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**BUILDING POLICY FOR A YOUTH FRIENDLY RURAL FUTURE:
POSSIBILITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS USING A FUTURE FORESIGHT
APPROACH**

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Abstract

Imagined futures developed through future foresight studies can inform policy measures to support realising future visions (Shucksmith, 2018; Kuhmonen et al., 2016). The OECD Principles on Rural Policy also emphasise the importance of using foresight studies to shape rural policy so it is informed by forward looking vision ensuring rural areas are future ready, while also being smart, sustainable and inclusive (OECD, 2019). Alongside this, it is important certain groups, such as youth, are given greater voice in the policy process. Future foresight studies can also contribute to this.

Further to this, structural change and generational renewal is one of the specific objectives of the CAP. The high level outcomes aimed for in Our Rural Future, Ireland's rural development policy for 2021 to 2025, include increasing the number of people living and employed in rural areas, with one particular issue retaining and attracting back young people. A significant body of research discusses what drives young people out of rural areas. Job opportunities are key, and more specifically, the amount of rural job opportunities, the sectors jobs exist in and the quality of rural jobs (Bjarnasona and Thorlindsson, 2006; García-Arias et al., 2021). Place attachment is also an important factor, including aspects such as personal and social relationships but also place-based features such as nature and heritage (Bjarnasona and Thorlindsson, 2006; García-Arias et al., 2021; Bernsen et al., 2022). These factors do not operate in isolation and come together to influence youth where trade-offs can occur (Ceryn, 2016; Bjarnasona and Thorlindsson, 2006; Jamieson 2000).

In the Irish context, as part of the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project, this study uses a future foresight approach developed by Kuhmonen et al. (2016) to understand the future lifestyle and livelihood dreams of youth. Rather than starting with a focus on drivers of youth out-migration, this study builds an understanding of what would facilitate young people to stay in, or return to, rural areas. Based on the urban-rural typology, in 2020 personal dream futures were collected from youth in two region types, a predominantly rural region (Western region) and intermediate region (Mid-East region). An online questionnaire engaged with youth aged 18 to 30 where they looked towards their personal dream futures in 2035. Following this, the results were also examined in two stakeholder workshops to explore the measures and actors needed to realise the dreams. The findings are then further explored in relation to some of the OECD principles on rural policy that are relevant in the context of this study. Particular focus will be placed on the principles 'Strengthen the social, economic, ecological and cultural resilience of rural communities' and 'Support entrepreneurship to foster job creation in rural areas'. How the policy implications of future dreams are aligned with, but also present challenges for policy based on these principles is also examined.