D3.1 RAP Methodology

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Brief abstract	Methodological framework and toolbox for the creation of Regional Action Plans for the 9 pilot regions of the project. It is based on the use of Foresight. It includes methods for the co-design of no-code / low-code tools based on AI and automation to support RAP creation and other complex tasks of people working in local administration in rural areas of the EU. This provides a basis for cooperation with WP4. The results of these efforts will provide a basis for the updated RAP methodology guide D3.2 to be provided in M36 of the project.

Disclaimer

Document history

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Title
AIA	AI and Automation
BAU	Business as Usual
BN	Background Note
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CoM	Covenant of Mayors
COR	Committee of the Regions
CRL	Curated Reading List
DG AGRI	Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG REGIO	Directorate General for Regional and Urban Development
EIB	European Investment bank
ELENA	The European Local ENergy Assistance program
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
FS	Foresight
IFO	Inventory of Financing Options
IPO	Inventory of Policy Options
LAU	Local Administrative Unit
LC-NC	Low Code / No Code
LTVRA	Long Term Vision for Rural Areas
MFF	Multi-Financing Framework
MS	EU Member State
MTA	Management by Talking Around

Acronym	Title
NAP	National Action Plan
NCS	National CAP Strategy
NIMBY	Not In My Back yard
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PPP	Participative Policy Process
PROSPECT+	An EU funded capacity building program aimed at local government
RAP	Regional Action Plan
RP	Rural Pact
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Fund
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan
SCF	Social Climate Fund
JTF	Just Transition Fund

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Executive Summary

This document describes an approach to creating a Regional Action Plan or RAP, driven by local communities, adapted to local needs. It describes a comprehensive, structured approach for developing sustainable rural-urban strategies, that incorporates foresight techniques, stakeholder engagement, and state-of-the-art analysis to create actionable plans aligned with EU, national, and regional policies.

The methodology provides a flexible framework which emphasizes that the intended result of a RAP is not a 'report,' but adequately financed action being implemented at local level. It is based on the use of Foresight, a structured approach to thinking about the future, which leads to an understanding of how the world is changing and the steps needed to thrive despite the threats and prosper on the basis of the opportunities that lie ahead.

It leverages the PoliRuralPlus platform for data management and analysis through tools such as the PoliRuralPlus Hub, Jackdaw Geo AI, Policy Options Explorer, and Map Whiteboard for collaborative work. These tools rely on existing datasets, for rural potential, demographics, and other pilot-specific information.

It emphasises the need to engage with stakeholders, and to agree a shared vision of what the RAP is to achieve. This makes sense because not everyone has the same idea of progress, and not everyone has the same set of needs. The emphasis on stakeholder engagement creates opportunities to discover important needs, which are invisible to those who initiate the RAP creation process, but which may need to be addressed as a condition for success.

Within this approach there is considerable flexibility and scope for variation. The document describes tools that one might use to support the creation of the RAP. This is not to say that all RAPs should follow this process, that they should use all of these tools, or that they use only tools that are described in this note.

The most innovative aspect of this methodology is the introduction of practices intended to create 'work awareness' as a new capability necessary for success in a work environment that is rich in and benefits from the availability of powerful Lo-Code No-Code (LC-NC) tools based on the use of AI and Automation (AIA.) These innovative practices provide a link between the work of project teams engaged in RAP development under WP5, and the design of new tools intended to support this work under WP2 and WP4. The adoption of such tools, and the new ways of working that they enable, is highly desirable in view of the work-related pressures under which policy professionals are nowadays required to work. Their adoption is also a necessity due to the increased amounts of information that those who work in public policy must now handle, as well as the fast-changing policy landscape in which such work is embedded.

For these reasons, this methodology document describes new practices that must be adopted by people working on complex policy related processes, including but not limited to the creation of a RAP. These practices include Work Awareness Journaling, which provides a basis for exploring the use of AIA, to facilitate the work of those who want to drive progress locally in line with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

The result of these efforts provide a basis for D3.2, an update of the RAP methodology to be provided in M36 of this project.

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Introduction

The Role of Foresight in Creating Regional Action Plans

The RAP cannot be a blueprint for an independent stand-alone initiative. It must align with EU, national and regional policies and plans. It must provide a tool for policy coordination and integration. Recognizing that rural areas are deeply connected with the cities, towns and villages with which they are associated, the RAP must provide a tool for integrating policies put forward by rural and urban policy actors and coordinate their activities with a view to achieving the goals of the LTVRA, consistent with other goals of the EU and its member states.

The academic literature on public policy refers to concepts such as the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' integration of policy processes, and advocates for 'integration' as a necessary means for ensuring the consistent design and delivery of policies that are 'touched upon' by many agencies and many layers of government.

Although much is written on such issues, it is not easy to translate the literature into a play book on how to operationalize these ideas. Nevertheless, the 'Foresight' approach, with its emphasis on 'stakeholder engagement' provides a framework within which to think about ensuring that Action Plans intended to address local growth and development challenges are implemented and are effective.

The Challenges Facing Local Government

Policy makers at every level are already overwhelmed. This is happening at Member State level (MS), regional and sub-regional level, and at the level of Local Administrative Units such as villages and municipalities (LAUs).

Complexity in EU systems of governance arises due to the difference between geographical and administrative breakdown of territories. Geographically, the EU is broken down in terms of NUTS1[1], NUT2, and NUT3 regions, and 94,995 LAUs. The EU contains 2350 cities, 12632 towns and 79,832 rural regions. From an administrative point of view, the EU is made up of 27 member states, 225 regional governments, and 92247 municipalities.

Governance models also vary considerably across the EU. MS are organized according to 1-, 2-, and 3-layer models, with some MS being highly centralised and others being highly decentralized. The EC asked MS central governments to consult on policy related issues down to the most local level, for example on issues such as CAP reform, recovery and resilience, as well as on the green deal. But this does not happen to the extent that it is needed.

The European Commission (EC), via its Directorate-General for *Agriculture* and Rural Development (DG AGRI), its Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) encourages regional governments to get ahead of the game on major policy issues, by being more proactive. It suggests that they should not wait for instructions from the central government, or for the allocation of finance from either the EU or from the central government. Regional and sub-regional governments are encouraged to secure the means to operate, independently of the delays and constraints experienced at EU and central government level. This often

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[1] NUTS stands for the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

takes the form of encouragement to develop 'local' green deals driven by Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Multi-Financing Frameworks (MFF.)

Recent reforms and most if not all new forms of finance for EU driven policy measures require MS to obtain a large part of the program finance from sources 'other' than those of the EU. These include MS budgets, EIB loans, green bond offerings, and PPPs. For this reason, the RAP methodology includes formal actions to address the origin of such alternative forms of finance such as the creation of Inventories of Funding Options (IFO.)

All of this is part of the new reality in which local government must now operate. But there is more !
● Ministries tend to operate in silos, and it rests upon the shoulders of those in local government to orchestrate the initiatives that fall under the authority of different ministries.
● Lower levels of government have little visibility over policies and programmes, and they struggle to position themselves in a useful way that best serves the interest of local communities.
● More and more is being asked of local government. So local policy professionals are overwhelmed with the increasing burden of effort that is being asked of them.
● Local government is confronted with an increasingly challenging HR issue. They do not have enough staff to do what they need to do, and those that they do have, do not have the right skills.
● Local government does not have the money to execute its plans, and when it does have the money, it is often held back by legislation which acts as a barrier to progress.

All of these issues are implicit in the formulation of the Long-Term Vision for Rura Areas (LTVRA.) And measures included in a RAP, intended to achieve the goals of the LTVRA, may need to address some if not all of the issues listed above.

So far, the EU system of local governance has responded with
● Lobbies for more resources such as Local Staff for Climate[2]
● Technical assistance provided by EU institutions such as the EIB ELENA program[3]
● Capacity building initiatives funded by EC programs such as PROSPECT+[4].

But such measures on their own are not enough. In the current environment of tight budgets it will not be easy to hire extra staff. Use of technical assistance (TA) may prove to be a more feasible way forward. The other two measures seem to be going in the right direction, but they are too narrow in scope and too small in scale. We are at the start of a long road in the reform of local government, how it makes and delivers policy, how it relates to higher levels of authority, those of central government and the EU. This issue is specifically addressed by the LTVRA.

The Need for a Future Foresight Methodology

Foresight often fails to deliver on its potential for creating value in regional and sub-regional policy processes for all of the reasons mentioned above. But the nature of work is changing, whether it is work in the public or private sector. This change is being driven by at least two factors. One is the adoption of work from home, a practice forced upon the world by COVID, and to which we have not quite mastered. Nevertheless a change which has eliminated

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[2] https://www.localstaff4climate.eu/
[3] https://www.eib.org/en/products/advisory-services/elena/index
[4] https://h2020prospect.eu/

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many unseen benefits of casual encounters with colleagues whether onsite at work, or off-site in workshop and conference venues. The other is the rapid adoption of AIA tools. This is hailed by many as the driver of a transformation of modern ways of working, on a par with adoption of the internet. This ongoing transformation is accompanied by a lot of 'noise' about how it may lead to lay-offs. In reality AIA tools can augment the capabilities of skilled individuals by allowing them to do more and better. This creates an opportunity to use AIA to lighten the load for people in local administration, enabling them to cope with the stress that is currently being piled upon them, working smarter with the help of virtual assistants, and working better with the help of new methods that integrate the use of AIA tools in policy processes which they would have struggled to complete in the past.

Foresight and the work of designing and implementing policies, at EU, MS or regional level, and whether by participative approaches or not, requires a huge effort in terms of tasks that lend themselves to improvement with the help of tools for AIA. Such tasks include

- Reading and following trends, fact finding, information gathering and research tasks of various kinds
- Taking part in remote meetings including online events such as webinars and workshops
- The creation of purposeful documentation for consumption by various groups with specific profiles, the public at large, experts, colleagues, and people throughout the governance hierarchy...
- Communicating via Email and social media.
- Editing data, image, video, audio and not just text.

These tasks have become increasingly difficult to complete, due to the sheer volume of meetings to attend, and materials to process. These tasks are also full of tedious, time-consuming, labour-intensive 'tasks with no-name.' Work can be characterised as

- Good work that create value and that we are able to do well
- Stretch work that is necessary and that we may struggle to do well,
- Busy-work, also known as "sludge." Work that eats up our time, leaving no time for good work or stretch work, that we really need to reduce or eliminate or delegate in some way.

The challenge is to identify those tasks (with no name) and develop an awareness of how we work and where the waste lies. This is a highly personal issue and may vary a lot from one person to another, even for those engaged in similar work. But it provides a starting point for creating ideas of how to improve one's work, motivating experimentation with use of AIA tools to see how they can support your work in ways that eliminate the busy work, enable the stretch work and free up time for the good work, to achieve better outcomes from our efforts and better work-life balance.

This is an entirely new dimension for modern work, where workers become 'aware' of how they work and proactively seek ways to improve the way they work. Already individuals are emerging who are front-runners in this approach. They use many AIA tools. They claim huge gains in productivity as a result of these efforts. Furthermore they emphasize the need to explore new tools, continuously improving the way they use those tools, in some cases integrating the use of simple tools carrying out 'atomic' tasks, using multi-agent platforms that may operate in batch mode in the background.

Adoption of this approach by the public sector lags behind its adoption in the private sector. Specific private-sector domains, such as legal affairs and research, offer valuable lessons for the public sector. Excellent resources are available for tracking trends in AI adoption within these fields, including Andy Stapleton's blog and newsletter. As

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a former scientist, Stapleton systematically evaluates new tools and their variations as they emerge, providing insightful analysis and practical guidance.

Work Awareness for Exploring New Ways of Working

The design of AI tools for use by the regional pilot teams in the development of their RAPs will follow a simple design-develop-test cycle, based on an increased awareness of

- The work they do as policy professionals,
- The possibilities offered by recent advances in the use of AI and automation applied to the complex cognitive tasks that make up much of the work of policy professionals.

This awareness will be developed through:

- Journaling exercises to develop 'work-awareness,'
- 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.

Work-awareness, refers to an awareness of the detailed structure of how we do the things that we do. It means developing an understanding of how the working day is made up of many small tasks, which are repeated over and over again, which take up our time and energy, many of which could be done more efficiently, or even eliminated with the help of new tools for AI and Automation (AIA.) The reality is that most people complain of not having enough time to carry out the work they need to do. They may look back on their week and wonder how come it took so long to achieve so little. This is explained in more detail in the notes and guidance provided to buddies. There is a high level of consensus in industry, especially in sectors such as IT, legal affairs, accounting, and consulting, that up to 80% of the work that people do is 'sludge' that could in principle be eliminated with the use of new AIA tools. Developing 'work awareness' is the first step along the path to eliminating that 'sludge.'

Andy Stapleton runs a blog for researchers[5]. He reviews AI tools that can be used by professional researchers. He evaluates their performance on tasks that researchers typically need to perform. These include tasks such as:

- Carry out a wide-ranging exploratory search on a general theme.
- Carry out deep dives on a specific theme.
- Carry out a literature review.
- Write an abstract.
- Write an introduction.
- Write a background note.
- Write conclusions.
- Generate citations.
- Produce charts, graphs from data for inclusion in the article.
- Check for plagiarism.
- Write a summary of a paper.
- Rewrite an article in a different tone.
- Rewrite random notes in a structured manner.
- Summarize the content of a complex diagram.
- Extract a method or recipe.
- Identify research gaps.

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[5] https://www.youtube.com/@DrAndyStapleton

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- Create and update a research notebook.
- Write emails to colleagues, supervisors, journal editors.

In his blog, Andy Stapleton focuses on the use of Gen AI tools that are currently being developed, for use by professional researchers. These tasks are very similar in many ways to the tasks that must be carried out by policy professionals. Policy is increasingly science-based and data-driven.

Policy processes such as Foresight require lots of desk-work - research, making summaries and briefing notes, as well as compiling inventories of policy options. These processes are very communication intensive. They require communicating in different ways to different kinds of stakeholders. All of this is time consuming and labour intensive. The tendency is to cut corners and omit steps which may be important for a good outcome.

The Gen AI tools reviewed by Andy Stapleton are highly relevant to the work being undertaken in this project. However, they represent just a subset of the many tools available that can enhance efficiency and effectiveness. These tools span a broad range of applications, which can be categorized into three main groups.

- **No-Code Tools:** This refers to a wide range of increasingly powerful tools that can be used to automate complex tasks. Examples include 'Auto Hot Key' to automate routine multi-stroke windows-based tasks, 'Bardeen' to automate data gathering from websites, and 'Julius' for exploring ad-hoc datasets of up to 1G. Such tools are very flexible. They allow anyone, even those with zero programming experience to work more efficiently and effectively. These are tools that anyone working in a regional pilot team on the development of a RAP can develop for themselves, alone or in small groups using a rapid design-develop-test cycle.
- **Lo-Code Tools:** This refers to an increasingly wide range of tools which can be built using short, easy to follow programs written in well-known, well-supported languages such as Python, where all complexity is hidden-within and handled-by ready-made libraries. One example is Crew.ai. This enables the creation of multi-agent applications that carry out complex multi-step tasks involving LLMs such as ChatGPT and its variants. Given that chatbots are increasingly able to write code based on simple prompts, it is most likely that these Lo-Code systems will soon become No-Code. In this way, the use of such tools will become accessible to people with zero programming skills. In any case Lo-Code tools are tools that can be developed quickly in a short design-develop-test cycle in a close collaboration involving a small group of policy professionals and an IT expert.
- **Hi-Code Tools:** These systems are built using traditional SW development approaches. From the users' perspective such systems are costly and time consuming to develop. Nevertheless, some of the big consulting companies such as Accenture, have developed AI-based platforms intended to address policy needs of the government. One such system is ClimateView[6], intended to help cities manage the transition to net zero. Hi-Code tools need to be designed, to address a need expressed by policy professionals, developed by a group of SW engineers, and tested by policy professionals as part of an ongoing design-develop-test cycle, that will be repeated several times in the course of a project.

The first step towards developing awareness and understanding of the tasks required to complete policy related work such as carrying out a PGA[7] or an RIA[8] is to carry out a simple 'journaling' exercise. The important thing is to

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[6] https://career.climateview.global/
[7] Policy Gap Analysis
[8] Review of Institutional Arrangements

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start and learn as you go. It may increase in depth, detail, and sophistication as you get used to reflecting upon what you do, the time and effort required and the frustrations you feel long the way.

The project pilots will carry out a Work Awareness Journaling with a view to identifying recurring tasks that may be susceptible to automation or assistance from AI. The identification of those tasks is followed by ideation on the use of AIA tools intended to eliminate their 'busy work,' improve their effectiveness on 'good work' and 'stretch work,' or otherwise extend their capabilities as policy professionals. The intention is that in systemically testing such tools and evaluating their impact on policy work such as Foresight based RAP development, we will see how to mutually adapt the techniques of Foresight and the tools of AIA to create a new methodology enabled by the ongoing AI driven transformation of modern work.

All of the tasks described in the following pages will be the subject of some form of WAJ, and of experiments to facilitate those tasks using AIA tools.

The second edition of the methodology (D3.2, due in M36 of the project) will include a report on the results of those efforts. This update will provide:
- Instructions on what tools can be used to facilitate that work, and the kind of efficiencies they provide.
- Descriptions of the prompt engineering required to obtain results of adequate quality for the needs of people working in public administration.
- Examples of effective prompts.
- What can be achieved with tools combined using a multi-agent approach.
- The skills required to effectively work with such tools.
- A perspective for the adoption of such tools and practices on a large scale by people in local government.

Overview of the RAP Methodology

The development of a RAP based on the use of Foresight can be broken down into the following 4 phases of work:
- Phase I: Preparation
- Phase II: Foresight and the Regional Action Plan
- Phase III: Follow-Up and Implementation

Phase I Preparation: Described in more detail further one, this is made up of essential tasks that are best completed in advance of any complex group work. It is where the general theme of the exercise is decided, key stakeholders identified, and basic goals are set. In particular it is important to identify:
- Institutions of local government with which to work.
- Relevant policies with which to align or coordinate, as well as.
- Possible sources of finance for the implementation of an eventual action plan.

It may (or may not) be useful at this stage to create basic agreements with key people and institutions. These may include a "memorandum of understanding," "statement of purpose" or a "schedule of work." These are basic management tools that may help to keep track of what is being done, or what has been agreed. They are simple common-sense devices that any competent manager will know if and when and how to use, and of course they can be revised and updated as needed. Other devices (tools) that are especially useful include the following. What these mean and how to do them will be explained in more detail further on.
- Policy Gap Analysis (PGA)
- Review of Institutional Arrangements (RIA)
- Stakeholder Analysis

Phase II Foresight and the Regional Action Plan: This phase of work is described in more detail further on. It is characterized by the high level of stakeholder engagement and the participation of stakeholders in well-prepared highly structured group-work activities. It cannot start until the theme has been clearly defined. It will be almost impossible to make significant progress unless the members of the team supporting the process possess a high level of understanding of the challenge to be addressed and the issue at hand. Without this it will be difficult if not impossible to engage with stakeholders in any purposeful way. It is not possible to say in advance how long this overall process will take. It could be days, weeks or years. The relevant timeframe is often decided by some external deadline, imposed by institutions of local, national or EU government. Typically, such constraints take the form of deadlines for consultation by the EU or central government, deadlines for submission of proposals for projects to be funded by national or EU programs, deadlines for the submission of actionable items to be included in a budget, or for consideration by legislators. In any case, this phase of work is highly participative and is made up of two processes happening in parallel:
- A top-down process that focus on the actors who must implement eventual policy measures, and
- A bottom-up process that focuses on the beneficiaries. On those who will benefit from the implementation of policy measures that make up the RAP.

Typically, there is more emphasis on working with the 'beneficiaries' at the start of the exercise, and more emphasis on working with the 'actors' at the end. This part of the process should lead to the production of a well-edited formal document suitable for public consumption made up of the following three elements:

- A vision which describes what the region should look like at a suitable time in the future, when the policy measures have been implemented and their impact achieved. For example, the world in 2025, 2030 or 2035.
- An action plan containing the list of measures needed to achieve that vision, along with their intervention logic.
- A roadmap. This is the timeline for execution of those measures, their scheduling, to clarify which measures must happen before others become possible or appropriate. Most importantly the roadmap should indicate how the measures will be financed, and what agents of local government will undertake to ensure that those funds are obtained, legislation is acted, and the programs needed to implement those measures are put in place.

This can be summarized in the following scheme.

Outline Structure of the RAP

Component	Description	Tools you can use to create that part of the RAP
Issue	One sentence Describe the big issue being addressed	Planning schedule to align with upcoming deadlines (CAP, RRF etc.) Issues analysis JTBD see EU targets and high-level policy goals such NET0... See presentations on RAP methodology (See 1, 2 and 3...)
Vision	A half page description What is to be achieved in qualitative terms By when 2026, 2030, 2040, 2050...	Drivers Analysis to understand how the world is changing (STEEPV...) Sense making activities (localisation...) Deep Dives and Scenario Work... Vision workshops, values, identity...
Action Plan	A list of measures needed to achieve that vision. The list should be complete. It should be justified based on an intervention logic, supported by evidence, for example by modelling, or plausible evidence that such measures have been effective elsewhere.	Policy Gap Analysis (PGA) Deep Dives on policy options Creation of Inventories of Policy Options Exploration of Policy Options Modelling impacts Understanding intervention logic... Selection of Policy mix
Roadmap	A sequencing of measures, which identifies the agencies or other actors responsible for implementation, and the sources of financing.	RIA (Review of Institutional Arrangements) Inventory of Financing Options

This work may require an initial divergent thinking phase. That is an exploratory phase, where judgement is suspended, minds are expanded, and lessons learned about how the world works, how the world is changing, the challenges and opportunities the divergent thinking will create. This task requires a lot of Management by Talking Around (MTA), over coffee or lunch, face to face, by mobile-phone or Email.

To those who are experienced in policy related tasks, this may seem obvious, but it is not obvious to many. Inexperienced people, or those to whom such work is simply not suited will send off elaborate emails, wait a month or more, and then complain that no one has replied to their message. This is not the path to progress. They need to pick up the phone and talk to people or meet them in their places of work. This is how they build the relationships needed to initiate strategic conversations that will shape the future of the region.

Nevertheless, this kind of work requires a lot of writing and editing of timely, relevant, readable documents such as memos, background notes (BNs), explanatory notes, inventories of policy options (IPOs), and Curated Reading Lists (CRLs.) It may require any or all of the following tasks:
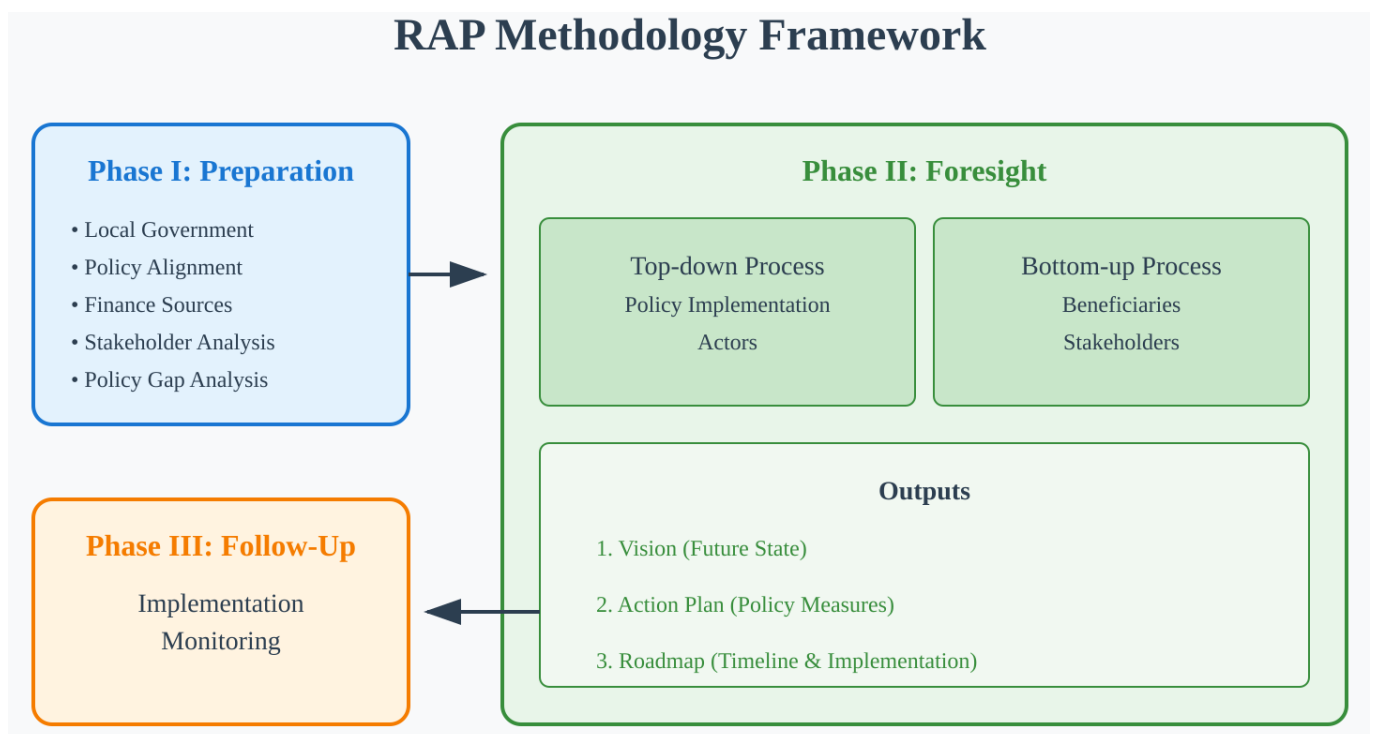
- Gathering lists of issues, and options…

- Ranking them and selecting priorities.
- Gathering data and other forms of 'evidence' required by policy processes.
- Group work such as 'sense making' activities including drivers' analysis, localization, SWOT analysis, deep dives on specific issues and the exploration of policy options including the comparison of policy mixes and the exploration of policy impacts.
- Drafting intermediary and final texts for the RAP and its components.

This is hard necessary work that those who try to drive policy processes such as the creation of a RAP struggle to do well. One of the goals of the project is to devise AIA tools and new ways of working which will enable those who undertake such work to do it much more effectively.

Phase III Follow-up and Implementation: This too is also described in more detail further on. Towards the end of a 'divergent' thinking phase, the work must become more 'convergent' to arrive at a consensus on an executable plan, the RAP. The final 'package' can be presented as multiple documents with annexes, as a single document with sections entitled 'vision,' 'action plan,' and 'roadmap' or as a short document with a title like "Regional Action Plan for …." The action plan will be implemented by the actors named in the roadmap. Success is about results not reports. But there is no guarantee that the RAP will be implemented. A well-designed action plan will include robust measures for monitoring and evaluation.

RAP Methodology Framework

Phase I: Preparation
- Local Government
- Policy Alignment
- Finance Sources
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Policy Gap Analysis

Phase II: Foresight

Top-down Process
Policy Implementation
Actors

Bottom-up Process
Beneficiaries
Stakeholders

Outputs
1. Vision (Future State)
2. Action Plan (Policy Measures)
3. Roadmap (Timeline & Implementation)

Phase III: Follow-Up
Implementation
Monitoring

In view of the LTVRA, it is expected that every RAP will consider measures to enable better governance, and access to appropriate forms of finance. If necessary, on the basis of new enabling powers granted to local government, training for people in public administration, or access to appropriate forms of technical assistance.

Toolheads Beware

Many individuals embarking on a project like creating a RAP often believe they can simply follow a predefined recipe or checklist. They seek templates, cheat sheets, and straightforward instructions. However, this approach is insufficient and offers little practical value in addressing the complexities of such projects. Doing Foresight or creating a RAP, like any complex management task, is like playing football or riding a bike. There is only so much you can write about it. It is a social process. and the only way to learn is by doing. So, those that are charged with creating a RAP, are advised to get a mentor, someone with experience and a record of accomplishment that they can ask for advice as they go along. This was well known to the pioneers of quality management. People such as Edwards Demming and Taichi Ohno. They insisted that methods should never be codified. In modern times, one of the best to explain why this is so, is John Seddon[9] an industrial psychologist and founder of Vanguard Consulting. He noticed how people struggle to adapt lean principles developed for manufacturing to a service context. He emphasized that what was important was not to blindly follow a set of rules, but to think about the task in the right way[10]. He referred to those who unthinkingly try to follow a recipe or list of steps as 'toolheads.' Sadly, as too often happens in the domain of quality management, the domain of policy development can seem like nirvana for the toolheads.

Creating Regional Action Plans

The world changes constantly and often in unpredictable ways. It should therefore appear obvious that any robust planning process must therefore anchor its ideas in some form of structured reflection about the future. Sadly, this is not always so, resulting in poor decisions being made, time and money wasted.

Foresight is the name given to one approach that tries to link planning to a disciplined way of thinking about the future. Generally associated with public policy, it distinguishes itself from other planning processes by its emphasis on engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Once, it was mainly associated with the planning of investment in research and innovation. But it has gone way beyond that and is now applied by both public and private institutions, not only to the planning of research, but to planning in domains such as new product and market development, business growth and development, infrastructure planning for transport and housing, healthcare and utilities, to name but a few.

By and large, the techniques of Foresight have been borrowed from disciplines such as marketing, and strategy development, and they continue to evolve.

In the context of regional or rural development, Foresight is a **participatory policy process** based on a structured approach to understanding **change**, and how it happens and thinking about **the future**. It emphasizes the use of techniques for **Stakeholder Engagement** to:
- Define **goals** for growth and development.
- Prioritize the **challenges** to be addressed.
- And explore policy **options** using modelling, scenarios, and other tools.

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[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Seddon

[10] https://beyondcommandandcontrol.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/watch-out-for-the-toolheads.pdf

Such stakeholder engagement consists of two parallel actions. One which is top down, starting from a series of strategic conversations with actors in local government, whose job it is to make sure that policies get implemented. Another which is bottom up, which consists of a series of strategic conversations with citizens who are the ultimate beneficiaries of any such policies, when implemented.

The main output of this work is the production of an actionable 'package' containing
- A **vision** that embodies the values, identity, and aspirations of the region,
- An **action plan** containing the measures needed to realize their policy goals,
- A **roadmap** indicating the timing of measures, their source of funding and competent authorities that need to access the funding and ensure execution of the action plan.

The ultimate goal is not the production of that package, but the implementation of the measures it contains. With this in mind, the Foresight process should include activities that will result in:
- The endorsement of the package by the beneficiaries as evidence of community need.
- The adoption of the package by competent authorities as a first step towards implementation.

The action plan should include a budget and mechanism for follow-up and monitoring the execution of the action plan. That mechanism could take the form of a monitoring committee that is independent of government, made up of individuals of standing, capable of holding the local authorities to account, and engaging with them on the status of implementation of the plan, or ensuring it gets the attention it requires in the case of a change in government.

This is a description of the ideal situation, towards which any significant community driven planning action should strive.

It should come as no surprise however that this is a significant challenge, and anyone leading such a process should possess good leadership and management skills. Even then, those that lack experience may fail to achieve that ideal for a wide range of well-known reasons.
- Even when filled with compelling content, Foresight initiatives often struggle to go beyond the production of a report.
- They may be driven by individuals or groups of people that under-estimate the need to engage early and often with "actors", those that must "act" to make sure the "action" plan gets implemented.
- They may have focused too much on process and neglected to create compelling content that merits action by local authorities.
- In extreme cases, they can result in a form of "engagement theatre," many meetings, with many people, but leading nowhere, except to fatigue and frustration for the intended beneficiaries.
- Sometimes, the team that must drive the initiative lack the time or resources needed to do the hard work of preparing meetings, writing briefs, on-boarding key actors, negotiating alignments with other initiatives, desk-research to discover policy options, and the many other tasks that are needed to co-create an actionable plan in collaboration with those that will make it happen.

These are not the only challenges faced by the individual or team that undertakes a policy planning process such as the creation of a RAP, whether or not it is based on the use of Foresight. People who work in public administration are under increasing pressure to do more, with fewer resources, and in shorter time scales, than ever before.

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Phase I: Preparatory Work

Needs Gathering, Issues Analysis and Policy Jobs to be Done

Sometimes, it is useful to choose a theme for the RAP or for a Foresight exercise, on the basis of an open-ended exploration of "things that need attention." This may take many forms, but it can be referred to as "needs gathering" and associated with some form of "issues analysis". Life is never perfect, and people love to complain, so given the opportunity it is always possible to come up with a list of issues that require attention. This list will require analysis of some kind to determine the real issues, and the root causes that may lie at their origin.

When deemed useful, this is a task to be undertaken in the initial phase of the foresight process. It uncovers what is already on the minds of stakeholders. In particular, it helps to reveal what are sources of dissatisfaction with the present or recent past. It can provide a diagnosis of "issues" related to "the way things work" in terms of policy gaps or impediments to significant progress with the overall scope and impact of measures intended to encourage growth and development. But it has its limitations.

There is a need to orient thinking towards the future, and in particular towards the anticipation of future challenges. This is difficult because most people are not accustomed to thinking about the future in a structured and rigorous way. They may have genal dreams and aspirations, but ignore significant issues looming on the horizon, ignore how these may impact their own lives and their own region, and fail to recognize the need for action in anticipation of these changes. Arguably, this is one of the key challenges faced by those running a Foresight initiative, is the challenge of carving out quality time to think critically about the future and identify the challenges that need to be addressed now, in order to achieve a desirable state at some time in the future.

One of the factors contributing to this difficulty is the presence of vested interests that divert attention away from critical issues which require urgent attention. This has been the case for many years, in relation to climate change. It has also been the case for the pandemic. The possibility of a pandemic such as COVID-19 has been recognized for many years, but society was ill-prepared for such an event when it occurred and ultimately did not know what to do and how to organize in the event of a pandemic, whether at state, region, or city level. One year into the COVID pandemic, it is not at all clear that governments are learning from the experience and that they will be better prepared for the next major disruption.

There are many more disruptions or permanent deviations from business as usual, and it is not at all clear that governments at the appropriate level are taking the steps needed to prepare and turn disruption into opportunity. These include, CAP reform, the Green Deal, and the new biodiversity strategy, which can be seen as laying the foundation for an entirely new economic mode of sustainability (the wedding-cake, as opposed to the three-pillar model that has prevailed until recently.

Each RAP needs a well-defined theme. In this project the theme and the RAP have to satisfy a number of constraints. It goes without saying that each RAP must align with EU, national and regional policy. Furthermore, each RAP must:
- Contribute to implementing the LTVRA.
- Contribute to implementing the New European Bauhaus.

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- Address an issue that requires urban-rural policy cooperation. That means the integration and coordination of policies implemented by urban and rural agencies or other government bodies.

There are many areas which require urban-rural policy coordination. These include but are not limited to the following:

- **Climate Change:** The EU, its member states, cities and regions must work together to achieve net zero by 2050. Under the CoM about 10,000 EU cities, towns and municipalities have declared net zero goals. Their plans include energy system upgrades, the transformation of industry based on a circular economy, transformation of the built environment and transport, as well as nature-based solutions to preserve natural capital and mitigate catastrophic climate change such as wildfires, flooding and supply chain disruption.
- **Food Systems:** Food is produced in rural areas and consumed in towns and cities. Under the CoM, towns and cities have local food strategies with defined targets for the local sourcing of food. Cooperation is needed on reaching those goals by reinventing production, distribution, urban agriculture, retail cooperatives etc.
- **Energy Systems:** Both urban and rural areas produce, distribute and consume energy. Both are concerned with energy efficiency and held back by NIMBYism[11]. Energy refers to electricity, liquid and gas fuels. Energy can come from wind, solar, hydro and waste. Waste can be transformed directly into energy, heat for industry, and biocommodities to replace the non-fuel fractions of the barrel of petroleum. It can be organized at individual, or collective level by district, and managed by energy communities.
- **Waste Systems:** Waste is a very complex product. It provides a wide range of feedstocks for the circular economy. These must be gathered, sorted, stored, processed and distributed. It includes agricultural waste, domestic sewage, food waste and plastic waste. It provides materials for construction, energy, animal feeds, composts, bioplastics and textile fibres. It is highly regulated. It is an opportunity for energy and food sovereignty, new businesses and new jobs.
- **Transport:** This includes infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels, ports and airports, public spaces for walking and cycling, the electrification of vehicles such as trucks, trains and farm machinery. It includes public transport, aviation, maritime and road transport. It must facilitate the transport of goods, private citizens in their daily commute, occasional or weekend visitors. It must connect rural and urban areas.
- **Accommodation:** This includes social housing, affordable housing, accommodation for new businesses, support for new practices such as working from home and home schooling, co-working, accommodation for refugees, business incubators and accelerators. 97% of buildings in the EU needed to be upgraded, to make them more comfortable and more energy efficient. Many countries in the EU are experiencing an affordable housing crisis.
- **Education:** One of the consequences of COVID was the sudden need to work from home and homeschooling. This has had a lasting impact on the geography of work, education and training. Many who lived in rural areas and commuted to towns could no longer do so. Many others relocated from their urban residence to family homes in rural areas, to be closer to relatives such as aging parents. In many cases, families with two parents working from home and one or more children attending classes remotely, found that their accommodation did not support this new way of living.
- **Tourism:** Public goods and services provided by rural areas that benefit the whole of society, in particular those who live in urban areas, include venues for leisure, rest and relaxation. This includes short visits to places of natural interest, places of historical or cultural interest, areas of natural beauty, hiking trails, and venues for concerts and festivals. The economic model of tourism must co-evolve with the economics of conservation, the restoration of forests, rivers, lakes and wetlands, the restoration of biodiversity, the re-

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[11] NIMBY stands for Not In My Back Yard

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introduction of pollinators, fish, birds and other fauna. This requires urban-rural policy integration and coordination inspired by frameworks which include the New European Bauhaus or NEB.

There are many other themes to consider where the need for urban-rural policy coordination clearly exists. Included are tourism, entrepreneurship, services such as education and healthcare, rural broadband, provision of potable water, restoration of biodiversity, wetlands, waterways, ancient forests. In any region there are government bodies interested in these issues, and eventually responsible for shaping related policy and implementing resulting plans. Any of these agencies or government bodies are potential partners with which to work to develop a RAP.

Many missions have been announced at EU level. Generally targets are set in consultation with the member states. The member states are expected to respond to such consultations after consulting with their regions. But this rarely happens if at all, and when it does happen the quality of consultation leaves a lot to be desired. Nevertheless implementation of measures to achieve such targets will usually require action at the level of local government. Sometimes independently, but often in collaboration with entities spanning a range of local jurisdictions. The challenge is for each region to get ahead of the game and start to shape policy already in ways that are somehow 'optimal' or well aligned with local communities in terms of their social and economic needs, their sense of identity and who they want to be in ten years' time.

Examples of "targets" created at EU level that will need to be translated into goals to be achieved and measures to be implemented at local level include the following:
- **2050: NET ZERO i**s one of the key missions of the EU. All programs and policies of the EU, its member states, regions and sub-regions must contribute to achieving this goal.
- **2040: The LTVRA** is achieved when the rural regions of Europe are STRONG, CONNECTED, RESILIENT and PROSPEROUS.
- **2030: The Green Deal** or "Fit for 55 " includes a 55% reduction in overall CO2 emissions by 2030, targets for adoption of biofuels, the decarbonization of aviation and maritime transport. All provide challenges for the targeted industries, but they also create opportunities for growth based on new jobs and enterprise.

In the context of Horizon Europe, various EU Directives such as the EU Nature Directive and the EU Biodiversity strategy, the EU climate adaptation strategy, the EU soil mission and "soil deal for Europe" a large number of specific missions have been defined. These all have both an urban and a rural dimension, though arguably the rural dimension dominates. By 2030 these include:
- 100 climate neutral and smart cities.
- At least 150 European regions and communities are climate resilient.
- Establish a network of living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition to healthy soils…
- Legal protection for at least 30% of land areas of the EU.
- At least 3 billion additional trees have been planted, respecting ecological principles.
- 25,000km of free-flowing rivers restored.
- 25% of EU agricultural land employs organic farming techniques.
- 50% reduction in soil nutrient loss…
- 20% reduction in the use of fertilizers…
- 30% reduction in the use of chemical pesticides…
- 50% reduction in the use of more hazardous chemical pesticides…
- Reverse the decline in pollinators.
- Restore 30% of species and habitats not currently endangered.

The list keeps growing and pressure increases with the introduction of new legislation such as new regulations and directives. Many of these have implications for local business including farmers, and anyone involved in EU or International supply chains. Such legislation includes:

- The 2014 NFDR or **Non-Financial Reporting Directive** which requires reporting on a company's impact on CLIMATE, NATURAL CAPITAL, HUMAN CAPITAL, GOVERNANCE...
- The 2019 SFDR or Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation, the 2020 Taxonomy Regulation, the 2023 CSRD or Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the 2023+ CSSD or **Corporate Sustainability Disclosure Directive**, the 2023+ CSDD, CSDDD or **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive...**
- The **Renewable Energy Directive** RED II (2018...), RED III (2023 up to 2030, part of "Fit for 55")...
- The **EUDR** or **EU Deforestation Directive**, dealing with **LULUCF** or **Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry...**
- The 2023 update to legislation concerning the **Geographical Indicators.**
- **The 2023+ proposal for a GCD or Green Claims Directive, with implications for** the 230+ "sustainable labels", and the 100+ "green energy" labels in the EU, 40% of which provide no evidence for claims, 53% are vague or misleading, and 50% provide no verification of claims.

One should take into consideration also national or regional strategies (e.g. RIS3[12]).

Last but not least, the regions need to anticipate and plan for updates to major EU planning and programming initiatives including:

- The next **CAP Reform including** AKIS reforms to AKIS and the transformation of farming to climate smart, low carbon, conservation and as a provider of public goods…
- Update to the **Rural Pact…**
- Updates to **National Climate Plans**…
- Updates to the national **Recovery and Resilience Plans…**
- The next **Framework Program…**

Policy Gap Analysis

An essential element of a RAP is the list of policy measures which collectively will ensure a successful response to the development challenge being addressed. In compiling such a list, it makes sense that:

- The list of measures is complete.
- It avoids overlaps with on-going initiatives, and
- It builds upon what already exists.

These reasonable and common-sense goal raises a number of immediate questions:

- How do we know what already exists on which to build?
- How do we know if there are overlaps to be avoided?
- How do we know when the set of measures is complete?

Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to this.

A good starting point is to make a simple inventory of existing policies, strategies, and plans that are or maybe somehow related to the theme chosen for the RAP, that have already been developed, are under development or whose development can be anticipated in the near future. The following diagram provides an illustration of what one will most likely find.

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[12] https://www.mpo.gov.cz/en/business/ris3-strategy/ris3-strategy--265275/

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The Skills " System" and the 41+ policies relating to skills...

Labour Market
- Employment agencies
- Statistical offices
- Interim services
- Worker unions

Labour Market policies (left):
- FBIH strategy for persons with disabilities 2011-2015
- FBIH employment strategy and action plan 2009-2013
- RS program supporting employment of returnees
- BIH strategy for social inclusion 2008-2013
- RS employment strategy with AP for 2013
- FBIH strategy for development 2010-2020
- BIH employment strategy 2010-2014
- RS social inclusion strategy

Labour Market policies (right):
- RS strategy for protection of children without parent care 2009-2014
- Brčko District strategic plan for development of health 2008-2013
- BIH country sheet "Analyses of position of Youth in BiH"
- FBIH strategy for development of health 2008-2018
- RS strategy for reform of the pension system
- BIH strategy of health information system
- BIH strategy of health information system
- FBIH strategy for young people and health
- RS mental health strategy 2009-2015
- FBIH strategy for the pension system
- RS youth policy 2010-2015

Human Resources
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Active
- Inactive
- NEETs
- Interns

The Economy
- Employers
- Domestic and foreign
- Entrepreneurs
- Business owners
- Self-employed

The Economy policies:
- FBIH SME development strategy
- FBIH Industrial development policy
- FBIH tourism development strategy
- FBIH Economic Development Strategy
- BIH strategy for SME development 2009-2011
- FBIH crafts development program 2007-2010
- RS strategy for SME development and entrepreneurship 2011-2013
- RS sectoral strategy for industrial development 2009-2013
- RS action plan for implementation of sectoral strategy for industrial development 2009-2013
- RS action plan to support the establishment and development of Business Zones 2009-2013
- RS programme for restructuring the chamber of crafts and entrepreneurship
- RS tourism development strategy 2010-2020
- Brcko District Development Strategy 2010-2012

ETL Services
- Pre-school
- Primary education
- Secondary and VET
- Higher Education
- CPI and LLL

ETL Services policies:
- BIH strategy for culture
- BIH strategy for VET 2007-2013
- FBIH Science Strategy 2012-2022
- BIH action plan for recognition of qualifications
- RS strategy for education development 2010-2014
- BIH strategic direction for education and implementation plan 2008-2015
- BIH strategy and action plan for entrepreneurial learning 2012-2015
- BIH strategy and action plan for investment in research 2010-2015
- BIH plan for standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education
- BIH road map and action plan for inclusion in EU programmes for LLL and youth 2013
- RS strategy for science and technological development 2012-2016
- RS strategy and action plan for cultural development 2010-2015

This is a slide from 2014 presenting an overview of the range of policies related to the development of a national skills system in Bosnia Herzegovina. It illustrates a typical finding when one starts to look at the range of policies relating to a specific theme. In this case we identified more than 40 policies which were current, and which referred to skill needs. In many cases the references to identified needs and proposed measures had not been acted upon. Nevertheless, the needs had been captured and it was useful to bring those stakeholders into a new conversation about reform of the skills system, as part of the pre-accession process for Bosnia Herzegovina.

Something similar but different will arise when you carry out his exercise for any other theme. Different in that the list of policies and stakeholders will be different from the case of the national skills' system. But similar in the sense that the list will be long, the stakeholders many, their stakes different, and most of the suggested measures contained in those policy papers will not have been implemented. Had I chosen 'water' as the theme, I might have found policies plans and strategies referring to tourism, agriculture, the food and beverage industry, the textile industry, sports and leisure, flooding, dams, landslides, the state of the water distribution system, the depth of water in navigable rivers, the amount of water in reservoirs, the need to import it from another country or ship it in by boat if you live on an island in Greece.

Anyone intending to lead a PPP will need to be familiar with such documents, that is with their existence, content and with the authorship. If they are not able to do this, they will not be able to converse with the key actors of importance for the relevance of the RAP. They will not be able to position it to add value to existing initiatives, or align it with existing policies at EU, national or regional level.

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Carrying out such a review of policy measures is basic deskwork that any competent policy professional or researcher should be able to carry out. It is also the kind of task where the use of AIA could eventually add considerable value.

Many of those charged with the development of RAP in local administration or in the context of a project such as POLIRURAL plus have little or no experience in working with public administration and no experience at all delivering results that go beyond studies. It will be very difficult for them to see in advance of doing the work of creating an inventory or related policy documents the number of such documents which might exist, the breadth of their coverage, and the extent to which most of these will have failed to produce any kind of real policy action.

It is in finding such documents and reading them that you will understand who the stakeholders are, what are the stakes, which agencies or government bodies are concerned, where the money might come from, who may need to be consulted to ensure passage of eventual legislation and who may need to be on board to ensure access to budget and program implementation.

It is prudent to build upon what exists already. That means building upon existing programs, policies and policy Initiatives. So, a good start is to create an overview of EU policies and programs in the theme you have selected. This requires desk work. The intention is that some of the AIA tools to be developed in this project will help with that.

But it also requires talking to experts in local government who have a good idea of what is being done. I call this Management by Talking Around, a wink to the Management by Walking Around[13] method made popular by Tom Peters[14] [15], but which originated in the practice of companies which have been feted for their excellence in management practices such as Hewlett Packard and Toyota. It is also a mild rebuke to those for whom the natural way to 'get things done' is to send an email, wait a month for no reply and complain that the other is hard to reach.

The leader of the RAP should also note that action plans are often incomplete in the sense that they do not include all measures needed to ensure a significant and timely impact. In addition to addressing the obvious, there will be a need to include as part of a complete plan

- **Policy Measures Addressing Gaps in Finance:** It has been clear for a long time to anyone working in regional or local administration that the execution of a coherent high impact set of measures will require a range of different sources of finance, including EIB loans and green bond offerings. At the very least, there may be a need to combine funding from a variety of EU funding programs such as the CAP, ERDF, RRF, CF, SCF, JTF etc. Bearing in mind that none of these sources of finance provided 100% of the needed funding, all require the local government to obtain funds from other sources to match those coming from the EU. This has been a consistent message of both DG REGIO and DG AGRI for many years, often summarized as an appeal for local government to think in terms of an MFF or Multi-Finance Frameworks. The RAP may require measures to create an environment in which this is possible. These include feasibility studies, or technical assistance from programs

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[13] https://www.leadershipahoy.com/management-by-walking-around-explained-by-a-ceo/

[14] https://tompeters.com/blogs/toms_videos/docs/Excellence_MBWA.pdf

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_Search_of_Excellence

such as the EIB ELENA program for technical assistance, or the services of initiatives such as PROSPECT+ an EU funded project that offers training to people in local administration.

- **Policy Measures Addressing Gaps in Legislation:** It often happens that local governments find the money needed to implement needed measures but are then frustrated by the existence of legislation which prohibits them from moving ahead, or the lack of legislation which enables them to proceed. Examples exist across Europe where this has happened in the past with respect to the creation of energy communities or the completion of energy projects due to the monopolies of local energy incumbents.
- **Policy Measures addressing Gaps in Training:** The transformation of local economies requires support from many actors in local government, in planning, and policy development as well as in public service provision such as agricultural outreach or support for new enterprise development. Several member states have found out recently that people in government don't necessarily understand what is meant by the circular economy, the bioeconomy, the carbon-economy. These found themselves in a poor position to support local development in line with headline targets of the EU such as "net zero by 2050." This is a reminder that the local government also needs training and capacity building, if it is to adequately play its role in support for the implementation of regional action plans.

The Review of Institutional Arrangements

To achieve its development goals, the RAP may need to integrate measures which naturally come under the authority of a range of different ministries. In fact it is a requirement of the POLIRURAL plus project that the RAP address precisely these issues.

The RAP leadership team will therefore need to identify all institutions in the target region which are involved in the execution of policy initiatives related to the theme chosen for the RAP. This is a simple but necessary measure which follows on naturally from the task of carrying out a PGA. The RAP leadership team is simply the group of people driving the overall process. That includes the people who organize key meetings and events such as deep dives. In particular those who 'hold the pen' and take the lead in drafting the key documents.

It will help the leadership team to focus on its effort on 'relevant actors' among the many possible stakeholders linked to a theme and avoid wasting time with organisations which ultimately may add little or no value to the RAP as an enabler of its implementation.
The RAP leadership team can create significant value by acting as a convener of institutions that normally operate in silos and have little or no professional connection to other local government entities, for simple lack of situational awareness, opportunity to meet and good reasons to meet and work together. This will be especially the case for the urban-rural issues on which collaboration is so obviously and sorely needed.

Stakeholder Analysis

People who take part in well-intentioned projects but have limited understanding of policy and how to make it happen tend to focus on bottom-up activities with grassroots stakeholders and may entirely forget to engage with the 'actors.' That is with those who pass enabling legislation, mobilize funding and other resources, and ultimately make it all happen. This oversight is arguably one of the most important reasons why so many "strategies" and "policies" and "foresight initiatives" are entirely ignored by the machinery of state. For this reason, it is worthwhile emphasising that there are two main categories of stakeholder – the actors and the beneficiaries, and that the lead

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of a Foresight (FS) or related Participative Policy Process (PPP) should prioritize identifying and contacting the "actors", as a prerequisite for eventual success. Without their support, no action plan involving the public purse or requiring enabling legislation will be implemented.

It is worth noting that not all stakeholders have the same stake. Some have much bigger stakes than others. The most important actor may not be the one with the most money. There may be issues of ethics, or justice or equality to be addressed in deciding which ones to prioritize, but that is life. Nothing is black or white, only shades of grey, and those shades may vary with the day.

There is no point in talking about stakeholders until the general theme of the RAP has been identified. The reason for this should be obvious to any rational being. The identity of both the actors and the beneficiaries, and the importance one might accord to them, vary considerably depending on the theme to be addressed in the RAP.

One can add to those two categories two more. These are the "enablers" and the "others." Here they are in more detail:

- **Beneficiaries:** These are the organisations (people) which will most directly benefit from the policy response to the challenge being addressed. These will vary depending on the specific nature of the challenge to be addressed. They usually correspond to groups of citizens such as farmers, entrepreneurs, retirees, refugees and so on.
- **Actors:** These are the organisations (people) whose job is to implement the policy measures. That is the people who define policy and design programs, find the money to implement those programs, enact new legislation, and those who run those programs.
- **Enablers:** These are the organisations (people) who help make it happen, by providing services, advise of expertise. They typically include academics, consultants and providers of technical assistance.
- **Others:** There are other groups of people that may require consideration. They may or may not be represented by some readily identifiable organisation. They include individuals, lobbies and vested interests, those who are likely to object to measures or try to block initiatives, for whatever reason. Opinions may vary as to how fair or just or legitimate those reasons may be. They might include activism, idealism, NIMBYISM, or naked self-interest at the expense of the public good. This group also includes people who like being on committees but have little or no real stake in the issue under consideration.

It is up to the driver of the policy process to see who needs to be involved, at what stage in the process, how and to what extent they should be asked to take part in the process. This is not an easy task, and it is hard to provide a general formula for success.

But without the involvement of the beneficiaries, it is very hard to define good goals, and without the direct involvement of actors, and their adoption of the action plan, nothing will get done.

Phase II: Foresight and the Regional Action Plan

Drivers' Analysis

When we talk about drivers of change, we are really talking about the trends that are shaping the world, and which may require a policy response. The terminology is ambiguous in the sense that trends often act as drivers, and drivers themselves may be considered trends. For this reason, we can also refer to these phenomena as 'factors' and count among them, not only trends and drivers but barriers and enablers. Again, all of these terms are to some extent interchangeable. Education for example, can be seen as a driver of personal ambition, economic progress, and high-quality jobs. But it can also act as a barrier to progress. When the subjects taught are inappropriate. When the skills acquired are poorly matched to the needs of employers or badly aligned with new and emerging areas of economic opportunity. In these cases, education is no longer a driver or enabler of progress, but a barrier to prosperity because it causes people to spend their time and money in pursuit of futile goals and creates frustration through unrealized hopes and dreams.

Other concepts that arise in trying to understand how the future unfolds, include:
- Mega-trends, meso-trends and microtrends.
- Fads, trends that do not last very long.
- Weak-signals, events that stand out as being new or different, which may develop into trends.
- Game-changers, phenomena that introduce new dynamics.
- Trend breaks, sudden departures from business as usual.

The meaning of these terms is fairly intuitive. But always bear in mind that the analysis of drivers is not an exact science. Trying to be 'rigorous' is not always a good idea. There is not much point getting hung up on definitions. The overall goal of the drivers' analysis is to understand how change is happening now, the kind of changes that are likely to have an impact on your region, their interlinkages and dependencies, their importance, and the possibility of being able to influence them based on policy choices. Some trends are very powerful and act out over long periods of time. They can be very hard to change. Other trends may change in the short- and medium-term, with appropriate action from the public sector. The goal of public policy is to "break" with existing trends such as high levels of unemployment in a region. Policies are designed to "change the game" based on new legislation, flows of investment or encouragement to entrepreneurs.

Understanding How Change Happens

So, one of the first major tasks in a Foresight exercise is to make lists of factors that may shape the future. These can then be discussed with a diverse group of people in order to complete the list and then rank the factors on the basis of their perceived relevance and importance for the region. Usually, time and resources are scarce, and an important concern is to make sure that the coverage is as complete as possible, that all important factors are given adequate consideration, and that no important factor has been left out. The standard approach is very simple. It is based on the STEEPV mnemonic and consists of the creation of separate lists under six headings as follows:
- **Social Factors:** These will include demographic trends, the evolution of the age-pyramid, issues related to gender, families and how they are organized, and any persistent or emerging phenomenon related to how society operates.
- **Technological Factors:** These include all major technologies that will have an impact on work and leisure, what we consume and the way we consume, the services that make our lives easier, more interesting, or

more fulfilling. These include infrastructure issues, such as road, rail, and airport but also communication infrastructure such as high-quality internet and rural broadband.

- **Economic Factors:** These include everything that has an impact on our ability to get a job or earn a living, support a family, set up a business. It includes the quality of work and the cost of living, the burden of renting, the ability of young people to buy a house or save for the future. Taxation, the burden of debt-service, private and public sector borrowing. The cost of looking after old people, the distribution of wealth, income inequality and wage stagnation. Trends related to public-private partnership and the cost of basic services such as energy, water, education, and healthcare. Record amounts of money going into VC and PE, the emergence of decacorns (as opposed to unicorns) as well as an accelerated shift away from coal and oil towards more sustainable sources of energy.

- **Environmental Factors:** These included everything to do with weather and climate, CO_2 emissions and what is generally referred to as natural capital. This includes stocks of good quality soil and water catchment areas, pollution, access to water for drinking and domestic use, industry, and irrigation, mineral resources such as metals and rare-earth elements for mobile phones, computers, wind turbines and PV panels, as well as for batteries. It includes biodiversity such as populations of winged insects, native species, nature reserves and everything required to maintain robust eco-systems. Diseases and parasites of plants, trees, crops, animals, and humans.

- **Political Factors:** These include policies, institutions and initiatives including new legislation at international EU or member state level. At EU level, there is the impact of BREXIT, the new commission with its new priorities and budgets, ambitious plans for the Green Transition, and facilities for the post-COVID world. There is the latest wave of CAP reform. Finally, there is a changing international order, in which the roles of superpowers such as the US and China have evolved considerably, trade wars are looming and new regions have gained I significance, in particular Africa.

- **Values:** One of the most powerful forces shaping human behaviour is the set of 'values' that inform how individuals see the world, and how they make decisions as consumers and as citizens and as voters. So, this category includes things such as the rise in student and employee activism, concern for the planet, new food movements, interest in cooperatives, concern for personal privacy and distrust of big-tech companies (such as Facebook).

The POLIRURAL project created an 'inventory' of 64 drivers across the 6 categories. It is still available on the POLIRURAL website[16]. This is not by any means an exhaustive list of drivers, and it can be improved. When it was created, it was pretty much up to date, but a lot has happened in the world since then and new drivers need to be added. It is our intention to provide an updated list as part of D3.2 of the POLIRURAL plus. More specifically, the intention is to develop this with the help of LC-NC AIA tools being created with the support of WP4.

The inventory of drivers provides a starting point for any analysis of drivers of change to be undertaken as part of a Foresight activity, such as that associated with the creation of RAPs in POLIRURAL plus.

The inventory can be used as a resource to help create inputs to group work intended to reach a collective understanding of...

- How change happens in your region.
- The changes that are happening right now.
- The changes that are likely to happen in the future.
- Their order of importance and your ability to influence those changes.

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It is up to each regional RAP team to decide on the details of the process, based on:
- The overall purpose or theme of the RAP.
- The level of knowledge and expertise available among the participants.
- The time available in which to complete the exercise.
- The need to provide timely inputs to on-going policy processes.
- The human resources available for related deskwork and the organization and animation of group work.

The lead team for the RAP might proceed as follows.

The animator circulates the inventory to the participants and asks them to read it and reflect on the changes that are happening or will happen in their region, and their significance with respect to the theme of the foresight exercise, and the forces driving those changes. They should be encouraged to not feel restricted by the list, but to extend and enrich it based on their own experience and insights, based on what they know from their work, independent reading, or casual observation of what is happening around them. They should think in terms of trends, enablers, and barriers to change. In particular new and emerging factors that are not yet fully understood and may require attention at the level of the group in order to be better understood.

The animator or core team of the Foresight group has an important role of play in shaping this discussion. In the early stages the focus should be on 'casting the net wide', extending and enriching the list, with a view to not missing out on issues which may be unfamiliar to some participants, but which may ultimately prove to be significant.

Some of the issues raised may require closer inspection. For example, by way of a DEEP DIVE workshop, that taps into locally available expertise. Other issues, in particular the so-called 'mega-trends' which feature in the international press, and which are addressed by international bodies, may require 'localization.' They may need to be interpreted locally, so that their real significance is apparent, and so that they do not get dismissed as 'someone else's problem' or 'something that happens elsewhere.' A good example here is climate change, which many may think of as global warming, but few may connect this to an increase in coastal flooding, looming water scarcity, landslides due to heavy rain or crop loss due to unseasonable weather. The use of deep dives can help to put these factors in perspective. Rural broadband is another factor that might require a deep dive. The general idea might be known from the press, but less so what it really means in terms of how access to rural broadband may transform the way people live and work, the opportunities for jobs and the connectedness of remote areas to urban centers. This is worth dwelling on and explaining in terms that are meaningful to local people, and especially in view of the experience of remote working and changes to the way that we live and work that started during COVID lockdown.

At some point, to be decided by the animator or Foresight team, the participants in the Foresight process will have absorbed most of the lessons about how change happens. At this point the mood can shift to deciding priorities. The challenge is to move from a long list of factors to a priority list of key trends. There are many techniques for doing this, based on:
- Simple ranked lists.
- 4-squares ranking based on plotting options on a two-axis table[17] or

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[17] There are many ways to choose the axes. The animator can decide perhaps based on a discussion with the participants. One approach could be to use 'relevance' and 'impact.' Another could be 'relevance' and 'timescale' or 'actionability.'

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- Complex multi-criterium approaches supported by software such as Criterium Decision Plus by Info Harvest[18].

A list of priorities can be drawn up containing 2 to 5 trends[19] using one or more of these techniques, based on some form of-interactive group work. Once again this is not an exact science, the techniques provide ways to tame complexity and structure a collective learning process that arrives at a result that can be justified, based on evidence from the literature and debate involving local experts. It is good to retain some flexibility. The list should get a final review to make sure that something important is not missing. The final step is to summarize all of this in a document with a title along the lines of "Drivers Analysis for XXX RAP" that:

- Describes the process and lists those who were involved.
- Describes intermediate results to demonstrate the level of hard-work and diligence that lies behind the results.
- Describes those final results referring to
  - The priority list of trends
  - The forces driving those trends (drivers, enablers, barriers)
  - The impact that those trends may have on the region,
    - The challenges they will create
    - The opportunities they will create

From Drivers' Analysis to Vision Building

The next step in the process is to build upon all of the work done so far to develop a shared vision for what the region should become at some point in the future, say 5, 10 or even 50 years hence. The choice of a "landing place" is important and will depend on many factors including the specific theme of the exercise. Depending on the detailed mission of the Foresight initiative, and the nature of the challenge it attempts to address, the time horizon for the exercise, its landing place, may differ considerably. Major projects such as the construction of highways, ports and airports, the reforestation of vast tracts of land, often aim at goals to be achieved over a period of up to 50 years.

Initiatives that address more immediate issues such as high levels of unemployment, persistent flooding at related loss of property, life or economic productivity may require quicker action and shorter time scales, of the order of 5 to 10 years for example.

Whatever the landing place, there is a need to describe what this new and better world will be, using an easy to remember and easy to understand narrative, that helps all of those involved visualize the result of the various policies and measures that will need to be put in place. A typical "vision" comprises a vision statement, perhaps 10 lines long. This can be qualified by adding further paragraphs to elaborate on this vision, based on normative scenarios or vignettes, that enrich the message from the point of view of different groups of stakeholders. For example, from the point of view of those who live in a region, those who work in the region, those who run businesses, those who visit it for business or leisure.

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[18] http://www.infoharvest.com/ihroot/index.asp

[19] The animator can decide the number, but certainly not 15 or 21. If there are too many topics then it will be impossible to make progress on policy options later on, and nothing will ever get done.

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There are no strict rules to follow—creativity is key. You might take a Wagnerian approach and compose an opera about it, or don a gold medallion and rap about your region in 2030. Whatever approach you choose, remember that the vision serves as both a communication and management tool. A strong vision will inspire and motivate the development of the roadmap and action plan, which are the next steps in the Foresight process.

Once the regional Foresight process has worked through the drivers of change, identified and agreed upon a list of challenges and opportunities, the next step is to decide what kind of a region you want to live in, in say 10 years-time, based on these realities. There are many ways of constructing a vision. This vision however is a response to the opportunities and challenges that are provided by the major trends acting upon the region in both direct and indirect ways. The local Foresight teams will decide on how best to do this, given their own skills and experience, as well as the expertise, time, and resources available for them to complete the task.

Whatever approach is used, it should draw upon the work done in the Foresight exercise to date. That is the results of any
- The SWOT analysis.
- The lists of local needs.
- Issues analysis that has been carried out.
- The results of the driver's analysis.

The chosen method should bring to the table all of what has been learned about the region, the world and how it is changing, in order to producing a vision statement, knowing that the next step in the Foresight initiative will be to connect the analysis to the vision, with an action plan and roadmap, composed of measures that the public sector will integrate into its overall program of policies related to the development of the region.
- A typical vision initiative might start with a workshop where
- All of the preliminary results are presented and discussed
- The anatomy or structure and purpose of the vision is discussed and agreed
- Breakout groups work on different aspects of the anatomy
- These are then discussed and edited
- Homework is assigned and the group disbands until the next and usually the final workshop where the final or near final text is agreed.

Depending on the skill and know-how of the organizers, the complexity of the job at hand and the various practical constraints with which they have to work, the process might involve sessions where the group or groups discuss:
- Key concepts or words that should appear in the final vision.
- Key 'values' against which a final text might be judged as being more or less compatible.
- Important 'principles' that may underpin a final version of the vision.

It is vital to assign capable people to key tasks related to drafting texts and animating the working groups sessions. Whatever the final result, it should be clear that this is a result that flows from the Foresight process and builds upon all of the work that has gone before. The result of this exercise is captured in a shared vision document that is unique to that regional Foresight exercise with a title that looks something like "XXX Foresight Vision for YYYY," where YYYY is of course the landing point for the exercise. The document should:
- Describe the 'vision process' and list those who were involved.
- Describe the previous work and resources upon which the vision is based.
- Elaborate the vision in terms of
  o A short summary statement or paragraph.

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> o A series of qualifying statements that further elaborates the vision from the point of view of key groups of stakeholders.

SWOT Analysis

This is a favourite tool for people who have been to business school and for those embarking on some kind of a local planning exercise. Yet it is rarely done well and seldom contributes any real value to initiatives such as the creation of a RAP. The reason is that the organisers of such activities are often excited about having a structure which could drive a participative policy process, but they lack the knowledge to say something useful, or lack the time to learn, or they naively hope that brining a diverse group of stakeholders into a room without preparation, for an hour or so will generate useful insights. The tendency is for inadequate preparation, facilitation by an expert with no insight or domain knowledge, who is unable to elicit views and opinions that go beyond the banal. Another reason is that people are too polite and like to say nice things about themselves and their regions. They elevate the average to being good or even excellent and entirely ignore the bad.

Regional strengths and weaknesses can be understood from looking at the past and present situation of the region. Regional threats and opportunities are a way of looking into the future.

Although this can be a useful way to summarize the situation of a region, exercises that rely on brainstorming with local stakeholders tend to yield banalities unless well prepared. Very few stakeholders have the insight or experience to contribute effectively to an exercise that starts with a blank sheet.

The best approach is to prepare something comprehensive in advance and discuss it with a view to updating or modifying it, based on conversations with people possessed of knowledge and insight and a capacity for critical thinking. Ideally the SWOT analysis should feed into and support the vision and the choice of measures by which it is to be realized.

The most common error in doing a SWOT analysis is to end up with a list of banal observations that provide no real insight into the region, its potential and the sense of purpose of the communities that live there. The following is an illustration of the kind of language one might usefully adopt.

Strengths
- We live in a very large region with a low population. This presents many opportunities for the development of export-oriented industries based on biomass, biodiversity and conservation.
- We have lots of high-quality grazing land with short mild winters that is well suited to milk production.
- We have a young entrepreneurial population, easy access to population centres, good schools and an attractive environment for young families.
- Local legislation is well adapted to the creation of energy communities, so there are low barriers to the adoption of new sustainable energy systems.
- We have no obvious strengths in relation to this issue. We need to catch up and make up for lost time as it is essential for our future that we achieve the ability to exploit these opportunities.
- Large numbers of people are moving here to retire due to the low cost of living. Some entrepreneurs are moving here due to the relatively low rents and availability of low-cost office space.
- Local government has started to build upon this by creating a land bank and setting aside properties for the creation of rural co-working spaces.

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Weaknesses

- Despite many efforts broadband coverage is low, and quality is poor where it exists.
- We have many properties situated in areas that are low lying and at high risk of flooding.
- The average age in the region is over 40. There are few schools and no hospitals in the region. Ultimately there is little reason for anyone to go there. It might be a good place to set up a secret military training camp or a NATO listening outpost. This will create a need for entertainment for lonely soldiers on their days and nights off.
- Large numbers of young people are leaving for third level education and employment.
- Lack of ability to anticipate, prepare for, and mitigate the catastrophic effects of climate change. One region might observe that "our forests have been attacked by the bark beetle. This has had a devastating effects on those in the business. Our weakness is our failure to anticipate the effects of climate change and undertake timely actions to mitigate the effects.
- There is a high level of industry concentration, leading to low levels of competition, low payments for farmers, and high prices for competition.
- Many strategies, but mainly sitting on the shelf and ignored, with a very low level of implementation.
- We have an understaffed and ageing local administration. This creates a need for renewal with staff training and support from technical assistance.
- We have research, education and training institutions. Though internationally recognised as centers of excellence, their activities are of little relevance for the local economy. They are badly in need of reform.

Threats

- Land and farm properties being bought up in large quantities by Private Equity which has no relationship with or loyalty to the region and the people who live there.
- Failure to align with big client needs related to ESG reporting, EU taxonomy for investing, the CSRD, CSDDD, GCD and the EUDR, leading to producers being excluded from supply chains or offered lower prices for their produce.
- Opposition to reforms by activists who oppose ... dairy and beef farming due to the high emissions of methane ...
- Winter snow is less plentiful of late leading to a decline in winter tourism, with a hard impact on hotels, leisure and retail activities.

Opportunities

- Current methods of agricultural production have low carbon emissions compared to other regions. This provides the region with a head start in the developing low carbon agricultural systems.
- The region presents many opportunities for the design and implementation of carbon projects. Those on public lands could generate revenues for local government. Those on private lands could generate revenues for local landowners.
- Opportunities exist to break with the past and encourage development based on models for the circular economy, the carbon economy, the post-fossil economy, the bioeconomy.
- New legislation favours the creation of cooperatives and social enterprise. Funding is available for start-ups. Existence of local institutions to support impact finance, alternative finance and crowdfunding, adapted to the needs of social enterprise.

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Strengths	Opportunities
• Large region, low population	• Low carbon agriculture potential
• High-quality grazing land	• Carbon project opportunities
• Young entrepreneurial population	• Circular economy development
• Good environment for families	• Support for cooperatives
• Favorable energy community laws	• Available startup funding
Weaknesses	**Threats**
• Poor broadband coverage	• Private Equity land acquisition
• Flood risk areas	• ESG alignment challenges
• Aging population	• Opposition to farming
• Youth exodus	• Declining winter tourism
• Understaffed administration	

Key Focus: Sustainable Agriculture + Circular Economy + Youth Retention

Whoever is driving the process should have a clear idea of why they want to do a SWOT, how it will support the creation of a vision for the region, or how it will support the narrative that justifies the policy measures making up the action plan. If the organizer is clear on these issues, they should be able to design the detailed process, make sure it is adequately prepared, and that the right kind of people take part in the exercise.

Deep Dives

Each team developing a RAP, pursues an independent agenda at its own pace. This is required in order to achieve a result that is relevant, timely and actionable, likely to be endorsed by local beneficiaries and adopted by local actors in public administration. Typically, many deep dives may be needed as part of the overall process of developing a RAP. There may be a need for deep dives specific trends to understand how global trends are manifest locally. There may be a need for a deep dive to survey the range of policy options available to address a specific challenge. There may be a need for a deep dive on a specific policy option to adapt it to the local context and establish its feasibility in the local context. There may be a need to do a deep dive on financing options, or on the readiness of the region to adopt a policy given the state of local legislation.

Determine the Scope of the Exercise

The first task of the RAP leadership team will be to determine the scope of the deep dive. This may need to proceed in phases. Starting with leading questions and drilling deeper if needed. In POLIRURAL we developed lists of "conversation starters" intended to open up the subject and establish the level of expertise and experience that exists in a community. We did this for a number of topics of importance at that time. These included COVID, CAP Reform and the Green Deal. All of those documents are available on the POLIRURAL website for consultation[20].

Anyone intending to carry out a deep dive is invited to consult those documents for inspiration, being aware that things move on and that any such background document will need to be updated every couple of years. Ultimately, we hope to use AIA tools to lighten the load, by helping the leaders of such initiatives to create the Background Notes (BNs), Curated Reading Lists (CRLs) and Inventories of Policy Options (IPOs) needed to support discussions adapted to the reality of the region, as well as to the knowledge and experience of those in the room.

Determine the Complexity of the Exercise

It is impossible and arguably unwise to prescribe in too much detail how each region should do its work. The best we can do is to flag some of the issues that they will have to manage as the organizers and social engineers of these participative policy events. Each region faces practical constraints in terms of available time and looming deadlines for actionable results, or limited resources available for the core team. For those and other reasons, it is important to design the exercise so that useful information and insights can be gathered and summarized in a report that can be circulated afterwards, to be validated by those who could not take part.

The core team will have to decide how the work will be organized. If it will consist of a mixture of online and physical events. This will involve plenary or break-out events, all held on the same day or spread out over several days. Each session requires careful planning to make sure that the right people show up and take part, that adequate documentation is provided in advance, that the sessions are well managed and that reporting on the sessions is carried out by skilled reporters, that will do justice to those who take part. The core team might decide to record sessions and make the recordings available afterwards along with slides-decks and background papers, for those who could not take part.

Involve Relevant Stakeholders, Experts and Policy Actors

One of the challenges that each core team will face is the challenge of moving beyond anecdote to actionable intelligence. Anecdotes are very important. They allow the core team to formulate hypotheses about the reality of what is going on. They help the core team to formulate specific questions for experts to reflect upon. But on their own they are not enough.

The term 'stakeholder' should be self-explanatory. But that is not always the case. Too often, an organizer invites a large diverse group of people into a meeting, most of whom have no real stake in the matter at hand and bring little

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[20] https://polirural.eu/results/capacity-building-results/guides-to-deep-dives/

in terms of knowledge or experience to enrich the discussion. They may feel good about the entire event because there is a good gender-balance or a good age-balance and so forth. But the main criterion should be to invite people who have a real stake in the matter at hand. This is quite different from people who may have an opinion or simply enjoy taking part in 'community' events. A capable organizer will know in advance why they have invited the people they invite. They will have spoken with them beforehand. They will know what each can bring to the discussion. They will have provided adequate briefing documents and clearly defined what the meeting is to achieve.

Ideally these experts will take part in the meetings, will engage with the stakeholders who may argue from their lived experience, and offer opinions and views based on their expertise and experience. Ideally these experts should be informed in advance about the issues to be discussed. They may provide links to background documents that can be distributed in advance. They may be invited to make presentations or short speeches to anchor the discussions in what is known about the subject matter. They may guide discussions towards conclusions that are robust and authoritative being based on the best evidence available. Sometimes that evidence is not available. This is not a failure of the process, just the discovery of questions which may be of great importance for the region, and which may require further study, research or data-gathering before a solid position can be formulated. In this situation it may not be possible to formulate measures to address the situation. But it may be possible to suggest measures such as the funding of the studies needed to decide.

It is part of the work of the core team to make sure that different parts of this work is adequately served by relevant stakeholders who can share their experience of what is going on, but also that it is adequately served by experts that will enrich the exercise based on their science, what they know from the literature, and what they know from on-going discussions with their peers who may be living elsewhere.

Exploring Policy Options

The exploration of policy options requires an understanding of policies and the many ways in which policy measures are formulated and delivered. For this reason, it is essential to involve people from regional agencies and departments of public administration. Even though it is their job to know about their things, like anyone in professional life, their knowledge will not be perfect, and they may be happy to take part in this part of the Foresight exercise if it affords an opportunity to update their knowledge or even to meet peers whose experience if different from theirs.

As a general rule, the place to start in the exploration of policy options is to look around the country, the EU and the rest of the world, to see what has already been done, by someone else, to address the challenge at hand. This requires a lot of desk work. One of the intentions of this project is to explore how the use of AIA tools can facilitate such work. Nevertheless, not all useful and even necessary knowledge is documented and thereby accessible to GEN AI. It also helps to attend workshops or conferences where 'good practice' is discussed. This gives access to another level of understanding. You might consider inviting someone who has implemented a successful measure to one of the deep dive workshops. But 'caveat emptor' as people love to talk up their own success. It is useful to adopt what Nicolas Naseem Taleb calls, 'an attitude of constructive scepticism.'

Most importantly, it is essential to involve 'actors' in the exploration of policy options; They are the ones who may be charged with following up on the implementation of these options. Their participation provides an opportunity

to inject realism, manage expectations, understand the realistic timelines involved in implementations and shape things in ways that make their work and the expected results more achievable.

The method for exploring policy options is fairly simple and straightforward. The main input is the list of major challenges to be addressed in order to realize the "vision." This list is based on:

- The Issues Analysis (in our case the needs analysis of WP4).
- The Drivers' Analysis.
- The Deep-Dives.
- Further refinements based on the work involved in the elaboration of the vision.

The final list may contain 2 to 5 challenges. The main task now is to transform each challenge into a list of 2 to 10 measures needed to adequately address that challenge.

Ideally each of these measures should be justified by the provision of an "intervention logic" and characterized by a set of KPIs. It often happens that the drivers of the Foresight exercise possess neither the insight nor the know-how to do such work. This is why it is important to engage with the 'actors' from an appropriate point in the RAP development process. They understand best what is required in terms of intervention logic and 'evidence' base to justify the mobilisation of the budget needed to make those measures happen. For these reasons, as the work progresses, there should be a steady shift in emphasis from working with the beneficiaries, to working with the actors. Ultimately, only the 'actors' are able to make those measures happen, and they must be fully complicit in the drafting of the roadmap, if the RAP is to move beyond the stage of being a nice report.

Creating an Inventory of Policy Options

Most stakeholders (whether actor or beneficiary) will have little understanding of most areas of policy and the details of how to make it happen. Nevertheless, it is very important to involve them in the elaboration of the action plan. They may not contribute much to the initial design of measures, but their most valuable contribution may be in their reactions to proposals, the identification of gaps, and in particular in the identification of gaps that can easily be filled in order to accommodate the needs of specific groups or minorities. Such issues can often be addressed at the early design stage, at no extra cost. Whereas attempts to "hack" existing solutions or extend established programs as an afterthought, can be costly and disruptive.

The rate of experimentation and creative endeavour in public policy has increased considerably over the years. Not only at local level, but also in terms of the scaling of innovative pilot concepts, and in terms of the financing of programs and projects. That is the good news. The bad news is that this creates a challenge for policy experts who want to keep up with "good practice." For this reason, it is useful to prepare an "inventory of policy options" that the teams can use as a support for their work. This requires a considerable amount of desk work.

It must be remembered that no significant measure gets implanted without appropriate forms of finance. Unless the method of financing is identified in advance the plan is likely to remain at best an interesting document and never pass into action.

![POLIRURAL plus logo]

Creating an Inventory of Financing Options

Most who work in local government are unaware of the range of methods that exist for financing policy measures. Many know about LEADER and for them that is all that matters. But LEADER only accounts for a fraction of the EU budget spent on rural development. According to a report by the European Court of Auditors, planned EU funding for LEADER in the 2014-2020 programming period was about **7 %** of total rural development funding[21]. Nothing of any lasting significance is possible without talking about the other 93% of funding, where it comes from and what it is used for.

LEADER provides limited funding for pilot projects. But what about the successful pilots? How do they get scaled up and integrated into the mainstream effectively? After all, the whole point of pilot projects is to find out 'what works,' with a view to scaling up 'what works' once the uncertainty around that is eliminated.

The European Commission has insisted on the adoption of CLLD and MFF for many years now. This recognizes the basic fact that any complete policy action will require the integration of measures that come under the purview of different ministries, which in turn requires cooperation between the institutions that those ministries employ, to implement their specific measures. This is one of the most important aspects of the POLIRURAL plus project, which emphasizes the need for policy integration and coordination between the government actors of urban and rural areas. This in turn will require the mobilisation of funds from a variety of different funding sources, both EU, and member state funds, as well as funds from development banks such as the EIB, private companies and citizens.

Clarifying the Intervention Logic

It is important to explain the "intervention logic." This is a good opportunity to involve experts in the Foresight process since most stakeholders will not be experts. They may have good general knowledge or awareness of issues and opinions on specific policy options, but their understanding will generally be fragmented and in need of qualification or completion by experts. It is also important that the team preparing events where the stakeholders will meet to explore options, will adequately prepare the stakeholders for taking part in these meetings, in particular by developing and circulating background papers that gathering together a range of policy options, drawn from examples of measures that have been implemented in other regions of Europe or from other parts of the world.

The exploration of possible policy measures should involve a discussion of the intervention logic. From a practical point of view, this means a narrative linking the measure to other measures in the policy mix and to the overall policy challenge or challenges to which it is expected to provide a solution, and thereby filling in details as to how the measure will contribute to achieving the vision. It is possible to think of the intervention logic as the "Theory of Change" or preferably a "Theory of Transformation," given the scale and pace at which change is needed, to respond adequately to the challenges created by climate change, potentially catastrophic loss of biodiversity, increased anger and discontent at rising prices, rising cost of living, wage stagnation and various other sources of social injustice.

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[21] https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/leader-10-2022/en/

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There is some ambiguity in the use of terms such as theory of change. This is due to the existence of a literature that treats the theory of change, as a theory of institutions and other "power structures" and which ones need to be mobilized, demobilized, or appeased so that the desired changes can effectively happen.

This kind of institutional intelligence is also often created (or co-created) on the basis of what is called Review of Institutional Arrangements (RIA), by involving appropriate stakeholders in specific events, supported by inputs such as an Inventory of Policy Measures. Ideally, the inventory should include an inventory of financing mechanisms, to initiate an adult conversation about where the money for implementation will come from and who will undertake to obtain it. Some of the measures to be included in a "complete" action plan may include preparatory measures involving training, capacity building and the enactment of enabling legislation to make policy action possible at local level or in cooperation with other instances of local, regional or national government.

The intervention logic is sometimes codified in terms of a logframe (short for logical framework). It provides a structure through which one can rationalize how a mixture of policy measures combine to produce multiple "outputs," "impacts" and "outcomes" as represented in the following diagram.

The **"THEORY of CHANGE"** is all about how these different "steps" are linked to each other. Usually, it is not explicitly written down. It always exists even if only half understood. Learning through evaluation helps you improve by updating your "theory of change" …
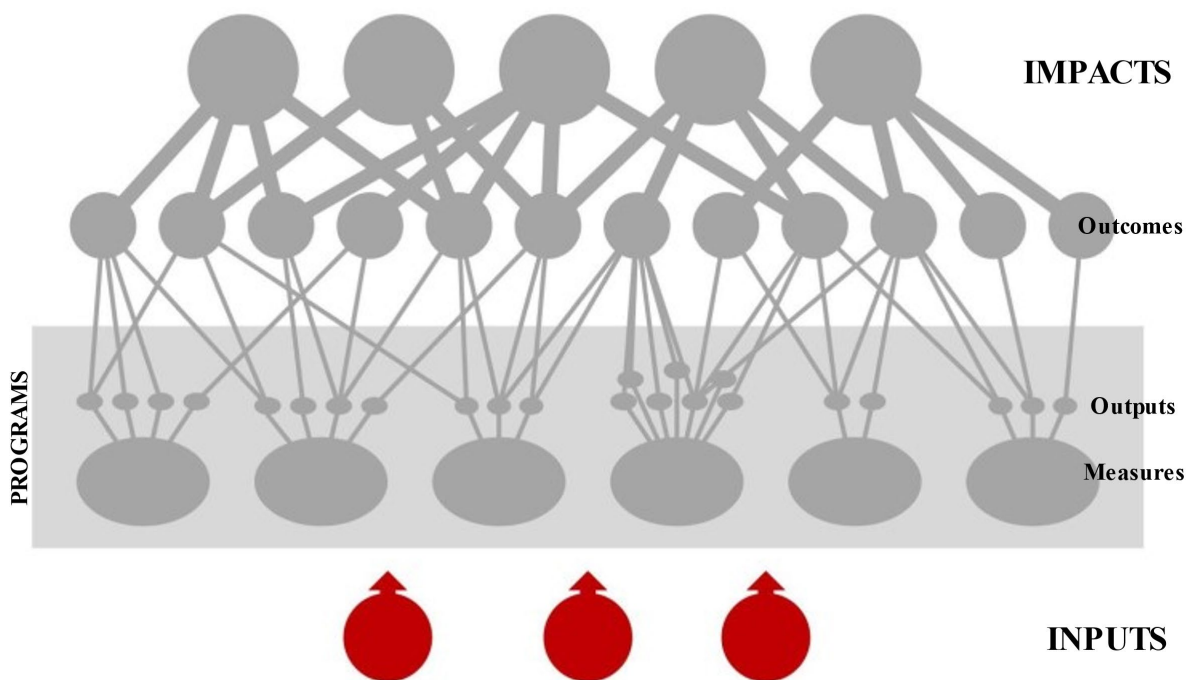
This may sound rather abstract, and a bit overwhelming, but to make it more accessible, one can take the example of "training" as a measure to address unemployment or job-quality.

Measures	Training courses, characterized method, topic, length, type of trainer…
Outputs	The number of people successfully trained…
Outcomes	The number of newly qualified people ready for work…
Impacts	The number of people newly employed based on those qualifications

This is not an exact science, by any means, and there are other ways of looking at the same thing. For example, one could also propose the following logframe for the same measures.

Measures	Training courses, characterized method, topic, length, type of trainer…
Outputs	The number of people successfully trained and ready for work
Outcomes	The number of people employed with those qualifications
Impacts	The expansion of a major employer based on suitably qualified personnel

It is not possible to say that one is better than the other.

The first case reflects a concern for employment and getting people into jobs. The Impact statement is clearly about people in new jobs. The narrative describing the intervention logic might start with a story about the levels of unemployment, an analysis of the overall job market, and an examination of trends related to future skill needs. The measures related to "training" might involve the recruitment of new staff at local training institutes and the creation of new courses with the details left up to the new professors. The second case reflects a concern for the HR needs of major employers. Typically, big companies that might expand given the right conditions, whose expansion will create a demand for a certain kind of a workforce. The measures include training co-delivered by local training institutions and the companies, based on curricula whose development is overseen by skills' councils involving key personnel form the interested companies. These may organize recruitment days and internships and donate tools and other resources to the training institute.

Talking through the intervention logic is an opportunity to deepen and enrich the overall understanding of the goal or desired impact of the measures undertaken. It provides an opportunity to check on what really needs to be done to reach this goal, and it sets the stage for an adult conversation about the cost of the initiative, the time scale for the intervention and the choice of indicators needed to monitor progress in achieving that goal.

Ideally each step in the program logic can be monitored with the use of KPIs, as suggested below based on the "training" measures example.

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The **"LOGICAL FRAMEWORK"** has its origins in work of USAID in the 1970s. Many funding agencies have progressively built upon this since then. There are many variations on the same basic ideas. The main insights relate to how best to use this framework.

Program Logic	Comment	Indicators
INPUTS	Everything needed to implement a program of activities, ideally broken down by activity …	• Budgets • The HR effort of agencies and ministries • The HR effort of internal + external experts • Other inputs (fees, PPP investment…)
ACTIVITIES (MEASURES)	All relevant things done that are part of the mission of an organization, or described in a contract with a service provider, i.e., training programs …	Everything to do with the formal or professional planning and monitoring of activities: • Budget expenditure … • On time execution of tasks …
OUTPUTS	The formal deliverables promised by each activity, often (but not always) described in a contract …	This too is often described in a contract: • The number of people trained … • The number successfully qualified …
OUTCOMES	If training is an output, this is only a means to an end. This end is the "outcome" of the activity. For example, it might be employment or promotion and better wages…	For example: • The number of graduates who find a job within three months … • The number of graduates who move on to higher paying work …
IMPACTS (OBJECTIVES)	The ultimate aim of all of these efforts and the reason behind the allocated budgets is a series of ambitious goals that are the result of all of these different outcomes ….	• Reduced unemployment • Higher levels of income • Reduced welfare payments • Increased active population • Increased exports due to better export capability …

In reality the attention of those involved tends to be on the measures and their outputs. These often correspond to the programming period of a measure and a check on outputs is all that is needed to determine if the terms of the contracts have been respected, at which point everyone involved gets busy with something else.

As a final word, it must be said that the use of this framework is not without its detractors. In the past "experts" working on the design and implementation of development projects have experienced great difficulty in using it. In practice it provides a framework that is often applied retrospectively, as part of an evaluation activity, and not before as part of a policy or measure design process.

For our purposes, it is suggested that the regional Foresight teams adopt aspects of the overall approach as a way of structuring their thinking about measures and their selection and the construction of narratives that explain the choices that they make.

The completion of narratives of selection is best done with the help of some numbers, the indicators referred to previously. But our focus will be on the indicators of impacts. These we equate with a selection of KPIs, that measure the performance of the economy, as well as progress towards successfully addressing the policy challenges which must be met in order to realize the "vision" that embodies the overall program for growth and development which has been codified as part of the Foresight process.

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Choosing SMART Indicators and KPIs

It is a well-established principle that "what gets measured gets managed." In using the logframe, it is common to provide indicators at every level of "achievement," at the level of outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

Providing a full set of indicators for all measures that make up the action-plan as part of a RAP, is a lot of work, so it is suggested that the Foresight teams focus on the most important ones, the measures of "impact." Often these can be considered as indicators of performance of the local economy, that will in any case be measured by local economists, statistical offices or payment agencies.

Nevertheless, the design of indicators is not as easy as it may look. Guidelines for creating indicators were provide in 1981 by George T. Doran writing in Management Review[22]. He suggested a set of rules summarized by a SMART mnemonic. There are many variations on this and on what each letter means, but the following table captures the general idea, adapted to the needs of our project.

S	Specific in the sense of clear and easy to understand
M	Measurable. It sounds obvious but most people will not know what data exists…
A	Achievable. It too sounds obvious, but few have a reliable "feeling" for the numbers…
R	Relevant. If a proxy is needed, its relevance should be explained
T	Time-bound in the sense that it should be clear by when the indicator is to be achieved

The diagram provided above, outlining the Theory of Change, is intended to reflect the reality that policy challenges often hide a lot of complexity and that combinations of measures are required in order for these challenges to be addressed. Different measures act on the region in different ways, over different periods of time. The phasing of measures, the order in which they are executed, is important. Different measures in the mix may complement each other in different ways and the impacts may happen with a delay in that a typical measure can be expected to provide an impact that will unfold over years, for example over periods of 3 to 10 years. These are all issues that will not be obvious to typical stakeholders taking part in the Foresight process. They may not even be obvious to the policy experts taking part. It is therefore reasonable to ask if tools exist for use in the context of a Foresight process, that will help stakeholders better understand the implications of the policy choices made, their interactions, and how their impact might emerge over time.

For many people, the discussion on indicators is not very interesting. It seems a bit technical, and some may want to "leave it up to the experts." Nevertheless, there is a lot to be learned from working through a process of indicator design. Indeed, there is everything to be gained, by making sure that the indicators are indeed SMART and that they

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[22] Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management review*, *70*(11), 35-36.

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do provide a basis for monitoring progress on the implementation of the action plan. In particular, the involvement of stakeholders in the design of indicators, will ensure that the final set avoids ambiguity and obfuscation and reflects the interests of minority groups, where appropriate.

A well-crafted action plan will include a process for monitoring progress on implementing, typically by setting up a monitoring committee composed of a representative set of stakeholders and led by powerful organisations capable of holding local government to account, as well as a budget to facilitate tasks such as interim evaluations and mid-course adjustments to the action plan where needed.

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Phase III: Follow-Up and Implementation

The RAP will be a work in progress for most of the duration of the RAP creation process. But it is something that can be created in stages. The end result could be quite short and to the point, supported by many annexes or explanatory and background notes. The exact structure and format of the document in final forms is something to be agreed with the actors who must bring it forward as a basis for programming and execution of the measures contained in the action plan.

But here are some general ideas to guide its construction. Ideally it should contain:

- A preamble that describes the region, and the overall challenge of growth and development for the region. It should not be too long and can be supported by background documents or studies provided in the annex. One of those annexes could be a description of the RAP development process, and a list of the institutions that were involved.
- A description of the specific challenges to be addressed by the RAP. They may be social, economic, demographic, or environmental in nature. The focus may be on countering threats, mitigating harm and harnessing opportunities. In our case it may refer to the LTVRA, or the NEB and refer to the need for urban rural cooperation.
- A vision section, describing what success will look like at some point in the future. A vision is not the same as a target such as 'net zero in 2050.' It is not the same as an ambition such as 'becoming the world's first exporter of potassium' (thanks Borat). It should resonate in terms of the values it expresses and what it means to live there at that future point in time.
- A section that translates the vision into a list of challenges that must be addressed before that vision can become a reality. These challenges can be addressed by a package of policy measures. Altogether this is the action plan. Ideally, the choice of measures can be justified on the basis of an 'intervention logic,' and their impact summarized using a set of indicators. This may require assistance from domain experts. It should make sense to the beneficiaries. Most importantly it should make sense to those who work in policy whose actions or approval may be required to ensure implementation.
- The roadmap. This is where the institutions that will create the legislation, mobilize the budget and ensure the programming need to appear. Because without that there will be no execution of measures, and no vision realized. This is where the extent of urban-rural policy integration and coordination will show in the range of actors that undertake to act together to realize the shared action plan.

How long or how detailed this needs to be is an open question. It will depend on the theme and on 'who' the eventual actors are. In some cases it is aimed at people in the local government. In other cases it may be intended for a major donor such as the EC or the EIB. It may need to be integrated into a national document such as a National CAP Strategy. It may be intended for a major funding facility such as the ERDF, the RRF, the SCF or the JTF. IN any case, the content and language will be adapted for that purpose.

The creation of a RAP is a social process. The engagement with local communities should be reflected in the 'vision' part of the document. It should be coherent with a local sense of identity and consistent with the values and sense of purpose that the members of the community possess. To have any legitimacy beyond the local community and the beneficiaries that have helped to formulate that vision, it needs to be 'endorsed' by major beneficiaries. To this end it is useful to formalize a process of endorsement. This does not have to be complicated. It is a public process, not a backroom process, where the key beneficiaries are present, perhaps as participants in a final consultation or

drafting event, underlined by a press release or publication. It is best if the whole thing is witnessed by the 'actors' who will intervene to make sure the plan gets implemented.

The essential element that underpins the implementation of the RAP, is the roadmap. This explains how the measures will be implemented, in what order, and by what local institutions, and with what sources of finance. Unless the roadmap is 'adopted' by those actors, the RAP will remain a report, and the measures will never be realized. This is not something to leave until the very end of the RAP process. The issue of who does what, and how will it all be financed must be broached at an early stage in the process. The institutions who will need to implement those measures, need to be involved in the RAP creation process. They will need to influence the action plan to ensure its feasibility and to its completeness. They are a better place to do this than citizens, because it is their job, they are experts in these issues and will know far more than ordinary citizens can ever know. That does not mean that they will know everything. It will be a learning process for them too. But if they do not 'adopt' the roadmap, agreeing to the timeline, and accepting the need to act to ensure implementation, then the plan will never be implemented. It is therefore useful to mark the moment of adoption in some way, so that everyone knows that the process has ended and that the focus should now move on to execution. A press release or publication is a good way to mark that transition.

Last but not least, there may be a need to follow up on execution to make sure that the action plan really does get implemented. This is best done by a monitoring committee of some sort. Ideally, the members of such a committee are people with political standing in the local community. People with the authority to follow up with the institutions listed in the roadmap. People who will check that needed actions are being taken, and if not, call a meeting to get things back on track. It often happens that due unforeseeable events such as flooding, wildfires, or catastrophic crop loss, due to elections and or major staff changes, the process of RAP implementation will get derailed. This is when the monitoring committee must act to bring it back on track.

Annex

REFERENCES

1. Horizon Europe, EU Grants, AGA - Annotated Grant Agreement, EU Funding Programmes 2021-2027, version 1.0, 01052024, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf
2. PoliRuralPlus, Grant Agreement