Dr. Majda Černič Istenič¹, Dr. Duska Knezevic Hocevar²

1. Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2. ZRC SAZU - Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

The CAP has set itself ambitious objectives for the period 2021-2027: promoting the development of a smart and sustainable agricultural sector, supporting rural businesses and consolidating the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. One of the basic prerequisites for these goals is that young people are willing to continue farming. However, current statistics on the proportion of young farmers in Europe show an unfavourable trend: from 7.3% in 2005, this proportion has fallen to 6.5% in 2020. Against this background, in this paper the authors present the results of four focus groups on the future of farming with young farmers in Europe, conducted in January and February 2025 as part of the Horizon Europe project SafeHabitus. To gain insight into how young farmers see the challenges and opportunities in agriculture today and how they assess their current and future position in the sector, the FGs asked them to reflect on: a) identifying the main trends affecting or likely to affect agriculture and impacting on young farmers' careers; b) assessing current and likely future working conditions in agriculture; c) assessing the conditions under which young farmers are willing to take over a farm; and d) their expectations of policy makers' actions and initiatives in this area. The results obtained are viewed through the lens of the 'good farmer' approach and the 'Farmers of the Future' foresight study.

Keywords: attractiveness of farming, young farmers, Europe

5. Gaming liveable rural futures: play and games for research and education

“La Vila per la vida”: gamification for reflecting on land defense and local food production

Oral

Dr. Marta Maicas Pérez¹, Mrs. Isabel Soler Bartolomé², Mx. Irene Llorenç I Vicedo³, Mx. Carmen Gimeno Suñer³

1. Department of Business Management, University of Valencia, 2. UNED, 3. Colectiva La Gavella

“La Vila per la Vida” (La Vila for Life) is an **escape room** designed for adult participants to explore food sovereignty and the importance of defending rural territories, local knowledge, and community networks. The game was commissioned by the NGO Justicia Alimentaria, which promotes education for social change, and was developed in collaboration with a team of Valencian designers.

This time-sensitive and cooperative game presents **players with a pressing issue**: a large construction company proposes to turn the agricultural lands of La Vila, a fictional inland town in the País Valencià, into a massive solar panel park. While some see this as a solution to the town’s depopulation and declining public services, others fear the destruction of local agriculture and community ties. Participants take on different roles and must **navigate challenges that introduce key concepts of food sovereignty**, gaining rewards as they advance. The final goal is to organize a community response, culminating in a town hall meeting and a large protest to halt the so-called “Green Plan.”

Designed in 2023 **for students in Education faculties**, the game aims to inspire future teachers to incorporate food sovereignty into school curricula. Tested multiple times, it is now a regular tool used by Justicia Alimentaria in its educational projects. Through play, participants critically reflect on **rural sustainability, local food systems, and collective action**.

Keywords: Food sovereignty, serious games, rural sustainability

Any similarity to actual events or persons is purely coincidental. Balancing facts, fiction and playfulness in a game for landscape mediators.

Oral

Dr. Jeroen De Waegemaeker¹, Ms. Sylvie Fosselle¹

1. Flanders Research institute for Agriculture Fisheries and Food

Keywords: serious game, playfulness, landscape mediators, collaborative landscape development

The development of sustainable agricultural landscapes builds on mediators who transpose environmental policies to local contexts, bridging the realms of policy making and agricultural practices. Building social capital is paramount in these collaborative and require negotiations between governmental expectations and farmers' complex realities. Thus mediators are faced with a highly dynamic process with multiple loops, set-backs and sudden breakthroughs.

To accelerate sustainable water-oriented landscape development processes the Flemish government set-up the policy program Water-Land-Schap (WLS) which supports local coalitions coordinated by local WLS mediators. To respond to an underutilized potential for knowledge exchange between WLS mediators the Turquoise research project builds a serious game that aims to facilitate peer-to-peer learning amongst them. The game is based on the chutes and ladders game format and players are confronted with questions and events that showcase barriers and levers in many WLS projects.

Draft results show that the game's potential to support knowledge exchange originates from the playful game design (e.g. the cards and the chutes) as well as the informal context the game creates. While this playfulness facilitates knowledge exchange, the though and tricky questions and events, all fictitious yet based on true stories, push the peers to discuss both successes but more importantly failures. We argue that serious games to facilitate genuine peer-to-peer discussions require the right mix of facts and fictions, glued together via playfulness.

Co-Creating Sustainable Rural Futures: A Serious Game for Participatory Decision-Making in Energy Transitions

Oral

Prof. Marina Frolova¹, Dr. Juan Carlos Osorio-Aravena¹, Dr. Belén Pérez-Pérez¹, Prof. Yves Michelin²

1. University of Granada, 2. VetAgro Sup Campus Agronomique de Clermont

The transition toward sustainable rural futures requires inclusive decision-making processes that integrate diverse stakeholders' perspectives. Within the CO-SUSTAIN project (HORIZON-CL2-2023-DEMOCRACY-01-05, N°191132467), we have developed a serious game as a participatory tool to foster deliberation and empower local actors in rural areas facing sustainability challenges. Designed as a role-playing board game, this tool simulates real-world scenarios of energy transitions, land use conflicts, and policy negotiations. The game introduces participants—such as farmers, policymakers, energy developers, and civil society actors—to a fictional yet realistic rural territory inspired by Southern Spain. Players navigate complex trade-offs, balancing energy production, land occupancy, water consumption, economic feasibility, and social equity. Unlike traditional decision-making exercises, the game incorporates conditional decision-making (“Yes, if...” / “No, if...”), encouraging negotiation, consensus-building, and systemic thinking. Embedded within CO-SUSTAIN's broader research on political participation in six European countries, this serious game serves as a deliberative engagement tool in multi-stakeholder panels. It allows participants to test governance strategies, explore alternative futures, and reflect on their role in shaping sustainable transitions by playing the role of others. Additionally, its adaptability to various territorial and socio-political contexts enhances its applicability as an educational and policy-support tool, introducing a democratic decisions process. By fostering interactive learning and stakeholder collaboration, serious games like this one can bridge research, policy, and local engagement, offering an innovative approach to participatory rural governance and sustainable energy planning.

Keywords: Sustainable rural games; Participatory governance; Rural energy transition

Designing serious games for food system transformation

Oral

Dr. Federico Andreotti¹

1. Wageningen University

Achieving a paradigm shift in global food systems requires dialogue among stakeholders on redesign strategies for liveable futures. The MSc course “Redesigning Global Farming and Food Systems” at Wageningen University addresses this challenge by engaging students in participatory cross- and transdisciplinary methods. The course’s main group assignment is to design serious games as policy support tools that facilitate dialogue on food system transformation. Students work with real research and intervention projects encompassing multiple aspects of farming and food systems, integrating diverse disciplines and knowledges. The design process applies metaphors, stakeholder networks, and power dynamics using tangible materials as boundary objects to model and play complex systems dynamics and interactions. Furthermore, the design process functions as a boundary crossing tool, supporting potential learning mechanisms at boundaries, including identification, coordination, reflection, and transformation. Finalizing the games involves aligning research assumptions with user experience, ensuring the method’s affordances match the intended learning and engagement objectives. The course ends with a public playtesting session, where external participants engage with the games to test their assumptions and potential. By designing serious games, students gain practical insights into how game-based approaches can foster dialogue, support visioning and stakeholder engagement in food system transformation.

Exploring Citizen Engagement: Testing the Library of Citizen Engagement and Future Food Sharing Game for Sustainable Food Systems

Oral

Ms. Ana-Maria Gatejel¹, Ms. Txell Blanco¹

1. Wageningen University

We propose a 1,5 h interactive session to test the Library of Citizen Engagement and play the Future Food Sharing game. Both instruments were co-designed in collaboration food-sharing initiatives, researchers, artists, and policy makers. The Library is an open access curated collection of tools, games, and stories that can be used by food sharing initiatives, policymakers and citizens for establishing, expanding and maintaining inclusive participation in sustainable food sharing. We would like to test the transferability of results between the urban and rural settings and expand the library to include rural-specific engagement instruments.

The goal of Future Food Sharing game is the exploration of possible futures that mobilizes action. Future Food Sharing is designed to immerse players in the power dynamics, opportunities and tensions experienced by different actors involved in food sharing. A set of cards informed by real-world examples and research outputs serve as prompts. The game helps players explore and shape food-sharing scenarios for a sustainable food future. By engaging with diverse perspectives and tools, players collaborate to explore innovative solutions and foster meaningful dialogue around building more resilient and equitable food systems. The game integrates the findings from the **CULTIVATE** project into an engaging, dynamic deck that can be used for educational and research purposes.

The Library of Citizen Engagement and the Future Food Sharing game was developed in the context of CULTIVATE -a four-year Innovation Action funded by the EU Horizon Europe (GA No. 101083377) and designed to support innovation in urban and peri-urban (UPU) food sharing and help transform urban food systems towards more just and sustainable future.

Gamifying Rural Gentrification

Oral

***Dr. Szentandrasi Dora*¹, *Dr. Nemes Gusztáv*², *Ms. Noemi Ring*³, *Ms. Rita Pongacz*³**

1. researcher, 2. HUN-REN KRTK, 3. student

A Participatory Board Game for Research, Dialogue, and Awareness This presentation explores how serious games can serve as both a research tool and an educational medium to engage multiple stakeholders in understanding rural transformation. Based on a long-term research project on rural and tourism gentrification in Hungary, we designed a participatory board game to both analyze and communicate the findings of our study. The game aims to bring together different local actors (residents, entrepreneurs, second-home owners, and tourists) and highlight the conflicts, tensions, and cooperation possibilities among them. The game development process itself functioned as a participatory research method, involving interviews, workshops, and game-testing sessions with local stakeholders, offering a gamified framework for dialogue and validation of our findings. Once completed, the game can be played by local communities to surface and discuss existing issues in a safe, structured, and engaging environment. Additionally, by making the game available in restaurants, cafés, and accommodations, tourists and visitors can be sensitized to the local context, fostering greater awareness, empathy, and responsible engagement with rural communities. Our interdisciplinary approach involved collaboration with MOME (Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design), game design experts, and rural sociologists, leading to the creation and testing of two prototypes, with one now in the process of publication. The presentation will critically reflect on the game development process, discussing challenges, conflicts, and lessons learned, while exploring the potential of serious games to bridge research, education, and community engagement in rural development.

How to design and use online games to collect data on land management decision-making. Experience, practical insights, and aspirations from ENDORSE and EcoKnowGames.

Oral

***Dr. Diana Valero*¹, *Prof. Nils Bunnefeld*², *Dr. Jianyu Chen*¹, *Dr. Yuan Pan*³, *Dr. Marly Samuel*², *Dr. Theodor Cimpeanu*², *Dr. Conor McKeown*², *Dr. Brad Duthie*²**

1. The James Hutton Institute, 2. University of Stirling, 3. Kings College London

Land management in rural areas is at the core of social-ecological challenges that affect rural areas and communities across the world. These challenges are embedded in complex systems with dynamic contexts where people are interdependent. These challenges also raise questions around values, preferences and decision-making; they implicate public policy dilemmas and societal trade-offs, including societal distributions of rights, responsibilities and resources, shaping so processes that generate inequalities, but also the pathways to address them.

To better understand these complex adaptive systems and possibilities for intervention, data must be gathered on the drivers and impacts of interactions among people and between people and such dynamic contexts. However, capturing comprehensive data on these interactions is often challenging due to their complexity and the limited resources. Online games offer a perfect tool for data collection, as they can be designed to record player decision-making and therefore explore interactions and decision making in complex scenarios.

During the last few years, our research has explored how to use games for research through the development of specific land management games for different projects. In this conference presentation, we will focus on two specific projects and games: ENDORSE, on pest management farming practices; and EcoKnowGames, on land management decision-making. We will reflect on these games and compare their design, scope, and ambitions. We will also share lessons learnt in the process and providing technical and practical nuances and insights for advancing on the use of games as research method.

Innovation and Sustainability: teaching the CAP with PAC GAME

Oral

Mx. roberto cagliero¹, Mx. patrizia borsotto¹, Mx. ilaria borri¹, Mrs. Milena Verrascina¹,
Mx. francesca moino¹

1. CREA

PAC GAME is a serious game developed under the Italian Rural Network 2014-2020 Programme.

Our purpose is to organize a play session of PAC GAME during the ESRS2025 Congress with the aim of sharing our experience.

The aim of PAC GAME is to build a sustainable farm from an economic, environmental, and social point of view, consciously using the tools of the CAP. The playing team represents a real farm called to build a sustainable path moving on a game board where it interacts with other players and with bodies managing CAP implementation, faces positive and negative events, and learns how to consciously use the CAP interventions under National Strategic Plan. The management of the farm becomes relevant, and the team must fill out a farm register. This register is the tool to present, at the end of the game, to the other teams the path undertaken, the choices made, the critical issues faced and the opportunities from the CAP to reach the farm's sustainability. PAC GAME, initially designed for high school students specialising in agriculture, is now aimed at a wider audience thanks to a testing process with different stakeholders (students, policy makers, wide public, researchers and territorial actors). Within a common framework PAC GAME could be tailored under local conditions and issues.

In this light, the researchers have developed a broader educational purpose to allow the best conditions for the gameplay, also providing a specific website with video tutorial, documents, podcast etc. (<https://www.reterurale.it/pacgame>)

Interactive herding dynamics – the case of Cabanera

Oral

Dr. Federico De Musso¹

1. Leiden University

Cabanera is a game about sheep herding. Based on more than 18 months of fieldwork in the Catalan High Pyrenees in Spain, it focuses on the shepherds' sheep herding activities to move sheep from winter to summer graze.

Coming from the interactive documentary, the game mixes storytelling with play to evoke the issues, characteristics, boons, and drawbacks of tending to sheep. *Cabanera* alternates game moments and observational videos to show shepherds' activities. Following feedback participation from the interlocutors, the ethnographic research result becomes part of two sides of the game. On the one hand, the herding mechanic allows users to interact with and corral sheep. On the other hand, character interactions set up multilinear narrative choices that guide players among the shepherds' obligations to families and herds.

Cabanera offers a counterpoint to farming simulation games that focus on optimizing mechanics to achieve productiveness – either to maximize efficiency in labour-related tasks or social connections. Cabanera focuses on the dwindling social possibilities in a scenario of rural emigration, and on the extensive and draining practices related to sheep herding. In a context characterized by the lack of certainty about generational replacement, the game asks: what if there were young generations that would like to continue the family's trade?

As such, the i-doc builds two parallel, and at times contrasting visions of the future perspectives related to farming and caring for sheep. This paper analyses how ethnographic research data helps design game interactions that problematise social and labour relations in farming.

Nurturing a Sound Personality and Rural Vitality in Ecological Games (Education)

Oral

Prof. Huidi Ma¹

1. Leisure Studies Center of the Chinese National Academy of Arts

The natural attributes of rural endow ecological education in serious games with endless imagination and creativity. Currently, various projects in China focused on youth natural education (such as planting, animals, plants, microorganisms, geography, phenology, etc.) are flourishing. Across different regions, a diverse range of “natural value” (Holmes Rolston) curricula have emerged, enabling youth to explore the interconnectedness of human, nature, the earth and others through activities that foster both sound personality development and rural vitality.

This paper uses the NGO of “Friends of Nature” as a case study to investigate the motivations, preferences, and interests cultivated in the participants of those serious games. It examines the roles they play in “state of being” and “socialization” (John R. Kelly), as well as their attitudes towards social care. The study aims to construct a “Serious Games Model” to analyze the complex dynamic relationships among human, natural ecology and social ecology. It tracks and assesses the correlation, effectiveness, and limitations of interrelated transformations, and predicts the potential of serious games to counteract the encroachment of AI technology on human nature. Additionally, it explores social practices rooted in the cultural heritage of rural ecology.

The research concludes that serious games contribute to enhancing the vitality and livability of rural environments, promoting urban-rural integration. Against the background of today’s deeply technologized human life, boldly innovating serious games in rural areas can both repair human nature and cultivate “technological virtues” (Shannon Vallor). In summary, humans bear responsibilities to uphold the natural attributes of both rural environments and themselves.

Serious gaming for social-ecological data collection

Oral

Dr. Claire Hardy¹

1. The James Hutton Institute

It has long been established that people that are able to interact with information, and are entertained during this experience, are better able to retain knowledge. Greater recall of information is a benefit for future knowledge exchange and encourages the development of training opportunities where gaps in knowledge are identified. In addition offering easy to access information, in farmer friendly formats, can increase uptake of knowledge. The gamification of exchanges aids uptake of knowledge whilst providing entertainment..

The Framework project uses the Farmer cluster approach to engage farmers in environmental measures to improve on-farm biodiversity. The project established 11 clusters across Europe. A pilot of three games were designed in German, Czech and English languages for the relevant clusters, to help identify gaps in knowledge to target training resource development. In country facilitators for the clusters developed the specific games, ensuring targeted content was included. In situ 360 degree footage was captured for the Farmer clusters involved. Embedded questions, in the related footage, gave right answers and access to additional information. Scores were accumulated and at the end of the quiz the opportunity to download a .csv file with responses was offered. In addition a link to a Qualtrics survey collected social-ecological data. The game facilitated data collection and gave insight to participants willingness to engage with digital technology. This data will be used to gamify additional scenarios for other sectors, both farming and rural related.

Swiftlingen: Bonding Roots

Oral

Ms. Clara Luise Schuster¹

1. Wageningen University

I developed ***Swiftlingen: Bonding Roots***, a serious board game for six players or teams where each takes on the role of a farmer in a rural territory called *Swiftlingen*. The players will find themselves in a situation where a big industrial farm threatens to expand all over the land, diminishing all other farms in its way. The players' objective is to fulfill their individual missions and goals and, together, realize nine agroecology strategies by gathering resources and coming up with practical actions. In this game, players will encounter challenges and dilemmas that women and queer farmers in Europe face in their everyday life, and they will learn how agroecology can promote gender equity and a good and dignified life for all. The game facilitates the communication of gender-specific barriers and discrimination experienced by female and queer farmers, (invisible) feminist work in farming, the introduction of the agroecology strategies from the *Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology* (Nyéléni, 2015) and their benefits to address collaborative struggles, and the stimulating of interaction and exchange for mobilizing collective action. This game is therefore an education tool that communicates both scientific and on-the-ground lived knowledge. But it could also be used in research to explore collaboration in rural farming settings and novel ideas for real-life problem settings, therefore, support the creation of future scenarios.

6. Criminalised and poisoned ruralities

The Future Transformation of the Rural Environment in the Context of Ensuring a Safer Environment

Oral

Prof. Andrejs Vilks¹, Ms. Aldona Kipāne¹

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

Lauku videi ir unikālas iezīmes ne tikai attiecībā uz nodarbinātības struktūrām un zemu iedzīvotāju blīvumu, bet arī attiecībā uz drošības izaicinājumiem. Neskatoties uz salīdzinoši zemo noziedzības līmeni, lauku apvidi bieži saskaras ar slēptiem draudiem, lielāku viktimizāciju un lielāku neaizsargātību. Ierobežota piekļuve savlaicīgam tiesībsardzības atbalstam vēl vairāk saasina šos riskus.

Latvijā, īpaši austrumu pierobežas reģionos, arvien lielākas bažas rada tādi jautājumi kā organizēta nelegālā migrācija, akcīzes preču kontrabanda un propaganda, kas veicina agresiju un ekstrēmismu caur Krievijas Federācijas sociālajiem medijiem. Šie faktori var pārveidot lauku apvidus, palielinot to pakļautību drošības apdraudējumiem.

Lai novērstu negatīvās tendences, ir nepieciešams efektīvs un novatorisks pārvaldības modelis. Mūsdienu tehnoloģijas var kompensēt tiesībsardzības darbinieku trūkumu, palielinot drošību. Ņemot vērā lauku vides dinamisko raksturu, būtiskas ir uz pētniecību balstītas pieejas, ņemot vērā reģionālo specifiku.

Lai stiprinātu lauku drošību, ir vajadzīgas ilgtspējīgas, uz pētniecību balstītas programmas, kas novērs jaunus riskus un nodrošina ilgtermiņa noturību.

7. Can rural be the new creative centre?

**Place-based innovation
and the transformative
power of cultural and
creative agents in rural
areas**

‘Treialon Cŵn Defaid a Sioeau Bach’ – seeking a better understanding of place-based cultural resilience across rural Wales

Oral

Dr. Eifiona Thomas Lane¹, Ms. Elen Bonner¹, Dr. Rhys Jones²

1. Prifysgol Bangor University, 2. Aberystwyth University

Cultural and creative groups are the backbone of Welsh rural communities, their networks and informal links of membership contribute towards rural resilience and shared identity. Yet, their informal nature makes them invisible from a policy perspective making this study pertinent to understand the effect of weak governance and policy and rural creative funding streams. Many rural communities have risk factors associated with loneliness and social marginalisation (ONS 2018). Social enterprises, many delivering cultural experiences, mitigate some of these effects (Kelly et al. 2019); their contribution to rural livelihoods is also valuable (Scope, 2022).

Within its devolved powers, Welsh Government has established a legal commitment to sustainability in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Welsh Government 2015) notably to create a Wales of vibrant culture where Welsh Government (2017) has established language targets of one million speakers by 2050. The Priorities for Culture 2024-2030 (Welsh Government 2024) directly notes the need to embed this cross cutting policy across government, at national and local level with little focus on rural areas. However, what is understood as ‘culture’ is limited to the arts and heritage (often urban based) and ignores rural folk traditions and cultural activity belonging to the land based economies of Welsh villages and market towns e.g. county agricultural shows and sheep dog trials. This study presents original case studies to explore their capacity, form and significant creative contribution to community resilience. Whilst often existing under ‘the academic and policy radar’, thus their grassroots contributions to rural life is little understood

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papersOnline solutions and sustainability in festival tourism**

Oral

***Mrs. Natalia Oszko-Jakab*¹**

1. Hungarian Tourism Program Foundation

This research investigates how online solutions can enhance the sustainability of rural festivals in Hungary. It explores how digital technologies can boost sustainability, economic impact, and community engagement within these events. A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining in-depth interviews with festival organizers, local community members, tourists, and representatives from organizations like the Arts for Rural Development Foundation and the Hungarian Tourism Programme Foundation (MTPA). This qualitative data will be complemented by quantitative analysis of festival attendance, economic impact studies, and online engagement metrics such as website traffic and social media reach.

A key aspect of this research will be its collaborative nature. Active engagement with stakeholders throughout all stages of the process is crucial. This includes conducting workshops with festival organizers, local communities, and relevant organizations to discuss research objectives and methodology, as well as establishing clear mechanisms for sharing research findings and incorporating stakeholder feedback. This collaborative approach will ensure that the research findings are relevant, actionable, and aligned with the specific needs and priorities of the rural communities hosting these festivals.

The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into the effective use of online platforms for festival promotion, ticketing, and community engagement. These insights will inform the development of more sustainable and impactful festival tourism models in rural Hungary, contributing to the growth of rural economies while minimizing environmental impact and fostering deeper community involvement.

A multifunctional urban food hub: embracing arts and culture for inclusive health and wellbeing

Oral

Prof. Talis Tisenkopfs¹, Mr. Miks Braslins¹, Ms. Ilze Mileiko¹, Dr. Emils Kilis¹

1. Baltic Studies Centre

Keywords: food hub, multifunctional, culture

This paper examines cultural activities and infrastructure in a neighbourhood market to explore (i) the interplay of arts and culture with other hub activities, (ii) how this contributes to the making of a multifunctional place and (iii) the impact of cultural activities on community health and wellbeing. The paper is based on a case study of Āgenskalns market in Riga which has been transformed from a traditional urban market into a multifunctional food hub with the help of private investment, and private-public-people-partnerships. The study is carried out within the framework of EU research project IN-HABIT: Inclusive Health and Wellbeing in Small and Medium-size Cities.

We apply three theoretical concepts. “Multifunctional space” (Ghafouri & Weber, 2020) evokes the presence of different functions and users during different periods of time, the capacity to accommodate many activities at the same time, and the fulfilment of different roles. “Thick place” refers to the degree of intensity and density of relations produced by the encounters and interactions between individuals in a given place (Graham, 2010; Casey, 2001). We operationalise “thickness” as physical, relational and normative density. The concept of wellbeing is operationalised as social wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, spatial and environmental wellbeing, economic wellbeing and healthy lifestyles. The data collection methods included interviews, surveys, focus groups, participatory observations, market stories, visual documentation, and sensor data about customer flows.

Results suggest that cultural infrastructure and events (theatrical performances, concerts, exhibitions, art festivals) attract a diverse audience and contribute to relational thickening of a multifunctional place. They also result in normative thickening by introducing ‘soft’ cultural norms such as do-it-yourself practices. In terms of wellbeing, cultural events enhance the dimensions of social wellbeing (social inclusion, civic engagement and non-discrimination), as well as aspects of subjective wellbeing (general life satisfaction and sense of belonging).

Art Revitalization in China, Japan, and Collaborations

Oral

Dr. Meng Qu¹

1. Hokkaido University

In rural regions of East Asia, art serves as more than just a tool for revitalization; it acts as a dynamic force for rural entrepreneurship, and socio-cultural enhancement. This study investigates the role of socially engaged art and creative tourism placemaking in the regeneration/revitalization of peripheral areas in Japan and China. Since 2017, collaborative rural art projects have sparked cross-national initiatives, fostering knowledge exchange and innovative artistic practices. Through a comparative analysis of landmark cases—such as the Setouchi Triennale, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Shiosai, Kamiyama Art Residency, and Goto Silk Road Art Festivals in Japan, alongside the Xucun, Qingtian, Taohuadao, Zhouqian and Hainan Art Projects in China—this research explores the operational mechanisms, impacts, and evolving approaches to art revitalization, and their respective challenges. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework that integrates art, rural tourism, and creative geography, the study examines how art-driven initiatives contribute to long-term community sustainability. The research addresses key questions on the organizational structures of these projects outcomes, and the potential for innovative interdisciplinary approaches in assessing their effectiveness. Methodologically, the study employs a convergent sequential mixed-method design, including interviews with 30 project organizers across ten rural case studies in Japan and China. The findings will shed light on the socio-cultural impacts of art-based revitalization, with broader implications for rural sustainability across Asia and beyond. This study also positions cross-national collaborations within a framework of rural revitalization, contributing to ongoing discussions on the transformative power of creative tourism and relational geography.

Keywords: Rural Art Revitalization, Socially Engaged Art, Creative Enhancement, Cultural Sustainability

Artists Welcome? The Role and Subjective Well-being of Urban Creatives in Cultural Revitalization Efforts in Rural Japan

Oral

Prof. Cornelia Reiher¹, Prof. Susanne Klien²

1. Freie Universitaet Berlin, 2. Hokkaido University

Rural areas may seem counterintuitive as places for creative artists since the infrastructures of art production and dissemination tend to be ingrained in urban networks. However, as rural communities in Japan face socioeconomic and demographic challenges, local governments have increasingly turned to culture-based strategies for revitalization, including the recruitment of urban creatives. These initiatives offer artists atelier spaces, financial support, and opportunities to engage with rural life, but questions remain about the long-term sustainability and subjective well-being of these artists in non-urban settings. Our study investigates the experiences of artists who have relocated to rural Japan through government programs and other initiatives, focusing on how cultural and creative agents contribute to rural revitalization while navigating issues such as social inclusion, belonging, and subjective well-being. We also address the challenges faced by creatives in rural areas in establishing networks with other artists for social and professional exchange. By comparing different rural communities in Japan, we explore the extent to which creative professionals perceive their contributions as meaningful and whether the infrastructural and social support they receive fosters a sense of belonging and well-being. Our research connects to broader discussions on the role of culture in rural revitalization initiatives and rural development and examines the conditions under which contemporary artistic practices can help foster resilient and livable rural futures.

Keywords: Urban-to-rural migration, artists, rural revitalization

Between Pheasants Contemporary: Curating in a Pheasant Coop to Build Community through Art

Oral

Mr. Alexander Rondeau ¹

1. Queen's University

Between Pheasants Contemporary (BPC) is my curatorial project that transformed a rural pheasant coop into an art gallery, presenting 20 exhibitions with 42 artists over the past three years. Situated 200 kilometres from the nearest art gallery, this project engages a community largely unfamiliar with contemporary art, many of whom have little exposure to queer, trans, and Two-Spirit artists (the primary but not exclusive focus of BPC). By situating art in the familiar context of a farm, a coop, and its surrounding rural landscape, the project provides a welcoming space for rural audiences to interact with unfamiliar artistic concepts in a comfortable setting. Using plywood walls instead of a white cube space allows participants to challenge normative expectations of art, creating opportunities for dialogue, understanding, and connection through a mix of visual art and the local agricultural environment. This approach not only introduces diverse themes, but also bridges rural and artistic communities, contributing to social cohesion and understanding. Through this work, I am excited to discuss the potential of art in rural spaces to foster community building, examine the precariousness of rural arts, and explore the role of artistic practice in creating liveable rural futures. This participatory model opens conversations about the viability of art projects in isolated areas, their role in navigating sociopolitical tensions, and the potential for arts to contribute to rural resilience and sustainability.

Key Words:

farm art gallery // community engagement // queer rural art

Creating place values between the city and the rural: insights from local artists

Oral

Dr. Oleksandra Nenko¹, Prof. Maunu Häyrynen¹, Dr. Marjo Heino¹

1. University of Turku

Key words: place value, local artists, artistic practice, meaning-making

Recognising multiple dimensions in place meanings and values is an ongoing debate in place research (Manzo 2005). We consider the value of place as a meaning-making practice of human agents resulting in a shared recognition of place features as valuable in line with Graeber's theory of value (2001). In this paper we study how values of places are created in and through creative practices of artists in their contact with more-than-human agencies. We concentrate on artists embedded in places and engaged into complex interrelations with them. In the focus of our study are artists working in non-urban areas of the Satakunta region, Finland. The empirical dataset is qualitative and includes self-narrated written reflections of artists who took part in the exhibition "Rurban" and an archive of their artworks and statements presented there. The "Rurban" exhibition, which took place in the capital city of Satakunta in autumn 2024 and was curated by one of the authors, addressed the theme of artist-place relations in areas between the city and the rural, featuring local artists of the region. Following the mixed methods approach in data analysis, we define the distinctive values of place which came into being in artists' works and were conceptually framed in their narratives. In the findings we show the toponymy of place values constructed by the artists, illustrating how these values unfold in the semantics, sensuality, and materiality of their artworks and narratives. Finally we discuss place values created by artists in view of sustainable development of the region.

Cultural sustainability transformation in rural areas

Oral

Dr. Katriina Siivonen¹

1. University of Turku

The basic quality of culture is individual, abductive creativity and individual capacity to build on the foundation of memories, images of futures, practices, habits and symbols, which people share with each other. Culture is a central driving force of futures both in rural and urban areas and, if we so want, towards a more liveable, sustainable world.

On the era of Anthropocene, with clear human impact on stability and resilience of Earth systems, there is a need to target both environmental and social sustainability. The focus of this paper is in cultural transformation, regarded as necessary to tackle these questions. I suggest a new form of Heritage Futures, based on Intangible Cultural Heritage, as a tool to co-create alternative, sustainable futures and accordingly actions both in rural and urban areas. Close connection to nature is a central element especially in many rural environments. In order to help us to better understand the human-nature interface and to form practical solutions towards a more sustainable world, Heritage Futures need to include both 1) understanding of the transformative power of culture, 2) anticipatory understanding, and 3) cultural heritage as a tool to engage people in an inspiring, affectual, cognitive and practical way. Voluntary participation is a prerequisite of ethical implementation of cultural sustainability transformation.

Empirical case examples come from ECOCRIN and IN SITU projects in rural areas of Rauma, Eurajoki and Kuhmo in Finland. The power of these areas is an ecosystem of professional and voluntary creative actors in close human-nature interface.

Culturally adequate food within the elderly care as a facilitator of sustainable local development. An action research among three municipalities with responsibility to administer Sami minority rights

Oral

Mrs. Ildiko Asztalos Morell¹

1. Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences

Rural areas play a pivotal role for a transformation for sustainable futures. Urban areas continue to depend on rural areas for among others food. Meanwhile, due to the integration of food systems with global agro-industrial complex, much of food consumption in urban areas are disconnected from their rural vicinity. This implies also a cultural disconnectedness. Public procurement can play a crucial role to facilitate the strengthening sustainable food production by promoting local and ecologically sound of food products in the procurement process. Considering sustainability, key focus has been on adding ecological and social sustainability to economic, leaving cultural sustainability apart.

Sami are indigenous people and one of five national minorities acknowledged by Sweden. Municipalities and Regions with special task to care for the maintenance of minority culture obtain special responsibilities and budget for promotion. Lack of culturally adapted food is a problem in elderly care in Sweden. This affects, among others, older Sami people within the elderly care, who cannot cook their own food.

In this project we interviewed elderly Sami, both in groups and individually, about what food they would like to be served in the municipal care for the elderly according to an action model developed by food consultant Ann Sparrock, where we also have a dialogue with officials in Suarssá (Sorsele), Máláge (Malå) and Ubmeje (Umeå), three selected municipalities within the Vindelälven-Juhtátahkka biosphere area representing mountain, forest and urban Sami communities.

The project explores how municipalities work for the realization of minority rights, how cultural rights are interpreted in relation to food provided by the public kitchen, how minorities are offered to participate in forming municipal menus, how and which ways their demands are acknowledged, what are the obstacles and opportunities to improve the linkages between the public kitchen and local Sami food producers.

Culture-led Village Revitalisation in China: Actors, Networks, and Place-based Transformations

Oral

Ms. Yiyang Wang¹

1. University of Groningen

This study investigates the role of culture-led village revitalisation in addressing rural decline in China. As rural areas face population decline and economic downturns, innovative strategies are imperative. China's recent paradigm shift towards culture-led village revitalisation, which is argued to be a form of Endogenous Rural Development, emphasizes local participation and the recognition of cultural assets, offering a new model for rural development. This study employs a comparative case study approach, drawing on fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. It examines Nandong Art Valley, a top-down transformation of a formerly impoverished village into a cultural tourism destination, and Dahe Village, a historic Hakka settlement that has undergone bottom-up revitalisation, where villagers, social workers, NGOs, and social enterprises play key roles. Using the lens of Actor-Network Theory, this paper examines the complex interactions between human and non-human actors shaping these culture-led initiatives. Findings suggest that culture-led village revitalisation is an effective rural development strategy, fostering economic diversification, community participation, and cultural revitalisation. However, top-down approaches, as seen in Nandong Art Valley, while accelerating economic benefits, can lead to fragmented management and the commercialisation and homogenisation of local culture. In contrast, more inclusive and participatory stakeholder models, exemplified by Dahe Village, encourage grassroots-driven transformation, social innovation, and long-term resilience. This study contributes to both theoretical and practical discussions on rural revitalisation, offering insights into how cross-sectoral collaborations, adaptive governance, and place-based cultural strategies can support sustainable and inclusive rural futures in China and beyond.

KEYWORDS: Culture-led village revitalisation; Actor network theory; Place-based innovation

Digital platforms in urban-rural knowledge transfer: Case of the Japanese Furusato Nozei Hometown Tax Donation System

Oral

Mr. Ryo Umeda¹

1. University of Helsinki

Rural development is increasingly involving multiple stakeholders across sectors, resulting in a more decentered and networked governance. Although this trend is amplified by digitalization and platformization, their influence on rural development and knowledge economy is yet to be examined. Drawing on neo-endogenous development and knowledge generation theories, this study explores the Japanese *Furusato Nozei* Hometown Tax Donation System. This state-led regional development program transformed radically due to the participation of private sector digital platforms. The research data consist of 32 interviews with platform company representatives, municipal officials and local entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis revealed how digital platforms contribute to urban-rural knowledge transfer and how they foster local knowledge generation and place-based innovation. Preliminary findings show that digital platforms connect the nationwide online marketplace and municipalities, generating monetary and information flows between the urban and the rural. Private sector platform companies provide municipalities and local entrepreneurs with beneficial online and offline resources that potentially improve the usage of local and intangible assets such as place brands and cultural identities. Results also illustrate potential platform intervention risks, such as the distortion of resource allocation, increasing competition and fragmentation of local development goals. Digital platforms foster interactions between urban and rural actors although their contribution to local knowledge generation and innovation tend to be limited and cause challenges in stakeholder coordination and governance. The study concludes that the successful urban-rural knowledge transfer hinges on the municipalities' awareness on their intangible capabilities such as local governance, local and extra-local networks and cultural identities.

Keywords: digital platforms, urban-rural knowledge transfer, cultural identity

How do community-led art activities change community participation in a village? A longitudinal study

Oral

Ms. Carmen van Bruggen¹, Prof. Tialda Haartsen¹, Dr. Gwenda van der Vaart¹

1. University of Groningen

Community-led art activities are found to increase community participation. This has been researched in multiple studies. However, such studies are hardly based on longitudinal data, which troubles the long-term perspective of the (sustainable) changes in the community. Besides, it is not always clear how the community effects of art activities, such as participatory theatre or collective painting relate to those of non-art activities, such as sports events or local fairs. To address these gaps, this study follows the course of a community-led activity week in a middle-sized village of 3000 inhabitants. The activity week will take place in May 2025 and contains community-led art, and non-art activities, which are currently being developed. This study will compare the effects of these art and non-art activities on community participation. We will conduct three rounds of surveys before, right after and a year after the activity week takes place. The survey data will be complemented by interviews and observations. As of this writing, a representative amount of 330 survey responses have been collected for the baseline measurement of community participation in the village. Based on previous literature, we expect participants of community-led art activities to show a more open attitude towards what is new or experimental, compared to participants of non-art community led activities. We further explore if this creatively inspired form of participation also leads to inspired forms of community participation off the beaten track. This presentation/paper discusses the methods of the longitudinal approach and intermediate results of the first baseline survey.

Potentials and challenges: From cultural stewardship to creative, place-based innovation

Oral

***Dr. Nancy Duxbury*¹**

1. Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

Stewardship of the resources of a place, its identity, and its unique potential forms a key dimension of local regenerative strategies (Duxbury, Vinagre de Castro, and Silva, forthcoming). Culture and creativity are place-based entities, with the embeddedness of cultural work linked to how creative actors use their environments as an active agent of production (Collins and Cunningham, 2017). Place-inspired creative work can strengthen local identities and cultural elements and contribute to safeguarding the continuity and evolution of local heritage. Artistic/creative perspectives on place-specific resources can provide sparks of inspiration and new approaches to exploring, understanding, and building value from the local context. Furthermore, research within the IN SITU project suggests that cultural and creative occupations in non-urban areas are more central to regional occupational networks than their urban counterparts, providing possible viable pathways for related diversification. However, while cultural and creative actors in non-urban areas can contribute significantly to place-based economies and community well-being, they face numerous obstacles hindering their growth and impacts. Key issues identified include: limited public policy recognition and support, insufficient networking possibilities, limited access to training and capacity building, gender disparities, and limited recognition of diverse types of innovation. Addressing these issues would contribute to unlocking the full potential of cultural and creative work in non-urban regions, contributing to economic diversification, innovation and social transformation. In this context, this paper presents insights emerging from the Horizon Europe project IN SITU, inspired by the question: How can care and stewardship of local cultural resources become creative, place-based innovation, creating values rooted in local specificities?

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Proposals for revitalizing rural areas in Sabrosa. The contribution of heritage and tourism.

Oral

Mrs. Clara Vasconcelos¹

1. PhD Student

With a multitude of landscapes, Sabrosa is a landscape mosaic, which combines a rural space to live and another one to visit. The objective of this study is to create proposals for local development, considering the heritage to enhance tourism as a vehicle for local job creation and population retention, involving the sustainable development as a source of identity preservation. With bibliographic review, statistical data and empirical work, with enriching formal and informal conversations, it is intended to understand the concerns and aspirations of locals, residents and entrepreneurs of the region in order, from a bottom-up perspective, to propose solutions that value the heritage and the tourism of Sabrosa, encouraging a sustainable and holistic development of the region. As partially a UNESCO heritage site, the municipality must be preserved, with its identity of the wine region, but also as a source of tourist exploitation. Since there are multiple agents involved in this dynamic, mention should be made of the parish councils and recreational, cultural, sports and social associations that play an important role, not only for population, supporting and stimulating activities, but also preserving local traditions which would otherwise be lost. Also, the residents express their joy for receiving tourists and maintaining traditions, while entrepreneurs in the tourism sector applaud the local development investing in tourism and culture, as this allows them better financial results and contributes to the reduction of unemployment. Finally, the City Council is responsible for attracting public funding to Sabrosa to help boost the economy, preserve the landscape and boost the region's development. We can see examples of this through the support for rural tourism, festivities during the harvest season, the new walking trails created or even the participation in fairs and events in the tourism industry.

Key-words: Sustainable development, heritage, tourism, landscape.

Prototyping cultural projects: The Matrix project of Bourges European Capital of Culture 2028

Oral

***Mrs. Milica Milosavljevic*¹**

1. Université Paris 8

he acknowledgment of Bourges as “nothing special” was at the heart of the city’s ECOC bid: Bourges is a medium-sized agglomeration in a rural area at the geographical center of France, on the periphery of Europe. These characteristics of the rural environment are presented as being shared by many regions across Europe.

The original concept of the Bourges2028 bid was that being typical would allow it to become prototypical: a testing ground for cultural solutions to challenges faced by cities with similar socio-demographic, economic, and political situations. The size of the city allowing for shorter decision-making processes, Bourges 2028 proposed to become a testing ground for cultural solutions for participative governance, cultural rights, Europe-wide social and territorial cohesion, and the role of artists in the context of the climate crisis. The creative solutions would be adapted and implemented throughout The Matrix, a network of 15 “humanely sized” cities mostly in rural areas, facing the same challenges of rural flight, hindered socio-economic and intra-regional mobility, and political disengagement.

While the explicit notion of prototyping has disappeared from the final program for Bourges2028, The Matrix project hasn’t. MetroEuropa, a flagship project of walking tours of the city, has been transplanted to Avignon after a successful run in Bourges in 2023.

How will the future forms of collaboration between the cities of The Matrix reconcile an authentic space-specific cultural project with its initial aim of transferability

Public Libraries: Last Anchors of Resilience and Well-Being in Shrinking Rural Communities

Oral

Mr. Markus Moora¹, Dr. Ingmar Pastak¹, Prof. Kadri Leetmaa¹

1. University of Tartu

Markus Moora (University of Tartu, MSc Student); Ingmar Pastak (Researcher in Human Geography, Department of Geography, University of Tartu); Kadri Leetmaa (Associate Professor in Human Geography, Department of Geography, University of Tartu)

Rural communities have traditionally relied on a network of local institutions—schools, kindergartens, health centers, cultural centers, and libraries—not only as essential services but also as key hubs for social and cultural life. However, due to peripheralization and demographic decline, many of these institutions have been closed to optimize social infrastructure. This presentation examines the evolving role of rural libraries as the last remaining anchor institutions in shrinking rural communities. Using case studies from four Estonian municipalities (Rõuge, Toila, Hiiumaa, and Paide), we analyze how libraries have adapted to support local resilience and well-being. As part of the five-year research program “Rethinking Smartification from the Margins: Co-creating Smart Rurality with and for an Aging Population” (2023–2027), interviews were conducted with leaders of anchor institutions, including librarians. Findings reveal that rural libraries have evolved beyond their traditional role of lending books. They now serve as vital spaces for cultural gatherings and social cohesion, particularly in aging communities. Additionally, they act as intermediaries between residents and increasingly digitalized public services by providing digital literacy training and support. This study highlights how libraries, as the last remnants of once-thriving social infrastructures, continue to foster rural resilience by adapting to community needs, preserving cultural life, and bridging gaps in essential public services. In doing so, they help aging rural communities culturally and socially connected.

Keywords: rural libraries, social and cultural resilience, peripheralization

Sustaining Rural Creative Economies: The Role of Cultural Industries in Navigating Liveable Futures

Oral

***Ms. Sumaira Malik*¹**

1. UNESCO 2005 Convention Asia Pacific Expert CCI

As rural communities worldwide face transitions in economic structures, environmental challenges, and social mobility, the role of creative and cultural industries (CCIs) in fostering liveable rural futures has gained increasing relevance. This presentation explores how CCIs contribute to sustainable livelihoods, cultural resilience, and economic diversification in rural areas, particularly in South Asia. Drawing from field research and impact assessments of cultural initiatives, including Pakistan's rural artistic communities, this study examines the systemic barriers that hinder the recognition and institutional support for rural artists and cultural workers.

Key challenges include the lack of policy frameworks integrating rural CCIs into broader economic strategies, limited access to infrastructure and funding, and exclusion from formal education and training programs. The presentation highlights case studies where rural artists have successfully sustained their practices through community-driven cultural festivals, heritage preservation initiatives, and digital platforms. Special attention will be given to how rural artists navigate environmental crises, particularly in light of the 2022 floods in Sindh. These floods disrupted cultural and creative festivals due to widespread displacement and loss of life, yet the impact on artists remains largely undocumented. A review of official social media channels from Sindh's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as regional music festivals, revealed minimal acknowledgment of the floods' effects on artists.

This research underscores the need for policy reforms that recognize rural cultural production as a viable economic sector. Recommendations include integrating rural artists into national income support programs, expanding educational partnerships between universities and folk artists, and fostering eco-conscious cultural initiatives. The findings also emphasize the urgency for both public and private sectors to develop climate adaptation strategies for CCIs, ensuring that rural artists can contribute meaningfully to just and sustainable rural transitions.

The Role of Heritage Networks in Sustainable Revitalization of Rural Cultural Heritage: Example of Valmiera Manor Network in Latvia

Oral

Mrs. Ilona Asare¹, Dr. Baiba Tjarve¹

1. Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies, Latvian Academy of Culture

In the context of increasing rural depopulation and cultural marginalization, heritage networks emerge as a vital mechanism for fostering community engagement, safeguarding cultural identity and promoting sustainable development, as evidenced by the work of Murdoch (2000) on rural networking and Flora & Flora's (2008) community capitals framework. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) and network governance models (Provan & Kenis, 2008), this study examines the Valmiera Manor network (VMN) —a collaborative initiative that connects historic manors, local stakeholders, and cultural practitioners. The VMN encompasses a diverse range of participants, including both private and municipal owners of cultural heritage sites. These sites - the historical manor complexes from the 19th and 20th centuries - cover more than just luxurious manor houses; they also contain a diverse array of outbuildings, parks, and gardens. These sites vary significantly in their physical condition and current usage (educational, social, cultural, tourism services, etc.). Despite these differences, the network's participants share a unified goal to revitalize these heritage sites for contemporary purposes. Their approach balances commercial sustainability with the needs of local communities, emphasizing knowledge exchange and resource sharing among members.

Through qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and participatory observation conducted over 18 months' period within the Horizon Europe project "IN SITU: Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas", the paper explores key opportunities and challenges faced by the VMN and identifies critical factors that influence its continued development.

The findings demonstrate that heritage networks not only strengthen social cohesion but also facilitate innovative strategies for heritage management and sustainable tourism. The VMN serves as a compelling case study, illustrating the transformative potential of collaborative heritage practices in rural settings. This research contributes to broader discussions on rural development and cultural sustainability in Europe.

The Role of Social Theatre in Empowering Rural Communities

Oral

Prof. Paolo Corvo¹

1. University of Gastronomic Sciences

Social theatre can be a transformative tool for rural communities, contributing to the empowerment of local populations, the preservation of agricultural landscapes, and the revival of cultural identities. As an inclusive and participatory form of cultural expression, social theatre plays a crucial role in bridging generations and fostering intergenerational dialogue, creating shared narratives that reinforce community identity and connection to the land. Through performances that reflect local traditions, values, and struggles, it helps to maintain and celebrate cultural heritage, ensuring its transmission to future generations.

In addition to its cultural impact, social theatre can drive rural economic and social development by attracting tourism and creating opportunities for cross-sectoral collaborations. It serves as a catalyst for local initiatives, helping to promote rural areas as vibrant spaces for creativity, innovation, and sustainable growth. By addressing pressing local issues such as environmental sustainability and the challenges of rural life, social theatre becomes a platform for raising awareness and advocating for positive change, all while enhancing the region's appeal as a place for both cultural tourism and investment.

Moreover, social theatre contributes to the development of a more resilient and inclusive rural economy by offering new forms of employment and collaboration, and by strengthening local networks of creative agents. It fosters a sense of belonging, pride, and social cohesion, which are essential for tackling the challenges posed by rural depopulation and economic decline. In this context, social theatre is not only a cultural expression but a vital force in the sustainable development of rural territories, blending tradition with contemporary creativity to ensure a bright and resilient future for rural communities.

The transformative power of cultural centers in rural communities

Oral

Ms. Dorothee Schulte-Basta¹

1. Åbo Akademi Univeristy

Cultural centers are vital to the artistic and sociocultural life of European communities (Peeters, 2017), serving as key gathering places that foster community cohesion and connection (Duxbury, 2010). However, their diverse forms and structures (ENCC, 2023) make their impact hard to define (Järvinen, 2021b). Despite the existence of thousands across Europe (Eriksson et al., 2017), research on their spatial distribution and role in rural areas remains limited.

The presentation addresses this gap by examining how cultural centers contribute to regional development and social sustainability in rural communities. Using Finland as a case study, it employs spatial and statistical analysis to:

- Explore the regional distribution of different types of cultural centers, and
- Assess correlations between community size, cultural center types, and socio-economic indicators.

The methodology combines regression analysis, cluster analysis, and GIS mapping, drawing on Statistics Finland's 2023 data. By identifying spatial clusters and urban-rural patterns, the presentation provides insights into the diversity of cultural centers' offerings and their transformational potential for rural municipalities in Finland.

As part of a doctoral project comparing rural cultural centers in Ostrobothnia, Finland, and Lower Saxony, Germany, this research challenges economic metrics as the dominant measure of progress, emphasizing social well-being. It contributes to discussions on rural creativity, cultural policy, and place-based innovation, highlighting the transformative role of cultural centers in rural development. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, cultural practitioners, and local governments seeking to enhance cultural infrastructure and creative resilience in rural areas.

Keywords: Cultural infrastructure, Spatial analysis, Finland

Weaving Networks of Rural Economic Sustainability

Oral

***Mr. Valdis Krebs*¹**

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

We will look at how a rural area of high unemployment and poverty grew into a sustainable local economy, first focused around local food, and later expanded into a place of national vacation/entertainment attraction by partnering with other local communities – such as artists, musicians, and similar folks in nearby towns.

It all started with a local economic development professional making her weekly visit to the local Farmer's Market. The market was in an area of high unemployment and poverty after the local steel mill and coal mines all closed down. After several failed attempts to spur the local economy, the leader of this economic development organization saw the future of this rural area in the transactions and interactions taking place in the Farmer's Market. There was a vibrant, although very small, economy self-organizing every week – they just needed some organizing and financial help to scale this budding economy.

Through weaving networks of many fragmented communities in this poor region, the economic development organization connected “many to many others” and the local economy grew in activity, size, and resilience. This growth soon included neighboring communities, which brought their own unique resources and abilities to this expanding diverse regional network.

Having studied Sociology, Complex Adaptive Systems, Network Science and Rural Economics the leadership of this economic development organization took a guided bottom-up, “social” approach to building this local economy. Several top-down approaches of economic development had already failed in this area. A different approach was needed... and succeeded!

We will share the history of this economic emergence using stories and social/economic network maps showing how connections and collaboration created a vibrant community.

Reference: <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/building-adaptive-communities-through-network-weaving/>

Women as change agents in non-urban settings: the case of cultural and creative initiatives

Oral

Dr. Ilona Kunda¹, Dr. Ieva Zemite¹

1. Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies, Latvian Academy of Culture

The recent years have seen increased scholarly attention to the cultural dimensions of non-urban development and to leveraging the potential of peripheral territories through cultural and creative work (Bakas and Duxbury 2018; Duxbury 2021; Lu and Quian 2023; Luckman 2018). The component of this enquiry, cultural entrepreneurship, is also relatively new, especially when analysing the women's perspective. Women's perspective in non-urban and peripheral cultural entrepreneurial settings is highly relevant and distinctive (Mathisen, Jansson, Power 2024; Vukovic 2023). While there is a body of research detailing gender-based differences in approaches to entrepreneurship as such (Guzman and Kacperczyk 2019; Kepler and Shane 2007; Orser and Hogarth-Scott 2005), there is scarce literature on women's interpretations of the various role identities (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2017; Cote 2015) that women can assume in cultural entrepreneurial endeavours. This is a relevant issue, since scholars have noted the relationship between the role identities and opportunities selected (Gruber and MacMillan 2017; Matthias and Williams 2017).

Thus, to understand the possible trajectories of women as cultural entrepreneurs in non-urban settings, we aim to analyse their perceptions of their role/s as change agents vis-à-vis challenges and opportunities in cultural and creative initiatives.

How do women perceive, position and narrate their role/s as initiators and implementers of creative changes? What kind of growth in CCI trajectories they find relevant? These are the research questions addressed by our study.

The current study gathered data in the form of narrative reports from case studies from 6 peripheral locations in Europe. Creativity was addressed in its broader sense, i.e. as encompassing creativity in addressing societal challenges, community building, and identity shaping.

The paper will detail the commonalities and differences in women's roles as agents of change undertaken via cultural and creative initiatives and will identify a range of pertinent types/narratives.

**8. Rural Proofing:
Disclaimer of Meaningful
Diversity or Promising
Tool to Progress with
Place-based Rural
Policy-making?**

Beyond rural proofing: wellbeing and a ‘whole of government’ approach to rural policy

Oral

Prof. Mark Shucksmith¹, Prof. David Brown²

1. Newcastle University, 2. Cornell

Rural proofing has proved difficult to implement in practice. This paper examines an alternative approach, involving wellbeing and a ‘whole of government’ approach to rural policy. First, it reviews the emergence of a wellbeing approach to public policy, following the Stiglitz/Sen/Fitoussi report and the OECD rural wellbeing report. The paper then considers how this approach might be applied in relation to rural policy, (a) asking whether the concept of *collective wellbeing* constitutes an improvement on GDP as a measure of human progress in rural societies, and (b) exploring whether a wellbeing approach might provide a better framework than rural proofing for more integrated, joined up governance and for greater civic participation and agency. The paper ends by suggesting several research avenues for rural studies to investigate these claims made for the concept of collective wellbeing and wellbeing approaches in relation to rural development, rural governance, and notions of a ‘good countryside’.

Challenges of scale in policy making: the case of rural municipalities in Latvia

Oral

Dr. Armands Pužulis¹, Dr. Renars Felcis²

1. Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics, 2. University of Latvia

Keywords: scale, local democracy, rural policy

Europe's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) proposes mechanisms to ensure coherence and synergies between EU policies and instruments. However, a sectoral approach to rural development policy remains dominant in EU member states such as Latvia, where policies related to agriculture, forestry, the environment, and well-being, among others, are not sufficiently integrated to address the interconnected challenges of rural areas. Our paper contributes to understanding the place-specific dynamics of rural development and their (dis)connection with national-level rural policies. By combining insights from a case study of three rural municipalities in Latvia (Smiltene, Jelgava, and Preiļi), along with expert interviews and document analysis, we aim to identify and highlight key challenges related to scale in policymaking. We conceptualize scale as encompassing multiple levels of action, ranging from territorial, community, and individual social and economic characteristics to aggregated statistical data commonly used in national-level policymaking.

Our empirical analysis indicates that local governance and participatory mechanisms play a crucial role in enabling local populations to engage in decision-making and strengthen their sense of identity. These mechanisms do not operate uniformly; their effectiveness depends on the engagement of local communities, the availability of resources, and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Despite their significance, these local-level manifestations of democracy are largely overlooked in national rural policymaking, which remains predominantly sector-focused. It is necessary to develop a new perspective on governance that respects differences in scale and creates new, including ethical, relationships between different players.

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Does rural proofing see the rural diversity? Application of rural proofing protocol at national level for the Polish rural areas.

Oral

Dr. Barbara Wieliczko¹, Dr. Paweł Chmieleński¹, Dr. Aleksandra Pawłowska¹

1. European Rural Development Network; Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences

In recent decades the developmental policies in numerous countries have been increasingly focused on growth centers to boost the country's or regions economic growth and competitiveness which led to speeding up the depopulation, aging and winding up the economic activity in rural areas. This resulted in a growing discontent and feeling of being left-behind by rural communities especially the ones most affected by the process of peripheralization.

The EU with its long-term vision for rural areas started the process of advocating for more attention to the needs of rural communities faced with not only socio-economic challenges but also to much extent already affected by climate changes and not being capable to face up to challenges related to green and digital transitions. Therefore, among others, a rural proofing mechanism is being called for.

However, based on the case study of Polish rural areas application of rural proofing exercise, such as the one elaborated by the GRANULAR project or the ones applied in Northern Ireland and Sweden, are not a sufficient tool to support rural communities as it does not take into account the diversity of rural areas when applied at national or regional level. We applied the rural typology elaborated for Poland by Stanny et al. to show that rural proofing exercise must also apply rural typology to see the differences in impact of proposed policy initiatives on different types of rural communities. Most probably, the choice of rural typology for the rural proofing exercise at a level higher than local one should depend on the type of policy in question to tailor the analysis to the situation of different types of rural communities and the specificity of the context they operate in.

Keywords: rural proofing, rural diversity, place-based approach.

Exploring the evolution of rural policy in Scotland: what might adopting a rural lens bring?

Oral

Prof. Lorna Philip¹, Dr. Jane Atterton²

1. Geography and Environment, University of Aberdeen, 2. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC

In 2021, the European Commission made a number of commitments for rural areas in its 'Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas', including to put in place a rural proofing mechanism through a rural lens to assess the impact of major EU legislation on rural areas. The Long-Term Vision was published twenty years after rural proofing was introduced by a number of 'early adopter' countries including England and Canada.

Since the mid 2000s the Scottish Government's approach to policy for rural areas was one of rural mainstreaming. However, in late 2022, the Scottish Government announced a commitment to develop and apply a rural lens to projects funded as part of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation. Since then, this commitment has been extended to apply the rural lens across all areas of Scottish Government policy-making, representing a significant shift in the evolution of rural policy in Scotland.

This contribution will describe how rural policy has evolved in Scotland since devolution. Implications of the lack of an explicit mechanism for rural proofing until recently will be considered, followed by reflections on how future rural policy and policy-making in Scotland may evolve in response to the development and deployment of the rural lens toolkit across all areas of Government and the preparation of a Rural Delivery Plan. The paper concludes by reflecting on how the application of the rural lens in Scotland may serve the needs of Scotland's diverse rural and island communities.

Rural proofing; rural policy; rural diversity

Links between actions for the development of the rural economy?

Oral

Mrs. Annette Thuesen¹, Mr. Kasper Friis Bavnbaek¹, Mr. Tobias Gandrup¹

1. Danish Centre for Rural Research, University of Southern Denmark

Both social capital and social innovation are directly related to the acronym for LEADER, ('Liaison Entre Action de Developpement de l'Economie Rural'), which stands for 'Linking Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy'. Both concepts are also key elements in the neo-endogenous approach to rural development, which emphasizes that development must take place through the activation of local resources and potentials, and that local communities must be able to reach out and draw resources down to their local area and engage in collaboration (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019; Ray, 2006) to create development. However, LAG activities do not take place in a local void but are connected to multilevel governance delivery mechanisms that affects what happens at local level. Through 20 interviews with project holders, supplemented by a questionnaire survey to 122 project holders in the Danish local action group LAG Thy-Mors during the programming period 2014-2022, this article examines the links, social capital and social innovation that have been created through the LAG project support and whether the linking is favored or hindered by the non-local governance bodies involved. Does it in other words live up to the nexogenous ideal (Bock, 2016) and socio-political reconnection, where public authorities resume their responsibility, or not? And what would a rural proofing of multilevel administrative burdens have to include for it to contribute to continued social capital and social innovation creation at local level?

New ways of neo-endogenous support. The Rural ticket in Asturias as a tool to revitalise LEADER and promote entrepreneurship

Oral

*Dr. Francisco Antonio Navarro-Valverde¹, Ms. Neslihan Önder Özen¹, Dr. Eugenio Cejudo-García¹,
Dr. José Antonio Cañete Pérez¹*

1. University of Granada

For Asturias (Spain), inside of its Rural Development Programme, in the period 2014-2023, a new measure called “Rural Ticket” was implemented by the Regional Government through the Local Action Groups (LAGs). Based on the Rule EU 1305/2013 (EAFRD), it promotes a direct support of 35,000 euros to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment in the region’s rural areas. The intention was to reduce bureaucracy and paperwork and be more efficient. This proposal aims to analyse this strategy, highlighting the pros and cons and extracting some of the learnings from its implementation.

The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data, given by the Asturias Rural Network, dealing with the total of initiatives by each Local Action Group, a survey to promoters about the evaluation of the programme. On the other hand, qualitative data, coming from fieldwork and interviews done with promoters, facilitators and politicians during November 2024, and several ex-post reports and evaluations done by a cooperation network initiative of Asturian LAGs and the Asturias Rural Network.

The Rural Ticket initiative received an excellent acceptance, and the evaluation from promoters was positive. However, the criticism about the programme’s bureaucracy continues. The rigidity in some specific questions, such as the prohibition of multiactivity, the need to pay the taxes without receiving the grant, or conditions to obtain it, were also mentioned.

Some learnings could be considered: the need to link the strategy with others rural policies; formal and informal training on management and entrepreneurship; an ad-hoc mentorship programme; the creation of coworking spaces; more involvement from the local government, municipalities supporting, i.e., with housing or technician support; among others.

The strategy is being renewed for this new programming period, increasing the amount of the grant, including a new programme called the Employment Ticket to promote workers’ contracts for these new entrepreneurs.

Rural Proofing Concerns, Challenges and Controversy, the case of the Netherlands

Oral

Dr. Henk Oostindie¹, Dr. Bettina Bock¹

1. Wageningen University

To realize its Long Term Vision of Rural Areas EU's policy setting actively advocates rural proofing, defined by its supportive Rural Pact alliance as: *'reviewing policies through a rural lens to make these policies fit for purpose for those who live and work in rural areas'*. Building on earlier rural proofing literature and debate, we will start with unpacking rural proofing aspiration in relation to meaningful rural differentiation tendencies, as theorized and brought together in a Rural Diversity Compass. Based on Dutch empirical material, we will subsequently argue that the reluctant reactions in the national policy circles to that ambition may probably be explained by the growing awareness of rural differentiation tendencies, together with persistent rural policy making dilemmas in relation to perspectives on agriculture, food and nature. At the regional level, rural proofing is welcomed as an instrument to address regional development disparities, increasingly assessed and compared in terms of broad prosperity performances and understood as place-specific outcomes of rural-urban interaction patterns. So far, this regional disparity lens focusses on the 'here and now' dimension of broad prosperity, as this allows to escape from stakeholder controversy around rural prosperity 'elsewhere' and 'later' effects; two other 'broad prosperity' dimensions as distinguished in Dutch wider policy monitoring and evaluation. As argued, this controversy reflects conflicting ideas about how to (re-) balance rural functionalities. Such differences in stakeholder views and expectations became also visible when we engaged in rural proofing exercises at the local level. Based on these policy-level specific responses and experiences the paper ends by suggesting to approach and unpack rural proofing as two-way processes of dialoguing, negotiation and learning.

Rural proofing in practice: a four-country comparison of rural impact assessment of policies

Oral

Dr. Anne Poder¹, Mr. Taavi Kiisk¹, Dr. Aare Kasemets², Ms. Ana Gómez Garcés³, Ms. Leire Martinez Murillo⁴, Mr. Georgi Simeonov⁵, Ms. Maria Hall⁶

1. Estonian University of Life Sciences, 2. Estonian Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, 3. ONGD Cives Mundi, 4. Government of Navarra, 5. Centre for Sustainability and Economic Growth, 6. Hub Planning

Rural proofing refers to the process of systematic assessment of the impacts of policies on rural areas and the adaptation of the policies to meet the distinct needs as well as untapped potential of the rural areas more effectively. Rural proofing has considerable potential to help improve the quality of policymaking by supporting place-based policies and spatial justice, taking into account the unique circumstances and spatial inequalities of rural areas and local stakeholders. This has been well acknowledged in EU policy documents that emphasize rural proofing as a vital policy tool that could help to ensure that various implications of policy proposals and initiatives on the rural areas are well considered.

The present research discussed the results of a comparative study on rural proofing in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, and Spain conducted in the INTERREG EUROPE project Coop4RURALGov. The aim was to map the present practices of rural proofing of policies in the four countries and at different governmental levels and the stakeholders' experience and expectations for addressing the rural needs in policymaking. The data was collected with a document analysis and a questionnaire survey in four countries. The analysis focuses on how, when, and with which methods the policy impact assessments on rural areas have been conducted, the interactions of different government levels, and highlights the good practices and the stakeholders' views on the needs for rural proofing.

Keywords: impact assessment, spatial justice, rural policy

The potential contribution of climate change policies to the (dis)improvement of living conditions in rural areas

Oral

Dr. Alexandru Brad¹, Dr. Patrick Küpper¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

In the wake of the Paris Agreement, climate change mitigation policies have gained traction around the world, as nation states have committed to limiting global warming to below 2°C. Given their broad financial and regulatory scope, such policies are expected not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also to shape socio-economic development and influence local living conditions. In recent years, however, as policy implementation has expanded, the tangible costs of the present have begun to overshadow the potential abstract benefits in the future, leading to a weakening of public support. Moreover, recent research points to a potential amplification of spatial disparities, suggesting that rural and already disadvantaged regions experience disproportionately negative effects.

Our contribution provides a spatially differentiated assessment of the impact of climate change policies on living conditions in rural areas. We define living conditions as macro-level factors that shape life chances in a given place and are beyond the direct control of individuals. We base our analysis on a recent Delphi survey of 56 experts and practitioners in Germany. We assess the likelihood of implementation, contribution to climate change, impact on living conditions and spatial variation of 19 climate change mitigation policies in the areas of land use, mobility, buildings and energy. Based on this empirical data, we develop three scenarios for rural areas: a baseline scenario (characterised by minimal climate change mitigation impacts), a climate change mitigation-oriented scenario (where public acceptance is a challenge), and a living conditions-oriented scenario (where financial constraints become a key issue).

The smartness evolution and its role in rural areas future

Oral

Dr. Filippo Chiozzotto¹, Dr. Michela Ascani¹, Dr. Emilia Reda¹

1. Council for Agricultural Research and Economics-Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy

Smartness, a concept born in the urban development environment and mainly related to technology and city-government, with the conceptual unit of smart cities, has shifted in recent years to citizens co-created approaches, promoting social inclusion, innovation and fairness and involving communities with a bottom-up approach. Crossing the conceptual boundaries of cities, smart transition has become recurrent in territorial development discourses, with reference to marginal and rural areas, shifting the focus from smart city to smart territory (Graziano, 2022).

The evolution of smartness is explicitly inspired by the concept of smart community, where new technologies are an instrument, not the objective, of a process of endogenous development involving local communities and all the actors insisting in a given territory. Recurrent features of smart communities in literature are shared interests, partnership and participation, knowledge creation, common needs and objectives for increasing quality of life (Lindskog H., 2024). Key objectives are services creation and provision at various territorial scale and n environmental, economic, social and sustainable development (Ciesielska M. et al., 2024).

From a policy point of view, smart communities have become a new element in territorial policies at EU level, with the paradigm of smart villages, rural development tools addressing territorial inequality by supporting communities in building strategies for enhancing endogenous resources and potential.

The aim of the analysis is contributing to the knowledge on smart communities, also studying the actual implementation and governance of smart strategies and interventions in rural areas and their correspondence to the EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas objectives.

The technoscape of rural vision: A dialogue between rural proofing and responsible innovation.

Oral

Dr. Poonam Pandey¹

1. University of Vigo

Keywords: Rural proofing, Responsible Innovation, Technology

Recent rural development policy in EU has envisioned for more connected, prosperous, strong and resilient rural areas. To fulfil these aspirations, EU's Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) 2040 has developed 10 shared goals. In parallel, efforts are being made to implement rural proofing as a systematic mechanism to assess the impacts of general policies and initiatives on rural areas. Policy and scholarly work on the implementation of rural proofing in selective EU and non-EU countries highlight its limited relevance to benefitting rural areas due to a top-down and one-size fits all approach (OECD 2011, DEFRA 2015, Tillväxtanalys 2016, Saraceno 2013). Studies have also criticised rural proofing exercises for re-enacting the rural-urban binary and re-interpreting 'diversity' as 'deficiency' (Nordberg 2021; Sherry and Shortall 2019). The lack of appropriate local engagement and democratic governance mechanisms are additional areas of criticism for existing rural proofing mechanism (Nordberg 2021, Atterton 2008). Adding technology to this mix further complicates the conceptualization and implementation of rural proofing. Yet, given the centrality of technology in realising the 10 shared goals of the rural vision, a discussion on technology in relation to rural proofing is crucial. Responsible Innovation (RI) is a widely used framework to ensure that technology development is in tune with societal needs (Owen and Pansera 2019). However, the literature on RI is scarce on the use and implications of technology in rural areas. This paper aims to initiate a dialogue between rural proofing and responsible innovation to highlight the gaps, overlaps, and possibilities of shared lessons to co-produce a 'responsible' technoscape for rural vision.

9. From Food country to Carbon country – Rural Livelihoods and the tensions between agriculture and ‘climate-solutions’ markets

Carbon farming and its shadows: changing practices and knowledges on Finnish farms

Oral

Ms. Anni Piironen¹

1. University of Oulu

Policymakers, scientists, and market actors are rapidly advancing practices of “carbon farming”, and the particular technologies and ways of knowing that it involves. In this presentation I explore how this shift is taking place in Finland, describing insights from the first phase of my doctoral research, which uses ethnographic methods to understand how carbon farming is impacting the practices, livelihoods and ways of knowing of Finnish farmers. While farmers are sometimes portrayed as silent adopters of scientifically verified carbon farming methods, my research focuses on how they relate to, engage with, and know soil carbon, and what their experiences and understandings can reveal about the complexities and tensions inherent in this new agricultural paradigm.

At the same time, I also look at how carbon farming relates to those parts of farming that are seemingly *not* about carbon, or beyond the purview of carbon farming toolkits, methods, approaches, and accounts. When the spotlight is placed on carbon, what other soil functions and diverse more-than-human relations get overshadowed? This question is particularly important because of the relationship between carbon farming and regenerative agriculture, an emerging farming movement and philosophy that has called for improving soil health and farmer livelihoods as well as transforming food systems more widely. As part of this research, I hope to also investigate to what extent an exclusive focus on carbon threatens to restrict the transformative potential of regenerative agriculture.

Keywords: carbon farming, environmental knowledge, regenerative agriculture

Farmers' Perceptions of Climate Change and its Impact on Farm Practices

Oral

Dr. Elizabeth Ransom¹, Prof. Carol Richards², Dr. Rudolf Messner²

1. Penn State Univ, 2. Queensland University of Technology

There is a growing literature that focuses on farmers' understanding and perceptions of climate change. Some researchers have advocated that farmers are best positioned to understand their farming systems and therefore should be integrated into ongoing climate adaptation research and policy. However, other studies have proposed that farmers may be limited in their ability to recognize broader patterns beyond one's own farm, and those who do not believe in climate change are less likely to be willing to support climate adaptation or mitigation strategies. Using a unique qualitative dataset that spans a 20-year period, our article explores how Australian livestock farmers' (graziers) perceptions of climate change have changed overtime, and if this has impacted their on-farm management practices and strategies. Specifically, our work focuses on Australian graziers located in Queensland, Australia. Our data is made up of approximately 20 farm interviews in 2003-2004, and approximately 31 participants on 19 farm properties in the same region in 2022-2023. This unique dataset provides us with the ability to analyze whether farmers' climate change perceptions have shifted over time and whether this shapes their farm management practices and decisions. Preliminary findings show that management practices have changed overtime, largely in response to the pressures of primary production which include market imperatives and a changing climate. In contrast to the prevailing climate skepticism 20 years ago, perceptions and attitudes have shifted towards climate markets and potential revenue streams. Some producers reported that emerging carbon markets presented a new opportunity for farm income, whilst new entrants to the industry spoke of land management with an implicit climate adaptation and mitigation narrative.

Food as by-product of farming? The challenge of changing farming livelihoods and devolved responsibilities for a just Carbon transition in rural Wales.

Oral

Dr. Eifiona Thomas Lane¹, Dr. Rebecca Jones¹, Mr. Ian Harris¹

1. Prifysgol Bangor University

This paper will unpick the ongoing concerns for farming land and livelihoods using information and visions from key stakeholders involved in implementing and regulating low Carbon innovation. Lived experiences of farmer innovation from empirical case studies illustrate the contested nature, equity considerations and future imperatives of rural Wales's Carbon transition towards Net Zero Wales by 2050 (63% by 2030). The paper's purpose is to present empirical information about a range of place-based examples of land-based Carbon management innovations implemented in rural Wales e.g. peatland sequestration, Woodland for Offsetting.

The paper presents current contestation and dissent from land-based innovation for Carbon descent in rural Wales. Based on case studies of land-based innovation, lived experiences of farming eco-entrepreneurs, this enables an exploration of the uncertain rural policy context within which farmers and wider rural stakeholders in Wales and wider UK are operating. Original case studies and thematic analysis from unheard stakeholders, often absent in rural research. The role of public sector visions for lower Carbon Economy as *driver and constraint* to further future innovation is pertinent as much of the extensive farming and scenic landscape of Wales exist as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Beauty. Recent notions of a '*just transition*' are discussed in the context for rural Wales that underpin a countryside where land and food sovereignty and access is not certain and is worthy of attention by policymakers and of *political* debate on what values underpin sustainable farming, wider Carbon innovation and localising food policy from farmer livelihood perspective.

Key words - rural Wales, Carbon innovation, farming livelihoods

Modelling Land Use Competition between Food and Bioenergy Production

Oral

Ms. Mariavittoria Perrone¹, Dr. Giordano Ruggeri¹, Prof. Chiara Mazzocchi¹

1. University of Milan

The increasing global energy demand and the urgent need for climate action have intensified competition for land between food production and bioenergy crops. This shift has profound implications for agricultural markets and, most significantly, for rural economies, where land use decisions strongly impact local livelihoods (Kwakye et al., 2024). Balancing food security with bioenergy development is crucial. While ensuring a stable food supply remains a priority (King et al., 2023), bioenergy provides an alternative to fossil fuels, with the potential to reduce emissions, while also stimulating economic opportunities and energy independence (Duarah et al., 2022; Tawalbeh et al., 2024), positioning it as a key component of renewable energy strategies.

This study examines bioenergy-related land use in Lombardy, Italy, and introduces a quantitative analytical framework potentially applicable to broader territorial analyses. Using a panel dataset, it explores the diffusion of bioenergy agriculture, focusing on key socio-economic, agricultural, and policy drivers. The analysis integrates data from various sources to evaluate the influence of factors such as livestock farms, population density, bioenergy production facilities, land value, commodity and energy prices, and policy incentives on energy crop diffusion, also evaluating potential spillover effects. Expected results suggest that livestock activity and policy incentives are pivotal in driving bioenergy adoption, especially in rural areas where agriculture and energy policies are closely linked. Findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders regarding land use in agricultural rural areas.

Keywords: Land Use, Energy-Crops, Rural Areas

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No Farmers, No Food? The Use of Food Security Discourse in Opposition to Green Transition Policies and Projects

Oral

Prof. Michael Woods¹

1. Aberystwyth University

The future use of rural land has increasingly become a major site of conflict in responses to the climate crisis and other global environmental challenges. From a policy perspective, rural land is important as a source of renewable energy to facilitate a post-carbon transition as well as for carbon mitigation through afforestation and rewilding. However, these policies and individual projects involving, for example, solar arrays or carbon forestry, have been resisted by interest groups and protesters who oppose any reduction in agricultural land. Such protests sit in a long trajectory of rural land use conflicts, however a distinctive contemporary future is the increasing use of the discourse of food security in campaigns. Drawing on evidence from the 'Rural-Spatial-Justice' project exploring rural discontent, spatial justice and disruptive politics, this paper scrutinises the use of food security discourse, analyses its key components, and traces its adoption by European farmer protesters in the winter of 2023-24 and capture by far-right and populist politicians. It argues that food security forms a cipher that allows farmer self-interest, agrarianism, rural perceptions of spatial- or environmental- injustice, nationalism and populist climate scepticism to be melded together in a movement that risks derailing the green transition.

Soil carbon credits in Maasai land: are European car manufacturers driving a new wave of land alienation in Tanzania?

Oral

***Dr. Priscilla Claeys*¹**

1. Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University

My contribution sheds lights on the rapid development of soil carbon projects in Northern Tanzania where pastoralism is the main livelihood. It is based on research conducted in January 2025 in 11 villages, in partnership with the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA), a network of human rights, development and faith-based organisations, activists and lawyers defending the rights of Maasai to stay and live on their land. My presentation will:

- present the key actors involved in the promotion of soil carbon projects in Tanzania (and Kenya) and their ties to the US conservation industry;
- explain the differences between forest and soil carbon and the reasons why soil carbon projects target pastoralist areas;
- explore the measures that Maasai communities are expected to implement as part of carbon deals, and how these will create a shift from traditional to rapid rotational grazing;
- discuss the anticipated impacts of carbon projects, with a focus on restrictions on communities' right to share grazing areas and use resources flexibly in times of drought;
- present community concerns in relation to carbon, especially when it comes to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

While this case study focuses on Maasai Indigenous Peoples in Tanzania, it documents the role of a European car manufacturer as principal investor and buyer. It reflects on the coloniality and land implications of corporate net zero pledges and on the need to adopt resilient pathways to address the climate crisis.

Trading carbon on empty lands

Oral

Prof. Carol Richards¹, Dr. Rudolf Messner¹, Dr. Elizabeth Ransom²

1. Queensland University of Technology, 2. Penn State Univ

Extensive cattle properties have become focal points for examining climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies due to their dual role as sites that both release and potentially sequester carbon, depending on management activities. The Australian beef cattle grazing industry occupies around half of the entire land-use of a continent renowned for its vast and exposed landscapes and extreme climate variability. Within the Australian national net zero strategy, land and vegetation management is projected to account for the largest amount of carbon removals until 2050. This will arguably be achieved through vegetation management regulations and market-based mechanisms such as carbon trading. Through a study in Central Queensland, this paper examines two contrasting paradigms of sustainable land management to mitigate climate change. On the one hand, sustainable grazing management practices are seen as producing ecological benefits including increased soil carbon sequestration and its co-benefits of increased biodiversity, water infiltration, soil fertility, and landscape regeneration. Such management increasingly relies on data driven solutions that support on farm planning and decision making, helping to enhance resilience, sustainability and ecosystem services. On the other hand, digital technologies and data also enable increased participation of farms in the global carbon economy, leading to an appropriation of agricultural land as 'carbon-land' by industry and international institutional investors. In some regions this commercial re-appraisal of pastoral lands as carbon sinks has removed large tracts of rangelands from food production and decimated surrounding communities. This paper draws on a food system perspective to investigate the socio-ecological implications of climate change policy for sustainable food production, sustainable land management, and rural livelihoods.

10. Varieties of Rural Gentrification

Assembling Comparative Studies of Rural Gentrification:

Oral

Prof. Martin Phillips¹

1. University of Leicester

Recent years have seen a growing appreciation of the potential significance of the concept of gentrification to understanding changes in a range of rural contexts (e.g. Du 2022; Lorenzen 202; Mießner and Naumann 2024). The growth in the geographical spread of these rural studies creates parallels to conceptual tensions that emerged in urban gentrification research, where concerns were raised about whether the apparent portability of the concept was achieved at the expense of both its theoretical coherence and contextual understanding (e.g. Ghertner 2015; Maloutas 2012; Smart and Smart, 2017). Alongside these debates, there emerged an increasing interest in the development of comparative studies of gentrification (e.g. Lees 2012; Lees et al 2015; Bernt 2016), which has also been explored in a rural context by Phillips and Smith (2018a, 2019b) as part of a comparative study of rural gentrification in France, the UK and the USA. This paper draws on further elements of this research project, as well as research conducted on comparative ruralism in Japan. More specifically, the paper highlights and explores the use of critical realist and assemblage approaches in discussions of comparative research and gentrification studies (e.g. Brenner et al. 2011; Clark 2005; McFarlane 2011; Peck 2014; Lagendijk et al, 2014). This paper seeks to contribute to these debates through exploring connections between realism, assemblage theory and the co-called “Copenhagen interpretation of gentrification” (Clark 1994). Attention is drawn to how the concept of assemblage might be used to understand constructions of gentrification in different localities and within the develop comparative studies of gentrification. These arguments are illustrated in relation to studies of gentrification in rural areas of England, France, the USA and Japan.

From rural to territorial gentrification: understanding socio-ecological transformations in the Catalan Pyrenees

Oral

Dr. Ana Moragues-Faus¹, Dr. Ferran Canudas², Prof. Enric Tello¹

1. Department of Economic History, Institutions, Politics and World Economy, University of Barcelona and Food Action and Research Observatory (FARO), 2. Arada Cooperativa

Despite widespread deagrarianization and gentrification processes transforming European rural landscapes, their impact on food systems remains underexplored. To address this gap, this paper analyses how rural gentrification processes reshape local foodscapes, from agricultural activities to food environments. Using an action research approach that integrates geographic and socio-economic analyses, this study investigates these changes in the Catalan Pyrenees, a place undergoing significant shifts from traditional farming and livestock practices to tourism and second-home developments.

The findings reveal that rural gentrification processes have negatively impacted local food production and access, creating food deserts and mirages, while escalating housing market pressures that displace long-term residents. These changes disrupt mobility patterns and daily routines while restricting access to essential resources such as land, water, housing, infrastructure, and labour. Collectively, these dynamics constitute a process of territorial gentrification, where local resources are appropriated to meet the demands of newcomers and visitors, reshaping economic structures, landscapes, and power relations. This process often results in the marginalisation of local communities and erosion of the region's socio-cultural fabric.

The analysis reveals how territorial gentrification processes compromise not only the capacity to fulfil essential rights - such as the right to food and housing - but also constrain the region's ability to sustain resilient and inclusive rural development. Overall, the research contributes to current rural gentrification debates by examining its complex interplay with food systems dynamics. Results highlight the importance of exploring further the territorial dimension of these processes to ensure comprehensive and situated interventions that foster resilient and just rural futures.

My house is my castle: Can international (pre-) retirement migrants' home-making have a gentrification effect on peripheral rural places? A case study from Hungary

Oral

Dr. Krisztina Németh¹, Dr. Dóra Gábor¹, Dr. Monika Váradi¹

1. HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies

Our presentation offers a micro-perspective analysis of the potential gentrification effects of international retirement migration (IRM). Recent research highlights that Hungary has been put on the map of IRM as a destination country. However, not only spa towns are popular; small, peripheral villages also attract Western European (mostly German) (pre-)retirees, even if they are less attractive in terms of tourism and „rural idyll”, and face demographic and socio-economic decline as well as infrastructural deficiencies. These less affluent older migrants seek not so much natural beauty and „amenities” in these remote places. When moving in, they prefer to find a relatively cheap house, thus an own property they generally could not afford in their home country. Since most of them buy these houses for their own use, the investment and property development goals are much less important in their strategy than the desire for financial and existential security and a relatively agreeable later life. In our presentation, drawing on the analysis of an older German migrants' narrative, we use the concept of homing (Boccagni 2022) to interpret what it means to own a house, make a home and create attachments in a new place of residence. From the perspectives of home-making and homing, our case study scrutinizes the interplay of home-making and the integration of older immigrants into the local community, and the effects of imaginations, practices and struggles related to home-making in the conceptual framework of rural gentrification.

Reimagining the Countryside: Rural Gentrification in Turkey

Oral

Dr. Gözde Orhan¹

1. Altinbas University

This study explores spatial reconstruction and population transformation in rural areas, conceptualized as “rural gentrification,” through case studies from Turkey. While existing literature on rural gentrification primarily emphasizes processes such as surplus value production and the displacement of previous residents by gentrifiers (Phillips, M. 2002; Gosnell, H. and Abrams, J. 2009), this research aims to highlight the distinctive cultural characteristics that shape these transformations in the Turkish context. It seeks to analyze these patterns underlying the geographical choices of the upper-middle classes who opt to reconstruct and settle in specific villages. What factors drive the process of rural gentrification along Turkey’s Aegean coast? Can this phenomenon be merely attributed to the region’s status as a tourism destination, or do deeper socio-cultural and economic dynamics contribute to it? In the context of Turkey, a country predominantly composed of a Muslim population and governed by a conservative/liberal political regime, this paper investigates the historical and cultural heritage that the upper-middle classes seek to revive through their rural settlement practices. Building on this premise, I argue that an important yet often overlooked motivation of rural gentrifiers is the aspiration to construct a future within a community composed of individuals who share similar social backgrounds and cultural affinities.

As the rural population continues to decline, the phenomenon of certain villages being “discovered” and reconstructed by settlers who differ significantly from the traditional peasant profile cannot be understood solely through the lens of political economy. Rather, it also reflects the evolving aspirations and socio-cultural pursuits of the middle-upper classes. Although rural gentrification affects a relatively limited geographical area and population, the nature of this transformation presents a compelling subject of study.

The new neighbours. German migration to rural Hungary

Oral

Dr. Kyra Tomay¹, Dr. Tamás Ragadics¹

1. University of Pécs, Department of Sociology

This presentation summarizes our research on the motivations of German citizens settling permanently in Hungary and the impact of their presence in rural areas. We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with German migrants and key local actors (e.g., mayor, doctor, educators, and NGO leaders) in four villages in southern Hungary.

Numerous theories explain migration decisions. Middle-class rural migrants are often motivated by an affinity for the countryside, a slower pace of life, and improved work-life balance (amenity/lifestyle migration) (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016). For less affluent populations, migration may stem from economic insecurity, with geoarbitrage—relocating to regions with lower living costs—becoming a key factor (Hayes, 2018). The pandemic heightened interest in rural areas offering security, often coupled with opportunities for remote work (Holleran, 2022; Pfening & Jászberényi, 2023). International migration is also shaped by personal values and ideological alignment (Nyíri & Xiang, 2022). Some scholars attribute German migration to Hungary to the welcoming rural environment, existing German infrastructure, and enhanced public safety (Bauer, 2023).

In the presentation we intend to answer why and how the migrants choose Hungary, particularly a Swabian or even a non-Swabian settlement, their perceptions of rural life in Hungarian, and their reception by local communities: whether they integrate or form enclaves. We explore the factors shaping their social relationships, and their broader impact on village life and community dynamics.

Keywords: German migrants, rural Hungary, social integration

The rural gentrification by lifestyle urban-to-rural later-life migration in rural China

Oral

Ms. Yadi Zhang¹

1. the University of Sheffield

Lifestyle migration serves as a catalyst for rural gentrification, generating economic opportunities while also contributing to social inequality, cultural transformation, and shifts in employment structures. However, the specific ways in which these changes driven by different groups and unfold within different contexts require further investigation. This study explore rural gentrification by lifestyle later-life migrants in rural China, examining how lifestyle later-life migrants have shifted economy, culture and society in rural communities. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research is based on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in Xia village (pseudonym) near Beijing, incorporating participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 13 lifestyle migrants.

Findings indicate that while Xia Village exhibits global patterns of urban-to-rural migration and rural gentrification, its trajectory is shaped by China's distinctive socio-political context. Economically, the influx of lifestyle migrants has driven housing price increases; however, residential displacement has not occurred due to China's rural land policies. The expansion of service-based employment has generated unequal power dynamics and social tensions between migrants and local villagers. Culturally, lifestyle migrants establish hierarchical relationships, leading to cultural colonisation, but mitigated by restricted interaction and local resistance. Socially, the migration process has contributed to the emergence of new capital and working classes, yet class colonisation remains absent, likely due to the continued dominance of smallholder economies and limited rural industrialisation.

This study challenges the binary working-middle-class perspective on rural gentrification and the portrayal of villagers as passive victims. By offering a nuanced, context-specific analysis, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of rural gentrification in rural China.

(key words: rural China, lifestyle later-life migration, rural gentrification)

Varieties of Rural Gentrification in Hungary

Oral

Dr. Kyra Tomay¹

1. University of Pécs, Department of Sociology

This presentation summarizes four years of research on “The Role of Gentrification in Rural Development.” The research based on six field sites, involved 250 semi-structured interviews with newcomers, long-established residents, indigenous populations, key actors, and entrepreneurs and was analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. A key focus is the impact of urban migration on rural settlements. How does the pace of gentrification vary? Why does it stall in some cases? Can rural communities benefit from the material, cultural, and social capital of newcomers, or are they victims of neo-colonization?

The presentation provides a synthesis of findings and a comparative analysis of case studies, summarized in a typology highlighting key similarities and differences. Findings show that, even within Hungary, gentrification varies widely depending on several factors. These include whether newcomers are permanent or temporary, whether they adapt to rural life or impose their own vision, and the host community’s resilience, traditions, and values. The extent to which newcomers integrate or disrupt local life plays a crucial role. The speed and scale of change, along with external factors like economic crises, real estate booms, or COVID-19, further influence outcomes. Ultimately, the study underscores the complexity of rural gentrification, showing that it is neither entirely beneficial nor entirely harmful but shaped by dynamic interactions between newcomers, local communities, and external forces.

11. What Is, and to What End, Do We Teach Rural Sociology?

Navigating an identity as a rural sociologist within UK HE: Is food the answer?

Oral

Dr. Bethany Robertson ¹

1. University of Leeds

In this paper, I draw on my experiences of teaching in sociology departments at UK universities in which I have found rural sociology to be a marginal endeavour. Often this has involved contributing to existing modules on the city, youth or social theory by teaching about media representations of the rural-urban divide, spatial inequalities in youth transitions or post-human families. Broadly speaking, these have addressed issues of place-making, rather than my entry point to research in the sociology of farming with a focus on gender and social reproduction.

Against a backdrop of polarised culture wars and misinformation regarding agriculture and climate change, the current moment seems timely to challenge the binary of nature/culture. Treatment of the rural as the subject of crisis and lack of transformation risks its demise within the sociology curriculum (Hillyard, 2007). In response to this, I have written a new undergraduate module on sociology of food futures which seems a viable starting point to revitalise the relevance of rural sociology to students, their career paths and policy today. As Murcott (2011) suggests, there is a risk that a food systems approach focuses on the economy at the expense of social relations. Therefore, I will discuss how I hope to embed rural sociology within this new module using critical pedagogies and object-based learning to encourage students to interrogate where is the social (and rural) in sustainable futures?

Teaching rural sociology at the University of Latvia

Oral

Prof. Aija Zobena¹

1. University of Latvia

For over 20 years, I have been teaching this course, focusing on the connection between the current direction of rural development in the EU and the processes occurring in the Latvian countryside. This course aims to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of rural sociology, its challenges, and its relevance to contemporary issues in Latvia, all while linking these discussions to broader EU trends in rural development. We start with exploration of rural discourse in social sciences, then analyse rural areas as specific socio-territorial units to understand dynamics of rural life. An understanding of the main theoretical perspectives and the evolution of rural sociology enables students to identify social problems using various sources of information to analyze the challenges of rural development from a sociological perspective in a national and global context.

The contribution of political ecology and the concept of food systems for teaching and supporting just transitions of rural areas in agronomy schools

Oral

Dr. Margaux Alarcon¹

1. Bordeaux Sciences Agro

The context of multiple crises and the call for rural and farming transition requires new knowledge and skills from agricultural engineers, and questions the content and form of social science teaching in agronomy schools. What approaches can we develop in social sciences within agronomy schools so that students are able to analyze and support social and ecological transitions in rural and agricultural areas, by going beyond the development of agronomic responses within farms and integrating new scales and a multiplicity of interacting issues and operators?

This paper is based on an experience as a young associate professor in environmental geography at a French public agronomy school. It highlights 3 main paths for building social science teaching tackling transitions in rural and agricultural areas, based on examples of schemes implemented as part of the 2024-2025 academic year:

1. **Using political ecology approaches** to take account of the multiplicity of discourses and practices of rural and agricultural stakeholders, to consider the social, political and ecological issues involved locally, and to highlight any power relationships;
2. **Taking a systemic and territorial perspective** to consider just transitions at the level of food systems and not just at the level of farms and production sector, in order to develop teaching that links social and environmental issues and that considers questions of justice by using for example environmental justice and food justice theoretical frameworks;
3. **Organizing time for reflection** (discussion workshops, open space technology...) **and active project-based teaching** to identify some of the students' needs and to promote and circulate knowledge and skills.

These findings will provide a basis for discussing the relevance of going beyond disciplinary approaches in social sciences to address the issues of transition in rural and agricultural societies.

What ‘doing’ rural sociology implicates for teaching it. Some reflections from Germany

Oral

Prof. Annett Steinführer¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

In a job interview a few years ago, a PhD candidate told me and the other interviewers that during her studies of the social sciences at a large German university, she had not even heard the terms ‘countryside’ or ‘rural’, let alone been offered any rural sociology course. At the same time, the political and media debates about (assumed) urban-rural divides in voting behaviour, social structure and world views had already reached its first climax, following the rise of far-right parties across Europe and other parts of the world.

As for Germany, this contradiction between a new relevance of the category ‘rural’ in societal discourse and its non-presence in academic teaching has not yet been resolved. Rural sociology or rural studies more generally do almost not exist as university subjects. However, interpreting this situation as a story of academic loss would be inappropriate as ‘the rural’ never used to be a major topic at German universities after WWII – with just two exceptions: community sociology as a temporarily quite successful subdiscipline and rural sociology as a subject restricted to agricultural faculties and rather considered an “auxiliary scienc[e] of agricultural policy” (Planck 1993, 31).

In recent years, however, there are signs for a re-institutionalisation of rural sociology (and rural geography) outside universities. Several research institutes and targeted project funding contribute to a revived scientific interest in rural areas, rural populations and rural life-worlds. In light of these endeavours, in my presentation I want to reflect on this practical ‘doing’ of rural sociology by outlining some major concepts and issues of current rural research in Germany and drawing implications for reviving an academic backing. From the WG, I hope for inspirations of an up-to-date curriculum to teach and address rural issues with sound sociological foundations.

12. The role played by forest and forestry in rural territories in transition

Challenges in Focus: The Forest Products Industry, the Rural Workforce, and Rural Communities in Alabama

Oral

Dr. MATTHEW ZINSLI¹, Dr. Kelli Russell¹, Dr. Mykel Taylor¹, Mr. Garrett Antonio Martinez¹, Ms. Amelia Pugh¹

1. Auburn University

Purpose

The forest products industry makes a major contribution to the economy in rural Alabama, employing nearly 124,000 people in the industry. Few existing studies explore the intersections of the industry, rural communities, and the rural workforce in the Southeastern United States. In this research, we ask: (1) what are the central challenges facing the industry, and (2) how are forest products businesses adapting to changes in rural communities?

Theoretical Framing and Methods

Grounded theory guides all components of data production and analysis for this research. Data from this paper come from semi-structured interviews with forest products business owners, managers, and employees and participant observation hours at forestry-related events and meetings. Data collection is ongoing, and at the time of writing, our research team has conducted 17 interviews and 32 hours of participant observation.

Findings

In this paper, we discuss our central preliminary findings regarding the tensions between labor needs and changes in rural communities as well as profitability needs, technology adoption, environmental regulations, and rural livelihoods. We focus primarily on the impacts of these tensions on rural communities and the rural workforce, highlighting the interconnections of sustainability and resiliency.

Changing relations of injustice in forest landscapes

Oral

Prof. Seema Arora Jonsson¹

1. Swedish university of agricultural science

Forests have been at the centre of intense conflicts in Sweden. While debates have focussed on new methods of forest management or different policy interventions, few have analyzed taken a comprehensive approach to tackling the relations of injustice in forest contestations. In this paper, using the Qualitative Case Analysis (QCA) methodology and a unique dataset compiled for this article, we examine conflicts around forest land in Sweden and the Nordic countries. We use the data to identify relations of (in)justice in forest land use conflicts and analyze the different configurations in which a collaborative process among disparate (and unequal) actors can take place leading to potentially new modes of solidarity and a process that is considered just by most, especially those who are most marginal.

Forest Bioeconomy as a driver of Regional Development

Oral

Dr. radek rinn¹, Dr. Petra Palátová¹, Prof. Martin Jankovský¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences, Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences

The bioeconomy concept has gained significant attention in developed nations, particularly in Europe and North America, while other regions require deeper exploration. The forest bioeconomy is especially crucial in countries where forestry plays a key role in industry and society. Recently, the concept of regional bioeconomy has emerged, emphasizing the continuity of value chains and the development of regional ties. However, the forest-based regional bioeconomy is understood differently across various areas, influenced by the level of government support and strategic policy integration.

Our research examined the perception of forest bioeconomy principles in selected regions of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Southeastern Europe. Using qualitative document analysis and stakeholder surveys, we found that “bioeconomy” had a lower level of understanding compared to related terms like “circular economy” and “sustainable forest management.” Raising awareness through these more familiar concepts could enhance public and industry engagement. The study also highlighted regional differences in perception, support, and barriers to implementation, while stakeholders consistently acknowledged the importance of the forest sector in a sustainable bioeconomy.

Future research should expand regional perspectives and explore generational differences in attitudes toward the bioeconomy to refine policy strategies. Education and awareness initiatives must target regions with lower familiarity to promote adoption. Additionally, establishing long-term monitoring indicators will be essential for tracking progress and aligning bioeconomy strategies with sustainable development goals. Ultimately, adapting policies to regional needs will be critical in ensuring the success of the forest bioeconomy.

Forest Bioeconomy: Implementation Challenges and Future Perspectives

Oral

Mr. Aleš Kůs¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences, Department of Forestry and Wood Economics

This paper focuses on the assessment of forest bioeconomy as a socio-economic concept and a strategic approach to the development of the forestry sector in the Czech Republic. The methodology primarily relies on qualitative content analysis of Czech strategic documents. The aim is to evaluate the extent to which bioeconomy principles are integrated into key national strategic materials and how they address current challenges in forestry management. The paper follows three main objectives: (1) an evaluation of strategic documents relevant to the development of forest bioeconomy in the Czech Republic, including the Concept of Bioeconomy in the Czech Republic for 2019–2024, the Concept of State Forestry Policy until 2035, and Circular Czechia 2040, followed by a comparative analysis with the European Bioeconomy Strategy; (2) the identification of key stakeholders influencing the implementation of bioeconomy measures and their mutual interactions; and (3) an assessment of the anticipated development of forest bioeconomy with consideration of its potential impact on rural areas. An important aspect of the paper is also the comparison of forest bioeconomy with related concepts such as circular economy, green economy, and sustainable development. This differentiation contributes to a better understanding of the role of bioeconomy in the broader context of environmental policy. The findings of the analysis may serve as a basis for formulating recommendations for updating strategic documents and strengthening bioeconomy principles in decision-making processes in the Czech Republic, as well as in countries with similar conditions in the forestry sector.

Keywords: strategic documents, forestry stakeholders, rural areas

Forest Managers' Appraisal of Climate Change Impacts on Forest Ecosystem Services: Insights from Across Europe

Oral

Dr. Elisabeth Gotschi¹, Ms. Anne Lehr¹, Dr. Alice Ludvig², Dr. Mirabela Marin³, Dr. Nicu Constantin Tudose³, Mr. Cezar Ungurean³, Mr. Ionut Mihai Hapa³, Dr. Ilaria Zorzi⁴, Dr. Francesca Giannetti⁵, Prof. Hermine Mitter⁶

1. Institute of Sustainable Economic Development, BOKU University, 2. Institute of Forest, Environmental and Natural Resource Policy, BOKU University, 3. National Institute for Research and Development in Forestry, 4. Bluebiloba Startup Innovativa, 5. University of Florence, 6. Department of Environmental Systems Sciences, University of Graz

A growing body of literature studies climate change impacts on forests and adaptation measures addressing rising average temperatures and more extreme weather events. However, we know little about how forest managers appraise the impacts of climate change on the provision of forest ecosystem services. Building on the Model of Private Proactive-Adaptation to Climate Change extended with forest ecosystem services, we have conducted 57 semi-structured interviews with forest managers in eight European countries (Norway, Lithuania, UK, Germany, Austria, Romania, Spain and Italy). Overall, forest managers agree that climate change impacts forest ecosystem services. The consequences of extreme weather events and the most effective adaptation measures can differ significantly depending on the specific geographical location. For example, damages and economic losses due to increased windthrows are consistent across the eight study areas. The risk of forest fires which limits recreational enjoyment and carbon storage is reported to be serious in the Spanish case study area, where the cooling effect of the forest's microclimate is reported to be particularly important. The observed increase in provisioning of wood due to milder winters and therefore a prolonged growing season are observed primarily in Norway and Lithuania. Depending on socio-cognitive processes, forest managers adaptation strategies in supporting forest ecosystem services varies from introducing new species, and reforestation following climate disturbances to wishful thinking or fatalism. Forest managers' outlook on future development of forest ecosystem services is characterised by uncertainty given the lack of control over extreme weather events and long-time horizons in forest management.

Gender and forestry: a feminist analysis of women situation in the forest sector in Spain

Oral

**Dr. Fatima Regina Cruz Souza¹, Ms. Malena Aparicio-Rodríguez¹, Ms. Alba Carrasco-Cruz¹,
Dr. Elvira Sanz²**

1. GIR Análisis e Investigación Psicosocial, Sustainable Forest Management Research Institute (iuFOR), University of Valladolid, Avda. Madrid, 44. 34004. Palencia, ESPAÑA., 2. Departamento de Sociología y Trabajo Social. Universidad Pública de Navarra

Forest areas are increasing in Spain due to rural depopulation and the decline in agricultural land use. Although this may have positive ecological impacts, depopulation itself implies challenges in forest management and rural development, mainly due to the disengagement of forest owners from their territories. This problem is even more serious in the case of women. In addition to being the main group leading rural out-migration, women have a restricted space to work on forestry and women forest owners are almost invisible. Forestry is still especially conceived as a male labor space. The project NATUR SMART (BF307) works on the objective to analyze the sociocultural barriers that intervene in the attachment processes of the women forest managers and forest owners to their forests. A qualitative research had been carried out in five rural areas in Spain. The discourses of women forest owners and local stakeholders show the persistence of gender stereotypes that act to expel women from decision-making processes in forest management. Among the main obstacles are the lack of female role models, the sexual division of labor and barriers to participation in decision-making processes and local governance. Thus, the results highlight the need to transform stereotypes and narrow beliefs about rural women, making visible forest women referents and creating spaces for women's participation. Women forest managers and owners must have their own voices.

Incorporating trees on farm: the influence of historical developments and place

Oral

Dr. Jorie Knook¹, Dr. Jolien Klok²

1. Lincoln University, 2. Wageningen University

The incorporation of trees on farms is a proposed solution to agricultural and societal challenges, such as climate change, soil and groundwater contamination and biodiversity loss. While studies are conducted to understand motivations of landowners adopting agroforestry, there is a call for more research, since enthusiasm for agroforestry is abundant but actual uptake lags behind. We respond to this call by digging into the reasons for incorporation of trees in the Netherlands (TN) and New Zealand (NZ). These nations face similar environmental challenges and economic prosperity. There are also important differences, allowing for a deeper understanding of how motivations for agroforestry are associated with socio-political, historical and geographical context. We take an institutional theory approach, in which we understand agroforestry practices as embedded in beliefs and values of the farming culture, and rely on 18 (9 in NZ and 9 in TN) farm visits and in-depth interviews with farmers, as well as expert interviews in both states. Profitability was mentioned in both countries, but more pronounced in NZ than in TN, whose farmers more strongly seem to act out of care for land, animals and community. This might reflect differences in national funding climates and the historical place of the tree as contributor to farm income, as well as differences in social configurations of the farmer population engaged in agroforestry. We conclude national comparisons are an undervalued tool to gain insight into more structurally driven motivations for agroforestry and that they illuminate policy space to increase the adoption of agroforestry.

Livelihoods and access versus the forests – a study of the Ashanti region, Ghana

Oral

***Dr. Adwoa Ofori*¹**

1. University College Dublin

‘[they say] why are we living by our forests and you don’t want us to go there?’ (Interview with Senior Researcher – Forestry Research Institute, 2017).

‘our objective is to bring back the trees and we cannot allow them. Theirs is to grow crops in perpetuity; they are conflicting’ (Interview with Senior Official, Forestry Commission, 2017)

In Ghana, communities adjacent to forests often depend on forest resources to sustain their livelihoods. However, access to the forests may not be automatic. Forestry lands are state lands, managed by the Forestry Commission, a government agency. Hence in accessing the forest without permission, communities often encroach for purposes like farming, only to be later expelled by the Forestry Commission with detrimental effects to their livelihoods.

Using the Ananekrom community and adjacent Boumfoum Forest reserve in the Ashanti region of Ghana as a case study, the paper examines the impacts to livelihoods through the lens of access due to the dynamics around the entry and loss thereof to the forest. A random sampling technique was employed to undertake interviews and focus group discussions with community members. Purposive sampling was used to carry out interviews with officials within governmental agencies.

The research found that the extent of the livelihood impact following eviction depended on the indigenous or non-indigenous positionality. Additionally, community perspectives on rights and disconnects in information regarding access created tensions due to expulsion. Thus, the critical issue is addressing the dynamics around rural livelihood activities within the forests vis-à-vis sustainability of the forests.

Living forest and visited forest: Tensions of use and representation of forest spaces in rural tourism

Oral

***Dr. Fatima Regina Cruz Souza*¹, *Ms. Alba Carrasco-Cruz*², *Ms. Malena Aparicio-Rodríguez*², *Dr. Xesús Lage-Picos*³**

1. Departamento de Psicología, GIR Análisis e Investigación Psicosocial, Facultad de Educación de Palencia. Universidad de Valladolid, Avda. Madrid, 44. 34004. Palencia, ESPAÑA., 2. GIR Análisis e Investigación Psicosocial, Sustainable Forest Management Research Institute (iuFOR), University of Valladolid, Avda. Madrid, 44. 34004. Palencia, ESPAÑA., 3. Área de Sociología - Universidad de Vigo.

In the context of global capitalist dynamics, rural areas and their forest environments have progressively become objects of tourist consumption for urban populations. This phenomenon is underpinned by processes of patrimonialization of nature, rooted in urban-centric hierarchies and the nature-culture dichotomy. This study analyses how rural and forest representations influence local everyday life, not only through institutional heritage mechanisms, but also through the concrete interactions among tourists, forest environments and local communities.

Using a qualitative methodology, 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, examining two case studies in rural areas of Spain with a high level of economic dependence on tourism activities: the region of La Vera (Extremadura) and the Alfoz de Segovia (Castilla y León). This study is framed in two national research projects: NATUR SMART (BF307) and IMFLEX (Grant PID2021-126275OB-C21). The participants show that, far from the predominant dichotomous views, forests are complex social spaces, with a great diversity of uses and meanings for local populations. Thus, although tourism is seen as an opportunity for economic development, it is also perceived as a source of disruption in community life. In both regions, there is an alteration between tourists and residents, resulting from conflicting representations of place. This tension affects forest environments, where uses and meanings must be renegotiated with the arrival of new actors and dynamics, sometimes conflicting and unrest among the local population.

Policy scenarios and recognizing diversity in small forest owners type to enhance biodiversity in Catalonia

Oral

Dr. Mireia Pecurul¹, Ms. Joana Nabau¹, Mr. Giuseppe Cappizzi¹, Dr. Nuria Aquilué¹

1. Forest Science and Technological Centre of Catalonia

In July 2021, the European Commission published the EU Forest Strategy (EUFs). The EUFS supports the socio-economic functions of forests to sustain prosperous rural areas and to develop the bioeconomy. At the same time, the EUFS emphasizes carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and forest restoration. In many European regions, where more than half of forests are privately owned, the forest management decisions of each owner are crucial to achieving these objectives and finding a balance between these two aims.

The authors have developed a case study in Catalonia to understand how forests are managed and to identify the objectives, motivations, and most relevant factors influencing forest management decisions. The empirical data has been collected through a survey distributed to forest owners and managers. Results served as a basis for classifying the respondents according to five different forest owner types.

Finally, we explore how different policy scenarios can support a paradigm shift towards silviculture closer to the nature paradigm. We argue that policy instruments can be tailored to the specific needs and motivations of each different type of owner. This would enable more owners to participate in biodiversity enhancement while aligning forest management with their interests. Combining participatory workshops with modelling, we have adapted the projection system for multi-objective forest planning (FORMES) to include agency according to different behavioural responses. If there are any biodiversity conservation differences in the long-term projections (estimated 120 years) for each scenario, these will be reflected through chosen indicators based on the new restoration law.

Power Perspectives in Private Forest Governance – A Literature Review

Oral

***Ms. Julia Müller**¹*

1. Universität Freiburg

Changing ownership structures of private forest holdings in Europe affect all aspects of forest management. While an extensive amount of literature is dedicated to understanding the goals of ‘new forest owners’, little attention has been paid to the shifting power dynamics affecting forest management including decision making, objective setting, planning, and implementation. Understanding these power dynamics may help answer questions of stability and change in forest management. However, power is a highly contested concept that allows various applications and interpretations. Therefore, this paper aims to understand the research traditions relating to power in the governance and management of non-industrial private forest holdings. Designed as a systematic literature review, it will (1) give an overview of the explicit and implicit use of power concepts (2) discuss the implications on forest governance practice and research (c) identify opportunities to extend and/or adapt the use of power concepts in research to better inform governance of private forest holdings. To identify relevant literature search strings will combine the topic of ‘governance of private forest holdings’ with a broad array of terms related to ‘power’. The studies will be analysed building on power typologies as brought forward by Partzsch (2017) and Avelino (2017 and 2021) distinguishing power as a relationship (power over) and power as a capacity (power to/with).

Keywords: power, forest ownership, forest governance

Protective forests and the interpretation of danger

Oral

Dr. Georg Wiesinger¹

1. Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research

Forests are protecting human settlements, industrial facilities and built infrastructures from natural hazards such as avalanches, landslides or rock falls. The maintenance of protective forests requires a great deal of effort, knowledge and skill. It takes decades until these forests will develop their full protective function. The expenses for the creation of protective forests are even higher compared with technical structures built from concrete and steel. Finally, environmental interrelationships and management systems of protective forests are hardly visible and understandable for non-experts. This is why laypeople tend to develop their own non-scientific concepts, shaped by everyday knowledge and historical experiences, in how to perceive and tackle with natural hazards.

Everyday knowledge leads to an epistemically unconcerned approach to knowledge. Berger & Luckmann pointed out in “The Social Construction of Reality” (1966) that scientific and theoretical knowledge is often representing a limited sphere of social knowledge as customs, common interpretations, institutions, shared routines, habitualizations and the division of labour. We must assume that there are many different realities in the perception of danger and threats, relevant to certain groups or individuals, constructed from experience and everyday knowledge, relying on routines, the language of everyday life about, installing social control mechanisms, etc. From the totality of these realities arise a coordinate system and rules of life in society and thus a “world of meaning”. From the perspective of this social construction concept the presentation will discuss findings from a case study conducted in an Austrian mountain village frequently affected by avalanches.

Key words: protective forest, danger, natural hazards

REDD+ safeguards institutionalization in Ghana: Lost in translation

Oral

Ms. Esther Wahabu¹

1. Radboud University

REDD+ programs are geared towards greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Safeguards such as the Cancun Safeguards and the World Bank Social and Environmental Framework have been orchestrated alongside REDD+ to protect non-carbon values and reinforce REDD+ that was accused of ignoring community and indigenous rights, harming biodiversity, and abdicating responsibility to reduce emissions to local farmers. REDD+ safeguards result from a political process since they indicate specific interests and contestations among political agents. Moreover, there is minimal guidance from the UNFCCC regarding translating and implementing safeguards at the national level. This points to a complex and politically charged safeguard policy and practice in REDD+ implementing countries. This paper focuses on explaining the institutionalization of safeguards in Ghana's flagship REDD+ program by tracing the political processes of negotiation, decision-making, and actions of agents. I used the concept of institutional bricolage to understand how the implementing agents modified existing policies and practices and adapted resources from elsewhere to give meaning to the new rules. Through analysis of documents, observations, and interviews, the findings indicate that at the national level, different national and international safeguard standards have been aggregated to meet international funding requirements. Meanwhile, implementation of REDD+ safeguards on the ground leverages existing community resource management structures and private and civil society networks who are already leading interventions at the local level. Therefore, proving the additionality of REDD+ safeguards is hard. In other words, the effects of REDD+ safeguards on communities and forest are hard to detangle from what would have occurred without them.

Keywords: Non-carbon values, social and environmental safeguards, institutional bricolage

Reimagining Forest Stewardship in Rural Latvia: A Gendered Analysis of Land Connection and Environmental Care

Oral

Dr. Renars Felcis¹, Mrs. Weronika Felcis²

1. University of Latvia, 2. PhD Studies in Social Sciences at Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences

Forests in Latvia are more than economic assets; they are cultural keystones that shape rural identity and social relations. While both men and women acknowledge the economic and protective dimensions of forests, our sequential transformative mixed methods analysis reveals a gendered divergence in forest engagement that resonates with current debates on gendered environmental governance (Gad & Hinds, 2021). Building on feminist critiques of patriarchal economics (by Vandana Shiva) and recent insights into agroforestry practices (Tērauda & Jansons, 2019), this study investigates how Latvian forests are simultaneously perceived as monetized and security assets during socio-economic uncertainty, and as active sites for agroecological stewardship.

Quantitative data from forest resource users were clustered based on motives for being in the forest, social management activities, organizational involvement, ownership patterns, and socio-demographic factors (region, age, and gender), identifying three distinct clusters. Notably, one cluster—predominantly composed of women—demonstrated strong associations with agroforestry and agroecology practices. Complementary qualitative insights from focus group discussions and participant observations further illustrate how these emerging practices are integrated into traditional forestry management, reinforcing forests' multifunctional roles and highlighting novel pathways for inclusive environmental stewardship.

Our work contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender and environmental governance by empirically demonstrating how differentiated forest valuations inform sustainable forestry practices in Latvia. Thus, effective forestry policy must be rooted in both cultural and symbolic meaningfulness of forests and in evidence-based gendered differences in perspectives on them.

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The horse, the logger and the apprentice: Interspecies and intergenerational perspectives on the future of sustainable forestry

Oral

Dr. Helen Wadham¹

1. Manchester Metropolitan University

Forestry is increasingly recognised as central to rural transitions, not only for its economic and ecological significance but also as a site of complex social and multispecies relationships. This paper explores the role of horses as co-workers in sustainable forestry in the UK, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with horse loggers and their equine partners. It examines how these human-horse collaborations challenge dominant narratives of forestry as mechanised and extractive, instead foregrounding slow, skilled, and relational forms of work embedded in rural livelihoods.

Bringing insights from slow philosophy (Stengers, 2018) and multispecies ethnography (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010), the paper considers how working with horses restructures time and space in forestry. Unlike mechanised logging, which prioritises efficiency and output, horse logging follows rhythms dictated by terrain, weather, and the horses' needs (Wadham & Dashper, 2024). This fosters an ethic of care between human and animal workers while, from a post-growth perspective (Mair et al., 2020), repositioning forestry as an interdependent practice rather than a purely economic transaction.

The paper explores the gendered and generational dimensions of horse logging, where women's participation is increasing and informal apprenticeship models shape knowledge transmission. These insights contribute to broader debates on rural work, governance, and sustainability. By centring interspecies labour, the paper advances a more-than-human approach to rural development, recognising the knowledge and agency of both humans and animals.

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The Influence of Operational Groups and Living Labs in forest and agroforestry innovation: some insights

Oral

Mrs. Ana Maria Ventura¹

1. Solutopus-Recursos e Desenvolvimento, Lda.

According to EIP-AGRI, innovation may be diverse and multifaceted, including economic, technical, management, social, and organisational. Based on Project Forest4Eu (www.forest4eu.eu), the Operational Groups (OG) show evidence of bringing innovation to the forestry and agroforestry sector across Europe and in diversified environments. Despite this, innovation is not perceived similarly in the distinct EU biogeographical regions, and the natural conditions and socioeconomic basis considerably influence innovation uptake by the social actors. On the other hand, the Living Labs (LLs) can be a way to bring innovation to the end-users; however, their efficacy and sustainability need to be analysed. Essential aspects in the OG and LLs implementation may be adherence to the region(s) where they operate and their capability to attract producers (with special relevance to the youth) and other value chain representatives where forestry and agroforestry are inserted. Social innovation may be a cause and a consequence of OGs and LLs implementation. Still, the policy framework appears to be a fundamental condition for innovation success and is relevant to the survival and strength of OGs and LLs. More research and field analysis emerged as key aspects to understanding the innovation in complex systems, as is the case of forestry and agroforestry.

Keywords: innovation; forestry and agroforestry; Operational Groups and Living Labs

Toward Multifunctional Forests in Rural Areas: Exploring Sense of Place in Ecosystem Services Discourse

Oral

Ms. Sakineh Ghorbanzadeh¹, Dr. Kenneth Nordberg¹

1. Åbo Akademi University

In response to global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, forests play a crucial role in providing diverse ecosystem services that support rural development. Ecosystem services are defined as the contributions of ecosystems to both material and non-material benefits arising from human-nature relationships, ultimately enhancing human well-being. These services encompass provisioning (food, timber, biomass), regulating (water regulation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation), and cultural services (recreational opportunities, tourism, identity, spiritual experiences, and Sense of Place). While forestry discourse has traditionally focused on provisioning services—often contributing to biodiversity loss—the growing emphasis on forest multifunctionality calls for greater attention to all ecosystem services, particularly cultural ones. This paper focuses on Sense of Place as an overlooked cultural ecosystem service and a relational entity that emerges from the mutual relationships between forest owners and their forests. It examines its potential to influence multifunctional forest management in rural areas. Through in-depth interviews with 23 non-industrial private forest owners in seven rural areas in the Ostrobothnia region of Finland, this study identified the diverse and multi-layered meanings attributed to forests. These meanings range from economic assets and sources of livelihood to symbols of family heritage, recreational spaces, and spiritual connections. Such multilayered meanings offer insights into the diversity of cultural practices that shape how forest owners engage with their forests. The results further indicate that place attachment contributes to a sense of responsibility and care for forests, which facilitates the adoption of multifunctional management practices that balance all ecosystem services. By highlighting Sense of Place, the study underscores the critical role of cultural ecosystem services in sustainable forest management in rural landscapes.

“This is Our Forest”: State-private Hybridity in Swedish Forest Governance

Oral

Mr. Jonathan Rahn¹

1. Swedish university of agricultural science

This paper contributes to understanding the challenges and opportunities of sustainable forestry management amidst climate and biodiversity crises, highlighting the role of local communities in shaping environmental policies. It demonstrates the potential and limitations of collaborative governance in natural resource management, offering lessons for Sweden’s forestry sustainability transition. We explore the case of a creation of a clear-cut free buffer zone around Tiveden National Park, that we take as an example of successful grassroots environmental advocacy for continuous-cover forestry rather than the dominant model of clear-cut logging, resulting in a collaboration between representatives from the community, municipality and a state-owned logging company.

We argue that this participatory governance process initiated “from below” shows characteristics of the shift from government towards governance, both in merits and drawbacks. Via the state-owned company, the administration of state-owned forests has been delegated to a state-private hybrid entities acting according to market principles. Still, through a non-confrontational, consensus-seeking approach, municipal support, and resourceful local residents, significant concessions were achieved from the company. Tiveden has become a laboratory for developing new forms of Swedish forestry and supporting infrastructure, showcasing the potential of novel governance arrangements for innovation. However, the collaborative group’s informal nature creates precarity through the sustained power imbalances. Dependence on key individuals and their unique competence ties it to that specific place and the model cannot be implemented on a large scale without both changed owner directives towards the state-owned forestry company and larger reconfigurations of forest governance at the national level and EU politics towards lower resource outtake.

13. Social participation and rural activism in rural spaces in transition

Autonomous collective actions toward a sustainable transition in rural areas led by neo-rural inhabitants: The case of the energy community in Monachil, Spain

Oral

Dr. Belén Pérez-Pérez¹, Dr. Juan Carlos Osorio-Aravena¹, Prof. Marina Frolova¹

1. University of Granada

The concept of “Emptied Spain” has been used to depict the ongoing depopulation of rural areas in Spain. However, over the past decade, certain groups have been increasingly moving to these territories, playing an active role in their transformation and energy transition. This study examines the dynamics of autonomous collective actions promoted by neo-rural inhabitants in rural areas, aligning with the need to explore new forms of activism and social participation to foster more livable rural transitions. Our main objective is to identify the socio-political and self-organizational dynamics of the Energy Community of Monachil (Spain), highlighting its successes and challenges. The research is framed within the CO-SUSTAIN project (HORIZON-CL2-2023-DEMOCRACY-01-05, No. 191132467), which investigates historical examples in six European countries to identify latent and manifest forms of political participation according to Ekman. We based the analysis on a multi-level perspective, social network analysis, and system mapping approaches. Preliminary findings reveal how the Monachil Energy Community, established outside institutional oversight, enables collective democratically access to renewable energy while facing regulatory, financial, and other barriers. This cooperative model underscores the importance of grassroots action and self-organization for revitalizing rural areas in transition. It also highlights persistent inequalities in the implementation of sustainable initiatives, as well as the challenges neo-rural inhabitants face in engaging the local population. These findings emphasize the need for more inclusive energy policies that promote social justice and strengthen the connection between rural populations and their territories.

Keywords: Social participation; Neo-rural inhabitants; Rural energy transition

Building Bridges between Urban Food Activism and quiet Food Self-Provisioning practices: lessons from transdisciplinary participatory action research interventions in Eastern Estonia

Oral

Dr. Lilian Pungas¹, Ms. Saara Mildeberg², Ms. Annela Samuel²

1. CEU Vienna / University of Tartu, 2. Tallinn University

This contribution examines the potential of building bridges between urban community gardening and food activists (UFA) and the rather overlooked Food Self-Provisioning (FSP) practitioners at Eastern Estonian *dachas* — a Russian term for a plot of land with a seasonal allotment house used primarily for food production. Against the background of deepening societal polarization (rural and traditional vs. urban and liberal) Estonia has thrived further apart due to political tensions with regard to the Russian(speaking) minority since the war in Ukraine. In addition, the invisibility of FSP practices, and the lack of communication between UFA and FSP practitioners, has been identified as an important gap by recent literature on urban gardens' sustainability potential. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, we organised a series of transdisciplinary events (Gardeners' Day 2022, 2023) at the Sputnik dacha garden association in Eastern Estonia where the majority of the Russian minority lives. We conceptualized these events as PAR interventions with a four-fold objective: countering polarization, cultivating 'unlikely alliances', re-powering local knowledge and enhancing mutual exchange. This contribution summarizes lessons drawn from the events and PAR process, completed with follow-up interviews, feedback surveys, and critical collaborative analysis. Our results demonstrate the challenges and limitations but also the formative potential of such interventions to counter societal polarization and build collaborative capacity for sustainability. We conclude that 'neutral' common denominators such as FSP have a specific potential for building 'shared politics of space' in a politically sensitive context like that of Eastern Estonia.

Can tourism provide a way of engaging rural communities?

Oral

Prof. Claire Wallace¹

1. University of Aberdeen

Community development models assume that economic development will benefit rural communities and this would be one outcome of increased tourism. However, without the engagement of communities in the development process, tourism itself is unlikely to lead to improved quality of life. Engagement processes could include the role of civil society, volunteers and local business mobilisation. However the interests of the community and heritage are not always aligned and are sometimes conflicted. Here we consider three different examples. The first where the heritage and community are well aligned; the second where they are disunited; the third where they are conflicted. It considers different factors that affect these alignments.

Community Building and Social Participation in Rural Hungary. Migration Trends and Civic Activity in an Eastern European Swabian Village.

Oral

***Dr. Tamás Ragadics**¹*

1. University of Pécs, Department of Sociology

Minor Hungarian settlements, which were farther away from the economic centres, had already attained the maximum level of self-sufficiency by the end of the 19th century. Their depopulation accelerated in the mid-20th century following the socialist transformation of agriculture. The dismantling of peasant society and the impossibility of civil initiatives were accompanied by the weakening and disintegration of local communities. The emigration of the younger and more educated population has continued in recent decades. Following the turn of the millennium, Hungary's countryside has been characterised by a heterogeneous movement of people, linked to trends in other European countries, including rural exodus (Baudin – Stelter 2019), migration as a way of life, the emergence of certain groups of the urban middle class (Tomay – Berger 2024) and geoarbitrage (Hayes 2018). Poverty and exclusion are on the rise in marginalised areas.

The present case study highlights the situation of a small Hungarian German village of about 200 inhabitants in South Transdanubia, which has suffered a significant population loss, and where the population has stabilised in recent years in the context of conscious community organising activities. An important attraction for newcomers to the settlement is the cooperative local society that has preserved its identity.

The presentation will focus on the actors and community organisations involved in the development of the quality of life in the settlement and will seek answers to the following questions: In which areas can the ageing local population and the heterogeneous small groups of newcomers cooperate? What role can newcomers play in the development of a village? How Swabian culture and identity in Hungary can serve as an integrating factor in the life of a small village?

Keywords: Hungarian countryside, community development, local initiatives

Contested Solidarities in Community Agriculture: Rural Transformations and Political Trajectories in Italy

Oral

Dr. Irina Aguiari¹

1. Scuola Normale Superiore

Rural areas are increasingly shaped by grassroots initiatives that seek to reclaim land, redefine food production, and foster new forms of collective life. Community agriculture has emerged as a key site where rural actors negotiate alternative socio-economic arrangements, balancing between institutional engagement, resistance, and autonomy. While often analyzed through the lens of food movements or sustainability transitions, community agriculture also embodies broader rural transformations, where contestations over land use, governance, and social organization reflect diverse political trajectories.

This paper examines how different models of community agriculture in Italy contribute to reconfiguring rural spaces and relations. Based on participant observation and interviews with key actors from three distinct initiatives – Arvaia (Bologna), Bread&Roses (Bari), and Mondeggi (Florence) – this study explores how collective farming projects navigate tensions between market integration, political contestation, and radical self-sufficiency. It analyzes how these initiatives conceptualize community, manage inclusion and exclusion, and engage with (or withdraw from) dominant rural institutions.

By situating community agriculture within the broader landscape of contemporary rural change, this research highlights the fluid boundaries between cooperation, conflict, and prefigurative politics in shaping new agrarian futures. Rather than a politically neutral practice, shared food production emerges as a contested space where rural imaginaries and power dynamics are continuously negotiated. This study contributes to rural sociology debates on alternative agrifood systems, rural activism, and the evolving relationship between agriculture, territory, and social transformation.

Does Business Social Responsibility Improve Enterprise Performance? Evidence from Micro Food Processors in Ghana

Oral

Mr. Bernard Kwamena Cobbina Essel¹, Dr. Miroslava Bavorova¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Despite its proven benefits for business performance and stakeholder engagement, youth-owned micro food processing enterprises in Ghana face challenges in integrating business social responsibility (BSR). This study examines the motivations behind BSR participation, key factors influencing engagement, and its impact on business outcomes. Using survey data from 244 young entrepreneurs, supplemented by qualitative insights from ten key informants, the study applies multivariate probit models to assess BSR adoption and inverse probability weighting regression adjustment (IPWRA) to estimate its impact on profitability and employment. The results show that female-owned businesses were significantly less likely to engage in charitable giving, while education positively influenced participation in local projects and the provision of customer value. BSR awareness strongly increased engagement in charitable giving, local hiring and community projects, while business association membership further strengthened participation. Although higher BSR engagement correlated with increased profitability, it was associated with a decline in full-time employment. These findings underscore the need for greater awareness, stronger business networks and targeted government support for BSR. Policymakers should prioritise mentoring and training initiatives that balance financial performance with sustainable job creation to promote socially responsible entrepreneurship in emerging markets.

Elderly volunteering in rural Denmark

Oral

Dr. Martin Lindhardt¹

1. University of Southern Denmark

Based on ethnographic research in Southern Jutland (Denmark), this paper sheds light on the importance of volunteering among senior citizens living in rural areas. Rural southern Jutland has a long and strong tradition of volunteering, with many senior citizens being active in running second-hand shops and, not least, in local retirement associations. In the paper draw, both on Lammertyn's distinction between different volunteering models (reflexive and collective volunteering), on role-enhancement theory and not least on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition. I argue that for elderly residents in rural areas the value of volunteering is mainly related to being visible and known/recognized by others as someone who contributes to the maintenance of vibrant communities and local social life. Hence volunteering becomes an important foundation of belonging (having a stake in and a claim to local rural areas), stable identities and (in the words of Honneth) of self-esteem.

Enterprising Communities as a Tool for Local Development in Inner Areas

Oral

***Ms. Silvia Scarafoni*¹**

1. Università degli studi di Perugia

Italy's *Inner Areas* face persistent challenges related to depopulation, aging populations, and the decline of essential services (Openpolis, 2023), leading to social and economic marginalization. In response, new bottom-up organizational models, termed *enterprising communities* (Euricse, 2022), have emerged as innovative approaches to local development. These communities foster social transformation through collective action, creating alternative solutions for socio-economic sustainability. While enterprising communities have primarily developed in urban contexts, their potential role in rural areas remains underexplored.

This ongoing PhD research investigates how enterprising communities can contribute to reversing depopulation trends in inner areas by providing essential services, fostering social cohesion, and enhancing local development by crafting tailored solutions for the communities they serve (Ritcher, 2019). Specifically, it examines which models can be successfully adapted to rural contexts, the dynamics of community participation, and the role of public, private, and third-sector actors in supporting their emergence and sustainability. Moreover, the study tries to understand how enterprising communities can offer resilient alternative to traditional models of economic development, with particular importance for rural or otherwise marginalized contexts (Steiner, Teasdale, 2018), and their ability to co-produce solutions with local stakeholders (O'Shaughnessy, 2022) and the community.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach—including mapping, ethnographic research, and participatory observation—to analyze the mechanisms enabling enterprising communities to thrive in marginal areas. As the research is still in progress, findings are currently being developed, with preliminary insights suggesting the potential of enterprising communities to foster community welfare and territorial regeneration. The study aims to contribute to the broader debate on sustainable development in inner areas, while also offering reflections on the evolving role of social innovation (European Commission, 2013) in rural contexts.

Generating solutions “for” or “with” the stakeholders: the paradigm shift in rural studies

Oral

Dr. Mikelis Grivins¹

1. bubu

Currently, around 40% of the budget available under the European Union's (EU) Horizon Europe (HEU) Cluster 6 requires the use of a Multi-Actor Approach (MAA), and it is expected that the proportion of projects with this requirement will increase. At its core, the MAA pushes for a greater involvement of different stakeholder groups in working towards the sustainability transition (both in conceptualising the transition and in developing the necessary tools) and aims to ensure that the actors involved in the process are better coordinated. As such, it is a managed shift from a mode of knowledge production that favours distant observation and focuses on generating universal academic statements about the mechanics of reality (mode 1 knowledge), towards offering solutions focused on the needs of particular stakeholder groups (mode 2 knowledge). Given the prominence of HEU in the international scientific agenda, the expected impact of the push for greater stakeholder engagement on the conceptualisation of scientific methodology may be substantial. Furthermore, the gravity of the push for this way of thinking becomes even more apparent when the trickle-down effect of HEU is considered. Thus, while the expectations of the MAA concept are very high, the stakes are also very high.

This paper asks how in-depth stakeholder engagement changes the research and research methods used to study the topics listed in Cluster 6 - Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment. It suggests that stakeholder engagement not only ensures a new route to impact, but also requires significant changes in the way scientific argumentation is constructed in general. The paper is based on expert interviews with experts leading multi-stakeholder projects, a quantitative survey and observations of project coordinators working with project proposals. The paper is based on data collected for the Premiere project.

Grassroots Food Initiatives, Resistance and Rural Resilience: The Case of TADYA Collective in Territorial Dynamisation and Environmental Advocacy

Oral

Ms. Neslihan Önder Özen¹

1. University of Granada

Rural depopulation poses a significant challenge across Europe, prompting the emergence of grassroots movements that foster social and cultural capital while strengthening community resilience. This paper examines how grassroots food initiatives, embedded within the framework of the social economy, contribute to the territorial dynamization of rural areas through collective action. Using the case of the TADYA Collective in Tah-tacıörencik village, Türkiye, the study explores how agroecological activism has fostered local engagement, social attachment, and resistance against environmentally harmful industrial projects. By mobilizing networks of producers, consumers, and environmental organizations, TADYA has demonstrated the potential of bottom-up initiatives to reclaim agency over rural transformations, independent of state-led interventions. The paper highlights key strategies such as participatory governance, legal advocacy, and digital mobilization, illustrating how these initiatives sustain rural social life by reinforcing alternative economies and shared identities of place. TADYA's experience contributes to broader discussions on how new forms of collective action and activism can reshape rural spaces in transition, offering valuable insights into the role of self-organized movements in revitalizing depopulating areas.

Multi Actor Platforms (MAPs) in depopulated rural areas. What moves rural population to join these platforms

Oral

***Dr. Beatriz IZQUIERDO RAMÍREZ¹, Dr. María Elena Nogueira Joaquín¹, Dr. MARÍA SONIA MARCOS¹,
Dr. LUIS ANTONIO MARCOS¹***

1. UNIVERSITY OF BURGOS

This study describes the implementation process of the methodology that is being used in the European project ESIRA (HORIZON Europe No. 101136253) in which both researchers take part. The aim of the project is to promote social innovation in disadvantaged rural areas from an endogenous and participatory approach in which the participation of vulnerable groups is central. Thus, there has been set up a Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MAP) in each of the territories spread throughout the different European countries, although the research focuses on the Spanish area located in a remote area in central Spain. The MAP is made up of people representing the main agents of the territory from a social, economic and environmental perspective: Local Action Groups, town councils, cultural, sports, environmental or elderly associations together with individuals who have an interest in promoting initiatives in the area.

Besides, the communication addresses the motivations that lead participants to join these new forms of participation due to the effort and commitment (it lasts for 4 years) that it requires, as well as their socioeconomic and cultural profile.

Participation in LEADER regions: mobilization of different groups, decision-making and activation of voluntary commitment

Oral

Dr. Kim Pollermann¹, Mrs. Lynn-Livia Fynn¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

Community dynamism has to grow at local level, but there are also options to encourage such developments by means of funding programmes. One example for collective mobilization are Local Actions Groups (LAGs) as a crucial element of LEADER, which is a funding scheme for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). LEADER is a place-based, participatory approach which brings together public, private and civil society organisations. Within LEADER, these different stakeholders form an LAG as a type of a public-private partnership. These groups collaborate on the basis of an integrated local development strategy (LDS) and administer own budgets to support projects.

To give insights about the implementation of this way of collective mobilization, we use results from the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (2014-2022) in four federal states in Germany with 115 LAGs in total. Our contribution will highlight different dimensions of participation:

- Mobilization of different groups: What is the socio-demographic profile of the participants? What are requirements to activate actors beyond the “usual suspects” (age over 40, higher education, male) to get involved? Are there special options to mobilize groups which are usually underrepresented?
- Decision-making: How are decisions made in these governance arrangements? What are differences in satisfaction of different groups of stakeholders (civil society, economy, state)?
- Activation of voluntary commitment: What is the origin of project ideas? What kind of local resources are activated in project implementations?

Participatory Rural Development Policies: a framework for comparison

Oral

Ms. Andrea Di Bernardo¹

1. DIST- Interuniversity Department of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning, Politecnico di Torino

The research proposes the Comparison of Participatory Processes (COPP) framework to analyze participatory rural development policies in Italy, specifically comparing the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) and the LEADER approach. SNAI is a place-based policy designed to address the development challenges of Italy's inner areas, which are often characterized by depopulation and a lack of essential services. Central to this policy is a co-design phase, aimed at fostering participatory development by engaging local communities and stakeholders. This research presents a qualitative evaluation of SNAI's co-design phase in an inner area of the Aosta Valley (Northwestern Italy), where critical issues emerge—both at the national level and in the case study—such as inadequate timeframes, the absence of binding moments for broad participation, and the dominant role of public administrations, which has limited the participatory potential of the policy.

By applying the COPP framework, this study conducts a comparative analysis with the LEADER programme, implemented by a Local Action Group in the neighbouring Piedmont region, to assess how different participatory structures influence local development processes. This analysis highlights the opportunities offered by participatory rural development policies in marginal and inner areas, emphasizing how participatory methods and community engagement can foster small-scale, localized development tailored to the specific needs and potentials of these territories.

Peasant organizations and the spatial construction of agroecological movements in colombia's conflict zones

Oral

Mr. Michael CHAVES¹

1. Università Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris

Agroecological movements have emerged as key actors in reshaping food systems by promoting sustainability, food sovereignty, and social justice. These movements not only advocate for ecological agricultural practices but also challenge dominant agro-industrial paradigms by fostering alternative socio-spatial arrangements. The geography of social movements underscores the importance of analyzing space-time frames, localization, places of interaction, conflicts, and spatial representations as both causes and effects of protest and mobilization. However, less attention has been given to the role of peasant organizations in the socio-spatial construction of agroecology and the development of re-peasantization processes.

Using a case study of two peasant organizations in the departments of Tolima and Valle del Cauca in Colombia, this study examines the transformative agency of spatial relations to contest dominant agricultural models and social relations. Data were collected through 50 semi-structured interviews and multiple focus groups conducted in 2022 and 2024 with members and leaders of these organizations. The analysis explores how spatial practices and territorial governance actively reshape social interactions, power dynamics, and community solidarity within rural contexts, highlighting the strategic role of spatiality in social mobilization, resistance, and institutional transformation.

Findings reveal that peasant organizations articulate both formal and informal agroecological networks at different scales, activating spaces for knowledge sharing, practice dissemination, sharing political repertoires, structuring alternative markets, and facilitating institutional governance and representation. However, the trajectories of agroecological movements and the presence of actors in direct conflict with peasant organizations result in distinct spatial strategies and patterns of institutionalization. Despite their geographic proximity, the two peasant organizations operate within different spatio-temporal frames as they resist various forms of territorial appropriation. This paper contributes to rural social movement literature by providing an empirically grounded analysis of the spatial dynamics of agroecological mobilization, emphasizing tensions, strategies, and adaptive mechanisms.

Planting Resistance: Community Gardens, Territorial Activism, and the Making of Place in Brazilian Quilombo Communities

Oral

Ms. Anne Ziegler¹

1. Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg

Rural activism is deeply intertwined with place-based identities and territorial struggles, particularly in communities shaped by histories of marginalization and displacement. This presentation explores how community gardens function as sites of resistance, activism, and place-making in Brazilian Quilombo communities – Afro-descendant settlements historically formed by escaped enslaved people. Positioned at the intersection of land rights activism, ecological struggles, and social participation, these gardens sustain local food practices while also embodying spiritual and political resistance, reinforcing territorial belonging. Peri-urban spaces, where food cultivation occurs in smaller plots, challenge rural-urban dichotomies; leading to the concept of gardens – which can be challenged.

By analyzing the role of gardens in Afro-Indigenous cosmovisions, this project examines how plants, land, and collective labor shape both the political subjectivities of Quilombola activists and the territorial identities of their communities. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews, I explore how these practices contribute to territorial dynamisation, fostering new forms of self-organization and resistance against state and private land encroachments while simultaneously developing alternative place-making practices.

Beyond serving as spaces for food cultivation, these gardens emerge as political spaces, where community-building, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and spiritual practices take place. Accordingly, territorial heritage is claimed as a site of resistance, where mobilizations for land, food sovereignty, and ecology actively reshape rural identities and might articulate utopian futures. Within this framework, community gardens and agricultural practices transcend their material function, becoming political and cultural spaces that embed resistance into the fabric of everyday rural life.

This case contributes to broader debates on self-organized territorial governance, activism, and the role of ecological practices in identity-making. By foregrounding the material and symbolic dimensions of land-based activism, I argue that gardens function as both physical and conceptual spaces for constructing alternative rural futures, challenging dominant models of land commodification and development.

Revitalising and Sustaining Small Villages | Case study: Gavalochori, Crete (Greece)

Oral

Ms. Rosalyn Benjamin¹

1. Foss-Radich Foundation for Gavalochori

Driven by a mission to revitalise and sustain small villages, the Foss-Radich Foundation for Gavalochori launched an initiative to support the rural community of Gavalochori, Crete.

Working in tandem with local residents and an international pool of rural regeneration experts, the Foundation is leading an effort to inspire a renewed identity and a contemporary sense of place for the village fit for the 21st century.

Through a series of consultations with the local community, the Foundation is guiding residents to think beyond what was previously possible and helping them shape an updated, shared vision for their village. The process involves identifying issues which need to be addressed, opportunities and laying the groundwork for sustainable development in the community. Some of the key areas being explored through the project are:

- **Year-round economic vitality:** identify how the village might work around seasonal business closures and enhance community vibrancy by leveraging creative and cultural industries
- **Balancing tourism and agriculture:** maintain Gavalochori's agricultural identity while improving infrastructure to accommodate and benefit from tourism
- **Redeveloping community assets:** maximise existing cultural heritage, including unused infrastructure, to make room for new, enticing programming
- **Engaging youth and supporting businesses:** create opportunities for young people and support local businesses to ensure continuity and vitality
- **Strengthening local institutions:** expand the roles of the village's Folklore Museum and Cultural Association to enhance their contributions to contemporary community life

The project is part of a 20-year strategy implemented by the Foss-Radich Foundation for Gavalochori in collaboration with the local community. The presentation will focus on the methodology developed to ensure community engagement and will describe the activities which have taken place to date as part of the strategy.

<https://gavalochorigreece.org/>

Rural Volunteering, Rural/Urban Coexistence, Social Inclusion and Land Care: the WWOOF Movement in the Baltic States.

Oral

Mrs. Jessica Girardi¹

1. RSU

In the context of the transition process that rural areas are currently asked to face in Europe (Green Deal), the prospects for future development depend also on the establishment of a more communicative and collaborative relationship between food producers and consumers. The rural volunteering movement, with volunteers searching for more environmental awareness and alternative approaches to conventional agriculture, is an exogenous incentive that offers opportunity to bridge relationships between rural and urban areas. Rural volunteering is a relatively new concept with only a few thematically fragmented studies available. This research explores the rural volunteering movement in its extension of the specific domains of civic engagement in local food production, and hence its importance towards the green transition.

The aim of this paper is to develop understanding of rural volunteering in organic farms in the Baltic states. This paper presents the first insight into an ongoing comprehensive investigation of the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farm (WWOOF) phenomenon, as part of a larger doctoral study. The WWOOF embodies an active social participation experience and triggers territorial transformation towards agroecology transition through active learning approach. The Baltic states represent an unexplored geographical area in the extant research. Its specific socioeconomic context implies significant differences in the WWOOF conceptualization itself.

The paper argues that in Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia national formal organizations do not manage the WWOOF movement. On this premise, the author opens a discussion on how relevant and cosmopolitan-oriented this type of mobilization is in the Baltic states.

Keywords: rural volunteerism, Baltic states, agroecology

Second Home Users and Rural Activism in Croatia: The Role of Social Media Use in Participation in Local Development Planning

Oral

Dr. Matea Milak¹, Dr. Geran-Marko Miletić¹, Dr. Sara Ursić¹

1. Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences

Depopulation and the loss of human capital are key challenges to the sustainability of European rural communities (Eurostat, 2015; Marini & Mooney, 2006). For a long time, second-home development has been considered as one of the possible remedies for this problem, as part of second-home users are often engaged in activities that can contribute to rural revitalization. The presence of second-home users helps sustain local services and economic activities that would otherwise disappear due to depopulation (Marjavaara, 2008), while their formal and informal participation in community life fosters innovation and local development (Hudson, 2005). Their active engagement in local planning and decision-making strengthens social cohesion and the resilience of rural communities (Murphy, 2012). In this context, social media further connects permanent and seasonal residents through virtual neighborhood groups, fostering local cooperation and solidarity (Afzalan & Evans-Cowley, 2013; Witten et al., 2021), while a hybrid model of interaction integrates virtual and physical forms of community participation (Mosconi et al., 2017). This study explores whether information and communication technologies and social media use have a positive or negative effect on the involvement of seasonal residents in local development planning in rural areas of Croatia. The research is based on data collected through an online survey conducted in 2024 on a national sample of second-home users. Regression analysis indicates that membership in virtual neighborhood groups significantly increases the propensity of seasonal residents to engage in local planning. This tendency is further reinforced by more frequent information-seeking about community events via the Internet and social media.

Key words: rural activism, participation, second home use, Internet, social media

Shaping Place with Art Legacy: The Case of “Painted Village” in Poland

Oral

Prof. Krzysztof Gorlach¹, Dr. Anna Jastrzębiec-Witowska²

1. Jagiellonian University (professor emeritus), 2. University of Opole

The authors describe the case of rural community in South-Eastern Poland in which the art heritage has led to social activism and participation in human development of this particular rural space. The idea of painting walls of residential buildings as well as farm ones with floral ornaments has been developed for practical reasons in the XIX century. At that time many residential buildings did not have chimneys which resulted in dark shadows on the walls. Covering these shadows with colored floral ornaments was an attempt to improve their appearance. Later with an elimination of such primitive buildings the idea of colored ornaments on the walls became simply an attempt to improve their aesthetics. This practice has been developed by particular (not all) families living in the village and has been passed from one generation to another up to our time. At the same time these families became the leaders of local rural activism transforming this community into a significant and widely recognized place called as the “painted village”. Basing on that the village has been able for example to introduce power lines with a help of national government after the Second World War just ten years earlier than other neighboring communities. The village has developed its tourist attractiveness with some agritourist farms as well as a production of small artefacts. This activity has been located in the cultural center in which one might also taste some drinks and local food products, and participate in craft workshops. Moreover, some floral ornaments connected to the village art legacy have become some patterns used in fashion industry.

key words: art - rural activism - place

Sketch Barge a renewed instrument for rural planning in the Netherlands

Oral

***Mr. Jan Spijkerboer*¹**

1. Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency

Participation - Rural Areas- Spatial Planning- Workshop - next generation

The Governmental Lead Agency for Landconsolidation (Dienst Landelijk Gebied) organized in the period of 2008-2012 innovative sketch boat workshops aimed at enhancing the development and sustainability of rural areas. These workshops provide a unique platform for stakeholders, including local farmers, landowners, tenants, community members, members of the council of the municipality and Province, to collaboratively design and visualize the future plans for the rural areas. By utilizing GIS information, Cadastral information, participants can navigate through the rural environment, gaining a hands-on understanding of the terrain and its challenges. Specialists like ecologists, landscape architects, landmanagement specialists calculators, plan economists are available to give advice and to explain more of the advantages and disadvantages of the ideas. Nowadays in the Netherlands we face big challenges for the rural areas. Loss of Biodiversity, the decrease of livability, access to land for young farmers. The very high land prices in the Netherlands (average € 91.300 per ha in 2024) it is hardly impossible to start up a new farm business. This workshops gives opportunities to bring different ideas of the rural area together. The interactive nature of these workshops fosters creative solutions and promotes active engagement in rural planning and development. Ultimately, the initiative seeks to empower rural communities, ensuring their voices are heard in the decision-making processes that shape their surroundings. More information is available in Dutch (<https://edepot.wur.nl/193390>)

SMART Villages against rural depopulation in Poland

Oral

Mrs. Katarzyna Zajda¹, Prof. Wioletta Knapik²

1. Center of Social Innovations, University of Lodz; Department of Rural and Urban Studies and Sociology of Social Change, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz, 2. University of Agriculture in Krakow

In post-socialist countries such as Poland, social capital remains relatively low. Rural residents tend to have limited trust in strangers, which contrasts with the relatively high confidence they have in family and neighbours. The Smart Village concept is seen as an opportunity to improve the quality of life in the countryside and, consequently, to reduce the scale of rural depopulation. It envisions rural residents creating innovative solutions to well-known social problems using local resources (including social capital resources), social innovations and modern technologies.

In the presentation, we examine how Smart Villages can address the challenges faced by young rural residents. We examine whether smart concepts strengthen social participation mechanisms and build social capital resources for young rural residents.

We present the results of a project implemented in 2024, in which six smart concepts were created in two regions of central Poland. A collective case study method is employed, using content analysis and participant observation.

We commend the project results, taking into consideration surveys conducted in 2024 on a representative sample of adult rural residents. In the presentation, we show the weaknesses of implementing smart villages in post-socialist Poland, specifically considering the social capital resources of young rural residents and the prospects for their development.

Keywords: depopulation, smart villages, social capital

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Social participation in rural Burgos (Spain). An analysis of current activism.

Oral

***Dr. María Elena Nogueira Joaquín*¹**

1. UNIVERSITY OF BURGOS

This paper explores the processes of social participation that, as forms of activism, are taking place in certain rural territories that form part of the so-called 'Empty Spain'. In theoretical terms, it recovers the discussion on social movements and, likewise, the concept of community in its sense of belonging which, it is considered, gives rise to active social participation. The area of the Sierra de la Demanda, located in the southwest of the province of Burgos (Castilla y León, Spain), has been selected as the most representative rural area of this Empty Spain. The methodological perspective is qualitative, using two fundamental techniques: participant observation and in-depth interviews. The analysis of the results enables us to discuss the existence of a progressive social participation, mobilised by a sense of community that is expressed discursively in the actions and which gives it new features.

Tackling Climate Change through Participative Approaches of Rural Development? Lessons from Six German Case Studies

Poster

Ms. Fenja Guhl¹, Dr. Patrick Küpper¹, Dr. Stefan Becker¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

Climate change is a pressing, cross-cutting issue calling for better integrated and more participatory solutions. The European Union is striving for NetZero emissions by 2050, while Germany has set its target for 2045. In this context, LEADER and village renewal are participatory approaches of rural development policy, aiming to shape rural futures by involving local actors to respond to societal, economic and ecologic challenges. This study explores the links between social participation and climate action in rural areas, examining how and under what conditions climate change is embedded into local development processes. Our research relies on six case studies (three LEADER regions, three villages respectively village regions) based on 33 semi-structured interviews with key actors from public administration, local economy and social or environmental organizations. Drawing on climate policy integration (CPI) literature we developed a framework to analyze these processes and apply Mickwitz et al.'s (2009) five criteria for climate policy integration to assess how far climate objectives are integrated into local and cross sectoral development strategies. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of local actors in integrating climate objectives in local development processes and on how participation can promote or limit CPI. Findings show that local strategies address climate considerations to different extents while the level of CPI remains relatively low and varies based on the involvement of climate experts, top-down requirements and prioritised local needs. Finally, we offer insights into how participatory processes can be strengthened to enhance climate policy integration in rural development.

Keywords: participation, rural development, climate mitigation

Territorial (Re)Configurations in Rural Participation: A Comparative Analysis of Democratic Innovations in Latin America and Europe

Oral

Dr. José Duarte Ribeiro¹, Dr. João Moniz¹

1. ICS-University of Lisbon

Democratic innovations (DIs) are defined as institutions or processes employing deliberative and participatory methods to enhance and diversify citizen engagement in policy and decision-making. This presentation examines the role of DIs in rural spaces, contrasting the experiences of Latin America and Europe.

Drawing on a comparative analysis of 271 cases from Participedia, LATINNO open-access databases, the study explores how DIs reflect and reshape territorial (re)configurations. While European DIs focus on strengthening governance, sustainability, and rural development within existing institutional frameworks, Latin American DIs emerge as tools for emancipatory struggles addressing land rights, food sovereignty, and social justice.

Furthermore, in terms of different types of DIs, in Europe, mini-publics and participatory budgeting dominate, emphasizing structured governance and institutional strengthening. Conversely, in Latin America, collaborative governance frameworks prioritize collective rights, addressing historical inequities and mobilizing grassroots action.

Therefore, the findings underscore the transformative potential of DIs in rural areas undergoing transition, while considering differences between the European cases, more aligned with territorial development policies and Latin American cases that demonstrate how DIs act as instruments of resistance, fostering autonomy and collective agency.

Accordingly, this research highlights the importance of territorial sensitive approaches in sustaining rural vitality and addressing governance challenges. By emphasizing the interplay between territorial (re)configurations and citizen participation, this study contributes to the understanding of how DIs enable resilience and dynamism in rural spaces, advancing sustainable rural futures.

The Municipal–Village Relationship in Finland: Historical Changes and Current State

Oral

Dr. Torsti Hyyrylaenen¹, Ms. Annamari Kiviaho¹

1. University of Helsinki

Previous studies in Finland have demonstrated that the terms village and rural are seldom referenced in municipal strategies, whereas city appears significantly more frequently. This is noteworthy given that more than half of all Finnish municipalities are classified as rural.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the relationship between municipal organizations and villages in Finland has evolved over time and to analyze its current state. The empirical data include the most recent (2024) strategic documents, including municipal strategies, annual financial reports, budgets, community programs, and LEADER group strategies from municipalities in the South Savo and Southwest Finland regions. Drawing on academic literature, we outline how the municipal–village relationship has changed over time, providing a temporal framework for assessing its current state.

Based on our results, most strategic documents do not mention villages at all, and the term rural is also used relatively infrequently. A key finding of the study is a significant shift in how municipal organizations perceive villages. The traditional view of villages as physical entities has been replaced by a more actor-oriented understanding, in which places are defined through the agency of residents, communities, and businesses. This transition highlights the increasing role of local actors in shaping rural development and raises important questions about how municipal policies and rural development tools recognize and respond to the diversity of rural areas.

14. Routes to revivifying reconnection in rural community

Citizen science in farmer clusters as a mechanism to reconnect rural communities

Oral

***Ms. Gerid Hager*¹, *Ms. Daniela Ablinger*², *Dr. Kristina Janečková*³, *Dr. Youri Martin*⁴, *Ms. Virginia Bagnoni*⁵, *Mr. Jan Trávníček*⁶**

1. International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2. Höhere Bundeslehr- und Forschungsanstalt für Landwirtschaft Raumberg-Gumpenstein, 3. Ceska Zemedelska Univerzita v Praze, 4. Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology, 5. Scuola Superiore di Studi Universitari e di Perfezionamento Sant'anna, 6. Czech Organics

Farmer Clusters (FCs) are communities of farmers and other local actors, who work together to conserve and improve biodiversity and ecological health on a landscape scale. The EU H2020 project FRAMEwork combines FCs with citizen science, where farmers and the wider public participate in joint activities and actively contribute to collaborative biodiversity monitoring. By engaging in shared biodiversity monitoring, rural communities exchange knowledge, strengthen social ties, and build collective environmental awareness. This presentation highlights some of the citizen science activities (e.g., local BioBlitzes) from 11 FCs across nine European countries and illustrates how these activities can help revitalize rural networks, encourage cross-generational participation and strengthen local relationships. Citizen science activities reconnect groups through shared experience, building on sense of place as well as notions of local food, landscape and the local diversity of living beings. Relevant actor groups involved in such activities include farmers and farming families, strengthening intergenerational ties and peer-to-peer learning; the wider public and community groups, such as schools, local clubs, groups of families also fostering rural-urban connections; institutional stakeholders and advisory organizations such as farming associations, conservation groups, citizen science networks, museums, and government bodies as well as local businesses including farm cooperatives, farm shops, and local food producers, reinforcing rural economic ties. Citizen science activities can bridge gaps between rural communities, farming networks, and the wider public and help restore otherwise loose or lost connections on the grounds of developing shared responsibility for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management.

Keywords: Citizen science, rural networks, farmer clusters

Combining inventories for ethical action: Informing food forest design using ‘community ethnobotany’

Oral

Ms. Anna Roodhof¹, Ms. Melanie Ziegler¹, Dr. Lucie Sovová¹

1. Wageningen University

Food forests present one of the many initiatives which seek to address the unsustainability of the industrial food system, but are often critiqued for paying insufficient attention to socio-economic inequalities. Aware of this risk, regenerative citizen farm the Biesterhof, located in the Netherlands, engaged in participatory action research in effort to include the neighboring community in the design of its food forest. This paper presents the insights from this process, which built conceptually on ethnobotanical and community economies scholarships towards what we call ‘community ethnobotany’. Participant observation and interviews with the farmers, as well as members of the neighboring communities from various demographic backgrounds revealed different ways of relating to nature and particular plant species. A co-designing workshop kickstarted participants’ emotional investment in the food forest and created a sense of co-ownership between community members and the farmers. The process has provided the farmers with concrete ideas for the food forest design which includes a diverse pool of possible plant and tree species. At the same time, it elucidated physical and financial barriers experienced by some community members that hamper their access to the food forest.

Food That Tastes Like Home: Food Ties Between Migrating Rural Youth And Latvian Rural Communities

Oral

Ms. Ilze Mileiko¹

1. riga stradins university

Over the last decades, many parts of Europe have experienced internal migration from rural areas to cities. Latvia, the focal point of this paper, is no exception. While the reasons for migration are multifaceted, one often-voiced cause is the search for better job and study opportunities in bigger cities. This search, in turn, leads a considerable number of young individuals to live “between homes” and “between communities.” These youths seek better opportunities in bigger cities while simultaneously trying to maintain connections to the rural and small-town communities they come from.

In this context, food is sometimes used by local rural communities in Latvia as a way to reconnect by organizing farmers’ markets and local food festivals. Meanwhile, during my anthropological fieldwork with Latvian rural youth moving to bigger cities I have explored how more intimate ties between young migrating individuals and their relatives in rural communities are also built and maintained with the help of food. I observe and describe how food can help maintain and strengthen connections to their (former) homes in rural areas. In practice, these strengthening elements can include home-grown fruits and vegetables and home-cooked meals, for instance, regular lunches at a grandfather’s home or Sunday dinners with family before returning to one’s responsibilities in the city.

Annemarie Mol (2021) states that, through the process of eating, we relate to food and through food. I emphasize the importance of such everyday elements as meals and providing food in cases when the connection with the place is no longer maintained by work, studies, or even friends who might have also embarked on their own migration journeys.

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Key words: youth migration, food practices, community ties

Valuing conviviality: the overlooked social dimension of farming's approach to engaging with nonfarming people

Oral

Dr. Catherine Broomfield¹

1. Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter

Key Words: farmer-nonfarmer engagement, conviviality, interpersonal communication

The changing scale, nature and impacts of the 20th century turn to productivist farming, together with the counter-urbanisation of rural communities in its latter decades brought about a disconnection between farming and nonfarming in England's rural communities, with consequences for the wellbeing and resilience of both individuals and the collective identity and functioning of 'community'. Despite the farming's efforts to reconnect with nonfarming people over the past two decades, the disconnect stubbornly persists. Drawing on my doctoral research, I suggest that for connectedness to re-establish in rural places, farming's narrow interpretation of engagement as a goal-oriented interaction with consumers in the marketplace about only farming-related matters, needs to be broadened to include and value the social dimension; to borrow from Eric Thrift to include the 'looser ties of friendship and conviviality' that are enacted through incidental and undirected interpersonal interactions, for their own intrinsic value and for the conditions they bring about to allow relationships and dialogues to emerge. By broadening out our conception of engagement to include interpersonal interactions that are not mediated by outcome nor impact, we make visible the value of conviviality as an end in itself and as a means to overcome dualities of disconnection in rural places, including but not limited to the disconnect between farmers and nonfarming people.

Working Class Spaces: Out of place in modern rurality?

Oral

Prof. Gary Bosworth¹

1. Northumbria University

This presentation draws on 3 years as a Committee Member of a small village social club in Northern England to explore the often unseen and unheard tensions between established all families and new residents as new patterns of rural life evolve. I focus on the unsettling experiences of change as an external force - i.e. something that happens to certain groups of people who see their community changing around them.

The period concerned (2021-2024) was turbulent for many reasons, not least the business challenges of the post-covid economy. The long-standing chairmen of the Club stepped down, there was a major expense on the fabric of the building that eroded all the Club's savings, and there were concerns about the future direction and identity of the Club among its members.

Presented these, and more everyday issues as part of a narrative of change provides the underlying data to analyse different attitudes and different perceptions of the Club and the wider rural community. Through this approach, the research aims to understand more about the encroachment of urban and professional lifestyles along with ever increasing consumerism into rural communities and the socio-cultural impacts that go deeper than traditional debates about house prices or commuting rates. Position the "left behind" working class families and new counterurbanites as two "immiscible" groups, I seek to offer a new theoretical angle for researching rural community cohesion, fragmentation and change.

Through participation in this mezze, I hope to draw comparisons with other types of rurality to understand more about processes of change in diverse rural communities. I also look forward to trying out a new form of presentation with a semi-autobiographical narrative approach.

‘On the decline’ or ‘close and caring’? Care and connection among rural and remote dwelling older adults

Oral

Mr. Noah Hurton¹

1. Advanced Care Research Centre, University of Edinburgh

The rural idyll – a romanticised idea of rural areas as spaces characterised by socially cohesive communities and a pace and quality of life that differs from that in the city – has long been subjected to critique by rural scholars. Increasingly it has been recognised that such a notion acts to obscure the diversity of rural lives and the varied experiences of different rural subgroups. Described as ‘flying under the radar’ when it comes to the risk of exclusion from their communities (Warburton et al. 2017), one of these groups is older adults.

In this paper, I draw on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in rural and rural-remote communities in Scotland and England to explore practices of care undertaken by people aged 65 and over and their links to questions of connectivity. Pointing to some of the barriers to care – material, social and cultural – I critique an overly idyllic conception of rural community. Noting that rural older adults do often perceive their communities to be close and caring and indeed actively strive towards making them so, however, I then work with their accounts in order to develop examples of relationships of care between neighbours, friends, and acquaintances. I argue that in such relationships lies the potential for rural reconnection.

Key words: idylls, care, older adults

15. Envisioning liveable futures for water dependent rural communities in transition

A 'global' model for territorial development in coastal areas? A cross-cultural comparison of Ireland and South Korea

Oral

Dr. Richard Freeman¹, Dr. Jaehee Hwang²

1. Newcastle University, 2. Chonnam National University

Rural coastal communities have undergone significant economic, environmental, and structural changes in recent years. The overexploitation and degradation of marine resources, climate change, and social renewal are among the many challenges faced by coastal areas worldwide. To address these challenges, national policies often focus on place-based approaches to support coastal areas in transitioning towards more sustainable development. This paper compares territorial coastal development in Ireland and South Korea, with particular attention to the EU's community-led local development (CLLD) initiative and South Korea's growing interest in replicating similar bottom-up approaches to support its coastal areas. Using a comparative case study method, it provides a cross-cultural analysis of fishing communities in both countries, assessing the changes and challenges they face and the territorial development intervention programmes used to mitigate them. While approaches in Europe and South Korea differ, we find that the creation and harnessing of social capital is a common and key underlying mechanism for supporting the sustainable transition of coastal communities. Through our comparative analysis, we evaluate the impact of CLLD in Europe and its transferability to the South Korean context.

Assessing adaptive capacity of community-based water organizations (CWOs) to water scarcity: A diagnostic framework and insights from Costa Rica

Oral

Mr. Dennis Wilke¹, Dr. Philipp Gorris¹, Prof. Claudia Pahl-Wostl¹

1. Osnabrück University

In the context of climate change, droughts are expected to increase in quantity, intensity, and duration, which negatively impacts the quantity and quality of available freshwater, affecting especially rural populations in the Global South. In Costa Rica's northwest, part of the Central American Dry Sector, low water availability and increasing consumption through tourism pose a complex challenge for water governance at all levels, requiring rapid adaptation. Here, community-based water organizations (CWOs), the so-called ASADAs, rely on local resources to supply water to their communities. Therefore, assessing adaptive capacity of these actors to external changes is crucial. However, which factors influence this latent and context-specific concept is debated in research. We present a framework on its systematic assessment for the context introduced. This was developed through (1) literature analysis of adaptive capacity determinants applied in previous studies, before (2) gathering empirical data through 40 interviews with water governance actors, operators, and local residents in Costa Rica in November 2023, and (3) applying Qualitative Content Analysis to identify the relevance of these determinants. The results show that collective social capital, human capital, institutions, and external networks & support are particularly relevant in this context. Overall, the findings contribute to refining governance attributes to improve adaptive capacity in the Costa Rican water sector and beyond.

Keywords: water scarcity, adaptive capacity, community-based water management

Co-creating socio-ecological solutions within the TCL Åland's fisheries community

Oral

Dr. Kristina Svells¹, Mr. Viktor Eriksson², Ms. Linda Sundström³, Ms. Salina Spiering⁴, Ms. Cecilie Bratt⁴, Mr. Maiken Bjørkan⁴, Dr. Katrina Rønningen⁵, Prof. Brendan Murtagh⁶, Dr. Wesley Flannery

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1. Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2. Archipelago Pares r.f., 3. Fisheries Agency, Government of Åland, 4. Nordland Research Institute, 5. Ruralis - Institute for Rural and Regional Research, 6. Queen's University, Northern Ireland

This study is part of the EU-funded EmpowerUs project, aimed at the socio-economic empowerment of coastal communities to ensure sustainable coastal development. As part of this initiative, six Transition Coastal Labs (TCLs) have been established across Europe, including one in the Åland Islands, which addresses challenges within the fisheries sector.

Although Åland's fisheries play a significant role in local culture and the economy, their GDP share remains modest (1.4%). The Åland TCL engages a diverse group of stakeholders, including fishers (commercial, recreational, household, and aquaculture), government authorities, NGOs, private water owners, and local residents. Together, they are addressing issues such as declining fish catches, conflicts with seals and cormorants affecting profitability, disputes over fishing rights, and challenges related to water access and sharing. Furthermore, problems like eutrophication, climate change, and their impacts on fish populations are also key concerns.

This study, guided by the EmpowerUs methodology, aims to explore the preparations necessary to generate actionable knowledge and implement a community empowerment pilot. The research focuses on two research questions:

- RQ1: How is the recognition of 'rights and responsibilities' among different fisheries sectors expressed in areas with strong private water ownership?
- RQ2: What preparations are needed to unite diverse fisheries sectors for a common pilot initiative?

The study examines TCL pilot preparation through participatory processes and co-creation of knowledge. Empirical data is gathered through governance audit report (document analysis and interviews), local stakeholder workshops, and a Q-method analysis. This analysis reveals two main discourses: one emphasizing positive empowerment in procedural and recognition aspects but expressing concerns about resource distribution, and another expressing dissatisfaction, particularly in environmental decision-making.

The Åland TCL study offers valuable insights into co-creation processes within the fisheries sector, with potential implications for other regions beyond Åland.

Making of blue-green culture The emergence of the “nutrient bomb” in the Finnish agriculture interpreted from the point of view of individual farmers

Oral

Dr. Simo Laakkonen¹, Ms. Virva Silvennoinen¹

1. University of Turku

Key words: nutrients, waters, farmers

The Baltic Sea has been one of the most polluted seas in the world. Today, its most significant environmental problem is nutrient loading, the main source of which is agriculture, whose phosphorus and nitrogen emissions have eutrophicated both inland waters and the Baltic Sea. The overall aim of our own study is to find out, on the one hand, which factors led to the nutrient loading of agriculture on Finnish farms rising to unprecedented levels in the 1980s, and on the other hand, why this loading began to decline sharply from the 1990s onward. The aim of the work is to introduce farmers' own experiences and the perspectives of related tacit knowledge, traditional lifestyle and rapid cultural change to environmental policy research.

The focus of our proposal is on how individual Finnish farmers made decisions about the purchase and use of fertilizers and how these decisions led to the peak of nutrient loading in waterways in the 1980s. We approach making of the “nutrient bomb” from the perspective of everyday environmental policy-making. For us the central concept in everyday environmental policy is environmental lifestyle, where both lifestyle and individual environmental interpretations are linked to the use of natural resources on farms on the one hand and to the loading of waterways on the other. The suggested presentation will address main interim research results. One such is that in a land of thousands of lakes, the cultural relationship of many farmers to their local waters has seemed surprisingly tenuous. The study is based on interviews with twenty individual Finnish farmers. The research may be the first, even internationally, to examine the emergence of the nutrient problem from the perspective of farmsteads.

Navigating Change: Fishing Communities, Identity, and Socio-Ecological Transitions

Oral

Dr. Loukia Maria Fratsea¹, Prof. Apostolos Papadopoulos¹

1. Department of Geography, Harokopio University

Fishing communities have faced several challenges in recent decades. These include fisheries management which involves various actors engaged in fishing, new technologies, globalisation and market competition. There is also growing concern among local communities, civil society and national authorities about the environmental impact of overfishing and the depletion of fish stocks. It is recognised that coastal communities have an important role to play in securing the future of small-scale fisheries. The challenge is therefore to give voice and power to the more marginalised groups while considering the economic, cultural and social environment in which fisheries are embedded.

Methodologically, the paper is based on survey data collected through face-to-face interviews with residents in two Aegean Islands (Syros and Andros) and fishers (both professional and recreational), and on qualitative material from 45 interviews and 4 focus groups with various fishery-related stakeholders and participatory research.

This paper aims at the individual/family histories of fishers, their attachment to occupation and place, their social positioning, and their sense of belonging. The paper critically discusses how fishing communities are defined and understood by examining the lived experiences of fishers and other social actors in coastal communities. The paper argues that to define fishing communities we need a more holistic and inclusive understanding of coastal communities that goes beyond economic dependence on fisheries and considers the social, cultural, and historical (heritage) dimensions that shape the identity and resilience of fishers and non-fishers and enable a sense of belonging and community cohesion.

Seafood producers and short food supply chains: Connecting social capital and entrepreneurial orientation

Oral

Dr. Richard Freeman¹, Prof. Jeremy Phillipson¹, Prof. Matthew Gorton¹, Dr. Barbara Tocco¹

1. Newcastle University

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) are increasingly recognised in fisheries and aquaculture as a means to enhance economic resilience and sustainability. By reducing intermediaries, SFSCs provide seafood producers with greater control over product quality, pricing, and market value. However, participation varies, often depending on individual traits – particularly entrepreneurial orientation (IEO), which reflects a producer's propensity for risk-taking, innovation, and proactivity. Social capital, encompassing networks, trust, and reciprocity, also plays a key role in SFSC engagement by fostering collaboration and economic cooperation. This study examines how normative-cognitive social capital – trust, connectedness, and collaboration – interacts with IEO factors to shape producers' willingness to participate in SFSCs. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), survey data from 151 seafood producers across 11 European countries and the UK reveal that higher social capital positively influences IEO, which, in turn, increases SFSC participation. Among IEO dimensions, innovativeness is the strongest predictor of engagement. The study also identifies key barriers, including limited marketing and management skills, and restricted access to viable sales channels. Findings suggest that fostering social capital within fisheries communities enhances SFSC participation, while targeted policy interventions and capacity-building efforts can help address barriers. This study contributes to research on alternative food networks and provides insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to strengthen SFSCs in the seafood sector.

Struggling for livelihood – Revisiting rights, marginalization and adaptation in Finnish small-scale fisheries

Oral

***Dr. Pekka Salmi*¹, *Dr. Kristina Svells*¹, *Mr. Viktor Eriksson*²**

1. Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2. Archipelago Pares r.f.

Small-scale fisheries provide at least 40% of the global fisheries catches. Despite the multiple benefits provided by the small-scale fisheries, parallel societal and natural processes have contributed to its marginalization e.g. in the European context. Securing fishers' rights is critical to reducing vulnerability of small-scale fisheries as they face diminishing opportunities to use fishing waters and to participate in fisheries management. We illuminate these challenges by focusing on Finnish coastal small-scale fisheries.

Fishing is an elementary part of the sociocultural heritage of many archipelago communities in the Baltic Sea, like in the Åland Islands. Finnish fishers appreciate their life mode that provides freedom and work in the nature. Instead of being profit maximisers fishers typically aim at securing reasonable yearly income through resilient strategies, like combining other income sources with fishing income. Some fishers have been able to innovatively adapt to the new challenges, but along the years a substantial number of fishers have been forced to leave the occupation.

Transformations over the last 20 years shall be reviewed: the increasingly wicked seal and cormorant problems, launching of individual quota systems and new pressures set by the environmental and recreational sectors. This follows by revisiting property rights provided by the system of local water ownership — by comparing these rights between the autonomic province of Åland and other Finnish coastal areas. Finally, we envision alternative institutional settings that would make small-scale fisheries more alluring to young people. This analysis is based on literature and empirical material collected on the Åland Islands.

The European Social Science Fisheries Network: A retrospective

Oral

Prof. Jeremy Phillipson¹, Dr. Pekka Salmi²

1. Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University, 2. Natural Resources Institute Finland

This contribution will invite reflection, 30 years on since its creation, on the works and contribution of the European Social Science Fisheries Network (ESSFiN). This short lived EU funded Concerted Action (1996–2000) changed the course of fisheries social science and approaches to fisheries management, bringing new insights into institutional change, the role of applied social science and multi-disciplinarity, *inter alia*. Initiating an active network of social scientists – very broadly defined – with the aim of deepening the role of socioeconomic issues in fisheries governance, ESSFiN was a prolific initiative, setting out the extent and breadth of the social sciences’ potential in relation to fisheries governance and management. As a unique experiment in applying a multi-disciplinary approach to fisheries management it demonstrated the relevance of the social sciences to an understanding of current issues in the organisation, development and governance of marine fisheries in Europe, becoming a standard bearer for an applied social approach to fisheries governance and management.

“It takes a bit of wishful thinking...” – stakeholders’ vision on the future of coastal fisheries in Germany

Oral

Dr. Fanny Barz¹, Dr. Ralf Döring², Dr. Christian von Dorrien¹, Dr. Leyre Goti², Dr. Gerd Kraus², Dr. Cornelia Kreiß³, Dr. Uwe Krumme¹, Dr. Tobias Lasner², Dr. Nikolaus Probst², Dr. Stefan Reiser³, Dr. Torsten Schulze², Dr. Sarah Simons², Dr. Vanessa Stelzenmüller², Dr. Daniel Stepputtis¹, Dr. Harry Strehlow¹, Dr. Christopher Zimmermann¹

1. Thünen Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries, 2. Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries, 3. Thünen Institute of Fisheries Ecology

Coastal fisheries in Germany are undergoing significant structural changes, including declining productivity of commercially important fish stocks, loss of traditional fishing grounds, a dwindling number of young fishers, and an aging fleet. To address these challenges a workshop was held to develop a vision for future German coastal fisheries. This study builds upon the empirical findings of the participatory “Future Workshop Coastal Fisheries 2045”, where a group of experts and opinion leaders from fisheries, fisheries research, nature conservation, local politics, tourism, marine spatial planning, recreational fishing and sea fish trade developed a vision for the use of German coastal waters in 2045. The workshop identified nine core elements for a future fishery: diversification strategies for fishers, fishers’ training, technological advancements, fisheries management, fleet capacity, recreational fisheries, aquaculture, marine protected areas, and offshore wind farms. The vision depicts coastal fisheries as an integral part in this marine environment. Following up on the vision, an interdisciplinary team of authors (natural scientists, social scientist, engineer) described these elements in light of current knowledge, critically examined their implications, and explored potential implementation strategies. Three perspectives emerged: resource user perspective, marine resource management perspective and the spatial dimension. The findings underscore the necessity of an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach of integrating fisheries into a multi-use concept of marine and coastal space in the future. Further research should address specific implications of this vision, for example, for life in coastal communities where fishing has been a significant presence and where many of the core elements converge.

**16. Food self-provisioning
and skills in rural areas:
lessons for food
resilience in household
and community contexts**

“Being Flatted”, the Phenomenon Among Chinese Farmers, its Potential Risks and Lessons —The urgency to regain values of food-self provisioning

Oral

***Prof. Huidi Ma*¹, *Mr. Fangliang WAN*²**

1. Leisure Studies Center of the Chinese National Academy of Arts, 2. Chinese Academy of Sciences Chengdu Institute of Mountain Hazards and Environment

The phenomenon of “Being Flatted” (被上楼) refers to Chinese farmers’ land being taken for reclamation and urban development (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2008), forcing them to move out of their ancestral estates into high-rise buildings. Its consequences: the local governments’ expropriation of arable lands for property development has left villagers unable to grow food in the fields or yards, and their cost-of-living increase (Chen Xiwen, 2011). In allusion to this phenomenon, the article focuses on the working and living conditions of approximately 200 million rural residents who have gone into town over the past decade. By examining the status quo of their allotments, urban living costs, food sources, and food reserves, we uncover the longstanding trend of rural hollowing. It would be like hidden potential risks: there’s no one to hand over the farming skills, and old wisdoms are irretrievably lost. Meanwhile, the spirits of law, fairness and justice are being challenged; a new underprivileged class emerge; and social conflicts rise. Our conclusion: the inconsistent rural policies have left villagers with broken hopes; They “enter with optimism but leave in despair”. The loss of allotment means heavier burden in domestic life, the decline of folk agricultural techniques, and lower resilience to food shortages. These add to the uncertainty of outlook, striking a deathblow to families or even the entire country. For now, the top priority should be to turn our vision from the commercial system to the value of food-self provisioning in rural life.

A Social Practice Theory Approach to Fertilization in Informal Food Production

Oral

***Dr. Felix Zoll*¹, *Mr. Florian Schühle*², *Dr. Ariane Krause*², *Dr. Gerhild Bornemann*³, *Dr. Maria Busse*¹**

1. Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 2. Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops (IGZ), 3. German Aerospace Center (DLR)

Social practices at household and community levels are often ignored but can substantially contribute to the development of sustainable ways of food supply and resilient food systems. However, misguided fertilization practices can lead to soil degradation and water pollution, for example, through excess phosphorus runoff into nearby waterways. To change social practices, we need to first understand how they are composed (deconstruction) and then actively recombine them into sustainable practices (reconstruction). This study examines fertilization practices in hobby gardening. Applying Social Practice Theory we aim to understand the role of fertilization in informal food provisioning, and the skills required for sustainable food production. Based on a mixed-methods study in Germany, we combine quantitative data from soil sample analyses with qualitative data collected in surveys, interviews and workshops to explore how meanings, materials, and competences of hobby gardeners shape fertilization practices.

Our social scientific findings reveal that gardeners prioritize sustainability and perceive their own fertilization practice as successful. However, horticultural scientific results show that their practices often result in nutrient oversupply in their gardens and plots, particularly in phosphorus and potassium. Specifically, our findings show that this oversupply results from widespread use of compost and plant-based fertilizers which have a high phosphorus and potassium to nitrogen ratio, as well as incomplete knowledge about on-site soil conditions and appropriate fertilization dosages.

By examining fertilization as a social practice (a bundle of routinized and socially learned actions), we show how gardeners navigate resources, knowledge, and meanings to manage soil fertility. While self-provisioning strengthens household food security, improving soil health knowledge can better align intention with impact, enhancing sustainability and resilience. We argue that structured skill development and soil testing in informal food production can bridge this gap. Reliable soil knowledge ensures sustainability efforts lead to healthier soils, balanced nutrients, and long-term ecological benefits.

Between mainstream and alternative household food practices: exploring diverse pathways towards sustainability

Oral

Dr. Petr Daněš¹, Dr. Petr Jehlička², Dr. Marta Kolářová³, Dr. Lucie Sovová⁴, Dr. Jan Vávra⁵

1. Faculty of Sciences, Masaryk University, Brno, 2. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, 3. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, 4. Wageningen University, 5. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Science, Prague

Literature on more sustainable forms of food consumption has increasingly recognised that ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ foodways cannot be seen as opposing realms, as both exist in mutual interactions and are combined in myriad different ways in everyday consumption. Building on this premise, this paper shares preliminary results from twelve focus groups investigating the diverse food sources, skills and values of Czech households. By comparing household practices across different geographies as well as social groups, we notice both differences and convergences. Our results point to creative strategies through which households combine a multiplicity of resources, which in turn enable them to meet food needs in line with individual values and local conditions. Importantly, household strategies are not limited to market-based food provision but include alternative and non-market sources such as food self-provisioning, foraging or networks of sharing and exchange. These networks reveal strong rural-urban connectedness, and they testify to the importance of non-market food economies to social resilience. Our preliminary findings advance discussions on what could socially inclusive sustainable consumption look like and which shared values might support mainstreaming sustainable consumption.

Keywords: informal food economies, social resilience, alternative sustainabilities

Civil Food Resilience in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil: An Analysis of Solidarity Kitchens

Oral

Prof. Catia Grisa¹, Dr. Fernanda Castilhos França de Vasconcellos¹, Dr. Potira Preiss¹, Prof. Sergio Schneider¹, Mr. Juliano Ferreira de Sá¹

1. Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

Since 2018, solidarity kitchens have become a frequent and important response from civil society organizations to the increase in hunger within the Brazilian context. Aiming to address the impacts of the political and economic crisis from 2017 to 2022, the dismantling of public policies on social assistance and food and nutrition security, the effects of the pandemic, and extreme climate events, solidarity kitchens are community-based initiatives or organized by social movements and volunteer networks, operating with the goal of providing meals for populations in food vulnerability. These are kitchens created or adapted where food is prepared, packaged, and distributed. While showcasing civil food resilience, these initiatives face various structural and organizational challenges, requiring support from the state. This study analyzes the contributions, functioning, conditions, strategies, and resources mobilized, as well as the challenges faced by 153 kitchens in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In methodological terms, the study involved semi-structured questionnaires, technical visits, and focus groups. The research was conducted in June-July 2024, following the largest extreme climate event in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil (landslides, floods, city inundations, etc.), which directly impacted 2.4 million people, displaced more than 600,000 people, and caused the death of 213 individuals. The results discuss the origins of the kitchens, the partnerships established, and the characteristics of the people served; the origin of the food, menu composition, and methods of distributing meals; as well as the composition of the teams and available infrastructure in the solidarity kitchens.

Closing the Nutrient Loop: Exploring Hobby Gardeners' Willingness to Use Urine-Based Fertilizer

Oral

Dr. Felix Zoll¹

1. Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF)

The current sanitation system is unsustainable, as valuable nutrients are lost through wastewater while synthetic fertilizer production remains resource-intensive. Urine, rich in nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, offers a promising alternative to close the nutrient cycle. This study investigates a German citizen science project in which 52 hobby gardeners tested a urine-based recycled fertilizer through independent fertilization experiments. The research examines social acceptability by analyzing participants' motivations and attitudes.

Survey results reveal that participants were primarily motivated by environmental concerns, scientific curiosity, and self-sufficiency. Many aimed to support circular economy principles and contribute to the potential approval of urine-based fertilizers. Initial attitudes towards urine-based fertilizer were largely neutral (35%) to positive (37%), though nearly half had never used urine as fertilizer before. Among this group, most could not initially envision applying urine-based fertilizer to their crops.

Concerns about contaminants, odor, and nutrient variability existed but were limited. Participants who already applied urine fertilization before the start of the project were more inclined to conceal its use when sharing produce, suggesting a potential stigma. However, most expressed no general hesitation in giving away urine-fertilized crops. Nearly all respondents supported legalizing urine-based fertilizers in Germany, with over half willing to purchase them if approved. Around 60% believed urine-based fertilizers could eventually replace synthetic alternatives.

Understanding public acceptance of urine-based fertilizers contributes to rethinking resource use, fostering resilience, and supporting sustainable rural food futures amid environmental challenges. Integrating urine-based fertilizers into formal markets could play a crucial role in transitioning toward circular nutrient management.

Cultivating Resistance: Ancestral Knowledge, Skills of Self-Provisioning, and Food Sovereignty in Brazilian Quilombo Communities

Oral

Ms. Anne Ziegler¹

1. Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg

In times of ecological crisis and economic uncertainty, communities are reclaiming ancestral food practices as acts of resilience and resistance, preserving not only their sustenance but also their cultural heritage, territorial connections, and social autonomy in the face of industrialized food systems. This presentation explores how skills of self-provisioning, rooted in ancestral knowledge transmission, function as social practices that reinforce both community identity and territorial belonging in Brazilian Quilombo communities - Afro-descendant settlements historically formed by escaped enslaved people. Beyond ensuring subsistence, these skills serve as forms of resistance against capitalist food systems, fostering alternative modes of food production, exchange, and knowledge transmission.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, in spaces of rural-urban transitions, this study examines how food self-provisioning practices, such as livestock raising, agroforestry, seed saving, communal gardening, and foraging, sustain a local informal food economy that strengthens community networks. These practices not only provide access to food but also preserve cultural memory, spiritual traditions, and ecological knowledge. The discussion highlights how skills of self-provisioning are deeply embedded in the material, social, and spiritual fabric of Quilombola life, connecting people to place while constructing utopian futures beyond market dependency.

By positioning skills as central to social practice and resilience, this study contributes to broader debates on food sovereignty, knowledge transmission, and self-organized food economies. Understanding the intergenerational transfer of skills and their role in shaping sustainable and autonomous food systems is essential for rethinking food resilience beyond conventional market structures.

Food consumption patterns and sustainable consumption in deprived rural Hungary

Oral

***Dr. CSURGÓ Bernadett*¹**

1. HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences

This paper explores the relationship between food consumption patterns and sustainable consumption among families living in extreme poverty in rural Hungary. It focuses on food self-provisioning, hybrid food procurement strategies and the role of skills among disadvantaged groups, contributing to an understanding of the resilience of rural communities in the face of environmental crises. The study is based on qualitative interviews with programme organisers and participants (mainly women) in six settlements involved in the Integrated Settlement Programme (FETE) in three counties. These communities are involved in a range of sustainability initiatives, including organic farming, local food processing and small-scale gardening schemes, and provide a unique setting for exploring informal and formal food systems.

The paper examines the food practices of poor rural families, highlighting the importance of small-scale production and sustainable agriculture. It explores how families combine food from informal sources (gardens, foraging, community networks) with formal market channels, revealing hybrid food procurement strategies that enhance food resilience. The study also identifies key skills and knowledge gaps in these communities that are essential for engaging in informal food economies and effectively combining multiple food sources.

While the research shows a strong link between sustainable food consumption and poverty reduction, it also highlights that existing programmes don't always lead to broader sustainability outcomes. However, initiatives that promote fruit and vegetable consumption and frugal food practices have a positive impact on family health and daily practices, suggesting that integrating social and sustainability goals can benefit disadvantaged families. The study calls for a stronger link between social inclusion and sustainability, particularly through skills development, as a key driver of rural development.

How do informal food producers sustain their practices? Insights from rural Czechia.

Oral

***Ms. Anja Decker*¹**

1. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Science, Prague

Scholars investigating food self provisioning, including the sharing and informal sale of products, have highlighted the diverse ways these practices support individual, community and ecological wellbeing and resilience (Daněk et al. 2022, Jehlička et al. 2019, Pungas 2019, Visser et al. 2015). My ethnographic research in rural Czechia reveals that household food production serves, amongst other things, as a means to foster recognition, autonomy and (self-)care. From the perspective of my interlocutors, it provides the pleasure of abundance, reduces dependence on market products and mitigates financial hardship. While household food production allowed my informants to perform enduring selves that successfully navigate the various forms of precarity they found themselves subjected to as residents of a peripheralized region, in particular the costs of materials and animal feedstuff were considered significant limitations and named as reasons for reducing or giving up production. Against this backdrop my contribution investigates the capabilities that enable rural households to sustain or even expand informal food economies in rural peripheries. Specifically, I focus on a) narrative constructions of abilities and skills, emphasizing the importance my interlocutors ascribed to individual traits and b) the realm of creative everyday practice, where informal producers identify, access and use a wide range of resources that allow them to lower or compensate for the costs of production. My findings provide insights into the social organisation of informality and (notions of) everyday agency. The focus on skills and resources of informal producers provides a foundation for comparisons with research on food activists and members of alternative food networks, which can help to support the formation of alliances between different agents of the informal food system.

Mobilizing co-agency for strengthening food self-provisioning capacities in rural communities

Oral

Mrs. Milla Suomalainen¹, Dr. Jarkko Pyysiäinen¹

1. University of Helsinki

The global food system is a major contributor to the ongoing ecological crisis, and thus small-scale localized food self-provisioning has been suggested as an alternative. Food self-provisioning can be practiced at multiple scales of “self”, from households to larger communities, and both within and beyond formal market structures. While informal self-provisioning is a natural part of life for many rural households, small-scale local food economies are increasingly disappearing; and so are skills and practices that underpin such localized economic relations and networks. This development is significantly driven by the globalizing and centralizing economic logic that challenges rural food systems. For rural communities, these processes pose important questions regarding maintenance of agency and autonomy over local development. We will discuss the opportunities and challenges that collective development of food self-provisioning and related skills and practices present for rural communities at local and regional levels. We observe the case of a rural municipality in Northern Finland where this type of development is underway. For such development work, collective agency, or co-agency, is required, in the form of pooling “knowledge, skills, and resources” and acting together to make a change. But how is it possible to build such co-agency? We suggest that a focal part of this work is the legitimating and steering agency of the key change agents. Building and mobilization of co-agency requires a variety of different skills from different actors, including openness to novel opportunities and practices and proactive communication and action readiness.

Keywords: co-agency, local food economy, food self-provisioning

Prudent Resilience of Farmers

Oral

Dr. Jovana Dikovic¹

1. CCRS

The paper examines the resilience of the farmers which is defined as prudent. The adjective “prudent” stands here for virtue; for the actions that may not always be economically rational but are prudent from social sustainability and risk-management point of view. By relying on ethnographic research findings from rural Serbia and Kosovo, I explore five resilience strategies: *scattered land parcels*, *managing neighbouring effect*, *storing crops*, *direct sale*, and *safety networks*. As much as these strategies address individual situation of the farm household, they at the same time directly and indirectly respond to the broader local political, economic, and environmental predicaments. Because of farmers’ rather holistic perceptions of individual and community risks, the prudent resilience is almost always multisectoral which enables farmers to manage parallel threats, amortize their negative consequences, ensure forward-looking, and at the same time maintain their ethical threshold. The paper argues that such prudent resilience as a virtuous practice cannot be measured which is a tendency imposed by global sustainability agendas and international organisations. Attempts to measure farmers’ resilience, create another danger: perpetuating the image of farmers as victims and not as competent and self-confident managers of risks and ignoring their reservoir of knowledge.

Keywords: resilience, risk, farmers, prudence, Serbia, Kosovo, self-management.

Rural life, local food production and the role of women in the Hungarian food sovereignty movement

Oral

Dr. Luca Sára Bródy¹

1. HUN-REN KRTK & Södertörn University

This presentation explores the experiences of women at the forefront of the Hungarian food sovereignty movement, highlighting their crucial role in sustaining rural life and local food production. Food sovereignty enables communities to determine their own food production systems, independent of large agribusinesses. Beyond an economic issue, it represents a broader social movement that seeks to empower local communities. Rural women are central to this process, not only sustaining local economies and providing for their families, but also maintaining vital community networks. This presentation examines how these women face daily challenges while contributing to sustainable food systems. However, their struggles often remain invisible to the wider public, in part due to mainstream media narratives that romanticize rural life while obscuring its realities. Through the work of the Herstory Collective, this research aims to present a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of rural food production, and to underscore the importance of the food sovereignty movement by amplifying the voices of the women driving it.

Sub-groups among Swedish back-to-the-landers

Oral

Prof. Jan Amcoff¹

1. Uppsala University

In the wake-waters of urbanisation, the food system has been altered completely. Although the allotment gardens accompanying newly constructed blocks of flats and the plots of land supplementing single-family houses still in the mid-20th century Sweden, hints that food purchases were intended to be complemented by home-grown potatoes and vegetables, the changes did not stop there. Over a longer period of time, subsistence farming has changed into a commercialised supply including ultra-processed products and ready meals. As a consequence of this development, both the quality of food and the sustainability of its production has been questioned, and related existential issues have been addressed. In the 1970s counter-urbanisation gained attention. Although many counter-urbanites just appreciated the rural residential settings, some were motivated by the food-related worries just mentioned. The study presented here is focused on back-to-the-landers, counter-urban migrants cultivating the land for subsistent (or small-scale market) purposes. Based on a survey of a few hundred self-defined back-to-the-landers in Sweden, a quantitative dataset is constructed, describing their backgrounds, stated reasons to become a back-to-the-lander, and various aspects of their subsistence (e.g. to what extent and in what ways their farm activities support them). This dataset is used to established subgroups of back-to-the-landers by the carrying out of a cluster-analysis. Preliminary results suggest a small group of hardcore back-to-the-landers and larger groups of less committed households.

Urban Versus Rural Food Insecurity: Evidence from Canada

Oral

Dr. Anna Russo Spena¹, Prof. Spencer Henson²

1. University of Naples - Federico II, 2. University of Guelph

Food security relies on four pillars: availability, access, utilization, and stability. It exists when everyone has continuous physical, social and economic access to nutritious, safe and healthy food according to their food preferences. Food insecurity remains a critical issue in high-income countries, including Canada. This study investigates the role of geographic location as a determinant of food insecurity in Canada, using data from the 2021 Canadian Income Survey (CIS). While previous research has focused on income as a primary driver of food insecurity, this study explores additional socio-demographic and structural factors influencing food access, particularly in rural areas. An econometric analysis was conducted using the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) and a multinomial logit model, controlling for variables such as employment precariousness, poverty status, homeownership, age, sex, education, household size, and visible minority status. Results indicate that living in rural areas is associated with a lower probability of being food secure (-1.5%) and a higher probability of experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity (+0.6%). These findings suggest that beyond economic constraints, structural barriers such as limited food retail infrastructure, higher distribution costs, and reliance on informal food networks contribute to food insecurity in rural areas. The findings emphasize the need for integrated approaches that support diverse food sourcing strategies, strengthen local food networks, and foster adaptive skills for self-provisioning, ultimately improving resilience at both household and community levels.

Keywords: Food security; Rural; Canada

17. Studying the societal aspects of social-ecological transformations in rural areas

A New Challenge to Farmer's Professional Autonomy? Exploring Agricultural Regime Dynamics in the Paludiculture Transformation

Oral

Dr. Mirko Suhari¹, Ms. Charlotte Schröder¹, Dr. Jens Jetzkowitz¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

In Germany, 95% of peat soils are drained for agriculture and forestry, contributing approximately 7% of total greenhouse gas emissions. In response, the German government has identified the rewetting of degraded peatlands as a strategic objective to restore their carbon sink function. This initiative would render traditional agricultural practices on peatlands unfeasible. In this context, paludiculture, the cultivation of biomass (e.g., peat moss, reed) on wet (or rewetted) peatlands, has been proposed as an alternative to reduce CO₂ emissions. However, value chains and markets for paludiculture are underdeveloped, and most farmers resist restructuring their businesses.

While the majority of research on paludiculture has centered on niche networks of actors and small-scale experiments, there is a clear lack of scholarly attention on the flipside of the proposed paludiculture innovation pathway – the discontinuation of drainage-based agriculture. Establishing paludiculture thus necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of profound socio-cultural dynamics within the existing agricultural regime.

In our study, we develop a comprehensive grounded theory about the conditions required for a social-ecological transformation towards paludiculture. The focus is on farmers and landowners as social groups who ultimately have to bear the burden of this transformation. On the basis of various qualitative data, our results show the ambivalent risks under which peatland farmers operate and the structural logic in which they have to defend the autonomy of their profession against external regulations. We are evaluating the first results of our research within various conceptual frameworks that explore the multifaceted nature of system transformations.

Beyond Fosen: Energy Transitions for Climate Resilience in Norway's Sámi reindeer herding areas. Can it be just?

Oral

Dr. Katrina Rønningen¹, Dr. Marcello Graziano¹, Dr. Kristian Borch¹, Ms. Marita Uglem Remøy¹, Ms. Sunniva Solnør¹

1. Rurális - Institute for Rural and Regional Research

The Low carbon energy transition is critical to sustainability and wellbeing, yet their operationalization remains problematic and often inequitable. In one of Europe's potential low carbon engines, Norway, wind energy development represents the strongest conflict area within current environmental, climate and justice debate. Especially in areas where indigenous Sámi reindeer herding practices, based upon land use rights from time immemorial as well as international conventions, clashes with energy investments and associated infrastructure developments. Land crucial for eg winter pastures (cfr the 'Fosen case' and Supreme court verdict), calving and seasonal migratory routes are lost, often through piecemeal fragmentation. Building upon the international JusticeFirst! project, this work presents findings from a workshop with the Sami reindeer herding association of Norway, local reindeer herding districts and units (sijte) in the Trøndelag region. Through this dialogue, we identify major sources of pressures to Sámi institutions and stakeholders, which create a sense of institutional fatigues and generalize opposition to encroachments, beyond wind projects. Specifically, Sami institutions are particularly affected by lack of administrative capacity to evaluate the multiple requests for developing sites on reindeers' migration routes (including mining, cabin developments, other infrastructures). From these issues, workshop participants propose several solutions, which we analyze in the context of the Norwegian policy landscape. This work contributes to the broader discourse of procedural democracy and justice in Energy Transition, associated industrial developments and interests, land use changes and pressures on socio-ecological systems, and highlights the continuing tension between devolutionary processes and resource availability at the administrative level.

Beyond ‘enraged citizens’: Civic engagement in the rural energy transition

Oral

Dr. Meike Fienitz¹

1. Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources is rapidly reshaping rural landscapes and social structures and is consequently often met by resistance from rural citizens. Public discourse commonly treats the resulting conflicts as obstacles to progress and protesters as egotistic, “enraged citizens”. This presentation challenges this narrative. Its objective is to explore rural citizens’ perceptions of the energy transition’s local impacts and their motives to participate in civic engagement and protest. Applying photovoice as a creative, participatory method for data collection to the case of a citizens’ initiative in Brandenburg, Germany, reveals a complex picture. Participants encounter renewable energy developments daily, particularly during leisure and at home. Their perception of the energy transition’s local impacts is mostly negative: it creates feelings of worry, frustration, anger, and powerlessness and is perceived as uncoordinated and unregulated. However, despite their negative view of current renewable energy developments, participants emphasize their deep concern about climate change and endorse the energy transition. They recognize their municipality’s responsibility in contributing its share to renewable energy production and aspire municipal energy-self-sufficiency. Rather than understanding their protest as resistance to change, participants perceive their engagement as an attempt to shape the local energy transition from the bottom up. These results demonstrate that people in rural areas can and do embrace local energy transitions but want to be actively involved in them. Additionally, the paper highlights photovoice as a suitable method to explore rural citizen’s perception of transformation processes.

Keywords: energy transition, local perceptions, photovoice

Climate Risk Perception and Agricultural Transition through Eco-Habitus

Oral

Mr. Lukas Zagata¹, Ms. Margarita Yelisseyeva¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

In the Czech Republic, climate scepticism is more prevalent than in other developed European countries, with a significant portion of the population questioning the anthropogenic origins of climate change. This scepticism extends to the agricultural sector, which faces increasing climate risks yet remains embedded in deeply rooted productivist values. Understanding farmers' attitudes towards climate change is therefore critical, not only for policy design but also for anticipating barriers to sustainable agricultural transitions.

This proceeding presents a research project carried out in the Czech Republic that investigates the relationship between farmers' perception of climate risks and their adaptive strategies. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the project examines how long-standing cultural dispositions shape farmers' responses to climate change. While existing studies have explored the structural determinants of agricultural adaptation, there remains a gap in understanding how farmers' subjectively perceived risks and directly experienced climate impacts influence their decision-making processes.

The study employs a sociological approach, integrating insights from contextual vulnerability research to capture both objective environmental changes and social-structural constraints. It builds on recent empirical findings that demonstrate how climate vulnerability is shaped not only by biophysical conditions but also by economic, political, and cultural factors. By applying the emerging concept of ecological habitus, this research aims to illuminate how farmers internalize and negotiate climate-related pressures within their established practices.

The research project aims to enrich understanding of the conditions under which farmers alter their practices in response to climate risks, providing valuable insights for policy interventions aimed at fostering sustainable agricultural transitions.

Differentiating hegemonic, national and regional specific patterns of meaning in the context of the peatland rewetting controversy in Germany

Oral

Ms. Charlotte Schröder¹, Dr. Jens Jetzkowitz¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

Peatlands are the largest terrestrial store of organic carbon and can act either as a source or a sink for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, depending on their water levels. The majority of peatlands and other organic soils in Germany have been drained for agricultural or forestry purposes, resulting in the release of 7% of Germany's total GHG emissions in 2021. Consequently, there is a growing awareness in public and political discourse of the significant potential to mitigate climate change through rewetting of peatlands. However, when assessing the desired transformation at the regional level, resistance to rewetting efforts can be observed among farmers and local residents primarily due to a strong attachment to established and profitable farming practices.

In order to inform policy-making at the national level, we focus on the regional distribution of meaning patterns surrounding the controversy and show, for example, that the national strand of the discourse is constructed through different meaning patterns than the regional strands. To this end, a discourse analysis from 1,957 newspaper articles was carried out using Structural Topic Modeling (STM). The use of STM allowed for the identification of discursive features and their composition within and across the northwestern, northeastern, southern and national discourse strands. In addition, we were able to identify hegemonic patterns of meaning used in all newspaper strands. The research presented here exemplifies a research design based on the theoretical fit between discourse analysis and topic modelling, offering illustrative insights into the application of this technique.

Farmers' Responses to Small-Scale Afforestation Adoption in Ireland

Oral

Ms. Zohreh Rafiee¹, Dr. James Breen², Dr. Kevin Kilcline³

1. PhD Student, 2. School of Agriculture & Food Science, University College Dublin (UCD), Dublin, Ireland, 3. Teagasc Rural Economy and Development Programme, Mellows Campus, Athenry, Galway, Ireland

Afforestation is Ireland's largest land-based climate mitigation strategy, yet planting targets remain unmet despite financial incentives. To address this, Small-Scale Afforestation Measures (SSAMs) were introduced under the Eco-scheme in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). However, little is known about the factors influencing farmers' adoption of SSAMs beyond financial incentives. Understanding both external (e.g., financial support) and intrinsic (e.g., beliefs, values, attitudes) motivations is crucial for designing effective policies. Using the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Ordinal Logistic Regression (OLR) analysis, this study examined farmers' attitudes, social norms, and perceived barriers to adopting SSAMs. A cross-sectional survey (n = 563) weighted to the Teagasc National Farm Survey applied Ordinal Logistic Regression to classify farmers as 'willing,' 'neutral,' or 'unwilling' adopters. Findings revealed that over half of farmers were hesitant, with economic and environmental beliefs shaping their attitudes differently across schemes. While economic considerations drove ACRES adoption, environmental beliefs influenced Eco-scheme participation. Higher farm income, stocking rate, and market returns reduced resistance to SSAMs. To promote adoption, policies should combine financial incentives with participatory training and peer-to-peer learning. Addressing both economic and environmental concerns through tailored support will enhance the effectiveness of afforestation policies, fostering greater climate resilience in Irish agriculture.

From Contemplation to Implementation: Social Influences on Farm-Level Climate Adaptation

Oral

Dr. Mohammad Mohammadrezaei¹, Dr. Lorraine Balaine², Dr. David Meredith¹, Mrs. Sharon Sweeney¹, Prof. Maeve Henchion¹, Dr. Aine Macken-Walsh¹

1. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, 2. Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc

Promoting adaptation at the farm level is a key priority for both international and European Union (EU) initiatives, and it is one of the main objectives of Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2024. Understanding the decision-making dynamics of farm-level adaptation is crucial for developing and implementing tailored policies and knowledge exchange initiatives that empower farmers to proactively adopt adaptation measures. This study aimed to explain adaptation decisions using the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Stages of Change (SoC) model in the Irish farming context. A causal-correlational quantitative research design was utilised. A cross-sectional online and in-person survey was conducted among 195 farmers. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to examine the hypotheses. Farmers were predominantly at the 'contemplation' stage of behavioural change regarding most adaptation measures. Although farmers reported a slightly positive attitude towards adaptation actions, belief in climate change, and greater risk perception due to their direct experiences of the negative impacts of climate change, they were not actively planning or implementing adaptation measures. Farmers were locked in the 'contemplation' stage due to low subjective norms, a lack of social support from other farmers and farm advisors (their primary social references), low perceived behavioural control, and a lack of confidence in executing actions due to insufficient social support. This research emphasises the importance of social learning and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange in empowering farmers whose decision-making processes have been triggered but are currently locked in the contemplation stage. The study recommends that climate adaptation discussions be integrated within existing support structures and extension programmes through community-based approaches, such as storytelling, farm discussion groups etc.

Keywords: Farm-level adaptation decisions, Subjective norms, Ireland.

Integrated river basin management – a promising approach of social-ecological transition?

Oral

Dr. Matthias Buchecker¹, Dr. Raphael Gaus¹

1. Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL

Since two decades European policies have called for ecological enhancement of rivers - with limited success. This has to do with conflicting interest-based perspectives of relevant stakeholder groups that complicate finding shared solutions. Recent literature on social learning suggests that interactive involvement of relevant stakeholders in the management of regional environments allows for a convergence of stakeholders perspectives and thus increasing the shared solutions space. As robust evidence for the expected effects of this approach are scarce, we designed a project with the goal to systematically evaluate the social learning effects of an integrated river basin management. The study was conducted in a river basin in the Central Swiss Alps, where an actor platform was initiated by a cantonal agency in order to co-define the future development of the rivers within the basin. To evaluate the participatory process, we combined a quasi-experimental intervention research design with a mixed method approach including a repeated measurement of involved and not involved members of relevant actor groups. The analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data confirmed the expectations. Before the participatory process the involved actor groups were found to held very specific interest-focused perspectives of the issue of regional river management, but also some shared interests, in particular in terms of the future flood management. During the process, a substantial convergence of actors perspectives could be determined, which became manifest in actors' agreement on a number of integrated river management projects. These included river restorations that had little acceptance before the participatory process.

Into the engine-room of citizen engagement: unveiling power dynamics in a large-scale renewable energy project in rural Denmark

Oral

Mr. Tobias Gandrup¹

1. Danish Centre for Rural Research, University of Southern Denmark

The green transition is changing rural societies. To ensure that affected communities can better benefit from the transition, municipalities in Denmark are exploring new ways to engage citizens. Drawing on a case study from a large-scale renewable energy project, this paper examines one such initiative, where local action groups were included early in the planning process, and their input influenced the project. The project followed best practice guidelines for citizen engagement, and on the surface, it appeared successful.

However, through qualitative interviews with action-group members, municipal representatives, politicians, and project developers, as well as participant observation carried out at meetings between the involved actors, it became clear that the process was underpinned by unequal relations of power. During these meetings, certain claims were elevated, while others were subtly marginalized, shaping the boundaries of what could (and could not) be discussed. At the same time, the citizens were unaware of their roles in the process, what was negotiable, and what they could demand. In other words, the citizens were invited to an already set “negotiation table,” but were never explicitly made aware of what was on it.

These findings support a view that considers citizen involvement as a tool to legitimize projects with specific economic and political objectives, rather than as a platform for genuine democratic engagement in shaping rural futures. I therefore argue for fine-grained ethnographic attention to what goes on in the “engine room” of citizen involvement processes, with a critical focus on the power dynamics at play.

Keywords: citizen engagement, power dynamics, renewable energy transition

Landownership and conservation easements for environmental protection: insights from a French inquiry

Oral

Prof. Romain MELOT¹, Dr. Guillaume PAIN², Prof. Juliette Young¹, Mrs. Lauriane Czyzyszyn¹

1. INRAE, 2. ESA

Public environmental policies are taking the form of increasingly diverse and sophisticated contractualisation tools, most of which have a direct or indirect impact on land ownership rights. The empirical research carried out on these forms of contractualisation all agree in highlighting both the flexibility of these legal practices and the fact that their long-term viability depends on specific land management and a solid diagnosis of the specifications.

We propose to present the initial results of a multidisciplinary study (sociology and ecology). Our field study was conducted in France on the use of conservation easements to protect natural environments. Conservation easements were introduced recently in France (2016 law) and are beginning to develop. Our aim is to study the way in which land ownership shapes environmental contractual practices.

We are interested in the profile of the landowners involved, the multi-actor governance of the contractual arrangements and the geographical characteristics of the areas concerned. In an ecological perspective, we also question the way in which the contractual specifications are designed, taking into account the interest for biodiversity at the territorial level, the impacts on other services (climatic, for example), the recommended changes in agricultural practices, the type of objects impacted (ecological infrastructures, wetlands, etc.).

Making commodity and flexible landscape in southeastern Turkey: Antep Pistachio

Oral

*Ms. Canan Uçar*¹

1. Koç University

Particularly in the last 10 years, in southeastern Turkey, the cultivation of Antep pistachio trees has increased at unprecedented speed and scale. From a perspective privileging the consumption process, the producers, who are dominantly conceptualized as economic actors, tend to plant crops with more economic value in the market, replacing the less economically valuable ones, as a result of their survival tactics in the neo-liberalized agricultural regime of Turkey. However, can we explain this single crop expansion within the region solely depending on the “demand-and-supply” principle of the neoclassical economy as a two-sided linear process in today’s changing and almost unpredictable ecological and economic conditions? If so, how has Antep pistachio spread across the region, particularly in the last 10 years, despite its geo-historical, cultural, and economic ties with the region? This study, based on a multisided ethnography, investigates this expansion through a more-than-human lens. In doing so, the study explores the interwoven relationalities of the state-science-capitalism complex and human-environment intricacies in the making of commodity and flexible landscape by concentrating on the materiality of Antep pistachio, climate change, knowledge production, urban-rural relations, and the growing market. Pistachio trees in the region, locally renowned as highly drought-resilient and less labor-demanding crop and economically valuable cash crop, particularly in the domestic market, have become one of the survivor tactics against the economic context of the country and as an adaptation tactic/response toward the ecological uncertainties, like climate change, for pistachio growers socially, economically and spatially situating in-between the rural and urban.

Method combinations for researching regional water management: case reconstruction and ANT

Oral

Prof. Stephan Lorenz¹, Ms. Laura Künzel¹, Ms. Roberta Wetzel¹

1. Uni Jena

In a regional study in Germany (funded by BMBF since 4/2023) we investigate the transformation processes of water supply and wastewater treatment. We combine the advantages of case-reconstructive social science methods (Objective Hermeneutics OH) with the approaches of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). While OH makes it possible to reconstruct the patterns of action of relevant collective (public and private) actors, ANT allows for investigating the 'networked' interplay of these and further actors.

Water is one of the most important planetary resources. Global issues has been known for decades and are part of political agendas (e.g., SDG 6). In Germany, however, the water supply was long taken for granted. This has changed, particularly as a result of periods of droughts in recent years. Both climate change (increasing weather extremes) and new pollutants (nitrates, PFAS, etc.) are jeopardizing water availability and water quality, depending on the region. The numerous transformation needs are reflected in a national water strategy in Germany, in state and community programs or research agendas, also in EU regulations (fourth purification stage for wastewater treatment plants) or in sustainability initiatives of the major water management associations.

In our regional case-and-network analysis, we examine the extent to which such transformation requirements are met and complied with. The analyses of the OH show that the water management actors follow a technology-focused professional ethos, while the ANT approach illustrates how this ethos is stabilized by an extended network of actors.

Keywords: climate change, water pollution, professional ethos

Social dynamics and maturity of Farmer Clusters to enable social-ecological transformations

Oral

***Dr. Claire Hardy*¹, *Ms. Gerid Hager*², *Mr. Thomas Rellensmann*³, *Dr. Iris Bohnet*⁴**

1. The James Hutton Institute, 2. International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 3. Osnabrück University, 4. Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Farmer Clusters (FCs) are communities of farmers and other local actors in the same region, who work together. In the Framework project these FCs work to conserve and improve biodiversity and ecological health of farmland on a landscape scale. As a concept and approach, they are considered highly promising to promote socio-ecological transformation in rural areas. Not dissimilar from a Living Lab, FCs also enable researchers to study agricultural practices, ecological similarities, environmental differences and the building of social capital. The Framework project has established 11 FCs across nine European countries. While the FC concept is well-established in the UK, it was novel in many other project countries, and the FCs are developing heterogeneously and have reached different levels of maturity since their inception in 2020. In this presentation, we outline a common enquiry approach and comparative analysis which helped identify the main influencing factors on FC maturity including leadership, facilitation, governance, and group characteristics, amongst others. Initial findings suggest that FC maturity hinges on local contexts, path dependencies, group set-up, and other factors. Furthermore, factors are closely interconnected, highly interlinked, co-dependent and can compensate each other. Indications show lack of maturity in some factors can also present a barrier for collaboration. By focusing on enabling factors, future projects can learn from the collaborative Framework. FCs approach as a mechanism for socio-ecological transformation and building a more sustainable and liveable rural future.

Spatial differences in the relationship between climate anxiety, perceptions of climate change impacts and environmental action

Oral

***Dr. Adrienn Bognár*¹**

1. University of Pécs, Department of Sociology

Climate change, a pressing issue that affects all regions of the world to varying degrees, has a significant impact not only on nature but also on societies and economies. It affects people both directly and indirectly, posing a threat to our health in a number of ways. Our mental health, as well as our physical health, may be at risk. There is also a wide variation in the perception, knowledge and capacity to act on climate change across regions, types of settlements and sizes of settlements.

Using international databases, I investigate how climate anxiety; perceived negative impacts of climate change; and individual responsibility/action to reduce environmental impacts influence each other, and what spatial differences can be found in this respect. The territorial differences will be examined not only between different regions of Europe, but also between different types of settlements in the countries. In the data analysis, I will use cluster analysis to create clusters based on the above-mentioned criteria and examine the role of settlement type/settlement size in cluster membership and whether people living rural areas are under- or over-represented in the different clusters.

Keywords: regional differences, climate anxiety, environmentally conscious action

Telecoupling framework: a research tool for exploring land-use changes in the context of climate change

Oral

Mrs. Danka Moravčíková¹

1. Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra

Climate change research is very complex and relies on integrating knowledge, expertise, and resources from many different domains and disciplines. Applying interdisciplinary approaches and frameworks and formulating innovative research questions is challenging and based on combining data from different sources, at different scales and dimensions, and from different disciplines. Understanding how making decisions about land use and management is institutionalised and shaped in concrete geopolitical, socioeconomic, and historical-cultural contexts is of great importance to ensure future sustainable development.

Telecoupling concept is seen as an appropriate paradigm for exploring multidimensional human-environment interactions in contemporary societies. Since its inception, telecoupling has been applied in various fields to develop more specialised frameworks to address specific issues. It draws specifically on systemic thinking when dealing with human-environment interactions such as land-use change, while also emphasising the need to understand the networked relations of actors that mediate cross-scalar flows and feedbacks between systems. The main aim of this contribution is to introduce the telecoupling concept from a sociological perspective concerning the analysis of land use strategies. The author will present experiences and insights from the interdisciplinary research in the Horizon Europe project ***Europe-LAND: Towards Sustainable Land-use Strategies in the Context of Climate Change and Biodiversity Challenges in Europe***. The intention is to highlight how this theoretical framework can be used for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of land-use change at different levels of spatial organisation of the landscape, emphasising how society transforms nature into social space and what social, economic and other factors influence groups' and individuals' land-use decisions.

The green mining imperative and multiple meanings of development in rural northern Sweden

Oral

Dr. Arvid Stiernström¹

1. Swedish university of agricultural science

The environmental historical track record of the mining industry is poor. Yet, mining industry is increasingly using terms like sustainability and energy transition to produce the minerals needed for 'green technologies' believed to be a model for development and a solution to the climate crisis. In Sweden, state policies associate mining with economic growth, and engines for regional development. I argue that these notions form an imperative wherein mining solves challenges that rural communities are facing, while contributing to a 'greener' future. Yet, this imperative is challenged by people living in the (predominately rural) areas targeted for mining. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in northern Sweden and Sápmi, I focus on how the narratives encountered on the ground diverge, overlap, and reveal the limits of state thinking on development and transition. I identify two ways that alternative development pathways emerge. First, I show how people engage with problems with the present political practices. Secondly, I focus on everyday acts of resistance as well as ways of being in the world where nature is not reduced to a set of resources. In sum, the two alternative development pathways challenge the 'mining as development and sustainability' imperative, to open questions of what sustainable development is and can be for the rural north.

The need to supplement current input controls with output controls in commercial fisheries management of Lake Malawi

Oral

Mr. Mexford Mulumpwa¹

1. Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)

All fisheries regulations employed in Malawi regarding control of fisheries effort are input-control measures. This study was conducted among commercial fishers to assess catch composition, catch per unit effort (CPUE) and develop management reference points for an output-based fisheries management system. Time-series catch data (1976 to 2022) from Department of Fisheries was used.

Estimation of MSY and optimum fishing effort at MSY of largescale fisheries in Malawi using CMSY++ method and linear Schaefer model showed that catch MSY was 266.96 tons/year and fmsy was 1953 fishing days. Trend of observed catch and CPUE were declining over the years. Mean catches in 76 years, recent 10- and 5-years period was 1702.5%, 824.5% and 699% of calculated MSY (266.96 tons) respectively. Mean fishing effort in the same period was 246.1%, 136.3%, and 136% of calculated fmsy (1952.86 fishing days). Largescale fishers are extensively fishing beyond MSY and Fmsy which is very worrisome.

Sociologically, the study expounds on complex interplay between unsustainable fishing practices and livelihoods of fishing communities. Local economies and food security are directly affected as exploitation of fisheries resources and community resilience face unprecedented pressures. Currently, fish contributes over 70% of animal protein in Malawi. The predominance of the Ndunduma species (an economically important fish species that contributes nearly 50% of the catch) highlights how market pressures and shifting species compositions are not merely ecological issues, but are also reshaping social structures and community identities.

Overexploitation could be as a result of increase in fishing effort by a worrisome 436% between 1976 and 2022. To ensure that largescale fisheries resources are not being exploited beyond MSY and fmsy, there is a need to employ output control measures. Although they are difficult to implement, high overexploitation leading to tragedy of commons necessitates their inclusion in current fisheries management system in Malawi.

What does the future hold for livestock feed production and feeding practices?

Oral

Dr. Nhat Strøm-Andersen¹

1. Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research NIBIO

Our research aims to evaluate how diverse feed production strategies and feeding practices can enhance the sustainability of the Norwegian food system while supporting national agricultural policy goals. Unlike other initiatives that focus solely on developing new feed types, we address systemic feed-related challenges. These include resolving land-use conflicts for protein crops, analyzing the environmental and economic implications of animal production levels and feed efficiency, and assessing broader impacts on food security, socio-cultural dynamics, and rural livelihoods. Proposed strategies range from adjustments in livestock diets and levels to advancements in breeding, animal health, and alternative protein feed sources. These results will provide critical insights for the future development of the country's livestock production, farming practices, and rural transitions.

We will conduct a comprehensive sustainability assessment, examining environmental factors—such as land-use changes, greenhouse gas emissions, soil carbon dynamics, nutrient balances, and biodiversity—and socioeconomic factors, including food security, economic and social sustainability, and rural viability. A Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) framework will be used to evaluate these strategies, identifying potential dilemmas and favorable scenarios. This analysis integrates interdisciplinary methods, including data compilation, livestock diet optimization, farm-sector modeling, enriched by insights from surveys, interviews, and workshops.

Results from the sustainability assessment will inform strategies to facilitate sustainable improvements. Initial interviews and surveys with stakeholders in established value chains will explore how social, cultural, and economic factors influence feed production and practices. We will also examine how developing robust value chains for alternative protein ingredients can address livestock sector challenges. These inputs will be crucial for our policy analysis and recommendations on effective policy measures for the livestock sector in the future.

Worsening Inequalities in Social-Ecological Transformation: The Role of Lobbying by Large Agricultural and Forestry Enterprises in Latvia

Oral

Dr. Renars Felcis¹, Prof. Aija Zobena¹

1. University of Latvia

We argue that current agricultural policies may inadvertently favor large enterprises, exacerbating social inequalities and disadvantaging small farmers. The proposed reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) aims to address longstanding disparities, as a significant portion of subsidies has historically benefited the wealthiest landowners. This policy shift seeks to promote a more equitable distribution of support, thereby enhancing the viability of small farms across Europe.

However, the substantial influence of large agribusiness lobbying on agricultural policies—both in EU and in Latvia—impedes these reform efforts. Evidence from Latvia demonstrates that lobbying activities frequently result in policies favoring large-scale producers, contributing to economic disparities that make it increasingly difficult for small farmers to compete and sustain their livelihoods. Our research question ask how large agricultural and forestry enterprises drive worsening inequalities in social-ecological transformation?

Using a desk study methodology, we propose that new inequalities are emerging, driven by the persistent lobbying mechanisms and efforts of large agricultural and forestry enterprises. These mechanisms not only consolidate resources and power in the hands of large corporations but also threaten the resilience—and, in some cases, the very survival—of small-scale farms. Large agribusinesses and forestry enterprises gain disproportionate advantages by exploiting structural deficiencies in production chains that disadvantage small-scale farms. Consequently, the balance within the complex network of interdependent actors and activities is being eroded under the continuous pressure of large-scale agricultural and forestry interests.

18. Queer(ing) Agriculture and Ruralities

Beyond Binaries: How queer farmers' agricultural practices can help us overcome the binary assumptions that underly current-day crises

Oral

Mr. Henk van Milligen¹

1. Wageningen University

One of the main challenges of the contemporary agricultural transition is to overcome the friction between agriculture and nature. Technocratic solutions are seen as a central component of bringing about such a transition. However, rather than focusing solely on technological improvements, political and social interventions are increasingly seen as being key to solving these environmental issues. In addressing these concerns, political and social interventions urge that reflecting on the views we have on our interaction with nature to produce food is necessary. Some argue that these views are built on binaries: nature versus agriculture, production versus reproduction, and the binary-gendered organization of work on the farm. This research aims to understand the implications of these binaries, and how they are addressed in the Dutch agricultural context. In order to do so, I will use an ethnographic approach, specifically participatory action research, in combination with semi-structured interviews with queer Dutch farmers. Queerness is the focus here due to its ability to question existing binaries, and offer alternatives to them. As a case study, insights from queer farmers can thus provide necessary insights into how to go beyond aforementioned binaries. Doing so is necessary to ensure a not just environmentally, but also socially and politically just agricultural transition. Insights from this project should 1) further our understanding of existing binaries 2) reveal which alternatives to these binaries are being envisioned and 3) how these alternatives can ensure more equitable agricultural futures.

Keywords: Queer theory, queer ecologies, food justice

Beyond the Heteronormative Lens: Women and People of Color in Amazonian Cattle Ranching

Oral

*Dr. Leonie Hodel*¹, *Ms. Isabel Panteani Aquino*², *Dr. Oscar Sampaio*¹, *Dr. Federico Cammelli*³, *Prof. Johanna Jacobi*³, *Prof. Rachael Garrett*¹

1. University of Cambridge, 2. -, 3. ETH Zurich

The untenable practices of agro-extraction and resource exploitation in forest frontiers place both the environment and local communities at significant risk. In the Brazilian Amazon, cattle ranching is the main driver of deforestation. It is also a culturally and economically significant activity for many communities. Nevertheless, the dominant narratives about cattle ranching systems in the Amazon are shaped by research that largely reflects the perspectives of white, cisgender, heterosexual men. The roles, experiences, and challenges of the range of other individuals in these systems remain underexplored.

Drawing upon data from a survey of 884 cattle ranchers and 51 semi-structured interviews in the state of Acre, we assess the intersection of land use, gender, and social structures within the cattle sector. Our findings indicate that conditions for women regarding land rights have improved in recent decades. However, land use practices show a persistent cultural path dependency, with traditional labor divisions still shaping daily life. Pro-social and pro-environmental value systems intersect with gender and race, highlighting diverse priorities within cattle ranching communities. While economic development remains a central focus, gendered roles—such as subsistence farming, home gardening, and caregiving—are strongly linked to expectations of improved healthcare and education.

For those challenging the dominant cultural model of cattle ranching forging alternative pathways, including women, experiences of precariousness and vulnerability—sometimes including violence—remain significant concerns. We conclude that policies aimed at fostering sustainability must center the agency of marginalized ranchers, ensuring secure land rights, economic opportunities, and spaces for self-organization.

Challenging hegemonic assumptions of socio-ecological transformation

Oral

Dr. Marie Reusch¹, Mx. Carla Wember²

1. University of Giessen, 2. University of Frankfurt

Hegemonic interpretations and institutional structures of agriculture and rurality build on anthropocentric, androcentric and Eurocentric assumptions. These assumptions have the effect of obstructing the realisation of diverse liveable rural lives and futures. Actors engaged in the struggle for socio-ecological transformation and the realisation of diverse liveable rural lives and futures are not immune to the impact of these hegemonic interpretations, and at times reproduce them in their actions and discourses. Our contribution will trace these anthropocentric, androcentric and Eurocentric traces in the struggle for alternative interpretations of agriculture and rurality, and ask what significance they have for the realization of socio-ecological transformation. To this end, we will bring empirical findings from the field of socio-ecologically alternative agriculture in Germany into dialogue with queer-feminist and decolonial theoretical reflections on selected reference points in the negotiation of socio-ecological transformation (including nature and naturalness, references to space and time, critique of growth). The objective is not to provide answers, but rather to stimulate reflection on the challenges inherent in the pursuit of socio-ecological transformation.

Composting the Family Farm: Gendered transformations and futurable ruralities

Oral

*Dr. Holly Patch*¹, *Mr. Pietro Autorino*²

1. TU Dortmund University, 2. Scuola Normale Superiore

The ‘family farm’ is a key concept in agricultural data collection and policy, as well as in social movements discourse on food sovereignty, yet its definition varies regionally and remains contentious. While often defined by land size or economic output, it is also socially determined, with family members predominantly or exclusively providing the labor. This term fails, however, to reflect the diversity of small farms today, and it discursively reproduces the patriarchal, heteronormative, nuclear family notion of what a farm looks like.

We consider everyday farm ecologies to both exceed the social, as they entangle more-than-human relations and materiality, and also extend beyond the fence, influencing broader local economies and social communities. Hence, starting from a queer ecological critique, we first deconstruct the concept of ‘family farm’ and, second, show empirically how it is being composted in small-scale farming today. We will present findings from qualitative ethnographic research we conducted in the Emilia-Romagna region in March 2025 with so-called family farms that are currently undergoing various transitions as they struggle with the challenges posed by market pressures and a crisis of generational renewal.

In our analysis of participatory walking biographies and farm life histories, we focus on how power relations and gender dynamics are being (re)negotiated within the farm household-farm operation interface. We examine how adaptive practices and emergent imaginaries of radical ruralities possibly challenge traditional gender roles and reshape notions of farm survival. By also queering the perspective of generational renewal, we shed light on alternative kinship networks.

Keywords: family farm, gender, transformations

From the Bush: (Dis)locating Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit Contemporary Art in Rural Canada

Oral

Mr. Alexander Rondeau ¹

1. Queen's University

Working Group 18:

This paper examines how settler colonial resource extraction industries in rural Canada have shaped understandings of race, gender, and sexuality through labor, and how these forces are inextricably linked to Canadian art history. Through a new materialist lens, I explore how the entanglement of resource economies, national identity, and cultural production has naturalized binary constructions of gender and sexuality, reinforcing heteropatriarchal notions of the rural. In the early 20th century, Canadian landscape painting—most notably through the Group of Seven—played a crucial role in framing the rural as a site of untouched wilderness, erasing Indigenous presence while simultaneously reinforcing masculinist and colonial ideals. These artistic narratives mirrored and legitimized the extractive industries that defined the region's economic and social structures, positioning white settler masculinity as both dominant and naturalized within rural space. Turning to contemporary interventions, this paper highlights the work of queer, trans, and Two-Spirit artists in rural Canada whose practices unsettle these inherited colonial imaginaries of the rural. Through performance, photography, and site-specific interventions, these artists challenge the lingering spectres of extractive economies and offer alternative ways of understanding rurality that resist both nostalgic pastoralism and urban-centrism. Their work queers the rural by making visible its entanglements with settler colonialism while also envisioning liveable futures beyond binary ontologies. This paper contributes to broader conversations on queer ruralities by situating the rural as a site of both historical construction and contemporary resistance — anything but a static, simple elsewhere.

Key Words:

contemporary art // settler colonialism // queerness and land

Immersive session: Queer(ing) Agriculture – Building Community and Imagining Futures

Oral

Mx. Natasha Ortolan Ervilha¹, Mr. Rani Nguyen¹

1. None

This immersive session explores queer(ing) agriculture by fostering reflection, connection, and collective action. Through individual and group exercises, participants will engage with the topic from a personal and deep space. By centering lived experiences and embracing creative methodologies, the session will cultivate a deeper understanding of queer rural realities while actively building a network to be launched in this opportunity. This draws from the work created early 2024 and piloted at the IFOAM Youth gathering in Bari - queering agriculture (see website here: <https://www.queeringagriculture.org/>)

Session outline:

The session begins with a **guided imagination exercise**, inviting participants to individually reflect on their connection to land, identity, and community. Through visualization, they will explore personal experiences and aspirations for queerer agricultural futures. This individual reflection will transition into a **collective visioning exercise**, where participants will map out shared possibilities, drawing from lived experiences, hopes, and existing queer agricultural practices.

To ground these reflections in action, the session will shift to **co-creating a network and community of practice**. Participants will engage in facilitated discussions and small-group dialogues to identify shared needs, resources, and strategies for supporting queer visibility and inclusion in agricultural spaces. This will be an opportunity to exchange knowledge, establish connections, and set intentions for future collaboration.

The session will conclude with a moment of collective grounding, using a short meditation or embodied practice to reinforce the connections made and carry the shared vision forward. Through imagination, dialogue, and network-building, this session aims to not only explore queer(ing) agriculture conceptually but to actively create a community invested in shaping more inclusive and liveable rural futures.

Liveable rural digital futures: a participatory action workshop study.

Oral

Mr. Richard Rawlings¹

1. Northumbria University

Hook-up apps, like *Grindr*, are often designed in global cities by urban metronormative elites (such as Grindr's founder Joel Simkhai). My PhD thesis explores the benefits and frustrations of such social connective technologies for queer people resident in rural areas across the UK and EU. Having initially compared rural and urban queer users' experiences of hook-up app affordances and limitations, the PhD project has developed from researcher-led studies to capture extant rural queer lives through to a Participatory Action Research project focused on identifying ideal and speculative rural, queer, and digital futures. The researcher proposes to discuss the results of this study in this panel.

Working with a Creative Arts facilitator (a zine-maker) and a non-governmental organisation offering face-to-face social groups in rural Yorkshire, UK, the present study (due to be carried out in March 2025, with consultation conducted in June 2024) supported participants to identify their research question of how an 'ideal queer app future in North Yorkshire' might look. The planned workshop will enable participants to create zine pages documenting their ideal digitally mediated rural and local connective possibilities, while recording discussion between researchers and participants about the frustrations and possibilities of rural queer app use.

In sum, the project aims to centralise the lives of rural queer participants via grounded research that contests established and constraining disciplinary and academic logics, in order to improve research impact, support non-governmental actors to lead research projects, and ultimately contest or improve technological tools for marginalised groups.

Living alone-in-community. Ethnography of the living environment of a queer person, based on a retreat in the french Pyrenees.

Oral

Mr. Hugo Soucaze¹

1. UCLouvain

Shantivana* is a meditative and ecological retreat in the French Pyrenees, founded by Arun*, a 55-year-old British transgender man. He lives there alone, but three members of the association regularly organize retreats and participatory workcamps, sometimes with queer non-mixed groups. This place illustrates an eco-queer way of inhabiting a territory.

Queer ecology has been studied through an epistemological prism (Gaard, 1997), while queer geography has focused on the urban as a space for LGBTQI+ emancipation (Chauncey, 1994). Here, the aim is to explore an eco-queer way of life through Arun's spatial practices, extending the critique of "metronormativity" (Halberstam, 2005) and building on research on "lesbian lands" (Rimlinger, 2023; Sandilands, 2002).

The study will be based on an ethnography of the daily life of Arun and his cohabitants, in particular during a participatory construction site. The aim will be to map everyday spaces (huts, stove, water pump), materials and technical networks, as well as interactions with human and non-human neighbors. The aim is to understand how a non-constructible, non-networked land is lived, perceived as a living organism where the domestic and the living environment are intertwined.

This way of life, far removed from the heteronormative model of the family unit, is based on interdependence and strong interaction with the (more than)human living community. It thus constitutes an eco-queer "critic in act" of inhabiting space.

Making queer fishers visible - Exploring the experiences of people of diverse sexualities and gender identities participating in Samoan fisheries value chains

Oral

Dr. Christina Kenny¹, Dr. Erika Valerio¹, Dr. Fetaomi Tapu-Qiliho²

1. University of New England, 2. National University of Samoa

The conflation of sex and gender in the majority of agrifoods policy design and research seeking to address gender inequality has resulted in a pervasive understanding of 'gender equality' as synonymous with women's programming (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021; Mangubhai et al., 2022). Further, research specifically addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) in rural contexts, and within agrifood value chains remains scarce (Bett et al., 2021; Hoffelmeyer, 2021). These significant gaps render the experiences and contributions of fishers and farmers who do not conform to traditional binary gender identities, or who otherwise reside outside cis-heteronormative cultural and social structures invisible.

Here, we address these persistent lacunae by offering a case study based in Samoa which employs a culturally grounded methodology informed by Queer Theory and Pacific research protocols. Subsistence and small-scale fishing in Samoa is usually organised through agreed community understandings of each individual's gender role and capabilities. Through centring Samoan values of *va tupaia* (the sacred covenantal relationship between people and their environment) and *va fealoaloa'i* (mutual respect in social relationships), we examine how individuals of diverse SOGIE operate within the fisheries value chains which are central to Samoan village and family life.

Our results reveal that many people of diverse SOGIE are skilled fishers and gleaners and their expertise contributes significantly to financial and nutritional health of their communities. We also demonstrate that it is possible to ethically and safely work with people of diverse SOGIE and begin to address the almost complete invisibility of their expertise, experiences and needs, not only in the Samoan agri-food system, but also in other culturally diverse rural contexts.

SOGIE, fisheries value chains, Samoa

Navigating the “double path” - Towards a queer framework for agricultural & food policy

Oral

Ms. Clara Bader¹

1. Wageningen University

Abstract

Queer representation is absent in agricultural policy(making). While some research has been conducted on sexuality and gender in agricultural practices (Leslie et al. (2019); Hoffelmeyer (2021); Pfammatter & Jongerden (2023); Raj (2024); Van Milligen (2025)), research in the political-institutional sphere has yet to be conducted. This master thesis aims to explore that gap by working towards a queer political framework for agricultural and food policy in the European context.

The theoretical framework is concerned with the tension present in queer theory between on the one hand deconstructing categories and identities, and on the other hand their alleged necessity for legal recognition, claiming rights and gaining equal opportunities. Approaching the research through grounded theory, I simultaneously collected and analysed data in an iterative process. The data was collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with queer farmers and representatives of agricultural & food advocacy groups and then analysed through a two-phase coding process.

Since the research has not been concluded, the abstract holds preliminary findings. The emergent themes lie within the tension between the post-identity and identity politics realms. Participants expressed both specific struggles within agricultural practices touching upon access to material resources, specifically to land; access to affirming health care; gender-affirming operations; social services and mental health spaces, especially in rural areas, as well as experiences of isolation and discrimination and struggles for recognition and representation in political spaces, thus providing findings for policy recommendations. From a broader perspective, some participants formulated a critique towards the undemocratic policymaking processes of agricultural policy and the CAP. Institutional violence through denying diverse gender identities, as a mechanism of oppression, is discussed.

Keywords: queer – policy – grounded theory

Queer farmers' lives in Austria - A first exploratory analysis

Oral

Mx. Irene Fink¹

1. Universidad Internacional de Andalucía

Queer individuals have always lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture, despite their historical invisibility. The state of international research indicates that the situation of queer people in agriculture is especially challenging, as they work in a particularly heteronormative and patriarchal field and live in predominantly rural areas, where traditional and conservative values prevail more strongly. In Austria, there has not yet been any research on queer farmers or queer people in rural areas in general. This master thesis contributes to closing this research gap by examining the realities of life for queer farmers in Austria, focussing in particular on the rural environment. The aim of the research is to find out how queer people perceive their role as farmers and agricultural practices, what specific challenges they have to overcome and whether they are involved in communities and networks.

The results of this explorative, empirical research show that queer farmers develop counter-hegemonic farming models that focus on innovative and sustainable practices. Those practices often go beyond organic farming and tend to reflect agroecological approaches. It is striking that the female* participants experience everyday sexism more frequently than queerphobia, which is why feminist issues come to the fore, while discrimination based on queerness and queer feminism play a subordinate role in their rural context. In addition, queer farmers surveyed in Austria live out their identity in spatially separate communities: they experience themselves either as queer or as farmers, but not at the same time.

Keywords: queer farmers, LGBTQ+ farming, queer agroecology, identity split, rural diversity

Queering Rural Development: A Scoping Review of LGBTQIA+ Experiences in Rural Contexts

Oral

Dr. Clara Park¹, Ms. Victoria Corallo¹, Dr. Erika Valerio¹, Ms. Johanna Schmidt¹, Ms. Silvia Rizzotto¹

1. Food and Agriculture Organization

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) populations in rural areas experience challenges rooted in heteronormative and patriarchal structures that shape social expectations and interactions. This study explores the intersection of LGBTQIA+ identities and rural development by conducting a scoping review to examine existing literature on the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas globally. Rural development often reflects heteronormative and patriarchal norms, limiting queer visibility and participation within agrifood systems worldwide. Recent studies suggest that there are significant disparities in inclusion across geographic, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, with limited studies addressing the compounded challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ populations. The absence of aggregated evidence underscores a critical gap in the existing body of literature. Our review employs the Population-Concept-Context (PCC) framework to systematically analyze existing literature, mapping knowledge gaps and identifying research deficits. The review seeks to provide a foundational understanding of the barriers LGBTQIA+ populations face in rural contexts and in agriculture, including disparities in inclusion and gaps in current research. By systematically identifying these gaps, this study contributes to advancing research in this field and envisioning inclusive and just rural policies and practices.

Queering the Rural: Lived Experiences and Advocacy for LGBTQ+ community in Türkiye's Countryside

Oral

Mr. Burak Keleşanlıoğlu¹

1. Independent Researcher

Rural spaces are often perceived as rigidly heteronormative and socially restrictive, and this perception largely reflects reality. This paper explores insights from *Taşrada Onur: Görülmeyen Renkler*, an ongoing podcast project documenting the experiences of LGBTQ+ community and women in rural and small-town Türkiye. Through in-depth interviews conducted across various regions, the project captures how queer identities and women challenge the dominant rural narratives shaped by heteronormativity and patriarchy. Drawing on rich qualitative data, this study contributes to the sub-theme *On The Ground* by examining how the lack of safe spaces affects the well-being of rural queer individuals, their coming-out processes, self-acceptance, and relationships within their communities. The narratives reveal that while queer lives in rural areas are shaped by unique forms of marginalization, they also foster resilience and alternative models of kinship that transcend geographical boundaries. By amplifying these stories, this research and podcast project disrupt the dominant assumption that queerness is inherently urban and demonstrates how rural spaces can be reimagined as sites of agency, solidarity, and transformation. Beyond identifying challenges, this project also seeks to propose solutions for creating more inclusive rural communities through collaborations with local governments (municipalities) and civil society organizations. Key findings highlight the urgent need for mental health support, scholarships for rural queer individuals, increased visibility through municipal initiatives, more diverse employment opportunities, and the establishment of safe spaces both online and offline.

Keywords: Rural Queer Identities, LGBTQ+ in Small Towns, Chosen Families, Local Governance, Inclusive Rural Futures

The SerranaCuir festival: Celebration as a means to bring political queer perspectives and contribute to liveable rural lives

Oral

***Dr. Raquel Luján Soto*¹, *Dr. Marta Maicas Pérez*², *Mx. Marta Province*³, *Mx. Carmen Gimeno Suñer*³, *Mx. Blanca de la Cruz Vicente*³, *Mx. Eugeni Peris Lumbreras*³, *Mx. Jaume Blanco Alambiaga*³, *Mx. Irene Llorenç I Vicedo*³, *Mx. Santi Terol Calvo*³**

1. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 2. Department of Business Management, University of Valencia, 3. Colectiva La Gavella

In recent years there has been an emergence of self-managed rural queer festivals in the Spanish state, which began in 2014 with the AgroCuir festival, held in Galicia region, as a means of making queer realities and struggles visible, and raise awareness among local populations, using festivals as celebration cultural political spaces. In 2024 our collective “La Gavella” ventured to hold the first SerranaCuir festival, in Chelva, a village located in Valencia region. The festival was self-managed, free and destined to all publics, and was held during the 14 and 15th of June. It hold multiple activities under the rurality and diversity axes, including: children’s storytelling and puppet workshops, talks on non-binary and trans identities, drag king shows, reinterpreted traditional dance and music workshops, and live music performances. The food at the festival was agroecological, local and seasonal. Over eight hundred people attended the festival. Some of the results of the festival included changes in the local population’s imaginings about the queer community and realities towards more comprehensive and more complex perceptions; networking with public agents in the village, and with queer collectives at regional and national level with the consequent creation of two networks; and the organization of the first meeting or queer rural collectives in Valencia region, among others. From this experience we can affirm that self-management festivals can successfully work as a means to bring political perspectives on sexual, gender and relational diversity to public spaces, fostering enabling conditions and contributing to ensure liveable rural lives.

What can eco-feminist thinking contribute to agrifood system transformation? Some thoughts and a Mística

Oral

Prof. Johanna Jacobi¹

1. ETH Zurich

Eco-feminist thinkers have long paved the way away from an instrumental understanding of the natural world towards a relational understanding of all components of life. By critically reviewing the history of mainstream Western science, authors such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies or Arturo Escobar have shown how deeply entrenched patriarcho-capitalist ideas are with “othering” and subsequently subduing and exploiting not only women, but also many other groups, and even ecosystems for their means and interests. In this session we will jointly reflect on how (eco) feminist, queer and non-binary thinkers can help us to find a different entry point to agrifood system transformation than common utilitarian and deterministic pathways. We will build on critical sustainability and eco-feminist thinkers to reflect on overcoming dualisms and polarization. To make an initial connection between critical sustainability sciences and agrifood systems, we will start with a short “mística”, a connecting, ephemeral, co-created artwork involving many different seeds.

Women farmers in the UK: queering agriculture through the body

Oral

Dr. Bethany Robertson¹

1. University of Leeds

This paper draws on qualitative research conducted with women farmers in the UK to understand the importance of gender in agricultural practice and work identities. Aligned with the work of Pfammatter and Jongerden (2023), I focus on lived experiences of the making and unmaking of binary gender to explore the queering of what makes a good farmer and what makes a good woman. It offers an insight into the role of bodily presentation and labour for recognition, success and authenticity in agriculture.

The participants' experiences of their bodies mediate their self and wider societal expectations about what it means to be a farmer and what it means to be a woman. They viewed themselves as embodying farming differently compared to default, masculine practices. Despite appealing to biological discourses about women's natural abilities, referred to here as a female sensibility, I argue they show agency in how they manage and interpret bodily presentation and bodily labour as expressive of gender being complex and contradictory. Body presentations are viewed as malleable to different circumstances, used to negotiate in/visibility as farmers and create liveable futures.

**19. Back to the Future?
Rural Biological
Economies and Agri-Food
Futures**

Exploring the integration of bioeconomies into regional food systems

Oral

Dr. Richard Helliwell¹, Dr. Rob J.F Burton¹, Dr. Maja Farstad¹, Dr. Markus Schermer², Dr. Dominik Noll³

1. Ruralis - Institute for Rural and Regional Research, 2. University of Innsbruck, 3. Universidade de Évora

The bioeconomy, with its promise of enabling a transition to a more sustainable society through the efficient and sustainable utilization of renewable biological resources, is a coveted goal of EU and Norwegian policy. The use of biological knowledge and biotechnology to revolutionize the processing of raw material inputs and byproducts of lower value and quality into higher value and novel products is a particularly attractive proposition in a sector with traditionally low margins. Practically, however, the materialization of the bioeconomy involves intersecting and integration with diverse regional food systems.

This paper examines the prospects of bioeconomic developments in across value chains in three countries: Portugal (olive oil), Norway and Austria (both cheese and meat). Our analysis highlights two key trends. Firstly, in Norway and Austria, a retrenchment in which conventional industrial production is utilizing biotechnological innovations and knowledge to seek out further efficiencies and valorization of waste production. Simultaneously, these developments, rather than threatening local, traditional producers are often retrenching market niches that have enabled them to flourish. Secondly, discursively and materially sustaining rapid intensification in the Portuguese olive sector. Here bioeconomic developments have been positioned as necessary to process newly abundant quantities of waste materials, to both avoid accumulation of pollutants, but also develop new fertilizers to meet the needs of this intensified production. The emerging 'bioeconomy' therefore re-enforces established dichotomies, identities and discourses between conventional and 'alternative' agri-food systems, but doesn't necessarily erode local, traditional eco-economies as previously imagined.

Making visible socio-metabolism in the agri-food bio-industrial complex: the conversion of bodies, lives, environments.

Oral

Prof. Damian Maye¹, Prof. Emma Roe², Dr. Philippa Simmonds¹, Dr. Theo Stanley²

1. CCRI, University of Gloucestershire, 2. School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, University of Southampton

This paper offers a theoretical overview of Goodman et al's seminal work on biotechnology in the late 1980s and overlays it, in relation to their 'appropriationism' and 'substitutionism' ideas, in the modern-day 'bio-industrial complex' reframed alongside food as 'metabolic partner'. Goodman et al's work emerged during a time of great change in how foods were produced, with an increasing appetite for biotechnology solutions. In the present period whilst some biotechnology solutions, notably GMOs, remain controversial, science and technology both despite, and because of, regulatory measures, has overall radically reshaped our foodscape and our bodies. There is now alarm about the percentages of those with poor health, that is affecting their ability to work, and that is understood as associated with poor food diet (Dimbleby, 2021).

Therefore, whilst the early political economists of food described how nature was being transformed by bio-industry, at the time the consequence for human bodies eating and metabolising a heavily bio-industrialised diet, didn't feature. Interestingly, the alternative protein innovations receive positive attention for the opportunities that bio-industrial food production offers in replacing animal-based proteins (Sexton 2018), but wider consequences of the bio-industrial food complex, beyond nature to the living bodies eating – human, animal and ecologies – is ignored. These changes point to a critical third process in the industrial agri-food complex, which, drawing on Landecker (2023), we term 'socio-metabolism' - the conversion of bodies fed a bio-industrialised diet into communities with dietary-health metabolic challenges (diabetes, obesity). The substitutes we see in industrial, ultra-processed products feed and sustain animal and human bodies lives, yet the question is the quality, health and welfare of that life 'good enough'? Biochemical modifications happening in food technology labs, often in the name of food safety, biosecurity, preservation and dietary health, in turn alter foods, bodies and microbial states.

Metabolic rift and rifts in the social sustainability of Norwegian agriculture

Oral

Dr. Eirik Fuglestad¹, Dr. Bjørn Egil Flø²

1. Rurallis, 2. Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research NIBIO

Whether it is called the bioeconomy or the green transition, rural areas in Norway will see drastic changes as they become part of the planned societal transition towards sustainable production and living. As part of this transition in Norway there has been appropriationist developments that has boosted conventional agriculture as well as substitutionist trends threatening to put agriculture at the bottom of the value chain. This paper employs Marx's term "metabolic rift" (Bellamy-Foster, 1999) and argues that both substitutionist and appropriationist trends pose serious challenges to the social sustainability of Norwegian agriculture because they intensify the metabolic rifts and metabolic shifts (Saito, 2022) in agricultural production. An agricultural production based on an ever-increasing metabolic rift means that more than hundred farms are closed every year as remaining farms become larger and more efficient by applying imported feeds, fertilizers and fossil fuels. The paper argues that the loss of farms every year risks severing social relations that are fundamental to social sustainability in agriculture, as well as alienating farmers from the work that they like to do. Further, the paper employs Vallance et al (2011)'s concepts of "transformative social sustainability" (re-imagine farmer's relationships with the environment, other humans and non-humans) and "bridge social sustainability" (practices, preferences and places farmers would like to see sustained or maintained). Through combining these sustainability concepts with the concept of metabolic rift, the paper engage with valuations and attachments to aspects of farmers lives beyond economic and material wellbeing, linking this to substitutionist and appropriationist trends.

Norwegian farmers as suppliers, livestock producers, and landowners in biogas production

Oral

Dr. Brit Logstein¹, Ms. Marita Uglem Remøy¹, Ms. Anders Melås¹

1. Ruralis - Institute for Rural and Regional Research

The use of manure to produce biogas is of great interest to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector. In Norway, the government and farmers' organizations signed a letter of intent in 2019 to reduce climate emissions from agriculture. One important ambition they agreed on was that by 2030, 25% of all livestock manure from agriculture should be used for biogas production. Such transitions might generate unequally dispersed costs and benefits. In a Norwegian region with a high density of livestock herds, initiatives for biogas production, and operating biogas plants, in-depth interviews were conducted with farmers' representatives, public authorities, farmers' organizations, and commercial actors in the biogas value chain (n=18). Informed by the concepts of recognitional, distributive, and procedural justice, we explore biogas production initiatives (e.g de Bruin et al., 2024). Key questions include who the different actors recognize as subjects of justice, and what principles of justice the actors are most concerned with. Several factors, including those beyond the control of the actors involved, influence the processes of establishing a biogas facility and the potential outcomes and consequences. We identified that farmers' sense of disempowerment and lack of voice in the regional plans for biogas production and societal discussions about climate emissions measures in general, hampered their enthusiasm for different initiatives and trust toward relevant actors.

Seed bioeconomies in cloudy futures: appropriationism and substitutionism in the digital age

Oral

Dr. Raquel Ajates¹

1. UNED

Seed is the starting point of the agrifood supply chain. Attempts to enclose and appropriate seeds have long played out in the physical realm, and more recently have entered the digital arena. The lowering cost of genetic sequencing techniques has fuelled the unstoppable growth of seed digital twins big data, commonly referred to as Digital Sequence Information (DSI) in policy debates. DSI has triggered a decade-long legal vacuum and ongoing international debate, raising heated questions about the social, policy and environmental impacts of the digital seed bioeconomy. This digitalisation of plant genetic materials generates disruptions in the locus of seed knowledge, how varieties are produced and where, by whom and who benefits. Furthermore, novel disruptive technologies have created a much more complex context for seeds, far removed from the reality of food growers and most seed activists. I present data from policy document analysis and 17 in-depth interviews with representatives from international governance institutions, civil society, seed savers and researchers. The paper discusses how DSI aggravates the effects of appropriationist seed bioeconomies - that augment conventional agriculture - and substitutionist seed bioeconomies - that put traditional seed producers and seed savers at the bottom of the value chain and policy agenda. DSI is also transforming the knowledge, skills and approaches required to “do seed activism”, creating a convoluted divide in policy and activism. The paper concludes with some reflections on how to engage critically with seed bioeconomies, looking at past, present and future perspectives.

Keywords: Digital Sequence Information, DSI, seed bioeconomy, appropriationism, substitutionism, seed digital twins, seed systems, varieties, plant genetic resources, cloud

What do Portuguese farmers want to know about CRISPR-Cas9?

Oral

Mrs. Cristina Soares¹

1. ICNOVA - NOVA FCSH

This study aims to understand Portuguese farmers' concerns and perceptions regarding New Genomic Techniques, to design effective communication on these topics.

With climate change a growing global population, and increasing demand for natural resources, farmers need new agricultural practices to face these challenges. In this context, CRISPR-Cas9 is emerging as a promising solution, as this technology allows scientists to edit specific genes, helping to develop more resistant crops to drought, heat waves, or diseases. However, New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) are complex from a technical, regulatory, and ethical perspective, and they should be communicated to farmers more clearly.

For decades, in Portugal, agricultural technologies were shared with farmers through Agricultural Extension Services, where trained agronomists helped pass on knowledge. Today, communication of agricultural science topics to farmers is done mainly by input supply companies or scientists. However, scientists often use complex language that farmers do not understand and may not fully address their concerns. As a result, communication between researchers and farmers is not always effective.

Therefore, communication between academia and farmers must be clear and focused on understanding farmers' knowledge, doubts, and concerns about CRISPR/Cas9. Moreover, little research exists on European farmers' perceptions and concerns regarding the NGTs.

This study, part of the research for the doctoral thesis "*The Impact of Using Clear Language in Communicating New Genomic Techniques to Portuguese Farmers*," aims to understand what farmers want to know about CRISPR/Cas9.

Three focus groups will be conducted, with farmers from the **Clube de Produtores Continente** (Grupo Sonae). Each focus group will include fruit, vegetable, olive, and vineyard producers of different age groups, education levels, and gender. This communication will aim to present and discuss the results of these focus groups.

**20. Reframing transitions
in rural spaces:
Livelihood opportunities
and everyday life in
Southern Europe**

About the survivable future – “new” rural poverty in Croatia: The case study of the Lika region

Oral

Mrs. Anita Busljeta Tonkovic¹, Ms. Ema Bašić¹

1. Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences

In 2022, as part of the RURALIKA project (HRZZ UIP-2019-04-3024), a qualitative study was conducted using the semi-structured interview technique in the Croatian rural mountain region of Lika with a total of 115 interlocutor over the age of 18, with the main selection criterion being the completion of formal education. The interviews were semi-structured using a topic guide focussing on the following areas: 1) the economic situation of the interviewees in relation to the reasons for their residence/emigration/immigration or return to this specific rural region; 2) the environmental situation in the town/village where they now live and how important this issue is to their lives; 3) the political circumstances that influenced their decision to stay/emigrate/immigrate or return; 4) the interlocutors views on the prospects of the rural area where they live or have lived; 5) the opportunities they have or plan to have to return to or stay in the rural area. Within this framework, a link was made between (new) rural poverty and the survivable future that interlocutors were planning for. Regardless of the level of income of the interviewees, most speak of infrastructural poverty, not only referring to basic infrastructure such as transport links, post offices and ambulance. They talked about their quality of life, which is affected by the lack of leisure and cultural facilities, and above all the opportunities to access high- quality healthcare services. The latter is the result of long waiting lists, which are typical of the national healthcare system.

Availability and accessibility of public services in relation to depopulation. What the statistical data say versus what local inhabitants think

Oral

Dr. Eugenio Cejudo-García¹, Dr. Francisco Antonio Navarro-Valverde¹, Dr. José Antonio Cañete Pérez¹, Dr. Alberto Capote Lama¹

1. University of Granada

Evidence suggests that significant disparities persist across European, national, and regional levels regarding the distances and time required for citizens to access public services. This results in an inequality of rights, particularly disadvantaging those living in remote and mountainous areas compared to residents near economic and service hubs. A strong statistical correlation is also observed between service availability/accessibility and population growth or decline.

At the same time, decisions related to abandoning, returning to, or newly settling in different territories—despite their multi-causal nature—are closely linked to how individuals perceive these choices. These perceptions are shaped by both their sociodemographic profiles and the characteristics of the territory in which they reside.

This study draws on 114 semi-structured interviews conducted across six demographic and professional groups: women, young people, individuals over 64 years old, entrepreneurs, local experts, and policymakers. The interviews took place in 20 Andalusian municipalities selected based on the extent of population gains or losses between the years 2000 and 2023.

Findings reveal a stark contrast in how respondents perceive the importance of service availability and accessibility based on their place of residence. These factors are considered of little to no significance for those in depopulating areas, though variations exist across different profiles. Conversely, for residents of growing and urban areas—again, with some variation—they are seen as crucial, particularly in explaining population outflows. In these cases, limited access to services becomes a significant obstacle, discouraging new settlements.

keywords: Public services, depopulation, socio-territorial diversity

Changes in Rural Livelihood Strategies in Hungary 1998-2024

Oral

Prof. David Brown¹, Prof. Laszlo Kulcsar², Prof. Tamas Domokos², Prof. Csilla Obadovics³, Prof. Laszlo Kulcsar⁴

1. Cornell, 2. Kodolanyi, 3. Univ of West Hungary, 4. Penn State Univ

Changes in Rural Livelihood Strategies in Hungary 1998-2024

Laszlo Kulcsar, David L. Brown, Tamás Domokos, Csilla Obádovics & Laszlo J. Kulcsar

This research examines changes since 1998 in strategies households use to make a livelihood in rural Hungary. It examines how households use social resources and relational strategies to buffer economic distress. This is a re-study of research conducted in 1998 when rural Hungary was characterized by high unemployment, a high share of low wage work in dead end jobs, heavy dependence on agriculture, and neoliberal withdrawal from social welfare systems and economic supports. Fiscal austerity, withering of the welfare state and the withdrawal of state support of industry that occurred during the post-socialist transformation had especially adverse effects on economic security in rural areas. While Hungary's economy has strengthened since 1998, it still has a poverty rate of about 13%, with rural poverty exceeding the national average.

This study's objective is to determine the persistence, and continued effectiveness, of livelihood strategies deployed by rural households, including informal economic activities, more than a quarter century after Hungary emerged from the USSR's sphere of influence. Since our previous research showed that informal economic activities buffered rural people from poverty immediately following socialism, it is important to determine the prevalence and continued effectiveness of such behaviors today when the poverty rate is lower and economic opportunities are more available. Do households employ the same strategies, or have informal economic activities changed during the past quarter century? How effective are these strategies in buffering rural people from poverty in present day rural Hungary?

To examine these questions we re-surveyed households in the same rural communities we surveyed in 1998. We replicated many of our earlier questions in addition to adding several new panels of questions focused on contemporary issues faced by rural Hungarians.

Collective Alternative Futures: Commons' Participatory Governance and the Challenge to Capitalist Ownership in Southern Europe

Oral

Dr. José Duarte Ribeiro¹

1. Institute of Social Studies (ICS), University of Lisbon.

This paper offers an exploratory operationalisation of the transformative potential of rural commons in Southern Europe as spaces for cooperative and community-based ownership, focusing on their role in de-commodifying vital resources and fostering resilient rural livelihoods. Through historical and socio-political analysis, the study investigates participatory governance and collective action in common lands across Portugal's Trás-os-Montes, Spain's Galicia, and Turkey's Aegean regions, where self-managed practices have persisted for generations, revealing their capacity to sustain socio-ecological stewardship.

Drawing on Ostrom's commons governance framework and Wright's "real utopias," the research situates rural commons as dynamic spaces where historical legacies of cooperation meet contemporary challenges, such as neoliberal enclosures, climate change, and socio-economic inequalities. Preliminary findings highlight how trust, solidarity networks, and collective action enable communities to resist privatisation, sustain shared ownership, and envision alternative socio-ecological futures.

The study advances an integrative agenda for exploring the interplay between commons and cooperative ownership, emphasising how historical practices inform contemporary resilience strategies. It underscores the importance of multi-scalar analyses to address rural transformations in Southern Europe, particularly in the context of austerity policies and global crises that disproportionately affect these regions.

In conclusion, the paper frames rural commons as vital loci for reimagining governance and ecological innovation. The preliminary findings highlight the transformative potential of commons to promote community-based ownership models and serve as visionary blueprints for ecological and social renewal, challenging neoliberal governance while envisioning achievable future alternatives.

Cross analysis on alternative food networks in Spain and Turkey: Transitions in production, distribution, and social interactions for liveable futures

Oral

Dr. Fatmanil Doner¹, Dr. Maria Jesus Rivera²

1. National University of Distance Education (UNED), 2. Public University of Navarre

The current conventional food systems have been revealed to be vulnerable, unjust, unhealthy, unsustainable, and open to crisis like pandemics, global warming, environment pollution, and political conflicts. Without considering health, social, economic, and environmental impacts that represent major challenges, the recent food regime is controlled by large-scale, mechanized, industrialized, agribusiness companies that encourage monoculture production and long-supply chains. Fortunately, there is a growing interest for short-supply chains and alternative food networks (AFNs) around the world, especially from producers, consumers, public institutions, and NGOs to endow tasks that “Big Business” seems to ignore. Expected positive impacts from enhancing AFNs range from economic benefits, improving livelihood strategies, strengthening social relations, preserving environment, and encouraging local development of rural spaces. A wide domain of literature is available in these themes.

Nevertheless, AFNs are very complex and differentiated. There is huge variety of networks that possess very different characteristics and operational methods shaped by the geographical, economic, and social connections between production and consumption. Here, this study intends to provide a cross analysis on AFNs in Spain and Turkey in different socio-economic and cultural context. The aim is to compare these networks in terms of motivation of actors, organization, collaborative governance, and social impact especially in rural spaces and to offer a mapping of the existing networks. A deeper investigation of networks will help us to understand that driving shift towards food systems for liveable futures entails diverse actors, policy dialogues, transparent and accountable governance. This study uses a systematic literature review, online research about networks, and thematic analysis-based research methodology.

Keywords: Alternative food networks, Spain, Turkey

Deciphering the Lived Experiences, Agency and Labour Arrangements of Migrants in rural Greece

Oral

Prof. Apostolos Papadopoulos¹, Dr. Loukia Maria Fratsea¹

1. Department of Geography, Harokopio University

Migration can be understood as a spatial process involving different places that shape the migration process in certain ways. Furthermore, migration provides a starting point to reflect on the intertwining of space and time, taking into account the complexity of social interactions, (non-)movements, and subjectivities in specific places. The main aim is to assess migrants' understanding of the rural places where they live, deciphering how they conceptualize their actions and practices in these places and how they construct their well-being in the place(s) they feel connected to. The temporal aspect is present at all levels, but more importantly, time plays a role in how migrants make comparisons between places and spaces, how they evaluate their position in the local social hierarchy, how they organize their working relationships, and how they project their belonging.

Our case study refers to the region of Western Greece, which has been the focus of our research for more than a decade, allowing us to observe the changes over time. Two studies have been conducted in this area, one as part of the IMAJINE project, using semi-structured interviews to explore the relationship between different forms of (im)mobilities and spatial inequalities, and a second using the life history approach to examine the social and spatial trajectories of migrants over the course of their lives.

The narratives of migrants and non-migrants reveal different experiences, understandings and meanings of temporal processes. In short, the settlement of migrants in rural areas involves their engagement with space and time.

Labor expectations and place attachment of rural youth in two regions of southern Europe: territory, gender and class

Oral

Dr. Manuel Tomás González Fernández¹, Dr. Beatriz Izquierdo², Mr. Javier Águila Díaz¹

1. Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2. Universidad de Burgos

Keywords: Rural youth, Employment, Place attachment.

Access to employment and working conditions for young people are crucial issues for the social sustainability of rural areas. This paper shows the preliminary results of the research 'Employment expectations and place attachment of rural youth'. This study focuses on the understanding on how public policies on employability and entrepreneurship are relevant to this attachment, based on the generation of employment opportunities and expectations in rural areas of two Spanish regions: Andalusia and Castilla-Leon.

The study addresses the socio-demographic characteristics of both territories, identifying the resources available in terms of employability and entrepreneurship, and the results obtained. Likewise, the extent to which they are known and valued, as well as their impact on the generation of positive professional projections concerning youth attachment. A key issue in the study approach is played by the consideration of all the factors that are involved in the conditions of the territory -differentiating between areas with a higher and lower level of development-, gender and social background.

The methodology combines quantitative (socio-demographic analysis) and qualitative (interviews and focus groups with young people, government staff, experts and employers) information together with the use of public policy analysis. Finally, the results show the different trajectories regarding rural- urban youth, as well as by gender. They also point out the difficulties for young people to acknowledge and access employment and entrepreneurship promotion measures, being social origin a relevant issue.

Living in Rural Depopulated Regions: The combined effect of housing and mobilities on social inequalities

Oral

Prof. Luis Camarero¹, Dr. del Pino Artacho Julio A.¹

1. UNED

Affordable housing is a crucial question in the daily life of rural areas. In the context of depopulation, it is difficult for new rural residents to find a dwelling to live in, while the number of empty houses is notable. The question of housing is a key factor of population rootedness, but it also affects the daily life activities of the traditional population. In remote regions, housing difficulties make local jobs and activities highly dependent on the daily mobility of non-local residents. In short, there is a lack of rental houses in rural towns, and the housing stock needs expensive renovations to adapt traditional houses and agricultural residences to modern and functional homes.

The rural housing issue is highly related to mobilities. The mobility opportunities in rural areas, on the one hand, settle the high-income population dependent on urban jobs that built exclusive urbanizations and, on the other hand, attract people with reduced resources looking for economical prices of poor-quality houses. In rural depopulated localities, stational mobilities configures a scenario of restrictive opportunities for permanent housing. On the one hand, most of the housing stock is used occasionally and is out of the housing market, and on the other hand, in some historical centres, tourist use reduces the opportunities for hiring housing. The interaction between mobility and housing is a vector of social polarization in rural areas.

The current presentation explores the situation of rural housing and presents the preliminary findings using statistical analysis of the ViviRural

Women-led innovation in Italian farming and rural areas.

Oral

Prof. Silvia Sivini¹, Prof. Annamaria Vitale¹

1. University of Calabria

The paper intends to contribute to the discussion on the understanding and recognition of women's role in promoting innovation in Italian agriculture and rural areas, presenting the results of two case studies. The research has been carried out within the EU FLIARA project (GA 101084234) which aim to improve understanding, awareness and recognition of women's role in a more sustainable rural future. Twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews with women leading innovations in farming and rural areas in Italy were conducted in the period January 2024-April 2024. In selecting the interviewees, the two main criteria were: the type of rural area in which they operate (rural village, remote rural area, rural area close to the city) and the sustainability dimension of the innovation (environmental, economic, social and cultural).

Patriarchal values and gender roles are still prevalent in many Italian rural areas and women's individual self-realisation and their collective mobilisation is hindered by the presence of various structural barriers (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). Women innovators often have to work harder to get their qualifications, talents and achievements recognised (Cerchlan et al., 2022).

The paper analyse the path of innovation led by the women interviewed, highlighting their motivations, decision and preparatory activities, concretisation and impacts of their practices. Their initiatives lead to the development of new approaches, values, goods, services and governance methods, all of which have the potential to positively influence various aspects of sustainable rural development, including advances in gender equality.

Youth Policies and Rural Dynamics: Tensions Between Institutional Action and the Strategies of Rural Young People.

Oral

Mr. Gonzalo Reguera-Zaratiegui¹, Dr. Andoni Iso-Tinoco¹, Dr. Jesús Oliva-Serrano¹

1. Public University of Navarre

Young rural people face structural challenges stemming from limited access to services and opportunities. This paper contrasts public youth policies with the strategies of young rural people, focusing on the tensions between institutional actions and local needs, where we identify demands and requirements. The aim is to address the question: Is there also a rural gap in youth policies?

This research is part of the 'Rural Access' project, funded by the Spanish R&D&i Programme. This research uses a dual qualitative methodological strategy, focusing on analysing two distinct types of texts and comparing them. We analysed regional and local youth laws and plans in Spain to determine where rural youth is positioned, what is said about them, and what is proposed. Explicit references to rural territories were examined. Additionally, to explore how rural communities are adopting this paradigm shift in their practices and discourse, a qualitative methodology was used, including 33 in-depth interviews and a discussion group in a case study located in a peri-urban area in Southern Europe.

The findings highlight the existence of policies formulated from an urban perspective, limiting their applicability in rural settings. Challenges are identified in mobility, access to education and employment, and the adaptation of services to youth needs. Mobility, in particular, emerges as a key resource for rural youth, but youth policies do not always adequately address the needs of this group. It is observed that public policies tend to focus on equal opportunities without considering the geographical and social specificities of rural areas.

**21. Bio-region as a
strategy towards liveable
rural communities:
seeking balance between
social, economic, and
environmental futures**

Are local food markets consumers' first, second, or no choice? Some evidence from consumer behaviour studies

Oral

Mrs. Lana Janmere¹, Prof. Irina Pilvere¹

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

With consumers' ecological consciousness slowly but steadily increasing, along with their desire to consume healthy food, scientists highlight the importance of short food chains and sustainable food systems. A key potential in this aspect lies in locally produced food made from local ingredients, which is one of the core elements of the bio-region approach.

However, consumer choices do not always favour locally produced products, as they are influenced by various factors, including price, perceived value, and quality. A recent sociological survey conducted in Latvia (2023, n=2738) on consumer food purchasing habits examined not only these factors but also the locations where consumers buy food and the reasons behind their choices. Among the various alternatives offered in the survey, only a small proportion of consumers identified local food markets as their regular food purchasing venues.

Nine out of ten consumers acknowledge that the proximity of the retail location to their home is an important factor in their decision-making, which is why supermarkets are preferred. Even if supermarket opening hours were restricted and they were closed on weekends, the purchasing habits of the majority of consumers would remain largely unchanged.

For the successful implementation of the bio-region approach, all stakeholders must recognise and address the issue of local food accessibility for potential consumers. Retail locations that are physically distant from consumers will not solve the accessibility problem and will not ensure the competitiveness of the local food system.

Key-words: consumer choices, local food, food retail.

Bioregional mapping in the Sand Ridge, Hungary

Oral

Dr. Dorottya Mendly¹

1. Corvinus University of Budapest

The Sand Ridge is a now semi-desert area within the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium region, which takes up one tenth of Hungary's territory. The landscape has historically been characterized by a mosaic of wetlands and dry sand grasslands, which conditions have supported the formation of unique settlements called "tanyas" along with specific land use practices. However, due to long-term aridification processes, this dry-wet duality of the landscape is fading away, along with the local ways of life. In a four-year-long research project entitled "Increasing Resilience through Bioregional Planning in the Sand Ridge", our interdisciplinary research team engages in the bioregional mapping of this area to foster sustainable agricultural and land use practices, and to engage and empower local communities. We expect that in such a process, the relationship of the local communities with the land can be restored and deepened, opening up possibilities to strengthen place-based identities, which is a cornerstone of lasting success. At the conference, we would like to present the process and the first results of our participatory mapping, along with the resulting storymap, as well as preliminary results of our stakeholder interviews.

This research (FK_146599) is financed under the NRDI FK_23 funding scheme.

Bioregions and Rural Transitions: Pathways to Sustainable and Just Futures

Oral

Mrs. Inga Megne¹, Dr. Kaspars Naglis¹

1. Latvia University of Life Science and Technologies

Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

Faculty of Economics and Social Development

Inga Megne, PhD student

Kaspars Naglis-Liepa,

Dr. oec., associate professor Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

Title: Bioregions and Rural Transitions: Pathways to Sustainable and Just Futures

Introduction: Bioregions offer a promising approach to fostering a sustainable and viable rural future. By emphasizing local ecological and cultural characteristics, bioregions can support sustainable economies and community well-being. Despite growing interest worldwide, there is a lack of scientific analysis of their establishment and management, including in Latvia.

Methods: This study uses a mixed-methods approach to assess international bioregional experience and its relevance for Latvian rural development. A comprehensive analysis of environmental, social and economic factors is conducted, as well as a review of the bioeconomy framework. Cluster analysis identifies the main influences on the formation of bioregions in Latvia.

Results: The results demonstrate significant public interest in strengthening local economies, preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable agriculture. Based on cluster analysis, it must be concluded that the main environmental, social and economic drivers influencing the prospects for the establishment of a bioregion are identified, providing insight into the strategic specialization planning of Latvian rural regions. At the same time, it should be noted that the most important condition for the selection of bioregions is the will of the local community to create a bioregion.

Conclusions: Bioregions are a viable model for achieving sustainability in rural areas, balancing ecological conservation with economic and social resilience. However, their effective implementation requires regulation and institutional support. Further research is needed to improve governance structures and optimize management models, ensuring that bioregions contribute to a just and viable rural future.

Keywords: Bioregions, rural development, community well-being.

Bioregions in Latvia: Collaboration and Management Issues from the Perspective of Stakeholders

Oral

Dr. Liga Paula¹, Dr. Dace Kaufmane¹

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

In the early 1970s, the vision of modern bioregionalism began to take shape through the collaboration of natural scientists, social and environmental activists, artists and writers, community leaders and farmers. Today researchers describe the bioregion as an implementable vision of societies who want to live and work according to the rhythms and environment of specific places thus preserving communities deeply embedded in their contexts. Currently, the stakeholders have great opportunities to get involved in the process of policy planning and drafting of regulatory acts. The range of potential partners involved in the formation of bioregions is diverse including local residents and their communities, non-governmental organizations, municipalities, policy makers, entrepreneurs, academic institutions, and experts. Creation of a bioregion is very complex process that has led to results in some European countries, but is only at the beginning in Latvia. Most of different stakeholders, interviewed by the group of LBTU researchers, acknowledged creation of new bioregions as a good solution for the balanced development of the countryside that should be further discussed in local communities. Collaboration was emphasized as crucially necessary; however, the absence of a leader in the formation of bio-regions was stressed as a weak point. Normative acts do not envisage a bio-region as a structural or economic unit, but it could coexist with and complement existing administrative units. Some stakeholders were concerned that freedom and independence are the values that any of the involved parties could lose if they did not want to be a part of the bioregion.

Keywords: bioregion, stakeholders, collaboration

Community-Led Sustainability and Experiential Learning: The Case of ZADIŅI in Latvia's Permaculture Movement

Oral

Mrs. Weronika Felcis¹, Mr. Elgars Felcis²

1. PhD Studies in Social Sciences at Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, 2. Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences

Rural spaces occasionally emerge as laboratories for sustainability experimentation, grassroots innovation, and alternative economies. A variety of eco-villages and eco-communities exist within the EU. In the Baltic States, several meaningful examples can be found in Lithuania and Estonia, yet in Latvia they are still very unpopular. This paper examines ZADIŅI, an eco-village in Latvia, as a case study of community-led sustainability transitions within the broader framework of the Latvian permaculture movement. Unlike conventional farms, ZADIŅI does not engage in commercial food production but serves as an educational hub for ecological restoration, social cohesion and experiential learning. As part of Latvia's expanding permaculture network, ZADIŅI exemplifies how non-production-oriented rural initiatives can cultivate socio-ecological resilience.

Drawing on Felcis and Felcis (2021) on permaculture as a bridge between traditional and novel practices, this study explores how ZADIŅI operationalizes permaculture ethics—earth care, people care, and fair share—through workshops, cultural activities, and regenerative land and forest management. Further linking to Felcis (2021) article on agroecological practices in Latvia, the paper situates ZADIŅI within wider sustainability transitions that challenge extractive economic models. Insights from Felcis and Felcis (2023) on degrowth and economic transformation further contextualize ZADIŅI as a response to crises through intentional design. The findings highlight how participatory sustainability initiatives contribute to rural resilience by fostering local engagement, environmental stewardship, and self-sufficiency.

By integrating permaculture principles into a non-agricultural rural setting, ZADIŅI exemplifies how open spaces can facilitate sustainability learning and social innovation. This case study contributes to academic discussions on permaculture movements, degrowth strategies, and the role of community-based initiatives in shaping post-industrial rural landscapes.

Keywords: *Permaculture, sustainability transitions, community engagement, resilience, experiential learning, degrowth, grassroots innovation*

Contribution of Agricultural Practices to Resilience: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis

Oral

Mr. Ahmad raza Khan¹

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies,

Agricultural resilience is about ensuring that farming systems can withstand and recover from a wide range of shocks and stresses, while continuing to provide food, livelihoods, and environmental benefits. It is a critical component of sustainable development and a key to building a secure and live-able rural community. Focus of this research is on mapping agriculture practices and evaluation of their effect on different dimensions that are important for agricultural resilience. In this research more than 250 agricultural practices were analyzed and their effect on specific indicators (like carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, soil fertility, nutrient losses, pesticides, animal welfare, biodiversity, landscape diversity, renewable energy) affecting agriculture resilience were evaluated. Using multidimensional analysis authors have classified agricultural practices according to their impact. Based on this analysis authors have highlighted possible dimensions and specific agricultural practices for resilient agriculture development. Agrarian strategy inferences and strategic references are also debated to improve resilience in farming schemes. The results deliver valuable visions for officials, academics, and practitioners pointing to endorse sustainable and adaptive agricultural practices. Future study should emphasize integrating technical novelties and socio-economic issues to further reinforce agrarian resilience.

Keywords: Agricultural resilience, sustainable farming, multidimensional analysis, agricultural practices, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, soil fertility, nutrient losses, biodiversity, landscape diversity, renewable energy, pesticides impact, animal welfare, climate adaptation, rural sustainability.

Contribution of Agricultural Practices to Resilience: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis

Oral

Mr. Ahmad raza Khan¹, Prof. Dina Popluga²

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies,, 2. Latvia University of Life Science and Technologies

Agricultural resilience is about ensuring that farming systems can withstand and recover from a wide range of shocks and stresses, while continuing to provide food, livelihoods, and environmental benefits. It is a critical component of sustainable development and a key to building a secure and live-able rural community. Focus of this research is on mapping agriculture practices and evaluation of their effect on different dimensions that are important for agricultural resilience. In this research more than 250 agricultural practices were analyzed and their effect on specific indicators (like carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, soil fertility, nutrient losses, pesticides, animal welfare, biodiversity, landscape diversity, renewable energy) affecting agriculture resilience were evaluated. Using multidimensional analysis authors has classified agricultural practices according to their impact. Based on this analysis authors have highlighted possible dimensions and specific agricultural practices for resilient agriculture development. Agrarian strategyinferences and strategic references are also debated to improve resilience in farming schemes. The results delivervaluable visions for officials, academics, and practitioners pointing to indorse sustainable and adaptive agricultural practices. Future study should emphasize integrating technical novelties and socio-economic issues to further reinforce agrarian resilience.

Keywords: Agricultural resilience, sustainable farming, multidimensional analysis, agricultural practices, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, soil fertility, nutrient losses, biodiversity, landscape diversity, renewable energy, pesticides impact, animal welfare, climate adaptation, rural sustainability.

Evaluation of socio-economic aspects of renewable energy in agriculture

Oral

Prof. Dina Popluga¹, Dr. Aina Muska¹, Ms. Laura Dubkēviča¹

1. Latvia University of Life Science and Technologies

Agriculture and renewable energy are two interrelated sectors whose synergy can contribute to sustainable development and environmental protection. Today's society is increasingly focusing on sustainable solutions to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and mitigate the effects of climate change. The agricultural sector can make a valuable contribution to the production of renewable energy using biomass, biogas, solar and wind energy, as well as waste generated in agricultural production. Such an approach not only increases energy independence, but also promotes the economic growth of rural regions and reduces carbon emissions. This study examines the importance of agriculture in the development of renewable energy, evaluating the main energy sources, benefits and challenges related to the effective implementation of this cooperation. In this study authors have selected indicators to monitor and evaluate the progress and well as socio-economic barriers for renewable sustainable energy production in agriculture. Study reveals effectiveness of initiatives, track trends in relation to renewable energy production and agriculture sector synergy and provide recommendations to renewable energy policy decision makers.

Keywords: renewable energy, agriculture, sustainable development, rural areas.

Integrating the Biodistrict Approach into Local Food Systems: From Agroecology to Policymaking

Oral

Ms. Daniela Proskina¹, Prof. Liga Proskina², Prof. Modrite Pelse², Dr. Sallija Cerina²

1. PhD Student, 2. researcher

The biodistrict approach offers a holistic perspective on territorial development, encompassing food production, natural resource management, local economies, and cultural identity. Despite the significant potential of the biodistrict approach to foster the development of sustainable food systems, several challenges persist. These include the integration of traditional agroecological practices, the effectiveness of multi-level governance, and a comprehensive assessment of the economic impacts of local food systems. A lack of sufficient research on these aspects hampers the practical implementation of the biodistrict approach and the enhancement of food sovereignty at the regional level.

Study aims to evaluate the potential of the biodistrict approach in developing sustainable food systems, with a particular emphasis on integrating agroecological practices and local governance mechanisms.

It analyzes key challenges and opportunities in implementing the biodistrict approach, offering recommendations for more effective integration into local food policies. The findings indicate that traditional agroecological methods can significantly enhance food security and bolster resilience to climate change. However, adapting these methods to modern food systems necessitates thorough research. Furthermore, local governance is crucial for the sustainability of biodistrict food systems, yet a more integrated approach is required—one that unites different governance levels and promotes collaboration among policymakers, farmers, and communities.

In addition to economic and ecological advantages, the biodistrict approach plays a vital role in enhancing social and cultural values. Strengthening local food systems aids in preserving and revitalizing local traditions and accumulated knowledge related to agriculture and food production, ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary needs. By fostering closer collaboration among farmers, consumers, and policymakers, the biodistrict approach promotes social cohesion, reinforces local identity, and builds trust between food producers and consumers. It also stimulates educational and public engagement initiatives that raise awareness about sustainable food production, healthy diets, and environmental conservation.

Interactions between existing and novel governance arrangements - the case of Bio-district Sörmland in Sweden

Oral

Ms. Courtney Adamson¹, Dr. Rebecka Milestad²

1. Department of sustainable development, environmental science and engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), 2. Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI) & Department of sustainable development, environmental science and engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)

Pressure on countries in Europe to increase food security amid mounting geopolitical conflict, as well as socio-economic, environmental and climate-related challenges and crises, is growing. Research highlights that an expanding food security agenda tends to re-justify productionism. The risk of such a development is that broader social and ecological food system aims fall by the wayside.

Bio-regions, or so-called bio-districts, as Alternative Food Networks (AFN), provide for novel food governance arrangements that prioritise the multifunctionality of regional food production, and seek balance between social, economic and environmental food system outcomes. However, an important question for the development of bio-districts is how their alternative governance arrangements interact with pre-existing governance practices and processes in a specific regional context. An additional question of interest in the current study is if and how a bio-district can support local and regional municipal food supply systems.

This paper explores the above questions by drawing on an ongoing empirical study, involving participant observations and interviews, of the first Swedish bio-district 'Ekodistrikt Sörmland', in the Sörmland landscape south of Stockholm. Results are explored in relation to what Marsden et al., (2018. *Food Secur*, 10: 1301–9.) outline as four governance-related conditions necessary to support the sustainable existence and transformative capacity of AFNs. The main findings concern the need for opportunities and mechanisms to embed the alternative governance arrangements of the bio-district, challenges of existing governance arrangements and processes, and ongoing efforts to build up key infrastructure (i.e. the "missing middle") in the region.

Keywords: bio-district, governance, municipalities

The balance between social, economic, and environmental needs: An exploration of the role of the blue bioeconomy in the Saaremaa region

Oral

Dr. Anne Poder¹, Dr. Tarmo Pilving¹

1. Estonian University of Life Sciences

Saaremaa Island in Estonia has long-time maritime traditions that have shaped its distinctive coastal landscapes and cultural and culinary heritage. The region is a major tourism destination; however, it is subject to rural peripheralization, and it is lagging in terms of incomes, infrastructure, and economic development. The region has considerable potential related to aquaculture, marine energy, and coastal and marine tourism activities; however, it is facing a multitude of interconnecting challenges related to the poor environmental condition of the Baltic Sea, marine resource depletion, a shift in the role of fishing and fish processing in the local economy, the loss of marine and culinary heritage, local capacity and skills for supporting blue biotechnology developments, and spatial and social conflicts related to marine resource use and access.

The paper explores the interplay between the local community's economic, social, and environmental needs and the potential of blue bioresource valorization as the engine of growth in the regional context. The analysis is based on data collected with a series of local workshops in the Saaremaa region and semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders. The research focused on what kind of role the local stakeholders envisage for blue bioeconomy in the future of the region and how sustainable innovations could address the economic, social, and environmental conflicts and the untapped opportunities for the valorisation of blue bioresources in the regional context.

Keywords: bioregions, blue growth, coastal communities

22. Knowledge Economies and Cultural Crossroads: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Europe

Counterurbanisation and New Cultural Crossroads in the Bulgarian Countryside

Oral

Dr. Ivaylo Markov¹, Dr. Desislava Pileva¹

1. Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Keywords: International counterurbanisation, rural living, Bulgaria

Counterurbanisation is a relatively recent phenomenon in a Southeast European and ex-communist country like Bulgaria, emerging in the context of wider demographic, social, political and economic changes. While much attention has been paid to Bulgarian citizens moving from urban to rural areas, this study highlights the growing importance of examining the experiences of international counterurbanites who have chosen Bulgarian villages as their new homes.

The paper examines the socio-cultural transformations driven by international counterurbanisation and explores how these processes are reshaping rural spaces into 'cultural crossroads', sites of intercultural interaction. It focuses on a family from Central Europe that has transitioned from seasonal tourists to permanent residents in a small village in coastal Dobrudzha. Key research questions include their motivations, adaptation strategies and socio-cultural contributions to the local rural life.

Their involvement in local activities and initiation of community events reveals interactions with both local residents and other newcomers from Bulgaria and abroad who have seasonal or permanent homes in the area. These networks not only challenge traditional notions of rurality but also contribute to new forms of rural sociability, cultural cooperation, and knowledge exchange, shaping the countryside as a space of cultural diversity and locally innovative practices.

The paper provides valuable insights into emerging patterns of rural revitalisation, potential redefinitions of rural development trajectories and re-imaginings of rural life beyond the narratives of demographic decline and socio-economic peripheralisation. By situating these dynamics within broader European trends of rural transformation, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on rural diversification, knowledge economies, and the future of sustainable rural living.

The study is conducted within the project 'The Neighbour from Sofia, the New Villager from Germany: Counterurbanisation, Socio-Cultural Interactions and Local Transformations', supported by the National Science Fund of Bulgaria, Contract No. KII-06-H70/10 (2022–2025).

Invisible belonging? Dynamics of seasonal labour in Swedish forests

Oral

Ms. Emma Sahlström¹

1. Swedish University of Agricultural Science

Seasonal labour has been theorized as an essential yet invisible dimension of rural areas. Research has illustrated how agricultural and horticultural sectors are dependent on the mobile and exploitable workforce provided by international migrants. Similarly, in Sweden the forestry sector is highly dependent on migrant workers, yet this work has (with few exceptions) received marginal attention. My paper centers seasonal workers in forestry and silviculture, specifically migrants from Central and Eastern Europe living and working in a rural municipality in northern Sweden. I ask: how do labour migrants working in Swedish forests shape rural environments and how does invisibility (of their presence, work and knowledge) function as a politics of belonging? Through their work thinning and planting trees, forest workers represent embodied labour in what is an increasingly digitized sector. From their vantage point, forests take shape not as lines on a computer screen or helicopter-view hectares but as everyday interactions with trees, plants and wildlife. Through semi-structured interviews with actors in different positions of forestry work (seasonal workers, managers and contractors), I trace how a group that is invisibilized in rural society claim belonging through their work and expertise and in doing so may challenge views on what constitutes sustainable forestry.

Keywords: seasonal work, forestry, belonging

Mapping the impact of co-ethnic migrants settling in villages in the Ukrainian-Hungarian border zone

Oral

Dr. Ágnes Erőss¹, Ms. Julianna Kohut-Ferki², Dr. Katalin Kovály², Dr. Patrik Tátrai²

1. Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, 2. HUN-REN CSFK

Following the eruption of the Russia-Ukraine war in Donbas in 2014, there has been a tendency of older adult ethnic Hungarian population resettling from Transcarpathia, Western Ukraine to the peripheral and depopulating villages in the neighbouring Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county in Hungary. The primary driver for their relocation was the acquisition of Hungarian pension eligibility, which requires an official registered residence in Hungary. Before the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine the purchased properties, frequently in poor condition but affordable, were used as temporary residences. However, since February 2022, many older adults have permanently relocated and renovated their properties to establish a safe place, a kind of refuge for the family, as close as possible to the border.

Based on our qualitative field work conducted since 2022 in the region, their arrival has impacted the life of these peripheral villages in numerous social-cultural aspects: Not only their refurbished houses and gardens beautified the previously often neglected rural landscape, but they transferred across the border new customs, a set of practical knowledge, and social network that brought a refreshing breeze and new energies to these places.

Drawing on literature of International Retirement Migration (IRM, King et al 2014, Savaş et al 2023) and migration in rural areas (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018), this presentation aims to contribute to the discussion of the working group by exploring the social impact induced by the settlement of older adult co-ethnic migrants in the depopulating eastern border zone of Hungary; while unveils some of the conflicts, often remain unspoken. We aim to shed light on the evolving socio-cultural landscape of these villages, offering a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities that arise from this migratory phenomenon.

Keywords: Co-ethnic migration, Russia-Ukraine war, Hungary

Migration and Rural Transformation: Migrant Experiences in peripheral areas in Spain, Belgium and Germany

Oral

***Ms. Iris Egea Quijada*¹, *Ms. Louise Hantson*², *Dr. René Kreichauf*³**

1. Brussels Institute for Social and Population Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2. Brussels School of Governance, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 3. Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Keywords: rural transformation, migrant experiences, sociospatial exclusion

In the past two decades, (international) migration has been increasingly framed as a solution to rural decline. Current rural reception policies often position migrants as mere economic assets rather than focusing on their experiences, perception of settlement processes, and their role as contributors to rural society. However, we know little about what factors, according to migrants' own accounts, foster their experience of belonging to a rural locality. Focusing on the intersections of migration, rural policymaking, and regeneration, in this presentation, we analyze migrants' experiences in peripheral areas in the Northeast of Spain, East Germany and the Wallonia Region of Belgium. Drawing on qualitative research (including interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations) and relational comparison, our study reveals the limits of inclusive integration policies and expounds that local factors, structural and spatial conditions, local migration discourses, and racialization processes significantly impact on migrant experiences. Specifically, we explain that the conditions migrants face on local labor and housing markets and the ways they are often seen as valuable for rural communities only in terms of their economic exploitability for precarious labor and as renters in unpopular sections of housing markets reinforces experiences of unbelonging, sociospatial exclusion, and desires to move elsewhere. Overall, our presentation contributes to debates on the transformation of rural Europe, highlighting the tensions between migration-driven regeneration and the social and economic realities of and consequences for rural newcomers, arguing that economic imperatives perpetuate racial and class-based inequalities present in rural areas.

The Social-economics of Knowledge for Sustainable Living

Oral

Ms. Zsuzsanna Artner¹, Dr. Nemes Gusztáv¹, Dr. Chris High²

1. HUN-REN KRTK, 2. Linnaeus University

The urgent need for more sustainable forms of living requires a systemic knowledge-driven transformation bringing together communities and practitioners to support innovation. In alternative food systems (AFS), new knowledge emerges as a hybrid of expert and lay insights, blending scientific, traditional, and experiential forms. This study examines the commodification of sustainability knowledge within Hungary's AFS, focusing on its transformative potential for regional development. We explore how knowledge for sustainable living is produced, processed, shared, and applied in alternative food communities, highlighting the interplay between formal and informal knowledge systems. The research investigates the social economy that arises around sustainability knowledge, emphasizing the role of citizen science to bridge systemic gaps. The findings reveal that transformative knowledge can drive ecological and societal change, but challenges such as fragmentation, limited accessibility, and institutional misalignment persist. This study offers valuable perspectives for policy-makers and practitioners in fostering sustainable regional development.

Urban-to-rural lifestyle migrants in local politics: Negotiating and transforming modes of governance in rural peripheries

Oral

***Ms. Anja Decker*¹**

1. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Science, Prague

While the transformative effects of urban-to-rural lifestyle migration on individuals and rural communities have received considerable attention, its political dimension remains underexplored. In particular, we know surprisingly little about how urban newcomers engage with local representative democracy and how their understandings of appropriate modes of political participation shape and are shaped by existing municipal practices in rural areas. Taking the case of domestic lifestyle migrants in rural Czechia who seek and win seats on local councils, my contribution investigates the intersection of lifestyle migration, rural political participation, and municipal councils. Specifically, the paper examines: (1) the motivation of urban newcomers to become local councilors, including class-specific understandings of good rural governance; (2) the impact of urban newcomers' political participation on municipal practices, including their quest to introduce new political practice to rural places; (3) how long-time residents perceive and negotiate the newcomers' aspirations for formal political representation and political innovation at the local level, highlighting the interplay of differing cultural perspectives on rural governance and municipal agency in rural peripheries. Conceptually, the paper draws on current debates surrounding the fluidity of the 'local' in mobile societies (Barnett 2024), the perception of rural peripheries as left-behind places on the one hand and as 'spaces of opportunity' (Görmär and Lang 2019) on the other, and the role of municipal institutions in political struggles and societal transformation (Russel 2019; Thompson 2021). The contribution builds on an understanding of rural communities as sites of democratic innovation and highlights the role electoral tools play in the emergence of new formations of local citizenship and the diversification of rural knowledge systems. It aims to stimulate further conceptual work towards a nuanced understanding of the political realm of urban-to-rural lifestyle migration and identify promising avenues for future research.

23. Rolling out digital infrastructures for liveable farming futures?

Agricultural Innovation on Whose Terms? Power, Knowledge & Equity in Innovation Systems

Oral

Dr. Chantal Clément¹, Ms. Saskia Colombant¹, Prof. Molly Anderson¹, Dr. Georgina Catacora-Vargas¹, Prof. Jennifer Clapp¹, Ms. Lim Li Ching¹, Dr. Emile Frison¹, Mr. Mamadou Goïta¹, Dr. Angela Hilmi¹, Prof. Phil Howard¹, Prof. Melissa Leach¹, Mr. Pat Mooney¹, Prof. Raj Patel¹, Dr. Elisabetta Recine¹, Mr. Errol Schweizer¹, Prof. Yiching Song¹, Dr. Nettie Wiebe¹

1. IPES-Food

Agricultural innovation has historically been driven and refined by farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and Indigenous communities to adapt to changing conditions. Rooted in traditional knowledge and collective experimentation, these innovations have been passed down through generations. However, agricultural innovation pathways have undergone a profound transformation over the past century, accelerating in recent decades. Today, policy frameworks and investment strategies around the world are prioritizing digitalization as the solution to sustainable rural futures. Increasingly shaped by corporate actors and investors, dominant innovation pathways raise urgent questions about power, equity, and sustainability.

Our report adopts a power-sensitive lens to critically examine current innovations in agriculture. It identifies five key challenges farmers face today (e.g., maintaining soil and crop health) and evaluates how different innovations address them. This analysis uncovers the systems that enable or constrain just and sustainable innovation and reveals contrasting socio-technical imaginaries and regimes, highlighting frictions between agroecology and digitalization, from material concerns such as energy to deeper ontological divides over agriculture, labour, and knowledge.

Ultimately, we argue for innovations based on the principles of agroecology and technological sovereignty. The report concludes with recommendations to foster innovation systems that prioritize agency, equity, and ecological resilience, centering socio-ecological justice, long-term sustainability, and care over narrow understandings of efficiency and productivity.

Our aim is to support emerging counter-narratives that challenge the depiction of digital solutions as the universally inevitable and desired future of food systems, identify blind spots in ongoing debates, and foster dialogue.

Keywords: Agricultural Innovation, Digital Agriculture, Technological Sovereignty

Biodigitalisation of agriculture : an imperative in the making

Oral

Dr. Barbara Van Dyck¹, Dr. Larissa Mies Bombardi¹, Ms. Coline Prévost¹, Ms. Danya Nadar¹

1. Université Libre de Bruxelles

Recent EU policy frameworks and strategic notes present the reliance on biodigital technologies to ‘optimise’ agriculture as necessary to keep pace with food demand as well as promote sustainability and competitiveness. The presentation of biodigitalisation as ‘unavoidable’ and a ‘necessity’ are not just viewpoints. They are, part of what Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim refer to as a ‘sociotechnical imaginary’ that produces systems of meaning, guides how we collectively see and order the world, and have material outcomes by, amongst others, the shaping of narratives, policies and institutions. Seemingly mundane expressions promoting the biodigitalisation of agriculture thus contribute to the normalisation of a certain course of action.

To unsettle and resist such ideas of an ostensibly biodigital imperative, this paper advances a genealogical approach to focus on the roots and visions that enabled the emergence and institutional stabilisation of what is framed as the fourth agricultural revolution in European policy and strategy making. We start from a sense of profound philosophical and methodological suspicion towards the biodigital paradigm and the ways in which the knowledges it mobilises are put to use. As part of the larger research agenda of FRICTION that studies the digitalisation of agriculture in Belgium, we focus on the range of actors, knowledges, legislation, technologies and capital that is mobilised across space and time to show the makings of a top-down policy transition with very material consequences. We also question what this means for strategies of critique and resistance.

Developing evaluation guidelines for agricultural digitalisation policies

Oral

Dr. Soledad Cuevas¹, Mr. César Redrado Tambo¹, Dr. Almudena Gomez Ramos², Mr. Daniel López-García¹

1. Instituto de Economía Geografía y Demografía (CSIC), 2. Universidad de Valladolid

Food systems worldwide face a number of environmental challenges, including climate change, a biodiversity crisis, soil degradation and water scarcity and pollution. These coexist with social and economic processes leading to rural depopulation, a lack or even reversal of progress in terms of farmer incomes and rural livelihoods, growing nutrition insecurity, poor animal welfare and the risk of emerging infectious diseases.

In this context, the European Union has made agricultural innovation and digitalisation a central priority of its agricultural policies. Integral to these drive towards digitalisation are objectives of efficiency but also sustainability, labour standards, and animal welfare.

However, there is a need to evaluate the implementation and system-level impacts of digitalisation promotion as a whole as well as of specific policies. For the purpose of evaluation, the promotion of agricultural digitalisation should be understood as a complex intervention, in a complex system. This implies the need to consider multiple interconnected outcomes, including potential social and environmental trade-offs, which might affect different stakeholders at different scales and over a range of time periods. In order to include relevant outcomes, it is necessary to adopt a context-specific and participatory approach, which might lead to the inclusion of impacts beyond the original goals of the policy.

In this study we make recommendations for evaluation of agricultural digitalisation promotion in Europe. For this purpose, we synthesize insights from the literature on evaluation of complex interventions and evaluation of One Health, as well as a systematic map of the literature on agricultural digitalization promotion.

Digitalisation in Grassland Management Systems: Trust is still an issue.

Oral

Dr. Joanna Storie¹, Ms. Vineta Gailīte¹

1. Estonian University of Life Sciences

CODECS is a four-year Horizon Europe aiming to improve European farmers' motivation and capacity to adopt digitalisation for sustainable and transformative change through a series of collaborative living lab projects. The Estonian/Latvian Living Lab is a collaboration of grass-fed beef farmers in landscape protection areas with experts in drone technology and conservation. The aim was to assess how drone technology generated data could be utilised for management and restoration planning of biodiverse grassland habitats by providing tailored digital solutions and improving farmers digital literacy.

The project showed there are challenges to effectively utilize the full range of complex remote sensing data in daily management decisions, conservation planning, and restoration monitoring. They include, farmers' technical knowledge, connectivity issues and whether the benefits will outweigh future costs. Biodiverse grasslands are low income generating production units but high in ecosystem service provision, limiting landowners' access to high-cost equipment or services. For the Authorities, however, the technology may present a low-cost approach to monitoring extensive agricultural lands, but farmers fear fines due to misuse or misinterpretation of data.

Ensuring the reasonable use and maximum benefits from remote sensing for the management of these threatened landscapes needs collaboration between all sectors and the farmers who manage them, to ensure an equitable distribution of benefits. Overcoming mistrust between actors is imperative for a future for grassland farmers in Latvia.

Keywords: Semi-natural grasslands; living labs; remote sensing

Digitisation for green agrarian extractivism or agroecological transition? Experiences and perspectives from the fields of Southern Italy

Oral

*Prof. Alessandra Corrado*¹, *Dr. Carmelo Buscema*¹, *Dr. Francesco Caruso*¹

1. University of Calabria

Digitalisation has emerged powerfully as one of the responses promoted by the ruling classes, from the perspective of transition, to pressing environmental issues, to the development needs of rural communities, to the goal of creating a more sustainable and efficient food system from both ecological and social perspectives. However, the ideological view that recognises technology as the salvific solution to the complex problems characteristic of these fields, overlooks important social, labour, cultural and political aspects, considering which from a critical point of view, instead, the digitalisation strategy appears rather as the lever of a new manifestation of agrarian extractivism. Ultimately, what is in the making appears to be a model of expropriative appropriation of the forces of production, commodified and non-commodified, human and non-human, based on new concentrated and unrecognisable forms of fixed capital, capable of shifting power relations even more sharply to the detriment of labour power, nature and local knowledge and cultures. This process, which is strongly supported by the state, supranational institutions and powerful consortia formed by research institutions and high-tech companies (i.e. the new European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP 2023-2027) and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan), seems to contribute to further eroding farmers' autonomy, dispossessing land workers, expropriating nature and concentrating added value, today also in the context of an agriculture oriented towards differentiated markets and characterised by "quality" and "sustainability" oriented processes.

However, we wonder whether and under what conditions digital technologies can also support agro-ecological transition and emancipatory farming.

The contribution explores digitisation through experiences and perspectives in the context of Southern Italy, drawing on the research activity carried out within the framework of the PRIN PNRR DiJjust project.

From milking cows to managing data? Questioning agri-digital technologies through political agroecology

Oral

Ms. Coline Prévost¹

1. Université Libre de Bruxelles

My research explores how the recent push for the digitalisation of agriculture is reshaping farmers' skills, knowledges and resources in Walloon dairy farms, Belgium. It is part of the research group FRICTION that critically analyses the biodigital imperative and its encounter with Belgium farms.

Promises of increased productivity, reduced workload and improved animal welfare have driven both industry and public investment toward digital, capital-intensive agriculture. However, a growing number of civil society organisations and social scientists are showing that digital technologies are exacerbating the very problems they claim to address, while also strengthening corporate control over the food system. Against the backdrop of Big Tech's expanding power, ecological emergency and rising farmers' protests, it is becoming crucial to critically assess agri-digital tools and examine their effects on farmers' autonomy and the wider food system.

The aim of this intervention is to present a review of Walloon public policies and research projects geared towards digital technologies in dairy farms, as well as the marketing strategies and narratives of milking robot dealers. These elements will be discussed with a critical literature review on milking robots, fieldwork observations and interviews with dairy farmers, farmers' unions, robot dealers and technicians. It will also present the in-depth analysis of a specific milking robot related technology to show the power relations it is embedded into.

This aims at taking a critical look at agri-digital tools' promises in light of what they bring, replace or prevent on farms, and more broadly on how they interfere with dairy farmers' practices.

Keywords: digital technologies, dairy farming, farmers' autonomy

From Rural Reachability to Meaningful Connectivity: Foundations for Livable Farming Futures

Oral

Dr. Maija Kāle¹, Ms. Marija Krūmiņa¹

1. The Baltic International Centre for Economic Policy Studies (BICEPS)

The rapid expansion of mobile technologies is revolutionising rural connectivity, creating new opportunities for knowledge sharing and innovation. However, this transformation often prioritises the delivery of information over the promotion of meaningful connectivity. In the context of agricultural extension services, mobile-based initiatives have been implemented to provide services such as weather data, market information, fertiliser sales and others. However, the voices of farmers, particularly women, who are less likely to own mobile phones, remain marginalised and their specific needs are often overlooked.

This study explores the potential of digital infrastructures to facilitate a transition from accessibility to meaningful connectivity and engagement, with the aim of supporting the development of viable agricultural futures. These futures could be embedded in systems that move beyond market-based systems and instead rely on people-to-people knowledge exchange and sharing (such as seed sharing and indigenous knowledge sharing for resilience).

Focusing on rural Ghana, where the climate crisis has severely disrupted agricultural livelihoods, through the lens of the Building Digital Education of Indigenous/Heritage Crops for the Resilience of African Food Systems in the Climate Crisis (ICRAFS) project as a case study, the research highlights the potential of mobile-based climate change education modules for food systems resilience. Delivered in multiple local languages, these modules are designed to empower farmers with limited internet access and low literacy by addressing their priorities and increasing their agency.

The study addresses the following questions:

- The extent to which farmers are able to build connectivity through reachability;
- The adaptation of mobile-based learning to amplify farmers' voices and foster inclusive participation;
- The role of non-market systems of connectivity in promoting equitable rural transitions.

This study highlights the need to ensure that technological innovations translate into meaningful impacts for rural communities.

Implications of public policy interventions for the digitalisation of European Agriculture. A systematic map.

Oral

Mr. César Redrado Tambo¹, Dr. Soledad Cuevas¹, Dr. Almudena Gómez Ramos², Mr. Daniel López-García¹

1. Instituto de Economía Geografía y Demografía (CSIC), 2. Universidad de Valladolid

In a context of environmental degradation and climate change, digital agricultural technologies—such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) or precision farming tools—are being framed as the silver bullet to enhance productivity, improve resource efficiency, and be more environmentally friendly. In this sense, European Union (EU) governments through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have recently adopted programs to foster a digital modernisation of agriculture.

However, while digitalisation offers considerable opportunities, it is simultaneously exacerbating land-use changes or financialisation, and concentrating access to land and markets. In this scenario, small-scale farmers and rural communities struggle to adapt to the changing conditions while keeping their livelihoods. Understanding the implications and impacts of public policy interventions for the digitalisation of European agriculture is crucial, yet there remains a gap in research on the available evidence.

The aim of this communication is to present the preliminary findings of a systematic map, a form of evidence synthesis useful to reviewing the range of policy instruments, strategies, and governance implemented or suggested for implementation with regards to digital agriculture by EU governments, international bodies and other diverse stakeholders. Additionally, it intends to scrutinise the rationale behind these policies and their main socio-ecological implications, to shed light on benefitted and injured parties and highlight the main research gaps and contradictions that could exist between scientific evidence and implemented policies.

Finally, this systematic map will deliver improved guidance in policy and decision-making towards more informed and inclusive strategies for the transformation of European food systems towards sustainability.

Overcoming market exclusion and labour shortages: digital-technologies sovereignty cases in rural València (Spain)

Oral

Ms. Cristina Galiana¹, Prof. Guillermo Palau Salvador¹, Ms. Ximena Pardo Fuentes¹

1. Universitat Politècnica de València

Agrarian critical studies have long examined the impact of market-driven innovations and advanced technologies on smallholders, highlighting trade-offs such as power imbalances, inequitable resource access, and dispossession. Despite these concerns, small farmers continue to face challenges like price volatility, financial constraints, limited market access, labor shortages, and climate vulnerability. In this context, digital technology sovereignty and instrumentality debate becomes crucial. This study explores digital technology sovereignty among small farmers and agrifood rural entrepreneurs in rural València, analyzing its role in addressing market exclusion, financial limitations, labor acquisition, and social network enhancement. By examining self-identified “sovereign” success cases, the research seeks to identify desirable pathways for digital technology adoption frames that align with agroecological and sovereignty principles. A qualitative methodology is employed, combining semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis with a coding system capturing both internal and external factors shaping digital technology suitability and agroecological principle’s alignment. Preliminary findings suggest that self-perceived yet structural constraints drive adoption, while labour dignity and labour substitution are the most cited outcomes. However, respondents report challenges such as lack of open-source training, digital burnout, and the burden of multi-tasking when digital-technologies are deployed to solve specific constraints. Notably, environmental concerns related to digital technologies receive little attention. This research provides actionable insights for policymakers and rural stakeholders seeking to envision fair and agroecological digital transformations in rural agrifood systems.

keywords: digital sovereignty, smallholders, labour, agroecology

Post-automated food systems: Untangling the meanings of automation to prioritise sustainability, health, and fairness in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Oral

Dr. Raquel Ajates ¹

1. UNED

The food system is entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution through novel mergers of disruptive technologies, generating unprecedented changes in food production and governance. These changes share an underlying policy and industry vision of automation. The food system has always been the canary in the automation mine, with each industrial revolution leading a series of transformative changes in rural farming communities and the food supply chain, giving way to far-reaching consequences and complex debates. Thus, the importance and timeliness of unpacking the diverse meanings of automation and where they are heading us, cannot be overstated. With a logic of resistance to a future of digital feudalism, the concept of ‘post-automation’ is emerging, defined by Smith and Fressoli (2021) as the common capabilities that enable people to subvert and appropriate technologies to achieve more open futures and challenge the deterministic essentialism of the current automation model. Analysing the concepts of automation and post-automation from a critical food studies lens, this paper contributes to the understanding of the politics entangled in discourse around new industry developments, social transformation and regulatory ambitions for food system automation. Using interpretative analysis, I examine both concepts to reveal the multiplicities of intended and unintended effects of word choice and use. I apply two key interpretivist concept elucidation strategies, i.e. *grounding* and *exposing*. Last, I consider current instances of post-automation in the food system, worth exploring to move us away from dystopian automated futures into shared post-automated futures of policy coherence and a focus on sustainability, creativity and wellbeing.

Keywords: Fourth Industrial Revolution, automation, post-automation, open source seed, farm hacks, policy coherence, citizen science

Reflexivity and parsimony: relational issues with digital tools in peasant farmers networks

Oral

Prof. Julien Blanc¹, Mrs. Maeva Mailliard¹

1. Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris

As environmental anthropologists, we are interested in “human-non-human” worlds as wholes, how their colonization by digital devices tends to reconfigure them, and how they resist. If digital tools are colonizing human worlds for a few decades now, a new acceleration seems to be underway, prompting sharply contrasting reactions, from admiration to fear, and unbridled adoption to profound rejection. Faced with this acceleration, it seems all the more important to give ourselves the means to slow down, take the time to weigh up the pros and cons of this new modernizing thrust and identify what we can gain from it and what we risk losing. In this respect, intense debates are taking place in the “agricultural worlds”, perhaps even more so among those involved in building a peasant alternative. We propose here to bring together 1) an in-depth ethnographic study of daily life on-farm of small-scale, low-mechanization, agroecological farmers in southern France, showing the logics underlying decisions regarding technical adoption, 2) preliminary studies of a few peasant farmers groups in France (members of the French “Peasant Seed Network”, the self-building coop. “L’Atelier Paysan”, CIVAM or FADEAR groups), 3) a long-term historical approach that highlights the specificity of the trajectories shaped by the coming digital revolution. We’ll use these materials to feed the discussion regarding the extent to which agri-digital tools - and which ones - may (or not) contribute to building diversified and democratic “human-non-human” worlds.

The Digital Divide in the Agricultural Sector in Bulgaria: Inequalities in the Access to Digital Technologies and in their Adoption

Oral

Dr. Dona Pickard¹, Dr. Svetla Stoeva¹

1. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The research explores the key factors leading to inequalities in the access to digital technologies and their adoption in the agricultural sector in Bulgaria and seeks to answer how these inequalities affect innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability in the sector. A socio-economic approach is applied, based on digital divide models, which consider inequalities at four levels: physical access to technology, quality of access, digital literacy, and socio-cultural barriers. The data used in the research is from non-representative quantitative and qualitative studies on attitudes toward digitalisation and innovation in agriculture, conducted within a research project funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission and activities for accelerating digitalisation in agriculture funded by the Digital Europe programme. The results show that inequalities exist at all four levels of the digital divide, with small and specialised farms being the most affected. Farms with more resources, especially grain producers, have better access to basic technologies such as GPS systems, while smaller farms struggle due to a lack of financial and infrastructural resources. The lack of digital skills, especially among older farmers, and socio-cultural barriers, such as conservative attitudes, slow down the adoption of digital technologies. In conclusion, the study highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve digital infrastructure, develop skills, and overcome socio-cultural barriers to promote digitalisation in agriculture.

**24. Frontiers in
agricultural
territorialization:
Economic viability,
socio-ecological
sustainability and the
future of food systems**

Agroecology and the state: From rejection to “they should pay us for what we do”

Oral

Dr. Patricia Homs Ramírez de la Piscina¹

1. Department of Economic History, Institutions, Politics and World Economy, University of Barcelona and Food Action and Research Observatory (FARO)

In Catalonia (Spain), the expansion of agroecology started in the 1990s through a wide range of actors and projects, among which alternative food networks (AFN) stand out. These networks are formed by consumers organized into groups or consumer cooperatives and farming projects that supply them with fresh food. The networks are structured based on direct relationships without intermediaries, trust, reciprocity, and commitment.

Some of the limitations of these AFN are related to the reproduction of inequalities in terms of class, gender, age, functional diversity, eating and cooking habits, and cultural practices, the lack of democratization of care within the collectives, direct relationship, dependence on unpaid labour, the size of the collectives, and especially the economic non-viability. In this context of economic unsustainability, many projects depend on loans, public subsidies, and unpaid work, the so-called self-exploitation.

This paper addresses the changing role of the state in these networks over the past 25 years in the context of sustained economic non-viability. Thus, in the early 2000s, the state's participation was rejected, with a stance of self-management and autonomy. This rejection materialized in various practices, such as the desire to remain without formal legal status, the rejection of third-party certification of organic agricultural production, and the rejection of public subsidies. However, since 2020, voices have emerged calling for a change in the concept of subsidies, which should be understood as a recognition of the unpaid work performed by these collectives in the form of environmental, social, and community benefits.

Despite the recent recognition by the state of agroecology as an essential strategy in the ecosocial transition, agroecological farmers and consumers still believe that current support is insufficient. In this regard, they demand structural changes in food policies to ensure the sustainability of the networks and their key role in the ecosocial transition.

Agroecology in Colombia, an approach to the challenges over the last 5 years

Oral

***Dr. JULIANA Cepeda Valencia ¹, Ms. Nathaly Jimenez Reinales ², Prof. Lizeth Manuela Avellaneda ³,
Prof. Ana María Castro ¹, Prof. Arlex Angarita ⁴***

1. Universidad de la Salle, 2. RENAF, 3. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 4. Universidad Minuto de Dios

Agroecology in Colombia emerged in the late 1980s as a response to the social and environmental problems generated by the green revolution. During 1980-2015, academies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were the most prominent actors in the promotion and development of agroecology. Peasant farmers and ethnic communities also have played a key role in implementing and disseminating agroecological practices, contributing with their traditional knowledge, experiences, and preservation of native and criollas seeds. In recent years, agroecology has been positioned as an effective tool for socio-technical innovation to strengthen agri-food systems, focusing on sustainability and adaptation to climate change. Some challenges, like lack of policies and lack of training and education in agroecology, were partially overcome in the country but others related to limitations in infrastructure, access to resources, and financing make it challenging to implement and scale up agroecological practices. Also, competition with conventional agriculture and cultural and social acceptance in some regions.

Carp, Conservation, and Controversy: The Role of Pond Farmers in Making Rural Futures

Oral

Prof. Laura Otto¹

1. Würzburg University

Carp pond farming in Central Europe exemplifies the paradoxes faced by small and medium-scale food producers in the Global North. Pond farming is a historically rooted form of food production, raising questions about the relationship between economic viability, ecological responsibility, and cultural heritage. Their work is embedded in a field of tension where agricultural, ecological, and economic concerns intersect. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the Aischgrund region (Bavaria, Germany, 2024-ongoing), the paper highlights how pond farmers navigate increasing environmental pressures due to climate change, positioning themselves as stewards of biodiversity, arguing that their traditional aquaculture practices support wetland ecosystems and species conservation. The paper examines how carp farmers navigate conflicts over which forms of life should be protected, whose interests should take precedence, and how sustainability is framed in everyday farming practice. Pond farming is an intriguing case because it does not fit neatly into conventional categories of agriculture or conservation, but is entangled in debates over economic viability, conservation priorities, and rural futures. The case study contributes to broader discussions in the panel by highlighting the roles that pond farmers assume—not only as food producers but as environmental caretakers and political actors within shifting agri-food landscapes.

Centering Life in Viability: A Feminist Ethnographic approach to agroecological family farming viability

Oral

***Ms. Cristina Galiana*¹, *Dr. Marina Di Masso Tarditti*², *Dr. Marta Rivera*³, *Dr. Judit Manuel Martin*³,
*Dr. Isabel Álvarez Vispo*⁴, *Ms. Laia Baró Gómez*², *Dr. Mirene Begiristain Zubillaga*⁵**

1. Universitat Politècnica de València, 2. Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya, 3. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 4. URGENCI, 5. Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

The traditional concept of viability, rooted in productivist paradigms, prioritizes capital over life. Drawing on feminist economics and ecofeminism, this research redefines viability by incorporating elements such as reproductive labor, care, self-care, the construction of mutual support networks, and agency in participatory spaces, thereby centering social reproduction and well-being in the analysis of viability. Following a co-designed methodology based on a bilateral reflection process, twelve study cases of women-led agroecological farms joined the research process to develop a participatory farm viability assessment tool. Initial field work consisted of an ethnographic study carried out under a feminist perspective for which three data leverage tools were constructed. An iterative process of dialogue, reflection, and adaptation to fit mutual expectations and accuracy was conducted by a transdisciplinary research team. The study established socially responsible methodological structures, despite bureaucratic challenges, including transparent communication and equitable compensation. Additionally, participatory workshops were organized to validate and influence the findings, contributing to innovative co-creation methods in knowledge generation under a feminist perspective. The research process yielded significant insights into the socio-economic dynamics and challenges faced by women-led agroecological farms while showcasing the effectiveness of a feminist, participatory approach. Furthermore, the incorporation of socially responsible practices, enhanced trust and engagement among participants, establishing a model for ethical research in similar contexts. This research not only expands the methodological repertoire of feminist ethnography but also provides a replicable framework for integrating feminist economic principles into agroecological assessment development, ensuring that life and well-being are prioritized in the pursuit of viability.

Competitiveness strategies within pre-selected agricultural producers in Central Bohemia in the Czech Republic

Oral

Mrs. Klara Prajsova ¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

The study explores a range of current challenges in agri-production among pre-selected producers in the central region of Bohemia in the Czech Republic. It is focused on their present situation, the values, practices, difficulties and opportunities in sustainable and worth living concept.

The aim was to examine and summary the agricultural sector in the selected region taking into an account traditional and modern agri-production approaches including promotion strategies. Additionally, to assess the importance of collaborative efforts, connections, solidarity, experiences and practices under the impact of national and EU policies.

Data were gathered via questionnaires and discussions, on-site observations, and a document review.

The findings indicate the viable competitiveness strategies and also recognize key factors affecting sustainability, resilience and technological adoption. The study provides significant insights into rural agriculture in Central Bohemia.

Expanding the livelihoods reproduction framework in the assessment of farm viability

Oral

Prof. Marta Rivera ¹, Dr. Marina Di Masso Tarditti ², Dr. Judit Manuel Martín ¹, Ms. Laia Baró Gómez ², Ms. Cristina Galiana ³, Dr. Mirene Begiristain Zubillaga ⁴, Dr. Isabel Álvarez Vispo ⁵

1. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 2. Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya, 3. Universitat Politècnica de València, 4. Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 5. URGENCI

The livelihoods reproduction framework (LRF) enlarges the agrarian question debate around peasants' continuation despite adverse social, political, ecological and economic conditions. By focusing on reproduction and adding a feminist economics and ecofeminist perspective to the assessment of farm viability, goes beyond monetary analysis. Interdependence and the need to examine relationships and strategies that take place within the household become central in peasants' viability. The LRF delves into four dimensions, closely connected and interacting: *livelihood resources*; *internal organization and interdependence*; *capacity for learning* and *external organization and interdependence*, with *power* and *institutions* as cross-cutting (yet understudied) dimensions). The use of the LRF for farm viability analysis allows a better understanding of the strategies implemented by peasant-based farms to guarantee their reproduction, which often escape the money-only logic. Based on the empirical analysis of 12 agroecological farms, we revisit and enlarge the initial proposal of the LRF by identifying new attributes and expanding existing ones. Our work suggests that the *livelihood resources* dimension, that determines the strategies available in every farm, and centred around the material and non-material capitals (social, human, financial, natural and symbolic), needs to incorporate policies as an attribute that facilitates or impose barriers to the implementation of viability strategies. Also, the *symbolic capital* attribute, linked to identity and subjective values, plays a stronger role than initially expected. Identifying the "center" of the project, i.e., the subjective vital reasons around which farming activities are organised, is crucial for the understanding of the strategies performed by small farmers. These can be productive, a closer connection to nature, an ideal way of living or parenting children in a better environment. Finally, we found that the different strategies implemented to ensure farm viability in the different dimensions of the LRF are oriented to increase livelihood resources, whether in their material or non-material basis.

Exploring the viability of territorial-based alternative food networks for municipal food supply: from local farm to public plate amid food governance crisis

Oral

Ms. Courtney Adamson¹, Dr. Rebecka Milestad²

1. Department of sustainable development, environmental science and engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), 2. Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI) & Department of sustainable development, environmental science and engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)

Existing structures and processes governing food systems in Europe are questioned for their ability to ensure food security, the health of humans, non-humans and ecosystems, decreased environmental and climate impacts, and social equity and justice. In short, research highlights the need for new modes of governance that can better handle food system complexity.

Alternative Food Networks (AFN) are broadly studied as an alternative paradigm capable of providing solutions for current food system crises and challenges. However, researchers also highlight AFNs as either sites of possibility, or of potential dominance that re-enforce the status quo. It is therefore an oversimplification to view AFNs as unproblematic solutions for sustainability transitions or transformations. Rather, it is important to study how AFNs evolve in specific social-ecological contexts.

This presentation introduces the results of an ethnographic study involving interviews and participant observations focusing on food practitioner (farmers, wholesalers, cooperatives, cooks, municipal meal designers etc.) experiences of a territorial-based AFN. The AFN involves local and regional supply systems for fruit and vegetables to municipalities in the region of Sörmland, Sweden. In focusing on practitioner perceptions and practices, the study identifies both supporting and inhibiting material and non-material factors affecting the viability of the AFN. Results indicate both the opportunities and challenges for prioritising the multidimensional values of local and regional food production given current governance arrangements for municipal food supply. The findings are discussed in light of existing research on food system governance and highlight governance arrangements that can support the sustainable existence of AFNs.

Keywords: governance, AFN, municipalities

More than money: Economic diversity in four Dutch food forests

Oral

Ms. Anna Roodhof¹

1. Wageningen University

Food forestry is an emerging land-use practice in the Netherlands and elsewhere (Roodhof, 2024; Albrecht & Wiek, 2021). Food forestry is characterized by its multifunctionality, uniting food production, biodiversity restoration, recreation, and educational activities (Park et al., 2018; Albrecht & Wiek, 2021; Roodhof, 2024). The economic viability of food forests as an agricultural business remains a point of discussion, as many food forests have a prolonged start-up phase and as of yet, few have fully developed (Albrecht & Wiek, 2021). Economic viability here refers to the profitability of food forests and is often limited to food production. However, this definition offers an incomplete view on the economic composition of food forests. This study therefore applies Gibson-Graham's (2008) diverse economies framework to four – very different – food forests in the Netherlands to gain a better understanding of the economic activities that take place in and around food forests. It adopts a more inclusive definition of economy, including any practice that contributes practitioners' livelihoods. Following Vincent and Feola (2020), this study investigates ontological and epistemological understandings of practitioners and their relation to the state along with economic activities in which they engage. Using extensive participant observation combined with semi-structured interviews, it demonstrates a rich economic diversity that stretches far beyond financial revenue. While each of the four food forests functions within a national economy where capitalist economic practices seem to dominate, practitioners adopt a broad range of – often innovative – economic practices to ensure their livelihoods through food forestry.

Keywords: food forestry, diverse economies, economic viability, rural livelihoods

No Magic wand: Uncovering Transformative Practices in Alternative Food Networks

Oral

***Dr. Shadi Hashem*¹, *Dr. Mingyuan Chen*², *Mr. Wojciech Zawadzki*³, *Dr. Katrin Prager*¹, *Prof. Mikołaj Czajkowski*³, *Prof. Alex Inman*²**

1. University of Aberdeen, 2. University of Exeter, 3. University of Warsaw

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) have emerged as bottom-up initiatives, providing pathways to drive sustainability in food provisioning systems. Their transformative potential lies in the short supply chain structure, which facilitates food re-localisation and re-socialisation. However, much existing research focused on their embedded values and potential impact in alleviating strains associated with capitalist markets; leaving our understanding of the key operational mechanisms and practices that enable sustainability in AFNs somewhat fragmented.

To address this, social practice approach was utilised to explore the process of ‘doing’ and provide insights into how sustainability is developed and maintained within AFNs. Two in-depth qualitative case studies using semi-structured interviews with AFNs organisers and participants (e.g., farmers/producers and consumers) were conducted in two third sector-led AFNs in Europe: an ecological farmers’ market in Poland and a digital local food hub in the UK.

The findings highlight that AFN organisers act as change agents by mobilising resources, providing infrastructure and leadership to drive change. Specifically, sustainability in AFNs emerges from a constellation of practices, where organisers’ sustainability strategies become institutionalised and socially constructed through three key practice elements: cooperation, improvement, and relational governance. These practices promote social and human capital through building shared understanding, collective engagement and learning, contributing to revitalising socio-cultural and socio-ecological meanings in food provisioning. Nonetheless, these AFNs face challenges such as limited financial resources and low demand rooted in unsustainable consumer culture, which necessitate creative marketing strategies and transformative policymaking to support their scalability and replication.

Short Food Supply Chains and Social Network Analysis in Bogotá's Urban Agriculture: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Food Systems

Oral

***Mrs. Laura Cabrera Téllez*¹**

1. Bogotá Botanical Garden

Urban agriculture (UA) represents a key strategy for enhancing food security and fostering socio-ecological sustainability in rapidly urbanizing areas. However, small and medium-scale urban farmers often struggle with market access, financial viability, and recognition within dominant food policies. This study explores the commercialization dynamics of 35 urban farms in Bogotá, Colombia, through Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) and Social Network Analysis (SNA), identifying key actors, structural challenges, and pathways toward a more sustainable urban food system.

Our findings reveal that direct sales (83%) and digital platforms (31%) are the primary commercialization strategies, enabling farmers to retain value and strengthen consumer relationships. However, integration into formal markets, such as municipal food procurement programs, remains limited due to regulatory and financial constraints. SNA results indicate a highly centralized food network, where a few actors—particularly local buyers and institutional programs—control market access. This structural imbalance contributes to the precariousness of urban farmers, mirroring the economic fragility observed in small-scale rural farms.

This study contributes to the broader debate on the undervaluation of non-monetary aspects of food production, such as biodiversity preservation, traditional knowledge systems, and community resilience. By exploring how urban farmers navigate economic and policy constraints through localized food systems, our findings highlight the urgent need for participatory policy frameworks that strengthen SFSCs, enhance institutional support, and embed urban agriculture within sustainable food governance strategies. This presentation will delve into the methodology, key findings, and policy implications, offering insights into how alternative food networks can foster more resilient and equitable urban food systems.

Social farming in the face of demographic challenges in Europe - case study in Poland.

Oral

Prof. Piotr Nowak¹

1. Jagiellonian University, Kraków

The care farms is an innovative solution of demographical problems which are connected with social ageing, shrinking population and other issues regarding care services in rural areas in Europe. The idea of care farm consists in the combination of the multifunctional agriculture with social services on the local level. The aim of the Polish GROWID project is to develop and implement a model of “care farm”, which would be acceptable in polish specific legal, demographic, social and cultural conditions. The research tasks are: Searching for informal types of care services for seniors within cooperation networks in rural areas. Diagnosis of social attitudes towards elderly people and demands for care services. Costs analysis and defining the potential of local authorities and local farmhouses to implement the idea of social farms. Identification and evaluation of previous initiatives preventing aging and shrinking rural population in Poland. In my presentation I will present an outline of the model of caring farms built on the basis of research conducted in Poland and comparative studies in the Italy and Norway.

Wild Experiments? Restricting Narratives in Research on Alternative Food and Agriculture Networks

Oral

Dr. Moritz Maurer¹

1. Independent Researcher

This contribution reviews the body of research on Alternative Food and Agriculture Networks (AFNs). Consistent with previous reviews on the subject, it concludes that the assumed advantages of AFNs require more rigorous verification. However, this review goes further by arguing that the proclaimed experimental appeal of AFNs is not taken seriously enough. It identifies three narratives that overly constrain what AFN researchers consider to be valuable AFN experiments: Alienation-Reembedding, Corporatization-Democratization, and Technologization-Detechnologization. Weaknesses in these narratives highlight missed opportunities to enhance variance in AFN experiments, which could generate much-needed insights for advancing sustainable food production.

(https://osf.io/preprints/osf/u2tyv_v1)

25. Quantifying the environment and the reshaping of social and natural relationships

Climate Migration in the Arctic

Oral

Prof. Guangqing Chi¹

1. Pennsylvania State University

Life in the Arctic can be tough. In addition to the livelihood difficulties, climate change is making Arctic life increasingly challenging. Arctic temperatures are rising four times faster than in lower-latitude regions. Some of the hardest-hit places are rural, coastal, predominantly Indigenous, communities. Many such communities face multiple urgent climate-related challenges, including thawing permafrost, rising sea levels, declining sea ice cover, coastal erosion, and extreme storms. One response to these challenges is to relocate the entire community. Individuals and families may also choose to migrate to urban centers because of compounding climate and social factors. But still many people choose to stay despite the challenges. Research on Arctic out-migration and relocation has been minimal, even for the most threatened communities. Thus, it is important to develop better understanding of migration drivers and make policy-relevant recommendations to tackle the challenges faced by Arctic communities.

In this study, I ask: What roles do environmental, sociocultural, policy, and economic factors, and their interactions, play in migration decision-making in the Arctic communities and at what scales? The findings indicate a strong need for communities under climate-related threats to relocate, but no clear evidence of climate-driven migration at the individual/household level. Migration in the Arctic is primarily driven by employment, education, healthcare, cultural, and infrastructural factors. The staying factors that keep them attached to their communities include family, culture, feeling safe, subsistence life, sense of community. This study calls for further research into disentangling climate and environmental drivers from other migration push factors.

26. Gender equality and the liveability of agriculture and rural futures

A Feminist Critical Analysis of the Common Agricultural Policy: Examining Its Impact on the Lives of Extensive Livestock-Farming Women in Catalonia

Oral

Ms. Maria del Mar Calvet Nogués¹, Dr. Marta Rivera¹, Dr. Federica Ravera Cerda²

1. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 2. Universitat de Girona

The research presented is part of the doctoral thesis titled “*A Critical Analysis of the Common Agricultural Policy for an Ecofeminist Agroecological Transition of Spanish Food Systems.*” This study aims to contribute to advancing a feminist agroecological food transition. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the most significant policies of the European Union, shaping the agricultural model and rural development strategy adopted by member states. Throughout its long history, the CAP has been criticised for generating profound gender inequalities, even fostering a process of women’s disengagement from agriculture.

Despite this, women leading agroecological farming projects have been recognised as key actors in building food systems capable of addressing current socio-environmental crises. Given the CAP’s substantial influence, this study applies a feminist critical analysis based on Carol Bacchi’s “*What’s the Problem Represented to Be?*” approach and the ecofeminist theoretical framework. The objective is to determine the types of food systems promoted by CAP measures and assess the position of women within this framework.

Beyond analysing policy documents, the study examines the lived effects of the CAP on extensive livestock-farming women in Catalonia, Spain. By incorporating their narratives and those from social movements where they are involved, the research seeks to identify the limitations they face in their daily activities and the structural constraints shaping their trajectories.

#WPR approach

#Policy analysis

#Ecofeminism

Breaking Barriers: Narratives of Women Village Cadres from Three Rural Communities in China

Oral

Ms. Chengxi Liu¹, Prof. Bettina Bock¹, Prof. Tialda Haartsen¹

1. University of Groningen

While existing knowledge has covered the barriers rural women encounter in public participation, there is a need to gain insights into the experiences of women who manage to get elected in the generally male-dominated local governance. These women can be considered as role models for other rural women, and analysing their pathways to election can contribute to academic and practical understanding. This study focuses on female village cadres who have broken through traditional gender biases to enter the local governance in rural China and explores why they succeeded in being elected as village cadres. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews in conjunction with policy and literature analyses, based on fieldwork conducted in three rural areas of China: Sichuan, Jiangxi, and Yunnan provinces. The findings indicate that the election of women as village cadres is influenced by a combination of personal capabilities, local cultural norms, the policy environment, and broader societal changes. Each narrative is unique and based on different context, but common patterns can be identified that are relevant for other rural women, both in these three provinces and beyond.

Bridging Tradition, Innovation and Inclusion: the evolving role of women in rural entrepreneurship – a case study in Umbria.

Oral

Ms. Silvia Scarafoni¹, Mrs. Paola de Salvo¹

1. Università degli studi di Perugia

Agriculture and rural entrepreneurship have long been rooted in tradition, often characterized by male leadership. However, recent years have seen a growing presence of women who integrate traditional practices with innovation and inclusive approaches, particularly in rural areas. This study examines this transformation through a case study of *Il Sentiero delle Fate*, a farm in Castelluccio di Norcia, in Umbria, an Italian region severely impacted by the 2016–2017 seismic swarm. The farm exemplifies how female entrepreneurship fosters resilience, economic revitalization, and social inclusion in fragile territories.

According to the Seventh General Census of Agriculture (ISTAT, 2021), women represent 31.5% of farm owners in Italy, with a higher presence in central and southern regions. However, female-led farms and businesses tend to be smaller and economically less competitive than those managed by men. The Gender Equality Group established by CREA (2024) reports that only 23% of livestock farms are managed by women, highlighting persistent structural and cultural disparities. Despite these barriers, women are redefining agricultural and business models by merging heritage-based knowledge with contemporary innovations, particularly in marginalized areas.

Regarding the methodology, a qualitative approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights into the experiences, challenges, and inclusive strategies implemented by the female farm owner. This method allows for an exploration of both subjective narratives and structural constraints, offering a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between gender, entrepreneurship, and rural development. This study contributes to the broader discourse on women's role in agricultural diversification, entrepreneurship, and inclusion. The 2023–2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) supports such transformations through targeted incentives, fostering sustainability, equity, and community resilience. Strengthening policies to remove systemic barriers is essential to achieving full gender inclusion, particularly in disaster-affected regions where revitalization and social cohesion are crucial.

Farming, Women and the Law: Patriarchal practices and the potential role for prenuptial agreements

Oral

Dr. Mary Curtin ¹, Dr. Caroline Murphy ¹, Dr. Una Woods ¹, Prof. Christine Cross ²

1. University of Limerick, 2. Napier Business School

This research assesses the extent to which prenuptial agreements can potentially have a positive role in farming relationships for a female partner. The potential role of prenuptial agreements in family farms is examined and whether they may act as a vehicle and precursor of change. This research takes an original approach looking specifically at prenuptial agreements from a gender angle discussing issues such as autonomy, contractual freedom and feminomics to create a pathway towards greater participation specifically in farming relationships. The paper considers the context of prenuptial agreements, looking at how these agreements can be used as tools to address unequal/gendered farm ownership.

The paper utilises farm ownership in Ireland as a case study. Ireland is a useful context by which to illustrate how these issues might play out in a particular context. Ireland ranks below the EU average in terms of female farmers and there have also been two Irish reports attempting to reform the area of prenuptial agreements that have yet failed to materialise into a change in policy.

Feminising Agriculture: A Manifesto for a Reproductive Landscape

Oral

*Ms. Georgia Maria Drakou*¹, *Ms. Vicky Bali*¹, *Ms. Nathalie Peeters*¹

1. ETH Zurich

Feminising Agriculture explores the intersections of landscape, labor, and gender in rural Switzerland, adopting an interdisciplinary approach to examine how feminist perspectives can reshape our understanding of both rural and urban life and infrastructure. By doing so, the project seeks to foster more sustainable, equitable, and nurturing relationships between people, the land, and non-human agents.

Central to this exploration is the symbolic tale of the “Three Daughters,” which serves as a narrative framework for rethinking agriculture and the societal roles of women and young girls, particularly in male-dominated spaces such as farming and land stewardship. This story becomes a lens through which to challenge entrenched gender inequalities in education, professional practice, and land ownership, while imagining new possibilities for inclusion and equity.

By questioning and critically examining current socio-environmental structures, the project envisions a future where gender-sensitive policies honor the labor of all people—particularly women—while recognizing the vital interdependence between human and ecological systems. It calls for the dismantling of hierarchical and masculinist models of agriculture and land use, proposing instead a holistic and inclusive approach that prioritizes care, collaboration, and sustainability.

Ultimately, *Feminising Agriculture* invites us to imagine landscapes that nurture both human and environmental reproduction, contributing to a more just and regenerative future for all.

Gender equality for rural and farm women in Europe: lessons from GRASS CEILING, FLIARA and SWIFT

Oral

***Prof. Sarah (Sally) Shortall*¹, *Dr. Maura Farrell*², *Prof. Marta Guadalupe Rivera*³, *Dr. Marta Rivera*³**

1. Newcastle University, 2. University of Galway, 3. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV)

Three Horizon Europe projects have been researching gender equality for rural and farm women over the past two and a half years. In this session there will be a discussion about our key findings. We will also discuss the different ways in which we engaged women throughout our projects, their role in co-production and what they gained from the project. We consider differences across European countries. We will discuss what we see as the key way forward for European policy makers. We will welcome questions and debates about our methodologies, the process of applying for Horizon Europe funding, and what we have learned.

Gender Mainstreaming in the German CAP strategic plan – focus 2nd pillar

Oral

Dr. Juliane Zazie von Davier¹, Mrs. Petra Raue²

1. Thuenen Institute of Farm Economics, 2. Thuenen Institute of Rural Studies

Equality between women and men has been a cross-policy objective of the EU since 1999. Earlier studies found that this cross-policy objective has so far been little addressed. To what extent the German CAP Strategic Plan takes the objective of gender equality into account with focus on the design of the 2nd pillar funding programmes financed by the EAFRD is discussed in this contribution. As a starting point, in addition to the CAP Strategic Plan document, the funding guidelines of the federal states for the implementation of the individual EAFRD interventions were evaluated. The results of the screening were afterwards discussed with key stakeholders. At the end, the screened interventions have been linked to the related funding leading to a first approach of gender budgeting in the German CAP-SP. Structural disadvantages of women, especially in the agricultural sector, are hardly addressed in the German Strategic Plan. Funding requirements especially in the interventions regarding investment in agricultural equipment are better suited to male farm managers and farm successors than to their female counterparts. In the area of rural development, there is still great potential for the further development of support programmes and a lack of specific measures to compensate for structural disadvantages of women. Only a very small proportion of the funds in the German CAP-SP provide an impetus for gender equality or have a clear potential to do so. To enhance gender equality in the future, gender mainstreaming should be pursued more consistently in programming and implementation.

Keywords: Rural development, Common agricultural policy, Gender equality

Gender Responsive Budgeting as a way to make to European agriculture policies more inclusive

Oral

Ms. Louise Legein¹

1. Oxfam België/Belgique

Gender norms, cisheteronormativity as well as racial capitalism contribute to the unfairness of European agriculture.

One promising tool to address those inequalities is the Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) approach, which assesses the incorporation of a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and the restructuring of revenues and expenditures.

Looking at the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is essential, as it counts for 30 % of the EU long-term budget. Experiences of the implementation of GRB both in the Global South and in some European countries show the potential and barriers of it so far.

It highlights the need to train policy makers and civil servants to ensure that those responsible for applying GRB are aware of the importance of addressing inequalities in agricultural policies. In Ghana, NGOs have organised capacity building tours to remedy the government's failure to implement GRB in a lasting manner despite its goodwill at the start of the process.

Another important issue is the contradiction between EU and national policies. Until recently, CAP Direct Payments regulations did not allow Member States (MS) to implement specific actions for female farmers. Advocacy from the Spanish governments and farmer organisations helped changing this, even though current actions remain insufficient.

Finally, budgetary processes are traditionally unfair, particularly because they are managed by already privileged players. They therefore need to be completely redesigned. It is also an opportunity to integrate an inter-sectional approach, which takes into account the realities of farmers and farm workers in all their diversity.

Gossip and shaming as instruments of power in small communities

Oral

***Dr. Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir*¹**

1. Researcher at Bifröst University

Gossip is often said to thrive in small tightly knit communities and has been considered one of social factors influencing peoples life's and wellbeing. In this presentation I will present my results from a Phd project on the life of women in small rural communities in Iceland. Special focus is on gossip and shaming as a part of social control, and how they are used as instruments of power against women. The study has shown that there are statistically significant relations between migration intentions and perceived gossip, the more the gossip, the more likely people are to want to migrate. There are also really interesting power relations within the gossip agenda, where women often face extensive shaming, mom-shaming and slut-shaming. There is also a challenge in being a single woman in rural communities, especially where gossip and shaming are used to enforce social norms and behavior, often favoring married couples as the norm. Mixed into the gendered shaming are then complex forms of power relations between the locals and non-locals, where the family relations and social capital matters. Research data is based on interviews with young women in small fishing villages in Iceland, conducted in 2019-2021.

Keywords: Gossip, Shaming, Small communities

How does gender shape the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices? Evidence from Belgium

Oral

Mrs. Sophie Henrotte¹, Prof. Goedele Van den Broeck¹

1. UCLouvain

Abstract:

Policymakers and researchers increasingly recognize the urgency of ensuring that agriculture reduces its impacts on the environment. Although this has created a rich literature identifying factors shaping the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices (SAP), the influence of gender on the adoption of SAP remains little to no investigated in high-income countries. However, strong gender dynamics in agricultural settings have been shown to influence labor distribution and access to resources. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 farmers from a diversity of field crops farms in Wallonia, Belgium, and analyzed the data through a thematic analysis, following the theory of planned behavior. Our results suggest that gender plays a significant role in SAP adoption. While confirming the existing literature in the Walloon context, this study provides novel insights into emerging phenomena shaping the future of European agriculture. This will open the discussion on the role that gender plays in transition trajectories, from producers to consumers. We will discuss how gendered social norms influence attitudes towards SAP, how hunting practices are a major driver of the adoption of SAP within men and how sexism prevents women to access information needed to adopt SAP. We will also discuss why women farmers are more dependent on outsourcing of labor and technical advice, and how this impacts SAP and transforms food systems. Including gender in current debates and policies is essential for gender equality and the sustainability of agriculture as women farmers play an increasingly important role in shaping food systems, notably as farm managers.

Key words : Gender, field crops, sustainable agricultural practices

Interrogating policy support of transitioning farm family norms: the case of the Irish farmhouse cheese sector as a site of female agricultural (and cultural) innovation

Oral

Ms. Marie TELLIER¹

1. Université Lumière Lyon 2

The Irish farmhouse cheese sector emerged in the 1970s as a socially created agricultural innovation. It was established by neo-peasants seeking self-sufficiency, ultimately becoming an icon in the contemporary Irish artisan food industry. This innovation arose within gendered family structures on farms, where farming work and domestic work could not be understood as separate entities. Cheese production is considered primarily as a household activity, where wives of dairy farmers initially process milk for family consumption, and secondarily as an economic activity that diversifies the household's income. Female producers thus fulfil their roles both as wives and mothers and their roles as producers, within productive and reproductive domains of work. Once cheese-making is established as an economic activity on the farm, the diversification activity itself along with the family structure catalyses co-construction of new gender norms and this PhD research aims at interrogating the transitional processes within normative farm family structures. Results from field research indicate that while changes in norms and normative structures position work traditionally undertaken by women as valued (socially, culturally and economically) on the farm, traditional inequalities persist regarding women's roles in family and domestic as well as other areas of work and innovation on the farm. To what extent do transitions in norms and structures within family farming – anchored in farmhouse cheesemaking - enable greater and expanded restructuring of farming and domestic work? What possible actions can policy and engaged policy-making take to support transitional processes within gendered farm family norms and structures? This paper presents findings from a qualitative study consisting of interviews, observations and participatory mapping exercises undertaken in Ireland. It seeks to prompt discussions of innovative policy approaches to support transitions in cultural norms and structures within farm families.

NOURISHING FUTURES: WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGROECOLOGY, CLIMATE ADAPTATION, AND PEACEBUILDING

Oral

***Ms. María-Paula Espejo*¹, *Dr. Bárbara Romero Ferrón*²**

1. Western University, 2. Leuphana University

This paper is the second installment of the research project *Gastronomy & Peace*. It examines the transformative role of women in food systems within the context of rural transitions, climate challenges, and resilience-building. Using the Agroecology for Food System Transformation (AFAT) framework, this study maps agroecological principles in ASOCOMAN, a rural Colombian community demonstrating interdisciplinary connections between food systems, sustainable development, and peacebuilding. We use Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyze over 25 semi-structured interviews with community members, offering insights into discourses, challenges, and aspirations shaping food systems transformation. Findings highlight women's leadership in sustaining agroecological practices, fostering biodiversity, strengthening food sovereignty, and innovating in the culinary sector. Their initiatives generate alternative incomes for women farmers and establish new partnerships, reinforcing collective rural organization. Through the combination of AFAT and NLP we identify key themes, including knowledge transmission, gendered labor dynamics, and socio-political mobilization, illustrating how women's voices articulate pathways toward more equitable and sustainable food systems. This study advances rural sociology by integrating gender, agroecology, and computational methodologies. It underscores the need for greater recognition of women's roles in peacebuilding and food system governance, advocating for the use of technological tools to amplify community-based knowledge. Ultimately, it argues that a just and liveable rural future requires reconfiguring power dynamics in food systems to acknowledge and strengthen women's agency.

Keywords: gender, agroecology, climate adaptation, peacebuilding.

Studying obstacles and enablers for women-led socio-ecological innovations in European rural areas: insights from a future foresight study

Oral

Dr. Sabrina Arcuri¹, Mr. Pedro Navarro Gambín¹, Prof. Gianluca Brunori¹

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa

This methodological contribution presents an exploratory foresight study run as part of the GRASS CEILING project to identify obstacles and enablers to women-led socio-ecological innovations in European rural areas. Despite rural women are considered as relevant agents of change for rural development and the ecological transition in EU strategies, policies have not yet satisfactorily addressed the double discrimination they suffer (i.e., the gender gap and the rural-urban divide). Moreover, academic literature about rural women as socio-ecological innovators remains scarce and fragmented, and future studies on rural areas and agriculture are rarely focused on gender issues.

This study – to our knowledge, the first foresight focused on rural women – comprised three phases, designed *ad hoc* to adapt to the needs of the women innovators in GRASS CEILING's living labs (LLs). Firstly, we identified megatrends and drivers of change. Secondly, LLs engaged women innovators in workshops meant to identify present struggles, envision future challenges, and define personas (fictitious characters representative of the women innovators). Thirdly, two online foresight workshops saw participants embodying the personas to explore four plausible future scenarios. As one major value of future studies is to facilitate thinking ahead, charting uncertainties and potential areas of concern, the set of enablers and barriers identified can inform policy recommendations by highlighting: (i) relevant elements to better understand and recognise the contribution of women innovators in future rural areas, (ii) different policy domains which cannot be considered in isolation, and (iii) the need to test strategies against future drivers and context-specific concerns.

Keywords: women-led innovation, rural development, foresight.

Sustainable landscapes through women's eyes: sensory practices and innovations in Lithuanian farming

Oral

Dr. Camille Robert-Boeuf¹

1. PAScapes Center, Vilnius University

In 2020, women accounted for 45% of farmers and played a central role in the division of labour on farms in Lithuania. However, their activities tend to be undervalued because 1) women predominate on small-sized farms and have the least qualified jobs, 2) they often declare another main activity, or 3) their main farming activity is linked to the family's food supply. Nevertheless, these activities are key to understanding the transformation of rural landscapes in Lithuania: they offer innovative ways of responding to environmental and social challenges by proposing adapting agricultural models outside or complementary to the market system. Faced with the significant transformations of the farming sector (i.e. farm concentration, agriculture industrialisation, decline in the agricultural workforce), this paper aims to show the women's capacity to develop new farming practices and sustainable landscapes in Lithuania. This paper is based on a qualitative survey (41 interviews and several ethnographies) and sensory data collection (photographic and sound recordings) conducted in 2024 and 2025 in three rural Lithuanian areas (Skaistgirys, Molėtai and Šalčininkai regions). The paper will show how women's work is linked to sensory practices (combining bodily, sensory and emotional experiences) that are little valued but fundamental to promoting Lithuania's rural future and farming sustainable landscapes. Thus, sensory experiences support the agricultural know-how dissemination among women and legitimise women's work since women farmers often base their skills on manual activities. These experiences also facilitate experimentation with new farming practices (introducing new plants, livestock and food knowledge) and models (agroecology, permaculture, etc.). While highlighting the gender inequalities they face, the paper will focus on how women create new farming landscapes and liveable futures to meet rural challenges in Central Europe (adaptation to climate change, newcomers integration, promotion of empowerment processes, etc.).

The Gendering of Hope: Rural and Farming Women's Biographies of Hope, Care and Resistance

Oral

Prof. Lia Bryant¹

1. University of South Australia

How does hope manifests and what does hope 'do' to shape the course of the intersectional lives of farming women? Hope is a moment of not yet, the directions women might take, what is foregone, what is remembered and what may shape the future. Drawing on biographical methods using in-depth conversational interviews and written memory work exercises with five Australian rural and farming women, I examine how hope emerges and unfolds in tracks of time and in specific moments bringing multiple affects and relations to the fore. Biographical approaches provide detail, depth and nuance to gendered inequalities that are paramount in women's lives. Through women's biographies the ordinary moments – a conversation with a friend, holding a child and driving a tractor can cause a shift or movement in the moment towards hope or hopelessness. The profound moments including death by suicide, family violence, and climatic devastation of land/waterways, insects and animals equally shape daily living as gendered. Examples from women's biographies and written memories show how hope becomes apparent as gendered and relational, connected to acts of giving and receiving care, resistance and ruptures that foreclose or open possibilities.

Key words:

Farm and rural women

Hope and gender

Biographies and Memory work

The Paradox of Resilience: Navigating Gendered Vulnerabilities in Rural Latvia

Oral

Mrs. Weronika Felcis¹

1. PhD Studies in Social Sciences at Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences

Women play a critical role in shaping sustainable and liveable agrarian futures across Europe. This paper explores how rural women in Latvia navigate socio-economic and ecological crises showing local trends in demographics, highlighting their contributions to resilience and rural development. Drawing on Felcis & Felcis (2023), this study examines qualitative insights into Latvian women's lived experiences during recent crises, including economic instability, demographic shifts, and environmental stressors. Findings reveal how gendered labor, informal networks, and care economies function as resilience mechanisms, sustaining both households and broader community structures.

This study situates Latvian women's resilience strategies within broader patterns of multifunctional rural economies contributing to the discussion outlined by García-Vila, Rivera-Ferre, & Chfadi (2024) on how global socio-environmental changes influence local resilience strategies and Shortall's (2017) critical analysis of shifting gender roles in rural households, revealing how historical social structures continue to shape the experiences of women in rural communities today. The analysis highlights how rural women leverage diversification, social capital, and localized economic activities to maintain sustainable livelihoods, yet often copy subconsciously the pattern of behaviours historically dictating survival of Latvian society. This twisted logic of survival rather than resilience, with perpetuating gender imbalance effects in vulnerability of Latvian basic fabric of society. These perspectives provide a comparative lens to assess rural gender dynamics across Europe.

This paper contributes to discussions on gendered sustainability transitions, policy frameworks, and rural resilience by underscoring the importance of policy interventions that recognize and support women's agency in ecological transitions, ensuring more just and sustainable rural futures.

Keywords: *Feminist political ecology, rural resilience, gender, sustainability, Latvia, women,*

The specificities of women's access to and work practices in French livestock farming

Oral

Mr. James Hogge¹, Mr. Christophe Perrot¹, Dr. Elsa Delanoue¹

1. french livestock institute

With the ongoing decline of farms in France, particularly livestock farms, the issue of workforce renewal has become a major challenge for maintaining French agriculture, its know-how, and its professions. While women once made up half of the agricultural population, their numbers significantly declined during the agricultural modernization of the 20th century and now stagnate at 26% of all farm managers. They often engage in specific projects such as farm-stays, direct sales, or organic farming and face specific challenges in accessing or working in livestock farming. Women are more often from non-agricultural backgrounds than men, tending to settle later, after the age of 40, or having shorter careers in the field.

To understand the specific paths of female livestock farmers, the "Women in Livestock Farming" working group of the GIS Avenir Élevages analyzed the trajectories of seventeen established women, identifying the material and social obstacles they face. The study also explored how they integrate into a profession that is both numerically and symbolically male-dominated, and how their gendered experiences influence their work practices. The study reveals four profiles of female farmers: "**traditional female farmers**," who adhere to customary gender roles; "**farmer-women**," who primarily see themselves as agricultural professionals; "**hindered egalitarians**," who face persistent gender norms; and "**committed egalitarians**," who challenge these norms to promote equality of responsibilities between men and women in both domestic and professional spheres.

The study further shows that the material constraints of the profession drive women to transform work practices, often improving the overall health and ease of the entire collective in which they are embedded. These changes, initially intended to ease their workload, also sometimes benefit livestock, underlining the importance of recognizing women's work to address both farmers' well-being and animal welfare.

Keywords :

Livestock farming

Women in agriculture

Work practices

Where are the women farmers? The Gendered effects of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027

Oral

Ms. georgia diamanti¹, Ms. Marije van Santen¹, Dr. Jessica DUNCAN¹, Dr. Bettina Bock¹

1. Wageningen University

The European Commission has made an explicit commitment to gender equality. But how does the EU's oldest and most financially significant policy support this goal? This paper investigates the gendered effects of the latest reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with particular focus on Pillar I (Direct Support and Market Measures). Given that CAP policies are translated into National Strategic Plans, we illustrate and ground our analysis with examples from the Dutch National Strategic Plan. Following a review of the role of women in EU agriculture, we conduct a policy analysis, guided by the framework of feminist institutionalism. It is concluded that the CAP fails to substantially consider women despite the European Commission's explicit commitment to gender equality. Our analysis further shows that some interventions potentially discriminate against women farmers – either creating or further solidifying structural disadvantages.

Women (non)negotiating gender roles in rural peripheries in Transcarpathia, Ukraine

Oral

Dr. Ágnes Erőss¹

1. Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

This paper aims to better understand the emotional and social aspects of the rigidity of gender roles and how these played out in narratives of voluntary (im)mobility (Furlong et al 2022; Mata-Codesal 2015) in the rural peripheries in Transcarpathia, Ukraine.

In Central and Eastern Europe Socialism produced a 'failed emancipation' (Kiczková and Farkasová 1993) of women who, after 1990, ended in more precarious social positions, especially in rural peripheries, typically performing informal and underpaid jobs. Following 1990 migration became a strategy of individual and family sustenance, resulting in gender and age imbalance, especially in rural peripheries. With the ongoing war in Ukraine, the families have separated: men liable to military service left behind their families in Ukraine, while women, stay put and face increased responsibilities at home and within the community.

Global-scale research attests (Webster et al 2018) that war might create space for women to hold new economic positions and accelerate their social empowerment (through community engagement) in the short and mid-term. However, in post-socialist countries civil engagement lags, and the populist revival exacerbates its decline. Under these new circumstances, communities of left-behind women who aspire to self-organization face structural constraints that operate at the social and emotional levels.

Drawing on qualitative field work, including documentary film making, conducted in a village since 2018, I intend to show the emotional and gender aspect of voluntary (im)mobility in rural areas and its relationship with the sustenance of traditional ideas of gender roles, and whether the geopolitical turmoil create space for renegotiating these roles.

Women-led agroecological and liveable farms: subverting gender division of labor?

Oral

**Ms. Cristina Galiana ¹, Dr. Marina Di Masso Tarditti ², Dr. Marta Rivera ³, Dr. Judit Manuel Martín ³,
Ms. Laia Baró Gómez ², Dr. Isabel Álvarez Vispo ⁴, Dr. Mirene Begiristain Zubillaga ⁵**

1. Universitat Politècnica de València, 2. Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya, 3. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 4. URGENCI, 5. Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

The viability of family farms is deeply intertwined with gendered labor dynamics, resource access, wellbeing and decision-making power. Altogether encompassing what we call 'liveability'. A feminist economics perspective unveils how the economic and social sustainability of agroecological family farms often relies on women's productive and reproductive labor, their limited access to productive resources, and their exclusion from agency roles. Agroecology aims to build resilient agrifood systems that support both agroecosystem sustainability, equity and farmers well-being. Agroecological farms perform integrative strategies to farming in order to ensure liveability. However, the transformative potential of agroecological farming is hindered by entrenched inequalities, such as gender division of labor, which affect both farm viability and farmers' well-being. To assess liveability, a set of data leverage tools and indicators was constructed. Objective and perceived over-exploitation, inequalities in time-use allocation and gendered farm and household tasks are analyzed in twelve study cases in Galiza, Catalunya and País Valencià to identify lock-ins affecting viability and its conditioning factors. Initial data analysis suggests overexploitation of farmers and inequalities in time-use allocation, depending on a diversity of internal and external factors. Our initial results provide both a frame to assess agroecological liveability strategies at farm scale and evidence to discuss conflicts at the core of political agroecology and ecofeminist economies, in a context of global change and agrarian crisis.

Women's farm entrepreneuring – Cultivating connections for change

Oral

Dr. Katarina Pettersson¹

1. Swedish University of Agricultural Science

Entrepreneurship discourses have been found to be 'masculinist', positioning men as entrepreneurial individual heroes, often rendering women entrepreneurs invisible (Ahl, 2006; Ogbor, 2000; Pettersson, 2004). Similarly, farmers have primarily been viewed as men – doing 'masculine' things through hard work by tough bodies, including the operation of heavy machinery and tractors (Annes and Wright, 2021; Pilgeram, 2007; Price, 2010; Saugeres, 2002). At the same time, women in farming have been found to be 'the new entrepreneurs' contributing to innovation and development within farming and farming communities (Alston, 2003), creating and catalysing socio-ecological transformations (Bock, 2016; Bock & Shortall, 2017). Still we do not know enough about women's farming and what changes their work bring about. In this paper, we explore the women farmers' entrepreneuring and the changes are they making drawing on in-depth interviews, FGDs and a participatory 'living lab' process involving seven women farmers in a south-central region of Sweden, performed over a (near) three-year period. Throughout this exploration we consider how their gendered identities and care work responsibilities come into play and how they navigate gender stereotypes in their farm entrepreneuring. We approach women farmers' change-making as *entrepreneuring* – an embedded social activity and process connecting people, processes and places (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019). Recently we found farmers are cultivating 'care ethics', leading us to trace an emerging change of the nature of farming from being mainly about cultivating food to cultivating connections (Pettersson & Tillmar, 2022). In this paper we deepen the thinking on building connections in farming by cross-fertilising the entrepreneuring approach with reasoning on care ethics and just sustainabilities, finding that the women, among other things, link humans to animals, and to nature, farms and forests by e.g. producing and selling meat in novel ways; using forests for experiences; developing farm shops and a café.

**27. Rural housing crisis
or rural housing in crisis?
International
perspectives on current
housing challenges in the
countryside**

Addressing the Housing Crisis in Rural and Island Communities: Insights from the ReRIC Project

Oral

Dr. Jane Atterton¹, Dr. Ana Vuin¹, Dr. Francis Naab¹, Dr. Carey Doyle¹, Ms. Lorna Pate¹, Ms. Bryony Nelson¹, Dr. Kate Lamont¹, Dr. Moonsoo Jung²

1. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC, 2. The Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI)

Keywords: Rural Housing, Policy Solutions, Energy Performance Regulations

This research is a part of the 'Reimagined policy futures: Shaping sustainable, inclusive, and just rural and island communities in Scotland (ReRIC)' project, developed under the Scottish Government's RESAS Strategic Research Programme 2022-27. The report examined the housing challenges faced by rural and island communities in Scotland and developed policy recommendations derived from multi-method research, including literature reviews, data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and case studies. Key findings highlight significant price increases in rural and island housing over recent decades, exacerbated by new challenges such as the differential impacts of proposed Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) regulations, which are expected to impose substantial costs on these communities. Primary data revealed three central themes in the lived experiences of residents: (1) Needs, reflecting the mismatch between available housing and residents' affordability and quality expectations; (2) Spillover, showing how housing issues affect other aspects of life, such as family dynamics, community cohesion, and demographic shifts; and (3) Capacity, highlighting infrastructure challenges, inadequate support systems, and limited community involvement in housing decisions. The research underscores that the rural housing crisis goes beyond a simple shortage of affordable housing. The challenges also stem from high energy costs, the need to comply with net-zero regulations, geographic isolation, and a lack of skilled tradespeople. These findings call for integrated, place-based policy solutions that address both local and systemic needs to support the sustainability and inclusivity of rural and island communities in Scotland.

Addressing the Plurality of Materialities and Practices: Towards a Better Understanding of Housing Issues in Rural Germany

Oral

Prof. Annett Steinführer¹, Dr. Aura Moldovan¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

For a long time, housing issues in Germany's rural areas were mainly framed in light of the so-called doughnut effect: Vacant housing units in village and town centres contrast with ongoing land consumption for new housing developments at settlement fringes. Owner-occupied housing in detached homes, as the dominant house type in the new neighbourhoods, was not problematised *per se*, as it is considered both the normalcy and the norm of "good" living in the countryside. Yet in recent years, rural housing markets have experienced profound transitions: The metropolitan housing crisis has been enlarging residential search areas beyond suburbia and, subsequently, changing patterns of internal migration in favour of rural areas. Amenity migration and touristic short-term rentals have further challenged housing materialities and practices, resulting in additional price increases. There is a growing understanding that housing issues cannot be solved by building even more owner-occupied detached homes, but rather that more social, rental and multi-storey housing is needed, for first-time movers, the elderly or seasonal workers, to mention but a few. Therefore, rural housing markets require a critical re-evaluation in terms of their affordability and accessibility for different socio-economic groups, household types and age cohorts.

In Germany, rural housing is not yet an established research field. In our presentation, we want to develop an analytical perspective on topical housing issues and housing inequalities in rural regions and communities. To do so, we will employ various data sources, subjective accounts and local case studies. Furthermore, we aim to identify open research questions.

Keywords: housing inequalities, housing stock, Germany

Assessment of housing in Gödence Village in Türkiye with Life Cycle Analysis Method and development of a holistic sustainable development strategy for the region

Oral

Mr. Onur Ozgur Eser¹, Prof. Mustafa Güneş²

1. Prosumer Life Cooperative, 2. Ege University

The increasing consumption of natural resources and raw materials throughout the production, use, and waste management processes of building materials causes significant environmental harm. In urban areas, the demand for raw materials derived from natural resources and the high levels of energy consumption required for the housing and industrial sectors negatively impact the living environment in rural regions as well. Therefore, there has been a particular effort to ensure that both existing and newly constructed buildings in urban areas meet design goals aligned with zero-carbon and zero-energy strategies. A similar effort is also required to develop design strategies for rural buildings and land use that adhere to low-carbon and low-energy principles.

This study analyzes and compares the energy and carbon emissions associated with all construction processes of three houses located in the Gödence Village, İzmir, Türkiye, with the Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) method. The building materials used in the existing housing in the Gödence were examined through LCA, and the study discusses the potential use of alternative local building materials with lower carbon and energy consumption. As part of the study, interviews were conducted with local community members to address the natural resource issues affecting the region, and these identified challenges were integrated into the LCA of rural housing to develop sustainable strategies. The study aims to serve as a technical guide for the construction of housing in the region, as well as for the renovation of existing buildings, thereby contributing to the implementation of a circular economy.

Keywords: life cycle analysis, natural resource consumption, locally sourced building materials, circular economy

Between innovation and challenge – The governance of shared and communal housing in rural areas in Germany

Oral

Ms. Madeline Brandt¹, Prof. Monika Alisch², Prof. Martina Ritter², Mr. Jakob Domke²

1. Hochschule Fulda, 2. University of Applied Sciences Fulda

Keywords: Communal Housing, Communitization, Housing Policy in Rural Areas

Providing adequate housing for everyone poses an increasingly challenging question for contemporary European societies. Could models of shared and communal housing be part of an innovative, sustainable path out of this housing crisis? However, so far forms of shared housing remains a niche phenomenon for the academic middle class, which rarely attracts those in precarious housing situations. Also, housing projects are less commonly set up in rural areas. In an ongoing empirical research project, the situation and potentials of communal housing – which can occur in forms of both intentional communal housing projects and informal caring communities – in rural areas are explored.

First results stemming from 16 expert interviews with various actors in the field of communal housing in Germany indicate attempts to search for adequate governance arrangements for shared and communal housing structures in rural areas. There are indications that although various institutional players in rural regions have recognized the forward-looking advantages of forms of shared housing (particularly in response to the differentiation of housing needs beyond the nuclear family and an increasing need for care and the avoidance of loneliness in old age), the opportunities to create favorable conditions for shared housing still appear to be limited. Sustainable governance still needs to be shape.

The interviews show such “searching movements” of quite different institutional actors (especially regional and local politics, social work organizations and housing project networks) trying to bridge the gap between those interested in forms of shared housing and those who are responsible for housing.

From Fields to Homes: Housing Realities for International Agricultural Workers in Rural Ontario, Canada

Oral

Dr. Ryan Gibson¹, Mr. Damilola Oyewale¹

1. University of Guelph

Rural communities in Ontario, Canada are confronted with housing challenges related to supply, affordability, and appropriateness. Historically romanticized as places of population decline, rural communities have and continue to witness transformations. Among this landscape, International Agricultural Workers experience heightened housing challenges. International Agricultural Workers are integral to Ontario's agricultural sector and rural communities, yet their housing options often face challenges due to policy constraints and limited resources availability. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, bringing them into sharper focus.

This presentation examines the influence of local, provincial, and federal policies on housing for international agricultural workers in rural communities in Ontario, Canada. This research employs mixed qualitative methods to examine the role of policy in facilitating, hindering, and promoting rural housing for International Agricultural Workers. Key informant interviews were conducted with rural community leaders to understand their realities, to recognize innovative practices, and to identify opportunities for policy changes. Central policies influencing housing were reviewed through a content analysis. Findings from interviews and content analysis were compared with reports from local and regional newspapers.

Findings indicate rural communities often find themselves caught in a policy quagmire. They need to navigate multiple policies, sometimes conflicting, with limited human and financial resources. Policies like the Ontario Provincial Policy Statement aim to guide sustainable land use and development, however, their implementation can inadvertently impact the availability and quality of housing for International Agricultural Workers. The findings challenge the dominant discourse, albeit dated, on rural housing in Canada and offers suggestions for new policy directions.

Housing at estate villages in Nottinghamshire

Oral

***Dr. György Mikle*¹**

1. University of Nottingham

Keywords: estate villages, affordable housing, UK

From the 1970s onwards a large number of regions through rural England have been facing a severe shortage of affordable housing, which goes hand in hand with counter-urbanization and rural gentrification. In most settlements the housing shortage is exacerbated by high real estate prices, especially at areas of outstanding natural beauty and villages of picturesque architectural design. At the so-called estate villages, however, housing processes have been controlled by a limited number of owners. Estate villages were built by landed estates to accommodate agricultural labourers. While most of these villages were sold off during the 20th century, some of them are still in single ownership, in the hands of private companies or public organizations (for instance the National Trust).

The presentation aims to shed light on recent housing processes at estate villages in Nottinghamshire, UK. In this area the majority of villages that were built by landed estates are now dominated by owner-occupied housing, while at some of the villages the latest census data shows high rates of the private rented sector; the latter usually indicates the villages in the hands of one large owner. Besides the structure of ownership, governmental regulations (central, county-level and local) can be looked at. Legislative efforts have often prioritised protection of local architectural heritage and landscape, that usually hinders the availability of affordable housing in the countryside. Determining the key factors forming the processes of local housing markets at estate villages can provide a better understanding of current and future challenges for these settlements.

Housing markets in rural regions – Danish experiences

Oral

Dr. Hans Thor Andersen¹, Dr. Helle Nørgaard²

1. Aalborg University, 2. Build, AAU

Rural housing is a broad and complex topic; demand and supply differs from region to region, so do the quality and amenities (heating system, bathroom etc.). Urbanisation has had a major influence on local rural housing markets; the long-term decline in agricultural employment has steadily imposed depopulation and weakened local housing markets. Industrial restructuring from manufacturing towards services has further added to this trend; in particular the credit crunch or financial crisis back in 2007/8 triggered a substantial deindustrialisation in rural districts. The outcome was a severe decline in housing demand for several years. A new conventional wisdom, that the future belongs to the metropolises, was established in the aftermath of the financial crisis: Well-educated, young people concentrated at large cities while old, less qualified labour remained or even moved to rural areas: The rural areas were narrated as a thing of the past. However, despite the success of this discourse, the realities are more complex: While several rural areas suffer from declining demand and depopulation, others have afterwards experienced growing in-migration, both national and international and consequently an increase in housing demands.

This paper aims at investigating local housing markets in rural Denmark, which includes type of areas and housing qualities. Moreover, the paper intends to uncover affordability of housing in rural districts. Finally, the paper examines recent changes in migration patterns, including employment status and educational level of the new rural migrants and how this influence demographic profiles and futures of rural regions.

International retirees: a new group of rural home buyers

Oral

Mr. Balint Koos¹

1. HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies

The challenges faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged areas are well-documented (outmigration, ageing populations, decline in housing quality and quantity). However, significantly low property prices can also attract new groups of purchasers, potentially mitigating these negative trends. This research focuses on the housing choices of retired individuals engaged in international migration. Members of this group tend to settle in locations with attractive recreational, natural, cultural, and historical attributes (King et al. 1998, 2021, Benson and O'Reilly 2009). However, an analysis of administrative data reveals that in the case of Hungary, there is also a distinct group of older migrants who apply for residence permit in areas with depressed property prices, distant from the primary tourist destinations. Property acquisitions by retired people from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, have shaken up the property market in the southern region of Lake Balaton. In one of the country's inner peripheries, a socio-economically disadvantaged area, property prices have started to rise unexpectedly and house renovation is gaining momentum. Notably, older foreign nationals settling in the area are bringing new impetus and demand to Hungarian rural areas, facing demographic and economic crises. There is a discernible skimming effect in the real estate market (the most desirable properties on the market are purchased by foreign nationals), which adversely affects local young people, initiating their independent lives (in some instances contributing to their outmigration). Interviews indicated that the motivations of the elderly are multifaceted: owning a house with a garden, keeping pets, and lower living costs are the most frequently cited reasons, and in many cases, status protection is also a factor underlying international migration. This aligns with recent studies that demonstrate that low-income retirees are becoming increasingly mobile internationally (Bender et al. 2018; Iorio 2020; Toyota 2022), which in turn affects the destination area's real estate market.

Large Scale Rural Vacant Spaces as Affordable Housing Potential - About invisible vacant structures of the Waldviertel textile industry in Lower Austria, hidden potentials, absent appreciation as well as realizable affordable housing perspectives

Oral

Dr. David Calas¹, Ms. Barbara Calas-Reiberger¹

1. dieTextilfabrik

Vacant Spaces, Affordable Housing, Demographic Shift

Rural areas in Austria exhibit considerable diversity in their formal structures, varying across regions. The northern Waldviertel (W4) is among the areas most affected by depopulation and demographic shifts. These changes, often tied to the dominance of single-family housing lifestyles, have led to the widespread emptying of village cores. This underlines the urgent need for innovative, affordable, climate-friendly, and soil-saving housing solutions.

The (W4) region inherited a rich textile history dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries, characterized by numerous large-scale production buildings located in village centers. Many of these structures, such as the Textile Factory in Hirschbach, now share a similar plight: neglect and decay. Once vibrant hubs of textile production, they now stand as silent witnesses to a bygone era.

The Textile Factory in Hirschbach, an initiative launched in 2022, seeks to unlock the potential of such spaces by adopting innovative approaches to make them attractive and functional for communal living and other uses. This initiative has established a research laboratory to redefine vacancy as an opportunity rather than a negative socio-economic outcome.

Currently, various approaches and models for eco-social vacancy management and permanent housing are being tested. These efforts are implemented under the theme: **“Attractiveness Through Art + Developing Affordable Housing Models for Young People.”**

Simultaneously, a vision development process has been initiated to form a building assembly as a counterpoint to the prevalent owner-occupied detached house model. This aims to provide economic alternatives to the conventional *buy-and-build* paradigm, fostering more sustainable and community-oriented living solutions.

Multistorey housing in villages in north-eastern Germany. Perspectives and challenges

Oral

Mr. Richard Pantzier¹

1. BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg

This contribution delineates the findings of a qualitative case study on extant multistorey residential buildings constructed during the period of the GDR in villages in north-eastern Germany. The study examined three buildings in different villages to determine potential household types that depend on the existence of rented dwellings in rural areas dominated by owner-occupied single-family houses. Secondly, it addresses perspectives and challenges for the rural municipalities that arise from an intended sustainable development, in particular in the case of (yet) municipal ownership. As part of the study, on each of the three examples interviews were conducted with two households and one person with administrative function in the village/ municipality.

The case study emphasises that multistorey residential buildings may facilitate plural and non-linear housing biographies in rural areas and as such can become places of arrival and/ or return to rural areas. Beyond their ecological added value of reducing the amount of land used for housing and increasing the energy efficiency, multistorey residential buildings may also contribute to a more diverse housing supply and thus, demographic diversification of rural areas in north-eastern Germany that usually face ageing and population decline. However, municipal ownership can pose significant challenges for the maintenance of residential buildings, especially for small municipalities, such as serious shortages of both staff and financial resources. Moreover, existing funding programmes so far seem to not meet the specific constraints of little rural municipalities in supporting them in terms of maintaining their housing stock.

Keywords: rural sociology, postsocialist rural areas, non-linear housing biographies

On the conversion and architecture of traditional barns in Austria

Oral

Ms. Marie Reichmann¹

1. Independent

The typology of the barn has stood the test of time as a building used for agricultural purposes. The hand down of farming business including its structures over generations to the present day is common practice. Nevertheless, the typology of the barn is increasingly facing a loss in its original use, followed by vacancy and leading towards a decay of these long-grown rural structures.

Hence dealing with the reuse, conversion and conservation of the barn typology means striving to preserve and sustainably strengthen the essence of the village and thus the community.

Up against the barn typology, one finds detached houses appearing all over former agricultural fields, lacking densified housing alternatives, preserving unsealed surfaces.

Could the typology of the barn, whether as a conversion of an existing structure or in the form of a new built housing project, serve as a potential provider of diverse and densified rural housing whilst sustainably strengthening a regional building culture and its contemporary articulation?

Can we as planners start to raise awareness of the qualities of rural structures and its potential by identifying the potential of the typology of the barn for various household types while counteracting the rapid soil sealing? How do we build in rural areas today and is it appropriate to today's challenges? Which strategies for climate-friendly construction can be applied?

What economic challenges and opportunities does the barn typology present?

On the basis of a field research of selected barns, including a typological analysis of characteristics and photographic documentation, with a focus on the barn typology of the so called "Stallscheune" (*stable barn*) within the region of Villach Land in Carinthia, Austria, the potential that exists in the continuation of this architecture shall be examined. Two design case studies suggest research outcomes and propose recommendations for further research.

RURAL HOUSING IN TRANSITION. HOUSING DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES FOR RURAL REVITALIZATION IN SPAIN

Oral

Prof. Josep Lladós-Masllorens¹, Prof. Soledad Morales-Perez¹

1. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Research on access to affordable housing and associated social tensions has predominantly focused on urban areas, as have most housing policies implemented so far. This urban dependence on housing dynamics entails conceptual and empirical risks that may be relevant for rural areas, especially when despite regressive demographic dynamics, constraints in the residential housing market and narratives of rural life are limiting the revitalisation of rural areas, community well-being and the effectiveness of public policies.

This study aims to explore the key dimensions of rural housing challenges and their potential impact on inequality processes in the context of the energy and digital transitions in Spain. A comparative and longitudinal analysis was conducted in four rural municipalities located in different geographical regions, experiencing severe depopulation rates over the last decade.

A methodological triangulation was applied, involving the analysis of more than 70 statistical indicators and 25 in-depth interviews to key agents from an intersectional perspective. Housing is examined both as a real estate asset and as a family home with emotional and cultural meaning, as well as a social construction that materializes the conception of rurality. In particular, special emphasis is placed on the role of tourism in shaping rural housing markets and its broader implications.

The study identifies key challenges and assesses the importance of various dimensions defining the housing issue. The findings provide insights for the design of public policies targeting rural housing and revitalization and emphasizing the interplay between social, economic and cultural factors, which are fundamental to sustainable rural development.

Unaffordable rural housing in Britain: still no homes for locals.

Oral

Prof. Mark Shucksmith¹

1. Newcastle University

As long as 45 years ago, a book “No Homes for Locals?” (Shucksmith 1981) drew attention to the unaffordability of rural housing in England and the lack of social housing provision in rural areas. Another report “Scotland’s rural housing: a forgotten problem” (Shucksmith 1984) revealed housing challenges in rural Scotland. Today, access to rural housing for all but the wealthiest is widely perceived as one of the most persistent challenges facing rural Britain, documented in numerous studies and official reports, but remaining unsolved. This paper draws on many years of research and policy advice to identify why these problems persist - identifying the power-infused arenas and processes which sustain the unaffordability of housing to rent or buy and the lack of social housing.

The first part of this paper shows how the class-based exercise of power over access to housing, its affordability and its tenure has been the primary motor of post-war social change in rural Britain leading to an ever more socially exclusive countryside. The second part of the paper examines rented housing in rural Britain, exploring why so little social housing is available outside the larger towns and showing how the private rented stock has been depleted. Because of the unaffordability of owner-occupied housing and the lack of social housing, lower and middle income groups have had either to leave the villages in search of cheaper housing in towns, or they have had to live in scarce, poorer quality, insecure private rented housing. In recent years private rents have risen rapidly, increasingly pushing their low income tenants deeper into poverty. The paper concludes by asking who might now achieve the dream of owning a house in the countryside.

**28. Studying islands on
their own terms:
developing research for
liveable island futures**

A Tale of Two Islands: How forms of capital are shaping the fortunes of Scotland's islands

Oral

Dr. Ruth Wilson¹, Dr. Rachel Creaney¹

1. The James Hutton Institute

This paper underlines the importance of studying islands “on their own terms” by highlighting that striking differences can exist between islands that may be assumed by decision-makers and outsider-researchers to face similar opportunities and challenges. It tells the story of two adjacent islands in Scotland that are often considered together because of their geographical proximity and shared transport infrastructure. Through an analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews, we unpack what the islands really do have in common and what makes them different, from the residents’ point of view.

The paper shows that, while one island is delivering a suite of activities that respond to local needs, the other is struggling to build agency and foster empowerment. While one is experiencing a virtuous cycle of community development, the other is fighting to turn the tide on a cycle of decline. Yet both islands are constrained in their capacity by the political, economic and physical infrastructures in which they are situated.

Framing our analysis in terms of human, social, cultural, political and natural capital and the interactions between them, the paper draws out the characteristics of each community and considers how these differences have emerged. We conclude by exploring what type of measures could facilitate sustainable futures for both islands, considering the internal agency of the communities alongside the wider political environment in which they are operating.

Achieving healthy, balanced population profiles in the Shetland Islands

Oral

Mr. Marcus Craigie¹

1. University of Aberdeen / James Hutton Institute

Population decline in Scotland's islands is a longstanding concern, and the most recent population projections published by the National Records of Scotland suggest that the trend is likely to continue in all of Scotland's island local authorities between 2018 and 2043 (National Records of Scotland, 2020). The Scottish Government has set out its ambition to tackle this issue in the National Islands Plan, the first objective of which is "To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile" (Scottish Government, 2019).

In this paper, we ask what this goal might look like in Shetland, Scotland's northernmost archipelago, and how it might be achieved. Drawing on primary data from two phases of fieldwork undertaken in Shetland in 2024; a series of interviews with key informants representing the public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors based in or representing Shetland; and a household questionnaire survey to elicit attitudes and opinions from residents of four areas across the Shetland Islands.

The paper considers how stakeholders and island residents conceptualise a "healthy and balanced population profile". We report on the various understandings from stakeholders and residents across the four case study areas, each of which faces different population challenges and opportunities. Further exploring these findings in the Shetland context, the paper asks how policies might be designed to help achieve a healthy, balanced population profile in the Shetland Islands.

Keywords: repopulation, Scotland, islands

National Records of Scotland (2020) *Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2018-based)*. National Records of Scotland. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk>

Scottish Government (2019) *The National Islands Plan: Plana Nàiseanta nan Eilean*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot>

Collaborating to effect sustainable change: Scottish islanders and animal disease control

Oral

Dr. Niamh Mahon¹, Dr. Claire Hardy¹

1. The James Hutton Institute

Key words:

Scottish islands; animal disease; participatory research

Abstract:

Engaging communities in collaborative, participatory research can aid in building agency and create sustainable, long-lasting change for more liveable and resilient futures. This is particularly beneficial for island communities, who face unique challenges and opportunities not felt, or understood in the same way in 'mainland' regions. These approaches can foster collective action in island communities to identify common issues and co-develop solutions. Here we present emerging findings and reflections from an on-going, multi-year project working with animal keepers on Scottish islands, focused on the control of sheep disease. This initially involved working together with crofters and other key groups on the island of Lewis and Harris. Subsequently groups in Shetland and Orkney joined the project to build a pan-island initiative for sharing experiences and developing effective solutions that result in greater empowerment and agency. We also present novel approaches used during the project that have been co-developed by islanders to visualise issues, share insights and ignite recognition. Finally, we discuss the successes and challenges encountered during the life of the project and reflect on the development of collaborative networks which grow beyond a single island or island group and join with other communities facing similar issues. These networks have been facilitated by the project with the aim of growing and developing beyond the life of the research. It is hoped that they will provide opportunities for long-term peer-to-peer exchanges, the sharing lived experiences, and the subsequent co-creation of solutions to create more liveable island futures.

Cultural crossings and connections across (im)material borders amid changing island populations

Oral

Dr. Laura Hodsdon¹

1. Falmouth University

Much of the attention paid to shifting island demographics concerns tangible, measurable domains such as infrastructure, housing, or jobs, as newcomers move in and local people move out. Less well understood is what happens to the cultural and social life of islands amid population and demographic change. Yet ensuring these socio-cultural dimensions thrive is critical to islands' appeal to incomers and in forging identity and connection for people who are already there.

Focusing on the Isles of Scilly, off the south-west coast of the UK, this paper will consider the implicit socio-cultural negotiations, or boundary work, that take place as people come and go, and the nature of the borders that mediate it. The sea is clearly chief among these borders. It simultaneously connects and divides Scilly from mainland Cornwall: connects via common heritage such as fishing and gig rowing, and as an ambiguous 'edge' providing for everyday practice and related identity-building; and practically, as connection to food and other supplies (including tourists). Others experience the border as more bounded: long, expensive, often rough boat crossings, often cancelled due to poor weather; or as an immutable divide from cultural identities of the mainland. At the same time, other visible and invisible borders on land create and are created by collective identity and community whose edges are variously porous. How a border – whether material or immaterial – is perceived and by whom is an important aspect of the intangible socio-cultural negotiations that underpin shifting island life.

Extended capacity: The potential of diaspora contributions in island communities

Oral

***Ms. Kirsten Gow*¹**

1. University of Aberdeen / James Hutton Institute

A long-term pattern of out-migration from Scotland's islands, well documented by both researchers and policy makers, has resulted in a significant population of ex-island residents living 'elsewhere'. While it is widely accepted that migrants often maintain ties with their communities of origin little research has been undertaken into if and how this group of largely internal migrants continue to play a part in community life at a distance. An understanding of the contributions this group can and do make to their origin communities could help inform approaches to creating sustainable futures for these islands, many of which are facing population challenges. This paper will use recent research with members of the Scottish islands diaspora to explore the involvement of out-migrants in community activity in the islands. The research indicates that migrants' continued ties to the island often go beyond friend and family networks to include the wider community, with a range of activity undertaken that both keeps the migrant 'visible' in a community they value and which actively contributes to that community. In continuing their participation in the life of the island migrants are also undertaking activity which contributes to the maintenance and development of place attachment, local knowledge, and social capital – all of which have been shown to be crucial elements in creating resilient rural communities. Depopulation and demographic change in the Scottish islands brings with it many challenges, including those related to capacity and human capital. Attempting to better understand the diaspora as a form of extended community who may offer additional capacity may prove fruitful for those looking to address these challenges, particularly in islands with small populations.

How do new distilleries impact communities in small island settings?

Oral

Mrs. Heather Storgaard¹

1. UHI Orkney

Whisky distilleries have become a popular business idea in small island communities across northern Europe, from their original home regions of Scotland to Arctic Norway, Frisia and the Baltic. For many of the founders, the focus of the distillery is on creating a sustainable, liveable island enterprise that also values the stories and local culture. Often, the Scottish Isle of Islay also known as The Whisky Island is cited as inspiration. However, issues such as space, transportation logistics and requirements for a skilled workforce all challenge the idea of distilleries as an ideal island solution. For my MLitt in Island Studies, I visited islands across the north to discover the impacts distilleries have had and witness a wide variety of models. From a 100% island whisky on Ærø in Denmark to an architecture award-winning distillery site on Myken in Norway, island distilleries have allowed innovation and skill to flourish in locations where economies often struggle. They offer both a tangible island product to sell as well as tourism opportunities. The spaces also have the potential to become cultural hubs, offering locals gathering spaces and connections to art, as seen on the Scottish Isle of Harris and at Faer Isle Distillery in Vestmanna, Faroe. The diverse perspectives of founders and workers will take centre-place in this examination of a perhaps unexpected solution to island employment. I have gathered interviews in local languages where possible (I speak English, German, Danish and some Icelandic) and my artefact may even be drinkable!

community development, alcohol, island-ness

Islands as Intersection? Social and Cultural Change on the Island of Teshima, Japan.

Oral

***Dr. Luke Dilley*¹, *Dr. Meng Qu*², *Dr. Simona Zollet*³**

1. Akita International University, 2. Hokkaido University, 3. Hiroshima University

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Change, Islands, Shima, Japan, Futures

Like many Japanese islands, Teshima is undergoing profound transformations driven by long-term depopulation and ageing. Amidst these demographic changes and the decline of traditional industries, new external influences – particularly art-based tourism – are, however, reshaping island life. This paper presents preliminary findings from qualitative multimedia research examining the social and cultural transitions experienced by Teshima's communities. Our research draws out the complex and sometimes contested nature of island cultural change. While *islands* in English literature are often seen as isolated, our findings highlight historical and contemporary interconnectedness, aligning more with the concept of *shima* in Japanese. Teshima's location along historical trade and pilgrimage routes has long facilitated exchanges with the outside world, positioning it as an island open to external influences rather than one defined by remoteness. The recent influx of artists, tourists, and entrepreneurs drawn by art has brought not only new economic opportunities but also less tangible change. We highlight how socio-cultural transformation on Teshima involves negotiation among multiple stakeholders and while some residents embrace, or at least accept, socio-cultural change and adaptations as a necessary means of survival and continuity, others express concerns about the loss and/or commodification of local heritage and the long-term sustainability of development driven by cultural tourism. By centring islanders' perspectives, this study contributes to broader discussions on the liveability of islands in an era of change. It shows the importance of understanding islands and their futures as dynamic, relational, and shaped by the intersection of historical trajectories and contemporary internal and external forces.

Listening to the Waves: Islanders' Voices and the Quest for Sustainable Futures

Oral

Ms. Angeliki Mitropoulou ¹

1. University of the Aegean

This research explores the intersection of islandness, place identity, and sustainable development through the lens of Greek islands, emphasizing the importance of understanding islands “on their own terms.” It examines how the unique geographical, social, and cultural characteristics of islands shape their pathways toward livable and sustainable futures. Central to this study is a comparative analysis of perspectives from island residents and those living in non-island areas, ensuring that the distinct voices of islanders are highlighted and their experiences foregrounded. While rooted in the Greek context, the study offers a replicable framework that can be applied to other island communities globally. Using a mixed-methods approach, it integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, to capture the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of island communities. The findings illustrate how community-driven research can empower islanders to co-develop tailored solutions that address their specific needs and contexts, all while recognizing the complex relationships between residents and their natural and cultural environments. Place branding emerges as a participatory tool that strengthens local agency, enhances cultural identity, and promotes sustainable tourism and economic development, while respecting ecological and social limits. Aligned with the session’s theme, this research demonstrates how lived experiences, and participatory methods offer valuable insights into island life. It contributes to broader discussions on navigating challenges in times of change, providing interdisciplinary collaboration pathways and actionable strategies to foster sustainable and livable futures for island communities.

Research in small island communities: Entangled consent

Oral

Dr. Erika Anne Hayfield¹

1. University of the Faroe Islands

Social life in small island communities is often characterised by multiple relations, high visibility, and strong social ties, which means that social proximity and distance are constantly (re)negotiated. Relational interconnectedness, which emerges in such contexts is shaped by the material and (relational) boundedness of islands, where spaces are socially and physically bordered. Whether researchers are already part of, or step into such realities, requires an island sensitive research ethics. Therefore, the ongoing ethical negotiation which frames islanders' lives, must become a conscious ethical practice for researchers.

I focus on consent and link it to reciprocity and care ethics. I argue that, that choices to participate in research are embedded in social contexts and expectations, and declining to participate might not always feel like an option. I problematise how the perspective of individual autonomy in consent processes dominates much thinking on research ethics (Vermeylen & Clark, 2017). Instead a relational perspective might be a more ethical approach for research in small island communities. I focus on reciprocity and care as forces which are place-based, social, material, and political. In other words, interdependencies in small island communities must be understood as being not only between people, but also between people and the islands where they live. I address how relational entanglements can implicate consent and subsequently, what kind of knowledge emerges in such relations. The question, therefore, is not confined to research ethics but becomes one of epistemology.

Vermeylen, S., & Clark, G. (2017). An alternative ethics for research: Levinas and the unheard voices and unseen faces. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(5), 499–512.

Resilience and Adaptation: The Role of New Islanders in Sustaining Tourism on the Ogasawara Islands, Japan

Oral

Prof. Lidia SASAKI¹, Dr. Eranga Ranaweera¹

1. Tokyo Metropolitan University

This study investigates migration to the Ogasawara Islands, Japan, focusing on the role of “new islanders” in sustaining the local tourism industry and fostering a resilient community. Despite the islands’ remote location, they fall under the jurisdiction of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and have experienced significant demographic changes, particularly after their return to Japan in 1968. Through field surveys, including participant observations and semi-structured interviews with local administrative staff, tour operators, and guides, the research examines the motivations behind migration, the process of social integration of newcomers, and their contribution to the sustainability of local economy. Key findings reveal that mentorship networks play an essential role in helping newcomers adapt to island life, while innovative, non-competitive business models contribute to maintaining a sustainable tourism business ecosystem.

Special attention is given to the pandemic period, when the tourism sector faced unprecedented challenges due to travel restrictions and a decline in visitors. Despite these difficulties, several factors contributed to the resilience of the tourism industry. Notably, government support, such as opportunities for alternative employment in environmental conservation, proved critical to the “new islanders” response, as it allowed tour operators and guides to adopt pluri-active work styles, diversifying their income sources beyond tourism. As tourism recovers, understanding these adaptive mechanisms offers important insights into the long-term sustainability of remote island communities.

The findings of our study contribute to broader discussions on resilience of island communities, emphasizing the need for diversification and flexibility in responding to external challenges.

Social and Cultural Impacts of Migration in an Island Community- findings from the Isle of Mull, Scotland

Oral

Dr. Ana Vuin¹, Dr. Ruth Wilson²

1. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC, 2. The James Hutton Institute

Keywords: Islands, Demographic change, Cultural sustainability

Demographic change is a persistent challenge for the Isle of Mull, as residents leave for education and employment, creating imbalances and straining essential services. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed interest in island living, attracting a range of different newcomers to the island and introducing new values, and activities to the local community. This shift brings both opportunities and challenges, as new cultural influences emerge, raising concerns about social integration, cultural sustainability, and evolving island identities.

This research examines the social and cultural impacts of demographic change on Mull through interviews with 14 residents and four stakeholders. To deepen understanding, a multi-stage approach is used, incorporating the 'Photovoice+' method, where participants, guided by a professional photographer and sound specialist, document cultural and social changes through photos, sounds, and videos. These materials serve as a basis for focus groups in which participants reflect on their contributions and discuss their significance in relation to the research questions. By capturing firsthand perspectives and fostering community dialogue, this study moves beyond simplistic local/incomer divides to explore the complex dynamics and cultural significance of population change across generations and genders. The findings aim to provide insights into how repopulation efforts can strengthen rather than disrupt the island's social and cultural fabric, ensuring a resilient and inclusive future for island communities.

Supporting young people's mobility decisions in small islands: the role of career guidance

Oral

Dr. Rosie Alexander ¹

1. Aarhus University

Youth outmigration remains a significant concern in island communities, threatening population and economic sustainability. The evidence shows that young people move primarily for education and, to a lesser extent, employment reasons. This means that young people's education and employment decisions are at the nexus of questions of staying, leaving, and returning, and are also important for the longer-term futures of island communities. In Denmark as in other nations, young people are supported to make career decisions through support from teachers and careers professionals, however typically these services have paid very little attention to issues of geographical place. This paper reports on a current participatory action research project with professionals involved in supporting young people (teachers, careers advisers and others) in three Danish island communities. The project focuses on developing innovative approaches in career education and guidance to more effectively address the needs of young island residents and island communities. This paper focuses on the first part of the project, where island stakeholders have explored the needs of their island communities and young people and discussed the purposes of career education and guidance services. Findings highlight the different opinions of stakeholders, and how dilemmas about staying and leaving are not just something that young people themselves experience, but also community stakeholders, as they wrestle with how to best achieve positive outcomes for their communities and their young people. The paper finishes by exploring some of the implications for design and delivery of career education and guidance services in island communities.

Keywords: island youth; migration; career guidance

29. Technological and Digital Rural Futures

Agricultural Innovation on Whose Terms? Power, Knowledge & Equity in Innovation Systems

Oral

Dr. Chantal Clément¹, Ms. Saskia Colombant¹

1. IPES-Food

Food and agricultural systems today face a series of interrelated challenges: ensuring food security and nutrition, weathering climate change, supporting environmental resilience, and producing food in ways that respect human dignity. Historically, agricultural innovations have been driven by farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and Indigenous communities, developing the tools and practices needed to adapt to changing conditions over generations. However, the nature of agricultural innovation has shifted dramatically over the past century. Today, corporate actors and investors increasingly drive innovation pathways, raising urgent questions about power, equity, and sustainability. Our report adopts a power-sensitive lens to critically examine current understandings of agricultural innovation. By analyzing how different innovations address five key agricultural challenges, we reveal how corporate consolidation shapes digital innovation today. Situating these developments within broader historical and political contexts, we explore their implications for rural futures, including deepening farmer dependencies, reinforcing extractive agricultural models, and influencing innovations' impacts across gender, age and regions.

This analysis uncovers the systems that enable or constrain just and sustainable innovation and examines the innovation pathways needed to support agroecological transformation. By contrasting corporate-driven and community-centered innovation models, we explore how autonomy, knowledge, and wellbeing within agricultural systems are shaped. The report concludes with recommendations to foster innovation pathways that strengthen rather than undermine agency, ecological resilience, and equity. Ultimately, we aim to highlight tensions and potential complementarities between agroecology and digitalization, advocating for innovation systems that genuinely support resilient rural livelihoods and just food futures.

Keywords: Agricultural Innovation, Digital Agriculture, Technological Sovereignty

Beyond adoption: unraveling the power shifts of digitalization in agriculture

Oral

Dr. Daniele Vergamini¹, Dr. Livia Ortolani¹, Mrs. Tiziana Nadalutti¹, Dr. Fabio Lepore¹, Prof. Gianluca Brunori²

1. Pisa Agricultural Economics (PAGE), University of Pisa (UNIP), 2. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa

Digitalization in agriculture is often framed as a binary—adopt or resist, innovate or lag behind. But such a view overlooks the deeper transformations at play. Digital technologies do not simply replace analog tools; they reshape relationships, restructure knowledge flows, and redefine agency within rural transitions. CODECS investigates these dynamics through a multi-layered approach that combines process modeling, digital ecosystems analysis, and socio-ecological systems (SES) perspectives to assess not only the costs and benefits of digitalization but also its broader systemic impacts.

Our preliminary findings, emerging from the analysis of 20 CODECS Living Labs across Europe, reveal a crucial insight: digitalization is not a neutral force. It does not simply “arrive” in rural areas—it bends the arcs of agency, restructures dependencies, and amplifies or flattens hierarchies. Technologies are embedded in existing socio-technical networks, influencing access to resources, decision-making autonomy, and the distribution of power among farmers, advisors, and policymakers.

This work argues that policy frameworks must not only assess costs and benefits but account for the relational fabric in which digitalization takes root. A technology’s success is not measured solely in efficiency gains but in the ways it reinforces or disrupts existing power dynamics. If we fail to see these shifting ecologies of influence, we risk designing policies that perpetuate exclusions rather than foster inclusion.

Digitalization, then, is not an endpoint but a field of tensions—an unfolding, adaptive process that demands a systemic, context-sensitive approach to governance and sustainability.

Digital agriculture without platforms: Drone use by smallholders in Vietnamese rice production

Oral

Mr. Shozo Sakata¹

1. Institute of Developing Economies

While the digitalization of agriculture for smallholders in, for instance, India and African countries is taking place through digital platforms, the digitalization in Vietnamese agriculture is occurring with a striking absence of platforms. While platforms have rapidly expanded in Vietnamese cities, digital services in agriculture are provided without platforms. The most rapidly rising type of digital service constitutes drone (spraying) services. This research shows that there is a wide range of, dynamically changing, actors providing drone services, including cooperatives, middlemen, and large food companies. This raises the question of why digital agriculture is advancing rapidly in Vietnam, without the platform dominance observed elsewhere. We also address the question of what the absence of platforms means for the benefits (autonomy, cost reduction) and risks (dependency, data ownership) of digitalization. The paper draws on literature on digital platforms in agriculture (especially for smallholders), on technology adoption in agriculture, and on middlemen and agricultural cooperatives. The paper draws on qualitative interviews and a survey in Vietnam's main rice area.

We find that, while farmers widely own mobile phones and use messaging apps, they do not use apps/platforms for digital farm services. The role of local social networks remains crucial in accessing farm services, even for advanced digital technologies. In addition, the study indicates the potential risks associated with exacerbating inequalities, marginalization of micro-scale producers, and data sovereignty, albeit in a different manner from that observed in the context of agricultural digitalization mediated by platforms, or the digitalization of agriculture in the global North.

Environmental Performativity: how digital technologies shape rural governance

Oral

Dr. George Cusworth¹

1. University of Oslo

This talk presents a new framework for understanding how agro/ecological dynamics, digital technologies, and the politics of environmental and rural governance interact. It gives scholars the critical tools needed to understand how metrics, data infrastructures, and digital technologies represent complex and messy agricultural and ecological dynamics in particular ways; and how those representations go on to materialise specific types of farm businesses and specific environmental forms. Based on the language of performativity, it can help sociologists understand how emerging digital technologies enact decisions about which aspects of the environment and which aspects of rural life are deemed desirable - and then how those decisions get inscribed into the lives of the people and landscapes being governed. More than just a descriptive tool, the language of environmental performativity can attend to the political and justice consequences tied up with an increasingly digitised and datafied approach to rural and environmental governance. Data infrastructures and digital technologies determine how the harms of socio-ecological crisis are divided between people and places, and they determine who benefits from environmental and agricultural subsidies, regulations, and natural capital markets.

The talk is based on newly published research that contains empirical elements as well as critical review of different geographical, sociological, and STS literatures.

Facilitating twin green and digital agrifood transitions: Moving from reskilling to shaping socially distributed knowledge creation spaces

Oral

*Dr. Chrysanthi Charatsari*¹, *Prof. Panagiota Sergaki*¹, *Prof. Stefanos Nastis*¹, *Prof. Evangelos Lioutas*², *Prof. Anastasios Michailidis*¹

1. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2. International Hellenic University

The growing policy interest in simultaneously promoting a digital and green transformation of agrifood systems has fueled the scholarly discourse on how to facilitate and expedite these so-called twin transitions. Having a complex and uncertain nature that requires continuous adaptations on the part of actors involved, such transitions are competence- and knowledge-demanding. The present study outlines and discusses an innovative model developed to equip actors engaged in these transitions with future-specific competencies. Our study reports on the experience and insights gained from the project “Promoting responsible twin transitions in European agrifood systems through innovation and learning alliances” (TWIN-IN), which receives funding from the European Union through the Erasmus+ program (Grant number: 101187101). The project brings together academic and research institutes, farm-level organizations, market actors, and AgTech providers, aspiring to facilitate twin transitions by creating open and enabling spaces for innovation and competence development. In pursuing this objective, we first formed micro-ecosystems in which various actors (farmers, farm advisors, researchers, AgTech startups, and vocational education providers) contribute their resources, practices, and knowledges while co-innovating toward twin transitions. The next step involves envisioning potential agri-digital futures and identifying the competencies needed to navigate them. Finally, through a learning-by-innovating approach, the project creates niches where actors co-create knowledge and co-shape skills by negotiating the meaning of transitions and using digital innovation not as an end but as a means to achieve sustainability-related goals and enhance their competencies. In so doing, TWIN-IN’s philosophy shifts the emphasis from a specialized but externally mediated knowledge delivery thinking to a new paradigm of socially distributed competence development that transcends the hegemony of high-tech science by promoting a localized system of competence development, in which actors undergoing transitions co-create and embody digitalization- and sustainability-related knowledge.

Acknowledgement: This research is funded by the European Union, grant number 101187101.

In the Greenhouse: A Multispecies Analysis of Scale, Technology, and Rationality in Agriculture

Oral

Mr. Jimmy Robinson ¹

1. University of Kentucky

In the face of climatic precarity, innovation in agrifood technology is being looked toward as a means of meeting the rising food demand for a growing global population. These innovations—real-time sensors, optimized growing algorithms driven by artificial intelligence, automated systems of production, etc.—are not presented in isolated arguments for efficiently increasing yields but are embedded in the discursive webs of environmental sustainability, renewable energy, local food production, job creation, and profitability.

While still in its early stages, this project will ultimately analyze greenhouses, across scales of production, to interrogate the intersecting relations amongst technology, rationality, and control within an agricultural context. I integrate the theories of Latour, Wallerstein, and Weber to understand greenhouses as nature-culture hybrids, embedded in a capitalist world-system, whose structures and practices are informed by dialectics of formal and substantive rationality. In other words, greenhouses are networks of multispecies relationships—architectures of multiple, yet inextricably linked, forms of *being*—shaped by rationality, technology, and global capitalism. The key question: What can greenhouses—in their variegated rationalities, technologies, and scales of production—tell us about dynamics of control, and power, in human and non-human relations? To answer this question, I employ multispecies ethnography, interviews, and participant observation to better understand the perspectives and roles of human actors and organizations central to greenhouse production. These include, but are not limited to, growers, greenhouse laborers, businesses, universities, non-profit organizations, governmental bodies, public-private companies, and investors.

The novel theoretical integration and methodology offered here will be applied to Kentucky as a regional context. Kentucky has a long history of greenhouse practices and currently includes greenhouses across scales of production and technology. Kentucky is also in an active collaboration with the Netherlands geared toward greenhouse development.

Not-so-digital platforms? Non-use, (in)appropriate technologies, and offline dimensions of digital agricultural services for smallholders in rural Africa

Oral

Dr. Oane Visser¹, Mr. Fabio Gatti², Ms. Mary Lorine Obala¹, Ms. Emelia Atabo¹, Mr. Sam Nicholas Atanga³

1. International Institute of Social Studies, 2. Wageningen University, 3. Independent Researcher

Digital platforms for agriculture in Africa have been widely promoted as transformative tools for smallholder farmers, often described as the drivers of a “Green Revolution 2.0”. Reports highlight rapid growth and expanding user bases, yet recent scholarly work reveals a stark contrast between these optimistic narratives and a reality of limited and slow integration in the daily life of smallholders.

This paper critically examines why digital platforms for smallholders in Africa struggle to gain traction, moving beyond explanations that focus solely on user deficiencies—such as literacy or access constraints. Instead, it explores some of the intrinsic limitations of platform models and their place within the broader agricultural knowledge transfer ecosystem.

Based on multi-year qualitative research in Ghana and Kenya, focus groups with farmers, expert interviews, and review of platform websites, user interfaces and online news articles, we identify three key factors contributing to this stagnation: (1) the platforms’ inability to provide truly unique, timely, and accurate services; (2) the limited interactivity of platform tools, reducing user engagement; and (3) the under acknowledged importance of the offline/human dimension in the digital world.

Furthermore, we suggest two divergent strategies that platform firms are adopting to try to overcome this stalemate: (1) intensifying engagement with smallholders through training, field agents, and nudging tactics, sometimes at the expense of user autonomy; and (2) reorienting business models toward agribusinesses and financial institutions, using smallholders primarily as data sources.

Ultimately, we raise critical questions about the platforms’ intended beneficiaries and their impact on farmers’ autonomy. Our study contributes to the growing literature on digital agriculture and platform economies, particularly in the Global South, and challenges prevailing assumptions about digital solutions as inherently empowering. We argue for a more nuanced assessment of digital platforms, questioning their ability to deliver meaningful (and just) agricultural transformation.

Regional applications of conceptual transitions? A case study on practical complexities of twin transition in four countries

Oral

Ms. Anni Tuomaala¹, Dr. Toni Ryyanen¹

1. University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute

Green and digital transitions or twin transition is perceived as providing potential solutions for the grand societal challenges such as climate change and inequality. Developments in twin transition offers opportunities also on a regional level. By drawing from recent scientific literature on green and digital transitions, our aim is to explore what kind of concrete and regionally relevant manifestations abstract and conceptual green and digital transitions could have. The analysed case demonstrates how the regional implementation of twin transition in a practical context take place and what kind of consequences are expected when the conceptual transitions meet the complexities of everyday. The qualitative data consists of different material collected during a digital services development project aiming at using digital technologies to improve regional capabilities in four countries: Finland (green transition on a map), Sweden (digital innovation service), Iceland (digital municipal waste system) and Ireland (flood monitoring system). The case analysis results show that digital and green transitions appear in different “concentrations”. The transitions may escape definitions or cannot be distinguished from each other. Digital transition was perceived as an abstract and distant entity only seldom visible to people whilst green transition was perceived as more concrete, measurable and therefore customisable. More emphasis is needed on concrete transition examples, focused transition indicators and underlining the transition potential rather than the vague idea of transitions.

Rural Telemedicine and the Double Digital Divide – Experts’ and Doctors’ Perspectives

Oral

***Dr. Tobias Mettenberger*¹**

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

In sparsely populated rural regions, doctors and patients have to travel long distances for medical treatment. Hence, telemedicine is seen as having great potential for reducing trips and for communicating more easily. Likewise, rural context conditions lead to specific hurdles and limits for the respective technological solutions, as my exploratory expert interviews conducted in 2022-2024 (Mettenberger 2024) showed. Those limitations mirror debates on a double rural-urban digital divide, not only referring to divergent infrastructural pre-conditions (e.g., regarding broadband or mobile coverage), but equally to the digital literacy of doctors and other health professionals, (not) using telemedical opportunities. Especially rural general practitioners are often said to be comparatively sceptic of digital technologies and to favor face-to-face interactions.

Complementary to those expert interviews, my current empirical analysis focusses doctors practising in rural areas, started using video consultations or teleconsultations several years ago. By sampling physicians, which have continued to use and such which discarded these solutions in the subsequent period, I take a retrospective view, questioning, how the added value and limitations of telemedical solutions are assessed in view of the specific contextual conditions of rural surroundings. Therefore, I currently realize qualitative interviews in different rural German regions.

Based on those two empirical studies, I will specify and contrast, how the experts’ and doctors’ narratives point to multiple digital divides between urban and rural regions.

Mettenberger, Tobias (2024): Telemedizin in der ländlichen Gesundheitsversorgung - Potenziale und Hürden aus Expert:innensicht. Z’GuG 47(2):180-198, DOI:10.5771/2701-4193-2024-2-180

Keywords

Digital Divides, Telemedicine, Public Health

Senior citizens and Digital grocery in rural Denmark

Oral

Dr. Martin Lindhardt¹

1. University of Southern Denmark

Previous research (Lindhardt 2023) has shed light on the importance attributed to local grocery stores among senior citizens in rural areas in southern Denmark. First of all, the presence of a grocery store in a village means that rural citizens do not depend upon a car in order to buy daily necessities. Second, rural grocery stores serve important social functions. Third, for many the presence of a grocery stores symbolizes a certain autonomy of villages in the sense that the store allows local residents to live their daily lives and buy necessities without having to leave their local area, and a grocery store sometimes represent something of a the last bastion in rural areas that are suffering from the closure of other shops (hair dressers, butchers, etc.) and of schools and other public institutions. In some villages in rural southern Denmark digital grocery shops have been implemented in recent years. Based on in interview study with senior citizens in rural Southern Denmark this paper will shed light on local experiences with such digital solutions. I focus, both on digital capital/digital comfort but also on perceptions of the social/communitarian value (or lack thereof) of digital grocery.

Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Agri-food Tech through a Podcast Ethnography

Oral

Dr. Emily Duncan¹, Dr. André Magnan¹

1. University of Regina

Public discourses about the farms of the future and the technologies that will ‘unlock’ increased efficiencies, profitability, and sustainability in agriculture continue to proliferate. These sociotechnical imaginaries tend to be dominated by agricultural techno-solutions, but nonetheless contain tensions and contradictions that merit attention by agri-food stakeholders including scholars, governments, activists, industry, and farmers. To better understand sociotechnical imaginaries in North American agriculture, we conducted a podcast ethnography. We listened to over 130 episodes across five agriculture-related podcast series, then analyzed how farmers, investors, agri-business representatives, and entrepreneurs reflect on trends in digital agri-food technology. Our analysis focuses on the lifecycle of agri-food tech starting from imagined solutions, to technology development, to funding cycles, and finally to tech adoption, showing how different actors assess technology trends. Our findings reveal a discursive narrative suggesting that agri-food technology will solve systemic agrifood system issues. Yet, in tension with techno-optimism, we find actors also expressed concerns around the consolidation of agri-business and a sentiment that current agri-food tech solutions have not materially addressed some of the most pressing challenges facing farmers. This qualitative research contributes to a growing body of global literature in rural sociology on the sociotechnical imaginaries of agri-food technology futures.

Sustainability and Digitalization in Rural Economies: Consumer Perspectives and Business Challenges

Oral

Ms. Ksenija Furmanova¹, Dr. Liga Paula¹, Prof. Gunta Grinberga¹, Dr. Sandija Zeverte-Rivza¹

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

Sustainability, digitalization, and consumer preferences are shaping the future of rural businesses and agriculture. In rural tourism, consumers value sustainability, favoring businesses that support eco-friendly practices, and also integrate digital solutions such as e-commerce, online booking and virtual experiences to enhance accessibility and transparency. Trust in sustainability claims is linked to official certifications, independent reviews, and transparent business practices. Digitalization is also a critical factor, with consumers expecting online booking, digital payments, and virtual experiences as part of modern rural tourism services. Despite strong consumer interest in sustainability and innovation, rural businesses face significant challenges, including financial constraints, lack of government support, and resistance to technological adoption. Many respondents believe that state subsidies, educational initiatives, and structured digital systems could enhance SME competitiveness in the sector.

This study aims to explore consumer attitudes toward agricultural products, rural tourism, and the role of technology and sustainability in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Latvia. The results highlight a strong preference for locally sourced, environmentally friendly products, with consumers emphasizing ethical business practices, transparent marketing, and sustainable packaging. However, concerns about “greenwashing”—misleading environmental claims—remain prevalent, affecting trust in both agricultural products and rural tourism services.

Key words: digitalization, rural entrepreneurship, greenwashing

Technological symbiosis: Transferring skills between mining and agriculture in the Bowen Basin, Queensland

Oral

Dr. Bingjie Song¹, Prof. Rob Brown¹

1. Central Queensland University

Labour retention remains a critical challenge for regional development worldwide, particularly in areas where agriculture and mining coexist as dominant industries. This challenge arises from various factors, such as competition for labour, the transient nature of mining work, and a limited pool of skilled labour. Family farms, which often persist in their regions due to deep, generational ties to the land, can offer opportunities to address this issue. This study examines the interplay between agriculture and mining labour dynamics in the Bowen Basin, Queensland, a region known for producing the highest-quality metallurgical coal globally and for being one of Australia's most significant mining areas. Using a case study approach, we explore how farmers, primarily involved in the sugarcane and beef cattle sectors, who are also employed as production operators in the mining sector, acquire skills and technological exposure that influence their agricultural practices. Our findings reveal that these farmers are more likely to adopt innovative agricultural technologies, such as overhead irrigation systems and GPS-guided machinery, leveraging experience gained from their mining roles. This cross-sectoral transfer of skills not only enhances agricultural productivity but also highlights the critical importance of upskilling workers to meet labour demands in both sectors. By reskilling and upskilling farmers, this approach helps address labour shortages and supports the sustainability of regional economies, while mitigating rural retention challenges. These insights underscore the potential of cross-sectoral strategies to foster resilience and sustainable development in regions facing similar challenges.

Uberisation of Mechanisation: Exploring the Features and Establishment of Matchmaker Digital Tractor Hire Platforms in Ghana with Actor-Network Theory

Oral

Mr. Ebenezer Ngissah¹, Prof. Cees Leeuwis¹, Dr. Cieslik Katarzyna², Dr. Comfort Freeman³

1. Wageningen University, 2. University of Manchester, 3. University of Ghana

Digitalization is often praised for transforming agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, improving efficiency, profitability, and rural livelihoods. Yet, agricultural matching platforms—digital tools connecting service users with providers—have received limited research attention. This paper examines Farm Digital, a startup in North-Western Ghana designed to link smallholder farmers with tractor owners through an “Uber for tractors” model. Despite its innovative vision, Farm Digital ceased operations, prompting an analysis of the challenges it faced. Using in-depth narrative interviews and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), we explore the complex process of establishing a digital startup in rural Ghana. The study unpacks efforts to reconfigure relationships among donors, platform managers, farmers, field agents, and brokers. Farm Digital’s struggles are framed as a failed network translation, where attempts to align diverse human and non-human actors toward a unified purpose faltered. Our findings reveal that the platform’s straightforward operational model was consistently outperformed by existing informal tractor brokerage systems. Furthermore, while Farm Digital aligned with donor priorities, such as women’s empowerment, its design failed to resonate with farmers’ needs.

This case highlights critical lessons for digital startups in agriculture. To succeed, new entrants must integrate with existing structures, such as national extension services and farmer organizations, to navigate local contexts effectively. The study raises broader questions about the sustainability of donor-driven tech solutions that overlook entrenched systems and stakeholders.

Vertical Farming and new Food Retailers Short Chain: Positive and Critical Impacts of a New Production and Distribution Model

Oral

Dr. Anna Russo Spena¹, Prof. Teresa Del Giudice¹, Prof. Alex Giordano², Prof. Roberta Paradiso¹

1. University of Naples - Federico II, 2. University of Giustino Fortunato

Abstract: The growing challenges of climate change and population increase demand innovative agricultural solutions ensuring food security while minimizing environmental impact. Alternative cultivation systems, such as vertical farming, have emerged as promising responses, leveraging controlled environments and resource-efficient technologies. However, traditional agriculture lacks a comprehensive approach to assessing the broader economic, social, and environmental implications of such innovations. This study explores the integration of vertical farming within a multifunctional retail model, where large-scale distribution organizations (GDOs) incorporate food production directly into their supply chains. By eliminating intermediaries, reducing food miles, and implementing more sustainable fresh food supply chains, this model can enhance efficiency and sustainability while reshaping consumers' perception of local food. However, concerns arise regarding economic value redistribution, marginalization of small-scale producers, and market power concentration. In France, for example, vertical farming's high performance encourages retailers to adopt the technology within stores, while social influence appears less relevant. Conversely, investment and operational costs create a perception of risk, acting as a barrier to adoption. Thus, assessing the long-term feasibility of vertical farming requires specific economic evaluations. Using a transdisciplinary methodology combining sociological, economic, and agronomic perspectives, this research evaluates the benefits and risks of implementing new short food supply chains in retail. The findings provide insights into sustainable and equitable agri-food transitions.

Keywords: Vertical farming; Agri-food Transitions; Value Redistribution.

Weaving stories and data: digital marketing as a case in point

Oral

Dr. Emīls Kilis¹, Dr. Maija Ušča¹, Prof. Talis Tisenkopfs¹, Ms. Ilze Mileiko¹

1. Baltic Studies Centre

The digital is reshaping agricultural value chains and marketing strategies, including in the context of urban-rural connections. Digital platforms create new opportunities for reaching urban consumers, while simultaneously reshaping the nature of direct sales relationships. Furthermore, the online environment, particularly social media and video content, are reshaping knowledge exchange and learning processes within farming communities. The digital sphere has become an important space for learning about agriculture and marketing strategies, creating new knowledge networks that ignore geographical boundaries.

This paper examines how digitalisation influences the marketing practices of small and medium-scale farmers in Latvia. Through a qualitative analysis based on data from various H2020 projects (CODECS, DESIRA, DATA4FFOD, IN-HABIT), we investigate the intersection of technical product information and narrative-based marketing approaches. Our research reveals an iterative interplay between different types of product information in digital marketing materials. While farmers increasingly employ technical data to demonstrate compliance with quality standards and environmental commitments, they simultaneously leverage social media platforms to share evocative storytelling that emphasises their connection to the landscape and traditional farming practices. This approach aligns with consumer trust-building in digital spaces, where data, independent validation and emotional resonance play crucial roles in the absence of a direct relationship between farmers and consumers. Simultaneously we note that, farmers must develop new communication strategies that preserve the personal connection historically achieved through face-to-face interactions while also allowing them to grow their reach.

The findings have implications for our understanding of the evolving nature of producer-consumer relationships, as well as the entanglements of data, information, independent review and cultural narratives about the rural in these relationships.

30. Building Liveable Rural Futures: Social and solidarity economy in the light of social and climate justice in rural areas

Conditions for sustainability and consequences of their absence: a pathway to decline for a “social co-operative” in rural Hungary

Oral

Dr. Katalin Kovács¹, Dr. Nigel Swain², Dr. Monika Mária Váradi¹

1. HUN-REN KRTK, 2. University of Liverpool

Keywords: social economy, conditions of sustainability

The presentation is based on a case study of grassroots collaboration amongst fruit farmers in an underdeveloped region of rural Hungary. In the late 1990s a new breed of fruit farmers established themselves there together with communal institutions like a sales co-operative and a “machine circle”. Both were established via a rather lengthy, genuinely social, innovation process initiated by an external actor, a “social entrepreneur”, whose inspiration for rural development originated in his participation in a USAID Programme. One and a half decades later, a smaller group of key fruit farmers, also members of the sales co-operative, capitalised on a funding opportunity and established a “social co-operative” devoted to processing the increasing quantity of fruit-production across the region. After a successful start, by the tenth anniversary of this social economy venture, there were signs of fundamental operational issues and decline; by the end of 2024 these resulted in the social co-operative closing down.

The presentation explores the causes of this social economy failure: the co-operative had to operate in a rather harsh market economy environment and a changed political context, where tendering opportunities for social economy actors were drastically cut. What are the external and endogenous conditions for successful social economy endeavour? Can a social enterprise be sustainable without targeted external support to compensate for addressing social goals? Such are the questions that the authors propose to discuss with the participants of the Working Group.

Context matters: The role of Living Labs in creating new horizons for the social economy in rural areas. Case studies, good practices, recommendations

Oral

Mrs. Katarzyna Gizińska¹, Dr. Agnieszka Kurdyś-Kujawska², Dr. Barbara Wieliczko³

1. European Rural Development Network, 2. European Rural Development Network; Koszalin University of Technology, 3. European Rural Development Network; Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences

Rural areas face serious challenges such as depopulation and an aging population, social exclusion, lack of infrastructure and access to public services. Given the challenges facing rural areas, the social economy can become an effective tool in solving rural problems and building conditions for sustainable and inclusive development. Supporting and developing the social economy in rural areas is crucial for the future of these areas and the overall well-being of the rural communities. Universal social economy solutions, although valuable, may not be a sufficient catalyst for change. It is necessary to take into account the local specificity of a given area and adapt solutions to the specific community needs. Living Lab (LL), acting as an Open Innovation Lab or Collective Innovation, can effectively support the activities of social economy entities in rural areas. Thanks to the involvement of various stakeholder groups, LL provides a space for generating and testing new solutions that can effectively address local problems, strengthening the sense of responsibility and impact on the development of a given community. The aim of the study is to identify and assess the potential of LLs as a tool to support the development of the social economy in rural areas in Poland. The analysis of LLs operating in Poland provides insight into good practices in supporting the social economy in rural areas, citing initiatives that effectively engage local communities in the process of creating and testing innovative solutions. Furthermore, it enables the formulation of recommendations for the further development of LL as a valuable facilitator of the social economy in rural areas, including key success factors for such initiatives, potential barriers and challenges, and ways to overcome them.

Keywords: Living lab, innovation ecosystem, social economy

Cultivating Solidarity: The Role of Social and Solidarity Economy in Empowering Older People in Rural Switzerland

Oral

***Prof. Sigrid Haunberger*¹**

1. Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work, Institute on Ageing

In this presentation, I would like to highlight Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives in Switzerland specifically addressing the needs of elderly people in rural areas. These regions often face demographic challenges, such as an aging population, youth migration to urban centers, and the social isolation of older adults. How do Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives in rural Switzerland impact the social inclusion and well-being of older adults? Based on a review of the literature and empirical evidence, I will briefly answer the following questions, which relate to some of the key areas where SSE directly benefits older individuals in rural areas: Community Living and Age-Appropriate Housing (What role do community-driven housing models and intergenerational living play in enhancing the quality of life for elderly people in rural areas?), Neighborly Support and Volunteering (How effective are volunteer networks and neighborly support systems in reducing social isolation among older people living in rural Switzerland?), Solidarity-Based Agriculture and elderly People (In what ways can solidarity-based agriculture (CSA) contribute to the social and physical health of older people in rural communities?), Social Enterprises for Older People and Digital Inclusion and Technological Support (What barriers and opportunities exist for the digital inclusion of older adults in rural Switzerland through SSE initiatives?). While there exists many theoretical approaches providing a rich framework for understanding the principles and potential of SSE, I will refer to the OECD concept of quality of life.

Mapping Research Trends on Climate Change and Rural Economic Development in Europe (2000–2024)

Oral

Ms. Ledianë Durmishi¹, Dr. Tibor Farkas²

1. PhD Student, 2. Professor

Climate change profoundly affects rural economies across Europe, presenting both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. This study uses bibliometric analysis to examine research trends on climate change and rural economic development from 2000 to 2024. Employing tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny, the analysis identifies key themes, influential studies and authors, and collaborative networks shaping the field.

The findings presented depict a changing axis of priorities regarding adaptation strategies, socio-economic resilience, and the integration of green technologies within the rural economy. Huge gaps regarding interdisciplinary approaches were also identified, in addition to that, most research is underrepresented in policy implementation within rural areas.

Mapping these trends, this research points to what needs investigation in the future and generates actionable insights toward sustainable and equitable rural transition in a situation of climate change. These results support the current discourse on the aspects of resilience and sustainability in a rural setting and thus help academia, policymakers, and practitioners toward the creation of livable futures for Europe's rural residents.

Keywords: climate change, rural development, bibliometric analysis, Europe

Mental models and Knowledge-co-production on Future Climate-change-induced Risks

Oral

Dr. Elisabeth Maidl¹, Dr. Matthias Buchecker¹

1. Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL

The interdependence of climate change and natural hazard goes along with large uncertainties regarding future risks. Local inhabitants, regional stakeholders, experts in natural hazard management and scientists have specific knowledge, resp. mental models on such risks. This diversity of views, interests and vulnerabilities in the multi-factored context of future developments make it difficult to find broadly accepted measures. Sharing them in a knowledge-co-production process enables a common understanding of complex situations, and resources resp. restrictions to address them. This allows to develop long-term solution strategies. Bringing diverse perspectives together, can close blind spots in solution finding.

Previous studies on mental models confirm that actors with specific vulnerabilities perceive different aspects and accordingly prefer different measures. However, studies that examine the mental models of regional actors on future climate-change-induced risks are lacking.

The project tested and evaluated the feasibility of knowledge co-creation for the anticipatory prevention of such risks in Alpine communities. Mental models of involved actor groups have been examined using the following methods: qualitative interviews, intervention of two interactive workshops applying participatory modelling, and quantitative pre- and post-measurement (participants and general population),

Results show insights on the constitution and distribution of five typical mental models, and effects of participating in a knowledge-co-creation process on the alignment of divergent opinions and understanding for needs, values and vulnerabilities. Further, participants develop competence in participation and communication.

Being integrated into the research program Climate Change Impacts on Alpine Mass Movements (CCAMM2), this project is carried out in two Swiss mountain regions.

Rural energy citizenship? Understanding the agency of residents within the energy sector in an urban-rural division, based on Hungarian national survey data

Oral

Dr. Gergely Horzsa¹, Dr. Lea Kőszeghy¹

1. HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences

Keywords: energy transition; energy community; peripheral regions

The concept of energy citizenship builds on the agency of stakeholders to actively participate in the energy system as energy producers, distributors, decisionmakers and consumers rather than being passively only the latter. The EU facilitates a change in the energy system by involving citizens as such actors, by building energy communities and supporting energy citizenship to contribute to local and EU-level energy resilience, to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote a decentralized democratic way of energy production and, consequently, a decentralized economy. However, as the conceptualisation of this topic is currently unfolding, the applied terminology is rather underdefined and little scientific attention was to understand especially the social driving and forestalling factors of this issue.

Based on a nat rep survey we conducted in 2023 on the sustainability-related attitudes and practices of residents, and along with insights from qualitative fieldwork results, we evaluate how energy citizenship can be circumscribed, understood and facilitated in peripheral rural areas. Results of the survey reveal that in some aspects, rural residents seem to possess a higher level of agency within the energy system, especially with regard to individual heat production. The share of those using individual heating solutions exclusively is 38% in villages, 18% in towns, 12% in cities and 2% in the capital. Nevertheless, with a critical approach, we argue that while local energy production is a core aspect of energy citizenship, other elements should further be enhanced in the rural societal context.

Social and Solidarity Economy for Rural Reinvigoration: A Study of Rural Initiatives in Europe

Oral

Dr. Poonam Pandey¹

1. University of Vigo

Keywords: alternative socioeconomic systems, rural reinvigoration, Social solidarity initiatives

Recently, a lot of efforts are being made, both in activist and academic circles, to rethink our existing and dominant socioeconomic systems (Kommandeur et al. 2025, Smith 2024). These efforts are motivated by the rising global concerns around climate change and environmental sustainability on the one hand and social factors such as rising inequality and social justice concerns on the other. To most of the proponents of alternative economic systems (such as the doughnut economics, diverse economic systems and degrowth discussions) the current environmental and social challenges are intricately entangled and systemically propagated through the capitalist socioeconomic systems (

Raworth 2018, Kallis 2011, Gibson-Graham 2008). Historically, rural areas have been exploited for human and natural resources to enable these dominant economic systems (Pandey et al. 2024, Moore 2017). The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) aims to mitigate the impacts of this exploitation by multiple interventions for rural revitalization and re-invigoration. Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is being recognized as a major driving force for rural revitalization. SSE is also one of the prominent terms in the lexicon of alternative economic systems (Kommandeur et al. 2025). Given the background of emergence of SSE, it has become an umbrella term that brings together initiatives that range from incremental changes to radical transformations of the existing socioeconomic systems (Hudson 2021). In this context, the paper discusses the ways in which existing SSE in rural areas of Europe are constructing the rural challenges and the mechanisms to mitigate these challenges. The paper relies on a grounded-theory informed analysis of social initiatives already existing in rural areas in Europe. We will discuss if and how the bottom-up initiatives relate to the existing theorization of SSE.

The Potential of the Social and Solidarity Economy to Enhance Social Inclusion: Lessons from Rural Austria

Oral

Ms. Katrin Hofer¹, Dr. Somaye Latifi¹, Dr. Marika Gruber²

1. Federal Institute for Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research, 2. Carinthian University of Applied Sciences

Rural areas often face significant challenges, including unequal access to essential services, limited opportunities for marginalised groups and deep systemic inequalities. Addressing these disparities requires a commitment to social justice, equality, and collective action. Increasing participation of vulnerable groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, in all areas of life is key to foster social inclusion. The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) plays a vital role in enhancing resilience, inclusion, and well-being in rural Europe through Social Innovations (SI).

These diverse and empowering social innovations are the focus of the Horizon Europe project SERIGO, which conducts participatory and community-based research, fosters co-creation via pilot actions and develops policy recommendations to illustrate the potential of SSE initiatives to promote social inclusion.

In Austria, SERIGO will examine two case studies and one pilot action in two rural regions. The case study in Lower Austria analyses the Silbersberg Association, which provides family-like, community-based, and client-centred care for people with multiple disabilities. Meanwhile, the case study in Carinthia focuses on initiatives fostering the labour market integration of female migrants and refugees and explores the capacity of SSE measures to support the social participation and empowerment of migrant (refugee) women. To achieve greater impact, we will additionally conduct a cross-case analysis for Austria, offering a broader perspective on innovative solutions to rural challenges. By developing a comparison framework, we will examine the structure and implementation strategies of these initiatives, highlighting their potential to promote social inclusion of vulnerable groups in rural areas.

Key Words: Social Inclusion, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), Social Innovation (SI)

The Role of Social Economy Organisations in rural areas and their contribution to local development

Oral

Ms. Giulia Tallarini¹, Ms. Giulia Galera¹, Mr. Jacopo Sforzi¹

1. EURICSE

Rural areas across Europe are experiencing increasing socio-economic and environmental challenges, including demographical changes, limited access to essential services, lack of employment opportunities and mounting social exclusion.

Based on the preliminary results of the ESIRA (Enhancing Social Innovation in Rural Areas) project, this presentation analyses the contribution of social economy organisations (SEOs) to rural development. It highlights SEOs added values compared to public agencies and conventional enterprises in countering the multiple transformations and challenges rural areas face while fostering inclusive development and community resilience.

Thanks to their participatory decision-making process, the pursuit of goals other than profit, and allocation principles based on reciprocity, SEOs are particularly well-suited to promoting place-based development. In the context of rural areas, their peculiar features make SEOs particularly effective in: (i) creating new employment opportunities, including for disadvantaged workers; (ii) delivering general interest services; (iii) allocating local resources in a more balanced way through the empowerment of the local community in strategic decisions; (iv) ensuring the survival of key economic activities, such as agriculture; (v) managing common goods that would otherwise be taken out of the control of local inhabitants; and (vi) strengthening social cohesion thanks to their capacity to enhance awareness and agency among individuals and communities.

However, due to the lack of policies properly recognising SEOs added value, their contribution to rural local development has yet to be fully harnessed.

Keywords: Social Economy; Rural areas; Local Development; ESIRA project

The role of the social and solidarity economy in social inclusion in rural areas of Hungary

Oral

Dr. Márta Kiss¹, Dr. CSURGÓ Bernadett¹, Dr. Boldizsár Megyesi¹, Dr. Katalin Rácz²

1. HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, 2. Institute of Agricultural Economics

Our research aims to present the current situation of the social economy and social entrepreneurs in rural Hungary and to explore the relationship between their specific mode of operation and the social integration of hard-to-integrate local populations and communities. Building on previous research we analyse the changes that have taken place over the last decade. We focus both on traditional forms of organisation and also map a wide range of potential actors at the national level, using a content-based definition and the available databases. In the next step, we explore the actual situation and practices behind the data in four selected rural areas by using local data, documents, and expert interviews; the list of informants is based on desk research and snowball method. Through in-depth analysis, social entrepreneurs are studied not as independent actors, but embedded in local societies along their networks. To contextualise the in-depth analysis, we combine sociological and anthropological methods such as semi-structured interviews, transect walks, participatory observation, visual data collection, and focus groups. The research focuses on the returns of the social economy at the level of individuals (disadvantaged workers) and will also examine the impacts on the community as a whole; it will also look at the difficulties faced by the management, staff or the community. This presentation will show the interim findings of the research: the conclusions of the national mapping exercise and the results of fieldwork in two rural districts. We will show the organisational and operational differences between the areas and possible explanations for these differences.

“From Vulnerability to Resilience”: Young General Practitioners in Times of Healthcare Challenges in Rural Areas

Oral

Mrs. Inguna Potetinova¹, Prof. Dina Bite¹

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

Latvia's rural areas are emptying. The latest Eurostat data show that the population is decreasing in all regions of Latvia, losing 4,3% or around 11,000 residents last year. This has led to increasingly centralized infrastructure. A serious problem is the shortage of general practitioners. The state expects young specialists to step in and help solve it, but there are not too many because of private or other reasons.

Based on semi-structured interviews with early-career general practitioners in Latvia, who despite long-lasting healthcare system problems have chosen to move to rural areas, I ask, what helps young doctors to maintain and preserve their resilience in this precarity and individual vulnerability? What agency do they potentially have on local communities and what role do they play in strengthening it?

By asking this question, I suggest that ties—both preowned and stable and new ones—help them maintain their resilience and diminish vulnerability. Additionally general practitioners own high status in local communities. They address not only individual health situations but also serve as a multitasking solution for system shortages and in the meantime — also for rural resilience. In many cases it is strengthened by the solidarity shown by locals — both authorities and community.

Complemented by the planned participatory observations further on, this study will contribute to the resilience literature by providing additional aspects of people's strategies to maintain resilience in vulnerable times and places. It will also highlight the role of GPs in strengthening rural communities.

**31. Coalescing the Public
Sphere and
Policy-Making: using
sociological knowledge
for liveable futures?**

Agripolicy beyond CAP: Considering farmers in the calibration of the new agricultural policy instruments in Scotland

Oral

Dr. Diana Valero¹, Dr. Kerry Waylen¹, Ms. Rebecca Gray¹

1. The James Hutton Institute

After more than 40 years of Common Agricultural Policy, agricultural policies in Scotland are facing an important reform triggered by the UK leaving the European Union in 2020. This reform, driven by the Scottish Government's vision for "becoming a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture", faces the challenge of balancing the strong legacy of CAP with new specific environmental ambitions regarding climate mitigation and nature restoration that are set to transform the support to farming and food production in Scotland. A phased complex framework of four tiers and a number of schemes to support sustainable farming is being developed and implemented in stages.

Among other innovations, the reform endorses taking a natural capital approach. However, the theoretical promise and operational reality of doing so is unclear. Our research focuses on how this approach is considered, aiming to unpack and reflect on the agri-policy innovation pathways and identify existing tensions between the strategic and operational perspectives on policy innovations. Drawing on interviews with policy-makers and other stakeholders involved in developing the new agricultural policies in Scotland, we analyse the logic shaping the design of the new programme and the forms of evidence enrolled. In particular, in this presentation, we will look into how farmers and their eventual input are being considered in the calibration of the new agricultural policy instruments in Scotland and reflect on potential inclusivity and agency challenges that new approaches, such as natural capital, might bring to the new generation of agricultural policies.

Bullshit farming ? Farmers' protests and the bureaucratization of governance

Oral

Prof. Jérémie Forney¹

1. University of Neuchâtel-CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim

European countries (including non EU countries) have introduced environmental objectives in the reform of their agricultural policies, under the banner of multifunctionality. The concrete enactment of environmental objectives combines market deregulation with a strong bureaucratization of the environmental measures and governance instrument, both in state policies and private-based certification. From an assemblage perspective, these public and private practices form a specific agri-environmental assemblage that has to be considered as a whole. Applying this approach to the Swiss case, I will show how this combination of pressures – both economic and symbolic – on alienated farmers characterizes a bureaucratization logic in a European mode of agri-environmental governance. This logic, while showing limited success at the environmental level, is about to transform farming into what David Graeber has described as “bullshit job”. At the same time, it translates concepts essential to contemporary environmental sciences, such as biodiversity, into technocratic tools of control.

Deliberative methods of non-governmental climate policymaking: Lessons from rural northeast England

Oral

Dr. Natalie Partridge¹

1. Newcastle University

Climathons are a place-based, deliberative method of bringing stakeholders together to define a set of local climate challenges and co-develop their solutions. This presentation shares the learnings from three Climathon events conducted by the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) in the northeast of England in 2024 and 2025.

A 'Climathon' event, from climate and marathon, takes place over 2 days. Each of NICRE's Climathon events was conducted in partnership with a non-governmental organisation: the first with the Northumberland Rivers Trust, the second with the National Trust, and the third with Sustainable Tadcaster.

The events were designed for partners and stakeholders to co-produce the climate-related strategic directions of these influential organisations. They covered topics such as multifunctional uses of agricultural land, nutrient neutrality, waterways management, multi-agency collaboration, and transport.

In a post-CAP and post-EU policy landscape, the future of environmental policy in England remains unclear, but the impact on rural economies is being felt. There is rhetoric that farmers may be increasingly incentivised "not to farm", through new Environmental Land Management Schemes. There is little support for rural communities in the face of this transition, and only a vague vision of the roles of farmers, landowners and land managers in shaping and delivering climate transitions.

This presentation explores the ways in which Climathons present an opportunity for place-based, climate-related strategy and policy to develop in the post-CAP context in rural areas, and to what extent including public policymakers in activities like this can decentralise climate policymaking going forward.

Find out more about NICRE's Climathons here: <https://nicre.co.uk/innovation-portal/rural-climathons>

Green Visions Vs Political Realities: A Comparative Study of the Green Architecture in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (2014-2020 vs 2023-2027)

Oral

Mr. Mujahid Rasool¹

1. Faculty of Bioscience & Engineering, Ghent University

This study examines the evolving environmental objectives of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by comparing the 2014-2020 and 2023-2027 policy periods. As agricultural sustainability becomes increasingly vital in the face of global climate challenges, understanding how CAP's "Green Architecture" has adapted in response to political, economic, and social pressures is essential. Among others, key political events such as the Financial Crisis, Paris Agreement, Brexit, and the introduction of the European Green Deal have significantly influenced these reforms. These events, along with the rise of Green Parties in Europe, have shifted the CAP's focus towards more robust environmental objectives.

The 2014-2020 CAP introduced greening measures and strengthened cross-compliance to integrate sustainability into agricultural policy. However, the 2023-2027 CAP marks a paradigm shift with the introduction of Eco-schemes and a more structured green architecture, supported by increased financial commitments for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable farming. Policymakers, environmental NGOs, and agricultural experts have played a crucial role in aligning CAP with EU climate and biodiversity targets.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly in administrative complexity and member states' varied responses. Recent farmer protests and European Parliament election results underscore tensions between environmental goals and agricultural productivity, questioning the policy's long-term viability.

This research provides insights into the political influences shaping CAP's sustainability goals and assesses its effectiveness in fostering a resilient EU agricultural sector. Through data analysis, policy evaluation, and literature review, it highlights the ongoing need for adaptive policy mechanisms to balance economic viability with environmental responsibility.

LEADER added value – sociological aspects and local democracy between theory and practice

Oral

Dr. Armands Pužulis¹, Ms. Elita Benga¹

1. Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics

Keywords: LEADER added value, local democracy, evaluation

LEADER CAP is an instrument for the development of local democracy. The opportunity to create your own development strategy based on local needs, to ensure the representation of local interests in decision-making processes, including the use of funds, involving diverse community target groups, to make your community socially responsible, supportive, action-oriented, strengthening mutual trust, assistance, and belonging to the place are some of the essential characteristics of LEADER activities. LEADER's added value is based on social aspects - social capital, improved management and strategy-oriented results and impacts.

However, as studies show, the granted local power opportunities are not always used to a sufficient extent, therefore the European Commission has raised the question of what the LEADER added value is. How to bring LEADER's theoretical opportunities closer to reality, what prevents us from achieving better results, and what LAGs themselves don't know about LEADER method, are some of the questions we are looking for an answer to. The study is based on the example of Latvia.

When developing an approach to assessing added value in the case of Latvia, by approbating the approach in four LAGs, it was concluded that the current policy instruments are not purposefully oriented towards the full implementation of the LEADER method. It is rather the understanding of each LAG of the LEADER method and responsibility, which can be very different. The movement from the method, local democracy, and local initiative towards limited formal administrative regulatory enforcement has not changed since LEADER has existed in Latvia for 20 years. This in turn raises the question of the role and place of LEADER as a method, instrument in the development of local democracy and the improvement of the implementation of the LEADER approach.

Lilliputian Rural Municipalities: Weak Governance or a Hub for Local Democracy?

Oral

Dr. Josef Bernard¹

1. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences

Despite the emergence of innovative rural governance mechanisms such as the LEADER program, traditional government structures—particularly municipalities—continue to play a crucial role in addressing rural challenges and shaping the local public sphere. In most European countries, recent decades have seen a strong push for municipal amalgamation aimed at increasing administrative capacity. While this has often led to the professionalization of local government, it has also resulted in significantly larger municipalities, distancing local governance from rural residents.

Czechia stands out as an exception, with most rural municipalities comprising only a few hundred inhabitants, allowing the majority of villages to maintain their own local government. This fragmented governance structure creates opportunities for local political bargaining and strengthens community capacity to address local issues. This presentation explores the implications of such a decentralized municipal system for inclusive and participatory rural governance. Focusing on the Czech case, it examines the dilemmas associated with a highly fragmented local government structure, highlights often-overlooked positive governance aspects, and compares villages that retained self-government with those that have lost it.

Problematic aspects of support measures for entrepreneurs to achieve the EU Green Deal goals in Latvia

Oral

***Mrs. Baiba Rivza*¹, *Mrs. Ilona Beizitere*²**

1. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, 2. Latvia University of Life Science and Technologies

One of the key national strategic plans aimed at implementing the European Union's Green Deal (GD) objectives is Latvia's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (LCAPSP) for 2023–2027. This plan is designed to align with the EU's 2030 targets, as set out in the "Farm to Fork" strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The LCAPSP outlines interventions for implementing GD principles across six key indicators.

To assess progress toward the GD objectives, a survey was conducted among both current and prospective entrepreneurs. A total of 178 responses were collected, with 39.9% of respondents having experience in business management. This study focuses on analyzing the perspectives of respondents with business experience.

Most respondents indicated that at least one of the LCAPSP target indicators was unattainable using only internal company resources. 75% admitted their inability to provide access to fast broadband internet in rural areas. Regarding the impact of Green Deal requirements on Latvian SMEs, 61% of entrepreneurs anticipated increased expenses. The most frequently mentioned support measures to help Latvian SMEs with green transformation are access to external financing and investments in new technologies or processes (83%), subsidies or grants to compensate for transition losses (77%), and support for digital skills development (58%).

The LCAPSP includes interventions for various groups, with a particular focus on small-scale and new rural enterprises, as well as organic farmers. However, the support measures do not specifically address SMEs' needs for green transition or the short- and long-term impacts of such transformations.

For a more targeted intervention measures, policymakers should consider the actual business needs. This can best be achieved through public dialogue involving various stakeholders, including municipalities and NGOs. Such an approach would provide rural entrepreneurs with a platform to voice their opinions and proposals.

Keywords: EU Green Deal, SMEs, support measures

Short Food Supply Chains: how can sociological knowledge be used to ‘open up’ existing AKIS structures and networks to embed new actors and models?

Oral

Ms. Eva Jennings¹, Dr. Aine Macken-Walsh²

1. Teagasc Rural Economy and Development Programme, Mellows Campus, Athenry, Galway, Ireland, 2. TEAGASC

Amid rising concerns in relation to food insecurity, supply chain unreliability, and unsustainable characteristics of transnational food chains, Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) feature prominently in several current EU agri-food strategies for example the ‘Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture’. SFSCs, however, remain marginal across much of the European agri-food system and questions arise regarding the feasibility of SFSCs delivering the benefits to society that are anticipated by policy strategies.

Drawing from findings of the COREnet Horizon Europe project, this paper reviews and problematises the translation of policy strategies to operational actions ‘on the ground’. It appraises the extent to which and how tangible policy supports for SFSCs have been formulated in funded measures of EU member states’ CAP Strategic Plans. To this end, policy mapping of measures supportive of SFSCs, undertaken by COREnet, is used as a basis to discuss intersections of policies, their functional activities and the population/s they serve within the context of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKISs). We focus on the politics of representation, by focusing on established AKIS structures (charted by previous projects over the past decade) and the policies that are now, to varying degrees, upholding prevailing structures, or potentially disrupting them and/or offering alternatives.

We seek to explore with WG participants how sociological knowledge may be used to identify, confront and practically address policy-related challenges of adapting and (re)configuring existing dominant AKIS structures to open up to and facilitate embedding of new ways of doing things. This paper seeks to mobilise a discussion of a range of potential policy considerations relevant to most European countries, specifically regarding how policy can use sociological knowledge to activate reconfiguration of the structures that underpin agricultural policy design and implementation, so that an ‘opening up’ to alternative models (such as SFSCs) can be achieved.

Social Principles for understanding farmer worldviews: What is their relevance today?

Oral

Prof. Frank Vanclay¹, Dr. Aine Macken-Walsh²

1. University of Groningen, 2. TEAGASC

Vanclay's 2004 seminal paper, "Social principles for agricultural extension to assist in the promotion of natural resource management" (<https://doi.org/10.1071/EA02139>) elaborated 27 principles intended to guide agricultural extension and promote understanding about the worldviews of farmers/farm families. Although based on research in Australia, this paper has inspired much interest worldwide. In this presentation (and in our paper under development), we reflect on the extent to which the 27 principles are still relevant today (i.e. over 20 years later), especially in a European context. To undertake this reflection, Frank Vanclay (originally Australian but now a professor at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands) has partnered with Aine Macken-Walsh (Teagasc, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority), who over the years has been using these principles in her role as a researcher working in an extension context. We are also thinking about what these principles imply for European rural and agricultural policy. The principles vary from the general to the specific, but in general address things like: farming as a social activity; the social diversity (heterogeneity) of farmers; the important role of social drivers in farming practice; and the socio-cultural basis of adoption of new ideas, technology and practices.

The Anti-Politics of Irish Rural Development: Political determinants of funding and implications for EU policy

Oral

***Mr. Conor Judge*¹**

1. Nuffield College, University of Oxford / University of Aberystwyth

Despite extensive policy literature on EU programs such as LEADER, they have failed to incorporate the equally extensive academic literature that is more critical of how the program operates in reality, and its relationship to political power.. While this disconnect is often attributed to a failure to translate academic findings into policy or bureaucratic inertia, I make the argument that Ferguson's *'Anti-Politics Machine'* (1994) is critical to understanding the gap between theory and practice not only in lesser developed countries but also for rural development in the EU. I trace Fergusons' argument relating to centralisation of control of rural development in Lesotho and apply it to the EU LEADER program and domestic rural development schemes in Ireland. Through an in-depth theoretical analysis of Ferguson, I identify corresponding practices of bureaucratisation and depoliticisation of rural challenges in Ireland. Secondly, I support this with empirical evidence linking electoral data and a unique dataset on rural development projects in Ireland between 2007 and 2024 totalling €1.34 Billion in value across ~19,000 individual projects. It finds evidence of associations between allocations of domestic rural development funding and the ruling party's electoral outcomes at local, national and departmental levels. Importantly, it can differentiate between domestic and EU funding. In doing so it raises legitimate questions about how EU programs were used by national actors to apolitically re-centralise power over rural development. It concludes that an implication of the failure to connect theory and practice undermines the intended goal of bringing Europe closer to its citizens.

The emic/etic distinction: a tool for policy-making?

Oral

Dr. Aine Macken-Walsh¹, Ms. Eva Jennings¹, Ms. Marie TELLIER²

1. TEAGASC, 2. Université Lumière Lyon 2

This abstract sets out an approach for an interactive session of participatory social mapping, which uses the interplay of ‘emic’ (insider, ‘subjective’) and ‘etic’ (outsider, ‘objective’) experiences as a tool for re/framing understandings of more liveable futures.

To activate the participatory social mapping process among participants, we present a case from the HERSELF and COREnet projects in Ireland. Participatory mapping exercises explored the networks of women from their emic (insider) perspectives, focusing on two main groups: pioneering women in the farmhouse cheese-making sector; and female leaders in conventional Irish agriculture. Juxtaposed, the two maps prompted a process of ‘conscientisation’ (the process of ‘awareness generation’, Sharma, 2000), the latter understood as a partial condition for empowerment. Further revelations emerged from situating the women’s ‘emic’ networks alongside ‘etic’ maps of agricultural and rural policy supports and how they are variously configured internationally. Viewed from emic perspectives, policy structures that may potentially limit or support particular types of agricultural feminisation are illuminated. It also becomes clear that while women overall are disenfranchised by policies that exclusively benefit land owners, some women are more resilient to these policies than others (by, for instance, by ‘qualifying’ as farmers and owning businesses, if not land).

The hypothesis presented through our example is that sharing of diverse ‘emic’ experiences, and furthermore sharing them within wider ‘etic’ contexts (e.g. policy contexts) is a process supportive of conscientisation. This participatory session aims to facilitate participants’ interrogation and learning in practice of how an interactive emic-etic dialogue may be applied as a dynamic and empowering process of refraction, within and also between diverse policy topics. It presents an example of one approach as a practical introduction to a collective hands-on, discursive mapping exercise on a policy topic chosen by participants.

The Expression of Sociological Knowledge in the EU Common Agricultural Policy: a comparative analysis of two EU member states

Oral

Dr. Aine Macken-Walsh¹, Prof. Frank Vanclay²

1. TEAGASC, 2. University of Groningen

The current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reflects policy awareness and recognition of the importance of taking human-centred approaches in dealing with challenges such as agricultural unsustainability and climate change. CAP funded measures, underpinned by European Commission reports, support farmer-led, peer extension approaches and ‘impartial’ advisory services that ‘enable’ farmers to make empowered, independent decisions. Other aspects of the CAP focus on the participation of women and youth in farming, and development of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), ascribing importance to increasing diversity, collaborations and knowledge exchange between actors to ‘boost’ resources available for innovation. In such a context, the potential for sociological knowledge to inform policy design and implementation appears to be expanded, and this paper explores to what extent it has and possibly could contribute in achieving more liveable rural futures.

This paper focuses on priority policy areas within CAP that hold specific potential for sociological knowledge to impress upon: participatory ecological schemes and AKIS development schemes. Vanclay’s (2004) social principles, which provide a comprehensive range of heuristics incorporating sociological wisdom, are used as a lens to analyse the operationalisation of CAP in two countries: Ireland and the Netherlands. The operational guidelines and implementation approaches of measures in both countries are analysed, supplemented by qualitative interviews with key informants (beneficiaries of the schemes i.e. farmers and professionals such as farm advisors who are currently delivering the schemes). Broader contextual information, such as EU-wide farmer protests, is implicated in the analytical discussion on the basis of the issues raised by key informants. This paper seeks to provoke debate among WG participants in relation to how current CAP design reflects sociological knowledge, how sociological knowledge could be more comprehensively reflected, and, together taking a reflexive look towards the future, possible impacts arising from such scenarios henceforth.

The role of alternative human-nature relationships in the depoliticized agricultural debate in Flanders

Oral

Mr. Wout Barbier¹, Prof. Joost Dessein¹, Mr. Ruben Savels¹

1. Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics

Keywords: post-political theory, agro-ecological transition, human-nature relationships

Agroecology is increasingly recognized as a response to pressing global challenges such as climate change and social inequality, yet it remains marginal within the Flemish agricultural landscape, where industrial agriculture dominates. This research investigates the barriers to the agroecological transition, shifting the focus from institutions and policies to the power of agro-industrial discourse. Using a post-structuralist approach, it argues that discourses shape resistance and that the Flemish agricultural debate is depoliticized, limiting space for alternative narratives. Drawing on post-foundational theory, social movements are identified as key actors in repoliticizing the agricultural debate.

The study explores the role of alternative human-nature relations in the discourse of social movements within Flemish agriculture, particularly focusing on farmer-soil relationships. Through discourse analysis, two dominant narratives are identified: an instrumentalization discourse, which emphasizes human control over soil functions, and a co-creation discourse, which recognizes soil as an active agent in agricultural production. Semi-structured interviews with agroecological and conventional farmers reveal diverse perceptions of soil that are not strictly divided along ideological lines. Additionally, farmers express concerns beyond soil care, including financial sustainability, access to land and farmer identity.

Findings suggest that emphasizing soil care alone is divisive and insufficient for broad mobilization. Instead, an expanded agroecological discourse should integrate economic security, legal protections, and trust in farmers. Strengthening alliances, particularly with labour unions, is crucial for scaling up the agroecological movement. This study calls for an agroecological discourse that moves beyond narratives of “naturalness” to foster a more inclusive and transformative agricultural transition.

Understanding depoliticization in participatory processes seeking food system transformation

Oral

Dr. Patricia Homs Ramírez de la Piscina¹, Dr. Ana Moragues-Faus¹

1. Department of Economic History, Institutions, Politics and World Economy, University of Barcelona and Food Action and Research Observatory (FARO)

This paper identifies depoliticization processes in the use of specific tools commonly employed in participatory processes to understand food systems and the co-creation of food policies. Specifically, it examines tools related to the construction of food system conceptual frameworks, food system representations (such as systemic maps), and theories of change in food system transformation (FST) based on a Multi-Level Perspective (MLP).

In this regard, we analyze different processes and tools within the FoSSNet project, a four-year Horizon Europe-funded research project aimed at establishing a pan-European network for Food Systems Science to support FST. Within this context, we explore the design of a food system conceptual framework, the co-production of a food systemic map, and the use of MLP as the theoretical framework supporting FST.

The paper addresses the benefits and limitations of these exercises, with particular attention to how the roles of the different stakeholders, power relations, responsibilities, and hierarchies between key food system activities are often rendered invisible, among others through a process of synthesis and aggregation of participants' expertise. Additionally, a possibilistic narrative is promoted, in which "different" food systems coexist without conflict being addressed.

Our research highlights the power relations not only between different but also competing food systems and the agents shaping them, demonstrating how certain tools can easily contribute to depoliticizing the constellation of relationships within food systems.

We compel the academic community to reflect on the role of current food system conceptualizations and representations in supporting post-political or depoliticized understandings of food system dynamics and the much-needed transformations.

Using Climathons to engage rural publics and mid-level actors in deliberative climate governance

Oral

Prof. Damian Maye¹, Dr. Aimee Morse¹, Dr. Philippa Simmonds¹, Ms. Caitlin MacKenzie¹

1. CCRI, University of Gloucestershire

A recent UK Climate Change Committee (2022) report recognised a need to decentralise climate policy, with deliberative methods a key mechanism for this engagement. This paper focuses on rural communities as public actors that are central to delivering climate targets (e.g. tree planting, renewable energy projects), but too often forgotten about in the public sphere i.e. where citizens debate in this case climate futures. The paper adopts a procedural justice perspective and argues we need to give rural communities greater voice, especially given specific structural and discursive challenges that they face. We present deliberative work conducted between 2023 and 2025 in the Forest of Dean, a local district in Gloucestershire in the UK, where the authors ran a series of three Climathon events covering energy, transport and food respectively. Each event was designed to develop locally-appropriate climate solutions. We worked directly with local authorities at district and county scales as strategic ‘mid-level actors’, co-designing each Climathon with them to support solution develop in a fair way. The paper reflects on our attempts to work with these policy actors and in so doing to engage a range of ‘publics’ from across civil society, industry and business. We share the different methods applied, the solutions that were developed and, crucially, monitoring data of the stakeholders that supported the events. Although Climathons are fast-paced, not always allowing time to fully debate and confront disagreements (‘agonistic pluralism’), we argue that solution-focused deliberation is highly empowering and essential to support positive rural transition.

What evidence? Whose evidence? Using sociological knowledge to inform farming policy development in Wales.

Oral

Dr. Sophie Wynne-Jones¹

1. Bangor University

This paper tackles the question of how European farming policy can become more inclusive and attentive to both academic and wider public voices, by exploring the ways in which different forms of social research, including participatory co-design approaches, can meaningfully inform policy development. Reporting on insights gained through a UKRI funding 'Policy Fellowship' with Welsh Government, the paper explores how different forms of social research insight are being utilised in agri-environment policy formulation in Wales.

The paper evaluates the influence of different insights to enable critical reflection on why certain types of knowledge are more or less influential. The analysis presented also enables rural sociologists to better understand factors that can determine the shape of policy, and how this may delimit the usability of different types of evidence. For instance, understanding policy makers' prior knowledges and ways of thinking, alongside more structural, institutional and bureaucratic limitations informing policy scope and design.

Reflections on a bespoke process of co-design for farming policy in Wales will comprise a key element of the analysis presented. The priority attached to these data is considered and their transformational potential evaluated, although limitations are ultimately acknowledged, given a need to balance farmer preferences against wider objectives. Ways forward are discussed in reference to a new 'Local Policy Innovation Partnership' for Rural Wales, that brings actors into new spaces of dialogue, learning from these past experiences of knowledge exchange.

**32. Turbulent presents
and uncertain futures:
How to explore and
navigate agrifood system
and rural transitions and
multiple futures**

“Reimagining Community-Supported Agriculture: The Socio-Material Nexus of Rice and Smallholder Alliances in Taiwan”

Oral

***Dr. NaiWen Wang*¹**

1. Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences National Science and Technology Council

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) originated in Japan in the 1960s as a response to agricultural industrialization, promoting ecological sustainability and smallholder farming. By the 1970s, it spread to Europe and North America. In Taiwan, however, CSA only gained traction after its accession to the WTO in the early 21st century.

Unlike global CSA models that emphasize crop diversity, Taiwan's CSA is uniquely centered on rice. This study explores CSA as an alternative agrifood network through the material and sociocultural dimensions of rice. Beyond ethical commitments to smallholder viability and sustainability, CSA's institutionalization within industrialized economies must be examined in historical context. Taiwan's rice-centric CSA stems from political and economic shifts, shaping its dominance in local initiatives.

This study investigates the challenges in Taiwan's rice farming sector and examines case studies from eastern Taiwan to explore how understanding rice's materiality, processing, and distribution can foster flexible smallholder alliances to reduce high circulation costs. Additionally, it critically reflects on the evolving identity of farmers and CSA's universal applicability. Expanding the concept of “community” in CSA discourse, this paper argues that producer relationships at the production site must be integrated into the broader socio-economic and material foundations of alternative food networks.

Affective Attitudes Amidst Uncertainty in Soil Care Practices

Oral

Mr. Michiel van de Pavert¹

1. Wageningen University

Keywords: uncertainty, care, affective

My contribution to this panel will be on attitudes towards uncertainty in vegetable gardening. I conducted ethnographic research with vegetable gardeners who use the no dig method to regenerate soil life. Entering the field I admired these gardeners as inventive pioneers, but I was struck by their humility. They asked themselves: do we really know that our soil care practices regenerate the soil? These practices are situated in and work with nature, which means inviting interconnectivity. This complexity comes with uncertainty, ambiguity, and unknowns. Despite efforts to control the farm ecosystem, the gardeners readily and humbly acknowledged the ambiguity that comes with working with nature. They did not attempt to optimise control, but rather acknowledge the unknowns. They remained open and curious towards possibilities for developing their soil care practices. Observations were combined with intuition and abstract knowledge. I argue that a humble, curious, and proactive attitude is more supportive of the agroecological transition. The urgency of the ecological crisis demands a different way of relating to knowledge. In an agri-food system where science is the main knowledge holder nature ends up being subverted and exploited. In an attempt to control uncertainty nature's complexity is reduced with the use of standardised industrial practices, leading to biodiversity loss and soil degradation. In response to this, policies could facilitate spaces of exploration that are driven by caring affective attitudes. For navigating agri-food transformations we can learn from vegetable gardeners who practice soil care.

Beyond planning: fostering future possibilities in a territorial agrifood systems through collective argumentation and experimentation

Oral

Ms. Karine Nunes¹, Dr. Claire Lamine²

1. School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), 2. National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment

Since the human capacity to steer agrifood systems transitions is limited due to the complexity of the systems in place and the uncertainty of the future, it is necessary to rethink transitions beyond classical planning approaches. In Ardèche, a French rural region facing several major challenges (climate change, water scarcity, land access difficulties, and significant precarity), an action research on agrifood transitions was launched in 2019 around a multi-actors group constituted through a careful process of actors' enrolment, aimed at including the agrifood system's different components and both representative and concerned actors. The action research started with a collective analysis of the territorial agrifood system's past trajectory, which was important to envision a desirable future and its key issues and principles. These were expressed in a manifesto collectively written based on a forward-looking attitude, viewing the future as something to be shaped. The overall goal of the group, later on transformed into a local food council, was never to frame a plan of actions, but rather to produce collective knowledge and experiments and to reflect on them collectively. Its thematic approach through working groups allows actors to choose the actions that they "care about", that resonate with their experiences, and are likely to inspire their commitment. We rely on the pragmatic sociology of transformations to understand the potential of this collective work of creating the opportunity to open up certain futures through collective argumentation and experimentation, in order to contribute to the development of ecological, just and inclusive agrifood transitions.

Key words: collective knowledge, attachments, agrifood system

Ensuring Fairness in Agricultural Markets: Perspectives from U.S. Livestock & Poultry Market Participants

Oral

Dr. Mary Hendrickson¹, Ms. Mallory Daily¹

1. University of Missouri

Keywords: agrifood markets, competition, consolidation, regulation

Among U.S. farmers, there is a pervasive sense that the agricultural marketplace is rigged against the farmer, with many market participants frustrated by corporate control of markets for agricultural inputs and livestock, poultry and grain products. However, there abounds a deep-seated skepticism of the ability of government in any form to intervene to ensure competition and fairness. We engaged with 20 producers through focus groups or extended interviews to understand their knowledge of the responsibilities of U.S. government regulations in livestock and poultry markets. In general, farmers and marketers lack faith in the ability of government to ensure competition and fairness. Many believe that “government” let the firms get so big that now they can manipulate markets, or that government corruption chose winners and losers. There is a deep-seated distrust of the very idea of government policing markets. If agrifood markets are perceived as rigged either by large market actors or “the government” what remedies exist to make them fairer? While interviewees had relatively consensus views of the problem of the intersection of corporate control and market performance, few had insights as to the best checks on market or regulatory power. As sociologists interested in checking agrifood power to move towards more inclusive farm and rural futures, this opens up both possibilities and challenges. Reining in corporate power is desired but how? If agrifood oligopolies are broken up, what comes next? Who fulfills coordinating functions and how? Could we shelter and prioritize alternative market arrangements and how? Could a food commons approach be politically viable in this environment? If oligopolies are allowed to continue, could we regulate food and agriculture monopolies as public utilities given the importance of food to the stability of society?

From Assessment to Intervention: How a Digital Sustainability Assessment and Advisory Tool influences Transition Pathways in Swiss Organic Farming

Oral

***Ms. Anna Geiser*¹**

1. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)

Keywords: assemblage, sustainability assessment tools, quantification

Engaging with the Swiss agricultural system inevitably intersects with the quest for sustainability. Whether in national debates on future agricultural policies or in talks with farmers, sustainability appears as an unquestioned horizon. Yet on closer inspection, this vision fragments into multiple, sometimes competing futures. This contribution takes a critical look at the development of a digital sustainability assessment and advisory tool at the Swiss Institute for Organic Research. Designed around indicators aligned with the FAO 'Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems' framework, the tool aspires to 'accelerate the agroecological transformation' of Swiss organic farmers.

However, rather than merely assessing sustainability, the tool actively structures transition pathways by defining what counts as sustainable. While the project envisages sustainability as a set of best practices to be identified, compared and shared, it also raises questions about the role of data as a governance actor. How does quantification influence decision-making, and to what extent does it shape sustainable futures rather than simply assessing them?

Drawing on assemblage thinking, this study examines the governance dynamics within this digital intervention, in order to explore the potential to shift these tools from rigid, goal-oriented visions of sustainability to more flexible, open-ended playgrounds that foster desirable transitions.

Empirically, it is informed by in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, as well as field notes from farm observations and project meetings. By tracing how this tool mediates knowledge production, this contribution asks: Who and what really governs within this assemblage, and towards what futures are they working?

From self-sufficiency to community-sufficiency: Lessons from the permaculture movement in Australia

Oral

Mrs. Giuliana Fiore¹

1. University of Queensland

This paper examines how Australia's permaculture movement navigates uncertainty in rural transitions by evolving from individual self-sufficiency toward community-oriented frameworks that embody alternative futures in present practice.

Drawing on two years of fieldwork using qualitative research across three Australian regions, including 30 interviews and participant observation, I analyse how permaculture practitioners use prefigurative politics—enacting desired futures in the present—to bridge the spiritual and material dimensions of place-based transformation.

This movement employs experimental, iterative approaches that balance visionary ambition with practical adaptability while confronting fundamental uncertainties about rural futures. It is characterized by a horizontal and informal organization that allows local groups to translate their permaculture knowledge into practices for their local needs. Some examples of this are the use of permaculture to integrate disaster management techniques, regeneration practices, local energy production through renewable sources, and sustainable agri-food systems.

Permaculture communities demonstrate how prefigurative politics and ethics of care create spaces where alternative futures can be tested and experienced, rather than merely imagined. These approaches offer valuable insights for European contexts grappling with similar tensions between the need for transformative action and recognition of fundamental uncertainty

Futures that tarnish the present. Using a Structural Equation Model to explain constraints for rural liveability in extractivist contexts

Oral

***Ms. Helena Martinez Cabrera*¹, *Prof. Gonzalo Rodríguez-Rodríguez*¹, *Prof. Miguel Caínzos-López*²**

1. Department of Applied Economics, ECOPESCA research unit, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2. Department of Political Science and Sociology, ISOPOLIS research unit, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Extractivism-based development models limit the ability of communities' to define and pursue well-being objectives—or agency—(Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019; Mische, 2009; Ye et al., 2019). Limited agency can trigger downward spirals: depopulation and degraded social institutions lead to less liveable places—i.e.: places with less capacity to attract and/or retain population (ESPON, 2017; Stockdale, 2006). This contributes to a sense of fatalism about the capacity of future generations to maintain established ways of life, meet their needs, or even remain in such areas. Empirically capturing the existence, causality directions and intensity of such vicious circles remains a major challenge. In this paper, we use a Structural Equation Model (SEM) to analyse: 1) how agency interacts with local modes of living, and 2) the mechanisms linking economic specialisation with the ability of areas to sustain lifestyles and well-being over time. We predicate our model upon survey data representative of rural areas in Galicia (NW Spain). This is a key timber-producing region in the European Union that is increasingly specialised in the extraction of unprocessed wood and board. Our model validates liveability as a two-dimensional construct, encompassing the local satisfaction of needs and future projections, both mediated by agency. We show that timber-specialised areas offer significantly fewer well-being opportunities. Furthermore, we provide guidance on the micro-level conditions for socio-economic development in rural areas, focusing on the connection between (i) the satisfaction of needs and (ii) the role of social institutions in regulating material life (Beckert, 2016; Max-Neef et al., 2010; Power, 2008).

Keywords: Liveability, Agency, Extractivism

Governing emergence towards the transformation of agri-food assemblages

Oral

Prof. Jérémie Forney¹, Dr. Angga Dwiartama², Dr. Dana Bentia³

1. University of Neuchâtel-CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim, 2. Institut Teknologi Bandung, 3. Anthropology institute, University of Neuchâtel

This paper develops a theoretical framing of agri-environmental governance (AEG) as assemblage. Assemblage thinking offers a particularly productive guide in exploring how everyday governance is co-produced in the interaction between numerous social processes involving a diversity of actors and instruments. The paper builds on four essential dimensions of assemblages: (1) the interdependence of instruments within a wider governance assemblage; (2) the uncertainty and unpredictability of effects in agri-environmental governance; (3) the distributed nature of agency and its implication for power relations; (4) the importance of capacities in the transformation of agri-food systems. It concludes on a series of four principles as points of departure for building a “governance of emergence”. This form of governance shifts towards redistributing responsibilities, prioritising processual and relational objectives, embracing reflexive and processual monitoring methods, and experimenting with spaces of possibilities by targeting major attractors.

Imagined futures in the transition towards sustainable food systems: fictional expectations and collective action of family farming in Southern Brazil

Oral

Dr. Paulo Niederle¹, Dr. Andréia Vigolo Lourenço¹, Dr. Gustavo Martins²

1. Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2. Anama

The transition to sustainable food systems has been a central topic on the agenda of organizations, governments, and companies. Although the topic itself encompasses a horizon of future, discussions are often limited to diagnoses of the historical trajectory of transformations in agriculture. In contrast, engaging a dialogue with the sociological literature on how imagined futures shape social changes, this article analyzes the fictional expectations that guide the transition strategies constructed by family farming organizations on the Litoral Norte of Rio Grande do Sul. The study was conducted between May and December 2023 through the articulation of prospective analysis and action research techniques. Data were collected through interviews, surveys, and focus groups involving representatives of 21 organizations. Based on the identification of critical factors for the transition, the article discusses two issues insufficiently addressed in the literature: changes in expectations when social actors are exposed to the imperative of public criticism and the strength of institutional mechanisms of path dependence (i.e., of the past) on imagined futures.

Imagining Agrifood Transitions: How Climate Change Perceptions Shape Adaptation and Transition Pathways

Oral

Ms. Marie Van Espen¹, Prof. Joost Dessein¹

1. Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics

Research on coping with climate change in the agrifood sector has focused extensively on mitigating or adapting to the biophysical effects of climate change on crops and livestock, but human perspectives remain rather elusive. Little is known about which aspects influence the way people involved in agrifood think about adaptation to climate change. Or whether they envision this as an incremental change within the current, dominant agrifood system, or as a transition of the agrifood system itself.

This study aims to answer the question of how a person's awareness of and disposition towards climate change affect their ability to imagine different adaptation scenarios. To this end, a framework is proposed in which firstly a person's understanding of and experience with climate change itself, and their stance on the duality of the agricultural sector as both a victim and a cause of climate change is determined. This positioning is then combined with the extent to which respondents view the current state of their respective sectors in light of climate change more positively or negatively. These two elements combined might provide an answer to the research question.

This analysis is based on 40 in-depth interviews with stakeholders – ranging from various levels of policymakers and (academic) researchers, over NGO representatives, to individuals involved in different steps of the agrifood chain – from the European beef, fruit, and potato sectors. These sectors differ in the extent to which they are viewed as contributors to climate change in the public eye.

Keywords: Climate change perceptions, Adaptation imaginaries, In-depth interviews

Is the Future of Rurality still Agriculture? Reassessing Rural Sociology through Anti-Speciesism and More-Than-Human Perspectives

Oral

Mr. luca di clemente¹

1. University of Milan

Anti-speciesism in rural development challenges dominant narratives of agricultural transitions by questioning human-centered models of governance and production. In a time of agrifood system uncertainty, this research explores how grassroots actors—including collectives, farms, and social movements—engage in transformative practices that reimagine rural economies beyond exploitative frameworks.

Agrifood systems and rural landscapes are at the center of deep ecological, economic, and political transformations, unfolding within conditions of profound uncertainty. As dominant models of food production and rural development face growing contestation, new imaginaries of rurality emerge, challenging extractivist paradigms and advocating for alternative futures. This conceptual paper examines the role of anti-speciesist perspectives and More-Than-Human (MOTH) approaches in rethinking rural transitions beyond human-centered governance.

This research is part of a broader investigation into rural development and agrifood system transformation through an anti-speciesist lens. We explore how neo-rural movements, alternative food networks (AFNs), and grassroots mobilizations reconfigure human-non-human relationships and propose new governance models in response to ecological and ethical crises. By integrating MOTH epistemologies, we interrogate how rural actors navigate uncertainty, challenge dominant expectations of agrifood futures, and engage in experimental practices of transition.

Focusing on the intersection between anti-speciesism, rural governance, and emergent agroecological economies, this study highlights how alternative agrifood systems foster interspecies justice, contest market-driven sustainability narratives, and open up plural rural futures. Through an analysis of political struggles, land-use debates, and multi-species agency, we examine how these actors negotiate power structures while advancing non-exploitative rural economies.

By addressing these interconnections, the paper contributes to the broader discussion on transition governance under uncertainty, the politics of agrifood futures, and the limits of human control over rural change. It argues for an approach to rural transformation that moves beyond anthropocentric and deterministic visions, embracing relational, dynamic, and open-ended pathways toward agrifood justice and interspecies coexistence.

Modernity and Tradition reversed: peasant futurism in rural Brittany

Oral

***Ms. Amelia Veitch*¹**

1. University of Lausanne & EHESS

When Lucie and her family moved to rural Brittany (France), she did not expect to face a cornfield daily. While their home overlooks a lush garden, the field behind their house—visible from certain windows—imposes itself through its presence and, more disturbingly, through the odors of pig slurry and chemical treatments. These nuisances, combined with health concerns for their child, led Lucie to reconsider the idyllic countryside she had imagined.

Rural Brittany, a sought-after tourist destination and retirement retreat, has seen rising appeal since the 2020 health crisis, fueled by its portrayal as a “climate refuge”. However, this growing attraction collides with the realities of an agricultural landscape shaped by intensive farming. While some newcomers secure coastal properties, most settle inland, where they confront an environment defined by industrial agriculture rather than rural idylls.

This paper examines how these tensions reconfigure notions of modernity and tradition. Based on a 16-month ethnographic study, it explores how industrial farmers—once symbols of progress—are now perceived as defenders of hopelessly outdated traditions, while peasant farming and ecological activism become linked to futurism (Bryant and Knight 2019). These shifts recycle long-standing anthropological hierarchies between tradition and modernity (Redford 1991; Fabian 1984). I wish to empirically and critically examine these emergent dominant visions of the future. How can we understand this persistent “will to improve” (Li 2007)? What and whom are left behind, and what new moral selves and economies are put into practice?

Intensified conflicts between proponents of productivist farming and environmental activists have turned Brittany into a contested space where traditional hierarchies of progress and backwardness are inverted. Rather than a “countryside for difficult times” (Léger and Hervieu 1983) the countryside itself faces difficult times.

Motivations for Profound Land-use Change in a Drying Area

Oral

Dr. Boldizsár Gergely Megyesi¹, Ms. Alexandra Czeglédi², Dr. György Pataki³, Ms. Hanna Boróka Acsády³, Ms. Katalin Varsányi³, Mr. Gergő Berta³, Mr. András Király⁴, Dr. Péter Kajner⁴

1. Environmental Social Science Research Group; Centre for Social Sciences, 2. Environmental Social Sciences Research Group, 3. Environmental Social Science Research Group, 4. WWF Hungary

The Sand Ridge in the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium, grapples with severe water scarcity due to recurrent droughts, significantly affecting agricultural activities and farmers' incomes. The combination of increasing temperatures due to climate change, water management focusing on draining waters from the landscape, and other agricultural practices compound these challenges. While local and regional actors acknowledge water scarcity, they harbour diverse expectations regarding potential solutions. Some farmers, supported by the local government and associations, have cooperated voluntarily to conserve water and enhance agricultural efficiency. They have initiated landscape restoration using nature-based water retention measures to fulfil biodiversity and climate objectives. However, most farmers and local stakeholders anticipate solutions from external actors.

We investigate the motivations behind local land use changes in the four-and-a-half-year long research (MOSAIC Horizon2020). We established a 'policy lab' to support multi-stakeholder planning and equip the local farmers' coalition with tools to incentivise key stakeholders to implement jointly defined sustainable land use plans. Our research, rooted in participatory methods, offline workshops, focus group meetings, and semi-structured interviews with farmers, local decision-makers, inhabitants, experts, and activists, delves into prevailing circumstances and recognises that farm-level land use decisions impact not only individual farms but the broader local socio-environmental milieu. In the present paper we aim (1) to share insights about the motivations of the different farmers toward land use change to better understand (2) determinants shaping decision-making at local, regional and national levels and (3) to elucidate effective proto-policies for fostering transformative change with diverse local stakeholders possessing distinct interests, power and knowledge regarding land use changes.

Key words: water scarcity, climate change, land use, farmers, rural policy

Narratives of present rural futures by the financial sector

Oral

Prof. Egon Noe¹, Dr. Hugo F. Alrøe²

1. Danish Center for Rural Research, University of Southern Denmark, 2. Independent

The financial sector tends to view itself as neutral and objective in facilitating societal development and engaging with future economic risks, and therefore, as playing a very secluded role in our imaginations of rural futures. However, decisions made by financial actors play an increasingly important role in rural areas. They decide which kinds of farming systems can be financed and where it is possible to get mortgage loans. We analyse the financial sector's impact to illuminate its role in rural development and to explore how images of the future are forming decisions towards an always unknown future. In this, we draw on two theoretical perspectives. One is Esposito's application of Luhmann's theory of temporality, where the present is a continuous reproduction of the difference between the past and the future. She introduces the notion of "retrospective causation, where the effect depends on a cause for which it is itself the cause." The future of the present is not an effect of the present but a cause of it. The other perspective, Bruner's narrative theory, offers a practical approach to exploring how narratives operate to reproduce the past and the future in the present, thus reproducing our identities, decisions, and values. We examine what kinds of narratives the financial sector circulates about the present future, with farming systems and rural housing as cases, to explore the sector's role in forming liveable rural futures and, at a more abstract level, to illuminate the contingency and importance of how we produce present futures.

Re-folking art – a radical rural politics?

Oral

Mr. Wout Barbier¹

1. Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics

Key words: artistic research, farmers, Science and Technology Studies

Many farmers are struggling, they are hardly – and not even all – surviving. Their state is often one of alienation, of decomposition, isolation and futility. Artistic practices are in theory the opposite of that: they critique and offer visions of alternative futures, and are comfortable with change and uncertainty. They can stimulate the consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, leading to true knowledge and lasting action. In late capitalism however, they are often marginalized, commodified and removed from everyday life. Are artistic practices a way of stimulating in rural communities the feeling of entitlement to a dignified live, to use the whole brain, body and soul ? What would it mean to “Re-folk art”, and can it create change, by disturbing, opposing, delay, moving to the edge, upheaving? Does the proliferation of these “rural imaginaries” have the potential to expand the solution space, to democratize the creation of knowledge and to inform radical action?

These questions are not tackled with a think-before-you-act approach. Instead, thinking and acting is approached as inseparable. The project is an amalgam of speculative fictions, impure hybrids, and collective “folk art”. In light of the de-traditionalization and decommodification of folk art, expressions that are inefficient, contradictory, abundant, unreadable and misspelled are embraced.

Rooting pigs, unruly futures: Exploring the emergence of alternative pig farming practices in Norway

Oral

Dr. Richard Helliwell¹, Mr. Tommy Ruud¹

1. Rurális - Institute for Rural and Regional Research

The behavioural resilience, flexibility of diet and genetic capacities of pig breeds have been harnessed to transform the pig and its production. Pig farming is now one of the most intensive, and technologically advanced livestock production systems in Europe. But this apparent domination of pigs' bodies is constantly strained by biological vulnerabilities and behavioural specificities which exceed human capacities at control. African Swine Fever is just the latest viral pathogen that threatens to collapse this system.

If we are going to transform the agri-food environment then it is point going to have to intersect with pig production, and grapple with the uncertainties and unruliness of pigs. However, efforts to develop commercial alternatives to intensive conventional production have largely failed. With the exception of Denmark, organic pork lags behind other organic meat sectors and constitutes less than 1% of pig farming in the EU. Low even in comparison to other organic livestock sectors.

The aim of this paper is to use the growth of alternative pig rearing systems in Norway as an entry point for exploring questions about how to transform agri-food system. We utilise an assemblage analytic to examine free-range pig farming in Norway as a material-discursive practice and commercial endeavour; and to what extent these efforts are opening new lines of flight for the broader pig farming assemblage in Norway. In particular we highlight how the limited market appeal of 'organic pork' has opened up space to experiment with rearing pigs differently. This includes situating pigs as a working animal contributing to the broader productivity of the farm, and decommodifying pigs and pork in favour of using them to sustain broader social relations that produce other values and opportunities. In conclusion, we reflect upon the implications this has for broader efforts to reassemble European agriculture in more sustainable ways.

The future of short meat circuits: focus on the role of small slaughterhouses in Switzerland

Oral

Mrs. Louisa Malatesta¹

1. Anthropology institute, University of Neuchâtel

Keywords : meat production, small slaughterhouses, transitions

The centralization of production and processing facilities is having a major impact on rural areas where short distribution channels, in this case for meat, are already well established. The centralization of infrastructures also affects an essential stage that remains in the shadows: the slaughtering of livestock. Indeed, centralization is also having an impact on small slaughterhouses, by encouraging the grouping of activities within the same large infrastructure. In the Swiss Jura, a rural mid-mountain region, there are still many small slaughterhouses attached to butcher's shops, which is becoming increasingly rare in the rest of Switzerland and Europe. My work shows that the future of these facilities is uncertain, even if the market is stable. This uncertainty is based on two main factors: (1) the future of small slaughterhouses relies almost entirely on the support of veterinary services during inspections to bring them up to standard, and (2) the desertification of butcher apprenticeships, jeopardizing the succession to these jobs in a part of the structures as well as the future of a craftmanship. Against this backdrop, butchers are not looking beyond the next ten years. Though fully aware of the transition that will soon be underway, they do not seem to be claiming key roles in the transition of meat production, for example by organizing themselves collectively. In this way, I question how the future of meat production can be conceived when the subject of animal death, though central, remains unthought, and how can we consider creating a place for dialogue between policies, institutions and practices in future transitions.

Transitions to a more fruit and vegetable secure UK food system? Unveiling narrative pathways towards differentiated horticultural futures

Oral

***Ms. Aoife Maher*¹**

1. Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter

Despite recognition of the importance of fruit and vegetables for healthy, sustainable diets and the realisation that UK imports of fresh produce are increasingly vulnerable to climate related shocks, UK production of fruit and vegetables continues to decline. Two distinct future imaginaries for UK horticulture have emerged within policy discourse. The first is an automation heavy, technology driven future typified by vertical farming. The second is an agroecological horticultural production future, where growers can contribute to more just, biodiverse and sustainable systems. Yet perspectives on how growers reach these futures which have been largely imagined for them, and whether they would want to, remain elusive. Taking predominantly Bazzani's (2023) framework, this research considers the future imaginaries for the UK horticultural industry and the engagement of growers, intermediaries and policy makers in enacting the 'narrative pathways' to reach these differentiated ideals. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with fifty-two participants contrasts grower hopes and expectations for the future with the future projects conceptualised by the wider expert system. This leads to several significant findings. Firstly, participants are not only guided in their projectivity towards horticultural futures by their experiences, their stage in their farming career and their active successors, but also by their familial memories of historic family growing practice. Secondly, participants could express strong alignment with an imagined future while also feeling disillusioned with or excluded from the narrative pathway to enact it. Finally, intermediaries were often excluded from visioning collective future projects despite being asked to participate in their delivery.

Keywords: horticulture; narrative pathways; collective imaginaries

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33. Reflecting on inclusive research practices in rural contexts

A farmer and a vegan walk into a conference...

Oral

Dr. Catherine Broomfield¹, Dr. Philippa Simmonds²

1. Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter, 2. CCRI, University of Gloucestershire

This paper reflects on positionality for researchers conducting qualitative research with livestock farmers. Specifically, we consider the impact of insider/outsider positionality when researching questions that relate to debates around livestock, climate change, and interactions between farmers and the public. We develop a framework for understanding the different components of “rapport”, and use it to guide reflections on our similar/dissimilar research experiences. Taking a “kitchen table” approach to reflexivity, we discuss our experiences of rapport and emotional labour during fieldwork. Through this, we identify risks to the outsider researcher in terms of researcher vulnerability, and risks to the insider researcher in terms of the “commodification of rapport”. In addition, we highlight some of the benefits of different insider/outsider positionalities and the implications these might have on sampling, data collection, analysis, and ultimately conclusions. Overall, we re-emphasise the value of reflexivity in developing high quality qualitative research that supports liveable rural futures.

A Strength-Based Approach to Rural Cardiovascular Health: The Farmers Have Hearts – Cardiovascular Health Programme

Oral

***Dr. Diana van Doorn*¹, *Dr. David Meredith*², *Dr. Noel Richardson*³, *Dr. John McNamara*⁴, *Prof. Catherine Blake*⁵**

1. Department of Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis, Rural Economy Development Programme, Teagasc, 2. Teagasc, 3. SETU, 4. Farm Health and Safety Knowledge Transfer Unit, Teagasc, 5. School of Agriculture & Food Science, University College Dublin (UCD), Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

Irish male farmers are a high-risk group for cardiovascular disease (CVD) mortality and morbidity but are considered 'hard-to-reach' (HTR) for health interventions. Effective outreach to this group requires tailored approaches that consider their working conditions and cultural perceptions. The Farmers Have Hearts – Cardiovascular Health Programme (FHH-CHP) was a targeted, multi-actor intervention aimed at improving cardiovascular health among male livestock farmers.

Method

The FHH-CHP was a workplace health intervention (n=868) for male beef and dairy farmers, conducted at livestock marts and co-ops. It included baseline and Week 52 health checks and a lifestyle change intervention through phone coaching and/or health text messages. Health checks were open all farmers, with intervention allocation based on choice ensuring inclusive participation. The programme adopted strength-based and farmer-centred strategies to strengthen autonomy and empowerment.

Results

Baseline participation rate was 86.4%, with 62% returning for the repeat health check. At baseline, 74% of farmers had ≥4 CVD risk factors. At Week 52, 81.5% reported having made lifestyle changes, and 42% significantly improved their CVD risk profile. Farmers valued the outreach, flexible and personal approach which accommodated their work and individual needs.

Conclusion

The programme demonstrated the value of inclusive research, increasing acceptability among HTR farmers. By accommodating farming schedules and respecting gendered and cultural perceptions, it remained accessible and relevant. Empowering farmers through a choice-based intervention and supporting their autonomy encouraged greater self-care and ownership of their health. These findings provide practical guidance for designing rural and inclusive health programmes with real-world impact.

Are Living Labs the answer in rural development in remote locations?

Oral

Dr. Joanna Storie¹, Ms. Vineta Gailite¹

1. Estonian University of Life Sciences

Living Labs, originally designed for urban environments, are increasingly being used in rural areas to promote regional development, user-centered design, community engagement, and sustainable living. However, their effectiveness in farming contexts, particularly in dispersed locations, raises some concerns.

Reflecting on the ongoing CODECS Horizon project, which examines digitalisation impacts on agriculture and the development of a new project to improve agricultural practices in potato production have highlighted the need for adaptations to the living lab concept to accommodate busy farmers in dispersed locations. These include adjusting workshop timings to avoid peak busy periods and not adhering to urban timeframes; multiple site workshops to overcome distances that farmers are prepared to travel; and digital tours to demonstrate new practices.

In addition, translating research into actionable data requires appropriate presentation based on farmers' capabilities and capacities. For example, complex remote sensing data can be provided as raw data or heavily processed, depending on the farmer's requirements or workshops given for them to utilise more of the data for themselves. Likewise, the language used in workshops needs to be inclusive, allowing researchers to access information without overloading farmers with disciplinary specific or overly technical language. Additionally, workshops should be designed to allow farmers to express their opinions and have their knowledge respected. Overcoming these constraints is crucial for ensuring equitable integration of the farming community into the living lab.

Keywords: Remote communities; rural-centric development; seasonal challenges

Contested Rural Transitions: Embracing Conflicts through Participatory Research. The CRAFT project

Oral

Dr. Eirini Skrimizea¹, Dr. Valentino Marini Govigli², Dr. Jordie .Ansari³, Dr. Agnieszka Nowak-Olejniki⁴, Dr. Natalia Tokarczyk⁴

1. Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, KU Leuven, 2. University of Bologna, Department of Agricultural and Food Sciences, 3. University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, 4. Jagellonian University, Krakow

As rural areas undergo significant transitions driven by socio-economic and cultural changes, technological advancements, environmental and climate policies, the frequency and intensity of socioenvironmental conflicts are expected to increase. These conflicts include human-wildlife interactions, disputes over pesticide use, land use claims, forest resource conflicts, and debates surrounding use and misuse of ecosystem services (e.g., renewable energies, recreational activities, water, etc.). They can occur at multiple administrative levels, on different spatial scales, and among a variety of actors with competing goals, values, rules, knowledge and, eventually, visions for territorial development. How can we structure and implement effective participatory action research designs that embrace rather than avoid conflict and contestation? How can we create trust and partnerships with the different 'sides' and how can we design and facilitate participatory methods that leverage conflict as a catalyst for co-produced, novel rural territories? Engaging with these issues from academia's perspective requires transdisciplinary research that integrates insights from social sciences, natural sciences, and other knowledge and values systems, with the ambition of knowledge co-production and constructive social change. Engaging with the above questions, the CRAFT project aims to connect and train early-career researchers in sustainability studies and sciences to design and implement transdisciplinary and participatory action research, addressing socio-environmental conflicts in rural transitions.

Cultivating Ground-Up Knowledge: Reflections on the “Experts in Your Field” Participatory Research Project with Agroecology Practitioners in the UK

Oral

Dr. Isobel Talks¹

1. Researcher and Consultant at University of Oxford

The UKRI funded “Experts in Your Field” project, which positioned small-scale farmers and landworkers as knowledge producers rather than solely subjects of study, is representative of a wider shift towards inclusive approaches in rural research. This paper critically reflects on the project’s two-phase implementation, which engaged over 70 farmers and landworkers across the UK in designing, conducting, and disseminating research on agroecological practices. Participants explored diverse research topics reflecting their priorities, including soil health and carbon sequestration, biodiversity monitoring (particularly bat populations), biofertiliser trials, silvoecological forestry impacts, mushroom cultivation techniques, and the social dimensions of agricultural work. Drawing on project documentation and participant testimonials, we examine how inverting traditional power dynamics created more inclusive knowledge generation, while acknowledging persistent challenges in reconciling practitioner needs with academic frameworks. The project built research capacity through providing equipment, financial stipends recognising farmers’ time constraints, and facilitated peer learning networks that sustained engagement across disparate rural locations. Beyond instrumental outcomes, we analyse how project architecture—from collaborative workshop design to participant-led WhatsApp communities and a community journal—created spaces where knowledge could flow multidirectionally. This approach revealed the depth of experiential insights previously marginalised in formal research contexts and expanded participation across diverse agricultural sectors. Our findings suggest that meaningful inclusion in rural research requires not only methodological innovation but fundamental reconsideration of who holds expertise, how knowledge is valued, and what constitutes “rigorous” evidence. We conclude by outlining principles for similar initiatives that seek to democratise agricultural knowledge production while navigating institutional constraints.

Embedding justice in transdisciplinary methodologies for more equitable rural research

Oral

***Dr. Marina Knickel*¹, *Prof. Guido Caniglia*²**

1. Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research, 2. University of Helsinki

Transformations towards sustainability in rural contexts are normative, political processes which require systemic shifts that integrate justice as a core ethical principle rather than an afterthought. Transdisciplinary (TD) research is lauded as a promising approach where issues of social and environmental justice can be embedded and mobilised. However, TD research might also perpetuate injustices instead of addressing them, even if implemented as participatory and collaborative.

In our presentation, we share insights from the EU-funded TD project PLUS Change that aims to develop decision-making processes for more sustainable land use in 12 Practice Cases while prioritising justice. These cases represent a mix of rural, urban, and peri-urban land use areas in Europe. In this project, we try to better understand how different organisations perceive justice and learn to embed justice considerations in their work, and how these shape TD research processes and outcomes (e.g. decision-making around land use in rural areas, spatial plans, chosen research frameworks and methodologies as well as related outcomes).

First, we illustrate how the integrated and action-oriented approach developed in PLUS Change – Justice Lens – can be used to embed justice in TD research carried out in rural contexts. Second, we present insights from the analysis of ‘Equity and Justice Plans’ developed by 22 partners. The Plans illustrate how an organisation (e.g. a planning authority) can develop strategies to navigate concrete injustice situations. These Plans exemplify diversity of injustices across different geographical, socio-cultural and political contexts in Europe and showcase that justice can be approached differently depending on needs, institutional setups and resources. We hope our work will inspire rural scholars to engage with justice in novel ways, at different levels, across diverse rural contexts, and at the intersection of research and practice.

3 keywords: justice, transdisciplinary research, land use

Engaging Community Researchers in a Digital Learning Experiment with Rural Elderly

Oral

Prof. Kadri Leetmaa¹

1. University of Tartu

Rural localities typically experience multiple forms of exclusion. Long-term peripheralization has led to the disappearance of once-dense social infrastructures, while contemporary digital services have not fully compensated for this loss. Additionally, due to prolonged economic and population decline, rural communities often face the challenge of aging. Older adults, who tend to adapt more slowly to new technologies, encounter an added layer of inequality—being disconnected not only from contemporary cultural and social life but also from essential public services. As part of the research project “*Rethinking Smartification from the Margins: Co-creating Smart Rurality with and for an Aging Population*” (2023–2027), we conducted a digital learning experiment with elderly residents in four Estonian rural municipalities. Over four months, 97 elderly participants used tablets to learn about key online solutions for e-services and other relevant digital environments. To facilitate learning and foster a local learning culture, we employed 17 community researchers—local mediators who connected our research team with small learning groups (3-7 members) in localities. These community researchers came from diverse backgrounds, including librarians, sports trainers, handicraft group leaders, and daycare center leaders. Our study provides valuable methodological insights into how mediated research with elderly participants functions and how small learning groups, supported by trusted local figures, help rural older adults navigate and find meaning in the digital society, ultimately enhancing their well-being.

Keywords: community researchers, rural elderly, digital learning experiment, Estonia

Evaluating Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Participatory Methodologies in Rural Innovation: Insights from RURACTIVE's Co-Development Process

Oral

Ms. Alessia Bertuca¹, Dr. Claudia de Luca¹

1. University of Bologna

As part of the Horizon Europe project RURACTIVE, a participatory methodology for community-led innovation has been developed and tested in 12 European rural communities (the RURACTIVE Dynamos). This methodology consists of establishing and activating Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs), guiding them through an inclusive co-development process for rural transformation. Rooted in participation and inclusion as key principles, it provides step-by-step guidelines, combining theoretical principles with practical tools, using the Dynamos as open laboratories for testing and refinement. Each step—from RIE establishment to stakeholder engagement—was designed for ensuring broad participation, integrating inclusivity tips, minimum representation requirements, gender balance quotas, and targeted outreach to youth, older people, migrants and minorities, disabled individuals and LGBITQ+ communities.

Now that the participatory process has been implemented, we reflect on its approach to gender-sensitive planning. While efforts were made to ensure balanced participation, gender aspects were often introduced ex post, rather than being structurally mainstreamed. This raises questions about systematically integrating gender-sensitive planning into participatory methodologies, ensuring gender perspectives actively shape challenge definition, decision-making, and solution design. Did the methodology go beyond representation to integrate gender perspectives meaningfully? Were the tools and guidelines sufficient to address gendered dimensions of rural challenges and solutions? How can they be refined to structurally embed gender considerations into future participatory processes?

Through this presentation, we aim to critically refine the methodology by sharing insights from RURACTIVE's real-world implementation, aiming to explore ways to enhance the structural integration of gender-sensitive planning methods within participatory rural research and innovation.

Exploring questions of research fatigue, incentives and inclusivity in UK agricultural communities

Oral

Dr. Caroline Nye¹, Dr. Rebecca Wheeler¹

1. University of Exeter

The agricultural community in the UK has faced innumerable challenges over the last decade, with substantial transitions in policy, the exit from the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and greater regulatory pressures. At the same time, interest in how land is managed has increased significantly in the wake of Defra's 25-year plan white paper, biodiversity collapse, and climate change. Add to this how crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have highlighted weaknesses in food security, and it becomes evident why such drastic transitions in both industry structure and land management ambitions mean that farmers have increasingly become the subject of much research attention. But how is this attention affecting farmers and their willingness to engage in such research? Are members of the farming community beginning to feel 'fatigued' by requests to participate in surveys, interviews, focus groups etc., and what implications might this have for the inclusivity of rural research? What role might financial and other incentives play in securing engagement and broadening – or indeed narrowing – the diversity of voices that are heard? In this conference paper, we outline findings from a preliminary research project that addressed such questions through in-depth interviews with a range of researchers from academic institutions, private consultancies and governmental agencies across the UK.

From data to action: Living Labs and their challenges for shaping rural policies

Oral

Ms. Fabiana Stortini¹, Ms. Brigida Marovelli¹, Mr. Tommaso Trinchetti¹, Mr. Michele Moretti¹

1. University of Pisa

The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas recognizes the importance of engaging territories and local actors for addressing rural challenges through active participation and collaboration. Rural territories are complex and dynamic and demand innovative data and methods to effectively capture the complexity and support decision making toward tailored area-specific solutions. This study aims to explore processes and dynamics in the real-world context through seven Living Labs across Europe (France, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) within the European GRANULAR project. The role of Living Labs, in this context, is shifting from the field of product innovation to a more general idea of territorial agencies, for organising policies and promoting a participatory system of local governance. The seven Granular Living Labs represent and include a variety of actors and geographical contexts. They show typical Living Lab issues, but they also have specificities because they deal with large rural territories (to varying degrees) and focus not on isolated interventions but on the broader management of the territory. This adds significant complexity, as they address a wide range of issues, including connectivity, tourism, agricultural productivity, accessibility of basic services, and involve diverse private and public actors. Within this framework, we aim to analyse the actions undertaken by these Living Labs during the first 24 months of the project, identifying the barriers they encounter and the drivers that enable their progress.

Gender Inclusiveness in Research at Life Science Universities

Oral

Dr. Jakub Husák¹

*1. Department of Humanities, Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Kamýcká 129,
165 00 Prague, Czech Republic*

Abstract:

The contribution presents preliminary findings from the Horizon Europe project AGRIGEP, which focuses on implementing sectorial specific Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) at Life Science Universities. GEPs serve as strategic tools for promoting gender equality and inclusivity while addressing disparities in recruitment, career progression, research opportunities, and work-life balance. This study specifically examines gender-inclusive research in the context of rural studies at Life Science Universities. The main aim is to identify challenges related to gender equality and inclusivity at various stages of the research process. Methodologically, the study draws on data from nine focus groups conducted across three Life Science Universities (particularly from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia), involving researchers, PhD students, and middle management (each focus group included ten participants and lasted approximately 90 minutes). Three key challenges have been identified. First, in project preparation, institutional criteria for principal investigators, such as publication requirements within the past five years, disadvantage women returning from maternity leave. Second, in laboratory research, legal restrictions on certain procedures for pregnant women limit research opportunities. Third, in fieldwork, researchers with childcare responsibilities face significant barriers, particularly when conducting studies in remote rural areas. Based on these findings, we propose sectorial specific recommendations for GEPs, including adapting eligibility criteria for project proposals (a challenge also relevant to funding agencies) and enhancing flexible childcare services at universities to facilitate field research for researchers caring for children.

Keywords: gender equality; inclusiveness in rural research; Life Science Universities

Acknowledgement: The paper was supported by Horizon Europe Project AGRIGEP No. 101094158.

Inclusive Research Practices in Rural Heritage Communities: Acting Like an Insider

Oral

Mrs. Damla Yeşilbağ¹, Prof. Z. Ezgi Haliloğlu Kahraman²

1. Çankaya University, 2. Geneva Graduate Institute

Traditional heritage conservation has long relied on institutional frameworks that prioritize material, often overlooking the role of local communities. In response to the paradigm shift toward community-based conservation, our study presents a qualitative case study of an indigenous rural community in Cemil Village, Cappadocia. We explore how everyday practices—rather than formal planning interventions—contribute to the maintenance of the built environment and cultural values.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates ethnographic techniques with participatory research through continuous fieldwork over six distinct periods aligned with the seasonal routines. Data were collected through archival documentation, participant observation, informal conversations, spatial and visual documentation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Continuous participant observation—where we directly engaged with everyday practices and agricultural activities—not only empowered local intermediaries to build trust but also guided the design of effective semi-structured in-depth interviews closely aligned with local practices, ultimately providing reliable data. This approach offers an insider perspective on the rural community's behaviors, values, motivations and challenges in preserving their natural and cultural heritage. Our findings indicate that conservation behaviors are deeply rooted in the community's historical and cultural attachments, as well as in the practical requirements of agricultural production, economic incentives and social cohesion. These insights highlight that conservation decision-making should move beyond rigid participation models to reveal the attachments communities have to their cultural landscape and everyday routines. By integrating contemporary conservation theory and empirical evidence, this study offers a model for community-based conservation, emphasizing the critical role of local knowledge and practices in shaping sustainable rural futures.

Keywords: rural communities, heritage conservation, insider perspective

Learning from threads - weaving as a means to understand the rural fabric

Oral

Ms. Dorothea Müller¹

1. University Bern

In the woven piece lies a thread of communication, a thread of culture, a thread of shared practice and the very material thread. In combination, these have the potential to create an understanding of different realities.

In my bachelor thesis, I delved into the realms of knowledge production and communication within urban studies, with a particular focus on the potential of weaving practice as a transformative research tool. Through this inquiry, I uncovered the inherent dichotomies between disciplines, including the profound gap between science and art, deeply ingrained hierarchies of knowledge production, and a limited understanding of methodologies. This revelation led me to issue a manifesto, calling for inclusive methods to become an integral part of social research, fostering a culture of collaboration and social cohesion. Weaving practice holds the potential to weave together disparate threads of community-making and collective thought, promoting inclusion through the very fabric of its material process. Moreover, the tactile nature of crafting can empower participants, imbuing them with a sense of agency and self-expression.

However, textile practice also presents challenges, particularly in terms of accessibility, as it is often situated within the realm of art rather than the social sciences. To unlock its full potential, a fundamentally open and experimental approach is necessary. Furthermore, the method requires innovative ways of encoding research outcomes, yet it can also unlock new avenues for understanding research findings.

Ultimately, the question remains: How can textile practices be meaningfully integrated into rural research practices? Textiles are not a panacea for participatory research but rather a starting point for exploration. In rural contexts, there is great potential for weaving together local and intergenerational knowledge in material and thought, reviving community spaces, and fostering a sense of shared practice.

PAR for connecting knowledge systems and improving socio-spatial liveability in rural communities

Oral

Dr. Hiska Ubels¹

1. Hanze University of Applied Sciences

During applied scientific PAR research, in a rural town in the North of the Netherlands, daily experiential knowledge of residents from the inside (holistic) and expertise of professionals from the outside (reductionistic) have been brought together for jointly building upon and improving local liveability. The aim was to develop practical solutions for problems within, and in this way, to contribute to individual well-being and a better living environment. It revealed how a researcher can function as knowledge-broker between residents and involved parties, making possible a concrete substantive contribution to more creative, richer legitimate local policy and socio-spatial planning outcomes. Through photo voice walks determined by residents themselves, their concerns about their living environment came to the fore with arguments and ideas for improvement of its liveability. This method revealed several benefits for coming to concrete and constructive outcomes: it created active conversation possibilities with all parties involved about visible concerns; residents enjoyed participating and, hence, became open-minded; residents appeared to be very capable of using a public perspective beyond self-interest, and; the usefulness of concrete images. Furthermore, it showed that the independence of a PAR-researcher can be pivotal for the confidence of both residents and professionals involved, making possible an accessible informal connection between a policy system and the actual living world. In addition, the method used proved to be able to strengthen awareness about the living environment of all parties involved. **Keywords:** *PAR, connecting knowledge systems, liveability*

Well-Intentioned but Difficult to Implement: Bridging the Gap Between Researchers and Participants

Oral

Dr. André Knabe¹, Ms. Annalena Ulherr¹, Ms. Marén Wins¹

1. Rostock Institute for Social Research and Social Practice

As part of our study on citizen participation in a peripheral rural region in north-eastern Germany, we set ourselves ambitious goals: *We want to set up a citizens' council in which the residents themselves design a scenario for the local production and use of renewable energies. Under expert guidance, they should discuss which technologies are suitable, how the costs and profits are distributed and what they definitely do not want. The results should be widely accepted among the population and be easy to implement by local political bodies.*

What seemed reasonable at the desk turns out to be difficult to implement in practice: *Nobody in the region was waiting for us. The motivation and reach of our local cooperation partners turned out to be very limited. Making contact with gatekeepers is difficult and bears little success, our quantitative survey suffers from a very low response rate.*

However, we have narrative data from about 30 qualitative interviews with people at different positions in the local social structure (local politics, business, volunteering, new and established residents, ...). The data shows that local narratives effect the acceptance of our participatory research design: residents are suspicious about external actors, feel marginalized and do not have high expectations about the future development. Contrary to our expectations, interest in the topics of renewable energies and citizen participation is rather low.

In our presentation and the discussion, we would like to make use of our challenges for reflection and improving the relations between social research and practice.

Working with farmers on biodiversity restoration via living labs – a reflection based on three rural landscapes in the Netherlands

Oral

Ms. Susan de Koning¹, Dr. Judith Westerink², Ms. Bibi Witvliet¹, Dr. Huub Ploegmakers¹

1. Radboud University, 2. Wageningen University

Rural landscapes face increasing pressures to meet societal demands, balancing food production, biodiversity conservation, aesthetic value, and the effects of global changes like climate change. In the Netherlands, biodiversity loss is a critical issue, particularly for species like the Black-tailed Godwit, which rely on agricultural landscapes. In response, the government initiated three living labs for biodiversity restoration in the Alblasserwaard, Dune and Bulb Region, and Ooijpolder, where researchers collaborate with farmers and stakeholders to test agricultural practices that support biodiversity. These landscapes differ in soil, agricultural sectors, culture, and the extent to which farmers already integrate biodiversity into their operations, offering an ideal context for exploring the potential of living labs in diverse agricultural settings. Using an evaluative framework focused on networks and transformative change, we conducted reflective workshops with the three labs. Key issues included a debate around the need for clearly defined and collaboratively established goals, appropriate compensation for farmers, and aligning scientific experiments with those deemed relevant and feasible by farmers. We also found that engaging one stakeholder group, such as farmers, is easier than involving all stakeholders, but may result in the exclusion of other perspectives. Based on our findings, we conclude that living labs can bridge the gap between science and farmers, contributing to incremental changes in farming practices. However, to enhance inclusivity and incorporate diverse perspectives, these labs must be structured and financed differently.

**34. Territorial-level
agroecological
transitions for liveable
rural futures: directions,
deadlocks, detours**

A translocal approach to farmers' collective action and policy needs for agroecological transitions

Oral

***Mr. Daniel López-García*¹**

1. Instituto de Economía Geografía y Demografía (CSIC)

Territorial transitions are a key topic to scale agroecology. At such a scale political, social and economic processes gain centrality, alongside ecological processes. Here the social subject leading the transitions becomes a central – and contested – issue, with strong epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and political implications. The collective and organizational dimensions of the transitions are key to the co-production and dissemination of knowledge, and also to addressing the power imbalances in the food system that ultimately reproduce its unsustainability. However, the collective forms developed by agroecology-oriented farmers are a missing layer in research on agroecological transitions. The present communication will reflect on the forms that local (agroecology-oriented) farmers' groups adopt and how they relate to other actors and scales of transition, and on the policies they need and promote at different scales for scaling up agroecological transitions in Europe. In addition, it will focus on how different self-organizing processes at the local level are interlinked and generate collective action frameworks that cut across territorial scales. For this purpose, we have worked with 13 agroecology-oriented farmers' groups in 13 regions of Spain in a participatory, bottom-up, self-organizing and translocal process. Based on a survey and workshops with all 13 local groups, we offer insights into the different forms and compositions of the groups, and their needs regarding organizational issues and public policies at different policy scales.

Agroecological transition and disaster risk reduction at the territorial level: notes for a dialogue

Oral

Dr. Isabella Giunta¹, Dr. Sara Caria²

1. Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, 2. Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia

The contribution aims at establishing a dialogue between agroecology and disaster risk reduction (DRR). It shows how they share some of their principles and practices and making a case for the bridging of two parallel debates, which can easily be connected, mutually reinforcing their theoretical and empirical relevance. On the one side, agroecological principles contribute to politicize the DRR and to strengthen territorial resistance and resilience before natural and/or anthropic hazards. On the other, agroecology could reinforce its three dimensions (practical, scientific and political) integrating DRR approaches more explicitly. To illustrate this connection empirically a case study in the Province of Manabí, Central Coast of Ecuador, is presented, where agroecological systems were implemented to promote post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction, adopting a DRR perspective. Despite their differences, the dialogue between the two traditions (of study and social mobilization) can make an important contribution to the debate on the political ecology of food transitions, strengthening shared research agendas and collective actions.

Agroecological transitions, rural development policy and a comparative political ecology of land and water in Sweden, Italy and Chile

Oral

***Dr. Cristian Alarcon*¹, *Dr. Alessandra Corrado*², *Dr. Johanna Bergman Lodin*³, *Dr. Margarita Cuadra*³, *Dr. Marcelo Garrido*⁴, *Mr. Mario Pullano*², *Mr. Juan Ortiz*³**

1. Associate Professor Division of Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 2. Università della Calabria, 3. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 4. Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación

At the policy level, local food security and agroecology are gaining an important role in the envisioning of new approaches to rural development in Europe and South America. Understanding the prospects and barriers of agroecological transitions for sustainable local food security, and food sovereignty, requires a much deeper understanding of how national and international food politics shape and are shaped by long trajectories of rural development strategies. This paper develops a political ecology framework to approach and explain the interplay between land and water questions in rural development and agroecological transitions, with a focus on the prospects for sustainable local food security in the Uppsala region, Sweden, the Petorca province, Chile, and Palermo-Etna provinces, in Sicily, Italy. The paper draws upon qualitative fieldwork in those three study areas and is based on the analysis of empirical evidence from interviews, observations, seminars and documents. Theoretically, we situate our paper in the context of contemporary discussions about land and water questions, and link this to more specific questions concerning agriculture and food production in local economic sustainability in rural areas. We discuss our case studies by approaching the processes that Alarcon et al., (2022) identified in the literature as key processes concerning contemporary agrarian change and rural transformations: 1) the global rise of flex crops, 2) the process of resource extractivism in rural areas, 3) the dynamics of de-agrarianisation (and re-agrarianisation), 4) land inequality in rural areas, and, 5) changes in rural employment, wage relations and rural markets.

Agroecology for humans' freedom: an autoethnographic research

Oral

Dr. Alessandra Piccoli¹

1. Free university of Bolzano

The philosopher Rudolf Steiner, lived between XIX and XX centuries, has been the founder of biodynamic farming approach (Muhie, 2023), said to be an inspirational model for agroecology (Aare et al., 2021). Biodynamic farming, diffused all around the globe since the '20 of the last century, promotes soil fertility, biodiversity, animal and plant wellbeing and a reshaped relationship between human and non-human/more-than-human beings (Rigolot and Roquebert, 2024). Aside from the biodynamic methodology, in the '70s also the community supported agriculture (CSA) model has taken shape in Switzerland first and then spread in the USA and finally globally (Delserone, 2007).

In my contribution I intend analyze, with an autoethnographic methodology, the case of a community supported agriculture experience, based on agroecological principles both in the field management (agroecology as practice) and in community activation (agroecology as social movement) in North of Italy. The analytical framework I propose is taken by Rudolf Steiner book "Philosophy of freedom" (Steiner, 1999), inquiring if and how agroecology as practice and social movement is fostering human freedom in relation to material needs and social constraints.

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Alnarp's Agroecology Farm: A Living Lab for Agroecology in the Nordics

Oral

Mrs. Ingrid Svedhem¹

1. Swedish University of Agricultural Science

Agroecology is increasingly recognized as a transformative approach to sustainable food systems, yet its practical implementation varies across regions. This presentation showcases *Alnarp's Agroecology Farm*, a student- and post-graduate-driven non-profit initiative located on the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) Alnarp campus, as a concrete example of agroecology in the Nordic context. The farm functions as a living lab, offering hands-on agroecological education and a space for community engagement, while supplying the local community with sustainably grown vegetables through a community-supported agriculture (CSA) scheme. By examining the farm's organizational structure, educational model, and market approach, this case study highlights both opportunities and constraints in agroecological transitions. The presentation will also explore how participatory learning, community engagement, and localized food networks contribute to liveable rural—and urban—futures, with a particular focus on the role of young people as key actors in this process. By linking theory to practice, *Alnarp's Agroecology Farm* provides valuable insights into how grassroots initiatives can drive food system transformations. This case contributes to broader discussions on fostering resilient agroecological landscapes in the Nordic region and beyond.

An agroecological transition towards perennial staple crops in the United States Midwestern territory: Facets of an agri-food future envisioned and uprising

Oral

Dr. Julia Valliant¹

1. Indiana University

For over a century, nearly every dollar invested in the agriculture of the US Midwestern territory has established a foundation of annual grain crops, principally maize (*Zea mays*) and soya (*Glycine max*). However, the Midwestern territory is also the native home to several nut and fruit crops that grow on trees or shrubs. Many of these perennial crops are nourishing enough to be considered staple crops. Perennial staples are highest priority crops for global production, for they combine climate resilience with nourishing food system development (Kreitzman et al 2020). Throughout the Midwestern territory, an upswell of grassroots work to preserve and diffuse tree crop knowledge and adoption is in motion. This movement pursues an agroecological (AE) shift towards a foundation that incorporates perennial staples - such as walnut (*Juglans*), hazelnut (*Corylus*), pecan/hickory (*Carya*), chestnut (*Castanea*), oak (*Quercus*), and fodders (locust (*Gleditsia*) / mulberry (*Morus*)). In response, a small, growing investment in “agroforestry” contributes to the bottom-up push to integrate economic trees and shrubs into farming, towards a “two-story” agriculture with numerous distributed nut, fruit, and berry crop enterprises and centres. In theory, the advantages of such an AE transition would increase territorial earnings and employment, aligning with recommendations of our group’s article in *Nature* (Brondizio et al 2023). My talk will highlight patterns from our research with Midwestern growers of perennial staples, and the discourse that surrounds them, to describe how they are navigating the directions, deadlocks and detours they encounter as they champion an AE transition.

Key words: Landscape transition, agroforestry, perennial staple crops

Assessing the integration of agroecology in agricultural policy in Flanders, Belgium

Oral

Mr. Ruben Savels¹, Prof. Joost Dessein¹, Prof. Stijn Speelman¹

1. Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics

The current European agricultural and food system is not sustainable on an ecological, social and economic level. Agricultural policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have played a significant role in shaping the sector by promoting technological innovation, economies of scale and specialization through market interventions, investment mechanisms, subsidy flows, quotas and income support, but leading to the system eventually colliding with planetary boundaries while weakening some of its social and economic foundations. Although current agricultural policies promise to make agriculture more sustainable, they are still often regarded as structurally maintaining the current unsustainable system.

The call for a different system is becoming louder, and agroecology is increasingly being looked at as an alternative paradigm to holistically redesign the agricultural and food system on the basis of ecological and social principles to achieve a more sustainable agricultural and food system. Agroecology is increasingly on the agenda of policy-makers, but the actual integration of agroecology and its principles into agricultural policy remains to be seen.

In this study, the financial flows towards the agricultural sector in Flanders, Belgium are mapped, and the direction in which these flows are driving the agricultural system is examined. Moreover, an assessment is performed of the alignment of these financial flows with the principles of agroecology, in order to assess to which extent and how agricultural policy in the region is supporting the agroecological transition of agricultural and food systems.

Biodistricts as Governance networks for the enhancement of AKIS functions

Oral

***Dr. Alberto Sturla*¹, *Dr. Simona Cristiano*²**

1. Council for Agricultural Research and Economics-Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy, 2. Council for Agricultural Research and Economics - Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy

In the view of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS) should support the promotion of a smart and resilient agricultural sector by mean of a systemic approach to change, that emphasises the importance of relational capital, the plurality of equal and trusting relationships between actors, and the continuity of knowledge flows, both tacit and codified, for transitions in agricultural systems.

Biodistricts seem in the right position for supporting those objectives, given that their nature of meso-level institutions and their inherent multi-actor nature make them fit to meet the needs of plurality of perspectives, equality in relational dynamics, multiactorship in co-creation required to activate transition in agriculture and rural development.

In the view of the need of a tailoring of innovation initiatives to the territories, so that global challenges could be faced by mean of a bottom-up approaches in which all voices are included.

This paper therefore applies the conceptual framework provided by Hekkert et al. (2007) to the information gathered in the CREA own database of the Biodistricts projects, and complements it with an analysis of the networks activated in order to describe the functions of biodistricts for fostering local innovation pathways and the networks they activate, so to verify whether and how Biodistricts could elicit the social capital, activate collaborations, address possible conflicts, align interests and promote the integration of scientific knowledge into local practices for supporting innovation that is meaningful for the development strategies that they pursue. The ultimate aim is to describe their role in local development so to suggest policies better targeted to territorial approaches to innovation.

Diagnoses of territorial agroecological transitions and the role of agroecological value chains in North Africa: Prospects from 7 living labs in the context of HE NATAE project

Oral

Dr. Rita Jalkh¹, Dr. Melanie Requier-Desjardins²

1. CIHEAM-IAMM, 2. CIHEAM-IAMM UMR SENS, Montpellier

In a Mediterranean context of climate change with severe impacts on agriculture threatening the rural food security, agroecological transition is presented as one main option for local and territorial development.

This communication takes place under the frame of HE NATAE project and concern seven North African living labs. It is based on the outputs of (i) seven territorial diagnoses conducted in 2022-2023 to assess the potential for local agroecological transition and (ii) further investigations (2023-2024) targeting the potential for social recognition of main agroecological products through value chains analysis in the same sites,

The overall approach is grounded on empirical investigations, mostly qualitative and participative in the seven sites of the NATAE living labs which represent the major agrosystems of the region and localised in 5 countries: mountains (Morocco and Algeria), oases (Algeria), peri-urban (Mauritania and Morocco), cereal plains (Tunisia) and irrigated valley (Egypt).

Two main objectives structure the research : (i) identifying the main existing agroecological practices together with their combinations, and particularly their advantages and limits in terms of relevance to existing main constraints ; (ii) with the living labs actors selecting two specific products per site, promoting the design of effective agroecological value chains and characterising the conditions for their implementation.

The research overall focuses on questions relating to the status of agroecological knowledge and territorial transition in this region. These include components such as i) producers knowledge and corresponding practices; ii) and the main stakeholders involved in the co-construction and transition process at the levels of the farm and agrosystems; iii) wider knowledge of agroecology among North African societies and empirical conditions for a social recognition of the quality of agroecological products and their multiple benefits as prerequisite for the elaboration of territorial value chains; iv) and the limits of such value chains.

Participatory Innovation and Agroecological Transitions: The ‘Open Farms’ Living Lab Model for Collective Learning and Territorial Development

Oral

Dr. Paola Lionetti¹, Dr. Laura Viganò¹

1. Council for Agricultural Research and Economics, Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy

Modern agriculture faces a ‘Polycrisis’ characterized by intersecting challenges (climate change, ecological degradation, socio-economic inequalities, erosion of traditional farming knowledge). These issues call for innovative approaches to support agroecological transitions at the territorial level. This study analyzes the Living Lab model developed by the ‘Open Farms’ project, where multi-stakeholder collaboration and real-world experimentation create environments for co-learning and value co-creation.

The research examines the implementation of a Living Lab involving 14 Italian regions, 27 universities, and 30 farms, focusing on three dimensions: the effectiveness of project-based learning in agriculture, the impact of co-creation processes between academia and businesses, and the role of digital tools in facilitating collective learning.

The methodology integrated qualitative and quantitative analyses, including territorial context observation during two camps (Sardinia 2022, Abruzzo 2024), analysis of five business case studies, and evaluation of training paths.

Preliminary results suggest that integrating traditional knowledge and technological innovation, supported by a collaborative territorial ecosystem, can accelerate agroecological transitions. According to that, the research questions are: 1. How does multi-stakeholder interaction in training LL contribute to agroecological transition and what is its potential?; 2 “What factors influence the effectiveness and scalability of the national Living Lab model across different territorial contexts?”; 3 “To what extent can the Living Lab model’s participatory learning approach contribute to innovating the design and implementation of CAP Strategic Plan training measures?”

[1] Adam Tooze, “Welcome to the World of the Polycrisis,” Financial Times, October 28, 2022

Regenerative farming in an area coping with water scarcity – the Sand Ridge region case study

Oral

Ms. Katalin Varsányi¹, Dr. Boldizsár Gergely Megyesi¹, Ms. Hanna Boróka Acsády¹, Mr. Bálint Balázs

1

1. Environmental Social Science Research Group

The Sand Ridge in Hungary in the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium, once home to blooming agriculture, has been classified as a semi-desert area by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, FAO. The region faces critical water scarcity due to severe droughts and increasing temperatures, caused by climate change and enhanced by inadequate water management practices. The transformation of the landscape significantly affects agricultural activities, forcing farmers to either leave the industry or to stop implementing traditional-conventional farming methods, and instead start looking for alternative innovative techniques.

With the four-year long, European Union funded Horizon2020 research project, ECONUTRI, we focus on agricultural innovations and nature-based solutions throughout Europe from a Responsible Research and Innovation perspective. As the sociologist project partners, our Hungarian case study explores the uses and possibilities of the up-and-coming regenerative agricultural practices, promoted by TMG (Soil Regenerating Farmers') Association. Through farmer and expert interviews and field visits, we investigate how the association's members perceive their shift from conventional farming towards agroecological values, and how these practices perform from an environmental, social, and economic perspective and RRI standpoint. We also aim to understand the farmers' motivations – either out of consciousness or by seeing no other choice – behind the local land-use changes fuelling the transition, and the possible future they create for following generations by implementing farming methods for soil restoration and water retention.

Keywords: nature-based solutions, regenerative farming, water scarcity

Social movements' counter-narratives on biodiversity, climate change and socio-economic resilience issues to advance agroecology in Europe

Oral

Dr. Raquel Luján Soto¹, Mrs. Elena Louise Alter¹, Dr. Marta Rivera¹, Dr. Elisa Oteros Rozas²

1. INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), 2. Estación Biológica de Doñana (EBD-CSIC)

Agroecology is nowadays a well spread concept used by multiple practitioners, initiatives and institutions worldwide. Nevertheless, the lack of a common understanding on this approach has been identified as a major challenge to develop sustainable agri-food systems in Europe through agroecology. Within the European project "Agroecology-TRANSECT" we aim to develop a comprehensive understanding of agroecology in the European context by identifying key actors across Europe and their narratives. In this work we present key social movements supporting agroecology in Europe and their narratives on the contributions of agroecology to biodiversity, climate change and socio-economic resilience. We identified 125 social movements from 24 countries operating at national, European and international level, and 236 grey literature documents on which we carried out content analysis. Among the topics more related with biodiversity, we identified the need to guarantee peasants' rights to seeds, natural resources and the commons as a means to the preservation of agro-biodiversity, as well as criticism to GMOs and new genomic techniques, patents on living organisms, and pesticides. Regarding climate change, climate justice and the urgent need to reach real zero emissions are among the most common threads of work. Socio-economic resilience is addressed through the defense of peasantry and small and medium-scale farming, to access to land, and peasants and people working in rural areas rights, of women, gender and sexual diversity, among other topics. Finally, social movements warn that reverting major global challenges and transitioning towards sustainable agri-food systems is not possible through farming approaches that cherry-pick isolated agroecology practices and do not rethink the whole basis of food and farming systems. Our results confirm the crucial role that social movements play in fostering a radical and transformative agroecology, by confronting the dominant discourse and by promoting enabling environments and countering disabling conditions at different scales.

Something old, something new? Multiple meanings of agroforestry in a Nordic context

Oral

Dr. Traci Birge¹, Dr. Toni Ryynanen²

1. University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, 2. University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute

Food system transformation via ‘agroecological transition’ pathways is increasingly viewed as essential for addressing food system challenges and has been written into EU policy. ‘Transition’ involves substantially altering a system so that both the values of the actors in the system and the techniques they use change (Hazard et al. 2017). There are multiple ways that farms and food systems might transition along agroecological principles. Agroforestry is one tool in the agroecology ‘toolbox’. Agroforestry is the practice of deliberately integrating trees and shrubs into crop and livestock farming to produce synergistic effects through the resulting ecological and economic interactions. The European Union defines agroforestry as ‘a land use system in which trees are grown in combination with agriculture on the same land’ (EU Regulation 1305/2013).

On the one hand, agroforestry has been practiced throughout Europe, including Nordic countries, since the advent of agriculture, and agroforestry has formed and maintained some of the continent’s most enduring farming and cultural landscapes, including those of high nature value. On the other hand, agroforestry seems to have attained “buzzword” status in regard to agroecological transitions.

The current focus on agroforestry in projects, position papers and mentions in policy planning suggests that support for agroforestry will be expanded in coming agricultural policy including CAP. While this would be a welcome development from an agroecology transitions point of view, there are also potential tensions and lack of clarity on *what* agroforestry is in focus and *how* it would be implemented.

Using focus group discussions and other materials, we explore 1) how agroforestry is understood in the context of contributing to agroecology transitions in the Nordic countries and 2) what factors need to be considered and potential risks mitigated for agroforestry to successfully contribute to agroecology transitions in the Nordic countries.

Studying learning processes in multispecies collectives for agroecological transitions

Oral

***Mx. Inez Dekker*¹, *Dr. Barbara Van Mierlo*¹, *Prof. Cees Leeuwis*¹**

1. Wageningen University

A transition to ecology-based agricultural systems is increasingly seen as a desirable development to counter the biodiversity loss caused by decades of agricultural modernization processes. In ecology-based systems, agriculture is based on interactions among multiple species, including microbes, soils, crops, climates, and animals, including humans. Learning processes in sustainability transition projects can further support systems change based on ecological principles. Studying learning provides insight into sustainability transitions in the making. The study of learning, based on first impressions and observations in the CropMix agroecological transition project, shows the need for insight into how learning processes can examine interactions among multiple species – an aspect that does not yet exist in the transition studies literature. Therefore, this article develops a conceptual framework consisting of a combination of relational approaches and learning theories for studying learning, including about interactions among multiple species. CropMix is a transdisciplinary project aimed at ecology-based arable agricultural systems with mixed cropping systems in The Netherlands. The project facilitates collaborative efforts among farmers, scientists, civil society organizations, and agribusinesses to explore and address systemic barriers and opportunities. The conceptual framework reported in this article elucidates how interactions among multiple species can be included in studying learning in such projects. The concept of enactment – the creation of a reality through humans actively selecting certain interactions among multiple species – is central to this framework. Broadening this concept and synthesizing it with the concept of systems learning will allow learning to be studied in a way that includes multiple species in agroecological transitions.

Sustainability Knowledge for Agroecological Transitions: - Production, Processing, and Mobilization in Hungary

Oral

Dr. Chris High¹, Dr. Gusztáv Nemes²

1. Linnaeus University, 2. HUN-REN KRTK

Agroecological transitions require more than just technical innovations—they depend on knowledge production, processing, and dissemination to create sustainable and liveable rural futures. However, in Hungary, as in many other contexts, agroecological knowledge systems are fragmented, underfunded, and poorly integrated into mainstream advisory services. Farmers often lack access to contextual, experience-based knowledge, while input-driven training programs remain top-down and product-oriented, failing to support meaningful transitions.

This presentation explores how different actors in Hungary produce, access, and mobilize agroecological knowledge, revealing critical barriers and opportunities. We examine contrasting cases, from large landowners cautiously integrating agroecological principles into industrialized systems to grassroots initiatives like the Cold Mountain Shelter, where agroecology is embedded in self-sufficiency, community resilience, and alternative economies. These cases highlight the uneven distribution of knowledge resources and the struggles of grassroots initiatives to gain institutional recognition.

A key challenge is the lack of mediation between scientific, traditional, and farmer-driven knowledge, leaving agroecological innovations either isolated or dependent on informal peer networks. Existing agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) still favor conventional intensification (e.g., precision agriculture), while alternative knowledge infrastructures—permaculture networks, self-organized farmer groups, and agroecology movements—remain marginalized and financially fragile. Without a robust knowledge exchange system, agroecology risks remaining an isolated set of practices rather than a systemic transition pathway.

To address these challenges, we explore innovative knowledge-sharing models, including peer-to-peer networks, participatory action research, and digital advisory solutions inspired by India's Digital Green initiative. Bridging agroecological knowledge gaps requires not just policy reform but also new institutional frameworks that support diverse knowledge forms—ensuring agroecological transitions are scalable and socially embedded.

The Organic Villages Initiative in Japan: advancing an agroecological transformation at the territorial level?

Oral

Dr. Simona Zollet ¹

1. Hiroshima University

Japan's *MIDORI Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems*, introduced in 2021, seeks to promote sustainable agriculture through ambitious targets, including an expansion of organic farming to 25% of total farmland by 2050. A key component of this strategy is the *Organic Villages Initiative*, which encourages rural communities to collectively adopt organic farming practices and short food supply chains. This initiative can also be seen as an attempt to promote agroecological transformation at the territorial level by fostering community-wide transitions to organic farming, integrating ecological sustainability with rural revitalization, and strengthening local food systems. However, the implementation of the Organic Villages Initiative, and the MIDORI strategy more broadly, also raises critical questions about the extent to which it can truly support a genuine agroecological transition. While it presents an opportunity to strengthen territorial-level food sovereignty and rural sustainability, there is also the risk of co-optation by corporate agriculture and top-down governance mechanisms that may dilute its transformative potential. Moreover, the reliance on policy-driven incentives rather than grassroots mobilization could limit its capacity to empower farmers and create systemic change. This contribution will present preliminary research on the Organic Villages Initiative as a potential tool for territorial-level agroecological transformation in Japan, drawing on policy research and a mapping of existing case studies to explore both the potential for driving agroecological transformation and the structural challenges that may constrain its effectiveness.

The role of landscape-oriented partnerships in territorial agro-ecological transitions: evaluating a collection of case studies using the transformative governance framework

Oral

Ms. Susan de Koning¹

1. Radboud University

Biodiversity is declining globally, with agriculture being a key driver of this loss, but also a potential solution. One approach to fostering change in agricultural practices is through landscape-oriented partnerships, such as those between farmers, NGOs, and governments. However, farmers often face constraints from local and higher-level institutional factors, such as policies and regulations. To achieve desired agro-ecological transitions, changes in agricultural practices must be coupled with broader systemic shifts. This study examines whether such partnerships can facilitate these necessary changes. Using the transformative governance framework, which emphasizes addressing indirect drivers of biodiversity loss (e.g., unsustainable values or economic systems), this research explores five governance approaches: inclusive, integrative, adaptive, transdisciplinary, and anticipatory. By applying discursive-institutional theory and amplification theory, and analyzing partnerships in the Dutch Dune and Flower Bulb Region as well as 214 global partnerships, the study finds that partnerships can promote agro-ecological transitions by implementing transformative goals locally in an inclusive and integrative manner. However, they are often hindered by dominant discourses and lack adaptive, transdisciplinary, and anticipatory approaches. Most partnerships remain focused on the landscape itself, without addressing external factors that constrain farmers. To drive agro-ecological transitions, alternative governance models and complementary instruments, such as thematic partnerships or policies promoting sustainable land-use practices, are needed alongside landscape-oriented partnerships.

Theorising change towards biodiversity friendly farming through participatory systems mapping

Oral

Ms. Rebekka Frick¹, Ms. Pinja Pöytäniemi¹, Dr. Marija Roglic²

1. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), 2. MBS School of Business

This contribution presents the development process of a Theory of Change (ToC; Roglic et al., unpublished) and its outcome for a case study in Switzerland aiming at studying the potential of the agroecological approach of results-based and farm-specific biodiversity promotion. The research emphasizes the concept of food system transformation as systems change, recognizing the need for fundamental shifts in system structures, processes, and interactions and aims at integrating behavioural science insights with systems thinking (Danermark et al. 2019), using tools such as Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs) and Value Network Maps (VNMs). The ToC was developed in a participatory systems mapping process (Wilkinson et al. 2021) involving 15 stakeholders in interviews, surveys, and workshops. We found that key leverage points include 1) farmers' free capacity, including aspects such as profitability, administrative burdens, and management flexibility; 2) farmers' feeling of being respected and appreciated, with their motivation to promote biodiversity and their sense of ownership of the measures taken being influenced by societal recognition, the rigidity of biodiversity promotion frameworks, and trust in farmers' skills; 3) enhancing farmers' knowledge and skills and therefore their ability to implement effective biodiversity measures. In order to target the leverage points, themes of intervention have been identified by the participants: farmer inclusion, practical biodiversity training adapted to the farm and the farmer as part of farm advice and basic agricultural education, incentives involving farm-specific biodiversity goals and support for experimentation. The system's ability to transform is influenced by powerful groups like the farmer lobby, advocating for stable agricultural budgets and self-sufficiency, often at odds with nature conservation goals; by market actors, including traders and retailers defining the market conditions, and by financial incentives that are mostly provided by public policy with financial instruments like subsidies, eco-labelling, and taxes not being widely used yet.

Towards a shared vision of co-creation processes within territorialized agroecology living labs

Oral

Dr. Maria Busse¹, Dr. Sophia Alami²

1. Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 2. CIRAD - French agricultural research and international cooperation organization

Co-creation of knowledge is considered as an entry point for agroecological transformation at the territorial and agri-food system levels. It is recognized that holistic transformational processes that stimulate changes in current systemic conditions and social practices (e.g. through transdisciplinary projects and living labs) should involve all actors of the agri-food system and science, respecting the diversity of knowledge, values, and worldviews. However, there is no consistent practical-methodological guidelines on how to perform ethically conscious and transformative co-creation in agroecology (AE). To fill this gap, we synthesized concepts of co-creation and adapted them to AE characteristics (mainly principles and levels), bridging them with practice drawn from our own experiences. Here, we present a first set of key components of co-creation in AE as guidelines for people engaged in such processes but with limited conceptual knowledge.

We suggest the following key components for a joint discussion with the purpose of a shared vision: 1) co-create transformative thinking, actions, and governance of agri-food systems; 2) be inclusive with appropriate space-time considerations (local context, diversity of actors, adequate language, available resources, time horizons); 3) be reflexive, adaptive, and enable co-learning well-adjusted to actors' needs (esp. farmers); 4) consider power dynamics towards more symmetry and an empowering environment (power to, over, with, within); 5) enable active actors' involvement in designing innovations and decision-making; 6) harness collective and creative intelligence; 7) promote co-leadership and trust; 8) build on existing social structures but also aim at expanding transformative networks, and 9) rely on reciprocity and co-benefits. Embedding in the transformation is apparent through the coherence of these components with the AE principles.

Transition to agroecological food systems in response to extreme climate events on the North Coast of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Oral

Dr. Paulo Niederle¹, Ms. Julia Menin¹, Ms. Ingrid Marques¹

1. Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

In 2023 and 2024, the North Coast of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil, was hit by five extreme climate events (cyclones and floods) that altered the dynamics of territorial food systems. The responses of local actors to these phenomena have been varied, but there is still a lack of elements to understand which factors guide the choice of their repertoire of collective action. In order to understand these variations, in the second half of 2024 we conducted interviews with family farmers, public managers and social leaders. The focus of data collection was to identify and analyze the actions taken in response to climate change and, at the same time, the strategies for preparing for future disasters. The results indicate that local actors recognize that they are directly impacted by the effects of climate change, and, in response to that, create adaptive practices that might suggest the incorporation of agroecological principles for the governance of the territorial food system. However, the local actors themselves do not interpret such practices as effective responses to the problem since they conceive climate change as resulting from phenomena over which they have no interference or control.

**35. Farm transformation:
diversification, greening
and other pathways
towards social and
economic sustainability?**

Agroecological Transition and Sustainability Innovations in Large and Medium-Sized Farms in Hungary

Oral

Dr. Gusztáv Nemes¹

1. HUN-REN KRTK

This research, based on a **survey and interviews with 114 farms across Hungary**, examines the **challenges and opportunities of farm transformation among large arable producers** within a highly **centralized and industrialized agricultural economy**. While agroecological transitions have been widely studied among small-scale and alternative producers, their adoption by **large-scale farms remains underexplored**. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how large and medium-sized farms navigate sustainability challenges.

As sustainability pressures grow, large and medium-sized farms in Hungary are adopting **agroecological practices at a faster rate than expected**. However, this shift is primarily driven by **economic and environmental necessity**—such as **climate adaptation, price fluctuations, and labor shortages**—rather than a deep engagement with agroecological principles. While policy incentives play a role, farmers tend to focus on financial benefits rather than the underlying ecological goals.

Findings reveal three key challenges:

- **A critical gap in agroecological knowledge systems** – Farmers often follow policies without fully understanding them, while supplier-led training remains **biased and product-oriented**.
- **Disconnection between agriculture and local communities** – Farmland ownership is increasingly **detached from rural livelihoods**, making land-use decisions **purely business-driven**.
- **Narrow environmental focus** – While **soil health** is a priority, **biodiversity remains largely neglected**, as food production takes precedence over landscape stewardship.

This research provides **new insights into how large producers engage with agroecological transitions** and the **barriers they face in implementing sustainability practices**. The presentation will discuss **preliminary findings and open questions**, contributing to a broader dialogue on how knowledge-sharing, advisory services, and policy adjustments could better support agroecological transitions in industrialized farming systems.

Between Structure and Agency: Applying Structuration Theory to Farmer Mental Health Exploring the Interplay of Agency and Structure in the Context of Male Farmer Mental Health and Dairy Farm Consolidation in New York State

Oral

Dr. Conor Hammersley¹

1. Bassett Healthcare Network, New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health

In any social analysis, one can attribute observed behavioral outcomes to actions and inactions of people or to the presence, or absence, of certain structures and systems. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration is a theory of social dualism, which claims that society should be understood in terms of people (agents) and structure; a duality rather than two separate entities. Farmer mental health is an escalating public health concern in the United States, with those in the agricultural sector experiencing disproportionately high rates of suicide compared to other occupations. Structural changes have transformed the social and economic landscape for many farmers (agents). This study focuses on dairy farmers in Upstate New York, a region marked by significant farm consolidation and one of the highest suicide rates among male farmers nationwide. Using Anthony Giddens' structuration theory as a theoretical framework, this research examines the reciprocal relationship between individual agency and structural forces, exploring how these dynamics shape mental health outcomes. Drawing on qualitative data with farmers and farm service providers, the study highlights the interplay between economic pressures, cultural identity, and structural constraints. By integrating the duality of structure and agency, this analysis offers critical insights for understanding and addressing the multifaceted impacts of structural challenges on farmer mental health, providing a foundation for targeted research, policy, and interventions.

Farm transformation towards biodiversity conservation as collective societal change

Oral

Dr. Maria Kernecker¹, Dr. Tobias Naaf¹

1. Leibniz Center for Agricultural Landscape Research

Farmers work within an environment often juxtaposing biodiversity conservation and agricultural goals, making it important to understand how knowledge exchange within farmers' social networks may favor biodiversity or production. In a study conducted in northwest Saxony, Germany, structured interviews with 71 farmers revealed that the network for biodiversity conservation was centralized around non-profit organizations, while agricultural production networks were decentralized, with private companies playing a significant role. However, large-scale farmers were particularly central in both networks. Non-profits could encourage more biodiversity-friendly farming practices when engaging in agricultural advice. To deepen an understanding of how biodiversity conservation and agricultural production might be reconciled on farms, we then conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 of the farmers, integrating an adapted photovoice method to examine the underlying values that shape farmers' perceptions of land use. Values such as frugality, autonomy, longtermism, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging were embodied by practices, including crop rotations, livestock husbandry, hedges, and set-aside areas. Reciprocity was particularly important in farmers' relationships with society, highlighting their need for stronger societal support to achieve conservation goals. Finally, a short free-listing survey was used to elicit the wider public's perceived responsibility for biodiversity conservation in agricultural landscapes. Almost 500 respondents provided insights to the incongruence between their local biodiversity knowledge and their emotional attachment to nature. Their perceived responsibility for biodiversity influenced where they purchased their food. The findings suggest fostering emotional connections to nature could enhance biodiversity-friendly food consumption to address biodiversity conservation and production collectively by farmers and society.

Farms as Locations and Agents of Sustainability Transformation during Succession

Oral

Dr. Ehlers Melf-Hinrich¹, Dr. Sandra Contzen²

1. Agroscope, 2. Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest, and Food Sciences (HAFL)

The agri-food sector needs to transform as it both affects environmental sustainability negatively as well as is affected negatively by environmental change. Farms represent a key locus and agent of the transformations needed. But when and how can they transform and are the resultant transformations more sustainable?

The succession of a farm by a new generation from inside or outside the family is a key incident in the life course of a farm that can provide space for transformational change. This contribution will take a conceptual and theoretical look at sustainability transformations that occur as part farm successions with a particular focus on social transformations. It is linked to a new research project in which we will empirically 1) examine how transitions to more sustainable farming practices, such as organic farming or less intensive livestock rearing, transform farms socially in terms of changing social organisation, networks, practices or perceptions of the people involved and 2) uncover and evaluate the structural and personal aspects of farm succession that enable or inhibit sustainable transformation in farming.

In our contribution we will discuss, adapt and arrange concepts of transformation and transition used in the wider sustainable development literature with help of social theory on structure and agency to conceptualise farms as locations and agents of transformation during farm succession. The aim is to explore how this can inform empirical research designs and connect research on social change in farming to wider discussions on transformation and transitions towards sustainability.

Impacts of land tenure on European food system sustainability

Oral

Dr. Elin Slätmo¹, Ms. Karina Brebert¹, Dr. Tristan Berchoux²

1. Nordregio, 2. Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier in France (CIHEAM Montpellier).

As an uncontrolled farmland market can create a situation where the rights to the land is confused and distant from the local and regional actors, and where non-desired actors have the rights to a large share of the European territory this study analyses the sustainability implications of farmland ownership. Connected to global research on land acquisitions and sustainable agriculture, and guided by pan-European data, our geospatial analysis shows that, in 2020, the majority of farmland at both national and regional levels in Europe was owned by family farms. Further the analysis on a European level indicates the family farms are decreasing in favour for legal person ownership, that is company-owned farming, between 2016-2020. However, these ownership changes are dynamic, regionally specific, and not showing any one-way trend. Although the analysis further show that the company-owned farming is performing better in economic terms, we argue that the traditional structure with family farm ownership of farmland as the dominant form, is to be perceived as an indicator for food security. Compared to other ownership types, family farms are relating the farmland to one or several persons, having national and regional 'control of' the land and food production. The study indicates further development of territorial governance of farmland, within which the farmland is an asset of fundamental importance for food production.

Keywords: farm transformation, land tenure, food system sustainability, Europe

Navigating through uncertainty and change – How farmers anticipate climate change

Oral

Mr. Simon Diener ¹

1. Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest, and Food Sciences (HAFL)

Keywords: future-making, transformation, climate change

Social scientists have until recently not paid much attention to the future. However, to understand transformation we also need to understand the future towards which people are working. This presentation examines how farmers in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland perceive and adapt to climate change in response to its anticipated impacts. It thereby emphasizes the importance of understanding both current perceptions and future anticipations in agricultural transformation processes. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, it investigates how these farmers have shifted their views on climate change, particularly in light of increasing climate extremes. While past experiences with climate variability were often seen as anomalies, today farmers view climate change as a persistent and increasing challenge.

The presentation highlights how farmers navigate uncertainty by integrating past knowledge, current struggles, and future expectations. This uncertainty fosters a state of anticipation, prompting farmers to develop adaptive and transformative strategies to address the growing unpredictability resulting from climate change. At the same time, many farmers express frustration with political and institutional barriers that complicate their adaptive and transformative capacity.

Despite fears about the immediate risks of climate change—such as drought and economic instability—farmers maintain a strong sense of hope. This hope drives them to anticipate the future, blending their fears with a proactive vision. In response, they work towards their desired future, by developing diverse strategies to adapt, such as crop diversification and increasing feed storage, which enhance their flexibility and resilience in the face of ongoing climate uncertainties.

Networking the landscape: How farmers and other involved actors think about collective agri-environmental and climate schemes

Oral

Dr. Claudia Sattler¹, Mr. Vinzenz Grahl¹, Ms. Kristin Paulokat²

1. Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), 2. Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (HNEE)

Agri-environmental and climate schemes (AECS) are an important instrument in agricultural policy used to incentivize farmers to integrate conservation measures into their farming practices. At the same time, they are frequently criticized for their high costs and administrative burden as well as low environmental effectiveness. For this reason, novel approaches are explored, among them collective approaches to AECS (cAECS), where groups of farmers coordinate their measures at landscape scale. They are often supported by additional actors, assisting in the coordination of the group, providing knowledge, monitoring effects, etc., building a whole network of actors. In Germany, cAECS are currently tested in several federal states. Against this backdrop, we conducted interviews in four federal states, both with farmers and other involved actors, to investigate how they perceive the merits and limitations associated with cAECS. We used software-aided qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts to create mental models, which help to explain reasoning behind the decision to get (and stay) engaged in cAECS (or not). Our results show that identified variables can be linked to personal (e.g. beliefs, perceptions, felt responsibilities), organizational (e.g. resources and capacities), community-related (e.g. value system, level of trust), and contextual aspects (e.g. environmental threats, policy support for cAECS). The mental models are found helpful to reveal where actors differ in their reasoning. This, in turn, once made transparent, can help to improve their capacity to cooperate effectively with one another with higher chances to achieve mutually set objectives.

Paths from the decline of the number of farms to sustainability

Oral

Prof. Imre Kovách¹, Prof. Silvia Sivini²

1. Institute of Sociology, HUN-REN CSS, 2. University of Calabria

The number of farms in the EU decreased by about 37% in the short period between 2005 and 2020. The study aims to illustrate the causes and consequences of this decline, using the example of two Member States (with a view to other countries), as well as actors, strategies, and policies for farm regeneration, generation renewal, and recovery towards sustainability.

The Italian and Hungarian farming sectors are among the most rapidly declining in the European Union. Between 2005 and 2020, Italy lost 34 percent of farms (0.6 million farms), and Hungary lost 68 percent of farms (0.5 million farms). In Hungary, the structural shifts in the agricultural sector can be traced back to post-socialist land re-privatization and state land ownership policies, and in Italy among other causes, to urbanization, generational changes and the renewal of local communities.

The agricultural structure of both countries is characterized by a rapid and large-scale concentration of land use and, at the same time, by a multitude of small-scale family farms. The survival of traditional self-sufficiency production on small-size farms, multifunctional farming, and the satisfaction of the demand for healthy food and sustainability are common features. In Hungary, moreover, other elements are the monocultural large-scale cereal production and the beginnings of the transition to precision farming, while Italian farming is accompanied by an increasing specialization and intensification.

The study will also shed light on the transformative potential and capacities of innovative actors in both contexts, focusing on the role that rural newcomers, new entrants, and farm successors can play in promoting a sustainable agricultural system.

The Canadian Province of Saskatchewan and Change in Land Ownership Patterns

Oral

Prof. Bruce Muirhead¹, Dr. Jostein Brobak²

1. University of Waterloo, 2. Ruralis - Institute for Rural and Regional Research

According to Statistics Canada, the province of Saskatchewan has over 60 million acres of farmland, which is close to 40% of the total amount of farmland in Canada. Before 2003, Saskatchewan had among the most restrictive of rules governing land ownership for both non-residents of the province, and non-Canadians. These restrictions, lifted as of 1 January 2003 for Canadians, prevent speculation in farmland, and limited land concentration to maintain opportunities for Saskatchewan residents to acquire farmland for agricultural purposes and support the development of strong rural communities. Since then, farmland investments have skyrocketed. Although land prices have doubled since 2005, Saskatchewan farmland is still considered cheap compared to land in neighboring provinces and cross-border states. This has made Saskatchewan farmland increasingly attractive for financial speculation.

We will discuss the most recent investment trends in Saskatchewan after 2003, including its effects on farm-sector restructuring, which includes generational change. The analysis is based on interviews with financial investors, realty brokers, agricultural consultants as well as farmers and farm union representatives. We find that despite heavy entry by investors such as Regina-based Assiniboia and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, most land deals are still farmer-to-farmer. However, in order to grow without reaching unsustainable debt-levels, traditional family farmers increasingly enter investor-induced leaseback deals. We ask whether this represents a paradigm shift, weakening the fabric of rural communities, giving birth to a new class of corporate family farmers, paradoxically removing capital from regional Canada despite a huge in-flow of investment capital.

The influence of societal issues on representations of the breeder's profession and perceptions of change

Oral

Dr. Elsa Delanoue¹, Mrs. Manon Fuselier¹

1. french livestock institute

The livestock sector faces two major challenges in response to societal concerns such as environmental sustainability, public health, and animal welfare : farmers must adapt their practices for sustainability while improving communication to reassure the public.

The **Entr'ACTES** project (CASDAR 2023-2026), led by the French Livestock Institute, analyzes how societal debates impact farmers practices and interactions with society. First, a qualitative study assessed farmers' perceptions of societal issues, their profession, and change. Nearly 70 interviews were conducted with farmers and advisors in three French regions. Then, a quantitative survey of 850 farmers refined these insights. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of change support tools in livestock farming has identified key factors influencing their adoption and effectiveness.

Findings reveal diverse views on farming, societal issues, and practices change among farmers. The analysis highlights global uncertainty and pessimism in the sector, alongside emerging opportunities. A typology of farmer profiles shows varying acceptance of societal concerns, from resistance to full integration. To support agroecological transition, advisory services must adapt change management tools to those different farmer profiles. An analysis of support tools identifies three groups: awareness tools (encouraging reflection), short-term change tools, and long-term progress tools. Advisor typologies highlighted different approaches to tool use, from strictly technical applications to more holistic and personalized support. Aligning these tools with farmer and advisor profiles is key to facilitating change. Ultimately, fostering successful farmer-advisor-tool synergies is crucial for effectively addressing societal challenges and ensuring the sustainability of the livestock sector.

Transforming Farming: Farmer Decision-Making and Perceptions Towards Circular Agriculture Adoption and its Potential for Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability

Oral

Ms. Ffion Evans¹, Dr. James Gibbons¹, Prof. Dave Chadwick¹, Dr. Heli Gittins¹, Prof. Prysor Williams¹, Dr. Sophie Wynne-Jones¹

1. Bangor University

Transformation of farming through transitioning to circular systems – that promote renewable and recycled resources to reduce reliance on external inputs – could enhance nutrient cycling, farm profitability and greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction. Collaborative circular initiatives may also improve farmer well-being and community relationships, fostering more sustainable and attractive business models for future generations. This study explored UK stakeholders' perceptions of circular farming practices. Focus groups with 16 agricultural industry experts and policymakers, alongside 17 semi-structured interviews with farmers engaged in circular practices, were analysed using the COM-B (Capability/Opportunity/Motivation-Behaviour) model to understand factors affecting adoption. Farmers perceived circular agriculture as a 'win-win' solution offering economic, social and environmental benefits, bridging 'environmentalist' and 'productivist' priorities. They also recognised the principles of circularity as 'common-sense' and aligning with their established intergenerational knowledge and values, reinforcing their identity as 'good [food producing] farmers'. However, despite positive perceptions, uptake remains limited, requiring targeted communication strategies and knowledge exchange to increase awareness and engagement across the sector. Additionally, the implementation of circular practices often necessitates collaboration at various scales, particularly in integrating crop and livestock systems. Intermediary organisations could play a vital role in facilitating these partnerships and overcoming resistance stemming from socio-cultural norms and peer influence. Lastly, government support, including financial incentives, was seen as a critical factor in enabling the transition to circular practices and could mitigate risks by providing economic stability. Overall circular agriculture presents a promising pathway towards net zero goals by embedding sustainable practices that align with farmers' established values and knowledge.

Keywords: Agri-environment schemes; Behaviour change; Circular economy

What role for farming landlords in the post-Brexit agricultural transition? A relational agency perspective on emerging models of landlord-tenant environmental action or inaction

Oral

Ms. Aoife Maher¹, Dr. Catherine Broomfield¹

1. Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter

The post-Brexit redesign of agricultural payment schemes represents a significant transformation in the relationship between UK Government and the nation's farmers, with farmers incentivised to increase delivery of environmental goods and services. Simultaneously, landowners are expected to engage in long term private finance schemes dealing in carbon and biodiversity credits. As noted in the Government's Rock Review (2022), 45% of agricultural holdings in England are wholly or partially managed by tenant farmers, many holding Farm Business Tenancies that average less than 4 years' duration. For these transient environmental custodians, this emerging policy landscape presents specific challenges. Despite a spate of interest in farm change and tenant-landlord relations some fifteen years prior, at this critical juncture for the sector the topic is, paradoxically, currently under-explored within rural sociology. This exploratory paper follows Burkitt (2016) by using a relational agency approach to illuminate the models of landlord-tenant relationship in the South West of England (SWE) and the implications for engagement with on-farm environmental actions. Analysis of qualitative data from case studies in the SWE yields several significant findings. Firstly, historic management of tenanted farms has been instrumental in shaping past farming practices, with impacts on current tenants' capacity to act. Secondly, both directive and ambivalent approaches from landlords towards tenants taking environmental action can inhibit cohort-wide engagement. Finally calls for collaboration within the tenanted sector to achieve environmental outcomes, requires reassessment of how liabilities, responsibilities and benefits are distributed between landlord and tenant, if a sector-wide transformation is to occur.

Keywords: environment; tenant farming; relational agency

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“Cafeology” jobs in the South of Minas Gerais (Brazil): Youth emancipation, farm transformation and struggles in the third wave of coffee

Oral

*Dr. Marie Sigrist*¹, *Ms. Braida Thom*¹, *Ms. Gabriela Schneider*², *Prof. Sabrina Doyon*³,
*Prof. Johanna Jacobi*¹

1. ETH Zurich, 2. Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, 3. Université Laval

In southern Minas Gerais, Brazil, people who work on coffee plantations face several socio-environmental difficulties such as low payments, dire working conditions, exposure to agrochemicals, extreme weather, and a lack of professional perspectives. To overcome these constraints while continuing to evolve within the socio-economic culture of coffee growing and rural life, young adults, whose parents are coffee farmers or rural workers in coffee plantations, often decide to stop working on the plantations and are specializing in the professional activities in “cafeology”, as graders and baristas. Through an ethnography of coffee sector players in two coffee-growing municipalities, we analyse the reasons, practices and issues linked with the activities of producing, processing, grading, preparing, and marketing specialty coffee. Riding on the “third wave” of speciality coffee, these young professionals emancipate themselves from the plantation, while becoming considerably renown locally, sometimes extending beyond not only the rural but also the continental sphere, with some individuals continuing their activities in gentrified neighbourhoods of the global North. At the same time, most of them contribute to the transformation of their parents’ coffee farms, providing them with knowledge on cafeology and developing local activities to ensure the farm’s sustainability (coffee tourism, on-site processing, or setting up an office and/or a laboratory on the farm as an independent consultant). However, while these activities are part of a silent struggle against contemporary challenges in the coffee sector, they are also subject to the impacts of neoliberalism on global agri-food systems as they have to deal with repetitive tasks, precariousness due to flexible work, global competition and price pressure, racism and gender or multisectional discrimination.

**36. The Political
Dimensions of Rural
Transformations.
Exploring the
Politicization of the
Rural-Urban Divide and
its Consequences for
European Societies**

Can environmental attitudes and behaviour explain the urban-rural political divide?

Oral

Dr. Sigrid Kroismayr¹, Dr. Dimitri Prandner²

1. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, 2. JKU Linz

Rural areas are usually seen as places with conservative and traditional values. In particular the election behaviour of the rural population in different European countries, including Austria, contributes to this picture as they have increasingly voted for right-wing parties which give little importance to climate and environmental issues. However, recent studies have shown that the ecological crisis is perceived as a significant threat regardless of where people live. Differences relate more to questions of how and who should make what contribution to overcoming the climate crisis (Mau et al. 2023).

Against this background it is interesting to examine whether the attitudes and behaviour of the rural population differ from that of their urban counterpart in relation to environmental and climate issues. Our analysis is based on the Austrian data from the fourth wave of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) module on environment. The results show that there are both remarkable similarities (e.g. climate change as the most important, environmental engagement) but also differences (e.g. economic growth to solve environmental problems) between urban and rural dwellers. When controlling for gender, age, education, income and election behaviour) it becomes evident that there remain significant differences.

Economic and Social Development in Left-Behind Regions: Insights from Focus Groups in Poland

Oral

Dr. Aliaksanda Sidarava¹

1. Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences

Economic and social disparities between in rural areas have deepened across Europe, influencing regional development trajectories and contributing to social and political tensions.

The goal. This paper examines the economic and social dimensions in rural regions by analyzing the cases of **Szydłowiec** and **Kętrzyn**, two Polish counties that exemplify the phenomenon of *left-behindness*. These regions face economic stagnation, high unemployment, low levels of private investment, and demographic decline. The study aims to explore how structural economic and social disadvantages shape local development, influence regional disparities, and interact with broader policy frameworks.

The methods. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of regional economic indicators with qualitative data from case studies, expert interviews, and policy document reviews.

The results. Findings indicate that economic stagnation in these regions leads to **reduced human capital retention, weakened local institutions, and increased dependency on external financial aid**. Despite various policy interventions, economic polarization between urban and rural areas persists due to structural barriers, limited economic diversification, and insufficient infrastructure investments. The study highlights that sustainable rural development requires **integrated, long-term strategies** focusing on local capacity-building, entrepreneurship support, and improved connectivity.

From Declining Regions to Rising Populism: Unraveling the Complex Link between Rural Discontent, Democratic Satisfaction, and AfD Support in Germany

Oral

Mr. Martin Refisch¹, Dr. Jörg Hartmann², Mrs. Larissa Deppisch¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, 2. German Institute for Economic Research (DIW)

Recent electoral results in Western democracies show a consistent pattern: right-wing populist parties perform best in peripheral, often rural regions. A prominent argument in public debate is that transformations as regional decline – manifested through deindustrialisation, demographic losses, and dismantling of facilities of general interest – undermines satisfaction with the government or even the political system, creating opportunities for right-wing populist parties to become outlets for rural discontent at the next election. Despite the pervasiveness of this narrative, empirical evidence for the presumed causal relationship remains limited.

Our study examines this relationship in Germany by investigating three questions: 1. What are the direct and indirect effects (via democratic satisfaction) of regional decline on AfD support? 2. Does regional decline increase AfD support to a greater extent among the more vulnerable segments of the population? 3. Which dimensions of regional decline have the strongest impact on AfD support?

We operationalize regional decline through population loss, economic deterioration, and infrastructure and public services degradation, combining longitudinal panel data from the German Socio-Economic Panel with a novel dataset tracking changes in public services, economic indicators, and demographic patterns at municipal and regional levels across 15 years.

Our preliminary findings confirm higher AfD support in declining regions but reveal that both overall and indirect effects of regional decline are relatively modest compared to other factors, particularly anti-immigration attitudes. This study advances the literature on geographical patterns of populist support by providing causal evidence while highlighting the need to consider multiple explanatory factors.

Keywords: rural discontent, regional decline, right-wing populism

Jobs Versus Environment: The Politicization of the Perceived Urban-Rural Divide in Just Transitions

Oral

Mrs. MARILENA PICKETT¹

1. None

The Just Transition movement, credited to U.S. activist and labor unionist Tony Mazzocchi in the 1970s, emerged from calls to transition from industries that were considered too detrimental to both the health and safety of workers and to the environment, and was supported by both labor and environmental movements. While both movements have continued to call for just transitions, a deep divide exists between the two in how they imagine these transitions to occur. This division, promoted by politicians who argue we must either prioritize “jobs *or* the environment,” can be viewed as a microcosm of the more general urban-rural divide. This paper explores the perceived differences between fossil fuel workers (the majority of whom live in rural communities) and environmentalists (who, justly or not, have been associated with an ‘urban elite’) – including themes of classism, personal and communal identities, and prioritized values. It considers how these differences, as well as their politicization, have contributed to existing societal barriers between both groups. It explores how workers across Europe and the United States have felt overlooked in existing or proposed plans for energy transitions, and how their resentment has led them to challenge transition plans. Furthermore, it analyzes how so-called populist movements have capitalized on these resentments to promote far-right agendas, despite having no real policies to improve the lives of worker. Finally, its conclusion imagines how the two parties may reconcile perceived differences, finding common ground against a system that has historically exploited both for its benefit.

Knowledge Divides and Rural Resentment in Switzerland

Oral

Dr. Maurits Heumann¹

1. University of Lucerne

The *rural revolt* is often framed as a reaction to economic decline, political alienation, or cultural marginalization. However, this paper argues that rural resentment is also shaped by knowledge divides, where scientific expertise and bureaucratic governance are perceived as distant, impractical, and untrustworthy. Applying Cramer's (2016) concept of rural consciousness to Switzerland, this study investigates how rural populations challenge knowledge hierarchies and assert the legitimacy of local, experience-based knowledge over institutionalized expertise.

Based on a thematic analysis of 14 group discussions in Swiss rural areas, the findings reveal that rural participants consistently criticize urban elites not only for their political and economic dominance but also for "not knowing what they are doing," "lacking common sense," and "being detached from reality." Three key epistemic themes emerge: 1) proximity to nature, where firsthand experience is contrasted with abstract environmental science; 2) hands-on (practical) work, which is valued over theoretical, office-based knowledge; and 3) independent reasoning, where common sense is positioned against expert authority. Rather than merely a cultural stance, skepticism toward expertise is a core element of rural consciousness, shaping how rural populations evaluate knowledge and legitimacy.

These findings challenge dominant explanations of rural opposition to climate, biodiversity, and agricultural policies, demonstrating that resentment is not only political but also epistemic. By conceptualizing rural resentment as a conflict over knowledge, this study advances debates on rural-urban polarization and the political dimensions of expertise in contemporary democracies.

Left-behind and Populist? Electoral consequences of rural-urban divide. Evidence from Poland

Oral

Dr. Michał Konopski¹

1. Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences

While in Western Europe the economic and social crisis of regions “left to themselves” was being explained by post-industrial changes, technological revolution and globalisation, spatial inequalities in post-socialist states took shape in the course different processes. These were the effect of the post-socialist transformation resulting i.a., in concentrated inflow of foreign investments into the core areas, crisis in the farming economy, brought about by the ownership changes and the collapse of the food market network. These processes contributed to reinforcing the rural-urban divide and thus marginalization of numerous regions and social exclusion. Attention of scholars has been increasingly concentrating in the recent years on the social and political consequences of spatial polarisation. One of these is the discontent of the inhabitants of areas lagging in development, resulting in the growing support for the populist and contestant parties. The present study concerns the phenomenon of rural-urban divide and its political consequences on the example of Poland. Five different case studies were selected, being electoral districts aiming to analyse the voting behaviour of their residents. Four of them represent peripheral, underdeveloped areas while, the last one having development indices above the national averages. The hypothesis about populist preferences of inhabitants living in less developed, peripheral areas, common in the literature on the subject, was adopted for verification. The analysis covered the last four elections (2011, 2015, 2019, 2023) to the Polish Parliament. One may confirm the proposition of the more populist electoral preferences, characterizing the population of “left-behind” areas. On the Polish political scene, though, populism does not always represent a definite ideology along the right-left axis and displays a potential of attracting the voters, whose preferences took shape in both the local more conservative and more progressive environments

Keywords: geography of discontent, electoral preferences, rural-urban divide, populism, Poland

Multiple Crises and Trust in Germany

Oral

Mr. Felix Rahberger¹, Dr. Matthias Collischon¹, Dr. Alexander Patzina²

1. Federal Institute for Employment Research (IAB), 2. University of Bamberg

Keywords: trust, multiple crises, three-way fixed effects

Trust is a critical aspect of social cohesion within societies, fostering democratic participation, acceptance of redistributive policies, and compliance with public health measures. However, the current convergence of global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, wars, and global refugee flows, raises concerns about potential declines in social and political trust. Although existing literature can help hypothesize potential changes in trust during specific crises, little is known about the effects of multiple, overlapping crises. Using representative panel data from Germany, we analyze how changes in district-level refugee shares, COVID-19 policy stringency, and inflation affect social and political trust. Using a three-way fixed effects estimation, we account for unobserved time-invariant differences between individuals and districts and control for national trends in trust. We also examine whether the regional divide in trust levels between rural East Germany and the rest of Germany can be attributed to regional differences in crisis exposure. Our preliminary results suggest that the influx of refugees may be a key driver of these regional disparities, while social trust remains fairly stable across different levels of regional crisis exposure. We also provide evidence for a rally-around-the-flag effect by showing that the stringency index positively affects political trust in both regions. Overall, our findings underscore the importance of the regional dimension in understanding polarization tendencies in social cohesion during crises.

Occupational segregation and right-wing populism in rural and urban areas. A longitudinal study with data from the Socio-Economic Panel 1992-2022

Oral

Dr. Kleiner Tuuli-Marja¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

This paper examines the influence of occupational segregation on the rise of right-wing populist tendencies in rural areas. The central assumption to be tested is that the decline of industrial occupations and the concomitant rise of knowledge-based occupations are exerting increasing pressure on the lifestyles, values and attitudes of the working class. This is hypothesised to lead to a value-based backlash, which is predicted to manifest itself in a rejection of the values and lifestyle of urban elites (Goodhart 2023; Goodwin 2023). Consequently, there is an observed rise in support for right-wing populist parties that explicitly position themselves against these elites (Goodwin 2023).

Utilising longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP 1992-2020), the study explores three key research questions: firstly, whether there is an increase in the concentration of the working class in rural areas over time; secondly, whether workers exhibit a greater preference for right-wing populist parties compared to other social classes; and thirdly, whether the disparities in the preference for right-wing populist parties between urban and rural areas can be attributed to these two factors (a and b). The results obtained demonstrate that right-wing populist parties gain disproportionately in importance in rural areas and that the working class develops a stronger inclination towards these parties compared to the service class. However, the urban-rural difference in party preference cannot be explained by occupational segregation alone

Political discourses around peripheralizing rural areas in Sweden and Japan

Oral

Prof. Ken Victor Leonard Hijino¹

1. Kyoto University

The paper investigates and compares the political discourses around depopulating and peripheralizing rural areas in Sweden and Japan. The study aims to contribute to a broader research agenda on the “politics of the rural” and the discursive dimension which underpins rural-urban cleavages and frames policy responses to these challenges. The paper is guided by the following empirical questions: what ideas or assumptions, frames or ideologies shape the diverging (or convergent) policy solutions and visions towards rural areas facing depopulation challenges? Are these diverging ideas reflecting differences in party groups/ ideologies, constituency of politicians, or some other systemic or structural variable? Using policy frame analysis of policy texts, national party manifestos, and interviews with politicians, the paper investigates how depopulation and peripheralization is framed and debated. The study also compares the Swedish and Japanese cases to illuminate both parochial and universal discursive features responding to rural peripheralization. We map the dominant discourses of the two countries on an original typology constructed of two dimensions: “role” (is the rural depicted as a resource or space to be utilized or as inherently valuable and needing to be maintained?) and “agency” (which actors are depicted as being responsible for rural issues in terms of its current challenges and future, e.g. the residents, central government, investors, in-migrants?). The two country cases are also of theoretical interest because, although in many ways very different in terms of socio-economic and demographic factors, institutional structures, and cultural norms, for both, rural depopulation and peripheralization are salient political issues, and yet they have avoided the kind of populist backlash, so-called “revenge of the paces that don’t matter”, observed in other developed democracies. The paper explores how discursive elements may play a role in this shared outcome of muted rural-urban tension and political polarization.

Problematizing Rurality in Labour Market Theory: A Historical Political Economy Approach

Oral

Mr. Dashiell Anderson¹

1. University of Leeds

In my paper I consider the methodological limitations within labour economics for predicting and meaningfully understanding wage determination (as well as wage exploitation) in rural labor markets. I use a political economy framework to critically conceptualize the role that rural labour plays in the global process of capital accumulation, and using this framework develop a theory of rural wage determination based on class conflict, profitability, and geographical trends of rural labour exploitation tied to capital accumulation. I use an interdisciplinary lens to consider the economic, political, and sociological specificities of rural labour that together allow us to better understand the market for rural *labour power* – i.e., the willingness of rural workers to work certain jobs at certain wages, and with certain levels of resistance and bargaining power. I conclude the paper by arguing for a more interdisciplinary and critical perspective on rural labour, which in turn can be used to better understand wage differentials between rural and urban workers. Lastly, I highlight the importance of understanding rurality and rural labour in its relation to the process of capital accumulation, and argue that it is only through this perspective that it is possible to truly conceptualize and predict the unique differences in real world wage determination between rural workers and urban workers.

Socio-Ecological Transformation and Its (Dis)Contents – Understanding Political Polarisation in Rural Areas

Oral

Mrs. Susann Bischof¹, Mrs. Larissa Deppisch¹, Prof. Andreas Klärner¹, Mrs. Franziska Lengerer¹

1. Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

The socio-ecological transformation affects urban and rural areas differently. Due to higher car dependency, widespread reliance on fossil fuels for heating and efforts to decarbonise agricultural production, rural areas are believed to bear more of the burden of climate policies. As a consequence, the ‘rural revenge’ is being expressed at the ballot box. With almost 30% of the European electorate living in rural areas, understanding and addressing this recently labelled ‘green discontent’ is crucial for navigating rural transitions towards a liveable future.

Our presentation examines the case of Germany, where the ecologically progressive Green Party performs better in cities, and the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany, which denies man-made climate change, gains more support in rural areas. Based on a thematic analysis of group discussions and expert interviews in two rural areas, our research reveals that green discontent is more nuanced than often acknowledged. While many rural residents support the climate transition’s objective and see economic opportunities for their region, they express concerns about the way in which green policies are implemented. In particular, they perceive green legislation as restricting traditional rural habits and as a financial burden on individuals who rely on fossil fuels for car mobility and heating.

Our study contributes to the debate by providing rich qualitative data that explores the dimensionality of political polarisation over climate change policies in terms of time (climate justice), class (social justice), and space (spatial justice), shedding light on the complex relationships between environmental policy, rural development, and social justice.

Keywords: green discontent; socio-ecological transformation; political polarisation

Stereotypes in national press coverage of rural areas in Germany

Oral

Prof. Steffen Kolb¹, Mrs. Fiarra Pohling¹

1. University of Applied Sciences (HTW) Berlin

From 2004 to 2020, we analyzed over 12,000 articles from four German national newspapers to assess how media coverage shapes the public image of rural areas in Germany. Our initial aim was to examine whether national and / or EU-wide cultural initiatives and funding programs designed to promote cultural activities in rural regions have any measurable impact on media representations. Although we did not detect any direct influence or systematic change in the news coverage, our analysis revealed a set of recurring topics associated with rural areas. These include infrastructural deficits, healthcare challenges, educational disruptions, economic and agricultural issues, demographic decline, and political as well as social conflicts, alongside portrayals of cultural life and local identity.

In this study, we conduct a qualitative re-analysis of approximately 1,200 articles from our dataset in which rural areas are the central focus. By comparing our analysis with existing research, we aim to analyze the media frames and stereotypes present in the coverage of rural areas and to examine how these narratives evolve over time. Preliminary findings suggest that dominant frames emphasize poor connectivity, medical shortages, declining school enrollments, and depopulation, while themes such as cultural vibrancy, rural idyll, and environmental issues also play roles. Our goal is to determine the extent to which newspapers employ framing strategies that may reproduce or reinforce stereotypes about rural areas.

Structural and Cultural Dimensions of White Christian Nationalism in the Rural United States

Oral

Prof. Leland Glenna¹

1. Pennsylvania State University

Many scholars have sought to link the rise of right-wing populist movements around the world to the impacts of political-economic structural changes, such as globalization and financialization. Although these structural changes may explain some people's grievances, they do not explain why people express those grievances in the language of right-wing, rather than left-wing, politics. This paper examines evidence of the rise of right-wing politics in rural America, focusing on white Christian nationalism. After reviewing political-economic structural changes behind rural grievances, it explores cultural dimensions of the rightward shift by describing the decline in local journalism and the rise of right-wing Christian radio and other media that supplied the symbolic material that people used to articulate their grievances while the political-economic restructuring was accelerating.

The Rural-Urban Divide and Disruptive Politics in Europe: Reality or Rhetoric?

Oral

Prof. Michael Woods¹, Dr. Conor Judge¹, Dr. Emanuele Amo¹

1. Aberystwyth University

Recent years have seen rising support in many European countries for disruptive political parties that have upset settled political cultures, including populist, nationalist, far right and radical right-wing parties. In many cases, disruptive parties have been observed to draw support from marginalised or 'left behind' regions and to define themselves in opposition to perceived metropolitan elites. As such, commentaries have commonly framed the rise of disruptive parties as part of a growing rural-urban divide. This paper seeks to test this assertion, drawing on research in the 'Rural-Spatial-Justice' project exploring rural discontent, disruptive politics and spatial justice. We employ a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of election results and qualitative analysis of political texts. First, we present findings from analysis of geographical voting patterns for around 200 disruptive parties across Europe to establish whether there is a skew in support towards rural areas. Second, we present textual analysis of speeches, websites, adverts, social media and other political documents from selected disruptive parties in three countries to investigate the emphasis placed on rural issues in their platforms and the significance of rural-urban comparisons and reference to a rural-urban divide to their discourse. Through synthesising these perspectives, we aim to assess whether claims of a rural-urban divide in support for disruptive parties are borne out by voting patterns, or whether the narrative is more important as framing device, and to consider whether there are different dynamics at play in different parts of Europe.

The Rural-Urban Divide and Party Sustainability: Challenges for Political Security in Latvia

Oral

Mr. Romāns Gagunovs¹

1. Faculty of Social Sciences, Rīga Stradiņš University

The sustainability of political parties is a crucial factor in ensuring political stability and security, particularly in small democracies like Latvia. However, the rural-urban divide presents distinct challenges for party sustainability, shaping voter behaviour, party organisation, and democratic resilience. This research examines how differences between rural and urban political landscapes influence the long-term viability of parties and their impact on Latvia's internal political security. Using a comparative analysis, the study explores key factors that affect party sustainability in urban and rural areas, including electoral volatility, voter-party linkages, ideological shifts, and external influences. As of early 2024, only one active political party in Latvia exceeded the threshold of 2,000 members, despite there being more than 50 political parties and party associations in the country. The political environment is characterised by high levels of party fragmentation. The research identifies that while urban areas tend to foster short-lived, issue-based parties and higher electoral competition, rural regions exhibit more stable, often influenced by economic disparities and regional identity politics. Additionally, the role of party organisations, leadership structures, and mobilisation strategies differs between these geographic contexts, which impacts political participation and democratic consolidation. By highlighting these variations, the study contributes to the broader discourse on political security in post-Soviet democracies, emphasising the need for adaptive strategies to improve party resilience in both rural and urban settings. Addressing the urban-rural divide is essential for fostering a cohesive, secure, and sustainable political environment in Latvia and similar transitional democracies.

Keywords: Party sustainability, rural-urban divide, political security.

Two Decades of Rural-Urban Divide in Europe: Is the Socio-Economic Gap Widening?

Oral

Dr. Josef Bernard¹

1. Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences

In recent years, social and economic disparities between urban and rural areas have unexpectedly regained prominence. For a long time, the rural-urban divide seemed to have diminished in relevance when explaining social inequalities in contemporary European societies. However, rising political polarisation and the increasing politicisation of rural issues in some countries have brought this socio-spatial gap back into focus. Despite this renewed attention, little is known about how the rural-urban socio-economic divide has evolved over time and how it has impacted the social status and financial well-being of rural and urban populations. This paper examines the evolution of this gap over the past two decades using EU-SILC data across European countries. Specifically, it explores whether a gradual polarisation has occurred, leading to a relative decline in the socio-economic conditions of rural residents, and how these trends vary across different national contexts.

Wanted? Dead? or Alive? – Discourses on viable villages in local planning

Oral

***Mr. Kasper Friis Bavnbæk*¹**

1. Danish Centre for Rural Research, University of Southern Denmark

Formal representations, such as narratives of the rural conditions juxtaposed to the urban, are evident in the act of statutory planning and thus shape the outcomes of the rural in terms of the lived experience and the physical environment. These formal representations are not void of influence from normative convictions but are decided upon by planners and politicians, and the planning documents are therefore not merely objective measures for spatial development. Using discourse analysis both as a theory and method on 29 Danish municipal statutory planning documents, focusing on the description of villages and the legal requirement of incorporating “strategic planning for development of viable villages,” this paper presents four dominating discourses conceiving rural viability based on: nature, social engagement, settlement, and relations to the urban. The analysis shows that these four discourses on rural viability are connected to, among others, discourses on the rural idyll and discourses of territorialisation. The planning documents thus reproduce stereotypes of the urban-rural relationship, with urbanism emerging as a hegemonic discourse, where villages are defined in relation to the city. Essentially, a dualism between being “alive” (urban) and “not yet viable” (rural) is being discursively produced, raising the critical question: if the villages are not yet alive, does that make them dead?

“We’re farmers. We’re the ones who know.” Politicization of expertise along the rural-urban divide in the Netherlands

Oral

Ms. Thereza Langelier¹, Dr. Koen Salemink¹, Prof. Léonie de Jonge², Dr. Sander van Lanen¹, Prof. Tialda Haartsen¹

1. University of Groningen, 2. University of Tübingen

Farmers’ protests have erupted all over Europe over the last few years. Although their precise motives depend on their national context, protesting farmers hold in common a deeply felt resistance against the ‘political elite’ and their plans for greener agricultural policies. In the Netherlands, agricultural nitrogen emissions have taken centre-stage in a wider political debate on the so-called rural-urban divide. A vocal subset of Dutch farmers rejects not only the proposed measures for bringing down nitrogen emissions, but the very premise that agriculture should be reformed in order to protect the environment. This paper analyzes how farmers construct an antithesis between their own expertise, grounded in thorough experiential knowledge of the land, and the theory-based thinking of ‘elite’ actors such as government officials and scientific institutes. Through semi-structured interviews with Dutch farmers and a qualitative analysis of their accounts, we shed light on a particularly geographically tinted populist anti-intellectualism that ties true and trustworthy knowledge explicitly to the rural, and thus exacerbates rural resentment.

Keywords: farmers’ protest; rural populism; rural resentment

**37. Arts and culture
under pressure: What is
their role for liveable
futures in the rural?**

‘Basket of Cultural Services’: Policy Solutions for Enhancing Cultural Diversity in Rural Areas in Latvia

Oral

Prof. Agnese Hermane¹, Prof. Anda Lake¹, Ms. Sabine Ozola¹

1. Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies, Latvian Academy of Culture

Arts and cultural activities tend to concentrate in urban centres due to larger audiences and greater opportunities for presentation. Mantecón (2009) argues that rural collective practices often remain at the level of entertainment, restricting opportunities to shape worldviews, foster political culture, and exercise citizenship. Additionally, rural residents’ artistic literacy is typically rooted in folk traditions and community knowledge (Becker, 1982), with less exposure to formal cultural education. MacDonald and Potts (2011) observe access to cultural services varies by location, influencing cost and content. The farther from large cities, the more limited the diversity and quality of cultural offerings (Diniz & Machado, 2011; Glaeser, 2011). A recent quantitative survey of Latvia’s population (n=1050) reveals significant territorial disparities in cultural participation, with rural residents engaging less in professional and institutional arts. Addressing this gap requires policies that develop not only diverse and high-quality cultural services but also an inclusive cultural environment that aligns with the lifestyle of rural inhabitants and the specific nature of their artistic literacy. In our study, we pose the question: How does life in rural areas frame the diversity and quality of available cultural services? What policy solutions can potentially reduce the gap in cultural service accessibility in rural areas?

Recognizing cultural access as equally vital as economic, political, and ecological factors in fostering livable rural futures, this paper explores policy instruments to improve cultural accessibility in rural areas and examines the potential of a “basket of cultural services” as a viable solution.

Keywords: cultural offering, rural communities, cultural policy instruments

Bourges' commitment to artists in the 2028 ECOC: Involving local artists and cultural organisations

Oral

***Mrs. Milica Milosavljevic*¹**

1. Université Paris 8

Bourges has won the 2028 European Capital of Culture (ECOC) title with a program called “Territories of the Future.” The application focuses on rural small to medium-sized towns and their surrounding regions as the optimal sociogeographic and political unit for democratically building a sustainable future based on green mobility. While the austerity and carbon neutrality at the heart of the program prevent any major infrastructural investments, one of the flagship projects is the renovation of the 16th century Hôtel-Dieu, set to house The European City of Artists and Authors (ECA).

This legacy project originates from one of the main themes of the application: “The Role of Artists in 21st Century Europe,” and is conceived as a knowledge center offering local and European artists and cultural organizations the resources and technical expertise to internationalize their projects. Presented as an incubator with a budget of €5 million for calls for projects, residencies, and work with art students, the ECA is conveyed as an opportunity for empowering artists and disseminating their work Europe-wide.

As with many ECOC initiatives, it is not always clear if this commitment to improving the position and rights of artists translates into actionable changes for the local cultural operators.

The first findings seem to indicate that thus far, for the students of the École Nationale Supérieure d'Art (ENSA) Bourges, the cultural organizations and NGOs, and the local artists of lesser renown, the dynamic of the B28 is nuanced.

Cultural and Creative Industries in Croatia's Rural Region of Lika: A Path to Sustainable Development?

Oral

***Ms. Ema Bašić*¹**

1. Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences

This PhD project focuses on Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) as both an indicator of modernization and an opportunity for sustainable development in Lika, drawing on Beck's theory of reflexive modernization and the four pillars of sustainable development. Existing literature highlights the vital role of CCIs in rural sustainability by fostering local cultural identity, generating employment, and enhancing quality of life. To explore the role of CCIs and related policy instruments in Lika's modernization and sustainable development, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with cultural practitioners from this region.

Findings reveal that despite economic constraints and limited infrastructure, CCIs in Lika have developed through the efforts of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), relying on (local) networks and digital platforms for survival. These industries play an important role in community building through workshops and cultural initiatives, fostering public engagement. Modernization has also shaped tourist preferences, leading to a growing demand for locally crafted souvenirs over mass-produced imports. Additionally, CCIs in Lika are increasingly integrating sustainable practices by using locally sourced, natural materials in their products. However, the sector faces significant challenges due to inadequate institutional support, bureaucratic barriers, and the absence of a strategic development framework. Without a clear long-term vision, Lika remains at a crossroads, uncertain whether to prioritize CCIs, ecological sustainability, or industrial expansion, leaving the growth of the sector largely dependent on the efforts of dedicated cultural practitioners and enthusiasts.

Exploring Citizen Engagement in Food Sharing through Liminal Commons and Invited Spaces: Insights from the CULTIVATE EU Project

Oral

Ms. Ana-Maria Gatejel¹, Dr. Oona Morrow¹

1. Wageningen University

Food-sharing practices are increasingly recognized as pivotal for fostering sustainable urban and peri-urban food system transformations. Drawing on commons and commoning literature, particularly the concept of liminal commons, this paper investigates how participatory approaches, and transdisciplinary collaborations impact citizen engagement in liminal commons within food-sharing initiatives. Liminal commons, defined as temporary, transitional, always-in-the making processes that create fluid, non-bounding institutions provide a lens to explore how ‘invited spaces’—settings established by governmental authorities to increase participation and consensus on an issue—can foster collective action. This paper seeks to answer ‘How can transdisciplinary teams collaborate effectively within invited spaces while ensuring that participation is community-driven rather than externally dictated? What challenges emerge in balancing institutional expectations with community needs? And how can this experience inform future transdisciplinary interventions in food-sharing and sustainability transitions? What is the value of artistic interventions for creating food commons?’

The study is based on data gathered in 2023-2024 from a neighbourhood in-the-making in Utrecht, where in the context of the CULTIVATE project, artists and academics were invited by the Utrecht municipality to facilitate greater citizen engagement in the management of an edible neighbourhood. Through collaborating on a series of artistic interventions and co-creation workshops, artists, academics and residents explored strategies for engagement in co-management and decision-making. Data was gathered through participant observation and artistic documentation of collaborative processes. This paper uncovers tensions and opportunities of artistic interventions in ‘invited spaces’ as catalyst for citizen participation. This study is part of the CULTIVATE EU project, a four-year innovation-action initiative funded through Horizon 2020, designed to support innovation in urban and peri-urban (UPU) food sharing and help transform urban food systems towards more just and sustainable future.

How Arts in rural areas can be freed and rebuild the community

Oral

Ms. Natalia Oszko Jakab¹

1. Valley Arts Festival

The presentation would describe activities of the Arts for Rural Development Foundation and details how they even use online solutions for festival tourism and sustainability. By means of examples, the Arts for Rural Development Foundation shows how festivals can be a tool for rural development and community building. The Valley of Arts Festival and the Kerekdomb Festival in Hungary are outstanding examples of cultural events which have had a long-term impact on the region's economy and community. The Foundation's mission is to boost the economy of rural areas, regenerate and revitalise natural and cultural heritage and to preserve and promote local cultural and built heritage. And rural art is the key. Involving volunteers and partners, excellent communication and sustainable methods, the events actively support rural development throughout the year. The Valley of Arts Festival's sustainability strategy reduces its environmental footprint through a range of environmentally friendly solutions, supporting public transport and making progress on waste management. The organisation is building the community of these rural place using art during the year, outside of the festivals and that is how art can be stranger in rural communities. I would claim that arts and culture is the yeast for future bake of rural communities.

KulTRes - Culture as a Factor of Transformation and Resilience in Rural Areas: Shaping Liveable Rural Futures Under Pressure

Poster

Mrs. Anne Rauchbach¹

1. Leipzig University of Applied Sciences (HTWK Leipzig)

This paper examines how cultural activities, despite operating under increasing pressure, contribute to shaping liveable futures in rural areas. Based on the research project “KulTRes”, we analyze how cultural initiatives navigate multiple transitions while facing structural, demographic, and digital challenges. Our comprehensive methodological approach combines over 60 expert interviews with cultural and creative industry actors, network analysis of cultural structures, discourse analysis of regional cultural narratives, and focus group workshops in three distinct rural German regions: Burgenlandkreis (post-industrial transformation), Prignitz (digital transition), and Höxter (demographic change). The research particularly focuses on the interplay between cultural activities and changing regional conditions since 2015, including increased migration, digitalization, and post-pandemic shifts in rural-urban relationships.

Our multi-method analysis reveals how cultural actors actively shape rural transitions: First, despite being under pressure from demographic changes, cultural structures show remarkable adaptability, with new initiatives emerging that bridge traditional and contemporary approaches. Second, network analysis demonstrates how cultural actors navigate digital transformation, developing hybrid formats that contribute to rural livability while struggling with resource limitations. Third, through focus group discussions and discourse analysis, we identify how voluntary engagement, despite increasing challenges, remains crucial for cultural resilience and community cohesion.

The findings demonstrate the essential yet precarious role of cultural activities in creating liveable rural futures. While cultural initiatives prove vital for regional transformation and resilience, they require sustainable support structures to maintain their crucial contribution to rural development.

Keywords: cultural resilience, rural transformation, regional development

Local development enforced by an arts and culture campaign?

Oral

Prof. Steffen Kolb¹, Mrs. Susanne Roewer², Mrs. Fiarra Pohling¹

1. University of Applied Sciences (HTW) Berlin, 2. self employed artist

From 1996 until 2019 we have analyzed the effects of a series of cultural and arts events hosted by the local administration of Neusalza-Spremberg, a 3,000 inhabitants city in Saxony, Germany, directly at the Czech and around 30 kilometers from the Polish border. Several arts exhibitions, participative cultural events and a series of classic music concerts even attracted connoisseurs from Dresden. The aim of this campaign was to establish a new public reception of the small city as a good place to live for younger people and with families. Nevertheless our content analysis of the regional newspaper (>10,000 articles) shows no intended change in the more and more stereotyped coverage of the city. Due to the difficult economic situation of the regional and local media, the local journalists had to cover more local entities from a larger and larger distance being moved to Görlitz in the end (result of added interviews).

Our findings highlight a key change in media coverage during this period: an increased volume of articles driven by the promotion of the local football club and the adoption of an “online-first” strategy by the media outlet. This shift led to more, but shorter, articles designed to address evolving media consumption habits. Notably, cultural reporting became dominated by short announcements of events, which accounted for over 70% of all cultural coverage by 2019. Further analysis examines the qualitative characteristics of reporting on artists. Our proposed presentation will show the quantitative as well as the qualitative results.

Keywords: public perception of culture, development in rural regions, media content analysis

Residential Art Centres and the “Freedom” of Rural Life

Oral

Dr. Pavel Pospěch¹, Ms. Stela Houserová¹

1. Masaryk University

The paper studies how managers and residents in residential art centres in rural areas understand their experience and make it meaningful. The research is rooted in interpretive epistemology - we are trying to understand the viewpoint of the actors and re-construct their understanding of what the stays in rural art residencies mean to them. Based on a set of interviews conducted in rural residential art centres in the Czech Republic, we have identified “freedom” as a key concept that our interviewees used to make their experience meaningful. The paper analyses what it is that artists and residence managers talk about, when they talk about “freedom”. In re-constructing the meaning of the concept, we identify four key contradictions that relate both to the benefits and to the drawback of the perceived freedom of rural residencies. These are: autonomy vs. disconnection, ideal working environment vs. solitude, authenticity vs. exhaustion and refuge vs. colony. We argue that these contradictions are negotiated by artists and artistic residential centres managers in their everyday lives, and contribute largely to shaping their experience and understanding of rurality.

The dramaturgical space of sustainable food consumption

Oral

Mr. Zsolt Szabolcsi¹, Dr. CSURGÓ Bernadett²

1. Institute of Sociology, HUN-REN CSS, 2. HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences

From an interactionist perspective, the meaning of objects is based on interpretative schemes derived from the historical and cultural context of a microsocial milieu. In this contextually defined space, individuals interact according to their chosen role. If the interpretative scheme of a situation changes, according to Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the chosen role of an individual, the public presentation of their selves also change. Through mass communication, however, these milieus are influenced in a large scale. The current research focuses on the dramaturgical space of sustainable food consumption constructed by mass media programs. The dramaturgical space of a market provides a situational space filled up with objects and employed roles related to sustainable food consumption. Meanings and roles that are related to sustainable consumption, however, are yet not fully defined in the Hungarian context. Therefore, what mass media displays in such novel dramaturgical space offers a new scheme for consumers and therefore provides additional knowledge to our understanding about the perception of sustainable food consumption and its constructed meaning, situational space and available roles that individuals can choose.

The research employs role theory for its analysis. Data is collected from Hungarian television programs, including news and magazines of six TV channels. From the period of 2015 to 2022, 213 video clips were analysed with a keyword search with which the identification of relevant television programs was carried out. Then, with a qualitative analysis, characters were systematically analysed and categorized to detect the sustainability related roles, interactions and situations that the Hungarian television displays to its audience on sustainable food consumption.

The role of spatial imaginaries for creative professionals in rural areas in Germany - a multimodal social media analysis.

Oral

Mr. Christian Rost¹, Ms. Marina Fischer²

1. Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, 2. University of Bamberg

Artists and creative professionals are often ascribed key roles in shaping economic and social transformation at local scale. They are seen as drivers of innovation and guarantors of democratic coexistence. However, culture and creativity are perceived more as an urban phenomenon. By contrast, cultural and creative workers in rural areas are increasingly confronted with negative attributions of the rural. Be it the recent successes of right-wing populist parties in Europe, which were able to win many votes in rural areas in particular, or classic ideas of the rural as traditional space, remote from innovation and culturally backward. These negative spatial semantics of the rural have a considerable impact on the living and working conditions of cultural and creative professionals in rural areas and their client-relations. On the other hand, spatial semantics of the rural also contain positive attributions such as the rural idyll, proximity to nature and stronger social cohesion.

Based on four case studies in Germany on rural cultural and creative economy initiatives we investigate the presence and relevance of such spatial semantics for creative professionals. The aim of the research project “KulturLandBilder” is to find out how artists and creative people in rural areas deal with such attributions and which images of the rural they (re-)produce themselves. The results of a multimodal media analysis suggest that they have developed target group-specific strategies and counter-narratives to increase their resilience to prevailing negative ascriptions and to utilize positive attributions to improve their living and working conditions.

Keywords:

spatial imaginaries; rurality; culture and creativity

Visions for the future of cultural work in rural areas: Empirical findings on the views of cultural stakeholders

Oral

Dr. Claudia Kühn¹, Prof. Julia Franz¹, Prof. Annette Scheunpflug¹

1. Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg

keywords: Visions for the future, cultural work, empirical study

Our contribution focuses on visions for the future of cultural work in rural areas. In two rural districts of Bavaria, 21 guided interviews were conducted (e.g. with the cultural administration, independent cultural workers, cultural associations or regional funding organisations) as well as five group discussions with cultural initiatives (e.g. from the fields of music, nature, art or tradition). Stakeholders reported on their ideas for future cultural life. Interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022). The findings were validated in participatory workshops and regional development processes were initiated.

The analysis shows that stakeholders predominantly associate the future of cultural life with the preservation of existing structures and cultures. However, this shared vision contrasts with concerns about the future conditions of cultural work; the future is said to be dependent on funding structures and the commitment of individuals. Attracting participants and reflecting the structural change due to demographic developments and digitalisation play an important role. Nevertheless, the actors consistently imagine a tradition-orientated older population as a cultural audience. Perspectives for shaping the content and networking of lifeworld orientated structures often remain a blank space for visions of the future.

It becomes obvious that strengthening cultural diversity (UNESCO 2024; Murphy & Cameron 2020) in rural areas requires opportunities to work on the transmission and further development of cultural objects, practices and communities (Kühn et al. 2024).

Kuckartz/Rädiker (2023). Qualitative content analysis. Methods, practice and software. SAGE.

Kühn/Franz/Scheunpflug (2024). Impliziter und expliziter Wissensaustausch in Forschung zu (alltags-)kultureller Bildung in ländlichen Räumen: Interessen- und Wissensdifferenzen von Wissenschaft und Praxis reflektieren. In: Kulturelle Bildung online.

Murphy/Cameron (Eds.) (2020). Voices of Culture: The Role of Culture in Non-urban Areas of the European union. Goethe Institut.

UNESCO (2024). Framework for Culture and Arts Education. UNESCO.

“It’s more than culture.” Cultural volunteering in rural areas in northeast Germany

Oral

***Dr. Friederike Berlekamp*¹**

1. Universität Rostock, Wossidlo-Forschungsstelle für Europäische Ethnologie/Volkskunde

The value of voluntary cultural work for the quality of life is undisputed – especially in rural areas. It creates opportunities for people to define, practise and satisfy their cultural needs. Following this premise, the EKLAIR project is conducting empirical comparative research in two regions, the Oldenburger Münsterland (northwest Germany) and the district of Rostock (northeast Germany), to determine its significance and benefits as well as challenges.

The diversity of voluntary cultural work is remarkable: theatre, dance, music, historical research, monument preservation, cinema, art, Low German groups and the managing of cultural venues. Compared to other areas of voluntary work, cultural volunteering plays a special role in society, as it provides a framework that fosters collective reflection to a greater degree: Who are we? Where do we come from? How do we shape our community? Where do we want to go together?

Based on the findings of field research in the district of Rostock, this paper discusses the significance and impact of cultural volunteering for rural communities. Both the individual level as well as the view of community life and beyond will be of interest. Particular attention is paid to the volunteers’ perspectives - their intentions, experiences and wishes. In this discussion, it is crucial to consider the significant changes that have transpired after 1989, as these have had (partially) a strong influence on the evolution of volunteering and cultural work in this rural region.

CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING - NORTHEAST GERMANY - IMPACT

**38. Rural population
changes and challenges
beyond the pandemic:
renaissance, resilience or
reversion?**

Ageing and Longevity in Rural Regions: Media and Policy Narratives in Spain and the European Union

Oral

***Dr. Néstor Vercher*¹, *Mr. Jaume Pla-Bañuls*²**

1. Department of Applied Economics, University of Valencia, 2. Research Institute for Local Development, University of Valencia

Rural areas across Europe are increasingly affected by demographic decline, particularly in southern and eastern regions where depopulation has become a prominent concern in media and policy agendas. In this context, ageing is often framed as a challenge that threatens the social and economic sustainability of rural communities, while narratives that recognise longevity as a societal achievement or a driver of rural development remain scarce. This study explores how ageing and longevity are framed in policy and media narratives, assessing their implications for rural development strategies. This study employs qualitative methods and narrative analysis, focusing on Spain—one of the European countries where depopulation has received significant media and political attention. The narrative approach is relevant since narratives shape public perceptions, influence policymakers, and define which challenges and solutions gain attention. The study analyses rural-focused national and regional policies in Spain alongside media narratives from regions most affected by demographic decline. Additionally, a comparative analysis is conducted with EU-level discourses, such as the *Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas*, to identify overarching trends and differences in framing. Preliminary findings suggest that in Spain, policy and media narratives predominantly focus on reversing depopulation and mitigating rural over-ageing, while EU policies take a broader approach, prioritising resilience, well-being, and quality of life. However, in both cases, narratives that frame longevity as an opportunity remain limited. The study calls for a shift in rural policy and discourse—moving beyond demographic growth objectives towards strategies that value longevity and support adaptation to demographic change within broader transitions, such as the green and just transition.

Demographic Change in Rural and Island Scotland: Insights and Implications

Oral

Dr. Ana Vuin¹, Dr. Jane Atterton¹, Dr. Francis Naab¹, Ms. Bryony Nelson¹, Dr. Carey Doyle¹, Dr. Kate Lamont¹

1. Rural Policy Centre, SRUC

Keywords: demographic change, internal mobilities, rural migration

This research is a part of the 'Reimagined policy futures: Shaping sustainable, inclusive, and just rural and island communities in Scotland (ReRIC)' project, developed under the Scottish Government's RESAS Strategic Research Programme 2022-27 and is focused on exploring demographic change in rural and island Scotland. These changes are framed within broader population trends, as outlined by the Office for National Statistics. Over the next 15 years, the UK population is projected to grow by 6.6 million. However, Scotland's population is expected to peak in 2033, followed by a gradual decline. This shift will be accompanied by an ageing population, and a decrease in the working-age population. Rural and Island areas, already sparsely populated, are particularly affected by these trends, especially in remote regions. This presents growing challenges in terms of healthcare, social care, and workforce. The research utilises a three-step methodology, including secondary analysis, a demographic change survey (394) and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from four communities, exploring residents' experiences and the factors influencing migration, preferences, and community dynamics. Preliminary results indicate that 'push factors' for rural and island residents are tied to service provision, infrastructure and transport- particularly in the context of accessibility, while family, identity and belonging play a significant role in 'pulling' existing and potential residents towards rural and island living. The research will generate evidence-based policy recommendations to mitigate this challenge and make reference to the key aspects of the challenge in Scotland, including mobilities from West to East, need for balanced sustainable communities and ageing population.

From temporary to permanent migration into rural areas: A contribution to the analysis of relations between second-home use and counter-urbanisation in Croatia

Oral

Dr. Geran-Marko Miletić¹, Dr. Mateo Žanić¹, Dr. Matea Milak¹

1. Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences

In rural areas of Croatia, alongside intensive depopulation and a decrease in the number of permanent residents, the number of second homes, and with that the number of temporary residents has been growing for several decades. In areas with a higher density of second homes, the practice of temporary dwelling often becomes an important resource in the process of the post-productivist transition of the rural economy. Additionally, the census data suggests that rural communities with a higher density of second homes have a somewhat better demographic situation. This supports the argument that second homes not only contribute to a temporary increase in social density, but that part of this practice tends to turn into permanent residency. This work aimed to investigate the extent to which the aspiration for permanent relocation from urban to rural areas exists among second-home users and to find out what factors affect it. Our analysis is based on data collected in 2024 through an online survey conducted on a national sample of second-home users. For this work, we relied on the Fleuret-Atkinson spaces of well-being framework and the results show that three out of the four proposed dimensions are significantly related to this kind of counter-urban migration aspirations. Respondents who perceive the place where their second home is located as more stimulative, restorative, and integrative were more likely to have an intention to relocate from urban to rural areas. These insights provide a better understanding of the relationship between second-home use and counter-urbanization processes.

Indian Rural Livelihood, Health And Economy Changes And Challenges under The Impact of Pandemic-A Socio-Economic Study.

Oral

***Dr. Gayanendra Yadav*¹**

1. Patliputra University

The current study sheds some light on the hardships faced by rural migrant workers and the effects of Pandemic on India's rural economies. The study main findings indicates that approximately 400 million workers in India's informal sector run the risk of becoming even more impoverished as a result of the crisis. There will be a community spread as a result of the low testing and low reporting of COVID 19 cases. Large number of individuals will experience extreme poverty as a result of reverse migration excessive strain on the rural and agricultural economies. Pandemic 19 will impact India's rural economy in the short and long terms. The government economic package primarily consists of long term initiatives but in order to safeguard migrant workers and marginal farmers short term initiatives like wage subsidies and monetary incentives should be provided. The primary obstacle to the successful execution of programmes is widespread systematic corruption.

Key Words: Migrant Labourers, Pandemic 19, Rural Economy, Agriculture.

Internal migration and gossip: rural Iceland and small communities.

Oral

***Dr. Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir*¹**

1. Researcher at Bifröst University

Small communities often become tightly knit social spaces, where each individual is not just important for the function of the community, but also quite visible to others living there. Flow of information becomes personal, where there will be gossip about the people living in such a space. Gossip has often been considered one of the social factors making live in small communities a challenge for people and their happiness with living in such a place. Gossip is often linked to women but a recent study in rural Iceland shows no gender difference of the amount of gossip that people estimate to be about themselves in their community. It also shows statistically significant relations between migration intentions and the amount of gossip. From the same study, data show that people that already migrated from rural areas of Iceland to the capital area, women that mention gossip as a reason for prior migration are statistically less likely to return to rural areas than other women. This difference can not be found with men, men that mention gossip as one of reasons for prior migration are as likely as other men to return to rural areas.

In order to avoid gossip related shaming, or tight spaces, some people are likely to take the flight response of migration instead of the fight response. Research data is from a survey conducted in all of Iceland Iceland and years 2019-2020, as well as from interviews with young women in small fishing villages in Iceland.

Keywords: Migration, gossip, rural

Life Choices and Political Disengagement Among Young People in Rural Croatia: A Case Study of Lika Region

Oral

Mrs. Anita Busljeta Tonkovic¹

1. Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences

The field research was conducted in 2022 using the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews (HRZZ UIP-2019-04-3024 Project RURALIKA). Of the 115 interviews conducted, 32 were selected, which were conducted with young people between the ages of 18 and 35, with the main criterion being completed formal education. The aim of the text is to present the reasons for the life decisions to stay/leave/return or immigrate in a rural region of Lika, focussing on the apolitical character of young people and the connection of this phenomenon with self-employment. Studies carried out by sociologists over the last thirty years confirm the apolitical nature of young people, which manifests itself above all in an ignorance of basic political concepts and structures, a low level of social activism and a lack of interest in political involvement. It follows that social participation (civil society) is not free from a lack of interest on the part of young people. The results of this research confirmed the fact that for many young people in rural areas it was not a primary decision to leave their place of birth, while the apolitical nature of the young people in the research conducted is a result of revolt and is mainly visible through the perception of politics as a “dirty game”, leading to a complete distrust of politics and politicians. In contrast, the young people see entrepreneurship as a part of society that is dominated by the “free market” and which they can (mainly) shape themselves: “If I were to return to Lika, I would return as an entrepreneur”.

Key words: self-employment, political disengagement, life choices

Locked Out, Not Locked Down: The Impact of COVID-19 on Counter-Urbanization in Iceland

Oral

Prof. Thoroddur Bjarnason¹, Prof. Stefán Hrafn Jónsson¹

1. University of Iceland

This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 on patterns of counter-urbanization in Iceland. Iceland urbanized rapidly in the 20th century, with the proportion of the population living in the Reykjavík capital area growing from 12% in 1901 to 62% by 2000, while the population of farming communities declined from 74% to only 6%. This changed abruptly in the first years of the 21 century as belated processes of counter-urbanization and massive in-migration led to population growth in all types of communities in all regions of the country. When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Iceland in early 2020, the proportion of immigrants had swelled from 3% to 16% of the national population. While Iceland did not implement lockdowns or stay-in-place measures during the pandemic, population flows from abroad came almost to a standstill. The daily average number of international arrivals thus decreased from almost six thousand passengers in April 2019 to only 42 passengers in April 2020. Overall, net immigration of foreign citizens decreased by 60% between 2019 and 2020. Our results show that while Icelandic citizens maintained similar domestic migration patterns throughout the pandemic, the absolute number of immigrants declined in exurban regions within commuting distance of both Reykjavík and the northern regional centre of Akureyri. These changes reversed after the pandemic with stronger growth of the immigrant population outside the Reykjavík capital area. These results and notable differences by age and gender are discussed in the context of the literature on international immigration in rural areas.

Older adults' perspectives on ageing in place in rural Poland

Oral

Prof. Ilona Matysiak¹

1. Maria Grzegorzewska University

Given the scarcity of literature and research on ageing in place in rural Poland as well as other countries, the primary aim of this paper is to explore experiences of older adults living in the Polish countryside, and how their needs and expectations are addressed at the local level. The main research question is whether small rural communities can provide their older residents with opportunities to age well and in what way. The main focus is on analyzing various types of formal and informal support available in the community, and how these correspond with what older adults' needs. The paper is based on 40 in-depth interviews with older adults aged 65 and over, conducted in 2024 in rural communities across Poland. The interviewees were diversified in terms of age, education level, health, and a general life situation. The results confirm the importance of informal support provided by family and neighbors, which is often taken for granted. The outcomes include also insights into older adults' perceptions of their local communities, as well as how they experience the ageing process.

Key words: rural ageing, ageing in place, informal support

Organic farming and rural areas abandonment in Paraguay. To stay or to leave, this is the question!

Oral

Dr. Naomi diSanto¹, Prof. Luis A Fernández Portillo², Prof. Lorenzo Estepa², Prof. Rosaria Viscecchia³, Prof. Roberta Sisto³

1. University of Bari Aldo Moro, 2. University Loyola, 3. University of Foggia

Rural abandonment, defined as the cessation of agricultural practices, is a growing global challenge driven by a combination of environmental, economic, and social factors (Terres et al., 2015). This phenomenon contributes to the disappearance of traditional agricultural practices and negatively impacts food security and local livelihoods (Guida-Johnson et al., 2024).

The aim of this study is to explore whether organic farming influences perceived territorial capital and the intention to stay. While previous studies have examined rural abandonment in countries like Ireland (O'Rourke, 2019) and southwest China (Yan et al., 2016), this paper focuses on Paraguay, adapting the validated scale used by Dufeu et al. (2024) to this specific context. Indeed, Paraguay faces land degradation due to the Green Revolution's technological advances, such as heavy pesticide use. These practices, alongside the expansion of soy and cattle farming, have caused environmental damage, forced displacement of local communities, and contributed to the loss of family farming and Indigenous lifestyles, leading to marginalization and rural outmigration (Lovera, M., 2014).

The study hypothesizes that organic farming adoption impacts perceived territorial capital, which in turn influences the behavioral intention to stay in rural areas. To achieve the paper's aim, a questionnaire will be developed and administered to farmers in Paraguay. A SEM model will be used to analyze the relationships between the variables. The results will have important implications for policymakers and rural development initiatives, and by highlighting psychological and behavioral factors, this study could inform targeted strategies to enhance rural resilience and improve local livelihoods.

Resurgence of a rural idyll? Longitudinal research in Scotland's North-West

Oral

Dr. Christina Noble¹, Dr. Ruth Wilson¹, Dr. Margaret Currie¹

1. The James Hutton Institute

The rural idyll saw a resurgence during COVID-19 amplifying a type of rural society, one prioritising safety, as an antithesis to an urban other. In times of crisis, the rural idyll has often been transformed (Short, 2006), and the sense of COVID-19 belonging to a suite of on-going and multiple crises (see Perma/poly-crisis) has presented opportunities for researchers to understand the ongoing impact as societies move towards recalibration and recovery.

This paper, brings together the living experiences of residents in the NW Highlands of Scotland following an on-going longitudinal piece of research that is working with communities across rural and island communities in Scotland to inform a resilient recovery process. The research importantly seeks to understand the distinct characteristics and needs of each community, in light of changing population dynamics, including those in search of their own rural idyll.

With dispersed communities, the area is known to be challenging for rural policy development, and this paper seeks to showcase not only the known needs (housing, childcare, service provision), but highlight a better understanding of these, one that takes account of different people, different places and different times in order for rural communities in the NW to thrive. As the research is ongoing, this paper presents an important juncture to reflect upon the research so far and critically assess the next steps.

Keywords: Rural Idyll, Longitudinal, Crises, Recovery, Repopulation, NW Highlands

Retaining permanent and temporary immigrants in rural Australia: Place-based and individual determinants

Oral

Prof. Neil Argent¹

1. University of New England

In many low-fertility countries, immigration is increasingly seen a solution to the twin problem of rural depopulation and skill shortages. In Australia, this takes the form of regional visa schemes that require both skilled and humanitarian migrants to reside initially in non-metropolitan regions for a minimum of two years. In the absence of nationally representative longitudinal data, the efficacy of this policy is yet to be assessed. Applying survival analysis to novel administrative data from the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), this paper establishes the level and determinants of rural retention among immigrants who arrived between January and August 2011 on eight different visas and compares these to the Australian population to the end of 2019. Our results suggest that regional visa schemes are effective in attracting permanent skilled migrants but not in retaining them, even when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. Migrants on regional skilled visa and temporary skilled workers display a 40 per cent nine-year retention rate compared with over 50 per cent for Australian and New Zealand citizens, permanent family, skilled and humanitarian migrants and 30 per cent for students. In contrast, the low retention of temporary skilled migrants is largely the product of their younger and more educated profile. We identify a negative selection process by which immigrants with less-education, lower incomes, or less English proficiency—including humanitarian migrants—are more likely to stay in non-metropolitan regions. This outcome signifies a process of socio-spatial polarisation and a segmented labour market. At a regional-level, we find that regions with a diverse occupational mix and co-ethnic networks are more likely to retain immigrants whereas those with high housing costs are significantly less likely. These results provide policy levers to boost rural retention.

Rethinking the Relationship Between Population Change and Society Across the Urban Hierarchy

Oral

***Prof. David Brown*¹, *Prof. Mark Shucksmith*²**

1. Cornell, 2. Newcastle University

Population changes affect many aspects of rural society, but these relationships are not automatic nor mechanistic. Rather, local, national and global structures mediate these relationships. The same demographic changes can have different outcomes in different communities. In addition, while the top down urban hierarchy obscures the agency of smaller and rural places, such places can exert power depending on their social structures and historical legacies, and their social, economic and natural resource endowments. This paper explores new ways of thinking about the intersection of these two conventional approaches to examining rural change, e.g., the inexorable Malthusian impact of population change, and the axiomatic powerlessness of rural places within a nation's settlement structure. Our discussion draws on two chapter of our recently published book, "Rethinking Rural Studies"(Edward Elgar 2024).

Robust growth amidst chronic decline: The contrasting demographic trajectories of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations of Northern New South Wales

Oral

Prof. Neil Argent¹

1. University of New England

In the contemporary academic literature, rural population decline has generally been regarded as a long-running and almost natural phenomenon. This paper examines the complex temporal, spatial and cultural dynamics of the population of an inland, largely agriculturally-dependent rural region, the New South Wales New England and North West region (SA4 level) from the late 1990s to the 2021 Census, and investigates the key demographic processes that have driven the region's spatially and temporally-uneven experiences of population change – including decline – over this tumultuous period, using these as portents of the regional population's likely future trajectories. Drawing on custom-created population estimates for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations of this expansive region, the paper explores these processes and trajectories for the population as a whole, then for the non-Indigenous and Indigenous segments. The analysis identifies that a profound ageing process is underway across the entire region, is becoming more severe over time, and leading to natural decrease for some Shires. However, the region's Indigenous population presents a striking contrast to the non-indigenous one, growing rapidly, increasing its share of the population and is a force for demographic rejuvenation.

Rural population change: internal and international migration to rural regions

Oral

Dr. Helle Nørgaard¹, Dr. Hans Thor Andersen²

1. Build, AAU, 2. Aalborg University

Over the last decades, a great deal of attention has been given to a growing urban-rural divide in countries across much of Europe emphasizing lack of investment, job loss and outmigration from rural places contrary to growth and concentration of jobs and continued migration to large cities. Although the Covid-19 pandemic gave rise to migration from urban to rural places changes are generally considered temporary. However, studies have demonstrated that both numbers and direction of migration has varied considerably in recent time and that migration to large metropolises was most significant in the period from 2008 to 2016. Thus, urbanization processes are far from unidirectional and rural municipalities are not only characterized by out-migration but also in-migration by both internal and international migrants.

Our paper examines recent changes in migration patterns, including employment status and educational level of the new rural migrants. Our paper also addresses that since the early 2000s a larger share of immigrants has migrated to rural areas in the Nordic countries, compared to other European countries, and explores how this may contribute to the rejuvenation of the demographic profile due to younger age of internal migrants and immigrants compared with the general population. Our paper further explores motives for moving to rural places for both internal migrants and immigrants based on a large survey among populations in Denmark studying migration and settlement preferences identifying a potential for revitalization of rural places previously in long term decline.

The impact of remote work on counterurbanisation in the UK

Oral

Ms. Kirsten Clarke¹

1. James Hutton Institute

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many studies documented workers' counterurban moves out of cities to rural areas, claiming that remote work could help to address rural depopulation and ageing, including in the UK. However, these claims have since been questioned, and some studies have since claimed that remote workers have moved back to cities or are moving to accessible rural areas but no further. Despite this debate, no studies have yet examined remote work's influence on UK counterurbanisation trends in the post-pandemic era.

This paper adopts a mixed methods approach to evaluate how remote work is impacting counterurbanisation. Quantitative data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study suggests that compared to non-remote workers, remote workers are more likely to counterurbanise. However, counterurbanisation trends vary across regions of the UK, with Scotland and southern English regions experiencing higher numbers of remote workers counterurbanising. Furthermore, the data suggests that most urban-rural moves are to accessible rural areas. Qualitative interview data further reveals how remote work shapes counterurbanisation decision-making and highlights that remote work may also be driving residential migration trends that have not yet been explored in the literature. For example, alongside remote work's influence on urban-rural migration, remote work may allow workers to consider rural-rural moves to support partners' careers or upsize their homes. These findings expand our understanding of remote work's impact on residential mobility and offer new insights into the evolving field of rural mobility studies, challenging traditional perceptions of rural areas as static and immobile.

The pandemic as a game changer for rural revival? Counterurbanisation and population dynamics within the discourse of ‘fast and slow’ demography in non-metropolitan Latvia

Oral

Dr. Maris Berzins¹, Dr. Elina Apsite-Berina¹, Prof. Zaiga Krisjane¹, Mr. Niks Stafekis¹

1. University of Latvia

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has generated renewed interest in counterurban migration and its comprehensive impact on population dynamics globally. We draw upon a wide range of evidence that probably still gives a relatively early assessment of the extent to which the pandemic reduced urban in-migration and stimulated a resurgence of counterurbanisation that has primarily been discussed in the global North. Although it is undeniable that the rural revival was evident, it may not have been as strong or long-lasting as some public debates and mass media reports have suggested. This study aims to shed new light on changes in counterurbanisation by examining population dynamics in non-metropolitan Latvia, building on Billari's (2022) framework of the "fast and slow" demography perspective. A specific focus will be placed on new patterns of in-migration to non-metropolitan rural areas which have become apparent during the pandemic. This research investigates how these areas navigate between slow structural changes (aging, low fertility) and sudden disruptions in migration patterns caused by the pandemic. The study employs a set of demographic variables derived from Statistics Latvia, analysing quantitative data of population turnover, natural growth, and migration share in rural areas to understand patterns of demographic change. Based on a case study of Latvia, our main findings show, first, that urbanisation has been the predominant migration trend across the past thirty years, with the main destination of domestic migrants being the capital city and its urban region. Second, we find that counter-urban moves have gained importance during the pandemic.

Key words: counterurbanisation, COVID-19 pandemic, demographic change, Latvia

The Urban Exodus: Understanding the Impacts of Urban to Rural Migration post-COVID-19

Oral

Dr. Sara Epp¹

1. University of Guelph

A notable outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, Canada has been an increased migration of urban and suburban residents to rural communities. For some, this migration was prompted by the pandemic-induced creation of telecommuting opportunities and the ability to work remotely. For others, this movement was linked to retirement, second home ownership, or simply a desire to escape the city or suburbs. While this new migration has resulted in population growth and new economic opportunities, it has also added pressure to existing rural infrastructure, reduced housing supply and affordability, and raised concerns about the adequacy of local healthcare services. The gentrification of the countryside had already been well underway in many rural communities, but the rates grew sharply as a result of urban flight between 2020 and 2022. The broader impacts of this migration and long-term outcomes of this migration, including retention rates, social wellbeing, and land uses conflicts are unknown. This paper will present a case study analysis of rural communities in Ontario that experienced pandemic-induced migration. The motivations, and expectations of these migrants will be explored, and their impacts on housing, employment and social services discussed.

Transformation potential and capacity of small and medium farms in Latvia

Oral

Prof. Aija Zobena¹, Dr. Renars Felcis¹

1. University of Latvia

The main aim of the study was to analyse potential of social agriculture as a form of social economy in Latvia to mobilize collective action with self-help and autonomy, new communication technologies and social innovation in provision of social services and access to social infrastructure, in development of opportunities for social entrepreneurship. Latvia is characterized by a large number of small farms with significant economic and social disparities, which also have a territorial impact. Small farm output and, consequently, incomes are relatively small, contributing to social stratification. Still these farms mark new trends in rural development based on the principles of social economy such as part-time farming, lifestyle farms, social care, rehabilitation, therapeutic functions, agricultural diversification, artisan food processing and helps to keep rural areas populated. Depopulation of border areas will increase the threat to national security.

The agents involved in the social farming network are linked to rural development, social entrepreneurship and social care providing services agencies at local, regional and national level. The core research methodology for obtaining and analyzing empirical data in this study was the case study approach. Several case studies of social entrepreneurship initiatives in all regions were conducted to analyze social farming as form of social entrepreneurship in the context of social services provision as a response to challenges of shrinking society and uneven regional development.

Acknowledgements

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39. Rural Areas as innovation ecosystems: transformative strategies and social innovations

Activating Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems: Inclusive, Participatory and Community-Based Development Towards a Sustainable and Smart Transition

Oral

Dr. Claudia de Luca¹, Ms. Caterina Selva¹, Mr. Francesco Vettore¹

1. University of Bologna

Rural Innovation Ecosystem, Social Innovation, Participatory Approach

Although rural communities and territories have the potential to serve as fertile grounds for Innovation Ecosystems, leveraging on local resources and heritage to create hubs of innovation, the activation of multi-actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs) in these areas continues to be a challenge. This contribution presents the RURACTIVE Methodology, which aims to activate and maintain local Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs) going beyond the issues of physical proximity, density and accessibility of rural areas. The methodology supports rural communities to undertake a participatory and inclusive community-led co-development process, setting key principles, methods and step-by-step guidelines. Two key principles, participation and inclusion, and three cross cutting priorities, climate change mitigation and adaptation, social justice and inclusion, and biodiversity, are integrated throughout the methodology and guide community-led rural development, to identify, engage and empower local stakeholders, civil society, and groups at risk of social exclusion and underrepresentation. Aware of the rich diversity of rural areas, this methodology embeds flexibility as a general guiding norm, giving freedom to the different territories to apply and tailor the methodology based on previous projects and experiences, current synergies, policies, objectives, and available funds and resources. This contribution will present the methodology and provide an initial overview of the results derived from its implementation in 12 territories around Europe and beyond, with a focus on stakeholder identification and engagement as the first steps in the establishment of the RIEs.

Exploring the Conditions for Rural Innovation Ecosystems: Insights from the Staying Process

Oral

Dr. Kenneth Nordberg¹

1. Åbo Akademi University

The conditions for rural communities to become dynamic, innovative, and resilient vary significantly depending on geographical, economic, and social factors. While some areas benefit from geographical advantages or strong industrial and tourism traditions, others face structural challenges that hinder their development. In this context, the staying process serves as an analytical tool to explore the factors influencing local development potential. Staying is an ongoing process wherein individuals at different life stages make conscious decisions to remain in a place, shaped by access to employment and services, social cohesion, and the community's ability to mobilize and direct its own development.

This paper investigates the staying process in rural areas, defining it as a voluntary, deliberate, and strategic action. On the basis of this understanding of the unique characteristics of different localities and the factors affecting staying decisions, development processes are initiated that directly address both the strengths and challenges influencing rural resilience. Drawing on models of rural innovation ecosystems, the objective is to identify concrete strategies for fostering sustainable local development.

Previous research (Nordberg 2024) highlighted the central role of local dynamics in staying decisions, linking them to historical trajectories, contemporary activities, and community structures. A key emerging question concerns the conditions that foster “dynamic stayers”—individuals who create networks and drive development processes. This study examines how different environments shape such agency, exploring local histories, conducting targeted inquiries with different types of stayers, and testing identified assumptions in real-world development initiatives.

Through a comparative study of rural communities in three distinct regions, this research seeks to generate broader insights into the staying process and rural development strategies, offering practical frameworks adaptable to diverse local contexts.

From Innovation to Action: Empirical Cases of Rural Digital Ecosystems and Socio-Cyber-Physical Systems

Oral

Dr. Chiara Mignani¹, Prof. Gianluca Brunori²

1. University of Pisa, 2. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa

The agri-food sector is currently facing significant challenges due to climate change, population growth, rural depopulation, and rapid technological advancements. To foster effective and sustainable agricultural innovations, it is essential to understand the dynamics within rural areas and capture the complexity of real-world situations. Scholars defined different frameworks to conceptualize the elements and dynamics that characterize the introduction of digital innovation in the agricultural context. This contribution focuses attention on two approaches applied to agriculture in rural areas: the Socio-Cyber-Physical Systems (SCPS) and the Digital Innovation Ecosystems (DIE). Although, the SCPS approach emphasises more the integration of technology among social, cyber, and physical elements, managing system complexity (Metta et al., 2022; Rijswijk et al., 2021), while the DIE perspective focuses mainly on the interactions among actors and relations activates through digital technologies, the two frameworks have more characteristics in common (Bravaglieri et al., 2025; Wolfert et al., 2023).

This paper examines the theoretical approach of these frameworks through the analysis of two case studies related to two Tuscan living labs in Tuscany, developed as part of the Horizon 2020 project DESIRA –“Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas” and the PRIN project SMARTIES –“Puzzling Out Smart Ruralities, Sound Knowledge, and Rural Agricultural/Agrifood Entrepreneurial Ecosystem”. The DESIRA living lab explored the use of digital technologies for land management in rural areas with mountain landscapes, aligning with the SCPS approach by utilizing data-driven decision-making and automation. The SMARTIES living lab focused on the introduction of digital technologies to enhance sheep milk production for Pecorino Toscano in southern Tuscany, from a business, knowledge, and innovation ecosystem point of view.

By exploring theories and practices, this ongoing study will offer insights for policy makers and practitioners to define new models for adopting digital technologies and involving local communities in the innovation process.

From social to transformative innovation: preliminary reflections on Rural Innovation Ecosystems in action

Oral

Dr. Carlo Giua¹, Ms. Brigida Marovelli¹, Dr. Sabrina Tomasi¹, Mr. Michele Moretti¹, Prof. Gianluca Brunori¹

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa

Rural areas, encompassing nearly 80% of the EU's territory and 25% of its population, face complex socio-economic challenges. Innovation, with its transformative potential, plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges, particularly within the EU's neo-endogenous rural development paradigm. Recent social science debates have increasingly emphasized the concept of Innovation Ecosystems (IEs) as a theoretical lens to understand systemic innovation dynamics. While IE has been referenced in several EU rural innovation policies, it remains largely uncontextualized for rural settings.

This study deepens into the concept of Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs), grounded in a narrative literature review, positioning it within business and social science studies, innovation discourse, and rural digitalization frameworks. The paper traces the evolution of innovation models — from linear approaches to systemic perspectives — and explores how ecosystem thinking, combining socio-technical and territorial perspectives, can better address the dynamic and heterogeneous needs of rural areas. Taking the Horizon Europe Innovation Action project FUTURAL as a case study, the operationalization of RIEs is demonstrated through its application. The discussion highlights the transformative potential of RIEs, emphasizing co-creation, multi-stakeholder engagement, and the need to shift from socio-technological to transformative innovation, which also implies broadening the scope of social innovation.

This conceptual framework highlights the potential of RIEs to co-design, co-create and test innovations that address the intricacies of rural contexts while advancing systemic change. It contributes to the ongoing discourse on social and transformative innovation, offering insights for research, policy, and practice aimed at empowering rural areas through context-sensitive, systemic approaches.

Innovation Ecosystems and Rural Peripheries: Nature Recovery, and Institutional Leadership

Oral

Dr. Joanie Willett¹, Dr. Jack Reed¹, Dr. Georgina Treloar¹, Prof. Jane Wills¹

1. University of Exeter

Dominant narratives about rural areas often struggle to see what they have to offer to national economies, and in this environment, the unique contributions of rural regions in terms of natural capital and biodiversity can often be overlooked. This risks locking rural areas into narratives designed for urban ones. In this paper, we look at the innovation ecosystems of 12 rural upper tier local authority areas in the UK around nature recovery, which collectively hold 27% of England's total land area, and 32% of England's drinking water storage capacity. Nature recovery has significant traction in the post-Brexit UK policy environment, where Environmental Land Management schemes replace the Common Agricultural Policy, working with Local Nature Recovery Strategies. In addition, development projects now have to offset their harms to local environments through Biodiversity Net Gain schemes. This, and other emerging markets including for carbon and nature credits represent possible opportunities and economic incentive for nature recovery for landowners. These provide a significant opportunity for rural areas to capitalise on increased attention towards one of their unique selling points, and turn nature recovery into a regional development tool.

This paper draws on interviews with local government leaders and nature recovery specialists to consider what factors a Nature Recovery innovation eco-system of interconnected actors, markets and skills requires for effective regional development, and how these might be developed. While there is new investment and innovation happening, we highlight the need for institutional leadership, additional skills and new training provision to realise the full potential of development.

Italian inner areas and metro-mountain flows: new local ecosystems of social innovation

Oral

Dr. Michele Iuliano¹

1. ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - Università di Bologna

This research explores Italian inner areas as ecosystems of social innovation, analyzing how metro-mountain flows—exchanges of social capital, knowledge, resources, and innovation practices—support Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIE) and territorial regeneration. The central question examines their role in developing innovative territorial services and sustainable social enterprise models.

Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes the Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), maps Project Areas, reviews policy documents, and compares case studies of social innovation in mountainous and peripheral contexts. The analytical framework follows the OECD's Local Employment and Economic Development (LEED) Programme, structured around three pillars: framework conditions, policy implementation measures, and progress dynamics monitoring. Additionally, it integrates insights from the SIMRA project, whose approach to social innovation as a reconfiguration of social practices in response to global challenges informs the selection of best practices examined throughout the research. The study also explores territorial co-design tools, including focus groups and scouting activities to engage local stakeholders.

Findings highlight the role of collaborative governance and multi-actor networks in enhancing local communities' capacity for social innovation. The interaction between institutions, social enterprises, and citizens proves crucial in fostering resilient local economies and improving access to essential services. The study identifies enabling conditions for sustaining RIEs and strategies for scaling successful models.

Finally, it presents a case study of a multidimensional social enterprise in the Emilia Romagna Apennines, focused on cultivating and processing medicinal and aromatic herbs. This model, deeply rooted in the territory yet connected to urban economies, exemplifies an innovative rural ecosystem fostering cooperation and transformation.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates how metro-mountain flow-based ecosystems address key challenges such as environmental sustainability, depopulation, and proximity economies, shaping a new paradigm for territorial innovation.

KEYWORDS:

- Rural Social Enterprises
- Metro-Mountain Flows
- Social Innovation Ecosystems

Libraries as Innovation Hubs: Transforming Rural Communities in Estonia

Oral

Ms. Triin Kübar¹, Dr. Katri-Liis Lepik¹

1. Tallinn University

This case study explores how rural libraries in Estonia are evolving into social innovation hubs, strengthening civic engagement and resilience in local communities. Using the Local Dialogue at the Local Library initiative in Toila municipality as an example, we analyze how libraries can function as intermediaries between other public sector institutions and citizens, fostering participatory democracy and social cohesion.

Grounded in an Intersectional Critical Systems Thinking (ICST) approach, the study examines libraries as complex social systems embedded in rural innovation ecosystems. The research employs a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating stakeholder mapping, semi-structured interviews with librarians and community members. This methodological design enables an in-depth analysis of the conditions that allow libraries to act as social innovation platforms.

Findings indicate that libraries serve as trusted, neutral spaces that bridge institutional and grassroots initiatives, facilitating community dialogue on issues such as governance, sustainability, and digital inclusion. The study highlights key enablers of this transformation, including librarians' capacity-building, multi-sectoral partnerships, and alignment with local policy frameworks. The results contribute to broader discussions on rural social economy strategies and the role of non-traditional institutions in fostering inclusive development.

Keywords: rural innovation, libraries, social innovation

Local Social Innovation Support Units as Catalysts for Rural Innovation Ecosystems: Knowledge Commoning and Social-Ecological Learning for Transformative Futures

Oral

Ms. Maria João Horta Parreira¹, Prof. Iva Pires²

1. Research Group 4 Sustainability and Socio-Ecological Systems, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences (CICS.NOVA), 2. School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA FCSH)

In rural territories, the experimentation with local Social Innovation Support Units (SISUs) offers a unique opportunity to reconceptualize social innovation, enhance resilience, and address place-based challenges. Drawing on Human Ecology doctoral research in mainland Portugal, we argue that SISUs can catalyze Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs) by facilitating collaborative governance, participatory experimentation, and multi-actor social-ecological learning processes that drive transformative change. SISUs are envisioned as creative spaces for active learning and civic engagement, where innovative participatory methodologies, exemplified by the “Game of Left-Behind Territories: Let’s Play and Create?”, operationalize the emergent concept of knowledge *commoning*. This is conceptualized as an “ecology of practices” that transcends mere information and/or knowledge transfer, democratizing knowledge by fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships to bridge the rural-urban divide. By empowering young entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, governmental and private entities, academia, and policymakers to engage in real-world problem-solving in a low-risk and creative environment, SISUs facilitate the development of cooperative solutions in areas such as regenerative and sustainable agriculture, the social economy, place-based policies with better regulation, and digital inclusion. Moreover, SISUs function as hubs for cross-scale connectivity, linking local practices with regional, national, and global networks aligned with sustainable development goals. From a human ecology perspective, this research demonstrates that integrating RIEs with knowledge *commoning* provides a collective transformative pathway that enhances social-ecological resilience and paves the way for livable and sustainable futures in rural contexts.

Patchworks of change: innovator networks and their strategies in pursuit of transformative landscape governance

Oral

Mr. Socrates Schouten¹, Dr. Katarina Haugen²

1. Wageningen University, 2. University of Gothenburg

Keywords: Transformative Governance, Biocultural Innovations, Rural Innovation Ecosystem

Background and research focus

Rural biodiversity continues to decline (Stanturf, 2021); however, when managed as ‘nature-inclusive’ landscapes, these areas can sustain considerable biodiversity (Runhaar, 2017). Achieving this outcome requires transformative change that addresses both the immediate drivers and the underlying causes of biodiversity loss (IPBES, 2025). Furthermore, biodiversity is intertwined with other challenges and conditions that shape livable rural futures. Rural landscapes comprise overlapping layers of social-ecological networks (Opdam, 2013), with each network capable of amplifying or attenuating the transformative intent and potential of governance processes. Gaining a deeper understanding of these networks is crucial for advancing both landscape governance theory and practice.

Approach and findings

Drawing on theories of transformative social innovation (Avelino et al., 2019), transformative governance (Termeer et al., 2024) and rural innovation ecosystems (Bravaglieri et al., 2025), we analyse 6 case studies of ‘biocultural innovations’ across Europe. Our aim is to examine how innovators promote and upscale biodiversity-supportive practices. Using a mixed-methods design – combining semi-structured interviews, surveys, and participatory diagramming with local partners – we develop a typology of network interactions in rural innovation ecosystems.

Interpretation and takeaways

Our findings reveal that biocultural innovations are often fragmented, emerging as patchworks of initiatives with varying commitment to transformative change. These innovations navigate complex material and governance constraints. We investigate how key innovators leverage these conditions and where conflicts or barriers emerge, offering insights into the dynamics of rural innovation ecosystems and their potential to enact biodiversity transformations.

Rethinking Community as a Driver of Rural Transformation and Sustainable Resource Management

Oral

Dr. CHUKWUMA UME¹, Dr. Stephanie Domptail¹

1. Justus Liebig University

In the context of rural transitions, the concept of “community” often remains underexamined, particularly regarding its impact on resource sovereignty and equitable development. This study examines the cooperative in Mucusso village, Angola, as a transformative model that challenges traditional narratives of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). Established in 2016 by an NGO, the cooperative operates within the Luengue-Luiana Park and the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area. With 134 members, predominantly women from marginalized groups, it addresses pressing socio-ecological challenges through sustainable agriculture, conflict mitigation, and resource sovereignty. Using social metabolism analysis, the study integrates quantitative data from 73 households with qualitative insights from key stakeholders, including local leaders, cooperative members, and conservation policymakers. Findings highlight the cooperative’s innovative trade-by-barter and exchange system, which fosters resource retention, reduces external dependencies, and promotes equitable distribution. Social network analysis further reveals a significant reduction in local inequality, with the cooperative enhancing both social cohesion and economic stability within the community. Despite challenges such as recurrent drought, fragmented governance structures, and limited access to formal markets, the cooperative serves as an adaptive governance model that aligns local needs with broader conservation goals. This case study demonstrates the potential for redefining “community” as an evolving process of negotiation, co-creation, and interdependence. By reconceptualizing community dynamics in this way, the research contributes to the ESRS 2025 theme of “Navigating rural transitions: Exploring liveable futures,” offering actionable insights into designing inclusive, resilient, and sustainable conservation and development frameworks.

Smart Village as a Tool for Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems: Applying a Narrative of Needs Methodology in Seven Slovenian Smart Village Initiatives

Oral

Ms. Blazka Rupnik¹, Ms. Sara Mikolic²

1. Seoul National University, 2. University of Ljubljana

Keywords: Smart Village, Narrative of Needs, Slovenia

This paper aims to contribute to defining the concept of Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIE) and empirically test Bravaglieri et al.'s (2025) proposed Multi-Actor RIE framework through case studies of seven smart village initiatives in Slovenia. We argue that smart village initiatives act as a tool for establishing linkages, nodes and modes of collaboration and reaching consensus on common goals and objectives - both crucial elements in the early stages of the RIS evolution. We apply a narrative analysis to 30 interviews with public, private and civil stakeholders driving the smart village initiatives and explore the types of narratives that emerge and how they converge into a common goal through the concept of common narrative of needs. Compelling narratives are central for stakeholders to join innovation ecosystems, yet little is known about them in rural settings (Vercher et al. 2021). Preliminary findings indicate narratives of urban-rural equality in service, autonomy and rural life optimisation, and the revival of local connectedness. These narratives converge through a strong and skilled leader, attachment to a social cause and rural fabric, and market/community readiness. Findings imply that education-related initiatives reinforce strong narratives and should be recognized as the seventh sector in the Multi-Actor RIE framework. This study offers insights for EU and global smart village policymakers on the stakeholder structure of successful initiatives and strategies for overcoming scaling challenges across administrative borders.

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Social innovation and their legitimation processes within rural developments in East Germany

Oral

***Dr. Sabine Hielscher*¹, *Dr. Friederike Rohde*²**

1. Institute for Ecological Economy Research, 2. TU Berlin

Rural areas can be marked by limited economic opportunities, poor job prospects, and declining infrastructures in Europe, which sometimes stand in stark contrast to urban living conditions. In the new German federal states, rural areas are highly diverse, with significant variations in population density, proximity to major cities, and socio-economic conditions. Citizens living in these areas have been part of major social upheavals and needed to rebuild and reorganize civil society activities and infrastructures after the German reunification. Despite these challenges, some of these areas have increasingly become hubs for social innovation, where diverse groups of actors collaborate to develop creative responses to local and regional challenges. However, despite growing political interests in these activities, the legitimacy of civil society initiatives in new rural governance arrangements still are ambiguous and not well supported. Significant work and effort are required from civil society initiatives to showcase their relevance to local and regional actors while legitimizing their ways of organizing, doing and thinking. Drawing on concepts linked to the transformative social innovation, legitimization processes, and governance beyond the state, as well as case study work that was conducted in the Harz in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, this study examines legitimization as part of social innovation processes between multiple actors and their translocal networks in rural areas and how they shape social changes in regional developments. In conclusion, processes of gaining legitimacy across civil society initiatives and principles linked to legitimization within rural governance are drawn out and discussed.

Social innovation in Italian rural areas: Community cooperatives and rural ecosystem innovation

Oral

***Mr. Mattia Mogetta¹, Dr. Deborah Bentivoglio¹, Dr. Giacomo Staffolani¹, Dr. Giulia Chiaraluce¹,
Prof. Adele Finco¹***

1. Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM) - Department of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences (D3A)

Rural areas are facing major challenges, from strong depopulation dynamics to economic and cultural depressions. However, these areas, with their own characteristics, may serve as fertile grounds for novel growth potential. In these contexts, a new “force” of transformation is emerging: the community cooperatives. The phenomenon of community cooperatives has recently emerged on the national scene, and, over time, is reshaping rural development by fostering resilience and social cohesion. Characterised by strong social capital, they act as a catalyst for local transformation with a relevant global impact, addressing challenges such as climate change and sustainability. They arise in diverse contexts and for distinct reasons, bringing together different stakeholders to enhance community well-being, and representing concrete models of rural innovation ecosystems. This study looks at the role of community cooperatives, as a new model of social innovation, as promoters of the sustainable development of rural areas. The qualitative approach is employed to analyze Italian case studies involved in new paradigms of alternative agricultures and in an integrated vision of rural development. Semi-structured interviews were utilized as a technique for gathering data while the SWOT analysis was used to highlight the strengths, the weaknesses, the opportunities, and the threats of community cooperatives. Preliminary findings highlight their positive impact on local communities, creating new job opportunities, income for farmers, and raising consumer awareness regarding sustainable choices. However, to optimize their potential and guarantee enduring resilience, it is essential to execute focused policy interventions and allocate resources while considering both local and global changes.

The impact of digitalization on rural and urban social innovation initiatives during the Covid19 crisis

Oral

Dr. Valentino Marini Govigli¹, Dr. Carmen Rodríguez Fernández-Blanco², Dr. Elisa Carloni³, Dr. Eirini Skrimizea⁴, Dr. Judyta Lubacha⁵, Dr. Pedro Jacobetty⁶

1. University of Bologna, Department of Agricultural and Food Sciences, 2. European Forest Institute, 3. University of Brescia, 4. Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, KU Leuven, 5. Institute of Economics, Finance and Management, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagellonian University, 6. University of Potsdam

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered radical digital transformations across global economies and societies. Urban and rural communities began collaborating without physical interaction, fostering innovative virtual communication and network development. However, the extent to which digital technologies and the rapid digitalization spurred by the pandemic are supporting Social Innovations (SI) in achieving their objectives remains unclear. This article draws on data from an EU-wide survey of SI initiatives, primarily in rural areas, to explore the adoption of digital tools during the pandemic and their impact on SI activities and outcomes. Our analysis examines the relationship between local communities and digital technologies, assessing whether digital transformation has benefited or hindered grassroots movements and associations in addressing sustainability challenges. Preliminary results indicate that, as expected, SI initiatives increased their use of digital tools during the pandemic, showing a greater willingness to adopt them. While the pandemic disrupted SI activities, it also presented opportunities to restart, reinforce, and reactivate them. In the post-pandemic period, SI initiatives saw increased interaction and stronger relationships. These findings suggest that the pandemic and subsequent digitalization reshaped SI networks, enhancing their outreach and internal structures, particularly by strengthening social capital. Our research highlights the role of digital practices in advancing SI initiatives, emphasizing the critical need for funding to support this transition.

The SMART ERA gamified phygital co-design tool for rural communities

Oral

Mrs. Alessia Torre¹, Dr. Simone Bassanelli¹, Dr. Elena Not¹, Dr. Chiara Leonardi¹, Dr. Eleonora Mencarini¹, Dr. Federico Bonetti¹, Dr. Annapaola Marconi¹, Dr. Matteo Gerosa²

1. Fondazione Bruno Kessler, 2. FBK

The pursuit of liveable rural futures requires inclusive and participatory approaches to address socio-ecological and socio-political challenges. A gamified phygital (physical and digital) co-design tool has been developed in the context of the Horizon Europe project SMART ERA, to foster stakeholder engagement and collaboration towards rural innovation. The tool consists of analog and digital components to structure co-design sessions with rural communities. The analog toolkit includes ingredient cards to explore key elements, reflection cards to prompt discussion, support canvases for structured activities, and a visual board for tracking progress. The digital counterpart enhances these processes through real-time monitoring, asynchronous collaboration, and gamified engagement. By integrating gamified progress tracking, visual feedback, and recognition mechanisms within a flexible, domain-agnostic framework, the tool enables communities to co-create the SMART ERA Smart Innovation Packages (SIPs)—tailored solutions combining technological and non-technological components to tackle rural challenges.

The tool was refined through the design of use-case scenario interventions in sustainable mobility, environmental conservation, rural tourism, digital transformation in agriculture, and community-driven healthcare in the six project rural pilot sites (Italy, Slovenia, Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Spain and Finland). Combining digital efficiency with analog social strengths, the tool enhances accessibility, inclusivity, and participatory governance. This approach contributes to autonomous rural initiatives, community resilience, and sustainable rural futures.

Using living labs to assess innovation in rural ecosystems by studying and comparing application scenarios of digitalisation

Oral

Dr. Fabio Lepore¹, Dr. Livia Ortolani¹, Dr. Daniele Vergamini¹, Prof. Gianluca Brunori¹

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa

Digitalisation is transforming agriculture, improving productivity and sustainability. A study exploring this phenomenon is ongoing as part of the European project CODECS – which analyses its costs and benefits.

Our proposal is based on extensive experience using Living Labs as innovation ecosystems. It examines how their interaction can foster a deeper understanding of the technology transition in specific *application scenarios*. This concept is particularly relevant because it defines the context in which digital tools are designed and implemented to achieve specific goals. So, we believe it should be one of the main factors in assessing the initial eligibility of case studies to be used.

Based on the comparison between two LLs – both focused on promoting data-driven agriculture in two specific sheep-cheese supply chains and thus close in their application scenario – we explore the potential of cross-visits as an empirical approach for observing and analysing their innovation dynamics. It allows for studying different contexts that share similar needs and expectations, helping to directly compare organisational models and adopted digital solutions.

Furthermore, its analysis allows for identifying drivers and barriers to innovation, evaluating how digital solutions can be adapted across contexts, and strengthening stakeholder collaborative networks. It also provides valuable insights for developing more effective policies for digitalisation in agriculture, highlighting the extent to which the specificities of each application scenario could hamper the generalisability of strategies and how these influence the broader rural ecosystem.

Our contribution can align with the debate on RIE, offering a perspective on comparative methodologies for analysing LLs. Through developing a framework to assess the potential for adopting digital innovations across different ecosystems and the limitations of comparability, our study can provide valuable insights for refining that concept.

Weak points of Rural Social Innovation Ecosystem in Poland. The perspective of NGOs.

Oral

Mrs. Katarzyna Zajda¹

*1. Center of Social Innovations, University of Lodz; Department of Rural and Urban Studies and Sociology of Social Change,
Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz*

The focus of the presentation is twofold: 1. The factors that support the implementation of grassroots social innovations in Polish villages by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and 2. their role in creating the Rural Social Innovation Ecosystem. The theoretical framework for the considerations is Giddens' theory of structuration. The paper posits that NGOs, as reflective entities that are rooted in the local context, possess knowledge of social practices for solving social problems. They can strive to address these issues using social innovations, defined as unconventional social practices to solving such issues. The paper presents the results of quantitative research conducted from 2018 to 2021, which involved a random, representative sample of 400 rural NGOs, alongside the results of qualitative research comprising eight case studies of the implementation of grassroots social innovations. The findings reveal that about 1/3 of rural NGOs implemented local social innovations, although this does not mean that they completed this process. Successful implementation was supported by the organisation's cooperation with local and non-local entities and the NGOs' human and financial resources. The emerging social innovation systems were based on local social networks, which were often unstable and fragile, limiting opportunities for the diffusion of these social innovations. The weaknesses of the Rural Social Innovation Ecosystem will be analysed, considering the social capital resources of the inhabitants of Polish villages and, in particular, the state of rural NGOs.

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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE “SI-POLICY” NEXUS?

Oral

Ms. melek karahasan¹, Prof. Gary Bosworth²

1. PhD Student, 2. Northumbria University

This research presents the co-evolution of rural social innovation and public policy in the form of a nexus. Drawing on theories of path dependency, we examine the different roles played by social innovators, as new path creators, and policymakers, who are often committed to supporting established development paths. Data were collected with semi-structured interviews to deeply understand the dynamic linkages between policy and social initiatives. Interviews were carried out with four social innovation pioneers and five policy representatives from four case studies in Türkiye. Findings indicate social innovation paves the way for creating a new path, while policy plays a role in ensuring the sustainability of this pathway. Public policy also has a role in enriching the social innovation ecosystem to encourage and facilitate the emergence of more new initiatives from within rural communities. We argue, however, that the burden or risk and effort tends to fall on a handful of social innovation leaders, who only receive direct policy support once they have demonstrated the potential for a new idea to succeed. At times, social innovation is a substitute for ineffective or absent policy interventions, but there is often a complementary relationship between local policy and social innovation too. Framing this as a nexus, we highlight the interdependence of rural policy and social innovation as a collective force for community participation, dialogue, experience sharing and the development of place-based solutions that can advance rural development. The research contributes to rural social innovation by drawing on the evolutionary economic geography realm.

Youth-led Engagement for Driving Rural Social Innovations: A Case Study from Taiwan

Oral

Prof. Hsi Chun Chen¹, Ms. Xin Jie Lin¹

1. National Chung Hsing University, Department of Soil and Water Conservation

Many rural areas around the world, situated at the intersection of human society and the natural environment, are currently facing the dual challenges of significant population decline and biodiversity loss. In response, a critical challenge emerges: how can rural communities effectively address environmental and ecological issues while experiencing population decline? In this context, youth engagement has been recognized as a promising approach to tackling these pressing challenges.

This study explores a youth-led engagement approach to fostering social innovation in response to ecological dilemmas in the Penghu Islands of Taiwan. To achieve this, we apply Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to examine the human-nature relationship and employ a mixed-methods research design, incorporating free-listing interviews for quantitative analysis and in-depth interviews for qualitative inquiry.

The study demonstrates that youth-led initiatives can effectively integrate modern and traditional knowledge, drive community transformation, and generate innovative solutions for sustainable rural development. Furthermore, the findings suggest that sustaining youth-led engagement in the innovation process hinges on fostering strong connections and collaboration among young people—an idea aptly captured by the well-known proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Keywords: Knowledge co-production, Innovation process, Youth participation

40. Shifting demographics

Rural housing and spaces of care – perspectives from older households

Oral

Prof. Susanne Stenbacka ¹

1. Uppsala University

Within the area of rural housing and ageing; urgent issues are articulated regarding the lack of suitable housing, the lack of access to necessary services and low mobility among older households, which means that migration chains stop. An ongoing study highlights older households' experiences of living in the countryside and in a small town and delves into their perceptions of socially sustainable living environments. What factors make the countryside an attractive living environment? Are these factors also found in the small town? If not, can they be created there?

Based on an interview study in Värmland - Sweden, it is argued that 'care' is a central practice that makes living in the countryside both attractive and possible. Caring practices are also found in the small town but are framed differently. The results show that care permeates relationships and activities, and includes people, buildings and the natural surroundings. Individuals of old age, in the countryside and in the small town, are both recipients and providers of care. The discussion departs from care in its most general senses defined as 'being engaged' – and including not only human interaction but also engagement with objects and the environment (Fisher and Tronto 1991; Tronto 1993).

The promotion effect of rural population aging on the high-quality development of rural agriculture—Taking agriculture in Henan Province as an example

Oral

Mr. WEI LING QUAN¹

1. Yunnan Minzu university

Abstract: Based on the panel data of 18 cities and states in Henan Province from 2020 to 2024, based on the entropy value method to measure the level of high-quality development of rural agriculture in Henan Province, the effect and mechanism of rural population aging in promoting high-quality development of agriculture are empirically examined by means of dynamic panel and threshold effect models.

The results of the study show that: rural population aging has a significant promotion effect on rural agricultural development in general; the heterogeneity analysis by dimension finds that rural population aging enhances the level of high-quality development of agriculture to a certain extent by improving the level of agricultural development, resource conditions, economic conditions and technological conditions; and hinders the improvement of the level of high-quality development of agriculture by inhibiting the improvement of the environmental conditions; and the test of the threshold effect The results show that as the level of agricultural development increases, the promotion effect of rural population aging on the high-quality development of agriculture will be further enhanced.

Keywords: rural population aging, rural agricultural development, empirical test, threshold effect model,

“You Have to Put the Person You’re Minding First”: A Pilot Study on Care for Older Adults in the Farming Community of West Cork

Oral

Ms. Amy Duley¹, Dr. Nat O’Connor², Dr. Emma Dillon¹, Dr. Julien Mercille², Dr. David Meredith¹

1. Teagasc, 2. University College Dublin

With over one-third of Ireland’s farm holders being over the age of 65, concern for the provision of care to older adults in rural areas is becoming more prominent. Due to high long-term residential care costs and no statutory basis for home care services, informal care remains the main source of care in rural Ireland. However, the expected decline in the availability of informal caregivers, and the State’s emphasis on shifting away from institutional care to care at home and in the community, has made home- and community-based services (HCBS) a central focus in emerging rural health research. While the field of rural long-term care is growing, no studies to date have examined how farm families organise this care or the impact that it may have on the farm business itself. A questionnaire derived from Andersen’s Behavioural Model was used to collect a number of environmental, predisposing, enabling and need variables that may influence the use of home care services. Fifty-seven (57) respondents provided data on individuals from farm households in West Cork who were aged 60 and older and receiving help with at least one Activity of Daily Living (ADL). Significant barriers were faced in accessing the target population, and this paper discusses methods that can be used and pitfalls to avoid to successfully conduct research within this type of rural population.

“You Just Get on With It”: Reflections and Recommendations on Conducting Research on Long-Term Care in the Irish Farming Community

Oral

Ms. Amy Duley¹, Dr. David Meredith¹, Dr. Julien Mercille²

1. Teagasc, 2. University College Dublin

Due to the ageing population, long-term care in rural Ireland is becoming an increasingly prevalent concern. This is particularly an issue for the farming community in which over one-third of Irish farm holders are aged 65 or older. The expected decline in the availability of informal caregivers, as well as the State's emphasis on shifting away from institutional care to ageing in place, has made care at home and in the community a central focus in emerging rural health research. A mixed methods study was implemented as part of a PhD project which aimed to better understand how care for older people in the farming community of West Cork is organised and the impact that caring may have on the farm family and the farm business. Accessing the target population proved to be difficult for a number of reasons. This article underscores particular considerations that researchers should make when conducting studies on long-term care within the farming community including varying perceptions of care, accessing certain farming sectors and reaching individuals that do not engage with farming organisations. Additional steps should be taken to prevent these pitfalls when carrying out this type of research in future.

**41. Tensions across the
food system: the
intersection of
technology, knowledge,
production and power**

Cultivating Ground-Up Knowledge: Reflections on the “Experts in Your Field” Participatory Research Project with Agroecology Practitioners in the UK

Oral

Dr. Isobel Talks¹

1. Researcher and Consultant at University of Oxford

The UKRI funded “Experts in Your Field” project, which positioned small-scale farmers and landworkers as knowledge producers rather than solely subjects of study, is representative of a wider shift towards inclusive approaches in rural research. This paper critically reflects on the project’s two-phase implementation, which engaged over 70 farmers and landworkers across the UK in designing, conducting, and disseminating research on agroecological practices. Participants explored diverse research topics reflecting their priorities, including soil health and carbon sequestration, biodiversity monitoring (particularly bat populations), biofertiliser trials, silvoecological forestry impacts, mushroom cultivation techniques, and the social dimensions of agricultural work. Drawing on project documentation and participant testimonials, we examine how inverting traditional power dynamics created more inclusive knowledge generation, while acknowledging persistent challenges in reconciling practitioner needs with academic frameworks. The project built research capacity through providing equipment, financial stipends recognising farmers’ time constraints, and facilitated peer learning networks that sustained engagement across disparate rural locations. Beyond instrumental outcomes, we analyse how project architecture—from collaborative workshop design to participant-led WhatsApp communities and a community journal—created spaces where knowledge could flow multidirectionally. This approach revealed the depth of experiential insights previously marginalised in formal research contexts and expanded participation across diverse agricultural sectors. Our findings suggest that meaningful inclusion in rural research requires not only methodological innovation but fundamental reconsideration of who holds expertise, how knowledge is valued, and what constitutes “rigorous” evidence. We conclude by outlining principles for similar initiatives that seek to democratise agricultural knowledge production while navigating institutional constraints.

State-Led Corporatization in the apple sector of the Himalayan state of India: A narrative enquiry

Oral

Ms. Anchal Kashyap¹

1. PhD Student

This study examines the role of the state in facilitating capital accumulation and the expansion of agribusiness in the apple sector of Himachal Pradesh. Through the framework of primitive accumulation of capital, the research analyzes the historical role of state policies in enabling private sector penetration, leading to the expropriation of farmers from their means of production.

The research investigates corporate interventions shaping production forces, including crop choices, cultivation patterns, and adoption of agricultural technology. Focusing on three Tehsils—Kumarsien, Theog, Chaupal,—the study employs theoretical sampling, semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) to reach data saturation and construct a Narrative analysis.

Findings indicate that the state has acted as a key mediator in integrating private capital into agriculture, particularly through agrochemical and input markets as accumulation vehicles since the 1970s. By gradually withdrawing subsidies, deregulating input markets, and promoting private investment, the state has facilitated the commodification of essential farming inputs, fostering increased farmer dependency on corporate-controlled supply chains.

This transformation reflects the changing dynamics of agricultural production and distribution, dividing the growers into “winners” and “losers” and reinforcing new hierarchies within village economies. By tracing the state’s evolving role in agrarian restructuring, this study provides insights into how corporatization has redefined power, production, and market dependencies in Himachal Pradesh’s apple sector.

Keywords:

Agribusiness, State Intervention, Capital Accumulation

Urban and peri-urban food production – pollution concerns and approaches towards food safety

Oral

***Dr. Dona Pickard*¹**

1. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) in Europe, unlike in many locations in the Global South, focuses a lot on social and environmental benefits that accompany the production of food. Still, while productivity and food supply are not the main aim of many UPA initiatives, especially for non-commercial ones, there are legitimate concerns about the quality of food and how urban pollution may create risks for food safety in densely populated European areas and areas that have been historically affected by industrial pollution.

The paper presents an overview of scientific data on the risks of producing food in and around cities, as well as production methods designed to minimize those risks. Specific data on factors for food safety from air, water and soil pollution is presented, as well as food types most suited for urban and peri-urban production. Issues of building trust between producers and consumers based on the involvement of the latter in the production process is also discussed, in view of the subjective meaning that consumers ascribe to certification.

The paper is based on data from international European research projects on agricultural innovation and urban agriculture, as well as national research on UPA food safety factors and attitudes towards UPA produce in Bulgaria, spanning data collected between 2017 and 2025.

42. Multispecies

(Re)connecting humans and other-than-humans through contextual care, the case of managing of sheep lameness

Oral

***Dr. Niamh Mahon*¹, *Dr. Beth Clark*²**

1. The James Hutton Institute, 2. Newcastle University

Key words: contextualised care; endemic disease; farm animals

Our starting point is the idea that kin, according to Haraway, can be a multispecies concept, and connections, especially in rural areas, can be both intra- and interspecies in nature. We present research into the changing relationships between animal keepers, farm animals, and veterinary professionals. We explore this via the management of lameness in sheep and in light of recent calls in the UK for veterinarians to employ 'contextual care' when interacting with their (human) clients and (other-than-human) patients. Lameness is a complex, multifactorial condition, endemic in the UK sheep population. It is a significant welfare issue and has labour, time, and financial costs associated with management and treatment. This makes it challenging for farmers and vets to control. Our research indicates that by employing contextualised care vets are (re)connecting with farmers to more effectively manage sheep lameness. To achieve this vets and farmers are working to build long-term, empathic and trusting relationships based on two-way communication. Vets are taking advantage of *ad hoc* opportunities as well as formalised events to encourage lameness management. Much of what presented as contextualised care is already practiced by vets as part of their day-to-day work. However, the greater focus on becoming responsive to the emotional and embodied experiences of clients and patients adds a potentially novel register to the work they do. We hope this presentation will create space in the working group to consider connections that go beyond the human and embrace the many, varied multi-species relationships present in rural communities.

An insight into processes of human wildlife co-existence – the case of the Baltic Grey Seal

Oral

Dr. Harry Strehlow¹, Dr. Fanny Barz¹

1. Thünen Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries

The frequency and severity of interactions between humans and wild animals are increasing worldwide. These interactions can cause considerable economic damage to users of natural resources or result in the decline of (protected) wildlife populations, creating human-wildlife conflicts. In this context, effective management plans are crucial for mitigating the growing global challenge of human-wildlife conflicts, a significant threat to wildlife conservation. The return of the grey seal is a major challenge for the German coastal fishery in the Baltic Sea due to interactions with seals. Seals consume fish caught in nets and/or damage the nets themselves. Consequently, a process to develop a management plan was initiated and an advisory board was set up. Based on a framework of key success factors for developing management plans addressing human-wildlife interactions identified in a preceding study, we conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews and evaluated this (incomplete) process of developing a seal management plan. The framework was operationalized by defining specific measures for the active monitoring and management of successful processes. These include integrating professional facilitation, considering diverse knowledge systems, and ensuring equitable representation of various sectors to prevent one group, such as fishers, from being outnumbered. We identify further elements of success factors for processes involving human-wildlife interactions, such as adequate time management to prevent prolonging such processes and the political will to complete them.

Strategies for/of Animal Liberation: Bridging Food Policies with Inspired Anti-Speciesist Practices

Oral

Mr. luca di clemente¹

1. University of Milan

Anti-speciesism in rural development reconfigures how human and non-human relationships shape agricultural and ecological systems. This research examines how bottom-up strategies by rural actors—including collectives, farms, and movements—pursue interspecies justice by challenging dominant agro-economic models based on animal exploitation.

This conceptual paper examines the role of anti-speciesist perspectives in reshaping rural governance and socio-ecological transformations. As rural landscapes face increasing pressures from planetary crises, industrial agriculture, and shifting economic paradigms, new rural actors are reconfiguring their relationships with food production, governance structures, and interspecies cohabitation. This study situates these dynamics within the broader context of rural transitions, exploring how anti-speciesism intersects with emerging neo-rurality models to challenge extractivist paradigms and promote alternative food networks.

This research is part of a broader investigation into rural development through an anti-speciesist and More-Than-Human (MOTH) lens, focusing on how interspecies relationships influence institutional change and political agency. By moving beyond anthropocentric frameworks, the study interrogates how grassroots movements, community-supported agriculture, and animal advocacy networks engage with rural policymaking and governance structures. Specifically, it explores the tension between top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up mobilizations that aim to integrate ethical commitments to non-human life into rural economies.

The paper critically examines how neo-rural communities and alternative agrifood networks negotiate their position within existing power structures while advancing interspecies justice. Through an analysis of political strategies, land use debates, and alternative rural economies, it highlights how these actors contest dominant rural imaginaries and contribute to new governance configurations.

By addressing these interconnections, the study contributes to debates on rural transitions, planetary crises, and interspecies justice, questioning rigid boundaries between nature and society. It advocates for a more relational and inclusive approach to rural development—one that acknowledges interspecies entanglements and ethical imperatives beyond human concerns.

43. Policy and governance

Bridging Governance Gaps: Local and National Roles in Land Use for Ecosystem Restoration

Oral

Mrs. Mari Palolill¹, Prof. Kadri Leetmaa¹, Ms. Liina Hints¹

1. University of Tartu

Land use decisions at the local level are crucial for achieving biodiversity and climate goals, particularly in the context of the European Union's Nature Restoration Regulation. By 2050 the goal is to restore 90% of degraded ecosystems - a goal that can be reached only in cooperative actions on all governance levels. This study examines how different governance levels in Estonia — state authorities, municipalities, and land users — perceive their roles and responsibilities in land-use decisions supporting ecosystem restoration. The focus is on wetlands, which are essential for carbon sequestration and biodiversity but have been significantly drained in Estonia in past century. Through qualitative interviews with stakeholders, the research identifies key challenges: a fragmented governance framework, lack of clear guidelines for municipalities, and competing land-use interests. The study highlights the need for better coordination between governance levels, standardized methodologies for assessing climate impacts of land use, and financial incentives to encourage sustainable practices. The findings emphasize that local governments require clearer mandates and tools to integrate climate and biodiversity objectives into spatial planning. It also stresses the need presented by the spatial planners community - to address the biodiversity and climate goals with the tools of spatial planning more effectively. Wetland restoration is presented as a cost-effective strategy for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, but its implementation depends on resolving conflicts between economic activities and environmental priorities. The research contributes to policy discussions by providing recommendations for improving land-use governance to align with national and EU climate objectives.

Climate Change and Food on the Agenda Setting of Brazilian Ministries

Oral

Prof. Catia Grisa¹, Dr. Fernanda Castilhos França de Vasconcellos¹, Dr. Cristiane Severo¹

1. Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

The impacts of climate change on agriculture, food access and prices, and consequently on food and nutrition security (FNS) are becoming increasingly frequent. At the same time, the impacts of food systems on exacerbating climate change are also evident. Among the various actors that must be involved in addressing these issues, we highlight the role of States and public policies. Using Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams approach, this study analyzes whether and how the interface of climate change, agriculture, and FNS entered the federal government agenda, particularly in the ministries that form the Brazilian political-administrative structure. Based on documentary research from official websites and interviews with policy-makers, we identified that this interface entered the government agenda of 9 ministries (out of 39 currently present), with three policy windows playing a significant role: the first was opened by elements external to the Brazilian Government (in the 1990s), manifested in the economic constraints and opportunities arising from global climate agreements; the other two windows resulted from the intensification of the climate crisis and governmental changes (with more progressive governments and openness to social participation – in the years 2004-2016; and 2023-2024). It is concluded that each ministry included the issue in its agenda at different moments and with varying intensity, responding to distinct problems and demands arising from climate change. Although governed by the same governmental cycles and under the influence of the same crisis, different interpretations, interests, and values create distinct dynamics in the problems and policy streams.

Co-design and improved tools: Addressing challenges in decision-making for CAP strategic plans

Oral

Ms. Simone Sterly¹, Mx. Carla Wember²

1. Institute for Rural Development Research, 2. University of Frankfurt

This paper is concerned with challenges that actors face in the CSP design and monitoring process in different EU Member States and throughout the design steps of the strategic plans. The results are based on work in the Horizon project Tools4CAP and are the outcome of the analysis of 12 focus groups reports, a literature review in 18 Member States and a EU level online survey (n=38). The results show that challenges resulting from the current multi-level governance of the CAP and its complexity as well as timing issues are the most common. Coordination between the national and the regional level, lack of transparency concerning decision-making processes or consultation results, as well as hurdles related to the volume and/or complexity of CAP documents and technical problems are among the most mentioned challenges. Based on the results six working groups within the Tools4CAP project worked on co-designing new and improved tools to enable actors in the Member States to create more evidence-based and participatory strategic plans. The paper critically reflects on this process and presents an example of a tool that resulted from the co-design process.

Innovation in border governance under legal pluralism: a study on the mixed governance mechanism based on the “three legged stool” model of Hani villages in Yunnan Province

Oral

Mr. songyao shu¹

1. Yunnan minzu university

In the border ethnic areas of Yunnan, the collision of law-state regulations and ancestral customs creates unique governance challenges. my mixed-methods study of the Hani village in Hill Town—combining 50 in-depth interviews, six months of immersive fieldwork, and quantitative analysis of 63 cohort records (2022-2023)—revealed three key dynamics: (1) 70% of other selected Choosing clan-religious solutions, the court formally rejected them as “lack of cultural warmth”; (2) Environmental regulations prevented access to ancestral materials, causing problems with housing construction; (3) More than 50% of welfare distribution conflicts used a hybrid strategy that combined administrative procedures with sacred oath-taking ceremonies.

I propose a three-pillar governance innovation: (1) Flexible Legal Hybridization: adopting provisional statutes that validate customary practices through village-level councils (government officers + clan arbitrators); (2) Cultural Jurisprudence Education: translating civil codes into Hani batik art manuals and folk operas; (3) Resource Co-governance: implementing open ledger systems for subsidy distribution and designing land contracts honoring generational usage customs.

Theoretical advances are reflected in my “three-legged stool” model, which employs two novel tools: a searchable dispute database recording 47 culturally annotated mediations and a 15-point law-culture fit index. Field implementation showed that 80% of communities achieved buy-in when combining traditional practices (adaptive bride price negotiation) with legal requirements (court-ordered child support). This “rooted constitutional” approach – strategically grafting national legal DNA into national governance frameworks – opens up new ways to modernize border management without erasing culture.

Integrating insecurity, human rights, and climate justice into small-scale fishing networks in Lake Victoria

Oral

Dr. Matthew Pflaum ¹

1. University of Bergen

Working groups:

- 30. Building Livable Rural Futures: Social and solidarity economy in the light of social and climate justice in rural areas
- 15. Envisioning livable futures for water dependent rural communities in transition

Key words: Small-scale fishing networks, value chain, human rights and climate justice, insecurity, livelihoods, Lake Victoria

Abstract

While small-scale livelihood systems remain increasingly critical to global low-income food security, economic production, and culture, there are gaps remaining in clarifying inequalities and negative outcomes associated with them. First, fishing livelihood systems have received less attention than farming and herding in terms of violent outcomes, ethnic tensions, and insecurity. This is due to neglect in scholarship and media, and governance and cultural identities associated with different livelihood systems. Second, the critical processes of human rights and climate change justice have been consistently touted as imperative when considering small-scale fisheries management and livelihoods, yet there has been a dearth of empirical data demonstrating these outcomes and how they vary in space and time. This study seeks to situate small-scale fishing livelihoods in Lake Victoria compared to other major agricultural systems and integrate human rights and climate justice into value chain analyses of fishing production and practices.

Promoting Agrobiodiversity Through Innovative Business Models: Insights from the DIVINFOOD Project

Oral

Dr. Francesca Galli¹, Dr. Dalia Mattioni¹, Dr. Yuna CHIFFOLEAU², Dr. Laurane DESOUTTER²

1. Pisa Agricultural Economics (PAGE), University of Pisa (UNIPi), 2. INRAE

Agrobiodiversity is vital for both human and planetary health, yet it continues to decline at an alarming rate. While research has explored the factors driving this loss, less attention has been given to how innovative farm business models-developed in collaboration with food system actors and public institutions-can create economic incentives for its conservation and valorization. Local food systems play a key role in preserving orphan crops, but there is limited understanding of how food system dynamics, particularly in the Global North, shape business models that sustain agrobiodiversity.

As part of the European DIVINFOOD project, this study examines how farmers, food system stakeholders, policies, and voluntary initiatives interact to develop viable economic strategies that support neglected and under-utilized crops (NUCs), such as minor cereals and legumes.

We identify three key business models that promote agrobiodiversity:

- Small-scale cooperative models, where farmers collaborate to share resources, mitigate risks, and improve market access.
- Publicly supported models, which rely on financial or regulatory support from local authorities.
- Direct market relationship models, which connect farmers, processors, and buyers to establish biodiversity-centered value chains.

Drawing on scientific literature and data from Living Labs in France, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, and Hungary, this study explores the barriers and enablers of these models. The findings provide actionable recommendations to strengthen resilient, biodiversity-friendly farm enterprises and support sustainable food systems.

44. Regional development

(Re)connecting Through Culinary Choices: Negotiating Identity and Economy in Munsyari, Uttarakhand

Oral

Ms. Lavanya Gupta¹, Dr. Sampat Kale¹

1. Tata Institute Of Social Sciences

This paper examines how culinary practices in Munsyari, Uttarakhand, reflect broader tensions between cultural preservation and economic pragmatism in rural communities. Through in-depth narrative case studies of the Himalayan Ark homestay's initiative to document and serve traditional Pahari cuisine, contrasted with interviews from local café owners who prefer Indo-Chinese offerings, the research explores how food choices become sites of negotiation between heritage and market demands. The study particularly focuses on how the homestay's culinary book and cooking practices attempt to preserve the transhumant food heritage of the Bhootia community, while other establishments cite time and investment constraints in favoring more mainstream options. Drawing from participant observations and semi-structured interviews with homestay operators, local café owners, and their customers, this study documents how different establishments navigate competing pressures of cultural identity preservation and economic sustainability. The paper argues that food practices serve as crucial indicators of how rural communities manage disconnections between traditional identity and modern market demands. The research contributes to broader discussions about routes to rural reconnection by examining how culinary choices either reinforce or bridge community divisions and what this suggests about the possibilities for cultural preservation in economically challenging contexts.

Keywords: Rural Food Heritage, Cultural Economy, Identity Politics

A Global World Heritage Status Meets Local Realities: Balancing Nature-Based Tourism, Local Communities, and Global Conservation Efforts

Oral

***Ms. Ann-Sofi Backgren*¹**

1. The University of Vaasa, Marketing and Consumption Research

Achieving UNESCO World Heritage status is a rare privilege, granted to sites that demonstrate universal value through their cultural, natural, or combined significance. Out of the 1,223 World Heritage sites across nearly 170 countries, 231 are recognized for their outstanding natural value. These sites are celebrated globally for their unique beauty and critical role in preserving vital ecological and geological phenomena, drawing growing interest from nature-based tourism.

While World Heritage status brings global recognition, it also raises complex challenges for local communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas. The implementation of conservation programs, such as UNESCO's protection efforts and the EU's NATURA 2000, often conflicts with local traditions and livelihoods, creating tensions between global conservation goals and local ways of life. In this context, sustainable tourism development must consider both the ecological value of these sites and the needs of the people who live and work in these areas. As interest in nature-based tourism rises, especially amidst climate change, the challenge lies in balancing conservation efforts with community engagement. Can local storytelling offer a platform for creating authentic, sustainable tourism experiences? Ensuring that local communities are active participants in conservation efforts is essential for fostering tourism that respects both cultural heritage and the environment, bridging the gap between global ambitions and local realities.

Determining Sustainable Conservation and Tourism Strategies with Community-Based Local Action in Misi (Gumustepe) Village, Turkey

Oral

Ms. Cansu Türker¹

1. FMV Işık University, İstanbul, Turkey

Rural settlements are shaped by the dynamics between the local community, nature and culture. In Turkey, many rural sites face abandonment, consumption-oriented transformations, and/or irreversible damage from mass tourism and urbanization due to a lack of protection and support. Misi Village, a historic rural heritage site in Turkey, hosted various civilizations and characterized by organic settlement pattern with traditional Ottoman houses. However, the effects of urbanization and the decision to develop new settlements on agricultural land have led the local community to abandon their local production activities. The village was subjected to tourism-led transformation with the master plan prepared by local authorities. The historical dwellings were purchased by the municipality, restored and refunctioned for touristic purposes, and daily lives of the local community have changed due to disruption of local economic cycles by tourism-oriented decisions, causing the area gradually to lose its rural dynamics. Today, the local people cannot directly benefit from tourism revenues, no budget is allocated for the repair of historical dwellings (except the ones that are bought by municipality), local people are at a disadvantage due to local inflation arising from mass-tourism and the destruction of resources. This article explores the potential of sustainable conservation and community-based tourism strategies for Misi Village, considering the fact that change and tourism cannot be ignored for resilience. The paper also examines how the preservation of historical houses and the cultural landscape can be achieved through local democracy and local circular economy, driven by the local community rather than local authorities.

Keywords: Local control, sustainable conservation, community-based tourism

Entrepreneurial perspective on digital social innovation in rural areas - a case study from Southeast Estonia, Võru county

Oral

Ms. Agnes Rosenberg¹, Prof. Kadri Leetmaa¹, Dr. Ingmar Pastak¹

1. University of Tartu

Keywords: digital social innovation, rural areas, entrepreneurship

Rural areas across Europe see themselves confronted with shrinking populations and declining accessibility to everyday services, further fueling the socioeconomic decline of the countryside. Digital social innovations may provide an opportunity in limiting such developments by transferring services reserved to urban centers into the digital realm and compensating the peripheral location of rural localities too. Many of these services are not known to the demographics specific to rural areas, highlighting the need for policy makers to establish the connection between inhabitants and service providers. The aim of this study is to establish a link between the pull factors promoting business expansion into rural areas and the demand side of the local population by analysing the self-image of said companies as digital innovation leaders. To address this problem multiple expert interviews were carried out with nationwide service providers (telecommunication, financial institutions, postal services, retail companies), chairs of local entrepreneurial networks and owners of local businesses in Southeast Estonia, Võru county. Preliminary results indicate that entrepreneurs need a goal of creating meaningful additions to local communities in order to see return on investment, both financially and when considering the improvements for quality of living. Companies operating nationwide on the other hand seem to struggle most in terms of the lack of clients for promoting further investments, but at the same time, promoting the nation-wide coverage seems to be a vital component of their marketing strategies. However, many of these companies are offering the essential services in the peripheral communities, often offering the replacement of the escaped public sector presence. Our study enables us to conclude that digital social innovation in rural areas is achieved best by small-scale entrepreneurships. The meaningful additions to one community however need to be assessed separately.

Kimchi and Chips: Culture-led regeneration and the value of culture

Oral

Prof. Claire Wallace¹, Dr. Stephanie Garrison¹

1. University of Aberdeen

Culture-led regeneration is implemented in many parts of the world as a way of improving de-industrialised and neglected areas, mostly in an urban context. Yet what culture means in this context is little explored. This raises the issue of the value of culture locally, regionally, and internationally and whose culture is being valued. Culture-led regeneration has been criticised for being a “top-down” view of policy-making, linked to an elite view of culture, which does not necessarily benefit local communities in the target areas. In this study of the introduction of the Great Tapestry of Scotland into the run-down former textile town of Galashiels, we argue for the successful implementation of culture-led regeneration using a middle-level layer of policy initiatives grounded in local community leadership. This raises the question of which kind of culture is valued in a non-metropolitan area, the interweaving of different local cultures and how this can help to reframe more negative views of the area. However, it also raises the issue of the fragility of this kind of regeneration in the context of the post-COVID global crisis and cuts in local authority funding.

Opening window for socially engaged (transdisciplinary) research in life sciences

Oral

Prof. Michal Lostak¹

1. Czech University of Life Sciences

This contribution is developed upon ongoing experience and outcomes resulting from the implementation of the EU Horizon-funded project named “Bringing Excellence to Transformative Engaged Research in Life Sciences through Integrated Digital Centres” (BETTER life - <https://betterlifehorizon.eu/>). The presentation aims at demonstrating that socially engaged research, or transdisciplinary research, is embedded in the paradigm reflecting contemporary late modern society. It will shortly highlight the activities done under the mentioned project (including the tools developed to support socially engaged research and training early-career researchers to obtain the skills in such kind of research). The core of the presentation rests in considering obstacles and incentives for socially engaged research in life sciences as they were identified in the BETTER Life project. It wants to demonstrate that socially engaged (or transdisciplinary) research is a social innovation necessitating the “opportunity window” to be opened. To be implemented, socially engaged research must overcome the old paradigm in the sciences separating researchers and the world they investigate. There is a demand in society for such change, and socially engaged research reflects this demand.

Rural Communities at a Crossroads: how much self-organisation can reasonably be expected?

Oral

Ms. Lieselot Vroom¹, Prof. Tialda Haartsen¹, Dr. Jacob Dijkstra¹, Dr. Vincenz Frey¹

1. University of Groningen

Keywords: citizen initiatives; volunteers; self-reliance

This contribution discusses whether and under which conditions rural communities can live up to policy expectations in terms of delivering key services and facilities via voluntary citizen initiatives. Recent national-level policies emphasize the role of local self-reliance, but it is questionable whether rural communities, where levels of self-organisation are typically already high, can support these additional demands. Due to the time commitment required for many local service provision tasks and the size of the available pool of healthy and active volunteers is at risk because of demographic challenges that rural communities face (ageing, depopulation). Moreover, citizen initiatives need volunteers with a lot of social and human capital in order to be successful and sustainable, but they are not always available. With an increasing risk that rural communities fail to self-provide crucial facilities and services, the risk of undesired spatial inequality and injustice grows. Hence, it is of key societal relevance to understand how much self-organisation can be expected from rural communities and which conditions enable bottom-up citizen initiatives in rural communities.

This paper presents an in-depth literature study on the theoretical side of the functioning of rural communities, local governance, and spatial inequalities and injustices, focusing on who can reasonably be expected to take responsibility for services in rural communities. Insights from this literature review are complemented by input from key stakeholders in the field of rural community participation in the North-Netherlands, involving volunteers, officials of local, regional, and national governmental institutions, as well as volunteer umbrella organisations.

Sake tourism towards developing a sustainable food system in Japanese rural areas: A case study of the Suwa area, Nagano Prefecture.

Oral

Dr. Ryo Iizuka¹, Prof. Toshio Kikuchi²

1. Teikyo University, 2. Tokyo Metropolitan University

Sake, Japanese rice wine, tourism has recently become popular in Japan. This trend seems to have been strengthened by UNESCO's designation of traditional sake brewing culture as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024. The growth of sake tourism can not only serve as a source of economic revenue in rural areas but also revitalise such areas by connecting local resources based on sake brewing and consumer culture through local branding or geographical indication. Through such a process, sake tourism also plays a role in establishing a sustainable food system in the area. Thus, this study examines the role of sake tourism as an alternative form of food system in rural Japan from a case study in the Suwa area, Nagano Prefecture, where traditional sake brewing is protected by geographical indication and sake tourism is promoted by various actors associated with activities ranging from brewing to consumption. We apply both quantitative and qualitative approaches to describe the realities of sake tourism in this area. This study reveals that the development of geographical indication promotes sake tourism in the Suwa area. In addition, tourism growth leads to sustainable sake brewing, including raw material procurement and consumption, that is to say, food system in and beyond the area. Furthermore, based on the case study of sake tourism in the Suwa area, the role of sake tourism as an alternative food system is discussed in detail.

Keywords: sake, sake tourism, geographical indication

Successes and tensions in sustainable practices in the wine industry in Germany, France and the UK

Oral

Dr. Sylvia Snijders¹, Dr. Caroline Bolam¹, Dr. Martin Mathews¹, Mr. Leon Jank²

1. University of Westminster, 2. Technische Universität Dresden

This paper explores the adoption of sustainable wine practices in Germany, Britain, and France through the lens of institutional theory (Scott, 2008), examining how national regulatory frameworks (e.g., Germany's strict environmental standards, France's AOC certification, and Britain's emerging sustainability certifications) serve as formal institutions affecting the adoption of sustainable practices. The paper highlights how cultural values, and industry norms, shaped by the historical and social contexts of each country, affect winemakers' adoption of sustainability measures.

The Saale-Unstrut region, Germany, with a tradition of wine growing of more than 1000 years, has been structurally disrupted and aims to establish sustainable ways of growing wine. Although there is a long history of wine growing in Dorset, UK, in recent years, this region has seen a renaissance of wine growing with many a grower proclaiming sustainable practices. In Burgundy, France, approximately half of all the wine producers aim to achieve sustainability standards or organic certification in this decade, rewriting the hundreds of years of winemaking history.

This spring, we will conduct 6 to 10 semi-structured interviews in the Saale-Unstrut region, Germany, Dorset, UK, and Burgundy, France discussing sustainable practices, barriers and regional conditions and traditions. Data collected will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006).

This comparative approach across three very different institutional contexts, reveals differences in pace and forms of adoption. In addition, we discuss the implications and impacts of sustainable innovations on existing practices and structures in communities in the different regions.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 2006, Vol.3 (2), p.77-101.

Scott, W.R. (2008). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Key words: sustainable wine practices, institutional theory, regulatory frameworks

Tourists' Perception of Agri-tourism Landscapes: Unravelling Cultural, Natural, and Service Dimensions

Oral

***Dr. Xinran Shen*¹, *Prof. Gianluca Grilli*², *Prof. Paola Gatto*¹, *Prof. Francesco Pagliacci*¹**

1. University of Padova, 2. University of Trento

Agri-tourism plays an increasingly vital role in supporting farm diversification and community livelihoods. By understanding how tourists perceive rural landscapes, farmers can formulate appropriate communication strategies to further enhance tourism experience and to increase their market shares. This study aims to investigate the relationship between tourists' perception of rural landscapes—specifically, cultural (e.g., cultural festivals, historic architecture), natural (e.g., scenic views), and service dimensions (e.g., activities provided)—and their overall satisfaction with agri-tourism. Destination's accessibility has also been considered. A structured survey was sent out to 1,022 Italian tourists who had agri-tourism experience in the past year, examining their perception of natural environment, cultural heritage, service offerings, and accessibility in the visited rural area. Structural Equation Modeling was employed to identify how each dimension of the rural landscape and specific landscape features affect tourists' satisfaction level. Preliminary results indicate that landscape perception significantly contributes to tourists' satisfaction. The natural landscape is expected to have the highest direct effect on overall satisfaction, followed by cultural and service dimensions. Accessibility is likely to emerge as a significant mediator variable in the model, suggesting that good accessibility can amplify impacts of landscape perception. This study also provides several practical policy implications, suggesting strategies to enhance the attractiveness of rural areas through targeted improvements in landscape management and service provision. These measures can boost local economies, preserve cultural heritage, and foster sustainable tourism, bringing benefits to both tourists and local communities.

Work and Natural Wine Production in the Alto Douro Wine Region: A Case Study

Oral

Mrs. Clara Vasconcelos¹

1. PhD Student

The Alto Douro Wine Region, widely recognized for its winemaking history, faces challenges and opportunities in integrating sustainable agricultural practices with new approaches to wine production. In this context, the production of natural wine emerges as an innovative proposal that preserves traditional methods, and contributes to the vitality of the region, encouraging new producers and the preservation of the authentic processes of Douro winemaking.

The objective is to observe a case focused on natural wine production company, understanding how wine production processes can contribute to attracting and retaining new producers in the Alto Douro Wine Region. Furthermore, we seek to explore how these processes help to keep traditional and natural production methods alive, while fostering a good relationship with small local producers. The research also aims to analyze the impact of these practices on strengthening the wine-growing community and preserving the region's agricultural techniques.

With a bibliographical research, analysis of scientific articles, local and regional sources and statistical data, we followed with an analysis of documents and specific data from the company.

The case study is located in the Alto Douro Wine Region, and produces natural wine. This project results of a partnership and friendship with local winegrowers, from different areas of the Douro Valley, with the aim of preserving and revitalizing traditional winemaking practices, paying a fair value for the work of winegrowers and for the grapes grown.

Projects like this, in which young producers engage directly with the local community and small producers, have a significant impact on preserving the authenticity of the region. Furthermore, these projects aim to support small producers and create products that differentiate themselves from the traditional "Port Wine", taking advantage of the region's excellent grapes to develop innovative and sustainable alternatives in the wine market.

Keywords: natural wine, rural sustainable, tradicional winemaking

45. Resistance

Big Business as Dependent Business: The Global Dimensions of Co-Ownership Between Agrochemical Conglomerations

Oral

Dr. Loka Ashwood¹, Mr. Mohammad Khalilian¹, Dr. Andy Pliny¹, Dr. Mary Hendrickson², Prof. Phil Howard³, Ms. Mariyam Jamila¹

1. University of Kentucky, 2. University of Missouri, 3. IPES-Food

Keywords: Consolidation, Dependency, Agrifood governance, pesticide industry

In the last twenty years, the use of pesticides has grown dramatically while simultaneously the most powerful companies have moved away from publicly traded and into privately held firms. Despite the disclosures that are required by publicly traded companies, the extent of consolidation and dependence between them is hard to ascertain—let alone anticipate acute risks, such as network collapse. To address this gap we created a dataset to delve into the publicly traded major conglomerates in agrochemical production and their connections to private firms and key individuals. We used global public records extracted through Sayari Graph to analyze 2,622 entities with 4,190 ties affiliated with BASF; Bayer/Monsanto; Corteva/Dow/DuPont; FMC; COFCO/ChemChina/Syngenta; and UPL. Utilizing social network analysis, we found that these massive conglomerates are deeply intertwined and depend privately on shared ownership between one another to operate. We found that German and U.S. affiliated entities favor co-ownership through subsidiaries, while Indian and Chinese firms favor co-ownership through shareholding. We also identified central leaders who leverage power through beneficial ownership and by serving on multiple boards, both within the agrochemical sector and outside of it. We analyzed how business organizational patterns, like use of foundations and co-ownership privately between public conglomerates, interact with nation-state location and business purpose.

Choosing a place to put down roots: back-to-the-land migration and belonging in the rural

Oral

Ms. Nora Wahlström¹, Dr. Emil Sandström²

1. Swedish university of agricultural science, 2. Swedish University of Agricultural Science

Scholars who compare current forms of back-to-the-land migration to the well-known 1960s and -70s expressions, depict contemporary back-to-the-land as more inclined to engage with their rural surroundings and communities. An ideal of contemporary back-to-the-land living is also the building of local communities for food self-sufficiency and crisis preparedness, as well as a reconnection with the land. Within the emerging literature on contemporary back-to-the-land migration, questions on how these urban-rural migrants settle in and form relations to their new place of living however remain rather unexplored. This article explores how back-to-the-land migrants in Dalarna, Sweden develop a sense of attachment and belonging to place through several means. The article finds that both agrarian practices enabling more-than human relations as well as an incorporation of the rural place of living into a life-story narrative of searching for a more sustainable, moral and meaningful way of life, are sources of an attachment and sense of belonging in place. When it comes to social aspects of belonging, the participants in the study do not experience a sense of belonging in a village/community of neighbors. Rather, more geographically widespread communities of back-to-the-land in-migrants – where the performance of agrarian practices play an important role – become important for a sense of belonging. Two example of community creation are lifted in the study, one centered on permaculture – consisting exclusively of in-migrants, and one Community Supported Agriculture-farm - which offers a sense of ownership and sense of belonging for in-migrants and locals alike

Croatia's Agri-Cartel: (State-Owned) Land Grabbing, Fictitious Farmers, and the Looting of EU Funds

Oral

Dr. Alex Gavranich¹

1. The University of Queensland

Since Croatia's first parliamentary election in 1990, the country has been governed almost exclusively by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). A lack of robust political competition has invigorated party patronage in an intense 'economy of favours', where clientelism has infiltrated public institutions and cosy state-corporate relationships flourish. Almost no scholarship exists in addressing corruption in the Croatian agricultural sector since EU accession in 2013, when unprecedented EU investments in rural development and agriculture were initiated (~2.3b Euro between 2014 and 2022). The desired outcomes of these investments remain far from achieved, with Croatian agricultural production deteriorating to its lowest level since independence in 2023. Which demands the question, where is this money going? In response, this study disentangles a complex system of corruption and party patronage in Croatian agriculture, employing methods in quantitative data analysis and semi-structured interviews with family farmers and activists in-confidence. I identify an 'agri-cartel', operating across two tiers of control and influence – the state decision-making level (Tier 1), and the local county and municipal level (Tier 2). At the head of this system (Tier 1) are Croatia's 5 largest agrarian oligarchs, politically connected benefactors of the corrupt privatisations during the neoliberal transition, who fix agricultural prices for family farmers, and hold a tight grip on state-owned land and the subsequent distribution of EU subsidies. These individuals engage in what I have termed '(state-owned) land grabbing', which is the long-term lease of former socialist era state-owned land on favourable, and untransparent conditions. At the local level (Tier 2), HDZ cadres are facilitating the advent of fictitious farmers, who have emerged solely for the purpose of leasing what remains of state-owned land to receive EU subsidies, at the expense of other production focussed family farmers.

Grievances and crises in rural Estonia

Oral

***Dr. Aet Annist*¹**

1. University of Tartu

This presentation considers the recently renewed activism in some Estonian rural regions. Since the 1990s, the rural population which suffered the greatest losses from the political and economic changes has been marginalised and muted, even ridiculed as “ex-kolkhozniks” whose voices are not worth listening to. The sidelined agony of these regions has grown into resentment, and by now, in some areas in particular, into political leanings that align rather far from the urban populations and the Estonian statehood within such alliances as the EU and NATO. These changes have intensified since the COVID pandemic, taking clearer shape in relation to Ukrainian war, in particular in response to a NATO military practicing ground in a quiet, peripheral area in the South East, but also in relation to the Green Turn and the planned inland wind turbine farms. The current rural antagonism with the national directions could be traced back to the failures since the 1990s to incorporate their contrasting experience of changes since the post-Soviet collapse, and their lack of participation in contributing into the nation-making. Today, the polarisation is rapidly increasing and the separation points are multiplying, on which the far right has managed to capitalise. My presentation will aim to track those emerging changes and the ways in which local grievances align with global crises.

Mobilising the politics of care against polycrisis in eco-social activism: a comparative perspective

Oral

Dr. Luca Sára Bródy¹

1. HUN-REN KRTK & Södertörn University

While movements often remain focused on single issues - such as environmental organisations prioritising ecological concerns and feminist groups emphasising women's rights - many activists are now seeking to bridge divides between climate, housing, labour, food sovereignty, feminist, and LGBTQ+ movements, recognising the interconnected nature of the polycrisis we face. In this article we explore how activists in Hungary, Czechia and Poland are meeting the challenges of building coalitions that address complex, overlapping crises while working across inter- and intra-group differences. We note that in response to the ongoing debates about the need for a profound systemic change, especially of societal-nature relations, activists in these three countries are increasingly mobilising care as a central framework for addressing interconnected crises. We examine how activists frame care as a value and practice to overcome ideological divides and technocratic depoliticisation, while simultaneously fostering solidarity and self-care to sustain their own action. Through care, movements aim to build inclusive coalitions that address not only environmental and social justice concerns, but also the democratic rollbacks and socio-economic challenges that shape their contexts. By analysing these framing strategies, our research highlights the transformative potential of care as a relational and political force which offers a bridging framework for building alliances capable of responding to the multifaceted crises of our time. Simultaneously, we also point to limitations and pitfalls of this framing strategy, resulting from its gendered connotations and the ways in which neoliberalism is conducive to devaluing caring practices.

**46. I will not present a
paper**

Poster session

“Between the care of the land and the home: the dual role of rural women in contexts of gender inequality”

Poster

Ms. Ximena Pardo Fuentes¹, Ms. Cristina Galiana¹, Prof. Guillermo Palau Salvador¹

1. Universitat Politècnica de València

Efforts to end world hunger (SDG 2, Agenda 2030) must address the structural inequalities that marginalize rural women, who, despite being primary food producers, are among the most food insecure. Their agroecological expertise and daily contributions—such as cultivating crops, tending livestock, and preserving biodiversity—remain largely unpaid and invisible, dismissed as an extension of care rather than recognized as productive labor. This devaluation not only exacerbates gender inequality but also weakens the sustainability of agrifood systems.

This research investigates how peasant women develop strategies either to navigate or to phase out the gendered division of labor and the invisibilization of reproductive work in farm systems. Specifically, it examines how gender shapes and exacerbates the socioeconomic and environmental challenges they face in both productive and reproductive dimensions. Using dialogical and reflexive interviewing techniques, a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) approach based on semi-structured interviews, is applied to analyze the experiences of peasant women in the Chiloe Archipelago (Chile) and L'Horta de Valencia (Spain). Different cultural, ecological, and socioeconomic contexts are compared to strengthen cross-context learning within agrarian gender studies. The findings highlight the need for an integrated approach to labor distribution, food security, and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the role of peasant women in fostering food-sovereign transformations within the agrifood system.

An Affective Atmosphere of Soil Care Practices: vegetable gardening in Luxembourg

Poster

Mr. Michiel van de Pavert¹, Dr. Jessica DUNCAN¹, Prof. David Ludwig¹

1. Wageningen University

Keywords: affective atmosphere, soil care, agroecological transitions

In the face of climate change and global soil erosion, care relations with soil are of utmost importance for regenerative futures. Care dimension contain an affective dimension. Most of the scholarly work on more-than-human care focusses on the sensorial affective moments that occur between an individual care giver and a care recipients. Based on a twelve months ethnographic immersion at two vegetable gardens in Luxembourg we elaborate on the affective dimension of soil care. The prolonged engagement helps to shed on collective affective relations that have received little attention in the literature on more-than-human care. Using the concept of affective atmosphere we highlight the collective affective relations. We found that the affective atmosphere was: (1) energizing / uplifting, (2) one of respect, (3) and of humility / curiosity. An affective atmosphere has the potential to lure people in and shape their subjectivities, which provides opportunities for agroecological transitions.

Circular Economy Index: Case Study of Latvian Municipalities

Poster

Prof. Dzintra Atstaja¹, Ms. Inga Liepa¹

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

Circular Economy (CE) is recognized as a critical strategy for advancing sustainable development and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This research addresses the limited application of CE assessment at the municipal level and identifies challenges and opportunities for improved methodology. In 2024, the first scientifically led survey was conducted across all Latvian municipalities to evaluate the level of circularity or readiness for transitioning from a linear to a circular economy. Through self-assessment, all municipalities provided their perspectives on key dimensions of the new economic paradigm. These insights were integrated with feedback from citizens, collected via a separate nationwide survey, to derive a composite index value. This article aims to review other methods and assessments of circular economy conducted at the municipal level worldwide and to assess their applicability to municipalities. While most of the frameworks, either developed institutionally or by research groups, utilize statistical metrics to assess CE at the municipal level, the objectivity of such an approach is overshadowed by the data availability and complexity of the CE concept. Further research is required to develop a state-of-the-art methodology that balances quantity and quality aspects well.

Climate Change Education in Latvian Schools: Advancing Sustainable Educational Services through Teacher and Student Engagement

Poster

Ms. Kristīne Blumfelde-Rutka¹, Ms. Ieva Saukuma¹

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

Abstract: As climate change increasingly affects ecosystems, economies, and societies, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to these challenges is essential. Schools are uniquely positioned to foster climate literacy, and this study provides evidence-based insights to support the development of more effective and inclusive climate education policies in Latvia. This study explores the integration of climate change topics into curricula of general education schools in Latvia, covered teachers' views on climate change and explored the place of environmental issues in education. The study employed a quantitative research design, targeting teachers from Latvian general education schools at the basic and secondary levels. A stratified sample of 226 respondents was formed based on school type and geographic location, with each school nominating one natural sciences teacher and one from another subject area. Data were collected between November and December 2024. Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted to gain deeper qualitative insights." The majority of educators incorporate climate change topics into science-related subjects, primarily focusing on environmental protection and natural phenomena. However, only a small proportion of schools (13%) address climate change within the framework of public policy, indicating a limited interdisciplinary approach. To enhance student engagement and understanding, it is recommended to integrate real world case studies, climate simulations, and examples of how everyday behaviors influence climate change. Furthermore, embedding climate change education into civic and social science curricula could foster a more comprehensive understanding of individual and collective responsibility in addressing global environmental challenges.

Keywords: Climate change education, Sustainable education, Curriculum integration
Acknowledgments: This study was carried out in collaboration with the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Latvia, contributing to the advancement of environmental education research.

Digital Transformation in Social Work: A Rural Perspective

Poster

***Mr. Edvarts Pāvulēns*¹**

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

According to the Central Statistical Office, around 32% of the population in Latvia lives in rural areas. From the point of view of the regulatory framework in the social field, social work in rural areas is not regulated separately, but, given the specific nature of rural areas, it is distinctly different, for example, in terms of the range of social services available. The digital transformation is changing the practice of social work, creating new opportunities for service delivery, but also highlighting serious risks in rural areas. The digital divide - both in terms of infrastructure and lack of digital skills - is becoming a barrier to social inclusion.

This work analyses the benefits and challenges of digital transformation from a rural perspective. The impact of the edge effect on rural social work is highlighted, where digital solutions can both enhance and limit access to services.

In order to reduce the digital divide in rural social work, it is necessary to strengthen both the digital literacy of social workers and the digital literacy skills of clients. Digitalisation can be an important tool to expand the opportunities for social work in rural areas, it can facilitate access to social services while promoting social inclusion and improving quality of life.

Evaluation and influencing factors of land-use efficiency considering ecosystem services in the Yellow River Basin

Poster

Ms. Jingjing Liu¹, Prof. Jing Wang², Mr. Longyang Huang³

1. Henan university, 2. Beijing Normal University, 3. Chongqing University

Integrating ecosystem services(ESs) into evaluating land-use efficiency and land management decision-making is crucial for promoting the sustainable management of regional territorial space. This study develops the evaluation index systems for the utilization efficiency of agricultural, urban, and ecological land, incorporating different types of ESs. Taking the Yellow River Basin (YRB) in China as a case study, this research calculates the utilization efficiency of various land types (2000—2020) and analyzes their coupling coordination degree and influencing factors. It identifies areas needing improvement and proposes policy recommendations. The research shows that: 1) There are significant spatiotemporal differences in the land-use efficiency in the YRB. Urban land-use efficiency remains extremely low, with values below 0.2. Ecological land-use efficiency remains stable at a medium level. Agricultural land-use efficiency is relatively high and increased from 0.38 in 2000 (low level) to 0.62 in 2020 (high level) during the study period. 2) The comprehensive efficiency and coupling coordination degree of land utilization in the YRB are low but generally coordinated. Although some improvement occurred from 2000 to 2020, over 70% of county-level efficiency composite values remained below 0.4 in 2020, and more than 20% of counties exhibited imbalances in the utilization efficiency of the three land use types. 3) From 2000 to 2020, the areas requiring improvement in agricultural and ecological land-use efficiency in the basin gradually decreased, while those with improved urban land-use efficiency first expanded and then declined. Moreover, human activities and land use intensity have a greater impact on land-use efficiency than natural conditions. Significant differences exist in efficiency improvements and influencing factors among the upper, middle, and lower reaches. Based on the analysis of influencing factors across different reaches, developing land-use management strategies that balance utilization efficiency and ESs can support high-quality development in the YRB and national ecological civilization construction.

Is the urban-rural political divide a fact or a myth? Insights from Poland

Poster

***Ms. Anna Grzelak*¹**

1. Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences

The urban-rural divide in voting preferences is a subject of ongoing debate among scholars, politicians, media, and citizens. While numerous studies have examined this phenomenon in United States, Western Europe, and the United Kingdom, its relevance to Poland remains an open question. This paper investigates the extent to which political preferences in Poland align with levels of urbanization. Using statistical methods, including correlation and linear regression, the study analyzes the relationship between county-level urbanization rates and electoral outcomes. The dataset spans parliamentary, senate, presidential, and local elections from 1998 to 2024, assessing whether urbanization consistently influences voter behavior. The findings determine whether the noticeable urban-rural gap exists in support for all major parties and all types of elections, or whether it is specific to certain political contexts. In addition, through a dynamic approach, this research examines whether the significance of this divide has changed over the past 25 years. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the political geography of Poland and offers empirical insights into the persistence—or evolution—of urban-rural electoral differences. Ultimately, it seeks to answer the central question: is Poland's urban-rural political divide a reality or a constructed narrative?

Is there something in the air? Affective strategies for local and regional food forestry governance

Poster

Ms. Anna Roodhof¹

1. Wageningen University

Food forestry (FF), a type of agriculture that mimics a forest ecosystem, has become increasingly prevalent in the Netherlands (Green Deal *Voedselbossen*, 2017). Current research flags entrepreneurial skills (Wiek & Albrecht, 2021) and an analysis of both the social and ecological context (Björklund, Eksvård & Schaffer, 2019) as pivotal to the success of FF initiatives. As FF is an emerging phenomenon, land-use policies, laws, and regulations often misrecognize it and consequently hamper its realization. FF practitioners stress the importance of generating political goodwill and the acquisition of allies within the local government to overcome this issue (Roodhof, 2024). Specifically, in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant, unlike in many other provinces, new policies have been implemented to accommodate the growing number of food forests – with an emphasis on community food forests. Drawing on Ben Anderson's (2014) affective analytics, this study investigates how civil servants from the provincial government of Noord-Brabant, as well as from water boards and municipal governments located inside this province, have created a more conducive infrastructural environment for food forests. Through fifteen semi-structured interviews and a two-part interactive workshop with civil servants, this study examines their capacity to affect and be affected in the context of facilitating community food forests.

Keywords: affect, governance, food forestry

Navigating conflicts in socio-ecological transformations

Poster

Prof. Stephan Lorenz¹

1. Uni Jena

The poster offers a theoretical contribution to the discussion of conflicts in socio-ecological transformation processes. First of all, the differences between social and ecological problems must be understood before both can be appropriately placed in relation to each other. Thus 'social' means two things: on the one hand, it stands for *relations within society* between different social groups and, on the other hand, for social-ecological, i.e. *society-nature relations*. According to Juergen Habermas, social conflicts can be differentiated into conflicts of interest, conflicts of justice and conflicts of values; these are conflicts within society that may indirectly have ecological consequences. In contrast, (social-ecological) eco-conflicts, with Bruno Latour, for example, concern the society-nature relations directly by shaping them mediated through science and technology. The distinction between the four types of conflict is explained in more detail on the basis of a number of characteristics, e.g. their specific objects, goals and actors. In particular, these types of conflict each require their own principles and ways of resolving them. While, for example, conflicts of interest can be resolved by compensations of losses, a solution of value based controversies cannot just rely on payments but need respectful dialogue. If sustainability is understood as an integrative principle, then sustainable conflict solutions in empirical conflict cases must take into account all four facets of conflict (interests, justice, values, ecology). This is illustrated by the example of urban-rural conflicts over urban water supply from the water resources of the rural surroundings.

No woman's land: The constitutive effects of discourses on gender inequality in German agricultural policy

Poster

***Ms. Laura Esche*¹**

1. Wageningen University & Research

Across the EU and its member states, policies fail to appropriately address gendered experiences of discrimination in agriculture, reinforcing gender inequities and power imbalances that facilitate and reproduce men's privileged access to land authority over agricultural spaces. This research interrogates - "What are the constitutive effects of the discourses on gender inequality in the German National Strategic Plan?" by examining (1) how gender inequality is represented as a 'problem' in the German National Strategic Plan as the national translation of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and (2) what subjectification effects are created through the identified problem representations. The analysis is based on poststructural theory and the 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach developed by Carol Bacchi.

Plant-Based Foods: A Viable Alternative for Future Sustainable Food Systems?

Poster

***Mx. Luiza Graciela Gonçalves*¹**

1. Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro

The growth of the plant-based food market has been promoted as a sustainable solution to the environmental and social challenges of the global agri-food system. However, this narrative conceals contradictions within the corporate-environmental food regime, in which large companies reconfigure consumption patterns without necessarily transforming the structures that sustain inequalities and ecological impacts. Based on the analysis of two Brazilian companies in the sector, “Fazenda Futuro” and “Incrível!”, this research investigates whether plant-based foods truly represent a viable alternative for new sustainable food systems. Drawing on food regime theory and the economic sociology of Karl Polanyi, we explore how the plant-based market incorporates innovation trends and sustainability discourses while integrating into the logic of the global agri-food system. While small producers and agroecological networks face challenges of economic viability and power concentration, the rise of large plant-based companies may reinforce an exclusionary, market-driven agri-food model. Given this scenario, we ask: Can plant-based foods effectively contribute to more just and sustainable food systems, or do they merely reinforce preexisting dynamics of financialization and inequality in food access? The research highlights the need to rethink not only food production but also institutional issues such as governance and distribution systems to ensure that sustainable alternatives are truly transformative and accessible.

KEY-WORDS: Brazilian companies; Food regimes; Plant-based market.

Sustainable Strategies for Rural Hospitals

Poster

Prof. Dina Bite¹, Ms. Olga Veilande¹

1. Rīga Stradiņš University

Environmental sustainability in connection with the climate change have become a topical issue in strategic planning also at the rural hospitals. The aim of this study is to investigate the contemporary and unique challenges of rural hospitals in becoming more sustainable to better understand the gaps and unexploited aspects of sustainability in strategic planning and rural hospitals in Europe.

The results of the study show that there are gaps and unexploited aspects of sustainability in strategic planning and operation of rural hospitals. During the past ten years, understanding of the significance of sustainability within the context of strategic planning (management) has increased. In nowadays, healthcare professionals, leaders and organisations understand the importance of the sustainable strategies as a scientific discipline that can produce knowledge to redesign business models and processes at rural hospitals and improve medical care and patient satisfaction. There have been studies conducted in Latvia on the importance of sustainable management in healthcare, however there are only few studies on the integration of sustainability factors in the overall strategic and operational management of healthcare organisations and rural hospitals in particular. Therefore, the GreenCare project research focuses on the need to integrate sustainability factors into strategic management in healthcare organisations of Latvia.

Using Photovoice to Facilitate Boundary Crossing Learning in Higher Education

Poster

Ms. Nicole Ercoli¹, Dr. Federico Andreotti¹, Dr. Sarina De Jager², Mr. Ivan McGill³, Dr. Jet Vervoort¹

1. Wageningen University, 2. University of Pretoria, 3. Private Design Studio

Interdisciplinary higher education increasingly emphasizes societally engaged learning that challenges disciplinary silos. However, fostering boundary crossing learning remains a challenge. This study explores photovoice as a practice-based method to facilitate interdisciplinary learning, reflexivity, and support students in navigating complex scientific and societal dilemmas. To examine the potential of photovoice in higher education, a novel photovoice toolkit was designed, applied, and assessed at Wageningen University. The study involved Plant Biotechnology Master's students in a course on food system dilemmas. Students engaged with photovoice individually and collectively, using visuals to explore their values and disciplinary perspectives. Findings indicate that photovoice can serve as an entry-point method for interdisciplinary learning, encouraging students to engage with complex topics through self-reflection and collaborative work. However, challenges such as time constraints highlight the need for systemic changes in courses to better support boundary crossing education. By integrating photovoice and other creative approaches within interdisciplinary programs, higher education can build capacity for transformative learning and complex societal challenges. This study contributes to discussions on operationalizing interdisciplinary tools in higher education, offering insights into the role of visual methods in facilitating boundary crossing learning. As we present this tool at the conference, we also aim to incorporate it as an interactive activity for participants to engage in throughout the event. The photovoice toolkit is designed to guide researchers on the use of the method through various steps. Each step is presented in a different leaflet, composed of an explanation of the step and how to carry it out. We have envisioned this toolkit as an interactive companion- a tool to not only guide your learning but also inspire your own creativity and reflection. With this in mind, we plan to encourage participants of the conference to use the toolkit themselves for self-reflection activity (e.g. on working group sessions).

Weathering the Storm: Exploring the Mental Health and Identity of Young Fishermen in a Changing Climate

Poster

Dr. Conor Hammersley¹

1. Bassett Healthcare Network, New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health

Commercial fishermen in the United States face increasing mental health challenges due to the inherent dangers of their work, economic uncertainty, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. While research on fisheries has traditionally focused on ecological and economic factors, limited studies have examined the mental health and social sustainability of fishing communities. This study explores how climate-induced changes, such as declining fish stocks, unpredictable weather patterns, and shifting regulations, impact the mental well-being and identity of young fishermen (ages 18–45) in the Northeast. Drawing on qualitative interviews and focus groups with fishermen in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, this one-year exploratory study investigates the psychological and social effects of these environmental transformations. Particular attention is given to how young fishermen navigate economic precarity, community cohesion, and personal identity in the face of an uncertain future. Preliminary findings from adjacent research suggest that PTSD rates among fishermen in the region are three times higher than the national average for men, underscoring the urgency of addressing mental health within this sector. By deepening our understanding of the lived experiences of young fishermen, this research will inform climate-adaptive policy, mental health interventions, and community-based strategies that support the sustainability of fishing livelihoods. Findings will be relevant to policymakers, fisheries managers, mental health practitioners, and researchers working at the intersection of occupational health and environmental change. This study provides a critical step toward addressing the social dimensions of climate resilience in commercial fisheries.

“The Countryside is a Good Place to Live if You Can Manage on Your Own”: Experienced Health Concerns and Social Inclusion in Rural Finland

Poster

Dr. Hanna-Mari Ikonen¹, Dr. Maarit Sireni², Ms. Katariina Kotila², Ms. Verna Helle²

1. University of Jyväskylä, 2. University of Eastern Finland

The aging of the population, rather low income, centralisation of health services, as well as long distances and lack of public transport are common challenges in Finnish countryside. We discuss how experiences of personal health and access to health services are linked to the possibilities of social inclusion for people living in rural areas. We understand social inclusion to consist of access to material and immaterial sources of well-being, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to have an influence on one's life, community and society. Based on our analysis of two qualitative datasets, we explore inclusion in three contexts: social relations, services and living environment, and membership and participation in the society.

Firstly, we found that through social relationships, people living in rural places may receive help and support concerning their health. However, rural social networks are at risk of becoming thinner, and personal relationships cannot be expected to compensate for the lack of health services. Secondly, concerns about the centralisation of health services are prevalent in the data. People are worried about how long it may take for emergency services to arrive, and the lack of public transport makes it increasingly difficult to access health services and take care of one's health. Finally, the data also reveals experiences of feeling marginalised and invisible in society and of having little control over one's own life. We argue that rural people may not feel able to participate in social affairs, such as the organization of health care in rural areas.

Keywords: health; health services; social inclusion

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