

# EDORA - European Development Opportunities for Rural Areas

The over-arching aim of the EDORA project is to better understand the development opportunities and challenges facing rural areas in Europe in order to support targeted policy development, especially in relation to job creation and social change. The three key issues are: the need to better understand patterns of differentiation between different kinds of rural area; the nature of the different opportunities for development which each of them faces; and the way in which such opportunities depend upon and may be strengthened by interaction between rural and urban areas.

The EDORA project provides a “heads up” with regard to the future of rural areas and rural policy in a variety of ways:

- By assembling a wide-ranging review of what academics are saying about ongoing processes of rural change, and synthesising this into a set of “meta narrative” generalisations.
- By developing a set of regional typologies which help to summarise the broad-brush patterns of differentiation across rural Europe.
- By exploring detailed, regional processes of change in the context of 12 “exemplar regions” which reflect a wide range of types and contexts.
- By providing a summary profile of the rural regions within each of 30 countries within the “ESPON space”, structured according to the typologies developed earlier.
- By compiling a set of alternative scenarios of rural Europe in twenty years time.
- By developing a policy rationale which builds systematically upon this “evidence base”.

## Research process

The starting point of the EDORA project is the recognition that, rather than becoming more uniform in character, rural Europe is, in many ways, becoming increasingly diverse. This diversity implies both new challenges and changing opportunities. The overarching aim of the project is to examine the process of differentiation, in order to better understand how EU policy can enable rural areas to build upon their specific potentials to achieve “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.” As a first step it is very important that we have a clear picture of rural Europe and its various development potentials, at the beginning of the

21st century. The project emphasises the importance of looking beyond the “agrarian” for that potential, since in many rural areas secondary and tertiary activities already play a very important role the local economy.

The image below is an attempt to provide a simple summary of the way in which EDORA researchers conceive the process of “micro-level differentiation” of rural areas across Europe.

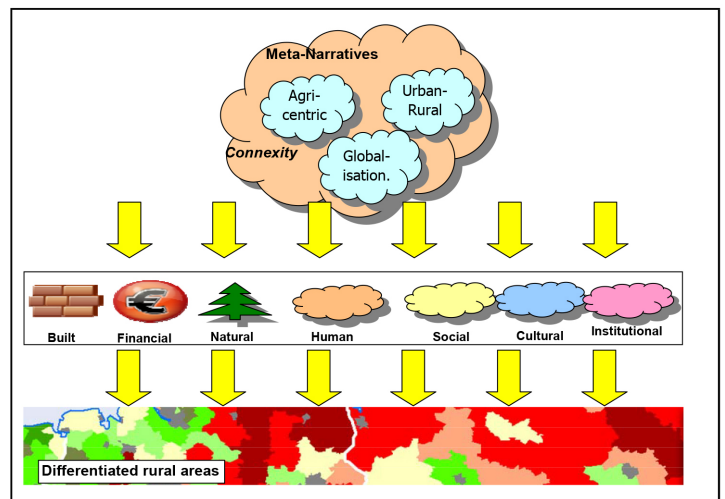


Diagram from EDORA Final Report, Figure 8: Schematic Representation of Micro-Scale process of rural differentiation, August 2011, page 60

The first phase of the project consisted of a literature review in order to establish a conceptual framework for subsequent empirical analysis, and as a basis for a policy rationale. Nine different fields of literature were presented in thematic papers. The literature review identified a very wide range of aspects of contemporary rural change. In order to manage this complexity, and so that it could be communicated simply and clearly, three “meta narratives” of rural change were devised. The first of these tied together a range of ways in which farming and other land based industries are evolving, the second showed how relationships between urban and rural areas and between remote and accessible areas are changing, and the third considered the many and various effects of globalisation.

In the second phase the evidence base for rural change was explored, both in terms of large scale patterns, based upon regional data, and local processes, based upon a case study approach. The macro-scale patterns were addressed by three typologies, based on indicators of Rurality/Accessibility, Economic Restructuring and Performance. Summary profiles of the rural regions within each of 30 countries of the “ESPON space”, structured according to the three typologies, were also produced. These were complemented at a micro-level by in-depth studies of 12 exemplar regions, reflecting a wide range of types and contexts.

In the third policy-oriented phase of the project, future perspectives were developed which builds upon the “evidence base” of the intermediary phase. The final report of the EDORA project argues that in the modern, globalised European countryside, local or regional response will be effectively determined by a broad range of place-specific conditions, which might be collectively termed “territorial capital”. These include traditional “hard” forms of capital, such as infrastructure and services and other forms of institutional support to enterprises, and soft/intangible assets, such as human and social capital, governance, and entrepreneurial culture. Some of these are very difficult to create or change through policy intervention, although there have been many successful experiments in these fields in recent years (not least through the LEADER programme), from which much may be learned. However, a more immediate pre-condition for effective policy is better information, comparable indicators and means of assessment to allow weaknesses to be identified.

## Key findings

EDORA has studied the changes which are taking place in rural areas of Europe, and their increasing diversity, in order to develop a clear and consistent rationale for policy to enhance territorial cohesion. It has attempted to do this from “first principles” beginning with a review of theoretical interpretations of rural change, and an analysis of regional patterns and local processes.

It concludes that such a “rural cohesion policy” is confronted with challenges, opportunities and potentials at two levels:

Some features vary systematically across the ESPON space. These may be captured by regional indicators and typologies. A notable example is structural change in the rural economy, (as revealed by the EDORA Structural and Performance typologies). It is proposed that this “spatially organised” disparity should be addressed through carefully targeted horizontal policies to stimulate entrepreneurship and economic diversification.

This is the macro-regional level.

On the other hand EDORA findings suggest that the “drivers” of most aspects of rural change are essentially ubiquitous, and that increasing spatial differentiation is principally a consequence of micro-scale (localised) differences in the capacity to respond. This variation is a function of each region’s unique constellation of assets, both “hard” and “soft” (intangible). At this micro-geographical level the key challenge for rural cohesion policy, in all but the least developed parts of the EU, relates to intangible assets, such as human and social capital, institutional capacity, entrepreneurial culture, and networking of various kinds. Tailoring the (micro-level) policy response to each region’s potential points to a “neoendogenous” approach, where local knowledge and commitment is supported by advice and regulation from the EU and National levels. Advocacy of such an approach highlights the pressing need for more appropriate indicators, and regional auditing procedures, to facilitate assessment of intangible assets.

The project was led by Andrew Copus at Nordregio.

Further information, including the Final Report and the full set of working papers may be found at:  
<http://www.nordregio.se/EDORA>

and at: [http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu\\_Projects/Menu\\_AppliedResearch/edora.html](http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_AppliedResearch/edora.html)



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