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D2.8 Ruralization: The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms

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RURALIZATION

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The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms

D2.8 MOOC

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[1]   PU= Public, CO=Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services), CL=Classified, as referred to in Commission Decision 2001/844/EC

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

MOOC	Massive open online course

1 Introduction

One of the tasks in the RURALIZATION project has been the development of a Massive Online Course (MOOC) entitled "Ruralization: Creating New Opportunities in Rural Areas".

The MOOC has been running on the edX platform from March 1st 2023 up to April 12th 2023. (https://www.edx.org/course/ruralization-creating-opportunities-for-new-generations-in-rural-areas). This document provides an overview of the set-up of the MOOC (section 2), the uptake of the course by the learners (section 3) and an Evaluation and Discussion (section 4).

2 The set-up of the MOOC

2.1 Introduction to the course

Many rural areas around the world face a critical population and economic decline and struggle to attract younger generations to reverse this trend.

An aging population, youth out-migration, lack of employment opportunities, shift to large-scale agriculture and land acquisition by investment companies, are some of the challenges faced in rural areas.

Life in villages has also become ever more challenging: the economic viability of shops and services is under pressure, healthcare facilities are difficult to organize, less support for community work is available and governmental investments decrease.

To break this vicious circle of decline, which not only affects people's lives but also the spatial quality of rural areas and their sustainable development, we need innovative initiatives that will have a broad impact.

This course provides ideas and insights that help to offer opportunities to young generations in rural areas. Such opportunities are based on international trends that influence the future of how we organize our lives and society. You will learn how these trends can be relevant for rural development.

Ruralization opportunities may include new businesses, sustainable farming techniques or, for example, shortening the food production chain so that areas benefit from the added value. These opportunities can be facilitated by innovative approaches to giving people access to land. We will explain different possibilities that have proven successful in different contexts and we will present several inspiring examples.

Each rural region is different and therefore needs a specific, tailored approach. After taking this course, you will be able to formulate region-specific strategies to enhance rural development.

2.1.1 Target groups

This course is mainly for:

- (Young) professionals aiming to work on rural development policy and strategy design.
- People aiming to make a difference in the future of rural areas, for example in the field of rural innovation and local economy.
- Students aiming to strengthen their knowledge to become better equipped professionals in this field.

The level is introductory. No prerequisites are required.

2.1.2 Learning aims

After taking this course learners will be able to:

- Identify challenges and trends in rural areas
- Analyse issues of population and access to jobs, services and land
- Discuss practices of rural development with a focus on younger generations
- Determine the development potential of a rural region
- Propose a regional strategy with actions for rural development

2.2 Syllabus of the course

For this course a syllabus has been developed that informs the learners, week-by-week, about the contents of the course.

2.2.1 Week 1: Mapping Strengths and Weaknesses of Rural Regions

You will learn the challenges that rural areas are currently facing and how these differ depending on the local context. You will also learn to apply SWOT analysis to identify the

strengths and weaknesses of rural areas. You will have a chance to critically apply this knowledge to a rural region of your choice.

Topics we'll cover:

- ⊞ Demographic dynamics in rural areas: how they affect socioeconomic decline and how they can be counteracted
- ⊞ Economic potential, infrastructure and accessibility in rural regions
- ⊞ Basic concepts regarding land: why it is important, and the impact landholders and land management have on rural challenges
- ⊞ How to map challenges: tools for analysis of rural areas

2.2.2 Week 2: Mapping Opportunities in Rural Regions with Trend Analysis

You will learn to distinguish trends relevant to a specific rural area and the ways they may have a positive effect. Trend analysis is a tool not only to understand the present challenges but also to develop strategies to counteract negative effects.

Topics we'll cover:

- ⊞ Trend analysis: what it is and how it works
- ⊞ Megatrends, trends and weak signals: what they are and how to recognize them

2.2.3 Week 3: Understanding the Issue of Access to Land

We will explore the importance of land for rural development strategies. Access to rural land is governed by complex mechanisms that strongly influence economic and agricultural development. You will learn to analyse the context of access to land and to select appropriate intervention possibilities.

Topics we'll cover:

- ⊞ Rural land markets, government initiatives and the impact of demographics
- ⊞ Innovations in access to land and land management

2.2.4 Week 4: Identifying promising practices for new generations

In rural areas, many economic activities and social practices are emerging that can represent a potential starting point for rural development. This week you will learn how to identify these promising practices and to analyse their potential for transferability in relation to your own region.

Topics we'll cover:

- How to identify promising practices, with examples
- Practices and impact of new entrants into farming
- Practices and impact of newcomers outside the farming sector
- How to transfer promising practices across regions

2.2.5 Week 5: Developing strategies and actions for rural regions

After discovering the economy of rural regions, land management, demographic dynamics, trends and promising practices, this week you will learn about the tools to translate this knowledge into actions aimed at positive change for rural regions - such as strategies, policies and programs.

You will have the chance to evaluate the outputs of the previous four weeks and propose a strategy and actions for a rural region of your choice.

Topics we'll cover in this week:

- Strategies, policies, programs, actions and practices: what they are, what distinguishes them, how they can be used and by whom
- The steps required for a development strategy and how to formulate action plans

2.3 Course content

In the course, there was a mix of text, videos and assignments (Table 1).

Week	Content
1: 01/03 - 07/03	One welcome video, one introductory video, three lecture videos, three quizzes, one reading material, one practical assignment and a feedback video
2: 08/03 - 14/03	One lecture video, one quiz, 60 trend cards, one practical assignment and a feedback video
3: 15/03 - 21/03	Two lecture videos, two quizzes, one practical assignment and a feedback video
4: 22/03 - 28/03	Four lecture videos, four quizzes, one practical assignment and a feedback video
5 & 6: 29/03 - 11/04	One lecture video, one reading material, two quizzes, a final assignment and a live webinar

Table 1 Content of the course

The content videos (Table 2) have each been followed by a short quiz to test whether the main learning aims of the video have been understood. Learners have also been invited to discuss matters on the forum of the course. Furthermore, they have been asked to reflect on fellow students' work. A course moderator has been active to monitor these activities.

COURSE UNIT	TITLE OF THE VIDEO	NAME OF THE INSTRUCTOR
0	Trailer	Edit of videos made by Jasmine Bacani (TU Delft)
1.1	Intro: mapping challenges	Maarten Koreman (TU Delft)
1.2	Demographic dynamics in rural areas	Aisling Murtagh (NUIG)
1.3	Economy, infrastructure and accessibility in rural areas	Camille Robert-Boeuf (CNRS)
1.4	Land issues in rural areas	Willem Korthals Altes (TU Delft)
2.2	Trend analysis	Tuomas Kuhmonen (UTU)
3.2	Five Takeaways on land innovations	Willem Korthals Altes (TU Delft) based on contributions by Alice Martin-Prével (TdL)
3.3	The pathway of access to land	Willem Korthals Altes (TU Delft) based on contributions by William Loveluck (TdL)
4.2	Identifying promising practices	Aisling Murtagh (NUIG)
4.3	New entrants into farming	Silvia Sivini (UNICAL)
4.4	Newcomers outside the farming sector	Boldizsár Megyesi (CSS) and Imre Kovách (UNIDEB)
4.5	Transferability of promising practices	Annika Salingré (Kulturland)
5.2	What are strategies, policies, actions and practices?	Maarten Koreman (TU Delft)
	Feedback videos for weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4 during the course (March-April 2023)	Jasmine Bacani and Willem Korthals Altes (TU Delft)
	Live seminar for week 5	Jasmine Bacani, Maarten Koreman and Willem Korthals Altes (TU Delft)

Table 2 Overview of videos in the course

Every week there has been an assignment. In these assignments, the learners were asked to apply the knowledge of the course to a region they have chosen. In this way, the learners have been challenged to apply the knowledge to a specific context that is of relevance to them. The main assignments could be uploaded at Sketchdrive, a platform that not only

allows uploading graphical materials, such as schemes, figures, and photos but also allows interactions between learners and course staff on these materials.

The following assignments in the five weeks had to be applied to the chosen region by the learners.

- Week 1: Mapping Strengths and Weaknesses.
- Week 2: Select promising trends, weak signals and megatrends and indicate potential benefits, actions needed and agents that must take these actions.
- Week 3: Identify initiatives/projects that carry out activities that belong to one or more steps of the access-to-land pathway.
- Week 4: Select promising practices and analyse them for potential uptake in other regions.
- Week 5: Review previous assignments, formulate overarching objectives for the regional development strategy (10-15 years), identify actions (1-5 years) and actors that need to be involved, and summarize the strategy in one image.

The weekly feedback videos provided generalised feedback based on activity in the forum and the assignments uploaded to Sketchdrive. In most weeks, a considerable share of the assignments has been uploaded after the feedback video had been made. The final feedback video was provided as a live webinar allowing for live interaction with learners.

3 Uptake of the course

The course has been running on the edX platform from March 1st 2023 up to April 12th 2023.

The total number of learners enrolled in the course at the closing week has been 580, who originated from 107 countries (or territories).

Rank	Country	Learners
1	Netherlands	45
2	United States of America	36
3	India	34
4	Italy	33
5	Spain	23
6	Indonesia	20
7	Belgium	19
8	United Kingdom	19
9	Portugal	19
10	Nigeria	16
11	Brazil	15
12	Türkiye	15
13	Australia	13
14	Germany	13
15	France	12
16	South Africa	12
17	Colombia	10
18	Mexico	10
19	Peru	10
20	Poland	9

Source: author based on edX Insights

Table 3 Top 20 of the countries with the most learners in RURALIZATION

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In the top 20 countries with the most learners, there are 8 EU Member States (Table 3). In fact, 208 of the 580 learners (35.9%) were from 21 EU Member states (Table 4). There were no students from Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia.

Member state	Learners
Austria	4
Belgium	19
Bulgaria	4
Croatia	1
Cyprus	1
Finland	4
France	12
Germany	13
Greece	5
Hungary	2
Ireland	4
Italy	33
Latvia	1
Lithuania	1
Netherlands	45
Poland	9
Portugal	19
Romania	4
Slovenia	1
Spain	23
Sweden	3
Total	208

Source: author based on edX Insights

Table 4 Learners from EU Member States

Of the 580 learners, 484 provided information on their gender. The distribution was 47.9% female, 49.8% male and 2.3% others. Most of the learners report that they have had tertiary education levels (Table 5).

education	learners
masters	220
bachelors	157
doctorate	63
secondary	24
associates	8
Other/none	6
no information	102

Source: authors based on edX Insights

Table 5 Education level of learners

Most students that have been enrolled in the course have not been active. The number of active students was the highest in the week of March 1st when the material of Week 1 become available (Table 6). Note that the course closed on April 12th and that except for the live webinar recording no new course material has been added after March 29th.

course week	week ending on	active learners
1	5-3-2023	175
2	12-3-2023	162
3	19-3-2023	120
4	26-3-2023	98
5	2-4-2023	76
	9-4-2023	99
	16-4-2023	57

Source edX Insights

Table 6 Active learners per week

One of the measures to review the quality of the materials is the percentage of learners who complete watching a video and not stopped watching before the end of it (Table 7). The figures show that a large majority of the videos have been watched completely. The relatively low figure of the last week may relate to the recording of the live webinar, which takes longer than regular videos.

Week	Number of videos*	Complete watches
1. Mapping strengths and weaknesses of rural regions	5	73.1%
2. Mapping opportunities of rural regions with trend analysis	2	84.3%
3. Understanding the issue of access to land	3	76.2%
4. Identifying promising practices for new generations	5	81.8%
5. Developing strategies and actions for rural regions	2	71.4%

* Includes feedback videos
Source: edX insights

Table 7 Percentage of learners that completed watching videos if they started with it.

Overall the uptake shows a diverse picture of people from many countries of the World being enrolled in the course. The reach with the EU member states has also been considerable. Gender division is balanced. Most learners are well-educated. Generally, the videos have been completely watched.

4 Discussion and Evaluation

The overall evaluation of the course is scheduled for May 22nd. In anticipation on this formal evaluation, the course manager, the course moderator, learning developer and academic project leader have evaluated the outcomes informally on April 26th. Based on course content and uptake of the course this evaluation was positive and it has been decided by the academic project leader that, sometime after the formal evaluation and allowing for adjustments if necessary, the course will be reopened to become available in a self-paced format. In all cases, the content will be available for free.

Some observations from two different learners in the forum:

"This course helps establish priorities for rural development. It offers not new knowledge, but novel methods for designing rural development strategies and relating local resources, opportunities, and real needs of locals. Proposed promising practices are valuable solutions for solving rural issues and introducing novel ideas for rural development. At the same time, it recovers the problem that limits the application of some of these practices in chosen region and highlights the directions of further actions."

"As others replied as well, I value this course the most for the conceptual and analytic framework it offers. It makes us think about rural development and our chosen region from a clear intervention logic. A SWOT or any other method for identifying needs and challenges leads us to a set of strategic goals which we can carry out or implement by means of actions or operational goals"

Generally speaking, the experience at TU Delft extension school is that student numbers of MOOC courses have dropped. There are more and more courses offered and, after the pandemic, the demand for MOOC courses has not grown at the same levels. This results in

fewer learners being expected to be at the courses. Although 580 enrolments from 107 countries are a considerable number, the original aims have been higher but were not realistic in the changing context. This does not disqualify the quality of the materials. But it has an impact on the number of learners that have been reached.