

SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces



SHERPA Conference Highlights:

Contribution to the
Long-Term Vision for
Rural Areas

30 November - 1 December 2020



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Foreword:

Enrique NIETO

Work Package Leader on communication, dissemination and stakeholder engagement, AEIDL

Welcome to SHERPA - Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors, a four-year project (2019-2023) of 17 partners funded by the Horizon 2020 programme. We aim to gather knowledge that contributes to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to EU rural areas, by creating a science-society-policy interface. This document reports on the first SHERPA conference hosted virtually between 30 November and 1 December 2020, which gathered around 120 participants from 26 countries (23 Member States).

The first part of the conference served to exchange on the contribution of SHERPA and its Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) to the process launched by the European Commission on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. It helped to get an in-depth understanding of the key drivers that will shape rural areas by 2040 around key areas such as demographic change, climate change, digitalisation, diversification of the rural economy, governance and basic services. In addition, this report presents interesting results from group discussions and the views from a panel of experts on actions that need to be taken now to make the rural vision a reality.

The second and last part of the conference focused on sharing experiences from SHERPA's MAPs' work on how to establish engaging processes to develop a vision together with local actors. This report presents the recommendations from the group discussions on specific aspects such as how to engage stakeholders who are hard to reach, balance Science-Society-Policy, deal with consensus and diversity of opinions, involve civil society, engage actors in COVID-19 times and link to different levels of policy.

At SHERPA we will continue to support our MAPs to exchange both on making the most of the research and knowledge, as well as bringing their voice forward to the discussions around future rural policies. As always, there is a lot to discuss and a lot for us to learn from one another, and we hope this report helps to inform and nurture meaningful discussions in the future. Engage with SHERPA through the MAP in your country or follow our work by checking our Newsletters, website and social media channels.

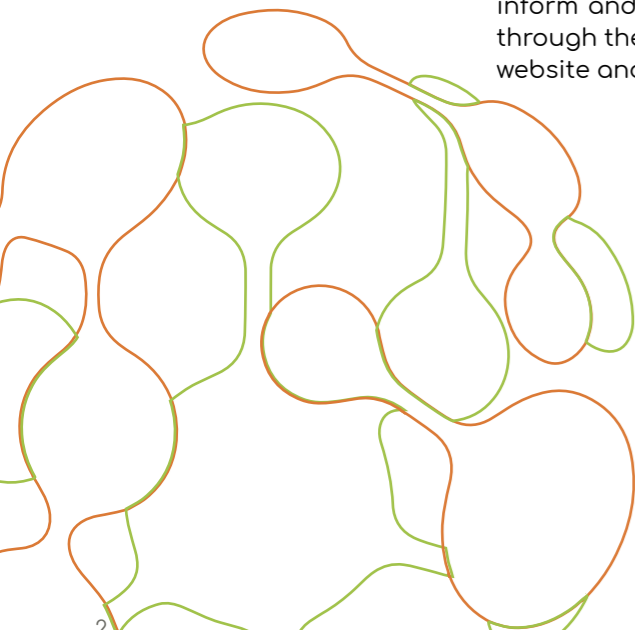
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Introduction to the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and the work of SHERPA

In 2020, the European Commission initiated the preparation of a new long-term vision for rural areas. SHERPA prepared a contribution to the process by feeding in the views of science-society-policy actors: between April and October 2020, SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) identified challenges and opportunities and discussed a vision for their territory towards 2040.

On 30 November 2020, this contribution was presented at the SHERPA Annual Conference.



DAY 1
30 NOV.
2020

Words from the coordinator



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator,
ECORYS



In 2020, the cancellation of physical meetings had consequences for our daily lives, both at the personal and professional levels. It also had implications for SHERPA, as the first restrictive measures to slow down the spreading of COVID-19 came into force only a few months after the start of our project. These are really exceptional circumstances and we had to adapt. Despite the obstacles, we succeeded in engaging more than 1 000 local actors in our discussions on the future of rural areas. As coordinator of the project, I am very grateful to all partners and everyone who has contributed.

Our first annual conference has been the occasion to share the results of this work and to enrich our findings with views from the participants. It also provided a platform for exchanges between researchers, policy-makers and representatives from civil society. In the first months of 2021, the SHERPA contribution to the long-term vision for rural areas will be submitted to the European Commission.

The work of SHERPA will continue in the following months and we aim to provide a follow-up contribution before the end of 2021. We hope that we will be able to celebrate the second anniversary of our project in person, during our second conference, planned to take place in Brussels in December 2021.



Introduction to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

María GAFO
DG AGRI, European Commission

María Gafo introduced the Commission's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). Rural areas represent about 26% of the total EU population (around 116 million people) and 76% of EU territory. They have a much lower population density than the EU average, and account for 27% of total EU jobs.

The main current challenges are: access to public and private services; generational renewal (an ageing population); 59% of rural population in regions that are demographically shrinking; and areas facing twin challenges of low income and rapidly declining population.

Access to high-speed internet in rural areas increased from 10% in 2010 to around 60% today, she said. However, 40% still lack access, with implications for education, remote working and e-healthcare. This has been felt acutely during the pandemic. ESPON data for 2017-2032 shows that most EU countries have declining populations in parts of their territories. Rapid recent declines have occurred in eastern parts of the EU, while gradual declines have depopulated areas in Spain, Portugal, France and Italy.

"These are the challenges, but there are many opportunities," said Ms. Gafo. These include the circular and bio-based economy, ecological and digital transformations, COVID-19 recovery and an enhanced appreciation of green spaces. "People are looking to rural areas with new eyes."

The LTVRA will be presented in a Commission Communication scheduled for June 2021. "At the heart of the vision we place a wide public consultation," explained Ms. Gafo. This transfers the focus from Brussels to people living in rural areas, and local and regional authorities.

The consultation includes a questionnaire, interviews and inputs from events like the SHERPA conference. DG AGRI also produced a downloadable package to help groups organise workshops to obtain information for their areas. This process will be followed by analysis and foresight stages. Outcomes will be presented at the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) conference in March 2021.

The work also includes an analytical assessment of key indicators for rural areas and a foresight exercise #Rural2040 that, together with the outcome of the public consultation, are the three key elements for the development of the Vision that the Commission will use.

Commissioners for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Regional Development, are working together under the coordination of Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography. Ms. Gafo noted the importance of this broad approach to the LTVRA, which covers different policies relevant for rural areas, including the Cohesion Policy and CAP.

"Our rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. The diversity of landscape, culture and heritage is one of Europe's most defining and remarkable features. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future."

- President Ursula von der Leyen. *Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024.*

Overview of the work of SHERPA for the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas



Michael KULL & Louise VESTERGÅRD
NORDREGIO

The speakers noted that one year into SHERPA, 20 regional and national Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) and one EU level MAP have been established. These are forums for two-way exchanges of ideas and knowledge, and co-creation, involving actors from the science, society and policy sectors. Eventually, 40 MAPs will be established across Europe within the project.

This conference provides the first opportunity for MAP members to engage with EU actors, as well as other MAPs. The speakers, from the international research centre Nordregio, shared some of the work done in synthesising the Position Papers produced by the MAPs.

Michael Kull explained how MAPs use the Delphi process to obtain information about rural areas. "With the Delphi method we are able to draw on the expertise of a wide variety of experts and respondents, and together with them think about alternative futures, possibilities, and probabilities."

The Delphi method comprises (i) desk research and context analysis, and then (ii) workshops (online due to COVID-19), (iii) to develop Discussion Papers sent to all MAP members for comments. Then (iv) surveys of MAP members and other stakeholders, (v) with

outcomes discussed in Consensus Meetings, lead to (vi) the production of MAP Position Papers. The Delphi process is characterised by several rounds of re-iterations to provide ample opportunity for feedback and refinement.

All the MAP Position Papers are synthesised into a SHERPA Position Paper. Louise Vestergård presented some key elements from the first analysis of the MAP findings. The central challenges noted were demographic changes, especially depopulation, out-migration of young people, and ageing populations. Other challenges identified, were climate change impacts on agriculture, forestry and other sectors, poor-quality infrastructure, and the long-distances to services such as healthcare facilities.

MAPs also mentioned many opportunities for rural areas, due to the rise of digitalisation and smart ruralities, tackling climate change, developments in renewable energy, tourism, and the emergence of a circular and bio-based economy regarding short supply-chains and local products. Some opportunities of social nature were as well identified, relating to governance and public participation.

A central part of this first SHERPA cycle focused on discussing the vision for 2040 and many visions for the different rural areas were presented, said Ms. Vestergård. These desirable elements for the 2040 visions were clustered into seven overarching themes:

- Infrastructures and basic services;
- Climate, environment, sustainability;
- Digitalisation and smart rurality;
- Governance and participation;
- Knowledge, data and a positive image of rural areas;
- Rural economies that are thriving and diverse;
- Social capital, with stable demographics.

To achieve these by 2040, the challenges have to be overcome and the opportunities realised. The most commonly stated themes across the MAPs were:

- 14 - Digitalisation and digital technologies highly integrated in the rural economy;
- 11 - A diversified rural economy;
- 10 - Environmental conservation, climate adaptation and biodiversity improved;
- 9 - Improved infrastructure, sustainable and innovative mobility models, and access to services;
- 9 - A stable and sustainable demographic structure.

Michael described the enablers given in MAP Position Papers that are essential for realising their visions. "From the hundreds of pages, we grouped enablers under different categories to allow us to do comparisons and link them back to the vision." Many of the enablers combine several dimensions and are cross-cutting, he said, for example, smart ruralities relates to the economy, infrastructure and many other issues.

The seven enabler clusters for realising the themes of the vision for 2040 were:

- Improved accessibility of infrastructure and basic services;
- Enhanced climate change and environmental services, policies and practices, and land-use planning;
- Enhanced smart ruralities and digitalisation;
- Shift in production and diversification of the rural economy, and bio- and circular economy boosted;
- Data and knowledge, and positive image and narratives
- Empowered local actors and communities, enhanced multi-level and territorial governance, and funding improved;
- Enhancing/developing policies and tools for attractiveness, quality of life and wellbeing, and placing young people at centre stage.

He concluded by noting that empowering local actors and communities, and enhancing multi-level and territorial governance, were among the top themes in all 16 MAP Position Papers analysed; while smart ruralities and digitalisation was a top theme for 14 MAPs. One Finnish MAP member was quoted saying: "It needs a bundle of different mechanisms, approaches and probably also a 'change of mentality' to enable the vision."

A key takeaway from this session can be summarised as follows: We have powerful local communities to build on; in rural areas that are appealing places to live, visit and work in; all attractive in their own right and offering a high quality of life; and attentive to climate and nature.

"We have powerful local communities to build on in rural areas that are appealing places to live, visit and work in; all attractive in their own right and offering a high quality of life; and attentive to climate and nature."





Carina FOLKESON
CEIGRAM

Spain | Aragón Regional MAP

Carina Folkesson from the Aragón Regional MAP, Spain, mentioned the balanced representation within the MAP, with a composition of 4 members from science, 3 from regional government and 4 from society, and herself as facilitator/moderator. "The main challenges relate to low population density, with over half of the region's population living in the regional capital Zaragoza. There is ongoing depopulation, with the out-migration of youth and women, and an ageing population," she said.

The newly-established MAP, like all MAPs, used the Delphi method to develop a vision for 2040. This resulted in an economically diverse and sustainable rural Aragón, regarded as a desirable place to live, with better urban-rural connections, and where the benefits of digitalisation are exploited.

The main enablers for achieving this vision were adequate financial resources and a better prioritisation of available budget; improved implementation of rural policies with citizen participation; and continued digitalisation. The family farm model should be sustained to retain employment.

Romania | Transylvania Regional MAP

Monica Tudor from the Romanian MAP, Rural Transylvania, presented the composition of membership as follows: 5 from civil society, 3 from science and 4 policy actors.

The MAP's vision for 2040 focused on economically and socially viable rural communities, with people and enterprises having access to modern infrastructures and services, a diversified local rural economy, with fully functional rural-urban linkages, and a sustainable family farm food system.

The enablers identified include: digitalisation; European guidelines and programmes; improved partnerships between local actors; and raised awareness of the socio-economic implications of a local approach in development programmes. "A local approach is important for local improvement, as national government may not be aware of the local realities," she explained.



Monica TUDOR
Romanian Academy -
Institute of Agricultural
Economics

European MAP

Marion Eckardt, the President of ELARD, specified the composition of the EU MAP: 3 from policy (DG AGRI, DG REGIO and the European Committee of the Regions), 4 from civil society (ENRD, PREPARE, ERCA and ELARD), and 2 from research (James Hutton Institute, ETH) actors, plus a facilitator, monitor, and communications and engagement officers. EU MAP members, apart from the NGOs, participate in an individual capacity.

The latest of the three EU MAP meetings held so far looked at the SHERPA work on vision and the enabling factors for reaching it.

"In our draft vision of the desired future for 2040, rural areas and their population are recognised for their vital importance for society. They are economically diverse and socially vibrant, inclusive, connected and resilient, work in harmony with nature in a sustainable and climate-positive way, and are active participants in decisions affecting their future," she pointed out.



Marion ECKARDT
ELARD

Sharing knowledge to achieve rural visions in 2040

Participants were allocated to breakout sessions to discuss some of the drivers, trends, challenges and opportunities identified in the SHERPA Position Paper on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.



DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

SHERPA MAPs had identified demographic change as one of the predominant challenges for their area. Depopulation, especially in intermediate and remote areas, and population ageing were identified as the main demographic challenges currently faced by European rural areas.



CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

A second major challenge confirmed by the MAPs was climate change, which affects activities carried out in rural areas (e.g. agriculture, forestry and fishing). However, Contributions to tackling climate change and the provision of environmental services were identified as a further area of opportunity.



DIGITALISATION

The rise of digitalisation and smart ruralities was also mentioned as one of the most valuable opportunities. Digitalisation is seen as an important instrument to develop rural territories in various ways, for example, by supporting the creation of new jobs, digital products or ways of working.



GOVERNANCE

The MAPs identified opportunities for the rural territories in relation to governance and public participation. For example, through the development of an adapted territorial approach and cooperation between territories, or opportunities arising from a shift towards a region-based empowerment.



DIVERSIFICATION OF THE RURAL ECONOMY

One of the most common characteristics of the visions from the MAPs is the diversification of rural economies. In 2040 the rural economy will be diversified, with non-agricultural activities adding to the sustainability of rural areas.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND BASIC SERVICES

MAPs also identified the lack or poor quality of infrastructure and basic services as a challenge. Poor levels of accessibility and a deficit in the provision of basic services such as healthcare, education and cultural activities, and lack of businesses make peripheral rural areas less attractive for people to live, and for the investment of capital.



Demographic shift

Bulgarian National MAP

Petko Simeonov presented the Bulgarian MAP and explained how it has addressed the issue of demographic shift. He pointed out to the different challenges related to demography, underlining that rural communities located in less developed and economically suppressed regions are the ones most affected. Areas with unfavourable characteristics and conditions (linked to geographical location and natural environment) are also more vulnerable to risks.

There are, however, opportunities, arising from the introduction of new technologies, digitalisation and innovation. Finally, achieving a more even distribution of incomes and wealth is considered as an enabler for people to stay or move to smaller settlements.

Mr. Simeonov also shared the vision and the different enablers that the Bulgarian MAP has discussed over the past months. MAP members consider that in order to reach the vision, it is necessary to address issues related to the high average age of the population in rural areas. Focusing on endogenous strengths, backed by a proper, coherent and comprehensive public support policy, can present rural areas in a more positive light.



Petko SIMEONOV
Institute of Agricultural
Economics

IMAJINE Horizon 2020

The Horizon 2020 IMAJINE (Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe, 2017-2022) aims at advancing social science knowledge, and the understanding of territorial inequalities and related policy measures beyond the state-of-the-art. The project coordinator, Michael Woods, presented the main activities undertaken thus far, such as: analysis of migration flows in the EU in relation to territorial inequalities, interviews with migrants and settled residents in 12 regions of six countries, online survey of 17 500 people in seven countries covering migration history and perceptions of inequalities, services, and spatial justice.

Prof. Woods shared some key lessons learned about demographic change and migration in rural areas. He stated that rural-urban income disparities in the EU are decreasing, but remain important at local scale – linked to demography and migration. An additional finding of the project, related to demographic change, is that migrants are also impacted by regional and urban-rural inequalities because of relative social mobility. Migration contributes to redressing territorial inequalities through, for instance, remittances, but at the cost of letting young people move away. He concluded that stakeholders often understand cohesion and justice as equal access to services. Rural areas are indeed disadvantaged by their peripheral location and because of demographic character.



Michael WOODS
Aberystwyth University

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The main outcomes of the group discussion about key actions that need to be taken by different stakeholder groups are outlined below:

Policy:

- Design an instrument similar to EIP-AGRI but for rural issues. Also 'AKIS for rural';
- Consider disparities between regions, urban-peripheral rural, and within rural areas;
- Increase the offer of households. Facilitate rental mechanisms for houses in order to bring new inhabitants to the area;
- Strengthen incentives for workers and employment protection legislation;
- Promote and support entrepreneurship;
- Explore fiscal benefits and incentives to make rural areas more attractive;
- Need for more innovation in the provision of public services.

Research:

- Develop community research for tailored solutions (cover gaps between research and society);

- Facilitate detailed analysis based on local data (rural areas are not homogeneous);
- Facilitate practical knowledge transfer (co-research);
- Encourage local citizens and communities to carry out research and collect data that is useful for planning;
- Develop co-responsibility mechanisms among research-communities and companies.

Civil society:

- Boost territorial 'affection'. Create community cohesion and a sense of belonging. Plan community dynamics and a common voice;
- Build on identity and ownership (through cultural heritage);
- Promote positive experiences and success cases;
- Reinforce civil society structures.





Climate change & environmental services

Scotland & Dee Catchment Regional MAPs

David Miller explained that climate change can be a driver of change in rural areas, a trigger for action, and a threat to natural and human capital. Natural environment and climate change are amongst the top challenges, but also the main opportunities identified by the survey.

The most important challenges are the implications of climate change for primary production, resource use, habitats and species, water quality, landscapes and the social impacts of climate change, and the resulting uncertainty. The natural capital, multi-benefit management practices and multi-functional land uses provide opportunities to mitigate and adapt to climate change in rural Scotland.

The vision of the two MAPs in Scotland paints a reality where integrated, landscape-level and ecosystem-based approaches to land use governance will be implemented widely. Scotland will be on track to achieve targets of net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045. The target will be achieved through spatial land use strategies and investment in natural capital, restoring degraded peatlands and expanding woodlands as part of effective ecological networks. Dr. Miller also outlined two main enablers to achieve their vision: the policy ambition and the levels of engagements of the rural community - based on traditions - businesses, and rural stakeholders.



David MILLER

James Hutton Institute

CONSOLE Horizon 2020

The CONSOLE (CONtract Solutions for Effective and lasting delivery of agri-environmental-climate public goods by EU agriculture and forestry) project started in 2019 and runs until 2022. Its objective is to assess innovative contract solutions for an improved design of agri-environmental-climate measures of the CAP. Stefano Targetti outlined some of the main activities undertaken to date, such as developing an operational framework to guide the design of improved solutions tailored to local contexts. This framework is able to facilitate stakeholder interplay, identify lessons learned from existing case studies (58 in the EU and about 80 worldwide), modelling and assessing acceptability, feasibility, ease of implementation and the creation of a Community of Practice to facilitate co-constructing, testing and implementation of new solutions.

Dr. Targetti highlighted the main lessons learned so far in the project. He mentioned that efficient delivery of environmental and climate services from rural areas requires improved contract solutions. Improved solutions are not necessarily more complex, but several (local) factors need to be considered. He further mentioned that solutions based on a mix of contract approaches, which are common and have flexibility, are a reason for their success - e.g. a mix of collective and result-based solutions are effective for a range of environmental services. To conclude, he indicated that capacity to foster and/or build-on existing bottom-up approaches is very often a driver of success.



Stefano TARGETTI

University of Bologna

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussions on the implications for policy, civil society and research, brought to light different actions to mitigate or adapt to climate change and strengthen the delivery of environmental services. Most actions are linked to governance structures to enable the required changes.

Policy:

- Show leadership at all levels, both in politics and policy, and make the environment and climate change a priority;
- Enable social capital development, work from trust and empower local communities;
- Be flexible to bring in knowledge from different sources and coordinate among the different policy areas;
- Understand the consequences of tenure and promote tenure arrangements that provide secure access to land (not necessarily ownership);
- Develop a system where the polluter pays and the provider of environmental services receives compensation.

Research:

- Gain insight on the costs and benefits of climate actions and environmental services. Develop environmental accounting for illustrating the trade-offs and synergies between different ecosystem services;

- Invest in R&D projects that aim at solutions based on cultural practices or agricultural approaches;
- Develop methods for monitoring climate actions and impacts. Involve civil society and farmers in monitoring through citizen science;
- Improve communication of scientific insights on climate change and environment to wider audiences.

Civil society:

- Raise awareness of the value of the countryside and the contributions of agriculture to maintaining landscapes and services to urban areas;
- Farmers/landowners can be more active to invite other (urban) actors and reconnect with the rest of society;
- Implement bottom-up approaches to allow communities to tackle problems themselves and develop sustainable energy sources;
- Stimulate a sense of social responsibility especially among shareholders of enterprises and younger generations;
- Develop citizens' panels, for dialogue among them as citizens instead of as stakeholders.





Digitalisation

Hungarian National MAP

Szabolcs Biró introduced the main results achieved by the SHERPA MAP implemented in Hungary on the long-term vision for rural areas. Digitalisation is the core component within their desired vision, which is expected to bring fundamental change in the way rural areas operate, economically, environmentally and socially. In their work, the MAP members identified outstanding challenges and opportunities for digitalisation. He stressed the transversal nature of digitalisation, which affects many different rural sectors. Digitalisation can create business opportunities in new sectors, while they currently observe a tendency towards the digitalisation of the service sectors in the country. A key challenge for all rural areas is to retain the value created from digitalisation in their territories.

To achieve the digital aspirations of MAP by 2040, Dr. Biró outlined some key enablers. The country should address the lack of digital infrastructure with actions to improve digital skills and competences of rural communities and businesses. Particular attention must be given to the rural areas that are lagging behind, which should receive additional and targeted support. They observed that rural areas with more favourable conditions will attract urban out-migrants and will thrive with the current positive dynamics they have at the moment.



Szabolcs BIRÓ
Research Institute of
Agricultural Economics

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

Participants discussed their visions, and outlined a number of actions that can be implemented by policy-makers, researchers and civil society.

Policy:

- Ensure access to digital infrastructure for all (broadband and mobile phone network). It should be considered as a basic right in modern societies. Design policy measures that bring the development of the infrastructure hand-in-hand with capacity building actions for rural citizens and companies;
- Boost digitalisation through local strategies that are developed around a particular local need or opportunity. This strategic approach must be coordinated with higher-level policy frameworks;
- Support policies that boost the creation of network 'brokers', helping to connect local people and their needs with those spheres that can provide digital solutions (universities, digital hubs, businesses, etc.).

Research:

- Data and information on digitalisation is currently available but not sufficiently disaggregated for rural areas. There is a need for more knowledge about the state of digitalisation in rural areas in terms of availability of infrastructure and its use by people and businesses;
- Focus on citizens and practice-oriented research, supporting rural communities in their digitalisation pathways by providing knowledge, information and capacity building. Act as connectors between innovation and rural needs.

Civil society:

- Mobilise the community and bring people together to develop local visions on digitalisation;
- Link up more with research and innovation actors to find solutions to local needs. Help local communities to connect with digital innovators.

DESIRA Horizon 2020



Gianluca BRUNORI
University of Pisa

Gianluca Brunori presented the main messages from the H2020 project DESIRA (Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas). The project aims to improve the capacity of society and political bodies to respond to the challenges of digitalisation in the sectors of rural areas, agriculture and forestry. He outlined the importance of having local visions to identify challenges, opportunities and the aspirations of the community, as the starting point for the identification of the right digital means to achieve it. He stressed that digitalisation should be the means to achieve an end, instead of being an end or objective in itself.

Professor Brunori outlined that digitalisation in rural areas should be based on multilevel strategies, linking infrastructure, technologies and capacity building. Digitalisation strategies hence should be organised around a rural challenge or an opportunity instead of around a rolling out of a specific technology. He concluded by pointing out that digitalisation strategies should be coordinated with other rural policies.





Diversification of the rural economy

Lithuanian National MAP

The Lithuanian MAP has a dynamic composition of members (business organization, civil society, a farmers' organisation, innovation agencies, research, and central government). Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė pointed to the agricultural production sector in Lithuania as being dominated by small producers and is fragmented, while the food processing industry and retail trade are highly concentrated. In addition, there is a lack of collaboration between farmers. The MAP identified the diversification of the rural economy as one of the six most sensitive topics for the future of rural areas.

There has been a significant increase in initiatives to develop the local food system and create short food supply chains. Community-led local development is gaining in importance in agriculture. Volunteering, community initiatives and partnerships still hold unfulfilled potential to diversify the rural economy.

The vision for rural areas in Lithuania in 2040 is: Attractive areas to live with modern villages, acting in partnership.

Important enablers for achieving this vision are the existing networks between rural and urban actors, existing partnerships and cooperation between different policy levels, the national policy framework that enables place-based strategies, and trust between public authorities and society.



Živilė
GEDMINAITĖ-
RAUDONĖ



Rita VILKĖ

Lithuanian Institute of
Agrarian Economics

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussion in the group took many directions, illustrating that the topic is broad and includes many aspects relevant for rural areas. A summary of the main actions that need to be taken now are outlined below:

Policy:

- Enhance the role of cultural heritage in the diversification of rural economies;
- Emphasise that the rural-urban linkages contains synergies for both areas;
- Provide support to short food supply chains to help the diversification of rural areas;
- Simplify regulations and put in place fast procedures to facilitate entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Research:

- Carry out studies and expand research about the different forms/types of

diversification that could take place in rural areas. The collection and dissemination of good practice examples is helpful;

- Provide and use micro-scale data that is useful for rural areas;
- Research can evaluate policy and analyze the implications of contradicting policy goals;
- It is important that research makes use of local knowledge;
- Transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research is needed to tackle the challenges of diversifying the rural economy.

Civil society:

- Active involvement in vision exercises and in managing the means to achieve visions;
- Take capacity building and training to local rural communities.

RURITAGE Horizon 2020



Claudia DE LUCA
University of Bologna

The EU-funded H2020 project RURITAGE – Heritage for Rural Regeneration - aims to establish a new heritage-led rural regeneration paradigm. Claudia De Luca described how sustainable development demonstration 'laboratories' will be used to show how rural areas can be transformed through the enhancement of their unique cultural and natural heritage potential.

The project includes six frameworks or drivers that are used to identify heritage potential in rural communities: i) Pilgrimage, route tourism as sustainable travel management; ii) Local food, emphasising eating and drinking experiences as the cultural heritage of a territory; iii) Migration as a response to depopulation; iv) Art and Festival, increased access to art in rural areas; v) Resilience, using natural and cultural heritage to improve resilience; and vi) Landscape, balancing the protection, conservation and redevelopment of heritage values.

The project is working with 'role models' and 'replicators'. They use learnings and recommendations from role models and replicate the activities in other places, e.g. learning why "El Camino" in northern Spain is so successful and seeing how this experience can be applied in other regions. A rural heritage hub has held 30 local workshops with 3 000 people attending.





Governance

France | PACA SUD MAP



The French regional MAP is not focusing on a specific topic. The MAP has 12 members: 5 policy-makers, 4 researchers and 3 members from civil society. The MAP covered all the seven items that were proposed in the SHERPA Discussion Paper, but went beyond these topics to have a cross-sectoral discussion, moving from the sectoral challenges and opportunities towards more cross-cutting issues.

Samuel Féret outlined that an opportunity for this French MAP are the many natural parks in the area, which brings a real asset to the region. Economic activity is very vibrant because of tourism. In order to preserve this asset, managing, conserving and enhancing the unique regional natural capital is important.

Mr. Féret highlighted that many questions about the definition of rural areas were raised by MAP members. This was a good opportunity to use external expertise. MAP members wanted to build on a specific and renewed (more positive) definition of rural areas.



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM

RURALIZATION Horizon 2020



Willem KORTHALS ALTES
Delft TU

Willem Korthals Altes introduced the H2020 project RURALIZATION, which started in 2019 and aims at opening rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms. It combines opportunities for rural areas and the issue of access to land for new generations. RURALIZATION started with an assessment framework and looked at what people in rural areas want. The project created an inventory of rural dream futures, collecting the voices of over 2 000 young adults. Currently, these results are being analysed and will be published in January. Prof. Korthals Altes indicated that the idea of the project is to go to these regions and have a debate with local stakeholders about the dreams and visions of young people. The project also looked at national contexts for new generations in rural areas in 10 EU Member States. At the same time, we looked at legal and policy arrangements for access to land and land market developments regarding access to land," said Prof. Korthals Altes..

He further explained that EU Member States have hardly any policies and legal arrangements to promote access to land for new generations. Many bottom-up initiatives have emerged to fill in this gap, but face an unfavourable policy and economic context.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

Policy:

- Invite young people to the table;
- Change the approach to rural policies: innovation, housing, etc. Rural policies are those which can really impact rural areas. Rural areas should not be seen as a specific policy domain;
- Rural development policy (e.g. farmer policy at EU level) does not always match rural policy at regional level. The SHERPA MAP model can be useful for the regional policy level;
- Better match between EU-level policy framework and regional development policies is needed (farming focus versus broader scope);

- Take the opportunity to learn from foresight exercises.

Research:

- There are promising practices on rural new comers, new entrants in farming and farm succession. There is a need to explore other contexts;
- Consider many SMEs from other sectors different from agriculture and farming, when identifying the needs of rural civil society.

Civil society:

- Take stock of practice-based knowledge;
- There is a crucial role for civil society to initiate rural change processes.





Infrastructure & basic services

Poland | Zielone Sasiedztwo MAP

The Polish MAP members' vision for rural areas of Mazowieckie in 2040 is "vibrant rural areas ensuring landscape and biodiversity preservation, integrating local community and offering wellbeing and a high quality of life". The situation in sub-regions inside (and outside) of Mazowieckie in terms of road quality, healthcare provision, childcare and EU projects per capita is really diverse. However, the needs of their communities are quite similar. The priority is to re-invent this community which is lagging behind with respect to others. In the better-off communities, priorities are to focus on new business models, efficiency in resource use – both natural resources and public funds – and infrastructure supporting the development of a green economy.

Barbara Wieliczko highlighted digitalisation, starting with broadband internet connectivity, as a cornerstone for providing basic services in rural areas. The COVID-19 crisis has shown how other basic services, like education, healthcare and possibilities for businesses to keep operating, start with good internet connectivity. She further mentioned that interconnectivity between rural areas – instead of only urban/rural connections – and a just transition is crucial, so no part of the society is left behind in the transition towards a greener economy. The vision is to bring society-economy-environment to a level playing field and find balance among rural stakeholders. Dr. Wieliczko pointed out the European Green Deal as a promising support for the long-term vision of the Polish MAP. It is important that the CAP also applies the Green Deal and delivers on it for rural areas.



Barbara WIELICZKO
European Rural
Development Network

RELOCAL Horizon 2020

RELOCAL is an EU-funded H2020 project that focuses on 're-situating the local in cohesion and territorial development'. It started in 2016 and carried out 33 case studies in Europe. Petri Kahila explained that the aim of fairness regarding availability of services of general interest has become increasingly difficult and expensive to achieve in some areas. This raises the issue of reforming cohesion policies in order to develop more adequate responses to these social and territorial challenges.

In the RELOCAL project, it was found that the level of service provision makes a critical contribution to socio-economic sustainability, especially in rural areas, as well as the maintenance of the role as a part of the integrated part urban/rural system. Prof. Kahila said that this can strengthen the creation of economic opportunities, if the embeddedness of services is sufficient. Place-based policies aimed at enhancing social/spatial justice and inclusion have a significant impact as well.

The main result is that place-based policies and tailored public services require a broad understanding of the role of local actors. Therefore, the crucial question is how to combine cohesion policy and national-level public service provision. In areas where maintaining demographic stability is too challenging as a policy target, a smart adaptation policy may compensate for the reduction of population. This can be done by focusing on implications for wellbeing, rather than trying to avoid shrinking population trends.



Petri KAHILA
University of Eastern
Finland

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussion on basic services touched upon many current issues related to the selection of basic services, the heterogeneity of rural areas, spatial justice and more.

Policy:

- Finding synergies between the European Green Deal and Common Agricultural Policy;
- There is a great diversity in characteristics and needs between urban and regional centres, and areas farthest away, which all require different policy approaches;
- Enhance social and spatial justice using place-based policies (targeting relatively disadvantaged areas);
- Invest in infrastructure supporting green transition and new business models in rural areas;
- Can a (just) transition in rural areas be managed? In a situation of demographic shift, there is a difference between a lack of political response (letting rural areas "die") vs. smart adaptation combined with land use planning. An appropriate place-based policy responding to the specific local context may facilitate a just transition.

Research:

- Ensuring a just transition for all parts of

society requires further research insights into what makes a transition (un)just;

- New data tools are needed (such as grid level data) to better understand the diversity of rural areas and municipalities;
- Knowledge is needed about what attracts young people to stay or move to rural areas. Digitalisation could also be a basic service to attract them, but needs to be explored;
- In the European Rural Parliaments there is a history of data collection from 20 rural parliaments on rural services and infrastructure, which could give a better picture.

Civil society:

- Are the services from urban areas the right services for rural areas? A greater voice from people living in rural areas is needed to share their views and needs on what and how to provide services;
- Civil society involvement can be difficult to achieve. More engagement is needed to understand the real problems faced by society;
- Increasing heterogeneity of rural society requires a different approach to identifying basic services (considering the farming and non-farming communities).



Acting on the Long-Term Vision now!

Speakers from civil society, policy and science sectors gave their views on how to act on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas: Mario Milouchev, Director of DG AGRI; Hannes Lorenzen, representing Forum Synergies and as a member of the EU MAP; and Karen Refsgaard, Research director at Nordregio.



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Civil Society:

Hannes LORENZEN
FORUM SYNERGIES, ARC 2020

Hannes Lorenzen pointed out that the European Commission's Communication on a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) is a vision for 2040: "I think it is also important to look, at the same time, at a mid-term vision and a short-term vision."

He acknowledged possible tensions between a far-reaching vision and what needs to be done on the way to achieve it. However, "to reach the long-term vision, we need a strategy for actions to take now," he said.

This must link top-down and bottom-up approaches, and build trust between institutions and people, to empower citizens to take local action. "That is, creating space for people in their daily lives to plan and develop their own vision and actions," he explained.

Mr. Lorenzen believes that the key to this is not just

financial, but connecting and supporting people. "It is also important that local actors get relevant information from the European level, to help them understand the complex situation," he highlighted.

"To reach the long-term vision, we need a strategy for actions to take now."

The LTVRA Communication is being developed alongside the important process of reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). And for this, SHERPA can provide a multi-disciplinary approach that addresses all the big challenges that rural areas face, including connecting CAP reform with other perspectives for rural Europe in 2040.

Policy:

Mario MILOUCHEV
Director, DG AGRI



Mario Milouchev highlighted how DG AGRI is using a bottom-up approach to gather views from rural stakeholders for the LTVRA Communication, including a public consultation. He shared seven questions about outstanding issues to which SHERPA could help answer in the future.

1. The costs of delivering services of general interest (e.g. health, education, transport, water and electricity supply, broadband, posts, police and other) are higher in rural areas - studies confirm that the *per capita* costs of most services rise with the decrease of the population density. These services should be of comparable quality to those in urban areas as this is a question of maintaining equitable living standards for all citizens and across all territories. Would the society (EU, MSs) follow a cost-effectiveness approach and therefore the general urbanisation trend? Or is it in the interest of society to make more efforts and investments to keep rural areas?

"Would the society follow a cost-effectiveness approach and therefore the general urbanisation trend? Or is it in the interest of society to make more efforts and investments to keep rural areas?"

2. The analysis of the different statistics can offer varied pictures about the rural reality. For example, according to urban-rural typology, 'predominantly rural regions' cover 44.6% of EU territory and have 21.4% of EU population, but these figures are 76.1% and 26.1%, respectively, using degree of urbanisation classification. This difference is even more pronounced for some Member States (for example Spain or Lithuania). If the right statistics and data are not available, it is not possible to have a good rural policy. Hence, wouldn't there be a need, first, to use more appropriate typology and, second, to use in the future techniques for high spatial resolution and geo-localised and -referenced data?

3. Is there a 'central data collection' or 'rural think tank' in Europe that collects, analyses and consolidates - in a structured way - sound and good data and different ideas, so that they feed the work of the policy-makers? Would you agree we need such an institution?

"What path are we going to choose for our rural vision?"

4. What does it mean when we say there is a lot of 'diversity' among rural areas? One reading is that diversity hinders coherent policy, though a solution is to use averages. Another reading, in the latest OECD report (Rural Well-being: Geography of opportunities), distinguishes three and sometime four types of rural areas depending on their distance from cities. What path are we going to choose for our rural vision?

5. Who is in charge of the holistic rural policy at Commission level and in Member States? Given that a number of EU and national departments are involved, for both EU and national levels, mechanisms should exist to lead and coordinate policies affecting rural areas. Should we think in this direction or the idea of 'rural policy' itself is still to be clarified?

6. What is the role for EU Member States in European rural policy? Several have developed their own national rural plans, which differ from Rural Development Programmes and from the Operational programmes and cover all policies and funds. They also have coordination mechanisms at governmental level. Can we draw for our vision any conclusion from these good practices?

7. In the past, many good initiatives like the Cork 2.0 Declaration have remained without concrete monitoring mechanisms to assess achievements. Our vision is for rural areas in 2040. Shouldn't we start a process for these 20 years ahead, as Hannes Lorenzen said, with short-term plans to be renewed, let's say, every 4 to 5 years?



Research:

Karen REFSGAARD
Research director, NORDREGIO

Karen Refsgaard raised four important points from the science and research perspective:

1) There is great potential for realising the EU vision for rural areas through the green transition. However, policies need to shift from the single agricultural focus of the CAP, to a broader focus. Further, providing rural communities with equivalent opportunities as cities which therefore questions the somewhat polycentric EU Cohesion policy that is built on the idea of city regions being assigned obligations to ensure surrounding regions can benefit from their added value. To help update policy, she thinks the MAPs can provide a 'highway' from the diverse rural areas to the Commission. On this point, Hannes Lorenzen questioned whether it is a 'highway' or 'many small roads' that we need to be better connected.

2) In terms of the actions that stakeholders and policy-makers can take, they need to target sectoral policies that have real impacts, such as environment, education, housing, innovation and infrastructure. These sectors are important employers in rural areas and have the power and resources to adapt policies, for example, through public procurement, regulation of land, or creating infrastructure to benefit businesses and housing as well as on locally adapted education.

3) It is important that MAPs reflect the real interests and the knowledge that exists in the rural areas. Some MAPs, for instance, lack inputs from SMEs that have

a lot of local knowledge. We also have youth, and arts and crafts groups, who contribute to very social and innovative rural communities.

“Rural policies need to shift from the single agricultural focus of the CAP, to a broader focus.”

4) There is a need for better data and improved analyses, with increased focus on the potential economic leak from rural areas and the innovation capacity. The Danish MAP highlighted the prevalence of older models that do not really look at where value is created and the need for improved analyses of which jobs (industry vs services) create value both directly and indirectly through up- and downstream the value chain. For example, consumption based analyses of CO2 emissions are important considering that much production happens in rural areas while consumption happens in cities – which is relevant for emission policies.

“There is an assumption that much of the innovation happens in cities and spreads to rural areas. There is a fantastic opportunity today, with new resources from the green transition, to redress the balance,” concluded Ms. Refsgaard.

Other interventions

Samuel Ferét (CIHEAM-IAMM, FR-Paca Sud MAP) said that typologies need to be improved, but we also need to create new monitoring tools, in particular, new regional wellbeing indicators and indexes to measure the health of rural areas beyond GDP, to grasp the reality of rural areas.

Marion Eckardt (ELARD, EU MAP) expressed the importance of monitoring the vision to make sure there is real implementation. However, she outlined that monitoring should be mandatory so the vision are really implemented in Member States.

David Miller (James Hutton Institute, UK-Scotland MAP) provided a reminder that Europe is a major contributor to the global debate on rural areas, but we also need to be alert to the findings emerging from, for example, North America and Australasia. He also noted the importance of Horizon Europe for providing a European innovation ecosystem.



Engaging local stakeholders in SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)

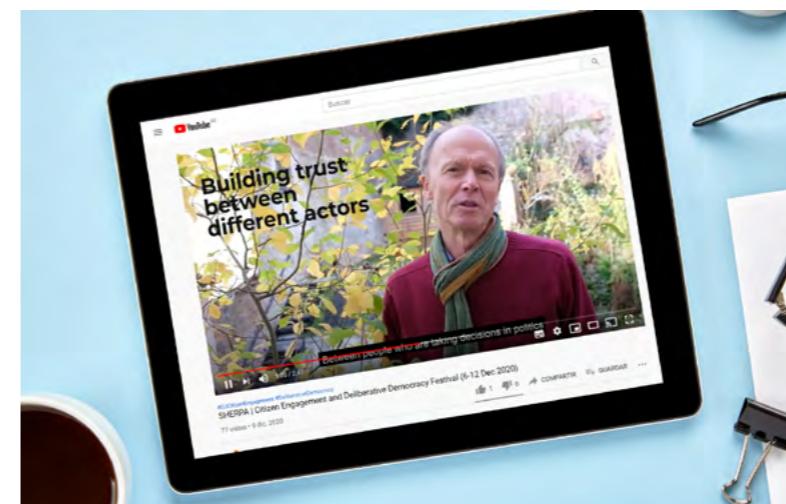
SHERPA relies on a network of rural interfaces to achieve its overall objectives of gathering relevant knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to rural areas in the European Union.

Rural interfaces are Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) implemented across Europe and act as open forums for exchanges of ideas, for co-learning and co-creating knowledge. They aim to engage citizens, researchers and policy-makers at local and EU levels in debates, to jointly develop strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies and research agendas at European and regional levels.

On 1 December 2020, the SHERPA Annual Conference focused on how the project has engaged stakeholders in the 20 MAPs.



DAY 2
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#EuCitizenEngagement

3rd Annual Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy Festival

DG AGRI and the SHERPA project produced a [video](#) for the European Commission's 3rd Annual Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy Festival (2-12 December 2020). The main themes of the Festival addressed how democracy is changing and how citizens can participate in this change.

The video was showcased during the SHERPA Annual Conference.

Citizens-science-policy MAPs contributing to the long-term vision for rural areas:

Engaging local stakeholders in SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen University & Research (WUR)

The SHERPA MAPs create space for dialogue between research, policy and civil society. They come together for both co-learning and co-creation, said Jorieke Potters. "The objective is to gather knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policy and issues relevant to rural areas."

She gave an overview of the 20 existing MAPs that engage over 250 stakeholders: 45-50% from civil society, 25-30% from policy, and 20-25% from science. Some MAPs are newly created and others build on existing networks, such as research or civil society networks. The location of the MAPs varies from remote regions to rather densely-populated areas. They have many similarities, but also differences that are reflected in the topics they focus on.

Monitoring is important for improving how MAPs engage with actors, and each MAP has a monitor in their team. "We have developed a monitoring tool that supports their operations and documents their experiences," explained Ms. Potters. A series of cluster meetings and workshops analysed the lessons learned and challenges when engaging local stakeholders.

Among the key lessons learned were:

- Connect bottom-up and top-down, by exploring ways to match local-level issues with EU policy processes;
- Capitalise on research projects, by translating their findings to enrich MAP discussions and integrating them with local knowledge;
- Combine guidance with context-specific requirements and allow flexibility;
- Methodological support enabling 'what works in practice', as seen when successfully moving forward during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main challenges in engaging stakeholders were identified as follows:

- Appropriate representation of the rural area;
- Engaging civil society, and especially hard to reach groups;
- Balancing power between policy, research and civil society actors;
- Building consensus and grasping diversity;
- Linking to appropriate levels of policy;
- Engaging actors in COVID-19 times.

Engaging local stakeholders in multi-actor platforms (MAPs) in SHERPA



ENGAGING THE HARD TO REACH



BALANCING SCIENCE-SOCIETY-POLICY ACTORS



DEALING WITH CONSENSUS AND DIVERSITY



INVOLVING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS



ENGAGING ACTORS IN COVID-19 TIMES



LINK TO DIFFERENT POLICY LEVELS



Engaging the hard to reach

Germany | Schleswig-Holstein MAP

The Schleswig-Holstein MAP focusses on the governance of environmental issues with particular importance to coastal areas. Currently the MAP is composed of 9 members from civil society, 3 from science and 3 from policy groups. So far, the MAP has undertaken bilateral meetings with MAP members, interviews, two online workshops and a survey. The composition of the MAP was and continues to be a deliberate process. The MAP team has good experiences with actively involving a well-trusted local actor in inviting new members and organising the MAP. Gerald Schwarz mentioned that it is time-intensive to establish relations and build trust in a MAP with actors who did not know each other before. However, he noted that it is time well spent. The MAP managed to include a wider range of views from society (e.g. from the church, women's group) in addition to actors from the agricultural and environmental sectors.

Since the topics of this MAP are future-oriented, Dr. Schwarz outlined that their aim is to specifically target the younger generation and recruit MAP members from universities or vocational schools who could represent rural youth organisations. Also, the MAP is exploring the possibility of engaging with stakeholders from other rural economic sectors so as to involve and gather views from the wider rural community and newcomers to rural areas.



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thuenen Institute

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

The group exchanged about practices for engaging actors that are more difficult to reach or who are 'the unusual suspects' in engaging with traditional rural development actors. Below are the main lessons learnt.

Do:

- Deliberately assess the local situation and define who needs to be engaged in the MAP, and reflect from time to time on who is missing or who could enrich the MAP discussions;
- Build on existing groups, well-known actors and relations, but be aware of the potential biases in discussions;
- Take time to build relations and trust and take an exploratory approach in early stages;

- Select topics that are of interest to the actors, create an attractive dialogue and make sure there is added value for each of them;

- Create different opportunities for engagement, e.g. interviews, informal conversations, surveys, group discussions, allowing everybody to contribute and adapting the means of communication (meetings, telephone, online) to the preferences of the actors.

Don't:

- Avoid engaging too many actors. If the group is large, it becomes more difficult to create meaningful engagement;
- Avoid making the multi-actor engagement an objective in itself.

Greece | South Aegean MAP

The South Aegean MAP consist of 3 policy actors, 2 from science and 7 from civil society actors (such as an agricultural engineer, workers in tourism services, and members of agricultural confederations).

Nicoletta Darra highlighted that the most difficult group of stakeholders to reach are policy-makers, due to their busy schedules, but also elderly community members who are less familiar with digital technology. As all interactions of the MAP were done online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this created additional challenges in engaging some less connected actors. Ms. Darra outlined some of the actions implemented to engage the 'hard to reach' stakeholders. She pointed out the importance of establishing initial contacts with members of the local community representing research, policy or civil society in general. For that, one could use different means of communication such as phone calls, emails, etc.

Sharing information material with potential members has helped to enhance the understanding of the SHERPA project, its context and the role of MAPs. She also mentioned that sharing documents presenting the main findings of the desk research was useful to boost engagements, as well as selecting topics for discussion which were of interest to the members.



Nicoletta DARRA
Athens University





Balancing Science-Society-Policy actors

Italy | Emilia Romagna MAP

This Regional MAP has a balanced composition of members, engaging the three stakeholder groups of SHERPA. Emilia Pellegrini expressed that the selection of the 'right' stakeholders is of capital importance so to end up with a small group that can offer different perspectives. For that, they have involved stakeholders with a cross-sectoral expertise and whose inputs are not excessively biased. She outlined that the consensus meeting played an important role in balancing the different opinions. All opinions were included in the position papers while special remarks were made to those aspects where common agreement was not reached by all members of the MAP.

Dr. Pellegrini stressed that given the complexity and multifaceted nature of the region, a key challenge is to identify the main priorities for a group, considering the variety of heterogeneous perspectives and context needs.



Emilia PELLEGRINI
University of Bologna

Slovenian National MAP



Emil ERJAVECH
University of Ljubljana

Emil Erjavec illustrated the case of the Slovenian National MAP highlighting a balanced representation between different SHERPA stakeholders groups (7 Society – 6 Research – 6 Policy). This MAP is able to mobilise the rural community in the country, gathering more than 100 people for some of its meetings, which reflects the need for Multi-Actor Platforms in rural matters.

Prof. Erjavec outlined that in their MAP they found limited usability of past research and literature, which narrowed the provision of science-based solutions to the topics addressed. To compensate, the use of stakeholder engagement tools was of key importance (e.g. surveys, mentimeter app, focus groups, etc.) to collect stakeholders' knowledge on the respective topic. The MAP facilitator played an important role in bringing the different discourses together and managed to get common agreements. He noted that the Ministry of Agriculture is very engaged in the MAP, and it is finding it very useful to inform the design of future policies.

Nonetheless, he expressed concerns about the value of applying a balanced approach and consensus to the outcomes of the discussions, as it might not be sufficient to bring policy change.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Do:

- Translate science and theory into common and simple terms to enhance its usefulness by the different stakeholders;
- Carry out data collection on the ground to compensate for the lack of specific data and scientific information at national/ regional level;
- Implement surveys, and focus groups for balancing strong positions of different stakeholders;
- The use of good practices and experiences helps in engaging stakeholders and generating dynamic discussions;

- Depending on the topic, encourage the engagement in the MAP of the wider rural community, in addition to agricultural stakeholders. This requires animation activities from the MAP facilitators.

Don't:

- Avoid focusing the exchange solely on the conflicts. Try to generate discussion on positive aspects and avoid negative ones such as "how bad things are";
- Do not limit the various positions of the stakeholders in the discussions. All different points of view are valid.





Dealing with consensus & diversity

Danish National MAP



Louise Vestergård gave a concise presentation on how the Danish MAP worked. She discussed the make-up of the MAP and how they tried to create stakeholder engagement that was as inclusive as possible. However, they noticed that the MAP was missing input from youth and SMEs. This is something that they will try and remedy in the future, as these are voices that bring unique perspectives to the table.

Another topic that she touched upon was how to deal with consensus. Ms. Vestergård and her colleagues discovered that some of the MAP members found it problematic to call a meeting a 'consensus' meeting. The members asked if consensus was the objective of the meeting, which would limit the range of discussions in the meeting. Ms. Vestergård questioned whether consensus was really the objective. And if so, if this is a realistic objective for MAP meetings.



Louise VESTEGÅRD
NORDREGIO

Romania | Transylvania MAP



Monica Tudor recognised the issues with the composition of the MAP that Ms. Vestergård mentioned in her intervention. The Romanian MAP tried to ensure a fair and good coverage of the different voices, but Ms. Tudor commented that this is something difficult to be sure about.

She asked several questions to the group concerning how to deal with issues regarding interactions among various MAP members, for instance, how to deal with disputes between MAP members during meetings, or how to intervene so that the dispute does not become a competition. She mentioned that they used coffee breaks to try and smooth out rising tensions. Ms. Tudor also highlighted other topics of interest such as how to overcome blockages from some members during decision (consensus), and how to respond at project level when no agreement seems possible. She gave the participants interesting food for thought by presenting these questions.



Monica TUDOR
Institute of Agricultural
Economics

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Participants brought up a lot of interesting points with regard to the improvement of stakeholders' engagement in the MAPs and how to maximise the impact. In addition to a list of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts', the group also mentioned topics for further reflection when it comes to stakeholder engagement. For instance, how does one capture the difference of opinion between a distinct group (e.g. farmers), or the fact that the various MAP members have different expectations of the meetings. One of the participants made the noteworthy comment that we also need to reflect the different forms of diversity that make up both the MAPs and rural areas (e.g. gender, race, LGBTQ+); it is not only important to reflect on what is being said, but also who said it.

Do:

- Reflect and identify where differences lie, what the differences are, and invite the different opinions to participate in the process. Be open to areas of disagreement so no one gets left behind;
- Be honest on areas where no agreement can be reached, as this is also a valid result;
- Invite active and positive people, who are everyday leaders and are actively involved in the topic of discussion;
- Invite MAP members individually and

explain the meaning and importance of their specific contribution towards the issue. In addition, listen and observe the MAP members when they participate;

- Be flexible in the process and increase the diversity when you think it is needed. This might change throughout the process and requires adapting to it;
- See the MAP as a tool for organisation development and identify the way to a solution.

Don't:

- Do not let strong personalities dominate the process and do not choose a moderator who 'knows' everything about the discussion;
- Do not just ask for approval, let MAP members discuss freely and disagree;
- Do not push for an agreement if there simply is none, this would ultimately do more harm than good;
- Do not put too much pressure on MAP members, as this would harm their future involvement;
- Do not call it a 'consensus meeting' as consensus might not be a realistic objective.





Involving civil society actors

Portugal | Rural.PT MAP

The newly established Portuguese MAP in the central region of the country consists of 6 members from science, 6 from society and 8 from policy. Pedro Santos explained that the region is different from where CONSULAI (SHERPA Partner) is usually active, making it more difficult to build on an existing network.

In the MAP discussions, the contribution of science was dominant compared to the other groups. Face-to-face and group meetings were needed to strengthen the cohesiveness of the newly established network. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to COVID-19. Mr. Santos mentioned that for the members from society, a vision for 2040 is considered too far in the future and does not seem useful. This might reflect a lack of knowledge on the implications of the long-term vision on their sphere of interest.



Pedro SANTOS
CONSULAI

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

There was a lively discussion on organising the composition of MAPs and the importance of including Local Action Groups. A number of 'do's' were discussed with practical ideas on how to engage more civil society through different networks and promoting the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas as an important issue, as well as process-related suggestions on how to run the MAP to build trust and create a fruitful environment for exchange.

Do:

- Inviting a representative from the EU level could be used to attract stakeholders and raise awareness about the activities being implemented;
- Make better use of the connections MAPs have (involvement of local associations), but also the members of associations participating in the SHERPA EU MAP, for instance Local Action Groups and stakeholders who are members of ELARD or PREPARE;
- Consider involving Local Actions Groups in each SHERPA MAP. It is also possible to invite civil society members to meetings, without them necessarily becoming a full MAP member;
- When existing structures are in place (national/local), it becomes easier to connect with citizens in rural areas;
- It is a big challenge to find the right representation of society, both in terms of making people feel interested and finding the right people with the appropriate representation;
- Animate different targeted groups with different methods (e.g. different approach for business associations than for civil society).

Netherlands | Greenport Gelderland MAP



Marianne GROOT
Wageningen University & Research

The Dutch MAP is built on an existing multi-stakeholder network, focused on the development of the fruit sector in the river region. The MAP consists of members from science, society and policy, but the society representation refers to participants from the private sector only. Marianne Groot noted the challenge of involving more citizens in the MAP meetings. Since the MAP network already existed prior to the SHERPA project, she said that it makes it a more delicate issue to include single issue action groups that could represent rather opposite views to the opinions of the existing members. Therefore, a preference was given to include citizen representation who do not necessarily represent Local Action Groups. However, there has been a hesitance from independent citizens or representatives from village groups to join the MAP on behalf of other citizens.

Ms. Groot highlighted that new ways have to be found to engage more citizens in addition to the private sector representation, to balance the society group. Working with an existing MAP already sets a certain perspective on issues to be discussed. She concluded by asking how to bridge private sector and action groups in a constructive manner.





Engaging actors in COVID-19 times

Czech National MAP

The MAP focuses on smart energy in rural areas and it gathers researchers and companies, mayors, entrepreneurs and residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the work of the MAP, said Marie Trantinova. Some members are busy solving issues related to COVID-19, while other members experienced stress and a lack of time resulted in less participation than expected. There were various physical encounters that had to be cancelled. The MAP found it challenging to organise digital meetings with the same quality of discussions. The transition to the digital environment decreased the participation and made the development of project documents slower. Also, some contacts with schools have halted. One positive effect is that it has been easier to share information with participants in remote areas.

There is a need for training on how to involve more people in discussions through online platforms. The effects of COVID-19 are large but not liquidating, however, there is a risk of losing input and opinions when people are not comfortable with the digital format, when people do not access computers nor have good Wi-Fi, and if the quality of meetings is not appropriate. Yet, online platforms can save time and reduce costs.



Marie TRANTINOVÁ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

The topic of how to engage stakeholders during COVID-19 sparked a lot of discussion. Everyone had varied experiences to share, sharing similar challenges and values but also varying from different place to place, e.g. due to skills in digital meeting facilitation, access to computers and broadband, and whether building MAPs on existing networks or creating new ones.

Do:

- Analyse who is most impacted by COVID-19 and make sure they are on board, or at least represented, in the MAP meetings;
- Find the communication channels that reach the right stakeholders, using simple language;
- Keep it simple;
- Combine informal, relaxed and fun interactions with more formal content-

based activities;

- Smaller groups help to get a good discussion;
- Make sure you have the right people in the room – not effective for anyone if the discussion goes in directions that are not of relevance;
- Need for facilitators to be trained in webinar facilitation and to participate in training of new digital tools.

Don't:

- Avoid overloading MAP members/ participants with heavy content and then, additionally, ask for feedback;
- Don't be too rigid with the meeting content and structure – adapt to where the participants take you.

Italy | Tuscany MAP

The MAP includes 5 actors from science, 7 from policy and 6 from civil society. It has focused on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and on the role of digitalisation in rural areas. The MAP builds on long-standing collaborations which has facilitated the challenges that digital communication under COVID-19 has generated.

Sabrina Arcuri stated that the COVID-19 situation has resulted in an increased participation in the MAP. There has been a vast learning in how to use new tools for online meetings and to adapt to the new needs. The work has become more efficient in terms of resources used and in keeping the discussion on track. However, it has been difficult to achieve team building goals, so the feeling of being part of a MAP is limited. There has also been less room for informal interactions and exchange.

Dr. Arcuri also mentioned that it was challenging for the MAP to find the right way to engage with civil society. It has been more difficult to understand needs and to enhance language and communication skills. It has also been difficult to build new relationships from scratch when only using digital channels. She concluded by expressing whether it makes sense to get back to the initial plan of physical activities, as in pre-COVID times, considering the environmental benefits from less travelling.



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa





Linking to different levels of policy

Finnish National MAP

Michael Kull explained that the Finnish MAP composition is very evenly distributed with 4 members representing local citizens and business, 4 representing science and research, and 4 representing policy. This gives a good group dynamic with a rather balanced structure. Because members of the MAP know each other, the group dynamic has worked well and everyone has been eager to engage in discussions. The Finnish MAP has therefore not had any issues with getting consensus on certain topics.

Challenges that still need to be dealt with includes the integration of the youth perspective (which is especially important when thinking about a future vision), but also finding the right balance between being too active, by overwhelming people with too much information, versus being too passive and not engaging members enough. One way to deal with this last challenge is 'keeping an ear on the ground' to stay up-to-date with members' interests.



Michael KULL



Mats Stjenberg
NORDREGIO

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Do:

- Involve youth perspectives. But how? One tip: to look for pioneers, people who are often everywhere and doing things differently;
- Balance in the composition is not necessarily the same number of people from each domain. In the Spanish-Galicia MAP, there are more members representing society. But the MAP looked for researchers and policy-makers with a broad view, while people from society have a narrower expertise;
- Regional policy-makers may have a very narrow view. To include a wider perspective, also invite national policy-makers to regional MAPs and vice versa, involve regional policy-makers in national MAPs to avoid a disconnect from everyday practice;

- If you want policy-makers to be involved, there needs to be something in it for them:
- Make sure people's voices are heard and included in papers, etc. In the end, people want to see that they have an influence on policy making.

Don't

- Avoid carrying out research just for the sake of it, but to also inspire real policy-makers on the ground;
- Avoid spending too little time on research while planning, as the project can often be put under great pressure for short-term action;
- Don't exhaust members (e.g. by repeating things they already know) and keep them engaged and interested: make sure you show added value.

Spain | Galicia MAP



Mariam FERREIRA

University of Santiago de Compostela

Mariam Ferreira explained that the Spanish-Galicia MAP is a regional platform, consisting of 10 members representing society, 3 from science, and 4 representing policy. During the past year, the group has come up with a list of actions for a desired rural area. She expressed that the task for 2021 is to achieve these actions. In Galicia, many funds come from the EU, so members are very interested in the SHERPA project. The MAP focuses on policy levels relevant for rural areas, namely local, regional, national and European. The MAP is, therefore, a place to exchange information and experiences between local and regional administrations.

Ms. Ferreira also mentioned that one challenge is to create synergies with the regional association of Local Action Groups. They help to recruit people for the MAP and the idea was to cooperate with them and also give other groups a voice (e.g. other municipalities). Yet it was difficult to take full advantage of this due to COVID-19.

Information flows to national policy levels through through researchers who are informing the regional governments, and linking with policy-makers who are implementing the CAP.





Way forward: concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE
Professor of Economics,
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Prof. Midmore concluded that it had been a really good conference, with excellent interactions and engagement. In his role as external observer, he provided constructive criticism of several aspects of the SHERPA project.

“**Multi-Actor Platforms from SHERPA could contribute to articulate rural interests and build networks of contacts.**”

He shared two main points. Firstly, he thought the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) were working well to identify key issues and to develop proposals for addressing them, thanks in part to the efforts of the MAP coordinators. “But I have a slight concern about their legitimacy,” he said. “Are they genuinely representative of rural communities or do they just replicate the views of existing rural elites who are used to engaging with debates, so leaving out the vast majority of rural people?”

The second point concerned effectiveness. “What we have seen so far is undoubtedly good progress, but it is a bit like a shopping list without any prices attached,” he explained. With a limited budget, this makes it difficult to set priorities. In addition, the CAP process excludes many items from the shopping list.

“**A long-term vision for rural areas in 2040 needs to understand where it is possible to intervene in the policy process in an effective way.**”

Prof. Midmore was involved in one of the first LEADER groups in 1991. “It was then a new and exciting bottom-up approach, different from what had happened before,” he said. “There were concerns about depopulation, an over-reliance on agriculture, and getting modern technology to rural areas. So what has changed?”

In 2020 we are still talking about the same issues, but there have been important changes, he explained, including advances in digital communication. He noted that many ‘digitally excluded’ people have mobile phones, so these could be used more to reach a wider rural audience.

He sees two formidable obstacles to overcome, or we may still be talking about the same issues in 2040. One is the very slow-moving policy process. “A long-term vision needs to understand where it is possible to intervene in the policy process in an effective way,” he said.

The second obstacle is that powerful interest groups are resisting change. Prof. Midmore noted that the way to counter this is to develop countervailing lobbying power. “There I see a role for the MAPs, in articulating rural interests and building networks of contacts.”

SHERPA’s early progress is very promising, he highlighted. Though there is a lot of hard work to do, there is the willingness and capacity to make the remainder of the project a success.

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www.rural-interfaces.eu

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Resources:

- Find all the presentations from the SHERPA Annual Conference on our website:

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/news-or-events/sherpa-annualconference/>

- Subscribe to the SHERPA newsletter and stay up-to-date with the latest news from the project:

<https://mailchi.mp/rural-interfaces.eu/sherpa-newsletter>

- Read the SHERPA Discussion Paper on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas:

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/resources-and-tools/rural-policypapers/>

- Working Document: ‘Overview of a sample of existing foresight and scenario studies carried out at EU and global levels’:

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/resources-and-tools/rural-policypapers/>



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