

# Strategic Vision

Strategic vision for Future Approaches to Land Development  
based on mutual exchange of experiences between seven European regions  
during the Interreg III C project **FARLAND**

## Land Development

**Land Development** is one of the instruments that governments use to cope with the continuously ongoing changes in their territories. It is an implementation approach to realise the objectives of various planning policies. The land use and ownership structures are rearranged by a coordinated programme of buying, selling and exchange of land between different owners and users as well as actual construction of facilities. The aim is to optimally match land use to the functions defined under the spatial planning regime and to reach socio-economic and environmental goals set in various regional and rural development plans.

Land development practice should continuously be adapted to the social, economical and environmental challenges of the moment. It operates under the background of the actual social value system and within the prevailing institutional framework.



## Current Challenges

To prepare for future developments, **FARLAND has investigated** current issues and trends in European territories and the various approaches of land development dealing with subsequent challenges. In the rich European diversity, the following common challenges have been identified:

**Economic development puts pressure on our living environment**, especially in densely populated European core zones and nearby economic and urban centres. A nice living and working environment is needed to attract enterprises to move to economically attractive regions. This is one of Europe's core objectives in the global framework. An attractive environment becomes a major economic asset. It is clear that the limitation or availability of 'open space' near European economic centres is a crucial and common concern for the near future.

**Protection of natural values, biodiversity and our collective space is a common concern.**

The continuing deterioration of natural habitats and the threats posed to certain species are some of the main concerns of European Union environmental policy. The establishment of a nature protection network such as Natura 2000 is an important step. The ecological viability of the network must be guaranteed within a liveable socio-economic environment. Access to parks and reserves should be provided in a well-planned way so people can enjoy the richness of Europe's nature.

**Structural problems in agriculture and forestry hamper rural development.** In many European regions the development of economically viable production is hampered by small scale and fragmented land ownership. Larger scale farming is more efficient in the use of manpower and equipment and even in the use of pesticides and fertilizers. A new development like bio fuel production involves large scale rational farming. On the other hand, small scale landscapes can have a higher ecological value and are typically rated higher as attractive visual landscapes. Therefore, they bear potential for broadening of activities like environmental farming or agro-tourism.

**Environmental risks/hazards.** In southern Europe, forest fires require action. Rural areas are primarily affected by them. However, urban centres have also been in danger in recent years. Several causes such as climate change, economical interests, careless behaviour and abandonment of rural areas have dramatically increased the risk of forest fire occurrences in recent years. However, forest fires are not the only natural threat. In recent years Europe suffered from major damaging floods. Climate change, rising sea level and human impact will increase flood risks in the future. The traditional ways to tackle flooding such as building higher dykes are not sufficient anymore. Current policies increasingly use the concept of 'room for the river' and controlled flooding. This will lead to considerable claims on land along river banks.

**Land abandonment and deterioration of the quality of rural life** affect many parts of southern, central and eastern Europe. Physical handicaps or adverse economic changes reduce the viability of established forms of production. Abandonment can lead to loss of semi-natural habitats, loss of cultural values (terraces, historical buildings) and increases the risk of forest fires. Finally, the loss of agricultural use can further increase the process of outward migration and marginalisation.



The major current issues in land development have a broad diversity in terms of themes, location, causes and effects, and perspectives. However, all of them have a common factor, a parcel, as a unique piece of land determined by property rights, use, location, and shape. Land development with all its different tools either static, unique, or universal – addresses the issues at the parcel level, which is essential for the management of the issues at stake. Land is inevitably connected to property and use. The use of land is increasingly dynamic since changes occur more rapidly due to socioeconomic and environmental forces. In the 'era of information' both society as a whole and individuals are increasingly aware of the topics of land use and property and they are empowered to discuss them. Availability of spatial information and technologies stimulate this. Google Earth for example is more popular than ever.

At the same, important institutional and organisational issues are at stake. The **way governments perceive their role is changing**. The general trend is towards less regulation by governments and an increasing reliance on market forces. For example, trade barriers have been reduced and the EU production support system has been trimmed. Further, national and regional governments tend to decentralise their public tasks, leaving the initiative or policy implementation to businesses or citizens. These developments reinforce each other and lead to organisational restructuring programmes all across Europe.

So, a broad range of questions needs to be answered: How to respond to a deteriorating living environment near the economic centres? How to upscale land ownership for easier adaptation to international developments? How to rearrange land ownership structures and land functions to be better protected against natural hazards like forest fires and floods? How to redirect the process of land abandonment?

## A Range of Solutions

**FARLAND has been a 2.5 year journey along the best practices of seven countries and regions:** Lithuania, Hungary, North Rhine-Westphalia, The Netherlands, Flanders, Galicia and Portugal. By means of presentations, field visits, workshops and discussion panels, the specific regional challenges were investigated and best practices and innovations have been identified. All partners have displayed a cross section of their work, an in-depth investigation of specific topics was done during technical exchange visits.

FARLAND has shown land development approaches as means to support a balanced economic development in a more coordinated and integrated way. 'Red' and 'green' functions can be managed better and negative impacts on landscape, biodiversity, land use and land ownership can be mitigated and compensated. On the other hand, land development can help to implement our common goals of protection and safeguarding of biodiversity, while promoting other interests at the same time. FARLAND has illustrated that land development practices can successfully support both the improvement of agriculture and broader approaches. In the fight against forest fires, land development approaches can help improve the management and structure of forest areas by reducing fragmentation, upgrading infrastructure and reviving abandoned areas in an integrated way. All over Europe, land development activities are increasingly applied to support flood control measures, to make these bearable for all users or even to add extra value to the projects by integrating multiple objectives. Land banking, formation of cooperations, land re-allotment and promotion of new uses can all help to find a new balance between profitable farming and preservation of nature and landscape in areas subject to abandonment.

Throughout Europe, land development has shown its wide range of measures, instruments and approaches such as the experimental voluntary projects in the fragmented lands of Lithuania and Hungary; the specific role in mega projects as Groningen Lake City, the port of Antwerp and Alqueva dam in Alentejo; the liveable villages of Mettekoven and Milchenbach; and the revival of abandoned rural areas of Galicia and Portugal. **FARLAND has recognised that there is no single recipe to the challenges, nor is there a single best instrument or best approach.**

Each region or country has its own history, context and specific challenges to tackle. This leads to land development with different regional flavours. However, just as the questions showed, the variety of answers also has its own common essence. All land development tools give society the opportunity to modify the spatial configuration of property rights in order to optimize land use, with guarantees for all parties involved in a democratic process. The different activities and varied outputs form the level of action needed to effectuate spatial planning and regional/rural development plans. The toolbox of land development provides an excellent opportunity to create the impact intended by these plans.

The fundamental goal of interregional exchange was to inspire each other to take steps to upgrade the individual approaches, be it the long matured West, the fresh East or the creative South. The answers to the issues at stake have been elaborated in regional discussion papers through fruitful processes of participation and debate.



## Common Directions

There is a clear common understanding that (both public and private) land development will remain an important government approach in future restructuring of land use and property. The regional visions show common directions for future land development approaches. Throughout Europe, people and organisations dealing with land development have expressed intentions and developed ideas to broaden the objectives, to create extended toolkits, to create tailor-made solutions and to increase capacity for implementation. In this common direction, land development is considered most effective when:

- ❖ done in an **integrated** way in which:
  - different interests are expressed by intense participation, and balanced during project preparation and execution
  - interventions react to current and future needs of the whole society rather than just the agricultural sector
  - activity packages are diverse and well coordinated during project implementation
  - funding flows are combined
  
- ❖ done in a **decentralised** way in which:
  - regional and local administrations take their responsibilities
  - interest organisations and local stakeholders are involved actively during the initiation, preparation and implementation phases
  - a good balance is found (depending on the issue at stake) between the responsibility of the government to safeguard public interests as well as local private interests (combination of top-down and bottom-up)
  
- ❖ **flexible frameworks** for implementation are available that:
  - contain various instruments and tools that support each other
  - enable quick production of visible results

To establish and develop these approaches, FARLAND partners have formulated the following recommendations for future approaches in land development.



## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1 – Recognition

**European regions, countries, local governments and the EU should acknowledge Land Development as a powerful set of instruments**

- ❖ Land Development should be used for implementation of various regional, rural and territorial development plans, complementary to other instruments
- ❖ The different plans should be defined and applied in cooperation and coordination to achieve the optimal effect of Land Development
- ❖ Consequently, Land Development requires new partnerships between public and private sectors and collaborative ways of working

### Recommendation 2 – Promotion

**Strategic thinking about Land Development should be strengthened**

- ❖ The European Commission is recommended:
  - to put more emphasis on structural improvement of land use and property in its regulations and guidelines
  - to better facilitate the implementation and co-financing by allowing programme financing under its Rural Development Program, its Regional Policy programs, and other policies affecting land use and property rights
- ❖ Each country or region is recommended to set up a strategy:
  - on how to use land development for various policies affecting land use and property
  - for open planning processes with different ministries, interest organisations and other stakeholders involved

### Recommendation 3 – Implementation

**Operational capacity for Land Development should be improved**

- ❖ Governments are recommended to establish and improve a range of instruments to work in a tailor-made way.
- ❖ Governments are recommended to create capacity for proper coordination and facilitation of integrated land development programming and implementation between sectors
- ❖ To implement integrated activity packages, systems for combining funding flows of different sectors and administrative levels

## Recommendation 4 – Innovation

### Capacity to innovate in the field of Land Development should be improved

- ❖ Land development organisations are recommended to invest in capacity for strategic planning, visioning and innovation
- ❖ Local governments, regions and countries are recommended to set up and participate in networks for review, innovation and continuous learning
- ❖ Networks should preferably contain a mix of organisations dealing with policy development, implementation and research / innovation
- ❖ A solid research and educational base should be established as a foundation for innovation

## Recommendation 5 – Acting now

### FARLAND, Near Future: Act Now.... to address the Gothenburg Agenda and the Lisbon Strategy!

- ❖ Countries, regions and local governments should start more pilot projects in specific areas related to the Gothenburg Agenda and Lisbon Strategy for applying the other four recommendations
- ❖ The European Union should take a 'Community Initiative' for Land Development





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