

Meeting Report: Promotion of Ruralism

27 February 2019

Salle 1, Palais des Nations, Geneva



Attendees: Milica Apostolovic, Michel Epinat, Amie Figueiredo, Rafic Khouri, Walter de Vries, Kees de Zeeuw, Daniel Steudler, Rob Vaandrager, Amalia Velasco, Rik Wouters, Fredrik Zetterquist,

The Vice-Chair of the Working Party on Land Administration, **Mr. Rik Wouters** opened the meeting, thanked the colleagues from L'Association pour le Ruralisme (APR), **Mr. Michel Epinat**, the President of the Association and **Mr. Rafic Khouri**, the Secretary of the Association for initiating the meeting, and gave floor to the discussion on increasing the visibility of ruralism in the work of the WPLA.

Mr. Rafic Khouri, the Secretary of the APR, opened the discussion by introducing the work of the APR, and highlighting the importance of sustainable land development of rural areas, which constitute significant part of the territory of a number of UNECE countries. The initiative of the association originated from the surveyors authorized by the French Ministry of Agriculture to perform land consolidation. He added that APR emerged from the wish of national surveyors to mobilise their in-depth knowledge of land issues of rural areas to contribute to greater political importance and visibility given to these areas. Despite the seemingly obvious importance of rural areas in terms of food, agriculture, tourism, environment, and despite the fact that urban dwellers tend to highly appreciate rural areas, the overwhelming emphasis on urban planning, as reflected in commitments and mandates of relevant UN bodies, often come at the expense of rural areas and result in their neglect. To tackle this, the Association is trying to mobilise interest of

mayors and key rural authorities to stimulate their greater involvement at the regional and international levels.

Mr. Rik Wouters acknowledged the common neglect of the rural areas and the overwhelming focus on the urban and asked whether there are expressions of interests in recalling this initiative on the European scale.

Mr. Walter de Vries, Professor and Head of the Chair of Land Management at Technical University of Munich, briefed on the existing academic interest in the topic, including academic initiatives set up at selected universities (European Academy of Land Use and Development) However, he added that, at least in Germany, interest in rural development is quite limited, unlikely, for instance, interest in real estate.

Some references which he thinks will be useful for further discussions:

- Bayerische Akademie Ländlicher Raum - <http://www.akademie-bayern.de/index.php>
- Cork 2.0 Declaration- https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/events/2016/rural-development/cork-declaration-2-0_en.pdf
- European Rural Development Network - <http://erdn.eu>
- The European Academy of Land Use and Development (EALD) - <https://www.landuseacademy.org/>

Mr. Rafic Khouri expressed interest in the initiative, noting that the Association is interested in building linkages between sectors and different stakeholders, including academics and practitioners of rural areas alike, and stressed the importance of this initiative being related to land development, not just urban farmers. The overall aim should be, he re-emphasised, promotion and greater importance being given to rural areas, in terms of policy and practice.

Ms. Amalia Velasco, the International Affairs Coordinator at the Directorate General for Cadastre of Spain, drew attention to the problem of abandoned rural areas in Spain, and noted that given the importance of domestic agriculture, it is vital to have local stakeholders' support for the initiative. However, she also noted that in some countries in the UNECE region, Spain included, the problem is that land governance is managed at different levels and is under jurisdiction of different authorities, which necessarily create space for policy gaps that are not so easy to close. This issue she underlined as the most important barrier to a wide-reaching European initiative.

Mr. Daniel Steudler, Scientific Associate at the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport at Federal Office of Topography of Switzerland, gave his support to the idea for European initiative on promotion of rural areas, but also highlighted the importance of reconciling very different rural realities across different countries of the UNECE region.

Mr. Fredrik Zetterquist, the Chair of the WPLA, emphasized the importance of not seeing rural development in isolation from urban development but rather in a context of development of sustainable societies. He also noted that the relation between land administration and promotion of ruralism may not be as strong as it seems. He called for more thinking of whether this is in line with the WPLA programme of work and whether there is a more appropriate body to raise international awareness and promotion of ruralism. Likewise, given the mentioned different rural realities of UNECE countries and complex operational landscape, he noted that maybe such initiatives should be kept on national level, rather than regional one, as this may inspire better and quicker action in terms of policy-making.

Ms. Amie Figueiredo, the Secretary of the WPLA, provided closing remarks and reminded the participants that the official position of the UN system, and its supporting agencies and the Secretariat (notably UN-Habitat and key recent publication the New Urban

Agenda, the FAO) is to see urban-rural in terms of continuum, not divide, and that in that sense, attempts to embrace such initiatives and adding them to the programme of WPLA must exercise caution not to overstep the WPLA mandate. This, however, does not mean that policy-makers at town and rural levels, should not take part in the conversation; and there is a need to devise mechanisms to ensure their proper representation at the discussion table and taking their opinions into account. Ensuring inclusivity, and keeping a commitment to rural-urban continuum, so far remains the official position of the UN and UNECE.

Mr Rob Vaandrager wondered what would be the objective of such cooperation at European level. Albeit he was not against the initiative to discuss ruralism he urged to define a well-articulated objective before stepping into further action.

Mr Michel Epinat invited all the participants to France to discuss the topic in a more concrete and detailed way, and see what follow-up can be given to their initiative. Mr de Vries had a keen interest to accept this invitation. Also **Mrs. Amalia Velasco** expressed her interest.

Mr. Kees de Zeeuw, Head of Kadaster International, emphasized that it is very important to bring onboard the young generation when discussing ruralism. Without them articulating the need for including rural development high on the agenda, the promotion of ruralism is less credible.

Mr. Rik Wouters thanked all participants for their contributions and agreed to check for a follow-up meeting. **Mr Fredrik Zetterquist** also thanks all present and agreed to provide feedback regarding the interest of the WPLA to collaborate and stay connected on this topic.