



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

D4.6 FINAL STOCKTAKE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

SEPTEMBER 2023



D4.6: FINAL STOCKTAKE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

The present document has been developed to meet the needs of the SHERPA project as one of the final deliverables of the project called 'Final Stocktake of Research Findings and Analysis'. Its purpose is to provide information on the stocktaking of research results and data from projects funded by the EU for research and innovation.

SHERPA built science-society-policy interfaces to involve citizens, policy makers, and scientists/researchers in the joint development of recommendations for future rural policies and research agendas. The contribution of the SHERPA Discussion Papers throughout the project was crucial in this respect, as they provided a synthesis of rural opportunities, challenges identified in recent publications, results of EU-funded research projects, and statistics for the identified indicators. On this basis, the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) discussed the local challenges and opportunities, and their vision for the future of their territory. During the course of the project, there were activities such as meetings with facilitators and monitors of each MAP to prepare and discuss the SHERPA Discussion Papers, the composition and engagement of the MAP members, the dialogue, and the SHERPA process. After these steps, there was the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) phase; feedback from the MAP members, which was collected by the MAP facilitators and monitors. That gave an insight into how to run MAPs, how to effectively incorporate results from past research and how to effectively feed into EU and national policy processes and research agendas.

One of the objectives of the SHERPA project was to gather relevant knowledge and opinions aiming to contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to EU rural areas. The SHERPA Discussion Papers summarised the key research findings and results being relevant to the MAP topic(s) addressed each MAP Cycle. They served as the basis for discussion and interaction within the context of the MAPs, building on existing scientific evidence. The SHERPA MAPs served as an interface to engage science-society-policy actors in dialogue and to jointly develop strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies.



1. Introduction

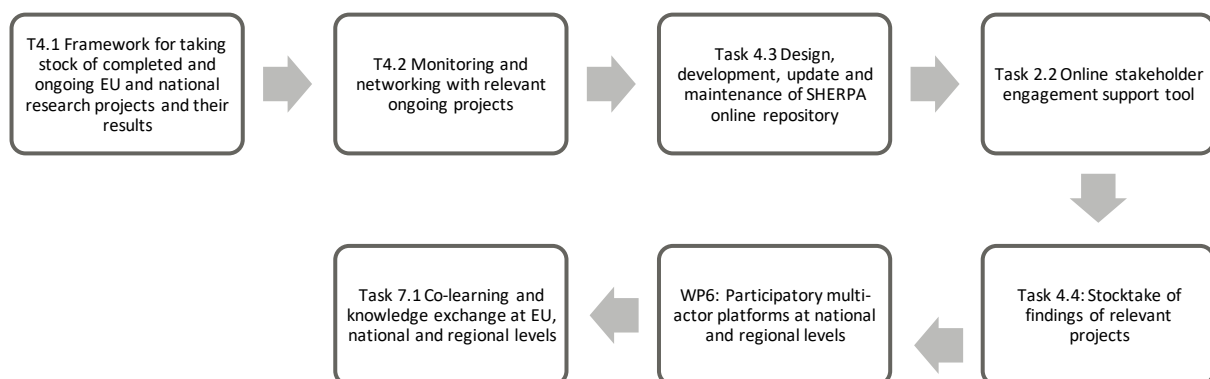
The aim of this report is to document the process of stocktaking of research findings and information available from EU-funded Research and Innovation projects for the needs of development of the SHERPA Discussion Papers, implemented as part of the work in Task 4.4 ('Stocktake of findings of relevant projects'). The overarching goal of Task 4.4 was the generation of summaries of the available scientific evidence and findings by drawing upon the expertise of experts from the consortium.

To produce policy- and research-related recommendations of relevance to rural areas, interactions were stimulated among researchers, policy makers/representatives of public authorities, and citizens in the context of the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs), namely the project's 'Science-Society-Policy' interfaces. 41 MAPs were established and operated during the course of the project, and dialogues were stimulated based on the SHERPA Discussion Papers, summarising findings from Research and Innovation projects on a range of rural-related topics. The topics addressed in the SHERPA project were the following:

1. Biodiversity and landscape features
2. Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)
3. Change in production and diversification of the rural economy
4. Climate change and environmental sustainability
5. Foresight exercise on alternative rural futures: how to get there
6. Social dimension of rural areas
7. Digitalisation in rural areas
8. Climate change and land use
9. Towards sustainable and resilient value chains
10. Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes

Figure 1 below shows how the work implemented in WP4 in general, and particularly Task 4.4, was situated within the broader context of the project.

Figure 1 Situating the work done in Task 4.4 within the broader context of the SHERPA project.



The development of the SHERPA Discussion Papers in WP4 and their availability to WP6 ('Participatory multi-actor platforms at national and regional levels') along with the feedback for the Discussion Papers available from WP6, led to the establishment of a feedback loop between the two WPs (WP4 and WP6). The activities in WP6, motivated and stimulated by the input available from WP4 (i.e., the SHERPA Discussion Papers) led to the policy- and research-related recommendations developed in WP7 ('Think Tank') and provided input to the communication and dissemination activities implemented as part of WP2.



The rest of the report is structured as follows: Section 2 focuses on the process of research findings stocktake (i.e., information about the process of identifying projects of relevance to the SHERPA MAP topics, and the identification and extraction of results produced by them), as well as the challenges faced during the process. Section 3 is concerned with the contribution of the project's consortium members to the process of research findings stocktake and the roles they assumed. The role and contribution of the SHERPA Discussion Paper in the project's MAP cycles is presented and explained in Section 4. In Section 5, the findings and information extracted from the results of EU-funded Research and Innovation projects and used for the creation of the SHERPA Discussion Papers is discussed. An overview of the Discussion Papers created during the course of the project is provided in Section 6. Final remarks and conclusions are provided in Section 7 of the report.

2. Methodology

2.1. Process of research findings

The EU-funded Research and Innovation projects' research findings stocktake started from relevant project identification and ended with the development and publication of SHERPA Discussion Papers. These papers provided input for discussions and interactions within the MAPs by summarising topic-related results. To create a SHERPA Discussion Paper on a rural topic, research findings, trends, difficulties, and prospects were identified, and a web crawling tool¹ was developed to search and retrieve project-related information and results.

More specifically, the process involved the creation a list of approximately 25 relevant keywords for the Discussion Paper, which were then used by the web crawler to search for projects in the [CORDIS](#), [LIFE](#), and [EIP-AGRI](#) databases. The output was a list of projects sorted by the number of matching keywords and the presence of keywords indicating relevance to the topics addressed. The Scientific Editor² reviewed the list of projects and suggested changes to the keyword list if important projects were missing or irrelevant projects were wrongly identified. The web crawler was then run again to repeat the search for relevant projects. This circular process was executed as many times as needed till having a list of projects and project results relevant to the topic.

The web crawler retrieved project results using topic-related keywords from EU databases. The Scientific Editor extracted the research results and used them as input for the drafting of the Discussion Paper. Key sentences extracted from reports produced within the identified and retrieved Research and Innovation projects in the form of highlights helped to determine the relevance of the projects, and their results, to the rural topic and decide whether they should be used as input to the Discussion Paper or not.

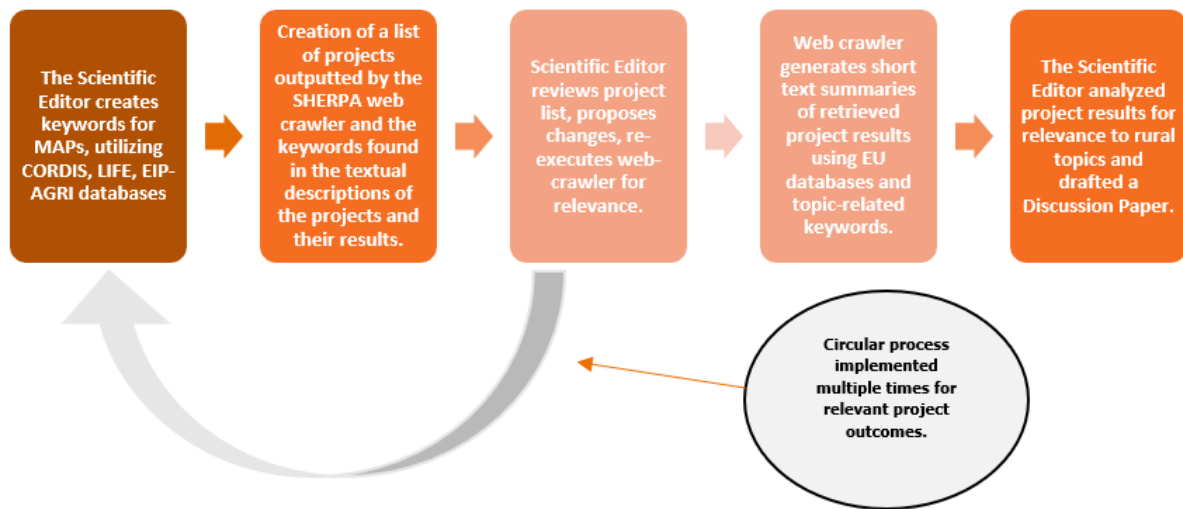
The above explained steps are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

¹ Espejo B., Panoutsopoulos H., Mouseti S., Chartier O., Fountas S. (2020). D4.3 First Rural Research Outcomes Retrieval Using Sherpa Web Crawling Tool (SHERPA)

² Panoutsopoulos H., Espejo B. & Fountas S. (2020), D4.1 Framework for identification, selection and evaluation of past and ongoing research projects (SHERPA), p.7



Figure 2 Steps of the process of searching for and retrieving projects and project results of relevance to a rural topic.



Apart from the Scientific Editor, more roles were involved in the Discussion Paper development process by undertaking specific activities:

- **Scientific Editor:** responsibility of assessment and filtering of the results of the crawling process, supervision of tasks related to the retrieval of project results and information, authoring of the Discussion Paper, as well as changes and corrections to the Discussion Paper based on the Review Editor's feedback.
- **Review Editor:** comments and feedback on the content of the Discussion Paper and about whether it can trigger discussion and interactions in the MAPs.
- **Communication Editor:** comments and editorial suggestions related to the information provided in the Discussion Paper and layout issues.
- **Support Staff:** search for relevant projects and project results using the web crawler, supporting the Scientific Editor in further search for projects as well as editing the Discussion Paper.

Although the SHERPA web crawler was a useful tool for the project, there were challenges that were faced during its execution and use including project misidentification, there were challenges that were faced during its execution and use including project misidentification. The result was a discrepancy between the topic-related keywords defined by the Scientific Editor and the descriptions of the projects found in the source databases (namely, CORDIS, LIFE, EIP-AGRI). For the Discussion Paper authoring, final decisions regarding the projects and project results to be made were taken by the Scientific Editor, so as to address and provide clear and straightforward information. This required a significant amount of manual effort from the side of the Scientific Editor.

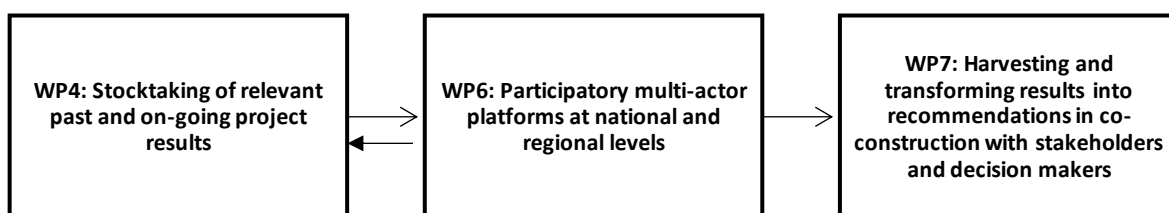
2.2. The use of SHERPA Discussion papers

A knowledge base related to EU rural policies was created during the project by synthesising the results of past and ongoing Research and Innovation projects. The results from these projects were extracted and analysed to develop the SHERPA Discussion Papers. Further details about this knowledge base can be found in Section 3. The contribution of the SHERPA Discussion Papers to the achievement of the SHERPA project's



overarching goal (i.e., ‘gather relevant knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to EU rural areas’) was important, as they constituted a basis for the dialogue that took place within the MAPs aiming to result in recommendations for policy- and research-related agendas (reported in the project’s Position Papers). These recommendations are considered crucial for research and policy decisions by the European Commission since they reflect the involvement of MAPs (citizens, researchers, and policymakers at local, national, and EU levels) who gathered stakeholder views and knowledge throughout the project. It is worth mentioning the participation of the policy coordinator of the European Commission in DG AGRI at the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023, who suggested that MAPs could (and should) further contribute to the Rural Action Plan and Rural Pact, feeding both with reflections and evidence, suggesting actions, and actively participating for more vibrant rural areas.

Figure 3 Interactions between WP4 and other project WPs



It should be stressed that the Discussion Papers were produced as a result of interactions and information flow among different WPs during the project, as shown in Figure 3 above. Specifically, as the objective of WP7 (‘Harvesting and transforming results into recommendations in co-construction with stakeholders and decision makers’) was to produce recommendations for future research and policy for rural development, input from WP4 regarding trend analysis and foresight, based on the stock of scientific findings and information available from Research and Innovation projects, was needed. All MAPs created a Dynamic Action Plan (DAP) before the beginning of each MAP cycle to outline and direct their activities. The DAP provided an overview of the MAP’s goals, processes, anticipated results, and a schedule for the MAP cycle (WP6). As the DAPs had a dynamic approach, (they were co-constructed within each MAP bringing on board representatives of Society, Policy and Research), they allowed the MAPs to orchestrate their multi-level interactions and refine their strategies and activities according to their needs. Feedback from the MAPs’ DAPs was taken into consideration to reflect upon the stocktake process and structuring of the Discussion Papers to better for the needs of the stakeholders involved in the SHERPA MAPs.

Although the structure of the SHERPA Discussion Papers changed throughout the course of the project based on the lessons learned and the collective knowledge acquired from their development process, there are some structural aspects being common to all Discussion Papers. First of all, an overview of the addressed topic was provided in all Discussion Papers, mainly in the introductory section. The Scientific Editor produced the document that provided an overview of the rural-related topic being considered. Following this, research findings were presented, (e.g., findings from relevant projects, databases, indicators and other sources presented in the next section) and some key questions were proposed for the triggering and motivation of discussions among the MAP members. During the first MAP cycle (2020), the 20 SHERPA MAPs elaborated on their visions for their rural area and contributed to the European Commission’s Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). It would be remiss not to mention that prior to this, three MAPs were involved in a short pilot MAP cycle to test the proposed MAP process, and so an initial SHERPA Discussion Paper on Biodiversity and landscape features was prepared. In the second MAP cycle (2021), the focus was on three topics: (i) Change in production and diversification of the rural economy; (ii) Climate change and environmental services; and (iii) a Foresight exercise on alternative rural futures and how to get there. In that cycle, the topics were suggested by the MAPs. During the third MAP cycle (2022), the MAPs were invited to select among four different topics: (i) Social dimension of rural areas; (ii) Digitalisation in rural areas; (iii) Towards sustainable

& Resilient value chains; and (iv) Climate change and land use. The final cycle focused on Governance ('Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes'). The topics addressed in each MAP cycle are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Topics addressed by the MAP in the MAP cycles.

| MAP Cycle | Topic(s) |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Pilot MAP cycle (2020) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity and landscape features |
| MAP cycle 1 (2020) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long term vision for rural areas (LTVRA) |
| MAP cycle 2 (2021) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in production and diversification of the rural economy Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability |
| MAP cycle 3 (2022) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social dimension of rural areas Digitalisation in rural areas Towards sustainable & Resilient value chains Climate change and land use |
| MAP cycle 4 (2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes |

3. Results of SHERPA Discussion Papers

The extraction of research results and information from EU-funded Research and Innovation projects was an essential part of the Discussion Paper development process. In SHERPA, the extraction was carried out using the SHERPA web crawler which scanned and retrieved data from online platforms such as CORDIS, LIFE and EIP-AGRI. The web crawler yielded results within hours after being launched, identifying projects and results relevant to the rural topic. The Discussion Papers focused, among other issues, on EU policies, the impact of Covid-19 and reflections on lessons learned from this unprecedented situation, and the social dimension including information and lessons learned from the pandemic and the social dimension. Research findings were gathered from surveys, databases, project reports, scientific publications, European Commission publications, statistics, indicators, graphs and interviews. The diverse range of research findings and information used in the SHERPA Discussion Papers aimed to provide a broad input to motivate and stimulate fruitful discussions in the MAPs, and to promote co-learning and knowledge generation for future research and policies at both the regional and EU level. Table 2 below presents some indicative projects whose results were considered and used for the development of the Discussion Papers.

Table 2 Projects provided as sources in the Discussion Papers, per topic.

| Topic | Projects results provided in Discussion papers |
|--|---|
| Biodiversity and Landscape Features | QUESSA, BiodivERSA, FARMLAND, APPEAL, CONNECT, EC21C, ECODEA, ECOSTACK, EKLIPSE, AgriEcoServices, FUNCITREE |
| Long term vision for rural areas (LTVRA) | SIMRA, RUBIZMO, PEGASUS, PROVIDE, LANDMARK, RURALJOBS, ETUDE, ROBUST, GLAMUR, SmartRuralGrid, MOBIL-AGE, PoliRural, VOLANTE |
| Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability | INCA, AGROMIX, MAIA, JRC PESETA III, H2020 TRACER, H2020 ZELP, H2020 TRUE, Creative Food Cycles, H2020 RURITAGE |
| Change in Production and Diversification of The Rural Economy | RURALJOBS, ETUDE, RUBIZMO, RURITAGE, RURACTION, DESIRA, DIVERFARMING |



| | |
|---|--|
| Digitalisation In Rural Areas | DESIRA, RUBIZMO, RAMSES, Digital Villages |
| Social Dimension of Rural Areas | POLIRURAL, SIMRA, RurInno, Smart-AKIS, FARMWELL, NEWBIE, CONSOLE, SUPER-G, HNV-Link, LIFT, UNISECO, RURITAGE, RURALIZATION, MATILDE, DESIRA, IMAJINE |
| Towards Sustainable & Resilient Value Chains | SMARTCHAIN, STRENGTH2FOOD, SUFISA, NEXTFOOD, NEWBIE, SURE-FARM, SUFISA, SKIN, PEGASUS, SURE-FARM, I2CONNECT, CIRC4LIFE |
| Climate Change and Land Use | H2020 RESIN, H2020 SOLIMPACT, H2020 REST-COAST, H2020 ARCH, LEAP-RE, H2020 MERLIN, Nutri2Cycle, AgriAdapt |
| Empowering Rural Areas in Multi-Level Governance Processes | ESPO Escape, BE-Rural, PHUSICOS, ROBUST, CLIC, FoodSHIFT2030, RURITAGE |

The aim of the SHERPA project was to effectively utilise research data and empower stakeholders in the creation of rural policies. It fosters interactions between researchers, public authorities, and citizens by means of the project's 'Science-Society-Policy' interfaces. The purpose of the Discussion Papers was to summarise the important outcomes of EU-funded Research and Innovation projects. Indicative summaries per topic follows, and all Discussion Papers are available in the [official website of the project](#), as well as in the Annex sections of this paper.

Biodiversity and landscape features

This Discussion Paper focuses on semi-natural habitats, which include landscape features and their role in enhancing the conservation status of habitats and species. It investigates how these habitats contribute towards enhancing the conservation status of habitats and species. It begins by examining the availability of indicators and follows up by presenting relevant insights from two Horizon 2020 funded initiatives, BiodivERsa and EKLIPSE.

Long term vision for rural areas (LTVRA)

This report presents an overview of important trends, opportunities, and challenges that European rural areas are facing. These include demographic shifts, climate change, diversification of the rural economy, infrastructure, digitisation, inequalities, and land-use change.

Change in production and diversification of the rural economy

The SHERPA Discussion Paper addressing this topic points out four fundamental aspects of rural diversification: (i) entrepreneurship; (ii) digitalisation; (iii) agricultural diversification; and (iv) climate change adaptation. It encouraged MAP members to engage in discussions on potential opportunities for rural development and production diversification.

Climate change and environmental sustainability

The aim and main approaches of policies for addressing climate change, as they relate to rural areas, are outlined in this Discussion Paper. Local threats, challenges, and opportunities, enabling the transition to climate neutrality by 2050, were topics for discussion identified and suggested for the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs).

Social dimension of rural areas

This Discussion Paper provides an overview of how the social dimension (as observed in social networks, social institutions and various forms of social capital) of rural areas is considered, captured and reflected in the topics in which the MAPs have expressed interest from a policy and research perspective.



Digitalisation in rural areas

The present SHERPA Discussion Paper summarises recent research on international and EU policies on digitalisation, focusing on the determinants of the digital divide in rural areas, their attractiveness and opportunities for strengthening local governance. Furthermore, the paper investigates the role of digital tools in the context of case studies. Finally, it presents guiding principles for sustainable digitalisation in rural areas and makes recommendations for action.

Towards sustainable & Resilient value chains

This Discussion Paper analyses EU policy objectives and research findings regarding sustainable value chains, with particular emphasis on topics relevant to rural areas. It does not address all value chain-related aspects, but highlights key findings.

Climate change and land use

In the specific Discussion Paper, there is an emphasis on the strategic priorities of the European Union, including climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, within both international and European policy contexts. Climate change related risks concern islands, neighbouring areas, renewable energy, land use and public attitudes. This paper highlights the importance of stakeholder cooperation and knowledge sharing in the transition to climate neutrality.

Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes

In this Discussion Paper, a summary of the objectives of EU policies and findings from studies relating to the governance of rural areas, as identified in recent research projects, is presented.

4. Conclusions

The work documented in the present report describes the process of research findings stocktake. During this process, apart from the technical work done with the web crawling tool, there was also a significant contribution from the side of the project partners within the Discussion Paper development roles they assumed. The SHERPA Discussion Papers were one of the key driving forces for building recommendations about future policies and research related to rural areas. To generate recommendations of relevance to rural areas, interactions were stimulated among researchers, policy makers/representatives of public authorities, and citizens within the context of the MAPs. The MAPs were established during the project, and dialogue was stimulated based on the SHERPA Discussion Papers, which provided summaries of findings from research projects on a range of rural-related topics.

SHERPA had a significant role in the provision of recommendations of interest to rural areas all over Europe. This deliverable report is one of the final project reports, summarising the work done in relation to the stocktake of research findings and information from the results of EU-funded Research and Innovation projects for the needs of producing policy and research recommendations for rural areas.



5. References

Espejo B., Fountas S., Mouseti S. & Panoutsopoulos H. (2020). D4.4 SHERPA online repository development documentation and user manual (SHERPA)

Espejo B., Panoutsopoulos H., Mouseti S., Chartier O., Fountas S. (2020). D4.3 First Rural Research Outcomes Retrieval Using Sherpa Web Crawling Tool (SHERPA)

Lostrangio C., SHERPA Conference Highlights: Co-creating rural futures 2023, p. 5.

Panoutsopoulos H., Espejo B. & Fountas S. (2020), D4.1 Framework for identification, selection and evaluation of past and ongoing research projects (SHERPA), p.3.



6. ANNEX 1 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Biodiversity and landscape features

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



RURAL POLICIES TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY THROUGH THE PRESERVATION, CREATION AND MANAGEMENT OF LANDSCAPE FEATURES

SHERPA DISCUSSION PAPER

David Mottershead, David Miller, Giulia Martino

Key messages

Conservation of heterogeneous landscapes, characterized by a high proportion of semi-natural habitats such as pastures and field margins, enhances and stabilizes pest control by natural predators and pollination by wild insects, and decreases sensitivity to climate change.

The implications for those drawing up CAP Strategic Plans are to ensure that the outcome of schemes will be the enhancement of biodiversity through the maintenance and restoration of semi-natural habitats and landscape elements (such as pastures, meadows, trees, hedgerows, forest patches, ponds and field margins) in agricultural landscapes.

The aim of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030¹ is to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU and help stop global biodiversity loss by 2020. The Strategy contributes to the global objectives of achieving the Aichi Biodiversity targets².

Biodiversity is a complex concept which refers to all existing plant, animal and micro-organism species that interact in an ecosystem. It satisfies a wide range of services expected by society in general, which seeks safe and quality products, produced with social and environmentally responsible standards, and is directly related to production. Conserving and improving biodiversity in production systems, above and below soil, is a fundamental part of sustainable agricultural practices. These practices also promote the improvement of biodiversity in other adjacent parts of the territory. The authoritative global assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reports that "indicators of regulating contributions, such as soil organic carbon and pollinator diversity, have declined, indicating that gains in material contributions are often not sustainable"³.

¹ EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/strategy/index_en.htm

² Aichi Biodiversity Targets <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

³ <https://ipbes.net/news/global-assessment-summary-policy-makers-final-version-now-available>

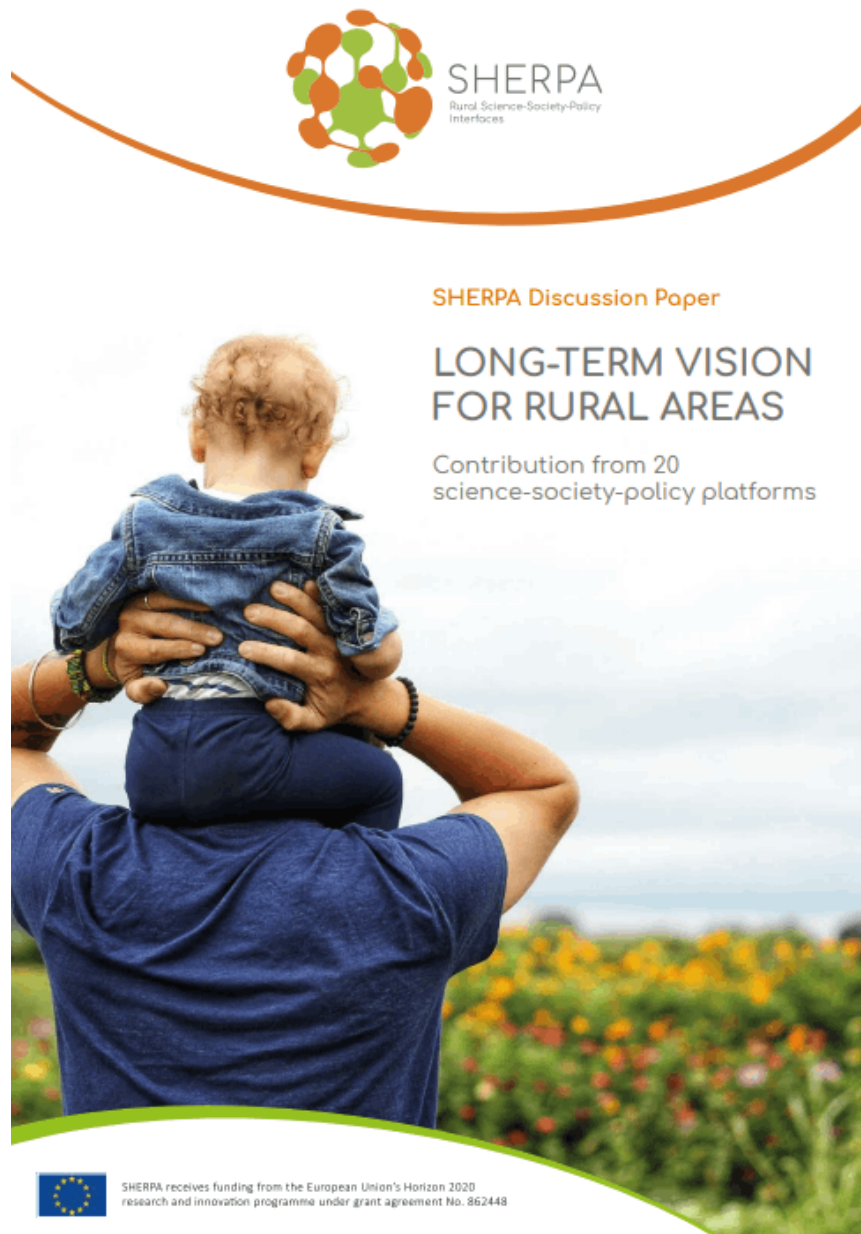


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7. ANNEX 2 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



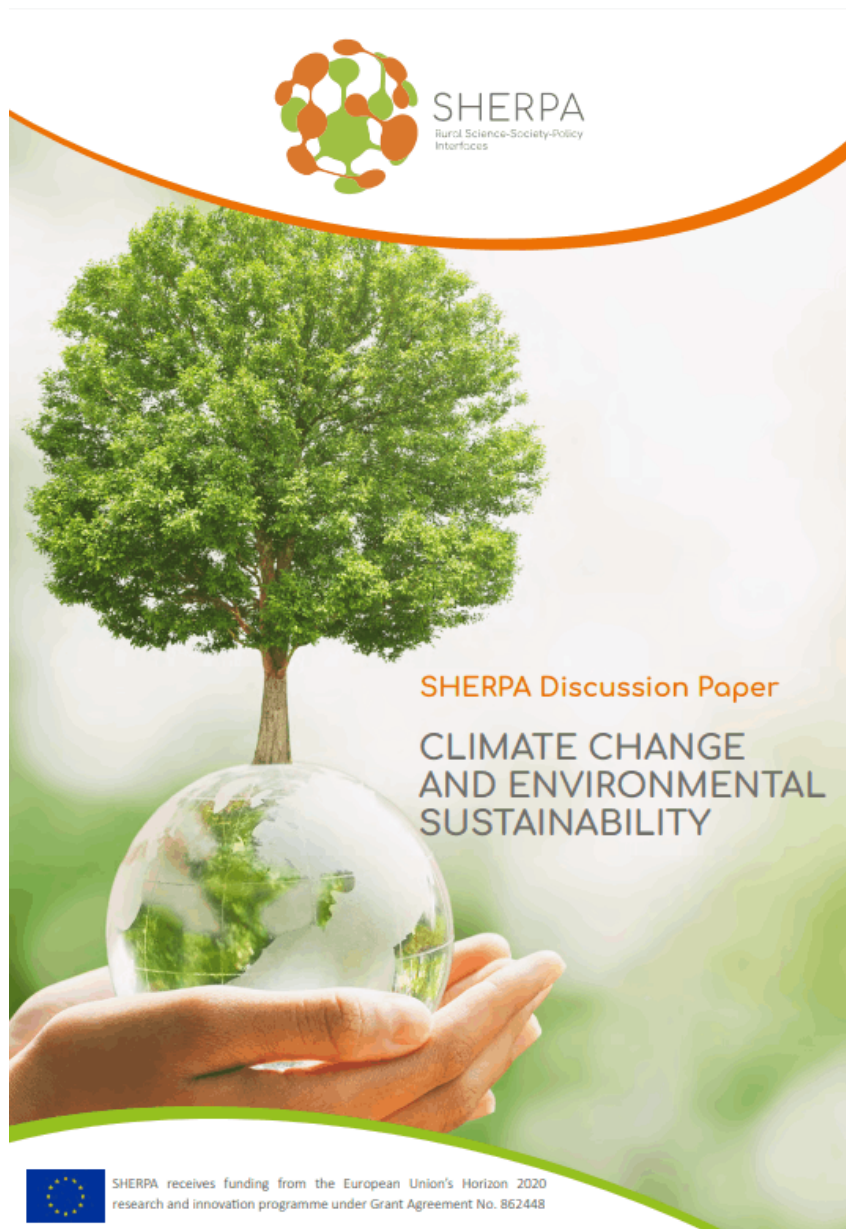
8. ANNEX 3 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Change in production and diversification of the rural economy

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



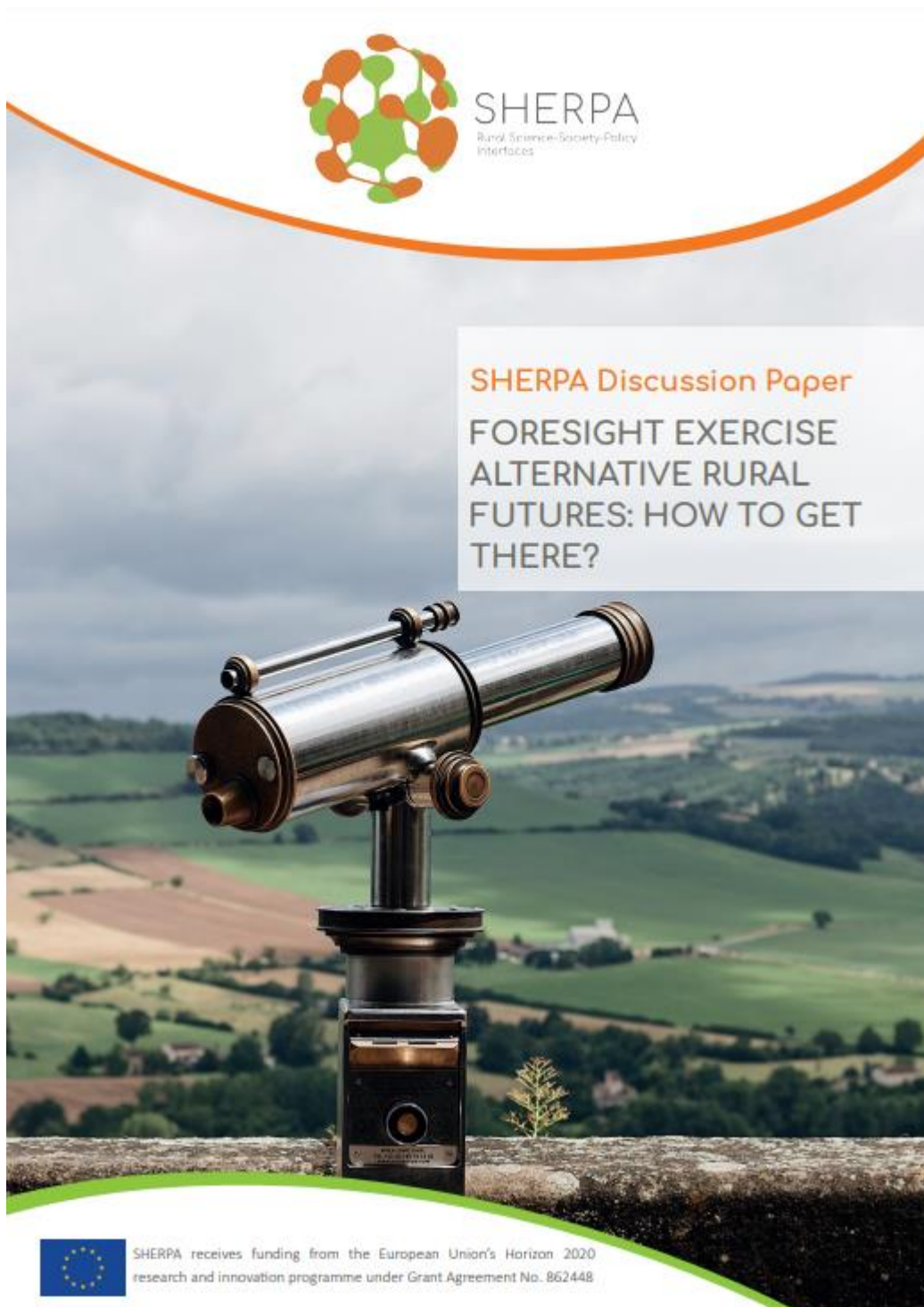
9. ANNEX 4 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Climate change and environmental sustainability

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



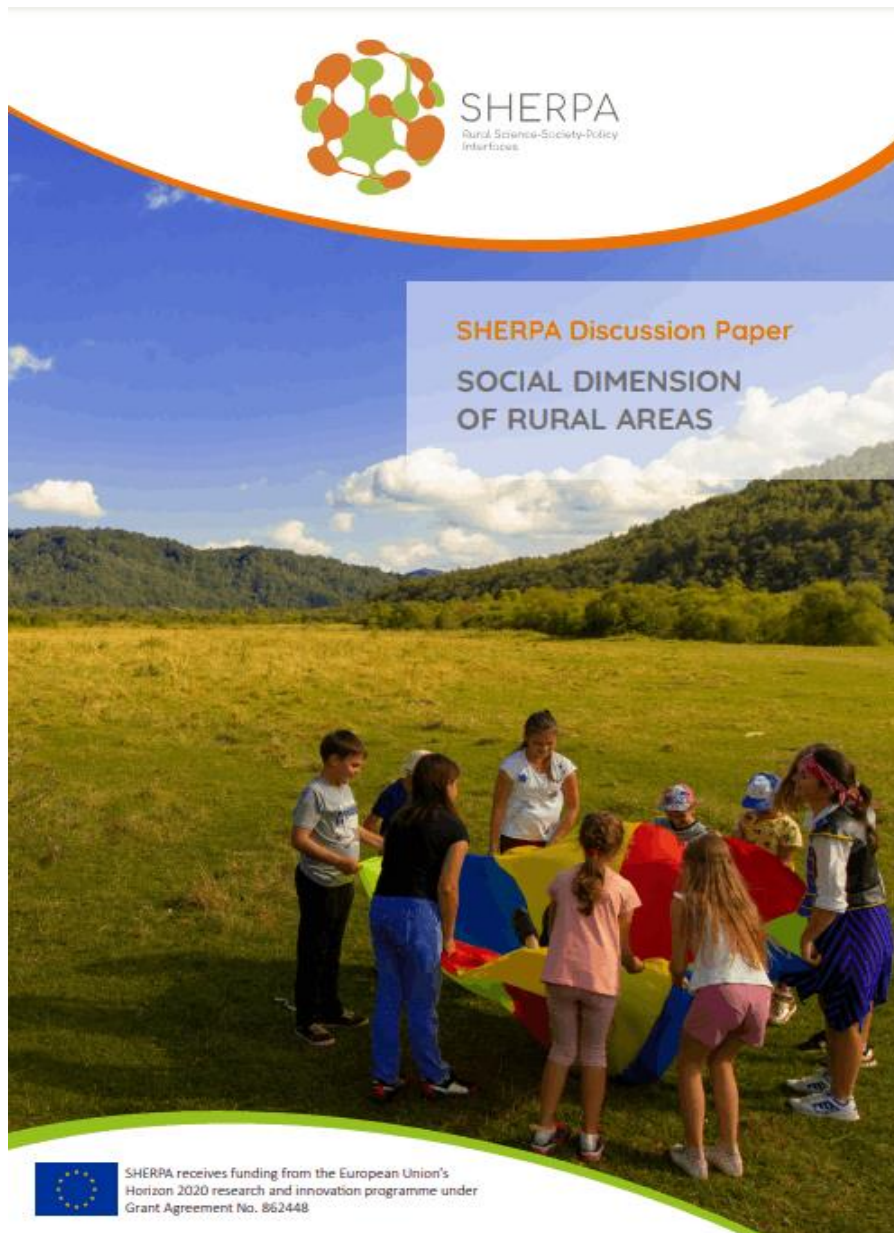
10. ANNEX 5 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Foresight exercise alternative rural futures: how to get there?

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



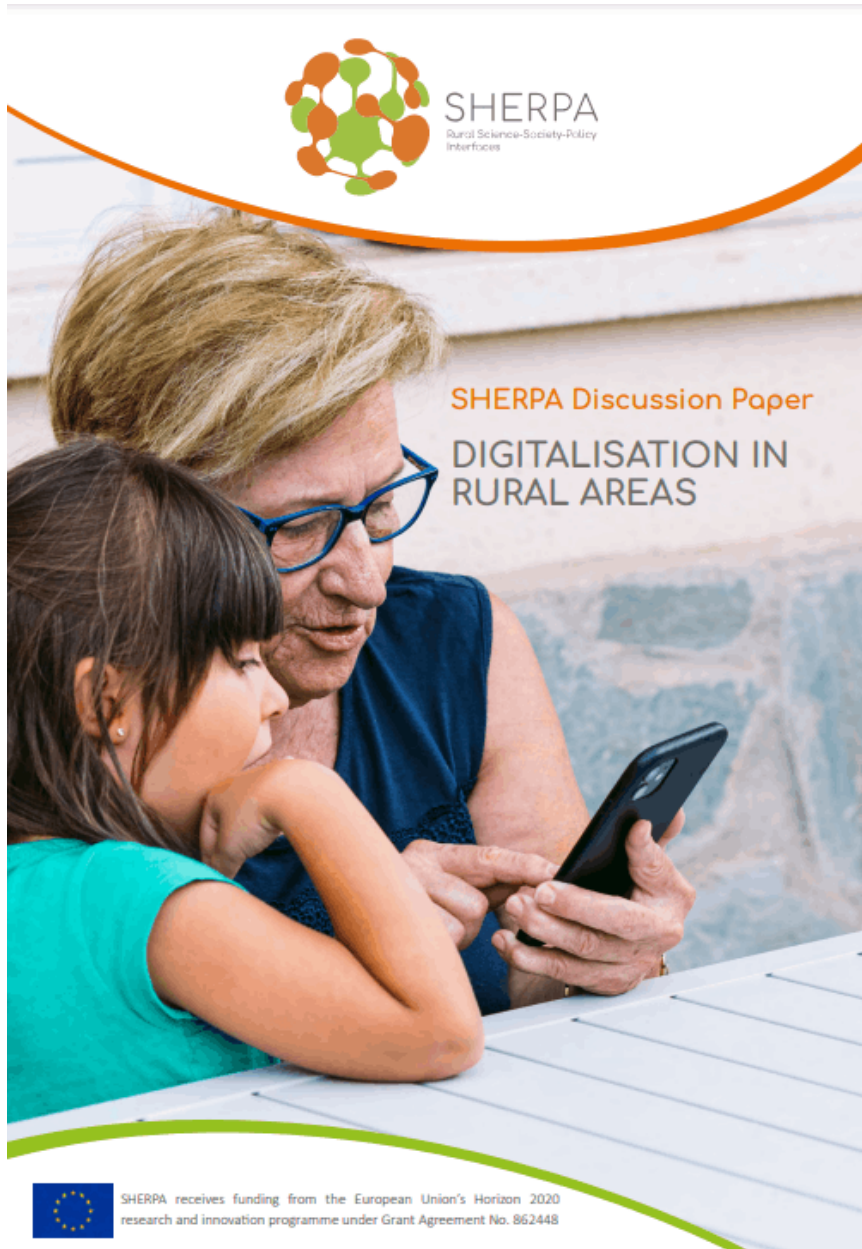
11. ANNEX 6 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Social dimension of rural areas

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



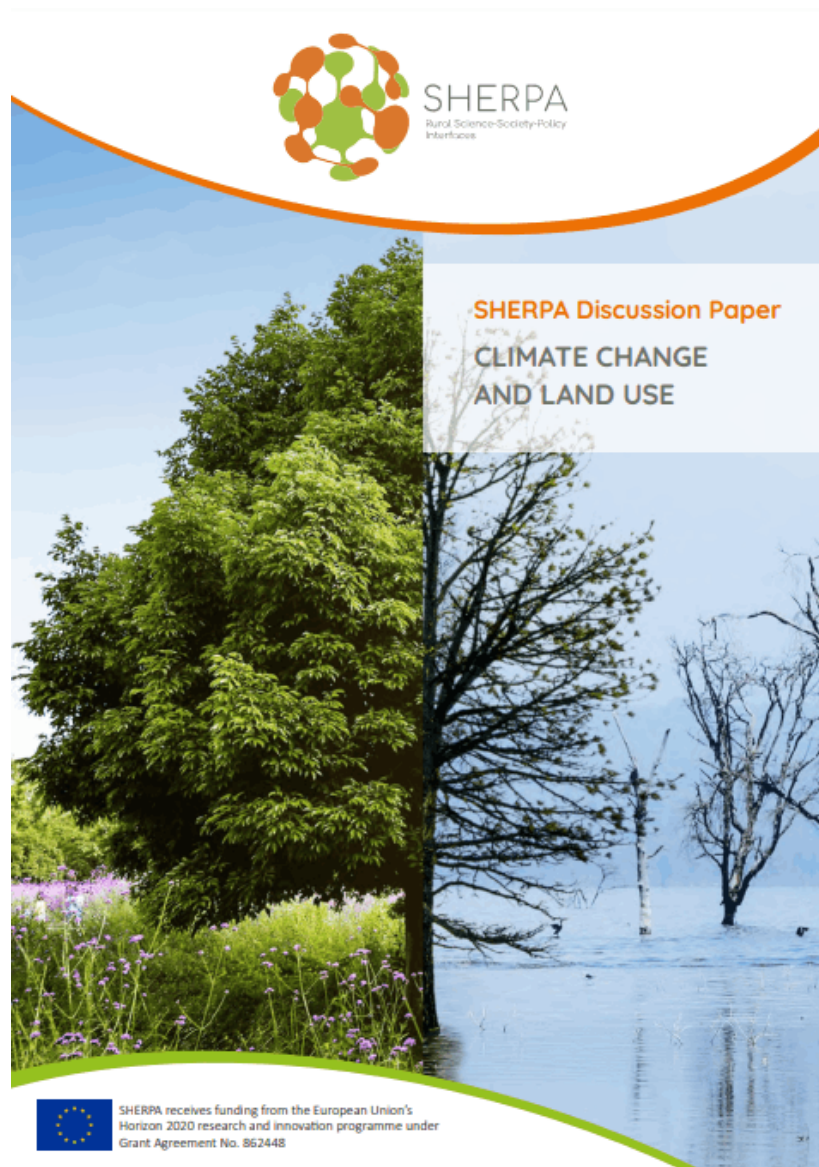
12. ANNEX 7 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Digitalisation in rural areas

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



13. ANNEX 8 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Climate change and land use

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



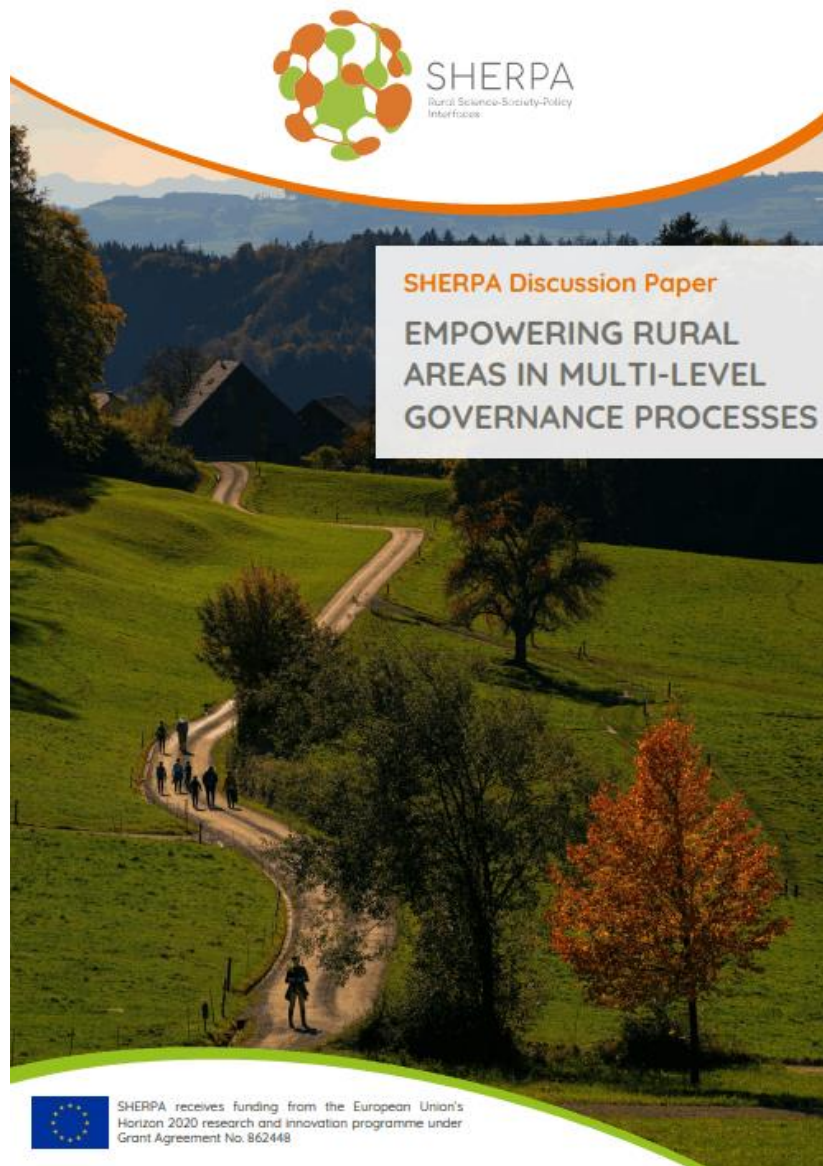
14. ANNEX 9 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Towards sustainable and resilient value chains

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).



15. ANNEX 10 - SHERPA Discussion Paper: Empowering rural areas in multi-level governance processes

The Discussion Paper can be found [here](#).





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