Rural-urban interactions: enhancing synergies

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About ROBUST

Overall goals:

1. Better understand interactions and dependencies between rural and urban areas

2. Promote governance arrangements and policies that foster mutually beneficial relations

Multi-actor project
11 Living Labs & 5 thematic Communities of Practice

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Main challenge: urban – rural dichotomy

- Urban vs rural policies (e.g., food = agriculture = rural; culture = creativity = urban)
- Urban vs rural images (cities as hotspots of modernity and creativity; rural areas as backward and dull and lagging behind)
- Urban vs rural investments (boosting economic development vs combatting marginalization, depopulation and economic decline)
- Rural as subordinate to urban (rural services to cater for urban needs)

Important to focus on rural-urban relations, stressing the inter-connection, inter-dependence and blending of the rural and the urban.

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Opportunities and trends

- Inter-municipal collaboration between 'urban' and 'rural' municipalities (e.g., social services, mobility, spatial planning, employment)
- Rural-urban public-private partnerships and governance arrangements (e.g., ecosystem service provision by farmers' collectives funded by cities)
- City-region food strategies / policies (and food policy councils as governance arrangement)

- COVID-19: rediscovery and re-appreciation of rural areas nearby; growth of local food networks; counter-urbanization & teleworking; (social) services & infrastructures in rural areas

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Example 1: REGIOtim Styria (Austria)

- Multimodal mobility node-system "tim – täglich.intelligent.mobil." developed by the city of Graz.
- Public transport is combined with e-car sharing, public charging stations, bicycle parking, micro-public transport and other functions, creating a flexible offer to meet the mobility needs in the region.
- Adapted to peripheral rural environment in the Metropolitan Area of Styria
- *See https://rural-urban.eu/publications/good-practice-regiotim-%E2%80%93-multi%E2%80%90modal-mobility-network*
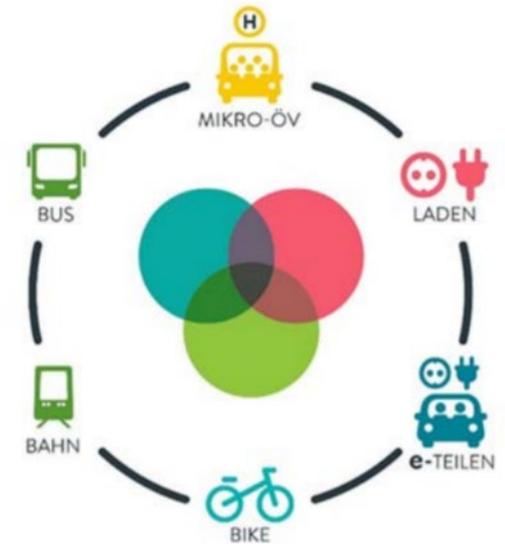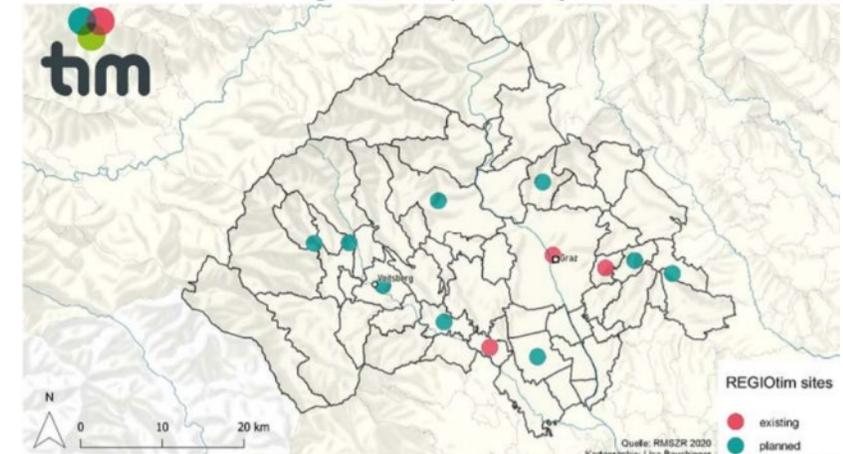

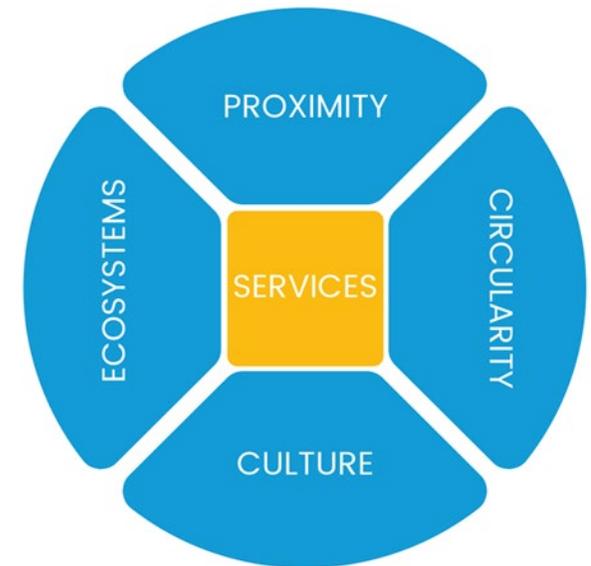Figure 1: Components of a tim node; Source: RMSZR

Example 2: Local food (Ljubljana region)

- Revival of farmer's markets in Ljubljana region
  - Counterurbanization / spread of urban lifestyles to smaller towns and rural areas
  - Growing demand for locally produced food
  - Driven by the Local Action Group "For Town and Village" and supported by the municipal authorities of Medvode, Domžale, Komenda, Mengeš, Trzin and Vodice
  - Municipal authorities provide a suitable space and basis services.
  - Different governance arrangements for these markets

See https://rural-urban.eu/publications/revival-local-farmers%E2%80%99-markets-ljubljana-urban-region

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Rural (- urban) futures

- Rural development ≠ growth of GDP, but producing essential daily services and social and material infrastructure needed to sustain / improve quality of life
- Key is social value of services and their contributions to wellbeing
- Five main domains / building blocks:
  - Social services (availability, access, quality)
  - Social and spatial proximity relations
  - Circularity (circular economy)
  - Culture & heritage
  - Ecosystem services

What is needed to realize this?

- New economic models (doughnut, foundational, wellbeing, circular)
- Building community wealth through anchor institutions (e.g., schools, health care)
- Place-based rural-urban governance arrangements (key role for local governments)
  - Build on and learn from well-working arrangements
- Rural proofing of urban policies, but also urban proofing of rural policies

Rural-urban synergies are key to ensure the accessibility of basic services in rural places (and keep those places 'liveable') in exchange for contributing to the socio-ecological foundation of urban areas through other dimensions (ecosystems, circularity, etc.).

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Thank you very much!

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