

**ESRS Congress, Vaasa, 2009**

**Theme 4: The Sciences of the Rural**

**Working Group Title: Rural Challenges: Resilience, learning and adaptation**

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The rural is a challenging space, a site of contrasting growth and decline, creativity and threat. Rural identity holds a privileged position within many cultural and historical narratives, yet it is neither passive nor past. Both the challenges and opportunities for rural communities concern broad processes of change. This working group will discuss the social basis of resilience, learning and adaptation in order to achieve a better understanding of how change works, how it is received and how it can be fostered or accommodated.

Rural spaces are at the forefront of many modern issues. Both the mitigation of climate change and adaptation to its effects have an impact on the future of rural communities and the countryside economy. It is often proposed that rural governance requires joined-up government and integrated policy, yet this confounded by the social and economic links between rural and urban communities on the one hand, and challenged by the sectoral division of policy responsibility and budgetary constraints on the other. Social trends have a profound effect, with depopulation, repopulation and cultural changes all affecting community identity and cohesion. Yet the tensions between tradition and innovation are not straight-forward, and both creativity and resistance find a basis in the retelling of history and institutional bricolage.

The social nature of resilience, learning and adaptation are at the heart of this discussion. The working group will feature dialogue on social and environmental change, social reflexivity and learning, governance, the formation of identity and the social basis of adaptive capacity. We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions from academics and from rural policy makers, practitioners and managers. As well as the presentation of papers, there will be a panel discussion between practitioners and academics to draw together the different viewpoints raised within the working group.