



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

D2.6 COMPILED PROCEEDINGS OF ANNUAL CONFERENCES

AUGUST 2023



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Authors	Carla Lostrangio, Maite Iglesias, Merveille Ntabuhashe (AEIDL)
Work Package Leader	AEIDL
Project Coordinator	ECORYS

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1. Introduction

SHERPA, which stands for 'Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors', is a four-year Horizon 2020 project (October 2019 – September 2023) with the main objective to collect knowledge and recommendations for the formulation of policy and research that could unleash the full potential of EU rural areas in the future. To this extent, the project has created [41 Science-Society-Policy interfaces](#) and one [EU-level Science-Society-Policy interface](#).

Throughout the project's implementation, the European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL) organised **3 Annual Conferences** and **1 Final Conference** in close collaboration with the SHERPA Coordinator and SHERPA Partners. The first two Annual Conferences were organised virtually, as they took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the third Annual Conference took place in Montpellier (France) and the Final Conference took place in Brussels (Belgium).

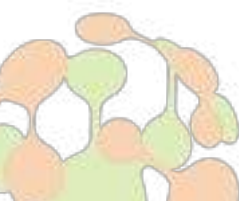
The SHERPA conferences were designed with the aim to discuss and promote the project's results, as well as to learn from experiences and reflections of all SHERPA Science-Society-Policy Interfaces.

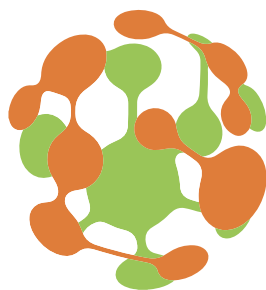
A wide number of stakeholders, from the SHERPA Consortium and external actors, attended the SHERPA conferences. Overall, 485 participants attended the four conferences. The table below summarises key information about each of the conferences.

Table 1. Overview of the SHERPA Conferences

Year	Dates	Conference title	Location	Number of attendees
2020	30 November- 1 December	Contribution to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas	Online	143 registered participants
2022	31 January- 1 February	Make it happen! Implementing the rural vision	Online	100 participants
2023	31 January- 1 February	Co-creating rural futures	Montpellier, France	77 participants
2023	1-2 June	SHERPA Final Conference	Brussels, Belgium	165 participants

This document collects the proceedings of the 3 Annual Conferences and the Final Conference. It brings together the main contributions from interventions and keynote speeches during these conferences, as well as from the interactive sessions.





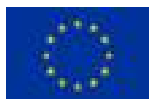
SHERPA

Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights:

Contribution to the
Long-Term Vision for
Rural Areas

30 November - 1 December 2020



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Foreword:

Enrique NIETO

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

Welcome to SHERPA - Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors, a four-year project (2019-2023) of 17 partners funded by the Horizon 2020 programme. We aim 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. This document reports on the first SHERPA conference hosted virtually between 30 November and 1 December 2020, which gathered around 120 participants from 26 countries (23 Member States).

The first part of the conference served to exchange on the contribution of SHERPA and its Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) to the process launched by the European Commission on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. It helped to get an in-depth understanding of the key drivers that will shape rural areas by 2040 around key areas such as demographic change, climate change, digitalisation, diversification of the rural economy, governance and basic services. In addition, this report presents interesting results from group discussions and the views from a panel of experts on actions that need to be taken now to make the rural vision a reality.

The second and last part of the conference focused on sharing experiences from SHERPA's MAPs' work on how to establish engaging processes to develop a vision together with local actors. This report presents the recommendations from the group discussions on specific aspects such as how to engage stakeholders who are hard to reach, balance Science-Society-Policy, deal with consensus and diversity of opinions, involve civil society, engage actors in COVID-19 times and link to different levels of policy.

At SHERPA we will continue to support our MAPs to exchange both on making the most of the research and knowledge, as well as bringing their voice forward to the discussions around future rural policies. As always, there is a lot to discuss and a lot for us to learn from one another, and we hope this report helps to inform and nurture meaningful discussions in the future. Engage with SHERPA through the MAP in your country or follow our work by checking our Newsletters, website and social media channels.

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Introduction to the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and the work of SHERPA

In 2020, the European Commission initiated the preparation of a new long-term vision for rural areas. SHERPA prepared a contribution to the process by feeding in the views of science-society-policy actors: between April and October 2020, SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) identified challenges and opportunities and discussed a vision for their territory towards 2040.

On 30 November 2020, this contribution was presented at the SHERPA Annual Conference.



DAY 1
30 NOV.
2020



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator,
ECORYS



Words from the coordinator

In 2020, the cancellation of physical meetings had consequences for our daily lives, both at the personal and professional levels. It also had implications for SHERPA, as the first restrictive measures to slow down the spreading of COVID-19 came into force only a few months after the start of our project. These are really exceptional circumstances and we had to adapt. Despite the obstacles, we succeeded in engaging more than 1 000 local actors in our discussions on the future of rural areas. As coordinator of the project, I am very grateful to all partners and everyone who has contributed.

Our first annual conference has been the occasion to share the results of this work and to enrich our findings with views from the participants. It also provided a platform for exchanges between researchers, policy-makers and representatives from civil society. In the first months of 2021, the SHERPA contribution to the long-term vision for rural areas will be submitted to the European Commission.

The work of SHERPA will continue in the following months and we aim to provide a follow-up contribution before the end of 2021. We hope that we will be able to celebrate the second anniversary of our project in person, during our second conference, planned to take place in Brussels in December 2021.



Introduction to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

María GAFO
DG AGRI, European Commission

María Gafo introduced the Commission's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). Rural areas represent about 26% of the total EU population (around 116 million people) and 76% of EU territory. They have a much lower population density than the EU average, and account for 27% of total EU jobs.

The main current challenges are: access to public and private services; generational renewal (an ageing population); 59% of rural population in regions that are demographically shrinking; and areas facing twin challenges of low income and rapidly declining population.

Access to high-speed internet in rural areas increased from 10% in 2010 to around 60% today, she said. However, 40% still lack access, with implications for education, remote working and e-healthcare. This has been felt acutely during the pandemic. ESPON data for 2017-2032 shows that most EU countries have declining populations in parts of their territories. Rapid recent declines have occurred in eastern parts of the EU, while gradual declines have depopulated areas in Spain, Portugal, France and Italy.

"These are the challenges, but there are many opportunities," said Ms. Gafo. These include the circular and bio-based economy, ecological and digital transformations, COVID-19 recovery and an enhanced appreciation of green spaces. "People are looking to rural areas with new eyes."

The LTVRA will be presented in a Commission Communication scheduled for June 2021. "At the heart of the vision we place a wide public consultation," explained Ms. Gafo. This transfers the focus from Brussels to people living in rural areas, and local and regional authorities.

The consultation includes a questionnaire, interviews and inputs from events like the SHERPA conference. DG AGRI also produced a downloadable package to help groups organise workshops to obtain information for their areas. This process will be followed by analysis and foresight stages. Outcomes will be presented at the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) conference in March 2021.

The work also includes an analytical assessment of key indicators for rural areas and a foresight exercise #Rural2040 that, together with the outcome of the public consultation, are the three key elements for the development of the Vision that the Commission will use.

Commissioners for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Regional Development, are working together under the coordination of Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography. Ms. Gafo noted the importance of this broad approach to the LTVRA, which covers different policies relevant for rural areas, including the Cohesion Policy and CAP.

"Our rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. The diversity of landscape, culture and heritage is one of Europe's most defining and remarkable features. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future."

- President Ursula von der Leyen. Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024.

Overview of the work of SHERPA for the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas



Michael KULL & Louise VESTERGÅRD NORDREGIO

The speakers noted that one year into SHERPA, 20 regional and national Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) and one EU level MAP have been established. These are forums for two-way exchanges of ideas and knowledge, and co-creation, involving actors from the science, society and policy sectors. Eventually, 40 MAPs will be established across Europe within the project.

This conference provides the first opportunity for MAP members to engage with EU actors, as well as other MAPs. The speakers, from the international research centre Nordregio, shared some of the work done in synthesising the Position Papers produced by the MAPs.

Michael Kull explained how MAPs use the Delphi process to obtain information about rural areas. "With the Delphi method we are able to draw on the expertise of a wide variety of experts and respondents, and together with them think about alternative futures, possibilities, and probabilities."

The Delphi method comprises (i) desk research and context analysis, and then (ii) workshops (online due to COVID-19), (iii) to develop Discussion Papers sent to all MAP members for comments. Then (iv) surveys of MAP members and other stakeholders, (v) with

outcomes discussed in Consensus Meetings, lead to (vi) the production of MAP Position Papers. The Delphi process is characterised by several rounds of iterations to provide ample opportunity for feedback and refinement.

All the MAP Position Papers are synthesised into a SHERPA Position Paper. Louise Vestergård presented some key elements from the first analysis of the MAP findings. The central challenges noted were demographic changes, especially depopulation, out-migration of young people, and ageing populations. Other challenges identified, were climate change impacts on agriculture, forestry and other sectors, poor-quality infrastructure, and the long-distances to services such as healthcare facilities.

MAPs also mentioned many opportunities for rural areas, due to the rise of digitalisation and smart ruralities, tackling climate change, developments in renewable energy, tourism, and the emergence of a circular and bio-based economy regarding short supply-chains and local products. Some opportunities of social nature were as well identified, relating to governance and public participation.

A central part of this first SHERPA cycle focused on discussing the vision for 2040 and many visions for the different rural areas were presented, said Ms. Vestergård. These desirable elements for the 2040 visions were clustered into seven overarching themes:

- Infrastructures and basic services;
- Climate, environment, sustainability;
- Digitalisation and smart rurality;
- Governance and participation;
- Knowledge, data and a positive image of rural areas;
- Rural economies that are thriving and diverse;
- Social capital, with stable demographics.

To achieve these by 2040, the challenges have to be overcome and the opportunities realised. The most commonly stated themes across the MAPs were:

14 - Digitalisation and digital technologies highly integrated in the rural economy;

11 - A diversified rural economy;

10 - Environmental conservation, climate adaptation and biodiversity improved;

9 - Improved infrastructure, sustainable and innovative mobility models, and access to services;

9 - A stable and sustainable demographic structure.

“We have powerful local communities to build on in rural areas that are appealing places to live, visit and work in; all attractive in their own right and offering a high quality of life; and attentive to climate and nature.”

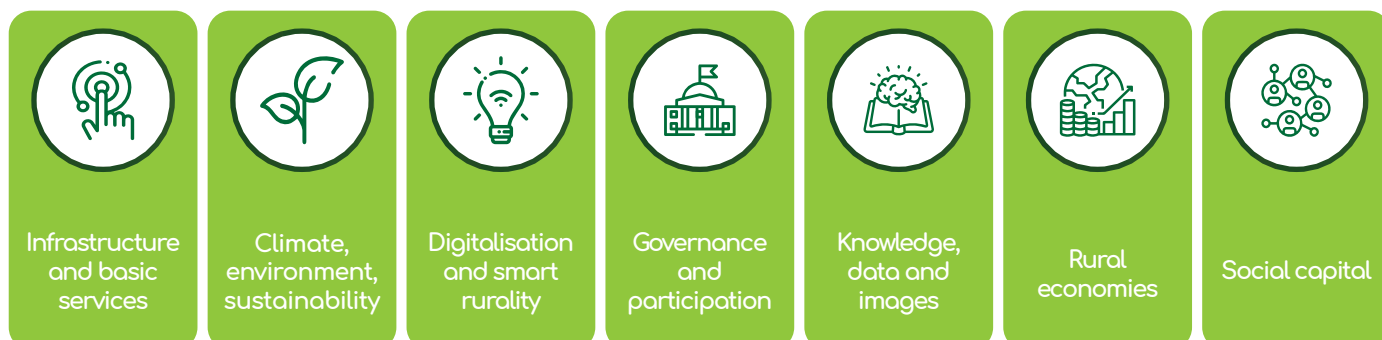
Michael described the enablers given in MAP Position Papers that are essential for realising their visions. “From the hundreds of pages, we grouped enablers under different categories to allow us to do comparisons and link them back to the vision.” Many of the enablers combine several dimensions and are cross-cutting, he said, for example, smart ruralities relates to the economy, infrastructure and many other issues.

The seven enabler clusters for realising the themes of the vision for 2040 were:

- Improved accessibility of infrastructure and basic services;
- Enhanced climate change and environmental services, policies and practices, and land-use planning;
- Enhanced smart ruralities and digitalisation;
- Shift in production and diversification of the rural economy, and bio- and circular economy boosted;
- Data and knowledge, and positive image and narratives
- Empowered local actors and communities, enhanced multi-level and territorial governance, and funding improved;
- Enhancing/developing policies and tools for attractiveness, quality of life and wellbeing, and placing young people at centre stage.

He concluded by noting that empowering local actors and communities, and enhancing multi-level and territorial governance, were among the top themes in all 16 MAP Position Papers analysed; while smart ruralities and digitalisation was a top theme for 14 MAPs. One Finnish MAP member was quoted saying: “It needs a bundle of different mechanisms, approaches and probably also a ‘change of mentality’ to enable the vision.”

A key takeaway from this session can be summarised as follows: We have powerful local communities to build on; in rural areas that are appealing places to live, visit and work in; all attractive in their own right and offering a high quality of life; and attentive to climate and nature.





Carina FOLKESON
CEIGRAM

Spain | Aragón Regional MAP

Carina Folkeson from the Aragón Regional MAP, Spain, mentioned the balanced representation within the MAP, with a composition of 4 members from science, 3 from regional government and 4 from society, and herself as facilitator/moderator. "The main challenges relate to low population density, with over half of the region's population living in the regional capital Zaragoza. There is ongoing depopulation, with the out-migration of youth and women, and an ageing population," she said.

The newly-established MAP, like all MAPs, used the Delphi method to develop a vision for 2040. This resulted in an economically diverse and sustainable rural Aragón, regarded as a desirable place to live, with better urban-rural connections, and where the benefits of digitalisation are exploited.

The main enablers for achieving this vision were adequate financial resources and a better prioritisation of available budget; improved implementation of rural policies with citizen participation; and continued digitalisation. The family farm model should be sustained to retain employment.

Romania | Transylvania Regional MAP

Monica Tudor from the Romanian MAP, Rural Transylvania, presented the composition of membership as follows: 5 from civil society, 3 from science and 4 policy actors.

The MAP's vision for 2040 focused on economically and socially viable rural communities, with people and enterprises having access to modern infrastructures and services, a diversified local rural economy, with fully functional rural-urban linkages, and a sustainable family farm food system.

The enablers identified include: digitalisation; European guidelines and programmes; improved partnerships between local actors; and raised awareness of the socio-economic implications of a local approach in development programmes. "A local approach is important for local improvement, as national government may not be aware of the local realities," she explained.



Monica TUDOR
Romanian Academy -
Institute of Agricultural
Economics



Marion ECKARDT
ELARD

European MAP

Marion Eckardt, the President of ELARD, specified the composition of the EU MAP: 3 from policy (DG AGRI, DG REGIO and the European Committee of the Regions), 4 from civil society (ENRD, PREPARE, ERCA and ELARD), and 2 from research (James Hutton Institute, ETH) actors, plus a facilitator, monitor, and communications and engagement officers. EU MAP members, apart from the NGOs, participate in an individual capacity.

The latest of the three EU MAP meetings held so far looked at the SHERPA work on vision and the enabling factors for reaching it.

"In our draft vision of the desired future for 2040, rural areas and their population are recognised for their vital importance for society. They are economically diverse and socially vibrant, inclusive, connected and resilient, work in harmony with nature in a sustainable and climate-positive way, and are active participants in decisions affecting their future," she pointed out.

Sharing knowledge to achieve rural visions in 2040

Participants were allocated to breakout sessions to discuss some of the drivers, trends, challenges and opportunities identified in the SHERPA Position Paper on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.



DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

SHERPA MAPs had identified demographic change as one of the predominant challenges for their area. Depopulation, especially in intermediate and remote areas, and population ageing were identified as the main demographic challenges currently faced by European rural areas.



CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

A second major challenge confirmed by the MAPs was climate change, which affects activities carried out in rural areas (e.g. agriculture, forestry and fishing). However, Contributions to tackling climate change and the provision of environmental services were identified as a further area of opportunity.



DIGITALISATION

The rise of digitalisation and smart ruralities was also mentioned as one of the most valuable opportunities. Digitalisation is seen as an important instrument to develop rural territories in various ways, for example, by supporting the creation of new jobs, digital products or ways of working.



GOVERNANCE

The MAPs identified opportunities for the rural territories in relation to governance and public participation. For example, through the development of an adapted territorial approach and cooperation between territories, or opportunities arising from a shift towards a region-based empowerment.



DIVERSIFICATION OF THE RURAL ECONOMY

One of the most common characteristics of the visions from the MAPs is the diversification of rural economies. In 2040 the rural economy will be diversified, with non-agricultural activities adding to the sustainability of rural areas.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND BASIC SERVICES

MAPs also identified the lack or poor quality of infrastructure and basic services as a challenge. Poor levels of accessibility and a deficit in the provision of basic services such as healthcare, education and cultural activities, and lack of businesses make peripheral rural areas less attractive for people to live, and for the investment of capital.



Demographic shift

Bulgarian National MAP



Petko Simeonov presented the Bulgarian MAP and explained how it has addressed the issue of demographic shift. He pointed out to the different challenges related to demography, underlining that rural communities located in less developed and economically suppressed regions are the ones most affected. Areas with unfavourable characteristics and conditions (linked to geographical location and natural environment) are also more vulnerable to risks.

There are, however, opportunities, arising from the introduction of new technologies, digitalisation and innovation. Finally, achieving a more even distribution of incomes and wealth is considered as an enabler for people to stay or move to smaller settlements.

Mr. Simeonov also shared the vision and the different enablers that the Bulgarian MAP has discussed over the past months. MAP members consider that in order to reach the vision, it is necessary to address issues related to the high average age of the population in rural areas. Focusing on endogenous strengths, backed by a proper, coherent and comprehensive public support policy, can present rural areas in a more positive light.



Petko SIMEONOV

**Institute of Agricultural
Economics**



Michael WOODS

Aberystwyth University

IMAJINE Horizon 2020



The Horizon 2020 IMAJINE (Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe, 2017-2022) aims at advancing social science knowledge, and the understanding of territorial inequalities and related policy measures beyond the state-of-the-art. The project coordinator, Michael Woods, presented the main activities undertaken thus far, such as: analysis of migration flows in the EU in relation to territorial inequalities, interviews with migrants and settled residents in 12 regions of six countries, online survey of 17 500 people in seven countries covering migration history and perceptions of inequalities, services, and spatial justice.

Prof. Woods shared some key lessons learned about demographic change and migration in rural areas. He stated that rural-urban income disparities in the EU are decreasing, but remain important at local scale – linked to demography and migration. An additional finding of the project, related to demographic change, is that migrants are also impacted by regional and urban-rural inequalities because of relative social mobility. Migration contributes to redressing territorial inequalities through, for instance, remittances, but at the cost of letting young people move away. He concluded that stakeholders often understand cohesion and justice as equal access to services. Rural areas are indeed disadvantaged by their peripheral location and because of demographic character.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The main outcomes of the group discussion about key actions that need to be taken by different stakeholder groups are outlined below:

Policy:

- Design an instrument similar to EIP-AGRI but for rural issues. Also 'AKIS for rural';
- Consider disparities between regions, urban-peripheral rural, and within rural areas;
- Increase the offer of households. Facilitate rental mechanisms for houses in order to bring new inhabitants to the area;
- Strengthen incentives for workers and employment protection legislation;
- Promote and support entrepreneurship;
- Explore fiscal benefits and incentives to make rural areas more attractive;
- Need for more innovation in the provision of public services.

Research:

- Develop community research for tailored solutions (cover gaps between research and society);

- Facilitate detailed analysis based on local data (rural areas are not homogeneous);
- Facilitate practical knowledge transfer (co-research);
- Encourage local citizens and communities to carry out research and collect data that is useful for planning;
- Develop co-responsibility mechanisms among research-communities and companies.

Civil society:

- Boost territorial 'affection'. Create community cohesion and a sense of belonging. Plan community dynamics and a common voice;
- Build on identity and ownership (through cultural heritage);
- Promote positive experiences and success cases;
- Reinforce civil society structures.





Climate change & environmental services

Scotland & Dee Catchment Regional MAPs

David Miller explained that climate change can be a driver of change in rural areas, a trigger for action, and a threat to natural and human capital. Natural environment and climate change are amongst the top challenges, but also the main opportunities identified by the survey.

The most important challenges are the implications of climate change for primary production, resource use, habitats and species, water quality, landscapes and the social impacts of climate change, and the resulting uncertainty. The natural capital, multi-benefit management practices and multi-functional land uses provide opportunities to mitigate and adapt to climate change in rural Scotland.

The vision of the two MAPs in Scotland paints a reality where integrated, landscape-level and ecosystem-based approaches to land use governance will be implemented widely. Scotland will be on track to achieve targets of net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045. The target will be achieved through spatial land use strategies and investment in natural capital, restoring degraded peatlands and expanding woodlands as part of effective ecological networks. Dr. Miller also outlined two main enablers to achieve their vision: the policy ambition and the levels of engagements of the rural community - based on traditions - businesses, and rural stakeholders.



David MILLER

James Hutton Institute

CONSOLE Horizon 2020

The CONSOLE (CONtract Solutions for Effective and lasting delivery of agri-environmental-climate public goods by EU agriculture and forestry) project started in 2019 and runs until 2022. Its objective is to assess innovative contract solutions for an improved design of agri-environmental-climate measures of the CAP. Stefano Targetti outlined some of the main activities undertaken to date, such as developing an operational framework to guide the design of improved solutions tailored to local contexts. This framework is able to facilitate stakeholder interplay, identify lessons learned from existing case studies (58 in the EU and about 80 worldwide), modelling and assessing acceptability, feasibility, ease of implementation and the creation of a Community of Practice to facilitate co-constructing, testing and implementation of new solutions.

Dr. Targetti highlighted the main lessons learned so far in the project. He mentioned that efficient delivery of environmental and climate services from rural areas requires improved contract solutions. Improved solutions are not necessarily more complex, but several (local) factors need to be considered. He further mentioned that solutions based on a mix of contract approaches, which are common and have flexibility, are a reason for their success - e.g. a mix of collective and result-based solutions are effective for a range of environmental services. To conclude, he indicated that capacity to foster and/or build-on existing bottom-up approaches is very often a driver of success.



Stefano TARGETTI

University of Bologna

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussions on the implications for policy, civil society and research, brought to light different actions to mitigate or adapt to climate change and strengthen the delivery of environmental services. Most actions are linked to governance structures to enable the required changes.

Policy:

- Show leadership at all levels, both in politics and policy, and make the environment and climate change a priority;
- Enable social capital development, work from trust and empower local communities;
- Be flexible to bring in knowledge from different sources and coordinate among the different policy areas;
- Understand the consequences of tenure and promote tenure arrangements that provide secure access to land (not necessarily ownership);
- Develop a system where the polluter pays and the provider of environmental services receives compensation.

Research:

- Gain insight on the costs and benefits of climate actions and environmental services. Develop environmental accounting for illustrating the trade-offs and synergies between different ecosystem services;

- Invest in R&D projects that aim at solutions based on cultural practices or agricultural approaches;
- Develop methods for monitoring climate actions and impacts. Involve civil society and farmers in monitoring through citizen science;
- Improve communication of scientific insights on climate change and environment to wider audiences.

Civil society:

- Raise awareness of the value of the countryside and the contributions of agriculture to maintaining landscapes and services to urban areas;
- Farmers/landowners can be more active to invite other (urban) actors and reconnect with the rest of society;
- Implement bottom-up approaches to allow communities to tackle problems themselves and develop sustainable energy sources;
- Stimulate a sense of social responsibility especially among shareholders of enterprises and younger generations;
- Develop citizens' panels, for dialogue among them as citizens instead of as stakeholders.





Digitalisation

Hungarian National MAP

Szabolcs Biró introduced the main results achieved by the SHERPA MAP implemented in Hungary on the long-term vision for rural areas. Digitalisation is the core component within their desired vision, which is expected to bring fundamental change in the way rural areas operate, economically, environmentally and socially. In their work, the MAP members identified outstanding challenges and opportunities for digitalisation. He stressed the transversal nature of digitalisation, which affects many different rural sectors. Digitalisation can create business opportunities in new sectors, while they currently observe a tendency towards the digitalisation of the service sectors in the country. A key challenge for all rural areas is to retain the value created from digitalisation in their territories.

To achieve the digital aspirations of MAP by 2040, Dr. Biró outlined some key enablers. The country should address the lack of digital infrastructure with actions to improve digital skills and competences of rural communities and businesses. Particular attention must be given to the rural areas that are lagging behind, which should receive additional and targeted support. They observed that rural areas with more favourable conditions will attract urban out-migrants and will thrive with the current positive dynamics they have at the moment.



Szabolcs BIRÓ

Research Institute of
Agricultural Economics



Gianluca BRUNORI
University of Pisa

DESIRA Horizon 2020

Gianluca Brunori presented the main messages from the H2020 project DESIRA (Digitisation: Economic and Social Impacts in Rural Areas). The project aims to improve the capacity of society and political bodies to respond to the challenges of digitalisation in the sectors of rural areas, agriculture and forestry. He outlined the importance of having local visions to identify challenges, opportunities and the aspirations of the community, as the starting point for the identification of the right digital means to achieve it. He stressed that digitalisation should be the means to achieve an end, instead of being an end or objective in itself.

Professor Brunori outlined that digitalisation in rural areas should be based on multilevel strategies, linking infrastructure, technologies and capacity building. Digitalisation strategies hence should be organised around a rural challenge or an opportunity instead of around a rolling out of a specific technology. He concluded by pointing out that digitalisation strategies should be coordinated with other rural policies.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

Participants discussed their visions, and outlined a number of actions that can be implemented by policy-makers, researchers and civil society.

Policy:

- Ensure access to digital infrastructure for all (broadband and mobile phone network). It should be considered as a basic right in modern societies. Design policy measures that bring the development of the infrastructure hand-in-hand with capacity building actions for rural citizens and companies;
- Boost digitalisation through local strategies that are developed around a particular local need or opportunity. This strategic approach must be coordinated with higher-level policy frameworks;
- Support policies that boost the creation of network 'brokers', helping to connect local people and their needs with those spheres that can provide digital solutions (universities, digital hubs, businesses, etc.).

Research:

- Data and information on digitalisation is currently available but not sufficiently disaggregated for rural areas. There is a need for more knowledge about the state of digitalisation in rural areas in terms of availability of infrastructure and its use by people and businesses;
- Focus on citizens and practice-oriented research, supporting rural communities in their digitalisation pathways by providing knowledge, information and capacity building. Act as connectors between innovation and rural needs.

Civil society:

- Mobilise the community and bring people together to develop local visions on digitalisation;
- Link up more with research and innovation actors to find solutions to local needs. Help local communities to connect with digital innovators.





Diversification of the rural economy

Lithuanian National MAP



The Lithuanian MAP has a dynamic composition of members (business organization, civil society, a farmers' organisation, innovation agencies, research, and central government). Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė pointed to the agricultural production sector in Lithuania as being dominated by small producers and is fragmented, while the food processing industry and retail trade are highly concentrated. In addition, there is a lack of collaboration between farmers. The MAP identified the diversification of the rural economy as one of the six most sensitive topics for the future of rural areas.

There has been a significant increase in initiatives to develop the local food system and create short food supply chains. Community-led local development is gaining in importance in agriculture. Volunteering, community initiatives and partnerships still hold unfulfilled potential to diversify the rural economy.

The vision for rural areas in Lithuania in 2040 is: Attractive areas to live with modern villages, acting in partnership.

Important enablers for achieving this vision are the existing networks between rural and urban actors, existing partnerships and cooperation between different policy levels, the national policy framework that enables place-based strategies, and trust between public authorities and society.



Živilė
GEDMINAITĖ-
RAUDONĖ



Rita VILKĖ

Lithuanian Institute of
Agrarian Economics

RURITAGE Horizon 2020



Claudia DE LUCA

University of Bologna

The EU-funded H2020 project RURITAGE – Heritage for Rural Regeneration - aims to establish a new heritage-led rural regeneration paradigm. Claudia De Luca described how sustainable development demonstration 'laboratories' will be used to show how rural areas can be transformed through the enhancement of their unique cultural and natural heritage potential.

The project includes six frameworks or drivers that are used to identify heritage potential in rural communities: i) Pilgrimage, route tourism as sustainable travel management; ii) Local food, emphasising eating and drinking experiences as the cultural heritage of a territory; iii) Migration as a response to depopulation; iv) Art and Festival, increased access to art in rural areas; v) Resilience, using natural and cultural heritage to improve resilience; and vi) Landscape, balancing the protection, conservation and redevelopment of heritage values.

The project is working with 'role models' and 'replicators'. They use learnings and recommendations from role models and replicate the activities in other places, e.g. learning why "El Camino" in northern Spain is so successful and seeing how this experience can be applied in other regions. A rural heritage hub has held 30 local workshops with 3 000 people attending.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussion in the group took many directions, illustrating that the topic is broad and includes many aspects relevant for rural areas. A summary of the main actions that need to be taken now are outlined below:

Policy:

- Enhance the role of cultural heritage in the diversification of rural economies;
- Emphasise that the rural-urban linkages contains synergies for both areas;
- Provide support to short food supply chains to help the diversification of rural areas;
- Simplify regulations and put in place fast procedures to facilitate entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Research:

- Carry out studies and expand research about the different forms/types of

diversification that could take place in rural areas. The collection and dissemination of good practice examples is helpful;

- Provide and use micro-scale data that is useful for rural areas;
- Research can evaluate policy and analyze the implications of contradicting policy goals;
- It is important that research makes use of local knowledge;
- Transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research is needed to tackle the challenges of diversifying the rural economy.

Civil society:

- Active involvement in vision exercises and in managing the means to achieve visions;
- Take capacity building and training to local rural communities.





Governance

France | PACA SUD MAP



The French regional MAP is not focusing on a specific topic. The MAP has 12 members: 5 policy-makers, 4 researchers and 3 members from civil society. The MAP covered all the seven items that were proposed in the SHERPA Discussion Paper, but went beyond these topics to have a cross-sectoral discussion, moving from the sectoral challenges and opportunities towards more cross-cutting issues.

Samuel Féret outlined that an opportunity for this French MAP are the many natural parks in the area, which brings a real asset to the region. Economic activity is very vibrant because of tourism. In order to preserve this asset, managing, conserving and enhancing the unique regional natural capital is important.

Mr. Féret highlighted that many questions about the definition of rural areas were raised by MAP members. This was a good opportunity to use external expertise. MAP members wanted to build on a specific and renewed (more positive) definition of rural areas.



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM

RURALIZATION Horizon 2020



Willem KORTHALS ALTES
Delft TU

Willem Korthals Altes introduced the H2020 project RURALIZATION, which started in 2019 and aims at opening rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms. It combines opportunities for rural areas and the issue of access to land for new generations. RURALIZATION started with an assessment framework and looked at what people in rural areas want. The project created an inventory of rural dream futures, collecting the voices of over 2 000 young adults. Currently, these results are being analysed and will be published in January. Prof. Korthals Altes indicated that the idea of the project is to go to these regions and have a debate with local stakeholders about the dreams and visions of young people. The project also looked at national contexts for new generations in rural areas in 10 EU Member States. At the same time, we looked at legal and policy arrangements for access to land and land market developments regarding access to land," said Prof. Korthals Altes..

He further explained that EU Member States have hardly any policies and legal arrangements to promote access to land for new generations. Many bottom-up initiatives have emerged to fill in this gap, but face an unfavourable policy and economic context.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

Policy:

- Invite young people to the table;
- Change the approach to rural policies: innovation, housing, etc. Rural policies are those which can really impact rural areas. Rural areas should not be seen as a specific policy domain;
- Rural development policy (e.g. farmer policy at EU level) does not always match rural policy at regional level. The SHERPA MAP model can be useful for the regional policy level;
- Better match between EU-level policy framework and regional development policies is needed (farming focus versus broader scope);

- Take the opportunity to learn from foresight exercises.

Research:

- There are promising practices on rural new comers, new entrants in farming and farm succession. There is a need to explore other contexts;
- Consider many SMEs from other sectors different from agriculture and farming, when identifying the needs of rural civil society.

Civil society:

- Take stock of practice-based knowledge;
- There is a crucial role for civil society to initiate rural change processes.





Infrastructure & basic services

Poland | Zielone Sasiedztwo MAP



The Polish MAP members' vision for rural areas of Mazowieckie in 2040 is "vibrant rural areas ensuring landscape and biodiversity preservation, integrating local community and offering wellbeing and a high quality of life". The situation in sub-regions inside (and outside) of Mazowieckie in terms of road quality, healthcare provision, childcare and EU projects per capita is really diverse. However, the needs of their communities are quite similar. The priority is to re-invent this community which is lagging behind with respect to others. In the better-off communities, priorities are to focus on new business models, efficiency in resource use – both natural resources and public funds – and infrastructure supporting the development of a green economy.

Barbara Wieliczko highlighted digitalisation, starting with broadband internet connectivity, as a cornerstone for providing basic services in rural areas. The COVID-19 crisis has shown how other basic services, like education, healthcare and possibilities for businesses to keep operating, start with good internet connectivity. She further mentioned that interconnectivity between rural areas – instead of only urban/rural connections – and a just transition is crucial, so no part of the society is left behind in the transition towards a greener economy. The vision is to bring society-economy-environment to a level playing field and find balance among rural stakeholders. Dr. Wieliczko pointed out the European Green Deal as a promising support for the long-term vision of the Polish MAP. It is important that the CAP also applies the Green Deal and delivers on it for rural areas.



Barbara WIELICZKO

European Rural
Development Network

RELOCAL Horizon 2020



Petri KAHILA

University of Eastern
Finland

RELOCAL is an EU-funded H2020 project that focuses on 're-situating the local in cohesion and territorial development'. It started in 2016 and carried out 33 case studies in Europe. Petri Kahila explained that the aim of fairness regarding availability of services of general interest has become increasingly difficult and expensive to achieve in some areas. This raises the issue of reforming cohesion policies in order to develop more adequate responses to these social and territorial challenges.

In the RELOCAL project, it was found that the level of service provision makes a critical contribution to socio-economic sustainability, especially in rural areas, as well as the maintenance of the role as a part of the integrated part urban/rural system. Prof. Kahila said that this can strengthen the creation of economic opportunities, if the embeddedness of services is sufficient. Place-based policies aimed at enhancing social/spatial justice and inclusion have a significant impact as well.

The main result is that place-based policies and tailored public services require a broad understanding of the role of local actors. Therefore, the crucial question is how to combine cohesion policy and national-level public service provision. In areas where maintaining demographic stability is too challenging as a policy target, a smart adaptation policy may compensate for the reduction of population. This can be done by focusing on implications for wellbeing, rather than trying to avoid shrinking population trends.

What are the implications (actions) for policy, research and civil society?

The discussion on basic services touched upon many current issues related to the selection of basic services, the heterogeneity of rural areas, spatial justice and more.

Policy:

- Finding synergies between the European Green Deal and Common Agricultural Policy;
- There is a great diversity in characteristics and needs between urban and regional centres, and areas farthest away, which all require different policy approaches;
- Enhance social and spatial justice using place-based policies (targeting relatively disadvantaged areas);
- Invest in infrastructure supporting green transition and new business models in rural areas;
- Can a (just) transition in rural areas be managed? In a situation of demographic shift, there is a difference between a lack of political response (letting rural areas “die”) vs. smart adaptation combined with land use planning. An appropriate place-based policy responding to the specific local context may facilitate a just transition.

Research:

- Ensuring a just transition for all parts of

society requires further research insights into what makes a transition (un)just;

- New data tools are needed (such as grid level data) to better understand the diversity of rural areas and municipalities;
- Knowledge is needed about what attracts young people to stay or move to rural areas. Digitalisation could also be a basic service to attract them, but needs to be explored;
- In the European Rural Parliaments there is a history of data collection from 20 rural parliaments on rural services and infrastructure, which could give a better picture.

Civil society:

- Are the services from urban areas the right services for rural areas? A greater voice from people living in rural areas is needed to share their views and needs on what and how to provide services;
- Civil society involvement can be difficult to achieve. More engagement is needed to understand the real problems faced by society;
- Increasing heterogeneity of rural society requires a different approach to identifying basic services (considering the farming and non-farming communities).



Acting on the Long-Term Vision now!

Speakers from civil society, policy and science sectors gave their views on how to act on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas: Mario Milouchev, Director of DG AGRI; Hannes Lorenzen, representing Forum Synergies and as a member of the EU MAP; and Karen Refsgaard, Research director at Nordregio.



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Civil Society:

Hannes LORENZEN
FORUM SYNERGIES, ARC 2020

Hannes Lorenzen pointed out that the European Commission's Communication on a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) is a vision for 2040: "I think it is also important to look, at the same time, at a mid-term vision and a short-term vision."

He acknowledged possible tensions between a far-reaching vision and what needs to be done on the way to achieve it. However, "to reach the long-term vision, we need a strategy for actions to take now," he said.

This must link top-down and bottom-up approaches, and build trust between institutions and people, to empower citizens to take local action. "That is, creating space for people in their daily lives to plan and develop their own vision and actions," he explained.

Mr. Lorenzen believes that the key to this is not just

financial, but connecting and supporting people. "It is also important that local actors get relevant information from the European level, to help them understand the complex situation," he highlighted.

"To reach the long-term vision, we need a strategy for actions to take now."

The LTVRA Communication is being developed alongside the important process of reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). And for this, SHERPA can provide a multi-disciplinary approach that addresses all the big challenges that rural areas face, including connecting CAP reform with other perspectives for rural Europe in 2040.

Policy:

Mario MILOUCHEV
Director, DG AGRI



Mario Milouchev highlighted how DG AGRI is using a bottom-up approach to gather views from rural stakeholders for the LTVRA Communication, including a public consultation. He shared seven questions about outstanding issues to which SHERPA could help answer in the future.

1. The costs of delivering services of general interest (e.g. health, education, transport, water and electricity supply, broadband, posts, police and other) are higher in rural areas - studies confirm that the *per capita* costs of most services rise with the decrease of the population density. These services should be of comparable quality to those in urban areas as this is a question of maintaining equitable living standards for all citizens and across all territories. Would the society (EU, MSs) follow a cost-effectiveness approach and therefore the general urbanisation trend? Or is it in the interest of society to make more efforts and investments to keep rural areas?

“Would the society follow a cost-effectiveness approach and therefore the general urbanisation trend? Or is it in the interest of society to make more efforts and investments to keep rural areas?”

2. The analysis of the different statistics can offer varied pictures about the rural reality. For example, according to urban-rural typology, ‘predominantly rural regions’ cover 44.6% of EU territory and have 21.4% of EU population, but these figures are 76.1% and 26.1%, respectively, using degree of urbanisation classification. This difference is even more pronounced for some Member States (for example Spain or Lithuania). If the right statistics and data are not available, it is not possible to have a good rural policy. Hence, wouldn’t there be a need, first, to use more appropriate typology and, second, to use in the future techniques for high spatial resolution and geo-localised and -referenced data?

3. Is there a ‘central data collection’ or ‘rural think tank’ in Europe that collects, analyses and consolidates - in a structured way - sound and good data and different ideas, so that they feed the work of the policy-makers? Would you agree we need such an institution?

“What path are we going to choose for our rural vision?”

4. What does it mean when we say there is a lot of ‘diversity’ among rural areas? One reading is that diversity hinders coherent policy, though a solution is to use averages. Another reading, in the latest OECD report (Rural Well-being: Geography of opportunities), distinguishes three and sometime four types of rural areas depending on their distance from cities. What path are we going to choose for our rural vision?
5. Who is in charge of the holistic rural policy at Commission level and in Member States? Given that a number of EU and national departments are involved, for both EU and national levels, mechanisms should exist to lead and coordinate policies affecting rural areas. Should we think in this direction or the idea of ‘rural policy’ itself is still to be clarified?
6. What is the role for EU Member States in European rural policy? Several have developed their own national rural plans, which differ from Rural Development Programmes and from the Operational programmes and cover all policies and funds. They also have coordination mechanisms at governmental level. Can we draw for our vision any conclusion from these good practices?
7. In the past, many good initiatives like the Cork 2.0 Declaration have remained without concrete monitoring mechanisms to assess achievements. Our vision is for rural areas in 2040. Shouldn’t we start a process for these 20 years ahead, as Hannes Lorenzen said, with short-term plans to be renewed, let’s say, every 4 to 5 years?



Research:

Karen REFSGAARD

Research director, NORDREGIO

Karen Refsgaard raised four important points from the science and research perspective:

1) There is great potential for realising the EU vision for rural areas through the green transition. However, policies need to shift from the single agricultural focus of the CAP, to a broader focus. Further, providing rural communities with equivalent opportunities as cities which therefore questions the somewhat polycentric EU Cohesion policy that is built on the idea of city regions being assigned obligations to ensure surrounding regions can benefit from their added value. To help update policy, she thinks the MAPs can provide a 'highway' from the diverse rural areas to the Commission. On this point, Hannes Lorenzen questioned whether it is a 'highway' or 'many small roads' that we need to be better connected.

2) In terms of the actions that stakeholders and policy-makers can take, they need to target sectoral policies that have real impacts, such as environment, education, housing, innovation and infrastructure. These sectors are important employers in rural areas and have the power and resources to adapt policies, for example, through public procurement, regulation of land, or creating infrastructure to benefit businesses and housing as well as on locally adapted education.

3) It is important that MAPs reflect the real interests and the knowledge that exists in the rural areas. Some MAPs, for instance, lack inputs from SMEs that have

a lot of local knowledge. We also have youth, and arts and crafts groups, who contribute to very social and innovative rural communities.

Rural policies need to shift from the single agricultural focus of the CAP, to a broader focus.

4) There is a need for better data and improved analyses, with increased focus on the potential economic leak from rural areas and the innovation capacity. The Danish MAP highlighted the prevalence of older models that do not really look at where value is created and the need for improved analyses of which jobs (industry vs services) create value both directly and indirectly through up- and downstream the value chain. For example, consumption based analyses of CO2 emissions are important considering that much production happens in rural areas while consumption happens in cities – which is relevant for emission policies.

"There is an assumption that much of the innovation happens in cities and spreads to rural areas. There is a fantastic opportunity today, with new resources from the green transition, to redress the balance," concluded Ms. Refsgaard.

Other interventions

Samuel Ferét (CIHEAM-IAMM, FR-Paca Sud MAP) said that typologies need to be improved, but we also need to create new monitoring tools, in particular, new regional wellbeing indicators and indexes to measure the health of rural areas beyond GDP, to grasp the reality of rural areas.

Marion Eckardt (ELARD, EU MAP) expressed the importance of monitoring the vision to make sure there is real implementation. However, she outlined that monitoring should be mandatory so the vision are really implemented in Member States.

David Miller (James Hutton Institute, UK-Scotland MAP) provided a reminder that Europe is a major contributor to the global debate on rural areas, but we also need to be alert to the findings emerging from, for example, North America and Australasia. He also noted the importance of Horizon Europe for providing a European innovation ecosystem.



Engaging local stakeholders in SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)

SHERPA relies on a network of rural interfaces to achieve its overall objectives of gathering relevant knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to rural areas in the European Union.

Rural interfaces are Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) implemented across Europe and act as open forums for exchanges of ideas, for co-learning and co-creating knowledge. They aim to engage citizens, researchers and policy-makers at local and EU levels in debates, to jointly develop strategic thinking and practical recommendations for the formulation of modern rural policies and research agendas at European and regional levels.

On 1 December 2020, the SHERPA Annual Conference focused on how the project has engaged stakeholders in the 20 MAPs.



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3rd Annual Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy Festival

DG AGRI and the SHERPA project produced a [video](#) for the European Commission's 3rd Annual Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy Festival (2-12 December 2020). The main themes of the Festival addressed how democracy is changing and how citizens can participate in this change.

The video was showcased during the SHERPA Annual Conference.

#EuCitizenEngagement

Citizens-science-policy MAPs contributing to the long-term vision for rural areas:

Engaging local stakeholders in SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen University & Research (WUR)

The SHERPA MAPs create space for dialogue between research, policy and civil society. They come together for both co-learning and co-creation, said Jorieke Potters. "The objective is to gather knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policy and issues relevant to rural areas."

She gave an overview of the 20 existing MAPs that engage over 250 stakeholders: 45-50% from civil society, 25-30% from policy, and 20-25% from science. Some MAPs are newly created and others build on existing networks, such as research or civil society networks. The location of the MAPs varies from remote regions to rather densely-populated areas. They have many similarities, but also differences that are reflected in the topics they focus on.

Monitoring is important for improving how MAPs engage with actors, and each MAP has a monitor in their team. "We have developed a monitoring tool that supports their operations and documents their experiences," explained Ms. Potters. A series of cluster meetings and workshops analysed the lessons learned and challenges when engaging local stakeholders.

Among the key lessons learned were:

- Connect bottom-up and top-down, by exploring ways to match local-level issues with EU policy processes;
- Capitalise on research projects, by translating their findings to enrich MAP discussions and integrating them with local knowledge;
- Combine guidance with context-specific requirements and allow flexibility;
- Methodological support enabling 'what works in practice', as seen when successfully moving forward during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main challenges in engaging stakeholders were identified as follows:

- Appropriate representation of the rural area;
- Engaging civil society, and especially hard to reach groups;
- Balancing power between policy, research and civil society actors;
- Building consensus and grasping diversity;
- Linking to appropriate levels of policy;
- Engaging actors in COVID-19 times.

Engaging local stakeholders in multi-actor platforms (MAPs) in SHERPA



ENGAGING THE HARD TO REACH



BALANCING SCIENCE-SOCIETY-POLICY ACTORS



DEALING WITH CONSENSUS AND DIVERSITY



INVOLVING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS



ENGAGING ACTORS IN COVID-19 TIMES



LINK TO DIFFERENT POLICY LEVELS



Engaging the hard to reach

Germany | Schleswig-Holstein MAP



The Schleswig-Holstein MAP focusses on the governance of environmental issues with particular importance to coastal areas. Currently the MAP is composed of 9 members from civil society, 3 from science and 3 from policy groups. So far, the MAP has undertaken bilateral meetings with MAP members, interviews, two online workshops and a survey. The composition of the MAP was and continues to be a deliberate process. The MAP team has good experiences with actively involving a well-trusted local actor in inviting new members and organising the MAP. Gerald Schwarz mentioned that it is time-intensive to establish relations and build trust in a MAP with actors who did not know each other before. However, he noted that it is time well spent. The MAP managed to include a wider range of views from society (e.g. from the church, women's group) in addition to actors from the agricultural and environmental sectors.

Since the topics of this MAP are future-oriented, Dr. Schwarz outlined that their aim is to specifically target the younger generation and recruit MAP members from universities or vocational schools who could represent rural youth organisations. Also, the MAP is exploring the possibility of engaging with stakeholders from other rural economic sectors so as to involve and gather views from the wider rural community and newcomers to rural areas.



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thuenen Institute

Greece | South Aegean MAP



Nicoletta DARRA
Athens University

The South Aegean MAP consist of 3 policy actors, 2 from science and 7 from civil society actors (such as an agricultural engineer, workers in tourism services, and members of agricultural confederations).

Nicoletta Darra highlighted that the most difficult group of stakeholders to reach are policy-makers, due to their busy schedules, but also elderly community members who are less familiar with digital technology. As all interactions of the MAP were done online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this created additional challenges in engaging some less connected actors. Ms. Darra outlined some of the actions implemented to engage the 'hard to reach' stakeholders. She pointed out the importance of establishing initial contacts with members of the local community representing research, policy or civil society in general. For that, one could use different means of communication such as phone calls, emails, etc.

Sharing information material with potential members has helped to enhance the understanding of the SHERPA project, its context and the role of MAPs. She also mentioned that sharing documents presenting the main findings of the desk research was useful to boost engagements, as well as selecting topics for discussion which were of interest to the members.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

The group exchanged about practices for engaging actors that are more difficult to reach or who are 'the unusual suspects' in engaging with traditional rural development actors. Below are the main lessons learnt.

Do:

- Deliberately assess the local situation and define who needs to be engaged in the MAP, and reflect from time to time on who is missing or who could enrich the MAP discussions;
- Build on existing groups, well-known actors and relations, but be aware of the potential biases in discussions;
- Take time to build relations and trust and take an exploratory approach in early stages;

- Select topics that are of interest to the actors, create an attractive dialogue and make sure there is added value for each of them;
- Create different opportunities for engagement, e.g. interviews, informal conversations, surveys, group discussions, allowing everybody to contribute and adapting the means of communication (meetings, telephone, online) to the preferences of the actors.

Don't:

- Avoid engaging too many actors. If the group is large, it becomes more difficult to create meaningful engagement;
- Avoid making the multi-actor engagement an objective in itself.





Balancing Science-Society-Policy actors

Italy | Emilia Romagna MAP



This Regional MAP has a balanced composition of members, engaging the three stakeholder groups of SHERPA. Emilia Pellegrini expressed that the selection of the 'right' stakeholders is of capital importance so to end up with a small group that can offer different perspectives. For that, they have involved stakeholders with a cross-sectoral expertise and whose inputs are not excessively biased. She outlined that the consensus meeting played an important role in balancing the different opinions. All opinions were included in the position papers while special remarks were made to those aspects where common agreement was not reached by all members of the MAP.

Dr. Pellegrini stressed that given the complexity and multifaceted nature of the region, a key challenge is to identify the main priorities for a group, considering the variety of heterogeneous perspectives and context needs.



Emilia PELLEGRINI
University of Bologna

Slovenian National MAP



Emil ERJAVECH
University of Ljubljana

Emil Erjavec illustrated the case of the Slovenian National MAP highlighting a balanced representation between different SHERPA stakeholders groups (7 Society – 6 Research – 6 Policy). This MAP is able to mobilise the rural community in the country, gathering more than 100 people for some of its meetings, which reflects the need for Multi-Actor Platforms in rural matters.

Prof. Erjavec outlined that in their MAP they found limited usability of past research and literature, which narrowed the provision of science-based solutions to the topics addressed. To compensate, the use of stakeholder engagement tools was of key importance (e.g. surveys, mentimeter app, focus groups, etc.) to collect stakeholders' knowledge on the respective topic. The MAP facilitator played an important role in bringing the different discourses together and managed to get common agreements. He noted that the Ministry of Agriculture is very engaged in the MAP, and it is finding it very useful to inform the design of future policies.

Nonetheless, he expressed concerns about the value of applying a balanced approach and consensus to the outcomes of the discussions, as it might not be sufficient to bring policy change.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Do:

- Translate science and theory into common and simple terms to enhance its usefulness by the different stakeholders;
- Carry out data collection on the ground to compensate for the lack of specific data and scientific information at national/regional level;
- Implement surveys, and focus groups for balancing strong positions of different stakeholders;
- The use of good practices and experiences helps in engaging stakeholders and generating dynamic discussions;

- Depending on the topic, encourage the engagement in the MAP of the wider rural community, in addition to agricultural stakeholders. This requires animation activities from the MAP facilitators.

Don't:

- Avoid focusing the exchange solely on the conflicts. Try to generate discussion on positive aspects and avoid negative ones such as "how bad things are";
- Do not limit the various positions of the stakeholders in the discussions. All different points of view are valid.





Dealing with consensus & diversity

Danish National MAP



Louise Vestergård gave a concise presentation on how the Danish MAP worked. She discussed the make-up of the MAP and how they tried to create stakeholder engagement that was as inclusive as possible. However, they noticed that the MAP was missing input from youth and SMEs. This is something that they will try and remedy in the future, as these are voices that bring unique perspectives to the table.

Another topic that she touched upon was how to deal with consensus. Ms. Vestergård and her colleagues discovered that some of the MAP members found it problematic to call a meeting a 'consensus' meeting. The members asked if consensus was the objective of the meeting, which would limit the range of discussions in the meeting. Ms. Vestergård questioned whether consensus was really the objective. And if so, if this is a realistic objective for MAP meetings.



Louise VESTEGÅRD
NORDREGIO



Monica TUDOR
Institute of Agricultural
Economics

Romania | Transylvania MAP



Monica Tudor recognised the issues with the composition of the MAP that Ms. Vestergård mentioned in her intervention. The Romanian MAP tried to ensure a fair and good coverage of the different voices, but Ms. Tudor commented that this is something difficult to be sure about.

She asked several questions to the group concerning how to deal with issues regarding interactions among various MAP members, for instance, how to deal with disputes between MAP members during meetings, or how to intervene so that the dispute does not become a competition. She mentioned that they used coffee breaks to try and smooth out rising tensions. Ms. Tudor also highlighted other topics of interest such as how to overcome blockages from some members during decision (consensus), and how to respond at project level when no agreement seems possible. She gave the participants interesting food for thought by presenting these questions.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Participants brought up a lot of interesting points with regard to the improvement of stakeholders' engagement in the MAPs and how to maximise the impact. In addition to a list of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts', the group also mentioned topics for further reflection when it comes to stakeholder engagement. For instance, how does one capture the difference of opinion between a distinct group (e.g. farmers), or the fact that the various MAP members have different expectations of the meetings. One of the participants made the noteworthy comment that we also need to reflect the different forms of diversity that make up both the MAPs and rural areas (e.g. gender, race, LGBTQ+); it is not only important to reflect on what is being said, but also who said it.

Do:

- Reflect and identify where differences lie, what the differences are, and invite the different opinions to participate in the process. Be open to areas of disagreement so no one gets left behind;
- Be honest on areas where no agreement can be reached, as this is also a valid result;
- Invite active and positive people, who are everyday leaders and are actively involved in the topic of discussion;
- Invite MAP members individually and

explain the meaning and importance of their specific contribution towards the issue. In addition, listen and observe the MAP members when they participate;

- Be flexible in the process and increase the diversity when you think it is needed. This might change throughout the process and requires adapting to it;
- See the MAP as a tool for organisation development and identify the way to a solution.

Don't:

- Do not let strong personalities dominate the process and do not choose a moderator who 'knows' everything about the discussion;
- Do not just ask for approval, let MAP members discuss freely and disagree;
- Do not push for an agreement if there simply is none, this would ultimately do more harm than good;
- Do not put too much pressure on MAP members, as this would harm their future involvement;
- Do not call it a 'consensus meeting' as consensus might not be a realistic objective.





Involving civil society actors

Portugal | Rural.PT MAP

The newly established Portuguese MAP in the central region of the country consists of 6 members from science, 6 from society and 8 from policy. Pedro Santos explained that the region is different from where CONSULAI (SHERPA Partner) is usually active, making it more difficult to build on an existing network.

In the MAP discussions, the contribution of science was dominant compared to the other groups. Face-to-face and group meetings were needed to strengthen the cohesiveness of the newly established network. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to COVID-19. Mr. Santos mentioned that for the members from society, a vision for 2040 is considered too far in the future and does not seem useful. This might reflect a lack of knowledge on the implications of the long-term vision on their sphere of interest.



Pedro SANTOS
CONSULAI



Marianne GROOT
Wageningen University &
Research

Netherlands | Greenport Gelderland MAP

The Dutch MAP is built on an existing multi-stakeholder network, focused on the development of the fruit sector in the river region. The MAP consists of members from science, society and policy, but the society representation refers to participants from the private sector only. Marianne Groot noted the challenge of involving more citizens in the MAP meetings. Since the MAP network already existed prior to the SHERPA project, she said that it makes it a more delicate issue to include single issue action groups that could represent rather opposite views to the opinions of the existing members. Therefore, a preference was given to include citizen representation who do not necessarily represent Local Action Groups. However, there has been a hesitance from independent citizens or representatives from village groups to join the MAP on behalf of other citizens.

Ms. Groot highlighted that new ways have to be found to engage more citizens in addition to the private sector representation, to balance the society group. Working with an existing MAP already sets a certain perspective on issues to be discussed. She concluded by asking how to bridge private sector and action groups in a constructive manner.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

There was a lively discussion on organising the composition of MAPs and the importance of including Local Action Groups. A number of 'do's' were discussed with practical ideas on how to engage more civil society through different networks and promoting the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas as an important issue, as well as process-related suggestions on how to run the MAP to build trust and create a fruitful environment for exchange.

Do:

- Inviting a representative from the EU level could be used to attract stakeholders and raise awareness about the activities being implemented;
- Make better use of the connections MAPs have (involvement of local associations), but also the members of associations participating in the SHERPA EU MAP, for instance Local Action Groups and stakeholders who are members of ELARD or PREPARE;
- Consider involving Local Actions Groups in each SHERPA MAP. It is also possible to invite civil society members to meetings, without them necessarily becoming a full MAP member;
- When existing structures are in place (national/local), it becomes easier to connect with citizens in rural areas;
- It is a big challenge to find the right representation of society, both in terms of making people feel interested and finding the right people with the appropriate representation;
- Animate different targeted groups with different methods (e.g. different approach for business associations than for civil society).





Engaging actors in COVID-19 times

Czech National MAP



The MAP focuses on smart energy in rural areas and it gathers researchers and companies, mayors, entrepreneurs and residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the work of the MAP, said Marie Trantinova. Some members are busy solving issues related to COVID-19, while other members experienced stress and a lack of time resulted in less participation than expected. There were various physical encounters that had to be cancelled. The MAP found it challenging to organise digital meetings with the same quality of discussions. The transition to the digital environment decreased the participation and made the development of project documents slower. Also, some contacts with schools have halted. One positive effect is that it has been easier to share information with participants in remote areas.

There is a need for training on how to involve more people in discussions through online platforms. The effects of COVID-19 are large but not liquidating, however, there is a risk of losing input and opinions when people are not comfortable with the digital format, when people do not access computers nor have good Wi-Fi, and if the quality of meetings is not appropriate. Yet, online platforms can save time and reduce costs.



Marie TRANTINOVÁ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics

Italy | Tuscany MAP



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa

The MAP includes 5 actors from science, 7 from policy and 6 from civil society. It has focused on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and on the role of digitalisation in rural areas. The MAP builds on long-standing collaborations which has facilitated the challenges that digital communication under COVID-19 has generated.

Sabrina Arcuri stated that the COVID-19 situation has resulted in an increased participation in the MAP. There has been a vast learning in how to use new tools for online meetings and to adapt to the new needs. The work has become more efficient in terms of resources used and in keeping the discussion on track. However, it has been difficult to achieve team building goals, so the feeling of being part of a MAP is limited. There has also been less room for informal interactions and exchange.

Dr. Arcuri also mentioned that it was challenging for the MAP to find the right way to engage with civil society. It has been more difficult to understand needs and to enhance language and communication skills. It has also been difficult to build new relationships from scratch when only using digital channels. She concluded by expressing whether it makes sense to get back to the initial plan of physical activities, as in pre-COVID times, considering the environmental benefits from less travelling.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

The topic of how to engage stakeholders during COVID-19 sparked a lot of discussion. Everyone had varied experiences to share, sharing similar challenges and values but also varying from different place to place, e.g. due to skills in digital meeting facilitation, access to computers and broadband, and whether building MAPs on existing networks or creating new ones.

Do:

- Analyse who is most impacted by COVID-19 and make sure they are on board, or at least represented, in the MAP meetings;
- Find the communication channels that reach the right stakeholders, using simple language;
- Keep it simple;
- Combine informal, relaxed and fun interactions with more formal content-

based activities;

- Smaller groups help to get a good discussion;
- Make sure you have the right people in the room – not effective for anyone if the discussion goes in directions that are not of relevance;
- Need for facilitators to be trained in webinar facilitation and to participate in training of new digital tools.

Don't:

- Avoid overloading MAP members/ participants with heavy content and then, additionally, ask for feedback;
- Don't be too rigid with the meeting content and structure – adapt to where the participants take you.





Linking to different levels of policy

Finnish National MAP

Michael Kull explained that the Finnish MAP composition is very evenly distributed with 4 members representing local citizens and business, 4 representing science and research, and 4 representing policy. This gives a good group dynamic with a rather balanced structure. Because members of the MAP know each other, the group dynamic has worked well and everyone has been eager to engage in discussions. The Finnish MAP has therefore not had any issues with getting consensus on certain topics.

Challenges that still need to be dealt with includes the integration of the youth perspective (which is especially important when thinking about a future vision), but also finding the right balance between being too active, by overwhelming people with too much information, versus being too passive and not engaging members enough. One way to deal with this last challenge is 'keeping an ear on the ground' to stay up-to-date with members' interests.



Michael KULL



Mats Stjenberg

NORDREGIO

Spain | Galicia MAP



Mariam FERREIRA

University of Santiago de Compostela

Mariam Ferreira explained that the Spanish-Galicia MAP is a regional platform, consisting of 10 members representing society, 3 from science, and 4 representing policy. During the past year, the group has come up with a list of actions for a desired rural area. She expressed that the task for 2021 is to achieve these actions. In Galicia, many funds come from the EU, so members are very interested in the SHERPA project. The MAP focuses on policy levels relevant for rural areas, namely local, regional, national and European. The MAP is, therefore, a place to exchange information and experiences between local and regional administrations.

Ms. Ferreira also mentioned that one challenge is to create synergies with the regional association of Local Action Groups. They help to recruit people for the MAP and the idea was to cooperate with them and also give other groups a voice (e.g. other municipalities). Yet it was difficult to take full advantage of this due to COVID-19.

Information flows to national policy levels through through researchers who are informing the regional governments, and linking with policy-makers who are implementing the CAP.

How to improve interactions, engagement and participation of the MAPs to maximise impact?

Do:

- Involve youth perspectives. But how? One tip: to look for pioneers, people who are often everywhere and doing things differently;
- Balance in the composition is not necessarily the same number of people from each domain. In the Spanish-Galicia MAP, there are more members representing society. But the MAP looked for researchers and policy-makers with a broad view, while people from society have a narrower expertise;
- Regional policy-makers may have a very narrow view. To include a wider perspective, also invite national policy-makers to regional MAPs and vice versa, involve regional policy-makers in national MAPs to avoid a disconnect from everyday practice;

- If you want policy-makers to be involved, there needs to be something in it for them;
- Make sure people's voices are heard and included in papers, etc. In the end, people want to see that they have an influence on policy making.

Don't

- Avoid carrying out research just for the sake of it, but to also inspire real policy-makers on the ground;
- Avoid spending too little time on research while planning, as the project can often be put under great pressure for short-term action;
- Don't exhaust members (e.g. by repeating things they already know) and keep them engaged and interested: make sure you show added value.





Way forward: concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE
Professor of Economics,
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Prof. Midmore concluded that it had been a really good conference, with excellent interactions and engagement. In his role as external observer, he provided constructive criticism of several aspects of the SHERPA project.

“*Multi-Actor Platforms from SHERPA could contribute to articulate rural interests and build networks of contacts.*”

He shared two main points. Firstly, he thought the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) were working well to identify key issues and to develop proposals for addressing them, thanks in part to the efforts of the MAP coordinators. “But I have a slight concern about their legitimacy,” he said. “Are they genuinely representative of rural communities or do they just replicate the views of existing rural elites who are used to engaging with debates, so leaving out the vast majority of rural people?”

The second point concerned effectiveness. “What we have seen so far is undoubtedly good progress, but it is a bit like a shopping list without any prices attached,” he explained. With a limited budget, this makes it difficult to set priorities. In addition, the CAP process excludes many items from the shopping list.

Prof. Midmore was involved in one of the first LEADER groups in 1991. “It was then a new and exciting bottom-up approach, different from what had happened before,” he said. “There were concerns about depopulation, an over-reliance on agriculture, and getting modern technology to rural areas. So what has changed?”

In 2020 we are still talking about the same issues, but there have been important changes, he explained, including advances in digital communication. He noted that many ‘digitally excluded’ people have mobile phones, so these could be used more to reach a wider rural audience.

He sees two formidable obstacles to overcome, or we may still be talking about the same issues in 2040. One is the very slow-moving policy process. “A long-term vision needs to understand where it is possible to intervene in the policy process in an effective way,” he said.

The second obstacle is that powerful interest groups are resisting change. Prof. Midmore noted that the way to counter this is to develop countervailing lobbying power. “There I see a role for the MAPs, in articulating rural interests and building networks of contacts.”

SHERPA’s early progress is very promising, he highlighted. Though there is a lot of hard work to do, there is the willingness and capacity to make the remainder of the project a success.

“*A long-term vision for rural areas in 2040 needs to understand where it is possible to intervene in the policy process in an effective way.*”

Authors:

AEIDL	Enrique Nieto, Stephen Nottingham, Blanca Casares, Roxana Vilcu and Lucía Garrido
ECORYS	Olivier Chartier and Elodie Salle
Wageningen University & Research	Jorieke Potters, Ellen Butlen and Ardjan Vermue
Nordregio	Michael Kull and Sandra Oliveira

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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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Resources:

- Find all the presentations from the SHERPA Annual Conference on our website:

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/news-or-events/sherpa-annualconference/>

- Subscribe to the SHERPA newsletter and stay up-to-date with the latest news from the project:

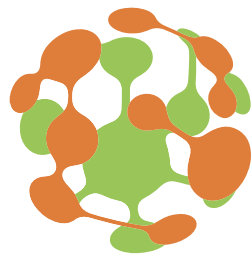
<https://mailchi.mp/rural-interfaces.eu/sherpa-newsletter>

- Read the SHERPA Discussion Paper on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas:

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/resources-and-tools/rural-policypapers/>

- Working Document: 'Overview of a sample of existing foresight and scenario studies carried out at EU and global levels':

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/resources-and-tools/rural-policypapers/>



SHERPA

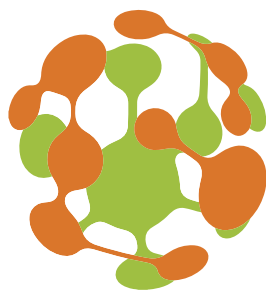
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SHERPA Conference Highlights:

**Make it happen!
Implementing the rural vision**

31 January – 1 February 2022



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

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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





DAY 1

31 January 2022

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

Introduction to the 2022 SHERPA Conference

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

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

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



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator
ECORYS

Words from the coordinator

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

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

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

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



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHERPA's work in 2021 and contributions at various levels

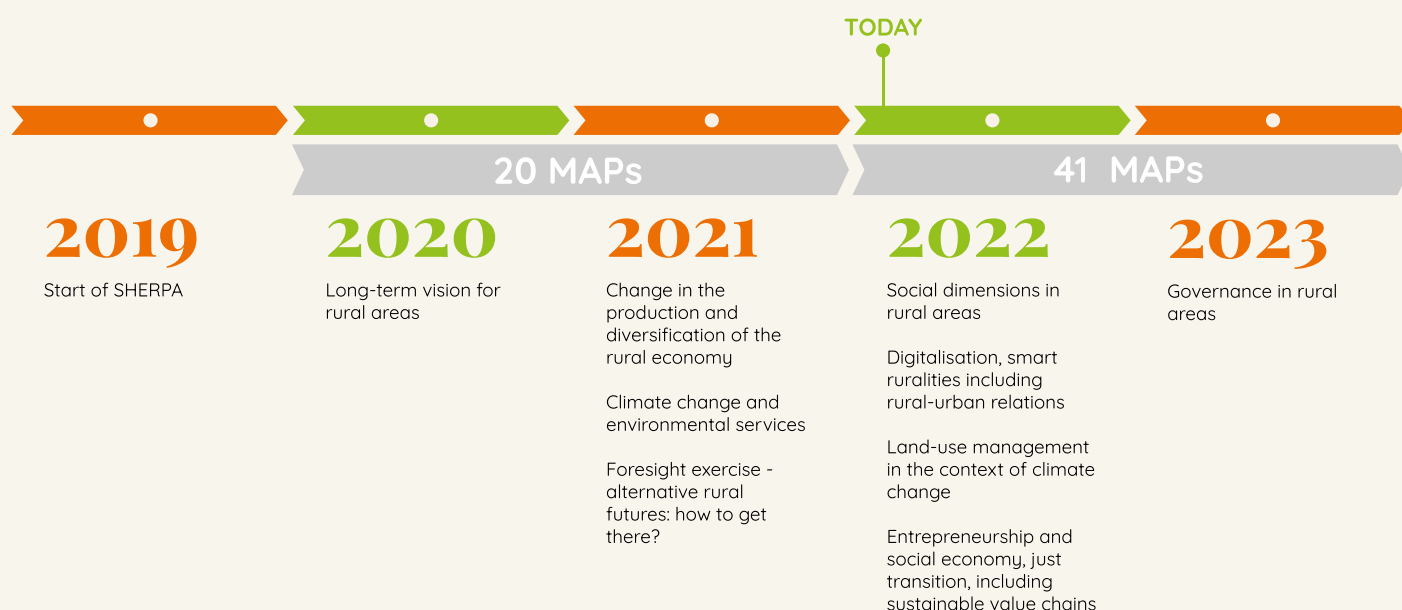


Elodie SALLE
ECORYS

SHERPA's work in 2021 & contribution to the vision



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



Contribution to the policy process at local level

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

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



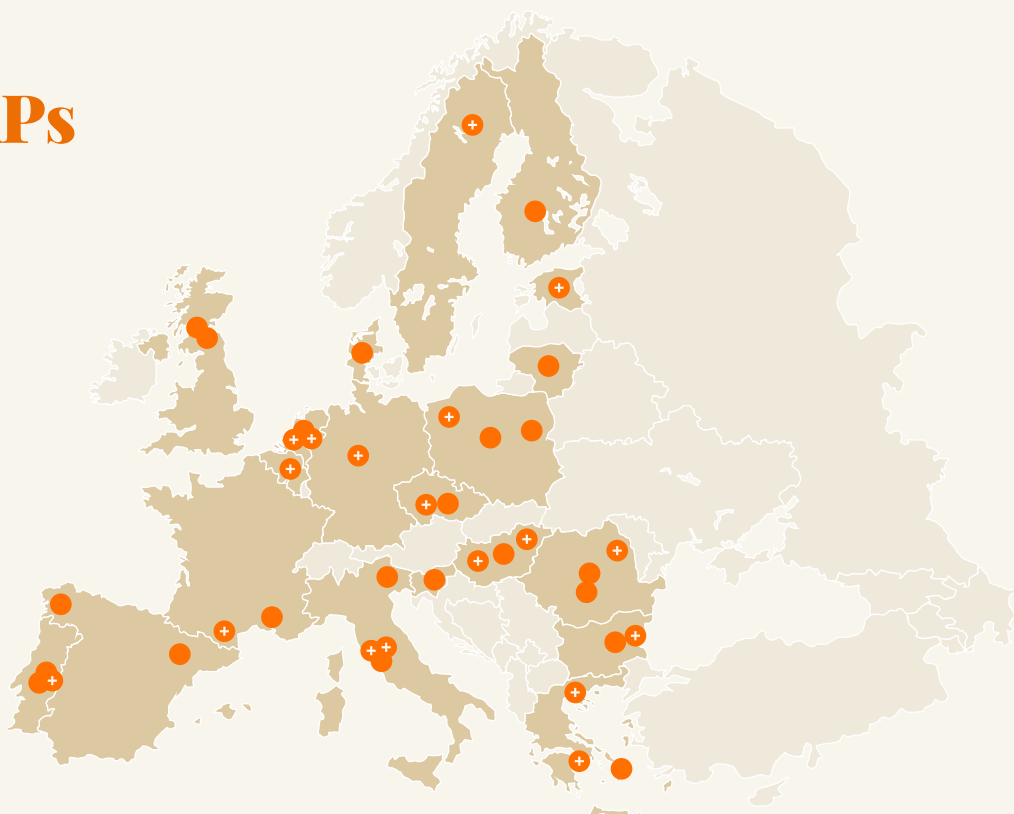
David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



SHERPA MAPs

● Current MAPs

+ New MAPs





Doris LETINA
European Council of Young
Farmers - CEJA



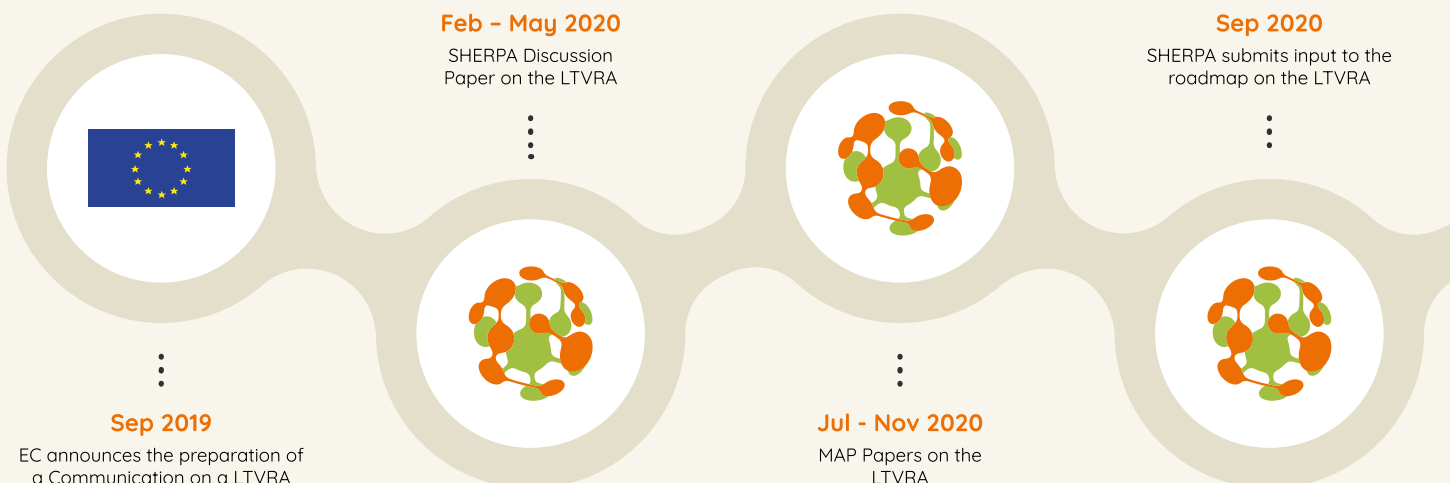
“I am extremely happy that the MAP of Slovenia has raised the attention of key rural stakeholders in different fields and that I am part of it.”

Contribution to the policy process at national level

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

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

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



Contribution to the policy process at EU level

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



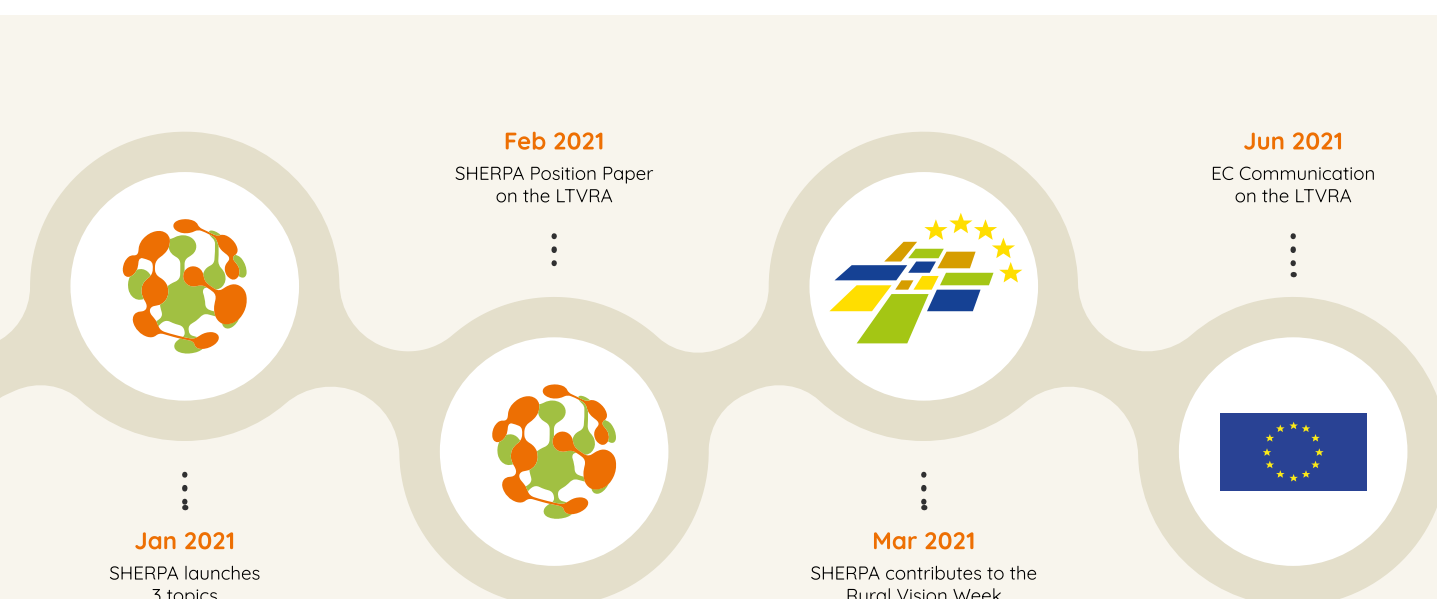
Eleftherios STAVROPOULOS
DG REGIO, European
Commission



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

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

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



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



Desirable futures & pathways



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa



MAP Tuscany, Italy

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

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

POLIRURAL – H2020

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

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



Patrick CREHAN
CKA



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

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

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



Climate change mitigation & adaptation

MAP South Aegean, Greece

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



Nicoleta DARRA
Agricultural University
of Athens



UNISECO – H2020



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thünen Institute



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

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

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

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

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

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

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





Environmental services

MAP Emilia-Romagna, Italy

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

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



Emilia PELLEGRINI
University of Bologna



Davide VIAGGI
University of Bologna



CONSOLE – H2020

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





Digitalisation & smart communities

MAP Suomi, Finland



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

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



Mats Stjernberg
Nordregio



Michael Kull
LUKE



Elena Favilli
University of Pisa



DESIRA – H2020

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

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

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

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

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

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





Farm diversification and food chains

MAP Rural Transylvania, Romania

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

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

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



Monica TUDOR
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Romania



Sherman FARHAD
University of Córdoba

MOVING – H2020

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

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

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



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

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

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





Bioeconomy & sustainable management of resources

MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo, Poland

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

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



Paweł CHMIELINSKI
European Rural
Development Network



Holger GERDES
Ecologic Institute



BE-RURAL – H2020

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

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

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

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

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



PANEL DISCUSSION:

Make it happen! Implementing the rural vision for 2040

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



DAY 2
1 February 2022



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy:
Mario MILOUCHEV
DIRECTOR
DG AGRI, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Science:

Karen REFSGAARD
RESEARCH DIRECTOR
NORDREGIO

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Elin SLÄTMO
Nordregio



Contribution to the local level

MAP Aragón, Spain

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

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



Bárbara SORIANO
CEIGRAP - UPM



Marianne GROOT
Wageningen University



MAP Greenport Gelderland, Netherlands

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

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



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

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

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

Key recommendations

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



Contribution to the regional level

MAP Rural Scotland, UK



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



David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



Gerald SCHWARZ
Thünen Institute

MAP Schleswig-Holstein, Germany



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

MAP Alqueva, Portugal



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



Pedro SANTOS
Consulai



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

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

Key recommendations

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



Contribution to the national level

MAP AKIS, Hungary

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



Viktória VÁSÁRY
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Hungary



Marie TRANTINOVÁ
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Czechia



MAP Venus, Czechia

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



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

The higher the level of policy-making, the more complex and difficult it becomes to ensure a sustainable and continuous relationship with relevant actors. Several aspects highlighted during the discussion help to shed light on how MAPs can play a role in the national level policy-making for rural areas.

Key recommendations

1. Increase the level of involvement and quality of the discussion to address the group's interest, while looking to fit it in their daily tasks, rather than it adding an extra burden. They will then feel enabled to participate with no additional efforts and contribute effectively to the discussion.
2. Bottom-up facilitation is decisive to foster innovative approaches to problems. Policy can be influenced and evolve if there is momentum and civil society actors are enabled to take on a leading role in processes of change. SSP interfaces can act as inclusive mediators. A key role, beyond their conventional functions, is assigned to scientists, as knowledge brokers in these processes, and policy-makers, who are required to understand and make understand the complexity of the issues at stake to the public.
3. Communication and action! Concrete actions may be more effective than reports when it comes to communicating at broad levels.



Contribution to the EU level

EU MAP

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

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



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM-IAMM



MAP PACA Sud, France

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

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



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

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

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

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



Role of rural interfaces in the next phase of the LTVRA

MAP CBioLit, Lithuania



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

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

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



Živilė GEDMINAITĖ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics, Lithuania



Rita LANKAUSKIENĖ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics, Lithuania



Beatriz GUIMAREY
University of Santiago



MAP Galicia, Spain

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

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

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



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

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

Key recommendations

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



Sustainability of rural interfaces

MAP Bulgaria

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



Bozhidar IVANOV
Institute of Agricultural
Economics, Bulgaria



Marta MENDES
Consulai



MAP Centro, Portugal

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

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



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

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

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



Concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS,
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Authors

Roxana Vilcu & Kallirot Pappa (AEIDL)

Contributors

Elodie Salle (ECORYS)
Jorieke Potters & Ellen Bulten (WUR)
David Miller (JHI)
Lucia Garrido & Blanca Casares (AEIDL)
Elin Slätmo (Nordregio)
Sabrina Arcuri (UNIFI)

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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:

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SHERPA

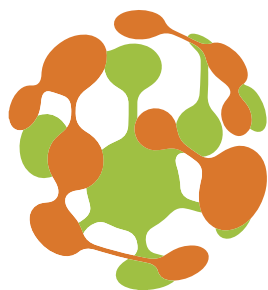
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Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights:

Co-creating rural futures

31 January - 1 February 2023



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Author

AEIDL | Carla Lostrangio

Contributors and reviewers

Sabrina Arcuri, Dominique Barjolle, Christelle Caso, Majda Černič, Paweł Chmieliński, Emil Erjavec, Samuel Féret, Julie de Galard, Miranda García, Raphael Garcia, Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Katarzyna Gizińska, Maite Iglesias, Leneisja Jungsberg, Rita Lankauskienė, Erato Lazarou, Estelle Midler, David Miller, Serafin Pazos Vidal, Nathalie Régond Planas, Alexia Rouby, Elodie Salle, Pedro Santos, Barbara Soriano, Stefano Targetti, Brigit Zomer

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

Foreword

SHERPA stands for Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors, and as such, the project has been running numerous Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) across Europe since its beginning in 2019; 41 at national, regional, and local levels, and 1 at European level. These platforms, understood as rural interfaces, bring together representatives from science, society and policy. Throughout the project, the rural interfaces are co-creating knowledge and shared experiences, actively contributing to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and consolidate their own knowledge, exchanges, and recommendations for policy and research in the MAP Discussion and Position Papers.

During the SHERPA third Annual Conference (31 January- 1 February 2023), the project reflected on its achievements from the past year, as well as its contributions to policies and the specific topics that the MAPs focused on in 2022: the social dimension of rural areas, digitalisation in rural areas, climate change and land use in rural areas, and resilient and sustainable value chains in rural areas.

Furthermore, keeping in mind that the project will be ending in September 2023, the participants to the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023 also took the time to reflect on the future of SHERPA MAPs by looking into the following questions: what is the added value and key ingredients of the MAPs? Which aspects will help to preserve the MAPs in the future? What governance and financing models should be adopted to continue the MAPs over time?

This report contains a summary of the discussions held during the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023 and its key outputs.



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





DAY 1
31 January 2023

Introduction to the 2023 SHERPA Conference

Serafin Pazos Vidal, Senior Policy Expert at the European Association for Innovation in Local Development welcomed participants, both in-presence and online, and opened the conference as moderator of the first day. He recognised that the third SHERPA Annual Conference was the first in-person conference organised by the project due to COVID-restrictions, and thanked the host of the conference **Thierry Dupeuble**, Director of Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier. As a practitioner, rural policy analyst and scholar, Mr Dupeuble recalled that rural attractiveness has been the subject of reflection for a long time, yet there is still much to be done. Mr Dupeuble welcomed the work done by SHERPA and its MAPs, who have helped to further advance the rural discussion by presenting concrete recommendations.



Alexia ROUBY



DG AGRI, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas - Where are we now and how can SHERPA continue to contribute to it?

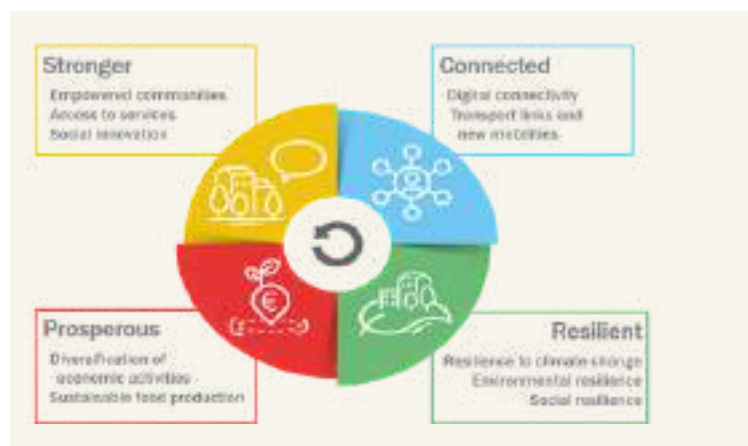
Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator at the European Commission in DG AGRI, presented the ongoing implementation of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and on how SHERPA can continue contributing to it. Launched in June 2021, the EU Rural Vision aims to achieve ten shared goals that summarise aspirations for **stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040**. There are two main avenues to achieve these goals: the Rural Action Plan (actions from European Commission) and the Rural Pact (cooperation between all actors).

Since the last SHERPA Annual Conference in January 2022, the European Commission has progressed with the implementation of the action plan's 30 actions to enhance rural areas in Europe (24 thematic actions and 6 cross-cutting actions). Among the thematic actions, a few leading examples are: the Rural Revitalisation Platform (to be launched by spring), specific Horizon Europe's calls for grants targeted to rural areas, the SMARTA 3 project to support rural mobility, and the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub project to provide assistance in the set-up of rural energy communities.

The European Commission has recently launched the European Rural Observatory, an online portal that gathers statistics, indicators and analyses related to EU rural areas. Furthermore, the Commission is currently working on other cross-cutting actions, ranging from collaborating with Eurostat to produce data at a more granular level and develop specific publications targeted to rural areas, to developing the concept of functional rural areas, as well as rural proofing legislation and creating an EU funding toolkit for rural areas (a first version is expected in September 2023).

In addition, Ms Rouby announced that the Rural Pact Support Office has been launched. This Office will help deliver the Rural Pact, launched in June 2022 with the aim to amplify rural voices; encourage networking, collaboration and mutual learning; and encourage people and

organisations to act for rural areas. Public authorities, civil society, businesses, academic research and innovation bodies, and individuals are encouraged to contribute to this Pact. Two events, one on 3 and 4 May in Uppsala (Sweden) under the Swedish presidency of the EU Council and one on 28 September in Spain as part of the Spanish Presidency, will contribute to advancing the Rural Pact, alongside other networking events organised by the Rural Pact Support Office.



Ms Rouby underlined the usefulness of the SHERPA Discussion and Position Papers for providing analytical and consultation work to the European Commission. She invited SHERPA and its MAPs to 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.

To conclude, Ms Rouby announced that the European Commission's **upcoming milestones for rural areas** include stock taking on programming of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy and on the implementation of the Rural Action Plan (mid-2023), listing indicators to track progress towards the shared goals, and preparing a public report on how to enhance support for rural areas (early 2024).



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator
ECORYS

Taking stock of SHERPA's work in 2022



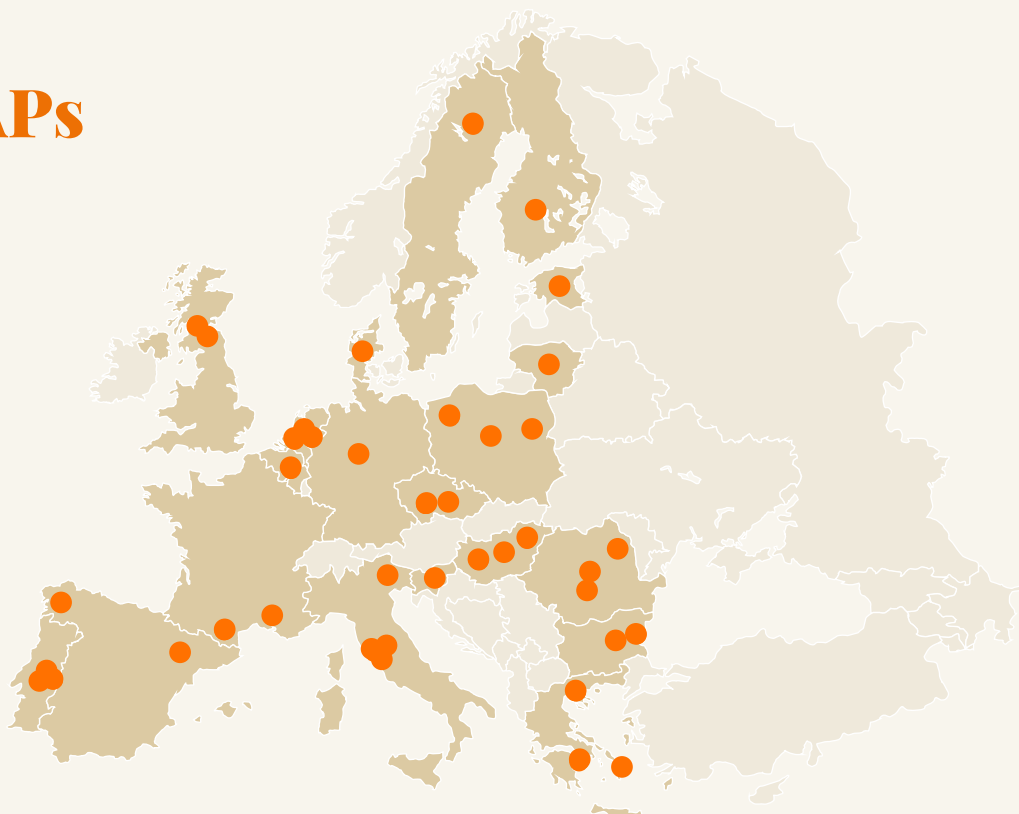
Olivier Chartier, Director at Ecorys and SHERPA coordinator, acknowledged SHERPA partners are what makes this project unique and easy to implement. He reminded participants that the “raison d’être” of the project is the necessity to better use research knowledge, and the need to empower key actors for public policy development. Since 2019, SHERPA involved more than **630 people** from over 17 countries, engaged in **125 meetings** and established **41 national, regional, and local MAPs**, as well as one at European level. Over the last three and half years, the 41 SHERPA MAPs have deliberated on **8 topics** relevant for rural areas.

Furthermore, Mr Chartier underlined that SHERPA gathered information and results from approximately **800 rural projects** in its Repository, and developed a cartographic map of multi-actor groups that are part of SHERPA and other European projects. In 2022, SHERPA's work focused on **4 thematic areas** (social dimension, digitalisation, climate change and land use, resilient and sustainable value chains) and translating the input from the MAPs into recommendations for policy and research.

Mr Chartier shared that SHERPA's last activities before its end in September 2023 are thematic work on multi-level governance, the preparation of final recommendations for policy makers and researchers, and its Final Conference in Brussels (1-2 June 2023). He added that SHERPA is reflecting on how to sustain Science-Society-Policy interfaces, the mechanism that makes the **41 SHERPA MAPs** unique and shown to be effective.

“What makes this project very easy is having a great team and receiving contribution from all project partners”

SHERPA MAPs



SHERPA'S contribution to local policy

Testimonies from the Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée MAP

Situated at the French-Spanish border, the Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée region stretches from the Pyrenees mountains to the French coast and includes 58 municipalities with approximately 108 000 residents. Nathalie Regond Planas, mayor of a small municipality at the French and Spanish border and president of Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée, presented their involvement and commitment in the SHERPA project as one of the two French MAPs.

The MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée capitalised on participation to the LEADER 2014-2020 programming, and included various members of this: five researchers, five decision makers and six civil society representatives. Since its beginning, this MAP focused on the "Mar i Munt" Territorial Food Project, an initiative to relocate food and recreate a food ecosystem to eat well and be accessible to all. Within this framework, SHERPA provided a methodology and a structure to deepen the discussion and transpose it into a MAP Position Paper, "Towards resilient and resilient value chains", which includes concrete recommendations for policy and research. For instance, the MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée calls for having the Food Territorial Project recognised at European level through a 5% earmarking in the rural development programmes, and asked to reward territories implementing such a system. The MAP Position Paper allowed them to highlight several relevant points, said Ms Regond Planas. She added that the new 2023-2027 LEADER programme largely inspired the work done in SHERPA to drive ecological transition on a regional level.



Nathalie RÉGOND
PLANAS
Mayor and president of
Pays Pyrénées
Méditerranée (France)



Testimonies from the French multi-actor platform in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Christelle Caso, facilitator at the Regional Rural network of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur illustrated her experience with MAP PACA Sud in France. Already being a network of rural development actors, they saw an opportunity with SHERPA to work on the future of rural areas, contribute to better rural policies, and capitalise on their former work. It was revealed to be a well-conducted experience that relied on a diversity of rural actors and provided a good framework for operational proposals, also thanks to the support of CIHEAM Montpellier. Ms Caso underlined that their participation in the SHERPA MAP allowed for strengthening linkages with the Local Action Groups and involve territorial leaders into the discussion of the future of rural areas, including the formulation of the SRADDET - the regional scheme for the management, sustainable development and equality of territories.

"We have learnt different lessons from this experience that drive different perspectives for the post-SHERPA period", said Ms Caso, from better involving rural researchers, to considering several ruralities and making proposals for the future of rural policies at different governing levels. Above all, the project contributed to the preparation of the LEADER 2023-2027 program and to the construction of public policies, including SRADDET.



Christelle CASO
Regional Rural network of
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur



**"SHERPA is an opportunity
for the Regional Rural
Network to work on the
future of rural areas
together with new actors"**

SHERPA's views on co-creating rural futures

Stronger rural areas: focus on social dimension of rural areas



Majda
ČERNIČ ISTENIČ
University of Ljubljana



"The Eurobarometer 2020 revealed rural areas are important for the future of EU and one of the main objective of rural policy is to maintain a vibrant rural areas", said Majda Černič Istenič, from the University of Ljubljana and [MAP Svarun](#) (Slovenia), and lead author of the [SHERPA Discussion and Position Paper](#) on social dimension of rural areas as well as main facilitator of this breakout room.

In line with this, she added that the European Commission has proposed a number of actions to make rural areas stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous, and the European Parliament has recognised the need for dedicated funding for those activities and importance of policy tools (i.e. rural proofing mechanism).

Yet, the experiences of the SHERPA MAPs on this topic show that rural areas are losing their sociability and face exclusion, poverty of life, and low engagement said Prof. Černič Istenič. She listed [SHERPA's main recommendations](#) at local, national, and European level, such as creating friendly public spaces, developing caregiving services, promoting the role of the Local Action Groups, and strengthening the social pillar in the CAP.

Beatriz Guimarey Fernandez, from University of Santiago de Compostela and facilitator of the MAP Galicia (Spain), confirmed this trend and said that social relationship are deteriorating in rural Galicia, and drivers such as sport, cultural activities or neighbourhood forums could help to counter it and build relationships. Similarly, Konstantin Mihhejev, from Estonian Agricultural Research Center and member of MAP Estonia, emphasised the need to develop rural leaders as well as to foster or facilitate access to funding for them. He added that, in the case of Estonia, it is almost impossible to get a loan for renting in rural areas, and banks do not invest in rural areas because they do not see their potential. Empowering the rural dimension is a key issue, especially in post-COVID when many people have relocated to rural areas.

The discussion among the participants focused mainly on how European policies, programs, and policies could strengthen the social dimension of rural areas. It was said that the European Union should ensure that laws are **rural-sensitive** and have a positive impact on social issues related to rural territories. In this sense, the **territoriality principle** should be embedded in EU rural policy, and the CLLD/LEADER approach was mentioned as very impactful in its ability to strengthen communities and society in general, and to develop innovation. Regarding both the national and regional level, participants suggested to address the **coordination of sectoral policies** and funding for rural areas in terms of separating agricultural and rural issues, promoting a more centralised and synchronised approach to rural social issues, and **tax exemptions** for missing services in rural areas. At the local level, it was proposed to increase the participation of local people (especially those who do not have time) through the training of local leaders and motivators as well as the use of innovative technological solutions, and to continuously monitor what is happening on the ground.



Beatriz GUIMAREY
FERNANDEZ
University of Santiago
de Compostela



Konstantin MIHHEJEV
Estonian Agricultural
Research Center



Connected rural areas: focus on digitalisation in rural areas



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa



Facilitated by Sabrina Arcuri, from the University of Pisa, MAP Montagna Toscana, MAP Casentino, and MAP Tuscany, and lead author of both the SHERPA Discussion and Position Papers on digitalisation in rural areas, this breakout room reviewed the SHERPA MAPs recommendations on this topic and gathered further feedback from participants. As presented by Ms Arcuri, digital is high on the European agenda, as well as national political agendas, as exemplified by the National Digital Agencies. In addition, other policies – such as on democratic participation or services – have a digital impact. The analysis of the MAP Position Papers showed that digitalisation can contribute to quality of the rural environment and stronger social capital in rural areas, yet governance remains a key issue. In addition, Ms Arcuri presented some of the recommendations developed by the MAPs on digitalisation, including leaving no one behind, investing in basic digital infrastructure with a larger contribution of public administration, scaling out local and regional best practices via exchange, allowing public data sharing, co-designing digital adaptation strategies with local actors, and providing technical assistance via competence centres.

Åsa Händel, from the MAP Norbotten (Sweden), added that their discussion on the topic highlighted in particular the need to promote an universal access to the broadband, as this is not always the case in Member States where the market approach is predominant. Further, she recommended to make digitalisation place-based and create more flexible funding systems to drive digital investments. Balint Csaba, MAP AKIS (Hungary) highlighted that, in his own experience, digitalisation relies on too many strategies and funds at European level, yet no approach specifically targets the agri-food sector. A better monitoring system is needed as well, considering that not all users are high-end users.

Participants agreed that the Member States should develop targeted models to allow digitalisation everywhere, also where the market does not step in when it is considered unprofitable. In addition, it emerged that the role of European actors is very relevant, in particular when it comes to funds for promoting connectivity to urban areas, dynamising operational groups, developing skills, supporting cross-country learning in social inclusion of the hardest-to-reach groups, and best practices. Furthermore, as borders should not be a hindrance in this matter, more cross-border solutions, “digital functional areas”, and less legal barriers should be a goal as part of harmonised EU legislation on the topic. Some participants found that digitalisation should rather be a matter for national policies than European ones in order to avoid the risk of creating a one-size-fits-all approach that would be unable to tackle the great diversity of European Member States in terms of digitalisation. To this sense, horizontal measures and bottom-up approaches should be used equally. In addition, the topic on agri-food digitalisation was underlined, in particular with respect to the need of provisioning services for precision farming.

By the end of the discussion, participants agreed on **three main recommendations** for the digitalisation of rural areas. Firstly, ensuring that digitalisation processes are needs-driven and digital tools depend on digital needs across all levels was identified. Then it was agreed that minimum local digital services should be guaranteed and that special attention should be put on ensuring inclusion. Finally, digital should be cross-cutting and embedded in all sectoral policies and, for instance, “digital rural proofing” could be suggested as some sectoral legislation actually actively hinder digitalisation.



Åsa HÄNDEL
MAP Norbotten, Sweden



Csaba BÁLINT
Monitor of the MAP AKIS,
Hungary





More resilient rural areas that foster well-being: focus on climate change and land use



David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



David Miller, James Hutton Institute, [MAP Scotland](#), [MAP Dee Catchment](#) and lead author of the [SHERPA Discussion and Position Paper](#) on climate change and land use, facilitated this session, with contributions from Reinhold Stauß, monitor of [MAP Schleswig-Holstein](#) in Germany, and Jorieke Potters, monitor of the [MAP South East Drenthe](#) and [MAP P10 network](#) in The Netherlands. Mr Miller said that SHERPA's recommendations to address climate change and land use in rural areas should cover a broad variety of sectoral interventions, including spatial planning, investment in renewable energy, and in natural capital such as peatland restoration, water management and woodland expansion.

Mr Stauß emphasised that climate change requires more imaginative thinking. He highlighted that whereas processes and progress in technical innovation are well-developed, whereas social innovation is further behind. Rural regions, he stressed, need more trust-based networks where people can innovate with respect to climate change. Mrs Potters agreed that addressing the climate emergency requires an integrated approach, and placing greater trust in people. For example, members of the Dutch MAPs asked for greater levels of flexibility when it comes to defining methods to achieving climate goals and empowering them to create their own solutions.

Participants stressed the need for urgency for action and the “need to act now”. A need for improving the understanding of elected representatives in regard to climate change was also identified, aiming to inform the decisions made that tackle regulatory barriers to mitigation and adaptation. Some participants expressed concern that climate change has been central to many debates but that “nothing has changed” or that there have been only “very small successes”. Some participants noted that awareness and motivation do not always lead to actions by individuals, as exemplified by choices of modes of transport. Mechanisms were reported as required to scale out and up in regard to approaches for tackling climate change, and asking how the contributions of some types of land use and users can be more effective.

Participants observed that rural areas need tailored policies to initiate ecological and social transitions, and not to overly rely on changes in the behaviours of individuals. For example, collective changes in rural mobility requires better infrastructures and rural mobility services.

Looking at solutions, it was agreed that policies and regulations can be improved and validated through collective decision-making and consulting with citizens and stakeholder groups. Amongst means of raising awareness of good practices and exemplars of tackling climate change which were identified by participants were interactive formats (e.g. calls, visits, excursions, citizen observations) and cooperation between local actors.

To conclude, participants agreed on the need for developing indicators, targets, and objective data to monitor and measure progress, and for identifying new economic paradigms that go beyond economic growth and embrace a holistic approach.



Reinhold STAUB
Thünen-Institut



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen University



Prosperous rural areas: focus on sustainable and resilient value chains



Estelle MIDLER
Institute for European
Environmental Policy



To frame the discussion, Estelle Midler from the Institute for European Environmental Policy presented [SHERPA MAPs recommendations](#) for more sustainable and resilient value chains, as emerged from the review of the [SHERPA MAPs' Position Papers](#). Among these, she insisted on the need to facilitate education and training to address the real needs of farmers; provide financial support for rural areas, and having more flexible funding criteria; increase the resilience of producers by avoiding short-term funding; decrease bureaucratic burdens by streamlining administrative procedures; and communicating sustainability and its benefits to farmers and consumers.

Monica Tudor, from the European Rural Development Network and involved in the three SHERPA MAPs in Romania ([Arges](#), [Iasi](#) and [Transylvania](#)), presented the specific situation in her country and related recommendations for different target groups. Starting with consumers and producers, she underlined that Romania needs to build a market for sustainable products. They often do not understand what the benefits of sustainable products are and therefore they do not value it on the market. Then, Ms Tudor advised involving farmers in the knowledge innovation related to sustainable value chains, as well as the need to build trust between different policy levels and sectors as an intermediary step to build cooperation.

Géraldine Caprani, representative of [MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée](#) (France), explained that in their context, the Territorial Food Project ended up being a smart tool for supporting agricultural and food transition in rural areas. Yet, to keep moving in this direction, there is a need to connect producers with other stakeholders, and develop a special fund for supporting cross-border cooperation in agri-food matters.

The main discussion point in this breakout session was the definition of the “sustainable” and “resilient” concepts. Participants agreed that farmers and consumers do not understand these concepts, so it is necessary to communicate the benefits of sustainable and resilient products and value chains. They also agreed that CAP Strategic Plans should have a key role to make value chains more sustainable and resilient. As such, at European level, participants agreed that the CAP funds should be used to upskill farmers and other rural operators, as well as to promote knowledge exchange. Further, the CAP should provide incentives and support to shift towards sustainable support systems and the impact of such changes on environment, sustainability and resilience should be carefully analysed and assessed.

At national level, participants suggested promoting sustainability through large communication campaigns, ensuring fair prices for sustainable products, and funding cross-countries exchanges. Participants also agreed that it is crucial to increase capacity at regional level to act, hence supporting bottom-up solutions, knowledge exchanges, providing more funds to local action groups, empowering local people, promoting the development of short circuits, and decreasing bureaucratic burden from the EU or national areas for CAP Pillar II funds.

To conclude, participants agreed that the need to develop a systemic approach goes beyond agriculture and targets other actors in food systems beyond farmers.



Monica TUDOR
ERDN



Géraldine CAPRANI
MAP Pays Pyrénées
Méditerranée





DAY 2
1 February 2023

Panel discussion with representatives from science, society and policy

Moderated by Elodie Salle (ECORYS)



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich
Science



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM Montpellier
Policy



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI, European
Commission
Policy



Tom JONES
European Rural
Community Alliance
Society

Elodie Salle, Principal Consultant at Ecorys and co-coordinator of SHERPA welcomed participants to the second day of the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023, and started the panel discussion by inviting the four panel members to reflect on the added value of science-society-policy interfaces for rural policies. The panel members agreed that one of the main added values of Science-Society-Policy interfaces (i.e. the MAPs) was the **capability of bringing together different perspectives**. “We see big gaps in terms of understanding policies and tools, and how to interpret policies at a local level”, said **Dominique Barjolle**, Senior Lecturer and Researcher at the Universities of Lausanne and Zurich and member of the European MAP in SHERPA. She stated that “SHERPA helped to move from a patchwork to puzzling together these perspectives”, as well as to build trust across stakeholders and so contribute to a systemic approach for rural development.

Samuel Féret, Associate Expert at CIHEAM Montpellier, Mayor of Arzal municipality (France), monitor of MAP PACA Sud and MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée, and SHERPA partner, added that the project started at a troubling time with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the geography of discontent with the yellow jackets in France. Through foresight exercises, SHERPA helped rural actors to imagine desirable futures and how to make rural areas liveable, especially under a new climate regime. He welcomed the European Commission’s initiatives such as the Rural Pact and Rural Action Plan, but pointed out that these were still widely unknown by the vast majority of rural mayors.

In this framework, Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator at the European Commission in DG AGRI and member of the European MAP in SHERPA, said that the methodology created

by the SHERPA project to organise Science-Society-Policy interfaces provides a good and practical model that can be inspirational for engagement processes in the Rural Pact. She also congratulated SHERPA for providing evaluable inputs, enriched by local contributions, and taking steps to sustain the Science-Society-Policy interfaces beyond the duration of the project. Ms Rouby also suggested to address SHERPA's forthcoming recommendations to various types of actors and multiple levels of governance, and to retain illustrations of rural diversity in the overall recommendations which will be useful for the European Commission's public report due in 2024.

The intervention of Tom Jones, President of the European Rural Community Alliance and member of the European MAP in SHERPA, further highlighted how crucial it is to co-design, co-create, and co-engage with people on the ground. In particular, he said that civil society has a big responsibility to provide proper feedback along this process, and that "we all need to have a sense of ownership on rural policies, as they define our collective future". Mr Jones also emphasised attention for marginalised groups, small business, social economy actors, and youth, who should not be excluded in this process of defining rural futures.

Following the interventions of the panel members, the discussion turned to the topic of democracy. Mr Féret suggested for the European Commission "to look into new governance mechanisms to trigger participation and co-

creation in rural areas and beyond", while some attendees said that emerging ideas such as participatory budgeting and redirecting gas and electricity companies' to people's benefits can bring new perspectives to the democratisation of financial resources.

The panel members were asked to reflect on the composition of SHERPA MAPs and learnt lessons. They suggested SHERPA partners to consider the elements of "**proportionality**" (what is the best ratio between representative of science, society, and policy in rural interfaces), "**representativeness**" (to what extent MAP members' opinions are representative of surrounding rural groups), and "**transferability**" (how knowledge of the MAP is communicated to academia and to local actors).

Before concluding the panel, Elodie Salle invited the panel members to give some suggestions for the last months of SHERPA activities and the future of the project. Ms Barjolle insisted on the need to communicate more on a local-to-national level about SHERPA's outcomes and impacts, as well as to raise awareness on success stories to inspire people.

Other panellists suggested a two-way dialogue between SHERPA and the European Commission; on one side, insisting on the ways and tools used by the European Union to get closer to rural areas, and on the other side, ensuring that SHERPA's recommendations are handed to the European institutions for future policies and initiatives.



Long-Term sustainability of the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms

Leneisja Jungsberg, Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio presented the results of a survey that SHERPA ran to investigate the likelihood of MAPs to keep running after the end of the project. Shared among the SHERPA MAPs, the survey received 199 responses. The results showed that more than **70% of respondents believe that the MAPs should continue after SHERPA** and a similar percentage would be interested to keep participating in these MAPs.

The three main factors that maintained respondents' interest in the MAPs are "engagement in a dialogue with science, society and policy", "gaining new knowledge and ideas on rural trends and dynamics", and "building networks", while the results of the survey also showed that the most important function of the MAPs to be preserved is their contribution to the policy-making process with new ideas and knowledge.

The survey showed that the key ingredients to ensure the sustainability of the MAPs are understood to be the definition of clear objectives and a well-defined topic to focus discussions. In addition, respondents emphasised the importance of funding in order to pay for the work done by MAP facilitators and monitors to cover the coordination activities and related costs (e.g. catering, materials). However, funding was not seen as necessary for MAP members, as their participation is mainly motivation-driven. In addition, the results of the survey showed that most MAPs recognise the science-society-policy interface model as a **unique selling point** of the MAP model that should be preserved.

To conclude, Ms Jungsberg presented various recommendations for the sustainability of SHERPA MAPs, such as selecting a strategic focus to feed into policy cycles (at regional, national, EU level), and considering how MAPs could be integrated into existing rural networks or projects such as the Horizon Europe projects Premium EU or GRANULAR.



Leneisja JUNGSRBERG
Nordregio



A background image showing several hands of different skin tones working together to assemble a large, light-colored wooden puzzle. The puzzle pieces are interlocking, and the hands are positioned around the edges, some holding pieces in place while others are about to be added. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Multi-Actor Platforms: How to sustain them post-SHERPA?

Added value of the Multi-Actor Platforms



Bárbara SORIANO
CEIGRAM

Facilitated by Barbara Soriano, [MAP Aragon](#) (Spain), and Paweł Chmieleński, [MAP Zielone Sądztwo](#) (Poland), this breakout session reflected on the added value of SHERPA MAPs. Participants agreed that MAPs can support in explaining what “Brussels” and its policies do for rural areas, and help creating links between the different policy levels. Another key added value identified was the ability of MAPs to create an open environment for debate and be able to bring policy makers to the same level as citizens, creating a space where to interact and discuss outside the formal approach. According to participants, this added value contributes to empower local communities, boost participation of citizens in local policy-making, and build new skills. It was said that researchers in particular can get inspired by MAP findings for their own investigations, as well as get information and validate results from the ground, and identify gaps for future research.

Participants agreed that the added value of Science-Society-Policy interfaces is demonstrated by concrete impacts. For instance, MAPs can use their outputs to influence policy making at national level, as well as at European level, and they help to compare existing solutions in different European countries.

For the future, participants convened that MAPs should not select specific topics to focus on, but adopt a more systemic approach by analysing the region the MAP represents, such as its challenges and interdependencies. Within this framework, **green and just transitions** and their consequences for regional territories were mentioned as particularly relevant for future MAP’ discussions.

To conclude, the discussion focused on actions that could be undertaken by the MAPs themselves to make the above-mentioned added values sustainable. A **Rural Pact in each Member State** was suggested, as well as the creation of national MAPs that would ensure the uptaking of recommendations in the respective countries. Also, participants recommended to create a tool to measure and assess MAPs’ contribution to policy making processes as a way to demonstrate its impacts.



Paweł CHMIELINSKI
ERDN

Key ingredients to sustain the Multi-Actor Platforms

This breakout session was held in parallel in Montpellier, facilitated by Erato Lazarou, MAP South Aegean (Greece) and Carla Lostrangio, European Association for Innovation in Local Development, and online with the facilitation of Stefano Targetti, MAP Emilia-Romagna (Italy). From the two parallel discussions, participants generally agreed on four main **key ingredients** needed to sustain the MAPs: **funds** as a compensation system for MAP coordination and expenses related to the implementation; **motivated people**, in particular high-level decision makers, local leaders, and young people; **a system to trace and measure the impact of MAPs discussions** in policy making as people need tangible results; the **integration of the MAPs into existing networks**, such as advisory networks, or link with other professionals. A few MAP representatives also emphasised the difficulty to keep MAP members motivated over time or involve certain categories, such as farmers or people with lower levels of education. This is either because the topics of discussion do not always match with local needs, or because MAP members do not see how their discussions link to concrete results.

In addition, participants agreed on the importance of **evidence-based approaches** as a key ingredient for the future of the MAPs. One participant stated that “reflecting on actual data helps people to weigh ideas and back them with a more complete understanding”. Others added that science is a way to create a common ground to kick-off the discussion in a MAP (especially due the diversity of actors), as well as the fact that it guides the discussions creates legitimacy in the context of each MAP. It was said that an important aspect to be addressed by MAPs in the future is to identify relevant data, promote a better level of granularity in such data, and make sure these data are accessible.

Looking towards the near future, participants recommended SHERPA to share success stories and report on what worked out as well as its results and impacts; to promote networking opportunities; and to advocate at national and European level on the added value of the MAPs. Furthermore, it was agreed that to maintain the key ingredients, MAPs should find ways to keep researchers and policy makers involved, communicate about MAPs’ results (especially by translating them in the local language), advocate for funds, and ensure that each MAPs has a clear planning so that members understand what is required from them.



Erato LAZAROU
Agricultural University
of Athens



Stefano TARGETTI
University of Bologna



Governance and membership of the Multi-Actor Platforms



Emil ERJAVEC
University of Ljubljana



Živilė GEDMINAITĖ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics, Lithuania



Rita LANKAUSKIENĖ
Institute of Agrarian
Economics, Lithuania

Governance and membership models for the future of the MAPs were discussed in a third breakout session facilitated by Emil Erjavec, MAP SVARUN (Slovenia), Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė and Rita Lankauskienė, MAP CBioLit (Lithuania). As emerged from the survey, most MAPs aim to continue after the project's end but for this to happen, participants agreed that the governing model of the MAPs should ensure a **shared and collective form of leadership**. Leadership, participants agreed, does not need to be political, but effective and rely on motivated people with the relevant expertise, who could also come from civil society or academia.

In addition, participants agreed that MAPs should be open to newcomers, with particular attention to integrating people with the **right competences and balancing expertise**, different ages, and the hardest-to-reach groups. On the contrary, they also agreed that a balance between science, society and policy was not a priority for the MAPs governance model, though all groups should be represented.

From the discussion, it emerged that it was considered important for each MAP to tailor how to meet (online, offline) and how often based on the MAPs needs. Yet, it was underlined that meetings should be clearly defined, focused on the policy impacts, and **aligned with the topics within relevant policy agendas and cycles**. In this framework, some participants said that an important role should be taken by MAPs acting at a national level.

To sustain the governance of the MAPs, participants recommended that each MAP should develop an action plan to clearly define the focus of the MAP, the duration, the membership type, and the leadership of the group. Furthermore, it was said that the activities described in a MAP action plan could focus on preparing recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU Cohesion Policy at multiple levels of the policy's implementation.





Business model and financing the Multi-Actor Platforms

Katarzyna Gizińska, [MAP Bieszczady](#) (Poland) and Pedros Santos, [MAP Southwest Alentejo](#) (Portugal) led a breakout session that reflected on the possible business and financing models for the future of MAPs. Participants agreed on the need to guarantee resources in order to keep MAPs running, though it was pointed out that economic resources should not be the only resources available. In particular, it was agreed that **key resources** should include: a properly formalised structure with governance and facilitation, trained facilitators and open/flexible membership, and an infrastructure, such as a platform to hold online meetings or a repository for key outputs.

When it came to economic resources to finance the MAP's activities after SHERPA has ended, different channels were suggested. Public funding, for instance from the CAP and/or EIP, was mentioned as an option, as well as vouchers at national/regional level. Other channels entailed a levy on infrastructure projects (e.g. large scale renewable energy), crowdfunding, or philanthropic contributions. Another suggestion was to look into opportunities for MAPs to become a flagship initiative of the [Rural Action Plan](#).

In addition, participants agreed that existing partnerships or initiatives that could financially support the MAPs are national and/or thematic forums, Managing Authorities, the EU Rural Parliament, and other Horizon Europe projects, such as [GRANULAR](#).

Finally, participants in the breakout room agreed that - at the moment- it is too early to guarantee financial viability for all the MAPs but some steps could be taken to provide a general viability of this mechanism. For instance, selecting a suitable MAP agenda, ensuring knowledge and experience sharing, and helping existing MAPs to set up new MAPs.



Katarzyna GIZIŃSKA
ERDN



Pedro SANTOS
CONSULAI



Concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE

**Professor of Economics,
Aberystwyth University**

Peter Midmore, Professor at Aberystwyth University, presented his concluding remarks to the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023, bringing a “fresh perspective”, before focusing on the final months of the project.

In particular, Prof. Midmore underlined that what makes SHERPA unique with respect to other projects is its ability to prove a new approach centred on deliberation as a way to tailor rural policies and provide innovative solutions. He added that he would be keen to see **deliberation** applied to a full range of rural topics.

Prof. Midmore also highlighted that “**co-creation must be a continuous process to be meaningful**”. In this regard, he

invited attendees to consider how to move from co-creation of policy recommendations to policy implementation in such a way that does not make deliberative processes too long, nor reduce their ability to be innovative and timely.

To conclude, Prof. Midmore drew attention to **two recommendations**. Firstly, he emphasised the need to make sure that MAPs are representative and advocate not just for their own rural localities but for all rural areas. Secondly, he stressed the importance to keep in mind that rural trends depend on dynamic spatial and constantly evolving processes: they are the outputs of complex socio-environmental and economic changes and MAPs are relevant to deeply analyse all these levels of complexity.





SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights

SHERPA Final Conference

1 - 2 June 2023



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Authors

AEIDL | Carla Lostrangio, Serafin Pazos Vidal

Contributors and reviewers

Maite Iglesias, Peter Midmore, Merveille Ntabuhashe, Brigit Zomer

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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 Stouňky (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.



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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.



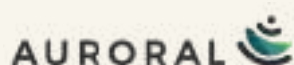
Carla LOSTRANGIO
European Association
for Innovation in Local
Development (AEIDL)



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)

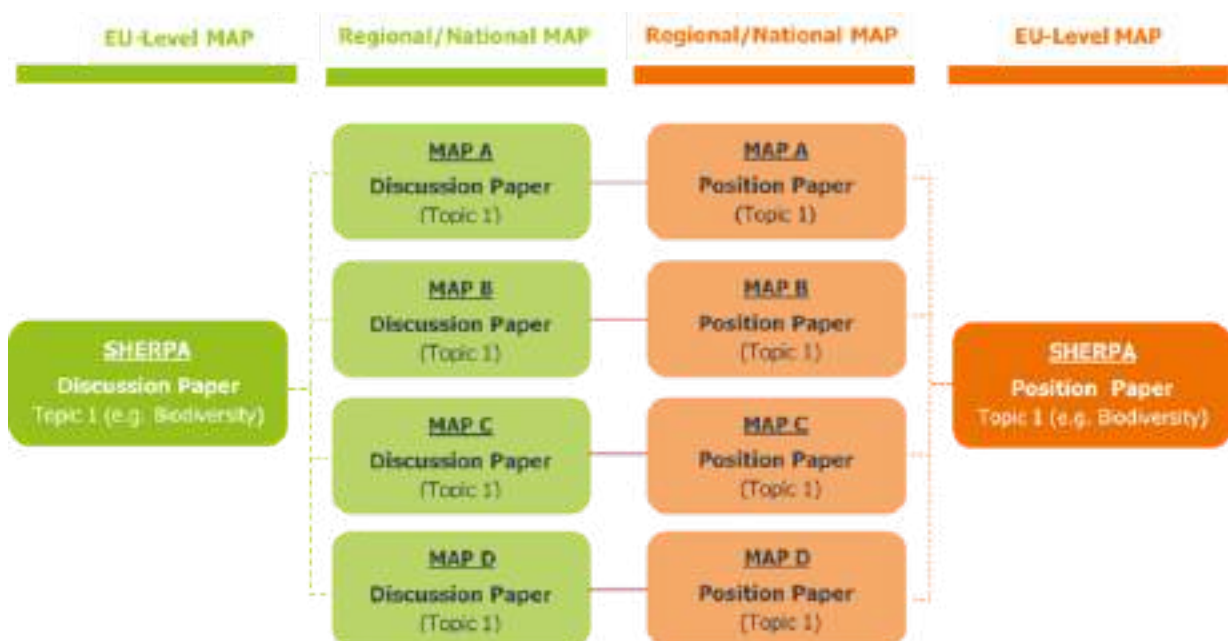
The afternoon session was led by **Serafin Pazos-Vidal**, Senior Policy Expert at the European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL) and focused on SHERPA's contribution to the LTVRA. Specifically, this session concentrated on interactions with the participants to rank Actions proposed 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.



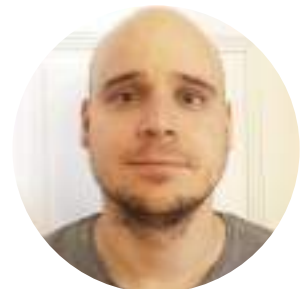
Prof. Ricardo REIS
MAP Southwest Alentejo

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

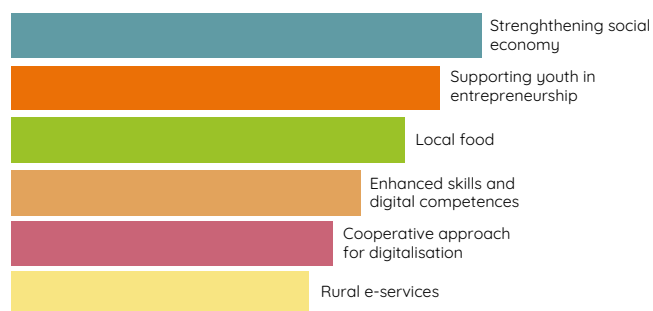
Voting exercise for the audience

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

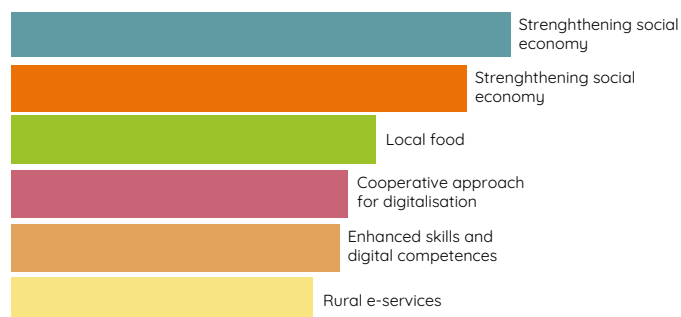
Rank the proposed SHERPA actions from more to less important for inclusion in the Rural Action Plan for Prosperous and Connected rural areas



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



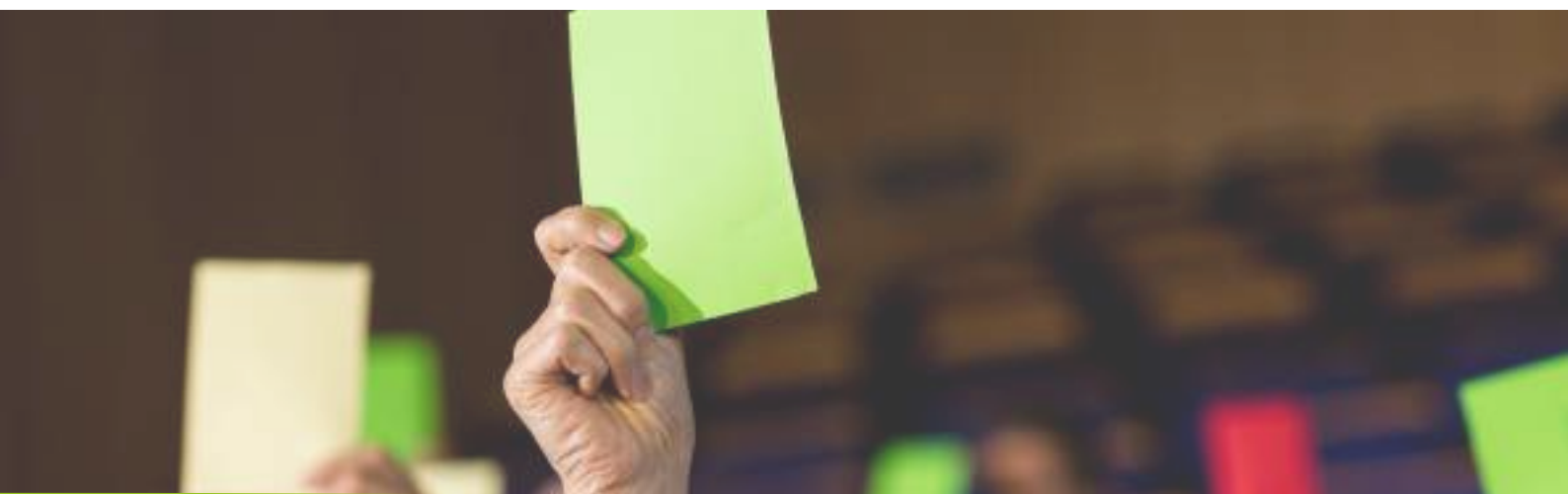
Source: SHERPA Final Conference

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.

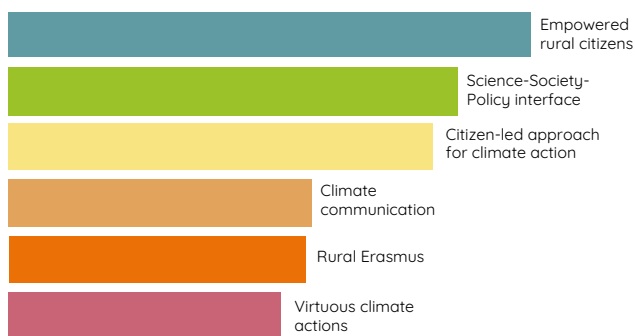
“Empowerment of rural citizens is the stronger point, but it is not easy to achieve it”

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



* including 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



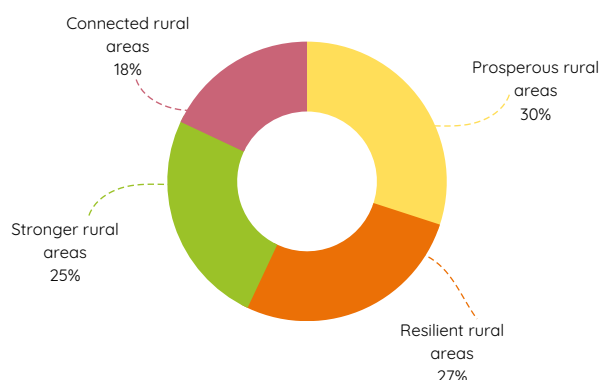
Voting and discussion with the panellists

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

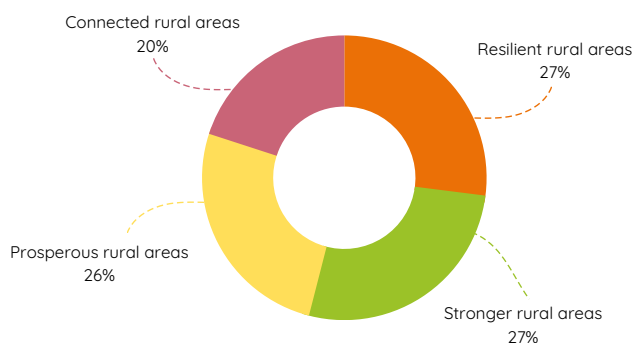
If you were in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



Source: SHERPA Final Conference

Figure 10. Results of the voting exercise from societal actors

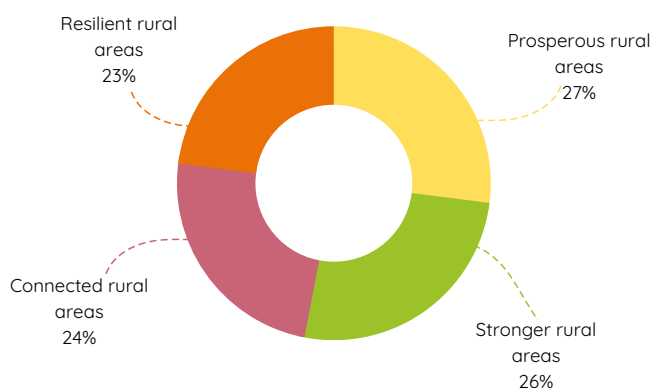
If you were in charge of the EU budget, how would you distribute 100 million Euros across the four rural priorities?



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.

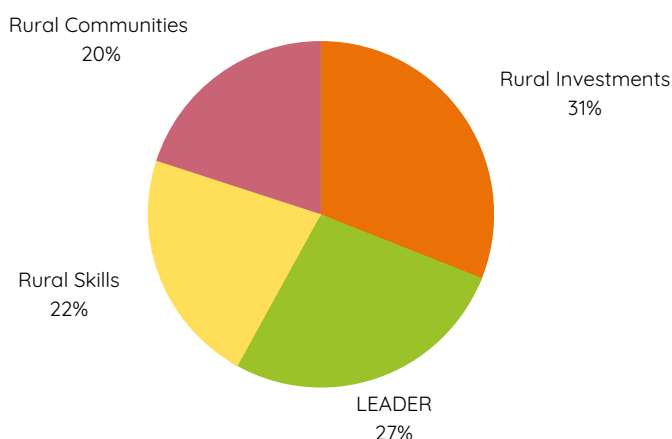
“It is important to build solidarity networks in rural communities to prevent population decline, strengthening resilience and promote work-life balance”

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



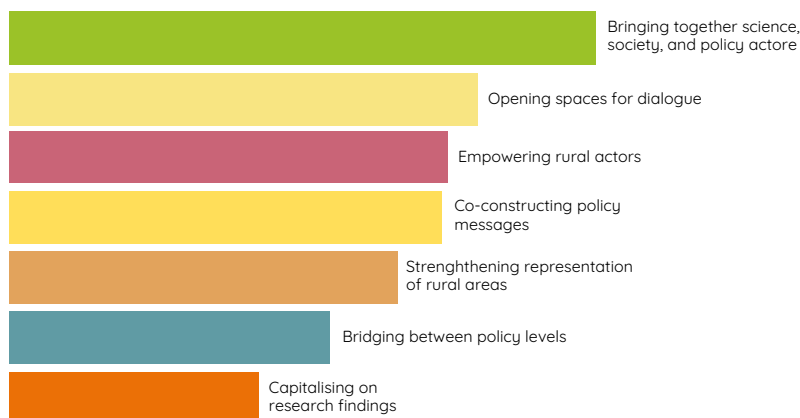
Source: SHERPA Final Conference. Key lessons on actor engagement in rural development, Jorieke Potters (Wageningen University) and Leneisja Jungsberg (Nordregio)

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

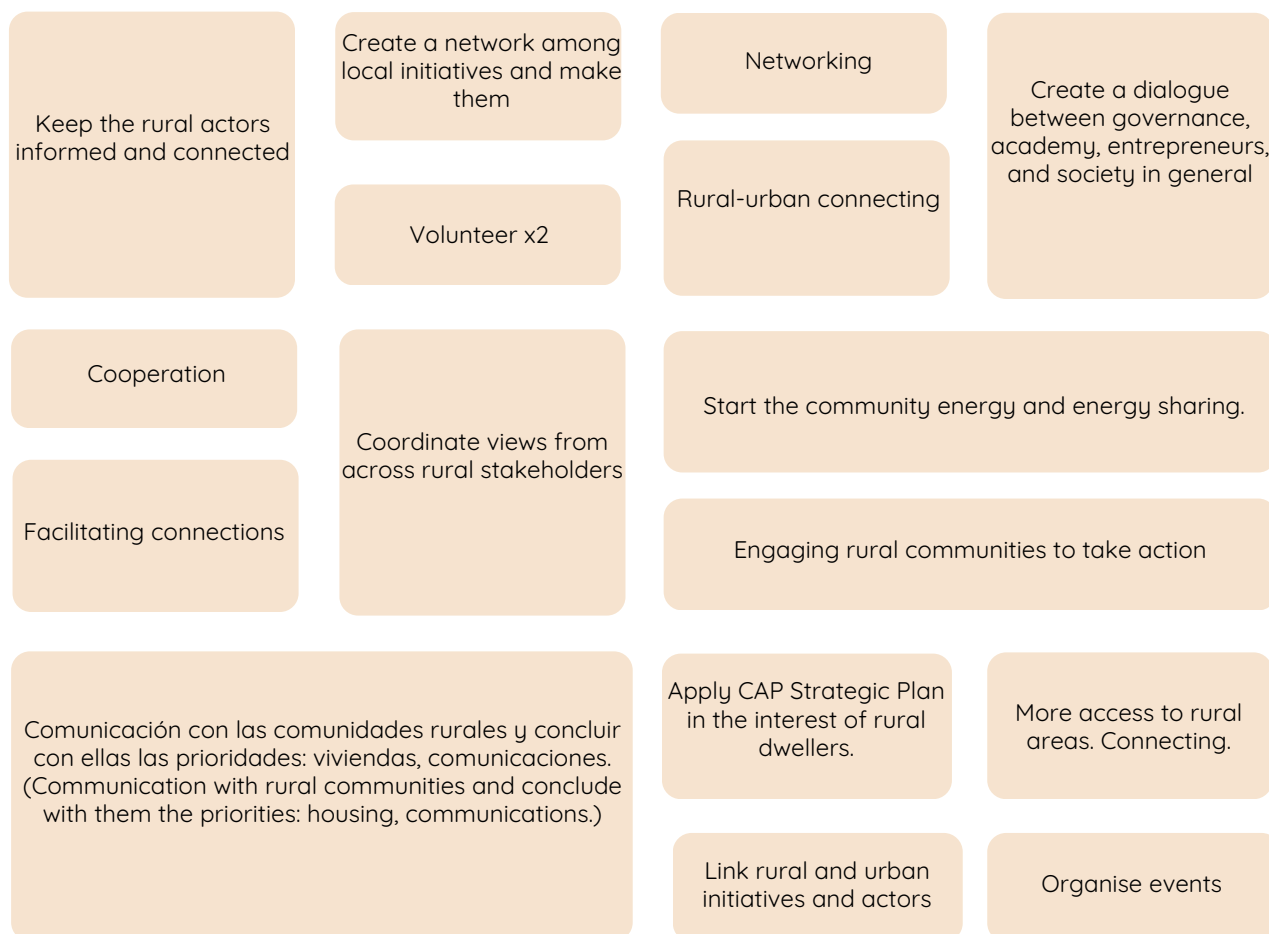
Setting up science-society-policy interfaces require a lot of time resources, patience

Short funding to reach objectives and cover needs

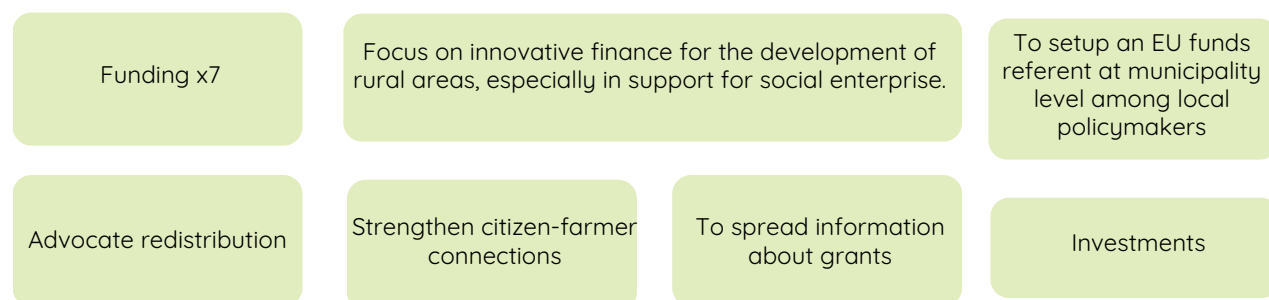
Restrictions coming from hard bureaucracy

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

Engagement and Collaboration



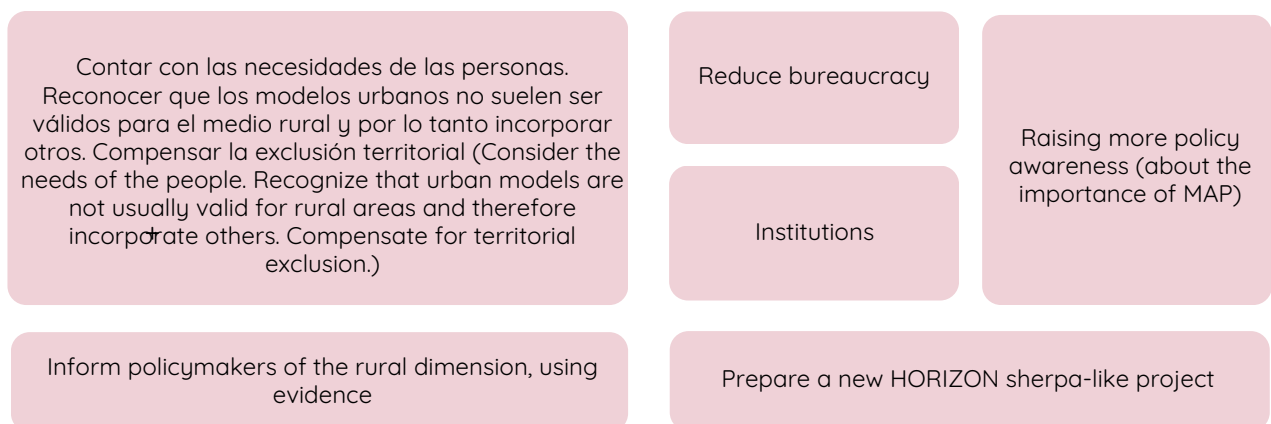
Funding and Financial Support



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

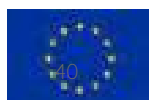


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