

# Agrobiodiversity for rural regeneration

**Supporting the  
emergence of a social  
cooperative for Irish-  
grown textiles**

*Tristan Lienhard, Malú Colorín,  
Jessica Leonard, Kate Carmody,  
Blatnait Gallagher, Adèle Pautrat*





To support the transition to seed diversification practices on an economic scale

- ▶ Spotighting and promoting the work of rural players relying on agrobiodiversity to implement alternative economic models.
- ▶ Creating synergies and facilitating cooperations at local and EU level.
- ▶ Amplifying voices from the field within political institutions.
- ▶ Raising awareness about the benefits of agrobiodiversity and the sustainable initiatives to support.



# How can we ensure the economic development of projects that are beneficial to cultivated biodiversity and rural renaissance?

- ▶ **Overview of the speakers' projects** with a particular focus on the obstacles they face in their commitment to local cultures and breeds.
- ▶ **The audience gets the floor!** Are you engaged in any other related projects that you'd like to present?
- ▶ **What's a social cooperative?** Short introduction to this model of organisation by Kate Carmody, from the Hemp and Flax cooperative of Ireland.
- ▶ **Collective brainstorming** on how to adapt this model to the Irish context and the textile production sector specificities.

A photograph of two women in a workshop. The woman on the left is wearing a blue beanie and a dark jacket, looking down at a piece of white fabric. The woman on the right is wearing a dark jacket and is also looking at the fabric. The scene is dimly lit, with a strong light source from the side creating a silhouette effect.

# AppleOak FibreWorks

Natural Dyeing and fibre supply company



# History 2007 - 2023

- Started by Jennifer Lienhard in 2007
- Teaching Knitting, Crocheting, felting, Dyeing and fibre supply on Etsy
- 2011 Focus on Dyeing yarn and online fibre supply
- 2013 Start attending trade shows to sell and advertise
- 2015 started contract dyeing for clients
- 2018 Established current premises for larger scale dyeing, shop and teaching space



# Sustainability and the Circular model

- All Dyeing is done with harvested rain water.
- After Dyeing all waste water is treated through settlement tanks, reed beds and evergreen planting.
- All dye plant waste and cardboard is composted through a wormery
- Compost is used to grow dye plants



# Biodiversity and seed production

- Over last 10 years developing recipes to create Irish grown colour palette
- Growing dyes in Ireland at home since 2013, at a medium scale through Irish Seedsavers since 2019
- This year we will start growing on a larger scale for workshops, own use, and seed production
- Different varieties of same dye plant give different colour tones therefore aiming to increase diversity in our collection
- Currently researching gene banks and conservation organisations for varieties - somewhat challenging as no specific conservation of dye plants
- Will be doing variety trials from seed to seed including dyeing trials



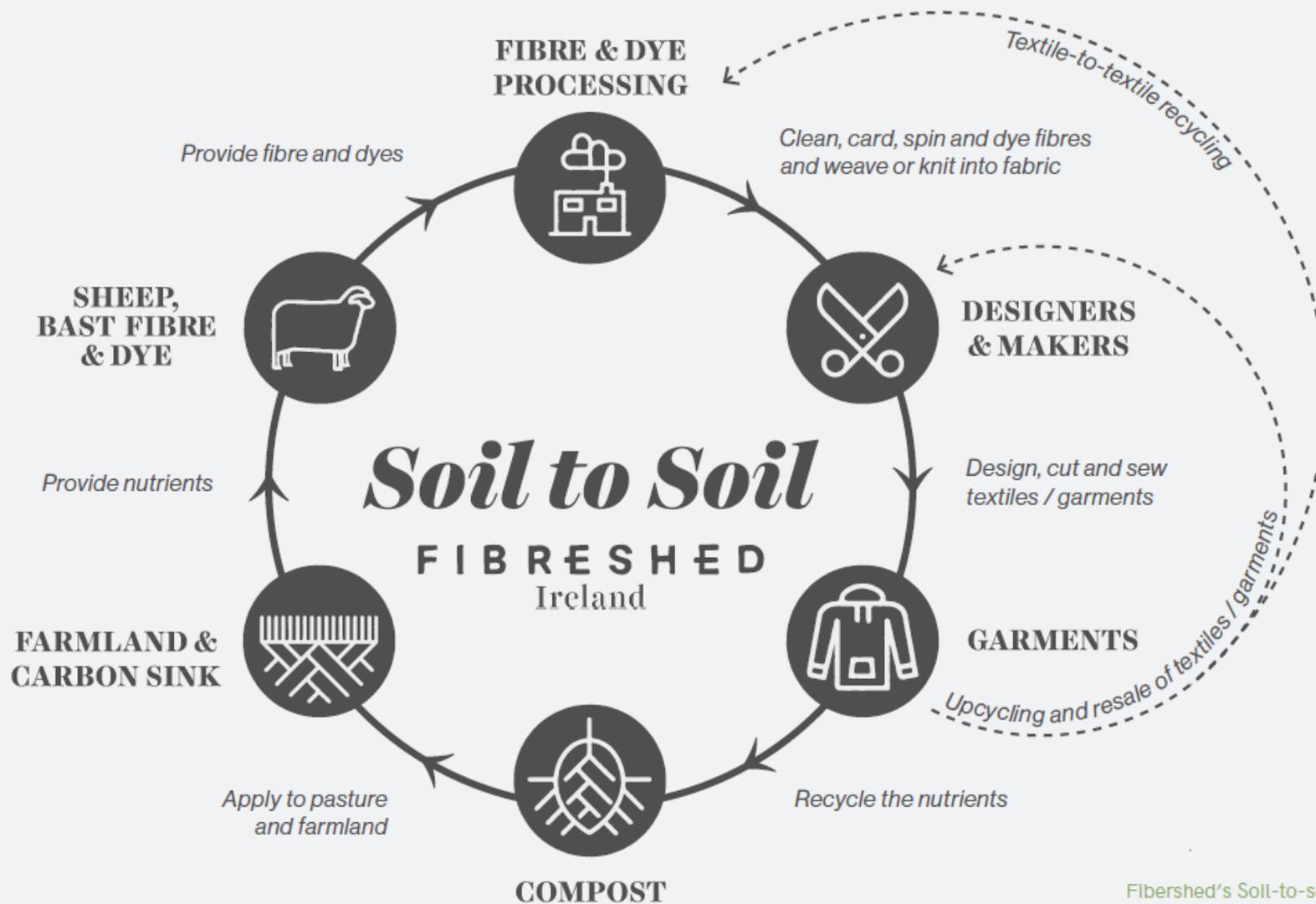


A community-supported not-for-profit social enterprise building networks to craft a regenerative Irish textile system based on local fibre, local dyes & local labour.

SINCE MARCH 2022, WE ARE:

A registered independent affiliate of the global Fibershed movement. Each affiliate works locally to develop regional fibre systems that help regenerate local ecologies, communities and economies.

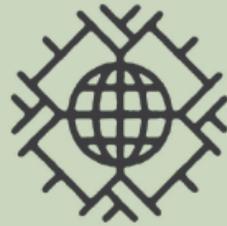




Fibreshed's Soil-to-soil model for textile production graphic, adapted by Fibreshed Ireland.

OUR VISION:

Biodiverse ecosystems and thriving livelihoods,  
woven by culturally vibrant Irish fibres.



OUR MISSION:

We build supportive networks to craft a regenerative Irish textile system based on local fibre, local dyes & local labour.

We do this by sparking collaborations with verified provenance, supporting farmers in implementing beneficial practices, and catalysing communities to facilitate regional fibre processing facilities.



## THE FOUR MAIN PILLARS OF OUR OPERATIONS:



### 1 — Networking

Mapping Ireland's fibre networks to facilitate collaborative partnerships and verified provenance.



### 2 — Regenerative fibre & dye farming

Expanding opportunities for regenerative farming to support farmers in transitioning to more resilient, biodiverse agricultural practices which sequester carbon and ameliorate climate change.



### 3 — Fibre processing

Catalysing regional fibre manufacturing to build equitable, local circular bio-economies and resilient rural enterprise.



### 4 — Education, research and advocacy

To shift policy, industry practice and public awareness towards reducing textile waste and pollution. Improving appreciation and utilisation of our indigenous raw materials through education and upskilling of local communities.

WE LOOK AT THE TEXTILE VALUE CHAIN HOLISTICALLY, FROM THE GROUND UP:



## Fibre & Dye Growers

Wool, Flax, Alpaca, Hemp, Natural dyes, Leather...



## Processors & Manufacturers

Mills, Natural tanners, Natural dyers, Hand processing...



## Crafters, Designers & Brands

Knitters, Weavers, Fashion & Textile designers, Leather workers, Natural dyers, Brands...



## Retailers

Local businesses, Supporters of local & sustainable products...



## Universities, Educators, Policy Makers & Aligned Partners

Research, Education, Policy change, Collaborations...



## Consumers & Supporters

## VALUING AGROBIODIVERSITY AND LOCAL CROPS / BREEDS



### Regenerative Growers Knowledge Transfer Group

This growing group started with 9 fibre and dye farmers and growers who are interested in or already implementing regenerative land management practices. The aim of this group was to share ideas and experiences over 6 thematic online sessions. As a result of these sessions, we are collaboratively developing a verification system for regenerative Irish textiles, inspired by Fibershed's Climate Beneficial™ programme in the USA.

Funded by the 2022 Fibershed  
Micro-Grant series, made  
possible by the Threading  
Resilience fundraiser.



## VALUING AGROBIODIVERSITY AND LOCAL CROPS / BREEDS



### Reciprocal Textiles key concept workshops

We will be getting hands-on in-depth experience into the key concepts defined during the first year of the programme:

1. Biodiversity
2. Habitat restoration
3. Water catchment restoration
4. Natural ways to increase productivity
5. Local farming wisdom
6. Cultural heritage
7. Community networks
8. Producer/consumer relationships

Funded by the 2023 Fibershed  
Micro-Grant series, made  
possible by the Threading  
Resilience fundraiser.



## OUTCOME FROM THIS PROJECT



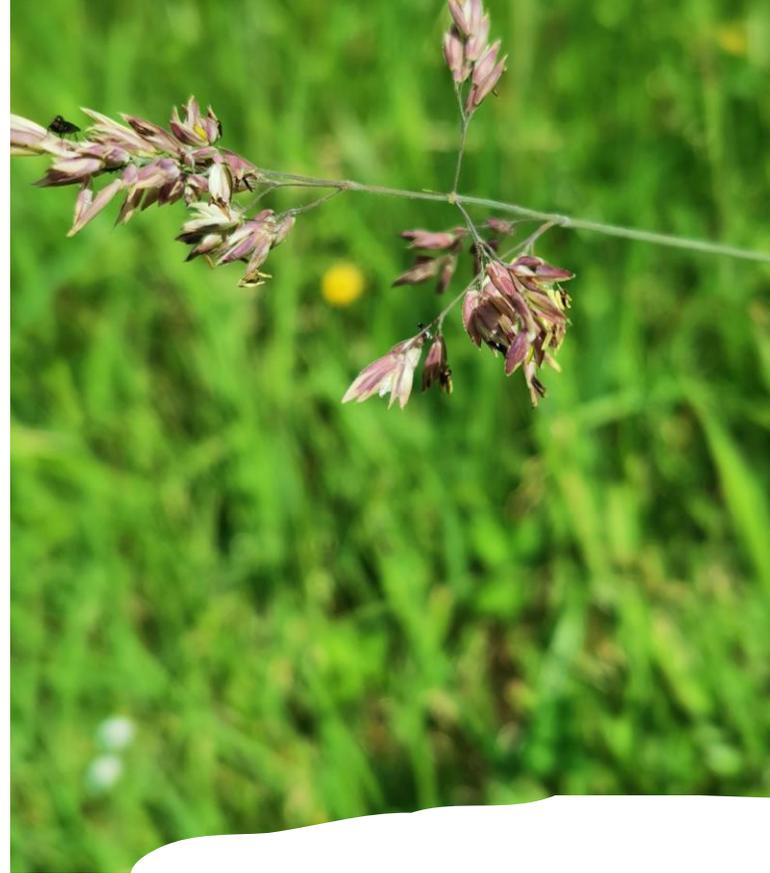
## Community-Supported Reciprocal Textiles yarn

We're in the process of getting yarn from two of our pilot Regenerative Growers processed into roving, batting and yarn. It'll be processed in Portugal, but we hope that in the future it'll be a fully-Irish value chain.

This is a pilot Community-Supported Yarn project, in which you pre-order the yarn before it's made.

Partly funded by the 2022  
Fibershed Micro-Grant series,  
made possible by the Threading  
Resilience fundraiser.





## Agrobiodiversity in Animal Fibre Systems

# Agrobiodiversity in Animal Fibre Systems

- Quality fleece depends on nutrition
- Nutrition depends on diversity in grass and forage





## Overall Biodiversity in Animal Fibre Systems

- Healthy grass and forage depend on thriving, diverse soil life
- All heavily dependent on insect communities above and below ground
- **Thriving ecosystems support robust livestock**

# Semi-natural Grasslands vs. Improved Land



- Sensitive to grazing
- Soil structure left intact
- No fertilisers, pesticides, or fungicides



- Ploughed
- Reseeded with perennial rye grass
- Dependent on inputs to maintain monoculture

# Semi-natural Grasslands

- 0.08% of farmed grassland in Ireland
- Losses of ~31% in the last 6 years \*

*\*likely highly under-estimated*

## Sources:

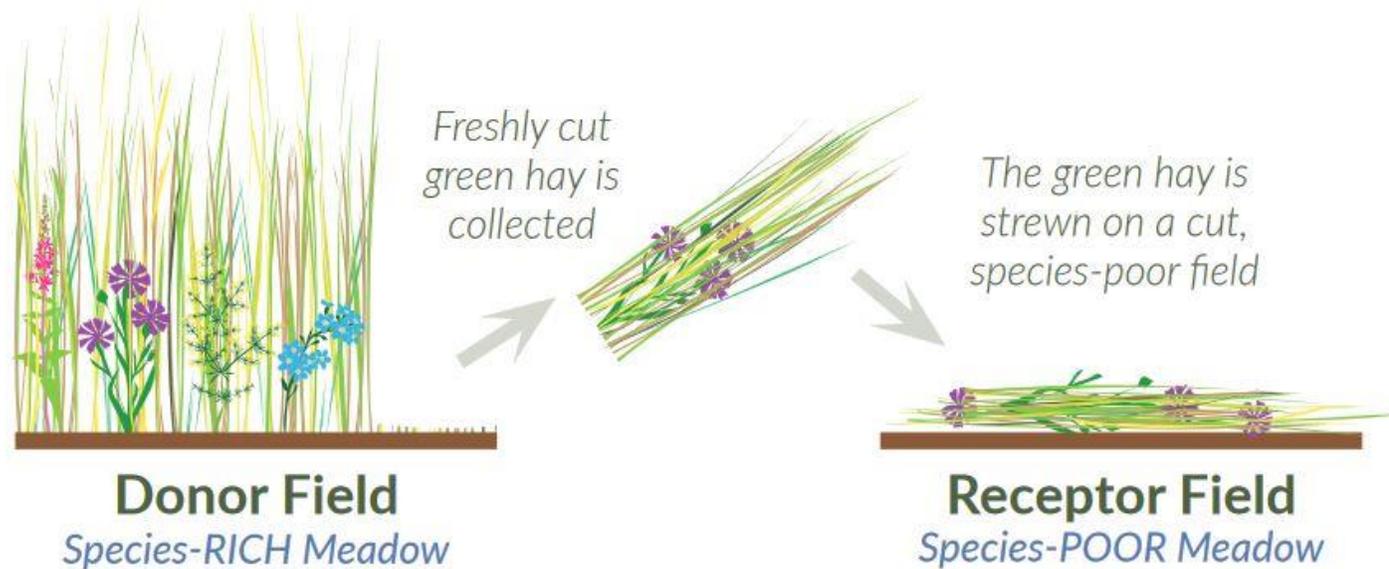
- Irish Semi-natural Grassland Survey: 2007-2012
- Grassland Monitoring Survey: 2015-2017, subset of sites re-visited



## What is green hay transfer/strewing?

Freshly cut green hay from a species-rich meadow (donor field) is collected and then strewn on a cut species-poor field (receptor field), ideally on the same day.

It is a way of increasing plant diversity in the receptor field by transferring the seeds from the wild flowers & grasses growing in the donor field.



**More information:**  
[greatirishgrasslands.ie](http://greatirishgrasslands.ie)





## THE GALWAY WOOL CO-OP

Blatnaid Gallagher MSc, Co-Founder of the coop

### IRELAND'S NATIVE BREED

- Less than 3.500 left in the world
- Strong Bio-Fire
- Up to 5kgs Per animal per year.

### HIGHEST STANDARDS OF WELFARE

- No Mulesing
- Family Farms
- Compulsory Welfare Shearing.

Happy Sheep are healthy Sheep.

# ABOUT US

All our Irish Wool comes from Pure Bred Galway Sheep that have a registered pedigree, ensuring our partners are creating and making with authentic Native Irish Wool.

## The Galway Wool Co-op

We are a farmer-owned and run Irish wool co-operative; supplying an Irish grown bio-fibre that is Galway wool.

Our farmers know that happy healthy sheep are productive animals. We work in tandem with nature to shepherd our flocks with compassion and care.



Galway Sheep are a Rare Breed



## PROBLEMS

### LEGISLATION

- No Regulation around labelling of Irish Wool Products.
- Import Wool, spin or create in Ireland and market it as Irish Wool.

### SCOURING

Scouring can be carried out in UK, Belgium or Germany but to scour in Ireland, we need scale and markets.

### TALK SHOPS

Forums, committees, discussion groups, etc.

### CUSTOMERS

Customers do not ask for country of origin for the wool.  
Did it grow in Ireland?

### MARKETING

Ireland is internationally renowned for its knitwear, tweed, carpets, rugs, blankets and Throws.  
All made from imported wool



## SOLUTIONS

### CLOSE THE GAP

Clear labelling on wool  
and its origin of growth

### TARGET AUDIENCE

Sustainable wool products  
need to be sourced locally

### BREED CHOICES

Support for dual purpose  
and wool producing breeds

### CLIMATE

Insulation with  
Petro Chemical

THANK YOU

Blatnaid Gallagher MSc

[info@galwaywool.ie](mailto:info@galwaywool.ie)

@thegalwaywoolco\_op

Where does your wool  
grow?



Galway Wool<sup>TM</sup>

# The role of the social cooperative in creating a rural renaissance

*A presentation primarily made for the Rural-Pact policy Lab  
on rural depopulation. Brussels, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023.*

# Recognising the potential of a social cooperative

- ▶ Farmers first met in 2016.
- ▶ The Irish Hemp Cooperative was registered May 2018.
- ▶ It was set up to address the many issues facing small farmers. It addresses legislative and logistical barriers.
- ▶ The work of the hemp Cooperative is encouraging young farmers, and rural actors to solve their own problems by providing them with a channel to take action.
- ▶ Kate Carmody, Organic farmer, Biochemist/Biomedical Scientist, Social Scientist, EU Expert in Agricultural Productivity & Sustainability.

# Depopulation and socioeconomic deprivation

We aim to drive a rural renaissance, supporting a Just transition for our communities recognising the challenges of climate change.

We are developing a sustainable network for hemp, flax and MAPS. There was a tradition of growing these crops in Ireland.

Struggling farms can stack enterprises. With local processing providing meaningful employment.

At a local level we are working on the “People’s Transition” which is run by TASC. This encourages empowerment of the local community.

*Image source: Aalen, F. H. A., Whelan, K., Stout, W. (1997). Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cork: Cork University Press.*

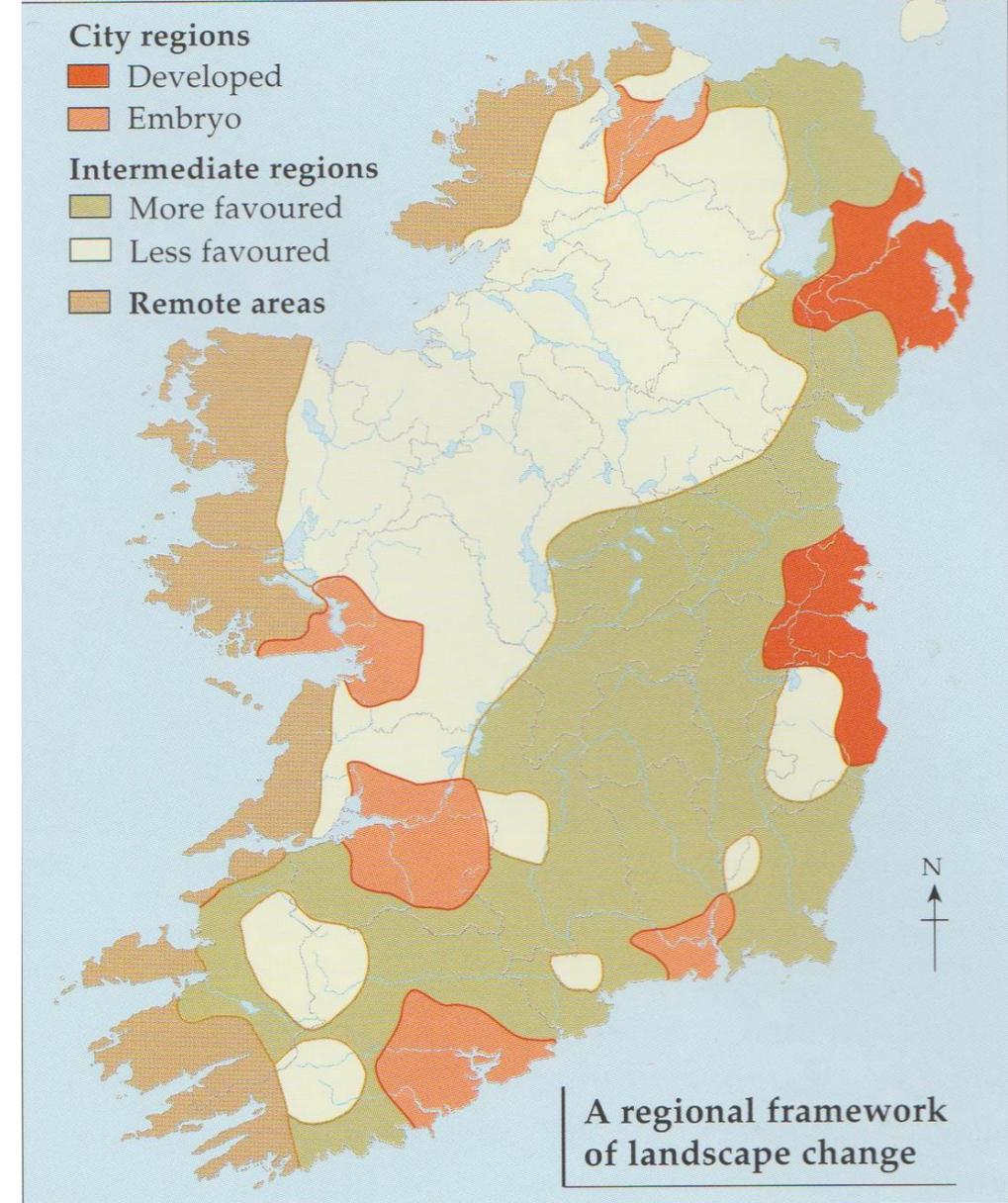


Fig. 3 The nature of landscape change varies substantially in different types of region, ranging from strong urban encroachment in city hinterlands to rapidly evolving agricultural land use in intermediate areas and depopulation, tourism development, land abandonment and afforestation in remote areas.

# Needs and Barriers

- ▶ The Co-op needs support and policy changes to achieve our potential. Current policy means we are locked out of funding.
- ▶ Rural areas like North Kerry are written off and designated as in decline, services and infrastructure are being withdrawn. We need funding to support the disruptive potential of co-ops to save our communities.
- ▶ Do we need to enshrine a value on social capital across Europe?

# Rural Renaissance needs to be social.

- ▶ Formation of social cooperatives which register as social (charitable) trusts, to facilitate funding.
- ▶ A social cooperative (not for profit) will invest surplus into the community thus allowing new ideas to flourish.
- ▶ Keeping communities knitted together and encouraging disruptive thinking to repopulate depleted areas is needed now.