SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy Interfaces

EMPOWERING RURAL AREAS IN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

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MAP POSITION NOTE

MAP RURAL_PT

Version 11.04.2023

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1. Current situation based on background research and evidence

The Fundão region is governed by the Municipality of Fundão, which is a local authority, i.e., a territorial entity with its own powers of administration and management of local affairs. The Municipality of Fundão is responsible for the management of various areas, such as education, health, culture, tourism, environment, among others, and aims to promote the region's development and improve the quality of life of its inhabitants.

This region is part of the Beira Baixa Intermunicipal Community (CIMBB), which is a supra-municipal entity composed of 6 municipalities in the region, including Fundão. The main objective of CIMBB is to promote the economic, social, and cultural development of the Beira Baixa region by fostering cooperation among its members and collaborating with other public and private entities.

There are several experiences and visible trends in governance in Fundão. One of the main trends is the use of digital technologies to improve citizen participation in decision-making processes. For example, the "Fundão Participa" platform allows citizens to propose and vote on ideas for the city's development. Additionally, the Fundão municipality has implemented a participatory budget, which allows citizens to vote on the allocation of public funds.

Another trend is the promotion of sustainable development, with a focus on environmental protection and the use of renewable energy sources. The Fundão municipality has implemented several initiatives in this regard, such as the creation of a network of electric vehicle charging stations and the installation of solar panels on public buildings.

Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of collaboration between different actors in governance, such as public authorities, private sector, civil society organizations, and citizens. This is reflected in initiatives such as the "Fundão Consensus," a partnership between the municipality and local businesses to promote economic development and job creation.

Regarding the digitalization policies there are several initiatives in Fundão that aim to improve citizen participation in these policies at the local level. One notable example is the Fundão Digital program, which aims to facilitate the adoption of digital technologies by the local community, commercial establishments, and institutions through a diverse range of training and awareness-raising initiatives.

Additionally, the Fundão municipality has established a Citizen's Portal, which allows citizens to access information about local services, events, and initiatives, as well as to submit complaints and suggestions online. This platform also facilitates the participation of citizens in local decision-making processes, through the submission of proposals and opinions on various topics, including digitalization.

Moreover, the Fundão Innovation Plan includes a set of initiatives aimed at promoting the digital transformation of local businesses and institutions, such as the provision of digital tools and services, the creation of a digital innovation hub, and the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation in the digital sector.

Overall, these initiatives demonstrate a commitment to promoting citizen participation in digitalization policies at the local level and improving the overall digital infrastructure and services available in Fundão.

2. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform max. 4 pages

2.1. Identified strengths and needs

The MAP Members were challenged to respond a survey on the main strengths and needs regarding the involvement of rural actors, and the local level, in multilevel governance; inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, and the creation of rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies rural-urban, resulting in very interesting outputs with different perspectives.

- **Strengths and needs | The involvement of rural actors, and the local level in multilevel governance.**

The Municipality of Fundão has demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging rural actors and local governance in the context of multi-level governance, which has been one of their main strengths. This is made possible by the fact that relevant actors can be easily identified and contacted, thanks to a history of consultation and positive experiences in the territories.

However, the main problem in these policies has been the lack of understanding of the real constraints facing rural areas by those who develop and decide on policies. The main needs in Fundão include a greater understanding of opportunities and the involvement of rural actors and local level in multi-level governance. The weaknesses of public governance lie in the governance and legitimacy of the models and actors involved, which include management problems such as the fragmentation of the State, atomization of society, and excessive number of laws, rules, regulations, licenses, among others.

A fundamental issue is that rural development policy is undergoing significant transformation, which is driven by new opportunities and ambitions resulting in a broader range of relevant topics and greater integration with other sectoral policies. However, if a shared set of references is not created for a significant number of these agents, the conditions for collaboration will be fragile. Therefore, it is necessary to identify relevant agents concerning new reference frameworks and create conditions for the perception of mutual benefits and the interpretation of the scope of individual contributions to rural development.

Entities that decide on territorial cohesion policies should be composed of multidisciplinary teams that include people who are knowledgeable about the needs of rural areas. The business fabric should also be represented, as they have practical knowledge of the most urgent needs. In general, these actions will contribute to the development of effective policies for territorial cohesion that support rural development.

- **Strengths and needs | Inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas**

Fundão is characterized by having a set of strengths in terms of inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas. Local agents, such as Local Action Groups (LAC), have a good understanding of the realities on the field. There are also municipal policies and infrastructures aimed at promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, such as migrants, and facilitating their integration into Portuguese society. Furthermore, the presence of a dense network of agents in Fundão makes it easier to foster community engagement and promote policies that align with local needs.

Despite these strengths, there are still some areas for improvement. For instance, it is important to increase the knowledge and visibility of agents and rural networks in Fundão, and to support integrated governance pilot projects based on territorial, thematic, or specific recipient selection. This will help ensure that sector policies are aligned with the needs and aspirations of local communities. Moreover, there is a need to introduce new perspectives into discussions about the future of rural areas, and to increase citizen participation in political decision-making processes. By doing so, it will be possible to create policies that promote sustainable development and provide added value for local communities in Fundão.

- **Strengths and needs | The creation of rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies rural-urban.**

Fundão is a region with several strengths in creating rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies. The proximity between rural and urban areas is one of the main strengths that facilitate the promotion of a more efficient and sustainable food system, from production to processing, distribution, and consumption. The integration is based on proximity resources and aims to create a "foodshed" to supply the urban population. The valorisation of historical and cultural heritage, as well as natural heritage, is also creating dynamics of urban-rural connection that can be expanded and deepened. Additionally, investments in the digitalization of rural territories can bring them closer to urban territories.

However, there are needs that Fundão must address to strengthen rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies. It is important to have a comprehensive and place-based approach that goes beyond the traditional divide between rural and urban areas. This approach is crucial for strengthening the connection and cooperation between policies related to rural development, regional development, and other relevant tools that impact rural areas. Strategies, partnerships, and territorial governance forms must be developed to respond to the potentialities and needs of different territorial contexts. Regional policies should integrate rural development objectives, and opportunities for connection must be revisited and reinvented considering the global context and daily life of territorially specific communities. Increasing investment in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas is also important to create more efficient interconnections and sustainable interdependencies between rural and urban areas.

In conclusion, Fundão has several strengths that can generate benefits for both rural and urban areas, but addressing the needs is critical to expand and deepen rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies. Fundão must have an integrated and territorial vision, develop strategies, partnerships, and territorial governance forms capable of responding to the needs of different territorial contexts, and increase investment in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas.

2.2. Existing interventions and actions

The members of MAP were prompted to respond to a survey in order to identify examples of both good and bad practices related to the involvement of rural actors and the local level in multilevel governance, as well as inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, and the creation of rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies. The survey aimed to identify some examples implemented in the region of Fundão.

- **What are examples of existing or emerging governance good practice(s) identified by the MAP that have helped address regional and local needs?**

The MAP has identified several examples of good governance practices that address regional and local needs. Regarding the involvement of rural actors and local level in multilevel governance, some examples include the **Provere networks** such as **Aldeias do Xisto and iNature**, which promote cooperation between public and private sectors to develop innovative projects in tourism, culture, and the environment. Another example is the **INOVCLUSTER**, a business cluster that aims to increase the competitiveness of companies in Fundão by promoting cooperation between companies and educational and research institutions.

In terms of inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, some examples are the **Centre for Migration and Reception of Temporary Agricultural Workers**, the **AGROTECH Centre**, and the creation of local groups with decision-making powers that promote citizen participation. Regarding the creation of rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies, examples include **CERFUNDAO**, the **Rurbanlink Project,** and the improvement of digital connectivity networks.

The Municipality of Fundão is an exemplary case of good practices, with clear and consistent guidelines on guiding principles and development goals that are widely recognized as credible and stable by local and non-local actors. The municipality can include various investment and development initiatives in multiple public

policy instruments that not only align with these principles and goals but also reflect their unique contribution to the broader strategic framework.

- **What are existing or emerging bad practice examples that the MAP would like to share?**

The MAP has identified several bad practices examples related to the involvement of rural actors and local governance at the multilevel level. These include a lack of strategies that are tailored to the local context, as well as problems with "capture" of strategies by specific interest groups, sometimes without negative intent, and a lack of value placed on monitoring and evaluation as a tool for collective learning and socio-political mobilization. Additionally, the MAP has noticed that some new concepts are superficially treated, despite being included in the technical-professional language of many proposals, and decision-making is centralized by individuals who lack understanding of local realities.

In terms of inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, the MAP has noted difficulties in obtaining information and a fragmentation of stakeholders. In the creation of interconnections and interdependencies between rural and urban areas, the MAP has identified issues such as regional urban centres exhibiting centralizing tendencies and decision-making processes being disconnected from local realities.

Table 1 – Examples of actions taken by local actors

Provere networks |Aldeias do Xisto and iNature

The Provere Networks are territorial cooperation networks that promote cooperation between public and private sectors for the development of innovative projects in specific areas such as tourism, culture, and the environment. The Aldeias do Xisto and iNature are examples of Provere Networks operating in the Fundão region of Portugal and aim to promote sustainable tourism and preserve the region's natural and cultural heritage.

The Aldeias do Xisto is a group of villages located in the Fundão region that have been restored and adapted for tourism purposes, while remaining faithful to their original architecture and characteristics. On the other hand, iNature is a nature tourism network that promotes eco-tourism activities in the region, such as hiking, cycling, and bird watching.

For more information on Provere Networks, including Aldeias do Xisto and iNature, please visit the website of the Agency for Development and Cohesion, which is responsible for managing these networks in Portugal: **https://www.adcoesao.pt/pt/redes-provere**

INOVCLUSTER

INOVCLUSTER is a Portuguese innovation cluster, which was created in 2008 with the aim of promoting competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability in the Central Region of Portugal. It is an association of companies, research institutions, and public entities, working together to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in different sectors of the economy, such as agro-food, tourism, and ICT.

The main objective of INOVCLUSTER is to promote the development of new products, services, and processes, through collaboration between its members, by fostering innovation, and facilitating access to financing, knowledge, and markets. INOVCLUSTER offers a range of services to its members, including support in the development of innovation projects, access to funding programs, training and qualification programs, internationalization support, and networking opportunities.

INOVCLUSTER's strategy is based on three main pillars: (i) Innovation, by fostering the development of new products and services, as well as the improvement of existing ones; (ii) Competitiveness, by enhancing the competitiveness of companies, and the internationalization of their activities; and (iii) Sustainability, by promoting sustainable development, and the reduction of environmental impacts.

To learn more about INOVCLUSTER, including its activities, projects, and members, you can visit its official website at **http://www.inovcluster.pt/**

2.3. Recommendations from the MAP

2.3.1 Recommendations for future rural policies

- **What kind of policy support could help to improve governance and stakeholder engagement at the local, regional, and/or national level?**

The survey allowed to identify various policies that can be implemented at the local, regional, and national levels to improve governance and stakeholder engagement in rural areas. These policies aim to promote inclusivity, participation, and collaboration among stakeholders, fostering a shared vision for sustainable rural development.

One of the policies is establishing regional councils with greater representation from active regional actors, enabling them to contribute to decision-making processes and ensuring the needs and interests of rural communities are considered. Creating inclusive local governments and institutions, including representatives from the private sector and civil society groups, could promote diverse perspectives and foster collaboration in decision-making processes.

Encouraging a debate on rural development in the 21st century and regionalizing decision-making on investments in rural territories could also help to improve governance and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, policies that include vulnerable and marginalized populations in planning, decision-making, and governance platforms and programs can promote a holistic understanding of issues and address the needs of marginalized populations.

Increasing regional citizen participation through various means such as developing forums for inter-municipal cooperation, adopting participatory methodologies, and increasing connectivity of telecommunications in rural areas, could also promote stakeholder engagement and governance. Finally, supporting improved road and rail links between cross-border regions and between urban and rural areas could facilitate the exchange of ideas, goods, and services, promoting collaboration and cooperation between rural and urban areas.

Overall, these policies aim to promote a collaborative approach to sustainable rural development, where stakeholders work together to achieve inclusive and equitable growth.

- **How can the EU support these interventions?**

To support these interventions, the EU can provide technical and financial assistance to regional and local authorities. The EU can also encourage and facilitate cooperation among authorities at different levels and with civil society organizations. This can involve providing funding for joint projects and initiatives that benefit the citizens in the region.

In terms of promoting regionalization, the EU can support the creation and strengthening of regional institutions and networks. The EU can also provide financial and technical assistance to help these institutions develop policies and programs that address the specific needs of the region.

To address the issue of distributing community funds, the EU can establish clear criteria for eligibility and ensure that funding is directed towards productive activities. This can involve providing technical assistance to local authorities to help them identify and implement productive projects and initiatives that can contribute to the development of the region.

In conclusion, the EU has the potential to identify regional and sectorial needs through research, analysis, and consultation with local authorities and stakeholders. Based on this information, the EU can design and implement targeted programs and initiatives that address the specific needs of different regions and sectors.

2.3.2 Recommendations for future research agendas

When it comes to the involvement of rural actors in multilevel governance at the local, regional, national, and European levels, there is a lack of knowledge and information in several areas of the MAP. One of the missing pieces is knowledge about the needs and specificities of each region, which is crucial for policymakers to tailor their policies to local realities. Additionally, there is a need for more information on the emerging economic and social areas in rural zones, as well as the day-to-day difficulties faced by rural communities and their practical knowledge in dealing with them.

Another area where there is a need for more knowledge is in inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, including the identification of active agents and good examples of successful collaboration. Finally, the creation of interconnections and interdependencies between rural and urban areas requires more information on the true regional reality and the actors involved in shaping it. To improve rural governance and stakeholder engagement, it is important to address these knowledge gaps and to promote collaboration between policymakers, rural communities, and other stakeholders to ensure that policies reflect local needs and realities.

- **In the specific context of MAP and considering the previously identified needs, challenges, best practices, and bad practices, what aspects do you believe require further investigation regarding governance in rural areas? What could be a potential research topic?**

The governance of rural areas in the MAP region requires further investigation to address the identified needs, challenges, and good and bad practices. One area for potential research is the valorization of natural resources in rural areas, including sustainable and innovative business models that promote circular economies. This research could help revitalize rural areas and support their sustainable development.

Another crucial area for investigation is climate change adaptation in rural areas, which are particularly vulnerable to its effects. Research could explore how governance policies and practices can be improved to support climate change adaptation in rural areas, including innovative approaches to water management and storage. Social innovation is another potential area of research that could examine how innovative social practices can revitalize rural areas and enhance their social and environmental sustainability while promoting economic development. Through this research, policymakers can develop new policy frameworks, and researchers can identify best practices to support the sustainable development of rural communities in the MAP region.

- **Considering the knowledge/information gaps and the aspects that need further investigation, what kind of future research projects do you deem necessary to address the issue of governance in rural areas? Do you have any specific suggestions on how such a project could be structured?**

One potential research project could improve the agro-silvo-pastoral value chain in rural areas, focusing on identifying gaps, developing strategies to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of rural producers in high-value products, and exploring innovative approaches. It would require interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and rural stakeholders to ensure practical and relevant findings.

Another potential project could enhance transportation and accessibility in rural areas, including public transportation services and improving rural infrastructure, such as road networks and transportation systems. It would require interdisciplinary collaboration to take into account the diverse needs and perspectives of rural communities and local contexts.

Overall, these projects should involve collaboration between rural communities, policymakers, and researchers to address the identified needs and challenges of rural areas, designed to consider local contexts and the diverse needs and perspectives of rural communities.

3. Conclusions

The paper discusses the governance and digitalization policies of Fundão, a region in Portugal, focusing on citizen participation, sustainable development, and collaboration between different actors. The Fundão municipality has implemented several initiatives to promote citizen participation, including the Fundão Participa platform and a participatory budget. It has also promoted sustainable development through the creation of a network of electric vehicle charging stations and the installation of solar panels. Additionally, the municipality has established a Citizen's Portal, providing access to local services and facilitating citizen participation in local decision-making. The paper also presents the strengths and needs regarding the involvement of rural actors and the local level in multilevel governance, inclusive and collaborative governance in rural areas, and the creation of rural-urban interconnections and interdependencies. The main strengths of Fundão in these areas include a strong commitment to engaging rural actors and local governance, and the presence of a dense network of agents, including GAL. However, the main needs include a better understanding of opportunities and the involvement of rural actors and local levels in multilevel governance, and increased knowledge and visibility of agents and rural networks in Fundão.

To improve governance and stakeholder engagement in rural areas, consider establishing regional councils with more representation from active regional actors, creating inclusive local governments and institutions with diverse perspectives, encouraging a debate on rural development, and involving marginalized populations in planning and decision-making. Increasing citizen participation, improving infrastructure, providing technical and financial assistance, establishing clear eligibility criteria for funding, conducting research, and addressing knowledge gaps are also essential. Collaboration between policymakers, rural communities, and other stakeholders is crucial for effective and sustainable development outcomes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the participants who shared their insights and perspectives, which have been instrumental in shaping the recommendations presented in this position note. We also acknowledge the providers of the data, which have been used to inform our analysis and recommendations.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the SHERPA project, which aims to promote sustainable and inclusive growth in rural areas through improved governance and stakeholder engagement.

Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

To start the work cycle, the **SHERPA Discussion Paper was shared with members of MAP** through email, and it was also translated into Portuguese. Members were then given the opportunity to **participate in a survey** related to the topic. To gain a more in-depth understanding of their contributions, a set of **five interviews** were conducted with some MAP members. Unfortunately, due to certain constraints, it was not feasible to organize any in-person MAP meetings.

However, a **subsequent meeting has been scheduled with local authorities** to discuss the topic in more detail and present the position note. This meeting aims to facilitate broader discussion and engagement on the recommendations presented in the position note.