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Article

# Transitioning towards a Sustainable Wellbeing Economy—Implications for Rural–Urban Relations

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the question of how a shift from a narrow economic perspective to a wider sustainable wellbeing focus in regional development strategies and actions might change rural–urban relations. A brief review of relevant research and discourses about economic development models provides the foundation for the analysis. The review leads to the development of an analytical framework that puts the notion of sustainable wellbeing at its center. The criteria included in the analytical framework are then used to assess the current situation, challenges and perceived ways forward based on data and analyses from 11 European regions. The focus of the analysis is on different expressions of a sustainable wellbeing economy, and aspects of territorial development that are consistent with the basic features of a wellbeing economy are identified. Development dynamics and tensions between different development goals and resource uses, strategies and actions that are in favor of sustainable wellbeing goals, and conditions for more mutually beneficial rural–urban relationships are discussed. The article concludes with the implications for local government, and governance and policy frameworks. Reference is made to current high-level strategic policy frameworks and the European Green Deal.

**Keywords:** sustainable wellbeing; rural–urban relations; land management; local government; governance; policy; case studies; Europe

## 1. Introduction

In 2012, the OECD contended in its Environmental Outlook to 2050 that business-as-usual is not an option anymore: “Humanity has witnessed unprecedented growth and

prosperity in the past decades, with the size of the world economy more than tripling [...]. This growth, however, has been accompanied by environmental pollution and natural resource depletion. The current growth model and the mismanagement of natural assets could ultimately undermine human development" [1].

In 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that concretize the agenda aim to build an *"inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet"* [2].

These high-level goals align, in terms of programmatic aims, with the European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy. The strategy explicitly demands an economy based on knowledge and innovation that is resource-efficient and greener, and that provides high employment and social cohesion [3]. The European Commission has recently introduced the European Green Deal. Pitched as *"a new EU growth strategy"*, the Green Deal promises *"enable European citizens and businesses to benefit from a sustainable green transition ... by [supporting] investments in green technologies, sustainable solutions and new businesses"* [4].

### 1.1. Evolution of (Economic) Development Models

Together with the increasing recognition of the global challenges, societies are confronted with, there has been an evolution in thinking about development. In the following, five broad types of (economic) development will be briefly reviewed in order to derive an analytical framework that will be used later in the empirical analysis. The examined models start with conventional and end with, in many respects, more encompassing and advanced models:

- Classical development models focused on economic growth;
- Green growth, smart growth, and circular economy models;
- Collaborative (or sharing) economy and distributed economy models;
- Eco-economy and regenerative economy models;
- Foundational economy and sustainable wellbeing models.

Up to now, classical development models have used economic growth as the primary marker of progress and prosperity [5]. Strong economic growth tends to be connected with expansion, not only in markets but also in space, and it can literally be seen how cities and economic powerhouses expand, putting pressure on the surrounding peri-urban areas, as well as natural resources and buffer capacities in natural systems. Fast growing regions also leave less space for those regions that still need to grow their economies because of insufficient job and income opportunities, or low living standards [6,7]. This aspect is crucial as across Europe very divergent trends in economic development can be seen. In some stagnating (or shrinking) regions current and prospective growth is much lower than elsewhere [6], and these differences are even more pronounced at global level [2,8].

Due to the more and more evident downsides of classical economic models governments are increasingly seeking economic growth that is smart (innovation-led), inclusive, and sustainable [9]. Models like green growth and smart growth and, more recently, circular economy [3,10] attempt to mitigate negative effects without putting into question the basic mechanisms underlying growth-centered policies. The European Commission supports related investments in resource use efficiency and through its circular economy action plan adopted in 2016 [11]. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021) argues that increases in resource use efficiency are not sufficient, emphasizing that circular models build economic, natural, and social capital, thereby encouraging a rather different approach to thinking about growth [12]. Isserman et al. (2009) and Van Leeuwen (2015) argue that even if growth as such occurs, it might not trickle down to the local economy and that its benefits do not necessarily accrue to the actors themselves [7,13]. An example of this could be a new logistics center that requires a lot of land but is largely automated with only a few remaining staff members often recruited from outside of the region. These few

examples indicate that the different interpretations of a circular economy and smart growth (or smart specialization) might have implications for rural–urban relations.

Jackson (2009, 2016), Raworth (2017), the OECD (2012) and others go a step further arguing that, in the resource-intensive lifestyles world, and in aggregate (or overall), further economic growth is not possible [1,8,14,15]. Raworth (2017) adds that economic growth tends to be progressively less connected with job creation and securing income and wellbeing for a broader population [15]. The resulting question is what the key features of alternative development models and the related progress measures are.

The collaborative economy (sometimes also referred to as a sharing economy) represents a more profound departure from classical growth models. It focuses more on the shared creation, production, distribution, trade, and consumption of goods and services. Working collaboratively is seen as transformative for both the communities where exchanges are happening and for the individuals involved [16]. Collaborative economy services are rapidly emerging across Europe, and range from sharing houses and car journeys to domestic services. They can potentially provide opportunities for citizens and innovative entrepreneurs and offer greater choice to consumers. So far, however, they have also created significant tensions, for example between new service providers and existing market operators [17]. Mason (2015) warns that business models in the collaborative or sharing economy are often based on the privatization of socially produced information, and that these new approaches might reproduce the old order if guided by old principles [18].

Another model which is meant as an alternative to large-scale, centralized production units that tend to be associated with socio-economically unsustainable dynamics is the distributed economy [19]. In a distributed economy a significant share of production activities is organized in the form of smaller units that are synergistically connected with each other and that prioritize quality in their production. Information technology is facilitating these changes. Locally controlled bioenergy and smart distributed energy systems are other expressions of a distributed economy. Essentially, structuring an economy as a distributed network can more equitably spread income and wealth amongst all those who help to generate it.

The eco-economy and regenerative economy models are in many ways complementary to the distributed economy model. Both emphasize environmental sustainability and a regenerative use of natural resources [20,21]. An eco-economy requires the “*principles of ecology [to] establish the framework for the formulation of economic policy and economists and ecologists [to] work together to fashion the new economy*” [20], p.4. Marsden and Farioli (2015) argue that the framing of the eco-economy goes far beyond the framing of the bioeconomy, especially in its implications for environmental, social, and spatial development; while the bioeconomy focuses on renewables and resource efficiency, the eco-economy also comprises more place-based systems and a wider distribution of value added [21]. A regenerative economy puts particular emphasis on the balance between efficiency and resilience, collaboration and competition, diversity and coherence, and small, medium, and large organizations with their different needs [22]. Both, the eco-economy and the regenerative economy model emphasize multifunctional resource uses, including of land.

Finally, there is a set of development models which correspond with Trebeck’s (2020) much more encompassing notion of a more humane and sustainable economy [23]. The related indicators include, for example, the EU’s sustainable development indicators, OECD’s better life indicators, the genuine progress indicator (GPI) and the human development index (HDI). The related quality of life goals are expressed in everyone’s need for health, a reasonable living standard, close relationships, activities considered meaningful by people, and self-realization. Closely connected are demands for an equitable distribution of wellbeing at present, as well as securing the wellbeing of future generations [24]. The foundational economy concept which was originally introduced in the ‘manifesto for the foundational economy’ [25,26] brings together these different aspects. Like the model of ‘doughnut economics’ proposed by Kate Raworth (2017, 2019) [15,27] it highlights the importance of addressing environmental sustainability (with ecological ceilings that life

depends on, etc.; or the ‘planetary boundaries’ as coined by Johan Rockström and colleagues [28]), and social justice (i.e., access to healthcare, education, etc.) goals together. In Kate Raworth’s doughnut model an economy is considered prosperous when 12 key social foundations are met without overshooting any of the nine key ecological ceilings [15,27].

In this article, these different notions are subsumed under the overarching concept of a sustainable wellbeing economy (the development model and term introduced by Katherine Trebeck [23]). Table A1 provides a summary overview on the framing of each model and the related shifts in focus. Central in the analysis presented in this article is the encompassing concept of a sustainable wellbeing economy.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The evolution of development models briefly sketched out above, leads to the two research questions that this article is about:

1. To what extent and in what ways is the shift from a narrow economic perspective to wider sustainable wellbeing, explicitly or implicitly, expressed in regional development strategies and actions?
2. How could the shift towards a wider sustainable wellbeing perspective change rural–urban relations, and under what conditions can it lead to more mutually beneficial relations?

## 2. Methodology and Empirical Basis

The approach applied in this article is based on three steps:

- Elaboration of an analytical framework with key criteria for exploring the significance of sustainable wellbeing goals in regional level strategies and actions;
- Application of the analytical framework in 11 European regions to determine in how far a shift towards sustainable wellbeing can be recognized;
- Exploring how this shift could change rural–urban relations and under what conditions this could lead to more mutually beneficial relations.

The first step, elaboration of an analytical framework, builds on the review of models of (economic, sustainable) development presented in the previous section. Based on the review and related studies, policy and strategy papers, key criteria for exploring the significance of sustainable wellbeing goals are derived.

The second step involves the use of the framework and criteria for analyzing the current situation, trends, challenges, perceived ways forward, strategies, and actions in 11 European regions. The third step comprises a synthesis of observations and an analysis and discussion focused on and structured by the two research questions.

In the second and third step a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis is used, given that different kinds of data are available in the different case study regions (see section ‘Empirical basis’). Multiple sources of evidence were used to ensure the internal validity of all analyses (e.g., pooling existing literature and data and including inputs from all relevant stakeholders). Generally, authors drew on primary and secondary data analyses and expert discussions.

The cooperation between practitioners and specialists from these different countries in this analysis and the elaboration of the article, involves integrating a range of disciplinary approaches (interdisciplinarity) and drawing on the experiential knowledge of practitioners (trans-disciplinarity). This, in turn, provides deep insights into how regional development challenges and rural–urban relations are addressed in different national contexts. The two research questions and the criteria in the analytical framework were used to jointly select illustrative examples for this article.

### 2.1. Analytical Framework of Sustainable Wellbeing

The review presented in the introduction has highlighted a range of models, most of which represent a significant departure from classical economic development notions. The three main concerns reflected in the more recent models are:

- The limitedness of natural resources and of the buffer capacity of natural systems which are effectively expressed in the planetary boundaries work; related to this, demands for a more environmentally sustainable development;
- The limited recognition of socio-cultural and quality of life goals in orthodox development models. Quality of life is becoming more important especially for the younger generation, but also more broadly;
- The uneven distribution of income and access to goods and services, and the increasing discomfort regarding the wellbeing of future generations; related to this, demands for a more, equitable and inclusive economic development.

The analytical framework presented in Table 1 draws out 17 criteria that—based on the reviewed models and literature — appear most effective in describing these three concerns. The criteria are grouped into the three broad kinds of concerns (or dimensions): environmentally sustainable, socio-cultural and quality of life, and equitable and inclusive economic development. It is recognized that some aspects, like ‘equitable and inclusive’ or ‘resilient’ could also be understood as transversal and therefore equally relevant to any of the three dimensions.

**Table 1.** Key dimensions and criteria of sustainable wellbeing.

<b>Environmentally Sustainable</b>	<b>Socio-Cultural and Quality of Life</b>	<b>Equitable and Inclusive Economic Development</b>
<b>(1) Climate-friendly production systems and lifestyles</b>	(7) Social capital, diversity and resilience	(13) Decent, satisfying jobs and enough household income for all
<b>(2) Natural capital, natural resources integrity and resilience</b>	(8) Social justice and good living conditions for all	(14) Fair income distribution
<b>(3) Sustainable management of land, maintenance of high nature value areas and ecosystem services provision</b>	(9) Activities considered meaningful by people, social recognition and security	(15) Equitable access to resources and inclusive development
<b>(4) More efficient use of finite resources (decoupling)</b>	(10) Collaboration and coherence	(16) Strengthening of local economic relations, diversity, synergies and resilience
<b>(5) Transition to renewable energy</b>	(11) Healthy food	(17) Maintaining the given resource base for future generations
<b>(6) Sustainable mobility</b>	(12) Education and healthcare	

Source: Authors’ compilation based on the results of the review of models of (economic, sustainable) development and related studies, policy and strategy papers.

Linking back the analytical framework with the five broad types of development model introduced earlier, it is apparent that classical economic growth models only maintain some limited meaning in regions where there is a tangible lack of job and income opportunities (Criterion 17 in Table 1). Green growth, smart growth, and circular economy models are reflected above all in the framework’s environmentally sustainable dimension (Criteria 1–6). Rebound effects (or take-back effects) often mean a reduction in expected gains from new technologies aimed at increasing the efficiency of resource use because of behavioral or other systemic responses. Criterion 2 ‘Natural capital, natural resources integrity and resilience’ is, therefore, only partially met. Eco-economy and regenerative economy models go further in particular in meeting Criterion 2. Collaborative (or sharing) economy and distributed economy models are reflected well in Criteria 8–10

and 13–16. All 17 criteria in the analytical framework are covered well with foundational economy and sustainable wellbeing models. As the latter play an increasingly important role in urban and regional development, they are chosen as reference system for this article.

The basic assumption underlying the empirical analysis presented in this article is that a shift towards a sustainable wellbeing economy can be recognized if perceived ways forward and regional development strategies and actions are in correspondence with these 17 criteria.

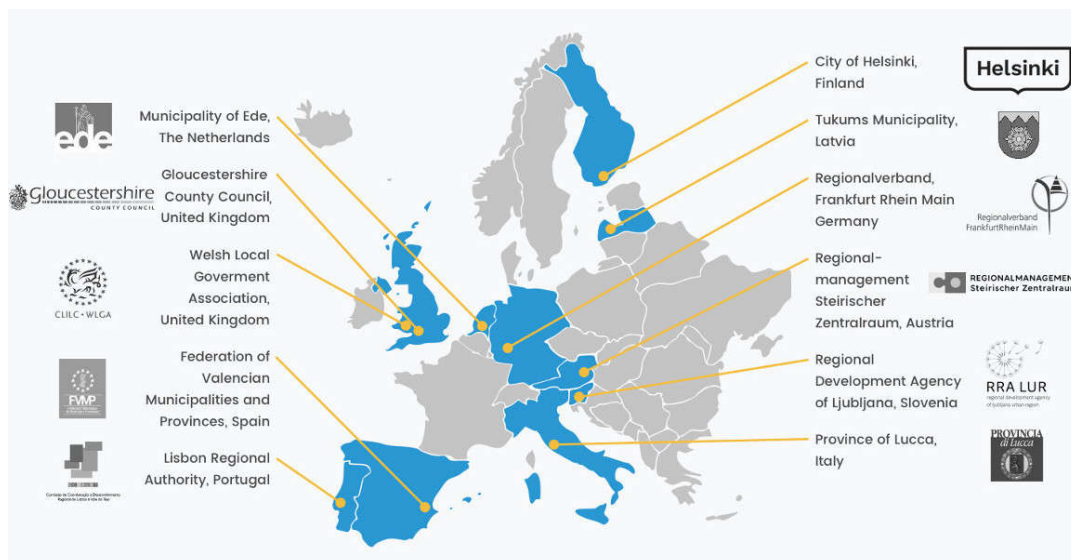
## 2.2. Empirical Basis

The empirical basis for this article are 11 regions that were selected for the EU-funded Horizon 2020 ROBUST project on enhancing rural–urban relations. The 11 regions cover a broad range of scales, historical, institutional, socio-economic and cultural settings, regional development trends and dynamics, and geographical locations.

The use of a case study approach ensures that the trends, strategies and actions identified in each of the 11 regions are analyzed with close attention paid to the unique mix of resources, structures, activities, formal and informal institutions, aspirations, and development trajectories that each region features. In line with that it is the aim to discover the diversity of possible pathways and actions leading to sustainable wellbeing economies, and *not* to compare the regions.

As the set of 11 case study regions covers a broad range of settings, trends, and dynamics, it will be possible to illustrate potential synergies, as well as tensions in much needed transitions in very different circumstances.

A map of the 11 study regions is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** ROBUST consortium partners leading the project's 11 Living Labs.

## 3. Results

In this section, the analytical framework is used to examine the situation and trends in the 11 study regions, which are briefly introduced first.

### 3.1. Characterization of the Development in the 11 EU Case Study Regions

Ede is a municipality, the east of which abuts Netherlands' largest nature reserve, The Veluwe, while its west has an agricultural character and is part of the central Dutch plains. The key concerns of municipal decision-makers are promoting rural business models that build on farming diversification, boosting the provisioning of ecosystem services

and increasing environmental quality. Consequently, regional development efforts are focused on integrating food, environmental, and planning policies, introducing novel forms of territorial cooperation and new types of offset mechanisms between public and private goods.

The Frankfurt/Rhein-Main region in Germany is known for its international airport, finance sector, and high-tech industry. Because the city of Frankfurt (Main) is economically successful with favorable employment opportunities, continuing population growth is foreseen. Municipal decision-makers and planners recognize the importance of quality of life and good living conditions but face the challenge of accommodating a rising demand for affordable housing while preserving remaining green spaces.

Gloucestershire, in the UK, also anticipates significant levels of growth. Key challenges in the future include the need to balance growth alongside ensuring the long-term protection of its environmental assets. Not all growth can be accommodated within the existing urban areas. Rural and peri-urban land will need to be sacrificed for new housing, supporting infrastructure and commercial enterprises. To maximize the benefits of growth and minimize its potential impacts, local decision-makers are drawn to championing the ideals of clean, green growth as an alternative to conventional practice. Support for the transition to a more circular economy is seen as key.

The population of Helsinki-Uusimaa region in Finland is expected to grow rapidly in the next 20 years. Development will differ within the region because around half of the rural and peri-urban municipalities in the region are expecting a drop in population numbers. In these shrinking municipalities, an ageing population will significantly affect cultural and economic dynamics, including basic services provisioning. The region's priority is to promote smart growth and adaptation by enabling knowledge networks and multi-locality for sustainable life, work, and entrepreneurship. Balancing the social impacts of these structural changes while enhancing the competitiveness of the region and not exceeding resource limits is a central issue for decision-makers.

Similarly, the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal, faces enormous peri-urban pressure, urban migration, and depopulation in rural areas. Expanding urban territories with high population density exist next to the places with prevailing rural lifestyles and primary sector activities, which face lower income opportunities and depopulation. Decision-makers recognize the need to strengthen mutually beneficial relationships while building on local assets, bridging metropolitan communities and economies for a harmonized and integrated territorial development.

The economic boom experienced in the 1990s–2000s in Slovenia's Ljubljana Urban Region, resulted in urban sprawl and suburbanization. As an employment center, Ljubljana attracts in-migration, which along with a steep increase in tourism results in high property prices and costs of living, leading in turn to the suburbanization of surrounding rural areas and pressure on agriculture and the natural environment. A municipal priority intended to foster more beneficial relations between the rapidly growing city and surrounding rural areas is to promote short food supply chains and increase local provisioning in public institutions.

Local and high-quality food products and wine play also a significant role for the local food system, the ecosystems and the cultural traditions of the Province of Lucca, Italy, characterized by dispersed settlements and peri-urban agriculture. Land fragmentation and abandonment, and the resulting deterioration of peri-urban agricultural areas are widespread. The province's goal is to foster a more sustainable spatial development through policies that mitigate urban sprawl, encourage multifunctional agriculture, and preserve environmental and cultural values.

In mid-Wales, UK, remoteness, poverty and depopulation are longstanding problems compounded by long distances from urban centers of economic development and market failures in service provision. As a predominantly rural region, mid-Wales has been struc-



turally overlooked by national policies that focus on investment in city-regions. Local government priorities hence focus on strategies for fostering rural growth, while maintaining agricultural landscapes, natural resources, and the distinctive Welsh culture and language.

Tukums Municipality in Latvia is also predominantly rural with agriculture and food central to regional development. Tukums is facing depopulation and related social and economic challenges, including maintaining service provision, infrastructure and quality of life. The municipality expects that ensuring sustainable living and working conditions of high quality will retain young people, attract new residents and visitors, and encourage business development. Vibrant cultural life is seen as one key ingredient of quality of life and sustainable living conditions in the region. For that purpose, a joint cultural strategy for the municipality is developed to preserve and add value to the rich cultural and historical heritage of the region that can also boost economic and social activities.

The Metropolitan Area of Styria in Austria includes the vibrant city of Graz and its surroundings which benefit from in-migration, as well as small and remote rural municipalities to the west. Development models that valorize the region's heterogeneous conditions and benefit from sub-regional potentials and aspirations aim to counteract the widening gap between rural areas and urban Graz, and to contribute to a higher quality of life overall. Decision-makers are pooling existing resources in the different sub-regions, fostering interregional cooperation in public infrastructure, social services, and cultural activities, and creating synergies that can benefit the whole region.

The Province of Valencia, Spain, is illustrative of many Mediterranean regions. Most of the population is concentrated in the metropolitan area. Over time, unbalanced population growth and development has resulted in complex territorial, social and economic tensions. A key question for decision-makers is whether shifting from sector-based (mainly tourism), short-term growth to a territory-based, comprehensive long-term view could help the region better manage challenges in the future. Focus areas include fostering smart growth to improve rural–urban relations and overcoming the negative impacts of low-cost tourism.

Table 2 provides a summary overview of the 11 study regions, as well as a simple characterization based on area size (sqkm), population density (inh./sqkm) and population change (% p.a.).

**Table 2.** Brief characterization of the 11 regions examined in this paper.

Region	Area sqkm	Population	
		Density inh./sqkm	Change * %
Ede Municipality, Netherlands	318	364	+0.9%
Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, Germany	2458	960	+1.2%
Gloucestershire, United Kingdom	3150	239	+0.9%
Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland	9568	176	+1.0%
Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal	3015	944	+1.3%
Ljubljana Region, Slovenia	2334	237	+0.8%
Lucca Province, Italy	1773	220	−0.1%
Mid-Wales, United Kingdom	17,034	60	−0.2%
Metropolitan Area Styria, Austria	1890	261	+1.1%
Tukums Municipality, Latvia	1195	23	−1.2%
Province of Valencia, Spain	10,812	228	+1.0%

Source: Authors compilation based on information provided on the project website: <http://rural-urban.eu/> (accessed: 26 April 2021). \* last 5 years in % p.a. (i.e., approximately 2015–2020).

The distribution of regions by population density and population change is shown in Figure A1. The data indicate that there are two regions with a low population density

and significant depopulation (Tukums, mid-Wales). Lucca stands out with an average population density and a slightly decreasing population. Two regions have a very high population density and significant increases in population (Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, Lisbon). All other regions have a population density of around 200–400 inhabitants/sqkm and population changes of around +1% p.a.

### 3.2. Do Sustainable Wellbeing Goals Play a Role in Regional Level Strategies?

Following the introduction of the 11 regions, the analytical framework is used to answer the two main research questions. The three related dimensions in the analytical framework structure the discussion:

- Environmentally sustainable development;
- Socio-cultural aspects and quality of life;
- Equitable and inclusive economic development.

Wherever relevant, for each dimension attention is paid to the related differences between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, and the connections across dimensions and boundaries.

#### 3.2.1. Environmentally Sustainable Development

The key issues examined in this sub-section are the maintenance of natural resources and ecosystem integrity, the sustainable management of land, nature conservation, and high nature value areas, the role of a more efficient use of finite resources (decoupling), and the importance of climate friendly production systems and lifestyles, the latter also in respect of sustainable mobility.

To contain the expansion of settlement areas and the spreading of cities and suburbs over more and more agricultural land and nature areas is a key issue in all regions except Tukums and mid-Wales. The challenge is to contain the overuse and fragmentation of space due to demand for infrastructural, business, and housing developments, and to preserve natural resources, while at the same time accommodating growth in population numbers and jobs, and the associated housing and infrastructural development.

A central concern of regional planners in Frankfurt/Rhein-Main is the intense demand for settlement and business development areas and, related to this, the question how environmental quality can be maintained as the city grows, both spatially and economically. Policymakers are asking how much growth is (still) possible, and how the conflicting goals between the further expansion of economic activity and the associated demands for open space can be balanced. Open space is maintained in the Rhein-Main Regional Park as an asset for people to enjoy attractive landscapes on their doorstep. The main challenge is to balance competing land uses identified for green open areas [29].

The situation is similar in Ljubljana and Helsinki-Uusimaa. In both regions accelerated suburbanization contributes to the loss of open space and increasing environmental problems. At the same time, the urban area benefits from the ecosystem services provided by surrounding areas. The harmonization of economic growth and environmental requirements is increasingly seen as one of the key challenges to be addressed. Spatial planning is becoming more effective in incorporating environmental goals, partly due to extensive Natura 2000 network, improved protection of water resources and better flood prevention and mitigation. In Helsinki-Uusimaa, expanding built-up areas and increasing the use of natural resources for building, livelihoods, energy consumption, and recreation create pressures on ecosystems. To reduce urban sprawl and mitigate climate change, regional authorities are encouraging the eco-efficiency of cities and increased density of urban areas. The ongoing mapping and valuation of ecosystem services and green infrastructure is to support planning. The region's land use and business planners see biodiversity and a sustainable use of natural resources as prerequisites for wellbeing. This in turn generates pressure to develop regulatory frameworks, for instance in land use and building act, that integrate ecosystem services into decision-making [30,31].

A closely related question in Ljubljana and Helsinki-Uusimaa is how overall resilience can be increased when connecting the dispersed rural settlements with the capital city. Decision-makers are exploring ways to enhance mutually beneficial relationships and foster sustainable economic development. Similarly, in Gloucestershire, greater attention is being given to the imposition of ever-progressive measures to protect and ensure the long-term resilience of the county's designated environmental assets and opportunities to secure beneficial enhancements in biodiversity and broader resource quality. Decision-makers argue that, ideally, this must occur in an integrated and coordinated fashion, in tandem with the ambition to deliver housing, employment and infrastructure growth and avoid unduly pressuring and degrading existing, resident local communities. Simultaneously, the adoption of circular business models throughout the local economy could help keep increasingly scarce and energy-intensive raw materials at maximum use for as long as possible and, thus, reduce their demand and the burden upon source locations, which are often rural areas.

In Ede, circular farming finds its expression in more traditional land-based farming practices, as well as in more high-tech inspired practices of urban rest-flow valorization. Circular systems are integrating renewable energy production and urban rest flow valorization. While they are clearly beneficial overall, locally they can be a source of conflicting interests. Windmills and solar fields, for example, are generally regarded as spoiling the landscape.

Decision-makers in the Province of Lucca aim to reduce land use conflicts resulting from urbanization and foster more sustainable spatial development. Building activities that lead to a loss of agricultural land are increasingly challenged as a waste of natural resources. A sustainable vision for the region has been agreed and policies put in place that mitigate urban sprawl, encourage multifunctional agriculture, and that preserve environmental and cultural values [32]. Closely related, and like Ede, policy also aims to encourage the strengthening of sustainable forms of agriculture, to the benefit of the environment, the landscape, and the provision of ecosystem services.

The apparently relentless growth in traffic volumes is a major problem in several regions (Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, Graz/Styria, Lisbon, and Ljubljana). Especially the exponential growth in transport and logistics related to online trade—often with only negligible local employment effects—is aggravating problems. Regional administrations are confronted with the question how further growth in mobility, transport and logistics can be sustainable. In many regions, less centralized, adaptive solutions are being developed which will also impact the relations between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. In Valencia, the rapid growth of low-cost air travel is imposing growing pressures on environmental resources along the coast. Low-cost air travel and tourism have limited positive effects on local economies, while consuming local resources. The predominance of low-cost tourism is therefore increasingly perceived as detrimental to the realization of the region's potentials.

These regional examples indicate that the environmental dimension is increasingly considered as intrinsic to sustainable regional development. At the same time traditional approaches to natural resources management and nature conservation continue to play a significant role. Restructuring of (economic) activities to achieve a more efficient use of finite resources (decoupling) plays a much lesser role. Illustrations of an economic restructuring are Valencia where the costs and benefits of low-cost tourism are questioned, and Gloucestershire which is aspiring to a circular economy. The same applies to climate friendly production systems and lifestyles where it can be assumed that awareness has grown although few tangible efforts are visible. The only two regions not struggling with rapid expansion of economic activities and population growth are mid-Wales and Tukums. Both regions are confronted with a lack of job and income opportunities, as well as a decreasing and aging population, which is discussed subsequently.

### 3.2.2. Socio-Cultural Aspects and Quality of Life

In this sub-section good living conditions are the focus of analysis alongside activities considered meaningful by people for all, a socially more balanced development, access to healthy food, education, and healthcare, diversity and resilience, social recognition and security, and collaboration and coherence.

Socio-cultural potentials tend to play a limited role for decision-makers in the study regions in respect of both the development of regions and quality of life goals. Exceptions to this are Lucca, Graz/Styria, Tukums, and mid-Wales, where socio-cultural aspects are seen as providing significant opportunities. Ongoing discussions on how to develop sustainable cultural tourism in ways that do not exploit and undermine, but preserve and let local culture flourish, and that are beneficial both for visitors and locals, are an example. Tourism can boost local economies, social and cultural life, incite preservation and maintenance of environmental resources, provide recognition of local culture (identities, traditions, language, food, etc.), but it can also exploit and destroy local resources [33].

In the Province of Lucca, opportunities related to quality food products and culture play a central role. The intermunicipal food policy for the Lucca plain includes encouraging access to locally produced food in open air markets, shops, restaurants, school and company canteens, and the establishment of shared vegetable gardens, on public or private land. The Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity in Garfagnana is an example of activities that combine the use of natural and cultural resources. This community-based initiative represents a multi-actor, cross-sectoral network that is driven by private sector actors and civil society organizations (CSO) who are mobilizing support from public actors, thereby also acquiring research and development funding. The initiative builds on the interests of tourists in consuming and buying local products, as well as in getting a sense of the place. The high and increasing reputation of Garfagnana is based on authenticity connected with rural and nature tourism. Local initiatives promote the conservation and valorization of local agro-biodiversity through the production, processing and marketing of quality food products and through tourism development, leading to new start-up firms [32].

An illustration of a new cooperative business model that is to improve access to resources and foster a more inclusive development is implemented in the more rural western part of the Metropolitan Area of Styria. The initiative aggregates products and services offered by female entrepreneurs. Particular attention is paid to women on their way to self-employment and to providing cooperation opportunities with female farmers. To secure livelihoods based on self-employment is seen as creating new regional jobs and an important measure for making the more rural parts of the region a more attractive place to live and to reduce out-migration [34].

Tukums' sustainable development strategy has four interrelated goals aimed at reviving the region's prosperity: educated and socially active and responsible residents; diversified smart businesses; attractive living space, including environmental conditions; and collaborative governance. Tourism development includes initiatives aimed at fostering the valorization of local natural and cultural resources. Examples include introducing visitors to local farming traditions, gastronomic tourism routes that offer the possibility of discovering local or traditional food and recipes, routes integrating local architectural sites like renovated castles and manor houses, and a range of creative workshops showcasing typical traditional handicrafts.

Over the past two decades, the focus in the development of Lisbon Metropolitan Area has evolved from infrastructure needs and the preservation of natural systems, to highlighting social cohesion, communities, citizenship and diversity, thereby projecting a metropolis based on solidarity, cosmopolitanism and interculturality.

The examples from the 11 study areas illustrate how in particular socio-cultural and environmental can be effectively combined in place-specific strategies. Businesses and community groups using commercial activities to deliver social, cultural, and environmental benefits play a central role in this integration.

### 3.2.3. Equitable and Inclusive Economic Development

In the following, traits of a more equitable and inclusive economic development in the 11 regions are identified. The focus is on the provision of a sufficient income for all and in all parts of a region, the goal to achieve a more equitable income distribution, the strengthening of local economic relations, and the maintenance of the given resource base for future generations.

The new edition of the regional land use plan for Frankfurt/Rhein-Main aims at reducing the massive increase in settlement areas, thereby enhancing the quality of life in the wider region [29]. A rather different but potentially very effective strategy for achieving a more even spatial development could be the location of innovation clusters outside of the Frankfurt/Main conurbation. The resulting development would be more dispersed, bringing opportunities to reduce commuting and traffic into the city and contributing to a more even utilization of infrastructure [35].

Other examples show that not all regions are in the position of abandoning growth strategies. In regions like Mid Wales and Tukums, more growth in economic activities is seen as essential in providing jobs, income opportunities, social recognition, and security, especially for the younger generation. In these regions, economic growth is directly coupled with social needs. In mid-Wales, the *Growing mid-Wales* partnership arises from a policy context in which polycentric development through 'city deals' has emerged to ostensibly temper London's economic dominance. However, city deals still follow a model rooted in classical economics wherein the benefits of growth in an urban center are assumed to trickle down to a wider region. *Growing mid-Wales* seeks to wrest a city deal without a city, thereby challenging the dominant narrative of growth.

Championing good practice in the evolution of circular business models is a cornerstone measure in the climate change strategy for Gloucestershire. Circular economy principles are seen as presenting tangible opportunities to ensure that future growth will occur in an equitable way, particularly with regards to the scale and concentration of resource use and the realization of enduring benefits. Circular practice is to also help drive the resilience of existing local communities in the county, many of whom will be challenged by external forces, such as climate change and global economic competitiveness. The County Council is seen as having an important role to play as a local resource regulator (through planning for minerals, waste management, and public infrastructure), and simultaneously as an economic actor via its own procurement of goods and services. Related initiatives include the adoption of waste minimization strategies and the expansion and reinforcement of green infrastructure. Decision-makers expect that, in totality, these approaches will reduce some existing inequities for example by tackling the flow of wastes from urban (producing) to rural (disposal) locations.

The cooperative for female entrepreneurs in Styria shows that decent and satisfying jobs, healthy food, education, healthcare, and mobility can emerge from the strengthening of local economies. In Tukums, a regional food strategy was developed to reconnect local producers and consumers and promotes sustainable food consumption, thereby supporting the local economy, and contributing to regional environmental quality and health. The regional analysis shows that improved market access can increase farmers' professional satisfaction and living conditions, and that both is beneficial for rural communities and economies [36]. Related support measures include public food procurement, branding of local food, and food education of consumers and food professionals. Similar initiatives are pursued in the inter-municipal food policy in Lucca Province.

Across the 11 regions, the two main economic development drivers are the need to provide jobs and enough household income for citizens, and, loosely related, the strengthening of local economic relations, diversity and synergies. Other aspects like a fair income distribution, equitable access to resources and inclusive development, and the maintenance of the given resource base for future generations appear still rather distant from current strategies and actions.

### 3.3. A Synopsis of Key Findings

Table 3 provides a synopsis of how important specific sustainable wellbeing aspects are for each region. Criterion marked 'h' (high) indicate regions where corresponding strategies and actions are more pronounced, and 'm' (moderate) denotes regions where a criterion is somewhat important. The scoring is based on the information and examples provided in the previous section and the best professional judgement of the author(s) from the respective region.

Across the 11 case study regions, three aspects are hardly recognizable in development strategies and actions: Criteria 9 'Activities considered meaningful by people, social recognition and security' (only in Tukums), Criteria 14 'Fair income distribution' and Criteria 17 'Maintaining the given resource base for future generations'. One other aspect seems only important in Helsinki-Uusima and Lisbon Metropolitan Area: Criteria 8 'Social justice and good living conditions for all'. It is telling that these four aspects can be seen as more profound expressions of a more humane and sustainable wellbeing economy. This, in turn, shows how far the distance is between conventional growth models that tend to still dominate policymaking in many regions and the notions developed by Kate Raworth, Katherine Trebeck, and the Foundational Economy Collective [15,23,25–27].

**Table 3.** Summary overview on how important specific sustainable wellbeing aspects are for each region. ('h' = high; 'm' = moderate; empty cells denote that a criterion does not stand out).

Region	Environmentally Sustainable						Socio-Cultural and Quality of Life						Equitable and Inclusive Economic Development				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Ede, NL	m	m	<b>h</b>	m	m	m	m			m	m				m	m	
Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, DE	m		<b>h</b>	m	m	m	m				m	m					m
Gloucestershire, UK		<b>h</b>	m	<b>h</b>													
Helsinki, FI	m		m	m			m	m				m	<b>h</b>	m	<b>h</b>	<b>h</b>	
Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT			<b>h</b>		m	m	m	m		m		<b>h</b>	m		m	<b>h</b>	
Ljubljana, SI			m			m	m		m	m			m		m	m	
Lucca Province, IT		m	m				m		m	<b>h</b>							<b>h</b>
Mid-Wales, UK			m				m		m				m				
Metropolitan Area Styria, AT			m			<b>h</b>	m		m			m	<b>h</b>				<b>h</b>
Tukums, LV	m		m				<b>h</b>		m	m	m		<b>h</b>				
Valencia, ES									m				m				<b>h</b>

(1) Climate-friendly production systems and lifestyles; (2) Natural capital, natural resources integrity and resilience; (3) Sustainable management of land, maintenance of high nature value areas and ESS provision; (4) More efficient use of finite resources and decoupling; (5) Transition to renewable energy; (6) Sustainable mobility; (7) Social capital, diversity and resilience; (8) Social justice and good living conditions for all; (9) Activities considered meaningful by people, social recognition and security; (10) Collaboration and coherence; (11) Healthy food; (12) Education and healthcare; (13) Decent, satisfying jobs and enough household income for all; (14) Fair income distribution; (15) Equitable access to resources and inclusive development; (16) Strengthening of local economic relations, diversity, synergies and resilience; (17) Maintaining the given resource base for future generations.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Can a Shift towards a Sustainable Wellbeing Economy Be Recognised?

Based on the evidence presented in the previous section, the extent and ways that sustainable wellbeing goals play a role in regional development strategies and actions can be assessed. Overall, many examples of thinking and acting could be identified that suggest that development trajectories are re-orienting towards strategies that aim at reconciling environmental, social, and economic goals.

However, we also found several examples that are still primarily about managing conflicting interests, and more specifically about dealing with land use conflicts at the urban fringe and the difficulty to maintain green spaces in urban and peri-urban areas. Frankfurt/Rhein-Main provides an illustration of a region with an enormous competition for land, and numerous pressures resulting from a very dynamic economic development. Ede, Gloucestershire, Helsinki, and Ljubljana are other regions also confronted with the enormous challenge of reconciling economic development and environmental goals.

Several other examples go beyond the management of conflicting interests, indicating that the related thinking and strategies are becoming more encompassing, cutting across economic, environmental, and socio-cultural goals. They show that integration goes beyond mitigating conflicts and can lead to development paths that are more mutually beneficial and sustainable. The development strategy for the Helsinki-Uusimaa region provides a notable illustration. The related strategic priorities include human wellbeing and competence, successful and responsible business, and being climate-aware and a diverse region [31]. The city of Helsinki uses some of the UN sustainable development goals as a frame for shifting to wider sustainable wellbeing (e.g., SDG4, SDG8, SDG10, SDG13). Implementation of the SDGs will take place locally through municipal cooperation and investments in education and learning opportunities, promotion of sustainable economic growth, significant investments in the reduction in inequality and becoming climate responsible [30].

That a more integrated approach commands the need for new approaches in urban planning and regional governance is shown by Lisbon regional authority (CCDR-LVT) and the Lisbon Metropolitan Area as a mandatory public association of 18 municipalities. Both are working together for the 2030 regional strategy to assure integration and better outcomes. Ljubljana Urban Region is another example where a considerable shift in development strategies can be seen. While the first regional development plan in 2002 prepared for EU accession focused on economic and infrastructural development, by 2014 regional development planning had shifted considerably. Economic development is still at the forefront, but more attention is now paid to sustainable mobility and inter-modality to cope with increased commuting and to reducing transport-related pollution, as well as to conserving and enhancing environmental services and green infrastructure.

Even more ambitious is the Welsh Government's *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act*, which came into force in 2015. It offers an explicit model of sustainable wellbeing in contradistinction to classical economic thinking. Rather than solely quantitative economic indicators, the act foregrounds seven wellbeing goals, including 'A healthier Wales' and 'A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh language', which collectively envision 'the Wales we want' beyond a solely economic sphere. Instead of determining that so-called 'lagging' regions must 'catch-up' according to narrowly quantified criteria [37], the seven wellbeing goals offer "the art of the possible" (<https://futuregenerations.wales/the-art-of-the-possible/> (accessed on 26 April 2021)). Notably, the act has provoked the publication by Oxfam Cymru, an NGO, of *The Welsh Doughnut – A framework for environmental sustainability and social justice* [38], which is an explicit attempt to link the new national policy context to the emerging theorization of doughnut economics.

The few examples provide vivid illustrations of what a shift from a narrow economic perspective to wider sustainable wellbeing can look like. The related strategies do not yet



include the full spectrum of what a sustainable wellbeing economy comprises, but they still represent considerable progress.

#### 4.2. How Could the Shift towards a Wider Sustainable Wellbeing Perspective Change Rural–Urban Relations and under What Conditions Can It Lead to More Mutually Beneficial Relations?

The examples from the 11 regions illustrate manifold interactions and functional relations between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, including their dynamics. The interactions (and dependencies) that were identified relate to the distribution and use of local assets, such as social and natural capital, and the way new strategic orientations can contribute to delivering more sustainable, integrated, and inclusive forms of development.

Generally, relations can be seen as positive when they are mutually supportive, i.e., when all parties benefit. Especially the examples of Ede, Lucca, Ljubljana, and Styria feature traits of more beneficial relations between urban and rural areas. Typical features include mutually supportive relations between different sectors, activities and actors, and synergies between ecological, economic, and social motivations.

A key concept used in Ede (and the Netherlands as a whole) is *spatial quality*. The new Environmental and Planning Act (EPA) demands that municipalities develop a single ‘physical vision document’ for the whole area of the municipality, including both its rural and urban parts. Elaborating a single vision, forces planners to consider how certain spatial functions and policies affect both urban and rural areas. In Lucca province, attention is paid to strengthening public and private sensitivity for the value of available open space and rural land, and of its ability to provide ecosystem services. The valorization of more sustainable resource uses is seen as crucial [39]. In the Ljubljana Urban Area, the increasing importance of sustainable development goals has reinforced the role of peri-urban and rural areas in preserving a high quality of life and providing local high-quality food. Short food supply chains are being established, sometimes experimenting with new ICT-based business models and delivery systems. Public procurement plays an increasingly important role in stimulating change. New forms of public transport, inter-modality and carpooling are being tested in Styria to improve accessibility.

The examples from Ede, Lucca, Ljubljana and Tukums show that food can act as a catalyst in connecting conservation and valorization, and in integrating rural, peri-urban, and urban spaces and functions. The related strategies facilitate access to local food, foster knowledge and education on local food, its production and consumption, and encourage sustainable agriculture. In Lucca, the concept of ‘smart rural’ links the capacity of organic farming and local and high-quality products with sustainable consumption. In Ede, an active community is working on sustainable food, agriculture, and food waste topics involving Slow Food, local schools and families. A challenge for policymakers in Ede is to integrate the world market oriented intensive livestock farms in the region as the smaller scale diversified farming initiatives seem more motivated to build connections with local urban communities.

The process of rebalancing economic development and quality of life goals in Frankfurt-Rhein/Main represents an ambitious spatial objective. Policymakers and planners are rediscovering the polycentric nature of the region characterized by an intricate pattern of peri-urban centers and high-quality open space. The regional spatial plan for the Territory of Lisbon Metropolitan Area aims at connecting four broader priorities: environmental sustainability (including revitalizing the rural environment); measures to contain urban expansion; socio-territorial cohesion with a focus on eradicating precarious residential situations and guaranteeing equal opportunities and access in housing; and improving the metropolitan transport system [40]. All four priorities have the potential to foster a sustainable wellbeing economy while at the same time improving territorial relations.

In the Valencia region, the latest tourism strategy aims at a more balanced distribution of incomes in rural and urban areas. Technological advances like Wi-Fi networks, mobile technology, cloud computing, etc., are fostering rural and urban synergies and

improving living conditions and sustainability at the same time. Valencia, for the same reason, has shifted towards pursuing a territorial longer-term perspective that connects the domains of business development, labor markets, public infrastructure, and sustainable food systems, and that connects activities across the urban, peri-urban, and rural parts of the region.

In the Helsinki-Uusimaa region, managing urban growth dominates regional development and planning. At the same time, counter-urbanization occurs in the region, manifested in seasonal mobility patterns and multi-locality. At the same time, multi-locality and rural-urban connections are hardly recognized by official development strategies and policies and transport systems remain strongly linked to the needs of permanent residents. Driven by growth corridor thinking, most investments in transport infrastructure are directed to strengthening the connections between the largest urban centers. Overall, Helsinki-Uusimaa is the only example where regional cohesion seems to play a lesser role despite differentiated development within the region.

Most of our examples illustrate the potential of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation for more balanced rural-urban relations. That both are not easily achieved is a finding which is supported by Meijers and Van der Wouw (2019) who refer to hierarchical relationships in which urban areas tend to outcompete rural ones [41]. The resulting question is under what conditions more mutually beneficial rural-urban relations can be expected.

When discussing under what conditions rural areas might benefit from the shift towards a wellbeing economy, particular attention needs to be paid to the importance of networks and cooperation, and the new possibilities that ICT, digital infrastructures, and the circular economy offer. Powering local economies requires activating external networks for knowledge exchange, and new kinds of supply chains and markets. Online platforms that connect food producers with processors and consumers, combine technological with social and organizational innovation.

In Graz/Styria, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Ljubljana, and other regions, the sharing economy, intercommunal cooperation and the balancing of sub-regional developments are becoming increasingly important. Well-working governance arrangements are being elaborated that are to organize the sharing of functions and space in ways that benefit urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. The possibilities that digital infrastructures offer for overcoming the distance between rural places and urban markets, and for generating new employment opportunities, play an increasingly important role. In Helsinki-Uusimaa investments in high-speed internet connections are to enable place-independent living and working, and lead to a more dispersed spatial distribution of economic activity. Mid-Wales is exploring 'Gigabit Hubs' to improve digital infrastructure, offering high-speed internet connections and co-working spaces. Improving digital infrastructures and development of public e-services in health, culture, and other domains is also on the agenda in Tukums. The expectation is that this will improve the quality of life, especially for rural residents in more remote areas. In the Valencia region, it is expected that investments in sustainable tourism and digital infrastructure could improve the connections between environmental, cultural, and food sectors, as well as boosting regional economic benefits.

In the Metropolitan Area of Styria, shared economy approaches and intercommunal cooperation play a central role. The expectation is that providing high-quality digital access and smart mobility will improve the quality of life of residents, as well as business opportunities. A more recent car-sharing initiative in the region follows a multimodal approach, connecting the City of Graz to 10 suburban and rural municipalities in the metropolitan region. In this way, synergies between the city and the surrounding rural areas are fostered that bring many financial and structural benefits. The Municipal Master Plan of Sintra emphasizes rural tourism and urban logistics for local products as key investment areas [42]. Decision-makers expect more mutually beneficial rural-urban relations, a dynamic, innovative and competitive regional economy, and increased wellbeing overall.

The examples illustrate how decision-makers try to deliberately connect, and even blend, goals that formerly were thought to conflict with each other, and how this can lead to more beneficial territorial relations. That the changes towards a more sustainable economy are not always without conflict and beneficial for rural areas is illustrated by examples from Ede and Frankfurt/Rhein-Main.

## 5. Conclusions

*“The economy is a means to an end, and should be helping us to live good lives, which means we need to redesign the economy. ... A wellbeing economy is one that will deliver human and ecological wellbeing.”* (Trebeck, 2020)

In consideration of the evidence gathered from the 11 regions, is there evidence of a paradigm shift in economic development? Clearly there are manifold indications of a re-orientation in regional level strategies and action that represent a shift from a narrow economic perspective to wider sustainable wellbeing. The regional examples include features of circular economy models (Ede, Gloucestershire), distributed economy models (Ljubljana, Metropolitan Area Styria), eco-economy and regenerative economy models (Lucca Province), as well as sustainable wellbeing models and doughnut economics (Lisbon Metropolitan Area, mid-Wales). Especially the examples of mid-Wales, Tukums, Ljubljana, Valencia, Ede and Frankfurt/Rhein-Main show how these new strategies are blended with traits of classical growth models.

The analytical framework and aspects presented in Table 1 helped to go beyond these broad types and describe these shifts in more concrete terms. Many territorial initiatives can be described as innovative, but they tend to be local and often still in the initial stages. However, several impressive examples of initiatives were found that focus on making lifestyles and economic systems more environmentally sustainable (e.g., maintaining the natural resource base and ecosystem integrity, nature conservation and preservation of high nature value areas, or promotion of climate friendly production systems and lifestyles). Some examples illustrate how socio-cultural and quality of life goals can reinforce each other. Generally, changes are most often driven by civil society and or the private sector.

When scrutinizing development dynamics and strategies in the 11 regions, it becomes clear how much situations differ. Regional disparities in growth dynamics, employment and living conditions are significant. Some regions struggle with depopulation and a lack of jobs, while others are trying to cope with high growth rates and seemingly limitless expansion. It is therefore important to pay attention to contextualizing, and to being explicit about regional needs and aspirations. Our 11 examples also illustrate that the cross-sectoral activities that could enhance rural, peri-urban, and urban linkages are highly complex and differentiated.

Related to regional development strategies and actions, and their connection with rural–urban relations, three broad clusters of regions can be identified:

- In four regions (Ede, NL; Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, DE; Gloucestershire, UK; mid-Wales, UK) balancing urban growth and economic goals with environmental goals, an increased ecosystem services provision, environmental protection, and sustainable modes of mobility are dominant strategic goals. Mid-Wales pays particular attention to encouraging smart growth, while maintaining the distinctive Welsh culture and language;
- Four other regions emphasize strategies and actions that are to strengthen local economic relations, a more balanced (harmonized, integrated territorial) development and social and territorial cohesion (Helsinki, FI; Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT; Valencia, ES; Ljubljana, SI). A particular aspect in Valencia is the shift from a sector-based, short-term view to a territory-based, long-term view. In Ljubljana, the related aim is to counteract suburbanization and the reduced availability of public services in rural areas, thereby fostering inclusion;

- Three regions emphasize in their strategies the valorization of social, environmental (landscape), and cultural values assets and cultural heritage (i.e., less related to balancing or rural–urban relations) (Lucca Province, IT; Tukums, LV; Metropolitan Area Styria, AT). Tukums connects sustainable living and working conditions of high quality, valorizing regional cultural capital and improving accessibility in its strategies. In Styria, particular attention is paid to fostering cooperation in public infrastructure, social services and cultural activities, thereby enhancing quality of life. Especially the regions in this last cluster point to a connection of more synergistic territorial relations with sustainable wellbeing.

More generally, it seems important to understand under what conditions synergies can be generated that result in a more balanced development. Related to new strategic policy frameworks like the European Green Deal, it became clear that many regional development strategies and plans are not playing out their potentials yet. One reason is that the realization of different objectives is not always perceived in their connectedness. Currently there are only few indications of a deliberate application of a more holistic, sustainable wellbeing perspective, and of strategies that address the environmental, social, cultural, and economic potentials of territories in a more integrated fashion. To link conventional development goals with the provision of social and environmental services and longer-term societal goals remains a major challenge. Overall, a major shift is still needed from sectoral, short-term goals in regional plans to strategies that are long-term, territorial, and comprehensive. The problem is that current policy frameworks do not yet incentivize the necessary shifts towards quality of life and sustainable wellbeing. One of the few instances, where mainstream sectoral policies, and perspectives, are the main driver, is the transition towards sustainable energy. Carbon emergency and zero carbon targets are likely to lead to a wider shift of the metrics for how regional economic development is planned.

More research is needed on how to encourage the implementation of new research-based concepts and models, such as the application of ecosystem services or valorization approaches, more systematically. At the same time, it is important to remain critical and reflexive regarding the way terms, such as the bioeconomy, the circular economy, or smart growth, are used. Great care needs to be taken not to confuse *means* and *goals*. The exploratory analyses presented in this article point to a need to fundamentally shift mindsets and perspectives, especially in policy development. The initiatives that were identified are important in this respect because they show why alternatives are desirable, and that they are feasible. They, in the words of Trebeck (2020, p.1), “*open up people’s imagination that a different economy is possible*” [23].

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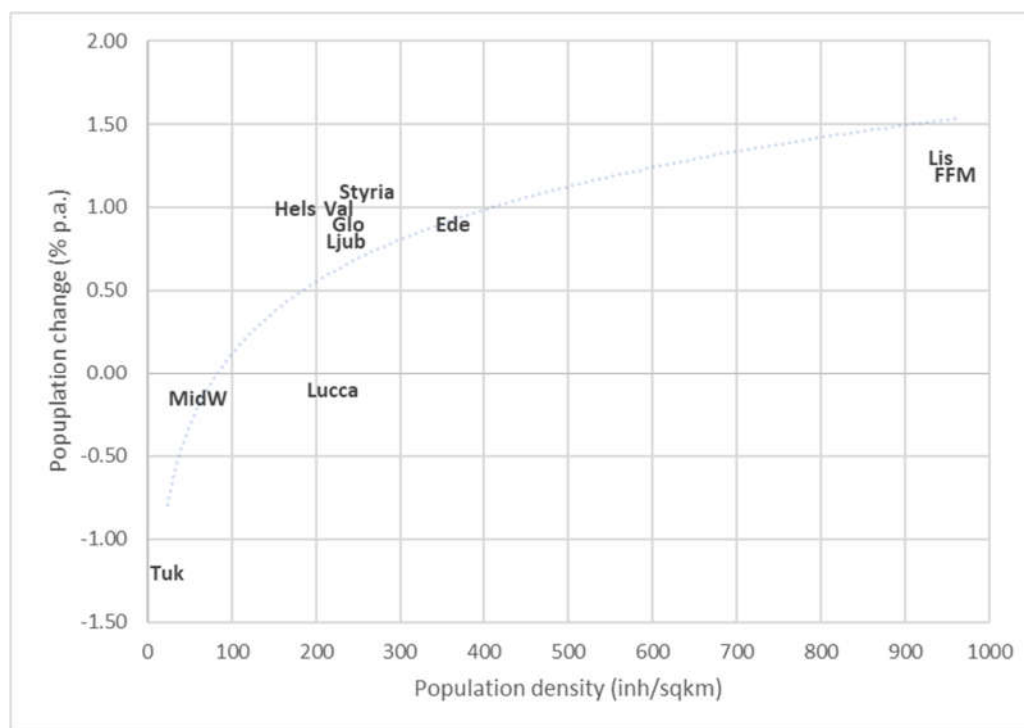
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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Framing of each model, key focus areas and key references.

Model	Framing	Key Focus and Mechanism	References
Classical economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth is central for obtaining wealth</li> <li>• Markets balance supply and demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies that promote economic growth</li> <li>• Curtailing regulation</li> </ul>	Smith (1776) [43]
Smart growth, green growth and circular economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decoupling</li> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Resource use efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing use of limited resources</li> <li>• Reducing waste</li> <li>• Wider access to goods, services</li> </ul>	COM (2010, 2017), Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2020)
Collaborative or sharing economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct interactions</li> <li>• Use of information and communications technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider distribution of resources</li> <li>• Socially produced information</li> </ul>	Botsman and Rogers (2010) [44]
Distributed economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic structures and scale</li> <li>• Use of information and communications technology, smart coordination</li> <li>• Sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider distribution of benefits and wellbeing among present generation</li> </ul>	Johansson et al. (2005)
Eco-economy, regenerative economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of given resources</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Systemic health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewal in natural, social and economic systems</li> <li>• Environmental sustainability and regenerative use of natural resources</li> <li>• Securing the wellbeing for future generations</li> </ul>	Brown (2001), Marsden and Farioli (2015)
Foundational economy, sustainable wellbeing economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellbeing</li> <li>• Planetary boundaries</li> <li>• Social justice (standards, floors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering a just and sustainable (safe) development</li> <li>• Sustainable wellbeing</li> </ul>	Bentham et al. (2013) Raworth (2017, 2019)

Source: Authors' compilation based on the results of the review of studies, analyses, policy and strategy papers on alternative models of (economic, sustainable) development.



**Figure A1.** The 11 regions by population density and change.

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