

Expression of Interest

The research institutions and individual researchers having signed below are hereby submitting the request to add a *new* Research Activity on "**European Rural Development**" under paragraph 1.1.6.4 to the Thematic Priority 1.1.6 („Sustainable Development, global change and ecosystems") of the 6th Framework Program (FP6).

This new Research Activity should be implemented through the two Instruments of „Networks of Excellence" and „Integrated Projects".

We would like to raise the following arguments for this expression of interest:

1. For decades, rural areas in Europe are in processes of **deep structural change** due to demographic, economic, social, cultural, technological, environmental and political transitions. These underlying driving forces require scientific investigation, if valid policy advice is to be provided.
2. Rural Development has a **high priority on the political agenda** of the European Union. It is considered a „second pillar" in the CAP reforms by DG Agriculture and is highly relevant for the EU accession countries (in particularly Poland).
3. Rural Development research was funded in the 5th Framework Programme and the FAIR programme and there are many reasons why this **initially supported research should be continued**.

Need and Relevance

Research on rural development in Europe is needed and relevant due to both scientific and political reasons:

1. Scientific needs

Europe's rural areas are experiencing multiple *structural* changes that are leading to new challenges and opportunities. Multidisciplinary research is needed to analyze the various dimensions of these processes and develop policy-oriented scenarios and tools for development planning.

- a) Human **dimensions**: The analysis of demographic trends is a key element in the research on human dimensions of rural development: Due to a high birth deficit, the population in many rural areas of Europe is aging and declining at a high rate. This trend is accelerated as young people migrate to urban areas. Europe's periphery, in particular, is facing a population collapse. These demographic trends have profound implications for the rural infrastructure, society and economy. Schools, hospitals, supermarkets have to be closed; roads, railways, telecommunication are downgraded or expanded more slowly. Both public and private investment is lagging because of shrinking consumer markets. However, there are also rural areas, where the population is *growing* rapidly due to sub-urbanization and new types of economic development, such as in the tourist villages and „wellness parks" of Austria, Italy or Hungary. Other important fields in human dimensions research are the (social and economic) impact of informal networks, the trends in education and training, or the questions of cultural identity.

- b) **Economy:** The rural economic structure is changing rapidly. Agriculture and forestry are becoming less important for the rural population, which is increasingly depending on income from the industry and service sectors. In areas dominated by small to medium-sized family farms, the population typically has *multiple* sources of non-agricultural income. More research is needed to identify new possibilities for sustainable economic development in those rural areas in Europe, where natural conditions prevent competitive agriculture or forestry. The expansion of the European Union will also lead to new challenges and risks in Europe's countryside. Research is needed not only to study income-implications for farmers in the accession countries, but also to investigate structural consequences (farm size, cooperation among farmers, new export markets, social conflicts). The consequences of CAP reforms are also fields, where more research is needed. Europe's cultural landscape critically depends on the type and structure of agricultural subsidies.
- c) **Environment and Resources:** According to the concept of a multi-functional European landscape, rural areas should not only supply natural resources (freshwater, food, feed, bio-mass), but also provide space for human recreation, and allow protection of plant and animal species (biological diversity). There should be areas reserved for water protection, and energy production (reservoirs, windmills), but also for CO₂ mitigation (CO₂ sinks) and ecosystem preservation (wetlands). The new economic and demographic developments will, however, affect the use of natural resources and will pose new threats to the rural environment, but also create new possibilities for nature conservation. Declining population density and a reduction of farmland, for instance, might provide new options for national parks or protective zones.
- d) **Technology:** Traditionally, agricultural and livestock technology is a central theme in agronomic research. Rural development research, however, has to take into account *all* technologies, that might affect rural areas, including biotechnology, transportation technology, and communication technology. For instance, high-bandwidth Internet connections might facilitate tele-work in rural areas and create new jobs. Much more research is needed to analyze the impact of emerging new technologies on rural areas - including their economic potential, but also their possible threat to the environment.
- e) **Policy:** The political participation of citizens and the effectiveness of governance are critical in rural development. This requires research in rural conflict resolution - including studies of structures, legal arrangements, mediation procedures and civil organizations involved in these processes.

This outline of *some* research themes should illustrate the wide range of problems and the great relevance of research for the future development of the European countryside. A screening of available literature on Rural Development also shows that there are several obvious research gaps: So far, very little research has focused on the demographic trends in rural areas despite their relevance for economic and social development. There is also a need to better *integrate* social- and natural - science approaches in Rural Development studies, such as through the combination of ecological and economic analyses. There should also be research to identify rural development initiatives that are both environmentally sustainable and provide an economically viable basis for the rural population.

2. Political relevance

CAP reform, EU expansion, and the underlying structural change in rural areas are major political challenges for the European Union in the coming decades. The Agricultural Directorate General has emphasized that the „future of the agricultural sector is closely linked to a balanced development of rural areas" (CAP Reform, Rural Development, CH-25-99-008EN-C). With its "accompanying measures of the CAP" (concerning agri-environment, early retirement, forestation, and compensation payments for less favored areas and areas subject to environmental constraints) and with its LEADER program the EU Commission has clearly demonstrated its high priority for rural development. Between 2000 and 2006 CAP expenditures to rural development from EAGGF Guidance and Guarantee sections will be in the order of 4.3 billion Euro *each year* (or 30.37 billion in total). In addition to the European Union many European governments have adopted

explicit policies of rural development, which they see as key elements for promoting a Europe of equal opportunities.

Excellence and Scale of Ambitions

The European research community focusing on questions of Rural Development includes many outstanding centers of excellence and multiple networks of highly qualified researchers. As an attachment we have listed a small sample of these research centers and university departments with both social-science and natural-science focus on Rural Development (we like to emphasize that this, by no means, includes all or even the majority of relevant research facilities and scientists). These institutions and researchers cover a wide range of technical skills, research orientations, research facilities, approaches and theories (such as the concept of "multi-functional landscapes"). There are centers that focus on *applied* research, while others have a strong emphasis on *basic* research, and yet others on *teaching*. The list also includes *International* research centers with *worldwide networks*. Under the umbrella of "Rural Development" a Europe-wide research community has established itself that clearly contributes to the development of a "European Model of Rural Development".

Continuity and Integration in Existing Scientific Community

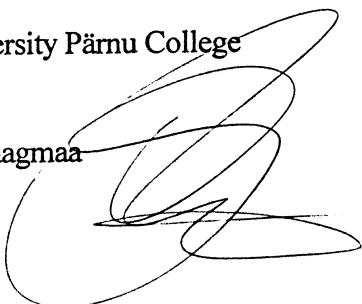
In the 5th Framework Programme Rural Development research was covered in Key Action 5 (KAS) under the heading of „the sustainability of European agriculture, forestry and fisheries". Section 5.5, concerning „Rural Development", included projects dealing with landscape management and evaluation of ecosystems, urban impact, impact of accession countries, investment, farm diversification and agro-marketing. Among others, the 5th Framework Programme funded projects on „Europe's Sub-Arctic and boreal regions" (QLK5-CT-1999-30745), on „Organic marketing initiatives and rural development" (QLK5-CT-1999-31124), on „Supporting and promoting integrated tourism in Europe's lagging rural regions" (QLK5-CT-1999-31211), or on „Urban pressure on rural areas" (QLK5-CT-2000-0094).

Moreover, the FAIR Programmed also supported rural development research, such as a project on „Regional differences in livestock production systems: development of protocols and methodologies for policy evaluation and impact on rural development" (FAIR-CT96-1586). There was also a project on „Structural policy effects in remote rural areas lagging behind in development" (FAIR-CT96-1554). These FP-5 and FAIR projects covered at least some of the fields of Rural Development research in Europe. In the current proposal for the 6th Framework Programmed, however, this broad field of highly relevant, rural development research is not adequately represented. Its thematic priority 1.1.6 of „Sustainable Development, global change and ecosystems" only covers „Energy", „Transportation" and „Global Change and Ecosystems". These rather disciplinary topics, however, do not adequately cover the mostly inter-disciplinary research questions of Europe's Rural Development research community.

There is a need and opportunity to integrate *newly established* and *previous* research activities on Rural Development at the European level. Through EU funding it would be also possible to broaden the scope of these activities. For instance, it would be possible to strengthen projects that combine natural-science and social-science approaches or to promote projects that attempt Europe-wide comparisons.

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