



SHERPA  
Rural Science-Society-Policy  
Interfaces

# A VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

MAP Discussion Paper

## LONG-TERM VISION FOR RURAL AREAS: CONTRIBUTION FROM 20 SCIENCE- SOCIETY-POLICY PLATFORMS

MAP DISCUSSION PAPER

GALICIAN RURAL INTERFACES

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## 1. Introduction

The Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) established in Galicia for the SHERPA project covers the entire territory of this region (NUT2): 29,574 km<sup>2</sup> in which 2,701,743 people reside, with a mean density of 93.6 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Galicia has historically been characterised by a strong rural prevalence. However, in recent decades the rural areas have experienced a demographic and economic decline, and they are currently facing problems common to peripheral regions in Europe, such as depopulation, ageing and land abandonment.

The institution responsible for the Galician MAP is the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), through the ECOAGRASOC and LABORATE research groups, with the support of the Galician Association of Local Action Groups (RDGs). This association brings together a broad representation of rural actors (more than 1,500 institutions are involved in the 24 LAGs), belonging to a variety of economic sectors, civil society and local public institutions. Starting with this association, and incorporating other actors, a MAP was established composed of 17 active members representing civil society, public institutions and research.

The MAP covers all of the issues which affect the current and future reality of rural areas in Galicia. To guide the reflection and debate regarding the future vision for the 2040 time horizon, the seven topics identified in the SHERPA Discussion Paper were taken, plus an additional one suggested by the MAP members: dynamics of the agri-food and forestry sector.

**Keywords:** depopulation, ageing, rural emigration, deagrarianisation of rural areas, agri-food sector, forestry production, land-use competition, forest fires, biodiversity and climate change, dispersed habitat, population services.

## 2. Results from desk research

### 2.1. Review of key trends

#### 2.1.1. Demographic shift: decrease and ageing of the rural population

Following the DEGURBA classification, we identify thinly populated areas (TPAs) as rural areas, in which 240 of Galicia's 313 municipalities are located. With this demarcation, Galician Institute of Statistics (IGE) data for 2019 show that rural areas occupy 4/5 of the territory (81.8%) but only 1/4 of the population (26.5%) reside there, with a mean density of 30.3 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Depopulation is particularly acute in low-density thinly populated areas (TPA low): 65.2% of the surface area but only 14.4% of the population, with the density limited to 21.0 inhab/km<sup>2</sup> (IGE, 2020). These low densities are added to by increasingly accentuated ageing.

Sex differences in life expectancy and in recent migrations mean that the rural population presents a feminisation in old age brackets, in contrast with masculinisation among young people and adults. The confluence of ageing and low fertility causes negative natural growth, which has become more accentuated over the last 10 years. With data from 2018, the natural growth rate of the rural population presents a negative value of 10.6 per thousand, double the Galician average. This means that, in the absence of migration, this population will suffer an annual decline of 1.06% due to natural causes. In addition to ageing, this is also influenced by an especially low fertility rate. The mean number of children per women is 0.92 in rural areas, which is lower than the Galician average (1.04), and in the least-populated rural areas (TPA low) it falls to 0.83. This lower rural fertility rate suggests the existence of specific factors in these areas which disincentivise the decision to have children – factors which must be linked to the limited employment opportunities and deficiencies in access to basic services (López Iglesias, 2019a).

With respect to migratory flows, a persistent emigration to urban Galician areas and other areas of Spain has been identified in recent decades, compensated for by the arrival of returning emigrants and, to a lesser degree, of immigrants. The result for rural areas as a whole is a migratory balance approximately in equilibrium, but one which masks large differences by municipality, age and gender. Specifically, the data indicate an important rural emigration of the young population, compensated for by the return of people of

middle and old age. As such, the greatest rates of emigration are recorded in the age bracket of 25-34 years, the initial stage of working life, and this affects women to a greater degree (Toxo & García, 2018). This fact may be related to the deficiencies in employment opportunities and access to services by the rural population.

### **2.1.2. Deagrarianisation and limitations on the economic diversification of rural areas**

The loss of demographic and economic weight of rural areas in recent decades has been accompanied by a growing deagrarianisation, due to a reduction in the importance of agricultural activity in these areas (López Iglesias, 2019a). Social Security data provide evidence of this reality: in 2019, of the employed residents in rural municipalities (TPAs), only 13.1% had their principal activity in the agricultural sector (including forestry and fisheries activities); 9.7% worked in construction, 15.5% in industry and 61.2% in the services sector (IGE, 2020). The same applies to low-density TPAs, where people who work mainly in agriculture constitute a minority (16.9%), with a clear predomination of those employed in services (58.7%).

In the last 60 years, total employment in Galicia suffered a moderate decline, but this masks enormous territorial contrasts: an increase in urban centres and peri-urban areas, compared to the strong contraction in rural areas (López Iglesias & Pérez Fra, 2004). It is this employment dynamic which is giving rise to the changes in the spatial distribution of the population.

The dynamic in rural areas is marked by the accelerated fall in agricultural employment: the population employed in the agricultural sector reduced by 95% in the period from 1950 to 2015, and in the last 30 years alone, since the integration into the European Union, the fall has been almost 90%. This led to a parallel decline in its weight in total employment: this percentage decreased in Galicia from 70% in 1950 to 4.5% in the present day (López Iglesias, 2019b). The other factor which defines the dynamic of rural employment is the limited development of the agri-food industry, other industrial branches, and services. This has meant that the contraction in agricultural employment has only been compensated by the generation of jobs in other activities to a limited degree (López Iglesias & Pérez Fra, 2004). Therefore, the specificity of Galicia compared to other European regions originate from these two factors: agricultural employment continues to decrease at very high rates, markedly above the Spanish and EU averages, and this is accompanied by a weak development of industrial and services activities in rural areas (López Iglesias, 2019a).

The data on the number companies also reflect the lower economic dynamism of rural areas: 90.5 companies/1,000 inhabitants in urban areas compared to 63.6 in peri-urban municipalities and 48.4 in rural areas. The low labour productivity in the agricultural sector, together with the limited development of industrial and tertiary activities, causes these rural areas to generally record low GDP per inhabitant. The situation is not so unfavourable in terms of disposable income, but with the cost of a strong dependence on public transfers, predominantly Social Security pensions (IGE, 2020).

### **2.1.3. Dynamics of the agri-food and forestry sector**

Despite the transformations of recent decades, the agricultural sector continues to present strong deficiencies, especially in the territorial base of holdings (small size and fragmentation of holdings) and in land uses, and this is reflected by low labour productivity. This productivity (GVA/person employed) is currently limited to 80% of the average for Spanish agriculture and a similar percentage of the average for the Galician economy (López Iglesias, 2019b).

According to the 2016 Farm structure survey, Galicia currently has around 76,400 holdings, but families who work and live mainly from agriculture are limited to around 25,000 (López Iglesias, 2019b). The reduced average size of agricultural holdings is accompanied by high ageing of the holders: in 2016 just 2.8% were aged under 35 years, while 35.5% were aged over 65 years.

To the structural deficiencies of the agricultural sector we must add the weakness of agri-food industry, which limits employment and the value added generated by the agri-food chain (Sineiro, 2009). This chain remains centred on the production of raw materials, with limited development of the transformation industry. As such, while the agri-food industry in Galicia adds €0.57 to each euro of GVA of agricultural production, in Spain and in the EU-28 the figure exceeds €1 and in more developed European countries approaches €2. The result of the deficiencies of the agricultural sector and the agri-food industry is

expressed in Galicia recording a deficit in its agri-food trade balance. Counting interregional and international trade, net exports are recorded for livestock raw materials and simple by-products (packaged milk and meat), but this is more than counteracted by the net imports of other products (López Iglesias, 2019b; Valdés & López Iglesias, 2008).

The forestry sector, which is expanding as deagrarianisation advances, and its by-product chains account for 1.8% of GDP and 2.2% of employment in Galicia. Forestry production specialises in pulpwood, especially *Eucalyptus globulus* and *Pinus pinaster*, which is mainly used for the manufacture of boards and paper pulp. As a whole, the timber chain is focused on first transformation industries, and the development of second transformation industries is limited. The 2008-2014 financial crisis severely negatively affected this production chain, due to its connection with the construction sector, whilst in recent years we have observed a gradual recovery.

#### 2.1.4. Infrastructure and basic services

Just as relevant as the weakness of the productive fabric is that rural areas in Galicia continue to record large deficiencies in access to basic services for the population and companies (health, education, welfare of children and the dependent population, public transport, etc.). This problem is exacerbated by the dispersed structure of the habitat, which makes it difficult for people who do not reside in centres of a certain size to access services (Fernández & Peón, 2017). This strong dispersity is reflected in the fact that, while occupying 6% of the territory, Galicia has half of Spain's population settlements (more than 30,000 in absolute terms), the large majority of them small in size (91.0% have less than 100 inhabitants).

A phenomenon which conditions both the economic structure and the provision of services in rural areas is the growing volume of daily mobility flows (commuting). According to the 2001 Population Census, 37.8% of employed people in Galicia work in a different municipality to the one where they reside, a percentage which increased to 42.8% in 2011. Mobility throughout the Atlantic Corridor and the nearby rural areas is notable, but the attraction to the two provincial capitals of the interior (Lugo and Ourense) and certain county centres is also observed (López-Iglesias, Peón, Rodríguez-Álvarez, 2018).

#### 2.1.5. Digitalisation and smart ruralities

4G coverage reached almost 100% of Galicia's population settlements in 2019, but with varying quality. Coverage of satellite access is 100%. Furthermore, 84% of settlements had fibre-optic trunk networks in their surroundings in 2017, a fundamental element for deploying the 5G network, which is expected to begin from 2020 onwards ([Government of Spain, 2020](#)). According to the official statistics, 89% of Galician households had internet access in 2018 (91% in Spain), almost all of them (88%) with broadband access. The percentage of rural households with broadband access was slightly lower (76%), although the strong increase in recent years ([OSIMGA, 2019](#)).

In terms of the real level of digitalisation, 70% of rural Galician households used the internet in the past three months in 2018, with the overall percentage at 80% in Galicia and 87% in Spain. This percentage masks a significant rift based on age and educational level, such that in rural households with people under the age of 45 and with a higher educational level (secondary education or above) the use of the internet in the past three months exceeds 90% ([OSIMGA, 2019](#)).

The main reasons cited for not using the internet in rural areas are the lack of need (57% of households that do not have internet), followed by a lack of knowledge (1/3). The cost of the equipment and the service represented an obstacle for 10% in 2018, reducing from 25% in 2015; and the lack of availability of the service is only cited as a reason by 1.7% of rural households ([OSIMGA, 2019](#)). As such, the lower use detected in rural areas appears to be due less and less to technological barriers and more to other problems: suitability of the services to needs, lack of knowledge about the possibilities of digitalisation and abilities to take advantage of them – particularly among the older and/or less educated population. The cost of services, which are comparatively expensive in rural areas (for the same level of performance), constitutes another limiting factor.

In the business sphere, the level of digitalisation of key sectors of rural Galicia is still low. The implementation of Industry 4.0 has barely occurred in the forestry sector and the familiarity of companies from this sector with emerging technologies is very low. The diagnosis is similar in the agriculture and livestock sector and in the agri-food industry, although with nuances based on company size ([IGAPE,](#)

2017). In this context it is important to note the recent establishment of the [DATAlife](#) Digital Innovation Hub in Galicia, focused on the primary, biotechnology and health sectors.

### 2.1.6. Inequalities and social well-being

As occurs in general in EU countries, the gender gap in employment rates is greater in rural areas in Galicia than in urban areas, but the differences are moderate. In addition, in the last decade the gap between the male and female employment rate has tended to reduce: while it amounted to 12 percentage points in Galicia in 2010 (14 in rural areas), in 2019 it had fallen to 7 points in both cases (IGE, 2020). As a whole, the data corroborate the reduced employment opportunities for women in rural areas. Additionally, the reduction in the gender gap in the recent period has to be partly related to greater female rural emigration.

The percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion has reduced slightly in Galicia in the last decade, standing at around 18% in 2018. This rate is traditionally somewhat higher in rural areas, although in recent years it has tended to approximate the regional average, and in some years (2015, 2016 and 2017) it has been situated below it (IGE, 2020).

Life expectancy at birth in rural areas is 82.7 years and the high ageing of the population means that the weight of pensions and other social transfers in Gross Disposable Income (37.6%) is clearly above the Galician average (32.6%), with a notable increase over the last two decades (IGE, 2020).

### 2.1.7. Land-use change and competition

Land-use data show that farmers currently only manage 29% of the land in Galicia, and only 21% is devoted to crops and pastures. Of the remaining 71%, 41% is forested land or abandoned in the hands of non-agricultural owners, 23% corresponds to communal lands and 7% is devoted to urban use, transportation routes and other non-agricultural land. This is a very different situation to the one 50 years ago, when the surface area devoted to crops, grassland and livestock pasture comprised half of the territory. This is combined with the maintenance of a strong division of ownership: there are currently 1,670,000 owners of rural holdings, the vast majority of the population (López Iglesias *et al.*, 2013).

These overall data on land use mask growing internal disparities which can be summarised as the existence of three very different rural Galicias: rural urbanised and forested, characteristic of the Atlantic Corridor, the coastal strip and other peri-urban regions; active rural, composed of areas of the interior with recent expansion and a high weight of agricultural area (crops and pastures); and rural abandoned, defined by the strong weight of shrubland, characteristic of mountainous areas (Corbelle & Crecente, 2014a). These three groups generally correspond to the three rural Galicias which are also portrayed by the demographic and socioeconomic indicators (Fernández & Peón, 2017; Martínez-Figueira *et al.*, 2017).

The current panorama is the result of some important land-use changes over the past half century and specifically in recent decades, which can be summarised in three phenomena: forestation, urbanisation and abandonment. Wooded forest areas recorded a notable expansion and currently occupy 35% of the surface area. Other relevant changes were the conversion of areas of seminatural vegetation to cropland, the inverse phenomenon resulting from the abandonment of agricultural land, and the occupation of land for urban and industrial uses (Corbelle & Crecente, 2014a, 2014 b; Fernández & Corbelle, 2018).

In the spatial plane, the change follows a gradient from coastal areas in the northwest to the mountainous areas in the east, where the abandonment of land is concentrated. Forestation also follows a northwest-southeast gradient, which affects the type of forest species. In the northwest, the lower-altitude areas are dominated by fast-growing species (particularly *Eucalyptus*), while the highest-altitude areas of the southeast are mainly occupied by autochthonous trees, generally without commercial exploitation (Corbelle & Tubío, 2018). In low-intensity agricultural systems, abandonment is associated with the loss of traditional, environmentally valuable landscapes. In addition, the expansion of vegetation linked to abandonment increases the risk of forest fires (Sil *et al.*, 2019; Montiel *et al.*, 2019).

### 2.1.8. Climate change and environmental services

The most significant environmental problem faced by rural areas in Galicia is forest fires. The area burned annually stands at 18,092 ha on average in the last 11 years and the number of fires at 3,200 annually. This chronic problem over the past five decades is closely linked to land-use changes and the absence of

land-use planning. More recently, to this we must add the influence of climate change, which aggravates extreme events.

Other important environmental problems are related to the intensification of livestock farming in certain regions and the management of liquid manure, the spread of plastics of agricultural origin and the loss of animal and plant biodiversity (Soto *et al.*, 2016). The proliferation of invasive species is also related to climate change. At the same time, climate change forecasts envisage important changes in the productivity of a range of crops ([INVERCLIMA](#) project).

Water pollution does not appear to be a significant problem, with bodies of water generally in good health: 87% of surface water and almost 86% of groundwater is of good quality (< 25 NO<sub>3</sub> mg/L), although this percentage has decreased slightly in the past ten years. On the other hand, Galician agriculture is not highly demanding of groundwater: extraction for agricultural use amounts to less than 1% of the Spanish total. GHG emissions originating from the agricultural sector represent around 10% of the total, reaching 11.5% in 2016.

## 2.2. Review of main challenges and opportunities

Based on recent trends, the future of rural areas in Galicia will depend on the capacity of private actors and public policies to make progress on two main challenges (López Iglesias & Pérez Fra, 2017):

- a. Improving employment opportunities, income levels and the provision of services for the population and companies.
- b. As the basis for generating employment and income, the second challenge is for the rural areas to be capable of responding to the current demands of society, demands which we can classify into four groups:
  - i. Traditional functions: supply of food, timber and other raw materials. Functions which are acquiring a renewed importance, while undergoing modifications due to shifts in consumption.
  - ii. Production of other goods and services rewarded by the market: handicrafts and local industry, renewable energy, tourism and leisure, etc.
  - iii. Environmental functions: preservation of the landscape, water, air and soil quality, biodiversity and climate change mitigation.
  - iv. Social-territorial functions: conservation of heritage and contribution to territorial balance.

Of these four types of demands, the dynamics of the first two will depend on the capacity of the population and companies to produce products with adequate quality and price conditions with the outflow of purchases. However, the other two types of functions (environmental and social-territorial) are not remunerated through purchases, as they are public assets. This means that their provision, and the effects on the local population, will depend on public policies (Andrade & Vázquez, 2016).

This determines the main economic and environmental challenges for rural areas in Galicia over the next two decades. Adequate fulfilment of the first type of functions involves resolving the structural deficiencies of the agricultural sector, in particular tackling the problem of mobilising production and land-use planning, while the agri-food industry develops. In this same area, pending challenges also include the improvement of forest management, species diversification and the consolidation of industries involving the second transformation of timber. Opportunities offered by demand trends include the potential for the development of ecological agriculture, currently limited to a mere 1.4% of the utilised agricultural area (UAA) but with important growth in the last 15 years (López Iglesias, 2019b).

In relation to the second group of functions, the challenge is to advance in the diversification of the local business fabric and/or the activities of the resident population. In this regard it is important to stress the growing importance of commuting: people who reside in rural areas but travel to a nearby urban centre to work on a daily basis. This phenomenon, in all likelihood, will continue to grow in the next 20 years. On the other hand, Galicia's rural areas have great potential for renewable energy, especially wind and hydropower, but also biomass energy (Andrade & Vázquez, 2016).

About environmental functions, in Galicia just 11.9% of the surface area lies in Natura 2000 areas and 1.9% has been declared a Natural Park. This protected area, with calls for it to be increased, offers an

opportunity for the provision of ecosystem services, and must also serve to generate new employment and income opportunities for the local population ([Estratexia de Infraestrutura Verde de Galicia](#) project).

Intersecting with these challenges and opportunities, we can underscore four issues which will condition the future of rural areas in Galicia in the 2040 time horizon (López Iglesias, 2019a; Fernández & Peón, 2017):

1. The role of the agri-food and forestry sectors and of other activities in the economic future of the “three rural Galicias”.
2. The management of complementarities and conflicts between activities and land uses, making land-use management a core issue.
3. The structure of the habitat and the model for territorial organisation, provision of services and governance of rural areas. In this regard, the high dispersity of the population constitutes a challenge, as does the adaptation of the administrative structure and government to a very different reality to the one of the mid-19th century (when the current municipal map was established).
4. The fourth cross-cutting issue is the need to organise new relations between the rural population and rural space and between landowners and land users. The basic fact that needs to be taken into account is the increasingly complex relationship which occurs between three groups which up until the mid-20th century could almost be considered one and the same: residents in each municipality, land owners and people or companies interested in exploiting the land.

It may be considered notable that in this list of challenges and issues for the future we do not include demographic problems. The reason for this is that, while acknowledging the gravity of demographic trends, these are the consequence rather than the cause of the weaknesses of rural areas. Therefore, limiting or reverting these trends will not depend on demographics, but rather on socioeconomic factors, mainly improving employment opportunities and access to services.

### 2.3. Summary of existing foresight(s)

Done in Section 2.1.

## 3. Results from interviews with MAP members

The results summarised below were obtained from two activities:

- In the month of February, with the aim of obtaining initial information for the MAP meeting scheduled for March, an online questionnaire in which the members evaluated the priority of 10 challenges for rural areas of Galicia, which correspond to the 9 specific objectives and the cross-cutting objective of the CAP 2021-2027. They were also asked to select the three most important challenges and indicated action proposals for them. The questionnaire was completed by the 17 members of the MAP, and its results are summarised in Sections 3.1 and 3.3.
- The crisis caused by COVID-19 forced the meeting scheduled for the month of March to be suspended. Finally, the first meeting of the MAP was conducted remotely on 11 June, attended by 12 of the 17 members, with the presence of three types of actors: society (7 members), policymakers (2) and research (3).

After the introduction of the attendees and an initial exposition on the activities of SHERPA in 2020 (based on the documentation sent beforehand), the agenda of the meeting was organised in two parts:

- A. Trends, challenges and opportunities in rural areas in Galicia. We began by summarising the discussion paper prepared by the USC team and the results obtained in the online questionnaire<sup>1</sup>. Then, by applying the Delphi method, the MAP members proceeded to re-evaluate the 10 challenges included in the questionnaire. They were also asked about the effects of COVID-19. The analysis of the results is shown in Section 3.1.

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<sup>1</sup> MAP members received a report with the results of the questionnaire in advance.

- B. Vision for the future. In this part of the meeting, which took up the most time, the MAP members were asked for their vision for the desirable future and also the likely future of rural Galicia in 2040. To do so, the 12 members present were divided into two discussion groups in parallel sessions. Finally, there was a plenary session in which they were brought together and the visions collected in the two groups were debated, as well as beginning the debate on the main issues and actions to be tackled. The results are shown in Section 3.2.

### 3.1. Challenges and opportunities in the next 20 years

The challenges which we asked the MAP members to evaluate, taking the 10 objectives of the CAP 2021-2027 as a reference, are:

- To ensure a fair income to farmers
- To increase competitiveness
- To rebalance the power in the food chain
- Climate change actions
- Environmental care
- Preservation of landscapes and biodiversity
- To support generational renewal of holdings
- Vibrant rural areas
- To protect food and health quality
- To generate knowledge and innovation

The responses showed a high level of agreement with the majority of these challenges, with little variability: they all obtained an initial score of between 59 and 75 points (on a scale of 17 to 85 - 1 to 5 points for each of the 17 MAP members) (Table 1). The high number of respondents who assigned a score of 5 to the majority of the challenges provides evidence of the high level of agreement of the MAP members with the challenges proposed.

These initial results were sent to the MAP members and commented on in the meeting held on 11 June, requesting that, in light of these results, each of members proceed to make a new evaluation. The results of this second evaluation reaffirmed the importance assigned in general to the objectives established in the CAP 2021-2027, given that they all obtained between 43 and 54 points (on a scale of 12 to 60)<sup>2</sup>. However, at the same time, some variations occurred in the order of priority, with the evaluation of three challenges of an environmental nature improving, especially those related to the preservation of landscapes and biodiversity and climate change actions.

If we compare this to the seven issues considered in the SHERPA Discussion Paper *Long-term vision for rural areas: contribution from 20 science-society-policy platforms*, it is important to stress the high importance that Galician MAP members assigned to the challenges more directly linked to the agri-food and forestry sector (see Table 1). This was repeated in the action proposals indicated as priorities (see Table 3 in Section 3.3). As a result, we decided that in the case of Galicia, both for the analysis of the trends, challenges and opportunities and for the vision for the future of rural areas, to the seven SHERPA issues it was necessary to add an eighth one specifically referring to the dynamics of the agri-food and forestry sector. We did this in the MAP discussion paper and in the discussions of the meeting on 11 June.

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<sup>2</sup> These results are not exactly comparable with the initial ones, because only 12 of the 17 MAP members attended the meeting.



**Table 1. Score obtained for the 10 challenges for Galician rural areas**

Challenges	Score (first evaluation)	Order of importance in first evaluation	Order of importance in second evaluation
To revitalise rural areas	75	1st	1st
To ensure a fair income for agricultural producers	72	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2nd
To support generational renewal of holdings	72	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5th-6th
To generate knowledge and innovation	70	4 <sup>th</sup>	7th-8th
To protect food and health quality	69	5 <sup>th</sup>	3rd-4th
Environmental protection	66	6 <sup>th</sup>	5th-6th
Preservation of landscapes and biodiversity	65	7 <sup>th</sup>	3rd-4th
To rebalance the power in the food chain	64	8 <sup>th</sup>	9th-10th
To increase the competitiveness of companies	60	9 <sup>th</sup>	9th-10th
Climate change actions	59	10 <sup>th</sup>	7th-8th

Another issue which must be stressed is the secondary role held by environmental challenges or objectives in the opinion of the MAP members: environmental protection, preservation of landscapes and biodiversity and, especially, the fight against climate change. However, this position was qualified or partially amended in the second evaluation (Table 1).

At the same time, we asked whether the pandemic required a change in perspectives on rural areas and what their opinion was on the permanence of the changes induced:

Has COVID-19 changed your vision for the future of rural areas?	No. of responses
No, not at all	2
Yes, partially	7
Yes, entirely	2

Will the changes be permanent?	No. of responses
Yes	2
No	9

### 3.2. Desirable future for 2040

The table reproduced below summarises the vision of the MAP members for the desirable future for rural areas in Galicia in 2040 and also what they consider most likely.

**Table 2. Results of the vision for rural Galicia in 2040 exercise**

SHERPA ISSUES	2040 vision: likely rural	2040 vision: desirable rural
<p><b>Demographic shift: decrease and ageing of the rural population</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The majority of MAP members view the most likely trends to be ageing, negative natural growth not compensated for by returns and immigration, and the concentration of the rural population in centres of a certain size.</li> <li>- The participants considered that the different types of rural areas are going to continue recording differentiated demographic dynamics. The majority will continue losing population, while some (the minority) will manage to maintain and even attract inhabitants.</li> <li>- Following COVID-19, new resident demand is appearing in peri-urban rural areas, but they consider this to be a temporary phenomenon.</li> <li>- The negative natural growth is aggravated by the emigration of young women. This is a reality acknowledged in the discussion, attributed to a situation of social control forcing young women to take responsibility for the care of the elderly and children, and expelling them from spheres of socialisation in rural areas.</li> <li>- They agree that recovering the abandoned towns would be a utopia and that this abandonment will continue. However, some negatively view the concentration of the population in administrative centres, whilst others consider this phenomenon to be positive, because it allows for better services to be offered.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The desirable rural environment is a lively, diverse and multifunctional one.</li> <li>- Some MAP members consider a less dispersed population, which allows for improved access to services, to be desirable.</li> <li>- Others, in contrast, view the dispersed presence of the population in the territory to be desirable, in order to favour management of the area and the conservation and provision of ecosystem services.</li> <li>- The desirable rural environment must have well provisioned public policies, which dynamize the territory and make it attractive for the population to reside there.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deagrarianisation and limitations on the economic diversification of rural areas</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The desirable rural environment also has to be an agricultural one, but one with the ability to transform agricultural and livestock products.</li> <li>- In relation to this, some of the attendees posed a question: Is it possible to maintain rural areas without agriculture? And without family agriculture?</li> <li>- Three large opportunities for economic diversification of rural</li> </ul>

		<p>areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewable energy: wind, electricity and heat production in homes from different renewable sources.</li> <li>• Population services, provided by private companies (defended by some) or by government (defended by others): organisation of out-of-school activities, welfare services for the elderly, including of urban origin, etc. Social economy: consumer cooperatives and other associative forms.</li> <li>• Leisure and free time, both for the rural and the urban population. Tourism.</li> </ul> <p>- Facilitators are required for the installation of companies, and research as a basis for the development of rural areas in the future.</p> <p>- Environmental services constitute an opportunity for the economic diversification of rural areas.</p>
<p><b>Dynamics of the agri-food and forestry sector</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In this topic, the need for a change in model is indicated, both in terms of production and transformation. The participants generally state that they are optimistic about the future, provided this change is made.</li> <li>- The structural deficiencies of the Galician agricultural sector would not be so important if the productive model were changed, taking advantage of the potential of differentiated production and quality.</li> <li>- They believe that the dairy sector, Galicia's main agricultural production, will remain strong.</li> <li>- For the forestry sector, two opposing positions were identified: a) the sector has no future under the current model, the profitability of which is based on not accounting for the environmental costs, which are socialised; b) the sector will evolve towards new forms of exploitation other than pulpwood (new uses for timber and new products linked to technological innovations).</li> <li>- The lack of qualified personnel in the agricultural and forestry sectors is worrying, because this could mean that they fail to develop their potential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The majority of members expressed the desire to make progress on food sovereignty. They underscore how important this concept became with the COVID-19 crisis.</li> <li>- The Green Deal and "Farm to Fork" Strategy are viewed as opportunities to progress towards more sustainable and competitive farms. The desirable future will incorporate the objectives set by this Strategy and will respond to the trends of purchasing healthy, differentiated products which have a connection to the territory, etc.</li> <li>- As a nuance, the need to reconnect urban consumers with the agricultural reality is stressed, particularly the livestock reality, to dismantle myths such as the criticism of human diets with proteins of animal origin.</li> <li>- The desirable rural environment will include short distribution channels and take advantage of the territory's potential (production of fodder, vegetables, diversified timber production, etc.) as an important element.</li> <li>- It is necessary to develop high value-added and differentiated products, improving transformation and commercialisation. Galicia's potential to produce healthy, high-quality food is</li> </ul>

		<p>underscored.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The desirable rural environment includes improved forest management to increase timber production. Other members point to the need for greater diversification of forest species, for environmental reasons and to promote the production of quality timbers.</li> <li>- To promote all the changes, active public intervention is considered essential.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infrastructure and basic services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For the likely future, there exists the risk of continuing with the vicious circle between depopulation and shortcomings in basic services (decrease in the population → fewer and more expensive services → decrease in the population). The privatisation of public services affects rural areas particularly severely.</li> <li>- The public representatives present point to the insufficiency of municipal budgets to offer services adequate for new demands (sanitation, maintenance of transport networks, street lighting, rubbish collection, etc.).</li> <li>- Ageing of the population increases the demand on social and health services and leads to certain infrastructure maintenance activities which were previously performed by inhabitants to no longer be performed. All of this accentuates the abandonment of rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Several MAP members belonging to social collectives pointed to the fact that the rural environment does not require the same standard or type of services as urban areas.</li> <li>- They view a rural future with different services to those of urban areas, but which permit an adequate quality of life. For this they consider policies are necessary which seek to share services and infrastructure, and which take advantage of synergies among different collectives. The policies must be designed for and from within the rural environment.</li> <li>- One of the members points to the fact that it will be a rural environment which is not in confrontation with the urban environment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Digitalisation and smart ruralities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Without an adequate internet connection (the official coverage figures are viewed with suspicion), companies cannot compete. It is also pointed out that even where coverage exists, there is an important cost difference, whereby it is greater in rural areas.</li> <li>- The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that digitalisation increases inequalities between urban and rural areas, with productive and social consequences. The young population demand a connection to stay in rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The MAP members agree that the information superhighway is currently more important to rural areas than transport infrastructure.</li> <li>- The desirable rural environment is one with broadband internet access for the entire population and for companies. This will only be possible with public policies. Without these policies, the private sector fails to find profitability in areas with a low population density and/or a dispersed population.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Inequalities and social well-being</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some MAP members consider that we live in increasingly unequal societies, and this will continue in the future unless we change the model of the private sector providing basic services, thereby increasing inequality in rural areas.</li> <li>- The participants agree that women have fewer employment opportunities, a fact which they link to a greater persistence of traditional gender roles in rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In regard to gender inequality, they note the difficult situation for women, but that when they are empowered, they are a driver of rural areas.</li> <li>- Improving employment opportunities for young women must be accompanied by measures for work-life balance, welfare for the elderly and policies for equality.</li> <li>- Regarding the desirable rural environment, they stress that the level of well-being in rural areas, if they have basic conditions of equality, will be much greater than in cities, and crises such as the current one reinforce this.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Land-use change and competition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The MAP members consider that land-use conflicts will become worse, especially between agriculture and livestock and forestry, unless an effective public intervention in land-use management occurs.</li> <li>- Several members make reference to the distinction between the “three rural Galicias”, pointing out that these will follow very different evolutionary paths: increase of urban use and intensive crops (vegetables and wine) in the Atlantic Corridor and more populated areas; reinforcement of agri-food production in specialist livestock areas (with an intensification of fodder crops according to some and a trend of extensification, in contrast, for others); complete abandonment and practical disappearance of the rural environment in mountain areas.</li> <li>- Land abandonment is one of the most concerning problems and one which could get worse, increasing the risk of forest fires. Nevertheless, there are different points of view on this issue:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some members include the increase of forested area with fast-growing species, often unmanaged and with absentee owners, as part of the abandonment.</li> <li>• Others believe that not all land abandonment has to be negative, given that it can give rise to environmentally beneficial renaturalisation.</li> <li>• Others consider that with the growth of the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All MAP members agree on the need to manage land use through public intervention, taking into account multifunctionality (agricultural uses, forestry – with the combination of short-cycle and high-quality timbers–, environmental use, and urban-residential use). For abandoned rural areas, one participant proposes that management should focus on preserving biodiversity.</li> <li>- The mobilisation of abandoned land for pasture is considered necessary, given that the current model of producing animal protein based on imported plant proteins is not sustainable.</li> <li>- Cereal crops are also viewed as an alternative for part of the abandoned areas.</li> <li>- They point to the need for research to develop new crops or land uses.</li> <li>- The need to evaluate the environmental use of the territory and introduce this with greater force in public policies was also stressed.</li> </ul>

	<p>population and the global food demand, the abandonment of large areas, as is currently occurring in Galicia, cannot be maintained.</p> <p>Given the starting point, it will be difficult to achieve sustainable, resilient and environmentally friendly agricultural systems in 2040 in Galicia, especially due to the area's dependence on importing feed for livestock.</p>	
<p><b>Climate change and environmental services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The MAP members expressed their concern over the greater virulence and danger of <u>fires</u> due to the current forest exploitation model and the effects of <u>climate change</u>.</li> <li>- They also stress the forecast of a growing problem of a <u>shortage of water</u> for human consumption due to the increased periods of drought.</li> <li>- In the measures proposed to combat climate change, biodiversity is often not considered. "Eucalyptisation" is found to be the main biodiversity-loss problem in rural areas of Galicia.</li> <li>- The participants express different points of view on the contribution of livestock to climate change. Some indicate that the carbon footprint of livestock farming is overestimated. Meanwhile, others stress that intensive livestock farming, with its dependence on external inputs, contributes to global warming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For several MAP members, the current concern over climate change constitutes an opportunity for current agricultural systems in Galicia; one which requires the dismantling of myths about livestock production and the emission of greenhouse gases.</li> <li>- Environmental services are viewed as an opportunity to generate income in rural areas.</li> <li>- The desirable rural environment must take into account environmental aspects in decision making, incorporating environmental costs and benefits in the evaluation of agricultural and forestry production.</li> <li>- As part of the desirable future, some members mention the consolidation of some mountainous areas of high natural value as a self-managed park, with a good provision of services, including internet access.</li> </ul>

### 3.3. Challenges in reaching the vision

In the questionnaire applied to the MAP members, they were also asked to indicate action proposals to tackle the challenges which they considered most important. Table 3 shows the responses, ordered based on the 8 SHERPA topics established for Galicia. These are initial responses, which require greater debate and elucidation, and this will be covered in the meeting planned for September 2020.

**Table 3. Actions proposed by MAP members**

TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTIONS
1. Demographic shift: depopulation, ageing and urbanisation	The launch of actions aimed at facilitating the installation of young people of non-rural origin
2. Climate change and environmental services	Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices
	Actions to take advantage of farm by-products
	Improvement of environmental education of the population (urban and rural), with a special emphasis on protected areas
	Changes in forest management
3. Change in production and diversification of the rural economy	Measures to support owners of spaces of environmental value to guarantee their conservation
	Strategic plan to foster innovation and differentiation of products based on quality. With actions based on improving education, technical assistance and economic and tax incentives.
	Application of a tax policy which promotes the installation of companies in rural areas
4. Infrastructure and basic services	Support for agribusiness and the tertiary sector, based on the social economy
	Improvement of basic services, with special attention to: internet access, education, health, social services, culture, sport and mobility
5. Digitalisation and smart ruralities	Take advantage of new technologies to facilitate remote working in rural areas
	Creation of knowledge centres on relevant sectors for rural areas
	Support public research through universities, with a 50% stake on the part of private companies
	Improvement of human capital in agricultural and agri-food research
	Facilitate financing of R&D+i and the incorporation of talent into rural areas
	Offering of innovative basic services in rural areas
6. Inequalities and well-being in rural areas	Actions to promote and acknowledge the role of women in rural areas
	Measures which permit work-life balance, with a special emphasis on farms
7. Land-use change and competition	Deintensification of livestock production
	Actions which promote the multifunctional use of woodland
	Sustainable improvement of the exploitation of abandoned areas
	Land-use management
	Promotion of leasing of abandoned land for agricultural use
	Strengthen joint woodland management mechanisms
8. Dynamics of the agri-food and forestry sector	Legislative measures which guarantee a minimum price which covers production costs and balanced operation of the agri-food chain
	Promotion of alliances between consumers and agricultural producers
	Create a basic aid per unit of work in the agricultural sector

	Support the creation of food distribution companies, especially cooperatives
	Promotion of short distribution chains
	Public intervention measures in the agricultural sector so that food production remains outside the free market, including setting public prices and quality levels
	Establishment of cooperation mechanisms between agri-food chain actors
	Expansion of aid for the installation of people other than male farmers into farms
	Facilitating the incorporation of women into work on farms through promotion and work-life balance measures
	Improving the education of agricultural producers in terms of quality and food security
	Improving the education of consumers in terms of quality and food security
	Promotion of small ecological agricultural holdings aimed at distribution to the surrounding areas
	General actions to promote ecological agriculture

## 4. Conclusion and next steps

The evaluation of the initial MAP activities, taking into account the exceptional situation in which it began to operate, is clearly positive. The readiness and willingness of the members to participate have been notable, and they have allowed us to obtain results that we consider to be of great interest.

Based on these results, we can summarise the main challenges of the rural areas of Galicia over the next 20 years. In the productive sphere, there is the resolution of the structural deficiencies of the agricultural sector, the consolidation and diversification of forestry production, the development of the agri-food industry and the timber chain, and taking advantage of opportunities in other activities such as renewable energy. With regard to social conditions and quality of life, we have the improvement of services and also of the working conditions for the young population and women as requirements for curbing the depopulation of rural areas. Finally, in the environmental realm, we can stress the need to tackle problems such as forest fires, the effects of climate change and the loss of biodiversity, with the MAP members viewing the Green Deal as an opportunity for the Galician rural environment in this regard. On the other hand, they agreed with the vision of the “three rural Galicias” proposed by the USC team, and therefore consider policies adapted to these different realities to be necessary. It is not thought that COVID-19 will have long-term effects on the rural environment.

Next steps (July-September 2020):

- Send MAP members the initial results of the meeting.
- Continue the process of preparing and analysing the information obtained in the meeting.
- Apply the questionnaire given to active MAP members to other actors (based on the list of external members).
- Prepare the draft Position Paper and send it to the MAP members.
- MAP meeting to debate that draft.
- Draft the final MAP Position Paper.



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