



BIOCIRCULAR VILLAGES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT – WORKSHOP REPORT

Taking place in JDE61 of the EESC during the second session of workshops, over 40 people attended the workshop to see how biocircular villages could help drive rural development.

The objective of the workshop was to showcase good practices in integrating biocircular principles in rural development, particular at village scale. The challenges that face rural stakeholders in stimulating a biocircular economy was also a topic of discussion.

Success Stories

The workshop was led and opened by Oana Neagu of Copa-Cogeca, who introduced the moderator for the session, David Lamb of the European Network for Rural Development. The theme of the workshop included rural development, and the first speaker, Markus Eerola introduced his Finnish organic farm as part of a [multi-enterprise network for sustainable food and energy production](#).



The farm is situated just north of Helsinki, covers 380 hectares and contains a farm store, restaurant, and food processing capability. Produce is sold through the store and at local food markets, and there are artist studios and a summer theatre. All of this highlights the potential in seeing a farm beyond just livestock and crops, with Knehtila attracting around 15,000 visitors per year. This all operates on the basis of agroecological symbiosis, a circular approach to energy use and material flows in food production. The benefits of this approach include increasing food production through enhancing nutrient recycling in the system, cutting down on nitrogen and phosphorus losses. This can also have a substantial impact on the use of fossil fuels, with 70% more energy being produced than consumed, providing for a switch from fossil fuels, and helping address climate change.

Tajana Radic, of the Croatian Chamber of Agriculture, provided the workshop with three [examples of success stories](#). The first is the roll-out and uptake of the Horizon 2020 EU Research and Innovation programme, the uP_running project – a project designed to promote the sustainable supply of woody biomass from agrarian pruning and plantation removal. This project will run until the summer of 2019, and is helping to change traditional practices, such as open air burning, to the production of compost, energy and other biocomodities. An example of the project in action can be found in Calimera, Italy, with the world's first power plant fuelled exclusively by olive tree prunings. Starting in 2010, and with an investment of €8million, the plant itself employs 6 permanent employees, as well as creating 10 permanent and 5 seasonal jobs along the logistics chain; providing jobs and energy in the local region. For more examples in seeing a farm as more than just livestock and crops, the family farm VRCEK and company EURO TIM can provide inspiration.



The conversation of the workshop turned then to a panel discussion on the opportunities for, and challenges to, a bio-circular transition, with input from Olivier Diana of European Commission Directorate for Agriculture. Meri Siljama of the Confederation of European Forest Owners gave a [comprehensive overview](#) of the instruments, regulations and different strategies that forest owners need to be aware of when managing their forests, particularly with sustainable methods. The panel discussion was wrapped up by Kjell Ivarsson of Copa-Cogeca, with conclusions on how to overcome the barriers to bio-circular models in rural development.

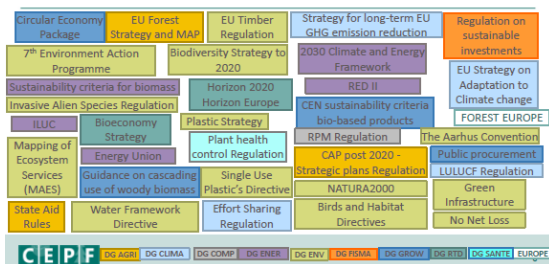


New Challenges

There are a number of challenges for rural development, with the core issue focusing on how to stem the flow of people away from rural areas that started during the industrial revolution. It might not be possible to reverse this, but farming and rural representative bodies are working to promote a new way of life that will attract young people. The biocircular approach, that sees a farm as more than the sum of its basic output of crops and livestock, could help to do just that. Not only does this approach have the potential to provide employment, it can also help to tackle the challenges of climate change and reliance on fossil fuels.

For this to succeed however, there needs to be adequate infrastructure – transportation links for the movement of produce, and communications links for connectivity and growth of businesses and social hubs. To have a bio-circular approach, such infrastructure needs to be developed with sustainability in mind, and with the input of key stakeholders – farmers, foresters, workers, and inhabitants – who know their villages and rural areas.

EU Forest Policy: a complex scattered puzzle



Another challenge identified within the CEPF presentation was the complexity of policy and strategy instruments. For example, looking only at EU forest policies, these can come from at least nine DGs, from Agriculture to Finance, Environment to Health.

What's Next?

- With the **Grown not Thrown campaign**, which showcases the efforts Copa-Cogeca's members make in leading the fight against food loss and food waste, the network is sharing **6 ways to avoid food waste** and dozens of best case practices across EU Member States
- **Greenovate! Europe** will hold a conference "Towards a circular agro-food industry" on behalf of the **BIOrescue consortium**, in Brussels on 4 April
- The **European Bioeconomy Scene 2019** will be held in Helsinki between the 8 and 10 July and aims to bring together academics, researchers, stakeholders, policymakers, business representatives and civil society from across the bioeconomy sector to talk about how to raise public awareness and promote dialogue on progressing a European bioeconomy

Want to keep the conversation going? Contribute your good practice on circulareconomy.europa.eu, join the online forum or drop us a line: CEStakeholderEU@eesc.europa.eu

