

# Urban and Rural Links: The Key for a Sustainable Future for Our Territories

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**Abstract:** This article aims to take a cross-sectional look at what may be some of the urban planning strategies that allow us to deal with the sustainable future of our territories, relying on the necessary link between the two main realities where we live, and which are apparently antagonistic: the Urban and the Rural Worlds. To do this, this study is structured in a series of sections that address the subject from different perspectives, but respond to a common argument discourse that allows them to be put in mutual relationship. From this perspective, some preliminary questions are introduced that must be taken into account in the study of the urban-rural relationships, to then identify the most important work topics. The scenario study has helped to develop a methodological and strategic discourse that can contribute to the improvement of these relationships, and the paper finishes with some conclusions of the study. This document seeks to provide some reflections and tools that can help to address the problem of our cities and our territories in the search for a better quality of life.

**Keywords:** rural environment; rural nuclei; territory balance

## 1. The Scenario: The Dichotomy and The Urban-Rural Links

There is often a tendency to see urban and rural areas as antagonistic, and to understand that both realities are completely exclusive. It goes without saying that this view could not be more wrong and counterproductive, since only from a joint perspective can we face the challenges of both realities ([Tacoli, 1998](#)). Moreover, the links between the urban and rural worlds have gained relevance in recent territorial debates ([Llop Torné, 2022](#)), and also regarding globalization and new technologies. And for the surviving of our cities, we need the rural approach and complicity.

So, we should not fall into the temptation to read rural land as a reality distant and contrary to our cities, yet it is essential to understand that both realities are part of a single and comprehensive system, and that it is only from this systemic, attentive and intentional reading of the territory that we will be able to glimpse improvement strategies for our urban environment. It is therefore evident that to address the difficulties and specificities of our cities it is necessary to take into account the territory as a whole, understanding the synergies that are generated between them and the nearby rural nuclei and their environment.

It is more than evident that rural areas close to cities are playing an increasingly important role in joint economic dynamics, while the collective experience on teleworking resulting from the pandemic has also involved the most remote rural nuclei ([González, 2022](#)). All these changes we are experiencing require us to take advantage of and benefit from these trends to build and develop win-win scenarios for both urban and rural environments, based on well-coordinated and integrated strategies between all administrations and jurisdictions.

We must therefore be optimistic about the problems arising from the gap between urban and rural environments, but there is still much work to be done to further reduce distances and optimise synergies. In fact, the starting point we find ourselves in at the moment, although future expectations may be



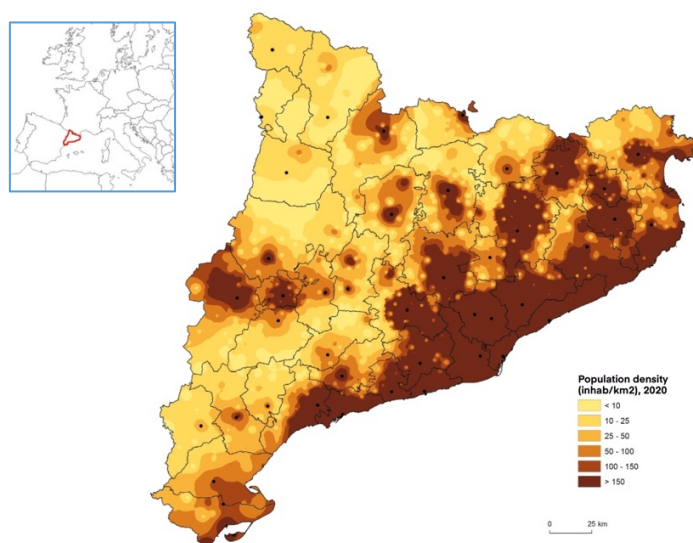
optimistic, is not too encouraging, especially for two reasons: due to the low population densities of our rural land and the limited economic dynamics they are experiencing.

The rural territory is highly complex and diverse, although one might think that its dynamics are far from being as complicated as in the urban environment. In addition, the perception of the rural world is very subjective, socially and culturally multifaceted, and highly dependent on the economic dynamics derived from great cities. It is a space very rich in singularities and heritage, with endemic elements that define its character, and that make it especially attractive to escape from the city, but it also shows some functional attributes that can help the strategies to be implemented in our cities, particularly if we consider together the urban-rural reality as an integrated system.

Is in this scenario that we must introduce the **mobility** concept, as a basic item of our lives. If we take a look at our cities, we will see that during the day they have a lot of social activity, but towards evening many of its inhabitants move to dormitory cities emptying their centers. If we look at where the population is distributed during the festive periods, we will see also how the population is distributed over the less densified territories. We are urban and rural at the same time, and we need to maintain our bond to nature: we use an **hybrid vital space**. This has a strong impact on the region, especially affecting other items such as access to housing. This increased mobility often creates a high demand for housing, particularly for second homes, which significantly raises local housing prices. As a result, local and future permanent residents are displaced because they cannot afford the high purchase or rental prices, leading to a very concerning form of rural gentrification.

## 2. The Starting Point to the Discussion

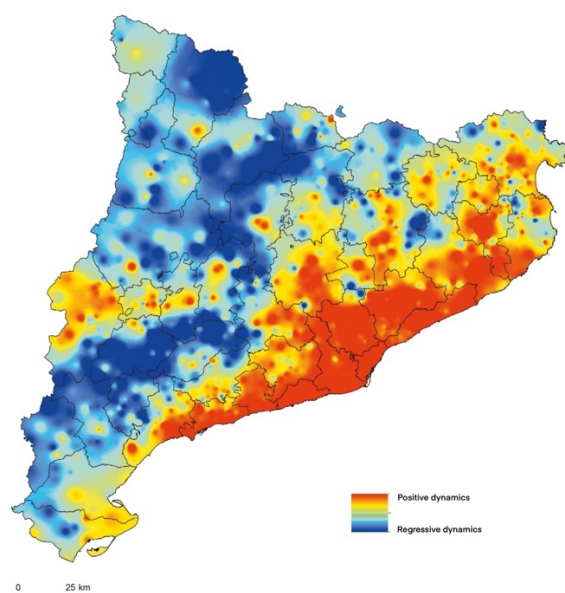
The guiding principle for this text is based on the concern aroused by a simple look at Catalan municipalities that have highly regressive economic dynamics, and that suffer from depopulation problems. We can see in [Figure 1](#) the population distribution in Catalonia, leading to an unbalanced territory.



**Figure 1.** Resident population per km<sup>2</sup> in Catalonia, municipalities, 2020. Source: [Aldomà \(2022\)](#).

Obviously the problem is not the population distribution, but what derives from this parameter. If we look at a map that aims to explain which are the positive and regressive economic dynamics, we can see that more than half of the Catalan territory shows worrying scenarios of degrowth, especially in more rural environments ([Figure 2](#)), as a result of the unsustainability of previous economic models that supported the formation of the rural landscape as we know it today, guiding to a aging areas and the lack of labour force and services in rural areas. It should also be noted that there are not much inintermediate areas, which allows us to speak of two very different "Catalonias": one populated and economically energetic, and the other one depopulated and recessive. This highlights the serious fracture that exists between urban and rural links in our territory, since if this link or the synergies between both realities were minimally hindered, we would find many more episodes of transition between them; in other words, there would be many more yellow and green colors than we can see in the image. We must look for strategies to reverse these trends and properly rebalance the territory under the criteria of ecological

sustainability, economic dynamization and social cohesion (Olmedo, 2023).



**Figure 2.** Assessment of the magnitude-socioeconomic dynamism of the municipalities. Source: [Aldomà \(2022\)](#).

The unbalanced territory problem in Catalonia is close to that of many other territories in the world. During the second half of the twentieth century, debates on urban planning have focused especially on the growth and transformation of cities ([Caja, 2021](#)) ([Piqueras-Blasco & Cabrera-Fausto, 2024](#)), while the discussions associated with the revitalization of rural territory have not gone much further than aspects linked to agricultural production and its derivatives. This undoubtedly simplistic approach has left aside or in the background aspects as important as the preservation of the environment, heritage, the protection of resources or the important economic and especially social approaches of these territories ([Casadei, 2022](#)). We have experienced, however, a change of trend, especially at the beginning of this century, where the impacts of urban growth, demographic changes and onslaughts, new uses, the technification of agricultural production, the revaluation of natural landscapes and architectural and cultural heritage or climate change have spurred attention on the rural environment and its links to the urban areas as a key matter for twenty-first century planning ([Monllor, 2015](#)).

Indeed, rural land is, in the years to come, a fundamental asset for the future of our living environments and our cities. Keep in mind: it is precisely this part of the territory (and the people who live in it) that provides us with most of our resources: food, water, wood, energy, metals, minerals and other essential goods for the community and that make our life possible. It is also a source of natural beauty, the diversity of flora and fauna and soil, ancestral cultures and an invaluable heritage.

### 3. The New Paradigm of Rural Development and Its Relevance to Our Cities

All this leads us to try to define what the new paradigm of rural development could be and how it can improve our cities. The need for urban strategies that first take into account natural, human and institutional resources is evident, and those strategies should be specific to each of the territorial contexts we are working in, with the need to maximize their complementarities and bonds. The strategies have to be multisectoral, focusing on economic diversity, and at the same time on services, and especially on the links between urban and rural spaces ([Gheysen, 2020](#)). These strategies must remain attentive to the relationships between the different agents involved and the different scales of approach, all in an inclusive and sustainable way.

One of the most important aspects is undoubtedly governance, since without the support of public administration and agents at all levels and strata, the implementation of strategies can be seriously weakened. And this governance must be especially sensitive to inclusive policies that minimize age, gender and poverty problems, ensuring education, health and social protection. At the same time, improving infrastructures, both hard (physical) and soft (digital) can substantially reduce costs and improve accessibility to different services ([Bernad, 2021](#)).

In the background of all these issues, the concept of sustainability must always be present,

understanding that the role of the environment as a key element of strategies on urban and rural links should not be limited to the high dependence of the rural population on natural resources for their development, but must also assess their vulnerability to climate change and the threats of energy scarcity, food and water.

Based on reflections on the development of rural environments, in 2006 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) proposed some new guidelines for addressing rural challenges, stressing the importance of local assets, diversifying economies, and highlighting the multilevel approach of the agents involved ([Table 1](#)) ([OECD, 2006](#)).

**Table 1.** The new rural paradigm. Source: [OECD \(2006\)](#).

The new rural paradigm		
	<i>Old approach</i>	<i>New approach</i>
<b>Objetives</b>	Equalisation, farm income, farm competitiveness	Competitiveness of rural areas, valorisation of local assets, exploitation of unused resources
<b>Key target sector</b>	Agriculture	Various sectors of rural economies (ex, rural tourism, manufacturing, ICT industry, etc.)
<b>Main tools</b>	Subsidies	Investments
<b>Key actors</b>	National governments, farmers	All levels of government (supra-national, national, regional and local), various local stakeholders (public, private, NGOs)

In any case, these components are once again talking about the relevance of the link between rural and urban centres, since the former depend to a large extent on the latter for their labour markets, for access to services and new technologies, and also for exchanging new ideas and initiatives. As we have already advanced, understanding both realities as a system is the best way to address the improvement of our cities. Indeed, only under this reading can we influence strategies to reduce inequalities between rural and urban centres.

## 4. Covid

The ravages of the virus on public health have had an important impact on domestic habits, as well as on priorities linked to quality of life that question pre-pandemic residential trends and, by extension, have had a significant impact on population distribution and the dynamics of our cities ([Görmar, 2021](#)). In fact, the added value that is now given to living space and access to open environments has considerably increased the pressure and demand on rural centres. This demand is multifaceted and not generalizable, but it takes on different colors: from firm willingness to live in rural settlements in search of a drastic change in life, through temporary stays, second homes for rent or purchase, greater pressure from weekend tourism, or even change of census registration in order to guarantee the possibility of relocation in case of a new confinement. All these derivatives, and others that are also occurring linked to work and new economies, are generating new territorial dynamics and mobilities that require a careful look to ensure the balance of our territory. We are therefore experiencing a paradigm shift, and the pandemic makes us see that this is a very pertinent time to reconsider the links between urban and rural environments in accordance with the new challenges that this situation is posing to us. And what is more important, this change in trend and the social upheaval on the scale of values, together with the widespread experience of teleworking, has permeated the collective consciousness and, therefore, it is not a topic or concern that covers only specialists in these matters, but is already a clearly public debate.

Recent studies show the reversal of migration balances in Spain ([González, 2022](#)), from cities to rural environments. The impact on demographic growth in the Catalan territory also demonstrates the population increase on rural land to the detriment of large cities. It is obvious that these results are possibly not very noticeable in large and medium-sized cities, but the impact on rural nuclei is very significant, not only from the population point of view, but also from the economic and social point of view.

The long-term consequences of the pandemic will also trigger more permanent changes related to the digitization of work and other daily activities and, consequently, will lead to reductions in mobility needs and global consumption of fossil energy ([Camarero, 2016](#)). It is therefore essential to take advantage of this unique moment to propose new initiatives and strategies that allow us to anticipate the important



changes that are to come, especially those related to population distribution, new mobilities, and new social priorities and ways of doing and, above all, how to understand the new functioning of the urban-rural system.

## 5. Taxonomic Fit

The territory is not neutral. Attention to its geography, morphology and land uses, the layout of urban and rural nuclei and the anthropic processes it sustains are absolutely fundamental to be able to discuss with criteria their dysfunctions, successes, imbalances and opportunities, readings that should allow us to understand their logics in order to be able to intervene for their improvement with a minimum of guarantees.

The territory is also diverse. Each territorial area has its specificities and singularities, and it is evident that strategies that can work in certain sectors may be ineffective and even counterproductive in others. In spite of this, and as a premise of important methodological value, we can establish three starting scenarios that can help us better understand the role of rural nuclei related to our cities according to the territorial context where they are located, and can facilitate our work when addressing their problems, their dynamics, and propose new strategies for improving the urban-rural relationships. This first taxonomic approach to rural nuclei is based on its proximity to more consolidated urban centers, whether large cities or intermediate cities. The proposed classification is as follows:

1. **Periurban rural nuclei.** These are rural settlements located on the periphery and proximity of large or intermediate cities. These rural nuclei maintain their own identity, and often base their economies on agricultural activities, but have other relevant alternative economies. Being close to consolidated cities results in nuclei of multiple different types, from autonomous settlements to dormitory city residential enclaves. These nuclei do not usually lose population, they even have positive population growth, and basic services are mostly resolved due to the proximity of the reference urban center (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Example of periurban centers, in the surroundings of the city of Manresa. Source: Institut cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya and Google Earth.

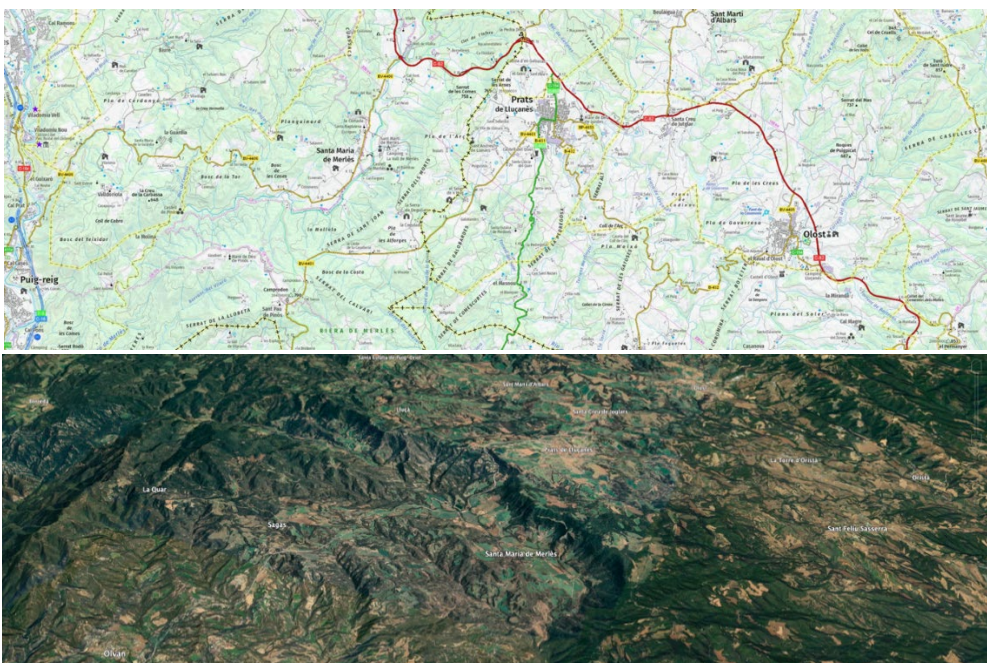
2. **Remote rural nuclei.** These rural nuclei are located far from the cities, and in territories of rugged morphology in most cases, with poor accessibility and with serious problems of depopulation. Access infrastructures are deficient, and public transport very scarce, as well as most basic services. Their economies are highly vulnerable, and show high rates of population ageing. On the other hand, they have natural environments of great heritage value, often agricultural and livestock economies contrasted with quality tourist economies, and often experience seasonal population setbacks, as well as altered markets such as housing, usually designed for high purchasing power communities for second homes (Figure 4).





**Figure 4.** Example of remote nuclei, in the surroundings of Pedraforca mountain. Source: Institut cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya and Google Earth.

3. **Synergistic rural nuclei.** These are rural nuclei relatively far from consolidated cities (between periurban and remote nuclei), in territories generally not very rugged, quite self-sufficient, and that establish suggestive synergies and complicities between them, giving meaning to the territorial dynamics of the area. They are rural settlements that tend to be stable from the population point of view, although with an ageing tendency, and that maintain very accentuated identity traits. Its economic activities are quite diversified, including many occupations outside agricultural and livestock. They usually have basic services covered, although they may show significant deficits in education, health and public transport (Figure 5).

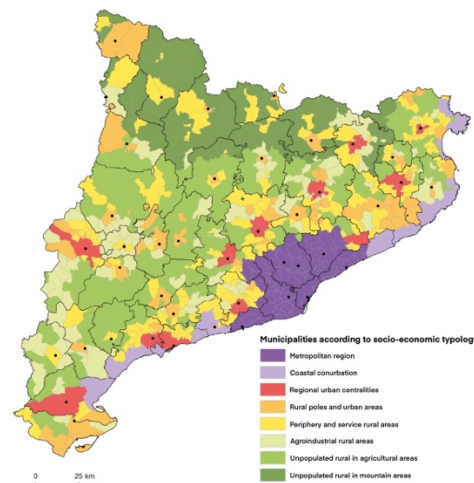


**Figure 5.** Example of synergistic nuclei, in the surroundings of Prats de Lluçanès. Source: Institut cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya and Google Earth.

This first taxonomic approach is part, as we have mentioned, of the work methodology. But we are particularly interested in the lessons we can draw from synergistic and peri-urban rural nuclei in the future cities discussion, the former because they demonstrate territorial balances that can be implemented in the less densified and peripheral environments of our cities, and the latter because they offer alternatives as well as stronger relationships over our cities.

This first taxonomic approach tells us about the local scale. But we need one more taxonomic approach to be able to adequately address the complexity of the territories in which they are immersed: a more territorial scale. Since the taxonomy of rural areas tells us about the local scale, the taxonomy of homogeneous areas tells us about the territorial scale.

Regarding this new scale reading, the geographer Ignasi Aldomà (Aldomà, 2022) presents us a taxonomic perspective that can be very useful, and that aims to classify Catalan areas according to their typology (Figure 6 and Table 2). To do this, he distinguishes eight different typologies according to their economic dynamics and the main types of activity, but also according to their number of inhabitants and their relative position. The mapping is based on the cross-checking of different data, and reflects the character and trends of municipalities. This approach allows us to draw a picture of a territory in which, broadly speaking, the impact of cities on nearby rural nuclei can first be seen, especially around provincial capitals, and in the surroundings of intermediate cities. We then distinguish a second strip that covers mainly the center of the country (rural sparsely populated), and a third area in the areas of the Pyrenees mountains in the north and its surroundings (rural sparsely populated mountains) (Domingo, 2009). This distribution shows many complicities with the taxonomy we have pointed out of rural nuclei.



**Figure 6.** Socio-economic typology areas. Source: Aldomà (2022).

**Table 2.** Municipal socio-economic typology. Source: Aldomà (2022).

Typology of the Municipality	Rural/urban Basic Concept	Economic Dynamics
Metropolitan region	Area of the metropolitan systems delimited according to the mobility studies of 2001. Although there are some small, almost rural municipalities, they are closely linked to metropolitan dynamics.	The most economically dynamic area, in which population growth is moving towards the smaller peripheral municipalities.
Coastal conurbations	Municipalities that are part of coastal urban systems with strong demographic and population dynamics and without clear centralities. Characterized by a large number of floating population.	Municipalities focused on services related to tourism, which have experienced great growth, committed in the years of crisis.
Regional urban centralities	Municipalities with more than 30,000 inhabitants and more than 10,000 non-agricultural jobs located outside the metropolitan region of Barcelona. Municipalities with a physical continuity with the central	Dynamic regional centers with diversified economic activity and dynamic growth

	municipality that experience similar dynamics are added.	
Rural poles and urban areas	Service centers in rural areas, usually county heads, with between 1,500 and 10,000 jobs (between 5,000 and 25,000 inhabitants), plus some towns of a similar or slightly smaller size located on the edge of regional centers.	In general, they have a good industrial base and have maintained a dynamic growth, despite the impact of the crisis.
Periphery and service rural areas	Small service centers of between 1,000 and 5,000 inhabitants in a rural environment, smaller municipalities located next to the aforementioned urban municipalities, subject to more urban dynamics linked to the presence of a strong floating population or, more rarely, to the availability of jobs.	Very subjected to residential dynamics and a less diversified economic base with very unequal behaviours.
Agroindustrial rural areas	Municipalities located in a context of low population that have between 200 and 1,000 jobs, among which there is usually a significant presence of agricultural workers.	Agricultural conditions have made it possible to withstand the crisis better, even though the demographic context is recessionary.
Unpopulated rural in agricultural areas	Small municipalities located in a very low density environment and that do not reach 200 jobs or 1,000 inhabitants.	Areas still quite subject to the historical dynamics of aging and abandonment.
Unpopulated rural in mountain areas	From the municipalities that meet the previous conditions of low density and number of inhabitants, the municipalities located in the Pyrenees are separated, particularly in the area that meets conditions for agriculture and mountain tourism.	Despite the general difficulties, mountain tourism slightly counterbalances the recession of mountain agriculture.

This approach allows us to see the need to establish new areas of centrality that lead us to rebalance the territory, where the role of intermediate cities becomes a fundamental key. The red areas on the map are the Regional Urban Centralities, which consist of cities with between 30,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, and which mean focal points of activity that allow services to be provided to immediate rural environments. But we can recognize how much of the territory does not show the existence of these nuclei. It seems pertinent to propose the reinforcement of minor urban centers in these more depopulated territories in order to propose a territorial rebalancing and make effective the happy combination between urban and rural centers, seeking the integral system that we could call **rurban**, where the link between the city and the rural environment establishes synergies and positive complicities for a future systemic development.

## 6. The requeriments

In accordance with the sustainability criteria, and with the three E's (economy, ecology and equity) that derive from the premises of the Brundtland Commission, we could establish what requirements the urban-rural complexes should meet in order to guarantee their quality of life and its viability (Buil, 2007; Burton, 2021; Dahlgren, 1991). It is clear that these three fields must be well interconnected and related, and must be able to establish synergies and complicity between them. Based on this triad, we could propose the following:

1. In the **economic** field, urban-rural complexes should:
  - Be **sustained over time** and consider economies that are not short-term, with views on their long-term potential.
  - Be attentive to the constant **process of transformation**, cultural and social, with a continuum of intertwined and transformable actions over time. It will therefore be necessary to be innovative, and to have the ability to break molds and prejudices.



- Be very respectful of their **inherited capital**, bearing in mind that it is necessary to build from the assets present in the centers and the surroundings, and avoid foreign initiatives uprooted from the territory.
  - Be **economically effective**, in relation to the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services, and therefore self-sufficient, and where it is viable to live and work.
2. In the field of the natural **environment** and ecology, urban-rural complexes should:
- Be **compatible and rooted** in their physical and natural environment, as well as their heritage, and should be particularly attentive to climate change and natural resource and recycling economies.
  - Be intentional and reasoned from the point of view of **urban design**, with consistent criteria in the definition of their urban structures, their limits and their link with the natural environment.
  - Be sensitive to the logic of **rural ecosystems**, paying attention to energy balances and flows (Machlis, 2011).
3. In the field of **communities**, urban-rural complexes should:
- Be **socially active**, have an identity and have community approaches regarding human relationships. They should pay particular attention to the sense of belonging, encouraging community involvement and co-participation (Galán-Fernández, Schoonjans & Gantois, 2022).
  - Be **culturally dynamic** with respect to the different types of community activities.
  - Be **inclusive** towards all ages, genders and social groups, and have effective reception policies.
  - Be comfortably **accessible** from a mobility point of view, and have good digital connectivity to strengthen their connections with global systems.
  - Be wealthy, with a good **quality of life**, especially in terms of services.

## 7. Six Rural Themes That Can Help Urban Ones

There are, however, some specificities inherent in rural nuclei that can enrich the urban debate when intervening on them and on their immediate environment, and that can undoubtedly help the different strategies that can be implemented.

The first argument has to do with **local diversity and specificity**. The territory is diverse, and sometimes it would be a mistake to propose common strategies. Strategic views over the urban-rural links must necessarily be sensitive to local singularities. Thus, while we could list some common aims to build this links, the economic and social circumstances of each scenario, their problems, needs and development potential are profoundly different. It follows that programs that address their problems must be locally sensitive. It should be noted that global strategies, often developed by high-level public administrations, may have a smaller impact than expected if the unique characteristics of each territory where they are implemented are not taken into account. In fact, the taxonomic definition of the three scenarios of rural nuclei exposed before can lead us to a new knowledge of how deal with the urban equilibrium with our cities. Thus, in the case of periurban rural centres, the decentralisation criteria must be considered. In the case of synergistic nuclei, the role of identity is particularly relevant and can bring to urban context some suggesting lessons.

The second argument has to do with **social capital and identity**. Its residents, either individually or collectively, in the form of companies or entities, are the key resources in rural development, and so must be also in urban contexts. Social capital has always shown a coherent roots in the territory, and has an accurate knowledge on which to build the different strategies. Social capital will only be involved if it believes that the proposal in question is clearly relevant to their concerns and to the improvement of their quality of life, and is also a constructive part of the core identity. The more its consistency with the site is demonstrated, the more likely it is that this crucial resource of unpaid local energy will be close and sustained. It is about building and mobilizing social capital and leveraging local knowledge and experience. This implies the need to establish management models that can balance the strategies proposed by public agents with private initiatives.

The third argument is **value added**. It is essential to take a close look at the own resources, so that new strategies build assets on this pre-existing support. Implementing value-added to local resources is likely to provide a safer and more sustainable future for economic development than a strategy involving over-reliance on imported materials and capital. This implies the need for a greater and more respectful understanding of local resources, in the broadest sense, and their potential to create new business opportunities. Indeed, it is essential to be very cautious when incorporating exogenous narratives that are disconnected from the functional dynamics of these territories, as they are highly vulnerable, and external interference can substantially alter their rural ecosystems.

The fourth argument is the **alignement** between local interests and public strategies. Rural realities are, contrary to what one might think, tremendously complex, where different aspects are continuously

intertwined and establish synergies and complicities, and can help the way to implement new strategies in the urban context. The readings of their problems always have a double starting point: *the bottom-up*, from the most local and specific issues of each rural nucleus and towards more general looks, and the *top-down*, addressing from the outset global aspects that have an effective transcendence in the local world. Strategic solutions are found at different intermediate points and at the confluence of these two directions, and where the transversality of the problems is absolutely essential. And the most effective way to achieve this may be at an intermediate level, somewhere between the region on one side, and the people on the other. The values of the territory and rural nuclei are based on their local elements, which are specific to them and attribute identity and specificity to them. But it is important to know what global urban trends and collective demands are, and to keep in mind this permanent connection with external agents, in order to find happy points and spaces of complicity that allow *win-win* in this urban-rural relationships.

The fifth argument is the **diversification** of supply and economic activities, which is absolutely necessary to adapt to the current circumstances. Agriculture is undoubtedly key in rural development, and it is important to emphasize that it has fared quite well during the pandemic period, showing an important solidity of certain sectors (meat, fruit, oil and wine), but non-agricultural activities and economies must be strengthened to guarantee both economic and social diversification, where indeed tourist activities acquire an important role. This economic diversity can substantially reduce migration processes and also reduce environmental pressures on cities, providing a more equitable population distribution.

The final argument is **balance toward globalization**. There is no doubt that technological advances and accessibility to different sources of information and knowledge are key to the future development of urban centres. Despite this, it is necessary to protect local traditions and their cultural and social heritage from the thrusts that globalization can entail, thus seeking a stable balance over time that allows both realities to be made compatible and generate satisfactory complicities between them. While bearing in mind the need to establish links with external dynamics, it is very important to deliberately accentuate and proclaim local diversity, fostering in each local area a uniqueness and, therefore, a "niche" at least in the mind of the consumer. The urgency of developing and marketing the local identity and the distinctive quality products and services linked to it is, therefore, key to the urban-rural links pursued at the local level. The specificities of each urban-rural context must be kept in mind and assumed in urban debates. As we said, the territory is not neutral, and generic strategies cannot be proposed on areas that include specific singularities and that have assets that are often endemic and unrepeatable in other contexts. Each area has certain specificities that require selective strategies adapted to the shape of the territory and its unique dynamics. In fact, while rural settlements must stay attentive to the dynamics of a globalized world, its interference in these territories can lead to significant disruptions in their internal logic, resulting in the potential loss of local heritage and the high valuable identity patterns.

These six arguments must be able to build a complex and yet coherent and harmonious scenario, and they must work towards a common goal: the care for the natural environment, which has to be engaged with them (Forman, 2014). It is necessary to bet on the necessary energy sovereignty of urban settlements and his relationships with the ecosystemic services, in order to fight against climate change and bet on renewable energies and reduce environmental impacts.

## 8. Conclusions

As we have been seeing, the complexity of the urban-rural links is very important for the future of our cities, where many different themes are often mixed and where many agents converge simultaneously. In addition, each territory is different, with often endemic specificities that require specific interventions to solve specific problems. However, we could establish a series of recommendations or suggestions to take into account when approaching this urban-rural links. As a summary, and based on the considerations presented in this text, we can highlight three fundamental aspects that could help us implement new strategies in these areas that may improve their quality of life.

1. It is necessary to **read the territory all-encompassively**, where rural centres and urban centres are part of the same reality. The strategies should be aimed at improving the quality of life of both realities simultaneously, and avoid the traditional view where it has been interpreted that rural environments are the negative of urban environments, or that there are servers and served. The planning of the territory implies understanding its complexity from all the realities that are part of it, and only on the basis of proposals that value the links between both realities can they have guarantees of success.
2. The rural territory is highly complex and requires strategies that address this complexity through a **cross-cutting approach**. This transversal approach must have a dual dimension. An essential

dimension is scale-based transversal thinking, meaning a holistic perspective that addresses and builds arguments at the territorial scale, the intermediate scale, and the local scale of rural settlements, while being capable of integrating the interests at each of these levels. At the same time, it is crucial to approach a thematic transversal strategy, focusing simultaneously on six key areas: housing, mobility, services, economic activities, urban form, and heritage, including both natural and architectural heritage as well as cultural heritage.

3. If one of the objectives is to rebalance the territory, it becomes essential to establish a strategy that seeks **new centralities** across the territory based on its identities and unique characteristics. Strengthening specific activity hubs and flexible, diverse uses, carefully and synergistically integrated with the existing ones, and in a highly strategic manner, could lead to the revitalization of these areas while aligning these strategic insights with their own rural ecosystems.

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