



# ROBUST RURAL-URBAN UPDATE

Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST) is a European research project that advances our understanding of the interactions between rural and urban areas. Its main premise is that strong, mutually-supportive linkages between rural and urban areas are key to realising smart, circular and inclusive development for a sustainable Europe. ROBUST kicked off in June 2017 and will run until May 2021. The project brings together 24 European partners representing both research- and practice-oriented organisations. They work with 11 regional Living Labs and five Communities of Practice.

## Gloucestershire Living Lab

ROBUST Living Labs operate in 11 European countries. They bring local stakeholders together to work to develop and test new ways to solve problems specific to the region. In this respect, Living Labs are 'user-led'.

In Gloucestershire, our Living Lab is concerned with three themes:

- sustainable food systems
- ecosystems services
- business models and labour markets

These, among other themes, are further examined across the ROBUST European partnership in Communities of Practice, providing a forum for sharing real-time experiences and findings from the other ROBUST Living Labs. For example, in October 2019 Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) contributed to the Ecosystems Services Partnership World Conference, in Germany.



## Looking back on 2019



Image: R. McCloskey

The emerging policy context was timely in 2019, while also continuing to be informed by the Gloucestershire Living Lab. For example, the new county food strategy has prioritised agri-industrial innovation and greater local sourcing of food for public procurement, a key area of experimentation in our Living Lab.

GCC is developing a new flood risk strategy and the Living Lab is proving an important forum for gathering views and data on how Natural Flood Management (NFM) can become an integrated and complementary aspect of flood management, given its low-cost and potential to influence downstream urban flows. NFM uses ecological techniques in rural land management to arrest fluvial flows and hold water in times of flood.

Another objective is to test the feasibility of achieving a circular economy as a key constituent of sustainable growth throughout the county. This is resulting in a series of discussions with partners and the preparation of supportive documents. These will help the businesses and decision-makers to facilitate the adoption of circular business models (CBMs) as part of the evolution of



business practice and future economic development. The expansion of CBMs will be vital to the implementation of clean growth that is a 'grand challenge' headlined in the emerging Local Industrial Strategy for Gloucestershire.

## Looking ahead to 2020

Food – the LL is experimenting with Dynamic Procurement Systems (DPS) for school food. DPS is an IT-based way of matching supply availability to daily changing demand. Usually, school food is bought in fixed lots, e.g. for fresh meat, dry goods and fruit. Small-scale rural producers may struggle because of varying seasonal capacity, in the face high demand and holiday interruptions. DPS could overcome this by consolidating supply from local producers for delivery to school cooks. Meetings with suppliers, cooks and farmers are planned, to inform a proposal for including DPS within Gloucestershire's new supply contract in 2021. An exciting development is that the national government's procurement agency, Crown Commercial Services, is leading a cross-sectoral DPS pilot

in south-west England, which Gloucestershire could join.

ESS – NFM effectiveness is not well-researched in relation to downstream urban impacts, which are hard to measure. As well as gathering examples of effective NFM in the region, the LL will support the development of a NFM practitioners' regional network, covering the Upper Thames and the Lower Severn, so that professionals in both catchments can co-ordinate research, policy and practice.

Business and labour – Targeted investment and the transfer of ideas and concepts will be crucial to removing existing or future barriers to transition towards CBMs. The LL will act as an effective conduit in which to accelerate the identification and dissemination of best practice and lessons learnt and to help develop and strengthen business networks, particularly those that will engender deeper and sustained rural and urban industrial symbiosis as part of the wider clean growth agenda. A Gloucestershire-focused CE website that is due to go live from March 2020, helping to communicate LL outcomes.

## Local Contact Information

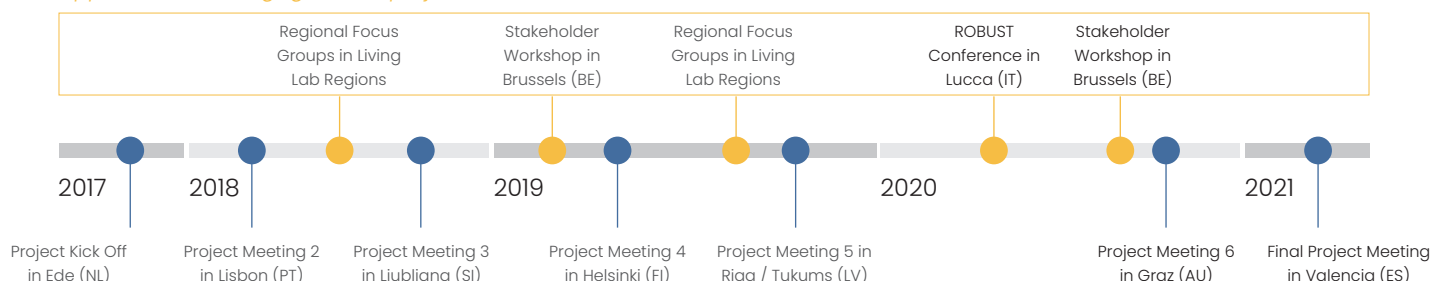
### Gloucestershire Living Lab

Dr Daniel Keech  
 Countryside and Community Research Institute  
 University of Gloucestershire  
[dkeech@glos.ac.uk](mailto:dkeech@glos.ac.uk)  
 01242 714131  
[www.ccric.ac.uk](http://www.ccric.ac.uk)

## ROBUST Project Timeline

The 8th Informed Cities Forum is taking place 2–3 April 2020.  
 For more information, visit the [Informed Cities website](#).

### Opportunities to engage in the project



## Learn more about ROBUST

ROBUST Project Coordinator  
 Prof.dr.ir. JSC (Han) Wiskerke  
 Professor and Chair of Rural Sociology  
 Wageningen University  
[info@rural-urban.eu](mailto:info@rural-urban.eu)

To learn more about the ROBUST project and to get the latest information about cutting-edge research on rural-urban issues visit [www.rural-urban.eu](http://www.rural-urban.eu)

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