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Interfaces

A VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

MAP Position Paper



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

MAP POSITION PAPER

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN MAP

GERMANY

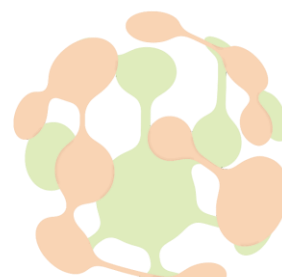
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1. Headline message

This paper is the result of the engagement of the members of the Multi-Actor Platform through different steps of the Delphi process and of the input of more than 80 anonymous respondents to a survey. This short synthesising paper builds on the analysis of the scientific evidence of trends and sustainability issues for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein which was reflected on in introductory meetings and interviews and first workshop with MAP members to discuss what they perceived as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of a future vision of rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. Survey results were discussed in a second workshop with MAP members to reflect on key aspects of a future vision for rural areas from perspectives of representatives of the civil society and practice, research, and the public sector.

The key messages on a future vision of rural areas that can be derived from the participative process and analysis undertaken in the context of the MAP in Schleswig-Holstein are: (i) a future vision includes a transition to sustainable land use systems and regional value chains that ensure the production of food, energy and fibre and provide wider ecosystem services for the benefit of the society; (ii) a future vision emphasises and builds on social innovations to strengthen the appreciation, trust and cooperation between the different actors in socially and culturally viable rural communities; (iii) a future vision emphasises the priority and solutions for a robust digital infrastructure for rural areas; (iv) a rural vision reflects the desire for attractive places to live, work and visit that have a stable social structure with an active cultural life and sufficient infrastructure with regional services; and (v) a future vision needs to be supported by a policy framework that fosters social and human capital in rural communities and enables local actors to actively participate in the governance of rural areas.

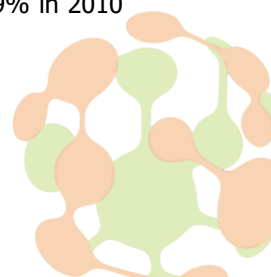
Keywords: *agriculture, sustainability, social innovation, trust, cooperation, value chains, rural community, digitalisation, coastal areas.*

2. Key scientific evidence

Schleswig-Holstein is the northern most of the 16 Federal States in Germany. Schleswig-Holstein is bordering Denmark with close socio-economic and political ties and is uniquely located between the Baltic Sea in the east and the North Sea in the west with a coastline of more than 1000 km. It covers a total area of 15,799 km², of which 97% is rural. Of the total area in Schleswig-Holstein, agricultural land covers nearly 68% and forest land 10%. It has a population of about 2.8 million inhabitants, of which 78% live in predominantly rural areas and 22% live in urban areas. In 2019 the unemployment rate was a little over 5% (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2020). The identification of key trends, challenges and opportunities identified several key themes:

Climate change and environmental services. Main environmental issues include the loss of biodiversity, water quality and eutrophication, wind and soil erosion caused by climate change and increasing flood hazard in coastal areas. A significant increase in storm surge water levels is predicted for this century due to an acceleration in sea-level rise in the Wadden Sea (Hofstede, 2019). A systematic loss of plant species is accompanied by a shift to a more eutrophic landscape. Important ecosystem services such as pollination are affected (e.g., Bruelheide et al., 2020). Intensification of agricultural land use contributed to a negative trend in the farmland bird index (Mitschke, 2017; Sander et al., 2019).

Land-use competition and structural change in agriculture. Agricultural land is converted to housing and transport infrastructure uses and to a smaller extent for reforestation and for ecological compensation measures (Zscheischler et al., 2016). This development is reflected in a decline of the share of agricultural land from 71% in 2005 to 68% in 2018 (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2020). In addition, an increase in biomass production for energetic purposes increases the pressure on arable land competing for land with food and feed production, with local shares of maize cultivation reaching 75 % in some areas (Stolz and Bruns, 2016). The share of renewable energy production (including solar and wind energy) has increased from 29% in 2010 to 69% in 2017 (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2020).



Digitalisation. Broadband coverage in rural areas is still lagging behind. Broadband coverage of more than 16 Mbit/s are available in 64% of Schleswig-Holstein's households but this coverage is concentrated in major towns and their vicinity. As access to high-speed internet in rural areas remains a major challenge a digital strategy has been agreed for Schleswig-Holstein by the regional government in 2018 with the aim that fibre-optic connections should be available to all households and buildings in Schleswig-Holstein by 2025 (Terwitte, 2018).

Demographic shift. The region of Schleswig-Holstein increasingly faces the negative effects of an ageing society, a decline of the population in rural areas and a sharp decline in the labour force. The population decline is projected to reach in some rural parts of the region more than 5% between 2020 and 2030 and nearly 40% of the population will be older than 60 years (Ministry of the Interior, Rural Areas, Integration and Equality, 2016). The demographic changes are challenges for the economic and social sustainability of rural areas potentially leading to fewer innovations in the main economic sectors such as agriculture and forestry, requiring new infrastructure to improve the mobility in rural areas and growing need and importance of health and social services.

These key issues are also reflected in the Rural Development Programme for Schleswig-Holstein which focuses on the priority areas of restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, and to improve structures including a coast protection plan with support for flood protection (EC, 2020).

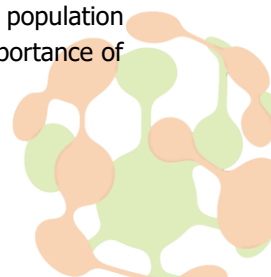
3. Summary of the outcomes of the Delphi

The DELPHI process was carried out in the period from May to October. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews and group discussions were carried out online covering the three groups of MAP members of Science (3 people), Policy (3) and Society (8). A survey targeting a wider audience of rural actors was launched in September and distributed through the networks of the MAP members. The aim of the survey was to identify key challenges and opportunities, enablers and barriers to rural development in Schleswig Holstein up until 2040. The survey was based on previous desk analysis and contributions from the interviews and group discussions. The survey obtained 81 responses. A second workshop with the MAP members was held online on the 28th of October. The aim of the workshop was to discuss findings from the previous steps, including preliminary results of the survey, and to inform the finalisation of this paper.

Based on the outlined process, a synthesis of the challenges and opportunities, the desirable future for 2040; and the enablers to achieve the vision for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein is provided in the following sections.

3.1. Challenges and opportunities in the next 20 years

The interviews conducted with MAP members provided first insights into particular views of future challenges and opportunities of rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. The discussion of future challenges and opportunities was informed by the perceived strengths and weaknesses of rural areas. Lack of industries and weak digital infrastructure were seen as particular weaknesses of rural areas. These weaknesses were contrasted by a range of strengths such as the geographic location with close ties to different Danish regions, major urban centres (e.g., Hamburg and Copenhagen) and coastal areas on two different seas. The geographic location provides major opportunities for tourism and bioenergy sectors as well as favourable conditions for agricultural production in terms of fertile soils, moderate temperatures and sufficient rainfall. Specific opportunities exist in utilising the potential for tourism in the development of local value chains and on-farm value processing and marketing strengthening the cultural importance of local produce. But the coastal location combined with climate change and changes in extreme weather events also results in increased risks of severe flooding in coastal areas and coastal protection remains one of the main challenges. Prime agricultural locations combined with the structural change have favoured intensive agricultural production which contributed to environmental challenges such as eutrophication and biodiversity loss. Changes in the expectation and requirements of the society for agriculture towards higher level of sustainability and the transformation of some rural areas with changing population structures were emphasised as further challenges. In addition, several interviews highlighted the importance of



trust between different rural actors and the implementation and facilitation of trust-building measures and approaches. Low appreciation and awareness of the contribution of different actors such as farmers to the social and socio-cultural capital of rural areas was cited as one factor that contributed to the lack of trust between actors. In this context, agricultural policies were highlighted as a negative driver that contributed to divisions between rural actors.

The initial insights from the interviews were used as a basis to design the survey questions. One question addressed the major challenges that rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein are expected to face during the next 20 years. Survey respondents confirmed the insights from the interviews and highlighted tackling weak digital infrastructure as the most important challenge. A little over 95% of the respondents felt that the digital infrastructure is extremely or very important. In addition, the following three issues were seen as very important challenges by more than 80% of the respondents: the provision of high-quality education and training and land availability for agricultural production and local processing of energy, food, drink and fibre. In addition to the multiple-choice options, the respondents could also provide open-ended answers. Respondents emphasised challenges relating to the allocation of more decision-making power to local community for financing targeted measures and for planning laws and regulations.

A subsequent survey question focussed on the opportunities for rural areas and asked survey participants to judge on the importance of a menu of different pre-defined opportunity statements. Nearly 90% of the respondents indicated that improved cooperation between different actors (e.g., communities, land managers, land owners, public authorities, businesses, researchers) is a very important opportunity in the next twenty years. About 80% of the respondents felt that improving regional value chains is a very important opportunity. And still three quarter of the respondents judged the development of new local governance structures, improved digital infrastructure and social innovations to improve trust amongst actors as very important opportunities for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. The responses on the opportunities of rural areas were also reflected in the answers on the open question on required measures to improve the resilience of rural areas. Measures that were frequently suggested were improving broadband coverage, improving social infrastructures, reduction of bureaucracy in administrations and policy implementation (but maintaining a transparent approach) and ensuring primary production. Furthermore, reference to pandemics such as the Covid-19 pandemic was made and improvements in rural health services and the importance of strengthening local infrastructure and supply emphasised.

3.2. Desirable future for 2040

A desirable future for rural areas in 20 years was characterised by being attractive places to live, work and visit that have a stable social structure with an active cultural life and sufficient infrastructure with regional services. Emphasised was that elderly residents are integrated and actively contribute to the social and cultural life of rural areas. Children and young people know and appreciate their particular region and are connected with the cultural values. School education is vivid and includes the surrounding area.

A particular emphasis was given to the role of agriculture in future rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. The desire was expressed that agriculture is again more at the centre of society with high appreciation and trustful relationships between the different actors, for example achieved through visits and campaigns to kindergartens and schools and also through regional marketing. Specifically, on a vision for future agriculture a wide range of different, partly conflicting, characteristics were emphasised. Farming activities are diversified and family-run with various production, marketing and income alternatives. An increased share of farms pursues direct marketing of their produce, contribute to additional socio-cultural values, are regionally anchored, preserve the cultural landscape and actively contribute to climate protection through adapted business practices and new business areas. It was also emphasised that farming will be done by modern businesses with larger units compared to 2020 that are digitally equipped with external labour and livestock systems using stables with high animal comfort.

In the survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree to a set of statements describing possible key characteristics of rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein in 2040 (Figure 1).

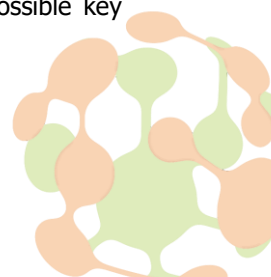
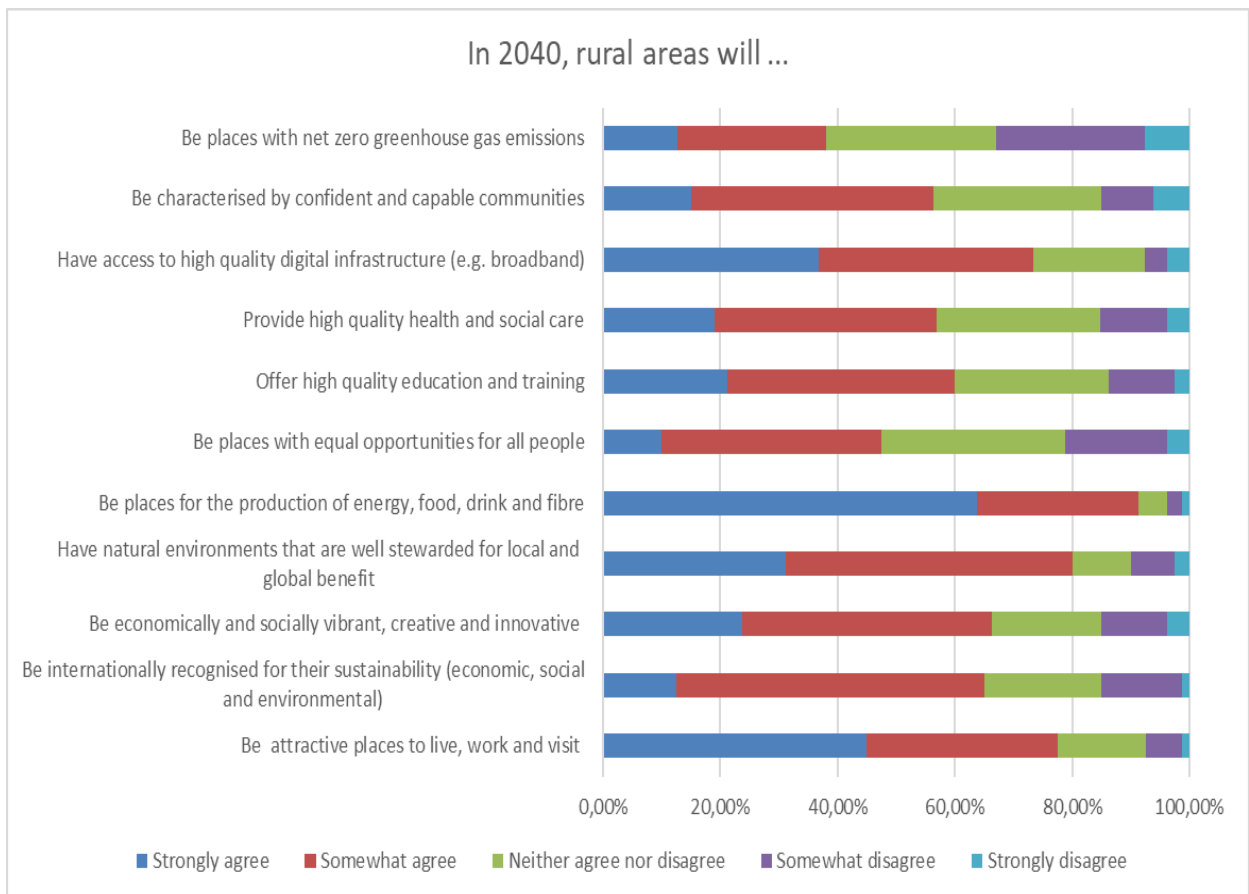


Figure 1. Rural areas in 2040

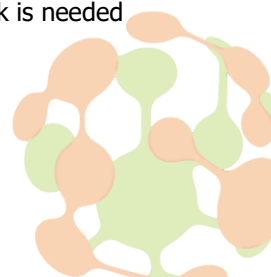


Nearly all respondents (91%) agreed that rural areas will be places for the production of energy, food, drink and fibre. But at the same time 80% of the respondents also agreed that rural areas will have natural environments that are well stewarded for local and global benefits. This is in line with the opportunities seen for rural areas in future sustainable agricultural and forestry systems. The majority of stakeholders (nearly 80%) also believe and desire that rural areas will be attractive places to live, work and visit confirming views expressed in the interviews and express the expectation that the challenge of improving the digital infrastructure in rural areas will be successfully dealt with by 2040.

3.3. Enablers to achieve the vision

At the second workshop with MAP members key factors and required changes were discussed that enable the achievement of the rural vision. Building on the results of the survey the focus of the discussion was on changes in the governance of rural areas and in the capacity building of rural communities.

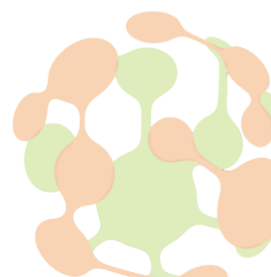
A transition to sustainable land use systems and regional value chains that ensure the viable production of food, energy and fibre and the provision of wider ecosystem services for the benefit of the society is seen as a central element in a future vision for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein. Rural policies have an important role in supporting the achievement of a future rural vision. There is scope to reduce the bureaucracy of current policy support focussing on policy approaches that foster social and human capital of rural communities and ensure an adequate remuneration of wider ecosystem services provided by land managers. But attention must be paid to maintaining transparency for which services and results policy support will be provided. The requirements of maintaining a land management diary and involvement farming peers in policy monitoring and advice can rebuild lost trust between practice and policy. In addition, improved digital infrastructure reduces bureaucratic processes and transaction cost involved implementing and administering policy support. Generally, policy framework is needed



that enables local rural actors to actively participate in the governance of rural areas and the related decision-making.

Networking and capacity building activities are important to increase trust between different rural actors. Food policy councils were highlighted as one of those trust-building activities that have the potential to reconnect producers and consumers as a basis to strengthen regional value chains. The importance of who is initiating the trust building activities was raised. The key for successful trust-building activities is acceptance by all involved rural (and urban) actors, which is largely influenced by who has initiated the activities.

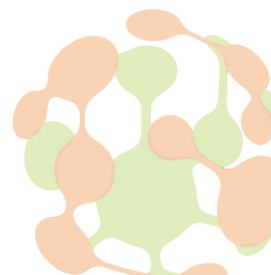
A range of different visioning activities exist that are (or were) initiated by different actors or small actor networks at local level as well as by actors at national and European level. A more coordinated process would be desirable that brings together the different initiatives to ensure the added value and contributions to a vision for rural areas that is accepted by all actors. Research infrastructures can play an important role in the coordination of the process.



Annex 1. Methodology used in the MAP

The position paper is based on a Delphi method that has been applied in 6 steps from April – November 2020.

1. Step 1 – Review of trends and key issues in rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein (April – May): Secondary data collected from official statistics were analysed to identify main socio-economic and environmental trends. In addition, a literature review of the scientific evidence and strategic regional policy documents was conducted.
2. Step 2 – Introductory interviews of key MAP members to reflect on emerging key trends and to identify additional grey literature and key actors to be invited to the MAP (May)
3. Step 3 - Interviews and first workshop with MAP members (June - July): 4 interviews with selected MAP members covering the three different main types of actors (society, policy and research) and a workshop with 9 MAP members were carried out to discuss the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein in the next 20 years.
4. Step 4 – Synthesis of results from the contextual analysis, interviews and workshop informing the themes and questions of the survey of rural actors in Schleswig-Holstein (July – August);
5. Step 5 – Survey of rural actors (September - October). An online questionnaire was developed with a set of 15 questions based on the previous findings. The purpose of the survey was to collect a wider range of opinions on the challenges, opportunities and vision for rural areas in Schleswig-Holstein to 2040. The questionnaire included multiple choice and open questions. The questionnaire was run through SurveyMonkey and disseminated through various networks of rural actors. The survey collected more than 80 responses, out of which 65% are actors of the category society, 20% are representatives of policy actors and 15% are representatives of science and education actors.
6. Step 6 – Second workshop with 10 MAP members to discuss preliminary survey results on future rural visions and policy implications and key issues for the draft position paper (October);
7. Step 7 – Finalisation of the paper considering the results of the workshop discussion and final responses to the survey, which has been extended to November (November).



Annex 2. References

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