

SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights:

Make it happen!
Implementing the rural vision

31 January – 1 February 2022



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

Foreword

SHERPA stands for **Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors**, and as such, over the past two years and a half, the project has implemented over 20 Multi-Actor Platforms across Europe. These platforms, understood as rural interfaces, bring together actors and representatives from science, society and policy. Throughout the first phase of the project, these rural interfaces have co-created knowledge and shared experience, actively contributing to the process of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

In 2020, during the first Annual Conference, the project highlighted its important achievement of having fed into the policy process of the EU rural vision. The work of the 20 Multi-Actor Platforms was distilled into the SHERPA Position Paper on the topic.

In 2021, the same platforms chose to focus on relevant topics to further support the development of the vision for their rural areas. This second edition of the conference put a spotlight on their work and activities and underlined the meaningful contribution they are making to implement the rural vision.

The first part of the conference helped to set the scene for the current stage of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and how SHERPA can continue to bring added value to its different components. It was highlighted the progress and meaningful contribution that the project has achieved at the various levels of policy from local to European. The various discussion groups held in the afternoon of the first day, reflected on the work carried out by Multi-Actor Platforms and other Horizon 2020 projects. Their viewpoints and exchange with participants put forward actions for implementing the rural vision. Relevant actions were identified for future pathways, climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental services, digitalisation and smart communities, farm diversification and food chains, and bioeconomy and sustainable management of resources.

A panel discussion with the same key speakers from previous conference, raised very important points on how to make the vision a reality, taking stock of what has been achieved and what remains to be addressed.

The second part of the conference was centered on the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms, discussing the role of science-society-policy interfaces in rural policy-making. The MAPs highlighted their experience, knowledge and lessons learned throughout the project, focusing on how they have contributed to the policy process at local, regional or national levels. In addition, participants also exchanged on the future role of the platforms in the next phase of the Long-Term Vision, as well as exploring ways to sustain them beyond the project.

SHERPA will continue to support the MAPs to exchange, engage and learn from each other and with each other. An additional 20 Multi-Actor Platforms will be set up in 2022. The project's aim will be to foster the long-term sustainability of over 40 platforms so they can meaningfully contribute to rural development.



Click on this icon when you see it to find online resources as videos, presentations or websites.





DAY 1 31 January 2022

¹ The term “foresight” refers to any process focused on building medium- to long-term futures aimed at influencing present day decisions and mobilising actions - Source: Gavigan, J., M. Zappacosta, K. Ducatel, F. Scapolo, and P. d. Pietrogiacomo. 2001. Challenges and priorities for European research: a foresight review. *Foresight* 3:261-271.

Introduction to the 2022 SHERPA Conference

The SHERPA Conference organised in 2020 brought the work of the project closer to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). The contribution made to the vision was presented during the event, alongside the important work of the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs). In 2021, SHERPA MAPs continued the work on three relevant topics for the implementation of the rural vision:

- Alternative rural futures (foresight¹ exercise)
- Change in production and diversification of the rural economy
- Climate change and environmental sustainability

The 2022 Conference took stock of the valuable insights of the MAPs, alongside relevant Horizon 2020 projects, with the aim to provide practical recommendations for the implementation of the rural vision.



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator
ECORYS

Words from the coordinator

When preparing this event, I looked back at the report of the previous conference. This is the second time we have organised the conference in a virtual format. There are advantages and disadvantages to this format, yet it allowed us to bring together over 100 participants from 25 different countries. We do look forward to being able to meet in person for the next conference.

We are already halfway through the project, and we are gearing up to welcome 20 additional Multi-Actor Platforms. In 2021, we defined three topics for the Multi-Actor Platform to work on, that have brought not only meaningful discussions, but the results have contributed to the various levels of policy and to the rural vision. The conference of 2022 was an excellent opportunity to share these results, to discuss them with participants and finalise the SHERPA Position Papers.

In the coming year, the 41 MAPs established by SHERPA, will focus on new topics to contribute with significant insights into the future implementation of the rural vision. The project will continue to explore and offer answers to the need for better use of research knowledge and to empower key actors in the development of rural policy.

On behalf of the SHERPA Consortium, we are grateful to all actors involved in the project and the MAPs, for their commitment and resilience throughout these unprecedented times.



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION



Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas – where are we now and how can SHERPA contribute

Alexia Rouby of DG AGRI (European Commission) introduced the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and highlighted SHERPA as a valuable contributor to the implementation of the vision. The LTVRA aims to create stronger, connected, prosperous and resilient rural areas by 2040 and to put in place the Rural Action Plan and the Rural Pact, which will play an important role in ensuring the success of the vision and a better future for rural areas.

The Rural Action Plan includes 21 thematic actions that the European Commission has committed to take to address the specific needs of rural areas, out of which nine are flagship initiatives. The actions cover a wide range of EU policies and services. “The idea really is, for the first time, to put the spotlight on the policy arenas of the rural areas. We need to put the focus on what specific actions can be taken - under those nine flagships - of rural revitalisation, research and innovation, sustainable mobility, digital future, energy transition, climate action in peatland, the soil deal, social resilience, and entrepreneurship”, said Alexia Rouby.

Ms. Rouby mentioned the upcoming Rural Revitalisation Platform flagship initiative, to be launched in 2023. This platform enables the collaboration among stakeholders and authorities to address population losses in rural areas, gathering tools, good practices, strategies and smart approaches to cope with this challenge and keep the rural areas vibrant.

The Rural Digital Futures flagship initiative will aim to increase connectivity through several layers of support to build reliable infrastructures and develop the digital skills of the rural population. Private sector investments, as well as EU funds and programmes, will support those actions.

The Rural Pact is a framework for interaction between all levels of governance and stakeholders (Member States, EU institutions, regions and stakeholders). Its objective is “to bring together all those who share the goals of the vision and work towards them”, mentioned Ms. Rouby, highlighting that “SHERPA can be a great contributor to the Pact as it is very well placed as a science-society-policy initiative. You can give us feedback and help us improve”. The Rural Pact aims to mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural communities and it will be presented in June 2022.

Within the Rural Vision, SHERPA will be also contributing in the Rural Observatory to feed the intelligence collected, as well as the Rural Revitalisation Platform and the thematic actions of the flagships that connect with the SHERPA topics on economy, climate, energy, etc.

“The Rural Action Plan falls under the responsibility of the European Commission, but we cannot do it alone. To achieve this vision, we need the participation of everybody. And this is why, along with the Action Plan, we have proposed the Rural Pact.”

SHERPA's work in 2021 and contributions at various levels

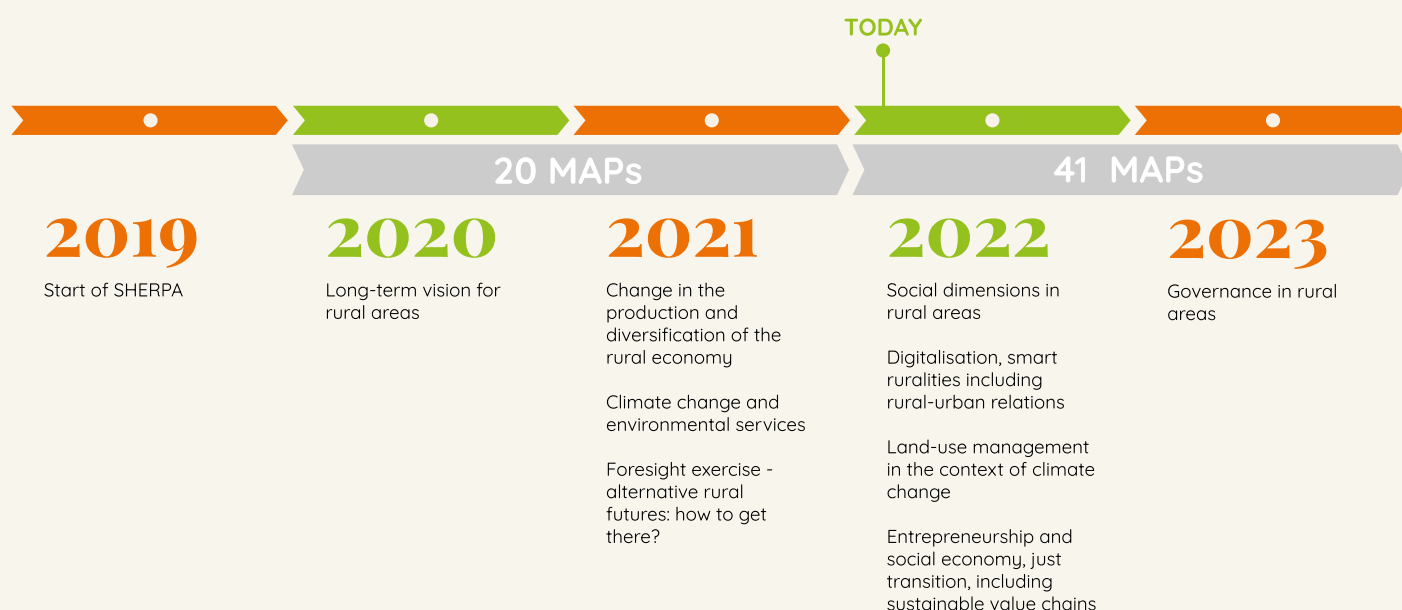


Elodie SALLE
ECORYS

SHERPA's work in 2021 & contribution to the vision



Ms. Salle introduced the audience to the work carried out by the project over the past year. She mentioned that this year SHERPA is welcoming 20 additional Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs), making a total of 41 MAPs established in almost three years of the project. During 2021, the MAPs focused their work on the topics of production and diversification of the rural economy, climate change and on a foresight exercise related to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). As the MAPs are going to double in size during 2022, SHERPA is introducing four more topics, which will focus on the social dimension of rural areas, digitalisation and smart ruralities, land-use management in the context of climate change, and sustainable value chains. Most of the SHERPA MAPs have a regional focus, with some acting at the national level. Together they cover 16 European countries and will continue to highlight even further the needs and tailored actions that need to be taken in the rural areas.



Contribution to the policy process at local level

During his intervention, David Miller of The James Hutton Institute, highlighted SHERPA's contribution at a local and regional levels sharing the experience of the two UK-based MAPs in rural Scotland and the River Dee Catchment. Both MAPs have undertaken exceptional work in the last year by engaging different actors, developing various angles of discussions, and co-authoring meaningful position papers. Mr. Miller shared feedback from a MAP member who said, "the MAP is very helpful for contributing most effectively to tackling the climate change and policy officers can make best use of the information shared".

Mr. Miller shared evidence that national and regional policy teams in Scotland have shared knowledge and conclusions through the MAPs on how much greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced, worked together towards the goal of climate neutrality by 2045 by co-designing events and online forums, and took actions in different dimensions touching upon mental health of the rural population. The UK MAPs set up within SHERPA have helped to join up policy measures, creating mechanisms to exchange evidence in order to contribute to wider policies, and providing members with the means to engage with policy from local to international level. Lastly, Mr. Miller gave an example of how the UK MAPs helped in linking scientific evidence with on the ground actions, such as the restoration of a 2 km river to reduce flood risks.



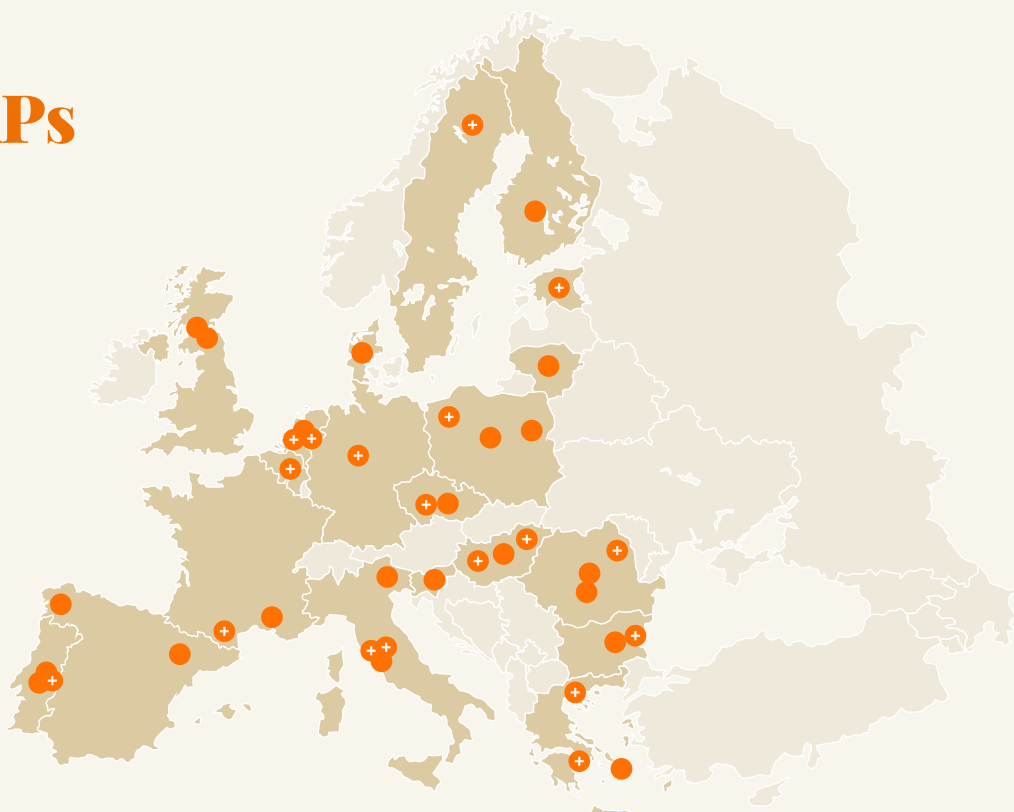
David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



SHERPA MAPs

● Current MAPs

+ New MAPs





Doris LETINA
European Council of Young
Farmers - CEJA



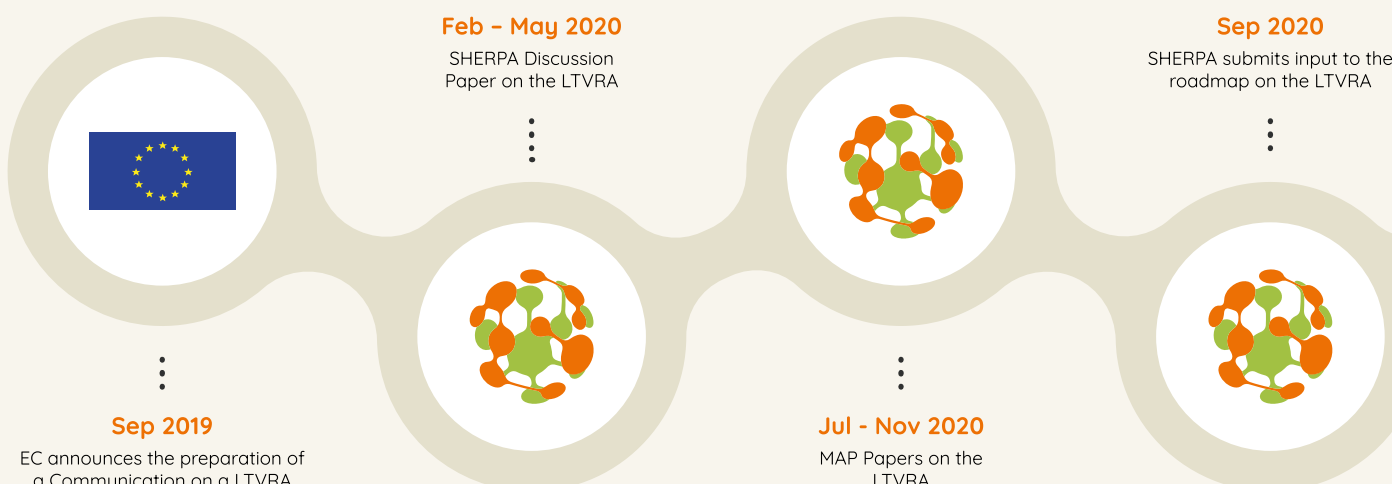
“I am extremely happy that the MAP of Slovenia has raised the attention of key rural stakeholders in different fields and that I am part of it.”

Contribution to the policy process at national level

As Vice President of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), Doris Letina shared her experience of being a member of the MAP in Slovenia. The SVARUN platform acts at the national level, involving over 35 members, out of which half are representatives of the scientific community and the other half are equally represented by policy-makers and civil society actors. Together, they all worked on the topic of diversification of the rural economy. “I am extremely happy that the MAP of Slovenia has raised the attention of key rural stakeholders in different fields and that I am part of it”, said Ms. Letina.

The work carried out so far by the SVARUN platform within SHERPA has addressed relevant topics for the Slovenian rural areas: landscape features, rural vision and diversification of the rural economy. The main activities undertaken were focused on literature review, workshops, focus groups and inviting key experts to collaborate in specific fields. These actions have not only contributed to the policy process at the national level and to the country’s strategic plan, but they have also created constructive debate at an EU level.

“The MAP connected different stakeholders and generated interest, which is extremely important to maintain and also expand. Also, there is a need for younger participants of the MAP to have a more active role in the future”, Ms. Letina noted, highlighting the need for funding and more resources for the project to succeed and become sustainable.



Contribution to the policy process at EU level

At the EU level, SHERPA's contribution was presented by Eleftherios Stavropoulos of DG REGIO (European Commission), and member of the SHERPA EU-level MAP. He highlighted the role of the EU MAP as an effort between different layers of policy-making, bringing together representatives of EU institutions, rural stakeholders acting at the European level and researchers. The SHERPA MAPs at national or regional levels can provide inspiration for the programmes that the European Commission is currently negotiating with the Member States for the new programming period. A further element highlighted was the increased interest in engagement shown by the different MAPs. This goes hand in hand with the recognition of the shared benefits of working together across the three communities of science, society and policy.



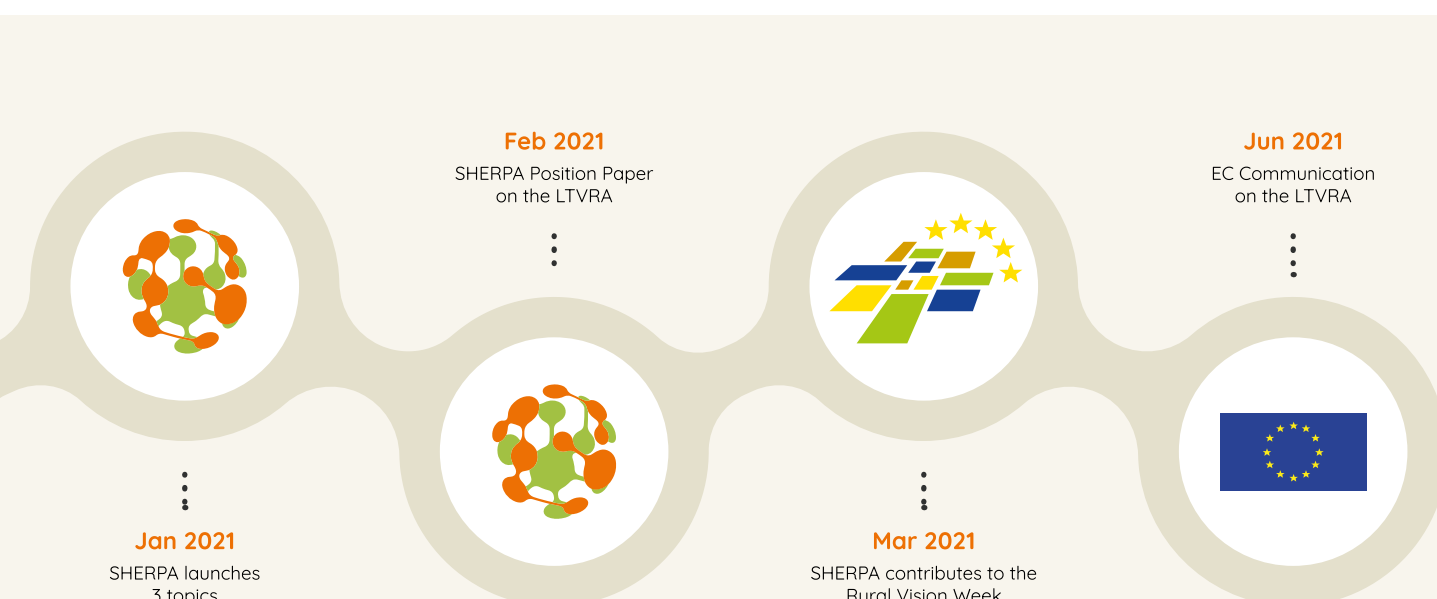
Eleftherios STAVROPOULOS
DG REGIO, European
Commission



“The European Commission finds that SHERPA and the EU MAP are a very important tool for knowledge and exchange of ideas in order to give recommendations for developing modern rural policies.”

He further mentioned the contribution of the EU MAP in acting as a reality checker for the 2021-2027 Cohesion policy, which aims to achieve the objective of being closer to citizens and tailor strategies that empower the local communities.

According to Mr. Stavropoulos, the EU MAP can play an active role in the Rural Pact and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas overall, providing further inspiration for the post-2027 period.



Stakeholder perspectives on how to implement the rural long-term vision



Desirable futures & pathways



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa



MAP Tuscany, Italy

Sabrina Arcuri, from the University of Pisa, presented the Tuscan MAP in Italy, pointing out that the foresight exercise results showed a very heterogeneous region. Building on the analysis carried out by the MAP, it was concluded that heterogeneity and diversity do not mean disparity. All citizens should have the same access to basic services and means. The creation of an enabling environment and the development of policies together with the rural stakeholders, are key elements for a desirable future.

To achieve the envisioned future, Ms. Arcuri explained that certain requirements have to be met. Firstly, a precondition for rural development is the prioritisation of residents' needs and access to all essential services. Secondly, it is important that residents, individuals and SMEs act together for the rural community, retaining added value from economic opportunities and matching education and training with local resources and needs. Lastly, to make sure that no one is left behind, digitalisation will play a significant role as it will support and reinforce the available forms of innovative governance in the rural areas.

POLIRURAL – H2020

The Horizon 2020 project, POLIRURAL, aims at a future-oriented, collaborative policy development for rural areas and people. Within the project, 12 regions have developed their own regional visions and action plans that are aligned with the LTVRA. Mr. Crehan highlighted that the main challenge is for the beneficiaries to feel and take ownership of these regional visions. They need to take a leading role and negotiate with local actors, in order to achieve the vision. Together, they have to define the targets and the possibilities and mobilise the necessary resources to make it happen.

When participating in the foresight exercises of POLIRURAL, Mr. Crehan explained that the 12 local teams faced many practical challenges such as different starting points and capabilities, overload of information, lack of knowledge, and increased levels of responsibility. POLIRURAL has provided and co-developed with the regional teams various tools and resources to support them. These cover things such as the 60 inventories of drivers, more than 40 financing options, multiple policy options and guides on the CAP and the Green Deal, alongside trainings and coaching.



Patrick CREHAN
CKA



How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas?

To implement the LTVRA and build desirable futures and pathways, MAP members from different backgrounds need to be brought together. To do this, trust and appreciation are very important elements. The foresight exercises are not easy to execute, and a valuable step forward would be to see how to make such exercises more action-orientated ('actionable foresight'). Rural stakeholders need to be convinced to act and to take ownership in order to develop further the vision. Foresight is not about implementing someone else's vision, but developing one's own vision.

There is a need to take action and be pro-active in order to reverse the power-relations with regards to developing rural policies. In governance, multi-level cooperation remains a key element. Lastly, funding also plays a relevant role in supporting the further involvement and engagement of the private sector, the possibility of hybrid funding (e.g. use a blend of funds related to the Green Deal and the LEADER programme) and the consideration of the implementation of technical assistance.



Climate change mitigation & adaptation

MAP South Aegean, Greece

Nicoleta Darra, of Agricultural University of Athens, highlighted that the South Aegean region in Greece is characterised by multiple islands, making it highly vulnerable to climate change. The agricultural sector, as primary activity, together with water resources are categorised as high-risk, due to the adverse effects of climate change. In this respect, the Greek MAP's work focused on identifying how to tailor environment-friendly interventions exploiting research, technology, and innovation achievements, with emphasis on the region's strengths (renewable energy resources, ecologically important areas) and on bringing together society and industry. The aims of climate neutrality will require investment in several areas of business and industry. These include: renewable energy systems by businesses (individually and collectively), planned so as to avoid negative impacts and adverse reactions from local communities; research is needed to understand the steps required to achieve climate neutrality in each type of region; tax reliefs to increase industry uptake of climate neutrality practices and reduce their environmental footprint; and shifting to 'green' tourism, capitalising on the transitions to climate neutrality and reversing the loss of biodiversity.



Nicoleta DARRA
Agricultural University
of Athens



UNISECO – H2020



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thünen Institute



The UNISECO project, funded by Horizon 2020, aims to strengthen the sustainability of European farming systems, through co-constructing strategies and incentives for agro-ecological transitions. Improving farmer knowledge on the benefits of agro-ecological practices and economic opportunities is a key aspect for successful agro-ecological transitions.

For the LTVRA to succeed there are some key issues that need to be addressed. Education and life-long learning are very important for the development of knowledge and skills of younger generations, of land managers and for the continuous professional development of those who are more experienced.

Mr. Schwarz also mentioned the importance of supporting short supply chains, local processing and enhancing the producer-consumer linkages. The establishment of regional coordination centres for AKIS actors helping to deliver Bio-districts or Bio-regions aligned with the LTVRA flagship on the EU mission for soil health and food. Mr. Schwarz highlighted the pivotal role of AKIS actors in facilitating networking and knowledge, acting as knowledge champions, amongst relevant actors (regional, national and cross-Europe). Dissemination activities should be aligned to education and training needs, and designed and made available from school through to later life, focusing on changes and measures required to achieve climate neutrality.

How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with regard to **climate change mitigation and adaptation?**

To realise the ambition of a just transition to a climate neutral Europe by 2050, and the contributions to be made by rural areas, there is a societal expectation that the best science, policy and practice work together. The Multi-Actor Platforms developed and implemented by the SHERPA project provide one of the mechanisms for co-creating new knowledge necessary at EU, national and local levels. As policies evolve into the 2028-34 programming period, there is an ongoing benefit of equivalent Multi-Actor Platforms that can support the delivery of the Rural Action Plan and the prospective outcomes of the Rural Pact. An improved use of science, better communicated and shared between communities, industry and policy, and between areas of policy, could enhance understanding of rural areas and people by those in urban areas. This is an action that could be acted upon immediately, considering the urgency of the transition to climate neutrality, and availability of relevant scientific evidence, alongside existing and emerging means of knowledge exchange.

Developing a set of success stories from actions on the ground that deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, mitigation and innovations in adapting to climate change, can serve as inspiration and boost take-up. This could be initiated already during the last quarter of 2022 and throughout 2024, to contribute to the Rural Action Plan and the Rural Observatory.

A follow-up to the SHERPA project, building on the frameworks linking science, policy and society, with a narrower focus, might be able to support the delivery of the Rural Action Plan and the prospective outcomes of the Rural Pact.



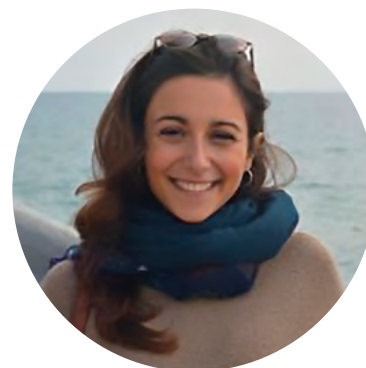


Environmental services

MAP Emilia-Romagna, Italy

From the Emilia Romagna MAP in Italy, Ms. Pellegrini pointed out that the remuneration of environmental services is perceived as an opportunity for the livelihood of predominantly rural areas.

Ms. Pellegrini explained that the region hosts heterogeneous rural areas where multifunctional farms can provide various services linked to health, wellness, recreational activities and education, alongside environmental ones. Specifically on environmental services, it was well established that a territorial approach is needed and that monitoring and evaluation of the environmental services should be based on indicators that are easily understandable to farmers. In order for farmers to get a better insight, training is important, alongside persuading them that there is a clear connection between environmental protection and economic sustainability.



Emilia PELLEGRINI
University of Bologna



Davide VIAGGI
University of Bologna



CONSOLE – H2020

The Horizon 2020 project, CONSOLE, seeks to boost innovation in the lasting delivery of Agri-Environmental-Climatic Public Goods by EU agriculture and forestry. Mr. Viaggi highlighted the need for innovation to work more towards solutions for environmental services in spite of being faced with resistance and lack of acceptance.

A key element is to build on good practices and real-life examples, but also to understand the real performances and their determinants. Additionally, there is a need to develop tailored and hybrid solutions by using collaborative processes and encouraging the learning of new processes. It is very important to benefit from the opportunities that the policy offers (e.g. CAP reform).

Mr. Viaggi explained that at the moment, there is a lack of awareness, knowledge, monitoring, evaluation and remuneration of the environmental services. However, a variety of good examples and practices do exist. These stories can serve as inspiration, and the MAPs can contribute to their collection and sharing.

How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with regard to environmental services?

Environmental services have value for several aspects of the LTVRA, for quality of life, for resource conservation, but it is still difficult to compensate without the support of public funds. On the other hand, consumers' attention to the environment is increasing, but not necessarily the willingness to pay. It is often the case for environmental services to be perceived as the agricultural domain. In the current policy framework, payment for environmental services is organised at national level, however it is expected that these will be addressed at farm level in the next programming period.

For the Rural Pact it is important to acknowledge the relevance of environmental services for the rural vision and that of healthy rural areas for providing environmental services. It is the challenge to look for synergies between the provision of environmental services and the components of the rural vision. The Rural Observatory can play an important role in data collection, raising awareness and providing a development tool that can allow certification or payment for environmental services.

In the next programming period, focus should be placed on preparing the mechanisms, calculation methods and data collection approaches, to enable funding for environmental services at a farm level. Yet, a territorial collaborative approach is needed to deliver environmental services, as it cannot be addressed at the farm level alone (through the CAP) but rather ensuring it is treated transversally. Further to this, it is relevant to acknowledge the important role of rural areas in providing environmental services and the interconnectedness between these with the other aspects of the rural vision.





Digitalisation & smart communities

MAP Suomi, Finland



Mats Stjernberg (Nordregio) and Michael Kull (LUKE Fi) presented the Finnish Multi-Actor Platform and the results of the work carried out on the topic of “Diversification of the rural economy”. Smart adaptation is at the core of the Finnish rural policy and will be promoted in the coming years. It aims to develop new strategies, plans and policies to prepare for population decline and how to manage it. Community and social dimensions are central to the Smart Village concept, and have been promoted in Finland through different policies.

In their presentation, Mr. Stjernberg and Mr Kull explained that “smart” is a multidisciplinary, wide-ranging and crosscutting theme. Hence, coordination and cooperation are vital. At the same time, implementation is crucial, and financing experiments, new partnerships, participation and long-term development are key for achieving progress and success. Improving broadband access is important for overcoming a digital urban-rural divide and it requires top-down coordination in construction, accompanied by more regionally tailored policies and public funding. In order to make the most out of the digital transformation of rural communities, it is important to understand what constitutes the basis of well-being and quality of life.



Mats Stjernberg
Nordregio



Michael Kull
LUKE



Elena Favilli
University of Pisa



DESIRA – H2020

Elena Favilli, from University of Pisa, introduced the Horizon 2020 project DESIRA, a sister project of SHERPA, aiming to assess the past, present and future socio-economic impacts of digitalisation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. Ms. Favilli highlighted the main messages deriving from the project, and the contribution to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

The project has developed seven guiding principles to ensure a sustainable digitalisation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. These principles are meant to 1) ensure the basic conditions for digitalisation, in terms of infrastructure, human capital, and economic gains; 2) anchor digitalisation to the Sustainable Development Goals; 3) adapt digitalisation to different contexts, through a participatory and place-based approach; 4) favour digital inclusion, to ensure no one is left behind; 5) develop digital ecosystems, by promoting the role of digital hubs, innovation brokers, LAGs, etc.; 6) develop adaptive governance models, that are proactive instead of reactive; and 7) design policy tools for sustainable rural digitalisation.

How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with regard to digitalisation and smart communities?

Infrastructure and technological development are needed to close the gap between urban and rural area. However, policy targets should go beyond broadband access and include access to digital social services. Technological development should go hand in hand with capacity building. Equality policies are needed to ensure that marginalised groups, such as migrants, families with low income, or the elderly, can fully grasp the opportunities brought by digital technologies and are not left behind. Internet connectivity at a fair price should also be ensured for these vulnerable groups. The role of advisors or “multipliers” is essential, to generate and transfer digital skills and promote capacity building.

Regarding smart adaptation strategies, top-down coordination is needed, especially in the roll-out of broadband and in closing the digital divide. However, there is also a need for regionally tailored public funding and policies. For example, the Flemish government allocated part of the Recovery & Resilience Fund to create a call to create digital hubs, stimulating rural communities and creating a network with cities to work together on digital transformation.

Location-independent work and multilocality, a concept recently arrived in Finnish policy, should be promoted. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, which can contribute to rural economies. In addition to funding broadband, there is a need for strategies that cover other aspects, such as legal and tax frameworks and addressing remote work and digital nomads.





Farm diversification and food chains

MAP Rural Transylvania, Romania

Monica Tudor, from the Romanian Institute of Agricultural Economics, presented the regional MAP of Rural Transylvania in Romania, where the small farms form 90% of the local economy mostly depends on. The MAP works specifically on diversification, on the decreased population and the sharing of good practices.

The Transylvanian rural economy is seeking to change the business models in the dominant sector of agriculture by diversifying the activity within the farm (e.g., agro-tourism, processing of primary and secondary agricultural products, bio-energy production etc.); through vertical integration in agri-food chains; and the efficient management of local agricultural resources based on circular bioeconomy. To become sustainable, the approach to farm diversification should respond to and follow the market trends while taking into account the local resources and capabilities.

From the work in the MAP, several recommendations were aimed at a) business by disseminating and exchanging good practices, creating local or micro-regional brands, and using media channels and digital tools for marketing and product placement; b) policy, through coherent synergies between public policies and programmes, setting up information offices and consultancy services, and supporting entrepreneurship; and c) science, by offering strong scientific evidence, supporting technological development and professional training.



Monica TUDOR
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Romania



Sherman FARHAD
University of Córdoba

MOVING – H2020

The Horizon 2020 project, MOVING, aims to build capacities and co-develop relevant policy frameworks across Europe for value chains that contribute to the resilience and sustainability of mountain areas. Mountains are home to 16 % of the rural population in Europe.

The project is studying the value chains of 23 mountainous regions, focusing on products such as cheese, meat, honey, and tourism. The work of MOVING shows that there are many new and emerging products (e.g., chestnut flour) as well as new production processes and cross-fertilisation between production and other sectors. These diverse activities and collaboration among actors have positive socio-ecological impacts on diversified incomes, higher adaptation and buffering capacity to cope with economic/environmental crises, more resistant agro-ecosystems to pests and disease, diverse landscapes contributing to the aesthetic, and touristic attractiveness of regions and territorial management.

MOVING supports the participatory processes that are linked to the areas of action, and works through 23 regional Multi-Actor Platforms and one European-level Multi-Actor Platform (EU MAP).



How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with regard to **farm diversification and food chains?**

Farm diversification is an important element in the implementation of the vision. There is a need for policy and sector integration, so that the policy support is not in conflict with new and emerging products and processes that are developed in rural areas. This is linked to the Prosperous area of work under the LTVRA, through actions that support entrepreneurship in rural areas. Policy needs to also guarantee support for small and diversified farms and value chains, and not only for large agri-businesses that are already profitable. In this sense, Multi-Actor Platforms can help to co-create innovative policy frameworks to ensure its implementation.

There is a need for information offices that support innovation and create professional training. As such, local brands being created around regional narratives need to be present online through social media, and display a strong brand. The impact of the pandemic has translated into urban-rural actor links to the regional food chain. A question arises on how to sustain these food chains over a longer period. Enabling businesses to share good practices within Europe, via online platforms and meetings could be rewarding and inspiring. Lastly, the policy goals should adapt to the consumer markets.





Bioeconomy & sustainable management of resources

MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo, Poland

Paweł Chmielinski from the European Rural Development Network presented the Zielone Sąsiedztwo MAP in Poland, whose work has highlighted that bioeconomy and sustainable management of resources at a local level are related to many factors. Firstly, with the design of local and regional, well-tailored policies with strong bottom-up and place-based approaches. Secondly, with the promotion and support of new business models (Bioeconomy-oriented should come first), and thirdly with a change in the educational system to raise awareness regarding bioeconomy and sustainable management of resources.

The Polish platform operates at the regional level and is based on an existing Local Action Group (LAG) complemented by business organisations, research institutes, local and central government actors, NGOs and citizens. It covers a large region in central Poland, with a big influence of capital agglomeration and with remote areas that are lagging behind. The MAP has worked on the topic of bioeconomy in 2021, had several meetings to discuss new ideas of future developments, and released position papers about diversification and connecting the economy to “green resources”.



Paweł CHMIELINSKI
European Rural
Development Network



Holger GERDES
Ecologic Institute



BE-RURAL – H2020

BE-RURAL, a H2020-funded project, aims to fulfil the potential of regional and local bio-based economies by supporting relevant actors in the participatory development of bioeconomy strategies and roadmaps. Within the case study countries that the project is working on, the focus is on regions that are placed at the lowest level in the European Innovation Score Board and have no bioeconomy solutions available yet.

The project's main actions are capacity-building seminars and business-model development activities, educational material, and citizen engagement. The BE-RURAL website has already made available five regional strategies and roadmaps regarding bioeconomy. Mr. Gerdes highlighted that “there is lot of interest into bio-based business potential, but there is a lack of initiatives from producers for joint actions”. Another crucial element is the ecological dimension of sustainability. At the moment, there is no way to measure whether a region would ecologically allow bio-based activities. By the end of the project, a tool of ecological capacities assessment will be developed for all the regions covered by the project.

How to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with regard to bioeconomy and sustainable management of resources?

A systemic and wider scope for bioeconomy is deemed necessary to ensure a long-term vision. To achieve sustainable development, one should have a holistic view of the value chain. A significant action to be taken in this direction is by offering of tools to the stakeholders to help improve policy design. A good example is the tool being developed by BE-RURAL, that connects ecological capacity with bioeconomy which can be a starting point for building a larger portfolio with similar tools. The design, implementation and evaluation of participatory processes in different rural settings as well as the support of small-scale bio-based business models could lead to stronger and prosperous rural areas.

Available data is crucial to understand and assess the potential trade-offs. This is an action that can be immediately implemented, requiring yearly updates. As an example, data regarding biomass potential and ecological boundaries will be valuable knowledge to support bioeconomy. The data should not focus only on the national level, but also on regional level (e.g., NUTS3).



PANEL DISCUSSION:

Make it happen! Implementing the rural vision for 2040

Speakers from civil society, policy and science sectors gave their views on how to make Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas a reality: Mario Milouchev, Director of DG AGRI; Hannes Lorenzen, representing ARC2020 and a member of the EU MAP; and Karen Refsgaard, Research director at Nordregio. The same three speakers participated as panellists during the first conference of the project. Their presence during the second edition offered an excellent perspective on the project's progress. Looking back at the issues raised in the previous edition, the question is now to see how the Long-Term Vision is addressing them, and what the potential challenges could be. Two key areas were highlighted: 1) The need for evidence, statistics and data; and 2) The diversity of European rural areas.



DAY 2
1 February 2022



Society: **Hannes LORENZEN** **PRESIDENT** **AGRICULTURAL & RURAL** **CONVENTION - ARC 2020**

Hannes Lorenzen started by praising the interfaces set up by SHERPA, giving the opportunity to contribute directly to the development of the project while taking stock of the results.

Mr. Lorenzen raised concerns around timing when it comes to the long-term vision. It is key to look at how the Vision can be implemented effectively on the ground. However, the Vision's process has come along at the same time as CAP reform. "So much needs to be done now and not after 2028. My message is that we should be looking on what is missing, which is local data", said Mr. Lorenzen and pointed out that there are not enough actions from the European Commission within this programming period to help small local initiatives to develop proper infrastructure and respond to the challenges that they are facing.

Diversity should not be an excuse to fail to move forward. Mr. Lorenzen challenged the need for data on the diversity of rural areas. A coherent policy framework works for the great

diversity but does not necessarily go into all the particularities of each rural area. He highlighted the need for more cooperation, more communication and negotiation on bringing together different interests, pointing out that local problems do not seem to be placed in the centre of the policy-making process. "We need sufficient investment into spaces, empowering people to solve the problems they have," he concluded.

Mr. Lorenzen expressed concern for the organisation of the Rural Pact, which offers an open space for stakeholders, yet no specific support has been included for local actors to participate in this process, to be part of it and have their voice heard.

"If we want a level playing field for all stakeholders, we have to do a big effort to make that really happen."

Policy:
Mario MILOUCHEV
DIRECTOR
DG AGRI, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION



In his introductory note, Mario Milouchev highlighted that “the LTVRA is the first European Commission visionary document on rural areas that has been adopted since 1988, when there was no internet and there were only 12 Member States in the European Union.” This makes the EC Communication an important step forward putting together elements from various policies affecting rural areas.

“*The diversity of rural areas should not be an obstacle for a coherent rural policy framework.*”

Mr. Milouchev mentioned that the Vision is a “huge analytical work that provides data, indicators and insight on 12 different themes. It is a very good basis because it brings in one document many sources in various fields and levels of expertise”. This will allow the Commission to understand the gaps in the data gathering, the challenges, as well as the opportunities.

Additionally, the European Commission will work on several actions to strengthen the collected evidence, one of which is the set-up of the Rural Observatory, a rural data platform that will be accessible to all and will produce several analytical papers each year. In addition, the European Commission will work to develop the concept of “functional rural areas” (similar to the concept of “functional urban areas”). Moreover, investment in research will support to strengthen evidence, having allocated €15 million under the Horizon programmes

to support two projects addressing definition of rural areas and develop new methods for data collection.

Reflecting on how the LVTRA takes into account and addresses rural diversity, Mr. Milouchev referred to the wide consultation that was conducted. The European Commission collected views from very diverse areas and stakeholders, and it was well established that there is a lot of diversity between countries and regions of Europe. Nonetheless, even when rural areas differ in scale, they do share similar problems and challenges -there is a common ground within diversity. Yet diversity should not be an obstacle to build a coherent policy framework. Sometimes this argument has been used as an excuse to avoid applying a holistic approach to policy.

“*The Commission alone cannot do it. We need all the actors at all levels to implement this long-term vision.*”

Mr. Milouchev highlighted the LEADER programme and smart villages as being important for enabling local communities to take more action. Furthermore, the idea of exchanging information and participating actively at all levels of governance involving rural stakeholders is a key element for the success of the vision.

The Rural Pact will provide a framework for actions to be taken, but also a process for the long-term development of rural areas.



Science:

Karen REFSGAARD
RESEARCH DIRECTOR
NORDREGIO

Karen Refsgaard highlighted the challenge posed by the lack of adequate rural indicators, their quality and geographical scope. “We need to add elements to our analysis. For example, we need to define in a more accurate way what really is a rural area by taking into account other indicators beyond distance and population density. Access to services, education, health, digital infrastructure, and local employment are only some of the indicators that will help calculating the challenges and opportunities of the rural areas”. Ms. Refsgaard mentioned the caveats of the traditional definitions of rural areas. In terms of quality of the indicators, there is a clear need to include economic data, to present the current economic structure and be able to address the obstacles and barriers. Eurostat has a key role in collecting data, similar to other organisations such as Nordregio or OECD. There is a clear need for collaboration, finding synergies among all organisations that manage and collect relevant data.

When addressing rural diversity, Ms. Refsgaard mentioned “there is an eternal challenge embedded between the sectoral and territorial approaches regarding rural areas. Rural areas

consist of a lot of different types of businesses, families, and residents with different needs.” According to Ms. Refsgaard the LTVRA is certainly a very good attempt to understand those differences, and the diversity in sectors, in sizes, and types of rural businesses of Europe.

It is very important to ensure adequate representation, especially for young people, is in place to take into account the various perspectives, which has a direct impact on local level democracy.

“*Access to services, education, health, digital infrastructure, and local employment are only some of the indicators that will help calculate the challenges and opportunities of the rural areas*”.





The role of Science-Society-Policy interface in rural policy-making

Science-Society-Policy interfaces are the expression of a new form of governance, going from the state based hierarchy in decision making to a network-based governance, enabling new forms of democracy.

In SHERPA, Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) are the rural interfaces that provide a forum for two-way exchanges of ideas, for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge with actors at European, national, regional and local levels.

Current societies are facing extremely complex problems connected to global and interlinked processes, such as climate change, poverty and inequalities. Scientists or policy-makers cannot solve these problems alone. These complex issues demand different fields of expertise – including citizens and experience-based knowledge – and for various actors to interact and collaborate with each other.

Research shows that co-producing knowledge via dialogue in multi-actor platforms in rural areas can:

- help to deal with issues of lack of trust between local actors and central governments, which is important especially in rural areas where the central governments might be located at a great distance.
- create common visions for sustainable regional development with a commitment to implementation.
- strengthen the resilience and economic competitiveness of rural areas.

Creating a network of actors that are interacting with each other enables quick responses to any crisis, and solutions that are adapted to the rural realities. There is however, no recipe for success - adaptation and constant learning and development is crucial for processes, outputs and outcomes to be sustainable.

On the second day of the conference, the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms shared their experience and practice in finding ways to contribute to the various levels of rural policy-making, reflecting on recommendations that can improve the process.



Elin SLÄTMO
Nordregio



Contribution to the local level

MAP Aragón, Spain

The rural areas of Aragón in Spain are characterised by an ageing population due to an outflow of the youth and women from the area. About 50% of the population is concentrated in the capital of the region. Against this background, Bárbara Soriano of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM-CEIGRAM) shared the main insights from the Spanish MAP in Aragón. Throughout 2021, MAP members discussed the main actions that contribute to the diversification of rural economy in their region, looking at coordination and administrative simplification; support for entrepreneurs and business creation; diversification and modernisation of family farm activities; and implementation of market actions (i.e., e-commerce, short supply chains).

The MAP was able to put forward specific recommendations for strengthening local policy processes and contributions of the platform by 1) setting clear objectives and prioritisation among the policy actions, with an emphasis on rural proofing; 2) developing online administrative procedures and one-step solutions to strengthen the relationships between regional administrations and rural citizens/entrepreneurs, and prioritise family businesses; 3) restructuring LEADER group functioning by centralising the administrative burden to free-up resources; 4) favouring housing through market flexibility and safety; and 5) supporting cultural activities, increasing the chances of the young population staying.



Bárbara SORIANO
CEIGRAP - UPM



Marianne GROOT
Wageningen University



MAP Greenport Gelderland, Netherlands

The Greenport Gelderland MAP in The Netherlands is focused on the fruit sector. Marianne Groot of Wageningen University shared the MAP's insights on contributing to the policy process at a local level. It seems clear that, generally speaking, discussions lead to greater awareness and understanding of each other. The fruit sector has been affected by climate change, through water shortage and extreme weather events (heavy rainfall, hail, and strong winds) which is affecting fruit production. Climate change adaptation needs to be addressed in regions, not just by the sector. In this respect, local and regional climate change adaptation should be positioned within the wider national policies and programmes.

Ms. Groot, as Facilitator of the MAP, put forward a few recommendations for the contribution of the MAP to local policy-making, such as finding ways forward where more consultation with a wider array of stakeholders is needed, yet this will require compromises. The MAP needs to have its own vision to bring to the table and be considered as a serious partner and stakeholder. For this to happen, the SHERPA MAP process should be envisioned for a longer period, to establish itself in the area and continue to play an important role.



How to improve the role of science–society–policy interfaces in rural policy-making at **local level**?

There certainly is much added value for MAPs to engage in rural policy-making at local level. Even though the timing of their development is rather short to see any meaningful policy change, many benefits can be grasped. These can be identified as: a) creating awareness of the policy process among local actors; b) connecting beyond the sectoral interests; c) empowering people in the region; d) connecting local issues to higher level of policy-making.

Nonetheless, some challenges were addressed, such as building trust and keeping motivation; balancing representation; and ensuring appropriate channels and connections between local and higher levels of policy-making.

Key recommendations

1. Increase the visibility of platforms and show their impact on how local engagement and the local problems and needs are effectively addressed and connected to different levels of policy-making.
2. Empower local actors, by connecting them with actors in other EU areas, to join forces and take coordinated action to make their voices heard.
3. Build on existing networks, make long-term commitments, and show persistence.
4. Strengthen local data gathering to create appropriate narratives linking this with both visions for the future and today's challenges.
5. Central levels should give clear mandate to lower levels, ask for input, promise to take it up and allocate resources.



Contribution to the regional level

MAP Rural Scotland, UK



David Miller presented his experience in facilitating two SHERPA MAPs in Scotland, reflecting on the regional level of policy. The role of Science-Society-Policy interfaces has been highly relevant, filtering scientific knowledge, bringing forward practical knowledge drawn from skills learned and experiences had on the ground, which leads to the co-construction of new ideas for policies, measures or approaches. Findings from the MAPs have fed into different levels of policy, including at the EU level. Last year, the UK MAP participated at the COP26 providing the opportunity to put forward regional messages on the international stage. Going forward, the MAPs can build on and contribute to initiatives on biodiversity, engage with new governance structures, inform debates about just transitions of land use change within forums for policy and practice.



David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thünen Institute

MAP Schleswig-Holstein, Germany



The German MAP in Schleswig-Holstein is a newly established platform within SHERPA, gathering large-scale social representation, alongside actors from the ministry and science sector. Mr. Schwarz shared with participants the benefit of rural interfaces in strengthening social and human capital, establishing trust, engagement of the younger generation, and linking local actors with regional level governance. Mr Schwarz highlighted the role of the MAP in breaking up sectorial silos and fostering co-learning and co-innovation. It becomes important to engage actors bringing forward experiences and challenges into regional-level discussions and at the same time linking practical and research knowledge for more effective policy instruments.

MAP Alqueva, Portugal



MAP Alqueva in Portugal is focused on a region that is experiencing a strong agricultural intensification as a result of large public investment in irrigation (i.e., construction of a dam). This has allowed growing new crops in a region that is threatened by climate change. The MAP has engaged actively with policy-makers and society representatives, yet it had more difficulty in connecting with researchers. Discussions carried out by the MAP have been adjusted to the territory, with an impact on policy preparation. Nonetheless, project reflections and recommendations can be further shared with local and/or regional authorities. For this to happen, there is a need for longer cycles to allow in-depth discussions and ensure members' involvement in a meaningful way.



Pedro SANTOS
Consulai



How to improve the role of science–society–policy interfaces in rural policy-making at the **regional level**?

Trust is the fundament of all relationships, and it works in the same way for the platforms established. The connection between trust and delivery of results that can impact the regional policy is linked to the closing of the gap between the sources of scientific knowledge and policy makers or managing authorities, and the delivery agents on the ground (i.e., community initiatives, land managers). Developing the quality of relationships between these groups enhances credibility, identifying and eliminating poor quality evidence or positions. MAPs can contribute to creating impacts by increasing the confidence in the process of planning and decision-making.

Key recommendations

1. Involvement of younger people, who also need trust, respect, and to be given a voice. This is also about recognition of issues and representation of the voices that are actually living in remote and rural areas. The narratives need to change to rural areas as being asset-based, rather than deficit-based (needing to catch up).
2. Including trust and relationship building activities within the MAPs and regions to increase uptake and quality of implementation of policy measures. To build trust, you need credibility and being able to hold people accountable. Trust can enable an understanding of the complexity of rural areas. Regular consultation is another valuable way to establish confidence among actors.
3. Linking up to other policy levels from the regional level. We need to do this in a sustainable way by including representatives of national government in the regional MAP or inviting local entrepreneurs to regional discussions. This is a matter of engaging the right people who are involved in multiple levels of policy-making.



Contribution to the national level

MAP AKIS, Hungary

Ms. Vásáry highlighted the national relevance of the Hungarian MAP. The MAP has continuously addressed the topic of digitalisation and will do so in the next period of the project. Being a crosscutting topic in the CAP strategic planning, digitalisation is at the centre of the policy debate, showcasing opportunities for synergies between different ongoing processes. In this context, the MAP has provided an additional forum for the AKIS working group on digitalisation. The MAPs are supposed to be used as stable components of the rural governance in the Hungarian case, beyond SHERPA's timeframe. The Hungarian MAP has built synergies by leveraging on the cross-cuttingness of a topic already embedded in the discussion, and provided an additional platform for knowledge exchange and discussion.



Viktória VÁSÁRY
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Hungary



Marie TRANTINOVÁ
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Czechia



MAP Venus, Czechia

Ms. Trantinová explained how the Czech Venus MAP launched a debate last year on a new topic [smart and renewable energy in rural areas], starting a pilot project for the first energy community in the country. The ambitious aim of the initiative is to increase the share of renewable energy from 14% to 30%, and to start a continuous measurement system for energy production and consumption in the region, with an eye on the benefits of decentralisation of energy production. The Venus MAP uncovered a weakness linked to the lack of debate and expertise on the new topic they were addressing, and saw it as an opportunity to move forward. This has resulted in high public interest, yet it has also uncovered an issue: the lack of expertise to help implement smart energy communities.



Key recommendations

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Contribution to the EU level

EU MAP

Dominique Barjolle of ETH Zurich has been a member of the SHERPA EU MAP since the start of the project. In her presentation, she highlighted the diversity of representatives in the activities of the platform, leading to rich discussions and knowledge exchange. The EU MAP takes stock of the outcomes of the discussions held at local level by the MAPs and are digested into a SHERPA Position Paper without any filter, judgement or interpretation, following an authentic discourse. This co-creation process leads to new knowledge, allowing for great interaction among members.

There are a few challenges and obstacles that have been observed, such as the limited number of MAPs, the process relying exclusively on qualitative methods, and the capacity of facilitators. There is also cultural bias. Overall, MAPs tend to be problem-oriented rather than solution-oriented leading to a longer list of challenges compared to solutions identified. Thus, the reflection is how to consolidate and leverage this new knowledge within the EU MAP.



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM-IAMM



MAP PACA Sud, France

The French MAP in the region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur addressed a very relevant topic, that of governance of resilience in rural areas. Mr. Féret explained that the discussions of the MAP deepened the knowledge on multi-level governance in a very diverse rural Europe. This is not fully understood by rural dwellers, when looking at the variety of EU, national and regional support measures and tools that often can lead to miss-coordination of actions. Nonetheless, a few aspects would help improve the situation.

In this respect, the MAP looked at the need to map competences in a multi-layered governance system, to understand who does what; to enable participation and involvement of rural dwellers in decision-making processes; to simplify access to funds for small entities and municipalities; provide tailored technical assistance to rural municipalities; and recognise the role of science-society-policy interfaces as forums that enable territorial diagnosis and foresight exercise for rural areas.



How to improve the role of science-society-policy interfaces in rural policy-making at the **EU level**?

SHERPA MAPs are seen as an efficient tool to address the challenge of multi-governance and linking to the EU level. The SHERPA project has successfully demonstrated the need for such platforms and interfaces. National and regional MAPs are a vehicle for sharing and transferring knowledge. The EU MAP is the lynchpin for national and regional MAPs and the EU-level. In addition, it ensures collaboration both vertically and horizontally (between national and regional MAPs) maximising the knowledge and experience sharing, co-creating and co-developing relevant outcomes.

There is a political momentum for SHERPA, considering the current policies being implemented or developed (CAP Strategic Plans, Biodiversity strategy, Farm2Fork, LTVRA, Rural pact, etc.). This represents an unprecedented opportunity to align the efforts on the ground with the European vision.

The EU MAP creates the space for debate, taking up the findings and outcomes of the work carried out by the MAPs and placing these in the European context. This brings added value not only to the EU-level discussion, but feeds into the process of policy-making. The overall objective of this European platform is to put forward recommendations for developing modern rural policies at European and national levels, as well as concrete proposals for the future research agenda.



Role of rural interfaces in the next phase of the LTVRA

MAP CBioLit, Lithuania



The Lithuanian MAP operates at the national level, bringing together, largely, actors from science (44%) and society (37%), and to lesser extent policy-makers (19%).

During the second MAP cycle, Lithuanian MAP activity was focused on the topic of change in production and diversification of the rural economy covering four dimensions: 1. Entrepreneurship, employment & new business models; 2. Smart rurality, smart communities, and digitalisation; 3. Bio-economy and sustainable management of resources; and 4. Farm diversification and food chains.

In each of these dimensions of work, specific lessons learned and conclusions have been drawn, but a number of common recommendations and needs have been identified: common long-term vision and strategy; alignment of “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches through dialogue; collaboration, cooperation and networking; and continuous improvement of knowledge and lifelong learning at all levels.



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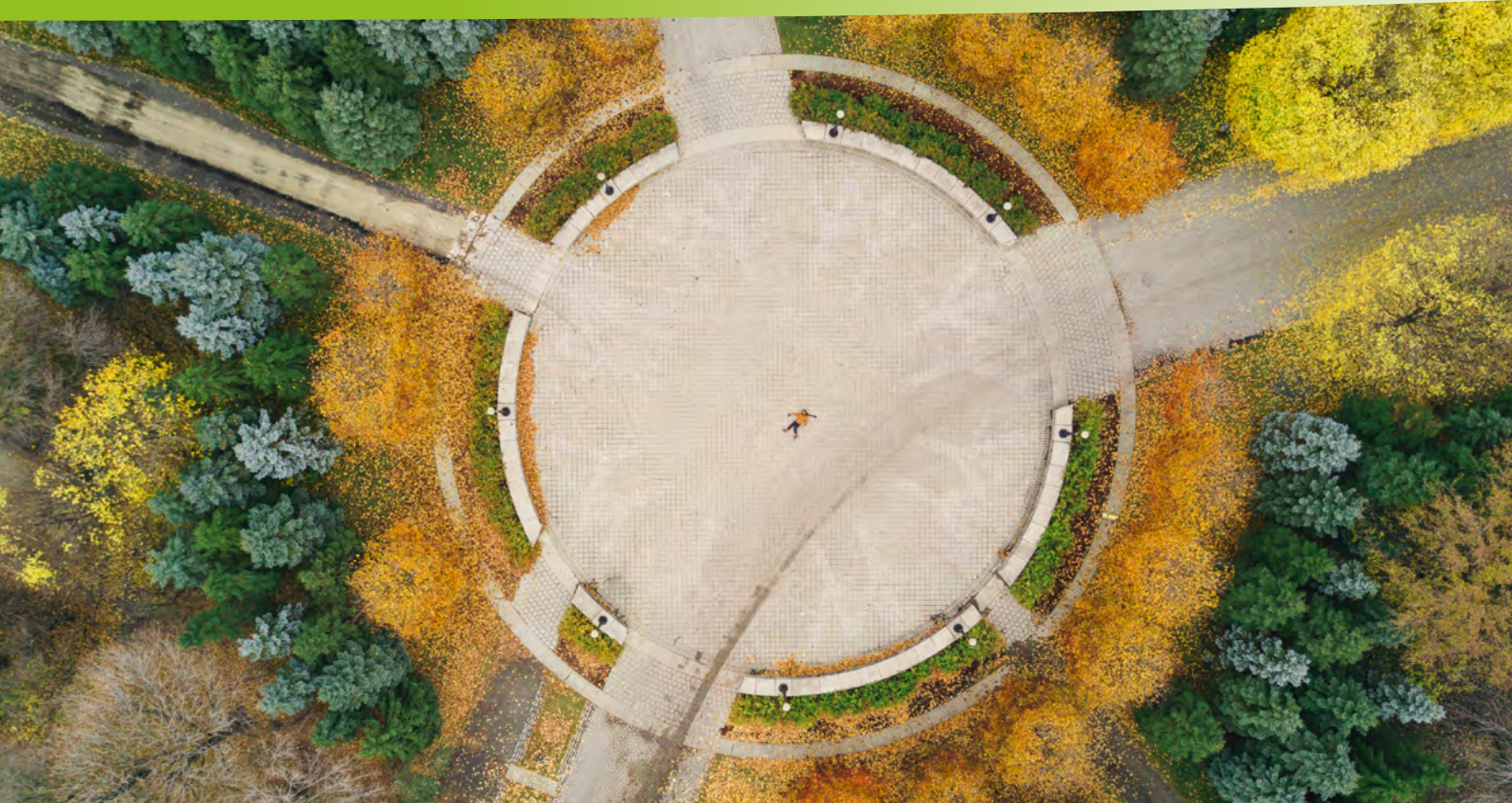


MAP Galicia, Spain

The regional platform of Galicia in Spain, builds on the Galician Association of Local Action Groups (GALAG) as a support network and starting point. It is composed of diverse actors representing policy (23%), society (59%) and science (18%).

Ms. Guimarey pointed out the need to pay attention to the diversity of actors and the balance of power within the platform. Scientists, policy-makers and citizens all have relevant contributions to make. She reflected on the challenge to respond to the expectations of MAP members to not only contribute to a debate, but to influence real policy. In addition, she spoke about the need to invest in building personal trust, needing space and time for informal interaction, and more durable interfaces.

In terms of recommendations, she pointed out that interfaces should inspire policy development, with a key role in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Participation mechanisms should be improved for not only the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), but also to play a role in and support the coordination of policies - and levels of policies - with impacts on rural areas.



How to improve the role of science–society–policy interfaces in the **next phase of the LTVRA?**

Rural interfaces have proven their relevance and the beneficial support they can offer in the conception and future implementation of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). Their contributions are constant and meaningful. Participants and speakers raised a few points to consider for the future role of MAPs in the next phase of the LTVRA.

Key recommendations

1. Aligning different types of programmes and interventions (individual interventions in the CAP, Cohesion Policy, objectives of strategies like Farm2Fork and the LTVRA), through a holistic approach and systemic thinking.
2. Achieving greater mobilisation of actors at the local level, by continuing to build trust and maintain interest and motivation in the MAPs. Circulating knowledge among MAP members and between the MAPs can be a strong motivator to boost engagement.
3. Ensuring quality engagement, not only to participate in activities but also to have the right channels, the right timing, to listen to and consider the recommendations and needs of all types of actors.



Sustainability of rural interfaces

MAP Bulgaria

The Bulgarian MAP operates at the national level, addressing nationwide issues, such as the visible gap between the rural and urban areas or their economic disparities. The platform has worked to ensure a fruitful dialogue between science, society and policy-makers. The results and experience achieved so far have pointed to the fact that science has served as a nexus in facilitating a constructive dialogue. There are aspects that can be considered for improvement, such as strengthening the scientific capacity. For the MAP Bulgaria, applied science is highly relevant, and the methodology needs to expand the focus from identifying the issues to and proposing possible solutions. Constant motivation of stakeholders can be based on showing and taking into consideration stakeholders' input and insights, and how it is further used. This can sustain their involvement within the platform and ensure an enriching dialogue. Furthermore, the platform should look for ways to weigh more into the decision-making process.



Bozhidar IVANOV
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Bulgaria



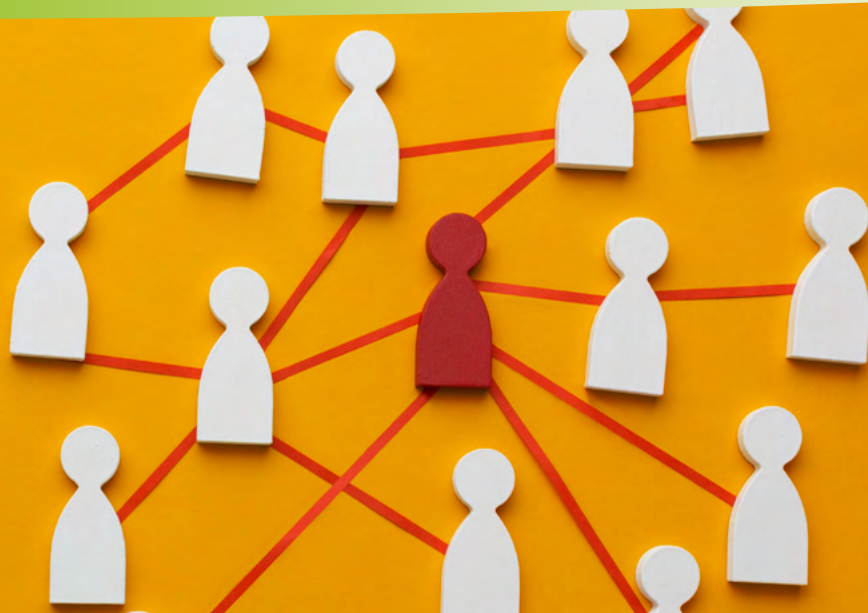
Marta MENDES
Consulai



MAP Centro, Portugal

MAP Centro in Portugal is active in a diverse, young and innovative region, with the capacity to attract investment and talent leading to a more sustainable society. Centro region's territory is very diverse, with 2.3 million inhabitants, some 22% of the Portuguese population.

At the MAP-level, the team has faced a decrease in participation, going from 20 participants in the first instance, down to six participants in the last period. This development has affected the output, from good to an acceptable level of quality. For the next phase, the MAP is adapting the approach to increase engagement, making activities local and therefore more relevant for everyday lives. Taking forward this approach, the Portuguese MAP will look to concretely engage at least two members from each organisation to ensure constant participation. It will also push for recognition of the members' efforts in seeing the impact their work is having at the national and even EU levels.



How to ensure the **sustainability of science-society-policy interfaces** in rural policy-making?

The SHERPA project explicitly aims to establish MAPs that continue to function beyond the project's timeline. As such, several recommendations were highlighted during the discussion:

1. Allowing MAPs the flexibility to take their own approach enables them to adjust to (changing) needs and interests. This means adapt to members and ways of working depending on topics.
2. Institutionalise the MAPs in terms of long-term financing and create an EU level network to function also after SHERPA.
3. The drivers of the MAPs should be the science as it brings neutrality to the table. The language used to present scientific knowledge should be direct, easy and local. This goes hand in hand with the simplification of background documents used to start discussions - make it easy to understand and use.
4. Addressing financing of the MAPs within SHERPA to understand the resources needed to run a MAP at a local level and the activities that it entails (desk research, organising meetings, summarise the findings, etc.). Face-to-face meetings are needed to create steady and trustworthy relations. Financial compensation could be a possibility to ensure long-term engagement.
5. Learning from good examples, such as EKLIPSE which has been financed several times – the project is focused on biodiversity and peer review processes. They do not interact directly with actors. This is one of the novelties of SHERPA.



Concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS,
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Prof. Peter Midmore was invited to present his concluding remarks. He started his intervention by congratulating SHERPA for the two-day vigorous conversation and the successful organisation of the annual event. "The MAP approach works", he noted. "By bringing together people with different interests into refining and developing policies for the rural areas, we have seen results. The MAPs are a useful innovation, the concept has been proved to work, they are expanding, and they are becoming part of the policy making at an EU level".

"The MAPs are a useful innovation, the concept has been proved to work, they are expanding, and they are becoming part of the policy making at an EU level."

According to Prof. Midmore the quality and accuracy of data has always been an issue in research. It has been clear during the conference discussions that for defining accurately what is "rural" there is a need for more qualitative data rather than just numerical measurement. In that sense, MAPs allow people to not only exchange information, but also learn from each other and collaborate on a basis of mutual understanding which can actually achieve progress in improving policies.

"By giving them more support, the MAPs can become the focus of positive changes in the society to the benefit not only of the rural people but for the people as a whole."

On the topic of rural diversity, Prof. Midmore mentioned "by using MAPs, it is easier to adapt policies to the huge diversity of the rural areas and at the same time address the real and common problems they face. The only drawback is that there are only 40 MAPs, and they cannot possibly cover the wide range of diversity of conditions, geographies, or economic conditions".

SHERPA could possibly consider in the next period how to give voice to those who for the moment do not have one. The process of sharing knowledge and experience is succeeding in refining policies, but it is also important to recognise that the process of reforms at a European level is a very long process.

Prof. Midmore concluded by highlighting the strong, multiplier and catalytic effect that comes from processes like the establishment of MAPs. He pointed out that by giving them more support, the MAPs can become the focus of positive changes in the society to the benefit not only of rural people but also for the people as a whole.

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Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors (SHERPA) is a four-year project (2019-2023) with 17 partners funded by the Horizon 2020 programme. It aims 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, which provides a hub for knowledge and policy. Find out more on our website:

www.rural-interfaces.eu

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