Breaking Ground – European Approaches to Changing Rural Narratives

Presentation to Joint Co-operation Ireland/ICLRD conference, ‘Death from Nostalgic Sentiment or A New Narrative for Rural Ireland?’

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1. The ICLRD: Who, What
2. Today’s Conference…The Trilogy
3. Scotland – Understanding the Vulnerability of Rural Towns and Villages

- In 2011/2012, Vulnerability index developed for Scotland’s town by SRUC.
- Objective to inform dialogue on why, and in what ways, Scotland is changing
- Covered range of themes
- Based on 4 key indicators:
  1. Proportion of local population of working age
  2. Proportion of local population claiming Job seekers Allowance
  3. Proportion of local population working in public sector
  4. Measure of income deprivation

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3. Scotland – Vulnerability Index

Towns ranked 1-90
(where 1 is most vulnerable)

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3. Finland – Rural Shrinkage

- ESCAPE – European Shrinking Rural Areas Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance
- ESPON-funded applied research programme – commenced March ‘19
- Focusing on the process(es) driving shrinkage
  - Simple Shrinking: characterised by natural decrease and out-migration
  - Complex shrinking: simultaneously experiencing population decrease and economic decline
- Examined through series of case studies

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3. France – Shrinking to Survive

- Vitry-le-François – Champagne Region, Eastern France
- Area greatly affected by deindustrialisation…now at stage of advanced decline.
- Strong community….public and private actors working together for solutions….
- Planned Shrinkage!

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3. France – Shrinking to Survive

- Municipality plan to diversity the housing stock – type & tenure
- Working with ANRU – the national agency for urban renewal
- Waiver to rule on demolitions/reconstructions
- A policy under the radar…conflicting with other policies
- Need for more inclusive approach…with emphasis not only on housing

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• Eeklo, East Flanders
• As a municipality, Eeklo is only main town…pop. just over 20,000
• Interesting history – with economy traditionally industry and textiles
• Shift to services centre for neighbouring communities
• Self-sufficiency model: Ecopower

3. Belgium – Eeklo: Ecopower through Citizen Co-operative

• Eeklo community have established an energy cooperative
• Currently 8 turbines, with fourteen further planned
• Also hydro-power installations and solar panels
• Community embracing the initiative – involved in setting the pricing and share in profits
• Also operates as social enterprise – employment to energy experts

- Evergem, East-Flanders
- Flanders is heavily developed – for tax incomes
- 13,000km of ribbon development – equal to distance from Brussels to Singapore
- Municipalities in competition – build it and they will come!
- BUT…environmental impacts

3. Belgium – Evergem: Restricting Future Build
4. Rural Policy….Ever Evolving

• **GERMANY**: Places of economic dynamism and innovation
  Embracing role of business - ‘Hidden Champions’

• **NORWAY**: Rural remote regions re embracing the silver economy

• **MEXICO**: Identification of 263 micro-regions and development of a
  Strategic Community Centre in each to drive change

• The need for new rural narratives is not NEW!

5. Conclusion

“The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which can not be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them”

*Albert Einstein*