Article

Network Governance Arrangements and Rural-Urban Synergy

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Abstract: Increasing attention has been paid to the importance of balanced rural–urban interaction to sustainable regional development. Yet, our knowledge on the elements of network governance for such interaction is scarce. The aim of this paper is to study what kind of network governance arrangements currently exist, how they can be improved, and whether evolutionary governance paths can be identified. We analyse five existing and evolving cases of functioning rural–urban interaction in European Union (EU) member states, using a network governance framework as an analytical lens. We supplement the governance analysis with examining what kind of spatial understanding or combination of different spatial lenses the studied rural–urban governance arrangements rely on, as well as with the role of smart development in the studied cases. Our results emphasise the significance of division of power and collaborative decision-design in guaranteeing balanced and mutually beneficial interaction. Furthermore, we recommend changes in current policies in order to tap into the potential of rural–urban synergy.

Keywords: rural–urban 1; governance arrangements 2; network governance 3; rural–urban linkages

1. Introduction

For a long time, rural and urban governance have been considered separately, as if they constituted independent systems (e.g., [1–3]). This distinction is easily misleading and outdated, because rural and urban areas are interconnected in economic, social and environmental terms [2]. Rural and urban are complementary parts of regional and national economies [4]. In the European Union (EU), changes have occurred in strengthening rural development policies, international trade liberalisation and, more generally, globalisation, technological change and parallel to globalisation, also growing localisation [5]. Moreover, a significant rise of peri-urban development [6] and multilocality [7] has taken place, that is, commuting and seasonal migration of people between urban, peri-urban and rural areas have increased [6,7]. Indeed, in recent decades, interconnected changes in the rural–urban dynamics have strengthened, in terms of increased mobility of population and exchange of goods and information, increased economic relocation, and specialisation of land use (production, tourism, housing etc.). New, complex social networks have also emerged [1]. New information technology associated improved services, such as better mobile phone coverage or social media, connect rural and urban dwellers in networks of social relationships, trade and markets [8]. This all indicates that evolutionary paths leading to different rural–urban relations are emerging.

Increasing attention has been paid to the importance of balanced rural–urban interaction to sustainable regional development [2]. The importance of studying rural–urban linkages has been acknowledged in understanding urban development and expansion, and consequently, in the reconfiguration of adjacent rural territories [6]. However, rural areas should not be seen only as objects depending on the development of the urban areas [9] although their influence cannot be ignored (see e.g., [1]). Rural-urban linkage is important not only for rural areas but impacts also urban areas [10]. Rural and urban areas rather have different assets that complement each other, and a better interaction between them is therefore needed. Rural-urban synergies may contribute to improved services provision and wellbeing as well as to increased growth opportunities [2]. It is beneficial to take an integrated urban–rural approach to regional development and focus on interdependencies and commonalities rather than differences in promoting sustainable regional development [11].

So far, the research on rural–urban linkages has especially focused on the problematic of urbanisation in developing countries (e.g., [10]), and governance of necessities, such as water and food (e.g., [6,9,12]) or food sovereignty. This is natural since over 90% of the world's rural population lives in less developed regions that are undergoing rapid demographic, economic, and governance changes [13]. There have also been some attempts to understand the rural–urban linkages in the US (e.g., [14]) and Europe from the socioeconomic and partnerships perspective (e.g., [1,2]), as well as that of resilience and sustainability (e.g., [15]). Typically, studies concentrate on certain aspects of the rural–urban interaction, for example, commuting, landscapes and migration [16].

Zonneveld and Stead [16] investigated projects that study rural–urban linkages in Europe. Their results show a focus on economic and social development, agriculture or economic diversification. In addition, they found projects on services and facilities; transport, energy and information; demography; consumption and amenity; and governance. They included studies that had a clear rural–urban dimension, although it was not always an explicit objective of the research. Otherwise there would have been only a few studies, mainly in the two latter categories [16].

There have been multiple approaches to understand rural–urban interaction. Lately, the importance to acknowledge that rural economies and societies are becoming less geographically constrained in their linkages has been recognized. Copus [9] distinguishes three modes to be used in promoting balanced territorial development, and supporting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: (1) thematic urban-rural cooperation that is relatively similar to a conventional city-hinterland policy, but stresses that individual spatial characteristics should be respected. (2) generic urban-rural policies intended to acknowledge the declining importance of contiguity in urban-rural relationships, concentrating more upon facilitating cooperation, and (3) translocal globalisation among rural businesses, underlining that contiguity and proximity are irrelevant.

Moreover, the concept of soft spaces has been used to understand current rural–urban linkages. Walsh et al. [17] have studied different approaches of soft spaces in literature. There are several different ways of understanding the concept, and the authors conclude that soft spaces are the result of a deliberate, conscious strategy that lies outside of the political-administrative boundaries and internal territorial divisions of the nation-state. Allmendinger et al. [18] define it as the emergence of new, non-statutory or informal planning spaces or processes that exist alongside but separate to the spaces and scales of elected government bodies. The prerequisite for soft spaces is the emergence of governance, as to an opposite to top-down government, that has strengthened informal networks and the horizontal approach, in general [19]. The new spaces of governance can operate at multiple scales, which has been adopted by planners for soft space and fuzzy boundaries [18].

The elements of good governance as such, for example, the role of informal networks, bottom-up initiatives, agency, appropriate deference, trust and transparency, as well as participation, communication and collaborative approaches are well recognized by the scientific community (see e.g., [2,8,20,21]). In practice, they are not often translated into

effective policy strategies (see e.g., [20]). Therefore, more information on the aspects of balanced rural–urban interaction and the conditions for them with real examples is needed. Our knowledge on the aspects of such real-life solutions for the benefits of rural–urban synergies is still scarce.

The aim of this paper is to study what kind of network governance arrangements currently exist, how they can be improved, and whether evolutionary governance paths can be identified. In this paper we analyse five existing and evolving cases of functioning rural–urban interaction and synergies in EU member states, using network governance framework as an analytical lens. We follow the framework represented by Woods et al. [22] while acknowledging other approaches to distinguish rural–urban interaction [9,17–19]. This approach has been created within the ROBUST project that aims to unlock rural–urban synergies at a European level [23].

In order to understand the potential and dynamics of rural–urban synergies in real life settings it is essential to examine governance arrangements in the broader context of their spatial relations and linkage to regional development.

Keeping the framework presented by Woods et al. [22] in mind, we focus on the elements of network governance. We follow the definition of governance by Douglas [24] which offers more detailed tools to describe specific elements of balanced rural–urban network governance arrangements. It takes a step forward from the approach created within the ROBUST project [23] in analysing the network governance arrangements. There are several definitions of governance but the relevance of Douglas in this context is based on the rural governance dimension of his approach. Another aspect is the understanding of resources commitment that is essential for synergies: all participants commit resources to gain better outcomes.

The main research questions are: (1) What are the elements of balanced rural–urban interaction that can be identified in the cases from the perspective of network governance? (2) What are the conditions for the network governance arrangements in the real-life cases? We provide existing or evolving rural–urban network governance examples from five EU member states: Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain. With these examples we illustrate the heterogeneity of governance models that are shaped by time and place and are context dependent. In addition to differences, we also aim to find commonalities in governance systems, and thus to be able to generalise from these examples to the EU level.

2. Theoretical Framework

The three principles of rural–urban synergies as identified by Woods et al. [22]: new localities, smart development and network governance (Figure 1) are interconnected and need to be emphasised in different ways in different cases. New localities advance our understanding of the interactions and dependencies between rural, urban and peri-rural areas. This enables us to elaborate multi-spatial rural–urban connections, and ways to create or strengthen these connections within or beyond the locality, that is, in relational space. Relational space has no borders but is made from connections, it is fluid and dynamic (soft). In this paper, relational space is the main aspect of new localities as described by Woods et al. [22].

Relational perspective implies that rural–urban synergies are perceived as symbiotic and characterised by interdependencies which are increasingly difficult to distinguish, unravel or unpack. We talk about relational space when space is understood as continual and connected, which may be divided into territories or localities, but in which the boundaries of these units are porous and contingent such that different places are interconnected with each other, and the local is connected with the global. In this understanding places or spaces cannot be considered as truly independent, but territories of localities can be regarded as connected containers for spatial analysis [25].
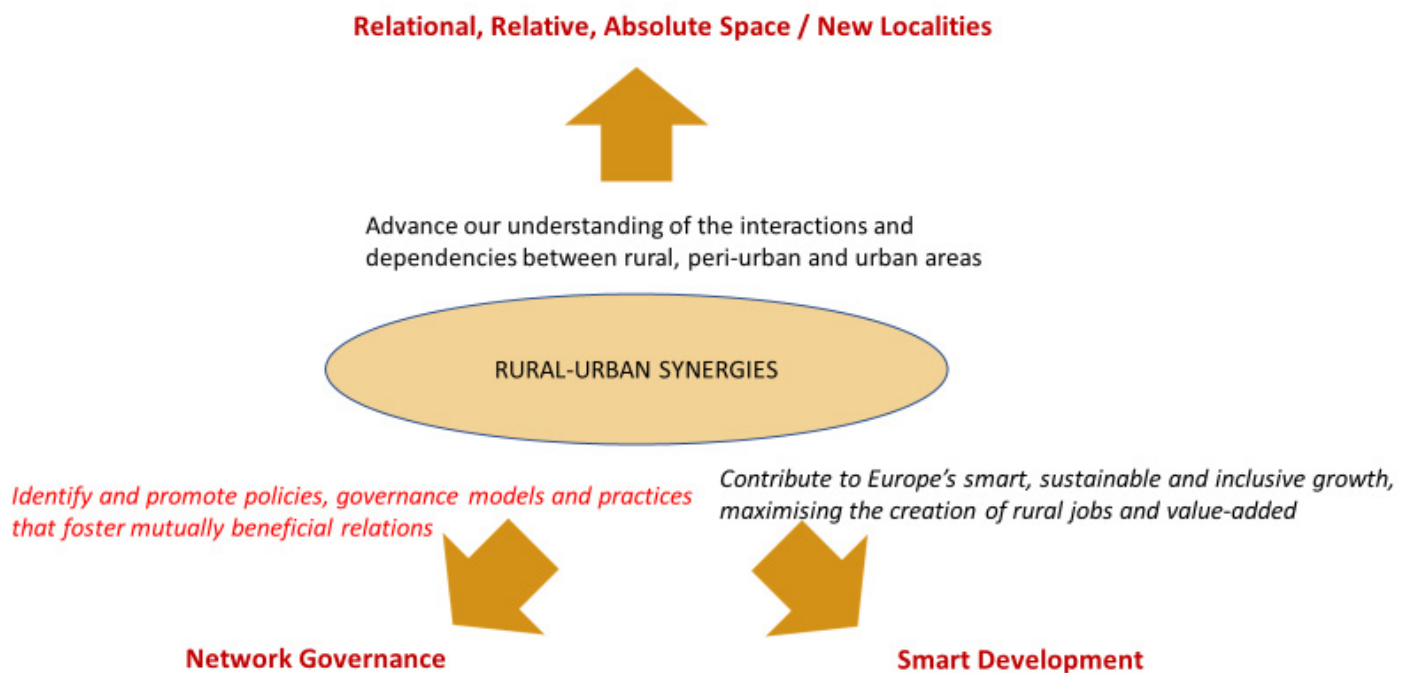
Relational, Relative, Absolute Space / New Localities

Advance our understanding of the interactions and
dependencies between rural, peri-urban and urban areas

RURAL-URBAN SYNERGIES

Identify and promote policies, governance models and practices
that foster mutually beneficial relations

Contribute to Europe's smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,
maximising the creation of rural jobs and value-added

Network Governance

Smart Development

Figure 1. Rural–urban synergies [22].

Yet, in practice, rural and urban stakeholders may combine mixtures of relational, relative and absolute spatial lenses in their understanding of rural–urban synergies. Absolute space refers to space understood as a bounded territory, where different spaces and places are treated independently, and the local is understood as distinct from the global. Relative space is more of an intermediate form of the two former perspectives. Relative space has blurry boundaries, like the spread of a city, food chain relations and labour market relations focusing on different types of functional ties between the urban and the rural. Policies using a relative perspective typically encourage working across administrative boundaries [25].

In the following we shall pay attention to what kind of spatial understanding or combination of different spatial lenses the studied rural–urban governance arrangements rely on.

Smart development for its part is about identifying, prioritising and supporting smart growth initiatives. It contributes to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. We acknowledge that smart development is a policy-induced concept, and thus difficult to define in scientific terms. However, if smart development really is smart, sustainable and inclusive, it benefits all members of society, includes balanced growth in a territory and fair distribution of income across territories (e.g., [26]) to make it indeed synergistic. The question is how to govern smart development, what kind of governance models and arrangements exist, or could exist, for rural and urban actors to cooperate.

Therefore, we concentrate on network governance arrangements to identify and promote policies, governance models and practices that foster mutually beneficial relations in different kinds of spatial assemblages. Network governance arrangements aim to enable participation and facilitate partnerships and new routines and procedures as part of social, economic as well as institutional innovations. Especially interesting for this paper is collaborative decision-design and division of power among the network partners, who cooperate from rural and urban settings. In addition, we will investigate the potential discrepancies and tensions between emerging novel governance arrangements created by the different ways in which the stakeholders, sometimes unintentionally, see the significance of spatially differentiating ideas (absolute, relative or relational), interpretations and strategic preferences as to rural–urban synergies.

We analyse the network governance arrangements of each of the five cases with a governance definition which we have applied to rural–urban synergy from Douglas [24]. Douglas's definition is originally designed for rural development but proved to be useful for structuring the aspects of rural–urban synergy, as well. In this paper, synergistic rural–urban network governance arrangements (Figure 2) contain the following elements: (a) new, negotiated, multi-stakeholder process; (b) a collaborative system of decision design and decision making; characterized by (c) significant degrees of self-governing; with (d) attendant resources commitments and shared power; where there is sufficient (e) common cause; and (f) a pragmatic understanding that to achieve the requisite capacity and agency requires appropriate institutional and organizational arrangements beyond the established architecture of power, control and authority, notably that of government.
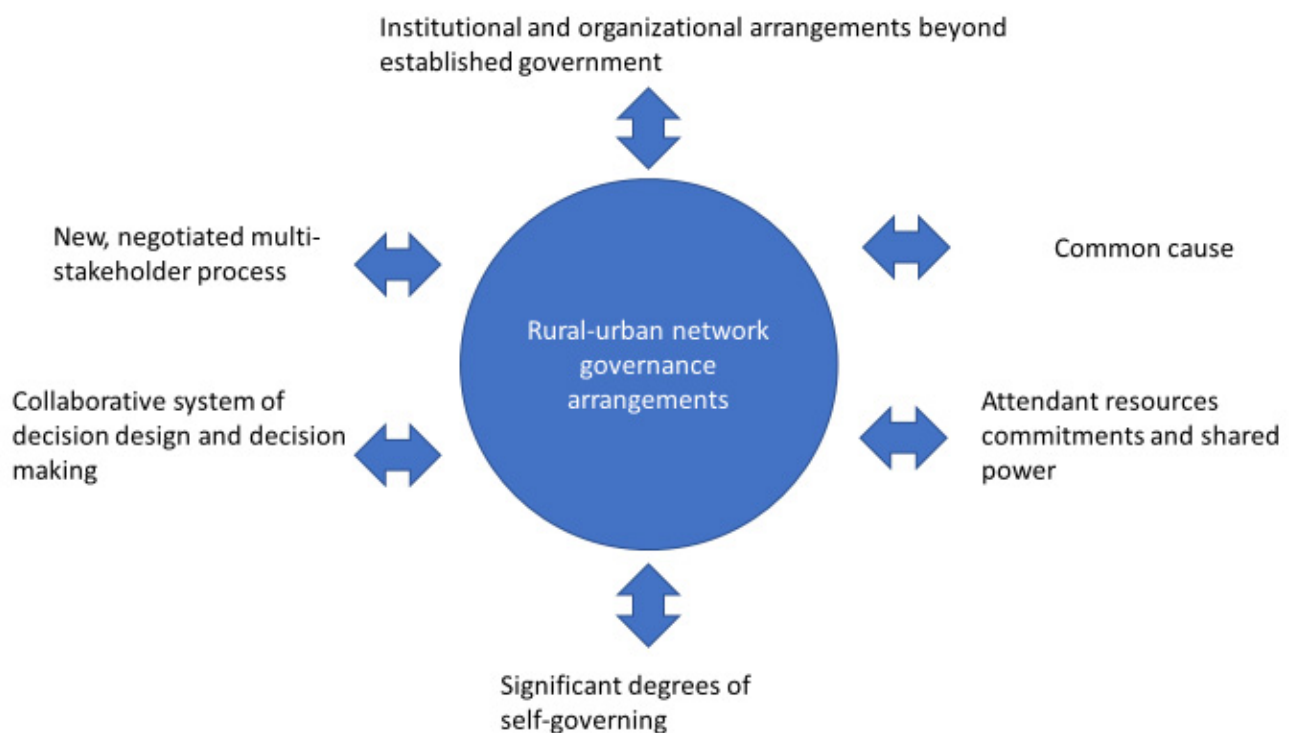

Figure 2. Elements of synergistic rural–urban network governance arrangements.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Cases

The five cases of network governance arrangements are: The Block Section of the Finnish Village Association in Finland, cultural strategy of Tukums in Latvia, FoodValley in the Netherlands, Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace in Slovenia and Municipal Food Council of Valencia (CALM) in Spain. They are in line with five Living Labs (LL) or case areas of the ROBUST project: Helsinki LL, Tukums LL, Ede LL, Ljubljana LL and Valencia LL, respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Geographical location of the five cases. Helsinki LL: The Block Section of the Finnish Village Association in Finland, Tukums LL: cultural strategy of Tukums in Latvia, Ede LL: FoodValley in the Netherlands, Ljubljana LL: Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace in Slovenia and Valencia LL: Municipal Food Council of Valencia (CALM) in Spain.

The cases show a variety of rural–urban governance angles: Foodvalley, CALM (Valencia) and Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace focus on food, whereas Tukums deals with cultural strategy and the Blocks Section of the Finnish Village Association in Finland concentrates on mutual cooperation, interaction and learning. This choice is made to show the variety of issues concerning rural–urban governance arrangements, and to emphasise that rural–urban linkages are indeed much broader than just food related [4].

The Blocks Section of the Finnish Village Association case describes the emerging rural–urban governance arrangement at a national level in Finland. The main actors and drivers of this development are the separate national multi-actor networks of rural and urban policy which seldom cooperate, and the Blocks section in the Association of Finnish Villages which is a platform bridging the two policy networks. The national network (currently Council) of rural policy is a strong, multi-actor and multi-level public-private actor, with own history in trying to promote rural–urban synergy. The national network of urban policy (currently called Urban Policy Committee) has historically represented the central government and biggest cities and has been the most important player coordinating joint urban interests especially in the connection of regional policy. Currently it is broadened to consist of 22 cities and towns, as well as local and regional authorities, but there are no representatives of the civil society, unlike in the rural policy council. The Association of Finnish Villages contains four sections: Leader, Villages, Blocks and International. The Blocks section started in the beginning of 2019 and cooperates closely with the Villages section bringing together urban activists, researchers and know-how from rural Local Action Groups (Leader). The aim of the Blocks Section is to strengthen the Leader-type community-based local development also in urban areas.

In Latvia, the case from Tukums concerns the process of developing a cultural strategy for the municipality in a participatory manner. The goal is to help preserve the rich cultural and historical heritage of the region by identifying development objectives and priorities in the cultural sector and agreeing on their governance arrangements in a manner reminiscent of network governance. The cultural strategy is the first attempt to approach culture in the municipality holistically, potentially contributing to improved territorial cohesion and smart growth. From the outset, the development of the strategy was intended as a collaborative enterprise, involving sectoral stakeholders from across the municipality. Several meetings, workshops and discussions were organised in 2019 and 2020 to allow a wide range of institutions to participate in, and contribute to, the process.

The Netherlands is represented by FoodValley, which is an example of territorial collaboration in line with smart innovation theory and triple-helix thinking and acting. It consists of 8 municipalities that started to cooperate about 10 years ago by developing a common strategic agenda for regional sustainable development and to stimulate close cooperation between regional knowledge institutions, with a prominent role for Wageningen University and Research Centre, and regional private sector and public administrative bodies. The strategic agenda is developed in close cooperation with these triple helix partners. There are two FoodValley Initiatives: another one is the Foodvalley.nl, which joins regional larger agro-industrial companies and Wageningen University and Research Centre in their collaborative aspirations to promote a global FoodValley concept. This paper focuses on the inter-municipality process.

In Slovenia, Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace organises twice a year a combination of a Stock Exchange approach and "speed dating" between the local food producers and the local consumers (mostly public institutions with their own kitchens such as kindergartens, schools, retirement homes, but also restaurateurs). The consumers move at intervals between the display tables set up by the local food producers and both parties use the interval to discuss the produce and potential sales deal. Organised since 2018 by the Municipality of Ljubljana, Tourist Office Ljubljana, Regional Development Agency of Ljubljana Urban Region, Ljubljana Agricultural Advisory Service and EKOmeter, it attracted 20 producers and 34 consumers at its 4th iteration in November 2019. Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace has been particularly popular with schools and kindergartens who use it to find good

quality local produce to be used for school meal preparation. Experience shows that Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace functions as a display of local food production and an initial contact point, resulting in establishment of direct rapport between local producers and local consumers.

In Spain, the creation of a Municipal Food Council of Valencia (CALM), aims to establish a new form of local food governance to improve the city's food system. The tasks, carried out both by the City Council of Valencia and by social organizations, consist principally of the development of a set of participatory processes from which to draw up a series of proposals. It presents an important environmental, social and economic value, because of the symbiotic relationship among the local population and the territory through agricultural activity, and a unique landscape, the 'Horta' (vegetable garden) (one of the remaining periurban agriculture spaces) placed within the Valencia Metropolitan Area. It has become a conflictive space due to urban sprawl producing territorial conflicts and pressures that the recent Law of the Horta, approved in 2018 by the Valencian Regional Autonomous Government, tries to control and manage. Moreover, globalisation of the food system has progressively moved the consumer away from local products. Consequently, Valencia has lost the role of main market of Horta products, and the agricultural activity has progressively lost economic relevance due to the growth of industry and tourist activities.

3.2. Data Collection

In the first stage of the data collection we conducted a description of each case. We used a template that structures and helps to evaluate systematically the rural–urban linkages and interactions of each case. The main questions were:

1. To what extent can the aspects of Relational, Relative or Absolute Space and Smart Development be identified? Do all involved stakeholders use the same spatial lens? Are there aspects of Smart Development for example, in the form of triple helix, that is, based on the idea of universities, business and public sector organisations fostering innovation and economic prosperity together [27].

2. Do you consider your case to contain aspects of rural–urban interaction and synergies? Which elements of the network governance arrangements (Figure 2) can be identified? How would you describe the divisions of labour and divisions of power among the rural and urban actors in your case?

The questionnaires were sent to the ROBUST Living Labs of the five cases (Helsinki, Tukums, Ede, Ljubljana, Valencia). The data originated from workshops and interviews that were made to investigate the rural–urban interaction and their governance arrangements. Each LL organised 3–5 workshops in 2018–2020, each with a total of 20–25 participants. Some participants attended only one workshop, some all. Participants represented research, local and central government, NGOs, LAGs, and businesses but also individual citizens. Moreover, LLs conducted 2–3 expert interviews in 2020 as needed to supplement their data.

The data were collected and analysed by the authors of this paper who are also members of the Living Labs within the ROBUST project.

In the second stage, based on a common analysis of these questionnaires, we identified strong and weak cases of rural–urban synergies and made recommendations on how to improve the interaction from the viewpoint of network governance.

The identification of strong and weak cases relied on the aspects of new localities: absolute, relative and relational space and that of smart development as defined by Woods et al. [22]. The elements of governance arrangements were analysed following Douglas [24]: institutions beyond established government; new, negotiated multi-stakeholder process; collaborative decision-design and making; self-governing; resources commitment and shared power; common cause.

We did not evaluate or rank the cases but describe the aspects of rural–urban synergies in the case studies. We conclude with discussing the spatial assemblages of governance arrangements which, at least potentially, enhance rural–urban synergies as well as the

main elements of promising rural–urban governance arrangements. Moreover, we study whether evolutionary governance paths are emerging.

4. Results

In the following table (Table 1) we present the results of the cases classified according to the framework presented above: new localities (NL), smart development (SD) and network governance (NG). The results show aspects of weak, moderate and strong rural–urban synergies.

The aspects of relational, relative or absolute space and smart development can be identified in all cases. In the early phases, the concept of absolute space plays a significant role, which is emphasised in case the rural–urban interaction has a city and its surroundings as a starting point. This is to be seen in the cases of Tukums, Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace and CALM, where the governance arrangements have been developed around a city. Yet, as can be seen in the cases, this changes in course of time revealing evolutionary governance paths. The cooperation and synergies develop during practice, and the concept of relative space, with for example, blurry boundaries between the urban and the rural, emerges strongly. In the cases the relational space was the ultimate aim of most of the arrangements but needs time to develop. The aspects can be recognised in the Finnish Village Association Blocks Section and FoodValley cases, the former of which is not linked to a particular municipality or region and the latter of which operates in triple-helix form. Moreover, it is to be noted that all involved stakeholders do not use the same spatial lens but may aim to concentrate strictly on local development and institutions or aim at inter-regional or even global connections. The art of rural–urban synergy building might be about developing a certain consensus between its relational, relative and absolute spatial perspectives. All three might have their specific pros, cons, potential and limitations in specific settings. In the FoodValley case, it turns out to be rather difficult in current times to agree on this balance, as for example, reflected in growing rural–urban tensions related to increasingly limiting and disputed agri-environmental measures.

Similarly, the importance of smart development was acknowledged, yet not existing in many cases. Our results indicate that the aspects of smart development in the form of triple helix would benefit rural–urban synergies but need proper network governance arrangements to be successful. In the Blocks Section case, smart development is not the main focus or primary frame of rural–urban activities, it is seen rather as one dimension among many policy issues and concerns to be promoted. The FoodValley case covered relatively well inclusiveness and sustainability, but also concerns were raised—lack of broadly accepted understanding of sustainability, for example, agro-industrial and agro-ecological interests. The CALM case developed a smart specialisation strategy which connects food, gastronomy, tourism, landscape and socio-cultural aspects in smart development of the region. The Tukums and Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace cases identified potential for smart development but had not yet been considered or discussed widely within the relatively new-established arrangements.

All cases contained aspects of rural–urban interaction and synergies. The most obvious reason was food: promotion of local food in FoodValley, Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace and CALM. In Tukums and CALM, the rural–urban interaction and synergies were also based on culture. In the Blocks Section, the questions of local community-led development were well established in rural areas whereas urban areas aimed to learn from their experiences. Moreover, rural–urban interaction offers an opportunity to strengthen the approach and mainstream it also in urban areas.

Table 1. Aspects of rural–urban synergies in five cases.

Rural-Urban Synergies	Blocks Section of the Finnish Village Association	Tukums	FoodValley	Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace	CALM
NL: relational space	Strong. The operations are solely based on network connections.	Weak. The arrangement focuses on one city and its surroundings.	Strong. Operates with a triple-helix structure. Relational lens is dominantly present.	Weak. Exists only in delivering food beyond the local.	Moderate. Exists in promoting local food culture internationally.
NL: relative space	Moderate. Rural and urban are still separate, although aiming to improve their connections.	Moderate. Rural-urban borders are blurry. Administrational reform is in process.	Moderate. Involved municipal administrations demonstrate growing attention for relative lens.	Strong. Based on cooperation of the city and its surroundings.	Strong. Based on cooperation of the city and its surroundings.
NL: absolute space	Weak. The operations are solely based on network connections	Strong. Focuses on one city and its surroundings.	Moderate. Tradition of separated rural and urban planning domains. Tensions and conflicts occur.	Strong. Focuses on one city and its surroundings.	Strong. Focuses on one city and its surroundings.
Smart Development	Moderate. Different policy sectors on agenda, no special focus on smart development.	Weak. There is no connection to smart development. To be improved when properly established.	Moderate. Sustainability and inclusiveness are relatively well covered.	Weak. Not considered for the most part.	Strong. There is a Smart Specialisation Strategy that includes e.g., food, tourism and gastronomy.
NG: institutions beyond established government	Moderate. Ambitious plans especially on the rural side, the urban part less active in building the partnership Based on networks and established government.	Moderate. Participatory process, committee, strong municipality.	Moderate. Triple helix with research, private and public institutions. Still predominantly project-based, vulnerable continuity.	Moderate. Brings together public and private actors, producers and consumers.	Strong. Public and private institutions, NGOs, media, civil society participate.
NG: new, negotiated multi-stakeholder process	Moderate. Ambition to elaborate further a new, negotiated multi-stakeholder process.	Strong. Participatory process, started top-down but operates bottom-up	Strong. Municipalities voluntarily negotiated, reflective.	Moderate. Platform organised by public bodies, by other actors required.	Moderate. Started top-down but participatory process.
NG: collaborative decision-design and making	Moderate. All members represented.	Moderate. City in lead but participatory process.	Strong. Triple-helix. Stimulates new forms of collaborative decision-design by using ongoing decentralization tendencies in national policy making processes.	Moderate. Public bodies lead but private and NGOs needed to operate.	Moderate. Formal committee but participation of other actors encouraged.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Rural-Urban Synergies	Blocks Section of the Finnish Village Association	Tukums	FoodValley	Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace	CALM
NG: self-governing	Strong. Initiated by multiple multi-scale actors.	Strong. City owns the process. Intention to participatory process strong.	Moderate. Limited formal policy responsibility. CAP reform (remuneration of ecosystem services) critical prerequisite.	Weak. Laws on public procurement limit purchasing of other than lowest products to 20%.	Strong. Institutionalised.
NG: resources commitment and shared power	Moderate. Most resources used are result of activities of the rural actors.	Moderate. City only financer. Committee will be named. Public hearings.	Moderate. Participant municipalities commit resources according to size. Most involved municipalities relatively small and rural or smaller-urban centres oriented.	Weak. Public bodies finance and regulate by law.	Moderate. Institutionalised but power difference between e.g., large companies and small-scale producers.
NG: common cause	Moderate. The aim is balanced rural–urban development, but the rural side is more committed, the urban side keener on widening their development tools and measures and strengthening the civil society.	Strong. Cultural strategy to the City for the benefit of the region.	Weak. Struggle around different spatial lenses on rural–urban synergies goes along with the absence of 'common cause feelings'.	Strong. Promotion of local food.	Moderate. Promotion of local food culture but stakeholders have different interests and focus areas.

Furthermore, all elements of the network governance arrangements (Figure 2) could be identified to some extent in all cases. They all intended to be new, negotiated multi-stakeholder processes operating beyond established government arrangements. The realisation of these goals was in its early phases in many cases, which is natural given that they all were relatively new. Collaborative decision-design and decision-making and self-governance to significant degree were shaping or already existing in the cases. However, shared power and thereby resources-commitment was not properly organised and seems challenging. It is important that all participants commit resources to the arrangement, let them be time, money or expertise [24]. In some cases, the ownership of one party was too strong to let other participants contribute. Or the participants were not willing to contribute, at least in the early stages of the establishment. Moreover, it is essential to find a common goal that all participants can share in principle, which was agreed upon relatively well in the cases.

In all cases there was a need to improve the governance arrangements to obtain benefits from rural–urban synergies. Often the problem is that the divisions of labour and divisions of power among the rural and urban actors are not equal. In the Block Section case the urban actors are less well organised, and do not experience such strong need of rural–urban/urban-rural interaction. In other cases, such as CALM and FoodValley, larger, urban companies or cities dominate the scene whereas small-scale rural actors do not have an equal say. In the Tukums case, the arrangements were intended to be participatory but the response from the civil society and NGOs was passive.

Our overall findings point at the rather problematic nature and manifold challenge to establish this type of interplays as prerequisites for synergistic rural–urban governance.

5. Discussion

5.1. Conditions for Network Governance Arrangements in Balanced Rural-Urban Interaction

In this paper, we follow Woods et al. [22] in their representation of a framework for rural–urban interaction that includes network governance arrangements, smart development and new localities. The new locality approach enables to apply a multi-spatial lens on contemporary rural–urban interdependencies. It is relevant because external networks for knowledge exchange, supply chains, and markets are needed for communities to grow. Network governance is about making decisions together in a participatory manner. In practice, partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors are needed. The aim of network governance arrangements is to design systems and services responding to the needs of everybody. Smart development means growing smart, which requires healthy and sustainable rural–urban economies. In case the growing is smart, it prioritises what a specific local economy can do best. The focus is neither on the past nor on the hopes but on the reality including attention for degrowth scenarios.

In our cases, the new localities are still clearly under construction, also with regard to their spatial lenses that were not shared by all participants. In the Blocks Section of the Finnish Village Association, the network governance arrangements were based on relational space and consisted of connections to begin with, and the idea was to disseminate good practices between the rural and the urban and to strengthen the synergies as well as generally promote place-based policies in regional development with the help of establishing new platforms for rural–urban policy-making. In the cases Tukums, Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace and CALM, in which the new governance arrangements were constructed based on a city and its surroundings, the starting point was absolute space that spread or was in the process of spreading to a blurrier rural–urban interaction, that is, relative space. In fact, in many cases a top-down push was needed for the network governance arrangement to be created, such as Tukums and Ljubljana Local Food Marketplace. It is important to acknowledge that rural–urban interaction is not only about urban development and expansion but about balanced synergies benefiting both the urban and the rural. In case the differences in size, resources and capacity are great, the development

of rural–urban interactions maybe challenging due to the tendency of the city to dominate the development [2].

In the FoodValley case, which was the eldest of the arrangements, the aspects of relational space were to be identified, and the triple helix model—cooperation between research, municipalities and businesses was in use. The predominantly relational perspective also goes along with regional rural–urban tensions, pointing at a certain disequilibrium or vulnerability in terms of the multi-spatial balancing that is thought to characterise rural–urban synergy governance. The involvement of the private sector has often been a main challenge in rural–urban interaction [2]. In particular, rural–urban linkages that private businesses have, are useful for obtaining synergies [3].

The triple helix model is broadly considered to be successful in promoting economic development and is definitely useful in smart development between the rural and the urban. Yet, there are challenges in applying it universally [27]. Decentralisation process in the decision-design and decision-making is taking place across Europe [28]. In many rural areas, non-conventional solutions are needed due to depopulation and population ageing, as well as to rural poverty. Simultaneously, in other rural areas the quality of life might be highly appreciated and policy concerns much more related to the preservation and safeguarding of such qualities. Collaboration between local public bodies, private actors, NGOs and civil society are needed to implement new ideas and to improve place-based development [29]. In remote rural areas, there are not necessarily strong enough representatives of research, businesses—or even that of public bodies. Therefore, the need to develop quadruple helix model involving both rural and urban communities is necessary [27]. In these cases relevant constellations are especially those which connect rural and urban areas that are located far from each other, reflecting the rise of relational new localities.

However, recent studies have found difficulties in creating the conditions for network governance arrangements in practice even according to quadruple helix model. There are challenges in local-based bottom-up initiatives that could engage local community and civil society, due to existing structures, nepotism and old institutions including behaviour and habits [30]. It is often the case that relations between local public bodies and NGOs are based on personal acquaintance and relationships. Therefore, the existence of active citizens or leaders able to engage others to promote developmental initiatives, is of essential importance [29]. The same applies to creating conditions for balanced rural–urban interaction and synergies obtained from it.

Thus, the creation of effective network governance arrangements that support the understanding and use of new localities and smart development is necessary for balanced rural–urban interaction and synergies in Europe.

5.2. Elements of Synergistic Rural-Urban Interaction from the Perspective of Network Governance

In this article, we follow Douglas [24] in defining governance. This definition is also used to characterise elements of network governance arrangements (Figure 2) in our cases. As noted earlier, we also acknowledge elements of good governance as they are broadly recognized by the scientific community, for example, the role of informal networks, bottom-up initiatives, agency, trust and transparency, as well as participation, communication and collaborative approaches are (see e.g., [2,8,20,21]).

Our findings show that network governance is an emerging strategy to replace the former command and control state, although there are discrepancies between the theory and the cases. It is important to note that we are discussing improvements in real-life governance systems, not suggesting that a perfect pyramid model of top-down state ever existed.

All the cases consist of networks of relatively autonomous self-governing organisations. In these networks, the public sector collaborates with various actors of the private sector and NGOs and other civil society organisations. The public bodies, private organisations and NGOs are typically local or regional but even national (the Blocks Section of

Finnish Village Association) or international organisations (the FoodValley case). The purpose of all network governance arrangements is to attain agency, which is not sufficiently available to the individual participants. A prerequisite for this is a common, shared goal, but also the fact that there is not sufficient agency, resources or other capacity to act without collaboration. Legitimacy is pursued through challenging initiatives in transparency and accountability (see [24]).

In that sense, the elements of balanced rural–urban interaction from the perspective of network governance, can be confirmed. Network governance contributes resources and legitimacy to decision-design and decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and changes to management rules and procedures [31]. However, all the elements of good governance are in practice not to be found as such in real-life cases (see e.g., [20]). Thus, it is to be noted that although network governance is something to be aimed at balanced rural–urban interaction, the definition given by Douglas [24] is an ideal state of affairs, still far from reality in our five cases—or anywhere.

However, in the formation and implementation of public policy, network governance has become a commonly acknowledged arrangement, which involves an informal and self-regulated set of public and private actors, addressing together various political and social problems. Network governance transfers power from the state and municipality to a wider set of private actors and stakeholders, which is considered to enhance pluralism and disperse power [28]. Networks provide legitimacy, joint capacity and institutional innovation. Legitimacy is a necessary component constructed through networks of governmental and non-governmental actors, with collaborative processes. Capacity is needed to implement and evaluate decisions. Institutional innovation is often needed to align rules with legitimate actions [31].

There is also criticism to network governance, which stresses that it may in fact generate a form of institutional domination. The core of this criticism is that once institutionalised, the network governance arrangement itself becomes exclusive and exercises arbitrary influence on the life choices of nonparticipants of the network [28]. This criticism is important to acknowledge. Despite of participatory processes encompassing, for example, local public bodies, private actors, NGOs and the civil society, it does not include all. Hence it is essential that network governance arrangements are as open for new, relevant participants as possible, and that the procedures for becoming a member are clearly explicated and accessible. The passive reaction to participatory processes involved in the new emerging network governance arrangements was recognised also in our study. Furthermore, there were different understandings of spatial lenses, distribution of power, division of labour or even the aim of the governance arrangement.

One of the reasons for the challenges is the heterogeneity of governance models that are shaped by time and place and are context dependent. Our cases represent well-established EU member states but also so-called new member states. Therefore, there are differences in existing institutions: both organisations and customs [29]. Furthermore, the shift from top-down policies to more bottom-up approaches is still in progress everywhere in our case areas. On the other hand, the criticism confirms the need of other aspect besides network governance arrangements to gain legitimacy and raise interest among potential participants, and to be inclusive and participatory. In our study, particularly essential are the questions of smart development and new localities (Figure 1), and how network governance arrangements can enhance them in the development of balanced rural–urban interactions.

5.3. Concluding Remarks

In addition to studying what kind of network governance arrangements currently exist, the objective of this paper was to elaborate how they can be improved, and whether evolutionary governance paths can be identified. Our results emphasise the significance of division of power and collaborative decision-design in guaranteeing balanced and mutually beneficial interaction. Rural areas cannot be seen as totally dependent on the development

of urban areas but developed in interaction. In addition to public bodies, private sector and NGOs, research and civil society should be engaged in the participatory process. It is obvious that network governance arrangements are in a constant process of co-evolution due to their interaction, and thus evolutionary governance paths are emerging. At its best, the network governance arrangements are reflective and inclusive supporting smart development that is based on local capacity and has connections according to the model of relational space. The potential of rural–urban synergy should be supported in policy to improve holistic development in rural–urban interface, as balanced arrangements do not appear spontaneously but are a result of determined action by committed parties.

Our study provided a perspective on real-life cases of network governance arrangements concerning rural–urban interaction and synergies. The limitations of the study relate to the fact that there were only five cases from across Europe dealing with different rural–urban contents (food, culture, local development) in this paper. In the future, research is needed on what kind of governance arrangements exist in different types of rural–urban interaction, and whether any patterns can be identified as to their existence and co-evolution.

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