

SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

PRACTICE ABSTRACT

Sustainably connecting local interest with EU policies in Wallonia



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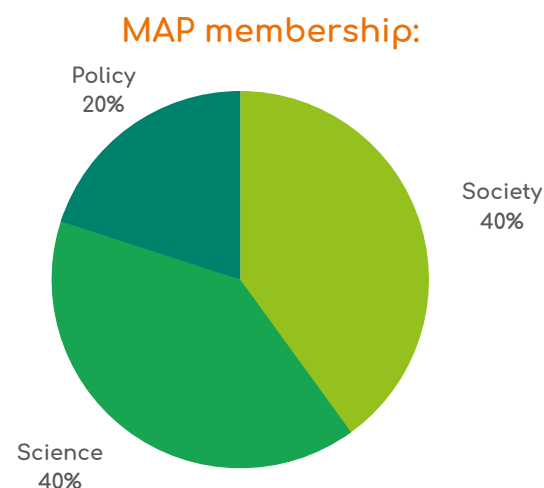
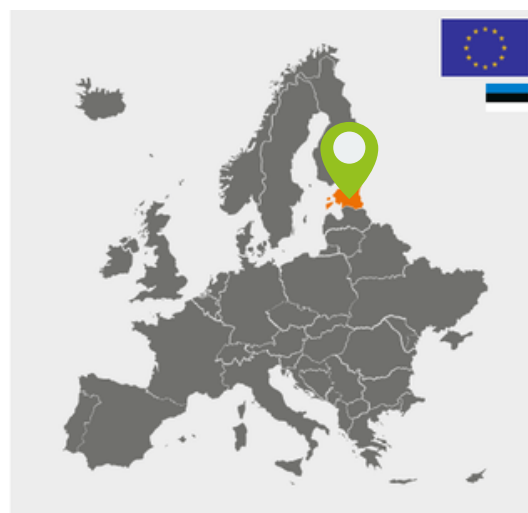
Ensuring meaningful dialogue between various governance levels involved is fundamental to the proper functioning of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MAPs). This is particularly relevant for rural actors (including those in the Wallonia region), that often remain detached from EU political context, possibly missing out on opportunities and latest developments. On the other hand, local interests often remain overlooked by EU-level decision makers.

The unique design of SHERPA, with local MAPs, an EU-level MAP and a central team (the SHERPA “think tank”) allows a constant dialogue between policy actors at EU and local level. Moreover, for the Wallonia MAP, the platform was facilitated by Ecorys, an EU-focused consultancy company, ensuring a strong link with the EU policy arena, whereas the involvement of the local network Ruralité, Environnement, Développement (R.E.D) helped to “root” it in the Belgian reality.

The link with EU policy has been an important tool to stimulate MAP members to get involved in SHERPA activities. This has been achieved by showcasing the concrete contributions of SHERPA to EU rural policy throughout the different MAP activities. As the Wallonia MAP was established in the second phase of SHERPA, it was possible to show how the recommendations formulated by the MAPs in previous cycles have been discussed in the EU MAP, existing out of high-level stakeholders from EU institutions, and integrated in the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) staff working document. This allowed MAP members to acknowledge the added value of SHERPA activities as a flywheel to make their voices heard and engage in EU-level debates.

The daily activities and management of the MAP also provided occasions to keep the members updated on latest EU policy development, such as new developments related to the LTVRA, the CAP, etc. This was achieved via regular email updates, containing links to SHERPA deliverables of relevance for MAP members, information about upcoming events, etc. Moreover, at the beginning of each meeting, a short recap on the ongoing EU level activities was foreseen.

MAP Wallonia
<p>Location Wallonia, Belgium</p>
<p>MAP contacts Facilitator: Elodie Salle Monitor: Olivier Chartier</p>
<p>More info SHERPA Regional Multi-Actor Platform Wallonia - SHERPA (rural-interfaces.eu)</p>





ABOUT THE MAP

The Belgian MAP was created in January 2022 and it focuses on Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium. The MAP is composed of various stakeholders interested in the main subject area such as local citizens and businesses, representatives from civil society, NGOs, land manager organisations, researchers, and policymakers.

The Belgian MAP has a strong thematic focus on the social dimension of rural areas as based on socio-economic characteristics, environmental variables, and subjective opinions on the quality of life of local governments. The rural universe of Wallonia is marked by diversity, particularly when it comes to demographic change. For all types of rural municipalities, the population has in average increased over the last decade, though the intensity varies, from very strong in the peri-urban areas to very moderate in the semiurban municipalities of the former Walloon industrial axis. Since the mid-1950s, the urban exodus from the Brussels conurbation has been accompanied by demographic growth in the surrounding rural municipalities of the province of Walloon Brabant.

Overall, members of the MAP contributed to co-constructing recommendations for developing modern rural policies at European, national and regional levels and develop specific proposals for future research agendas in the field of social dimension in rural areas.



OBJECTIVES

The Belgian MAP has the following objectives:

- Assess new decision-making tools to empower local communities and allow active public participation;
- Better understanding of how policy interventions enable rural areas to answer tomorrow's challenges (EU Green Deal) and become vibrant communities, considering the solutions needed at our national/regional level;
- Assess the potential of current social innovation and identify the research needs and gaps in this context;
- Renewing and rebalancing rural-urban relationships through new proposals for relations between cities and rural areas.



MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the establishment of the Belgian MAP in 2022, there have been various MAP meetings. At the beginning of 2022 (MAP Cycle 3), the Belgian MAP focused on the topic of the social dimension of rural areas and met once physically as well as once virtually in the summer of 2022 to discuss this. Based on these meetings, as well as continuous email exchanges, the MAP prepared a [MAP Position Paper](#) on the social dimension of rural areas in Wallonia.

Near the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 (MAP Cycle 4), the MAP continued its work while focusing on the topic of governance in rural areas, meeting a few times to discuss this topic more in-depth. A [MAP Fiche](#) and [MAP Position Note](#) were published as a result of this process and have been used for the preparation of the SHERPA Position Paper on this topic.



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