

GENERIC VISIONS FOR EUROPEAN COASTAL-RURAL AREAS

People and Nature – “Naturally Better”

In a decarbonized economy, people live and behave in harmony with nature with a low consumption of natural resources, for healthy sea, coastal and rural ecosystems and their communities.

Nature is central to every aspect of society; by working with nature and building with nature, the use of space is rationalized allowing more room for the natural environment and supporting the ecosystem services it provides to humans.

Coastal-rural communities have easy access to innovation and latest technologies.

In addition, high level of environmental awareness and knowledge means people behave in such a way that human environmental impacts no longer jeopardize life on Earth.

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The sustainable economic development of coastal-rural areas is based on alternative forms of tourism, sustainable local agriculture, and a clean (zero-net emission) maritime sector. Tourism activities focus on natural, cultural and historical heritage. The precious biodiversity is highly protected, preserved, respected as well as enjoyed by everyone, and recognized as part of the local heritage. The flow of tourists is spread along the whole coastal-rural territory with activities related to eco-tourism and agro-tourism as attractive and accessible as the beach. The tourism industry plays a central role in preserving the natural richness it is relying on, with tourists' behaviour minimizing the environmental footprint of the sector.

The sustainable local agriculture model benefits from the wide use of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based practices,

which enable production in accordance with the natural cycle of the ecosystems and their complementarities. The locally well-organized agricultural sector uses the latest technology available to efficiently grow and monitor crops, fruits, vegetable and animals.

The integrated and diversified production is based on the sustainable use of resources and minimum artificial inputs. It creates a local value chain and a high quality and quantity of products with a rationalised use of water. This model of production relies on strong partnerships and cooperation within the sector making it highly efficient and resilient. It is financially sustainable, which makes it economically attractive to new farmers.

The maritime activities complement the economic development of the coastal-rural area by offering skilled jobs to the community, clean energy, healthy food products and innovative solutions through marine biotechnology research.

The marine renewable energy sector is well-developed; offshore wind farms, tidal and wave energy systems are widely implemented, providing jobs and clean, affordable energy sources to inland communities. Seafood production is mainly supported by artisanal fishery and sustainable aquaculture, offering high quality products with a low impact on the marine ecosystems. Maritime transports along with other forms of transports rely on clean energy supply, being a carbon-free sector. Ultimately the activities from the blue and green economies are perfectly integrated providing peaceful and economically prosperous coastal-rural communities.



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Governance and Cooperation
“Stronger Together”

Coastal-rural areas are economically, environmentally and socially balanced territories, thanks to strong governance at river-basin scale, and citizen participation in the decision-making process.

Partnerships and cooperation both between and within sectors is the norm which allows for the development of integrated approaches towards economic activity, increasing the competitiveness of each activity. Natural resources are sustainably used, as result of a high-level environmental awareness and proper law enforcement.

Cooperation is the new rule at the supra-national level, and marine-coastal areas benefit from the efficient management of governing bodies at the regional sea basin scale with a holistic approach:

they are responsible for the sustainable use of the sea basin with extended competences in environmental, economic and social aspects, as well as ensuring cross-border cooperation and open-data access between countries. This allows easy and fast transnational agreements to be validated and implemented. The EU integrated maritime and inland policies facilitate this process, supporting the effectiveness of EU directives at a national and local level.

The sustainable management of natural resources and land is encouraged by combined activities and multi-use of space. Sustainable agriculture, fishery, aquaculture and tourism industries, and other marine activities benefits from unified policies which rewards environmentally-friendly and decarbonized activities as well as social justice.



Local coastal-rural areas benefit from governing bodies at river-basin scale, in charge of the strategic sustainable development of the coastal-rural areas, based on a single marine-coastal-inland spatial planning document (following the concept of “source-to-sea”, the integrate coastal zone management principles and ecosystem-based approach). The coastal-rural strategic planning document is fully integrated into a Marine Spatial Planning document at a sea-basin scale. This allows for sustainable management of the water resource throughout the whole river-basin, to capitalize on land-sea interactions by emphasizing synergies between marine, coastal and rural activities. The tourism and agricultural development strategies support coastal-rural territorial cohesion by facilitating collaboration between coastal and rural stakeholders.

Community-driven energy projects further enhance cooperation between coastal and rural communities and ensure equal access to cheap, local and clean energy.

The predominance of renewable energy sources is facilitated by the Resilient Energy Union which contributes to the decarbonisation of the economy. Increase synergies between sectors, development of new technologies, wide-use of nature-base solutions and general environmental and climate change awareness drastically reduce energy consumption and fossil fuel dependency.

Based on a participative approach, local stakeholders and the general public are engaged in the strategic decision-making process related to the sustainable development of their community. Citizen integration to the governance process is supported by a life-long learning systems based on Information and Communication technologies. The development of a network of coastal-rural hubs for innovation and education in agriculture, energy, environment and blue economy sectors allows local stakeholders to benefits from the latest innovations adapted to local context via knowledge transfer, sharing, and exchange between sectors, regions and countries.

The coastal-rural society is characterized by a strong environmental, social and economic sense of justice, responsibility, equality and tolerance.

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Circular Economy
“What Goes Around Comes Around”

Coastal-rural areas are examples of a decarbonized systems, which operate based on the principles of circular economy (reduce, reuse, recycle). They provide equal opportunities for all, high quality standards of living, and a healthy productive environment. Based on the multi-functional use of spaces, they are sustainable and dynamic, supporting strong rural livelihoods, and blue circular growth.

Economic activities have eliminated the production of waste and pollution; products and materials are either reused or recycled, constantly producing new raw materials and thus helping regenerate natural systems. The bio-marine industry is a leading sector, supported by a ‘full circle model’ in the blue industry value chain and a high level of innovation. Bioplastics have replaced conventional carbon-intensive plastic products, which eliminate further micro-plastic contamination in the environment.

Sustainable aquaculture, powered by renewable energy sources, benefits from the latest innovation and is the main supplier of ocean proteins and healthy seafood products.

The generalization of close recirculating aquaculture systems (i.e. aquaponic systems) integrates the aquaculture sector into the energy production system, and the inland food production system (for human and livestock consumption). It is fully integrated into the coastal-rural circular economy model where the fishery, forestry, agriculture, and energy sectors undertake sustainable cooperation based on the win-win principle.

The agri-food sector follows the principles of bio-based circular economy by only using renewable biological resources and transforming waste production throughout the value chain into a local source of heat, energy and nutrients; thus reducing the carbon footprint of the sector to near zero. This strong local sustainable agriculture, where livestock and crop farming are perfectly integrated, uses a combination of traditional techniques and advance precision farming technologies. It benefits from the digitalization of food and land-use systems, and is supported by strategic partnerships both within and across sectors. It ensures a high level of productivity and high-quality food products which allow coastal-rural areas to be food self-sufficient.

Behavior change towards general consumption reduction (of water, energy, consumer goods), and increase demand for high-quality, nutritious and affordable foods (a predominantly healthy plant-based diet) also contributes to the elimination of food lost, waste and unsustainable use of natural resources. Embedding circularity within all economic activities, means that used water no longer reaches the ocean but, instead is recycled through a combination of innovative technologies and nature-based solutions, and/or reused based on cross-sectoral cooperation.

Within a resilient EU Energy Union, coastal and rural areas are part of a single energy grid system where production and consumption are shared from the inner river-basin to the offshore areas. The supply of 100% clean, carbon free energy takes advantage of a diversity of renewable energies sources (wind, solar, biomass, tides and waves, hydropower, geothermic). These are driven by community-based energy projects from different geographical locations (sea, coast and rural areas), where every sector contributes and benefits (based on block chain technology).

Tourism activities are mainly based on natural and cultural heritage, and benefit from a high-quality local environment, contributing to the full circular economy system.

The thriving, resilient, attractive, gender equal coastal-rural community promotes social well-being and environmental quality. It offers diverse work opportunities, supported by innovative technologies and infrastructure across sectors. These circular coastal-rural areas can easily adapt to new challenges, both protecting and regenerating their natural capital.

