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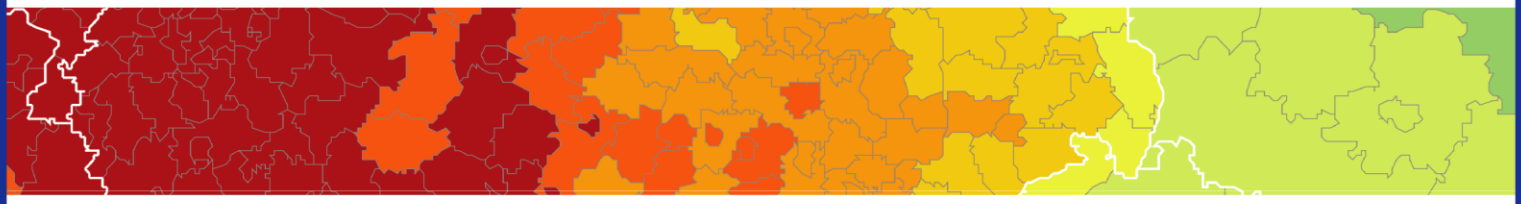

Urban-rural Connectivity in Non-metropolitan Regions (URRUC)

Targeted Analysis Activity

Synthesis report

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Abbreviations

CP	Cohesion Policy Programmes
EC	European Commission
ECF	European Cohesion Fund
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
EU	European Union
NACE	Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne
NMR	Non Metropolitan Regions
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdon
URRUC	Urban-rural Connectivity in Non-metropolitan Regions

1 Introduction

The objective of the 'Urban-Rural connectivity in Non-Metropolitan Areas' project is to contribute to understanding of how to improve connectivity and accessibility in Non-Metropolitan regions within the EU. Metropoles are classified according to population, territories where a large urban centre(s), 250,000 persons or more, serves as the focal point for an identifiable region. NMRs are territories where smaller urban centres struggle to attract the same levels of support and priorities for policyholders and suffer from comparative under-development. URRUC addressed the challenge of countering under-development in NMRs by focussing on four case study areas across the EU and making recommendations, both specific and general, that are transferable to comparable territories across Europe.

The four territories focussed on were: Scarborough Borough, in the UK; Marina Alta, Spain; Valle Arroscia in the Province of Imperia, Italy, and; Västerbotten County, Sweden. All four were coastal territories with comparable challenges around transport and connectivity, but were also substantially different enough to add value to case study analyses. Notably, one of these territories, Marina Alta in Spain, was classified as a small metro region at federal level, but as a non-metropolitan region at national level. This particular case study demonstrated the importance of a bottom-up approach to investigation and subsequent policy recommendations.

Central to the URRUC project was the concept of functional regions. This idea views the internal functioning dynamics of a region as being best perceived as the social, economic an spatial linkages across a territory, connecting urban and rural areas in terms of governance, services provision, employment, leisure and lifestyle. By optimising transport solutions these urban-rural linkages would be strengthened, improving access and movement across this urban-rural divide. Accessibility could also be improved for both groups of residents by focussing on other delivery formats for certain Eservices so recommendations were also made in relation to these.

The project therefore focussed on exploring Urban-rural linkages in the four case study areas. A set of policy development tools were created based on literature and case study analysis. The policy development tool generated specific recommendations for each area and were central to a tailored case study report developed for each individual territory. As transferability was a core component of the project, general policy recommendations for improving transport connectivity and accessibility in comparable NMR regions were also created, details of which are included in the main report and scientific annexes. The final and integral component of the project were EU policy recommendations for improving and optimising interactions with stakeholders in NMRs, as well as informing about potential gaps in policy coverage and how to address them. These recommendations from the project are captured below.

2 Urban-rural linkages

A core pillar of the URRUC project is improving connectivity between urban-rural areas within each of the stakeholder territories. Two highly relevant types of urban-rural linkages within the context of the ESPON URRUC project, namely the urbanisation process and the challenges of ensuring public transport availability in rural areas, underpin the findings of the project.

2.1 Identifying the relevant urban-rural linkages in ESPON URRUC

The OECD (Piacentini et al, 2010) developed a typology of urban-rural linkages identified in OECD countries. This typology has been used as a basis to identify the most relevant types and sub-types of urban-rural linkages in the four case study areas. Two sub-types have been identified as highly relevant for all the four case study areas. They correspond to the urbanisation process (rural-to-urban migration) and public transport availability in rural areas.

Table 1. Highly relevant Urban-rural linkages in four case study areas

Type of interaction	Sub-type	Province of Imperia	Marina Alta	Scarborough Borough	Västerbotten
1. Demographic linkages	a. Urbanisation (rural-urban migration)	Highly relevant	Highly relevant	Highly relevant	Highly relevant
	b. Commuting (long distance) and counter-urbanisation				Highly relevant
2. Economic transactions and innovation activity	a. "Central place" consumer relationships		Highly relevant	Highly relevant	
3. Delivery of public services	a. Delivery of and access to urban-based services by rural households and businesses.	Highly relevant		Highly relevant	
	b. Public transport availability in rural areas	Highly relevant	Highly relevant	Highly relevant	Highly relevant
4. Exchanges in amenities and environmental goods	a. Access to countryside for leisure and recreational use by urban residents b. Rural areas as a source of water supplied, carbon capture, waste treatment. c. Rural areas as sources of renewal energies			Highly relevant	Highly relevant

Source: Nordregio, 2019

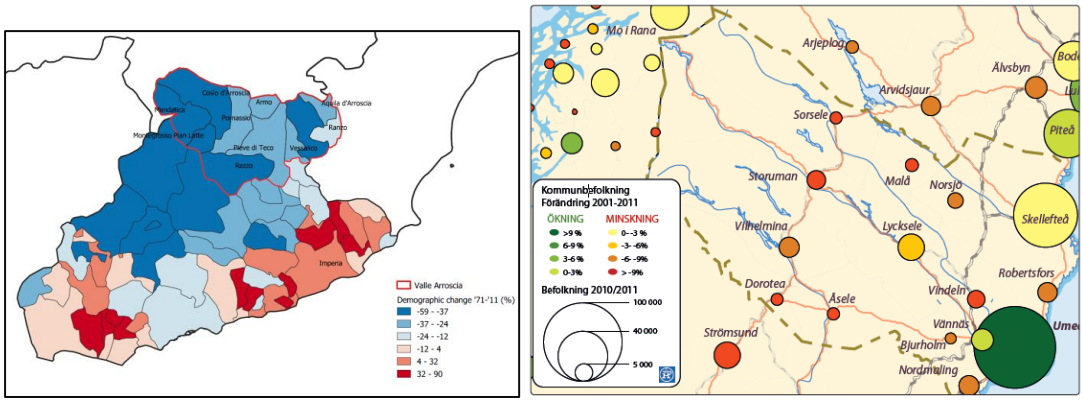
2.1.1 Urbanisation (Rural-urban migration)

Rural-to-urban migration refers to the process of people moving from rural or remote rural areas to urban centres or urban peripheries. Estimates suggest that 24.1 million more people will live in urban regions by 2050, while people located in rural areas are projected to decrease by 7.9 million during the same period (ESPON, 2018). City populations within the EU are not growing at the same rate while some rural areas are actually increasing their population (Eurostat, 2018a). The process of counter-urbanisation contributes to this change.

Not all rural areas have experienced population decline. Rizzo (2016) refers to an “intra-rural divide” where some rural areas have managed to stabilize and/or grow while others fall behind. A further aggravating factor is that of ageing populations. A declining and ageing population reduces tax revenues for the region or municipality, which makes it difficult to maintain adequate social and public services to remote or isolated areas.

Migration from rural to urban areas is characteristic of the demographic structure in the four regions. People moving from the more rural inland areas to the more urban coastal areas is a phenomenon that is common in the four case study areas and has been identified as highly relevant by local stakeholders and their partner research teams. It results in having a population decline in the rural parts and accentuates the ageing and gender imbalance. Figures 4a and 4b highlight this change in the distribution of the population in the Italian and Swedish case study areas within its regional context.

Figure 1a and 4b. Demographic change 1971-2011 in Valle Arroscia and Liguria (left) and 2001-2011 change in municipalities in Västerbotten (right)



Source: Region Liguria and Region Västerbotten, 2019

2.2 Public transport availability in rural areas

One important public service that has proven difficult to maintain in rural areas is access to public transportation for different types of journeys. From an environmental and accessibility perspective, an effective and optimised public transport system is an important component in this structure. The cost to maintain public transportation all hours of the day for children, young people, elderly people and commuters is much higher because of the few numbers travelling every day. It is difficult for a private company to become profitable, frequently requiring state or municipality subsidiaries to remain active. Public companies are also struggling economically. What is proposed by studies in both the United Kingdom and Sweden is a system with more innovation and flexibility as well as coordination between different service providers (Commission for integrated transport, 2008; Trafikanalys, 2014).

3 Overview of the Case study areas

This following section reflects on the case studies using six themes that are replicated across all four studies;

- Contextualisation
- Territorial characteristics
- Economic structure
- Institutional framework and policy environment
- Identification of urban-rural linkages
- Transport provision and present accessibility challenges

3.1 The Four territories in context

Common to all four territories is their coastal nature. While all four are different in terms of geography, some more mountainous, others more spacious, the shared experience is that of regions with a notable concentration of population along their seafront and in pockets across the area, with more inaccessible inner areas being rural and relatively remote, with underdeveloped infrastructure and frequently poor access to core services. Population concentrations seem to follow corridors whereas low population densities are the results of physical features (e.g. mountains) or legislation (e.g. natural park). Note the somewhat different context in Västerbotten where the size of the region and the relatively small size of its population results in having very low population densities in most parts of this region

Territorially all four areas used in the case studies share strong similarities; long coastlines with concentrations of population that are poorly connected to interior, rural areas which depend on these comparatively small urban centres for key services and employment. However, each of the territories are also distinctly different. Clearly, such differences cannot be appreciated from an overarching perspective. What this points to is the need for the detailed case studies supplied as part of the URRUC project to address the transport and connectivity issues in the four partner areas.

3.2 Economic Structure

It is notable that each of the partners have very different challenges and, arguably, are at different stages of economic growth and activity. What is common to all territories is the central importance of improving transport and accessibility as a means to optimising economic activities as well as improving take up of employment opportunities for all those within the respective territories. Understanding the differing experiences of each of the territories is important in identifying comparable non-metropolitan regions that might benefit from adopting solutions that are relevant to each specific case study. What emerges from this examination of the four partners is the need for specific solutions that answer the needs of the stakeholders, but can also enhance the general approaches and recommendations.

3.3 Institutional framework and policy environment

The most frequent and shared concern voiced by all stakeholders is the priorities placed by regional and national government agencies on developing transport systems and infrastructure in their respective territories. All agreed that a crucial component of URRUC was as a piece of evidence to demonstrate a shared set of challenges to regional and national actors. That will allow thoughtful and timely intervention with input from actors closest to the problems with the most knowledge of how to deal with them.

3.4 Urban rural linkages

two sub-types of urban-rural linkages have been identified as highly relevant for all the four case study areas. They correspond to the urbanisation and counter-urbanisation process and public transport availability in rural areas. Aging populations is also a shared challenge for all the case study territories; delivery of public services is a very real challenge for residents who may be less mobile than younger groups. Inland areas are highly dependent on main urban nodes along the coast both for main public services and for commercial and leisure time. Most of the commuting residents are connected to a local labour market dominated by an urban centre.

3.5 Transport provision and present accessibility challenges

Transport provision in all of the territories revolve around road and rail; only Marina Alta has a significant maritime transport presence. Västerbotten does have an airport, but in Marina Alta, Scarborough, and Valle Arroscia residents have to travel outside the territory for connecting flights. This means across all four territories road and rail improvements are essential to improving connectivity and accessibility, either through improving services, or improving infrastructure. This make public transport and public transport providers crucial to the success of improving connectivity and accessibility. Consistently then, across all territories is the need to improve road and rail services. Allied to the demographic and institutional challenges facing all territories it points to a level of intervention required at a range of levels across each area.

4 Policy recommendations

Building on data collection, territorial typologies and case studies, a number of specific policy recommendations are made for improving connectivity and accessibility in non-metropolitan regions. These are derived from tools generated during the project, as well as recommendation from analysing Cohesion Policy programmes juxtaposed to findings from URRUC.

4.1 Guidelines and Recommendations for European regions

Recommendations were captured under two broad categories, **Specific** and **General**. These overarching themes were then further sub-divided into; **Market**, **Consumers perceptions**, **Stakeholders**, **Policy and government**, **Economic**, **Sociocultural** and **technological features**. Tailored solutions for the four regions are viewable in the scientific annexes. The transferable solutions that inform policymakers in comparable NMRs are described here.

4.1.1 Operational recommendations

URRUC focuses on **Demand Responsive Transport** (DRT) solutions to encourage a shift from private car use. In this way accessibility and connectivity can be optimised. Policy tools developed offer a range of DRT ideas and outlines their usefulness to various consumer groups, detailing their cost value, social value and optimal operation. **Possible alternatives to private car considered include**; taxis and shared taxicabs, village minibus (mixed use), social transport, shuttle vans, feeder transport, buses on demand, car sharing and car clubs, ride sharing and service delivery.

The second area that was considered was **non-material and transversal actions**. This included focusing on improving accessibility through solutions such as digital platforms and smart ticketing, as well as dematerialisation of services, for example telemedicine, telecare, e-learning and e-government. Central to the success of such activities, which can be considered at levels such as NUTS 2, NUTS 3 or even consortia of LAU 1 and 2, is collaboration and coordination of local institutions.

The final area that was focussed on in the cases studies that have transferable components was **structural interventions and intermodality.** Possible interventions to structurally improve mobility and support multimodality include: road or rail extension, intermodal parking facilities for bikes and cars**,** integrated multimodal ticketing and intermodal passenger transport e.g bike racks on public transport.

4.1.2 Recommendations for the specific context

The following actions are recommended to improve urban-rural connectivity in NMRs:

- Careful analysis of users' needs
- Targeted policies (various users)
- Strengthen a public transport friendly culture
- Mixed use of transport services
- Strengthen local skills and roles
- More funds for transport projects
- More importance given to the tourism sector
- To better inform population

4.1.3 Recommendations for the general context

The following actions and measures are recommended for transport policy:

- Governance (horizontal and vertical)
- Flexibility (rules and procedures)
- Compact urban development
- Reverse marginalisation
- Bridge the digital divide

4.2 Recommendations for EU policy making

Building on the above recommendations, as well as on the evidence collected through the case study analysis and on the review of the literature and recent European research projects on the matter, this section aims to address guidelines and recommendations to the EU transport and connectivity policies impacting in urban-rural connections.

4.2.1 Guidelines relevant to EU transport and connectivity policy

This set of recommendations focuses on:

- Inputs from the case studies, emerging from the analysis of the impacts of EU projects in their territories, and the transport and connectivity related solutions proposed by case study stakeholders
- Results and considerations emerging from the analysis of scientific literature, publications and studies on EU transport and connectivity projects in non-metropolitan regions, EU and public institutions reports.

Building on this evidence, it is possible to come up with the following inputs and suggestions, that could inspire EU policy making

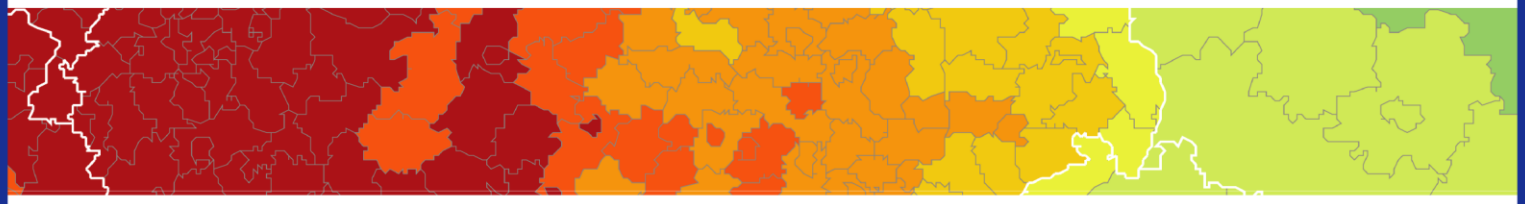
- Strengthening territorial cohesion: Rural-rural and rural-urban connections in NMRs should be considered as an element that strengthens territorial cohesion and, therefore, central in terms of policies.

- Transport and tourism: In those case study territories where tourism is an economic driver, significant seasonal differences in terms of transport demand and number of users of public transport services can occur.
- Strengthening rural-urban collaboration: Strengthening rural-urban collaboration in development policy planning is fundamental to allow both rural and urban population, economic activities and organizations to access all local services and activities
- Organic development of transport policy: Area-based strategy formulated by local stakeholders through a community-led approach should steer in multi-faceted solutions backed by regional, national and EU resources
- Improving understanding of functional regions: a representative model of urban-rural linkages should be investigated, to better understand the functional nature of regions
- Maintaining economic activities and encouraging growth: EU transport policy should stimulate flexible, cost and energy-saving, solutions
- Streamlining EU funding application processes: further effort towards the simplification and lightening of the bureaucratic burden in EU funded projects
- Digitisation of services: Digitisation of services (e-care, e-education, e-administration, etc.) reduces displacements and optimises public administration resources
- Improved governance and collaboration: European, national and regional institutions should include mechanisms that bind the funding of transport and connectivity projects in rural areas.
- Sustainable transport policy: Planning and testing periods should also be considered, in order to verify the feasibility of proposed solutions.

4.2.2 The UK as a member of the European Union

The delayed agreement on the future partnership of the EU and UK means that the URRUC project was be completed before the final treaty agreement. Therefore it is not possible to determine with absolute accuracy the impact of withdrawal. One measure that can be used to estimate the impact of leaving the EU is that of European funding. It will prove difficult to fill the void created by EU funding. Below are some approaches to mitigate the challenge;

- Improve dialogue between funding authorities and regional and local actors
- Clarify and appropriately structure the remit of regional and local authorities for investment and economic development
- Address the constraints created by matched funding requirements
- Central funding is frequently too cyclical
- Market led solutions are too short term and create social gaps
- Longer term investment is crucial to the well-being of local authorities



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