

SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights

SHERPA Final Conference

1 - 2 June 2023



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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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Foreword



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

SHERPA, which stands for Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors, is a research project that has been working since 2019 to develop recommendations for future policy supporting rural development across Europe. Its principal approach has been through establishing and running 41 Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) at national, regional, and local levels across Europe, as well as one MAP at the European level, bringing together representatives from science, society, and policymakers to design improved rural projects and contribute to the co-creation of improved policies at multiple spatial scales. The MAPs, understood as rural Science-Society-Policy interfaces, have co-created knowledge and shared experiences on key topics relevant to the future perspective of rural areas, making a major contributing to the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. The outputs of work done have been consolidated in several SHERPA and MAP Discussion and Position Papers.

After four years, SHERPA is to end in September 2023 and this report summarises the outcomes of the SHERPA Final Conference, held in Brussels on 1-2 June 2023. The Conference showcased the main results of SHERPA's activities, identified key recommendations, and considered the effectiveness of the underlying science-society-policy interaction. It provided an opportunity for discussion, comment, and constructive criticism to reflect on SHERPA's legacy and that of its constituent MAPs. It attracted more than 160 participants, including members of the SHERPA MAPs, representatives from European institutions, relevant networks, and external organisations working in the field of rural development.

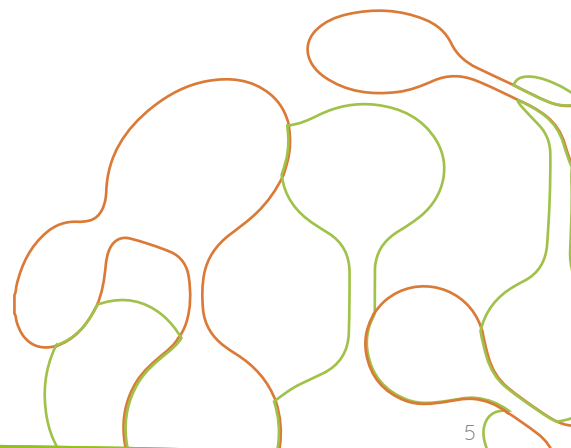
It included three interactive opportunities for participants, giving them the chance to co-design of SHERPA's contribution to the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas with a specific focus on potential adjustments of the EU Rural Action Plan, shape its final policy recommendations for the EU's broader policy framework, and investigate potential ways to maintain the SHERPA MAPs after the project's conclusion in September 2023. The SHERPA Final Conference placed a strong emphasis on supporting rural communities and underlined the value of collaboration, inventiveness, and inclusive policies.

The Conference was hosted by the European Committee of the Regions under the patronage of its senior member Radim Sršeň, rapporteur of "The Committee of the EU Regions' contribution to the renewed Territorial Agenda with special emphasis on Community-Led Local Development" (2019) and the Opinion on "Targets and Tools for a Smart Rural Europe" (2023). He also serves as vice-chair of the NAT Commission, the mayor of Dolní Stoužky (Czechia), and Deputy Minister of regional development of Czechia. With his genuine commitment and strong understanding of rural needs at multiple levels of governance, Radim Sršeň and CoR was an exceptional host for the SHERPA Final Conference.

This document summarises the main highlights, take-away messages, and outcomes of the SHERPA Final Conference for wider impacts and sustainability of the project's outputs and its rural interfaces.



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





DAY 1
1 June 2023

Introduction to the day

Elodie Salle, Principal Consultant at Ecorys, warmly welcomed the participants to the SHERPA Final Conference and opened the event by introducing the welcome speech of **Radim Sršeň**, Mayor of Dolní Studenky, Deputy Minister of regional development of Czechia, vice-chair of the NAT Committee of the European Committee of the Regions, and host of the SHERPA Final Conference.



Radim SRŠEŇ



**Mayor of Dolni Studenky,
Deputy Minister of regional development of Czechia
& Member of the European Committee of the Regions**

Welcome speech

“We need to foster innovation in rural areas as a tool for bringing future for rural areas”

In his welcome speech, Radim Sršeň commended the SHERPA Partners for their exceptional ability to bring together more than 630 participants from 17 different countries and to work with them to develop policy proposals aimed at enhancing rural policies. He emphasised that, as the mayor of the Czech town Dolni Studenky, he understood how challenging it could be to get people involved in matters that have an impact on their daily life and the community in which they reside.

The SHERPA project helped to foster people's engagement towards achieving the goal set out in the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). It was stressed that the Committee of the Regions strongly supports the LTVRA to unleash the potential of rural territories and deliver territorial cohesion in Europe, and Mr Sršeň emphasised the need to ensure the appropriate tools and targets to monitor and assess the progress. He was the rapporteur of the opinion on Targets and Tools for a Smart Rural Europe, which has been recently accepted and advocates for more tailored support to promote the attractiveness of rural areas, as well as equal access to basic services and opportunities and a stronger concentration of financial resources. In relation to this, he shared the view of the Committee of the Regions on the concept of Smart Villages: fresh and creative instrument for the development of rural communities in addition to the tried-and-tested method used by the LEADER programme.

As a final point, Mr Sršeň highlighted the importance of digitalisation in boosting public services in rural areas, including healthcare, as well as expanding remote employment prospects. Digitalisation is one of the key topics which has been addressed by SHERPA.

Welcome to the SHERPA Final Conference!



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator
ECORYS



Elodie SALLE
Project Coordinator
ECORYS

SHERPA project's coordinators, **Olivier Chartier**, Director at Ecorys, and **Elodie Salle** reminded participants on the two main reasons for SHERPA's existence: the need to **more effectively use the knowledge gained from research investments** and the need to **empower key actors and stakeholders** in the creation of public policy. Since its start, the **main mission of SHERPA** has been to gather relevant knowledge and opinions to formulate recommendations for future rural policies.

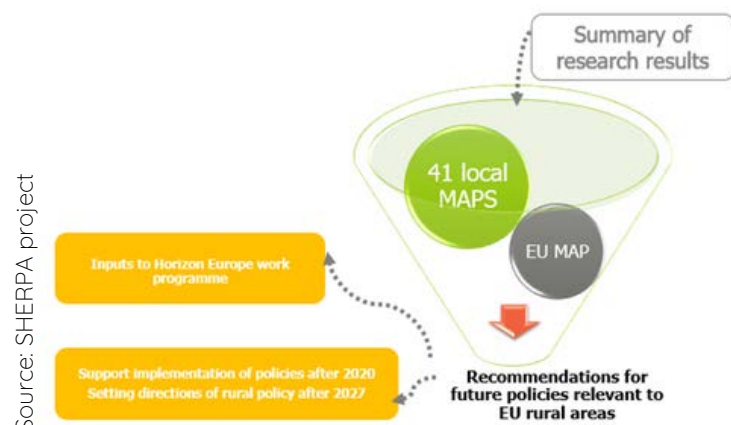
To fulfil this mission, SHERPA established 41 Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) at local, regional, and national levels and one EU-level MAP, all based on the concept of Science-Society-Policy interfaces. Through the SHERPA MAPs, more than 630 participants from 16 Member States and the United Kingdom (Scotland) provided input to develop policy recommendations from their respective standpoints as either local, regional or national MAPs. These recommendations aim to improve existing EU policies and those introduced after 2027 that affect rural areas. The SHERPA MAPs also provided input for the development of the Horizon Europe Work Programmes by sharing suggestions for potential topics for future research that would be beneficial for rural areas and its inhabitants.

In addition to the SHERPA MAPs and their work, the SHERPA project coordinators drew attention to the other high-quality outputs produced by the SHERPA project in four years:

- The development and implementation of the SHERPA Repository, which is an online repository containing results from over 800 research-focused projects;
- The publication of 9 SHERPA Position Papers (1 more expected by September 2023) and over 100 MAP Position Papers and Notes;
- Two sets of recommendations for future research agendas and future rural policies (the first set published in 2022, the second one expected by September 2023);
- More than 25 SHERPA Deliverables highlighting key aspects of policies with an impact on rural territories and how rural communities can mobilise for more just rural development.

Furthermore, SHERPA's activities contributed to various EU policy working documents and many SHERPA's outputs were incorporated into the EU Communication on the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. This acknowledges the dedication of all the participants who have actively contributed to the project through their knowledge and expertise.

Figure 1 The SHERPA Process



The Rural Corridor

To further promote SHERPA's findings and inspire people to connect with one another on important issues for rural development, **Carla Lostrangio**, Rural and Territorial Development Expert at the European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL), presented the Rural Corridor. This was a side-activity of the Conference, with the goal to showcase some of the best practices identified by SHERPA concerning five topics addressed during the project's duration:



Social dimension of rural areas



Digitalisation of rural areas



Sustainable and resilient value chains



Climate Change and land use in rural areas



Multi-level governance in rural areas.



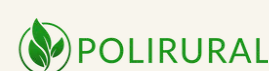
Carla LOSTRANGIO
European Association
for Innovation in Local
Development (AEIDL)



Participants of the SHERPA Final Conference had the opportunity to learn about other ongoing EU-funded projects for each of these topics.

The projects represented included PREMIUM EU ("Policy Recommendations to Maximise the beneficial Impact of Unexplored Mobilities in and beyond the European Union") and GRASS CEILING ("Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems") aimed at strengthening the social dimension in rural areas. Two additional projects on rural digitalisation present at the Conference were AURORAL ("Architecture for Unified Regional and Open digital ecosystems for Smart Communities and Rural Areas Large scale application") and CODECS ("maximising the CO-benefits of agricultural Digitalisation through conducive digital EcoSystems"). Furthermore, MOVING ("Mountain Valorisation through Interconnectedness and Green growth"), which aims to create more resilient value chains across Europe's mountains, OPER8 ("European Thematic Network for unlocking the full potential of Operational Groups on alternative weed control") on alternative weed control measures and GRANULAR ("Giving Rural Actors Novel data and re-Useable tools to Lead public Action in Rural areas") on developing and testing novel data and indicators for better rural policies were also present at the SHERPA Final Conference.

The SHERPA Repository, was also promoted by the Hercules Panoutsopoulos, Research Associate at the University of Athens. With more than 800 results from rural projects on nine different topics, the SHERPA Repository is one of the main outputs of the project. It also contains a cartographic map presenting the SHERPA MAPs as well as other interfaces (e.g. living labs, multi-actor platforms) from projects related to SHERPA (e.g. DESIRA, MOVING, PoliRural).



Contribution to the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas



Serafin PAZOS-VIDAL
European Association
for Innovation in Local
Development (AEIDL)

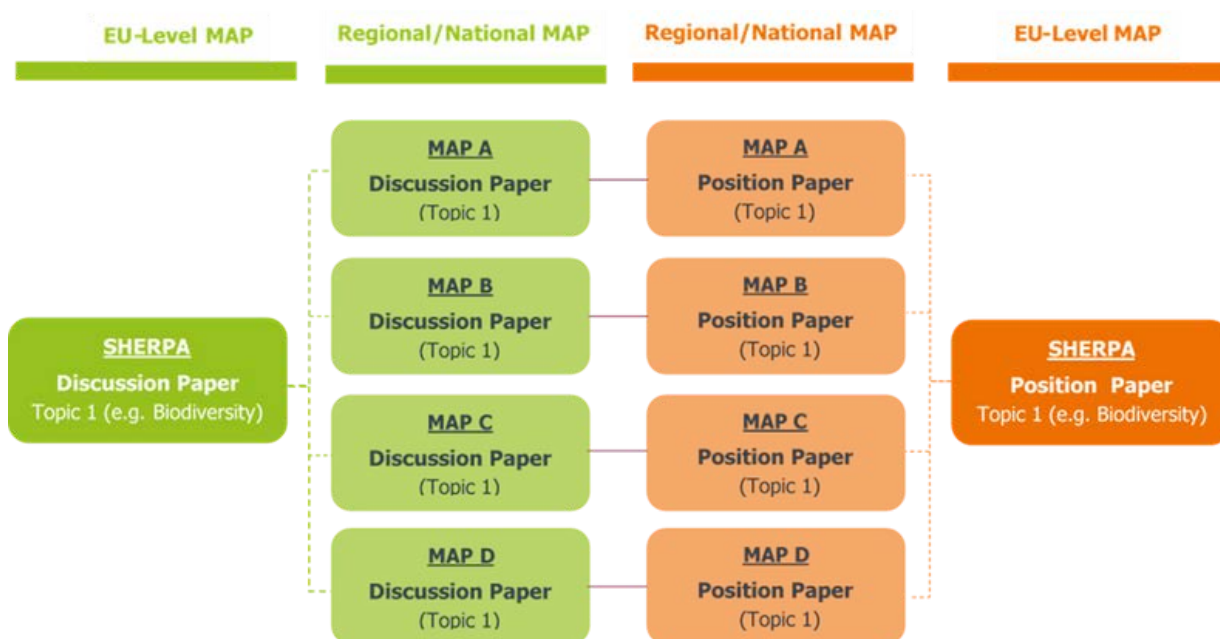
The afternoon session was led by **Serafin Pazos-Vidal**, Senior Policy Expert at the European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL) and focused on SHERPA's contribution to the LTVRA. Specifically, this session concentrated on interactions with the participants to rank Actions proposed by SHERPA, based on the project's main recommendations for the LTVRA building blocks, for potential adjustments of the EU Rural Action Plan (and rural development policies in general). Part of this were to expert panels with representatives from society, research, and policy, who shared their opinion on the proposed Actions.

How SHERPA developed its main recommendations

The SHERPA MAPs (i.e. Science-Society-Policy interfaces) were essential for the development of SHERPA's main recommendations. To come to these recommendations, the SHERPA project set up a linear procedure that included the following steps for each of SHERPA's main topics:

1. SHERPA Partners develop the **SHERPA Discussion Paper**, which is a preliminary report on a specific topic that included results of existing and ongoing EU research initiatives on that particular topic. This report is disseminated to all MAPs as a starting point for their work.
2. The MAP members (i.e. representatives of the science, society, and policy fields) use the SHERPA **Discussion Paper to facilitate and kick off** discussions on the particular topic within the MAPs;
3. The **MAPs** develop **their own MAP Position Papers** based on collection of evidence and views from their perspective (i.e. local, regional, or national). The MAP Position Papers contain each MAP's perspective on a particular topic (i.e. overview of the current situation in the geographical area, related challenges and needs are) and recommendations developed by the specific MAP for future EU policies and research agendas that affect rural areas and its inhabitants.
4. Based on all MAP Position Papers, the **SHERPA Partners draft a SHERPA Position Paper** which summarises the content of the **MAP Position Papers, highlighting their commonalities and differences as well as** their suggested **best practices** and developed recommendations;
5. Complementing the input provided by the MAP Position Papers, the **EU-level MAP integrate its own perspective and recommendations in the SHERPA Position Paper**, providing a **wider EU perspective**.
6. The SHERPA Position Paper is finalised and published, showcasing the ideas, suggestions and recommendations from the SHERPA MAPs.

Figure 2. Development process of SHERPA Position Papers



Source: [SHERPA website](#)

Prosperous and connected rural areas

Gerald Schwarz, Researcher at the Thünen Institute for Farm Economics, presented SHERPA's main recommendations related to two LTVRA's building blocks, namely Prosperous and Connected Rural Areas.

The need to adopt common, integrated, and long-term plans and policies that support the transition to a bio-based economy and for green innovation was emphasised, as well as the need to identify financial mechanisms to upskill all workforce sectors and rural people involved in those transitions, with a particular focus on rural youth. Gerald Schwarz also emphasised on the need to set up national plans to facilitate remote work and to create multi-service centres, while facilitating public participation in digitalisation policies.



SHERPA's recommendations for Prosperous and Connected Rural Areas can be found in SHERPA Position Papers on "Change in Production and Diversification of the Rural Economy," and on "Sustainable and Resilient Value Chains".



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thünen Institute for
Farm Economics

"A lot of interest is in cooperation of value chains, but quite often we come to the point we need local infrastructure that is not there"

Based on a closer analysis of the SHERPA's main recommendations for these two LTVRA building blocks, the SHERPA Partners developed various Actions that the project would propose to add to the related blocks of the Rural Action Plan; please see them in the table below.

Table 1. SHERPA proposed Actions for Prosperous and Connected Rural Areas in the Rural Action Plan

SHERPA proposed Actions for Prosperous Rural Areas	SHERPA proposed Actions for Connected Rural Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local food: to stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives within local and sustainable value chains;• Strengthening social economy: to incentivise community empowerment as well as collaboration between municipalities to achieve an equitable green transition;• Support youth in entrepreneurship: to promote the development of, and access to, education, training and networks of advice, and mentoring systems. for young people from across rural actor types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rural e-services: to facilitate digital access to public services and systems;• Cooperative approach for digitalisation: to encourage cooperation among societal groups to design strategies and exchange best practices;• Enhanced skills and digital competencies: to update digital competencies and access to technical assistance and need-based services in key sectors and particularly for vulnerable groups.

Key messages from the panel

A panel of SHERPA MAP representatives shared their opinions on the proposed SHERPA Actions, including Prof. Ricardo Reis, member of the MAP Southwest Alentejo, Csaba Bálint, member of MAP AKIS, Katherine Irvine, member of the EU MAP, and Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator at DG AGRI, European Commission.



Prof. Ricardo REIS
MAP Southwest Alentejo

Ricardo Reis emphasised the importance of cooperation and mutualisation of risks in agriculture, as well as mechanisation and digitalisation of rural areas. He called for larger investments in the digital economy in rural areas, as promoted by the LTVRA's building block on Connected Rural Areas.

“We don't need to reinvent the wheel, let's go back 150 years and we'll find cooperatives”

Csaba Bálint called for a greater support to youth entrepreneurship as a long-term investment to promote innovation and modernisation of the rural economy, as well as to its diversification and resilience.

“Youth entrepreneurship is a long-term investment in the sustainability of rural economies because of the continuous influx of new ideas and of economic dynamism and can cope with the exodus from rural areas”,



Csaba BÁLINT
MAP AKIS



Katherine IRVINE
EU MAP

Katherine Irvine emphasised the role that the social economy can have to foster transformative change and citizen empowerment in rural areas, and able to cope with ongoing challenges, such as climate change and promote a well-being economy.

“Social economy in rural areas can foster transformative change necessary to address the multiple challenges that people and planet face such as climate change”

Alexia Rouby confirmed that SHERPA's proposed Actions are in line with the EU Rural Action Plan. She emphasised that all actions and building blocks of the LTVRA should be seen in an integrated manner and mutually complementary. She recalled the crucial dimension of the social economy as a key element to address the decline of public services in rural areas while putting the benefit on society and the environment first, and the need to strengthen rural e-services for the benefit of rural people.

“It is important to address the decline of public services in rural areas inputting the wellbeing of society first”



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI- European
Commission

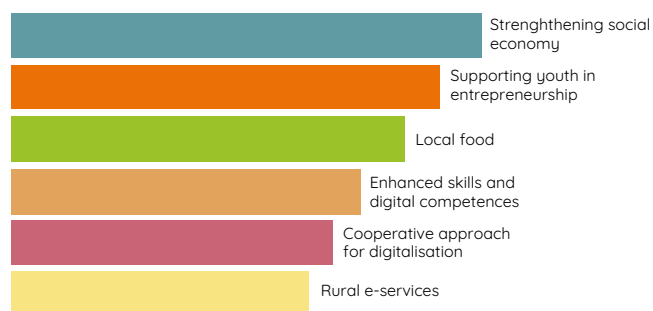
Voting exercise for the audience

Using the information provided during the presentation and panel discussion, participants were asked to rank the SHERPA proposed Actions for Prosperous Rural Areas and Connected Rural Areas, submitting their opinion, submitting their opinion and identifying whether they were a science, society or policy stakeholder. This allowed everyone to see any discrepancies or similarities between the perspectives of these differing groups in real time.

Interestingly, the voting revealed that **"strengthening the social economy"**, **"supporting youth in entrepreneurship"** and **"local food"** were deemed to be the three most important Actions to be included in the EU Rural Action Plan for Prosperous and Connected Rural Areas by all three groups of representatives, indicating wide-spread agreement on the importance of these Actions.

Figure 3. Results of the voting exercise from science actors

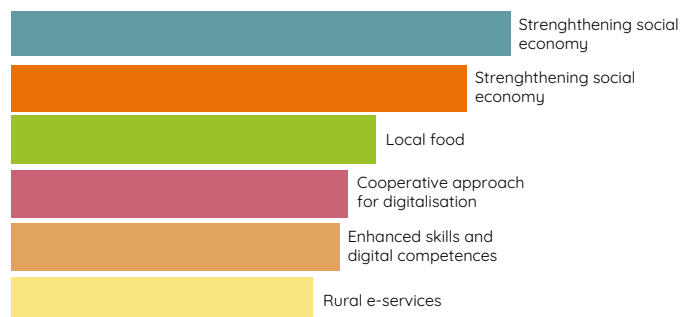
Rank the proposed SHERPA actions from more to less important for inclusion in the Rural Action Plan for Prosperous and Connected rural areas



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Figure 4. Results of the voting exercise from societal actors

Rank the proposed SHERPA actions from more to less important for inclusion in the Rural Action Plan for Prosperous and Connected rural areas



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Figure 5. Results of the voting exercise from policy actors

Rank the proposed SHERPA actions from more to less important for inclusion in the Rural Action Plan for Prosperous and Connected rural areas



Source: SHERPA Final Conference



Reactions from the panellists

Following the voting exercise, the panellist noted that the results were rather consistent and that this was not surprising to them. They also remarked that the preferences from the participants for Actions in regard to youth and social economy reflected the situation of immigrants and people living in rural areas across Europe, and should strongly be considered for the future of these territories. Furthermore, it was underlined that a strong social economy can serve as the enabling environment that can then facilitate other factors that foster rural development.

One panellist highlighted that digitalisation is widely promoted as the solution for securing the future of rural areas, but that it should not be regarded as primarily a technological infrastructure issue. Digitalisation also require addressing softer dimensions, namely around human and social capital, and particularly around skills and needs. Interestingly, the Action for E-services was ranked quite low by all participants, though the panellists remarked that this might be due to the fact that the COVID-19 boosted digitalisation and is now less of a major concern.

Input from the audience

In addition to the reactions from the panellist, various audience members took the floor to add some succinct but valuable input in regard to the proposed Actions.

- There is a critical need to promote local action and to strengthen the role of local and regional governments. Both levels of government need more support from the EU, and also national actors, given the multiplicity of challenges that they face in the frontline;
- To provide E-services in rural areas, we must first strengthen digital skills to ensure that no one is "left behind";
- Local businesses and local proximity services (social economy) are important, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Local food systems are currently facing difficulties remaining viable due to local energy costs and inadequate last-mile transportation infrastructure. To boost rural prosperity, both should be addressed;
- Rural citizens should receive training in entrepreneurship as well as wider soft skills like networking and teamwork. The creation of co-working spaces can make this process easier;
- Agriculture is frequently the focus of rural policies to an excessive degree. There are many other options besides agriculture for keeping people in rural areas. Nordic nations demonstrate how rural areas can change and become more accessible to green industries.



Stronger and resilient rural areas

“We should prove financial, technical and moral support for community, let innovation and create safe spaces for co-creating solutions.”



Giulia Martino
Ecorys

Giulia Martino, Consultant at Ecorys, presented SHERPA's main recommendations for Stronger and Resilient rural areas, the two other building blocks of the LTVRA. Enhancing the LEADER programme's social goals and enabling citizen-led funding, particularly in terms of climate mitigation and adaptation, were strongly emphasised. In addition, she underlined the need to promote good practices and opportunities to exchange across local actors, as well as the fact that connecting relevant actors from research, society, and policy fields, can unlock new opportunities and promote cross-fertilisation. More marginalised rural actors, such as women, should not be forgotten in this process.



SHERPA's recommendations for Stronger and Resilient Rural areas are further detailed in the SHERPA's Position Papers on “Social dimension of rural areas”, “Long-term vision of rural areas”, “Climate change and environmental sustainability” and “Climate Change and land use”.

Based on a closer analysis of the SHERPA's main recommendations for these two LTVRA building blocks, the SHERPA Partners developed various Actions that the project would propose to add to the related blocks of the Rural Action Plan; please see them in the table below.

Table 2. SHERPA proposed Actions for Stronger and Resilient Rural Areas

SHERPA proposed Actions for Stronger Rural Areas	SHERPA's proposed Actions for Resilient Rural Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science-Society-Policy interface: to foster interactions, deliberation and decision-making, bringing together science, society and policy;• Empowered rural citizens: to enable more participation of citizens in existing, or new governance structures (e.g. citizen-led allocation of funds, stimulate the participation of citizens in Horizon Europe rural projects);• Rural Erasmus: to foster the exchange of experiences between rural areas in Europe facing similar social problems. (e.g. field trips, study tours).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen-led approach for climate: to stimulate place-based, territorial, citizen-led approaches to tackle climate change (e.g. participatory budgeting from levies on largescale renewable energy developments);• Virtuous climate: to promote existing good practices and virtuous examples (e.g. multimedia demonstrations of best practices of just transition)• Climate communication: to develop a community-oriented communications strategy, tailored to local contexts of life, work and responsibilities.



Key messages from the panel

A panel with SHERPA MAP representatives from the European, national, and regional/local levels expressed their views on the SHERPA's proposed Actions. Panellists included Prof. Lorna Dawson, member of [MAP UK](#), Mihaela Mihailova, member of [MAP Bulgaria](#), Tom Jones, member of the [EU MAP](#), and Alexia Rouby, DG AGRI- European Commission.



Lorna DAWSON
[MAP UK](#)



Mihaela MIHAILOVA
[MAP Bulgaria](#)



Tom JONES
[EU MAP](#)



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI

Lorna Dawson emphasised the importance of fostering skills for greener professions as well as the importance of citizen-led approaches to combat climate change that leave no one behind, citing participatory budgeting and levies on transitions as a couple of examples.

“The decisions we make must be evidence-based to do the right thing for the right community in the right place also listening to the community”

Mihaela Mihailova noted that young people are the driver for rural areas and because of that, it is crucial to bring youth back to rural areas and help them to connect with each other as a precondition for rural development.

“Youth have abandoned rural areas and we need to bring them back to foster innovation”

Tom Jones maintained that rural areas should not be left behind and we should particularly ensure the inclusion of women and vulnerable groups throughout European policies, above all the Green Deal and the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

“Empowerment is an important word, as well as capacity, the ability to participate, gather views. We very often do not look to the most vulnerable of communities, such as women and the poor, there’s an elitist element. So empowerment is key.”

Alexia Rouby said that multi-actor approaches offer a practical example of how to make rural areas stronger and, she added, that further economic support should be given to citizen-led initiatives for climate action.

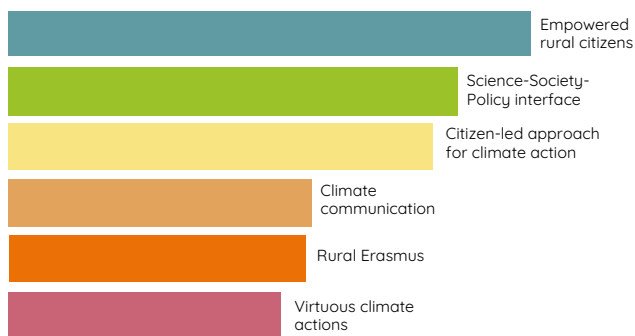
“Empowerment of rural citizens is the stronger point, but it is not easy to achieve it”

Taking into consideration the presentation and key messages shared during the panel discussion, participants were asked to create small groups and jointly rank the SHERPA proposed Actions for Stronger Rural Areas and Resilient Rural Areas, enabling participants from various rural parts of Europe to exchange their perspectives and experiences and come together to cast a single vote. This time around, there was also the possibility for participants to provide other ideas for actions that could be included in the Rural Action Plan.

The majority of attendees stressed the necessity of empowering rural players and strengthening ties between science, society, and policy actors through suitable interfaces, followed by a call for communities and climate action driven by citizens. When having a closer look at suggestions for other ideas to be included in the Rural Action Plan, elements such as ‘community enterprises’, ‘place-based instruments’, ‘differentiated tax’ were most present. Other suggestions surround topics such as local governance, smart communities, capacity building, multi-level governance, rural women, giving a voice to youth, and aspects in relation to cross-policy rural focus and cross-level activities.

Figure 6. Result of the group voting exercise

Rank the proposed SHERPA actions from more to less important for inclusion in the Rural Action Plan for Stronger and Resilient rural areas



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Input from the audience

Following the voting exercise, several audience members shared some additional suggestions in relation to the proposed Actions.

- We should investigate tactics, policies, and initiatives that emphasise the connections between the local and global spheres as well as between rural communities' quality of life and wellness;
- As some of the challenges we face today have a high level of technical complexity, we should increase the capacity-building for local authorities;
- Empowering citizens requires giving them practical tools, and it needs to be integrated into a larger framework through multi-level governance.





DAY 2
2 June 2023

Introduction to the day

Mario Milouchev, Director at Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) of the European Commission, welcomed participants to the second day of the SHERPA Final Conference. He has been actively involved with and supportive of SHERPA from its inception; he attended three previous SHERPA Conferences and closely followed the evolution of the project. Mr Milouchev commended SHERPA for its contribution to the LTVRA and its ability to connect with the EU's policy formulation process and highlighted the innovative aspect of SHERPA to facilitate stakeholder engagement throughout the project including the Final Conference. He concluded by announcing that, by the end of 2024, DG AGRI will publish a report on a series of reflections on how to improve support for rural areas. This study will be relevant to the discussion of the upcoming post 2027 Multiannual budget of the EU.



Mario MILOUCHEV
DG AGRI

Contribution to the wider policy framework

Olivier Chartier and **Elodie Salle** led the morning session focused on SHERPA's contribution to policies affecting rural areas in the EU, with a focus on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy. A participatory budgeting exercise was used to gather feedback from the participants on how the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU could allocate its resources to better address rural needs and accommodate new opportunities in Europe's rural areas.

Presentation of three EU policy options for rural areas



The CAP (in particular Specific Objectives 7 on “Generation Renewal” and Specific Objective 8 on “Vibrant rural areas” with the LEADER ring-fencing of at least 5% EAFRD budget) and the Cohesion Policy were pointed out by Olivier Chartier as the two main policies relevant for rural areas in the current framework. These policies represent roughly €1.2 billion in EU budget between 2021 and 2027, in addition to the €800 billion available via the Next Generation EU.

In this respect, SHERPA published an evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans for the socio-economic fabric of rural areas (2023). This appraisal showed that about 10% of the total CAP budget is allocated to rural areas and nine countries explicitly refer to the LTVRA in their CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs). As he explained, the evaluation makes clear a few key lessons:

- The LEADER ring-fencing works (only 12 countries allocated less than 6% of EAFRD to LEADER);
- The farming economy is perceived as the backbone of vibrant rural areas in many CSPs;
- The LTVRA came too late in the policy process to influence the design of the CSPs;
- LEADER and Smart Villages are perceived as the main interventions to operationalise the LTVRA in CSPs.

Following this, Olivier Chartier informed the participants that a public consultation on the next reform will begin in 2024, and the first legislative proposal of the European Commission for the next Multiannual Financial Framework will be published by 2025. Both represent crucial milestones for future policies that could affect rural areas and its communities.

Figure 7. Timing for the next policy reform



Source: SHERPA Final Conference. Presentation of 3 EU policy options for rural areas after 2027 and Introduction to the budgetary exercise

Keeping all of this in mind, Olivier Chartier presented three policy options to start the discussion on potential rural policy scenarios for the post-2027 programming period in light of the upcoming policy overhaul. The policy options identified ranged from the traditional **“business as usual”** (i.e. continuation of the current delivery of both the CAP and Cohesion Policy) to the slightly more adventurous **“rural acceleration”** (i.e. reorganisation of the next policy with the LTVRA building blocks and ring-fencing for four rural interventions) to a fully **“new model”** (i.e. merging funds in a single European Rural and Agricultural Policy and a shift from direct income support to farmers to redeployment of those resources to develop rural infrastructure).

Figure 8. Three policy options presented during the SHERPA Final Conference



* arc2020, article by Mathieu Willard, a CAP post-2027: An Integrated Rural and Agricultural Policy

Source: SHERPA Final Conference. Presentation of 3 EU policy options for rural areas after 2027 and Introduction to the budgetary exercise

Of the three presented policy scenarios, the focus of the morning session would be on “rural acceleration” to look at the potential evolution of rural policy in the post-2027 framework. Under this scenario, SHERPA would suggest a new policy framework structured along the building blocks of the LTVRA with national ring-fencing for four rural interventions, namely the LEADER programme, rural investments, rural skills, and rural communities.

“Participatory budgeting is a way to bring citizens to participate in the allocation of parts of public budget via democratic deliberation and decision-making.”

Elodie Salle, Ecorys

Elodie Salle introduced a participatory budgeting exercise to test this alternative scenario and gauge participants' willingness to support **four different rural priorities** based on the LTVRA. Four promoters gave pitches on the four rural priorities, after which attendees were asked to allocate a "virtual portfolio" of €100 million of the EU's post-2027 budget for rural development in accordance with the "rural acceleration" scenario. This exercise was repeated for the additional rural interventions: promoters gave a pitch on the rural interventions and participants were again to allocate €100 million of the EU's post-2027 budget among them. The main goal of this voting process was to gather participant feedback and facilitate group reflection on the future of the EU budget as it relates to rural policies in the programming period following 2027.

Pitches on rural priorities

Stronger rural areas

Barbara Soriano, Professor at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, expressed her ideas for strengthening rural areas. The wide trend of depopulation across Europe, the lack of attractive jobs and an enabling environment for rural innovators and increasing land competition are some of the challenges for the social dimension of rural areas. She stressed that there is a need to exploit the valuable social networks built by 30 years of the LEADER/CLLD approach through its Local Action Groups. She emphasised the role of social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement to empower communities and access to services.



Barbara SORIANO
Polytechnic University
of Madrid



"Youth think differently about work, the environment, community, etc., they no longer see these from the perspective of traditional industrial society"

Suomi MAP, Finland

Connected rural areas

According to **Gianluca Brunori**, Professor at the University of Pisa, improving connectivity in rural areas requires investment in transportation and digital infrastructure. Rural areas lag behind urban territories when it comes to digitalisation both in terms of infrastructure and human capital, maintained Gianluca in his intervention. The digital divide and digital poverty have widened in recent years as a result of COVID-19, endangering low-skilled and vulnerable communities in particular. Investing in digital solutions can increase the attractiveness of rural areas for residents and tourists, as well as transform societal governance and government engagement with citizens.



Gianluca BRUNORI
University of Pisa



"In 2040, rural areas will seize the opportunity of digitalisation as a wide array of tools to answer residents and businesses' needs"

Tuscany MAP, Italy

Resilient rural areas

Harriet Bradley, Head of Programme, CAP and Food at the Institute for European Environmental Policy, recalled the urgency to instil resilience in rural areas. Rural areas are at the forefront of suffering from climate change, she added. Making rural areas more resilient would entail both environmental resilience, such as through storing carbon in peatlands and wetlands and enhancing soil health, alongside socio-economic resilience, through improving the prospects for women, migrants, and vulnerable groups.

“*Rural areas can be part of the solutions for tackling climate change through investment in natural capital (e.g. stewardship of carbon-rich soils, peatland, afforestation)*”

River Dee Catchment and Rural Scotland MAPs, United Kingdom



Harriet BRADLEY
Institute for European
Environmental Policy



Prosperous rural areas

Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė and **Rita Lankauskienė**, Senior Researchers at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, shared their views on how to increase rural prosperity. As they recalled, key ingredients include supporting the social economy, addressing the needs of young people, promoting the bioeconomy and producing organisations. Rural areas have numerous resources to be valorised for the benefit of their residents, such as forest resources, as well as partnerships and relations all along the supply chain. Last but not least, the need to provide training and education opportunities for rural youth, the key pool of talent in these territories was emphasised.



Živilė GEDMINAITĖ-RAUDONĖ
Lithuanian Centre for Social
Sciences



Rita LANKAUSKIENĖ
Lithuanian Centre for
Social Sciences

“*A widespread understanding of the valuable contributions rural areas have for the economy, prosperity and welfare is central to our vision*”

Danish MAP



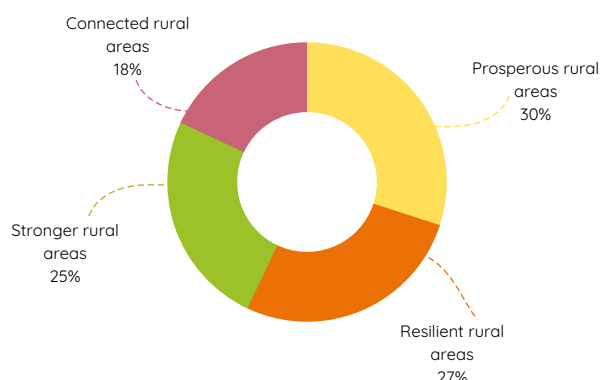
Voting and discussion with the panellists

Based on the type of stakeholder they represent (i.e. science, society, or policy actors), attendees were asked to allocate the “virtual portfolio” of €100 million of the EU’s post-2027 budget for rural development among the four rural priorities that were pitched. Each participant could choose to designate portions of their “virtual budget” to each of the stated rural priorities, depending on which were the most important to them.

It became clear that representatives of science and policy agreed on allocating the majority of their “virtual budget” for more prosperous rural areas, while societal actors had prioritised more resilient rural areas. Stronger rural areas was seen as the second most relevant policy priority by policy and science actors, and the third for societal actors. In all cases, the connected rural areas building block was the one that was the least prioritised during the exercise.

Figure 9. Results of the voting exercise from science actors

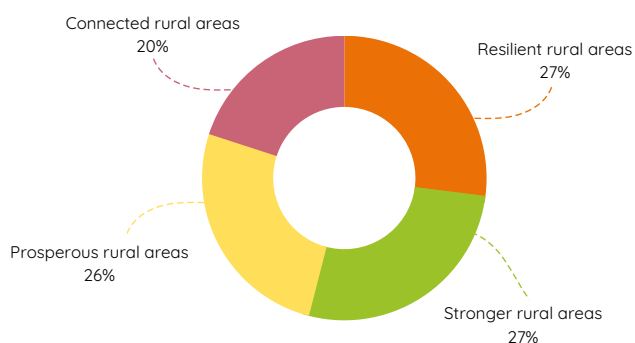
If you were in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Figure 10. Results of the voting exercise from societal actors

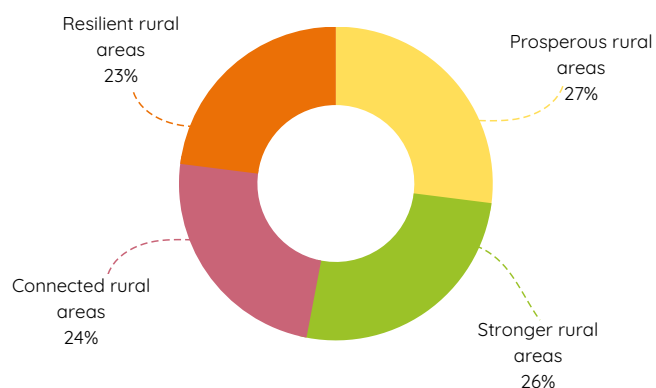
If you were in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Figure 11. Results of the voting exercise from policy actors

If you were in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Response from the panellists

A panel with representatives from science, society and policy actors working at the European, national, and regional/local levels was invited to provide their feedback on the results of the participatory exercise. The panel included Mario Milouchev (European Commission, DG AGRI), Eleftherios Stavropoulos (Policy Officer at the Joint Research Centre), Vanessa Halhead (Director of the European Rural Community Alliance), Dominique Barjolle (Senior Researcher and Lecturer at ETH Zurich), and Klaus Boele (Policy Officer at the European Committee of the Regions).



Mario MILOUCHEV
DG AGRI



Eleftherios
STAVROPOULOS
Joint Research Centre



Vanessa HALHEAD
European Rural
Community Alliance



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich



Klaus BOELE
European Committee of
the Regions

The exercise to reorganise existing rural policies alongside the four LTVRA's building blocks was seen as extremely valuable by all panellists as it offered an integrated framework for rural development. However, panellists also mentioned the need for caution, noting that as the LTVRA was not designed for this purpose; it may overlap with pre-existing EU policies and require further adjustment to be "mutually-exclusive but collectively exhaustive".

Mario Milouchev noted, with some surprise, the result of the public preferences expressed, particularly regarding the low scoring of the "Connected Rural Areas" as a rural priority area as some related interventions – such as expanding broadband or public transport – require higher investments than others (e.g. strengthening social capital in rural areas). In relation to this, **Klaus Boele** added that the potential impact of digitalisation on rural areas should not underestimate and in this respect, a report on the cost of non-rurality was recently published. This report attempts to provide a systematic approach that could estimate the costs of centralising EU funds in urban areas, and hence the respective "net costs" derived from urban-rural imbalances.

Adopting a comprehensive strategy that considers all four policy spheres of the LTVRA was commended by Vanessa Halhead. She also stressed the growing significance of "resilient rural areas" in light of the continuous climate change-related developments that both rural and non-rural communities must adapt to. In this respect, Dominique Barjolle recalled the importance of the public sector and of public initiatives to strengthen the resilience of rural communities, as private players are not always willing to make investments in climate mitigation and adaptation. In addition, Eleftherios Stavropoulos mentioned that all scenarios have strong and weak points. Yet, he also added, the European Commission has already been working to strengthen all policy areas at once through, among others, the EU Rural Observatory, the Startup Villages as well as the new EU Rural Toolkit to help optimise existing EU funds, which is foreseen by the end of 2023.

To conclude, panellists agreed on the need to ensure that, above all, policies adopt a bottom-up and place-based approach.



Pitches on rural interventions



Iwona WOCH
Local Action Group
Zielone Bieszczady

Rural Cooperation



Iwona Woch, member of the Local Action Group Zielone Bieszczady argued in favour of more funding for the LEADER programme, which is currently financed with a 5% ring-fencing. She went on to say that since it was established, the LEADER programme has supported bottom-up projects in rural areas that might strengthen both public and private institutions. It has also supported collaboration and new forms of private-public-civil society partnerships, making rural areas fertile testing grounds for developing cross-sector integration between traditional and modern knowledge-based industries and businesses that deliver green transitions (e.g. Living Labs).

“Since 25 years, I am working in a Local Action Group. My region is very depopulated, lack skills and the closest city is at 120 km. At the local level, we [Local Action Group] are more efficient.”



Monica TUDOR
Institute of Agricultural
Economics

Rural Investment



Monica Tudor, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Agricultural Economics – Romanian Academy, invited the audience to the room to advocate for more rural investment. As she stressed, various types of investments are crucial for rural areas. This ranges across investments to provide assistance for entrepreneurs to foster rural diversification, investments in digital services and infrastructure to reduce the dependence on physical mobility and facilitate the life of the rural population, to investments in bio-based solutions, natural capital and environmental restoration.

“Investments must be focused on rurality, we need investments in building grounds for local diversification, for supporting other activities other than farming in rural areas. We need to increase the accessibility of rural areas, to integrate remote areas.”



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich

Rural Skills



Dominique Barjolle urged for a greater focus on fostering rural skills, with a focus on ensuring lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling of the entire rural population, outside of the farming industry. Education, training and knowledge sharing are all important in the transition to a bio-based economy, she said. Increasing human capital is also essential for rural areas to take their leading role in achieving climate neutrality and reversing biodiversity loss, as well as empowering rural producers to transition to sustainable practices.

“Education, training, knowledge sharing are all important in the transition to a bio-based economy”



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM Montpellier

Rural Communities



Samuel Féret, Associated Expert and Project Manager at CIHEAM Montpellier, proposed a new intervention through the CAP Strategic Plan to support local communities and solidarity networks in rural areas, building on existing initiatives and concepts (e.g. smart villages, start-up villages, rural energy communities). As he explained, such an intervention could compensate for the decline of municipal revenues and reinforce social networks and capital in rural areas. Investments could also support initiatives for a better work life balance, integration of migrants and new inhabitants relocating from urban areas.

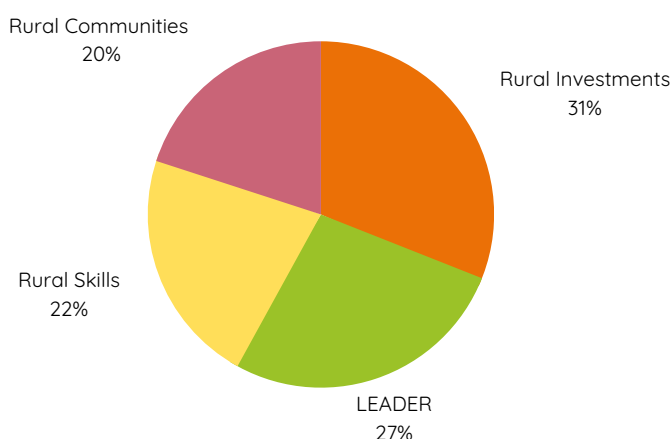
“It is important to build solidarity networks in rural communities to prevent population decline, strengthening resilience and promote work-life balance”

Voting and discussion with the panellists

Following this round of pitches, the participants were invited create small groups and jointly distribute the “virtual portfolio” of €100 million of the EU’s post-2027 budget for rural development across the four rural interventions. As can be seen below, “Rural investments” emerged to be the policy intervention (31%) with the most budget allocated, followed by “LEADER” (27%), “Rural Skills” (22%) and “Rural Communities” (20%).

Figure 12. Results of the voting exercise

If your group was in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Response from panellists

The same panel with representatives from science, society and policy actors working was invited to express the feedback on the voting results.

The panellist noted that the distribution of funds should consider both present and future needs, as priorities and key needs today might change overtime. Rural interventions should be forward-looking and have long-term objectives. Furthermore, it was stressed that it is difficult (and not always desirable) to prioritise one rural intervention over another. Overall, it is recommended to ensure a multifaceted and all-encompassing strategy that do not look at those rural interventions separately, but integrate them in a consistent way;.

Furthermore, the panellists emphasised that the LEADER programme is a catalyst for the majority of the rural investments expressed and presented by the four promoters. As such, it would be fundamental to keep supporting this programme as well as rural communities benefitting from these funds. Lastly, it was acknowledged that bureaucracy and administrative procedures to access existing funds are often burdensome for local actors, especially the ones living in rural areas. Simpler rules are essential to facilitating the access to funds for rural communities, and, to this extent, a lot of progress has been made with the latest rules.

Input from the audience

Following the participatory budgeting exercise, multiple audience members took to the floor to add some additional feedback:

- Solutions and strategies to target population decline, inadequate housing, and similar issues should be suggested and decided by those who are familiar with the situation. Since the LEADER programme has confirmed its effectiveness and impacts, we ought to boost its funding and fortify the multi-funding strategy;
- Investments in rural regions can improve connectivity in these territories. One method to work and become resilient in an affluent world is through connectivity, both digital and physical;
- In contrast to other rural areas of Europe, the Nordic countries experience a quite distinct situation. In debates about rural development, agriculture is frequently given far too much attention, which is out of step with the Nordic backdrop and trends. Continued emphasis should be given to job prospects, private sector growth, and SMEs in this rural area.





Science – Society – Policy interfaces

The afternoon session was led by Jorieke Potters, Researcher Knowledge and Transition at Wageningen University & Research, and was devoted to a review of the lessons learned from designing, setting up and implementing the SHERPA MAPs. Key reflections were made also on the evaluation of their work as well as on their sustainability after the project's end.



HOW to effectively design, support and run Science-Society-Policy interfaces? What are their benefits and added value?

New rural policies, in the words of the OECD, "require new ways of thinking about rural areas and multi-actor and multi-level governance mechanisms", said Jorieke Potters, though she acknowledged that designing and operating a successful multi-level mechanism is no simple undertaking. This challenge has not discouraged **Jorieke Potters**, who has overseen the implementation of the 41 SHERPA MAPs as well as leading an evaluation workshop of the MAP implementation in May 2023. Based on the data gathered by setting up and establishing these across Europe, it was clear that a few **essential components** should be considered when creating and operating Science-Society-Policy interfaces. These components were identified from feedback gathered by the project's MAPs through surveys and other activities.

As Jorieke Potters explained, the term "Science-Society-Policy interfaces" refers to a specific architecture and dynamic method used to attain this scope. To be effective and well-functioning, this architecture should entail a **balanced representation** of rural actors from science (the "evidence" side), society (the "values" side) and policy (the "decision" side) at different governance levels (local, national, and European) with a minimum of 10 members. In addition, each interface should define its own **Dynamic Action Plan**, which is a guiding document with clear objectives and a common purpose. In SHERPA, the flexibility of the Action Plan allowed MAPs to align its trajectory with a constantly evolving environment and the complexity made of different interests and dimensions.



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen
University

In addition to these components, Jorieke Potters listed other essential factors for successful design and implementation of a Science-Society-Policy interface, as follows:

- **Science-based engagement**, to provide a common ground to trigger discussions based on evidence;
- A safe space for **meaningful dialogue** with an experienced facilitator for engaging participants;
- The formulation of **policy recommendations** as tangible output from the entire process that could be used to engage with policy and other actors at multiple levels.

When looking at the future, some **critical elements** need to be considered **to sustain the MAPs** are:

- Creating meaningful **bottom-up connections** of policy to local actors and interests is crucial for rebuilding trust and impactful policy;
- Supporting **rural facilitators and monitors** to do engagement groundwork and scientists to take part in rural development dialogue;
- **Building on experiences and capacities** developed in SHERPA to make the EU Rural Pact and EU Rural action plan a success.

Figure 13. Overview of SHERPA's dynamic



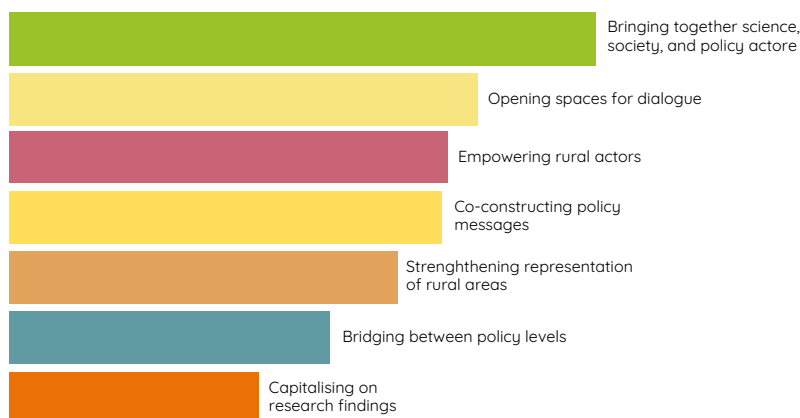
Source: SHERPA Final Conference. Key lessons on actor engagement in rural development, Jorieke Potters (Wageningen University) and Leneisja Jungsberg (Nordregio)

Input from the audience

Jorieke Potters invited the participants to reflect on the question **"What do you consider to be the most important contribution of SHERPA Science-Society-Policy interfaces?"** and rank what they considered to be most important added value of the MAPs. The most important contributions were seen to be **"bringing science, society, and policy actors together," "creating dialogue spaces,"** and **"empowering rural actors"**.

Figure 14. Responses to the question from the audience

What do you consider to be the most important contribution of SHERPA Science-Society-Policy Interfaces?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Following this line of questioning, the audience was asked to share what they personally found to be the most important SHERPA lesson on the interfaces between science, society, and policy. Participants emphasised "learning," "Europe being at very different stages of rural development, making it impractical to search for a one-fits-all solution," "knowledge exchange between different sectors learning to action," and "co-creation" among the responses (for a complete list of responses, see the Annexes).

Key messages from the panellists



Karen REFSGAARD
Nordregio

Karen Refsgaard noted that while it can take time, it is crucial to bring different actors together to debate important topics and build a shared knowledge on solutions. However, she emphasised that it is essential to carefully assess who should participate in a MAP and to make sure that MAP members have clear objectives and a well-defined mandate. Involving people who have a strong interest in the subject of the conversation is crucial, she continued, and scientific players should be seen as facilitators rather than participants.

“I believe we really created something through understanding.”



Valeria FANTINI
ALDA

Co-creation and debate, according to **Valeria Fantini**, can strengthen local actors' engagement and bridge different viewpoints. Bringing together rural players and giving them a shared role can foster social interaction and forge new alliances, but it is crucial that actor engagement leads to concrete outcomes.

“Civil society can hold governments accountable, but are also their major allies on the implementation of measures.”



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI

Alexia Rouby noted that the SHERPA MAPs created a bridge between rural reality and policymakers. It enabled policy makers to learn from the actions of rural actors, and it also supported comprehension of the policy cycle of rural actors. She continued by saying that because so many inputs are requested from those participating in the policy-making processes, it is crucial to set up feedback mechanisms to demonstrate how their suggestions are incorporated into initiatives or policies.

“SHERPA is an experience on participatory democracy where civil society can have an impact.”

WHY? Benefits and added value of Science - Society - Policy Interfaces

It is vital to reflect on the **added value** that has been produced for rural actors and rural territories where SHERPA has been operating. Based on her research, the MAP process's five primary areas of greatest added value were as follows:

1. **Strengthening the rural dialogue** through increasing the capacity and the creation of non-politicised spaces that could reinforce trust, knowledge and the involvement of new actors;
2. **Increasing connectivity and networking** by linking of policy levels, as well as building networks and structures has the potential of reinforcing social capital for the future;
3. **Contributing to all aspects of policy**, from policy preparation to formulation and implementation, with the ultimate view of strengthening the content of the policy and the emancipation of rural areas;
4. **Inspiring action new initiatives** and empowering rural communities in their development;
5. **Building capacity** for democracy and rural development.



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen
University

Figure 15. Added values of the SHERPA process to rural areas and communities



Source: SHERPA Final Conference. Key lessons on actor engagement in rural development, Jorieke Potters (Wageningen University) and Leneisja Jungsberg (Nordregio)

Key messages on added value by SHERPA MAPs

To further expand on the added value of MAPs, Jorieke Potters invited representatives of three SHERPA MAPs to express their views on this: Isolina Rodríguez ([MAP Galicia](#)), Anne-Liisi Mändmets, ([MAP Estonia](#)), and Olga Kriezi ([MAP Central Greece](#)).



Isolina RODRÍGUEZ
[MAP Galicia](#)



Anne-Liisi MÄNDMETS
[MAP Estonia](#)



Olga KRIEZI
[MAP Central Greece](#)



Isolina Rodríguez claimed that one of the primary added features of the Science-Society-Policy interfaces for her respective MAP was the ability to ground the MAP conversation on **evidence-based science**. Evidence-based science assisted MAP Galicia in identifying earlier issues and problems in the discussion of rural areas and in developing suggestions for various rural territories. The scientific facts contributed to the discussion's enrichment and emphasis without constricting it.

Creating meaningful dialogue was the main added value of the Science-Society-Policy interfaces for **Anne-Liisi Mändmets**, Facilitator of the MAP Estonia operating at national level. Face-to-face meetings, moderated conversation, and prompt and thorough communication on the ultimate objective and how the meetings' outcomes are used were all essential elements for that, she said. She went on by saying that grassroots and bottom-up initiatives should receive more focus as they present novel ideas. Effective communication between MAP members strengthened their cooperation, which had positive effects on the country's rural development. It also helped to broaden the perspectives of social actors and policymakers, and it made local communities more eager to take part in any future SHERPA-like program.

Olga Kriezi asserted that one of the primary added values of Science-Society-Policy interfaces has been their ability to influence policy. That can only happen if all MAP members attend the meetings prepared, are aware of the time constraints, can envision the topic, and can ask and answer questions. The MAP's composition enabled the development of discourse and the capture of various viewpoints among various actor kinds and levels of governance.

Sustaining the value and benefits of Science-Society-Policy interfaces

Leneisja Jungsberg, Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio, presented the results from a survey launched for SHERPA MAPs to assess whether they plan to sustain their activities after the project's end. Approximately 70% of the SHERPA MAPs members, Monitors, and Facilitators who responded to the survey indicated they would prefer to **continue participating in a MAP in the future**. Additionally, **90% of respondents** said that the MAP approach improves monitoring and facilitating skills.

The respondents cite strong leadership, a defined focus issue, a clear declaration of goals and objectives, and financing for MAP Facilitators and Monitors as **key sustainability criteria** for the continuance of the MAPs. Additionally, more than half of the respondents concurred that **evidence-based knowledge** is crucial in informing MAPs. To conclude her intervention, Leneisja Jungsberg presented some recommendations to sustain the MAPs in the future:

- **To sustain the MAP processes:** Establish a strong MAP leadership team and ensure that evidence-based actors continue to have a central role in driving the MAP process;
- **To sustain the MAP impacts:** Clearly identify target audiences for MAP outputs and enhance visibility of MAP impacts on policy processes;
- **To sustain the MAP integration:** Consider whether the MAP model should replace or merge with existing rural networks (e.g. Rural Pact and LEADER) and prioritise the network of the MAPs in future rural activities on EU, national, regional, and local level.

Following her presentation, Leneisja Jungsberg invited the participants to reflect on the question **“What left the greatest impact on you during the MAP meetings?”** and share some key words to address this question. The most common key words are outlined below:

Dialogue

People

Cooperation

Impact

Collaboration

Following this, participants were asked to reply to the question **“What valuable lessons and insights will you carry with you in future rural development projects?”** and reflect on their main uptake from SHERPA, in particular in view of future perspectives. The most common key words are outlined below:

Networking

People

Food

Network

Co-creation



Leneisja JUNGSEBERG
Nordregio



The EU Rural Pact



Pascale VAN DOREN
Rural Pact Support
Office



Do you wish to join the
Rural Pact?
FIND OUT MORE HERE!

Pascale Van Doren, Team Leader of the Rural Pact Support Office, provided examples of how the Rural Pact could support the SHERPA MAPs once the project ends. Launched in 2021 by the European Commission as part of the LTVRA, the Rural Pact provides a legal setting and framework to encourage collaboration between rural actors at multiple levels. The variety of rural actors involved in the Rural Pact is large and can range across local, regional, and national authorities, civil society organisations, businesses, academic and research organisations, as well as individuals. The Rural Pact has three main objectives, which are:



To amplify the voice of rural areas and bring them up in policy agendas;



To promote networking, collaboration & mutual learning among rural actors across Europe;



To encourage rural stakeholders to submit their commitments to act to strengthen rural areas and communities in the future.

Today, the Rural Pact Community consists of over **1750 members** and more than **80 commitments** to act. The Rural Pact Support Office will keep in touch with rural players in the coming months and promote fresh pledges for improving rural areas and communities. This will be done in coordination with the **Rural Pact Coordination Group**, a group of national experts steering the Rural Pact Action Plan.

Several initiatives and events to link rural players together are being worked on by the Rural Pact Support Office. Pascale Van Doren provided a short list of upcoming ones, including:

- High-level Policy Forum “Shaping rural futures” (27-29 September 2023, Spain)
- Webinar on energy transition (October 2023)
- Policy Lab on “Designing future support for rural areas” (December 2023)

Pascale Van Doren also announced that, as part of the EU Rural Action Plan, the European Commission will launch a Rural Revitalisation Platform on 29 June 2023. This platform is a collaborative tool for and by all revitalisation actors, enabling them to set up communities within the Platform that can help the continuation of the work of the SHERPA MAPs as it provides a virtual interface to find information on rural revitalisation, interact with peers, strengthen collaboration, and enable the sharing of relevant materials within the community.



Closing of the Conference

“Can SHERPA results show a model to more rapidly addresses problems that will emerge in the future?”

Peter Midmore, Professor at the Aberystwyth University, provided the closing remarks for the SHERPA Final Conference. He suggested that many trends affecting rural areas today are not new but were already in place about 40 years ago when he started his career. Depopulation and diminishing services in rural areas provides some examples of this. Rural policies have evolved over time, but those patterns of decline have not entirely been reversed, and they are still a heated topic in today's society. Professor Midmore said that SHERPA offered **"promising perspectives"** to rural governance and contributes to the policy process. Indeed, the SHERPA's multi-actor strategy has demonstrated its capacity to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in those discussions. He concluded saying that the SHERPA's results can provide a paradigm for more quickly addressing future problems across Europe's rural areas.



Peter MIDMORE

**Professor of Economics,
Aberystwyth University**



Annex 1. What is your most relevant lesson learned in SHERPA on the Science-Society-Policy interfaces?

Engagement and Collaboration

Actors must see an impact of their engagement

The importance that members commit to engage over a long period of time (i.e to meet at regular intervals)

How to engage different actors and make them express their opinions.

The very thing of bringing representatives together for constructive dialogue is in itself already a major achievement.

Genuine willingness to work together is fundamental

Value of social participation

Importance of three-way dialogue & reinforcing the importance of involving community-level orgs and individuals in both research and policy development.

Communicate the concrete contribution of MAP work to LTVRA allowed keeping members engaged

The common activities between science policy and society

It can be possible to bring together actors from different field in favor of a constructive and effective collaboration!

Dialogue

Future depends on the level of democracy, trust between actors and dialogue for empowerment the rural.

Is important to have different approaches to different MAP Members to increase engagement

Co-creation x2

Discuss our problems with policymakers and scientists on a one-to-one basis

Bottom-up method is always good!

Let's agree to disagree

Partnerships and sharing experience are important

Replantear pensamientos, analizar mejor la realidad a la luz de otros puntos de vista, aprender del grupo dinamizador (USC) a pilotar (Rethinking thoughts, analyzing reality better in light of other points of view, learning from the driving group (USC) to pilot)

Listen to the others and participative governance

Linking actors and bridging among regions and countries

Multi-actor approach

Founded dialogue is possible and society and policy actors really appreciate this

Dialogue among actors and proposal of solution

The Importance to have space for dialogue

Cooperation power

Open space for co-learning through exchanging different perspectives

Listen to the others and participative governance

Positive experience, especially to be able to work with different people at different levels and to be able to come here.

L'importance de faire échanger ces différents acteurs qui ne se rencontrent pas souvent (The importance of exchange between different actors who do not meet often)

To listen

Importance of three-way dialogue & reinforcing importance of involving community level orgs and individuals in both research and policy development.

Knowledge exchange between different sectors leading to action

Learn more about the diverse condition in EU rural areas

Importance of exchanging different perspectives and co-learning

Learning

Networking

Impact and Policy Influence

Alignment with local needs and policy cycles

SSP interfaces in Sherpa allow learning while giving own personal views, motivating approach which should sustain and leverage policy power of the rural

Data sciences diffusion

It helped a lot to make rural voices be heard at various policy levels

Positive experience

Good practice

This model could be a useful tool for policy makers to adopt best practice in their work on policy development and implementation.

Science-society-policy interfaces may act as strategy makers

It shall be an active practice in each MS

SSP Interfaces seem to be a form of societal control over policymaking.

New idea

There was no such Interfaces before Sherpa MAP meeting

Upscaling of innovations in the rural policies

Empower rural areas

The need to involve civil society in policymaking

Importance of expert involvement in order to present and interpret science for stakeholders

Challenges and Needs

We need to give society more space/place to meet, ways to have an impact on local policy, more money for doing things

It's difficult to "buy in" the participation of members

That Europe is at very different stages of rural development and that it is impractical to search for a one size fits all solution

Limitation of rural development policy

Not taking decisions with the necessary speed with regards to the changes that are being brought upon us by climate change

Keeping people engaged is hard

The interdependence of environmental safety and the need for investing in rural areas for the benefit of everyone

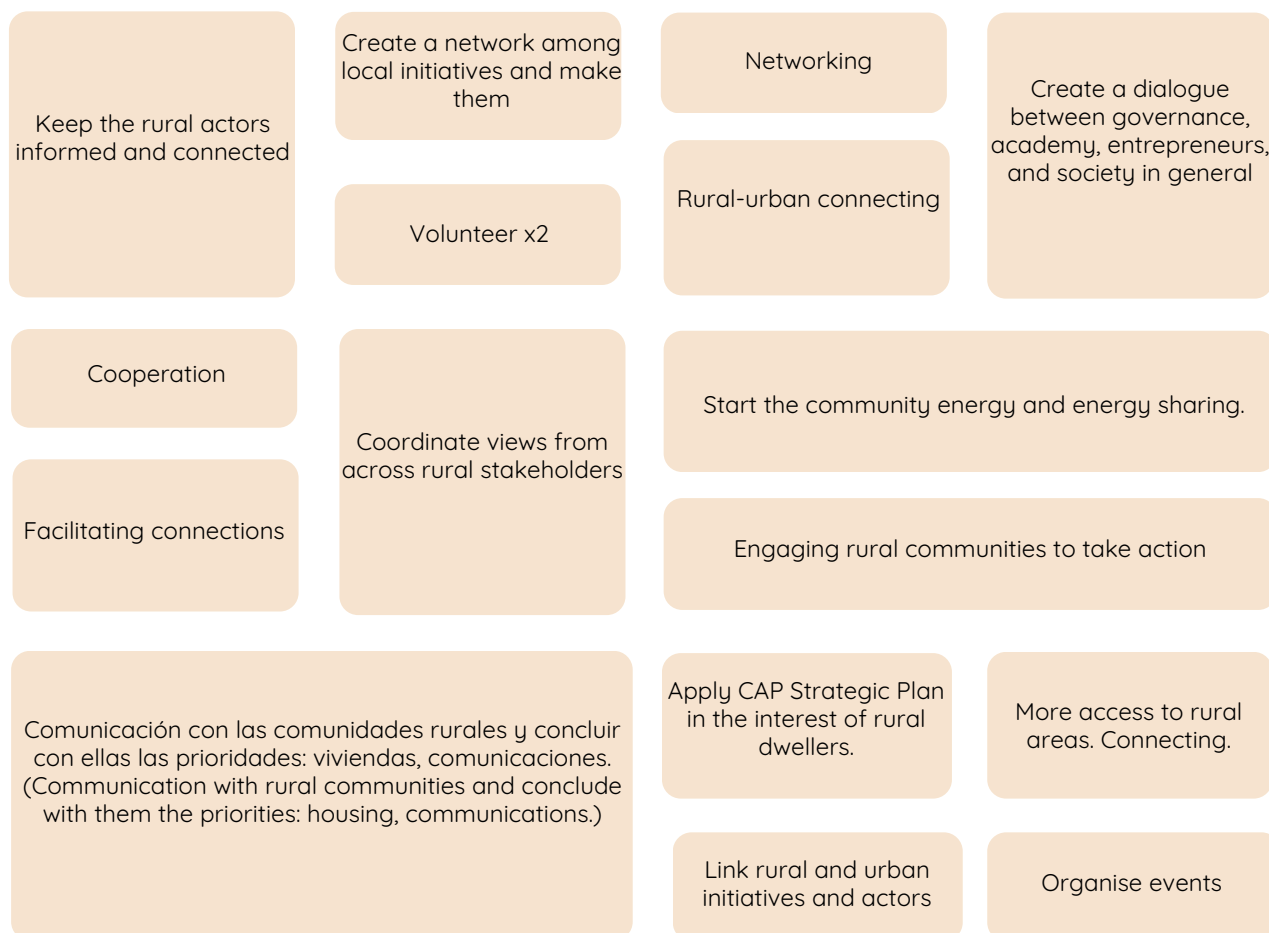
Setting up science-society-policy interfaces require a lot of time resources, patience

Short funding to reach objectives and cover needs

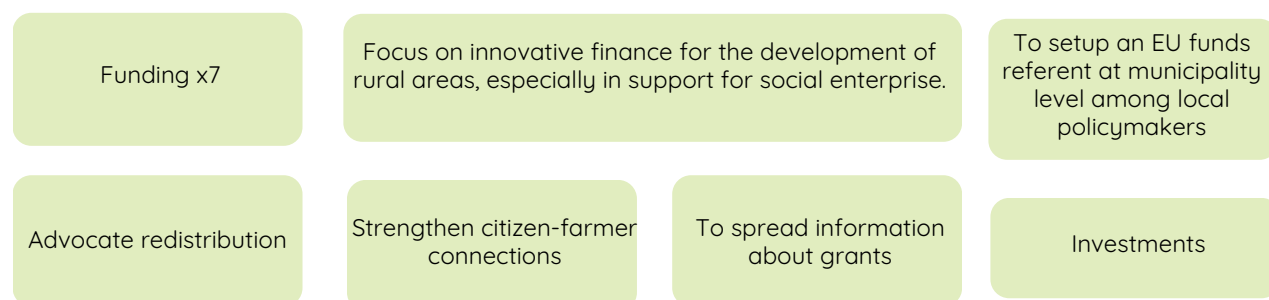
Restrictions coming from hard bureaucracy

Annex 2. What is one action you could take to support rural development in your country?

Engagement and Collaboration



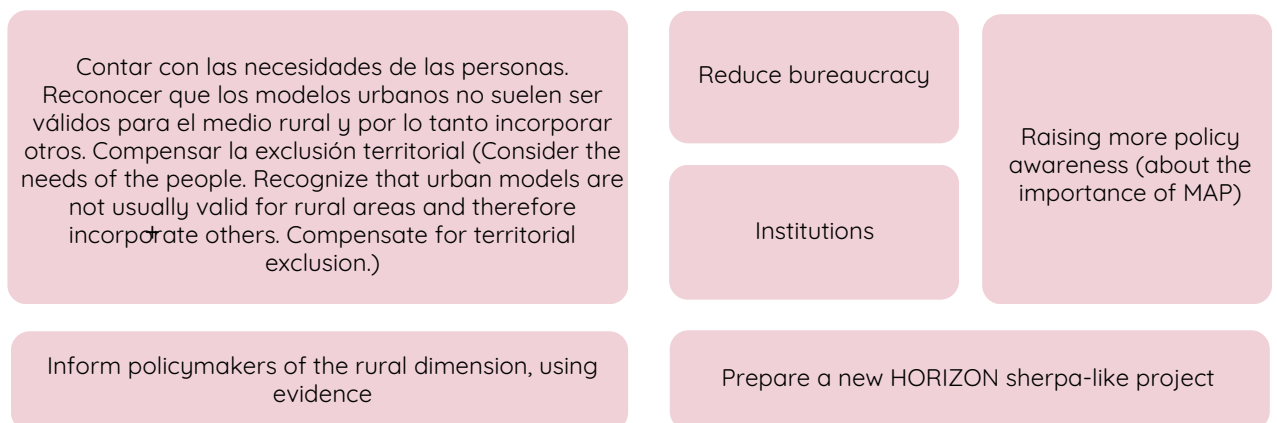
Funding and Financial Support



Knowledge Exchange and Research



Bureaucracy and Policy Advocacy



Social and Economic Development

Buy from local rural businesses & social enterprises

Support local economy

Buy local food and beers

Actually doing things in rural areas

Buy local

Keep buying nearby food

Short supply chain

Live in rural area

Keep focus on rural disadvantage

Être attentif à la pression touristique (Paying attention to tourism pressure)

Develop local social care solutions in rural areas

La conservación del medio ambiente como oportunidad laboral para la población local (Environmental conservation as a job opportunity for local people)

Protect of soul, landscape And Water!

Support rural women

More action for young people

Developing social economy



SHERPA

Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces



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