



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

GOVERNANCE IN RURAL AREAS



MAP WALLONIA, BELGIUM

The MAP of Wallonia operates at a regional level in Belgium. The group consists of local citizens and businesses, representatives from civil society, researchers and policy makers.

Wallonia has implemented various initiatives and policies to ensure citizen participation in political debates. Examples include the LEADER programme, Local Action Groups, the Group of 1000, and the participatory budget. Nevertheless, Wallonia continues to adapt to a changing environment and strives to maintain representativeness. As such, combining small achievements with larger projects is also important to demonstrate the value of citizen participation in the short term and create new opportunities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Future rural policy

- Establish meeting spaces in rural areas for interactions and brainstorming.
- Create clear principles for local citizen participation.
- Ensure representation of underrepresented groups.
- Provide support for neutral facilitation and guidance of civic participation processes, incl. training for stakeholders and facilitators.
- Maintain a balance between short- and long-term projects to sustain citizen mobilisation and support citizen initiatives beyond predefined calls.

Future rural research

- Conduct a comprehensive study on participant profiles in participatory governance and ways to remove barriers and promote long-term engagement.
- Develop tools for local authorities to ensure representation of diverse stakeholders.
- Define service levels based on territorial types (e.g. medical facilities, emergency services).
- Clarify coordination between territorial scales.
- Implement training programmes for citizens to better understand institutional functioning

KEY STRENGTHS

- Rural areas in Wallonia are not isolated, nor threatened with depopulation or abandonment.
- Wallonia has extensive experience in implementing participatory approaches at the local level. With community initiatives (e.g., Rural Development Community Programs - PCDR) and Local Rural Development Committees (CLDRs)) which are called upon to provide input on various subjects and with the LEADER programme and the 20 LAGs generating highly active participation, involving a large number of rural municipalities in Wallonia.

KEY NEEDS

- Mobilisation and representativeness of all groups of actors concerned, including unrepresented groups.
- Maintaining citizen mobilisation over time through concrete results and considering alternative forms of democracy.
- Transparent and legitimate participatory governance processes and adequate involvement of policies.
- Capacity-building and resources to facilitate citizen participation and providing community spaces for organising citizen participation activities.
- Training programmes to equip participants with the necessary skill and knowledge for effective participation and continuous education in citizen participation.



EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Group of 1000

The Group of 1000, launched in 1991, randomly brings together 1000 citizens from different backgrounds to stimulate debate on Belgium's future. It aims to increase citizen participation, encourage dialogue between linguistic and cultural communities, and address various issues. The concept inspired similar initiatives in other countries (e.g. G1000 in the Netherlands and France) and has been adapted for municipalities and organisations.

