



THE SANTO ESTEVO DE RIBAS DE SIL DECLARATION FOR A **EUROPEAN RURAL AGENDA**

National and international experts in rural development, innovation, environment, entrepreneurship, education, employment, agroecology, depopulation, health, tourism and policy makers among others, gathered on the 31 October 2019 at the Monastery of Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil, a place for reflection and inner peace in the rural area of the province of Ourense, to exchange on the important role that rural areas will play in addressing global challenges. The Ourense Rural Summit (OURS), organised by the University of Vigo with support from the Ourense Regional Government - through the Smart Province strategy - provided a space for sharing experiences and good practices on how to best support rural areas in addressing their challenges and seizing emerging opportunities while contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UN's 2030 Agenda. Outcomes and conclusions from participants during this Summit, and their commitment to bring a positive development into our rural areas, put the foundations for the following declaration:

Rural territories and their communities have a crucial role to play in solving current social, economic and environmental challenges through innovation. Boosting the revitalisation of rural areas will put them in the leading role in addressing some of the emerging global concerns through local action while ensuring a sustainable and competitive development of Europe. To do so, it is crucial to share knowledge, and understand the different realities and needs of our rural areas in order to develop and implement innovative solutions that capacitate local communities to take action, and ultimately generate an integrated and inclusive development.

Hence, rural areas are calling for an integrated rural development policy that is drawn up under a broad **European Rural Agenda**, similarly to the European Urban Agenda, which offers an overall framework for action in all the policy domains relevant for rural areas. In particular, the following measures offer a great potential for supporting rural communities in their path to a modern and vibrant future:

- 1** **Boost the creation of rural innovation ecosystems** by developing and integrating solutions based on social, scientific and technological knowledge.
- 2** **Revitalise rural territories** through supporting entrepreneurship, investments and new business models that generate added value for society in areas such as basic services, a knowledge-based society and the development of lifelong social, personal and professional learning.
- 3** **Enhance quality life in rural areas** and consider it as a specific asset that gives competitive advantage rural areas that can contribute to attract and encourage young people to stay and return.

- 4** **Preserve and add the value to natural and cultural heritage** in order to guarantee endogenous development and sustainable management of natural resources such as water, land and biodiversity.
- 5** **Support the fight against climate change** through actions that contribute to helping territories mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, thereby highlighting the potential of sectors such as renewable energy, bio-economy and circular economy.
- 6** **Boost new rural value chains and support emerging business opportunities** for enterprises in all sectors, and thus enhance local production and trading networks.
- 7** **Encourage a modern and agile rural governance**, by improving local engagement and participation in public policy and by reducing administrative burden on public administrators and citizens.

Rural areas should make good use of the current *momentum* to develop an integrated and transversal policy framework involving all institutions. In this context, a European Rural Agenda has to provide a specific framework for action which encourages the design of all policies through a rural perspective. Hence, there needs to be a serious mechanism for coordinating and '**rural proofing**' all EU policies, as indicated in the Cork Declaration 2.0.

Moreover, a wider scope to rural policy interventions calls for earmarking and ring-fencing a dedicated budget for rural areas in the ERDF and ESF, in particular for supporting the preparation and implementation of community-led innovation in the wider rural sectors such as energy, mobility, health, education, etc (e.g. through Smart Villages and LEADER). Consequently, a transformation is needed in the AKIS (Agricultural and Knowledge Innovation Systems) towards an **ARKIS (Agricultural and Rural Knowledge and Information Systems)** increasing the network and capacities of innovation agents.

The CAP is a crucial supporting tool for rural areas which needs to act in synergy and coordination with the other European Structural and Investment funds. Hence, it is important to bring back this policy into the Common Provisions Regulation with the other ESIF funds.

The above will ensure that an EU Rural Agenda enables that the right tools are in place for local communities to develop and implement innovative solutions thereby driving rural areas towards a better future.

With the above in mind, the International Observatory of Rural Research (RIO) was created to act as 'rural innovation broker' in Galicia and leading actor in rural development in Europe by providing a platform for exchanges between the scientific community and local agents in the territory.

In witness thereof, we sign the present declaration at the Parador de Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil, on 31 October, 2019.

Hon. Mr. Manuel Reigosa Roger

Hon. Mr. José Manuel Baltar Blanco

Rector, Universidade de Vigo

President, Ourense Regional Government