
8. Bridging the ‘Urban-Rural Divide’

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1. Introduction

Infrastructural, ecological, public service, economic, social and cultural inequalities worthily preoccupy debates concerning the ‘urban-rural’ divide. Arising less frequently, however, is the topic of lost development opportunity in the urban-rural interchange. The premise of this paper is that there is a mutually interdependent relationship between urban and rural development, without which society as a whole cannot fully prosper. I take as a starting point an official policy acknowledgement of problems of ‘crisis proportions’ in agricultural development leading to the identification of new opportunities in the urban-rural interchange as a solution. I then elaborate the scope of potential opportunities presented in this context, followed by an analysis of how and why many of these opportunities failed to materialise. Arising from the analysis, a pathway is identified to establish a social contract bridging the ‘urban-rural divide’ for the benefit of society as a whole. To achieve such a social contract, challenges arise not only for agricultural society but for rural and urban dwellers, civil society and industry groups, and, crucially, organisational cultures of the state.

2. Rural areas: from production to include consumption

By the late 1980s a number of problems were said to have reached “crisis proportions” in rural Ireland:

‘Rural population decline was acute, particularly so in remote disadvantaged areas; the effects of the polluting, non-sustainable character of heavily capitalised intensive agriculture was becoming evident in the natural environment (CEC, 1988); there were steeply declining numbers at work in agriculture and low agricultural incomes (stemming in part from the high proportion of officially categorised non-viable farms); rural underemployment

was rife; and there was a deficiency of outlets for off-farm employment opportunities' (Kearney et al., 1995, cited by Curtin & Varley, 1997).

The Future of Rural Society (CEC, 1988) was one of the first policy documents to set out a new EU vision⁶⁴ for rural economic development, presenting a broadened interpretation of the rural economy as 'a complex economic and social fabric made up of a wide range of activities: farming, small trades and businesses, small and medium-sized industries, commerce and services'. A central characteristic of revised policies was an acknowledgement that consumption (as well as agricultural production) took place in rural areas and that increased investment in invigorating an economy around consumption would deliver livelihood and lifestyle benefits for both rural and urban societies. Such policies heralded a development vision for rural areas that was firmly located within the urban-rural interchange.

Rural areas were newly perceived by policy as 'not just for farmers living there but for the benefit of society as a whole' and as acting for urban areas as 'a buffer, providing a regenerative environment essential for ecological balance' (CEC, 1988; Gray, 2000, 42-44). The importance of the 'regenerative' functions of rural areas has since become more pronounced in the consciousness of civil society, accompanying greater prominence of issues such as climate change in public debate. Rural products and services that encompassed ecological capitals were identified as increasingly sought after by rural and urban consumers nationally and internationally. Rural areas were also newly perceived as a repository for important national cultural resources, such as native languages and traditions, which were regarded as valuable commodities for stimulating rural enterprise. It was clear that visions for a revitalised rural economies and societies were characterised not by the production of unbranded beef, dairy and sheep commodities but of products and services that reflected important national and international ecological, cultural and social issues. The new rural development agenda was set to address broader social issues and it would involve an 'opening up' of the countryside for unprecedented urban-rural interchange in processes of mutually beneficial production and consumption.

⁶⁴ Agricultural policy in Ireland, similar to all EU member states, strongly reflects and is influenced by the EU's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). This explains the dominant emphasis on EU policies in this paper.

3. 'Local partnerships' for development

Over the three decades after the Future of Rural Society (1988), various policy statements and instruments⁶⁵ cemented its vision for a less insular and more diversified economy for rural areas. The EU LEADER programme, espousing a local partnership based approach, was a primary policy in practically supporting the new development vision on the ground. Such partnerships, representing a departure from the centralised, hierarchical decision-making structures of past EU policies, were described as having the aim of 'returning power to local communities'⁶⁶ (Varley and Curtin, 2006, 424). Like many urban and rural partnerships, the LEADER programme (Figure 1) operates on the basis of two principles: involvement of representatives from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental groups (principle of partnership); and decision-making taking place as close as possible to the site of implementation (principle of subsidiarity) (Osti, 2000, p. 172). Central assumptions regarding the effectiveness of partnership and subsidiary structures for development were as follows:

- The participation of a variety of (public, private, voluntary) sectoral stakeholders at the local level gives rise to an integrated approach capable of addressing development problem and opportunities in a more integrated, diverse and creative way.
- Design and implementation of development at the local level and 'tapping into' local knowledges and perspectives makes development more relevant and appropriate to local conditions and thus capable of addressing local problems and exploiting unique local resources. Decisions reached are also more likely to 'stick' when involving local people on the ground (Moseley, 2003).

(Macken-Walsh, 2009)

⁶⁵ Including The MacSharry Reforms, 1992; Community Initiative for Rural Development (LEADER) 1991-current; The Cork Declaration (1996); The Buckwell Report, 1997; Agenda 2000, 1997; CAP 2000, 1997; The Cork Declaration, 2016. See Gray (2000).

⁶⁶ Not unique to rural areas, these partnerships were inspired by 'an official analysis that the conditions resulting in urban and rural decline has reached crisis dimensions that cried out for a fresh policy response'. While crises experienced in rural areas related to the 'unsustainable character of intensive farming', counterpart crises in urban areas were long-term unemployment, unemployment 'black spots', and poverty (Varley and Curtin, 2006, 423-424).

Figure 1 EU LEADER Programme Funding in Ireland

PROGRAMME	EU FUNDING	IRISH EXCHEQUER	TOTAL
LEADER I: 1991-1994	€26.4m	€17.6m	€44m
LEADER II: 1995-1999	€68.8m	€29.3m	€98.1m
LEADER +: 2000-2006	€74.3m	€44.8m	€119.1m
LEADER: 2007-2013	€233.8m	€191.2m	€425m
LEADER: 2014-2020	€157.5m	€92.5	€250m

Source: Kearney (2009)

3.1 The 'business case' of local partnerships

A particular 'business case' accompanies the use of local partnerships for rural development. Explaining the foundations of such a business case, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1999) says, "globalisation not only pulls upwards, it pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy". This is reflected in Michal Porter's work on the Competitive Advantage of Nations, which argues that there are two main ways to be competitive in a global economy: 'being the lowest cost supplier of an undifferentiated commodity; or providing the market with unique and superior values in product quality or special features' (Porter, cited in Kirschenmann, 2008). Fostering an alternative to the 'low-cost' model of 'heavily capitalised intensive agriculture' identified as underpinning the 'crisis' of the 1980s (Kearney *et al.*, 1995), the LEADER programme was designed by policy-makers to be aligned with the second of these 'value-added' routes towards competitiveness. The local partnership approach was fit for purpose in his context: *"If the endogenous potential of rural regions is to be properly developed, local initiatives must be stimulated and mobilised"* (CEC, 1988, .62).

'Indigenisation' of local economies, involving the attachment of 'lifestyle significance or political ideology to products and services' (Ray, 2000, 6) is becoming an increasingly common development strategy in urban as well as rural areas. The 'culture economy' approach became synonymous with LEADER from the outset. Described as a development approach focused on "capitalising on the distinctive features of rural areas and cultural practices by commodifying them for commercial purposes rather than seeking to pursue scale economies in production" (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008, 145), it

is entirely consistent with the route towards competitiveness followed by LEADER.

Unsurprisingly, because of the programme's pursuit of a value-added rather than low-cost development route, analysis of development outcomes of programmes such as LEADER are found to have a common 'differentiated status' (Moseley, 2003). A pan-European research project involving the Irish sociologist Hilary Tovey identified three main forms of core economic activity supported by LEADER and similar initiatives across Europe: *alternative* food; *cultural* tourism; and *new ways* of managing and valorising local resources (CORASON, 2009). The orientation of these enterprises and the products they sell are often described in terms of what they are alternative to. Food products that have special ecological, social or cultural qualities present an alternative to undifferentiated commodity products. Similarly, cultural or ethno-tourism are described as representing an alternative to the "mass tourism of the 'bucket and spade' and 'Costas' varieties" (Lowe *et al.*, 1998, 53). New uses of physical and land resources to generate green energy or establish leisure enterprises represent an alternative to industrial agriculture.

3.2 Producers in the 'new rural economy'

The academic and policy literatures emphasised how LEADER and other local partnerships had the aim of 'returning power to local communities' (Varley and Curtin, 2006) in local development design and implementation, in a context where farmers, fishers and other rural actors had been largely governed by top-down policies for decades (Gray, 2000).

Aside from new opportunities for local people to gain powers in development decision-making through local partnerships, the particular type of development promoted by LEADER type policy measures was also considered to have 'emancipatory' qualities. Macken-Walsh (2009) reviews how the culture economy development approach is claimed to have the capacity to "raise local consciousness of territorial identity... and raise confidence in the ability of the area to regenerate itself" (Lowe *et al.*, 1998, 54). Rural areas, particularly those that are remote and have been heretofore marginalised by the industrialising and homogenising effects of mainstream policies, can often still hold many of the 'raw', authentic and increasingly rare cultural commodities such as "speakers of the regional language, traditional foods, remnants of craft skills, important historical

and archaeological sites and the native flora and fauna” (Lowe *et al.*, 1998, 55). In addition, it is claimed that the valorisation of local custom, tradition, and skill in a culture economy approach creates ‘higher status jobs’ for local people (Lowe *et al.*, 1998, 56). The culture economy approach is claimed to have “further participative rationale...in the empowerment of an historically repressed or marginalised cultural system... such as Gaelic, Breton or Lap” (Lowe *et al.*, 1998, 54) where such cultural features can provide a locus for regeneration and development.

3.3 Consumers in the ‘new rural economy’

For non-rural dwellers, the importance of rural areas as ‘sites for ecological regeneration’ in the context of serious global concerns such as climate change has never been so prominent in public consciousness and policy debate. Kelly *et al.* (2004) in their research on environmental attitudes and behaviours in Ireland note “that there has been a shift away from the materialist concerns of pre-industrial and industrial societies (that is, support for the established order through maintenance of law and order and the preservation of economic gains) towards post-materialist values (that is greater emphasis on individual self-expression, greater participation in decision-making, freedom, and quality of life)” (Kelly *et al.*, 2004, p. 4).

Consumption can be a powerful tool of active citizenship and research has highlighted how consumption of rural products and services symbolising ecological, social, economic, political and cultural values is led by consumers’ desires to subscribe to or acquire those values (Ray, 1997; Moseley, 2003; Dilley, 2009; Macken-Walsh, 2009). For instance, alternative food movements involving local box schemes and market venues are typically not only driven by citizens wanting to access locally produced, healthy and fresh food but by political issues such as food sovereignty and rural viability important to both producers and consumers.

Dilley (2009, 4) discusses in his research conducted in the UK that ‘food can become a signifier for ‘green’ identities amongst environmental activists – people can “literally eat their way into [green] identity positions’ (Horton, 2003, 71)”. Another example of the weight of food as a political issue around which considerable consumer participation has been mobilised is the ‘Food Sovereignty’ movement, defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically

sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture system” (Via Campesina, 2017).

Consumer trends and social movements are intensifying around health and fitness endeavours closely connected to and reliant upon land and open space. Furthermore, the importance of rural culture and cultural products and services which operate at the level of ‘the aesthetic and the spiritual, the symbolic and the social’ (Scott *et al.*, 2016, 3) are identified as benefits of a culture economy approach. This is consistent with explicit policy representations ‘of rural areas for leisure and environmental preservation’ which identify ‘rural space for relaxation and recreation necessary for regenerating the human spirit for people throughout the entire European Community’ (Gray, 2009, 31).

However, it is also important to note that many culture economy products occupy a market niche occupied by culturally ‘alternative’ ‘authentic’ ‘original’ products, marketed on the basis that they are more meaningful and valuable than the mainstream and mass-produced. In this context, it is important to note that typically intentionally, considering the high value-added route towards competitiveness pursued by the culture economy, its products and services can be of a premium nature, which can curtail their consumption to the economically well-off. Dilley (2009) in his study of UK local food movements notes that local food is frequently described and recognised as something of extra quality, naturalness, freshness and safety and thus becomes linked to issues of socio-economic class - “with a premium price tag, its consumption signifies one’s good sense and discrimination. In this context, local food has been described in some contexts as representing ‘yuppie chow’ (Dilley, 2009, 6).

It is also the case, perhaps inevitably, that products and services of the culture economy are open to the same forces of consumerist materialism as other market segments. Philosophical analyses identify a consumerist and materialistic backlash against the homogenising effects of globalisation, which has “spawned a desire for anything but conformity and convention... consumers have launched a rejection of the fake, the virtual, the spun and the mass produced” (Boyle (2004) cited in Lewin and Williams, 2009, 80). Rural products and services are consumed in an effort to ‘connect to the real’ through ‘real experience’ and ‘real connection’ (Lewin and Williams, 2009, p.113). While the ‘devotion to self-discovery’ and the ‘desire for

authenticity' in contemporary culture (Lewin and Williams, 2009) can be a part of active citizenship, it can also drive the popularity of materialist consumer trends favouring ethnic, or 'authentic' cultural products. The prevailing of materialist consumer trends can give rise to negative consequences for both producers and consumers such as the distortion of culture through trivialisation and 'trinketisation' (Kneafsey, 1998); and an obfuscation of citizenship efforts to contribute to the flourishing of authentic cultural products and services.

4. Local partnerships: three decades on

The emergence of the local partnership approach to development was anticipated to generate multiple positive effects including local community empowerment, higher-value-added enterprise and better employment opportunities for rural dwellers; and improvement of citizens' access to products and services to further their environmental, political and cultural values. Research undertaken in Ireland and across Europe, however, has found that while there has been an increase in rural (and equally urban) areas of the distinctive types of enterprises supported by LEADER and other policies, engagement on the part of farmers and other indigenous groups such as indigenous fishers has been very low. This is of policy and societal concern not only because of the 5.8 million semi-subsistence farmers and landholders in existence across the EU27 and their continually precarious economic circumstances but because policies from the late 1990s were designed specifically to offer to such farmers a more supportive alternative to historical policies that had failed to support them.

4.1 Farm families' participation in LEADER and the 'new rural economy'

Van der Ploeg (2003, 2) concluded from a representative study of EU-wide LEADER partnerships that while there are notable exceptions "the role of farmers is relatively modest if not marginal, not in all, but in many LEADER projects". Across various empirical studies, farmers and fishers are noted for various reasons to remain at the margins of LEADER type initiatives, such as in Italy (Osti, 2000), Ireland (Macken-Walsh, 2009) and France (Esposito-Fava and Lajarge, 2009). Other studies focused on farmers' engagement in the types of alternative food, tourism and land use enterprises sponsored by LEADER have reached similar conclusions.

Research on the participation of indigenous farmers and fishers in the contemporary rural economy has been undertaken in the Irish context since the early 1990s. The most recently available nationally representative statistics show that just 4% of Irish farmers nationally have engaged in any diversification activity with just .4% of farms undertaking on-farm food processing (Meredith, 2011, Figure 2). Short food supply chains involving farms partnering with external processors and retailers are equally rare outside of the dairy sector, particularly where beef is concerned.

Figure 2

Diversification on Farms in Ireland

DIVERSIFICATION TYPE – IRISH FARMS	% UPTAKE
With Diversification (any)	4.1%
With Farm Tourism	0.94%
With Sports/Recreation Entertainment	0.39%
With Processing	0.4%
With Diversification (other)	0.78%
With Contracting	1.95%

Source: Meredith, 2011

Inevitably, low participation of farmers in farm diversification and in the culture economy more generally bears an imprint on how the EU vision for the rural economy has been achieved. Qualitative research has found that although culture economy approaches to rural development are proliferating, they can have tenuous links with indigenous farmers and fishers (Macken-Walsh, 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012). The *Wild Atlantic Way*⁶⁷ initiative, for instance, is a paradigmatic example of the culture economy approach, marketing niche leisure and local food attractions along the

⁶⁷ www.wildatlanticway.ie

western seaboard of Ireland. Food takes a dominant focus in the marketing material, which highlights opportunities for visitors to ‘taste the place’ and ‘shake the hand that feeds you’. However, recent research on the Galway region of the *Wild Atlantic Way* conducted as part of a EU-wide project has found that very few indigenous farmers are directly engaged in enterprises associated with the initiative. One of the most illuminating findings from the study is that the vast majority of meat served to visitors (and sold to dwellers) in Co. Galway originates from the same typical factory supply chains that supply the vast majority of the mainstream Irish market. While Irish meat is fully traceable of exceptionally high quality by international standards, enterprises that supply regional, branded meat products marketed through the culture economy are largely absent. Of the 11 small abattoirs provide slaughtering services in Co. Galway⁶⁸ only one identifies a restaurant as its most significant customer⁶⁹. Farmers who arrange slaughtering for their own consumption and domestic consumers (through butcher counter sales) are the primary customers of the abattoirs. Of the 11 abattoirs, all but two foresee that they will cease operating within a ten year period or less due to retirement. However, despite this, initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way and the Galway EU Region of Gastronomy (2018) rely heavily on the imagery and ‘food story’ of coastal agricultural and indeed fishing communities. While this proves that the role of farmers is important in the region’s ‘food story’, their lack of involvement curtails both the authenticity of the story as well as the potential of new food and tourism initiatives to achieve the economic, social and ecological development aspirations that they are associated with in the policy and academic literatures.

5.2 Pioneers of the ‘new rural economy’

The enormous contribution of immigrants and returned Irish emigrants in establishing and developing of Ireland’s alternative food economy in particular is acknowledged in the sociological literature. In her research on the ‘alternative food movement’ in Ireland, Tovey (2006) notes, “their networks include farm households occupying the same land for several generations, but also settled New Age Travellers from Britain, American, German, Swiss, English, and Irish ex-urbanites, women who had married

⁶⁸ ‘Typical factory supply chain’ is used here to refer to large meat factories’ purchasing (often through marts) of livestock from private farmers. The factories process and sell meat products which although are traceable are not branded according to place of origin.

⁶⁹ A notable exception of these was one abattoir that sold a significant amount of unbranded product to a fast-food operator.

into farming or fishing families, and returned Irish emigrants”. Tovey (2006) notes in relation to traders at a local rural market in Cahir, Tipperary, that,

“...such actors come from a surprising diversity of backgrounds. In West Cork, for example, many are incomers to Ireland, and even those who grew up in an Irish farm family household, have usually spent part of their lives working abroad or outside farming. They also tend to be active in local and community development generally, and not just in relation to food. The stallholders in Cahir include a number of incomers or migrants returning to Ireland, who have managed to acquire a small parcel of land or built up a small food business from which they want to construct an ‘alternative’ livelihood” (Tovey, 2006, p.16).

Similarly, the organic food movement in Ireland, though including a “slow but steady trickle of Irish indigenous converts”, is recognised as having been pioneered by “waves of incomers” (Tovey, 2006). Supporting these findings was a nationally representative study, which found that having farming experience impacts negatively on the likelihood of farming organically – “organic farmers have in general less farming experience than conventional farmers” (Läpple and Donnellan, 2008, p.14).

The important role that extra-local actors play in appraising the commercial potential of local cultural and physical resources is observed by Irish rural development professionals (Macken-Walsh, 2009):

“It’s hard for the community to see its own culture [from a consumer perspective]”

“I think in some rural communities there’s a need for a set of prompters that show the menu of possibilities...Internationally as well as nationally. Sometimes we don’t realise what we have ourselves, we need other people’s eyes”

Source: Macken-Walsh (2009, 113)

A EU-wide study found that those prominently involved in alternative food movements in particular have a distinctly consumer (rather than producer) perspective of food. Tovey (2006), for instance, in her case study of alternative food movements in Ireland found that “Some of the most prominent ‘local food’ actors, even if they are farmers or growers, see themselves as part of

a consumer movement than a rural producer movement” (Tovey, 2006). Fonte (2008) in her theorising of a “reconnection perspective” in relation to European local food markets notes that such markets provide a means for consumers to ‘connect’ with local food and are “strongly driven by a consumer perspective on food” (Fonte, 2008, 207).

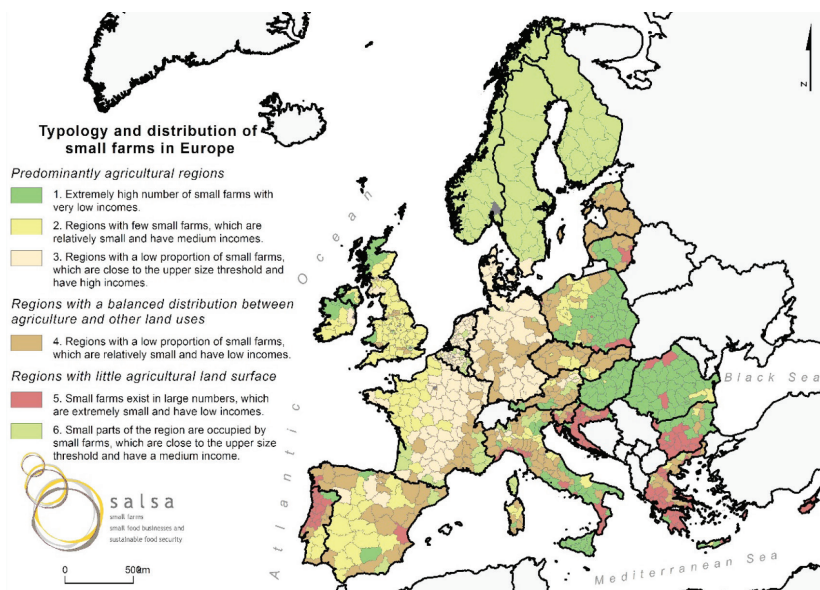
Collaborative business models, such as farm partnerships between members of same farm family or between neighbouring farm families, have grown in popularity over the past decade. These partnerships, often involving women, can serve to combine both producer and consumer perspectives in business approaches to alternative food production and other culture economy enterprises (Macken-Walsh and Roche, 2012; Byrne *et al.*, 2014; Cush *et al.*, 2015)

5.3 Farm Viability

However, the problems of poor farm viability recognised as having ‘crisis proportions’ in 1991 are persisting, demonstrated annually by Teagasc’s National Farm Survey (NFS) and periodically by the Census of Agriculture undertaken by the Central Statistic’s Office (CSO). The problem is experienced in particular by drystock (beef and sheep farms), the smallest of which are concentrated in less intensive farming regions, predominantly in the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) region (Dillon *et al.*, 2017, 4).

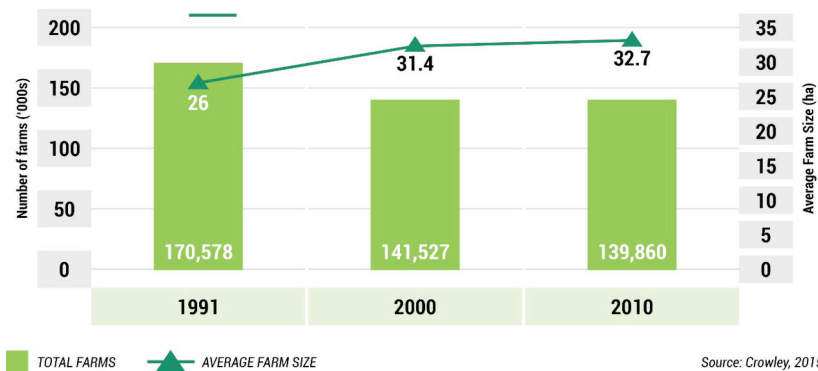
Differentiating between small farms, defined as farms whose standard output⁷⁰ is less than €8000 and large farms as those whose output is more than €8000, Teagasc’s National Farm Survey (NFS) presents nationally representative data on farm incomes (Figure 5). The CSO’s Farm Structures Survey (2013) found that there were 139,600 farms in Ireland, of which 53,000 had a standard output of less than €8000 (Dillon *et al.*, 2017, 4). Dillon *et al.* (2017, 4) describe €8000 of standard output as the equivalent of 6 dairy cows, 6 hectares of wheat or 14 suckler cows. It is important to note however that all small farms in Ireland are drystock (beef and sheep) farms (Dillon *et al.*, 2017, i).

⁷⁰ The standard output of an agricultural product (crop or livestock), abbreviated as SO, is the average monetary value of the agricultural output at farm-gate price, in euro per hectare or per head of livestock. There is a regional SO coefficient for each product, as an average value over a reference period (5 years, except for the SO 2004 coefficient calculated using the average of 3 years). The sum of all the SO per hectare of crop and per head of livestock in a farm is a measure of its overall economic size, expressed in Euro (Europa, 2017).



Source: <http://www.salsa.uevora.pt/>

Figure 3 Ireland Farm Size Variations 1991/2000/2010



Source: Crowley, 2015

Figure 4 Ireland Farm Size Variations 1991/2000/2010

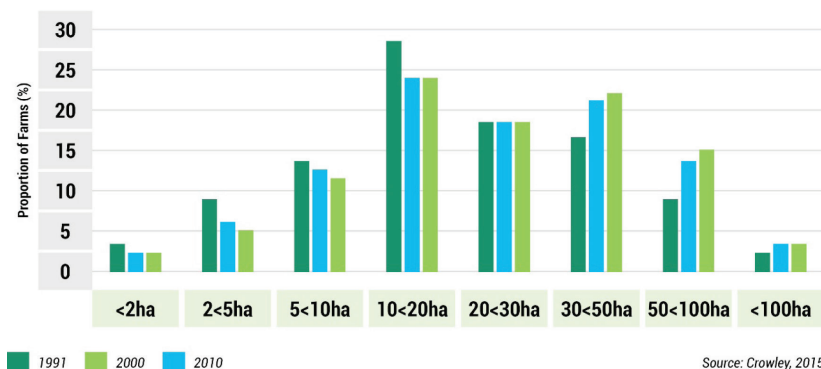


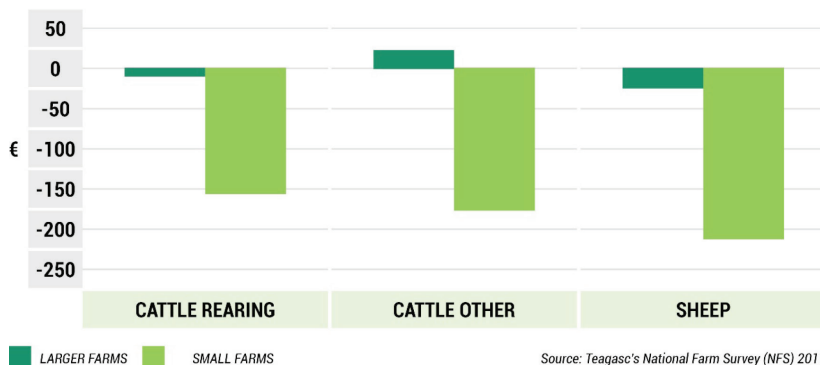
Figure 5 Average Family Farm Income: Cattle & Sheep Farms 2015

	LARGER FARMS	SMALL FARMS
GROSS OUTPUT	46,235	11,351
(OF WHICH DIRECT PAYMENTS)	15,217	5,474
TOTAL COSTS	31,265	8,434
(OF WHICH DIRECT COSTS)	15,112	3,304
(OF WHICH OVERHEADS)	16,153	5,131
FAMILY FARM INCOME	14,970	2,917

Source: Teagasc's National Farm Survey (NFS) presented in Dillon et al. (2017, 13)

The market income for most larger and small drystock (cattle and sheep farms) is negative, which means that they receive less than the cost of production in the market (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Market Income Per Hectare - Cattle & Sheep Farms 2015



While less than 1% of farmland is sold on the open market annually, a figure that remained constant throughout the 'Celtic Tiger' (Hennessy, 2006), the number of farms is decreasing and their size is increasing (Figures 3, 4).

A recent nationally representative survey of Teagasc's National Farm Survey (NFS) focusing specifically on farms with a standard output of less than €8,000 provides some insights to the current situation and future of these farms. A snapshot of the analysis is as follows:

- 16% of the total farmland area of the country is operated by smaller farms.
- Nitrogen and phosphorous balances on a per hectare basis are lower on smaller farms than larger farms: the systems on these farms are low-input; and a high proportion of grass is used in animal diets.
- Per hectare, smaller farms emit fewer greenhouse gas emissions but this is dependent on their low level of (meat) output. 38% of smaller farm operators describe farming as their main occupation.
- The average smaller farm employs less than a half a labour unit and the average income per full-time labour unit equivalent was €6,238 in 2015.

- In 2015, 88% of smaller farm households were in receipt of an off-farm income source – an off-farm job, pension or social welfare payment.
- Of these, 45% of the farm operators/spouses have an off-farm job, compared to 50% of the operators/spouses of larger farm operators.
- The age distribution of smaller farm operators is not substantially different from larger farm operators, with 33% of smaller operators over 65 years compared with 23% of larger farm operators.
- Risk of isolation increases with age: just 39% of farmers over the age of 60 meet people outside of their household on a daily basis compared to 84% of younger farmers.
- Two-thirds of smaller farm operators report a deterioration in their sense of security: 40% report a deterioration in access to Garda stations and banks.
- 85% of smaller farms operators plan to continue farming while only 7% are currently seeking employment off the farm, regarding which the authors deduce, ‘given the age profile and high prevalence of pensions, this is perhaps not surprising’.

Source: Dillon et al., 2017.

6. Rural crises unsolved: explanatory factors

What are the factors that explain why policies supporting a ‘new rural economy’ largely failed in Ireland and across to Europe to mobilise farm families out of their ‘crisis’ circumstances? Research in Ireland and elsewhere has put forward various explanations.

6.1: ‘Rules of the game’

The first and perhaps most obvious factor is the scope of development activity permitted by LEADER-type initiatives and the culture economy more generally. Haugaard (2002, 309) in a discussion of ‘rules of the game’ (i.e. structural power) reminds us that ‘structures and institutions [even local partnerships] are *always* goal-specific and frequently actor specific’. If this is the case, it follows that partnerships encourage the inclusion of some

actors and the exclusion of others. The theory of power reminds us that the transition from ‘top-down’ policies prescribed by the state to partnerships involving local people does not mean that the state has relinquished power. As explained by (Haugaard, 2012), local funders (or dominant local actors) orchestrate the ‘organising in’ of some development interests and the ‘organising out’ of others:

“Circuits built on ideology that seek to dominate, to attain *hegemony*, are the most fragile and vulnerable... It is much more efficient to govern through freedoms, however illusory, than repressions and this applies across all levels of analysis from the organizational to the societal. Circuits that stress system integration and allow for diversities and pluralities in social integration are more resilient and robust” (Clegg, 2014, 388).

It was already clear at the time of LEADER’s emergence in 1991 that particular solutions, lying outside of mainstream agriculture, were envisaged at the EU level. Of this, Curtin and Varley (1997, 142) explained, “what the Irish state/EU have in mind in the area-based partnerships is not the simple handing over of responsibility to local actors. On the contrary, the expectation is that external actors must be centrally involved in providing resources, deciding what is required to be done, who is to be admitted as legitimate partners and how the partnerships are actually to operate”. Such a scenario is echoed in the research of O’Toole and Burdess (2004, p.433) who state: “Higher levels of governance “‘steer’ the self-governing processes of small rural communities, expecting them to ‘row’ for themselves”. It became clear that the possibility of rural partnerships having an empowering effect in rural communities was dependent on an assumption that inhabitants have the appropriate skills and, more importantly, preferences to design and implement the distinctive types of projects that rural partnerships are assigned by policy to achieve (Macken-Walsh, 2009; Convery *et al.*, 2012; Macken-Walsh, 2016).

6.2: From ‘material and labour value to design value’: a policy expectation from family farmers

A second factor is that, for farmers, transitioning from mainstream agriculture may not be unproblematic or desirable. The challenge, as aptly described by Christopher Ray (2000, 6), is ‘replacing material and labour value with design value’. The knowledges and occupational practices

required for types of design-centred, consumer-focused enterprises fostered by programmes such as LEADER are entirely different to practices and knowledges required for land and animal husbandry. Even more crucially, design-led enterprise and primary farming and fishing are underpinned by completely different value systems and different manifestations of cultural, social and economic capital (Macken-Walsh, 2009; Macken-Walsh, 2012). Farmers and fishers engaged in primary fishing and agricultural production activities may not typically esteem skills in service provision and interfacing with consumer markets (see also Burton 2004; Burton *et al.*, 2008). For social groups whose occupational and socio-cultural identities are centred on traditional agricultural and fishing enterprises, even if these enterprises are lacking economic viability, service-based and processing activities may have little or no appeal (Esposito-Fava and Lajarge, 2009; Macken-Walsh, 2012). However, it is important to note that wider members of farm and fishing households have a diverse professional profile and often very high levels of educational attainment, which may support greater preferences for service and design-based enterprises henceforth. A trend of highly educated farm offspring returning to the farm to establish alternative enterprises, driven by the “dream of a smallholding” (Blekesaune *et al.*, 2007) has been noted elsewhere in Europe.

6.3: Production obscured by consumption

A third factor is that culture economies are often driven by force of consumerism rather than production. Despite hopes that indigenous cultural practices and characteristics, as commodities for the culture economy, would empower indigenous communities and invigorate their economies, sociological studies across Europe and in Ireland have found that the culture economy is more driven by forces of consumption and what consumers want rather than production and indigenous people such as farmers. For a culture economy to deliver benefits and meet expectations of both producers and consumers, it is necessary for the drive to be bidirectional.

With specific reference to the culture economy, the philosophy literature warns against the ‘obscuring’ of production by consumption (Pratt, 2004 p. 117). In particular, Pratt, (2004, 123) cautions against consumption becoming ‘spectacularised’ and ‘artificially separated’ from the reality of production and producers. Untethered from production, the culture economy becomes generated by transnational convergences and conformities in cultural products and services, influenced by ‘Eurocentricity’, ‘street fashion gossip’

(Pratt, 2004) and an ‘escalating awareness of, contact with and borrowing from, other cultures and polities as goods, people and ideas circulate on a global scale’ (Ray, 2000). Disconnects between production and consumption are inevitably problematic for a value-added strategy that, for consumers, is expected to be founded on authentic cultural features and, for producers, is expected to give rise to better livelihoods. The obscuring of production by consumption, thus, leads to new dimensions of the urban-rural divide rather than its amelioration.

6.4 Resistance paysanne

As Shortall (2008) reminds us, “it cannot be assumed that to participate is the default position or the social norm, or that non-participation is exclusion”. For farmers and fishers who wish to remain farming and fishing, they “do not see the point” in engaging with local partnerships if their problems cannot be solved by local partnerships (Shortall, 2008; Macken-Walsh, 2016).

It is through this lens that the power of non-participation or of ‘*resistance paysanne*’ becomes clear. Van der Ploeg (2008, 15) identifies the powerful roles of the rural peasantry in civil society, offering ‘pockets of resistance’ that represent ‘uncapturedness, the struggle for autonomy and the creation of noncontrollability’. Van der Ploeg (2008) notes an “intriguing ‘traveling’ of the peasant principle”, and calls for the recognition of *resistance paysanne* as powerful, ‘actively constructed response’ to attempts at domination. Arguably due to the relationally deep human ecological connection between successive generations of farm families and their land and livestock, farm families can have secure ontological identities resilient to integrative forces such as expert or reified knowledge influences that challenge ‘what is locally considered reasonable behaviour... (and) whereby the conventionality of structures disappears from view from the perspective of the social actor’ (Haugaard, 2011, p.23; Macken-Walsh, 2016). Such a thesis also comes forth from the work of Varley and Moser (2013), who identify the nub of their ‘integration through marginalisation’ thesis as interventions in agriculture that aimed to ‘define the substance and direction of what was to pass for ‘progress’ under modern conditions’ (p. 34).

7. Current and future challenges

Davidova *et al.* (2014), on the basis of an extensive study across Europe, identified three future paths for small farms: “disappearance due to absorption into larger commercialised farm holdings or to land abandonment (e.g. in remoter areas); transformation into small commercial farms; continuation through a) diversification; b) non-agricultural wage employment and part-time farming; or c) “forced” re-entry of successive family generations due to the lack of other income sources” (Dillon *et al.*, 2017, 38).

There is little doubt that at least some of the large cohort of economically vulnerable ‘middle’ Irish farms will follow these various pathways. However, an alternative route is possible for Ireland, following the ‘Agriculture of the Middle’ (AotM) model that originated in the USA (Macken-Walsh, 2011; Macken-Walsh, 2012; Hooks *et al.*, 2017). The premise of the model is that middle family farms, the majority of which have been farming on the same land for generations must be supported for the benefit of wider society. This, as articulated by the US White Paper on AotM is because of the following reasons:

“This is not just about “saving” the family farm. It is about the associated social, economic, and environmental costs to society. With the loss of each family farm, a rural community loses approximately \$720,000 in related economic activity. Ecologists now affirm that the only way we can manage farmland in an ecologically sound manner is by having the farmer living on his/her land long enough and intimately enough to have learned how to manage it properly. With the loss of ecological land health we see the loss of soil quality, wildlife, and recreational areas. And with the loss of rural populations, the loss of public services - education, health-care, transportation - inevitably follow”*

(Kirschenmann et al., 2005)

**Specific to the Irish context, “every €100 of agricultural output generates an additional €73 output in the wider Irish economy. This figure is 18% higher than the average economic impact of all other manufacturing sectors in Ireland.” (Walsh et al., 2017, 21).*

This logic of this manifesto corresponds with the ‘causal link between family farming and the preservation of rural society’ evident in EU policies

since the inception of the CAP⁷¹ (Gray, 2009) and reaffirmed in the 1980s by statements such as, ‘an agriculture on the model of the USA with vast spaces of land and few farmers, is neither possible nor desirable in European conditions in which the basic concept remains the family farm’ (CEC, 1985, 5). Rather than emphasising options of farm diversification, non-agricultural employment or service and design based enterprises for family farmers, the AotM development model is focused on opportunities within the practice of family farming and identifies a particular contemporary market niche for the produce of family farms,

*“There is a burgeoning market demand for foods – **neither cheap commodity foods or luxury expensive speciality foods** – that are somewhere in the middle and are produced in accordance with sustainable agriculture standards. It is precisely the farmers of the middle who are in the best position to produce those products”*

(Kirschemann *et al.*, 2008, p.4).

However, as discussed by Hooks *et al.* (forthcoming), the problem of poor viability among Irish drystock farms is at least partially caused by officially recognised power imbalances in the supply chain (DAFM, 2014). Unlike the dairy sector in Ireland, where there is a longstanding tradition of the cooperative movement, the vast majority of drystock farmers are not organised collectively in the market. Providing a organisational response to this problem, the AotM model is operationalised through a cooperative structure, which coordinates production on individual family farms and undertakes processing, sales negotiations, distribution, marketing and branding on behalf of the farmers who co-own the cooperative.

“Imagine a large number of small and midsized family farmers, linked together in a marketing network, producing food products for regional food sheds, using sound conservation practices, providing their animals with the opportunity to perform all their natural functions, preserving the identity of such food products by processing them in locally-owned processing facilities, and making them available in the marketplace with opportunities for consumers to access the entire story of the products life cycle using existing

⁷¹ Gray reports (2009, 21), “In the 1970s and 1980s, the effect of the CAP’s original market and price support mechanisms on agriculture began to be analytically identified as two interrelated predicaments that threatened the viability of farming and rural society central to the image of rural fundamentalism. They derived from the CAP’s conflicting aims of social equity and economic efficiency; paradoxically, the programs aimed at ameliorating them.

food service delivery systems” US White Paper on Agriculture of the Middle (Kirschenmann et al., 2005).

The basic strategy of the model, thus, is i) adding value to the output of family farms and ii) changing how family farms are represented in the marketplace so that they receive a greater return for their produce. This strategy closely echoes Ireland’s current agriculture policies. In the first instance, while policy documents of the recent past aimed to increase the volume of production output, there has been a marked transition to an emphasis instead on the value of produce. *Food Harvest 2020* (p. 3) future states that there is a need to “shift from commodities-based supply to one that is increasingly brand centred and consumer focused. Its successor, *Food Wise 2025* (p.35) contains a more explicit emphasis on increasing the value rather than volume of output of agricultural produce. Bell and Shelman, (2010) in their marketing vision report *Pathways for Growth* remind Ireland that ‘it is small not multi-national’ and “its competitors for the “green” market cannot deliver on that promise”. *Ireland’s Smart Economy* policy document states that “...high value-added parts of the food industry depend on Ireland’s ‘green image’ for competitive advantage” and Ireland’s agriculture development blueprint *Food Harvest 2020* acknowledges that “The modern use of ‘green’ to identify concern for the natural environment has, for some time, been recognised as representing a natural marketing opportunity for Irish agri-food to build on.”

An important characteristic of Irish agriculture, particularly drystock farms, is that they are participating in and accredited *en masse* by a national marketing scheme, Origin Green. Bord Bia, Ireland’s Food Marketing Board reports,

“Origin Green is the only sustainability programme in the world which operates on a national scale, uniting government, the private sector and food producers, through Bord Bia... Over 90% of Irish beef output is covered by Origin Green”.

The Origin Green sustainability report for 2016 (Bord Bia, 2016, 14) confirms that since 2011, 117,000 carbon assessments have taken place on over 49,000 participating Irish beef farms and 13,000 participating Irish dairy farms. However, by contrast to dairy farmers, represented by farmer-

owned cooperatives in the marketplace, the vast majority beef and sheep farmers are represented by large privately owned processors.

However, beef Producer Organisations (POs) were legislated for in Ireland in 2016 in the context of power imbalances in the supply chain disavouring farmers (DAFM, 2014; Renwick, 2015; Hooks *et al.*, forthcoming) and following recommendations of a beef industry stakeholder group. The functions of POs⁷² correspond with the functioning of AotM cooperatives. Hooks *et al.* (2017) undertook a case-study of a beef AotM cooperative in the US with a view to identifying learning arising for the Irish context. The authors found the cooperative generated “positive effects on farm-level viability, sustainability and resilience” (Hooks *et al.*, 2017).

A crucial characteristic of the AotM model is its advocacy of a transitioning from food ‘supply chains’ to ‘values based supply chains’ (VBSCs). Intrinsically, VBSCs are constituted of partnerships involving farmers and consumers (and processors, retailers and other intermediary partners in between), which are founded on commitments to social, economic, cultural and ecological values provided by family farming (Stevenson *et al.*, 2008; Hooks *et al.*, 2017). Ideologically, VBSCs represent a ‘*new and radical social contract*’ (Irish Times, 2017) that is the cornerstone delivery model of Social Justice Ireland (Healy *et al.*, 2017).

However to lay down roots for such a social contract, empowerment is needed in the interchange between agriculture and wider society; and at the level of statutory organisations and policy-makers. It is useful in this context to recall Solbakken’s (1996) definition of empowerment, which resonates with Healy *et al.*’s (2017) articulation of social contract, is described as requiring:

- *Conscientization*: acquiring a comprehensive awareness and understanding of the economic, social, political and cultural factors that shape our opportunities, constraints and our ‘way of thinking and doing things’

⁷² EU regulation (1308/2013) defines POs as organisations undertaking the following functions: i) joint distribution, including joint selling platform or joint transportation; (ii) joint promotion; (iii) joint organising of quality control; (iv) joint use of equipment or storage facilities; (v) joint management of waste directly related to the production of live cattle; (vi) joint procurement of inputs (Hooks *et al.*, forthcoming).

- *Participation*: taking action to bring about positive change for oneself
- *Solidarity*: with others in creating positive change for wider society

To support conscientisation, a pre-cursor for creating a culture of empowerment henceforth, critical reflection is required at the level of the state and EU of institutionalised divisions between ‘rural development’ and agriculture. How the policy trajectory of agricultural development, described by Moser and Varley (2013) as based on ‘integration through subordination’, has conditioned not only agriculture at farm level but the culture and approaches of policy-making and implementing institutions must be appraised, and critically reflected upon. New EU policies that broaden the application of the partnership approach to mainstream agriculture, intended to ‘mobilise existing knowledge... (in) a social process, more bottom-up or interactive than top-down’ (EU SCAR, 2013, 17) must be recognised as representing an entirely new way of supporting agricultural development requiring new policy ways of thinking (Macken-Walsh, 2016). Lingering influences in institutional cultures of policies that valued economies of scale, generating attitudes towards the small farmer, must be acknowledged and mediated through new cultural conversations, involving rural and urban societies equally. The inculcation of a hegemonic rural masculine culture in an agriculture sector that remains partially in industrialisation mode, with constraints arising for the human potential of men and women, must be addressed. In this regard, inspiration can be drawn from evidence of reconstituted gender relations supported by men and women on family farms (Byrne *et al.*, 2014; Cush *et al.*, 2017). The term ‘peasant’ colloquially understood as a ‘poor smallholder’ or an ‘unsophisticated person’ must be revised in public consciousness to reflect the Chayanovian definition of peasant farmer, which highlights remarkable tenacity, resilience and ingenuity in balancing social, cultural and economic priorities (Chayanov, 1980).

8. Conclusion: a social contract for the urban-rural interchange

Creation of a Values-Based Supply Chain (VBSC) that addresses the serious farm viability problem, inequitable imbalances in supply chains, and ecological and food sovereignty threats arising for rural and urban society as a whole, requires a new social contract that is tethered primarily

between farmers and consumers with crucial services, entrepreneurialism and regulatory supervision provided by industry partners and the state. Following Healy *et al.* (2017), regard for citizens' rights and, equally, responsibilities, are predications upon which this social contract is reliant. Clear from the analysis of this paper are the immense respective powers of farmers on one hand and consumer citizens on the other. To empower a workable and enduring social contract, a forging of these powers in the urban-rural interchange is necessary to drive a renewed consumer perspective of an authentic culture economy resourced by a resilient population of family farmers.

Currently, while recent policy change, such as new legislation for the formation of Producer Organisations, is supportive of creating conditions for a new social contract, preliminary indications are that a non-radical view is shaping how policy will be implemented in practice. An analysis of stakeholder⁷³ discourses found that there is little consideration or involvement of consumer perspectives (Hooks *et al.*, forthcoming), with stakeholders taking "a relatively narrow view of the purpose and function of POs, with most associating cooperation with the pursuit of economies of scale and few identifying broader potential in adding value" (Hooks *et al.*, forthcoming, 1). This finding, arguably, reflects an agriculture that has been for over half a century dominated by a development perspective that has valued economies of scale, undifferentiated commodity production, and poor integration with and responsiveness to consumers. In order to avoid once more future losses of opportunity in the crucial interchange between urban and rural societies and economies, a challenges is posed to institutions of the agri-food sector to engage with consumer and citizen perspectives.

However, citizens are also challenged to engage with the topic of agriculture, food production and sustainability is such a way that overcomes materialist consumerist trends that have caused losses in opportunity for both consumers and producers heretofore. For all citizens, a 'cognitive liberation' (McAdam, 1992) must underpin transformed understandings of 'the role of agriculture in rural development, moving it from peripheral and dying to a central activity in rural places' (Tovey, 2006, 173). In order

⁷³ Farmer representative groups, current producer groups, beef sector organisations and statutory bodies who, in response to a call for submissions, made submissions representing their interests concerning POs to Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

for this to occur in a social contract, the most vital partnership of all is between enlightened citizens and the ‘experience and language of peasant agriculture’ (Moser and Varley, 2017).

The extraordinary resilience of the peasant agriculture model demonstrating judicious navigation through ‘both persistence and adaptation’ (Grubstrom *et al.*, 2014, 154) has served society well throughout changing market and policy conditions over time. The tenacity or *resistance paysanne* of the 5.8 million or more peasant farmers across Europe and has arguably prevented at a larger scale the officially recognised ‘disastrous effects of integration to the dominant modernisation model, with its goals of continuous expansion of scale, industrialisation of production and integration into increasingly globalised agri-industrial corporations’ (Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004, 234). In the context of culture economies dominated by consumer trends, *resistance paysanne* has also been protective somewhat paradoxically protective of cultural diversity because, in the words of Irish sociologist Anne Byrne, “when indigenous inhabitants... gradually abandon local criteria regulating forms of reasonable thought and feeling, they will have become much more similar to people everywhere else” (Byrne *et al.*, 1993, 253).

It is very important to observe that the vision of the ‘new rural economy’ was in many respects sound but the policies designed to achieve it failed to strike the correct balance in a socio-culturally appropriate way with the family farmer. To quote Pratt (2004, 124) in this context: “while it once was fashionable to criticise old Marxists as ‘productivist’, perhaps it is now time to lay a similar, but opposite charge at the door of the new ‘consumptionists’”. A particularly balanced vision, however, was presented by Irish agricultural sociologist Hilary Tovey and her colleagues of ‘new paradigm rural development’. Re-appraised in light of an AotM delivery model, this vision constitutes much of the important content for a new social contract between citizens in the urban-rural interchange:

New Paradigm Rural Development:

1. Repositions small-scale farming/food production practices at the centre of rural development; rural development is initiated and carried out by rural actors themselves. Its practices try to reshape and recombine all those rural resources which the modernisation

paradigm treats as 'increasingly obsolete and external to agricultural production' – land, labour, eco-systems, animals, plants, craftsmanship, networks, market partners, town-countryside relations (Van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000, 398)

2. Aim to create and particularly to retain wealth within agriculture and the related rural economy. New opportunities for employment and income generation at the local level should be those which add value to the primary product, rather than, as in conventional development models, cheapening those products and reducing their value (Marsden 1993,184; see also Douthwaite, 1996). Projects appropriate for rural economic growth are distinctively different from industrial modernisation projects in which the eventual location of the wealth generated is irrelevant to the spatial location of the jobs created.
3. Encourage innovation in the institutions supporting and regulating economic activities: for example, new forms of marketing of food, new relationships between food producers and consumers. This follows partly from the first aim above, but it is also a deliberate effort to bypass and avoid incorporation into global chains of production and supply. New paradigm rural development 'diminishes, both symbolically and materially, the dependency on financial capital, agro-industry, the global commodity markets and the big retailers'; while 're-grounding' rural economic activities on ecological, social and cultural capitals which are held at the local or regional level (Van der Ploeg and Renting 2004, 233)
4. Finally, its supporters understand new paradigm rural development as a form of *emancipation*, leading, on the aggregate level, to new patterns of sustainability, natural and social (see also Lyson 2003). Sustainable social organisation requires a rethinking of gender relations, social and spatial divisions of labour, identities and forms of cooperation: 'Central to the current practices of rural development, then, is that the creation of wealth, the rise of new institutional patterns and identities, and the shift in power balances, are increasingly being intertwined' (Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004, 233).

Source: Tovey, 2006

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