D5.1 Prepared pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach

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Brief abstract	Deliverable D5.1 "Prepared pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach" is part of T5.1. Collaboration with stakeholders identified in T3.2 is established to contribute to the preparation and development of Regional Action Plans (RAPs). Through the Multi-Actor Approach, communication with stakeholders helps identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities in the pilot regions.

Disclaimer

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
DiH	Digital Innovation Hub
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IoT	Internet of Things
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale (EU rural development program)
LTVRA	Long Term Vision for Rural Areas
MAA	Multi-Actor Approach
NEB	New European Bauhaus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RAP	Regional Action Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFSC	Short Food Supply Chain
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
WP	Work Package

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Executive Summary

The PoliRuralPlus project seeks to foster sustainable, balanced, and equitable development between rural and urban communities across Europe through a series of nine pilot projects in diverse geographical areas. These pilots aim to address the interconnected challenges of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion by creating innovative Regional Action Plans (RAPs) that focus on enhancing rural-urban linkages. The multi-actor approach is central to the project, ensuring that stakeholders from different sectors, including government bodies, businesses, NGOs, and local communities, actively participate in the decision-making and implementation process.

The challenges faced by rural areas today—ranging from economic stagnation to population decline—require complex changes that involve disruptive innovations, such as digital transformation and the promotion of green economies. Through the Foresight methodology, the project anticipates future challenges and opportunities, allowing stakeholders to collaboratively develop strategies that are resilient and adaptive to change. The Lippitt-Knoster model guides the implementation process, focusing on a clear vision, skills development, and continuous monitoring, ensuring that the change process is effective and sustainable. By addressing these complexities, PoliRuralPlus aims to improve mutual access to services, foster social and economic resilience, and create vibrant, integrated rural-urban communities.

Introduction

This deliverable outlines the progress and initial structure of the PoliRuralPlus project pilots. The document emphasises the importance of collaboration, innovation, and adaptability in promoting rural-urban development through shared visions, cross-sector partnerships, and forward-looking strategies.

Section 1 (General Approach) discusses the concept of complex change in rural-urban dynamics, driven by disruptive innovations and multi-actor collaboration. Section 2 (PoliRuralPlus Themes) details the specific focus areas of each pilot region, such as green economy, digitalization, tourism, and cultural heritage. Each pilot tailors its RAP to local needs, leveraging innovative tools and stakeholder engagement. Section 3 (Links to Other Work Packages) describes the integration of the pilot activities with other project components like policy analysis (WP2), methodology development (WP3), technology experimentation (WP4), and funding support (WP6). Section 4 (Pilot Descriptions) provides an in-depth look at each of the nine pilot regions, outlining their themes, stakeholders, vision, resources, and action plans. Section 5 (Monitoring & Effectiveness) explains the tool and initial activities used to monitor the success of the multi-actor approach and the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in achieving project objectives.

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1. General approach

1.1. Complex change

In the context of PoliRuralPlus, which aims to explore and strengthen the connections between rural and urban areas across nine geographically diverse pilots, the concept of complex change is particularly pertinent. Complex change involves the transformation of deeply entrenched systems and practices, requiring not only a rethinking of existing structures but also the ability to anticipate and adapt to future uncertainties. This process is inherently non-linear and involves multiple, interrelated factors that must be managed carefully to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Disruptive changes and innovation are central to driving this type of transformation. Disruptive changes often emerge from new technologies, shifts in policy, or social movements, fundamentally altering how systems operate. In our project, such disruptions include the introduction of new digital tools or the adoption of innovative practices that challenge conventional methods. While these changes can create significant opportunities, they also require careful management to avoid unintended consequences and ensure that the benefits are widely shared.

To effectively navigate the complexities of such change, a multi-actor approach is essential. This approach emphasises the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies, local communities, businesses, NGOs, and academic institutions. By engaging diverse actors, the project can leverage a wide array of perspectives, resources, and expertise, ensuring that the strategies developed are inclusive and address the needs of all involved. This participatory approach not only enhances the legitimacy and acceptance of the change process but also helps to build the necessary coalitions and partnerships that are crucial for sustaining long-term transformations.

In addition to the multi-actor approach, the Foresight methodology provides a strategic framework for anticipating and preparing for future challenges and opportunities. This methodology involves scanning for emerging trends, analysing potential impacts, and developing scenarios that explore different future possibilities. In your project, foresight can help to identify and understand the forces that might shape rural-urban linkages in the coming years, enabling the development of strategies that are resilient and adaptable to changing conditions. By envisioning possible futures and working backwards to the present, the project can establish clear goals and actions that are aligned with long-term objectives, ensuring that it remains responsive to emerging trends and disruptions.

The Lippitt-Knoster model complements these approaches by providing a structured process for managing the change itself. This model emphasises the importance of establishing a clear vision, developing the necessary skills, providing incentives, allocating resources, and creating detailed action plans. In the context of the project, the Lippitt-Knoster model will guide the implementation of the nine pilots, ensuring that each one is carefully planned and executed, with ongoing monitoring and feedback to adjust strategies as needed. This model helps to ensure that the complex change process is both systematic and adaptive, capable of addressing the diverse challenges and opportunities that arise in the project's rural and urban settings.

Together, these frameworks—complex change, disruptive innovation, the multi-actor approach, foresight methodology, and the Lippitt-Knoster model—provide a comprehensive context for the development of the

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PoliRuralPlus Rural Action Plans. By integrating these concepts, the project is well-positioned to navigate the intricacies of rural-urban linkages, anticipate and respond to future challenges, and drive meaningful, sustainable change across the communities involved.

The following sections delve deeper into these identified aspects.

1.1.1. Foresight methodology

The Foresight methodology is a systematic, participatory, future-oriented approach used to explore and shape long-term visions and strategies. It is designed to anticipate future challenges, opportunities, and disruptions, enabling organisations, governments, and communities to prepare for a range of potential scenarios. This methodology is particularly valuable in contexts where uncertainty is high, and where decisions made today will have significant, long-term consequences.

In the context of PoliRuralPlus, as in the previous PoliRuralPlus project, the Foresight methodology offers a strategic framework to navigate the uncertainties and complexities of these environments. By using this methodology, the project can anticipate future trends and developments that might affect rural-urban linkages, and design strategies that are resilient to change.

The Foresight methodology involves several key steps:

1. Horizon Scanning: The process begins with a comprehensive scanning of the current environment to identify emerging trends, signals of change, and potential disruptions. This step involves gathering data from a wide range of sources, including economic, social, technological, environmental, and political domains. In your project, this might include analysing trends such as urbanisation, technological advancements in agriculture, or shifts in policy that could impact rural-urban dynamics.
2. Trend Analysis and Mapping: After identifying relevant trends, the next step is to analyse and map these trends to understand their implications for the future. This involves assessing the potential impacts of each trend and how they might interact with one another. In your project, this could involve examining how technological advancements in urban areas might affect rural economies, or how changes in rural labour markets could influence urban migration patterns.
3. Scenario Development: Based on the trend analysis, the Foresight methodology then involves developing a set of plausible future scenarios. These scenarios are not predictions but are instead narratives that explore different ways the future might unfold based on varying assumptions and drivers of change. For your project, these scenarios could illustrate different possible futures for rural-urban linkages, from scenarios where these connections are strengthened through innovation and collaboration, to scenarios where they are weakened due to social or economic divides.
4. Visioning: With the scenarios in mind, the Foresight methodology then moves to visioning, where stakeholders collaboratively create a desired future state. This involves defining the goals and aspirations for the future, based on the preferred scenarios. In your project, visioning might involve rural and urban stakeholders coming together to articulate a shared vision of a future where their communities are interconnected in ways that promote mutual growth and sustainability.
5. Strategic Planning and Backcasting: Once a vision is established, the next step is strategic planning, which involves developing strategies to achieve the desired future state. This is often done through backcasting,

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where the vision is taken as a starting point, and steps are planned backwards from that future to the present. This helps to identify the actions that need to be taken today to move towards the preferred future. In your project, this could involve identifying policy changes, technological investments, or community initiatives that are necessary to strengthen rural-urban linkages.

6. Implementation and Monitoring: The final steps in the Foresight methodology involve implementing the strategies and monitoring progress. This requires a flexible approach, as the future is inherently uncertain, and strategies may need to be adapted as new information and trends emerge. In your project, this could involve setting up mechanisms to regularly review the progress of the nine pilots, and adjusting the strategies as needed to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving rural-urban landscape.

The Foresight methodology is a powerful tool for managing complex change and uncertainty, making it particularly relevant to projects that aim to influence long-term outcomes. By integrating this methodology into your research, you can ensure that the project not only responds to current challenges but is also positioned to anticipate and adapt to future developments, thereby enhancing the resilience and impact of the rural-urban connections being fostered.

1.1.2. Multi-Actor approach

The multi-actor approach is a collaborative framework that emphasises the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders in the planning, decision-making, and implementation processes of a project or initiative. This approach recognizes that complex challenges, such as those related to rural-urban linkages in your research project, cannot be effectively addressed by a single entity or perspective. Instead, it requires the input and cooperation of multiple actors, each bringing their unique expertise, resources, and viewpoints to the table.

In the context of your research, which involves nine pilots in various geographical regions, the multi-actor approach is particularly relevant. The connections between rural and urban areas are influenced by a variety of factors—economic, social, environmental, and political—that intersect and interact in complex ways. To navigate these complexities, it is essential to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, and other relevant actors.

The multi-actor approach involves several key components:

1. Stakeholder Identification and Mapping: The first step in the multi-actor approach is identifying all relevant stakeholders who have an interest in or are affected by the project. This involves mapping out the different actors, their roles, interests, and the potential influence they can have on the project's outcomes. In your research project, this could include identifying local government bodies responsible for rural development, urban planners, community leaders, farmers, and businesses that operate in both rural and urban settings.

2. Building Partnerships and Alliances: Once stakeholders are identified, the next step is to build partnerships and alliances among these diverse actors. This involves creating formal and informal networks that facilitate collaboration and communication. In your project, this might include forming partnerships between rural and urban municipalities, setting up cross-sectoral working groups, or establishing advisory boards that include representatives from various stakeholder groups. These partnerships are crucial for

pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise, and for ensuring that all perspectives are considered in the decision-making process.

3. Participatory Planning and Decision-Making: A core element of the multi-actor approach is the involvement of all stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes. This ensures that the strategies and actions developed are inclusive, addressing the needs and concerns of all parties involved. In your project, participatory planning might involve organising workshops, focus groups, or community meetings where stakeholders can contribute their ideas, share concerns, and collaborate on developing solutions that strengthen rural-urban linkages.

4. Coordination and Governance: Effective coordination and governance mechanisms are essential in the multi-actor approach to manage the diverse inputs and ensure that the project remains on track. This involves setting up clear roles and responsibilities, establishing decision-making procedures, and ensuring transparent communication among stakeholders. In your research project, a governance structure might be established to oversee the implementation of the pilots, with representatives from key stakeholder groups involved in regular reviews and decision-making processes.

5. Conflict Resolution and Consensus Building: Given the diverse interests and perspectives involved in a multi-actor approach, conflicts are likely to arise. Therefore, conflict resolution and consensus-building mechanisms are vital to address disagreements and find common ground. This might involve mediation processes, negotiation techniques, or the use of facilitators to help stakeholders reach agreements that are acceptable to all parties. In your project, this could be particularly important in balancing the sometimes competing interests of rural and urban actors, ensuring that solutions are equitable and sustainable.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptation: The multi-actor approach also emphasises the importance of continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation. This involves regularly assessing the progress of the project, gathering feedback from all stakeholders, and making necessary adjustments to strategies and actions. In your research project, this could include setting up monitoring frameworks that track the impacts of the pilots on both rural and urban communities, and using this data to inform ongoing decision-making and ensure that the project remains responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

The multi-actor approach is particularly well-suited to projects that deal with complex, multi-dimensional issues like rural-urban linkages, where the involvement of a diverse range of actors is necessary to create holistic and sustainable solutions. By integrating this approach into your research project, you can ensure that the strategies developed are not only technically sound but also socially acceptable and broadly supported, thereby enhancing the likelihood of success and long-term impact.

1.1.3. Lippitt-Knoster model

The Lippitt-Knoster model is a strategic framework for managing change, commonly used to facilitate complex transformations in organisations or systems. It integrates elements from both the Lippitt's Phases of Change Theory and the Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change, providing a comprehensive approach to guide projects through transitional phases effectively. In the context of PoliRuralPlus, the Lippitt-Knoster model offers a valuable blueprint for navigating the complexities inherent in the multi-actor approach realm.

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The Lippitt-Knoster model comprises several key components that are particularly relevant to your research. At its core, the model emphasises the importance of a clear and shared **vision**, a fundamental aspect in ensuring all stakeholders—ranging from researchers to community members in both rural and urban settings—are aligned with the pilot's objectives. Establishing a common understanding of the goals across diverse geographical areas is critical, as it lays the foundation for the subsequent steps in the change process. In our project, this vision fosters mutual benefits such as improved access to resources, knowledge exchange, and economic development.

The model also underscores the necessity of **skills** development among those involved in the change process. This involves ensuring that participants, including project leaders, local stakeholders, and community members, possess the necessary competencies to implement the envisioned changes. In the context of your project, this could mean training local leaders in rural areas on how to leverage urban resources or educating urban stakeholders about the unique challenges and opportunities in rural settings. The success of each pilot depends on the ability of the teams to apply new skills in bridging the rural-urban divide.

Additionally, the Lippitt-Knoster model highlights the need for **incentives** to motivate participants. In your research, these incentives might take the form of demonstrating tangible benefits from improved rural-urban linkages, such as increased economic opportunities, better access to services, or enhanced quality of life. Creating these incentives is crucial in ensuring sustained engagement from all parties involved in the project, as they provide a clear rationale for why the change is necessary and beneficial.

Another critical aspect of the model is the importance of **resources**. This includes not only financial resources but also time, technology, and human capital. In your project, allocating adequate resources to each of the nine pilots will be essential to their success. Each pilot will likely have unique resource requirements based on the specific geographical, social, and economic contexts in which it operates. Ensuring that these resources are available and effectively utilised will help overcome potential obstacles that might otherwise hinder the progress of the project.

Furthermore, the Lippitt-Knoster model emphasises the importance of **action plans**. These plans serve as roadmaps for implementing change, detailing the steps that need to be taken, the timeline for each step, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. In our research project, developing tailored action plans for each pilot will help guide the implementation process, ensuring that all stakeholders are clear about what is expected and when. These plans also provide a framework for monitoring progress and making necessary adjustments along the way.

Finally, the model calls attention to the need for consistent monitoring and feedback. This aspect is vital in any change process, as it allows for the identification of issues as they arise and enables timely interventions to keep the project on track. In the context of your project, regular monitoring of each pilot's progress will be essential to ensure that the rural-urban connections being fostered are developing as intended. Feedback from stakeholders will also be crucial in refining the approaches used in each pilot, ensuring that the strategies employed are responsive to the needs and realities of the communities involved.

In summary, the Lippitt-Knoster model provides a comprehensive framework for managing complex change, making it highly applicable to your research project investigating rural-urban connections. By focusing on a shared vision, skills development, incentives, resources, action plans, and ongoing monitoring, the model offers a

structured approach to guide the nine pilots through the process of change. This ensures that the project not only achieves its objectives but also creates lasting, positive impacts on the communities involved.

The picture below depicts the Lippitt-Knoster model as it is described in the article "Rewriting Curriculum: Managing This Complex Change"[1]. It is of particular importance to realise the consequences if any of the key aspects of the model is missing. For instance, if Incentives are not, the process of complex change will encounter resistance from the participants.

Model for Managing Complex Change

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Success
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Missing	=	False Starts
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Missing	Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Missing	Resources	Action Plan	=	Resistance
Vision	Missing	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Missing	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion

Adopted from Knoster, T. (1991). Presentation in TASH Conference, Washington, D.C. Adapted by Knoster from Enterprise Group, Ltd.

Lippitt-Knoster model: Consequences of key elements missing

1.1.4. Elements to foster changes

Finally, as an interesting resource for pilot partners, it has been recommended to read the book "*Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*" by Chip Heath and Dan Heath. It is a practical guide to understanding and managing change, especially in challenging contexts. The authors use a simple but powerful framework based on the metaphor of a rider, an elephant, and a path to explain how to influence change.

- **The Rider** represents our rational side, which needs clear direction and understanding. The Heath brothers emphasise that change is more successful when the rider is given clear instructions and goals. This means leaders must clearly articulate the vision and the steps needed to achieve it.
- **The Elephant** symbolises our emotional side, which must be motivated to embrace change. The book stresses the importance of connecting emotionally with those involved, ensuring that they feel the change is beneficial and worth the effort. Engaging the elephant requires inspiring and appealing to people's feelings and values.

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[1] https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/TLE_Winter21_Article.pdf

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- **The Path** refers to the environment or the context in which the change occurs. The authors argue that simplifying the path—removing obstacles and making the process as easy as possible—can significantly increase the likelihood of success.

In the context of our project, "Switch" offers valuable insights for the partners involved. It highlights the need to align both rational and emotional factors in driving change across rural and urban linkages. By addressing both the logical aspects (Rider) and emotional engagement (Elephant) while also optimising the surrounding environment (Path), the project partners can more effectively manage the complexities of implementing change in their respective contexts. The book's strategies are particularly useful in guiding stakeholders through the difficult, multifaceted changes that the project aims to achieve.

1.2. Links to other Work Packages in PoliRuralPlus

During the first months of the project, special emphasis has been placed on establishing close and fruitful collaborative relationships between the pilot work package to which this deliverable belongs (Development, implementation and validation of Regional Action Plans in 9 pilots, WP5) and the rest of the work packages of this project related to our activity (WP2, WP3, WP4 and WP6).

As a result, satisfactory progress has been made in establishing a cohesive working team ready for the challenges to be faced together during the project.

The following is a brief summary of the collaboration with other work packages of PoliRuralPlus.

1.2.1. WP2 - Analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities + Impact of COVID1

There has been a very close and fluent collaboration between WP2 and WP5 in different aspects to foster rural-urban linkages and facilitate the implementation of regional action plans:
- Identification of relevant stakeholders
- Definition of storage fields and stakeholder data requirements.
- Joint monthly meetings between WP2 and WP5.

WP2 lays the foundational groundwork through research and analysis, identifying the opportunities and challenges in rural-urban interactions. It informs WP5 by generating insights on rural-urban linkages, including economic, social, and environmental aspects, while also addressing the impact of COVID-19. Allowing WP5 to focus on implementing the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) to prepare and validate pilot activities based on the findings of WP2. WP5 integrates stakeholder input gathered through WP2 to ensure that regional action plans (RAPs) reflect real-world conditions and feedback. This collaboration creates a feedback loop where the findings of WP2 inform the practical applications in WP5, and stakeholder engagement in WP5 helps refine the broader analysis conducted in WP2.

The deliverables of WP2 have set the groundwork for understanding and enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities. Some key contributions include:

1. **Stakeholder Identification (D2.1)**: This deliverable compiled a comprehensive database of stakeholders essential to the rural-urban development process. It identified actors from local communities,

governments, NGOs, businesses, and other sectors across nine pilot regions, helping establish communication channels and setting the foundation for integrated strategies in rural-urban development.

2. **Rural-Urban Linkages and Opportunities Post-COVID-19 (D2.2)**: This report assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural-urban linkages, identifying both the challenges and opportunities that arose from the crisis. It provided critical data to inform regional action plans (RAPs) by analysing the effects on key sectors like transportation, governance, and economic interaction. This deliverable also leveraged AI tools to analyse complex datasets, offering insights that shaped policy recommendations.

These deliverables have guided and informed the subsequent work of WP5, and now supports its focus on implementing these insights through multi-actor approaches and pilot initiatives.

Both work packages also collaborate to refine methodologies and tools, facilitating regional development through structured RAP cycles.

1.2.2. WP3 - Development of methodologies for Regional Action Plans

During the first months of the project, particular attention was paid to aligning the activities of WP3 and WP5.

The main pillars that we have followed for this alignment are:

1. **Ensure alignment of topics and themes with the overall project goals** (LTVRA, R-U nexus, NEB, etc.) and accelerate adoption of a theme for their pilot, resulting in a RAP Outline which includes:
   - Contribution to the LTVRA
   - How it will contribute to the region being 'prosperous' by 2024
   - Contribution to the NEB (New European Bauhaus)
   - Contribution to other EU policies (Net Zero, Fit for 55, EU missions, a just transition...)
   - Need for urban-rural policy coordination and cooperation

2. **Develop "work awareness" and identify opportunities for innovation in new ways of working**. This requires regular contact and coaching to encourage journaling, examining the journals, to distil descriptions of the "jobs to be done" and ideas of how technology can help. Work awareness can start anywhere in the policy cycle, based on i) Choice of theme or policy focus, ii) Policy Gap Analysis and iii) Review of Institutional Arrangements. This awareness will be developed through journaling exercises to develop "work awareness" and training to understand recent advances in IT, enabling the regional teams to contribute more effectively to the conception of use-cases for new productivity tools.

3. **Develop "technology awareness"** of the new possibilities opening up, brainstorming with pilots on how to transform the way they work to shorten policy cycles, initiate strategic conversations, launch policy initiatives, enable cooperation, especially across the rural urban divide. As a result, ideas will be acted upon by WP4, which will develop prototype systems for testing. These prototypes will be provided to the pilots for evaluation and feedback.

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One of the results of this collaboration is part of the structure of this deliverable D5.1, which includes the identification of themes to be addressed by the pilots aligned to the topics to be addressed in the RAP Outline (see Section 2).

Besides, the WP3 has set up a "**buddy system**" where a set of partners support pilots to:
- Keep them on track thematically (Urban-Rural nexus, LTVRA, NEB, Rural Pact, working towards EU and MS missions and targets...)
- Elicit new tool design ideas based on development of "work awareness" and "technology awareness"
- Elicit feedback for tool re-design or upgrades based on evaluation of tool performance

PoliRuralPlus builds upon the work already done in the PoliRural project, where a Foresight methodology guide was produced as "D1.8 Polirural Future Outlooks Methodology." This document was created as a guide on how to integrate the creation of "future outlooks" based on the use of System Dynamic Modelling, into the Foresight activities of participative policy and planning processes for rural areas. It contains a description of how to conduct Foresight and provides instructions on how to carry out key tasks such as Issues Analysis, Drivers' Analysis using STEEPV, Deep Dives, and Vision Building. It provides instructions on how to ensure the implementation of action plans, with the use of processes dedicated to the endorsement of plans by beneficiaries, their adoption by actors in public administration who must ensure their implementation, and provision for monitoring and evaluation activities included in the action plan. This deliverable was accompanied by a series of resources documents including a series of deep dives on drivers of change, CAP reform, the impact of COVID in local economies and recovery and resilience plans.

All of this is what might be called "classical" or "analogue" approach to Foresight. It is very labour intensive and requires a lot of research-like work such as reading, sense-making, summarising and editing short purposeful documents.

PoliRuralPlus does nor recreate these guides. It encourages the pilots to use the material created in PoliRural, it supports them in a series of webinars, whose recordings are made available online, and it will supplement the "analogue" methodology material with new elements such as the use of RIA (Review of Institutional Arrangements) and PGA (Policy gap Analysis). WP3 also responds to any specific requests for support communicated via the lead of WP5 and does so in a timely as-needed manner.

The main focus of "methodology" in WP3 of PoliRuralPlus, is to develop a modern ("digital" as opposed to "analogue") approach to Foresight implementation, based on the use of AI and automation, taking advantage of the extraordinary progress that has been made in the application to the processing of text, natural language, image and unstructured datasets. In particular it looks at the use of technologies which can be characterised as No-Code, Lo-Code and Hi-Code. These tools are intended not only to improve the efficiency of traditional Foresight tasks, but more generally the wide range of complex cognitive tasks that characterise the work of policy professionals. In this way it is hoped to transform the work of policy professionals in ways that reduce the burden of work, in a context where they are often overwhelmed by the pace of change, are asked by the hierarchy to address an increasing number of objectives and lack adequate human resources with which to do so.

In this way WP5 works closely with the pilots, and with WP3 and WP4, using the RAP development process as a laboratory for the co-design, development and testing of new tools, to create a new approach to Foresight methodology, based on the use of AI and automation. This approach relies on activities to develop "work

awareness" and "technology awareness" as part of an iterative co-design-test-evaluate process. This work is ongoing and will be documented in detail in the WP3 deliverable due at the end of 2024.

1.2.3. WP4 - Experimentation and innovation technologies in selected domains

WP4 in PoliRuralPlus will be instrumental in leveraging data-driven insights and methodologies to support the development and implementation of foresight and Regional Action Plans (RAPs) across all pilot regions. A key element of WP4's work is the use of GeoAI tools and the PoliRuralPlus Hub for managing both spatial and textual data. GeoAI, which integrates geospatial intelligence with artificial intelligence, will be essential for analysing large datasets and providing actionable insights for rural-urban planning. The Hub will serve as a centralised platform, facilitating data management, collaboration, and seamless access to analytical tools that help stakeholders interact with and interpret the data effectively.

WP4 is focusing on designing and testing these tools based on data gathered from pilots, ensuring that they align with the foresight and RAP methodologies. These tools, including GeoAI-powered analysis and the Map Whiteboard for real-time collaboration, will support all stages of action plan development, ensuring a comprehensive and adaptable strategy for each region. Furthermore, the integration of the Multi-Actor Approach Tool (MAATool) with the Hub will enable enhanced stakeholder management, data sharing, and objective tracking, allowing for continuous feedback and improvements. Collaboration with WP5, supported by WP3's insights on tool design through a "work awareness" approach, will further refine these tools, ensuring that they meet user requirements and can be scaled across regions.

1.2.4. WP6 - Financial support to third parties

The Outreach call submission (deadline July 31st, 2024) has been set up in WP6. The 9 pilots have played a crucial role in encouraging their own stakeholders and other actors to participate in this call, which is currently being evaluated.

WP5 plays a significant role in supporting these efforts, particularly by offering its expertise and resources to strengthen the open calls managed by WP6. This collaboration between work packages ensures a cohesive approach, optimising the project's overall impact. The support provided by WP5 is designed to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of the outreach activities, helping to foster engagement and participation across the board.

WP6 primarily supports WP5 and the pilot regions through financial contributions via outreach calls. These calls enable grassroots innovation by providing financial resources for local projects that align with the regional action plans developed under WP5. The funding encourages stakeholder engagement, supports entrepreneurship, and facilitates the implementation of innovative solutions tailored to the unique needs of each pilot region.

WP6 strengthens regional initiatives in areas like digital transformation, sustainability, and the green economy. This support helps pilot regions to test and scale new approaches, contributing directly to the overall success of WP5's objectives of fostering rural-urban synergies and sustainable development.

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2. PoliRuralPlus Pilots' Themes

This section outlines the core themes that guide the PoliRuralPlus pilots, each tailored to address specific regional challenges and opportunities while strengthening rural-urban linkages. This is a preliminary and important step that leads to the mapping of the different stakeholders that will conform the pilot. The decision on the themes needs to be aligned with the key actors in the local governments and the policy issues.

It is important to note that the stakeholder mapping that follows the analysis of the themes is an ongoing and complex process. Thus, each pilot starts with an initial set of actors and works with them to start the policy cycle in a process in which, over time, other stakeholders will be incorporated, strengthening the pilot.

Next, the result of this initial theme analysis process and selection is presented for each of the nine pilots of the PoliRuralPlus project.

2.1. County Monaghan, Ireland

Theme 1: *Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy: Exploring Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Environmental Products and Services in County Monaghan*
Description: This research theme explores the potential of the green economy in Rural and Urban linkages in County Monaghan, Ireland. It focuses on how entrepreneurship and innovation in environmental products and services can contribute to a more sustainable and prosperous future for the county. The research examines five key areas, Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Environmental Impact, Economic Development, and Policy and Regulation.
Note: We and our stakeholders are decided to go with this research theme after rapid assessment and discussions.

Theme 2: *Exploring Sustainable Tourism and Recreation in County Monaghan, Ireland: Opportunities and Challenges for Local Economic Development.*
Description: This research theme focuses on leveraging sustainable tourism and recreation to address rural economic development challenges in County Monaghan, Ireland. It specifically highlights concerns raised in the Monaghan Action Plan. The research explores how tourism and recreation can contribute to Job creation, Business development and Environmental sustainability.

Theme 3: *Optimising Sustainability and Innovation in the Dairy Sector: A Case Study of County Monaghan, Ireland*
Description: This research theme examines how dairy farms in County Monaghan, Ireland, can achieve a balance between economic viability, environmental responsibility, and technological advancement. It explores current practices and identifies opportunities for improvement in three key areas: Sustainable Practices, Technological Innovation and Balancing Economic and Environmental Concerns.

2.2. Slovakia

Theme 1: *Enhancement of cooperation among interested stakeholders and actors*
Description: Improve coordination between various sectors with the impact on rural areas through Interministerial working group as a cross-sectoral governmental platform to break the silos involving various

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interested stakeholders and actors. Facilitate development of the position of rural areas to the new CAP and Structural Funds after 2027 as a contribution to national consultations.

Theme 2: *Development of Intent for Digital Innovation Hub (DiH)*
Description: The Slovak pilot aims to develop an action plan for the creation of an Agricultural Digital Innovation Hub. This DiH will focus on digital transformation, sustainability, innovation and research, start-up support, training and education, and data sharing and standardisation within the agro-food sector. The plan will outline strategies to modernise agricultural practices, promote sustainable farming, foster innovation, support start-ups, provide training, and ensure effective data sharing. Key actors involved will include government bodies, research institutions, industry stakeholders, technology providers, financial institutions, farmers, NGOs, and international partners. The action plan will serve as a blueprint to drive digital transformation and innovation in Slovak agriculture.

Theme 3: *Facilitation of the national contribution to the EU Rural Pact and initiation of constitutional and administrative reform*
Description: *Vision for more attractive rural areas* was developed in a mission-oriented foresight process in a Polirural project in parallel with the EU's Long Term Vision for rural areas. From the beginning of 2023 a series of consultatory conferences were co-organised with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The overall goal is to have the "Vision" enshrined in the constitutional law in order to provide long-term stability, continuity, clarity, and clear strategic direction for Slovak rural areas, agriculture, and rural economy and to pave the way for a sustainable future for all. In this way, the document will be binding until its next update regardless of government changes thus providing some certainty in a sector that is naturally subject to a huge amount of uncertainty. It will guide and support the decision-makers and help to avoid repeated mistakes of the past and constant changes in the priorities by individual ministers (sometimes even several times during one government turn).

2.3. Central Greece

Theme 1: *Greener economy/society*
Description: The Greek pilot employs comprehensive training in sustainable agritech technologies with the objective of promoting a greener economy by advancing environmentally friendly agricultural practices. Central Greece faces a lack of digital skills and an underdeveloped ICT infrastructure, which limits the agricultural sector's ability to adopt modern agritech solutions. To address this, the initiative aims to enhance productivity and sustainability by equipping local farmers with precision farming tools and organic techniques that minimise environmental impact. The development of these skills is crucial for maintaining the human capital of the local workforce and aligning it with the agri-food market's requirements. Additionally, the project fosters the development of a localised, sustainable food system by promoting the consumption of local agricultural products and agritourism, thereby reducing carbon footprints, and supporting local economies. The pilot programme contributes to the development of sustainable food systems by fostering awareness of sustainable practices and a community-oriented approach to agriculture. This approach is essential for environmental and social sustainability, as it encourages the development of a greener economy and a more resilient agricultural community.

Theme 2: *Digitalisation*

Description: The Greek pilot programme has been designed to significantly enhance the digital skills of AKIS actors through specialised training in sustainable agritech technologies. This comprehensive initiative has the dual objective of boosting both the efficiency and sustainability of agricultural practices, while simultaneously enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of agriculture and the region's appeal as an agritourism destination. By improving digital literacy among stakeholders, the programme enables them to leverage ICT services more effectively, facilitating the faster and more efficient adoption of digital tools. This initiative is aligned with broader digitalisation initiatives, with the potential to serve as a model for integrating technology into traditional sectors in order to foster economic and social development. The success of this pilot programme could pave the way for future efforts, marking a significant step towards sustainable regional growth and the long-term viability of Central Greece's agricultural community.

Theme 3: *Tourism*

Description: The Greek pilot employs agritourism as a strategy to enhance regional tourism, with the objective of promoting local agricultural products and natural resources. The initiative aims to raise awareness and appeal by integrating agriculture with tourism in order to create a unique, sustainable travel experience. The key strategies include the implementation of tailored promotional campaigns, the establishment of stakeholder engagement, and the delivery of educational activities pertaining to local farming and ecology. It is anticipated that these outcomes will include an increase in tourist arrivals, economic growth for local businesses and farms, and the adoption of sustainable tourism practices. This approach not only enhances tourist experiences but also benefits local communities. It enhances their economic resilience against market fluctuations and environmental challenges, and conserves natural resources. Consequently, the region can be considered a model for sustainable tourism development.

Theme 4: *Entrepreneurship and innovation*

Description: The Greek pilot demonstrates how the digital skills and agritech technologies can be integrated into the agritourism sector, thereby combining entrepreneurship and innovation. This approach facilitates the creation of new business models and the uncovering of potential financial opportunities. Such developments have the effect of enhancing both the economic viability and sustainability of local agriculture, combined with tourism. Additionally, the initiative explores novel revenue streams through eco-tourism and promotes a diverse agritourism experience that attracts a broader audience. Its objective is to build a robust, interconnected community of entrepreneurs and innovators who are well-equipped to navigate and thrive in a rapidly evolving market landscape. These endeavours have the potential to significantly contribute to the economic and sustainable development of Central Greece, positioning the region as a model for integrated agritourism and agritech innovation.

2.4.   Apuria, Italy

Theme 1: *Closer connections between consumers and producers*
Description: Develop and/or foster Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) models that give the opportunity to consumers (especially those located in urban areas) to find and buy food products directly from farmers/producers.

Theme 2: *Local biodiversity and healthy diets with local and seasonal products*

Description: Promote educational frameworks (especially for young generations) that allow a better understanding on the protection/promotion of food and local biodiversity as well as on the importance of choosing/buying seasonal products for the benefit of the natural ecosystem and the famers' activities.

Theme 2: *Multi-actor stakeholder engagement*
Description: Facilitate the connections and interactions between different actors in the territory (farmers, entrepreneurs, municipalities, LAGs, educational institutions, policy makers, etc.) to develop strategies (or create the conditions) for rural-urban synergy through SFSC models.

2.5. Mallusjoki, Finland

Theme 1: *Cultural heritage and creative arts*
Description: Building territorial identities and a sense of community, as well as improving access to a valorised cultural heritage and cultural life to enhance the attractiveness and vitality of the region.

Theme 2: *Tourism, specifically Rural Event Industry in the creative sector*
Description: Emphasis on rural event tourism in the creative sector aims to build a thriving Rural Event Industry Ecosystem. By engaging local and regional stakeholders, leveraging cultural and natural assets, and fostering urban-rural interactions, the pilot aims to create a vibrant ecosystem that not only attracts urban visitors but also empowers the local community by enhancing their cultural identity and economic opportunities.

Theme 3: *Entrepreneurship and innovation*
Description: Aiming to foster a dynamic ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation, leveraging the unique assets and opportunities within the Mallusjoki region to drive economic growth and sustainability.

2.6. Czech-Bavarian border region, Czechia - Germany

Theme 1: *Entrepreneurship and innovation*
Description: This theme focuses on fostering a robust ecosystem for startups and SMEs in the Czech-Bavarian border region. By adapting urban incubator models to the rural context, the pilot aims to support local entrepreneurship, particularly among young professionals in sectors like tourism and food production. Central to this theme is the transfer of the "Technology Campus" model from Bavaria to Czechia, promoting localised innovation hubs that serve as crucial links for knowledge transfer and economic development, thus increasing the attractiveness of the regional economic area for the target group.

Theme 2: *Digitalisation and connectivity*
Description: This theme aims to enhance digital infrastructure (mainly via PoliRural tools and apps, such as the innovation hub and the Rural Attractiveness Explorer, as well as the available PR-Tools of all pilot partners) and capabilities in the region, facilitating better connectivity and communication. The focus is on promoting digital literacy, enhancing online services, and leveraging digital tools for regional development. By improving digital infrastructure, the pilot seeks to bridge the urban-rural divide and promote a connected and technologically advanced border region.

2.7. Spain

Theme 1: *Rural-Urban Synergies & Cultural Heritage*
Description: Integrate the strategies of ADESIMAN and the Segobriga Archaeological Park to foster rural innovation, cultural heritage preservation, and community cohesion. This theme aims to cultivate diverse business models and enhance cooperation by leveraging cultural assets, collaborative tools, and policy support, thereby stimulating the local economy and strengthening community ties.

Theme 2: *Digital Transformation and Entrepreneurship*
Description: Adapt urban incubator models to rural settings to foster localised innovation ecosystems that connect technology experts, startups, and policy-makers. This theme focuses on embedding digital and entrepreneurial skills within the agricultural workforce, promoting digital literacy, and encouraging the use of modern technologies to boost regional development and innovation.

Theme 3: *Renewable Energy and Environmental Sustainability*
Description: Promote programs centred around renewable energy production and the creation of energy communities. This theme seeks to encourage sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, contributing to the reduction of the carbon footprint and fostering a greener rural environment.

Theme 4: *Agrotourism and Education*
Description: Develop agrotourism initiatives and educational programs to enhance understanding and appreciation of local agricultural practices and cultural heritage. This theme aims to attract tourists and educate the younger generation on the importance of agriculture, sustainability, and cultural heritage, thereby reversing the declining agricultural labour force trend and attracting young farmers.

Theme 5: *Capacity Building and Community Engagement*
Description: Establish capacity building activities to foster a sustainable, innovative, and inclusive rural environment. This theme focuses on bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern technologies, enhancing the skills of the local population, and promoting active community engagement to ensure the long-term viability and resilience of the region.

2.8. Vidzeme, Latvia

Theme 1: *Inclusive governance*
Description: Governance at regional level is a statutory mandate of the Vidzeme Planning Region. Governance is also a horizontal priority that permeates the NRP's long-term strategy 2030 and the medium-term Development Programme 2022-2027. It is important to assess differences and find targeted solutions for balanced regional development.

The regional territorial development plan and activities implemented are aiming to reach the goals not just for the public sector, but its inhabitants in the whole region, e.g. regional development plan should respond to the needs of people. Need for better cooperation, additional work from both involved parties, public sector and inhabitants, towards local action that respond to the common challenges were highlighted in the public discussions also within the PoliRural project. Challenge is rooted in different aspects, like (a) people lack of civic education and disbelief in

their ability to influence the democratic process, (b) insufficient understanding of the role of civil society in both, communities and public administration, (c) lack of targeted policies for the development of civil society, (d) legal and financial environment that is unfavourable and unstable for the growth of civil society, (e) high intolerance to another, (f) low capacity and insufficient competences of civil society and organisations for long-term development and other factors that intertwine.

Therefore, it is very important that each goal and planned activities of a development program responds directly to needs of inhabitants and where possible actively involve them into the action. It should include wider society in all the stages - planning, implementation and monitoring as well as to serve as a link between regional, municipal and local priorities strengthening the actions and added value of actions implemented by stakeholders.

2.9. Malta

Theme 1: *Facilitation and introduction to digitalization to the Agriculture Sector*
Description: In view of the declining workforce within the sector, there is a need to invest in digital literacy of the workforce and support them in understanding the opportunities and advantages digital tools and technologies provide. The aim is also that of aiding the sector in taking such aspects into consideration within their businesses to facilitate their operations and possible growth or for the younger generation to venture into this sector. This could involve training programs, focus groups, provision of guidance on resources and services already available and promoting successful digital applications being produced through the PoliRuralPlus project to the sector.

Theme 2: *Entrepreneurship for Rural Areas*
Description: The pilot aims to build entrepreneurial skills, particularly among young people working in or are interested in working within rural areas/agricultural sector. Young people often possess innovative ideas and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. By nurturing their entrepreneurial skills, Malta can tap into this potential and drive sustainable development in its rural regions. Entrepreneurship can play a crucial role in revitalising rural areas by creating jobs and stimulating growth while preserving traditional agricultural heritage practices. This could involve workshops, guidance on possible mentorship programs, or creating platforms to connect young people with resources and opportunities to start their own agricultural businesses.

Theme 3: *Addressing the Brain Drain*
Description: The agricultural sector in Malta is suffering from a decline in young people interested in agriculture, thus this brings about the need to make the sector more attractive. By providing digital and entrepreneurial skills, this pilot aims to provide a more positive image about the career paths in agriculture hence encouraging young people to stay, return or venture into rural opportunities.

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3. The PoliRuralPlus pilots

This section presents an overview of the nine PoliRuralPlus pilot regions, each of which has been selected to address unique challenges and opportunities within the context of rural-urban linkages. PoliRuralPlus pilots illustrate how local and regional strategies can be aligned with broader European goals to promote integrated territorial development.

The following subsections provide detailed descriptions of each pilot, highlighting their description, stakeholders, vision, skills, resources, and initial actions planned, all following the Lippitt-Knoster model for complex change introduced in section 1.

3.1. County Monaghan, Ireland

3.1.1. Description

County Monaghan is a mainly rural county in Ireland. It is part of the Border Region and is in the province of Ulster. Monaghan County Council is the local authority for the county. According to the 2022 census, the county had a population of 65,288 people. It is the fifth smallest of the Irish Republic's 26 counties in area (1,295 sq. km) and fourth smallest by population, with 63% of the County's population living in rural areas.

In recent years, the county has become more diverse and is now home to a significant population of newly arrived immigrants. Some have fled from wars and persecution, but most arrived to pursue a better life in Ireland and to work, live and study in the county. In 2022, new communities of non-Irish nationals now comprise 11% (7,413) of the population of the county.

The latest Monaghan Socio-Economic Profile was published in March 2023[2]. Some of the key findings of the report include:
- The population of County Monaghan is growing and is expected to continue to grow in the coming years.
- The unemployment rate in County Monaghan is lower than the national average.
- The median income in County Monaghan is lower than the national average.
- The main sectors of employment in County Monaghan are agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
- The number of people employed in the agriculture sector is declining, while the number of people employed in the services sector is increasing.

Some of the key figures from the Monaghan Socio-Economic Statement are:
- Population: 65,288 (2022)
- Unemployment rate: 4.9% (2022)
- Mean Annual Earnings: €40, 024 (2020)
- Number of farms: 4,478 (2020)
- Percentage of people employed in agriculture: 10.1% (2016)
- Percentage of people employed in services: 62.3% (2016)

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[2] MonaghanSocioEconomicDraftforConsulationApril2015.pdf

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Given the challenges highlighted in the Monaghan Action Plan during the PoliRural project, it is crucial to address them to enhance rural-urban linkages and development effectively:

- Limited access to adequately paid job opportunities for people living in rural areas,
- Lack of viable opportunities to repurpose land or farm assets,
- Low numbers of business realising the potential for business expansion and job creation in the rapidly expanding environmental products and services sector across Europe,
- Inability to fully exploit the untapped potential of the roll out of broadband across rural County Monaghan for provision of services and employment.
- The Urban & Rural divide has widened in recent decades.
- We will explore the potential for greater linkages between Urban and Rural areas in our territory

The Monaghan pilot will focus its PoliRuralPlus Rural-Urban Regional Action Plan, on the topic - **Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy: Exploring Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Environmental Products and Services in County Monaghan** which have strong synergy for other activities within the county, particularly in the context of LEADER as well as EU and Irish national policies.

With the result that by the end of the PoliRuralPlus project County Monaghan will be a thriving, integrated rural-urban area with equal quality of life, focused on: Green Economy: Boosting rural jobs and innovation in environmental products and services, to diversify the economy and attract young people and skilled newcomers. Success will depend on strong urban-rural ties. This includes collaboration for green business, shared marketing of the region, digitalisation and ensuring broadband access and use.

3.1.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)	External	Research and Education
02	Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Monaghan	External	Enterprise development
03	Retrofit Ready Project	External	
04	Truagh Development Association CLG	External	Social Enterprise, Rural Digital Hub provider
05	Nigel Renaghan/ Farmer	External	Farmer and Member of Sustainable Energy Committee
06	TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan	External	Rural and Urban connector
07	MCA Consulting	External	Green economy consultant
08	New Communities Network	External	New migrants connecter
09	Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority)	External	Research Agency of Gov of Ireland
10	Glaslough Tyholland Group Water Scheme	External	Sustainable Energy Committee
11	Glaslough SEC	External	Sustainable Energy Committee

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12	Monaghan County Council/ Economic Development	External	Local Authority
13	Monaghan County Council/ Broadband	External	Local Authority
14	Aura Internet Services Ltd	External	Internet designs and develops
15	Enterprising Monaghan	External	Supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurs and businesses
16	Chadwicks Group	External	Ireland's leading builders' merchanting company

3.1.3. Vision

Following consultations with relevant stakeholders, Research Methodologies guidance of WP3, and the aim of the Monaghan Pilot that by 2030:

1: County Monaghan will be a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable rural-urban region, where smart towns and villages harness green innovation, entrepreneurship, and environmental products and services to drive economic growth and equal access to opportunities. These communities will prioritise sustainable living and active civic engagement, fostering a high quality of life and a balanced rural-urban connection.

2: County Monaghan will be a leader in sustainable rural development, driving entrepreneurship and innovation in the green economy through diverse industries in environmental products, agritech and digital innovation. Smart technologies and community-led development will create a resilient, prosperous, and environmentally responsible region recognized across Ireland and Europe.

Contribution to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA):

The Irish pilot in County Monaghan aligns with the New European Bauhaus (NEB) by focusing on sustainable development through the green economy. It promotes innovation and entrepreneurship in environmental products and services, fostering economic growth and environmental resilience, in line with NEB's values of sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics.

The pilot also strengthens rural-urban linkages by improving broadband access and promoting collaboration between rural and urban areas. It engages various stakeholders, such as farmers, businesses, and institutions, encouraging community participation and sustainable solutions, resonating with NEB's vision of creating beautiful and sustainable living spaces.

The Irish pilot contributes to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) by promoting the green economy and innovation in environmental products, strengthening the rural economy and making it more resilient.

It fosters sustainability and creates strong rural-urban linkages through digital infrastructure and broadband access. Additionally, it enhances the quality of rural life, making rural areas more attractive to young people and newcomers, aligning with LTVRA's goals of more prosperous and resilient rural communities.

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3.1.4. Skills

The successful implementation of the "Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy" project in County Monaghan necessitates a diverse range of skills from stakeholders, the project team, and the broader PoliRuralPlus initiative. Key skills include expertise in sustainable agriculture and environmental science to guide the development of innovative green products and services. Business development and entrepreneurial skills are essential to foster new ventures and expand existing businesses in the environmental sector. Digital literacy and advanced IT skills will be crucial to fully leverage the rollout of broadband, enabling remote work, digital marketing, and e-commerce. Project management and strategic planning abilities are needed to coordinate activities, manage resources effectively, and ensure the alignment of initiatives with EU and national policies. Additionally, strong community engagement and communication skills will facilitate collaboration between urban and rural stakeholders, fostering a shared vision and mutual support for green economic growth. By harnessing these skills, the project aims to create a thriving, integrated rural-urban area with enhanced quality of life, driven by innovation and sustainability in the green economy. We identified these skills now from our 16 stakeholders who are coming from different sectors as mentioned below in the Incentives section.

3.1.5. Incentives

Engaging stakeholders in the "Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy" project is crucial for its success, and providing clear incentives will motivate active involvement. Stakeholders such as Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Monaghan, and others will find significant benefits through their participation. For educational institutions like DkIT, involvement offers opportunities for research, innovation, and collaboration on cutting-edge environmental technologies. Local businesses and entrepreneurs supported by LEO Monaghan can access new markets and funding opportunities, enhancing their growth and competitiveness in the green sector. The Retrofit Ready Project and Truagh Development Association CLG can showcase their sustainable initiatives, attracting further investment and community support. Farmers like Nigel Renaghan can diversify income through sustainable practices and gain access to advanced agricultural technologies and training provided by Teagasc. Transportation initiatives like TFI Local Link, Monaghan will benefit from improved infrastructure and connectivity.

Monaghan County Council, through its Economic Development and Broadband departments, plays a pivotal role in this project. The Council can drive economic growth and sustainability efforts by supporting local businesses and fostering innovation. By ensuring the rollout and effective use of broadband, the Council can enhance digital connectivity, enabling new business models and remote working opportunities that attract young professionals and skilled newcomers. Additionally, the Council's involvement in economic development initiatives can help streamline processes, provide essential resources, and create a more attractive environment for green enterprises. Participation in this project allows Monaghan County Council to further its strategic goals of sustainable development, economic diversification, and improved quality of life for residents.

By contributing to this project, stakeholders will be part of a collaborative effort to boost the local economy, create jobs, and improve the quality of life in County Monaghan. Monaghan Integrated Development CLG can encourage active involvement by highlighting these benefits, offering platforms for networking and collaboration, and providing regular updates on project progress and successes. The project promises to enhance visibility, foster

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innovation, and create a supportive ecosystem for sustainable development, making participation highly advantageous for all stakeholders.

3.1.6.   Resources

To ensure the successful implementation of the "Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy" project, a comprehensive range of resources will be mobilised. Key resources include:

1. **Financial Resources**:
   ○ **Grants and Funding**: Access to EU funds, national grants, and local funding schemes to support green initiatives and business development.
   ○ **Investment Opportunities**: Attracting private investments and public-private partnerships to finance innovative green projects and infrastructure improvements.

2. **Human Resources**:
   ○ **Expertise and Training**: Skilled professionals from Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Teagasc, and other educational and research institutions to provide training, technical assistance, and expert advice.
   ○ **Community Engagement**: Leveraging the experience and networks of community groups like Truagh Development Association CLG and New Communities Network to foster local involvement and support.

3. **Technological Resources**:
   ○ **Digital Infrastructure**: Ensuring high-speed broadband access across the county, facilitated by Monaghan County Council and Aura Internet Services Ltd, to enable digital services, remote work, and e-commerce.
   ○ **Green Technologies**: Access to the latest environmental technologies and practices through partnerships with retrofit and sustainability projects, such as the Retrofit Ready Project and Glaslough SEC.

4. **Institutional Support**:
   ○ **Policy and Regulatory Support**: Monaghan County Council's Economic Development and Broadband departments will provide essential policy frameworks and regulatory support to facilitate project implementation and attract investments.
   ○ **Local Enterprise Support**: Resources and assistance from the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Monaghan and Enterprising Monaghan to help local businesses develop and scale their green initiatives.

5. **Physical Resources**:
   ○ **Facilities and Infrastructure**: Use of local facilities for training, workshops, and co-working spaces to support entrepreneurship and innovation.
   ○ **Transportation Networks**: Enhancement of local transportation services, supported by TFI Local Link Cavan Monaghan, to improve connectivity between urban and rural areas.

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6. **Knowledge and Data**:
   ○ **Research and Development**: Collaboration with academic and research institutions like DkIT and Teagasc to drive R&D efforts in environmental products and services.
   ○ **Data and Insights**: Utilisation of socio-economic data from reports such as the Monaghan Socio-Economic Profile to inform strategies and measure impact.

Monaghan Integrated Development CLG will coordinate these resources, ensuring that stakeholders have access to the necessary tools, funding, and expertise to drive the project's success. By aligning financial, human, technological, institutional, and physical resources, the project aims to create a robust foundation for sustainable development and innovation in the green economy, benefiting all participants and the broader community in County Monaghan

3.1.7. Action Plan

Action Plan for Research Project: Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy in County Monaghan

Phase 1: Initiation

Stakeholder Engagement

- Organise an initial meeting with stakeholders to outline research objectives.
- Conduct workshops with stakeholders (DkIT, LEO Monaghan, Monaghan County Council, etc.) to identify research priorities and data sources.
- Establish formal agreements and roles for data sharing and collaboration.

Phase 2: Research Planning

Detailed Research Planning

- Develop a comprehensive research plan, including timelines, milestones, and methodologies.
- Identify potential challenges and develop risk mitigation strategies.

Data Collection Framework

- Define data collection methodologies (surveys, interviews, case studies, etc.).
- Establish data management protocols, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and data protection regulations.

Phase 3: Data Collection

Field Research

- Conduct surveys and interviews with local businesses, community groups, and stakeholders to gather primary data.
- Collect secondary data from existing reports, databases, and studies relevant to the green economy and environmental services.

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Monitoring and Review

- Regularly review data collection progress and adjust methodologies as needed.
- Ensure continuous communication with stakeholders to gather insights and feedback.

Phase 4: Data Analysis

Data Processing

- Clean and organise collected data for analysis.
- Use statistical and qualitative analysis methods to interpret the data.

Findings Synthesis

- Identify key trends, opportunities, and challenges in the green economy within County Monaghan.
- Compare findings with other regions to draw broader conclusions.

Phase 5: Reporting and Dissemination

Research Report Preparation

- Compile a comprehensive research report detailing methodologies, findings, and conclusions.
- Develop case studies and best practice examples based on research findings.

Stakeholder Review

- Share the draft report with stakeholders for review and feedback.
- Incorporate feedback and finalise the report.

Dissemination of Results

- Publish the research report and executive summaries.
- Present findings at conferences, workshops, and stakeholder meetings.
- Distribute reports to relevant policymakers, industry leaders, and community groups.

Phase 6: Policy and Practice Recommendations

Recommendation Development

- Based on research findings, develop actionable recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders.
- Focus on strategies to foster entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable development in the green economy.

Policy Briefs and White Papers

- Prepare policy briefs and white papers summarising key recommendations.
- Share these documents with local, national, and EU policymakers.

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Follow-Up Studies

- Identify areas for further research and potential follow-up studies.
- Secure funding and plan for extended research projects if needed.

This action plan outlines the structured approach to conducting the research project on "Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy: Exploring Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Environmental Products and Services in County Monaghan," ensuring thorough data collection, analysis, and impactful dissemination of findings.

3.2.   Slovakia

3.2.1.   Description

Introduction: The Slovak pilot covers the territory of the whole country. Slovakia has 5,4 million inhabitants and covers the territory of 49 036 sq. km. Highlands and mountains cover 60% of its territory and lowlands 40%. At the European level, it has a character of mountain and sub-montane landscape. According to the territorial-legal division, Slovakia is divided into 4 areas (NUTS 2), 8 regions (NUTS 3), 79 districts (LAU1), 2 890 municipalities (LAU2) of which 138 have the status of a city.

As a predominantly rural country (the rural population represents 38% of the total population, and the EU average is 19%) Slovakia lacks a vision document or a strategy specifically dedicated to rural areas.

Disillusion from Structural funds: Even though Slovakia has received more than €30 billion from cohesion policy funds for regional development, Slovaks do not feel this in their own lives. According to a survey conducted by the Median Agency for the Association of Self-Governing Regions only a third think that EU funds have helped reduce regional disparities. People who think they have helped improve the quality of life in their region are a minority.

Smart Villages - missed opportunity: The Slovak CAP Strategic Plan does not include interventions related to smart rural development, including the preparation and implementation of Smart Villages strategies and thus does not include Smart Transformation of the Rural Economy. It was recommended by the EC to include smart rural support at least as a pilot activity under the LEADER intervention. The concept of Smart Villages offers an opportunity to do development differently. It highlights the importance and value of a community-led approach and introducing or supporting technology and business models ensuring long-term sustainability, ability to scale and meaningful socio-economic impact.

Background from PoliRural to PoliRuralPlus: During the previous Polirural project the mission-oriented foresight process was developed *"Vision for more attractive rural areas"* (further referred to as "Vision") with the aim to make the rural areas stronger, sustainable, resilient, and prosperous. At the same time, the EU was preparing its Long-Term Vision for rural areas.

The overall goal: is to have the "Vision" enshrined in the constitutional law in order to provide long-term stability, continuity, clarity, and clear strategic direction for Slovak rural areas, agriculture, and rural economy and to pave the way for a sustainable future for all. In this way, the document will be binding until its next update regardless of government changes thus providing some certainty in a sector that is naturally subject to a huge amount of

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uncertainty. It will guide and support the decision-makers and help to avoid repeated mistakes of the past and constant changes in the priorities by individual ministers (sometimes even several times during one government turn).

Stakeholders' consultations: After the endorsement of the Vision by stakeholders and actors at the conference in December 2021 the new round of broader stakeholder consultations and advocacy processes started at the end of the Polirural project cycle. The Vision was officially presented to the decision-makers in October 2022 at the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Since then, several consultations took place and a series of joint conferences with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development started in 2023. Three joint conferences were organised in the year 2023 (February in Middle Slovakia, June in Western Slovakia, and October in Eastern Slovakia). Two followed in the year 2024 (April in Middle Slovakia and May in Western Slovakia). The conferences bring together people at different levels (stepping out of silos) regularly around the common goal which is the vision of more attractive rural areas and allow a better understanding of different realities and perspectives, improve mutual cooperation, and also develop creative and innovative new solutions. It introduced a practice of constant, respectful, and timely exchange on a regular basis in both directions from the bottom up and also from the top down.

A Monitoring Committee was established and held regular meetings to prepare and organise these consultations.
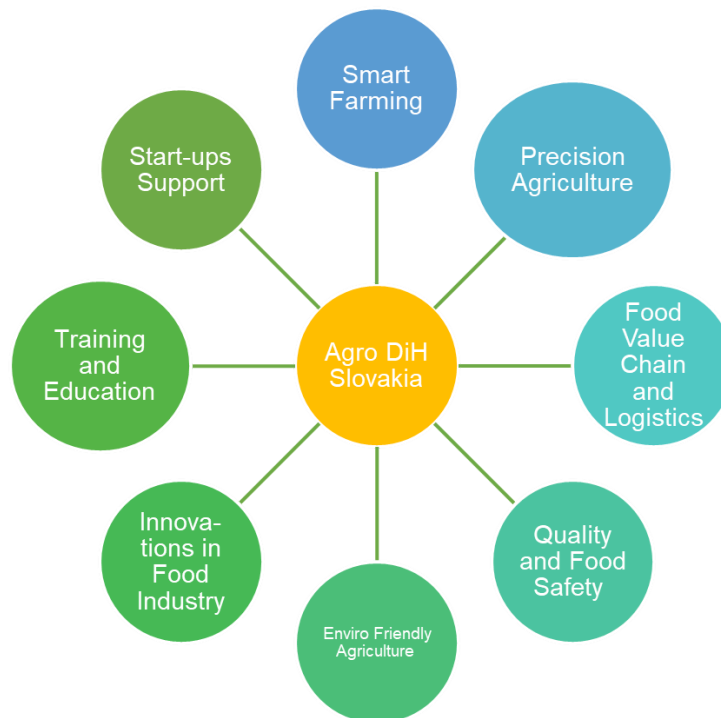
EU Rural Pact: Participation in the activities of the Rural Pact has been carried out from its beginning till today and facilitating the national contribution to it. An article was published on Rural Pact Community Platform: [A new Slovak 'Vision for more attractive rural areas' | Rural Pact Community Platform (europa.eu)](europa.eu). The Slovak Vision and its consultations processes contribute to the three objectives of the Rural Pact: (i) amplifying rural voices and bringing them higher on the political agenda; (ii)structuring and enabling networking, collaboration and mutual learning and (iii) encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitment to act for the EU LTVRA.

COVID-19: In the Polirural project, an Analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural areas was prepared based on the questionnaire survey that took place between February 15, 2021 and March 9, 2021. Some of the findings were confirmed in the years that followed, particularly the increased number of people moving from urban to rural areas. There is a need to look deeper into this to understand the change.

A significant focus on integrating digital technologies and enhancing digital skills among rural actors to improve agricultural practices and support rural businesses.

Digital Innovation Hub: As a digital solution the activities will focus on the development of the Agricultural Digital Innovation Hub which plays a key role in the agro-food sector in the area of support of digital transformation and innovations. The tasks include:
1. Digital Transformation
2. Sustainability
3. Innovation and Research
4. Start-ups Support
5. Training and Education
6. Data Sharing and Standardization.

Main Emphasis of DiH:

1. Digital Transformation:

- Promote digital transformation and innovation within the agro-food sector.
- Develop an action plan for creating the DiH focusing on sustainability, innovation, research, start-up support, training, education, and effective data sharing and standardisation.
- Implementing advanced technologies such as IoT, AI, big data, and robotics to modernise agricultural practices.
- Enhancing precision farming and smart farming solutions to optimise resource use and increase productivity.
- Modernised agricultural practices, enhanced sustainable farming, fostered innovation, and better support for start-ups. This involves the participation of government bodies, research institutions, industry stakeholders, technology providers, financial institutions, farmers, NGOs, and international partners.

2. Sustainability:

- Promoting sustainable farming practices through the adoption of green technologies.
- Reducing environmental impact by optimising the use of water, fertilisers, and pesticides.

3. Innovation and Research:

- Encouraging innovation by supporting research projects that focus on new agricultural technologies and methods.

- Fostering collaboration between research institutions and the agro-food industry to drive technological advancements.

4. Start-ups Support:

- Providing incubation and acceleration services to agro-tech start-ups.
- Offering funding opportunities, mentorship, and networking to help start-ups scale their innovations.

5. Training and Education:

- Organising training programs and workshops to upskill farmers and agro-industry workers in digital technologies.
- Developing educational materials and courses on digital agriculture and sustainable practices.

6. Data Sharing and Standardization:

- Establishing protocols for data sharing among stakeholders in the agro-food sector.
- Promoting standardisation of data formats to ensure interoperability and effective use of data across different platforms and systems.

Key Actors of DiH:

1. Government Bodies:

- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic: Policy support and funding.
- Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA): Providing expertise in innovation and energy efficiency.

2. Research and Academic Institutions:

- Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra: Research collaboration and educational programs.
- National Agricultural and Food Centre (NPPC): Research and development in agricultural sciences.

3. Industry Stakeholders:

- Agro-food companies: Adoption and implementation of digital solutions.
- Agricultural cooperatives and associations: Facilitating the diffusion of innovation among farmers.

4. Technology Providers:

- ICT companies specialising in agricultural technologies: Development and deployment of digital tools and solutions.
- Start-ups in the agro-tech sector: Innovators bringing new technologies to market.

5. Financial Institutions:

- Banks and venture capital firms: Providing funding and investment for digital transformation projects and start-ups.

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6. Farmers and Agro-industry Workers:

- Primary beneficiaries and implementers of digital transformation initiatives.
- Active participants in training and educational programs.

7. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs):

- Organisations focused on rural development and sustainable agriculture: Advocating for sustainable practices and supporting community engagement.

8. International Partners:

- European Union and Horizon Europe program: Providing funding and facilitating collaboration with international research and innovation projects.
- International research consortia and networks: Sharing knowledge and best practices from other regions.
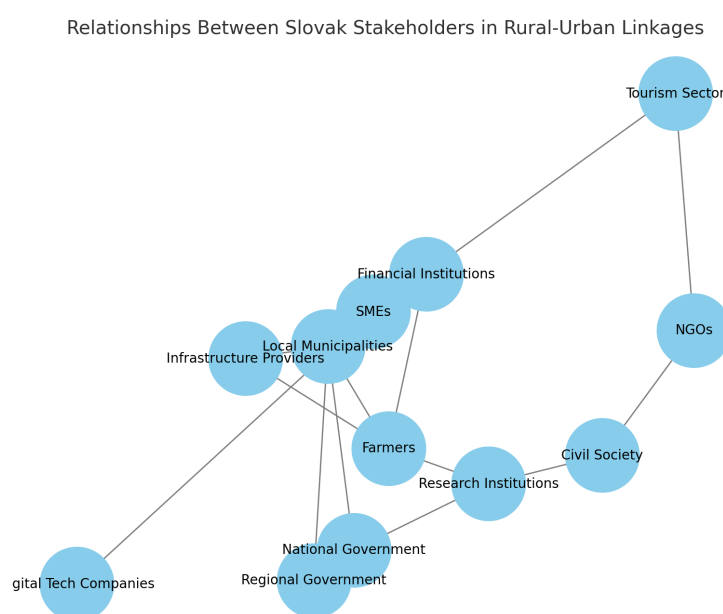
3.2.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot in the initial phase and it will be further extended over the period of the project running:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic	External	policy-making national authority co-organizer of joint conferences cooperation on the establishment of a cross-sectoral working group on breaking the silos
02	Rural Parliament in Slovakia	External	co-organizer of joint conferences and workshops outreach to rural stakeholders
03	National Agricultural and Food Center	External	
04	Slovak Association of Tourism and Agritourism	External	co-organizer of joint conferences
05	Lišov Museum	External	tourism services
06	Regional Government of Banska Bystrica	External	regional and local development authority
07	OOCR Central Slovakia		rural tourism sector representative
08	Slnečný Hont	External	rural tourism sector representative
09	Slovak Youth Council	External	civil society group dedicated to the youth
10	Minisy of Culture of the Slovak Republic	External	Governmental body
11	Higher Territorial Unit Žilina	External	regional and local development authority

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12	ASYF - Association of Young Farmers of Slovakia	External	CSO representing young farmers
13	Hemp Cluster	External	industrial association of hemp producers and processors (circular bioeconomy)
14	New Edu NGO	External	innovative education solutions, networking, research and transfer of knowledge, advisory, marketing and promotion services
15	Dobrý kraj. Regional Development Agency for Banska Bystrica region	External	coordinator of regional development to improve its socio-economic situation
16	Association of Cities and Municipalities	External	the largest NGO associating and representing cities, towns and urban districts in Slovakia with focus on building and strengthening local self-government and democracy
17	TBS a.s.	External	Farming, food processing and agritourism
18	Free Food, NGO	External	Food waste prevention activities
19	Specialized High School Rakovce	External	Youth issues and education
20	Specialized High School Zeliezovce	External	Youth issues and education
21	Specialized High School Modra	External	Youth issues and education
22	Specialized High School Pruske	External	Youth issues and education
23	Union of Slovak Clusters	External	Technology transfer, innovations and business support
24	Specialized High School Krupina	External	Youth issues and education
25	Zivica	External	NGO for youth issues and education
26	Agrokruh	External	Innovative circular farming technology
27	Vegget microfarm	External	Small family farming business
28	Truly Healthy School	External	NGO supporting and educating school canteens and working with voluntary network of schools
29	Centre for scientific-technical information	External	Support and popularisation of science, research and development
30	Novy dvor Brhlovce	External	Rural tourism
31	Kopek Dolne Kockovce	External	SME size family run bakery introducing innovative technology for bread waste prevention
32	Farma na háji	External	Family farm
33	CEDE	External	NGO
34	IZPI	External	Subsidiary body of the Ministry of Agriculture in charge of AKIS

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			development - research team participates in the activities of working groups for AKIS (advisory services, education and demonstration farms)
35	Alamsun Jablonovce	External	Farmers
36	ADEL Slovakia	External	NGO for youth and education

The relationships between the stakeholders are shown in the following diagram:

Relationships Between Slovak Stakeholders in Rural-Urban Linkages

The diagram illustrates the relationships between Slovak stakeholders involved in rural-urban linkages. It depicts various entities like government bodies, SMEs, farmers, NGOs, research institutions, and others, highlighting how they interact with one another in the context of rural and urban development. The arrows represent the directional flow of influence or collaboration between these stakeholders.

3.2.3.   Vision

Vision for more attractive rural areas represents a new push for making a meaningful difference and hope for revitalization of the Slovak rural areas and as a Polirural project output served as an input document into broader public consultations for consensus building in anticipation of new sources of funding with the aim to improve its impact on the ground.

At the end of the Polirural project, broader consultations started and continued over the following years. A living definition of "Vision statement" was adapted and expanded in the process of those consultations to the current version:

"On the basis of the Vision enshrined in the constitutional law adopted by the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic in 2024, a strategic orientation that takes into account the real needs of the countryside and long-term sustainable support through several financial instruments was ensured, thanks to which the countryside in 2040 is more developed and prosperous with many positive environmental, social, economic , ecological and architectural improvements, on the basis of which the countryside becomes more and more attractive, climate-friendly, almost carbon-neutral, lively and vibrant place to live, work, leisure and invest. Cooperation and support for rural areas is implemented through various public policies across all sectors and levels of public administration. The countryside is one of the priority areas of state interest.

Rural areas are connected to each other and to cities. Traditional rural architecture is preserved and respected in the villages. Internet connectivity has improved across the country. The symbiosis between the cities and the countryside is preserved.

Rural entrepreneurs are leaders in the regions. Support structures are created for them. There are new employment opportunities and new sectors are involved in services, circular economy, and energy. Working from home is much more common through shared spaces in the regions and a significant strengthening of social and health services in the countryside.

Actors are actively, inclusively and transparently involved in the preparation and implementation of public policies and their views are taken into account at all stages, with the flow of information being two-way, bottom-up and top-down, and consultation being timely, constructive, continuous and for the common good of rural areas and their inhabitants. For this purpose, management structures are in place and functioning.

The agricultural-food sector has undergone a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable, ecological and resilient one. People working in agriculture and food production are thriving and are encouraged to continue in this economic field.

No pesticides or chemicals are used to produce the food. Soil quality is improving and its degradation has been averted. GMOs have been completely abolished. Prevention of food waste contributes significantly to strengthening food self-sufficiency. Farmers, grocers and advisors are well trained.

Farmers have the sufficient inputs they need; they have an available market that develops in parallel with farmers adopting new sustainable practices. Adequate prices are ensured for farmers. The global pandemic and subsequent conflict on the eastern border provided a unique opportunity to reboot rural areas in a new, more progressive, sustainable and resilient way. All agricultural production is ecological and Slovakia is the first purely ecologically producing country in Europe.

People living in the countryside are happier, more satisfied, healthier and lead more fulfilling lives.

Science, research, education and transfer of knowledge have gained their respectable place in rural society and serve as a key tool for innovation and development in all sectors of a diversified rural economy.

Sustainable rural tourism and agritourism are developing and thriving.

People actively, passionately and voluntarily participate in decision-making processes that affect them, at all stages, because they can see their own influence right around them. Participation mechanisms are established, well-functioning and supported by sufficient personnel and financial capacities."

The text of the Vision Statement at the end of the Polirural project was following:

Based on the adoption of the "Vision" in constitutional law, the Slovak rural areas in 2040 are an attractive, lively and vibrant place for living, working, leisure and investment thanks to the strategic orientation and long-term sustainable support of the real needs on the ground with the active and inclusive support of all stakeholders and actors involved in all stages. The symbiosis between city and rural areas is safeguarded. The Slovak food system

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has undergone a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable and resilient one. People working in agriculture and food production are thriving. No pesticides or chemicals are being used for food production. GMO was abolished completely in the whole EU. COVID pandemic provided a unique opportunity to restart the rural areas in a new more progressive, sustainable and resilient way. The whole agricultural production is organic. People living in rural areas are happy and content. Science, education and transfer of knowledge have gained their respectful place in the rural society and serve as the key tool for the development across all sectors of diversified rural economy. People actively and voluntarily participate in the decision-making processes that relate to them and at all stages and participatory mechanisms are in place and well-functioning.

3.2.4.   Skills

Develop tools for people in local, regional and national government to develop their skills in terms of working with stakeholders on the ground and actively engaging them in consultation processes in a structured manner. In order to achieve this, short instructional videos and training materials will be developed and distributed to national authorities and focus group meetings will be organised to identify their needs, priorities and tools and methods needed.

3.2.5.   Incentives

Mutually support events of various stakeholders by active participation.

Making stakeholders aware that their contribution is valuable, considered in the decision-making processes and reflected in the policies. That they have a real impact on policies that influence them.

Facilitate observance of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer declared by the United Nations General Assembly by introducing a new category recognizing Rural Woman Leaders awarded yearly by Rural Parliament in Slovakia on the occasion of International Day of Rural Women celebrated on 15 October a day before World Food Day. Consider the organisation of Zero Hunger Run connecting rural and urban areas and people for a good cause and raising awareness and knowledge.

3.2.6.   Resources

Strengthen the role of research and innovation through Horizon projects to deliver upon ambitious green goals by 2030 combined with new forms of governance and collaboration and engagement of citizens.

Crowdfunding startups for farmers was identified and potential collaboration will be explored.

Utilisation of outreach calls to support the pilot in innovations related to the many challenges identified.

3.2.7.   Action Plan (version 0)

The action plan for the Slovak pilot is to be designed to enhance rural areas by fostering cooperation among stakeholders, developing a Digital Innovation Hub (DiH), and contributing to national and EU-level reforms.

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Here are the key phases for its achievement:

1. Preparation and Launch

- **Objectives**: Establish groundwork by identifying key stakeholders and initiating preliminary discussions.
- **Key Activities**:
    - **Assessment**. In the pre-preparatory phase, the evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan and Road Map developed in the Polirural project was undertaken. The outcome is that there was a follow up on the vast majority of tasks and measures proposed and the Monitoring Committee established is functioning and convening on a regular basis.
    - **Stakeholders Engagement.** Identify and engage key stakeholders and actors.
    - **Needs mapping and analysis**: Conduct surveys, interviews or workshops with stakeholders to understand the region's digital skills gaps.
    - **Organise a kick-starting conference** with stakeholders to outline research objectives. To kick start consultation with stakeholders a conference was organised on 16 April 2024 with over 60 people participating under the title "More Attractive Rural Areas". It was co-organized with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Rural Parliament in Slovakia and the Slovak Association for Rural Tourism and Agritourism. Additional challenges were identified and are included below under no. 5 - 15.
    - **Establish formal contacts and collaboration** with stakeholders and actors.
    - **Stimulate formation of an inter-ministerial working group** to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and ensure stakeholder engagement.
    - **Mapping out the position of rural areas** for upcoming Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms and Structural Funds beyond 2027.

2. Co-Development of the Vision, Action Plan, and Roadmap

- **Objectives**: Develop a shared vision and strategic plan to address rural-urban challenges.
- **Key Activities**:
    - **Research Planning.** Develop a comprehensive research plan, including timelines, milestones, and methodologies. Identify potential challenges and develop risk mitigation strategies.
    - **Series of internal consultations** organised with various WP leaders to frame the concrete activities of the pilot.
    - **Regular meetings of pilot partners** organised to track progress and push the formulation of pilot activities forward.
    - **Contribute to the activities related to the development of the national AKIS** (Agricultural Knowledge and Information System) by participating in the working group activities organised by the managing authority.
    - Engage in multi-stakeholder consultations for building a "Vision for More Attractive Rural Areas".
    - Hold conferences to gather input from local communities and national bodies.

3. Implementation

- **Objectives**: Execute the strategic vision and implement key activities.
- **Key Activities**:

- ○ Establish an Agricultural Digital Innovation Hub (DiH) to support digital transformation and sustainability in agriculture.
- ○ Facilitate constitutional and administrative reforms options to enshrine the rural development vision into national law.
- ○ Facilitate national contribution to the EU Rural Pact.

4. Monitoring and Review

- **Objectives**: Evaluate the progress and effectiveness of the implemented measures.
- **Key Activities**:
  - ○ Regular meetings with the monitoring committee to assess the effectiveness of strategies and progress toward the goals.

These phases ensure a structured, consultative, and iterative approach to the Slovak pilot's action plan, aiming for sustainable and impactful rural-urban development.

To further support the Slovak pilot's action plan, several strategic and operational steps can be taken to enhance its effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability. Here are key recommendations:

1. Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement

- **Action**: Continuously involve a wider network of stakeholders, including local communities, private sector entities (e.g., SMEs, agri-businesses), and academia.
- **Improvement**: Establish more robust mechanisms for ongoing collaboration and feedback among stakeholders. This could include regular workshops, digital platforms for continuous communication, and structured feedback loops to ensure all voices are heard.
- **Reason**: Broadening stakeholder engagement ensures that diverse perspectives are integrated, leading to more resilient and locally tailored solutions.
- **Step**: Organise regular multi-stakeholder forums, workshops, and surveys to gather input and maintain open communication. Utilise digital tools to create a collaborative platform where stakeholders can share updates, discuss challenges, and propose solutions in real time.

2. Enhanced Digitalization and Innovation

- **Action**: Accelerate the development and adoption of digital tools, particularly through the Agricultural Digital Innovation Hub (DiH).
- **Reason**: Digital solutions can improve the efficiency and sustainability of agricultural practices, data management, and rural governance.
- **Step**: Offer training programs and digital literacy workshops for farmers, SMEs, and rural businesses to encourage tech adoption.

3. Policy Alignment and Integration

- **Action**: Align the Slovak action plan with national and European policies, especially in areas such as the European Green Deal, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- **Reason**: Integration with broader policy frameworks will secure funding, regulatory support, and long-term sustainability.
- **Step**: Conduct regular reviews to ensure the action plan aligns with evolving EU policies and sustainability targets.

4. Long-Term Funding and Investment

- **Action**: Identify and secure diversified funding sources, including EU grants (e.g., Horizon Europe, CAP), public-private partnerships, and national rural development funds.
- **Reason**: Financial sustainability is critical for the long-term impact of rural development initiatives.
- **Step**: Establish a dedicated team to monitor funding opportunities and develop investment proposals for new projects and innovations.

5. Capacity Building and Training

- **Action**: Provide ongoing training for stakeholders in areas such as sustainability, digitalization, policy implementation, and innovative farming techniques.
- **Reason**: Capacity building will ensure stakeholders are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the action plan successfully.
- **Step**: Implement training sessions, webinars, and capacity-building programs to equip stakeholders with tools for sustainable development.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

- **Action**: Develop a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to track the progress of the action plan and assess the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Reason**: Continuous monitoring ensures that the action plan remains adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges.
- **Step**: Utilise KPIs to regularly assess the impact of the action plan, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement, rural-urban linkages, and digital transformation.

7. Fostering Cross-Regional and International Collaboration

- **Action**: Promote cross-regional collaborations between Slovakia and other regions in the PoliRuralPlus project to share best practices and lessons learned.
- **Reason**: Collaboration with other EU rural pilots will provide valuable insights and opportunities for learning and innovation.
- **Step**: Establish cross-regional partnerships, organise joint conferences, and participate in European rural development networks.

By taking these additional steps, the Slovak pilot's action plan will be better positioned for successful implementation, fostering long-term rural resilience and sustainable development.

The anticipated results of the Slovak pilot have been identified in the initial phase in the following way:

1. Enhancement of cooperation among interested stakeholders and actors.

2. Establish a cross-sectoral governmental platform to break the silos involving various interested stakeholders and actors.
3. Facilitation of the national contribution to the EU Rural Pact.
4. Initiation of Constitutional and Administrative Reform.

Additional challenges identified in the beginning of the PoliRuralPlus project:

5. Increased move of people from urban to rural areas (over the past 20 years, the number of people living in the rural areas increased by 240 000, while 160 000 people disappeared from cities looking for better quality of life offering a calmer environment, clean air, nature and less stress; different lifestyle; lower housing and living costs).
6. Use the potential of an increased number of people with secondary vocational and apprenticeship education in the rural areas for development of rural areas and its economies.
7. Evaluate national legislation and its potential for simplification.
8. Evaluate various partial policies of different ministries with the impact on rural areas.
9. Contribute to AKIS development.
10. Tapping into new sources of funding.
11. Expanding governance.
12. Plans for Net 0 by 2050, LTVRA by 2040 and 30% reduction of emission by 2030 in the agriculture and food sector, with particular focus on organic farming (target: 25% of agricultural land), soil nutrition lost (target: 50% reduction); use of fertilisers (target: 20% reduction); use of chemical pesticides (target: 30% reduction); use of hazardous pesticides (target: 50% reduction) and decline of pollinators is reversed (target: 30% of species and habitats returned).
13. Identify cities and villages with net 0 goals and support them in developing local strategies.
14. Facilitate national contribution to Rural Pact.
15. Facilitate contribution to national consultations on new CAP and Structural Funds after 2027.

The challenges identified in the Polirural project still valid are following:

16. Consider agriculture and rural areas as a strategic sector.
17. Achieve stability and continuity in support and strategic mission-oriented thinking.
18. Improve coordination among different ministries.
19. Increase the efficiency of funds use.
20. Improve technical and professional capacities.
21. Functioning consultation mechanisms.
22. Use pandemic as a driver for restart of rural areas.
23. Establish permanent foresight activities.
24. Settle long lasting land reform.

All these challenges are interconnected and mutually supporting each other.

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3.3. Central Greece

3.3.1. Description

The pilot will provide training in sustainable agritech technologies and promotional services for agritourism. The availability of training options will result in an increased level of digital skills among AKIS actors, enabling them to utilise crucial ICT services with greater speed and efficiency. Through the implementation of promotional strategies and the development of bespoke plans, opportunities will be created for the diversification of agritourism and the identification of financial opportunities to promote both the local agricultural products and the region's rich natural resources. The promotional activities will serve to raise awareness of the local products, while at the same time providing inspiration for potential stakeholders.

3.3.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Business Support Center Boiotias	External	Guidance and support for local businesses, particularly in the agri-tourism and agri-tech sectors.
02	Business Support Center Fokidas	External	Guidance and support for local businesses, particularly in the agri-tourism and agri-tech sectors.
03	Business Support Center Eurytanias	External	Guidance and support for local businesses, particularly in the agri-tourism and agri-tech sectors.
04	Business Support Center Evoia	External	Guidance and support for local businesses, particularly in the agri-tourism and agri-tech sectors.
05	Business Support Center Fthiotida	External	Guidance and support for local businesses, particularly in the agri-tourism and agri-tech sectors.
06	Union Of Agriculturalists Of Fthiotida	External	Representation and promotion of farmers' interests and may be involved in the promotion of agritech practices.
07	Hellenic Agricultural Organization "Demeter" of Boiotia	External	Provision of expertise and training in agricultural practices, with a likely focus on sustainable agriculture.
08	Farming Association of Pistacio	External	Promotion of the cultivation and marketing of pistachios, possibly as part of agricultural diversification.
09	Agrifood Partnership of Central Greece (APCG)	External	Focus on improving the food and agriculture sector, potentially driving innovation in agritech.
10	Agronomists' Association of Fthiotida & Evritania	External	Supporting sustainable farming practices by providing agronomic expertise.
11	Agricultural Consulting Company	External	Providing specialist advice on modern farming practices and helping farmers to adopt new technologies.

12	Journalist/ Media	External	Helping to promote the Pilot's activities and help to raise awareness through media coverage.
13	Pork Meat Processing Unit	External	A key player in the local agricultural value chain, focusing on the processing and marketing of meat products.
14	PSTE - Tourism Project Officer	External	Responsible for the tourism-related aspects of the project, helping to develop agri-tourism.
15	PSTE - Agriculture Development Officer	External	Oversight of the agricultural components of the pilot and promotion of sustainable agritech solutions.
16	PSTE - European Research Project Consultant	External	Guidance on the alignment of the pilot project with EU research and funding opportunities.
17	Cultural Union of Lianokladi	External	Promotion of local culture, possibly through the integration of cultural tourism with farm tourism.
18	Farmers - New comers	External	Representation of new farmers
19	Agronomists	External	Support modern, sustainable farming practices by providing agricultural expertise.
20	Stilida Agricultural Oil Cooperative	External	Representation of the olive oil sector, focusing on improving production and marketing.
21	Evritania Chamber of Commerce and Industry	External	Business support and development of commercial and industrial opportunities related to agri-tourism and agri-tech.
22	Fokida Chamber of Commerce and Industry	External	Business support and development of commercial and industrial opportunities related to agri-tourism and agri-tech.
23	Viotia Chamber of Commerce and Industry	External	Business support and development of commercial and industrial opportunities related to agri-tourism and agri-tech.
24	Evia Chamber of Commerce and Industry	External	Business support and development of commercial and industrial opportunities related to agri-tourism and agri-tech.
25	Fthiotida Chamber of Commerce and Industry	External	Business support and development of commercial and industrial opportunities related to agri-tourism and agri-tech.
26	OPEKEPE - Regional Unit of Central Greece	External	Administration of agricultural payments and support programmes, and facilitation of the financial aspects of the pilot project.

3.3.3.   Vision

The objective of the Greek pilot is to integrate the successful outcomes achieved through the Polirural project. This includes the identification of stakeholders' needs.

During this process, the vision of this pilot should contribute to the LTVRA. This implies that the pilot will have contributed to the development of a more robust vision, which will seek to foster sustainable agritech and promote agritourism through targeted training and promotional services. The following section presents a detailed vision of how the pilot will contribute to various strategic goals and EU policies.

The provision of training in sustainable agritech technologies will facilitate the enhancement of digital skills among AKIS actors. This upskilling will empower local farmers and agritourism operators to utilise ICT services in an effective manner, thereby enhancing their operational capabilities and resilience. Furthermore, the implementation of agritech solutions will result in enhanced agricultural practices, which will lead to improved agricultural productivity and sustainability. This, in turn, will contribute to the strengthening of the agricultural sector in Central Greece and its increased self-reliance.

Furthermore, the connectivity of rural areas can be enhanced by increasing the digital skills of AKIS actors, which will facilitate better connectivity and integration with broader agricultural networks and markets. This will ensure that local stakeholders remain well-informed and connected to the latest developments in agritech and agritourism. Furthermore, the pilot will facilitate more effective engagement between local stakeholders and regional, national, and EU-wide agritourism and agritech initiatives, thereby fostering a more interconnected community. With regard to the resilience of the task, the pilot in Central Greece can be demonstrated to be resilient, through the diversification of agritourism. The promotion of agritourism and the creation of bespoke plans will enable farmers and local businesses to develop alternative income streams, thereby enhancing their economic resilience against market fluctuations and environmental challenges. The training in sustainable agritech will encourage the adoption of practices that are more environmentally friendly and resilient to climate change. This will help to secure the long-term viability of local agriculture. Ultimately, the pilot will contribute to this aspect of prosperity, based on the economic opportunities that will be created. The pilot will uncover financial opportunities to promote local agricultural products and natural resources, driving economic growth and prosperity in the region. Finally, the expansion of the market will serve to further stimulate the local economy, as a result of the promotional activities. Consequently, the implementation of these activities will result in greater awareness of local products, potentially attracting more tourists and increasing demand for local produce, thereby boosting the local economy.

The Greek pilot in Central Greece is set to contribute to the New European Bauhaus (NEB), as per the Ministry of Museums and Sports. This initiative will present the landscape of Central Greece, which connects the attractive rural areas. Furthermore, tourism is a fundamental aspect and source of income for the region, which also combines sea, mountain landscapes, rural areas and contributes to NEB's vision.

3.3.4.   Skills

As an overall ambition is to develop skills for the stakeholders. In Central Greece there is lack of experience on digital skills and there is no mature ICT infrastructure (e.g., Internet coverage) operating in the region to support crucial sectors of the regional economy i.e., agriculture, tourism, regional services. The limited personnel capacity of regional authorities, the limited budget combined with the complex bureaucratic procedures hinder the development of well organised training programmes. To achieve the desired vision, it is essential to invest in ICT skills, with a particular focus on agriculture. This includes the development of precision farming technology and the implementation of food quality tracking. In order to maintain the human capital of the local workforce and to

better align it with the requirements of the agri-food market, Central Greece must implement new training and skills acquisition initiatives.

3.3.5.   Incentives

The Greek Pilot in Central Greece aims to address key regional challenges by offering substantial incentives for the adoption of sustainable agritech technologies and the development of agritourism. One significant incentive is the comprehensive training programmes designed to enhance digital skills among AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) actors, thereby facilitating more efficient utilisation of crucial ICT services. This initiative is of particular importance in a region where the agricultural sector frequently encounters difficulties in adopting modern agritech solutions due to a lack of digital literacy. Furthermore, the pilot offers promotional services designed to diversify agritourism, creating new financial opportunities and promoting local agricultural products in conjunction with the region's rich natural resources. Such promotional activities serve to raise awareness about local products, while also inspiring potential stakeholders to invest in the region.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging digital solutions, the Greek Pilot encourages the development of a more resilient and prosperous agricultural economy, thereby fostering regional development and economic diversification.

3.3.6.   Resources

In order to address a number of critical challenges, the Greek Pilot in Central Greece is implementing targeted initiatives and regional action plans. The pilot will rely on a combination of resources and partnerships in order to achieve its objectives. These include:
- Financial resources will be sourced from EU funding mechanisms, such as Horizon projects, which will provide support to training programmes, agritech solutions and promotional services.
- The human resources required for the project will be sourced from local actors within the AKIS network, agritourism stakeholders, and cooperatives. The involvement of local farmers, cooperatives, and regional authorities in the initiative will ensure that the activities are tailored to local needs and foster active participation.
- The deployment of outreach calls will facilitate the acquisition of further engagement and resources for the pilot project. It is anticipated that these outreach activities will prove instrumental in engaging a broader range of stakeholders and enhancing the visibility of the project.
- Technological resources will be enhanced through the establishment of partnerships with external organisations or institutions, with the objective of addressing the current limitations in ICT infrastructure and ensuring access to the necessary digital tools.

3.3.7.   Action Plan

The action plan will set out the steps needed to achieve the pilot's objectives:

Phase 1: Collaboration & Assessment

- Stakeholder engagement: Identify and engage key stakeholders, including farmers, cooperatives, policy makers and tourism representatives.

- Needs mapping and analysis: Conduct surveys, interviews or workshops with stakeholders to understand the region's digital skills gaps and agritourism opportunities.

Phase 2: Training
- Digital skills training: Deliver training programmes aimed at improving digital literacy and ICT skills among AKIS stakeholders.

Phase 3: Policy recommendations
- Research Findings & Recommendations: Based on research findings, formulate policy recommendations addressing agritourism and agritech challenges and opportunities.

Phase 4: Promotion
- Agritourism Diversification: Develop promotional strategies to market the agritourism and agricultural products of Central Greece, taking advantage of the natural and cultural assets of the region.
- Outreach initiatives: Use promotional campaigns to raise awareness among potential stakeholders.

Phase 5: Monitoring
- Performance evaluation: Monitor the progress of digital skills development

3.4.   Apulia, Italy

3.4.1.   Description

The main scope of the pilot is to reduce the information asymmetry between the producer of agri-food products and the consumer. Too often, in fact, intermediaries who work between these two main players don't share or may reduce knowledge about consumer needs and the characteristics of local products. These problems are similar in all EU member states and fair-trade groups are increasingly being created to contrast this issue. Therefore, the model of the pilot project in the Apulia region could materialise in a large fair-trade group where entrepreneurs and consumers can talk to each other and share their needs, expectations and activities.

3.4.2.   Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	LAG PONTELAMA	External	Support for local development - management of the Local Action Plan of the Regional Development Programs
02	LAG MURGIA PIU'	External	Support for local development - management of the Local Action Plan of the Regional Development Programs
03	Confagricoltura Bari	External	Organisation representing and protecting agricultural businesses in the metropolitan area of Bari and the province of Barletta-Andria-Trani.

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04	Aproli Bari	External	Producers' Organization that intends to organise the offer of olive producers to make them more competitive.
05	Pellegrino 1890	External	Olive oil mill that has used an important ISCC PLUS sustainability certification protocol
06	CIA	External	CIA PUGLIA is an organisation representing and protecting agricultural businesses in the Apulia Region.
07	Confcooperative Puglia	External	Confcooperative Puglia is an organisation representing and protecting cooperative businesses in the Puglia Region.
08	Agriturismo Madonna dell'Assunta	External	Agritourism, educational farm located on the high ground of the Murgia.
09	University of Foggia	External	Academic organisation with strong research experience in Short Food Supply Chain
10	University of Bari	External	Scientific research and innovation capacity in the rural sector
	Azienda agricola Coppicelle	External	Short supply chain agricultural company that adopts the ISCC Plus sustainability certification system
12	Leader soc. cooperativa	External	Leader is a company that deals with training, facilitated finance, digital Innovation, business startups, research and development, internationalisation
13	Masseria Redenta	External	Innovative educational farm that works on programmes for bringing young generations, and in particular children, closer to nature
14	Masseria Storica Pilapalucci	External	A local farm surrounded by oak, almond and olive groves, hosts a charming agritourism, oriented towards the promotion of typical local products and wellness.

*This is just an initial list to provide an overview of the type of stakeholders the pilot aims to involve in. Similar categories will be identified throughout the project.

3.4.3. Vision

The Italian pilot revolves around the opportunity of creating closer connections between producers and consumers, with a particular effort in facilitating direct relations with urban dwellers.

The development and/or innovation of Short Food Supply Chain models has been found as a strategic activity to foster linkages between rural and urban areas, which can consistently contribute to meet and support the objectives of multiple European policies and programmes.

Starting from the Long-Term vision for Rural Areas and the New European Bauhaus, the pilot on SFSC models will contribute to:

- Create a stronger and pioneer region in terms of knowledge and innovation capacity in the short food supply chain, with the development and/or promotion of collaboration frameworks for direct selling between rural and urban areas

- a more connected region, not only in relation to economic and logistic arrangements but also in terms of local/regional networks with the engagement of multiple actors such as farmers, advisors, academics, food companies, and local agencies
- Identify resilience approaches in response to the globalisation of the food supply chain, which constantly undermines local food identity and production. Particular attention will be given to the promotion of local and seasonal products as well as on activities that enhance biodiversity and protect the natural ecosystem.
- Express the economic and social potential of short food supply chain models through the development of sustainable and prosperous activities that allow better margins for the producers and high-quality food for the consumers, with the aim of creating a sense of attachment and identity with the territory
- Overcome social and digital divide with the identification of solutions that allow all consumers to access local and quality food, but also the opportunity to connect with the local producers and the natural environment

The initiative of creating closer connections between producers and consumers in rural-urban areas is also aimed to identify and promote the contribution of SFSCs to environmental and climate policies such as Net Zero, Fit for 55, the Green Deal, SDGs, and more. To this end, the pilot will support the following approaches:

- Focus on the first-mile delivery, where consumers can buy directly from the local farms, or the food can be delivered within a limited distance
- Identify effective and efficient logistic arrangements to deliver local food in urban (or near urban) areas
- Look for food productions that promote and/or enhance the local biodiversity and allow the natural ecosystem to flourish, including regenerative agriculture
- Explore solutions that encourage the adoption of activities for circular and renewable resources along the entire supply chain, from production to consumption
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge for the development of local policies for a more inclusive, resilient and environmentally friendly food supply chain

Contribution to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA):

The Italian pilot in Apulia contributes to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) through its emphasis on short food supply chains (SFSC) and the creation of closer links between rural producers and urban consumers. By promoting sustainable local food systems and biodiversity, the pilot integrates NEB's principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics. The pilot fosters collaboration between farmers, advisors, academics, and food companies, developing frameworks for direct sales that preserve local food identity, enhance biodiversity, and protect natural ecosystems, aligning with the NEB's goals.

Besides, the Italian pilot supports the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) by encouraging rural-urban synergies through SFSC models that strengthen the rural economy. It promotes resilience by focusing on local and seasonal food production, which helps mitigate the impact of globalisation on rural communities. Additionally, the pilot enhances connectivity through regional collaboration and improves access to local quality food, supporting sustainable development and strengthening the identity of rural areas.

Eventually, the Pilot action will provide local institutions and decision makers with a better knowledge about the potential of SFSC for reviving rural communities and activities (economic, social and environmental), and which can be used as an input for the development of local and regional policies.

3.4.4. Skills

The opportunity to develop and establish Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) models that create stronger connections and better synergies between urban and rural areas, relies on the knowledge and innovation capacity of the different stakeholders operating in the territory. In particular, it is essential to enhance knowledge flow and strengthen the skills of the key actors involved in this process. Some of the main competences/knowledge promoted by the pilot will include, but are not limited to:

- Knowledge on the type of SFSC models
- Promotion and marketing of local products
- Identification of consumers needs
- Knowledge on consumers behaviour
- Digital literacy and experience with digital solutions (such as apps)
- Networking and regional collaboration frameworks

3.4.5. Incentives

The establishment or innovation of SFSC models can trigger multiple incentives for the different actors involved, such as:
- Improve profit margins for farmers/producers involved in direct sales
- Provide local, healthy and seasonal food to consumers located in urban areas
- Enhance awareness of the consumers about local food and the farming activities
- Encourage consumers, especially from urban areas, to visit the farms and learn about the ecosystem and spend time in nature
- Improve job quality and opportunities with professional that own adequate advisory skills to support SFSC models

3.4.6. Resources

The implementation of the SFSC pilot will require the combination of different resources such as financial, human, logistics and digital.

Financial resources: In the start-up phase SFSC models will be established and/or implemented starting from the financial resources provided at the different stages of the PoliRuralPlus project. During the implementation, the local actors will also explore the opportunities for accessing regional and national funding based on the type of models or structures they will need/require to set up.

Human resources: The development of SFSC models/strategies will require the involvement and support of professionals from different stakeholders/organisations operating in the pilot region. Besides the pilot leader "TINADA", additional experts will be invited from the Local Action Groups, the regional Universities, farmers and agricultural companies, advisors, and from local agencies and schools.

Logistics and digital resources: The pilot will concentrate on the organisational aspects of the SFSC, including digital-friendly solutions that improve and facilitate the connection between consumers and producers. The

planning phase will serve as an opportunity to identify organisations, companies or experts that can provide the most adequate equipment, materials, software and/or services that best align with the SFSC models.

3.4.7. Action Plan

Tinada has been working for years in local development with the collaboration and engagement of various local actors.

Starting from this experience, the pilot will work to facilitate connections among different stakeholders (Farmers' associations, producers' organisations, districts, LAGs, municipal associations, Schools etc.) for the development of SFCS strategies/models at local and regional level.

The **Action Plan** will revolve around three essential activities:

1) **Web page**: it is intended to create a "web page" (within the Tinada website) to raise awareness of local producers and especially those who have started an e-commerce site as a short supply chain tool. This will facilitate interaction with consumers from urban and/or peri-urban areas.
2) **Meetings** and **Networking** activities involving:
    a) producers both remotely and in person to raise awareness of production models and products.
    b) experts in the sector to raise awareness of the nutraceutical properties of local products.

3) **Business model**: Design of SFSC models or improvement/expansion of existing SFSC models.

We have defined the stages of the Action plan as follows:

Phase 1: Initiation
- Creation of the core working group with the identification of the main experts and collaborators (researchers, entrepreneurs, consultants, representatives of local organisations/agencies)

Phase 2: Roadmap planning
- Definition of the Research methodology and activities
- Identification of additional stakeholders to be involved in the project such as SFSC chain experts, producers, farmers' organisations, tech companies, and local institutions
- Creation of a Roadmap with a calendar for the action plan

Phase 3: Stakeholder engagement and networking
- Meetings and/or seminars to facilitate the dialogue with the main actors identified in phase 2
- Co-development of activities and strategy with producers and food experts, in particular:
    a) Producers, both remotely and in person, to raise awareness about production models and products
    b) Industry experts to raise awareness of the nutraceutical properties of local products

Phase 4: Implementation of research activities
- Business model development: Design of SFSC schemes or improve/expand existing models of direct selling between producers and consumers

Phase 5: Monitoring and analysis of the results
- Collection of data and feedback from the main actors involved in the research activities
- Assessment of the SFSC models and network developed during the project

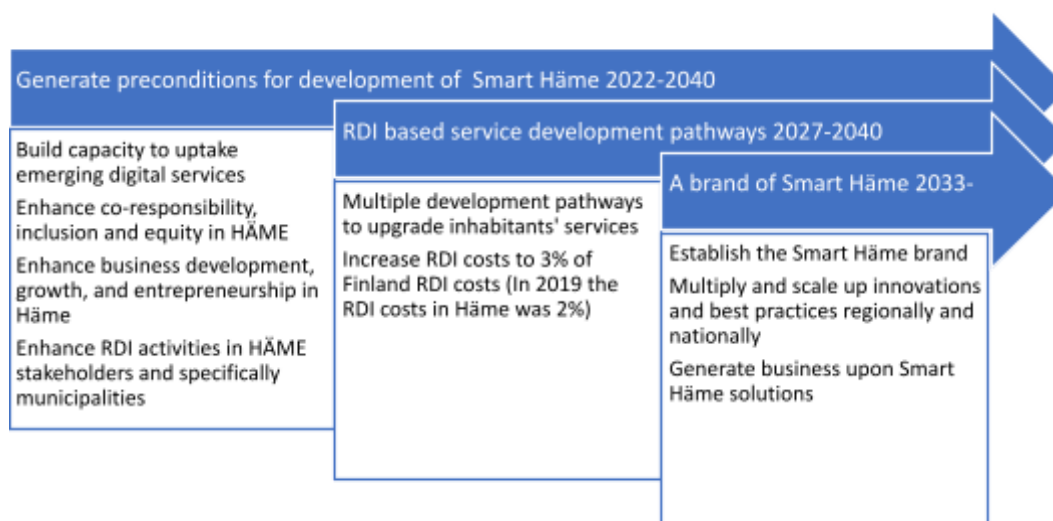**Phase 6: Communication and knowledge transfer**
- Seminar with local actors and stakeholders
- Creation of a "web page" (within the Tinada website) to raise awareness of local producers and especially those who have started an e-commerce site as a short supply chain tool. This will facilitate interaction with consumers in urban and/or peri-urban areas.
- Development of a white paper and policy proposals addressed to representatives of local and regional institutions

3.5. Mallusjoki, Finland
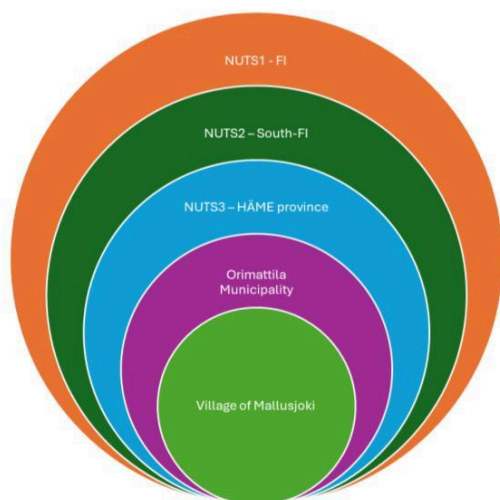
3.5.1. Description

Background from PoliRural to PoliRuralPlus: In the previous PoliRural project the Finnish pilot was addressed to the Häme region which covers two NUTS3 provinces: Kanta-Häme and Päijät-Häme. The current state in Häme region was summarised into the following two issues: 1) Employment and living prospects do not attract graduated and working people (21-40 years) in rural areas of Häme. A trend to move away from the area is strong. 2) Häme rural communities service network is shrinking. To attract newcomers, graduated and working people (21-40) the feasible public and private services are vital.

The below rather generic roadmap gives a framework and input for the new PoliRuralPlus project, in which the Mallusjoki pilot in the Häme region will adopt the feasible and valid elements of the roadmap and develop them further to be more specific and addressed to the pilot region.

From the previous PoliRural project - Häme region roadmap 2022-2040

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Positioning and characterization: The Finnish pilot, the Mallusjoki Village, represents almost the smallest unit in the society. Only the family is a smaller unit. Above the village unit there is a 5-floor high ivory tower of governance levels: the municipality of Orimattila, the province of Päijät-Häme (NUTS2), the territory of Southern Finland (NUTS1), the country of Finland, and lastly the European Union. In addition, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) brings in one transversal dimension into rural area governance and development[3].

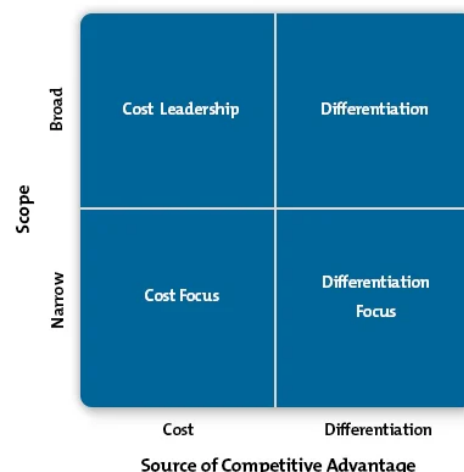Mallusjoki is a representative and typical Finnish village. There are more than 100 similar villages in the Päijät-Häme province, and more than 3000 in the whole of Finland. Agriculture and forest landscape as well as traditional and cultural events that reflect the community spirit and intellectual landscape of the inhabitants are the typical common features of rural communities and villages.

In order to stand out of the crowd, the Mallusjoki village strategy is **to differentiate and focus** on particular niche markets.

Theme: Mallusjoki pilot's theme is event tourism, and more specifically rural event tourism in the creative sector. Event tourism is essentially any tourism that relates to events. Events come in all shapes and sizes- they can be large scale events or small events, private events or public events. Rural event tourism can bring income and visibility to the community and the surrounding ecosystem adding vibrancy and economic viability of the rural area at large.

Mallusjoki pilot objectives are:
- to improve rural-urban cooperation and interaction through Rural Event Industry Ecosystem actions which increase people-, information- and material flows between urban and rural areas.
- to kick-off cooperations, open dialogues and provide constructive initiations and feedback to national (NUTS1), territorial (NUTS2) and regional (NUTS3) development actors about grass root (village) rural development.
- to strengthen and enlarge resources that are addressed to the Rural Event Industry Ecosystem. The resources are e.g. funding, premises, equipment, human skills, methods, and fame and visibility.
- to deliver a vision for Mallusjoki village 2040 and Mallusjoki Youth Association and an actionable strategy which responds to socio-environmental disparities and fosters sustainable growth.

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[3] CAP in rural development, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en

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3.5.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	City of Orimattila	External	Regional & Local Development
02	Regional Council of Päijät-Häme	External	Regional & Local Development
03	Finnish Village Movement Association	External	Community work:Regional & Local Development
04	Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment	External	Regional & Local Development
05	Local Action Group - Päijänne Leader	External	Regional & Local Development
06	Lappeenrannan-Lahden Technical University (LUT)	External	Research, development and innovation, and education
07	Häme University of Applied Sciences	External	Research, development and innovation, and education
08	City of Hämeenlinna	External	Environment & Bioresources
09	Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Orimattila	External	Community work: Regional & Local Development
10	Finnish Red Cross, Orimattila	External	Regional & Local Development
11	Finnish Youth Association SNS, Karkkula	External	Youth issues & Education
12	Wellamo Community College	External	Adult Education
13	Eerolan Hunaja - Honey producer	External	Business & Farming
14	Southern Finland Youth Association	External	Youth issues & Education
15	Creative arts: Pia Simonen photography	External	Creative arts: Business & Farming
16	Creative arts:FotoHannele	External	Creative arts: Business & Farming

17	Creative arts:Tapani Kokko	External	Creative arts: Business & Farming
18	The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland	External	National, Regional & Local Development
19	Finnish Food Authority	External	National, Regional & Local Development

3.5.3. Vision of the region 2040

Mallusjoki region vision 2040

1. Cultural Preservation and Community Empowerment (Strong - Resilient)

- Community Engagement: Active participation of all residents in planning and implementing initiatives.
- Heritage Sites: Preservation of historic buildings and sites, integrating them into daily village life and promoting cultural heritage.
- Cultural Activities: Regular cultural events, festivals, and workshops that celebrate and preserve local traditions and crafts, strengthening community bonds and attracting visitors.
- Health and Wellbeing Programs: Community initiatives promoting physical and mental health, such as group fitness activities, mental health support groups, and wellness workshops.
- Community Learning Environment: An environment that serves as a continuous learning space for children, youngsters and adults offering courses, workshops and events in sustainable living, technology, arts, and crafts.
- Community Spaces: A central community hall for events, meetings, and social activities, fostering a strong sense of community.
- Emergency Preparedness: Community-led training programs and resources for disaster preparedness and response, including first aid and emergency protocols.

2. Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Tourism (Prosperous - Connected)

- Rural Event Industry Ecosystem: Operational and beneficial cooperation platform which is orchestrated by Mallusjoki Youth Association. Improved rural-urban cooperation and interaction through Rural Event Industry Ecosystem actions which increase people-, information- and material flows between urban and rural areas.
- Local Agriculture: Small-scale organic farms and community gardens provide most of the village's food, with surplus produce sold at local markets or through cooperative schemes.
- Craftsmanship and Small Enterprises: Local craftspeople and entrepreneurs create goods and services, also digital, that cater to both residents and tourists, promoting local craftsmanship.
- Sustainable Tourism: A small-scale eco-tourism program offers unique experiences like guided nature walks, cultural workshops, and stays in eco-friendly accommodations.
- Smart Village Initiatives: Implementing simple smart technologies in homes for energy management, security, and community connectivity. Platform for entrepreneurs delivering new solutions enabling them

to work through digital channels. Smart, scalable technology solutions to enhance quality of life without overwhelming the small community.

3. Sustainable Infrastructure and environment (Resilient - Strong)

- Sustainable Practices: Emphasis on sustainability in every aspect of village life, from housing to agriculture to waste management.
- Eco-Friendly Housing: All homes are energy-efficient and use renewable energy sources such as solar panels and small-scale wind turbines.
- Smart Energy Solutions: A community-wide initiative for energy efficiency, including smart metres and energy storage systems, allows for optimal use of locally generated renewable energy.
- Zero-Waste Village: Implementing robust recycling, composting, and waste management programs aiming towards zero waste.

Mallusjoki region vision 2040 contribution to the NEB (New European Bauhaus)

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative and the Mallusjoki Region Vision 2040 share several core values and goals, making them inherently linked. The shared values are sustainability, community and beauty. Both NEB and the Mallusjoki Region vision emphasise sustainable practices in all aspects of life, from housing and energy to agriculture and waste management. Both initiatives prioritise multi-actor approach, community engagement and empowerment. NEB focuses on creating beautiful and inspiring living spaces whereas the Mallusjoki Region vision promotes preserving cultural heritage, creative arts, local traditions, and rural landscape.

NEB's focus on sustainability aligns with the vision's goal of a Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment. NEB's call for co-creation resonates with the vision's emphasis on Community Learning Environment. NEB's bridge between science and art connects with the vision's Cultural Preservation and Community Empowerment.

Contribution to other EU policies (Net Zero, Fit for 55, EU missions, a just transition...)

The Mallusjoki Region vision 2040 aligns with Net Zero, Fit for 55, EU missions, and a just transition, in the following ways:

Net Zero by 2050: The vision's emphasis on Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment, including eco-friendly housing, smart energy solutions, and a zero-waste village, directly contributes to achieving the EU's goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Fit for 55: The Fit for 55 package aims for a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The Mallusjoki region's focus on sustainable practices across various sectors aligns with this target. The vision's Smart Energy Solutions with renewable energy sources and energy efficiency measures directly address the Fit for 55 goals.

EU Missions: The EU Missions on climate change, clean cities, and healthy oceans can be supported by the Mallusjoki Region's vision. The focus on local agriculture and sustainable tourism can contribute to the mission for a healthy and resilient food system and healthy oceans.

Just Transition: The vision's commitment to Community Engagement ensures a just transition for all residents. Involving the community in planning and implementing sustainable solutions empowers them and avoids potential negative impacts. The Community Learning Environment can provide training and upskilling opportunities to prepare residents for the green job market emerging from the just transition.

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<u>Need for urban-rural policy coordination and cooperation</u>
Mallusjoki region is likely to benefit from assistance in urban-rural policy coordination and cooperation to achieve their Vision 2040.

Mallusjärvi Region will need external expertise and resources for integrated territorial development. For example, with regard to the Smart Village initiative, Mallusjoki Region needs to seek best practices from other regions that have implemented similar projects. When it comes to the Rural Event Industry Ecosystem, Mallusjoki region needs to collaborate with nearby towns and cities to build a more robust tourism industry.

Mallusjoki Region will explore EU programmes that provide funding for projects that are in line with Mallusjoki's goals of territorial cohesion and sustainable development.

3.5.4. Skills to carry out the pilot and to reach out the vision of the region

Core Skills Required:

1. Rural Event Industry Know-How
   - Organising and managing rural events.
   - Coordinating with vendors, stakeholders, and participants.
2. Community Engagement
   - Building community sense and community power.
   - Stakeholder engagement and communication.
3. Project Management
   - Planning, organising, and managing resources.
   - Overseeing project timelines, deliverables, and milestones.
4. Business Development
   - Developing business plans and strategies.
   - Mentorship to access funding.
5. Digital Skills
   - Digital marketing tools and platforms.
   - E-commerce and online sales strategies.
6. Agricultural Expertise
   - Knowledge of the local food industry.
   - Development and adoption of innovations in farming.

Skill Matrix for reaching the vision 2040

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Skill

	Person	Producer	Local roots over generations	Restaurant Manager	Security Manager	Construction Expert	Project Manager	Executive Director	Senior entrepreneur	Busines Developer	Artist	Coach	Health Care Specialist	Accommodation Manager
Expertise in	Local region		x											
	Community Engagement		x					x						
	Event industry	x												
	Event tourism	x												
	Customer service	x												
	Marketing/sales	x												
	Business Development								x	x				
	Innovation			x				x	x					
	Project Management						x							
	Restaurant Management			x										
	Hygiene													
	Security				x									
	Community Spaces	x	x			x	x	x						
	Heritage Sites		x											
	Creative Arts	x									x			
	Health and Wellbeing			x								x	x	
	Learning							x			x	x		
	Emergency Preparedness												x	
	Sustainability			x				x						
	Local Agriculture		x	x										
	Accommodation		x											x
	Digital Tools						x	x						
Networking (rural-urban)	Municipality of Orimattila						x	x						
	NUTS3 (Päijät-Häme)						x	x						
	NUTS2 (southerns Finland)						x	x						
	NUTS1 (Finland)						x	x						
	EU						x	x						
	Food industry			x										
Fund raising	EU						x			x				
	NUTS1 (Finland)						x			x				
	NUTS2 (southerns Finland)						x			x				
	NUTS3 (Päijät-Häme)						x			x				
Policy level (legislation, funding, regulation) which aim to direct e.g. rural-urban interaction, regional- and municipality development, tourism and other businesses in rural areas, and rural villages futures	National policies						x			x				
	Regional policies						x			x				

Identified Skill Gaps:

1. Lack of digital business skills among rural entrepreneurs.
2. Need for enhanced project management and business development expertise.

3.5.5. Incentives

Quality of Life: The inhabitants of Mallusjoki village are motivated to influence the future of Mallusjoki village through Mallusjoki Youth Association's innovative actions. The inhabitants' goal is to keep the village attractive, lively and inhabited, and a good place to work and live for current inhabitants and newcomers.

Funding and grants: The Finnish government provides funding and grants to support entrepreneurs, social and culture initiatives, diversification of rural economies, infrastructure development and capacity building.

- **Entrepreneurship support:** Initiatives to support entrepreneurship and small businesses play a vital role in rural development. This includes access to Lahti Region Development's business development services, training, mentoring, and ELY-keskus - Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment's financial support for startups and SMEs in rural areas.
- **Social and cultural initiatives:** Supporting social cohesion and cultural vitality is an integral part of rural development. Päijänne-Leader's initiatives and funding promote community engagement, cultural heritage preservation, and recreational activities contribute to the overall well-being and attractiveness of rural areas.

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- **Diversification of rural economies:** Lahti Region Development, ELY-keskus - Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment and Päijänne-Leader, and Regional Council of Päijät-Häme encourage diversification beyond traditional sectors like agriculture and forestry to create new economic opportunities in rural Finland. This may involve promoting tourism, renewable energy projects, agri-food processing, and other innovative industries.
- **Infrastructure development**: Investments in infrastructure such as roads, broadband internet, and public services are crucial for rural development. The Finnish government, ministries and regional authorities such as ELY-keskus - Centre for Economic Development allocate resources to improve connectivity and accessibility in rural areas, thereby attracting businesses and residents.
- **Education and training opportunities:** Access to quality education and life-long vocational training is critical for empowering rural residents with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in modern economies. Finland invests in education and lifelong learning initiatives to ensure that rural communities have opportunities for personal and professional development. The most relevant educational institutions are Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT, Applied Science of University LAB and Salpaus.

Regional Collaboration and Networks: Encouraging collaboration among rural communities, businesses, and organisations can amplify resources and expertise, leading to more effective development outcomes. Regional networks can facilitate knowledge-sharing, joint initiatives, and collective problem-solving.

Promotion of Remote Work and Telecommuting: Remote work opportunities enable individuals to live in rural areas while accessing employment opportunities in urban centres or global markets. Supporting telecommuting through infrastructure investment and flexible work policies can revitalise rural economies.

Tax Incentives: Governments can offer tax breaks or incentives to attract businesses to rural areas. These could include reduced corporate taxes, property tax exemptions, or tax credits for job creation in rural regions.

Innovation and Research Hubs: Establishing innovation centres, research institutions, or technology parks in rural areas can stimulate entrepreneurship, attract talent, and diversify the local economy. Typically, the innovation and research hubs are run by universities such as Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT, Applied Science of University LAB and Salpaus.

Digitalization and Innovation: Embracing digitalization and innovation is essential for enhancing the competitiveness of rural businesses and improving the quality of life for residents. Finland promotes the adoption of digital technologies, such as IoT (Internet of Things), AI (Artificial Intelligence), and smart solutions, to optimise agricultural practices, streamline services, and create new economic opportunities in rural areas. In Orimattila municipality there is a new initiative to establish a datacentre[4] which would empower and spark the region.

Smart Specialization Strategy: Finland has adopted a smart specialisation strategy that identifies and supports the strengths and potential of different regions. By focusing on areas where regions have a competitive advantage, such as technology, innovation, or natural resources, this approach encourages targeted investments and collaboration to drive economic growth in rural areas. For example, the Päijät-Häme region is focusing on food and drinks.

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[4] Data center in Orimattila, Finland, https://www.seutuneloset.fi/paikalliset/6476632

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3.5.6. Resources

The Mallusjoki pilot reaches out, engages and exploits the following human and tangible resources: Mallusjoki village inhabitants and summer guests, customers of rural events arranged by Mallusjoki Youth Association, premises, and the Rural Event Ecosystem.

Mallusjoki Youth Association is the dynamo and centre of the village. It embraces about 70 % of the village inhabitants; elderly, working people, youth and children. Mallusjoki Youth Association arranges free of charge culture, arts, sports, outdoor events for inhabitants and summer guests.

The free of charge events are funded by multiple fee-based culture events which are addressed to customers which live in southern Finland. The fee-based events gather annually 2800 customers from nearby municipalities and cities to visit in Mallusjoki.

The essential resource for the Mallusjoki Youth Association is the premises that is the Youth Association House. It was built in 1916. The house was renovated between 1973 and 1978 and modernised in the 1990s. The hall equipped with a stage can accommodate about 180-220 people, depending on how tightly you want to sit. The house has a separate kitchen, restaurant side and indoor toilets. Hobby groups and events are held at the Youth Association House throughout the year.

The Mallusjoki Rural Event Ecosystem consists of over 50 product and service providers from Orimattila municipality, Päijät-Häme region, Southern Finland, and beyond.

External stakeholders that support and advance rural and regional development are considered to provide resources for the Mallusjoki pilot such as networks e.g. Finnish Villages and Finnish Youth Association, additional funding opportunities e.g. European Social Funding, European Regional Development Fund, Leader program, and opportunities for capacity building and training at universities and vocational continuous training.

PoliRuralPilot secures financial resources for the period 2023-2026. During the project time frame and with the grant the below action plan is implemented. The execution of the action plan and achieving anticipated results mirror the first milestone in the pathway to the Mallusjoki Village Vision 2040.

PoliRuralPlus open calls will be managed by work package 6. Mallusjoki Pilot will define the scope and challenges of the third-party open call projects. Thus, the third-party projects will respond to Mallusjoki requirements and needs and bring in external resources and competences as well as solutions.

3.5.7. Action Plan

Methodology: The Mallusjoki pilot has chosen to apply the OODA loop methodology to guide the internal work process associated with the Mallusjoki pilot's eight (8) work packages listed below.
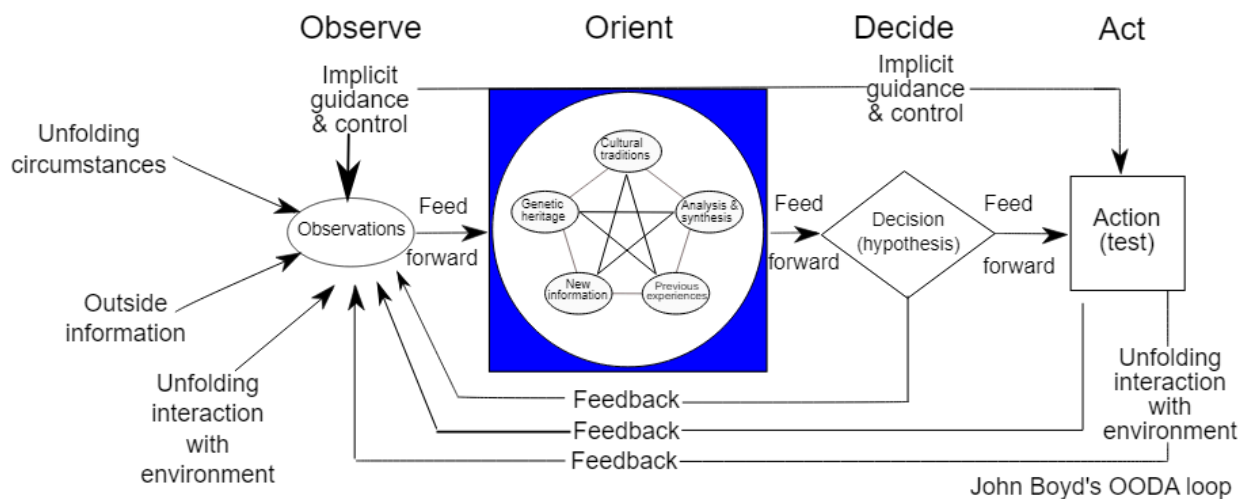
The OODA loop - Observe, Orient, Decide and Act - is a four-step approach to promote and direct actions. The OODA loop focuses on exploring and filtering available information, putting it in context and making the most

appropriate decision, while also understanding that changes can be made as more data becomes available aka the OODA loop embraces an iterative feedback loop.

The OODA loop corresponds to the Foresight methodology described in chapter 1.1.1. The advantage of OODA is that it's easy to understand, robust, practical and includes a clear 'Decision' step. OODA approach is used internally in the Mallusjoki pilot, and it embraces Foresight methodology.

In the Observe step the pilot examines the surrounding environment and collects observations on events, trends, issues and variables. The Observe step combines the first two phases of the Foresight method. The Orient step combines the steps 3, 4 and 5 of the Foresight method i.e. steps Scenario Development, Visioning and Strategic Planning and Backcasting. The decision step of OODA is important when there is a need to seek an official decision from the Mallusjoki Youth Association steering group or a confirmation from the stakeholder panel. The last OODA step is Action which is in line with step 6 of the Foresight Methodology. It includes the follow up of the progress and an iterative approach.

OODA - loop (ref. John Boyd)

Work plan

Mission: Community-driven, connected and resilient Mallusjoki Rural Event Industry Ecosystem

- Work package 1: Build up a rural-urban stakeholder panel and a rural event industry ecosystem - 1st wave.
- Work package 2: Acquire funding for the Mallusjoki Rural Event Industry Ecosystem development - 1st wave.
- Work package 3: Build capacity on Mallusjoki Event Industry Ecosystem operators - 2nd wave.
- Work package 4: Functional, safe and energy efficient premises of Mallusjoki Youth Association - 2nd wave.
- Work package 5: Ensure and bolster Mallusjoki community members' engagement and skills - 1st wave
- Work package 6: Marketing and communication towards stakeholders, inhabitants, customers and guests - 1st wave.

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- Work package 7: Understand and develop rural-urban interactions through improved provision and services - 2nd wave.
- Work package 8: Foster the uptake of Smart Village concept - 1st wave.

Work packages include actions that help to understand the current state (e.g. surveys, desk work, interviews), define the future state (e.g. vision 2040, mission), design the action plan to close the gap (e.g. actions, SMART goals, responsibilities, resources, milestones towards the mission), and plan for monitoring progress and performance.

3.6. Czech-Bavarian border region, Czechia-Germany

3.6.1. Description

The pilot initiative in the Czech-Bavarian border region is geared towards fostering a robust ecosystem of innovation and sustainable development. The pilot aims to leverage the unique geographical and cultural connections between Czechia and Germany to drive forward technological advancements and economic cooperation. Central to the initiative is the adaptation of urban incubator models to the rural context, which supports local startups and addresses the unique challenges of border areas. Key activities include enhancing digital capabilities, facilitating cross-border collaborations, and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship particularly among the youth and professionals in sectors like tourism and food production. The project also emphasises the transfer of the "Technology Campus" model from Bavaria to Czechia, promoting localised innovation hubs that serve as crucial links for knowledge transfer and economic development. This comprehensive approach seeks to not only spur innovation in the joint border region, but also to enhance its long-term appeal and liveability.

3.6.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	GreG Digitales Gründerzentrum Freyung-Grafenau, Stephanie Fichtl	External	Stefanie Fichtel is the managing director of the GreG, a incubator on the Bavarian side of the border region that has adapted to the unique requirements of the people in the highly rural region.
02	Euregio Bayerischer Wald - Böhmerwald - Unterer Inn	External	Jaroslava Pongratz is a network manager, works for the EUREGIO Bayerischer Wald - Böhmerwald - Unterer Inn e.V. She organises frequent events for both Czech and Bavarian Companies targeting various aspects of current developments that the companies of the border region face.
03	TC Freyung, DInO	Internal	Wilko Westphal is an assistant researcher at the DIT's research campus Technology Campus Freyung. He works in the DIno, Digital Innovation Ostbayern,

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			a European Digital Innovation Hub. The mission of DInO is to enhance digital transformation innovation in rural areas in Eastern Bavaria.
04	Úhlava, o.p.s.	External	Regional development, educational programmes, grant applications support
05	MAS Pošumaví	External	Regional development, educational programmes, grant applications support
06	Municipality of Klatovy	External	The Municipality of Klatovy acts as a local government authority, overseeing regional planning and development, supporting cultural heritage preservation, and facilitating cross-border economic activities.
07	University of West Bohemia	External	The University of West Bohemia contributes to regional development through research and education, particularly in fields relevant to border economies. It plays a crucial role in fostering innovation and providing expertise in technological advancements.
08	INN.Kubator Passau	External	The start-up centre supports new start-ups in their development and helps the start-up scene and medium-sized companies in the field of digitalisation. An extensive network of various stakeholders from the industrial sector serves to establish contacts.
09	Netzwerk Internet und Digitalisierung Ostbayern (INDIGO)	External	Border crossers and bridge builders, interdisciplinary perspectives on internet, digitalization and AI. An association of 6 different universities from Eastern Bavaria that want to bring this topic forward together
10	DIT	Internal	
11	P4A	Internal	P4A brings together expertise and knowledge from the regions based on past activities and connections with local stakeholders.
11	CCSS	Internal	The main link to IT technologies developed within the project.
12	Wirtschaftsförderung Freyung-Grafenau, Landratsamt	External	Main contact: Johannes Gastinger, Wirtschaftsförderer (Economic development office of the county Freyung-Grafenau). The office enhances and supports regional (economic) development and is interested and actively working on cross-border relations in the southern Bavarian-Czech border region. As an immediate neighbour of the Technology Campus Freyung and

			their involvement in the innovation hub (GREG), they are well-known, long-term partners of the Campus and aware of ongoing projects.
13	TC Teisenach	Internal	The IPH - Institute for Precision Machining and High Frequency Technology is made up of professors, scientific and technical staff who emerged from the Laboratory Optical Engineering (LOE) research group in Deggendorf and the Teisnach Technology Campus and can now draw on the laboratories at the Deggendorf Institute of Technology (THD) and the Teisnach Technology Campus. In contrast to university institutes, we are characterised by our focus on application orientation and work closely with industrial partners.
14	Otisk - civic association	External	Strengthening the links between rural and urban communities and supporting the development of cultural and social innovation in the rural areas, creating conditions for the preservation and promotion of traditional economic practices and crafts in the region, organising cultural festivals, meetings, courses and internships, contributing to the broadening of cultural horizons to transfer and acquire greater cultural experience.
15	Šumavaprodukt s.r.o.	External	Farm2fork, delivering local production from farmers, bakers, beekeepers and other food producers through a web portal directly to consumers. Participation in several HE projects focused on short supply chains and promotion of local production.

3.6.3. Vision

In the long term, the PoliRuralPlus pilot envisions the Czech-Bavarian border region as a leading example of rural innovation and sustainable regional development. This vision aims to leverage the unique geographic and cultural ties between Czechia and Germany to foster a vibrant ecosystem of technological innovation and economic cooperation. By enhancing digital capabilities and cross-border collaboration, the pilot seeks to create an environment where local communities can thrive economically and culturally while maintaining the region's rich environmental heritage.

Contribution to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA):
- **Strong by 2024:** The pilot will empower local communities by providing access to resources and support for entrepreneurship, particularly through adapting urban incubator models to rural settings. This will

strengthen the economic foundation and social fabric of the region, ensuring robust community development.

- **Connected by 2024:** By enhancing digital infrastructure and promoting cross-border collaboration, the pilot will improve connectivity within the region. This includes a effectiveness analysis of the "Technology Campus Freyung" and the transfer of this model from Bavaria to Czechia, fostering better communication and collaboration between local businesses and international partners.
- **Resilient by 2024:** The project will focus on sustainable practices and innovation, making the region more adaptable to economic, environmental, and social changes. It will support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adopting resilient business models and leveraging local resources effectively.
- **Prosperous by 2024:** By promoting a localised innovation ecosystem and supporting startups, the pilot aims to create new economic opportunities and increase the overall attractiveness and prosperity of the region. The focus on sustainable development will ensure long-term economic health and growth.

Contribution to the New European Bauhaus (NEB):

The pilot will align with NEB principles by integrating sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics into regional development. It will promote green technologies and sustainable practices, ensuring that rural innovation is both environmentally friendly and culturally enriching.

Contribution to other EU policies:

- **Net Zero:** By supporting green technologies and sustainable business practices, the pilot will contribute to the EU's Net Zero targets, reducing carbon emissions in the region.
- **Fit for 55:** The pilot will enhance energy efficiency and promote local resources among local businesses and communities, aligning with the Fit for 55 initiative.
- **EU Missions:** The project will support EU missions by fostering innovation in rural areas, promoting health and well-being, and addressing climate change challenges.
- **Just Transition:** The pilot will ensure that the transition to a sustainable economy is inclusive and fair, providing support and opportunities for all community members.

Urban-rural policy coordination and cooperation:

Recognising the interdependence between urban and rural areas, the pilot will facilitate policy coordination and cooperation. It will ensure that rural development initiatives are integrated with urban policies, promoting balanced regional growth and reducing disparities. It goes in line with the SDG´s goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic growth, 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

3.6.4.   Skills

Knowledge transfer between the border region in Germany and that in Czech is the end goal. With DIT having the know-how of connecting urban and rural areas via the idea of Technology Campuses (i.e. specialised campus that spans beyond the main university area, usually in urban settings, and into rural districts), the end of the project, in a best-case scenario, should witness the creation of a similar hub that works as a connection point, linking the Czech border region to the knowledge centre in Bavaria. The project members from Czechia and Bavaria bring regional expertise and research competencies into the project and benefit from their experiences of working in cross-border projects.

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The pilot focuses on cultivating a range of skills crucial for the region's development:

- **Digital literacy**: Enhancing the ability of local populations to utilise digital tools and platforms for business and governance.
- **Environmental monitoring**: Developing skills in using advanced technologies for environmental conservation and sustainable resource management.
- **Cultural competency**: Strengthening understanding and cooperation across cultural and language barriers to bolster cross-border initiatives.
- **Entrepreneurship**: Encouraging innovation and start-up culture among the local youth and professionals to retain talent and attract new business opportunities, especially in the tourism and food production and supply domains.

This matrix highlights the key competencies required for successful implementation and specifies the team members typically responsible for each skill set.

Skill category	Specific skills	Importance level	Responsible person	Covered by the team
Digital Literacy	- Digital platform management - Digital transformation expertise	High	Project Managers, IT Specialists	x
Cross-border Collaboration	- Knowledge transfer - Multilingual communication (Czech/German) - Partnership building	High	Cross-Border Coordinators, Collaboration Experts	x
Entrepreneurship	- SME support - Business development - Strategic planning	High	Business Consultants, Innovation Leaders	−
Sustainability	- Eco-friendly practices - Renewable energy knowledge - Rural project management	Medium	Sustainability Experts, Project Managers	−
Policy and Regional Development Experts	-Advising on regional pilot project and regional demand of development	Medium	Rural-Urban Development Specialists Legal and Regulatory Advisors	-
Communication	- Stakeholder engagement - Workshop and event facilitation	High	Communication Specialists, Community Liaisons	x
Networking	- Building and maintaining networks	High	Network Coordinators, Innovation Hubs Managers	x
Project Management	- Rural development project management	High	Project Managers	x

Skills gap:
- Entrepreneurship
- Sustainability
- Policy and regional development experts

To address the gaps in entrepreneurship and sustainability, we will leverage our existing network of stakeholders to identify individuals or organisations with relevant expertise. INN.Kubator and GreG are key partners in supporting startups and can provide entrepreneurial guidance, while Úhlava and MAS Pošumaví have experience in regional development and can offer insights into sustainable practices. Additionally, we will explore collaborations with local universities and innovation hubs to further strengthen these areas. With the Euregio Bayerischer Wald - Böhmerwald - Unterer Inn and the Wirtschaftsförderung Freyung Grafenau, we have two strong partners on the political stage of the border region who support us in our project.

3.6.5.   Incentives

Motivating and incentivizing stakeholders in the pilot project is especially difficult due to the novelty of the pilot project. The stakeholders of the pilot are – so far – regional actors that are interested in the idea of enhancing innovation in the rural (peripheral) Czech-Bavarian region. The stakeholder's active participation is rather low in this early stage of the pilot project. Being a stakeholder further comes without any financial or other responsibility in the pilot project.

Offering tailored incentives can effectively motivate stakeholder engagement in rural-urban development projects like PoliRuralPlus. Here are various incentives that can be offered for motivating stakeholders' engagement in an early-stage project:

- Financial grants via cascade funding: For businesses and startups that engage in innovative practices or contribute to sustainable economic growth. Advertising and promoting the funding opportunities is one of the tasks of the project team, which further assists also in the proposal writing for the funding.

- Awards and Recognition: Initiatives like recognizing leaders (e.g., a "Rural Woman Leader" award) or organising awareness events can incentivize involvement by offering public recognition.

- Collaboration partnerships: With universities and technical institutes to provide research support and training programs. Offering stakeholders the chance to form partnerships with universities, technical institutes, or other key organisations is an effective incentive.

- Participation in High-Profile Events: Opportunities to participate in important events like workshops, hackathons, or ideathons provide stakeholders with platforms for networking and sharing ideas, further boosting their engagement.

- Policy support: Decision and support mechanisms for cross-border economic activities. This will be supported by multiple tools such as the PoliRuralPlus portal and its applications (e.g. regional attractiveness). Making stakeholders aware that their contributions influence policy decisions can be a significant non-financial incentive. Stakeholders who feel their input is valued and reflected in local or regional policies are more likely to engage actively.

- Building Trust and Ownership: Active participation from stakeholders builds trust, fosters a sense of ownership, and increases the likelihood of successful project implementation. Engaged stakeholders are more likely to support and advocate for the project's goals.
- Sustainability and Long-Term Impact: Involving stakeholders helps ensure that the solutions developed are sustainable and can be maintained beyond the project lifecycle. Stakeholders can continue the work, ensuring long-term benefits and the adaptation of innovative practices to future challenges.

These incentives provide stakeholders with clear benefits, ensuring their active involvement in achieving sustainable rural-urban development goals.

3.6.6. Resources

Financial Resources: At the current stage of the project, the stakeholders are not financially involved in the pilot. (Potential) stakeholders are invited to participate in the open calls within the PoliRuralPlus Project. Financial resources of the pilot team are used to organise round tables, focus groups, and networking activities with stakeholders.

Human Resources:

Pilot team
The regional expertise of the pilot team allows the usage of experiences in the region and from former projects, this also includes well-established contacts to (potential) stakeholders.

Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:
The stakeholder's knowledge of the region, the innovation potential and the influential factors in various aspects (economical, political, social, or others) is considered in the outline of the innovation support offered within the pilot. This expertise will enrich project outcomes. To be able to fully include the needs of the stakeholders, regional actors (such as enterprises in the project region), round tables and focus groups will be organised and knowledge will be exchanged. Furthermore, by involving local actors and experts in the Multi-Actor Approach Tool (MAA), the project fosters collaboration, ensures transparency, and enhances the accuracy of the collected data. Results from previous projects on both, the Czech and the Bavarian side, are also valuable for the outcome of the project

Research resources
As part of the pilot, a regional analysis of the impact of research campuses in the rural, peripheral region of Bavaria is performed. The aim is to transfer the most effective measures to the Czech border region. To support the research, existing literature on the matter is reviewed and provides an overall insight into innovation and innovation potential in rural regions. A deeper understanding of how the technology campus model works is supported by qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Technical applications:

Rural Attractiveness Tool and PoliRuralPlus Hub
The regional attractiveness tool, developed within the pilot project, will be used and further improved during the pilot's duration. Spatial data plays a significant role in analysing and mapping rural-urban interactions. This tool

integrates geospatial data to visually depict various factors impacting rural and urban areas, such as connectivity, land use, environmental features, and more. In addition, the PoliRuralPlus Hub combines AI and spatial data. It aims to bridge rural and urban linkages by providing tools and methodologies to support regional development initiatives, rural attractiveness, and stakeholder engagement.

Synergies between other ongoing projects:

Theros and Data4food

Synergies with other ongoing projects in the Czech Republic such as Theros and Data4food projects are highly beneficial because they enhance collaboration, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange, leading to more impactful outcomes. Synergies allow projects to learn from each other, share best experiences and learn from failures.

DInO and RZZ Süd:

Synergies with other ongoing projects at the Deggendorf Institute of Technology (Bavaria) are drawn to benefit from following mutual goals. The DInO, Digital Innovation Ostbayern, a European Digital Innovation Hub has the mission to enhance digital transformation innovation in rural areas in Eastern Bavaria. Further, the team members of the DInO are stakeholders of the PoliRuralPlus project. The RZZ Süd, the regional future centre south, aims to help small and medium-sized companies in the automotive and mechanical engineering sectors and other industries to adapt to digital and sustainable change.

Regular exchange among the project members to provide a detailed insight into the innovational needs in the region.

3.6.7.   Action Plan

The Czech-Bavarian pilot focuses on strengthening cross-border collaboration and fostering regional innovation and sustainability. Key actions include:

- Promotion of activities in national languages: Efforts will be made to communicate project goals and initiatives in both Czech and German to ensure local engagement and inclusivity.
- Address open issues such as: Pilot will tackle regional challenges such as developing tourism, adapting to climate changes, and implementing mitigation actions to make the region more resilient.
- Spatial planning support to municipalities: One of the core activities of the pilot is providing municipalities with guidance and tools to improve their spatial planning, enabling them to better manage land use and infrastructure development.
- Innovation business targeted on young professionals: By creating opportunities for innovation-driven businesses, the pilot aims to attract and retain young professionals in the region, fostering long-term economic growth.
- Identification of key stakeholders: Stakeholders will be identified through direct engagement with local communities, regional authorities, and industry networks. This will involve consultations with municipal leaders, local business associations, innovation hubs, and existing cross-border partnerships to pinpoint individuals and groups who can contribute to and drive local innovation.
- Stakeholder engagement through hackathons and workshops: Plans will be drawn to actively involve stakeholders through in-situ hackathons and community workshops, encouraging collaboration and innovative solutions.
- Spatial data analysis: The pilot will analyse and collect spatial data, particularly focusing on digital maps from Bavaria, to inform planning and decision-making processes.

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- Defining the region of interest: The project will focus on NUTS 2 regions DE22, DE23, DE24 (Bavaria) and CZ03, CZ04 (Czech Republic), ensuring targeted efforts in these areas.
- Innovation potential analysis in CE: Based on collected data and discussions, the pilot will analyse innovation potential, identifying regions with high attractiveness but low levels of innovation to focus development efforts.
- Address the question on how to bring innovation into a low populated area: Strategies will be developed to introduce and sustain innovation in sparsely populated areas, ensuring even these regions benefit from project activities.
- Best practice analysis within the DIT network: The pilot will study successful initiatives within the DIT network to identify what works well and could be applied locally
- Knowledge transfer to the Czech region: The potential for knowledge transfer from Bavaria to the Czech Republic will be explored, with consideration of setting up an innovation hub in Klatovy or Domažlice.

This comprehensive plan addresses critical regional challenges while fostering innovation, sustainability, and cross-border collaboration. In addition, the plan will also involve identifying and analysing gaps in **skills**, **incentives**, and **resources** needed to successfully implement pilot activities. By addressing these gaps, we aim to ensure the region has the necessary capacity and support to drive long-term innovation and development.

3.7. Spain

3.7.1. Description

The "Federation for the Development of the Sierra and Mancha Conquense" (ADESIMAN), established on January 7, 1997, stands as a cornerstone of rural development in the region. Formed through the amalgamation of ADIMMAC and SEDECUCE, ADESIMAN encompasses 56 municipalities and numerous entities, playing a pivotal role in advancing regional progress through programs like PRODER 1 and PRODER 2. These initiatives have significantly contributed to economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

Building on this foundation, there is a proposal to initiate a pilot project emphasising **Rural-Urban Synergies & Cultural Heritage**. The aim is to mobilise local stakeholders around the Segobriga Archaeological Park, developing diverse business models and fostering cooperation by leveraging cultural assets, collaborative tools, and policy support. This endeavour seeks to enhance the local economy, promote community cohesion, and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the area.

Furthermore, a proposed **Sustainable Tourism Plan** for the Sierra and Mancha Conquense region focuses on creating cohesive interventions that encourage sustainable tourism development, job creation, and population retention. It intends to meet the expectations of tourists, citizens, and professionals by promoting natural, cultural, and gastronomic heritage through innovative strategies.

Challenges description

The Sierra and Mancha Conquense region faces a multifaceted set of challenges that the proposed initiatives aim to address comprehensively:

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1. **Adapting Urban Incubator Models to Rural Settings**
   - **Context and Rationale**: Urban incubators have proven effective in fostering innovation, providing startups with resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. However, rural areas often lack such support structures due to limited infrastructure, fewer investors, and a smaller talent pool.
   - **Proposed Adaptation**:
     - **Localised Incubation Centres**: Establish small-scale incubators tailored to rural needs, focusing on sectors like agriculture, renewable energy, and rural tourism.
     - **Virtual Incubation Programs**: Utilise digital platforms to provide remote mentorship and training, overcoming geographical barriers.
     - **Community Integration**: Engage local stakeholders, including municipalities and educational institutions, to support incubator initiatives.
   - **Implementation Strategies**:
     - **Resource Sharing**: Create shared workspaces equipped with essential technology and resources accessible to entrepreneurs.
     - **Mentorship Networks**: Connect rural startups with experienced mentors from urban centres through partnerships and exchange programs.
     - **Access to Funding**: Facilitate connections with investors interested in rural innovation, including government grants and social impact funds.
   - **Expected Outcomes**: Stimulate economic growth by nurturing local enterprises, reduce rural depopulation by providing opportunities, and foster an entrepreneurial culture within rural communities.

2. **Understanding Cultural and Language Barriers**
   - **Context and Rationale**: The region's diversity can lead to communication challenges, hindering collaboration and social cohesion. Cultural misunderstandings may affect business practices, education, and community relations.
   - **Analysis and Strategies**:
     - **Cultural Assessments**: Conduct surveys and studies to map out cultural and linguistic landscapes.
     - **Multilingual Education**: Promote language learning programs in schools and adult education centres to enhance mutual understanding.
     - **Cultural Exchange Programs**: Organise events that bring different communities together to share traditions, food, music, and stories.
     - **Inclusive Communication**: Ensure that public information and services are accessible in multiple languages and dialects prevalent in the region.
   - **Expected Outcomes**: Enhanced cooperation across communities, stronger social networks, and a more inclusive environment that supports collaborative development efforts.

3. **Enhancing Regional Innovation Potential**
   - **Context and Rationale**: Tapping into the creativity and skills of young academics and entrepreneurs is crucial for regional advancement. However, limited opportunities may lead to brain drain, where talent migrates to urban areas.
   - **Engaging Young Academics and Startups**:
     - **Innovation Grants**: Offer funding and resources for projects addressing local challenges, encouraging innovative solutions.

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- **Research Partnerships**: Collaborate with universities to establish research centres focused on rural innovation.
        - **Startup Competitions**: Host events where entrepreneurs can pitch ideas, receive feedback, and win support for implementation.
    - **Promoting New Technologies and Sustainable Practices**:
        - **Technology Adoption Programs**: Provide training on cutting-edge technologies relevant to rural industries, like precision agriculture or renewable energy systems.
        - **Demonstration Projects**: Implement pilot projects showcasing the benefits of new technologies, serving as models for broader adoption.
        - **Knowledge Sharing Platforms**: Create online forums and networks where innovators can share insights and collaborate.
    - **Expected Outcomes**: A dynamic ecosystem where innovation thrives, leading to economic diversification, job creation, and increased competitiveness of the region.

4. **Transferring the "Technology Campus" Model**
    - **Context and Rationale**: Technology campuses concentrate resources and talent, fostering an environment conducive to innovation. Adapting this model can catalyse technological advancement in rural areas.
    - **Proposal for Localised Innovation Ecosystems**:
        - **Decentralised Campuses**: Develop smaller, interconnected hubs spread across the region to maximise accessibility.
        - **Specialisation**: Focus each hub on specific industries relevant to local strengths, such as agro-tech, eco-tourism, or cultural industries.
        - **Public-Private Partnerships**: Encourage collaboration between government entities, businesses, and educational institutions to support these hubs.
    - **Facilities and Services**:
        - **Research Labs**: Equip centres with laboratories for testing and developing new products or processes.
        - **Training Facilities**: Provide spaces for workshops, seminars, and vocational training.
        - **Business Support Services**: Offer assistance with marketing, legal advice, and financial planning.
    - **Involvement of SMEs**:
        - **Collaborative Projects**: Encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to participate in joint ventures and shared research initiatives.
        - **Supply Chain Integration**: Strengthen connections between local producers and larger markets through technology.
    - **Expected Outcomes**: A surge in local innovation, strengthened capacity for technological advancement, and increased attractiveness of the region to investors and skilled professionals.

These integrated approaches are designed to:

- **Stimulate Innovation**: By creating environments that nurture creativity and support risk-taking, leading to new products, services, and processes.
- **Support Local Economies**: Diversifying income sources, increasing employment opportunities, and enhancing the economic resilience of rural communities.

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- **Bridge Gaps Between Urban and Rural Areas**: Reducing disparities by providing rural areas with access to resources and opportunities typically found in urban settings.
- **Enhance Social Cohesion**: Building stronger, more inclusive communities where collaboration across cultural and linguistic divides is commonplace.

Rural-Urban Synergies & Cultural Heritage

The challenge aims to create a harmonious blend of rural strengths and urban advantages by integrating the efforts of ADESIMAN and the Segobriga Archaeological Park. This integration focuses on several key areas:

1. **Rural Innovation**
    - **Harnessing Local Expertise**: Leverage traditional knowledge in agriculture, crafts, and resource management to innovate products and services with a modern appeal.
    - **Value-Added Agriculture**: Encourage farmers to process raw products into higher-value goods, such as organic foods, artisanal cheeses, or natural cosmetics.
    - **Innovation Hubs**: Establish centres where rural innovators can access tools, technology, and support to develop and prototype ideas.
    - **Collaborative Networks**: Facilitate connections between rural innovators and urban markets, investors, and research institutions.
2. **Cultural Heritage Preservation**
    - **Integrated Tourism Strategies**: Develop packages that combine visits to historical sites, cultural events, and natural attractions, providing a holistic experience.
    - **Community-Based Tourism**: Empower local communities to manage tourism activities, ensuring that benefits remain within the community and cultural integrity is maintained.
    - **Cultural Education Programs**: Implement initiatives in schools and community centres to teach the importance of preserving heritage.
    - **Digital Archiving**: Use technology to document and preserve oral histories, traditions, and artefacts, making them accessible to wider audiences.
3. **Digital Transformation**
    - **Smart Tourism Solutions**:
        - **Mobile Applications**: Create apps that guide visitors through cultural sites, providing information, translations, and interactive features.
        - **Online Booking Platforms**: Simplify access to accommodations, tours, and events, making it easier for tourists to plan visits.
    - **Digital Skills Training**: Offer courses to local businesses and residents on using digital tools for marketing, sales, and customer engagement.
    - **E-Governance Initiatives**: Implement digital services for residents, improving access to government services and information.
4. **Entrepreneurship and Capacity Building**
    - **Business Incubation Programs**: Provide entrepreneurs with mentorship, training, and resources to start and grow businesses.
    - **Access to Microfinance**: Establish financial programs that offer low-interest loans or grants to startups and small businesses.

- ○ **Networking Events**: Organise conferences and workshops that connect entrepreneurs with potential partners, investors, and customers.
  - ○ **Educational Partnerships**: Work with universities to provide continuing education opportunities and certifications relevant to local industries.
5. **Sustainability and Environmental Initiatives**
   - ○ **Eco-Friendly Practices**:
     - ■ **Sustainable Agriculture**: Promote organic farming, permaculture, and regenerative agriculture techniques.
     - ■ **Waste Reduction Programs**: Implement recycling and composting initiatives to reduce environmental impact.
   - ○ **Renewable Energy Integration**:
     - ■ **Solar and Wind Projects**: Encourage the adoption of renewable energy sources for homes and businesses.
     - ■ **Energy Cooperatives**: Form community-owned energy companies that provide affordable, clean energy.
   - ○ **Conservation Efforts**:
     - ■ **Biodiversity Protection**: Establish protected areas and wildlife corridors to preserve native species.
     - ■ **Environmental Education**: Teach residents and visitors about the importance of conservation through workshops and interpretive centres.

By focusing on these areas, the integrated framework aims to:

- ● **Strengthen the Local Economy**: Through diversified income streams, job creation, and the development of new markets.
- ● **Preserve and Promote Cultural Identity**: Ensuring that modernization efforts respect and highlight the region's unique heritage.
- ● **Enhance Quality of Life**: By providing better services, infrastructure, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- ● **Achieve Environmental Sustainability**: Balancing development with ecological preservation to ensure long-term viability.

3.7.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Ayuntamiento de Saelices	External	Regional development, business support
02	Ayuntamiento de Almonacid del Marquesado	External	Regional development, business support
03	ADESIMAN (Federation for the Mancha Alta and the Middle Sierra of Cuenca Development)	External	Regional development, business support

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04	Social Innolabs Foundation	Internal	Research and ICT activities
05	Institute for Rural Development and Sustainability	External	Research on sustainable rural development
06	Spanish Rural Development Network (REDR)	External	National network for rural development, policy advocacy
07	University of Castilla-La Mancha	External	Academic research, innovation, and education
08	Business Association of the Cuenca Region	External	Business development and support
09	Agricultural Cooperative "Green Mancha"	External	Agricultural development and support
10	Global Nature Foundation	External	Environmental sustainability initiatives
11	Government of Castilla-La Mancha	External	Regional policy and governance
12	Association of Young Farmers (ASAJA)	External	Support and advocacy for young farmers
13	Chamber of Commerce of Cuenca	External	Business networking and support
14	Cultural Association "Friends of Segobriga"	External	Cultural heritage preservation and promotion
15	Center for Rural Innovation and Development (CIDR)	External	Innovation and development in rural areas
16	Technological Institute of Castilla-La Mancha	External	Technological research and development

3.7.3.   Vision

The vision is to pioneer a transformative approach to regional development in the Sierra and Mancha Conquense region. The aim is to create a dynamic and sustainable environment where every individual can actively participate in shaping their community's future, with trust in governmental decisions and active engagement in local and regional development.

Through collaborative efforts and data-driven insights, the proposal is to develop stronger, connected, and resilient rural areas. Prioritising sustainability and inclusivity, the focus is on promoting beautiful, eco-friendly living spaces. By reducing carbon emissions and embracing renewable energy, the goal is to drive the region towards smart economic specialisation, ensuring equitable benefits for all communities.

This holistic approach will foster inclusive growth, preserve cultural and natural heritage, and nurture a vibrant ecosystem of opportunities, building a resilient and sustainable Sierra and Mancha Conquense region.

Contribution to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA):
The Spanish pilot contributes to the NEB by promoting rural-urban synergies and leveraging cultural heritage as a driver for innovation. The pilot's focus on enhancing local cultural assets, particularly through the Segobriga Archaeological Park, aligns with the NEB's emphasis on sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics. By fostering collaboration between local stakeholders, the pilot supports the creation of sustainable and beautiful living spaces, reflecting NEB's core values.

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The pilot also aims to integrate green innovation into regional development, with programs centred on renewable energy and environmental sustainability. This focus on both cultural heritage and environmental solutions helps create a balanced, aesthetic, and sustainable approach to rural development.

The Spanish pilot contributes to the LTVRA by focusing on rural-urban cooperation, cultural heritage, and innovation. The pilot encourages regional development by adapting urban incubator models to rural settings, supporting startups, and fostering entrepreneurship in local communities. This directly strengthens the rural economy and promotes connectivity.

Additionally, the pilot emphasises the preservation of local culture and the environment, creating resilient rural areas capable of thriving despite global challenges. The involvement of diverse stakeholders and the promotion of sustainable practices contribute to a long-term vision of stronger, more connected, and prosperous rural regions

3.7.4.   Skills

To achieve these goals, the following skills are essential:

- **Expertise in Digital Transformation and Rural Innovation**: Implementing digital tools and innovative practices in rural contexts.
- **Proficiency in Monitoring and Evaluation of Regional Development Programs**: Assessing the progress and impact of initiatives.
- **Strong Stakeholder Engagement and Community Mobilization**: Involving local communities and stakeholders effectively.
- **Experience in Regional Development and Governance**: Understanding policies and governance structures relevant to rural development.
- **Educational and Training Expertise**: Designing and delivering training programs to enhance local capacities.

3.7.5.   Incentives

To motivate participation and ensure success, the following incentives are proposed:

- **Developing Proposals for Authorities**: Classifying performance indicators for monitoring local development to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Creating a Methodological Framework**: Structuring the preparation of municipal development documents to be adopted by local councils.
- **Designing a Regional Development Program Monitoring Framework**: Integrating it into regional monitoring systems for better oversight and coordination.
- **Implementing Training Programs**: Offering courses and workshops to improve competencies and employability, in collaboration with organisations like the Fundación Biodiversidad.

3.7.6.   Resources

The following resources are available to support these initiatives:

- **Access to Local Government Leaders and Policymakers**: Facilitating communication and collaboration for project implementation.
- **Established Relationships with Government Departments and Councils**: Enabling coordinated efforts across different levels of government.
- **Project Expertise and Strategic Documents**: Leveraging existing plans and strategies to inform new initiatives.
- **Participation in Development Networks**: Accessing broader knowledge, best practices, and potential funding opportunities.

3.7.7. Action Plan

1. Collaborate with Local Governments

- **Engage Municipal Leaders**: Begin by establishing strong partnerships with local councils, such as those of Saelices and Almonacid del Marquesado. Collaborate to develop advanced monitoring systems for rural development, ensuring that infrastructure and services align with sustainability and energy efficiency goals.
- **Policy Coordination**: Work closely with municipal authorities to align proposed initiatives with regional and national sustainability policies, leveraging existing relationships with government departments to facilitate smooth implementation.
- **Regulatory Support**: Advocate for policies that support sustainable practices and the adoption of new technologies in rural areas, ensuring a favourable regulatory environment for proposed projects.

2. Engage Communities and Stakeholders

- **Host Stakeholder Meetings**: Organise regular meetings with key players like ADESIMAN, the Social Innolabs Foundation, and the Institute for Rural Development and Sustainability. These gatherings aim to synchronise development strategies and gather valuable insights into community needs.
- **Mobilise Community Participation**: Implement outreach programs to involve local residents in the planning process. This ensures that initiatives reflect the community's aspirations and encourages public support.
- **Partner with Educational Institutions**: Collaborate with the University of Castilla-La Mancha to involve students and young academics in research and projects focused on rural innovation, fostering a culture of learning and innovation.

3. Conduct Workshops and Training Sessions

- **Professional Development for Planners**: Offer specialised workshops for municipal planners and development professionals to enhance their expertise in sustainable practices, digital technologies, and innovative planning methods.
- **Entrepreneurship Training**: Provide training programs for local entrepreneurs and startups. Focus areas include tourism services, environmental management, digital skills, and community development to stimulate local economic growth.

- **Leverage Existing Courses**: Utilise training programs offered by organisations like Fundación Biodiversidad to improve the skills and employability of the local workforce, covering topics such as tourism promotion, community engagement, and environmental stewardship.

4. Implement Sustainable Projects

- **Develop Green Infrastructure**: Launch projects that focus on creating sustainable infrastructure, such as eco-friendly parking areas, bicycle lanes, and renewable energy installations like solar panels and wind turbines.
- **Enhance Cultural Heritage Sites**: Initiate efforts to preserve and promote cultural landmarks. This includes digitising museums and archaeological sites like the Segobriga Archaeological Park to offer virtual tours and interactive experiences.
- **Promote Environmental Conservation**: Start community programs for environmental protection, such as setting up composting facilities, planting trees, and conserving local wildlife habitats.

5. Drive Digital Transformation

- **Modernise Tourism Services**: Implement digital tools to enhance the tourism experience. Develop mobile apps, virtual reality tours, and online platforms that showcase local attractions and facilitate visitor engagement.
- **Introduce Smart Technologies**: Integrate smart solutions into public services—like intelligent lighting, waste management systems, and energy-efficient buildings—to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact.
- **Enhance Digital Literacy**: Offer training to local businesses and residents to improve digital skills, enabling them to adopt new technologies and participate in the digital economy.

6. Evaluate and Adjust Mid-Term Strategies

- **Monitor Progress**: Set up clear metrics and performance indicators to track the success of projects. Regularly assess whether objectives are being met and identify areas for improvement.
- **Gather Feedback**: Create channels for ongoing input from stakeholders and community members. Use this feedback to make timely adjustments to projects and strategies.
- **Assess Training Effectiveness**: Review the impact of training programs on participants. Adjust course content and teaching methods based on feedback and observed outcomes.

7. Consult Advisory Experts

- **Engage with Development Experts**: Work with the Advisory Council and regional development specialists to review project progress. Incorporate innovative tools and insights from initiatives like PoliRuralPlus to enhance strategies.
- **Share Best Practices**: Participate in wider networks to exchange experiences with other regions. Apply learned best practices to local projects for improved results.

8. Align with Broader Policies

- **Integrate Regional Goals**: Ensure all initiatives support regional and national objectives, such as those outlined in the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the New European Bauhaus (NEB). This alignment enhances coherence and increases the potential for funding support.
- **Maintain Compliance**: Keep all projects in line with legal and regulatory requirements. Regular reporting to authorities demonstrates transparency and builds trust.

9. Prepare Proposals and Secure Funding

- **Develop Detailed Proposals**: Craft comprehensive project proposals to present to local and regional authorities. Highlight the benefits and expected outcomes to gain support and funding.
- **Standardise Performance Indicators**: Propose a framework for measuring success across projects. Standardised indicators make it easier to monitor progress and report results.
- **Seek Funding Opportunities**: Identify grants and financial support from national and European programs. Apply for funding to ensure resources are available for project implementation.

10. Implement Education and Training Programs

- **Coordinate with Training Providers**: Work with organisations like Fundación Biodiversidad to deliver training tailored to local needs. Focus on areas that will have the most significant impact on employment and economic growth.
- **Facilitate Job Placement**: Connect training participants with local businesses and ongoing projects to provide practical experience and improve employment prospects.
- **Promote Lifelong Learning**: Establish ongoing educational opportunities to keep the workforce adaptable to new technologies and industry trends.

11. Promote Sustainable Tourism

- **Develop Marketing Strategies**: Create campaigns that showcase the region's cultural and natural assets. Use storytelling and branding to attract visitors interested in sustainable tourism experiences.
- **Organise Cultural Events**: Collaborate with groups like the "Friends of Segobriga" to host festivals, workshops, and exhibitions. These events can boost tourism and celebrate local heritage.
- **Expand Tourism Offerings**: Design new tourist activities, such as eco-tours, heritage trails, and local food experiences. These offerings can diversify the tourism sector and support local businesses.

12. Support Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- **Establish Business Incubators**: Create programs that provide resources and mentorship to startups and entrepreneurs, encouraging innovation and business growth in the region.
- **Create Innovation Hubs**: Develop centres where technology experts, businesses, and policymakers can collaborate on projects, fostering an ecosystem of innovation.
- **Engage Youth**: Implement programs that inspire young people to participate in entrepreneurship, offering support and resources to turn their ideas into viable businesses.

13. Advance Environmental Sustainability

- **Launch Renewable Energy Projects**: Initiate projects like solar farms or wind energy installations to reduce reliance on non-renewable energy sources and lower carbon emissions.
- **Promote Sustainable Agriculture**: Encourage eco-friendly farming practices and support agricultural cooperatives to enhance environmental sustainability and product quality.
- **Educate on Sustainable Practices**: Run community workshops and campaigns to raise awareness about environmental issues and teach sustainable living habits.

14. Develop Infrastructure

- **Improve Transportation**: Enhance roads, create new cycling and walking paths, and improve public transportation to increase connectivity and reduce environmental impact.
- **Upgrade Public Spaces**: Invest in parks, community centres, and public amenities to improve residents' quality of life and make the area more attractive to visitors.
- **Ensure Accessibility**: Design infrastructure projects to be inclusive, accommodating the needs of people with disabilities and ensuring equal access for all.

15. Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- **Implement Tracking Systems**: Use technology to monitor project milestones and outcomes effectively, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- **Analyse Data for Decision-Making**: Collect and interpret data on economic performance, employment, tourism, and environmental health to inform future strategies.
- **Report to Stakeholders**: Regularly communicate progress to all involved parties, maintaining openness and encouraging continued collaboration.

16. Plan for Long-Term Sustainability

- **Develop Strategic Plans**: Outline clear long-term goals and the steps needed to achieve them, ensuring that today's actions contribute to future prosperity.
- **Manage Risks**: Identify potential obstacles and develop contingency plans to address them, ensuring that projects can withstand challenges.
- **Foster Continuous Improvement**: Encourage a culture where strategies are regularly reviewed and updated, keeping the region adaptable and forward-thinking.

3.8.   Vidzeme, Latvia

3.8.1.   Description

Vidzeme, the northern region of Latvia, holds the distinction of being the largest region in the country, covering 30.6% of its territory. Vidzeme is the European Union's border region. Despite its vast size, Vidzeme is the least populated region in Latvia, with a population of 278 792, accounting for only 14.7% of the total population. Consequently, it also boasts the lowest population density in the country, with just 16,27 people per square kilometre, compared to the national average of 30. Vidzeme is home to several key industries, including dairy, forestry, wood processing, metalworking, chemical industry, ICT, tourism, and creative industries.

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The Vidzeme planning region in Latvia's North East is a thriving area due to its strategic location intersecting major international transport corridors. Boasting abundant natural resources, the region's economy thrives in sectors like agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing (wood and food industries). The region's natural resources also facilitate the growth of tourism and health services. Vidzeme's economic development is shaped by diverse bioeconomy sectors. Additionally, the region houses research institutions like The Institute for Environmental Solutions, and the Latvian High Added Value and Healthy Food Cluster, driving innovation in products, technologies, and services. With its rich resources, Vidzeme is a promising destination for growth and development.

Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR) is a public regional development and coordination institution. The main functions of VPR are to ensure regional strategic and spatial planning and coordination, as well as cooperation between municipalities and governmental institutions. VPR provides planning services on national, regional, and local level, it ensures regional and local level representation in elaboration of national policies. The mission of the VPR is to coordinate and promote long-term and well-balanced development of the Vidzeme region.

VIDZEME PILOT

The regional territorial development plan and activities implemented are aiming to reach the goals not just for the public sector, but its inhabitants in the whole region, e.g. regional development plan should respond to the needs of people. Need for better cooperation, additional work from both involved parties, public sector and inhabitants, towards local action that respond to the common challenges were highlighted in the public discussions also within the PoliRural project. Challenge is rooted in different aspects, like (a) people lack of civic education and disbelief in their ability to influence the democratic process, (b) insufficient understanding of the role of civil society in both, communities and public administration, (c) lack of targeted policies for the development of civil society, (d) legal and financial environment that is unfavourable and unstable for the growth of civil society, (e) high intolerance to another, (f) low capacity and insufficient competences of civil society and organisations for long-term development and other factors that intertwine.

Therefore, it is very important that each goal and planned activities of a development program responds directly to needs of inhabitants and where possible actively involve them into the action. It should include wider society in all the stages - planning, implementation and monitoring as well as to serve as a link between regional, municipal and local priorities strengthening the actions and added value of actions implemented by stakeholders.

So far there are no systematic mechanisms to monitor progress of the VPR Development Programme on a territorial level, and so far, it is monitored only on an organisation level. It is very important that each goal and planned activities of a VPR DP responds directly to needs of inhabitants and where possible actively involve them into the action. Therefore, a transparent, reliable system for collecting, aggregating and communicating regional development progress to the public is a necessity.

VIDZEME pilot EXPECTED OUTCOME - Monitoring framework for the development of the Vidzeme Planning Region.

The establishment of a unified monitoring framework in the Vidzeme planning region as a territory is very important in order to ensure a successful development management process and feedback to each of the parties involved in the implementation of the VPR Development Programme, thus also promoting the interest and

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involvement of each resident of the region in the development of their place, region and Vidzeme region as a whole.

3.8.2. Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Cēsis Municipality	External	Regional development, business support
02	Ministry of Agriculture	External	Agriculture policy making and supervising
03	Latvian Union of Local Governments	External	Regional development, governance, advocacy
04	Ministry of Economy	External	Entrepreneurship promotion, innovations, economic development
05	Latvian Cluster of High Quality and Healthy Food	External	Development and innovation of high-quality and healthy niche food products, knowledge exchange, international and inter-sectoral cooperation
06	Valmiera Development Agency	External	Cooperation between entrepreneurs, local government and educational institutions, innovation, entrepreneurship promotion
07	ALTUM Vidzeme branch	External	Management of public financial instruments for business support in State identified areas
08	LAG "Sateka"	External	Local Action Group, sustainable and balanced regional development
09	ZEIT creative district	External	Creative district offering free time activities, place for events, concerts, tourism activities
10	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences	External	State university, Social Sciences and Engineering, Research on rural development, innovations etc.

3.8.3. Vision

In envisioning the future of the Vidzeme Planning Region, we aspire to pioneer a transformative paradigm in regional development. Our vision is to create a dynamic, sustainable environment where everyone can actively shape their community's destiny because they trust governmental decisions and are engaged in local and regional development. To reach that purpose, we aim to ensure the transparency of our efforts, which are inclusive and

responsive to the real needs of the people. A robust Monitoring Framework based on collaborative efforts and data-driven insights will contribute to our vision by continuously tracking the effectiveness of our strategies, allowing for adaptive planning and fostering trust through measurable progress.

We aim to develop stronger, connected, and resilient rural areas by promoting sustainability and inclusivity in our projects and creating beautiful, eco-friendly living spaces. Reducing carbon emissions, embracing renewable energy, and driving Vidzeme towards smart economic specialisation are a few of our strategies to ensure equitable benefits for all communities. The Monitoring Framework will help us assess our progress towards our environmental goals, ensuring that our efforts in reducing carbon footprints and enhancing renewable energy adoption are on track.

This holistic approach, supported by real-time monitoring and feedback, will foster inclusive growth, preserve our cultural and natural heritage, and nurture a vibrant ecosystem of opportunities, building a resilient and sustainable Vidzeme Planning Region.

Contribution to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA):
The Vidzeme pilot in Latvia contributes to the New European Bauhaus by focusing on inclusive governance, sustainability, and the creation of resilient rural spaces. It aims to bridge the gap between regional, municipal, and local priorities, promoting collaborative solutions for rural development. The pilot aims to integrate innovative monitoring frameworks to track progress also in environmental sustainability, such as reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy use. This aligns with the NEB's focus on sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics, aiming to create eco-friendly and aesthetically pleasing rural environments.

The Vidzeme pilot supports the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) by fostering stronger rural governance, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and building regional resilience. The pilot focuses on promoting collaboration among public sector institutions, civil society, and residents to address local challenges through a participatory approach. Additionally, the pilot works to strengthen the bioeconomy sector, promoting sustainable practices and creating a framework for balanced regional development. This contributes to the LTVRA's goals of creating prosperous, connected, and resilient rural communities.

3.8.4.   Skills

The Vidzeme Planning Region pilot benefits from a diverse range of skills, many of which are already present among the involved stakeholders. These capabilities ensure the successful implementation of the development and monitoring frameworks while also providing opportunities for further capacity building as the project progresses:

- Expertise in regional development and governance
- Data analysis and monitoring framework design
- Stakeholder engagement and collaborative planning
- Digital literacy and ICT solution implementation
- Project management and coordination
- Knowledge of EU and national policy frameworks

- Strategic planning and foresight capabilities
- Communication and dissemination skills

3.8.5. Incentives

1. Incentives for Municipalities

Municipalities are crucial stakeholders in the pilot, as their active participation is essential for the successful implementation and monitoring of regional development strategies.

- **Improved Governance and Efficiency**: Municipalities will benefit from adopting a structured methodology for preparing development documents. This will lead to more efficient decision-making, better resource allocation, and enhanced service delivery, which are strong incentives for local governments to engage actively in the pilots.
- **Access to Funding and Resources**: Participation in the pilot projects offers municipalities the opportunity to secure additional funding and grants, especially those aligned with national and EU objectives for sustainable growth. The chance to improve local infrastructure and economic development through targeted investments makes the pilots highly attractive for municipal leaders.
- **Capacity Building and Skills Development**: The pilots will enable municipalities to build their capacity and improve technical skills in areas such as data management, digitalization, and performance monitoring. By enhancing their capabilities, municipalities can ensure continuous improvement and innovation in their governance practices.

2. Incentives for Regional Authorities

Regional authorities play a pivotal role in coordinating and supporting municipalities during this pilot.

- **Enhanced Regional Coordination**: Through participation in the pilots, regional authorities can improve coordination among municipalities, ensuring that regional development strategies are coherent and aligned with broader national goals. This increased collaboration will amplify resources and expertise, leading to more effective development outcomes.
- **Strategic Influence and Policy Development**: The pilots provide regional authorities with the opportunity to shape national policy on regional development monitoring. By developing a model that could be replicated in other regions, these authorities can position themselves as leaders in regional development and policy innovation.
- **Alignment with EU Goals**: Active involvement in the pilots will help regional authorities demonstrate their commitment to EU objectives, such as smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. This alignment could lead to increased recognition and potential funding from EU sources, further incentivizing their participation.

3. Incentives for the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development

The Ministry oversees the pilots and ensures their alignment with national policies, making its role central to the success of the initiatives.

- **Policy Innovation and National Leadership**: By leading these pilots, the Ministry can develop innovative policies that influence national and EU-level regional development strategies. The ability to guide policy innovation is a powerful incentive, positioning the Ministry as a leader in shaping future regional development practices.
- **Improved Monitoring and Decision-Making**: Developing a comprehensive monitoring framework through these pilots will enable the Ministry to make data-driven decisions, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of regional development initiatives. This will result in more strategic and impactful outcomes across the regions involved.
- **Public Engagement and Transparency**: The pilots offer the Ministry an opportunity to enhance transparency and public engagement in regional development processes. Building trust with the public and stakeholders will strengthen the overall success of regional development initiatives and encourage broader participation in future projects.

4. Incentives for Local Communities and Businesses

Local communities and businesses stand to gain significantly from the outcomes of successful regional development strategies.

- **Economic Opportunities and Job Creation**: The pilots are expected to create new economic opportunities, particularly in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, tourism, and technology. For local businesses, this means access to new markets and funding opportunities, driving growth and job creation.
- **Quality of Life Improvements**: Communities will benefit from improved infrastructure, services, and overall quality of life as a result of successful pilot outcomes. These improvements are strong incentives for community support and participation, as they directly impact the day-to-day lives of residents.
- **Community Engagement and Social Cohesion**: By participating in the pilots, local communities can play an active role in shaping their future, fostering a sense of ownership and social cohesion. This engagement not only strengthens community ties but also ensures that development strategies reflect the needs and aspirations of the residents.

Conclusion

The stakeholders involved in these pilots have robust incentives to participate actively. Municipalities and regional authorities will gain from improved governance, access to funding, and strategic influence, while the Ministry will benefit from policy innovation and enhanced decision-making. Local communities and businesses, motivated by economic opportunities and quality of life improvements, will likely support and engage in the pilots.

3.8.6. Resources

The Vidzeme Planning Region pilot is well-equipped with all necessary resources, ensuring smooth implementation without the need for additional external support. These resources are already available within the pilot, providing a strong foundation for its success.

- Direct access to local government leaders and ministries
- Wide network of international cooperation

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- Project expertise, knowledge, documents, and strategies from PoliRural project
- Participation in networks and working groups at national and international levels
- PoliRural project experience and tools, including AI and spatial data analysis
- ICT solutions being developed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
- Human capital: experienced staff and engaged stakeholders
- Financial resources from regional, national, and potentially EU funds
- Existing data sets and reports on regional development

3.8.7. Action Plan

Phase 1: Planning and outreach

Stakeholder Engagement

- Organise meetings with key stakeholders (ministries, planning regions, municipalities)
- Update and engage the members of the Development Programme monitoring committee

Research and Analysis

- Review existing monitoring systems and best practices
- Analyse current development programmes and their alignment with regional needs

Phase 2: Framework development

Framework Development

- Design the monitoring framework structure, compare that with existing structure, find gaps and opportunities for improvements, also for ICT and AI
- Develop classification of performance indicators for local government development programmes
- Create methodological guidelines for municipal development documents, so they are later possible to compare

ICT Integration

- Collaborate with the Ministry on aligning the monitoring framework with their ICT solution
- Prepare framework/technical description for ICT tool of the monitoring mechanism
- Develop data collection and reporting protocols

Phase 3: Testing and evaluating

Pilot Testing

- Implement the framework with selected municipalities from Vidzeme region
- Gather feedback and make necessary adjustments in the framework or ICT solution (if achieved as a result)

Capacity Building

- Conduct training sessions for municipal and regional planners
- Develop user guides and support materials

Evaluation and Refinement

- Assess the effectiveness of the new monitoring framework
- Make final adjustments based on pilot results and stakeholder feedback

Phase 4: Framework integration and dissemination

Prototype dissemination

- Roll out the framework across the Vidzeme region
- Share results and best practices with other regions and national authorities

Full implementation proposal

- Prepare proposals for the Ministry on performance indicator classification
- Develop a methodological framework for structured preparation of municipal development documents

3.9.   Malta

3.9.1.   Description

The Maltese pilot covers the territory of Malta and Gozo.

Malta, a small, densely populated archipelago of islands (Malta & Gozo) with around 500,000 inhabitants, faces unique challenges in its agricultural sector. Despite being one of the most densely populated countries globally, only 30% of its 316 square kilometre land area is considered agricultural, totalling to around 10,000 hectares. This limited space, often interspersed with development due to the high population density, restricts rural areas.

Limited Land and Intensive Farming:

- Rocky terrain and a dense population leave Malta with a limited amount of arable land.
- This available land is often used for intensive farming, specialising in high-value crops like potatoes, grapes, and vegetables grown under cover.
- Malta has a relatively small agricultural sector, contributing under 2% of GDP.
- The Maltese agricultural sector consists mostly of small holdings on terraced strips of land, and soils tend to be shallow.

Challenges and Support:

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- This limited land and focus on intensive farming make Malta heavily reliant on imported food to meet its needs.
- The agricultural sector also faces a continuous reduction in employment due to an ageing population, with only 23.7% of workers under 45 years old, and the inherent challenges of the profession.
- To address these challenges, the government offers support to farmers through subsidies and programs promoting sustainable practices.
- A growing interest in local and organic produce presents opportunities for growth.

Looking Forward: Training and Innovation

- Recognizing the need for a modern workforce to keep afloat in this day and age, the pilots aim to address the needs for digitalisation and heighten the entrepreneurial skills of the sector.
- plan initiatives to establish training programs to make aware the current farmers with cutting-edge technology and entrepreneurial skills, fostering a more innovative and sustainable agricultural sector.
- Connect farmers with relevant government entities offering free support services, to revitalise the sector for the digital age.

3.9.2.   Stakeholders

The following key stakeholders have been identified for the pilot:

#	Name (function)	Internal or External?	Role (short description)
01	Malta Digital Innovation Authority	External	National Authority for digitalisation and innovative technologies. Amongst its roles, it acts as a promoter of innovative technologies. This is done through various incentives to secure the uptake of digital innovation. This entity can complement the pilot with services, guidance and a test base for digital tools offered to SMEs through the entity
02	Golden Island Ltd	External	Largest honey procedure in Malta - an excellent example of the use of digitalization within the sector - collaboration is subject to competitive issues, but possible some knowledge sharing could be possible
03	MaYA Foundation	External	Organisation representing the interest of young farmers, mostly to build bridges between young farmers, government entities and the general public. Entity is still being chased to get onboard to collaborate with the project, but would be an excellent bridge for the pilot.
04	Merill Rural Network	External	Entity is still being chased to get onboard to collaborate with the project

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05	Local Councils Association	External	Representation of Local Councils in Malta & Gozo - possible collaboration in outreaching in the interest of rural localities.
06	The Oliver Growers Cooperative Limited	External	Cooperative representing Oliver Growers whose mission is to link traditional knowledge —a legacy passed from generation to generation— to new technologies that allow the growth of the olive industry.
07	SEAM - Social Entrepreneurs Association Malta	External	SEAM aims to be a point of reference for all entities which identify as 'social enterprises' in Malta. Their objective is to promote social entrepreneurship in Malta, inter alia, through the introduction of a legal framework and the setting up of an adequate support ecosystem.
08	Malta Tourism Authority	External	The role of the Authority varies from the tourism industry's regulator and motivator, its business partner and the country's brand promoter. The entity is interested in enhancing the viticulture sector in terms of produce and tourism. Hence this calls for potential collaboration within this project.
09	Malta Beekeepers' Association	External	Association representing Beekeeper, which provides guidance, training and coordinates apitourism initiatives.
10	Academic Body/ies	External	Entity who can collaborate in giving youths a taste of what job opportunities the sector provides and its benefits.
11	Regional Councils (capturing most rural areas)	External	The Regional Councils have the power to make bye-laws for the purpose of carrying out their functions. Regional Councils are chaired by a Chairman to be elected from among all Councillors of the localities forming that Region. This could be relevant as a bridge for end users, training etc.

This is an initial list to provide an overview of the type of stakeholders the pilot has been discussing with and aims to involve. Similar categories will be identified throughout the project as necessary.

3.9.3.   Vision

Contributing Towards a Revitalised and Stronger Maltese Agricultural Sector

This pilot project seeks to promote a rejuvenated Maltese agricultural sector that is a key contributor to a strong, connected, resilient, and prosperous region, aligning with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiatives.

Contribution to a Stronger Region:

- **Empowered Workforce:** By equipping farmers with digital and entrepreneurial skills, the project fosters a more skilled and adaptable workforce, possibly strengthening the agricultural sector's contribution to the regional economy.
- **Innovation and Diversification:** The project will nurture a culture of innovation, leading to new ventures and diversified production, enhancing the sector's overall strength and possibly improving competitiveness.

Contribution to a Connected Region:

- **Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide:** The project will encourage collaboration between urban and rural areas. Digitally-savvy farmers can connect more effectively with consumers and markets, fostering stronger regional ties.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** The project's capacity building initiatives will promote knowledge sharing and collaboration among farmers, fostering a more connected and supportive agricultural community.

Contribution to a Resilient Region:

- **Sustainable Practices:** The project can integrate training on sustainable practices alongside digital and entrepreneurial skills. This empowers farmers to adapt to climate change and resource scarcity, building a more resilient agricultural sector.
- **Future-Proofing the Workforce:** Equipping farmers with future-proof skills allows them to adapt to changing market demands and technological advancements, ensuring the long-term resilience of the sector.

Contribution to a Prosperous Region:

- **Increased Profitability:** The project's focus on entrepreneurial skills can help farmers identify new business opportunities, increase profitability, and contribute to overall regional prosperity.
- **Possible Job Creation:** A revitalised agricultural sector can attract new entrants and create jobs, fostering economic growth and prosperity in rural areas.

Alignment with EU Policies:

This project directly contributes to the EU's goals of achieving net zero emissions by 2050 ("Fit for 55") and a just transition by promoting sustainable practices and empowering rural communities. The focus on innovation aligns with the EU Missions, and the project's emphasis on aesthetics and functionality resonates with the NEB principles.

Urban-Rural Cooperation:

The project recognizes the need for strong urban-rural policy coordination. By fostering connections between these areas, it can create a more integrated and prosperous region.

3.9.4. Skills

Core Technical and Digital Skills:

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- **IT Infrastructure:** Knowledge of IT infrastructure and network management to ensure the smooth functioning of digital systems.
- **Tourism Diversification:** Understanding of the tourism industry and how to leverage digital tools to promote agricultural tourism.
- **Digital Tool Training:** Ability to train young farmers on using digital business tools effectively.
- **Digital Marketing:** Understanding of digital marketing channels (SEO, social media, content marketing) to promote agricultural products and services.
- **Digital Tools:** Proficiency in using digital tools for business management, such as CRM systems, accounting software, and e-commerce platforms.

Business and Entrepreneurial Skills:

- **Business Planning:** Ability to develop comprehensive business plans for agricultural ventures, touching upon concepts about market analysis, financial projections, and risk assessment.
- **Marketing and Sales:** Skills in marketing agricultural products, understanding consumer preferences, and building effective sales channels.
- **Financial Management:** Knowledge of financial management principles, including budgeting, accounting, and financial analysis.
- **Funding Acquisition:** Knowledge of funding sources and grant applications to support digitization efforts.

Community Engagement and Education:

- **Social Awareness:** Understanding of societal issues related to agriculture and the ability to communicate effectively with the public.
- **Educational Outreach:** Skills in developing educational programs for children and young adults to raise awareness about agriculture and its importance.
- **Digital Advocacy:** Ability to use digital tools to advocate for the agricultural sector and raise awareness about its challenges and opportunities.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Knowledge of local cultural traditions and practices related to agriculture and the ability to incorporate them into digital initiatives.

Project Management and Facilitation:

- **Project Planning:** Ability to develop and implement project plans, set timelines, and allocate resources effectively.
- **Stakeholder Management:** Skills in managing relationships with various stakeholders, including farmers, government officials, and community members.
- **Problem-Solving:** Ability to identify and address challenges and obstacles that may arise during project implementation.
- **Workshop Facilitation:** Ability to conduct engaging and informative workshops for farmers on various topics related to digitalization and entrepreneurship.
- **Collaboration:** Ability to work effectively with farmers, government officials, and other stakeholders to achieve project goals.

Cultural and Regional Understanding:

![POLIRURAL plus logo]

- **Local Knowledge:** Understanding of Malta's agricultural landscape, cultural context, and specific challenges faced by farmers.
- **Language Proficiency:** Fluency in Maltese and English, but mostly Maltese to effectively communicate with farmers and local communities.

Skills Gaps:
- Lack of knowledge with regards to agronomy & Sustainable Farming and related aspects; this could be addressed through the involvement of relevant stakeholders to be able to adapt the digitalisation and entrepreneurial skills accordingly.
- Access to digital technologies and testing grounds; this can be addressed through the involvement of the Malta National Digital Authority

3.9.5. Incentives

Government:

- **Improved agricultural productivity:** Digitalization and entrepreneurship can help increase agricultural productivity and reduce reliance on imports.
- **Economic growth:** A more vibrant agricultural sector can contribute to economic growth and job creation in rural areas.
- **Preservation of cultural heritage:** The project can help preserve Malta's agricultural heritage and cultural traditions.
- **Enhanced food security:** A more resilient agricultural sector can improve food security for the country.

Farmers:

- **Increased income:** Digital tools and entrepreneurial skills can help farmers increase their income through improved efficiency, better marketing, and diversification.
- **Access to new markets:** Digitalization can help farmers reach new markets and customers, both locally and internationally.
- **Reduced costs:** The use of digital technologies can help reduce production costs and improve efficiency.
- **Improved sustainability:** Sustainable farming practices can be supported through digital tools and training.

Young Farmers:

- **Career opportunities:** The project can provide young farmers with new career opportunities and pathways to success in the agricultural sector.
- **Skill development:** Participation in the pilot project can help young farmers develop valuable skills, such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and agricultural knowledge.
- **Networking opportunities:** The project can provide opportunities for young farmers to connect with other farmers, mentors, and industry experts.

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Community:

- **Improved quality of life:** A more vibrant and prosperous agricultural sector can improve the quality of life for rural communities.
- **Preservation of the environment:** Sustainable agricultural practices can help protect the environment and preserve Malta's natural resources.
- **Community development:** The project can contribute to community development by creating new opportunities for businesses and jobs.

Businesses:

- **New market opportunities:** The agricultural sector can provide new market opportunities for businesses that offer digital tools, services, or products related to agriculture.
- **Increased innovation:** Collaboration with farmers and the agricultural sector can drive innovation and the development of new products and services.
- **Positive public image:** Supporting sustainable and innovative agricultural practices can enhance a company's public image.

3.9.6.   Resources

Human Resources:

- **Project Manager:** A skilled project manager to oversee the planning, execution, and monitoring of the project.
- **Business Consultants:** Individuals with experience in business planning, marketing, and financial management.
- **Trainers and Facilitators:** Skilled trainers and facilitators to conduct workshops and training sessions.
- **Community Outreach Workers:** Individuals to engage with farmers, communities, and other stakeholders.

Financial Resources:

- **Funding:** Secure funding from government agencies, NGOs, or private donors to cover project costs, including salaries, equipment, training, and travel expenses.
- **Grants:** Explore opportunities for grants and subsidies from government agencies or international organisations.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with businesses, universities, or research institutions to share resources and reduce costs.

Technological Resources:

- **Digital Tools:** Access to digital tools and platforms for data collection, analysis, and visualisation.
- **IT Infrastructure:** A reliable IT infrastructure to support digital systems and data management.
- **Equipment:** Agricultural equipment and machinery, including sensors, drones, and other technologies.

Physical Resources:

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- **Office Space:** A suitable office space for project staff and meetings.
- **Training Facilities:** Facilities for conducting workshops and training sessions.

Knowledge and Information Resources:

- **Research:** Access to research and publications on digital agriculture, sustainable farming, and community development.
- **Networking:** Opportunities to connect with experts, researchers, and other stakeholders in the field.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with universities, research institutions, and NGOs to access knowledge and resources.

3.9.7.   Action Plan

1. Stakeholder Identification and Engagement:

- Conduct a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key individuals and organisations relevant to the project's goals. This will include representatives from the agricultural sector (farmers, cooperatives), government agencies, educational institutions, co-operatives, local councils, networks and other potential collaborators.
- Establish communication channels with identified stakeholders and develop a strategy for ongoing engagement. This could involve regular meetings, workshops, and information sharing to foster collaboration.

2. Training Material Development:

- Develop high-quality training materials specifically tailored to the needs of the Maltese agricultural workforce. This will include content on digital literacy, e-commerce, marketing, and entrepreneurial skills relevant to the agricultural sector.
- Materials will be designed in a clear, concise, and engaging format, incorporating visuals and practical examples whenever possible.

3. Training Delivery and Logistics:

- Develop a comprehensive training plan outlining the format, schedule, and location for workshops or training sessions. Consider factors like accessibility, convenience for stakeholders, and potential partnerships with local institutions for space utilisation.
- Promote the training program through various channels, including stakeholder networks, agricultural associations, and social media.
- Utilise both English and the national language (Maltese) to ensure maximum reach.

4. Evaluation and Monitoring:

- Gather feedback from participants after each training session to assess their learning experience and identify areas for improvement in future iterations. This could involve surveys, discussion forums, or focus group discussions.

- Implement a long-term monitoring plan to track the impact of the project on the agricultural sector. This may involve collecting data on skill development, adoption of new technologies, and overall economic performance of participating farms.

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4. Monitoring & Effectiveness of the Multi-Actor approach: The Multi-Actor Approach Tool

4.1. What is the Multi-Actor Approach Tool

The Multi-Actor Approach Tool (MAATool) is a web-based tool whose main purpose is to implement the multi-actor approach methodology easily, considering the complexities that occur within projects. The MAATool is designed to aggregate information from various teams involved in a program that employs the multi-actor approach methodology. It estimates stakeholder representativeness using a customizable set of indicators and tracks the progress of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Three main elements of the use of this tool are:
- The tool will help establish objectives among the use cases and enable smooth tracking of their commitments.
- All the information related to the project such as stakeholders, users or activities relevant to the evaluation of the project will also be collected.
- The tool will allow all the involved actors to have a centralised and unified view of the project progress.

The development and implementation of the MAATool within the PoliRuralPlus project aims to demonstrate the tool's capability to enhance collaboration and efficiency across multiple actors involved in urban innovation initiatives. By employing the multi-actor approach methodology, the MAATool aggregates diverse information streams and provides a robust framework for monitoring and tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
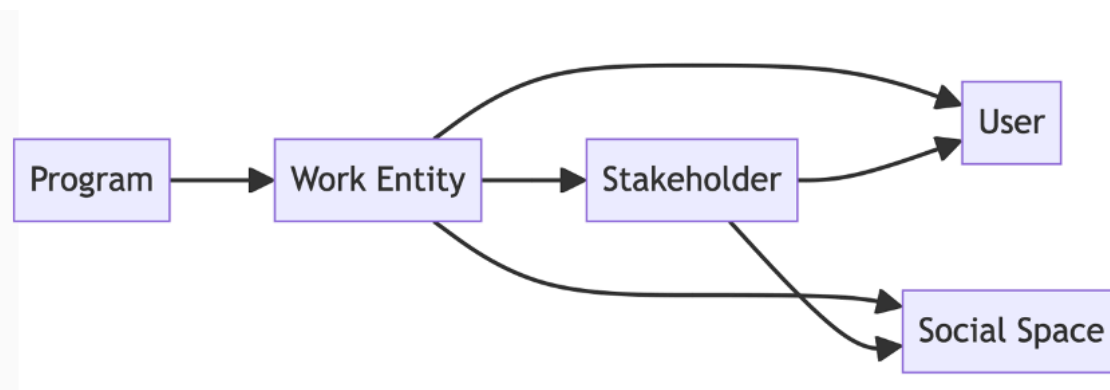
The architectural design, which leverages modern web technologies such as Angular for the frontend and Node.js with NestJS for the backend, ensures that the tool is both scalable and maintainable. The use of Docker Compose for deployment facilitates seamless updates and enhances the tool's reliability and security.

The customization features, including the ability to define new levels of depth and add extra attributes, make the MAATool highly adaptable to the needs of heterogeneous programs and work entities. This flexibility is crucial for addressing the dynamic requirements of the different pilots in the PoliRuralPlus project.

In summary, the MAATool aims to be an all-encompassing solution for managing and monitoring urban innovation projects. Its strong architecture, customizable features, and effective use within PoliRuralPlus pursues to demonstrate its capability to foster significant advancements in rural-urban planning and enhance stakeholder collaboration.

4.2. Main actors in the MAA Tool

The tool defines programs and work entities which include the main actors in a multi-actor approach methodology:

User

The user has been defined as the person that performs every action on the platform. They are linked to email and can manipulate all the other actors. Every action on the platform is executed by a user. It is not an essential piece of the application of the methodology, but it is a necessary element.

A user can have different states:

- **Deleted**: this is the state of a user who has been deleted either by an administrator or moderator or by themselves when deactivating their account.
- **Pending**: A user is in a pending state when the system needs the user to confirm an email that has been sent to them.
- **Representative**: This is an important state. It indicates that the user has been created for representative purposes by another user for another element. In this state the user can be invited by receiving an email or a notification to their account.
- **Active**: An active user that can enter the website and perform actions.
- **Administrator**: A user that can enter any element and define pillars.

Stakeholder

A stakeholder is any person or group of people that represents an interested party in the project. They can belong to users, social spaces and programs. A stakeholder is a key part of the tool because they are a part of the objective equation process. In addition, a stakeholder is quantified at the moment that they enter a social space. This quantification process is based on a set of pillars predefined in the tool. Based on this quantification the MAATool estimates the reality of the stakeholder representativeness in the platform ecosystem. It helps to ensure an effective way of sharing stakeholders between projects. A stakeholder can be private or public. Being public allows the stakeholder to be searched and invited by social spaces or programs.
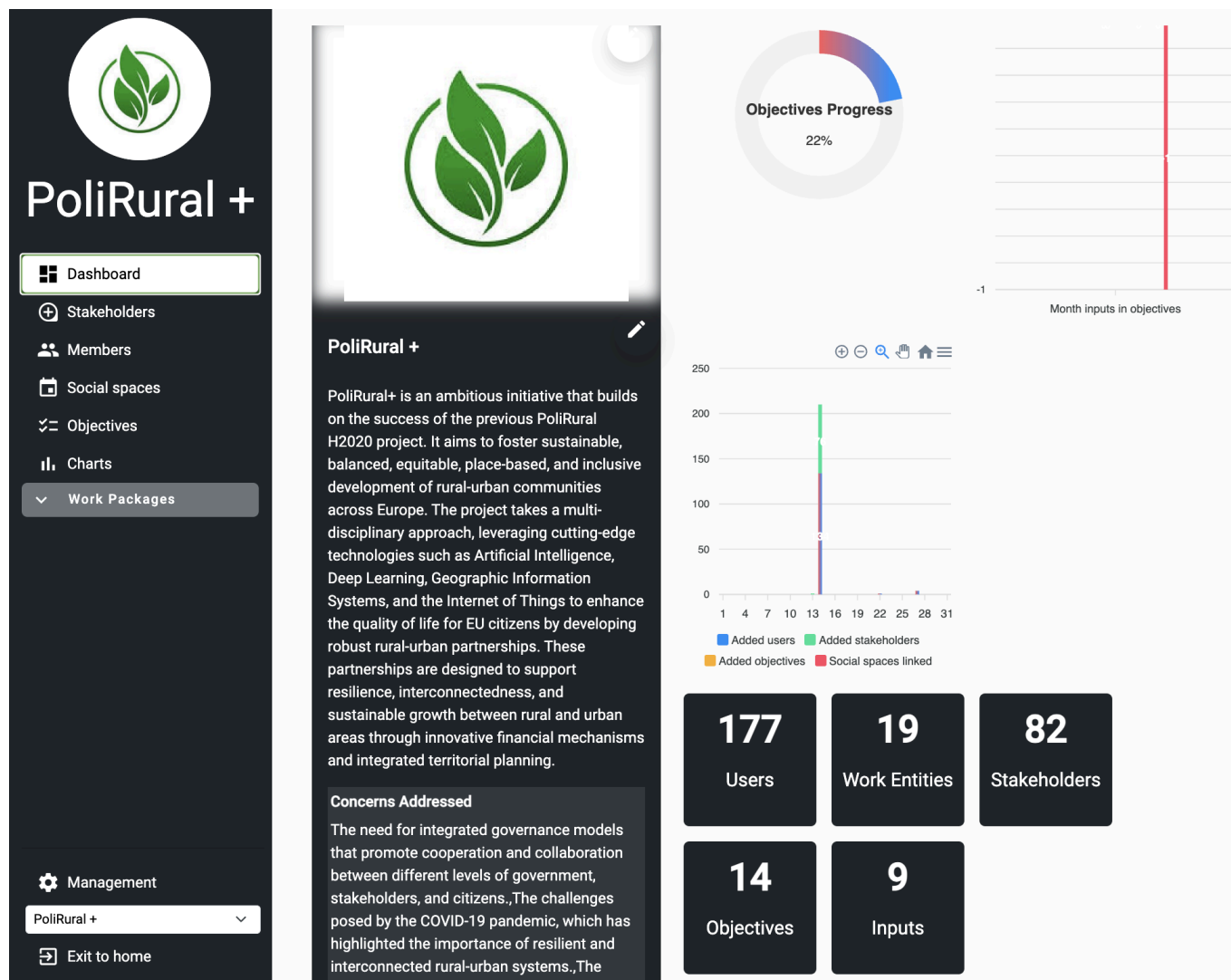
Pilot

In the MAA Tool, a pilot is a user-centred, open-innovation ecosystem that integrates research and innovation processes within a public-private-people partnership. It operates as a social space where users can design and experience their own future, encouraging co-creation and real-life experimentation to address societal challenges and innovate solutions.
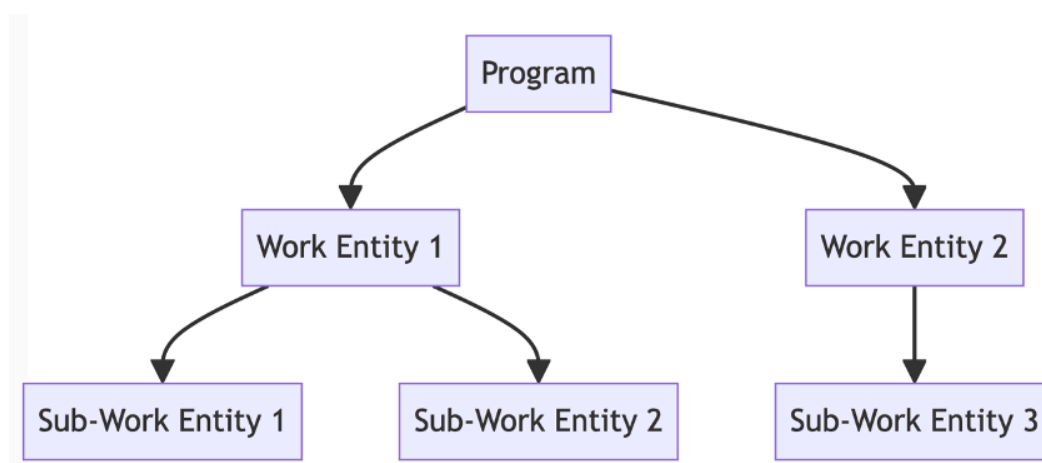
Program

Programs are initiatives that integrate social spaces, users, and stakeholders to achieve targeted innovation goals. They ensure that various elements work together harmoniously for effective and inclusive outcomes. A program includes work entities.

PoliRuralPlus program: main view

Work Entity

Work entities are flexible, user-defined components within a program that can represent various levels of work, from individual tasks to comprehensive action plans, enabling adaptable and scalable management.

Thanks to this methodology it is possible to define different levels of depth in a program. For example, we have a project where the levels of depth are as follows:

1. Work packages.
2. Actions plans.
3. Actions.
4. Tasks.

But in Work Package 5 the work package leader does not want Action Plans in the next aggregation level but wants Pilots and then Activities. So, its depth level will be:
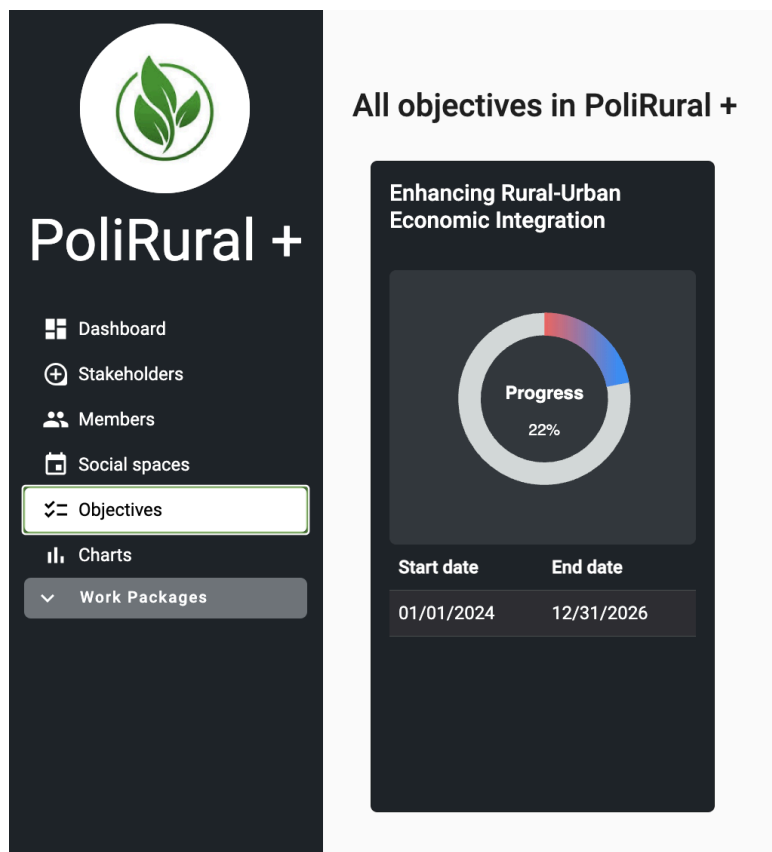
1. Work packages.
2. Pilots.
3. Activities.

This is possible because there is the possibility of defining new levels of depth in each work entity.

Objectives

The objectives represent another pillar for the MAATool. They are responsible for the accomplishment of different objective types. Such as KPIs, goals, milestones and an undetermined set of definitions.

PoliRuralPlus Objectives: main view

The objectives are created inside the programs, and they can be assigned to specific work entities.

An objective should be linked to an objective type, and it can be linked to an indicator.

An objective can be of two types:

- Normal objective.
- Aggregated objective.

Indicators

Unless an objective is aggregated it should have an indicator linked to it. An indicator is the way of quantifying the value that the user is going to track. It has, apart from name and description attributes, an objective has three values that define its purpose and tracking method.
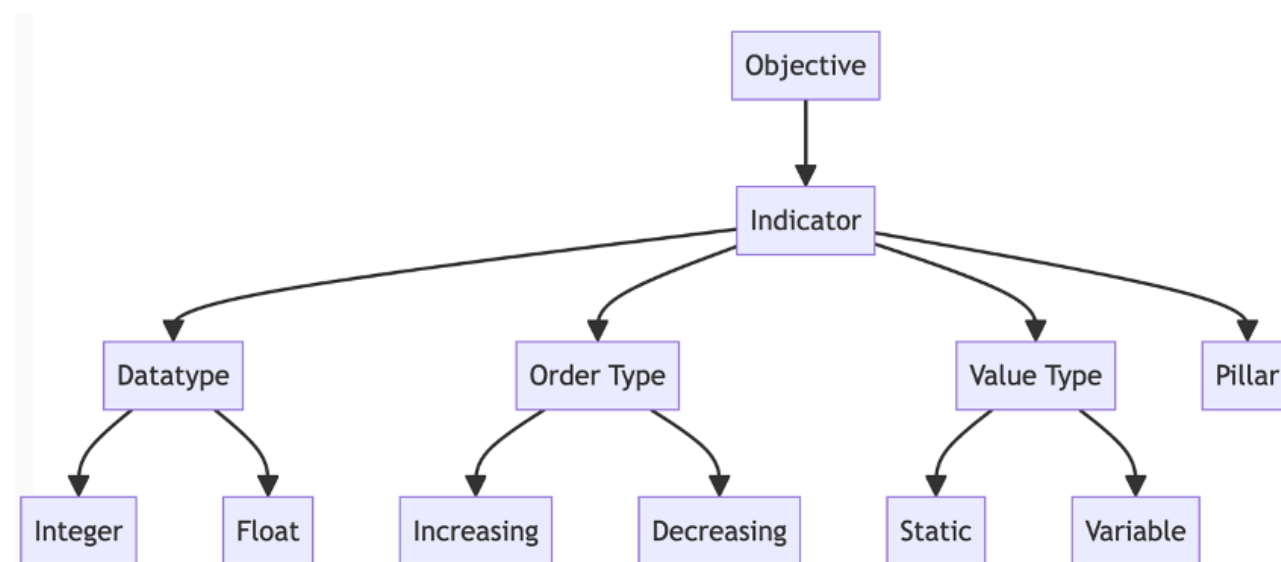
- **Datatype**: it's used for defining if the numeric value of the objective will be an integer or a float value.
- **Order type**: it's used to define the direction of the indicator, whether it is increasing or decreasing.
- **Value type**: it represents if the value is static or variable, in the case of being static the latest added value to the objective is the current value of it. On the other hand, being variable implies updating the value constantly based on the current value of the objective.

Lastly, an indicator is linked to a pillar. This is necessary to correlate the value of objective completeness linked to a stakeholder versus the pillar estimations done by the social spaces.

Inputs

The objective values are updated based on inputs. The inputs are new values added to an objective that should have a date and an optional comment on it.

Extra attributes system

One of the main goals of the tool was to make it customizable. This wouldn't be possible if the MAATool entities' attributes weren't customizable based on projects or work entities.

The customization currently is performed only in the programs. Where it is possible to add extra attributes to stakeholders, users, and work entities. The setup of the extra attributes is not static within the program environment. It follows, just like work entities, a hierarchical methodology.

Programs and work entities contain a set of extra attributes for each of its contained entities and a set of children extra attributes for their children work entities. In the case of the work entities extra attributes within a program only the children set exists.

In addition, the application allows personalising the validation of the extra attribute values that the user is going to create.

4.3. MAATool implementation phases

During the first period of the PoliRuralPlus project, covering activities under WP4 and WP5,
- **MAATool development**:
- **Set-up of PoliRuralPlus pilots**: importing all pilots' stakeholders defined in T2.1 in close collaboration with WP2
- **Capacity building activities**: The following section details these activities.

4.4. Capacity building activities

During this period there have been different capacity-building actions around the multi-actor approach and stakeholder management concepts. In this line, the MAA Tool serves as a pivotal point to promote urban-rural synergetic mechanisms and regional development.
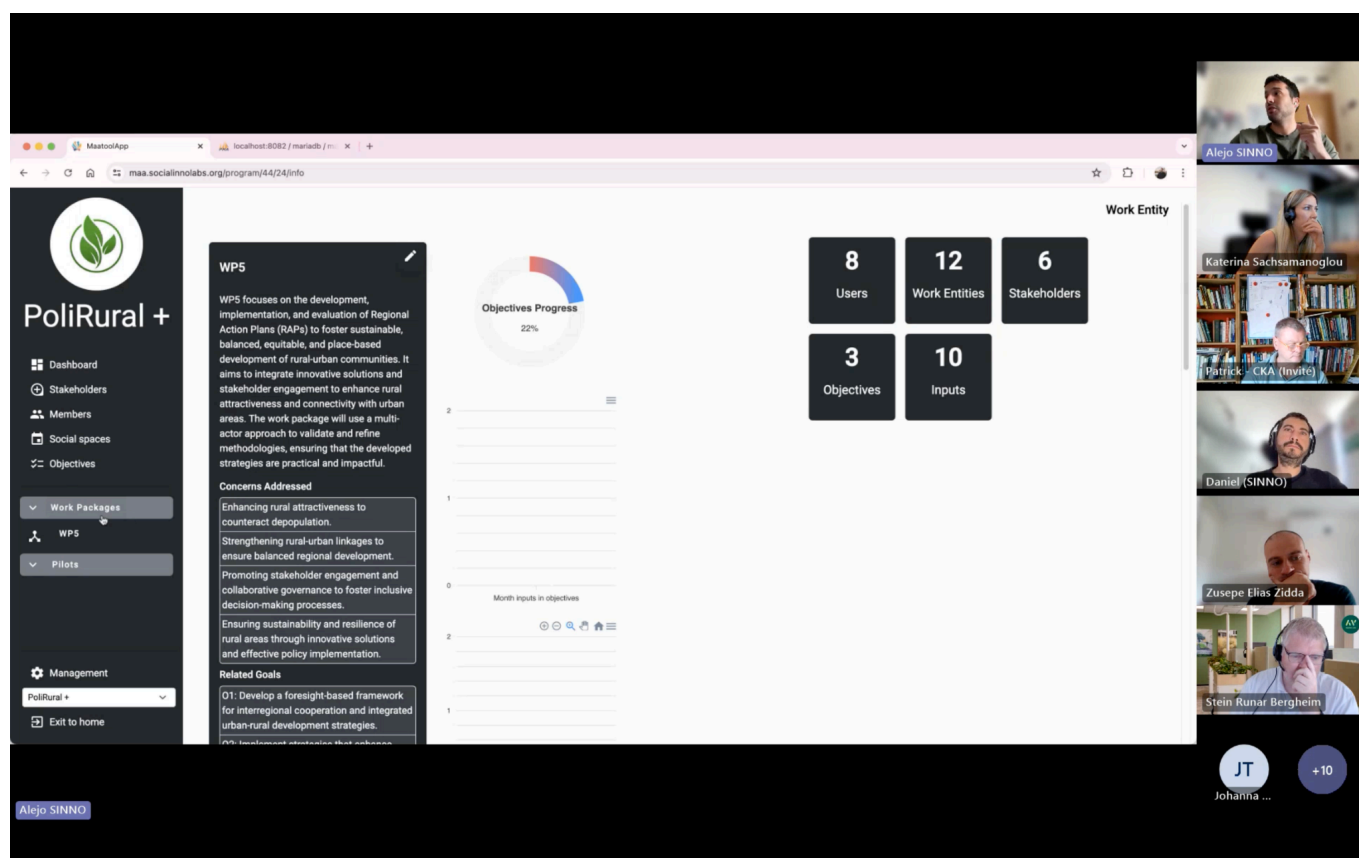
The feedback from these workshops is key to advance with the development of the tool, ensuring it meets the users' needs effectively.

The activities performed are detailed in the following subsections.

4.4.1. MAATool online Workshop

The first MAA Tool workshop was held on July 22, 2024, and was attended by most of the project pilots and other partners interested in learning about the proposed technological solution. In addition, the session was recorded for later consultation.

The workshop consisted of a first part introducing different aspects of the Tool related with the multi-actor approach, and a second eminently practical part where the different parts of the application were navigated through and its different capabilities were demonstrated.

MAA Tool online Workshop

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4.4.2.   1-1 meetings with pilots

During this period, two sets of 1-1 meetings with pilots have been held:

1. A first round of 1-1 meetings covering the strategy. In May
2. A second round of 1-1 meetings where pilots (August and September)

4.4.3.   MAA Tool Workshop with Spanish pilot

The 29th of July 2024, Social Innolabs held a workshop with the Spanish pilot focused on discussing the usability and purposes of the MAATool in a rural environment, including its potential for monitoring stakeholders and quantifying objectives.

The workshop was held on the occasion of a face-to-face meeting organised by the Spanish pilot, in which Social Innolabs, the developer of the MAA Tool, participates.

MAA Tool Workshop with Spanish pilot

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5. Conclusion

The document "PoliRuralPlus D5.1 Prepared Pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach" has provided a comprehensive overview of the strategic framework and methodologies guiding the development of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) in nine geographically diverse pilot regions. Central to this process is the multi-actor approach, which fosters collaboration among a broad range of stakeholders—government, businesses, local communities, and NGOs—ensuring that the initiatives are inclusive and responsive to regional needs. The combination of Foresight methodology and the Lippitt-Knoster model is fundamental to address the complex change required to strengthen rural-urban linkages, facilitating the anticipation of future challenges and the effective management of transformative processes.

The document has also detailed the specific themes addressed by each pilot, such as the green economy, digital transformation, and cultural heritage preservation, while highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagement in shaping these initiatives. By focusing on regional priorities and aligning them with broader European policy goals, the pilots are designed to foster sustainable, balanced, and equitable development in both rural and urban contexts.

As a foundational deliverable, this document serves as a starting point for the subsequent work and activities within the pilots in the PoliRuralPlus project. It lays the groundwork for the implementation, monitoring, and adaptation of the RAPs, ensuring that future project efforts are well-structured and aligned with both local and EU-level objectives. The insights and strategies presented here will guide the next phases of the project, fostering innovation and collaboration across all regions involved, and contributing to the long-term vision of creating stronger, more resilient rural-urban communities.