



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

MAP Position Paper

ALTERNATIVE RURAL FUTURES (FORESIGHT)



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<https://rural-interfaces.eu/maps/portugal-centro/>



1. Headline messages

This second cycle of the MAP RURAL_PT followed the SHERPA Discussion Paper methodological steps for the execution of the MAP foresight exercise. Throughout this cycle, the whole foresight exercise was done with the exploratory scenarios provided by the Joint Research Centre (JRC)¹, which argues that through foresight, it is possible to encourage future-oriented thinking. This exercise was structured in two workshops: Workshop 1 was an individual reflection; Workshop 2 was a group activity.

In the first workshop, a work plan was sent out for MAP members to reflect individually, and present their contributions to the following exercises: i) Framing the Centro region's (CR) current context in the JRC exploratory scenario matrix, taking into account the two priority axes (Rural Demography and Governance); ii) Revisiting the priorities, challenges and opportunities of the Centro region, based on the vision defined in the 1st MAP cycle; iii) Framing the Centro region, in the context of the desirable future, again in the JRC exploratory scenario matrix, based on the revisited vision. A total of four contributions were received, two from policy members and two from members of society. After analysing the contributions received it was clear that there were two distinct perspectives of the Centro region in the current scenario ("Rurbanities" and "Rural Specialisation") and two visions with distinct ambitions ("Rural Renewal" and "Rural Connections").

The second workshop was animated in an on-line group session, with a total of 6 MAP members (two members from society, three policy members, one member from science). In this session the work plan was structured as follows: a) Presentation of Workshop 1 results; b) Discussion and agreement on the positioning of the vision in the "new desirable future", item iii of the agenda of Workshop 1; c) Identification of objectives and achievable goals to reach the vision of the "new desirable future"; d) Main actions or initiatives that will be necessary to carry out until 2040 to achieve the vision in the "new desirable future". This workshop, despite not having had a representative from each of the three levels of local actors (policy, science, and society), allowed the collection of remarkably interesting information to understand exactly the typology of local policies that will be necessary to implement in the coming years. This was undoubtedly the testimony of those who operate and are in the field.

2. Outcomes of the foresight exercise

2.1. Current context of the MAP

In the current context of the MAP RURAL_PT, the Centro region was placed in two distinct quadrants according to the arguments provided by the local stakeholders, who actively participated in this exercise (Figure 1):

- **MAP RURAL_PT in the current scenario "Rurbanities":** In this scenario, rural demography is expanding, and governance is fragmented, the main motivations for placing the Centro region in this quadrant were the following:
 - Concern of rural territories to promote conditions to improve the quality of life for population settlement and new job opportunities.
 - Rural expansion in some territories.
 - National and regional approaches not well coordinated among themselves.

¹ The four scenarios were presented at the Rural Vision Week (22-26 April 2021) and are available here: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/2_maciej-krzysztofowicz-ppt2-pl2-day1_0.pdf



- Promotion of entrepreneurship, digitalisation of sectors and technological transition.
- **MAP RURAL_PT in the current scenario “Rural Specialisation”:** The Centro region has been in this scenario where rural demography is decreasing and governance is fragmented, according to the following arguments:
 - Sharp demographic decline - between 2011 and 2040 the CR will lose 13% of its total population (-36% young, -29% active, +49% elderly). The loss of young and active people and the gain of elderly people will be much more pronounced in rural areas. The situation relating to active people could be minimised (-20%) with a significant attraction of immigrants (15,000 per year by 2040).
 - Deficit in the articulation and coordination of sectoral policies between the various levels of power and the same levels of power in different territories.
 - Territorial disarticulation.
 - Sectoral incoordination (i.e., forest fires in 2017 in Portugal).
 - Difficulty in coordination and disarticulation between community funds and governmental areas (i.e., Common Agricultural Policy out of step with Cohesion Policy).

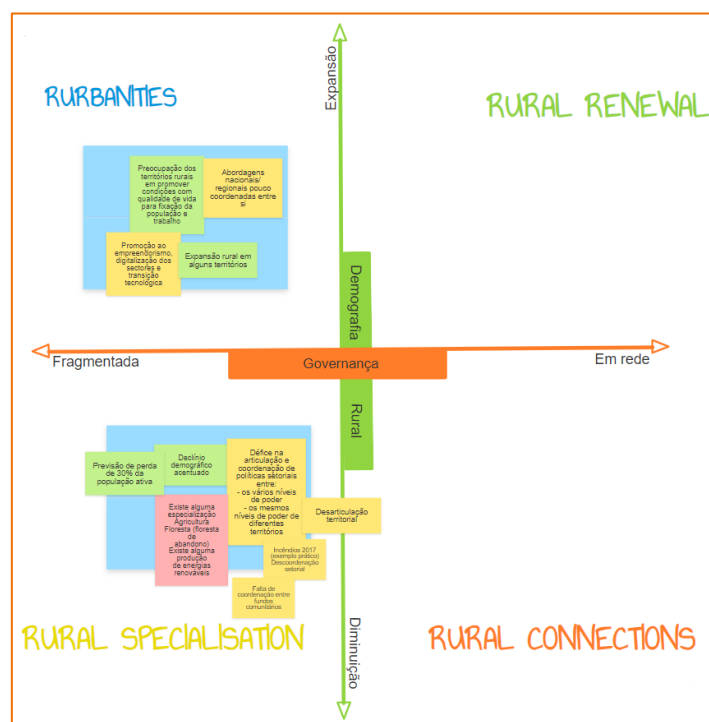


Figure 1 - The current context of the Centre region in the JRC scenarios.

2.2. Desirable future of the MAP

Before positioning the Centro region in the desirable future, it was necessary to revisit the priorities, opportunities and challenges defined in the vision of the 1st MAP cycle and redefine or structure them while creating a new MAP vision, in this 2nd cycle. Thus, the following results were obtained (figure 2):

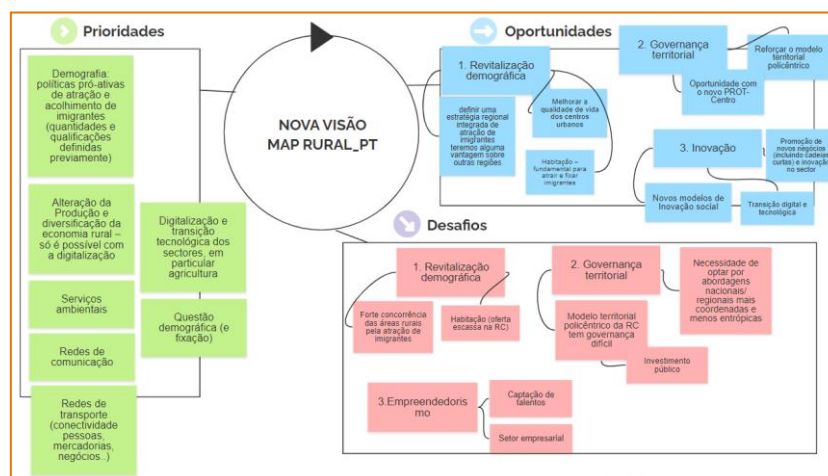


Figure 2 - Priorities, opportunities, and challenges for the new vision of the RURAL_PT.

Regarding priorities, members detailed priorities already identified in the 1st cycle vision (P_1), and defined new priorities for this 2nd cycle vision (NP_2), obtaining the following contributions:

- **P_1:** Proactive policies to attract and welcome immigrants (quantities and qualifications defined in advance).
- **P_1:** Change in production and diversification of the rural economy.
- **P_1:** Environmental services.
- **P_1:** Digitalisation and technological transition of the sectors, particularly agriculture.
- **NP_2:** Improvement of the quality of life to increase population settlement.
- **NP_2:** Communication networks.
- **NP_2:** Transport networks (connectivity between people, services/goods, businesses).

Based on the priorities defined in this new MAP vision, the main opportunities were identified in three main areas: i) Demographic Revitalisation; ii) Territorial Governance; iii) Innovation:

- **Demographic Revitalisation:**
 - Definition of an integrated regional strategy to attract immigrants.
 - Improving the quality of life in urban centres.
 - Guarantee of housing stock - fundamental for attracting and settling immigrants as well as the active population.
- **Territorial Governance:**
 - Opportunity with the new Regional Programme for Spatial Planning in the Centre Region.(PROT-Centro) to define integrated territorial and sectorial policies.
 - Reinforcement of the polycentric territorial model.
- **Innovation:**
 - Promotion of new businesses (including short chains) and innovation in the sector.
 - New models of Social Innovation.
 - Digital and technological transition.

Subsequently, the main challenges for the new vision of the Centro region were identified, based on the priorities and opportunities identified in this same exercise, considering the following central axes: i) Demographic Revitalisation; ii) Territorial Governance; iii) Entrepreneurship:

- **Demographic Revitalisation:**

- Strong competition for attracting immigrants: urban areas have an advantage over rural areas.
- Supply of housing stock.
- Availability of services to the community.
- An ageing local population.
- Low birth rates.
- **Territorial Governance:**
 - Polycentric territorial model of the Centro region has difficult governance.
 - Adoption of national and regional approaches are not well coordinated but more entropic.
- **Entrepreneurship:**
 - Talent capture.
 - Business sector.

After this redefinition of the new vision of the MAP RURAL_PT, the exercise of locating this new vision of the Centro region in the JRC exploratory scenarios matrix was carried out (Figure 3). Based on the group discussion, the members reached the understanding that the most accurate location would be mostly in the "Rural Connections" scenario, moving towards the "Rural Renewal" scenario, in the rural demography axis. The main arguments for the definition of this location were:

- Minimising population loss.
- Social innovation, including networking and active population advocacy.
- Strategic and open governance.
- Greater articulation between the various levels of power.
- Integrated sectorial policies.
- A more networked Region.
- Promotion of short and long value chains (valorisation and internationalisation).
- Digital and technological transition.

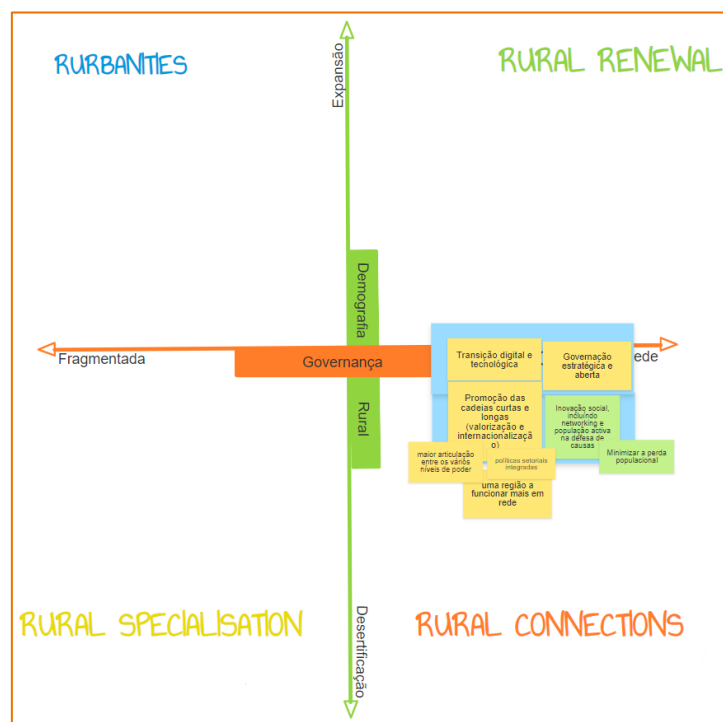


Figure 3 - Placement of the Central Region in the new desirable future, in the JRC scenarios.

2.3. Goals and targets of the MAP

Through the identification of the priorities of the new MAP vision, the next exercise aimed at identifying concrete objectives to answer the question "What needs to be changed in the Centro region to achieve the desirable future?". This was a dynamic exercise, as each member wrote directly in the online platform their contributions, obtaining the following results (Figure 4):

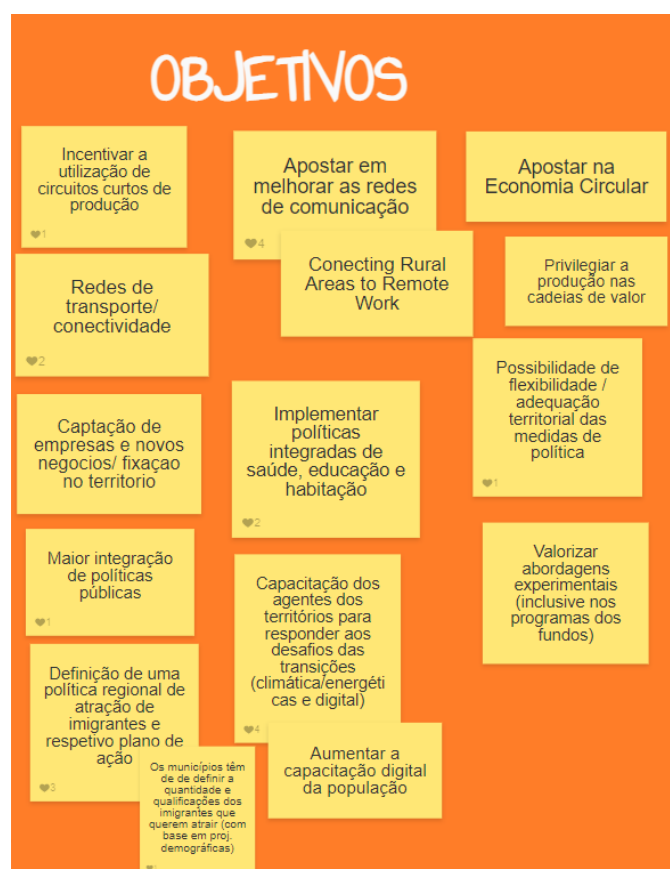


Figure 4 – Concrete objectives defined for the Centre region to reach the desirable future.

The outputs gathered from this joint reflection, were the following:

- Encourage the use of short production circuits.
- Improve the transport network.
- Attracting companies and new businesses/settling in the territory.
- Greater integration of public policies (health, education, and housing).
- Definition of a regional policy to attract immigrants and respective action plan.
 - Definition of the quantity and qualifications of immigrants to be attracted (based on demographic projections).
- Investing in improving communication networks.
 - Connecting rural areas for remote working.
- Capacity building of actors in the territories to answer climate, energy, and digital transitions challenges.
- Investing in the circular economy.
- Favouring production in value chains.
- Enabling flexibility / territorial adequacy of policy measures.
- Valuing experimental approaches (including in fund programmes).

It is important to understand that the local agents have a panoply of objectives for the Centro region until 2040, and there is a lot of work to be done to achieve the desirable future. However, due to it not being possible, within the scope of this cycle, to define actions and initiatives for all of the objectives identified in Figure 4, it was necessary to undertake a new exercise to identify the 3 priority objectives, which were agreed as:

1. Definition of a **regional policy to attract immigrants** and the respective action plan, based on demographic projections (quantity and qualifications).
2. Commitment **to improving communication networks** (e.g., Connecting rural areas to remote work).
3. **Capacity building of actors in the territories** to answer to the challenges of the climate, energy, and digital transitions, to become more active in their territories.

2.4. Pathways identified by the MAP

The next stage of this foresight exercise consisted in identifying the main actions and initiatives that should be placed on municipal agendas in liaison with the different local agents, to achieve the desirable future of the Centro region by 2040, based on the priority objectives defined in the previous stage.

1. Regional policy for attracting immigrants

- Replicate the reception centres and immigration centres (e.g., Fundão).
- Create a regional entity (observatory?) to:
 - Anticipate immigrant needs (skilled and unskilled labour) of companies and institutions based on demographic projections and economic evolution scenarios.
 - Prospect labour from abroad, according to identified needs and liaise with companies and institutions in the CR.
 - Support municipalities in demographic projections and their use, namely for the definition of immigrant attraction targets.
- Implement a public management network of immigrant attraction and integration and replicate it in municipal centres duly supported by public institutions.
- Specific and welcoming programmes for the inclusion of refugees in rural territories:
 - Create incentive programmes for the settlement of new people in rural territories, focused on housing, employability, cultural and social agenda.
 - Joint cultural and social actions between the resident population and refugees/immigrants/temporary workers for greater and better integration in the territories (e.g.: In Fundão, on Christmas Day, refugees and immigrants cooked for the local population).
- Greater dialogue between institutions (SEF, SS, CCDR, Employment Centre, municipalities, ACT, educational institutions) for the integration of immigrants.
- Create conditions to be able to attract active young people from other countries.
- Create a structured programme of incentives to compete directly with the housing and employability conditions of young people settled on the coast.
- Turning temporary labour into permanent labour by considering the agricultural calendar (complete annual cycle of work between rural territories).
- Less intensive and socially responsible agricultural models.
- Integrated measures for immigrants (e.g., placing them in central regions with good communication and transport networks):
 - Facilitating rural mobility.
- Awareness campaigns for the local population on the benefits of immigration.

2. Improvement of communication networks

- Create a cluster of networking spaces in the Centro region.
- Integrate the priorities identified for improving the digital communication network in the Regional Operational Programme.
- Digitalising the economy means increasing broadband coverage.

- Installation of networks that allow communication protocols (e.g., in agriculture, as it allows the communication of sensors and empower farmers in the future).
- Guaranteeing better conditions of the communication network will make possible a decentralisation of the active population to rural areas, in a telework regime.

3. Capacity building for actors in the territories

- Digital transformation with increased capacity building.
- Investing in dissemination techniques and being closer to farmers.
- Facilitate the relationship between sectors, actors, and projects, interfacing with networking
- Promote capacity building of farmers based on their needs.
- To link the concept of innovation to the component of capacity building (transfer of knowledge between rural territories and urban centres).

It is also important to identify some barriers in the Centro region that need to be overcome to achieve the desirable future by 2040, highlighting:

- The Partnership Agreement between the different funds of the European Union, applicable to Portugal, should facilitate the integration of agriculture as a beneficiary of extra-EAFRD support and should allow approaches in the territory that are financed by multi-fund instruments (which apparently is not foreseen in the next programming period)
- The EC published the Common Exposures Regulation separately to the PEPAC Regulation, and then afterwards published a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas calling for articulation.
- Potential problems of xenophobia in the arrival of immigrants in rural areas:
 - Initial negative impact of local people with the arrival of refugees/immigrants/temporary workers due to ignorance and fear.
- Lack of broadband accessibility / internet network throughout the territory

2.5. Adjustment(s) towards the vision

For the last part of the exercise, a question was introduced to the working group "Is the current situation of the Centro region in line with the pathways identified in the process?". Since the previous step focused essentially on the actions and initiatives that the Centro region will have to work on to move towards the desirable future in 2040, this question was not answered for the dimension and representative of sector agents present at the workshop, since the discussion in this session was in general quite consensual among all members present.

However, it was suggested that this same exercise be carried out in a broader working discussion, with greater representativeness of the sector agents and with different perspectives according to their area of activity, assessing the degree of consensus of this same group.

3. Recommendations and conclusions

In this second cycle of the MAP RURAL_PT, the foresight exercise was substantially relevant to, in a first phase, listen to the local agents about the current situation of the Centro region regarding the two central axes: i) governance; ii) rural demography. And, in a second phase, to outline the desirable future for the region and the necessary path to get there.

The Centro region, in the current context, and from the point of view of the representative members in the work session, finds itself between two possible scenarios: "Rurbanities" and "Rural specialisation", with the rural demography axis being the determining factor for this indecision. However, it is agreed that governance

is very fragmented, with great difficulty in territorial coordination and disarticulation between governmental areas and sectorial policies at different levels of power and between rural territories.

Consequently, the placement of the Centro region at the JRC matrix, as well as the long-term vision for 2040, were consensually agreed. The MAP members considered that network governance, more structured and integrated between the different policies bodies and local agents, and a growth in rural demography will be of fundamental importance. Despite not being on the immediate agenda, the must be on the political agendas of the municipalities with the sustained involvement of the local population.

This region has a long way to go to reach the desirable future in 2040. Before moving forward with more regional policies, it is necessary, in a first stage, to improve the sectorial coordination and dialogue between the different governmental areas, not only between levels of power, but also within the same levels of power between different territories within the Centro region. Only after this first territorial policy organisation is seen to work, will the region be prepared to work on the three priority objectives until 2040, identified by the local agents actively involved in the work done of this foresight exercise: i) regional policy to attract immigrants; ii) improvement of communication networks; iii) capacity building of agents in the territories.

4. Acknowledgement

Please acknowledge the participants in the development of the Position Paper, providers of the data, and the SHERPA project.

We would like to thank all the MAP Members that promptly responded to all the proposed challenges throughout this 2nd cycle of the MAP RURAL_PT.

This 2nd cycle coincided with a period of reformulations and discussions at the level of territorial development policies and with the electoral period of the municipalities, which made it difficult to involve and engage the different sector actors throughout the cycle. However, it is important to highlight the quality and the grounds presented by the MAP members in all the proposed challenges and which culminated in this Position Paper, which clearly reflects the perspectives of those who are on the field and those who fight daily for the Centro region's path to be as close as possible to the new "desirable future".

5. References

Krzysztofowicz, M. Competence Centre on foresight, JRC. #rural2040 / Rural areas 2040 – building future scenarios. The four scenarios were presented at the Rural Vision Week (22-26 April 2021) and are available here: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/2021-04/maciej-krzysztofowicz-ppt2-pl2-day1_0.pdf

Annex 1. Methodology used in the MAP

This 2nd cycle of the MAP was composed of the MAP members from the 1st cycle, with actors from policy, society and science, a facilitator and a moderator, partners of the SHERPA project.

The foresight exercise carried out in this 2nd cycle of the MAP RURAL_PT followed the methodology proposed in the Sherpa Discussion Paper. This document served as a dynamic action plan, as it clearly described the procedure that each MAP should follow to achieve the final goal.

The Discussion Paper's explanation of the JRC's exploratory scenarios were useful and sufficient, and served as a basis to present the scenarios to the MAP members in a clear, simple, and easy-to-understand way, considering the target audience. The use of the exploratory scenarios was a winning procedure in this foresight exercise, as it guided the members' discussions and allowed for a better local perspective of the Centro region, about governance and rural demography. Added to this, the back-casting approach was also very useful in the last phase of the exercise, as it helped to place the Centro region in the desirable future, while at the same time forcing a return to the present for the definition of what actions and initiatives could be used to get there.

However, due to the critical period of work among the different agents of the sector, with restructuring and discussions around rural development policies and the electoral period in Portugal, it was necessary to readjust the procedure of Workshop 1. This one was not face-to-face, but adapted to an individual reflection work, through which each member was asked to send their contributions in the document prepared for this purpose.

Afterwards, and before Workshop 2, the facilitator analysed all the collected contributions and aggregated them in a digital platform for group work called Klaxoon. This platform allowed, through a whiteboard, group work dynamics that served as a guide and work tool in Workshop 2. Due to the short duration of this last workshop, it was not possible to fulfil all the objectives foreseen in the methodology defined in the Discussion Paper. The aspects left unfulfilled were mainly at the level of the definition of goals for the concrete objectives, as well as in the identification of the main necessary resources, actors involved, and main infrastructural and immaterial barriers to the actions or initiatives required for the Centro region to achieve the new future desirable in 2040.

The only issue raised by the MAP members regarding the methodology of the foresight exercise was that the last part of the exercise, in which it was necessary to reassess the initial priorities and the current context given the paths defined for 2040, should not be done with the second workshop group, since it was not representative of all territorial and sectorial agents. They suggested that this last part should be done in a new group activity with a greater diversity of agents from local areas of action, where we would possibly have distinct and more interesting opinions for territorial policies.

All the results collected throughout the whole foresight exercise were aggregated in this Position Paper, which was later shared with all MAP members.



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