



DEVELOP CALL

Financial Support for Third Parties

Mid-term progress Report Part A (Public)

LocalLinks.AI

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Executive Summary

The LocalLinks project aims to strengthen short food supply chains in rural–urban regions through the development of a data-driven digital solution that maps and activates relationships between local producers, sales outlets, and consumers. Implemented within Pilot Area No. 6 – the Bavarian–Czech Cross-Border Rural Innovation Network – the project responds to the fragmentation of information on regional food systems and the limited availability of interoperable data for regional development and policy support.

During Phase 1 (October 2025 – January 2026), the project focused on requirements analysis, stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and the development of a functional prototype. Key activities included the identification of target user groups, organisation of stakeholder workshops, design of a data structure aligned with regional needs, and development of core technical modules for data collection, relationship management, and spatial visualisation. Initial integration with PoliRuralPlus tools, particularly Atlas and Jackdaw, was implemented and pilot-tested.

At mid-term, the project has delivered a functional prototype (TRL 6–7) supported by real pilot data and validated integration pathways. Early stakeholder engagement and pilot testing indicate strong relevance of the solution and a high potential for further adoption. As an innovative feature, a pilot GeoAI chatbot powered by Jackdaw was implemented to enable natural-language interaction with spatial data.

The project contributes to the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem by supplying interoperable datasets, demonstrating practical integration scenarios, and providing a replicable methodology for mapping short food supply chains. Phase 2 will focus on broader testing, open beta release, dissemination activities, and preparation for replication and long-term sustainability.

1. Project Overview

Context and rationale

Short food supply chains (SFSC) play a key role in sustainable rural development, yet in many regions information about relationships between producers, sales outlets, and consumers remains fragmented or unavailable. In the selected pilot region, covering the Pilsen region with a focus on the Pošumaví, small and medium-sized producers often lack access to digital tools enabling systematic presentation and activation of their supply relationships. LocalLinks addresses this gap by building on existing regional initiatives, such as the Digital Marketplace and the Atlas of Regional Specialities. The project responds to the need for structured, interoperable, and up-to-date data that can support local markets, public decision-making, and cross-sectoral cooperation in rural–urban regions.

Alignment with the call objectives and selected pilot region(s)

LocalLinks is fully aligned with the objectives of the PoliRuralPlus Develop Call, in particular with the ambition to support pilot-level innovation, strengthen data-driven rural development, and contribute reusable digital solutions to the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem.

The project is implemented within Pilot Area No. 6 – the Bavarian–Czech Cross-Border Rural Innovation Network, where strengthening short food supply chains, territorial identity, and digital capacities are key priorities. The pilot approach enables close cooperation with regional stakeholders, validation of real-world use cases, and preparation for future cross-border replication.

Target users and stakeholders

The main target users and stakeholders of the LocalLinks project include:

- Local producers and farmers, who gain tools to document, visualise, and manage their customer relationships.
- Sales outlets and institutional buyers, such as local shops, restaurants, school canteens, and catering services, who benefit from improved access to regional suppliers.
- Public sector and development organisations, including municipalities, Local Action Groups (LAGs), and regional development agencies, using aggregated data to support planning and policy design.
- Citizens and consumers, who indirectly benefit from increased transparency and accessibility of regional products.
- PoliRuralPlus tool developers and users, who benefit from interoperable data and tested integration scenarios.

Short description of the solution / service / methodology

LocalLinks delivers a digital solution for the systematic collection, validation, and visualisation of producer–customer relationships within regional food systems. The solution combines questionnaire-based data collection, AI-supported semi-automated data enrichment from public sources, and spatial visualisation of supply relationships.

A key methodological principle is interoperability with the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem, achieved through integration with tools such as Atlas and Jackdaw, including pilot implementation of a GeoAI chatbot enabling natural-language queries over spatial data. The solution is designed as modular and replicable, allowing its transfer to other regions and pilot areas.

2. Progress Against Objectives and Work Plan

Objective description

The main objective of Phase 1 was to establish the conceptual, technical, and organisational foundations for the LocalLinks digital solution. This included requirements analysis, stakeholder engagement, design of the data structure, development of a functional prototype, and initial pilot testing with real users.

This objective directly reflects the project proposal and focuses on delivering a working prototype (TRL 6–7) by the end of January 2026, prepared for further validation and scaling in Phase 2.

Work plan progress

The implementation of Phase 1 followed the approved work plan and timeline. All planned activities for the period October 2025 – January 2026 were carried out as scheduled, leading to the delivery of a functional prototype and preparation of the mid-term progress report.

The work was organised in an iterative manner, combining technical development with continuous stakeholder feedback to ensure relevance to real regional needs.

Summary of activities carried out

During the reporting period, the following key activities were implemented:

- Identification and analysis of target user groups, including producers, consumers, and public sector stakeholders.
- Organisation of stakeholder workshops and technical consultations with regional and technical partners.
- Analysis of available data sources, including the Atlas of Regional Specialities, and design of a basic data structure in cooperation with regional partners.
- Development and pilot testing of core system modules, including data collection, relationship management, map visualisation, and interoperability connectors.
- Initial pilot deployment and testing with selected users.
- Preparation and submission of the mid-term progress report.

Reference to planned phases and tasks

The activities implemented during the reporting period fully correspond to Phase 1: Requirements analysis and development of a functional prototype, as defined in the approved project proposal. No activities planned for Phase 2 were advanced prematurely beyond preparatory technical alignment.

Milestones and deliverables status

Milestone / Deliverable	Planned date	Status
Identification of target groups	Q4 2025	Achieved
Stakeholder workshops	Q4 2025 – Q1 2026	Achieved
Data analysis and data structure design	Q4 2025	Achieved
Functional prototype development	31 January 2026	Achieved

Milestone / Deliverable	Planned date	Status
Pilot testing with selected users	Q1 2026	Achieved
Mid-term progress report submission	15 February 2026	Achieved

Deviations from the work plan and corrective actions

No significant deviations from the approved work plan were identified during Phase 1.

Minor adjustments were made at the operational level, mainly related to the sequencing of technical tasks and the incorporation of stakeholder feedback into the prototype development. These adjustments did not affect the overall objectives, timeline, or expected results of the project.

Impact on objectives, timeline, or results

The implemented adjustments had no negative impact on the project objectives or timeline. On the contrary, early involvement of stakeholders and technical partners contributed to improved alignment of the developed solution with user needs and PoliRuralPlus interoperability requirements.

Mid-term assessment

At mid-term, the project is on track. Phase 1 objectives have been met, and the project has delivered a functional prototype supported by initial real-world data and validated integration pathways with PoliRuralPlus tools. The results achieved provide a solid basis for Phase 2 activities focused on broader testing, dissemination, and preparation for replication.

Transition to Phase 2

Based on the successful completion of Phase 1, the project will proceed to Phase 2 with a focus on:

- expanding the user base and collected datasets,
- refining functionalities based on pilot feedback,
- making an open beta version of the tool publicly available,
- strengthening dissemination and contribution to the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem.

3. Technical Results and Outputs

Description of the developed prototype and technical solution

During Phase 1, a functional prototype of the LocalLinks digital solution was developed, focusing on the collection, management, and visualisation of relationships between local producers and sales outlets within the pilot region.

The prototype is composed of several interconnected modules forming a minimum viable product (MVP):

- a data collection and editing environment,
- a relationship management module,
- spatial visualisation components,
- interoperability connectors to selected PoliRuralPlus tools.

The solution builds on existing infrastructures, in particular the Atlas of Regional Specialities and the LocalFarms / Digital Marketplace environment, ensuring continuity with previous regional initiatives and avoiding duplication of existing data.

Core modules and functionalities

LocalFarms Editor

A dedicated LocalFarms module was developed and pilot-tested. The module enables semi-automated acquisition of information about relevant entities (producers, sales outlets, institutions) using AI-supported methods. It allows:

- assisted data entry and enrichment from publicly available sources,
- verification of selected attributes against official public registers,
- assignment of a confidence score indicating the estimated accuracy of collected data.

Map-based visualisation

Collected data are visualised using a spatial interface, enabling users to explore producer–customer networks directly on a map. This relational view represents a shift from static listings towards a dynamic spatial understanding of short food supply chains.

Interoperability and integration components

To ensure compatibility with the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem, dedicated connectors were developed:

- a connector enabling visualisation of LocalLinks data within the Atlas environment,
- a connector providing structured access to LocalFarms data for the Jackdaw tool.

As an experimental proof of concept, a chatbot powered by Jackdaw was implemented within the Atlas interface. The chatbot uses LocalFarms data as input and enables users to query spatial and relational information using natural language, supporting exploratory analysis and improved accessibility of data.

Technical maturity and deployment status

At the end of Phase 1, the LocalLinks solution reached a functional prototype level (TRL 6-7). The prototype is operational, supports real data inputs, and has been tested with a limited group of pilot users.

While not yet publicly released, the system is technically prepared for broader testing and incremental improvements planned in Phase 2.

Data, datasets, and methodologies

Initial datasets describing producer–customer relationships were collected using a mixed methodology combining:

- structured questionnaires,
- AI-assisted data extraction from public online sources,
- validation through direct stakeholder contact.

The data model was designed in cooperation with regional partners to ensure relevance, scalability, and future reuse. Emphasis was placed on data quality, transparency, and the ability to distinguish between verified and estimated information.

Interoperability standards and reuse potential

The architecture of the prototype follows interoperability principles promoted by PoliRuralPlus, including modular design, clear separation of data and presentation layers, and compatibility with existing tools such as Atlas and Jackdaw.

This approach supports future reuse of the developed components in other regions, as well as potential extension to additional domains beyond food supply chains.

Mid-term status summary

At mid-term, the project has successfully delivered:

- a functioning prototype of the LocalLinks solution,
- core modules for data collection, relationship management, and spatial visualisation,
- tested integration pathways with PoliRuralPlus tools,
- an initial AI-supported chatbot use case.

These technical results provide a solid foundation for Phase 2 activities focused on validation, dissemination, and preparation for replication.

4. Integration and Contribution to PoliRuralPlus

Use of PoliRuralPlus tools, platforms, and data

The LocalLinks project actively integrates and builds upon selected tools developed within the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem. During Phase 1, particular emphasis was placed on interoperability with the Atlas and Jackdaw tools, which were identified in the proposal as key components for spatial analysis, data visualisation, and advanced user interaction.

The project does not operate as a standalone application but rather as a set of tools and functions that extends the functionality of existing PoliRuralPlus tools by supplying structured, regionally grounded data on short food supply chain relationships.

Data generated and integration into the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem

LocalLinks generates structured datasets describing relationships between producers, sales outlets, and other relevant actors in the local food system. These datasets include both spatial and relational attributes and are designed to be reusable beyond the immediate project context.

During Phase 1:

- data structures were aligned with the requirements of the Atlas environment,
- initial datasets were made available for visualisation within the Atlas,
- controlled access to LocalFarms data was enabled for Jackdaw to support spatial querying and analysis.
- This integration ensures that data generated within LocalLinks contribute to the broader PoliRuralPlus data ecosystem and can be combined with other datasets and analytical tools.

Contribution to interoperability and reuse

A core contribution of LocalLinks lies in its focus on interoperability and modular design. By developing dedicated connectors and aligning data models with PoliRuralPlus tools, the project demonstrates practical pathways for integrating third-party solutions into the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem.

The approach supports:

- reuse of LocalLinks components in other PoliRuralPlus pilot regions,
- replication of the data collection and visualisation methodology in different territorial contexts,
- extension of the solution to other domains, such as crafts, agritourism, or cultural services.

Synergies with other projects and initiatives

LocalLinks builds directly on results achieved in previous and parallel initiatives, in particular the THEROS Digital Marketplace and activities related to Data4Food2030. These synergies ensure continuity of data, avoid duplication of effort, and strengthen the added value of PoliRuralPlus tools by grounding them in real operational contexts. By connecting these initiatives with Atlas and Jackdaw, LocalLinks contributes to cross-sectoral data integration spanning agriculture, regional development, and digital innovation.

Mid-term contribution assessment

At mid-term, LocalLinks has demonstrated its ability to:

- integrate with core PoliRuralPlus tools,
- supply real-world data for spatial and relational analysis,
- test innovative interaction mechanisms, such as a GeoAI chatbot powered by Jackdaw.

These contributions confirm the relevance of the project within the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem and provide a solid foundation for deeper integration, broader dissemination, and long-term reuse in Phase 2.

5. Stakeholder Engagement and User Involvement

Stakeholder groups involved

The LocalLinks project is based on active involvement of multiple stakeholder groups representing different roles within short food supply chains and regional development. The key stakeholder groups involved during Phase 1 include:

- Local producers and farmers, as primary providers of data and end users of the solution.
- Sales outlets and institutional buyers, such as local shops, markets.
- Public sector and regional development organisations represented by Local Action Groups (LAG).
- Technical stakeholders, including developers and users of PoliRuralPlus tools (Atlas, Jackdaw), involved in ensuring interoperability and technical alignment.

Engagement methods

Stakeholders were involved using a combination of qualitative and practical engagement methods designed to support iterative development:

- Stakeholder workshops were organised with regional actors to discuss project objectives, validate user needs, and gather feedback on proposed functionalities.
- In-person and online technical meetings were held to address integration aspects and ensure alignment with PoliRuralPlus tools.
- Pilot testing was conducted with selected producers and sales outlets using real data and real use cases.
- Structured questionnaires were developed and used to collect information on producer–customer relationships, supported by direct personal contact with stakeholders.

This approach ensured continuous interaction between technical development and real-world practice.

Feedback received and its influence on the project

Feedback from stakeholders directly influenced several aspects of the LocalLinks solution, including:

- prioritisation of simple and time-efficient data entry workflows,
- emphasis on map-based visualisation rather than text-based listings,
- clarification of data sharing levels and the need to distinguish between verified and estimated information.

Stakeholder input was systematically incorporated into the design of the data model, user interfaces, and pilot testing scenarios.

Evidence of user uptake and interest

During Phase 1, stakeholders demonstrated strong interest in the proposed solution:

- producers and sales outlets actively participated in pilot data collection and validation,
- regional development organisations expressed interest in using aggregated outputs for planning and communication,
- technical partners collaborated on testing integration scenarios with PoliRuralPlus tools.

Although the system has not yet been publicly released, early engagement and pilot testing indicate a high potential for adoption and further scaling in Phase 2.

Multi-Actor Approach

The engagement strategy applied in LocalLinks follows the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) promoted by PoliRuralPlus. By involving producers, buyers, public authorities, and technical actors throughout the development process, the project ensures that the resulting solution is practically relevant, user-oriented, and aligned with regional development needs.

6. Communication, Dissemination and Visibility

Progress on obligatory communication outputs

Communication and dissemination activities during Phase 1 focused primarily on stakeholder engagement, pilot testing, and preparation of content for broader dissemination planned in Phase 2. Given the mid-term status of the project and the ongoing development of the prototype, communication activities were intentionally phased to align with technical maturity.

During Phase 1:

- preparatory work for news articles and blog posts was initiated,
- one social media post presenting the project concept and initial progress was prepared and published.

The remaining mandatory communication outputs, including news articles and PoliRuralPlus blog posts, are planned for Phase 2, when the solution will be available in an open beta version and ready for broader public presentation.

Social media communication

A first social media contribution was published during Phase 1 to introduce the LocalLinks project, its objectives, and its role within the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem. The post aimed to raise initial awareness among regional stakeholders and potential users, while setting expectations for further updates during the next project phase. Additional social media summaries highlighting key milestones, implementation steps, and results will be published at the beginning, mid-point, and end of Phase 2, in accordance with the communication requirements of the Develop Call.

Events, demonstrations, and presentations

Dissemination activities during Phase 1 were closely linked to stakeholder workshops and technical meetings, where the project concept and early prototype were presented to selected audiences. These interactions served primarily as targeted communication towards involved stakeholders rather than public dissemination. Public demonstrations and wider presentations are planned for Phase 2, following the release of the open beta version of the tool.

Visibility and compliance with EU funding requirements

All communication activities related to the LocalLinks project follow the visibility guidelines of the European Union and PoliRuralPlus. Project-related materials acknowledge EU funding and include appropriate references to the PoliRuralPlus programme. Visual materials used for communication purposes are prepared in a GDPR-compliant manner and avoid the disclosure of sensitive or personal data.

Mid-term outlook

At mid-term, communication and dissemination activities are progressing as planned. The project has established the foundations for structured communication, with initial outreach already performed and a clear plan for fulfilling all mandatory dissemination outputs in Phase 2.

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7. Impact Assessment

Expected impacts

The LocalLinks project is expected to generate positive impacts at technical, social, economic, and policy levels within the selected pilot region.

At the technical level, the project contributes to the development of interoperable digital tools enabling structured collection, validation, and visualisation of short food supply chain data. The integration with PoliRuralPlus tools supports reuse and scalability beyond the initial pilot area.

At the economic and social level, LocalLinks is expected to improve the visibility and accessibility of local producers and their products, supporting the development of short food supply chains and strengthening relationships between rural producers and urban customers.

At the policy and regional development level, the project provides public authorities and development organisations with aggregated, spatially explicit data that can support evidence-based decision-making, planning, and evaluation of regional development measures.

Early signals of impact

Although the project is at mid-term and the solution has not yet been publicly released, several early signals of impact have been observed:

- active participation of producers and sales outlets in pilot data collection,
- expressed interest from regional development organisations (LAG Posumavi) in using aggregated outputs for planning and communication,
- successful pilot integration with PoliRuralPlus tools, demonstrating the feasibility of cross-tool data reuse.

These early signals indicate strong relevance of the project concept and a high potential for further adoption in Phase 2.

Qualitative indicators

Qualitative indicators collected during Phase 1 include:

- positive stakeholder feedback on the usefulness of extended datasets,
- appreciation of AI-supported data collection methods as a way to reduce administrative burden,
- interest in the chatbot-based interaction with spatial data as an accessible entry point for non-technical users.

Together, these indicators suggest good acceptance of the solution among target user groups.

Contribution to regional and pilot-level objectives

LocalLinks directly supports the objectives of Pilot Area No. 6 – the Bavarian–Czech Cross-Border Rural Innovation Network, by strengthening short food supply chains, improving data availability, and supporting cooperation between rural and urban actors. The project also creates technical and methodological conditions for future cross-border extension of the solution, contributing to shared innovation and digital capacity building in the pilot region.

Mid-term impact outlook

At mid-term, the main impact of the project lies in the establishment of a functional and validated foundation for further development. Phase 1 has demonstrated technical feasibility, stakeholder relevance, and alignment with regional needs. Phase 2 is expected to translate these foundations into measurable impacts through broader deployment, dissemination, and user uptake.

8. Challenges, Risks and Lessons Learned

Key challenges encountered

During Phase 1, the project encountered several challenges typical for pilot-oriented digital innovation projects operating in a real regional context. One key challenge was the heterogeneity of data sources and data quality, as information about producer–customer relationships is often fragmented, incomplete, or outdated across different public and private sources. Another challenge related to stakeholder availability and capacity, particularly among small producers, who often have limited time to engage in data provision and testing activities.

Risk mitigation actions

To address data-related challenges, the project adopted a mixed data collection approach combining structured questionnaires, AI-assisted data extraction from public sources, and direct validation through stakeholder contact. The introduction of confidence scores for collected data further supports transparency regarding data quality. Stakeholder-related risks were mitigated by simplifying data entry workflows, offering multiple engagement channels (online, in-person), and involving intermediary organisations with strong regional trust, such as regional development organisations and non-profits.

Lessons learned

Several important lessons emerged during Phase 1:

- Simplicity is critical - user-friendly interfaces and minimal data entry requirements are essential for engagement of small producers.
- Spatial visualisation adds significant value - map-based representation of relationships was consistently perceived as more intuitive and useful than text-based listings.
- AI can support, but not replace, human validation - semi-automated data collection is effective when combined with clear verification mechanisms and stakeholder involvement.
- Early interoperability planning pays off - early alignment with PoliRuralPlus tools facilitated smoother integration and reduced technical uncertainty.

Mid-term reflection

At mid-term, the identified challenges are considered manageable and do not threaten the achievement of project objectives. The lessons learned during Phase 1 have already informed adjustments to the prototype and will guide further development, stakeholder engagement, and dissemination activities in Phase 2.

9. Sustainability, Replicability and Next Steps

Planned next steps

In Phase 2, the LocalLinks project will focus on verification, refinement, and wider dissemination of the developed solution. Key planned activities include:

- expansion of the user base and involvement of additional producers, sales outlets, and public sector stakeholders,
- further data collection and validation using real operational data,
- functional improvements based on feedback from pilot users,
- release of an open beta version of the tool to enable broader testing.

These steps will build directly on the results achieved during Phase 1.

Sustainability considerations (mid-term)

At mid-term, sustainability is addressed primarily at the technical and organisational level. The solution is designed as modular and interoperable, allowing individual components to be maintained, upgraded, or reused independently. Organisational sustainability is supported through close involvement of regional partners who are already active in the management of local food systems and digital platforms. Their continued engagement provides a foundation for maintaining and further developing the solution beyond the project duration.

Financial sustainability options, including integration with existing platforms and potential public-sector use cases, will be further explored during Phase 2.

Replicability and scaling potential

The LocalLinks solution is designed to be transferable to other regions and PoliRuralPlus pilot areas. Key features supporting replicability include:

- a modular architecture and clearly defined data model,
- use of open standards and interoperable interfaces,
- methodology applicable to different types of short supply chains and regional contexts.

The project's focus on mapping relationships rather than only entities makes the approach adaptable to other domains, such as crafts, tourism, or cultural services.

Outlook towards Phase 2 and beyond

Phase 2 will further test the scalability and robustness of the solution while preparing documentation and guidance materials supporting reuse. The project will also assess opportunities for extending the solution to cross-border contexts within the Bavarian–Czech pilot area.

At mid-term, LocalLinks demonstrates a clear pathway from pilot development to sustainable use and replication, aligned with the long-term objectives of the PoliRuralPlus ecosystem.

10. Conclusions

At mid-term, the LocalLinks project has successfully achieved its Phase 1 objectives and delivered a solid foundation for further development. The project completed requirements analysis, engaged key stakeholders, designed the data structure, and developed a functional prototype integrating core modules for data collection, relationship management, and spatial visualisation.

The results demonstrate the technical feasibility of the proposed solution and confirm its relevance for regional stakeholders. Initial integration with PoliRuralPlus tools, including Atlas and Jackdaw, validates the project's interoperability-driven approach and its contribution to the wider PoliRuralPlus ecosystem.

Stakeholder engagement during Phase 1 confirmed strong interest in the solution and provided valuable feedback that has already been incorporated into the prototype. The project is well aligned with the objectives of Pilot Area No. 6 and supports the development of short food supply chains in rural–urban regions.

Overall, the LocalLinks project is on track. The achievements of Phase 1 provide a strong basis for Phase 2 activities focused on broader testing, dissemination, and preparation for replication and long-term use.

Optional Annexes