

## **Multiple Dimensions of Sustainability in Rural Europe**

Varied conceptions of sustainability can be found in UN documents that have guided policy as well as in academic analyses. Sustainability is now being linked to rural development policies that were already in place in European rural areas. While some contend that sustainable development has been co-opted by governmental bureaucracies and the market (by decoupling economic growth from its environmental and social implications), others see it as bringing questions of environmental processes and social justice back into a conversation that had been dominated by economic growth. Critical rural studies have recently drawn attention to discourses on rurality, identity, gender, class, ethnicity and race in relation to migration, agriculture, rural development, resource exploitation and disenfranchisement. We explore what these mean in relation to sustainability.

With this special issue, we aim to contribute to a grounded understanding about ‘sustainability’ in a range of rural contexts and shed light on accompanying tensions and implications for the future of rural areas. We do so by dividing the papers into two major themes: the politics of ‘sustainability’ practices and the ‘politics of knowledge’ on rural sustainability. The aim of the authors in this issue is to foreground the multiple dimensions of this ‘fuzzy’ concept in rural areas. These range from people’s intimate relationships to their environments to questions of migration, place-making, farm-work, development and governance in rural areas. Importantly, we regard sustainability as a political concept and explore the explicit expressions of ideological conflict surrounding what it might mean to be sustainable. Existing contributions to this special issue ask:

**What does a transformation to ‘sustainability’ portend for the future of rural areas in Europe and how is it being conceptualized?**

**What are the multiple dimensions of sustainability in rural areas and how may we need to think and act in order to realize sustainable rural development in Europe?**

To supplement these papers we are looking for contributions that conceptualize the question of sustainability in rural Europe in relation to:

- Populism and authoritarianism in European rural areas
- ‘People who want to be sustainable,’ groups, often urban and well-educated who move to rural areas to live sustainable lives that also give rise to processes of counter-urbanization and the gentrification of some rural areas.

- Landscape aesthetics or the biophysical aspect of rural areas. What do people want sustainable rural areas to *look like*? This is of particular interest in relation to idea of the rural idyll and its many exclusions in relation to dimensions of different such as of ethnicity, race and class.
- The question of mobility for rural sustainability: are mobile populations, the transport of goods and trade contributing to unsustainable futures or is the sustainability of rural spaces contingent on mobility?
- The digitalization of the rural and its implications for sustainability: what are the contradictions at the heart of the digitalization of rural spaces.
- The Covid-19 crisis has brought to centre stage the importance of the rural with rural areas being increasingly perceived as safe spaces. What are the implications for sustainability in rural Europe?

We invite extended abstracts on or before 18<sup>th</sup> December. Please submit to Professor Seema Arora-

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Full papers will be due by end of April and publication of the Special Issue is anticipated late summer 2021.