



**SHERPA**  
Rural Science-Society-Policy  
Interfaces

# **D6.2 FINDINGS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION (PHASE 1)**

**PUBLIC REPORT**

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## D6.2 FINDINGS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION (PHASE 1)

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## Definitions of structures, roles and documents in SHERPA

Item	Description
<b>Multi-Actor Platform (MAP)</b>	Interface to engage actors from science-society-policy in dialogue and the joint development of strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies.
<b>Facilitator</b>	An individual from one of the SHERPA project partners. The Facilitator invites and enrolls members into the MAP. Facilitators plan and implement activities of the MAP together with MAP members.
<b>Monitor</b>	An individual from one of the SHERPA project partners. The Monitor reflects on the MAP functioning, takes stock of how the MAP responds and how it affects the effectiveness of the MAP in achieving its objective.
<b>MAP team</b>	The team of Facilitator and Monitor who collaborate to support a specific MAP.
<b>MAP active member</b>	An individual who actively participates in the MAP, representing one of the three categories of MAP stakeholders (society, policy-makers and researchers).
<b>External stakeholder</b>	An individual willing and able to contribute to the work of the MAP as a representative of one of the three categories of MAP stakeholders (science, society, policy).
<b>SHERPA process</b>	The full process developed in the SHERPA project to capitalise on research findings and engage actors in policy and research (see figure 1).
<b>MAP cycle</b>	The cycle the MAP team follows to organise the MAP dialogue on a specific topic (see figure 2).
<b>MAP dialogue</b>	All the activities the MAP team organises to engage actors from science policy and research in policy and research.
<b>Dynamic Action Plan (DAP)</b>	Document describing the composition of the MAP, and the objectives of the MAP and the activities planned for a given period.
<b>SHERPA Discussion Paper</b>	Document summarising the findings from EU research projects on a particular topic. The document will be used to prepare 'MAP Discussion Papers'.
<b>MAP Discussion Paper</b>	Adaptation of the SHERPA Discussion Paper to the local context of the MAP. The document is translated and enriched with additional research findings. The document will be used to stimulate discussions within the MAP.
<b>MAP Position Paper</b>	Document summarising the opinions of the local MAP on a specific topic. The set of position papers from the local MAPs will be used in the EU MAP to prepare a single 'SHERPA Position Paper'.
<b>SHERPA Position Paper</b>	Document summarising the knowledge from previous and ongoing research projects, and synthesising the opinions from the MAPs on a specific topic. The topic and document will be prepared by the EU MAP and discussed at the SHERPA annual conference.
<b>EU MAP</b>	Equivalent of the local MAPs but operating at the European level, comprising representatives of society, policy-makers, researchers, a Facilitator and a Monitor. The EU MAP runs in parallel to the local MAPs and works on ready-to-be-used knowledge (e.g. MAP position papers), which supports the formulation of recommendations.

## Executive Summary

The SHERPA project creates science-society-policy interfaces to engage citizens, stakeholders, policy-makers and scientists in the joint development of strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies. SHERPA captures and uses results of ongoing and past research projects and also creates spaces and channels for meaningful interaction. SHERPA **Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) are the main fora for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge with actors** at European and regional levels.

During the first phase of the project, 20 MAPs were established or consolidated, a SHERPA process and MAP cycle was developed and tested. During the first MAP cycle the 20 MAPs organised the MAP dialogue on a vision for their rural area, and contributed to the European Commission's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). At the time of writing this report the MAP dialogues of the second MAP cycle (2021) is well under way. The aim of this report is **to document and share the findings of monitoring and evaluation** of both the functioning and the results of the SHERPA MAPs during Phase 1 of implementation between M3 (December 2019) and M22 (July 2021). The central question in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan is:

*How to effectively design, support and run Multi-Actor Platforms to engage science, society and policy actors in a meaningful way in the formulation of policy and the research agenda on rural development?*

Data was collected by the dedicated MAP Monitors, using a specifically developed M&E tool. Furthermore, the findings in this report are based on observations of the Monitor, reflections in the MAP teams, exchange between the MAP teams and joint analysis in the SHERPA consortium and by the M&E team.

**Findings on the origin and composition of the MAPs.** Each MAP includes a balanced representation of "active members" representing the three actor groups: science, society and policy. In most MAPs, science and policy are represented equally. A slightly higher number of civil society actors are included in many MAPs to properly represent the different backgrounds and perspectives of this actor group. The composition of the MAP is a constant point of attention for the MAP teams. For the second cycle, many MAPs want to improve the composition by specifically involving underrepresented groups like youth, elderly, more remote populations or ethnic minorities.

The 20 MAPs were of different origin. Both starting with an existing MAP and establishing a new MAP have advantages and challenges. It is foremost important to understand the specific starting position and the biases that come with that situation. To create lasting MAPs, an existing platform seems to have advantages due to its integration in existing structures. For newly established platforms, it is crucial to create linkages and communication channels with existing structures from the start.

Establishing a meaningful MAP requires a good understanding of the specific interest and intentions of each MAP member and design the dialogue in a way that will facilitate the accomplishment of their goals. Civil society actors seem more dedicated to action and realising impact compared to the other two actor groups. Meeting the diverse needs and interests of civil society actors seems most challenging and this should be an important focus in the design and operation of the MAPs.

**Findings on defining the topic and Dynamic Action Planning.** Preparing the engagement of multi-actors in policy processes needs to strike a balance between coordinating the influence on policy and research on one hand, and supporting the MAPs to prioritise and develop their own agenda and dynamics, on the other hand. During the first cycle, the topics and the general method were proposed top down by SHERPA coordination in order to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. This more guided approach also provided structure to the MAPs to face the uncertainty during the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the second cycle, the selection process supported the MAPs in defining their interests and choosing a topic. Working on the same topic across MAPs provides the possibility to exchange with other MAPs and join forces on the same topic. However, MAPs need flexibility and room to adapt to changing circumstances, to select topics that are of interest to the actors involved, create an attractive dialogue and make sure it benefits both the members and the MAP as a whole. The Dynamic Action Plans (DAP) elaborated structured the MAP establishment. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the DAPs were not implemented. For the second cycle, the format of the Dynamic Action Plan was simplified to facilitate its use.

**Findings on the input of knowledge and experience from outside the MAPs.** Translating general research findings to enrich the local or national MAPs remains a challenge. The SHERPA Discussion Paper succeeded in providing a basis for the MAP dialogue and broadened the horizon of the MAPs. It required quite some work of the MAP teams to adapt or even rewrite the paper to make it more relevant for their specific context. For the second cycle, the relevance of the Discussion Papers was increased by involving the MAPs also after the selection of the topics in defining the focus of the SHERPA Discussion Paper. For the longevity of MAPs and the engagement process, it is important to observe and better understand the role of the discussion paper in the dialogue to be able to determine what needs to be sustained.

**Findings on the dynamics and governance of the MAPs.** A MAP dialogue is a continuous process of building relations and trust, stimulating participation in activities, ensuring equal space to express, making everyone feel heard, inviting dialogue and debate, and monitoring the level of satisfaction. Across MAPs, there is a strong willingness to collaborate, to listen, and to acknowledge different points of view. In general, MAP members were satisfied with the process and expressed an interest to continue to participate in the MAP dialogue. Improvement can be made in learning to even better adapt facilitation and methods to the preferences and capacities of different MAP members. Creating different opportunities and formats for engagement can really allow all members to contribute. The COVID-19 pandemic posed serious restrictions on organising the MAP dialogue and invited creativity from the MAP teams. Especially for newly established MAPs, it was challenging to engage all participants and create active dialogue between members in an online setting. Nonetheless, advantages of an online setting were also experienced and MAP teams managed to organise an interesting MAP dialogue within the given circumstances.

**Findings on the co-construction of recommendations on research gaps and future policies.** Members from all three-actor groups (science, society, policy) across the MAPs are generally satisfied with the MAP Position Paper and SHERPA Position Paper and recognise their input. Allowing diversity and aiming for concrete applicability and influence are important to increase the relevance of recommendations on both local and EU levels for research gaps and future policy. Additional follow-up activities at local, regional and national levels show to be promising to strengthen the MAP dynamic. For added value and thus the longevity of the actor engagement, it is important to further explore and develop ways to connect with existing structures and institutions, and strengthen the delivery of messages to different levels of policy-making.

**Reflections on the design of the MAP cycle and the SHERPA process.** The current SHERPA process and MAP cycle seem to work as a promising mechanism for engaging actors in the formulation of policy and research agenda. The contribution of the MAPs to the LTVRA has been substantial and has been evaluated positively by MAPs and policy-makers. Increasing the visibility of these impacts can be stimulating for future engagement.

The support to the SHERPA process quite heavily depends on written material. This seems to favour science and research actors over the engagement of civil society actors and especially of marginalised or less connected groups in rural areas. SHERPA can contribute to the development of more diverse oral and visual ways of information exchange by better connecting to the preferred means of communication of these specific groups. MAP teams and MAP members expressed their desire to join forces among MAPs. SHERPA could support the movement of rural engagement in policy-making, provide a forum for finding allies on specific topics and join forces to voice the rural perspective in policy processes. Besides the current MAP cycle, MAP teams have developed various alternative ideas on how to serve the purpose of SHERPA. It is valuable to capitalise on the experiences in the first phase and experiment with emerging ideas. Diversity in approaches to engage actors and to connect to policy processes is an important basis for co-creating effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces.

The added value of the SHERPA process and the MAP cycle is crucial for its lifespan. The main benefit of SHERPA is influencing policy and research agenda to better reflect and address the needs and ambitions of rural areas. Strengthening the linkages with existing structures and institutions for actor engagement at local, regional, national and EU levels can also contribute to the creation of added value. The learning agenda summarises the encountered challenges and opportunities for improvement as learning questions to foster curiosity and invite the sharing of insights to contribute to the creation of effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction to SHERPA and its Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs).

The SHERPA project creates Science-Society-Policy interfaces to engage citizens, stakeholders, policy-makers and scientists in the joint development of strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies.

SHERPA captures and uses results of on-going and past research projects and creates spaces and channels for meaningful interaction. SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) are the main **fora for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge** between actors at European and regional levels. During the four-year project period, 40 regional MAPs will be established and one will be established at the EU level.

This report shares the findings resulting from the monitoring and evaluation of the establishment and running of the first 20 SHERPA MAPs during the first phase of the project between January 2020 and June 2021. During the second phase 20 additional MAPs will be established.

The SHERPA MAPs are based on common principles, while showing diversity in their origin, context, focus and specific design. The MAPs are either newly established or operate within, or closely aligned with existing structures. They are composed of a mix of actors from three target actor groups: civil society, policy-makers and researchers.

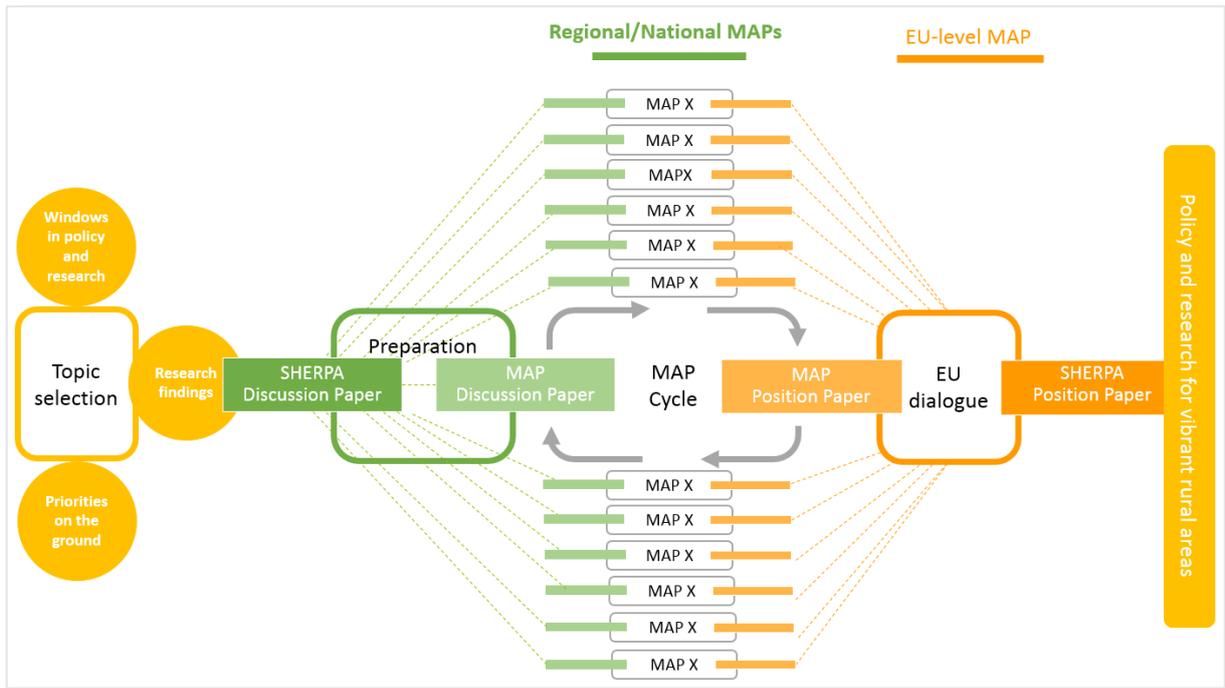
A MAP team consisting of a facilitator and a monitor support the functioning of the MAP. Figure 1 illustrates how the SHERPA process starts with local priorities and policy windows. Through multi-actor dialogue at the local and EU levels, it leads to policy and research recommendations for vibrant rural areas. The MAP capitalises on research results and develops a participatory process to engage citizens and civil society, researchers and policy makers in a dialogue about future policy.

The main conclusions and recommendations of this process are presented in the MAP Position Paper summarising the opinions of the MAP on a specific topic. The set of position papers from national or regional MAPs have contributed to the EU dialogue to prepare a single 'SHERPA Position Paper'. The whole SHERPA process results in recommendations for developing modern rural policies at European, national and regional levels, and concrete proposals for future research agendas.

### The SHERPA MAP principles in a nutshell

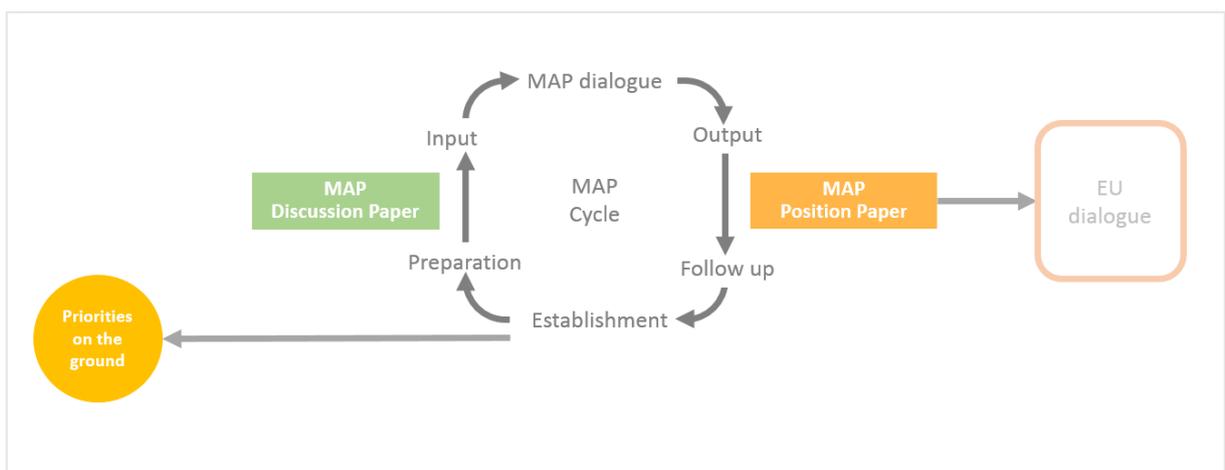
The composition of each MAP comprises a balanced representation from three actor groups: society, policy-makers and researchers. Each MAP has a facilitator and a monitor from the local SHERPA project partner who will support and oversee their operation. The MAP team will identify and invite membership of the MAP, aiming to involve at least 10 active members, and invite external stakeholders with relevant domain expertise or local knowledge. Members will be invited based on criteria of interest and willingness to participate, availability and commitment, relevance, appropriateness, representativeness, gender, age, actor groups (science, society and policy), and geographical distribution.

**Figure 1.** The SHERPA process



Within this process, the MAP cycle provides structure and coordinates the MAP dialogue. Figure 2 illustrates different steps of the MAP cycle. It starts with the **Establishment** (or in subsequent cycles re-assessment of the composition) of the MAP: if needed the MAP team identifies and invites new MAP members from science, society and policy sectors. During the **Preparation** step, the topic is selected, relations are built and a Dynamic Action Plan (DAP) is made for multi-actor dialogue. The MAP Discussion Paper is the main **Input** and the starting point for the **MAP dialogue**, which aims at the co-creation of recommendations. These are documented in a MAP Position Paper as the main **Output**. The MAP cycle continues with **Follow-up** where the MAP Position Paper is used to feed appropriate levels of policy-making and reflection on the whole MAP cycle helps to draw lessons learned as input to the next MAP cycle. The position papers of the 20 MAPs together are the starting point for the EU dialogue.

**Figure 2.** The steps in the MAP cycle with reference to the paragraphs in chapter 3.



During the first phase of the project, the following progress was made: The MAP cycle was piloted in Spring 2020 on the topic of 'Biodiversity and Landscape features' in the MAPs in Lithuania, Italy (Emilia Romagna) and Portugal (Alqueva). During the subsequent first full MAP cycle (2020) all 20 MAPs elaborated their visions for their rural area and contributed to the European Commission's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

At the time of writing this report the MAP dialogues of the second MAP cycle (2021) are well under way. The MAPs chose their own topic of interest at the beginning of 2021 and are working on a range of topics (see table 1). The findings documented in this report are mainly based on the experiences during the MAP cycle, and insights from the initial stages of the second MAP cycle are also included.

**Table 1.** Overview of the topic of the dialogue in each of the 20 MAPs during the second MAP cycle. For more information on the MAPs see <https://rural-interfaces.eu/multi-actor-platforms/>

Change in production and diversification of the economy	Climate change and environmental services	Vision – second phase
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MAP Circular Bioeconomy – CbioLit (LT)</li> <li>2. MAP Innovation in rural development in Aragon – IDRA (ES)</li> <li>3. MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo (PL)</li> <li>4. MAP SVARON (SL)</li> <li>5. Danish MAP on EU Rural Policy (DK)</li> <li>6. MAP Suomi Finland (FI)</li> <li>7. MAP Rural Transylvania (RO)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MAP Alqueva (PT)</li> <li>2. MAP Rural Scotland (UK)</li> <li>3. MAP Dee Catchment Partnership (UK)</li> <li>4. MAP Schleswig-Holstein (DE)</li> <li>5. MAP Greenport Gelderland (NL)</li> <li>6. MAP Emilia-Romagna (IT)</li> <li>7. South Aegean MAP (HE)</li> <li>8. MAP VENUS (CZ)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MAP Rural Centro (PT)</li> <li>2. Hungarian AKIS MAP (HU)</li> <li>3. MAP Development of Rural Areas in Tuscany (IT)</li> <li>4. MAP Rural Mapping Bulgaria (BG)</li> <li>5. MAP Galician Rural Interfaces (ES)</li> <li>6. MAP PACA Sud Region (FR)</li> </ol>

## 1.2. Purpose of the document

The aim of this report (deliverable 6.2) is to document and share the findings of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of both the functioning and the results of the SHERPA MAPs during Phase 1 of implementation between M3 (December 2019) and M22 (July 2021).

During Phase 1, the monitoring and evaluation of the 20 MAPs focused mainly on the establishment and the running of the MAP process, and on how to effectively enrich the MAP process with results from past research. Valuable insights were also gained on the co-construction of recommendations on research and policies and the added value of the whole MAP process.

The purpose of this deliverable is firstly to serve as a basis for the MAP teams to redefine their approaches where needed and for improving the running of the MAPs in subsequent MAP cycles. Secondly, the lessons learned serve as a basis for the establishment and running of the 20 additional MAPs in phase 2 of the project. Finally, it contributes to the joint learning for the creation of effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces beyond the SHERPA consortium.

## 1.3. Structure of the document

The deliverable is organised as follows, after this introduction to the SHERPA project, chapter 2 explains the M&E methodology as it was used to gather the insights and lessons learned in this report. Chapter 3 is the main body of the report. It describes the key findings on six aspects of the MAP cycle: composition, preparation, input, MAP dialogue, output and the overall MAP cycle and SHERPA process. Each section starts with the principles, then elaborates on the lessons learned, and ends with concluding remarks and a summary of the learning questions. In chapter 4, all these learning questions are summarised in a first version of the SHERPA learning agenda on effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces. This learning agenda will guide the monitoring and evaluation in the remainder of the SHERPA project, providing insights for other projects.

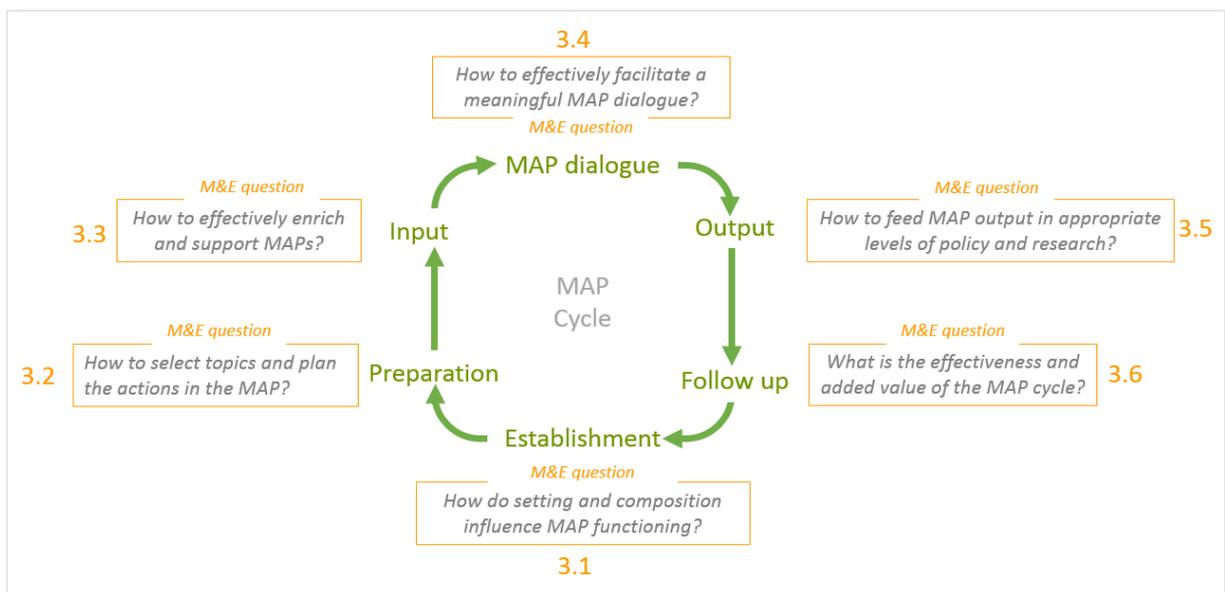
## 2. Monitoring and evaluation in SHERPA

This deliverable draws on the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of experiences of the 20 SHERPA MAPs established during the first phase of the project. During Phase 1 the monitoring aims to give a glimpse into how to: (i) run MAPs; (ii) effectively include results from past research and policy analysis into the activities of regional platforms; iii) effectively feed EU and national policy processes and research agendas. M&E was guided by a SHERPA M&E plan, and a practical M&E tool served as the basis for reflection and learning in the MAPs. The central question in the M&E plan is:

*How to effectively design, support and run Multi Actor Platforms to engage science, society and policy actors in a meaningful way in the formulation of policy and the research agenda on rural development?*

The M&E follows the steps of the MAP cycle and, as illustrated in figure 3, for each step a specific M&E question guided the monitoring. The M&E questions during each step's preparation, input, dialogue and output are more of a practical nature focussing on the first part of the M&E question: How to effectively design, support and run a MAP? During the establishment and follow-up, the focus of M&E is more on the second part of the M&E question; the meaningful engagement of the relevant actors in policy and research.

**Figure 3.** Overview of the monitoring questions in the different steps of the MAP cycle. The numbers refer to the sub-sections where the findings on each question can be found.



Each MAP has a dedicated Monitor collaborating with the MAP facilitator. The monitor fosters reflexivity and supports learning and the functioning of the MAP. The monitors have been trained in the M&E method during a face-to-face training workshop and during an online webinar on the use of the M&E tool. Furthermore, a SHERPA M&E team supports the MAP teams and monitors the overall SHERPA process. The M&E tool consists of an Excel file with a series of open and closed questions for each step of the MAP cycle. It is meant to inspire the observation, reflection and documentation of insights and experiences during the MAP cycle. All together, the following six interrelated moments of reflection and learning were the backbone of the M&E:

- The monitors created **moments of reflection within the MAP** team and in the MAP inviting members to share their impressions, opinions and ideas. The monitors documented their observations in the M&E tool. At regular intervals, the M&E tools were shared with the M&E team to analyse the results and identify preliminary lessons learned to input into cluster meetings and consortium meetings.
- Regular **meetings** in sub-groups of MAP teams provided a platform for the exchange and consolidation of experiences and lessons learned between the different MAPs.
- Informal **exchanges** during the weekly SHERPA Call for work package leaders when issues arose that required attention.

- Preliminary and final **analysis** of the M&E tools and the insights from the MAP meetings.
- Presentation and **discussion** of the preliminary findings and insights during the consortium meetings and with a wider audience during the first SHERPA conference.
- The findings from the M&E were shared, discussed and **deepened** with all the 20 MAP teams during an half-day online M&E workshop.

Together this process of documentation, reflection, analysis and discussion provides a rich basis for joint learning and drawing the findings as they are presented in the next chapter.

### 3. Findings from monitoring and evaluation

This chapter is the main body of the report and shares the findings on the most important aspects of the MAP cycle: composition, preparation, input, dialogue, output, and the overall MAP cycle and full SHERPA process. The findings are based on monitoring and evaluation as described in the previous chapter. Each section briefly explains the principles for each step and how they were put to practice in the 20 MAPs, and shares the findings and lessons learned. The section ends with conclusions about what this could mean for future operations, and a summary of the learning questions that require attention to create effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces.

#### 3.1. COMPOSITION: Findings on origin and composition of the MAPs

##### 3.1.1. Principles

The MAPs involve actors from the domain of science, civil society and policy. Each MAP includes a balanced representation of active members representing the three actor groups: i) science (for example, researchers, specialists, lecturers, PhD students) ii) society for example representatives from civil society, citizens, NGOs, businesses and farmer organizations, and iii) policy (for example civil servants, regional policy makers, members of Parliaments or municipalities. In the dialogue around a specific topic the MAP team may invite external stakeholders, for example civil society representatives, policy makers or researchers) to provide relevant input or represent a specific group with regard to that topic. The M&E monitored the MAP establishment and reflected on the resulting composition of the MAPs in order to understand how the origin and composition of the MAP influences the MAP functioning.

##### 3.1.2. Findings and lessons learned

The main insights from the M&E deal with the origin of the MAP, the initiator, the composition and the intentions of the members.

The first 20 local, regional and national initiatives and leads that were identified during the writing of the proposal were formally established as SHERPA MAPs. The MAPs were established in accordance with the guidance provided by the internal Working principles of the Multi actor Platforms (D1.2) and the Methods for setting up of MAPs (Slätmo et al, 2020). However, **the origin of the MAP and the level of development at start differed** considerably between the 20 MAPs. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the 20 MAPs over Europe and the origin of these MAPs. As such, 3 MAPs were already existing platforms, 9 MAPs were built on existing platforms and 8 MAPs were completely newly established. The same figure includes the location of the EU MAP and the additional MAP established in Portugal in the middle of 2020 for the purpose of contributing to the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas.

**Figure 4.** The distribution of the 20 first phase MAPs and their origin.



The origin of the MAP influences the establishment of the MAP in different ways. Working with existing platforms makes it possible to kick-start the process and build on existing relations and group dynamics. However, the existing group culture and objectives also makes it more of a challenge to integrate the SHERPA principles and aspirations into the existing composition and agenda.

It is important to take time to understand the existing group and to negotiate and develop appropriate ways to integrate SHERPA principles such as the steps in the MAP cycle and a focus on EU policy. Flexibility in procedures and requirements from SHERPA is key here.

Establishing a new platform also has advantages and challenges. A new MAP provides the opportunity to build on SHERPA principles from the start and to organise a balanced composition between science, society and policy. However, the establishment of a new platform takes time and dedication to invite members, create a common understanding of the purpose and to build working relations and linkages with existing structures. The COVID period was especially challenging for new MAPs when members had not met before and did not have the possibility to organise face-to-face meetings.

#### Anchoring the MAP

“The MAP is newly established as part of the SHERPA project. Anchoring the MAP in the Rural Council of Denmark is considered the best possibility to make the MAP sustainable after the SHERPA project ends”.

*Monitor of the Danish MAP*

**Lesson learned:** Both working with existing and new MAPs have advantages and challenges. It is most important to understand the starting position and the biases that come with it. To create lasting MAPs, an existing platform seems to have advantages due to its integration in existing structures. For newly established platforms, creating linkages with existing structures and communication channels from the start is crucial.



### ***The initiator and intentions***

The 20 MAPs were initiated either by research actors such as universities, research institutes and consultancies, or by civil society actors such as local action groups, civil society organisations and producers' organisations. None of the MAPs were initiated by a policy actor. The initiator has an influence on the composition and intentions of the MAP in the sense that different actors have a different perspective on the purpose of the MAP. Figure 5 shows the initiating actor for the first 20 MAPs.

**Figure 5.** Initiating actors of the first 20 MAPs



MAP members have different motivations for joining and interests in the MAP. Understanding the specific interests of the MAP members allows the facilitator to design the MAP dialogue to fit the interests of all the MAP members. This strengthens the chances of longer-term commitment. One MAP member can have several reasons for joining the MAP. The various interests of MAP members documented in the M&E tool can be categorised in three types:

- **Process:** to creating space for sharing knowledge and dialogue, discussing research, discussing regional challenges, engaging in policy development.
- **Results:** finding common grounds, establishing a regional rural think tank, identification of rural needs.
- **Impact:** building a common future, facilitating debates on the future of EU-funded programs (i.e. the Common Agricultural Policy, the Cohesion policy, the Research policy), influencing policy and improving the vitality of the region.

An analysis of the intentions of the MAP members, as documented by the monitors, shows a difference between the main interests of the three actor groups. Below is a summary of the intentions of the three actor groups as stated in the M&E's tool:

- **Science:** Enriching the discussion, increasing impact, contributing, learning to understand, networking, improving the flow of insights to EU.
- **Civil society:** Having their voice heard, contributing, improving the situation.

- **Policy:** Receiving relevant input, legitimising decisions, getting inspiration, understanding perspectives, influencing and aligning with the EU.



**Lesson learned:** Running a successful MAP requires a good understanding of the specific interest and intentions of each member and design the dialogue in a way that will facilitate the accomplishment of their intentions. Meeting the diverse intentions of society actors requires specific attention in the design and operation of the MAPs

In general the interest of MAP members from science and policy refer to the content and the interaction with the other actors. Instead, civil society actors participate in the MAP because they are interested in the results of engagement and the impact in their rural reality. In the further design and exploration of the MAP operations it is most challenging and very important to accommodate the interest of civil society actors. The bigger challenge of engaging civil society, as compared to policy and science actors, stems from two sources. Firstly civil society actors are more ambitious in their interests in impact and improving the situation. The interest of science and policy can be largely met by organising an interesting dialogue. Secondly, different sub groups within civil society (such as NGO's, businesses and different age and economic groups) have different and often personally felt interests. The longevity of the MAPs and long-term added value of the SHERPA process largely depends on the degree to which the MAP manages to engage the civil society actors and meet their interests.

All MAPs followed the principle to include a minimum of 3-4 members of each actor group, making a total of over 200 members in the 20 MAPs. The representation of each actor group is usually well-balanced with 30%-40% - 30% for science, civil society and policy respectively. Some MAPs indicated that it was not always possible or relevant to allocate each member to one actor group. In general, the MAPs include more members from society as this is the most diverse actor group. This group covers civil society organisations, private businesses and citizens, with a wide diversity within each of these sub-groups. The accurate representation of civil society is a challenge for many MAPs, both in terms of finding the right people for appropriate representation and raising and maintaining interest. Where the time of science and policy actors to participate in the MAP is often financially covered, the participation of civil society actors is often on voluntary basis. For civil society actors the benefit of participation must by itself legitimise the time invested in the MAP process.

The careful composition of the MAP received much attention during the establishment phase. Within each group, the MAP teams selected MAP members deliberately and avoided engaging too many actors. If the group is too large, it becomes difficult to create meaningful engagement. While running the MAP cycle, MAP facilitators continue to assess the MAP composition and see opportunities for improvement. They assess the local situation to determine 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. For the second cycle many MAPs want to improve composition by specifically involving underrepresented groups like youth, older people, more remote populations or ethnic minorities. The inclusion of the perspective of the youth is the deliberate intention of many of the MAPs for the second MAP cycle. Furthermore, it is relevant to systematically collect data on the composition of the MAPs also with regard to gender and age.

### Representation of rural communities

"Are the MAPs genuinely representative of rural communities or do they just replicate the views of existing rural elites who are used to engaging in debates, so leaving out the vast majority of rural people?"

*Member of the SHERPA advisory committee*

### Balance in engagement

"Balance in the composition is not necessarily the same number of people from each actor group. In our MAP we have more members representing civil society... [as they] have a more specific expertise and interest."

*Facilitator of the Spanish-Galicia MAP*



**Lesson learned:** In general, it is a time-consuming activity to establish a MAP. Creating the appropriate MAP composition requires attentive observation of the developments within and around the MAP to identify and invite appropriate members. It works well to build on existing groups, well-known actors and relations, but be aware of the potential biases in the discussions.

### 3.1.3. Challenges and learning questions

It is a point of attention of the MAP facilitator and the monitor to find ways identify and include underrepresented groups. The composition of the MAP influences its functioning, the content, and the value of the results of the MAP dialogue in important ways. It is crucial to be aware of built-in biases, and ask the right questions: for example, who was engaged? Whose voices are not being heard? Were any voices particularly dominant due to their privileged positions? The strengthening of the composition of the MAPs requires creativity and experimentation with different formats, methods and channels linking to initiatives to involve actor groups, which are more difficult to reach and engage. The ongoing learning on the origin and composition of the MAPs focuses on the following learning questions:

- How to balance between science, civil society and policy actors?
- How to optimise the added value of the MAP process for each actor group?
- How to involve civil society actors? What is in it for them?
- How to involve the hard to reach?
- How to get the MAP composition right?
- How to deal with civil society, citizens and private sector?
- Should a MAP be representative of the rural area or operate as a rural think tank?

## 3.2. PREPARATION: Findings on defining the topic and dynamic action planning

### 3.2.1. Principle

The MAP cycle starts with the selection of topics by matching the interest of the MAPs with opportunities to influence policy development, thus operationalizing the principle of flexible programming. The number of topics for each cycle is limited by the capacity to identify and summarise research findings into SHERPA discussion papers. Furthermore, if some MAPs work simultaneously on the same topic, this allows exchange and joint learning and the coordination of policy influence.

For each MAP the MAP team make proposals for a "Dynamic Action Plan (DAP)". The DAP describes the setting of the MAP, the topics that will be discussed, and stipulates the activities to be implemented as part of the MAP dialogue. The MAP members will discuss these proposals and decide on the DAP. For each MAP cycle the DAP will be updated and enriched. The M&E question in this step is: How to decide on topics and plan the actions in the MAP?

### 3.2.2. Findings and lessons learned

Already before the kick-off meeting an inventory was made of relevant topics for policy and the topics of interest of the existing MAPs. This resulted in a long list of topics for the first cycle. The matching process was underway when the COVID pandemic hit Europe and the opportunity arose to contribute to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTRA). Contributing to the Long-term Vision on one hand allowed for diversity and flexibility for the MAPs, and on the other hand provided an excellent window to have a meaningful contribution to policy development.

It was decided to focus the first MAP cycle for all MAPs on contributing to the LVTRA. As a consequence of this decision the planning of the MAP cycle was less participatory than originally anticipated. The initial DAPs were not considered at this stage and all MAPs organised their MAP dialogues according to the same DELPHI process. In terms of content, however, the MAPs were free to focus on the topics of own interest for the long-term vision for their rural area.

In the second MAP cycle, the selection of topics was completed according to the principle of matching the interests of the MAPs with windows of influence in policy. This resulted in the selection of 3 topics which allowed each of the 20 MAPs to work organise the MAP dialogue on a topic of their interest. The work on the LTVRA formed a good basis for the MAPs to identify their priorities. The following three topics were selected: i) Climate change and environmental services, ii) Change in production and diversification of the rural economy iii) Foresight exercise. Combining one broader topic with two more specific topics allowed all MAPs to work on a topic of their interest. MAPs appreciate the possibility to exchange with other MAPs and join forces on specific topics. However, they also emphasise the importance of flexibility to define their own specific focus, and tend to their place-based interests and requirements of their MAP. The option to work on the foresight exercise allowed MAPs who did not want to work on one of the two specific topics more flexibility to choose their own focus. MAPs need room to adapt to changing circumstances, to select topics that are of interest to the actors, create an attractive dialogue and make sure there is added value for each of the members and the MAP as a whole.

### Creativity in the MAPs

“We 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 challenges and opportunities towards more cross-cutting issues.”

*Monitor of the French MAP PACA region Sud*

The Dynamic Action Plan (DAP) included the MAP’s key objectives, expected impacts, an action plan, working methods and activities for the first period. The MAPs elaborated their initial DAP during their establishment in months 3 and 4 (Mazzocchi, et al, 2020). Due to the early stage these initial DAPs focussed more on the establishment process than on the planning of the engagement process. Nevertheless, the DAP did play a role in organising the preparation and for the overview of the MAPs interests and objectives. However, as indicated before, once the DAPs were finalised at the end of February 2020, the plans were changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the second MAP cycle the DAP format was simplified.

### 3.2.3. Challenges and learning questions

In practice, preparing the engagement of multi actors in policy processes always brings tensions between coordinating the influence on policy and research on one hand, and allowing the MAPs to prioritise and develop their own agenda on the other hand. During the first cycle, the topics and the process to follow were selected centrally. During the second cycle, the selection process supported the MAPs in defining their interests and choosing a topic. The current limitation in the capacity to prepare SHERPA discussion papers will slowly diminish, as with each new cycle SHERPA new discussion papers on a broader range of topics will be produced. It could be considered to allow MAPs more freedom to choose one of those topics. The challenge will then be to create joint learning, and to coordinate the provision of input to policy and research at EU level. Some coordination and focus will be desirable, but new balances between top-down coordination and bottom-up prioritisation can be explored. The following questions need attention:

- How to effectively link local level priorities with EU level policy windows?
- How to link bottom-up with top-down processes?
- How to select the topics for MAP dialogue?
- How to balance the need for coordination with flexibility to follow the interest of the MAPs?
- How to dynamically plan the engagement process?
- How to ensure ownership of the action plan?

## 3.3. INPUT: Findings on the input of knowledge and experience from outside the platform

### 3.3.1. Principles

Once the topic is established, the next step is stocktaking of research results and the development of a SHERPA Discussion paper (WP4). The SHERPA Discussion paper is based on past and on-going EU research,

results of the analysis of rural trends and drivers, foresight exercises on the future of rural areas in the EU, and recommendations for future research agendas and policy options from the SHERPA Think Tank (WP7). Subsequently, the MAP teams translate and enrich the SHERPA discussion paper to the local circumstances, which results in a MAP Discussion Paper. The M&E question for this part of the MAP process is how to effectively enrich the MAP dialogue?

### 3.3.2. Findings and lessons learned

For the works on the LVTRA, the SHERPA discussion paper (Féret et al, 2020) was structured in seven main themes: 1) Demographic shift: depopulation, ageing and urbanisation, 2) Climate change and environmental services, 3) Change in production and diversification of the rural economy, 4) Infrastructure and basis services, 5) The rise of digitalisation and smart ruralities, 6) Inequalities and well-being in rural areas, 7) Land-use change and competition. Furthermore, guidelines supported MAPs in a DELPHI approach to discuss local challenges and opportunities as well as their vision for the future of their area within the next 20 years.

In the M&E tool the MAPs scored the relevance of the SHERPA Discussion Paper on average 3,5 out of 5. The MAP teams performed a desk study on trends and developments as input for writing the MAP Discussion paper. The desk study served as a useful starting point for preparing the dialogue. Besides providing a basis for dialogue, the discussion paper broadened the horizon of the MAPs, it served as a source of information, and helped to clarify specific questions. The LTVRA is a broad and generic topic, and some MAPs expected more specific input and clarification from the SHERPA Discussion Paper. Generally, more specificity and depth is desirable. An additional recommendation for the SHERPA discussion paper is to aim for more inclusiveness of different perspectives to cover the diverse realities of rural Europe is.

MAP teams translated the SHERPA discussion paper to the context of the MAP, which required significant effort. All MAPs successfully managed to create a MAP discussion paper as a starting point for the MAP dialogue. There was diversity in the use of the SHERPA discussion paper. A few MAPs translated it almost literally, where others merely used it as inspiration to write a MAP discussion paper for their situation. It is important to provide the discussion paper well in advance to allow the MAP teams to translate the discussion paper to the local context and prepare the MAP dialogue.

#### Translation to MAP context

“The SHERPA Discussion paper was useful as a starting point, we made it more concrete for each issue, using data and research relevant for Slovenian rural regions.”

*Monitor of Slovenian MAP*

For the second cycle, three SHERPA discussion papers were developed on: i) Climate change and environmental services (Miller et al, 2021), ii) Change in production and diversification of the rural economy (Chmielinski et al, 2021) iii) Foresight exercise. All three topics are broad, in order to accommodate the interests of all MAPs. This time MAPs were consulted during the process in order to increase the relevance of the SHERPA discussion papers for the MAPs.



**Lessons learned:** Increase relevance of discussion papers by involving the MAPs in defining the focus. Translate science and theory into common and simple terms and use visuals to enhance its usefulness for the different actors. If needed, carry out data collection on the ground to compensate for the lack of specific data and scientific information at national/regional level.

### 3.3.3. Challenges and learning questions

Translating general research findings for use in local or national MAPs remains a challenge. The SHERPA Discussion paper plays a role in structuring the MAP process. However, for the longevity of MAPs and the engagement process, it is important to observe and better understand the role of the discussion paper in the dialogue to determine what needs to be sustained. In future, it could be interesting to experiment with the use of visuals or video to communicate findings to a diversity of MAP members. The following questions require attention:

- How to capitalise on research findings to enrich the quality of actor engagement?
- How to translate research findings to local contexts?
- What exactly is the contribution of the MAP discussion paper to the MAP dialogue?
- What type of information best enriches the MAP dialogue?
- How does the MAP discussion paper enrich the MAP dialogue and what aspects are particularly valuable?
- What are suitable formats and channels to share information with the MAP members?
- What could a facility to provide research findings to local engagement processes look like?

### 3.4. DIALOGUE: Findings on the dynamics and governance of the MAPs

#### 3.4.1. Principle

The MAP discussion paper provides the introduction to the topic and suggests issues to be discussed. The MAP teams facilitate the MAP dialogue following the DAP. The MAP dialogue enables the exchange of ideas, co-learning and co-creating knowledge on the selected topic. Different events and activities are organised using a diversity of methods to engage actors from civil society, research and policy 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. The M&E question in this regard is how to effectively organise dialogue in a MAP?

#### 3.4.2. Findings and lessons learned

Although there was flexibility and room for the MAPs to adapt their process to MAP requirements, all MAPs roughly follow the steps in the DELPHI process outlined in the guidelines. During the first MAP cycle the MAP teams organised different types of activities such as interviews, working meetings, online meetings/workshops, face-to-face meetings, focus group meetings, surveys and consensus meetings.

In general, the MAP meetings were well attended, with an average of 3 to 4 participants per actor group. In some events it was a challenge to find a suitable time slot for the MAP interaction, or members cancelled at the last instance. Cancellation appears to happen more often in an online meeting than when meeting face-to-face. The MAP teams were generally satisfied with most activities organised. In the M&E tool, the level of debate and the level of engagement were evaluated with an average of 4.3 and 4.4 out of 5 respectively. The positive aspects mentioned especially concern the level of engagement and interaction, and the enthusiasm and passion of the MAP members for the topics discussed.

The COVID pandemic posed restrictions on face-to-face meetings and invited creativity from the MAP teams. It was difficult to engage all participants and create active dialogue between members in an online setting. Also, some technical problems were reported. But MAP teams managed to organise an interesting MAP dialogue within the given circumstances. To avoid over-long online meetings, some MAPs organised a series of discussions with smaller groups followed by an online event with the whole MAP. Organising a series of meetings diverse methods provided different opportunities and modes to participate, thus allowing different members to find suitable ways to join the dialogue. For the next cycles it would be valuable to experiment further in creating different spaces and allowing different participants to contribute more authentically. Creativity in methods is especially important to engage less connected groups who have difficulties voicing their perspective.

#### Different spaces for dialogue

“It is important to create dynamics of small mixed groups (society, policy and science) to discuss and brainstorming about the priority areas for the region. And for the group dynamics it is important to give space in a plenary session to exchange ideas, knowledge and perspectives on the topic.”

*Monitor to the Portuguese MAP*

Many MAPs indicate that the preparation and organization of the MAP dialogue took more time than anticipated. This time went into preparing the MAP discussion paper and agenda, selecting the methods for engagement, finding appropriate timing, invite participants and explain the purpose. And then in running the

events, and analysing, documenting and communicating the outcomes. The DELPHI process in the first cycle required an extra effort of the MAP teams because it included a desk study and a survey. Both methods have proven relevant to bringing in a diversity of knowledge and perspectives.

Across MAPs there is a strong willingness among members to collaborate, to listen, and to acknowledge different points of view. This collaboration is easier in the case of existing MAPs where people already know each other. It should be noted, however, that if discussions are always very civil, the question can be raised whether all members are able and/or comfortable to share their real opinions. Moreover, in co-construction processes like MAPs, the issue of one member dominating the discussion can arise, which undermines other members' points of view. A MAP dialogue is a continuous process of building relations and trust, stimulating participation in activities, ensuring equal space to express, making all feel heard, inviting dialogue and debate and monitoring the level of satisfaction. Besides the value of networking and being heard, the added value of the MAP depends largely on the kind of impact achieved. In general MAP members were satisfied with the process and expressed an interest to continue to participate in the MAP dialogue.

**Lessons learned:** Adapt facilitation to the preferences and capacities of different MAP members. Create different opportunities for engagement, e.g., interviews, informal conversations, surveys, group discussions, allowing everybody to contribute. Surveys and focus groups are good methods for balancing strong positions of different actors.



### Lessons from the pandemic – Turbo boost learning on remote engagement

#### Pros and cons of remote engagement

**Pros** → Remotely it is easier to:

- Engage more actors and also higher-level representatives, since travel is not required.
- Connect to EU level and exchange with other MAPs.
- Create different moments for interaction.

**Cons** → Remotely it is more difficult to:

- Involve marginalised groups and less digital savvy people.
- Organise a longer meeting for more in-depth dialogue and interaction.
- Create personal relations with the MAP members and to bond within the MAP.
- Create rich added value for individual MAP members since networking is restricted.
- Create sense of belonging within the MAP and continuity in membership.

#### Do's and don'ts for remote engagement

- Analyse who is most impacted by COVID-19 and make sure they are on board, or at least represented, in the MAP meetings.
- Need for facilitators to be trained in webinar facilitation and to participate in training of new digital tools.
- 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.

#### Outlook to post pandemic situation

Of course, MAPs look forward to the time when it will be allowed to organise dynamic face-to-face gatherings and activities in inspiring environments. Face-to-face has many advantages and is especially important for bonding, interaction, networking and group formation. However, MAP teams have shown a swift learning curve and have proven to be capable of organising remote engagement if needed. This will be an additional methodological practice for the SHERPA MAPs. It is valuable to experiment and explore and learn to define the right balance between remote, face to face and hybrid forms of engagement.

### 3.4.3. Challenges and learning questions

The MAP teams have developed valuable insights and experience in running the MAP dialogue. Although valuable lessons have been drawn from the learning questions below, most of them remain relevant for ongoing learning and deepening the understanding and experience during subsequent MAP cycles and the second phase of the project.

- How to create meaningful engagement and dialogue?
- How to deal with power relations within group constellations?
- How to integrate different types of knowledge in the MAP dialogue?
- How to find a balance between controversy and consensus?
- What methods and tools are suitable for what engagement?
- How to combine remote with face-to-face engagement?
- How to serve different motives of actors for engaging in policy processes?
- How to link to appropriate levels of policy making along the MAP dialogue?
- How to optimise added value in MAP dialogue?
- What is needed to sustain the MAP dialogue process after SHERPA project?

## 3.5. OUTPUT: Findings on the co-construction of recommendations on research gaps and future policies

### 3.5.1. Principles

The MAP process results in the co-construction of a MAP position paper by each MAP. An aggregation of all MAP position papers results in an overarching SHERPA position paper, which is complemented with co-construction in the EU-level MAP. These outputs form the basis of the SHERPA recommendations. Representatives from a MAP may also participate in platform discussions at the EU level, enabling engagement across MAPs, and between policy-makers and actors from local to EU levels. The leading M&E question to evaluate the outputs from the MAPs is: How to feed MAP output in appropriate levels of policy and research?

### 3.5.2. Findings and lessons learned

Members from all three actor groups (science, civil society, policy) across the MAPs are generally satisfied with the MAP position paper and SHERPA position paper and recognise their input in the SHERPA position paper. This is reflected in both quantitative scoring of levels of satisfaction as well as qualitative comments made by MAP members. However, the position paper was considered too general by some, where policy members in particular found the MAP Position Paper too broad and considered a more radical vision to be preferable. Stakeholder groups considered the SHERPA position paper to be correct and relevant, but at the same time too general and missing concrete examples.

Policy members reported that they have hope and enthusiasm that EU policy will be steered in a more sustainable direction, but they simultaneously worry those findings in the SHERPA position paper may be too general to actually achieve this. MAP members are interested in gaining insight into interaction between EU policy and local/regional policy frameworks and recommendations for national and regional policy. These reflections indicate that position papers are a useful and relevant, but local contexts and concrete applicability should be kept in mind to provide relevant recommendations on both local and EU level for research gaps and future policy.

#### Linking to EU policy level

“There is an interest to present and frame the specificities of the Finnish rural policy context at the broader EU level. The link to the European policy level should be seen as a two-way street.”

*Monitor of the Finnish MAP*



**Lesson learned:** In order to create meaningful outputs such as position papers that indicate research gaps and enrich future policies, position papers should not be too broad. Local contexts and concrete applicability should be addressed, or local stakeholders should be assisted in applying general outputs to local contexts.

Although only few MAPs actively organised follow-up activities at local, regional and national levels, there are still lessons to be learned from the MAPs that did make this effort. At the local and regional level, some MAPs transferred experiences and dissemination material via MAP members, for example by sharing the MAP and SHERPA position paper. At national level, some MAPs presented work of SHERPA and other rural Horizon projects to national rural policy councils, or adapted European policy to trends, challenges and opportunities to the national context. Another suggestion is to use the MAP process to provide input for the next call for the LEADER programme, or to link up with national rural councils to disseminate results. As these examples show, there are many ways to connect European level input to local, regional and national levels, but in practice individual actors or stakeholder groups may need additional support in actually doing so.

#### Follow-up activities

“We shared the MAP position and the MAP discussion paper with an officer from the Greek Ministry of Agriculture as inspiration for the ‘Rural Vision Week: Imagining the future of Europe’s rural areas’”

*Monitor of the Greek MAP*



**Lesson learned:** The experiences of the few MAPs that organised follow-up activities at local, regional and national levels suggests that such activities can be very interesting and add value to the MAP cycle. Additional support may be useful to stimulate MAPs to organise relevant follow-up activities. This may also help to better connect the work in the MAPs to local, regional and national policy.

The SHERPA output is confined to papers (MAP position paper and SHERPA position paper). However, other types of additional output can also be useful. Different types of output may resonate with different target groups. Examples of different types of output include videos, joint working groups where MAPs share outputs with policy makers, additional documents such as fact sheets and (recorded) testimonies from MAP members. These types of output may also create more room for engagement, both online and face-to-face. Additionally, producing outputs in local languages will help bridge the gap between SHERPA and EU level stakeholders versus local stakeholders.

### 3.5.3. Challenges and learning questions

For added value and thus the longevity of actor engagement, it is important to further explore and develop ways to connect with existing structures and institutions and strengthen the delivery of messages to different levels of policy making. There are a number of challenges and open learning questions related to bridging research gaps and recommendations for future policy. These are listed below as inputs to ongoing exploration and learning:

- How to link actor engagement to appropriate levels of policy making?
- How to capture controversy and diversity in the messages for policy?
- What are effective ways to deliver messages from the MAPs?
- How to bring together and discuss the local perspectives at EU MAP level?
- How to influence the research agenda?
- What is the impact of actor engagement on policy and research?
- What other types of output can MAPs generate?
- How to maximise influence and impact in feeding into policy processes?
- How to sustain the channels to influence policy and research?

## 3.6. Reflections on the design of the MAP cycle and SHERPA process

### 3.6.1. Principle

At the end of the MAP cycle, the MAP team together with the MAP members reflect on the whole MAP cycle and the SHERPA process in general. This reflection focuses on the central question of the M&E: How to effectively design, support and run Multi Actor Platforms to engage science, society and policy actors in a meaningful way in the policy and research agenda on rural development?

The reflection is guided by reflexive questions such as: What is the added value of the SHERPA process? How can that be improved? What do you want to change in the next MAP cycle? And what would you do differently if you start a new MAP? These reflections and understandings are especially valuable to the ambition to sustain the MAPs and their engagement after the SHERPA project has finished.

### 3.6.2. Findings and lessons learned

Five aspects arise from the whole experience, which are important for the future running of the SHERPA MAPs:

The current SHERPA process and MAP cycle seem to work as a promising mechanism for engaging actors in policy and research. Generally, MAPs agree that the MAP cycle went well, with high levels of engagement from MAP members, good representation of different actor groups and division of monitor and facilitation roles with good collaboration. The MAPs manage to contribute to the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas (European Commission, 2021).

The contribution of the MAPs to the LTVRA has been considerable and has been evaluated positively. However, local MAP members are not always aware of these results and impacts. It is important and stimulating for future engagement to **improve the visibility of the outcomes** and impacts of the SHERPA process. The communication about the outcomes and impacts should be supportive of a sense of ownership by the local MAPs. This could enrich and contribute to the longevity of the actor engagement.

Another point of attention is the strong **dependence on written material, the English** language and the dominance of North Western European realities in policy paradigms. The focus of the SHERPA process on written material seems to favour the engagement of policy and research actors. This seems to disfavour the engagement of civil society actors and especially of marginalised or less connected groups in rural areas. A lot can be won by better connecting to the preferred means of communication of specific groups. SHERPA can contribute to the development of more diverse oral and visual ways of information exchange. Consideration of language barriers and support in translating communication into local languages is another point of attention. Finally, the inclusion of a diversity of perspectives and paradigms in SHERPA Discussion and Position Papers should be strengthened.

On many occasions the MAP teams and MAP members expressed their desire to **join forces between MAPs**. On the one hand this relates to strengthening the feeling of belonging to a bigger movement of rural engagement in policymaking. This strengthens effectiveness in local or regional policy processes. On the other hand, SHERPA could also provide a forum for finding allies on specific topics and join forces to influence policy. The contribution to the LTVRA is an example of such role, which can be extended into other topics and policy areas.

#### MAPs are promising mechanism

“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 teams”.

*Member of the advisory committee*



Interaction between MAPs with common issues can be strengthened both during and after the position papers are drafted. An exchange on specific topics (e.g., demography, climate change) is an example of how to initiate this interaction. Digital platforms for informal exchanges (social networking) are also suggested. Similarly, 'cross MAP' events on a certain topic with additional exchanges between partners from other projects can also enrich the MAP cycle and SHERPA inputs and outputs. It would be valuable to create an EU forum for joining forces and organising rural think tank and counterforce to vested interests and lobbying. It is important to discuss whether the EU MAP could evolve to such a space or if a new space should be created. In both cases it is important to involve the MAPs in their creation to ensure ownership. The forum could explore different strategies and levers to increase the effective influence on policy and research.

### Counter vailing lobbying power

Powerful interest groups are resisting change; 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."

*Member of the advisory committee*

Besides the currently developed and tested MAP cycle, MAP teams and consortium partners have different ideas on how to serve the purpose of SHERPA. It is valuable to capitalise on these experiences and creative ideas. This could be done by allowing more flexibility. Create room, invite and support MAP teams to **experiment, discuss and exchange different approaches**. Pragmatically allowing MAPs the flexibility to take their own approach enables MAPs to adjust to (changing) needs and interests. Flexibility can, for example, relate to topics, activities, and methods, involving external actors. Flexibility could also give MAPs more opportunities to adjust the process to better fit local/national policy agendas. Diversity in approaches to engaging actors and connect to policy processes is an important basis for co-creating effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces. Flexibility and diversity increases the complexity of organising joint learning and policy influence. The learning agenda in chapter 4 could provide a structure for joint learning between a diversity of experiences.

The experiences show that **added value of the SHERPA process** and the MAP cycle is crucial for its longevity. The main added value of SHERPA is by influencing policy and research to better reflect and address the needs and ambitions of rural areas, as expressed by civil society voices. Additional value can be created in the process by strengthening the connections between rural areas and EU-level policy making. It also can be created through increased visibility of rural areas and the sense of being taken seriously. This can support and strengthen local processes of actor engagement in policy and research. One way of doing this is by adding good examples and best practices that show experiences from different regions. Other ways could be explored. In order to improve the added-value it is important to better understand how SHERPA relates to the existing structures and institutions for actor engagement at local, regional national and EU levels. From there the added value can be specified.

The question of added value was also raised for society members, who often voluntarily deliver valuable input in the MAP cycle, but it is not always clear what they gain out of it. To optimise added value, it is important to understand the specific interest of each MAP member and to design the MAP process and the SHERPA process in such a way that the interests of each member and member group (science, civil society, policy) are met.

### 3.6.3. Challenges and learning questions

The creation of a SHERPA process that optimally allows engagement of local actors is at the centre of attention in future MAP cycles and future MAPs. In this regard it would be interesting to experiment with more flexibility in planning the MAP process. One could think of leaving it completely up to some MAP teams to design the MAP process in content and timing according to their own needs and ideas. This comes with the challenge of synthesising output in a SHERPA Position Paper and to add to the EU level policy and research agenda. The SHERPA support would then focus on providing relevant research findings, promoting exchange between MAPs, and providing insight into opportunities and strategies to influence the policy process in an effective way, as well as linking to appropriate levels of policy and research. Diversity in approaches to engage actors and connect to policy processes is an important basis for co-creating effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces. The questions below can help to support the challenging task of coordinating and monitoring the diversity of experiences.

For the next MAP cycle, a number of challenges and new learning questions remain.

- How to balance between central guidance and context specific requirements?
- How to overcome biases in language, power and perspectives?
- How to create, strengthen and show added value of the SHERPA process?
- How to ensure the benefit of engagement for each of the actor groups?
- How to link to existing initiatives, structures and institutions?
- How to be relevant for EU policy and allow MAPs to choose their own methods and timing?
- How can local MAPs effectively join forces?
- What is the added value of actor engagement?
- What is in it for each of the actor groups?
- What are promising alternative ways for engaging actors?
- How to sustain the process and mechanisms after the life of the project?

## 4. Towards a learning agenda on effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces

A learning agenda is a living document summarises all the questions that still need further learning, exploring and answering. These questions are meant to foster learning within the MAPs, between the MAPs, in the SHERPA Consortium and with other H2020 projects.

In this chapter we summarise the encountered challenges and ideas for improvement as learning questions. This way we have a list of positively formulated questions, which can be used in diverse ways on various occasions to foster learning. The learning agenda aims to stimulate curiosity and be open for new insights while running and monitoring the MAPs. It aims to, every now and then, broaden the perspective on key issues instead of the details of everyday reality in running the MAP. Finally, it allows and invites other projects and initiatives to share their insights and experiences. The learning questions are formulated in such a way that they invite multiple answers and the sharing of experiences. Ideally, at the end of phase 2 we have rich and experience-based answers to most of the learning questions, which together form a well-founded answer to our monitoring question:

*How to effectively design, support and run Multi Actor Platforms to engage science, society and policy actors in a meaningful way in policy and research agenda on rural development?*

Besides stimulating joint learning within the SHERPA project, a learning agenda also allows us to systematically draw lessons learned from elsewhere. This will also help to liaise with 'rural development hubs' or 'rural think- tanks' from other EU and H2020/HE projects to cross-fertilise knowledge contribute to the creation of communities of practice.

Draft **learning agenda** on effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces

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### Learning questions on structure and composition of the platforms -COMPOSITION

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- How to balance between science, civil society and policy actors?
- How to optimise the added value of the MAP process for each actor group?
- How to involve civil society actors? What is in it for them?
- How to involve the hard-to-reach?
- How to get the MAP composition right?
- How to deal with civil society, citizens and private sector?
- Should a MAP be representative of the rural area or operate as a rural think tank?

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### Learning questions on defining the topic and dynamic action planning -PREPARATION

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- How to effectively match local-level interest with EU-level policy windows?
- How to link bottom-up with top-down processes?
- How to select topics for MAP dialogue?
- How to balance the need for coordination with flexibility to follow the interest of the MAPs?
- How to dynamically plan the actor engagement process?
- How to ensure ownership of action plan with ownership?

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### Learning questions on the input of knowledge and experience from outside the platform -INPUT

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- How to capitalise on research findings to enrich the quality of actor engagement?
- How to translate research findings to local contexts?
- What exactly is the contribution of the MAP discussion paper to the MAP dialogue?
- What type of information best enriches the MAP dialogue?
- How does the MAP discussion paper enrich the MAP dialogue and what aspects are particularly valuable?
- What are suitable formats and channels to share information with the MAP members?
- What could a facility to provide research findings to local engagement processes look like?

### **Learning questions on the dynamics and governance of the MAPs -PROCESS**

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- How to create meaningful engagement and dialogue
  - How to deal with power relations within group constellations?
  - How to integrate different types of knowledge in the MAP dialogue?
  - How to find a balance between controversy and consensus?
  - How to combine remote with face-to-face engagement?
  - How to engage actors in COVID times?
  - How to serve different motives of actors for engaging in policy processes?
  - What methods and tools for what engagement?
  - How to link the dialogue to appropriate levels of policy-making?
  - How to optimise added value in the MAP dialogue?
  - What is needed to sustain the MAP dialogue process after SHERPA project?
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### **Learning questions on the co-construction of recommendations on research gaps and future policies -OUTPUT**

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- How to link actor engagement to appropriate levels of policy-making?
  - How to capture controversy and diversity in the messages for policy?
  - What are effective ways to deliver messages from the MAPs?
  - How to bring together and discuss local perspectives at EU MAP level?
  - How to influence the European research agenda?
  - What is the impact of actor engagement on policy and research?
  - What other types of output can MAPs generate?
  - How to maximise influence and impact in feeding policy processes?
  - How to sustain the channels to influence policy and research?
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### **Learning questions on the design of the MAP cycle and SHERPA process – OVERALL PROCESS**

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- How to balance central guidance with context specific requirements?
  - How to overcome biases in language, power and perspectives?
  - How to create, strengthen, and show added value of the SHERPA process?
  - How to ensure the benefit of engagement for each of the actor groups?
  - How to link to existing initiatives, structures and institutions?
  - How to be relevant for EU policy and allow MAPs to choose their own methods and timing?
  - How can local MAPs effectively join forces?
  - What is the added value of actor engagement?
  - What is in it for each of the actor groups?
  - What are promising alternative ways for engaging actors?
  - How to sustain the process and mechanisms after the life of the project?
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The experiences in the 20 MAPs during the first phase of the SHERPA project provided new understanding and insight and inspired new questions. There is exciting exploration and work to do in creating new experiences and finding new answers. The findings from the M&E and the learning agenda as presented in this deliverable are meant as resources for the second phase to create effective and sustainable Science-Society-Policy interfaces.

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