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The ROBUST Conceptual Framework: A Guide for Practitioners (ROBUST Deliverable 1.5)

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The ROBUST Conceptual Framework: A Guide for Practitioners

Deliverable 1.5

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1 A 3-minute Introduction

Cities are often seen as economic engines, forging ahead through agglomeration, industry, creative capital, and innovation. Meanwhile, the countryside gets viewed as a place for food production, resource extraction and recreation – at best pulled along by city growth; at worst, left behind. Previous regional development strategies have seemed to reinforce this perception. But we now know that creating strong, mutually supportive linkages between rural and urban areas is the key to realising smart, circular and inclusive development for a sustainable Europe. We need a different strategy for a better future.

Rural and urban are actually interdependent. By treating them separately in policy and planning, rural areas can be caught in a catch-up game they can never hope to win, while the reasons why cities need the countryside go overlooked. We're missing significant opportunities to make our regions stronger, more successful, and better places to live and work.

ROBUST breaks out of the old rural and urban boxes. We don't prioritise cities or focus only on rural development. We work to improve both, together. We call our recipe for regions rural-urban synergies, and it means:

- Connecting rural and urban places, people and products
- For mutual growth and benefit
- Towards a shared, sustainable future.

1.1 Putting research into practice

ROBUST is supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. We bring together policymakers, researchers, businesses, service providers, citizens, and other stakeholders from eleven regions across Europe. Together, we're not just talking about rural-urban synergies – we're putting it into practice. We work over five themes to tackle pressing regional challenges:

- Growing innovative new business models
- Providing efficient public infrastructures and effective social services
- Establishing sustainable food systems
- Fostering dynamic cultural connections
- Supporting vital ecosystem services

To address these challenges, ROBUST has developed a framework that makes it easier to identify, evaluate and envision practical rural-urban synergies. Our framework unites ideas that are grounded in research with the good practice tested through leading regional policy initiatives. We've distilled this into three principles:

ROBUST's three principles for rural-urban synergies:

New Localities: Connecting the local

The local matters – but places and communities cannot grow alone. Connection starts with the functional areas in which we live, work and collaborate. Powering local economies requires activating external networks for knowledge exchange, supply chains, and markets.

Network Governance: Deciding together

Good rural-urban government enables participation. Partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors should mean deciding together and delivering better. Together, we can design for shared systems and services that respond to everyone's needs.

Smart Development: Growing smart

We need healthy and sustainable rural-urban economies. Local economies aren't nurtured by urban agglomeration – but nor will we meet the future by trying to preserve the past. Growing smart means prioritising what a specific local economy can do best – not did do in the past or should do.

1.2 Using this guide

The Conceptual Framework Practitioner Guide introduces ROBUST's theoretical approach to rural-urban synergies, and outlines the framework we've developed to identify, evaluate and envision rural-urban synergies in policy and practice. The ROBUST framework integrates leading scientific literature, proven good practices, and innovative policies to provide straightforward principles and practical tools to help make rural-urban synergies a reality.

This guide has been written with different audiences in mind. This introduction is intended for those who would like to learn more about ROBUST's approach, but don't need all the detail or the terminology. Section 2 - ROBUST in brief has been specifically developed for practitioners and policy makers who would like a quick, jargon-free overview of the framework. For those interested in more background and technical detail, Section 3 describes how we developed the framework and how ROBUST practitioners can use it in their regional Living Labs and Communities of Practice. A Glossary of Terms used in this guide, and other terms related to rural-urban connections and development, can be found at the end.

2 ROBUST in brief

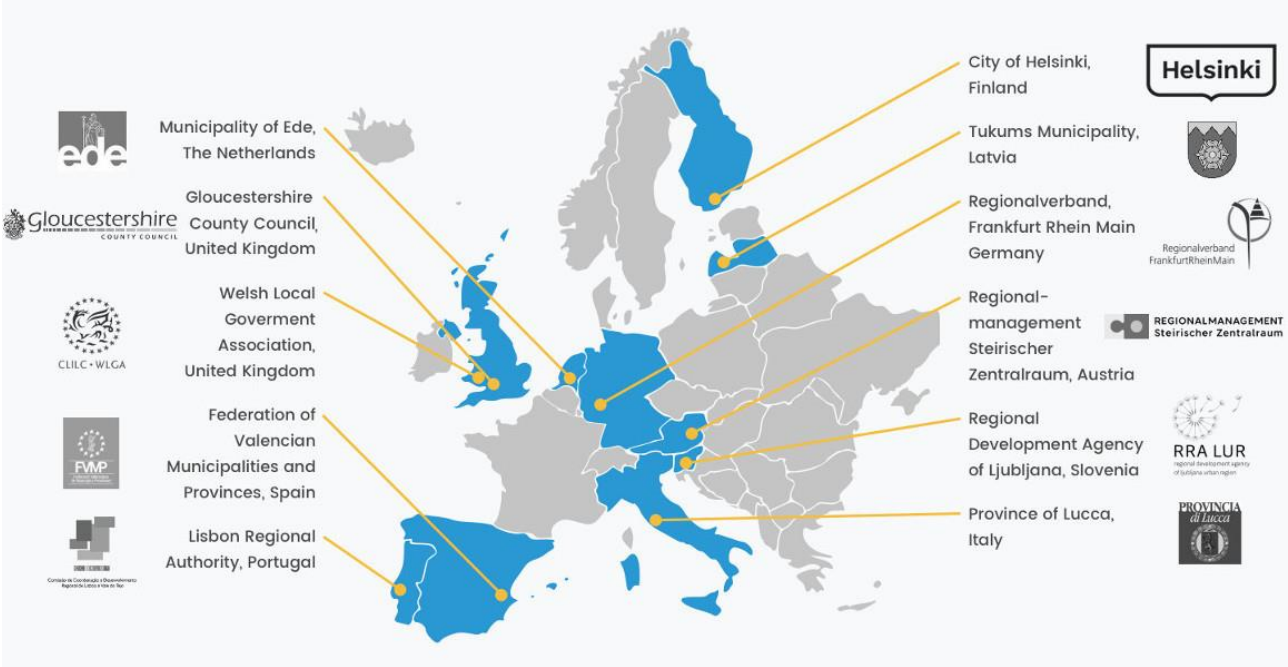
2.1 Creating rural-urban synergies

Rural and urban are interdependent. That's why ROBUST believes that creating strong, mutually supportive linkages between rural and urban areas is the key to realising smart, circular and inclusive development for a sustainable Europe. We call this *rural-urban synergies*.

2.2 Working in practice, working together

ROBUST creates rural-urban synergies by integrating research and practice. That means we're not just talking about abstract academic theories. But we're not limited to standalone local projects, either. Our network of 'Living Labs' brings together policymakers, researchers, businesses, service providers, citizens and other stakeholders from eleven diverse regions across Europe.

ROBUST's Living Lab network



What is a Living Lab?

ROBUST's Living Labs are place-based forms of experimental collaboration. Through Living Labs, policymakers, researchers, businesses, service providers, citizens and other stakeholders work together to develop and test new ways to solve problems in their regions. Our Living Labs incorporate:

- Active involvement from local participants
- Real world settings for real world solutions
- Multiple tools and methods of working
- Co-creation – designing solutions together

2.3 Tackling regional challenges

ROBUST is bringing rural-urban synergies to five of the big challenges facing our regions:

- Growing innovative new business models
- Providing efficient public infrastructures and effective social services
- Establishing sustainable food systems
- Fostering dynamic cultural connections
- Supporting vital ecosystem services

We collaborate to address these challenges through our Communities of Practice.

What is a Community of Practice?

ROBUST's Communities of Practice are networks of researchers and practitioners from across our Living Lab regions. They come together to share information, swap experiences, and develop new ideas and solutions. Each of our five Communities of Practice focusses on one key regional challenge. They offer:

European networking
A strong pool of research knowledge and practical experience
Recommendations for rural-urban synergies tested across different regional contexts

2.4 Applying our framework

To tackle regional challenges practically, ROBUST uses a framework that makes it easier to identify, evaluate and envision rural-urban synergies. We developed our framework by uniting ideas grounded in research with the good practice tested through leading regional policy initiatives. The framework has three key principles:

- Connecting the local by designing for the real areas in which we live, work and collaborate
- Deciding together through participation in government and partnerships between sectors
- Growing smart by prioritising what each local economy can do best

The box below shows how we apply our framework to propose new opportunities for rural-urban synergies.

Rural-Urban synergies: Connecting rural and urban places, people and products for mutual growth and benefit, towards a shared, sustainable future.

New Localities: *Connecting the local*	*Network Governance:* *Deciding together*	*Smart Development:* *Growing smart*
Where do people live, work and collaborate? Which networks could be activated? What enables connection?	Who could participate? What can be done together? How can deciding together be facilitated?	What can this local economy do best? Where are the opportunities for innovation? How will growth occur?

2.4.1 Connecting the local through 'new localities'

The local matters – but rural and urban places and communities cannot work alone. Even the biggest city still needs water from the hills upstream. The closest of close-knit villages is still stitched into distant supply chains. We need to enable connection. This means designing for shared access to systems and services, planning functional infrastructures, and activating networks between people, places and products.

Connecting the local starts with the real areas in which people live, work, and collaborate. These are called 'localities'. Localities aren't neat dots on a map, and they don't always fit within municipal boundaries. We need to actively respond to how the local gets lived, not to borders that only work on paper. Our local economies cross borders, too. Doing business is about more than shops and streets – it takes networks of knowledge and exchange. ROBUST uses 'new localities', a concept developed by researchers, to explore ways to better connect the local.

Connecting the local in practice: Mynyddoedd Cambrian Mountains Initiative (Mid Wales, UK)

The Cambrian Mountains are a large area with a small population. Farming is a local way of life. But, the mountains don't fall within any single local authority's boundaries. The Cambrian Mountains Initiative connects producers together and connects local products with urban markets. The Initiative's achievements include a supply deal with a major UK supermarket chain.

2.4.2 Deciding together with 'network governance'

Good rural-urban government enables participation. Real world solutions won't be found by making decisions for the countryside from a city office. But nor should the village hall be the limit of local democracy. We need to make decisions together. This takes the acknowledgement that no one group knows best, and the will to get listening (before we start talking).

Deciding together requires making active partnerships between rural and urban stakeholders. Partnerships make a network between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Partnerships are not only about what different groups need, but what they have to offer and how they can be helped to contribute. Local government has an important facilitation role to play here. ROBUST works to enhance how deciding together happens through 'network governance', a practice model advocated by the OECD.

Deciding together in practice: Garfagnana Community for Food and Agro-Biodiversity (Lucca, Italy)

Italian law enables 'Food Communities'. These are partnerships between farmers and food processors, consumers, universities and public bodies. Garfagnana's Food Community works together to decide on practical ways to support local food systems and sustain biodiversity. Local municipalities helped set the Food Community up and provided advisors – it's the network of members who now make things happen.

2.4.3 Growing smart using 'smart development'

Hoping that the urban agglomeration effect will pull the countryside along does little to nurture local economies. Yet, sustainable futures won't be found by trying to preserve the economy of the past – or by hurrying after the latest trend. To grow inclusively, we need to grow smart. This means focussing business development and innovation on what a region (or even a village) can actually do best.

Growing smart begins with local potential. We need to explore existing strengths and pinpoint real opportunities. This is the process behind the strategies known as 'smart development', which are supported by the EU. Growing smart need not be about technology, but it will be helped by the smart use of local resources and amenities. It will also involve finding the right balance of business diversity, to create an economy that is specialised but still resilient. ROBUST uses 'smart development' to make recommendations for regions.

Growing smart in practice: Cluster Study Frankfurt Rhein Main (Germany)

How do regions know what they do best? Frankfurt Rhein Main's cluster study surveyed almost 1,000 businesses and ran workshops with local entrepreneurs. Twelve key regional industries – or 'clusters' – emerged. By prioritising business development and innovation in these clusters, the region is able to better target resources – savvy knowledge for growing smarter.

3 The framework in detail

3.1 What does ROBUST aim to do?

ROBUST's overall objectives are to:

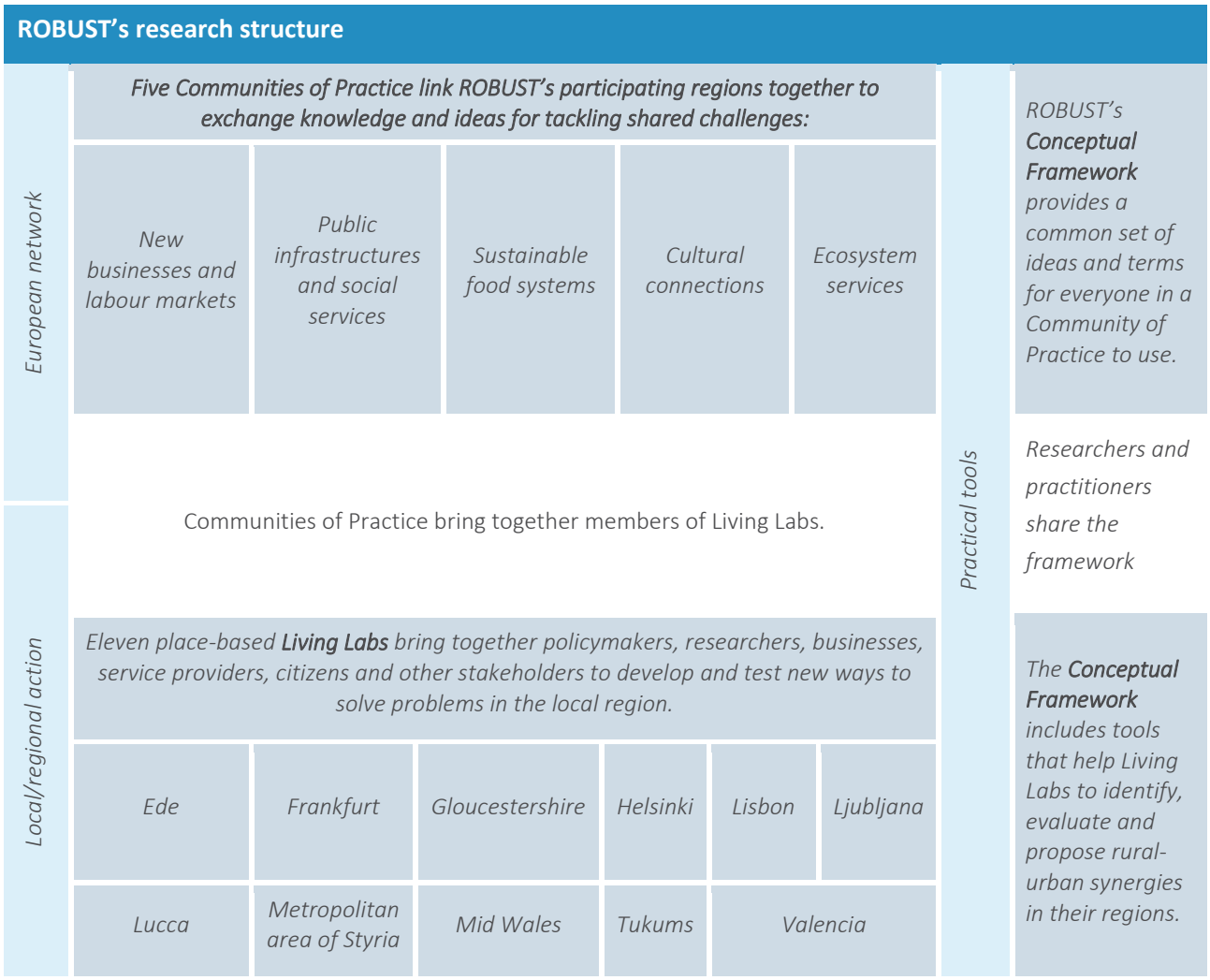
1. Advance our understanding of the interactions and dependencies between rural, peri-urban and urban areas; and,
2. Identify and promote policies, governance models and practices that foster mutually beneficial relations.

ROBUST works towards the goal of smart, circular and inclusive development for a sustainable Europe. We do so by envisioning rural-urban synergies, which create strong, mutually supportive linkages between rural and urban areas.

ROBUST builds upon existing knowledge about rural-urban relations from research, policy and practice. However, we challenge the common assumption that the rural and urban should be separate spheres for policy and development. We understand that the rural and urban are interdependent. Our research will generate new insights into how the rural and urban interact and the opportunities for synergies this presents. We will propose new actions and policies that help regions build strong, sustainable rural-urban synergies.

3.1.1 How does ROBUST work to achieve these aims?

ROBUST brings researchers and practitioners together towards our shared aims. The box below shows how we use the networking advantages of Communities of Practice and the local action of Living Labs. It also shows how we use a conceptual framework alongside these.



3.2 What is a conceptual framework and why does ROBUST need one?

Simply put, a conceptual framework brings together key terms and theories that can be used as tools to:

- Plan and carry out research
- Interpret the findings
- Make recommendations.

ROBUST has developed our own conceptual framework to use within the project. ROBUST's conceptual framework is action-oriented. This means that we use concepts that are founded in real world practice, and which will help us identify actions that regions can take. In other words, the conceptual framework is not an academic exercise – it is a practical toolkit. The framework can be used by both researchers and practitioners to help:

- Identify and evaluate existing rural-urban relations
- Scope opportunities to enhance existing relations
- Propose, plan and implement stronger rural-urban synergies

The conceptual framework in practice: Rapid appraisals

In mid-2018, ROBUST's research teams produced 'rapid appraisals' of selected existing organisations, initiatives, and administrative mechanisms in their regions. The conceptual framework helped in this work. The framework was turned into templates that guided researchers through what to look for in each example. By working through the template, researchers were able to quickly evaluate the initiative or mechanism in question. The templates also meant that the same kinds of information were collected, despite very different examples. ROBUST can now directly compare 78 rural-urban initiatives from 11 regions – a much bigger challenge without a conceptual framework.

3.2.1 The value of a shared framework

All members of ROBUST already use other concepts and tools in our regular work. For practitioners, these might be tools like operating procedures, project management approaches, or regional strategies. Many of these tools will of course continue to play a role in ROBUST's Living Labs. However, for ROBUST to be most effective, it is also vital that we share a toolkit – our conceptual framework. Having a shared framework allows ROBUST to:

- Draw upon the same pool of scientific knowledge
- Coordinate our research efforts across work packages
- Directly compare findings from different Living Labs
- Share findings more effectively within Communities of Practice
- Communicate clearly at meetings and in written reports
- Propose strong overall recommendations from the project.

In other words, without a shared framework, we have a network of initiatives and some similar challenges, but little commonality in how we reach solutions. The conceptual framework brings us together, and ensures that by using the same words and tools everyone in ROBUST is able to contribute, no matter where we are from or what we do.

3.2.2 Practitioners and the conceptual framework

ROBUST's conceptual framework can be viewed as a toolkit that both researchers and practitioners share. Because it's action-oriented, the framework is not just for academics, and nor should it be. To get the best possible use out of the framework, practitioners who are directly involved in ROBUST need to help put the framework into action.

What do practitioners need to do with the framework?

- Know the framework's three key concepts and be able to explain what they mean
- Apply these concepts to help inform and evaluate Living Lab activities
- Remember to use the concepts, where relevant, in reports for ROBUST and in presentations at our project meetings and Community of Practice activities

'Directly involved' means practitioners who attend ROBUST project meetings and actively participate in the Communities of practice. Many other people will be involved in our Living Labs and interested in our research, from line managers to elected officials. They will not need to know or use the conceptual framework, but

rather to see its results. Practitioners are encouraged to translate ROBUST's messages into words that are relevant to their regions and make sense to local stakeholders.

3.3 Background to the framework

Developing a conceptual framework for ROBUST was a key deliverable for Work Package 1. This task was led by a team at Aberystwyth University, in consultation with other research and practice partners. The framework was first presented for feedback at ROBUST's Lisbon project meeting in February 2018. In addition to ROBUST researchers and practice partners, over forty stakeholders from municipalities, regional planning, and local initiatives had input on the framework through focus groups in the Living Labs.

How was the conceptual framework developed?

To develop the framework, the Work Package 1 team:

1. Identified the existing scientific literature on and relevant to rural-urban relations
2. Reviewed the literature, and compared the main findings to ROBUST's objectives
3. Facilitated a workshop in Brussels with European Commission and OECD experts
4. Isolated the most relevant and practically useful concepts for ROBUST from research and policy
5. Examined how different concepts could work in combination
6. Generated a draft framework and collected feedback
7. Coordinated focus groups within the Living Labs to gain further feedback
8. Finalised the framework

3.3.1 The story of rural-urban research so far

In the past, researchers used 'rural' and 'urban' mostly as a way to classify places and explain social patterns. Usually, agriculture was seen as the distinctive feature that made the rural different from the urban. When modern urbanisation began to increase, social scientists in particular came to believe that the rural and urban were basically opposites. They often wanted to document 'traditional' rural ways of life that they saw as under threat in a world that was rapidly changing.

However, during the twentieth century, agriculture in many places became less and less important economically and as a source of employment. This meant that it no longer made simple sense for researchers to conflate agriculture with the rural. One alternative was to use a rural-urban 'continuum' or 'gradient', which could be measured through land use and population patterns. This idea is still used in some research fields, but although ways to measure rural and urban have become more sophisticated over the years, there are many practical limitations. For example, a population considered a town in one country might be a city in another. Or, people living in a 'peri-urban' area close to a city may actually feel as though they are far away.

Because of these problems, many scholars in recent decades have been critical about whether 'rural' can really be a useful category for research. At the same time, it is obvious that, outside academia, rural places hold deep meaning for many people. Rural places, for example, often matter for cultural heritage, and they get valued for things like nature, leisure, lifestyle and local food. Researchers now understand how the rural is valued as examples of 'social construction'. Very simply, social construction theory is the idea that many things in our world do not have the natural or inherent meanings we often think they do. Things do not have meaning because they are things – they are given meaning by people. This happens through a whole range of actions,

from the ways people talk together to the results of policy. According to this perspective, 'rural' and 'urban' are not objective categories, because what counts as rural or urban is actually decided by what people themselves say and do. Social construction, then, has some important implications for ROBUST.

Lessons from the literature for ROBUST 1

- We can never objectively define rural and urban places. This also means that we can never precisely measure or map the rural and the urban.
- Because the rural and urban are not fixed in this way, a particular person or thing, for example, could be considered 'rural' even in a city, and vice versa.
- Different people and groups give different meanings to the rural and urban. None of these 'social constructions' are more or less real. But, it is often the contradictions between different constructions that cause conflict, especially over development.

3.3.2 How will ROBUST advance the story?

The story of rural-urban research so far shows how researchers have treated the rural and urban differently, often by trying to define the rural. By understanding the rural and urban as interdependent, ROBUST tells another story. When we compared existing research to ROBUST's aims, we found four particular ways that ROBUST moves ahead.

Researchers have previously …	ROBUST believes …
Classified and mapped rural and urban regions and their boundaries	The assumption that rural can be differentiated from urban through particular characteristics is problematic and limiting. **ROBUST moves from putting places in boxes to helping places connect.**
Studied how people, money, goods and resources move from urban centres to rural places	By seeing cities as engines of economic growth, this urban-centred perspective misses how people and things also move from rural places. **ROBUST understands rural-urban relations as two way and seeks ways to maximise mutual benefit.**
Examined the 'peri-urban' – or, the interface between rural and urban	Peri-urban studies have tended to stick to land use and planning problems like development control. ROBUST expands upon their useful insights into how different 'social constructions' of the rural conflict.
Lamented the 'urbanisation' of the countryside	By telling the story of lost ways of rural life, we 'construct' rural places as the past and cities as the future. **ROBUST uses rural-urban synergies to propose ways forward to shared, sustainable futures.**

3.3.3 Conclusions from ROBUST's literature review

A comprehensive review of the existing scientific literature on rural-urban relations is available as ROBUST Deliverable 1.1 'Conceptualisation of Rural-Urban Relations and Synergies'. The main findings are summarised in the box below. We used these findings to evaluate and select the key concepts that make up ROBUST's conceptual framework.

Lessons from the literature for ROBUST 2

- The rural and the urban are not separate. Rather, there are many complex connections between rural and urban places, people, and economies.
- The rural and the urban cannot be truly defined. They cannot be precisely measured or accurately drawn on a map. Rural and urban mean different things in different places, and for different people. Nevertheless, how places get categorised matters for how people use and value them.
- Different meanings of rural and urban get especially blurry at the outskirts of cities. Yet even in areas a long way from cities, it is still possible to find a mix of rural and urban values.
- Cities influence their surrounding regions, but how far that influence extends does not have firm boundaries. The areas that different cities influence can actually overlap. Even a very distant city can influence a place far from its vicinity.
- Although places have official boundaries, these are often relative in real life. Furthermore, places extend through their relations with other places.
- Rural-urban connections especially spill over the fixed boundaries of municipalities and regions. As a result, local government may not have the capacity to fully manage rural-urban synergies.
- In practice, effectively governing rural-urban synergies means working across official boundaries. But, it is also important to maintain the democratic legitimacy that boundaries enable, such as through local elections.

3.4 Exploring the framework

The box below shows how research and practice have both informed the development of ROBUST's conceptual framework. It also introduces the technical terms for the framework's three key concepts: **new localities**, **network governance**, and **smart development**. These are the terms that will be used internally within ROBUST. Each of these concepts is explained in detail over the following pages.

Research		Key concepts		Policy and practice
How scholars have theorised space, place and regions		**New localities** Connecting the local by designing for the real areas in which we live, work and collaborate.		The practicalities of local authority boundaries, and the functional areas where people live and work
Research on democratic decision-making, and into rural development	*Informs*	**Network governance** Deciding together through participation in government and partnerships between sectors.	*Informs*	Actual changes in government and administration, and OECD and EU policy
Research into innovation and regional development		**Smart development** Growing smart by prioritising what each local economy can do best.		Current EU policy and regional development strategies

3.5 Key concept: New localities

New localities is the concept behind ROBUST's work to connect the local. A locality is simply an area that has meaning for people's lives and with which they can identify. 'New localities' is one particular way to study these areas. The concept offers a mix of theory and method that has useful applications for ROBUST.

3.5.1 Where does the concept come from?

Localities were once a common topic for research. But, research and policy turned towards regions some twenty years ago and the role localities play in how people live and work was neglected. To take a new look at the topic, geographers Martin Jones and Michael Woods proposed the concept of 'new localities' in 2013.

3.5.2 The theory behind new localities

Geographers have long been interested in 'space' – in how particular areas of our world, from a room to a village to a region, take form and have function. Researchers have explored how space works in society, the economy, and for government. They identify three main forms of space: absolute, relative and relational.

Three different forms of space

- **Absolute** space is a territory with fixed borders, like a nation or municipality. Rural and urban classifications are also forms of absolute space. In this perspective, policy works within boundaries.
- **Relative** space has blurry boundaries, like the spread of a city. Policies using a relative perspective typically encourage working across administrative boundaries.
- **Relational** space has no borders, but is made from connections. For example, two places far apart on a map may be very close in a supply chain. Relational space is difficult to govern in practice.

When researchers study space, they typically use just one of these perspectives. But, when we look at how people actually live and work, it's clear that all three forms of space co-exist. For example, a person can live in a municipality (absolute), commute (relative), and buy imported food (relational). New localities allows for this reality by investigating how and where each form of space is present in an area. This means that new localities can integrate the need for administrative boundaries with how these are crossed in practice.

3.5.3 How to identify a locality

Some localities are just the same as official maps of towns or regions, but many are not. To identify localities, researchers look for cores rather than boundaries. A core will be an institution or identity that a locality has formed around. Localities form ('cohere') in two ways.

Two ways a locality can cohere

- Material coherence means the institutions and physical structures that hold a locality together. For example: local authorities, commuting zones, school catchments.
- Imagined coherence means the sense of identity residents feel for a locality and share with one another. For example: supporting a local sports team, attending local events.

Although it is possible for a locality to form in just one of these ways, strong localities need to have both. For example, while an amalgamated municipality has an institution (material coherence), it might not inspire a sense of identity among residents (imagined coherence). People may also be part of different localities for different purposes and at different times. For example, the commuting zones of different localities can overlap, and the locality around a shopping centre can differ from a school's catchment area.

3.6 Key concept: Network governance

Network governance is a model for deciding together. Governance refers to how the work of governing a nation or region is organised. Network governance emphasises the participation of local stakeholders and partnerships across sectors and scales. Participation and partnership can help build rural-urban synergies.

3.6.1 Where does the concept come from?

In recent decades, government in many countries has become less centralised and top-down. Planning and decision-making now involves more participation. This includes partnerships between the public, private and non-profit sectors. These partnerships often also link the local, regional and national scales together. For example, the national government may fund a regional authority which partners with local organisations. Researchers have termed these new kinds of collaboration 'network governance'. The concept has not just been written about in the academic literature. Notably, the OECD's 2006 report *The New Rural Paradigm* recommended that policies enable decentralised decision-making and partnerships.

3.6.2 What does network governance involve?

One way to sum up network governance is that it gives local and regional partnerships and institutions the 'power to' rather than the state keeping 'power over'. Although central government is still important, its role in network governance is more to coordinate and enable than to direct. Five main features can be identified.

Five features of network governance

- Groups from different sectors and scales are brought together in an ongoing partnership
- They negotiate with each other
- The partnership is formalised somehow, such as through a committee or with monthly meetings
- The partnership has the autonomy to make decisions (although there will be external limits to what it can do, such as national laws and allocated budgets)
- There is a public purpose involved

3.6.3 The benefits of network governance

Decisions involving local people and places need to be informed from the bottom up. Network governance can create new opportunities for democratic participation and local empowerment, which can be especially welcome in rural areas. Partnerships also bring together different types of expertise and knowledge. Network governance can enhance rural-urban relations by facilitating cooperation and exchange.

3.6.4 Enabling participation and partnership

Despite the benefits of network governance, there are practical challenges. Some challenges are obvious, like partners working well together. Others may be less apparent. For example, social inequalities can mean that only some groups are able to participate. Some ingredients for success can be identified.

Four ways to make network governance work

- Enable participation by building local capacity
- Facilitate communication between partners and participants
- Encourage reciprocal exchange and information sharing
- Establish mutual goals and shared working practices

3.7 Key concept: Smart development

Smart development is a strategy for regional growth. It involves prioritising what a specific local or regional economy can do best. 'Smart' here does not mean technology (although technology can certainly enable smart development), but simply taking a more intelligent approach to growth. The concept of smart development has practical applications in ROBUST's work.

3.7.1 Where does the concept come from?

Researchers and policymakers alike have long been aware that people, innovation, and knowledge exchange all play important roles in economic growth. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that the best growth policies are not one-size-fits-all. Instead, evidence suggests that regions are better able to grow when their strategies for growth are tailored to their own strengths and potentials. This is integral to the Europe 2020 strategy's call for 'smart growth'.

3.7.2 What does smart development mean?

Smart growth, smart development and smart specialisation are all ways of describing a similar idea: that regions should focus their growth policies and resources on taking advantage of their competitive strengths. The concept has three key principles.

Three components for smart development

- Growth requires making **connections**. For example: infrastructures and supply networks.
- Priority areas for growth should be **locally embedded**. For example: available natural resources, existing industry clusters, local culture.
- Local businesses need to be **related** to growth priorities – but not all so similar that the local economy becomes vulnerable.

Rural-urban relations offer some particular possibilities for smart development. For example, rural places can develop local food or tourism industries that target urban markets. At the same time, smart development can be challenging for rural localities, for reasons ranging from limited access to amenities to mismatches between businesses' employment needs and local residents' skills.

3.7.3 How to establish priorities for smart development

Identifying priorities is a bottom-up process, involving local businesses and regional stakeholders. The first step is to clarify the ultimate aims of development, such as increasing economic indicators like GVA or reducing the local unemployment rate. This is important because there can be differences between what seems 'smart' for different stakeholder groups. Research should help inform decisions about what to prioritise.

Seven kinds of information to use in setting priorities

1. Reliable data on the economy, employment and business size
2. How businesses and activities cluster by sector
3. Local innovation and research activities
4. Education levels
5. Infrastructures and digital connectivity
6. Where key institutions and companies are located
7. How local amenities can contribute directly (for example, a business centre) or indirectly (for example, attracting professionals to the area) to development

3.8 Putting the framework into practice

Each of the framework's three concepts can be applied in research and practice. The concepts can be used as individual tools. Overlapping the concepts, however, expands the work they can do. The example below shows how all three concepts have helped produce a preliminary analysis for ROBUST's Lisbon Living Lab.

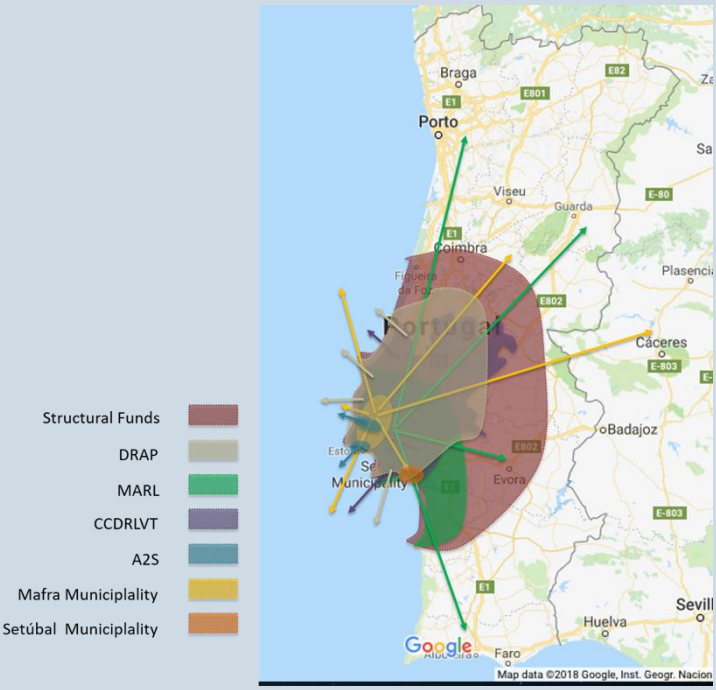
Looking through the conceptual framework: Lisbon's Living Lab

ROBUST's Lisbon Living Lab team ran two focus groups with regional stakeholders in mid 2018. Participants shared ideas and information about existing rural-urban relations in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

*The **new localities** concept sheds light on the different administrative boundaries and functional areas within the area. Many participants worked for municipalities and regional commissions. These organisations have boundaries (**absolute** space). But, in practice, most participants actually work across boundaries (**relative** space). They connect with neighbouring regions and other parts of Portugal, and into Spain. They even work into the ocean, through conservation initiatives and fisheries policy. Sometimes, they might work across boundaries while working within other boundaries, such as with EU Structural Funds. The region also depends on markets near and far for production, consumption, and tourism (**relational** space). The map below shows how different forms of space overlap, and how connections extend elsewhere.*

*Lisbon also shows two different examples of how **localities** cohere. The rural municipalities of Mafra and Setúbal both have **material coherence** through their institutions. However, while Mafra feels connected to urban Lisbon, Setúbal has a self-contained identity (**imagined coherence**).*

*A better understanding of localities can be used to expand **participation** in **network governance**. For example, Torres Vedras municipality is very similar to Mafra, but is not formally included in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Many focus group participants already work in regional **partnerships**, especially around agricultural competitiveness and cultural activities like gastronomy and wine tourism.*



*These examples also suggest how network governance can be used to support **smart development**. The wine industry presents one regional priority for growth. Wine is **embedded** in particular rural localities within the region, due to climate and soils, and also local knowledge. Businesses are **related** through wine, but in different ways – some produce wine, others offer wine tourism, still others benefit from the visitor numbers wine brings in. Obviously, tourism needs **connections** to other places, making urban infrastructures like Lisbon's airport an integral part of development.*

The Lisbon example shows how the conceptual framework can be put together to identify existing rural-urban connections in a region. But this is only a first step. As research progresses, ROBUST's Living Labs will use these insights to evaluate what currently exists, identify opportunities, and propose ways to strengthen rural-urban synergies.

Based on a report by Maria Rosário Partidário & Margarida Monteiro, Instituto Superior Técnico.

3.8.1 Using the framework in Living Labs

As the Lisbon example shows, the conceptual framework can be used to help inform and evaluate activities within Living Labs. Over the course of each Living Lab, how the framework is used will change. We can expect to use the framework in three main ways:

- To identify and evaluate existing rural-urban connections
- To discover opportunities for Living Lab activities
- To propose recommendations for rural-urban synergies

The box below gives examples of the kinds of questions that Living Labs can use the key concepts to ask.

Key concept	Questions for Living Labs
New localities	What and where is the locality? Is there more than one? Does the locality have material and imagined coherence? What forms of absolute, relative and relational space can be observed? How does the locality connect rural and urban?
Network governance	Who is currently involved in network governance? Which partners could be included? How can participation be facilitated? How can network governance enable rural-urban relations?
Smart development	What are the existing or potential opportunities for smart development? What should the local priorities for growth be? How are local growth initiatives connected, embedded, and related? How could smart development benefit both rural and urban?

3.8.2 Using the framework in Communities of Practice

Using the framework in Living Labs will in turn inform Communities of Practice. Through Communities of Practice, we share practical examples and learn together. We can use the framework to help in the following ways:

- To compare similarities and differences between Living Labs
- To translate practice from one Living Lab to another
- To develop and explain rural-urban solutions to shared challenges

The box below suggests the kinds of concrete examples that might be shared in Communities of Practice, and how solutions could be developed together.

Key concept	Information to share in Communities of Practice
New localities	Examples of rural-urban connections within or beyond the locality Ways to create or strengthen these connections
Network governance	Examples of network governance in practice Ways to enable participation and facilitate partnerships
Smart development	Examples of smart priorities and growth initiatives Ways to decide on and support priorities

4 Glossary

The glossary below defines terms that have been used in this guide, along with other related terms that may be used in both research and policy. Terms used in ROBUST's conceptual framework are highlighted in blue.

Concept/term	Definition
Absolute space	A form of space divided into separate territories with fixed boundaries.
City-region	A spatial planning term for a region with both rural and urban areas that is centred on a city. The city will have economic and political influence over the region.
Commuting field	The area from which people will travel on a daily basis to work in a central city or town (also known as labour market area or a travel-to-work area).
Connectedness	A feature of smart development. Businesses, markets and supply chains need to be connected through infrastructures and networks for knowledge exchange.
Counterurbanisation	Technically a shift in the overall balance of the population of a nation or region between urban and rural areas, with an increased proportion living in rural areas, but also used to refer to migration from urban to rural.
Dichotomy	Two related things or ideas which are considered to be opposites of each other.
Ecosystem services	The functions that environmental features like forests and rivers have in supporting larger ecosystems. These are often intangible and have in the past not been given any economic value. For example, carbon storage and flood alleviation.
Embeddedness	A feature of smart development. Priorities for growth should be locally embedded, for example existing industries and natural resources.
Fuzzy boundaries	Similar to relative space. A spatial planning term that describes how regions and municipalities have boundaries that are officially firm, but regularly crossed in working practice.
Governance	How the work of governing a nation or territory is organised and carried out. Particularly used to describe decentralised government. Similar to, but not to be confused with, corporate governance, which is how a business is structured and managed.
Greenbelt	A defined area around an urban settlement where new building development is restricted in order to preserve the rural appearance of the land and constrain urban expansion. Particularly used in Britain.
Hybridity	When different things are mixed together to make new forms. Sometimes used to describe the mixing of rural and urban characteristics in a place.
Imagined coherence	The sense of identity that residents feel for a locality and share with one another.

Concept/term	Definition
Locality	An area of social, cultural, economic and political life. Strong localities have both material (shared institutions) and imagined (shared identity) coherence.
Material coherence	The institutions and physical structures that hold a locality together.
Network governance	A decentralised model for governing a region or nation that emphasises the participation of local stakeholders and partnerships across the public, private and third sectors.
New localities	An approach to studying localities developed in human geography. The concept integrates absolute, relative and relational space.
NUTS regions	The standard geographical regions used by the European Union for statistical monitoring and policy delivery. Organised in a scalar hierarchy, with NUTS 1 regions divided into NUTS 2 regions, which are divided into NUTS 3 regions, which are divided into Local Administrative Units (LAUs).
Participation	As a feature of network governance, participation means enabling different stakeholders to participate in decision-making.
Partnership	As a feature of network governance, partnership involves the public, private and third sectors working together.
Peri-urban	A spatial planning term describing areas immediately surrounding towns or cities, but beyond the edge of the built-up urban area. Peri-urban areas are usually characterised by a mix of urban and rural land uses.
Relatedness	A feature of smart development. Businesses should be related to local or regional growth priorities. Relatedness still involves diversity – if the priority is wine, for example, there are many related business opportunities besides producing wine.
Relational space	A form of space that does not have boundaries and is not flat on a map. Through social, economic and political connections, different points can be close together without geographical proximity. Supply chains and cyberspace are good examples.
Relative space	A form of space that has blurry boundaries, such as the spread of a city.
Ruralisation	A term occasionally used to refer to either the incorporation of rural cultural references (e.g. clothing, 4-wheel-drive cars) or practices (e.g. urban agriculture) into urban lifestyles, or the relocation of urban lifestyles and cultural practices to rural locations.
Rural-urban continuum	A model which uses land use patterns and population data to describe a gradual transition between rural and urban areas. Now considered outdated.
Rural-urban fringe	Similar to peri-urban. A transition zone between the countryside and built-up urban areas. The rural-urban fringe includes a mix of rural and urban land uses. It may be the location for infrastructures and services that support the city but cannot be located within it, for example waste treatment.

Concept/term	Definition
Rural-urban interface	The zone of interaction between the city and the countryside, or between rural and urban economic or social forms. It is sometimes used specifically to refer to the geographical area at the margin of cities (see also the rural-urban fringe), but may be applied over a wider area where interactions between rural and urban forms take place.
Rurban	A term sometimes used to refer to places or practices that combine rural and urban characteristics.
Smart development	A general term for a group of similar approaches to regional development, including smart growth and smart specialisation. A strategy in which regions or localities focus their growth policies and resources on taking advantage of their competitive strengths. Although 'smart' is often associated with technology, the word is not necessarily used in this sense here.
Smart growth	The term for smart development used in the Europe 2020 strategy. It emphasises innovation and specialisation.
Smart specialisation	Another term for smart development. The European Commission has a Smart Specialisation Platform to support regions in developing their strategies.
Social construction	The idea that things do not have any natural or inherent meaning, but are given meaning by people. This happens through the ways people talk about and represent things, including in media and art. According to this perspective, 'rural' and 'urban' can never be objective categories.
Soft space	Similar to fuzzy boundaries and relative space. An idea in spatial planning that describes areas that have some unifying feature, but do not have firm boundaries. This can include crossing administrative boundaries.
Space	In human geography, the kinds of places that people live in and use are described as 'space'. For example, space can be applied to something as small as a room or as big as a town, and it can describe different forms and functions, such as regions or parks.
Spatial planning	An approach to planning that integrates land use planning, infrastructure, economic development, service delivery and ecosystem management. Spatial planning has been promoted through the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP).
Territorial development	Policies and strategies for economic development that focus on the integrated development of a defined territory, rather than, for example, a particular sector.
Urbanisation	A term used in several different ways: (i) the shift in the balance of the overall population of a nation or region between rural and urbans areas; (ii) migration from rural to urban areas; (iii) the extension of urban built-up areas into rural areas; (iv) the adoption of urban lifestyles by people living in rural areas.