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Building Policy for a Youth Friendly Rural Future:



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Possibilities and Contradictions using a Future Foresight Approach

1 Introduction

The OECD principles on rural policy emphasise the importance of using foresight studies to shape policy. It is also important youth are given a greater voice in the policy process. This research brings these two needs together to understand how we can build policy for a youth friendly future.

2 Aims and Research Questions

In relation to young people who aspire to live in rural areas of Ireland, the research aimed to:

- Use a future foresight approach to understand the character of the jobs, lifestyle and accommodation that young people aspire towards.
- In the context of Our Rural Future and the OECD principles on rural policy, explore the implications of the youth aspirations on building policies for a youth friendly rural future.

These aims lead to two key questions:

- What can make rural areas more 'youth friendly'?
- What policy needs does this suggest?

3 Methodology

As part of the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project, in 2020 personal dream futures were collected from youth aged 18 to 30. The data was collected in Ireland as part of a European study involving 10 countries (Kuhmonen et al. 2021). Youth looked towards their dream futures in 2035 and an online questionnaire asked participants to reflect on their dream future in relation to their livelihood, accommodation and lifestyle. They were also asked about the obstacles they identified to realising the future dreams. The foresight method was developed and previously applied in Finland (Kuhmonen et al., 2016). Based on the urban-rural typology, the dream futures were collected in two region types, a predominantly rural region (Western region) and intermediate region (Mid-East region) of Ireland. Overall, 196 responses were gathered. Following this, the results were further examined in two stakeholder workshops to explore the measures and actors needed to realise the dreams.

4 Key Findings

Appetite for Rural Life Among Youth

Increasing the number of people living and employed in rural areas is an outcome aimed for in Our Rural Future, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021–2025. This foresight research identifies an interest among Ireland's youth for a rural future, showing potential exists to realise this outcome.

- Although a random sample, from our data in 2035 more youth aspired to a rural future than an urban one.
- The broad and general character of the dream futures of youth is not luxurious and trendy, but a vision of family life in strong communities with work life balance.
- The desire for a detached house shows the persistence of a culture that is positive towards one-off housing. This is a potential challenge for a youth friendly rural future where housing provision has sustainability at its core.

Key Challenges

Our Rural Future points to retaining and attracting back young people as key issues. Factors potentially driving this emerging from this research include:

- The quality, type and availability of jobs.
- Access to the lifestyle young people desire can also be a challenge impacted by services such as poor public transport.
- Wider issues such as broadband and the cost of living also emerge.

These are some of the general challenges, but they can also differ depending on the specific future vision, such as a livelihood as a farmer or a teacher.

The future dreams suggest making rural areas more youth friendly raises some recurring rural development issues for policy, notably jobs and services. This points to the importance of some of the OECD principles on rural policy to underpin rural policy for a youth friendly rural future.

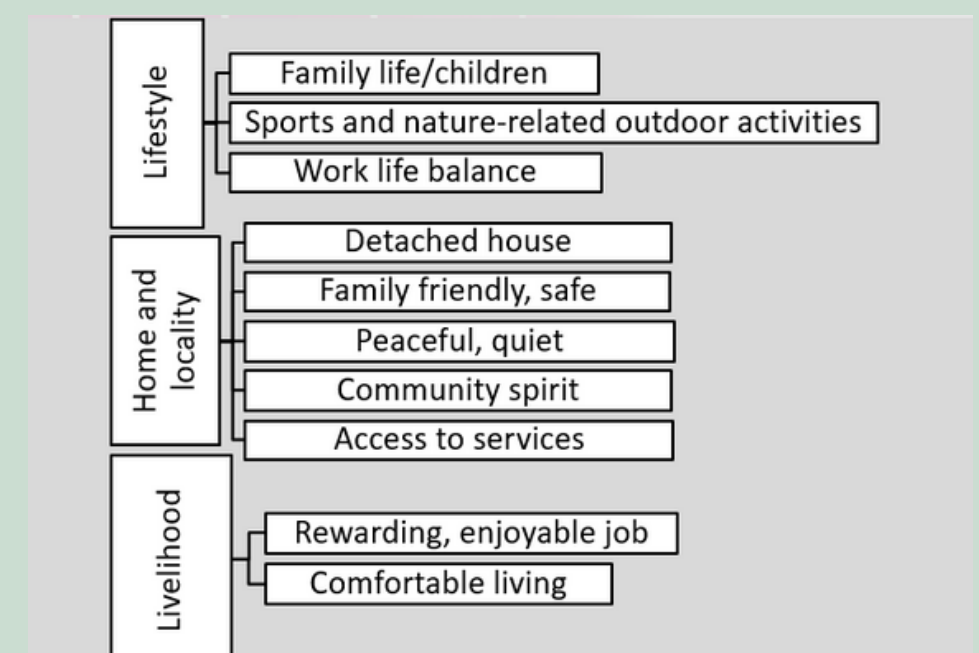
Value of the OECD Principles on Rural Policy

One of these principles is to 'Strengthen the social, economic, ecological and cultural resilience of rural communities'. This highlights how, for example, creating jobs, developing rural housing and building rural services that tailor with the future dreams of youth must be done in the framework of supporting rural resilience. In relation to the rural economy, a more resilient rural economy can be conceptualised as one that is diversified and multifunctional. This links to another OECD rural policy principle 'Support entrepreneurship to foster job creation in rural areas'. Application of this principle could help to address the concerns within the youth dreams around job opportunities.

Need for Greater Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship

A policy focus on rural youth innovation and entrepreneurship can help youth become part of the solution to rural jobs issues. In addition focusing on certain sectors that hold most rural potential can have a spin-off effect helping to deal with wider issues presented in the dreams. This might include a focus on social enterprise to help address rural service deficits and the circular economy to support the sustainability transition.

Content of the rural youth 'dream' futures



"...Cost of living and housing is rising constantly making it harder to be able to buy the house and be able to sustain myself and my family."

"...Work/life balance will be key, I want to be in a job that I love doing but also allows me to have free time out of normal working hours to switch off."

References

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