



Ruralities

RURALITIES - CLIMATE SMART, ECOSYSTEM-ENHANCING AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED RURAL EXPERTISE AND TRAINING CENTRES

TECHNICAL REPORTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT'S IMPACT MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT, VERSION 2

D2.5

WP2 – IMPACT: shift-driven instrument for tracking and alignment

Horizon Europe Grant agreement: 101060876

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ABSTRACT

The project 'Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres' (RURALITIES) delivers an ecosystem-enhancing and climate action driven expertise and learning framework organised in hubs e.g., the '**RURALITIES**', comprising a series of innovative methodologies with the learner at its core, supported by a comprehensive network of living labs, and a blockchain-based digital platform combining the Internet and wireless technologies, to assist engage, connect and empower actors. This is done via a multi-point approach e.g., multi-actors, multi-disciplines, multi-systems, multi-scale, multi-sectors, and multilevel.

RURALITIES is rooted in the recruitment, preparation, training and coaching of 1.000+ facilitators for a variety of tasks (e.g., trainers, facilitators, role models, hub coordinators, etc.), and who play a significant role in creating the matrix and the platform upon which the learning framework is built, develops and evolves. RURALITIES proposes to ideate, implement, futureproof, validate and deliver the aforementioned expertise and learning centres via real-scale practicing in 6 simplified rural socio-ecological systems (SIMSES) e.g., demonstrators, 2 in Italy, 1 in the United- Kingdom (UK), 1 in Slovenia, 1 in Spain and 1 in Romania. **RURALITIES** coordinates identified actions of local, regional authorities in supports of rural innovation in regions and economic sectors where rural innovators are not yet engaged in a relevant network.

RURALITIES coordinates identified SIMSES networks promoting rural innovation solutions whilst establishing innovative multipoint 'RURALITIES Hubs' of expertise and training on rural innovation. This is done via coordinating action for the managing authorities and regional bodies influencing regional and national policy instruments in Italy, the UK, Slovenia, Spain and in Romania.

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DRAFT

ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
AP	Associated Partner
AU	African Union
BEN	Beneficiary
C&D	Communication and Dissemination
COO	Coordinator
CSA	Coordination and Support Action
DPC	Diverse Projects Community
DPM	Diverse Policy Makers
DRA	Diverse Rural Actors
DSC	Diverse Scientific Community
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
G-Drive	Google Drive
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MSM	Media and social media
RURALITIES	Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres
SEA	Socio-Economic Agents
SIMSES	Simplified rural socio-ecological systems
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
URP	Unorganized Rural People
WP	Work Package

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deliverable 'RURALITIES Technical Reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment' aims to gather, in the form of a compendium, all the project's important data regarding project monitoring and evaluation from the period M33-M48. This deliverable is an updated version of D2.4, which, as a living report, is updated continuously, until the end of the project, with this version D2.5 (M48) and the upcoming version D2.6 (M60). The three fundamental methodologies designed for this impact monitoring are the Half Double methodology, Citizen Sensing, and the 2ES Trilemma—the Environment-Economic-Society multi-layered index system. D2.5 updates the methodological framework provided in previous versions and provides the results of applying this framework in the last year (M33 - M48).

The first contribution (Section 2) is dedicated to the **development of the Half Double Methodology**, which guides the implementation of the RURALITIES Monitoring and Evaluation framework, prioritizing value creation and adaptability, and focusing on key outputs, emerging outcomes, and critical risks or barriers. This methodology assesses planning fidelity, achievements, and value creation for both internal stakeholders and target groups. Progress on key activities, the delivery of results, and the management of barriers and facilitators are examined, highlighting the importance of adaptability and impact orientation. The main milestones, stakeholder participation in the SIMSES, alignment with planned objectives, and lessons learned are also presented, highlighting the consortium's ability to adapt to challenges and maximize the value generated, as well as opportunities and next steps for strengthening implementation and impact in subsequent project phases.

The second contribution (Section 3) describes **how the RURALITIES project uses citizen science to monitor and evaluate its impact**, relying on tools such as the MICS platform. This platform facilitates impact self-assessment through a 200-question questionnaire with multiple choice options, useful resources, and personalized recommendations to improve project outcomes. The 1st project-level MICS assessment of RURALITIES revealed a strong overall performance, with a total machine-learning score of 31/42, placing the project above average across most domains. This section provides the 2nd project-level MICS assessment, analysing how the actions carried out during the project's second period have contributed to strengthening the different dimensions, identifying also the dimensions where the project has made the most progress and those that continue to require specific improvement actions.

The third and final contribution (Section 4) updates the design and describes the implementation (M36-M48) **of the 2ES Trilemma multi-level index system**, a self-assessment tool that measures the impact of RURALITIES project activities across three key dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. The system, developed in collaboration with project partners, facilitates monitoring and visualization of the progress of the experiments in each SIMSES region. Assessment period 3 results show how this approach identifies progress, challenges, and opportunities providing comparable data and recommendations for continuous improvement of interventions in the pilot territories.

In conclusion, deliverable D2.5 demonstrates the acceptance of impact measurement tools within the RURALITIES consortium and the benefit these tools have provided in understanding and assessing progress in achieving results.

1 INTRODUCTION

Aim of the Report:

The deliverable 'RURALITIES Technical Reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment, version 2' aims to gather, in the form of a compendium, all the project's important data regarding project monitoring and evaluation from the period M33-M48.

The intended audience for the deliverable is the *project management team, consortium members, and the European Commission officers*. It is a living report, meaning that it is updated continuously, until the end of the project, with the upcoming version of the deliverable D2.6 (M60).

Report Structure:

Structured in three independent yet interrelated parts, the compendium provides insights into the project's progress and impact to date, by looking from three different perspectives: Half Double methodology, Citizen Sensing, and the 2ES Trilemma - the Environment - Economic - Society multi-layered index system.

Section 2. RURALITIES Project Implementation: Tracking Progress, Fidelity and Value Creation

Led by EQuIP, this section presents a formative evaluation of the project's implementation. It is guided by the project's Action/Change Model and the Half Double Methodology, highlighting progress, fidelity, and emerging outcomes and impacts.

Section 3. RURALITIES Project Impact Sensing through Citizen Science

The project impact sensing framework through citizen science is detailed in Section 3. This Section is led by IRI, which provides inputs on monitoring and assessment from the RURALITIES Citizen Sensing framework and Task 2.3.

Section 4. Definition and First Implementation Results of the 2ES Trilemma (Environment-Economic-Society multilayer index system)

This Section is led by UPM, which provides inputs gathered in the multi-layered index system (2ES self-assessment framework) related to Task 2.4.

NOTE: The information presented in this report is based on progress reported by the informants (work package leaders, task leaders, and SIMSES leaders), and the accuracy of the information reported remains the responsibility of the respective informants.

2 RURALITIES PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: TRACKING PROGRESS, FIDELITY, AND VALUE CREATION

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the RURALITIES project, focusing on progress monitoring, adherence to planning, and value generation throughout M33 to M44, covering Impact Case cycles 5 and 6.

Section 2.1 provides a summary of the main contributions established in previous deliverables and elaborates on the key focus points for D2.5. Section 2.2 details the evaluation methodology, describing the analytical framework based on the Half Double approach and the Action/Change Model, as well as the protocols for qualitative and quantitative data collection and triangulation. Section 2.3 presents the core empirical findings structured around the three Half Double pillars: RURALITIES Flow, which evaluates implementation fidelity, deliverable completion, and milestone progress; RURALITIES Impact, which examines value creation, emerging outcomes, and indicator achievements at both project and SIMSES levels up to M44; and RURALITIES Leadership, which reviews consortium governance, adaptive management practices, and the structured rhythm of collaborative events. Progress and key opportunities

2.1.1 Summary of progress

During the first thirty-three months of the project, WP2 established a solid framework for monitoring the implementation of RURALITIES from a value-creation perspective, going beyond simply tracking activity completion. The evaluation was designed as a **formative process intended to provide useful information to support decision-making, identify deviations from the initial plan, and facilitate the project's continuous adaptation.**

As a methodological basis, the work integrated the program theory defined in the initial deliverables of WP2 with the Half Double methodology, structuring the analysis **around three complementary dimensions: Flow**, focused on the progress and fidelity of the implementation; **Impact**, oriented towards the early generation of results and value; and **Leadership**, dedicated to evaluating the consortium's coordination and the project's adaptability. This approach allowed for combining quantitative progress indicators with qualitative evidence from meetings, workshops, informal interviews, technical documentation, and internal monitoring mechanisms, offering a comprehensive view of the implementation status.

One of the main results achieved in previous deliverables was the **definition of an evaluation framework based on structured questions.** This framework allowed for the systematic analysis of aspects such as adherence to the Description of Action (DoA), the degree of activity implementation, the level of participation of the different target groups, the facilitating factors and barriers encountered during implementation, as well as the initial evidence of impact. This framework provided a common reference point for monitoring all the Work Packages and facilitated comparisons between the different territorial contexts represented by the SIMSES.

Regarding project implementation, the analysis showed that execution progressed consistently with the planned schedule. It was verified that **most of the activities programmed for the first cycles of the project had been initiated or completed**, maintaining a high degree of alignment with the objectives defined in the proposal. Monitoring confirmed the **successful launch of the six European SIMSES**, the active participation of the partners responsible for each one, and the increasing involvement of the SIMSES Followers, whose participation will increase during the final phases of the project.

Another key aspect that was highlighted in D2.4 was the evaluation of the scope of the activities carried out and the level of participation achieved among the various target groups. The analysis allowed for monitoring progress toward the participation indicators defined in the Grant Agreement, including rural communities, entrepreneurs, social organizations, public administrations, businesses, Living Labs, and other stakeholders in the rural innovation ecosystem. Although most indicators showed satisfactory progress and appeared on track for achievement by the end of the project, D2.4 also identified, at the time, **areas where greater effort was considered necessary in subsequent phases**, including the involvement of specific groups, such as immigrants, and the implementation of actions scheduled for later periods.

The evaluation also highlighted the **significant progress made in developing the various Intervention and Service Delivery Protocols (ISDPs)**, which are essential to ensuring consistent implementation across the consortium. During this period, the protocols related to project management, the monitoring and evaluation system (MEL), ethical management, communication and dissemination, as well as the initial components of the training and learning framework, were consolidated. The availability of these tools provided a common methodological basis that facilitated coordination among partners and ensured that the activities carried out maintained a consistent focus on generating impact.

Regarding implementation activities, the report documented the progress achieved on the project's main objectives. Among the most significant contributions were the creation of the RURNex network of rural actors, the establishment of the facilitator network, the initial characterization of the participating rural ecosystems, the launch of the Living Labs, the development of mechanisms to strengthen collaboration between rural actors and research organizations, the preliminary design of the RURALITIES Commons 2050 training framework, and the initial validation of the transcontinental Rural Thrive 2050 campaign. **Each of these activities was evaluated, identifying both the achievements and the main risks, opportunities, and recommended actions.**

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Analytical Framework

RURALITIES' formative evaluation is guided by the project's programme theory (Action Model/Change Model Schema) presented in Figure 1 and structured through the Half Double Methodology lens of Flow, Impact, and Leadership. The overall structure is aligned with that of the previous formative evaluation presented in deliverable D2.5, thereby ensuring continuity and comparability across the evaluation activities.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, the theoretical foundations are not presented in detail again, as they are comprehensively documented in deliverable D2.4. The present report therefore focuses on practical findings, insights, and lessons emerging from the formative evaluation.

Resources: • Volunteer hours • Expertise • Existing networks • Technology • Knowledge base

Environment

RURALITIES Action Model

Pan-European & Pan-African Union Rural Landscape

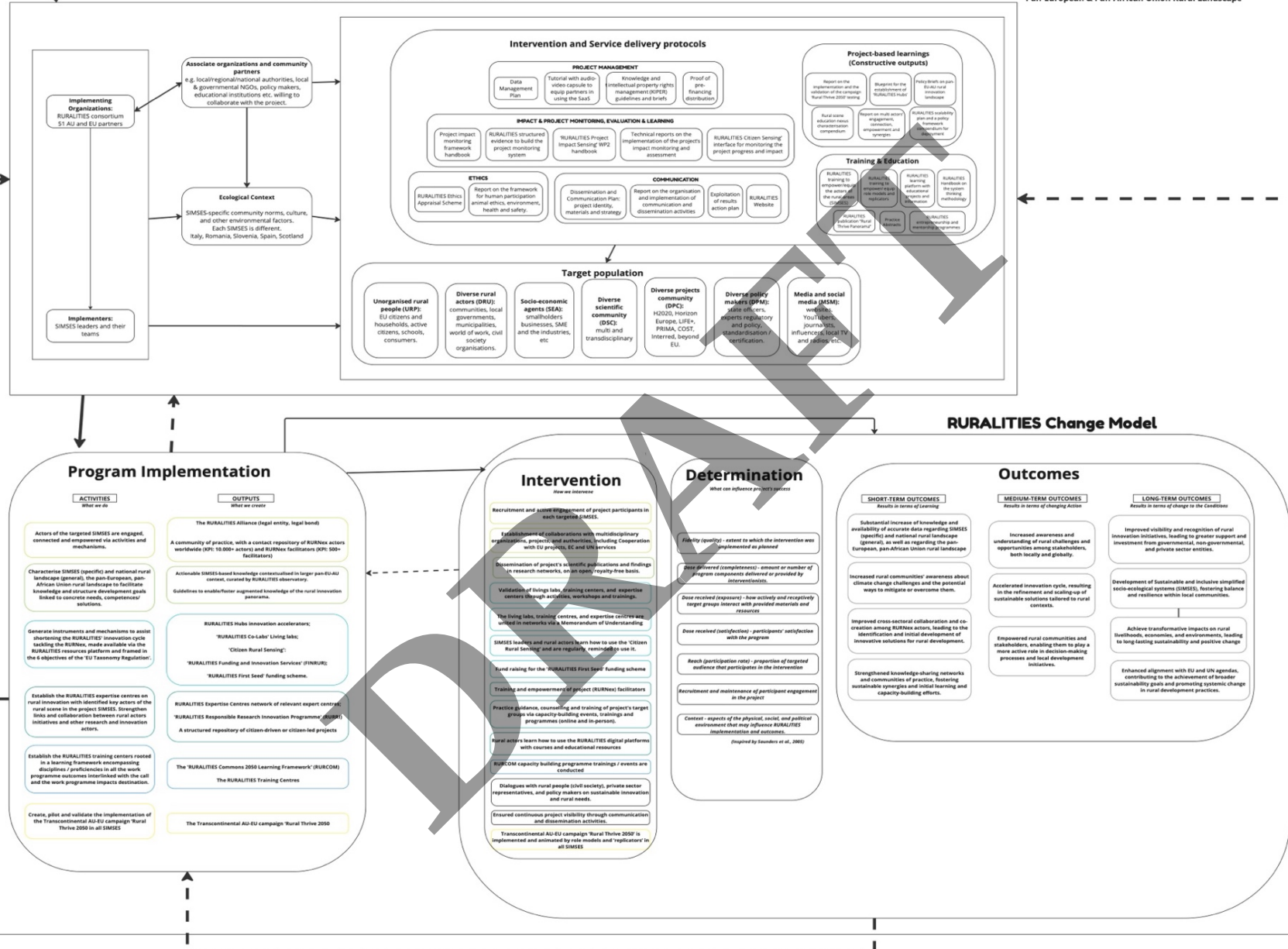


Figure 1. RURALITIES' Program Implementation & Change Model

2.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The evaluation draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected from work package leaders, task leaders, and SIMSES leaders, complemented by a review of project documents and internal reports. Data were collected on an ongoing basis between M33 and M48 to assess activity progress and status during the project period from M33 to M44.

Qualitative data were collected through three structured exercises completed by the above-mentioned actors, using two standardised reporting templates (one for WP- and task- leaders, and another for SIMSES leaders). Additional qualitative inputs were gathered through e-mail exchanges, informal, unstructured discussions with key informants, and a review of project documents and internal reports. Quantitative data included project key performance indicators (KPIs) and Pulse Check survey results.

The analysis combined qualitative synthesis, comparative analysis, and descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were reviewed and synthesised to assess progress against planned activities and outputs, and to capture key developments, outcomes, and contextual factors. Project KPIs were compared over time, including at baseline, M33, and M44. Pulse Check survey results were summarised using descriptive statistics and compared over time to assess stakeholder satisfaction and experience.

Findings from different sources were triangulated, where possible, to strengthen the validity of the findings and identify key developments, deviations, and learning opportunities.

2.3 Findings

Building on the previous formative evaluation, this chapter provides key updates on the project's flow, impact, and leadership and discusses key achievements, main risks, opportunities, and recommended actions. RURALITIES Flow looks into the implementation progress and fidelity to the Description of Action (DoA); the Impact looks into the value created by the project in relation to the expected outcomes and impacts; and the Leadership looks into the managerial structures of the project that ensure project implementation and impact attainment (in other words, the internal kitchen where everything is made).

2.3.1 RURALITIES Flow: Implementation Progress and Fidelity

Evaluation timeline: This Formative Evaluation will assess progress during Impact Case cycles 5 and 6 (M33-M44).

2.3.1.1 Fidelity to Project Implementation

RURALITIES Implementing Organisations and Implementers

During the reporting period, implementing organisations and implementers continued to carry out their roles and responsibilities in line with the Grant Agreement and Description of Action, with no significant deviations identified.

For more details on the implementing organisations and implementers, review the 'RURALITIES Implementing Organisations and Implementers' section in D2.4 (pages 17 and 18).

Associate Organisations and Community Partners

Stakeholder engagement continued throughout the reporting period, with local, regional and national authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, policymakers, and other relevant actors remaining involved in project activities. The RURALITIES Multi-Actor Repository continued to support the identification and connection of a wide range of rural stakeholders across Europe and beyond.

Ecological context

At month 36, RURALITIES reached a new milestone by broadening its ecological and geographical context, with active engagement from African partners in project activities.

During this reporting period, RURALITIES implemented activities across the European and African continents; the primary work continued in the six European pilot areas (SIMSES), while European and African SIMSES followers were involved mainly in tasks related to work packages 4, 7, and 8. This expanding transcontinental context is particularly valuable for the project's consortium as it creates opportunities for knowledge exchange, transfer, and mutual learning between rural territories across various geographical areas and socio-ecological contexts.

Target Groups and Outreach Strategy

RURALITIES target groups include unorganised rural people (URP), diverse rural actors (DRU), socio-economic agents (SEA), diverse scientific and project communities (DSC and DPC), diverse policy makers (DPM), and media and social media (MSM) representatives.

During the reporting period, RURALITIES continued to implement its two-fold outreach strategy, combining broad communication and dissemination activities with targeted engagement of specific stakeholder groups. Activities continued to reach the different target groups identified in the Grant Agreement through events, workshops, meetings, publications and other communication formats. A detailed summary is included into D4.11 - Report on the organisation and implementation of communication and dissemination activities – third version

Participation Reach and Alignment with Target Groups and Expected Outcome Topics (by M44)

Participation reach continued to be monitored against the KPIs defined in the Grant Agreement. At the beginning of the reporting period, discussions with the SIMSES examined the relevance and feasibility of engaging the specified target groups in their respective local contexts. The SIMSES reported that immigrant populations were either very small or absent in their communities or were not identified as a particularly vulnerable group in those contexts.

It was therefore agreed that the SIMSES would prioritise the target groups most relevant to their local circumstances and allocate engagement resources accordingly. This context-sensitive approach does not exclude immigrants from project activities, and SIMSES may undertake targeted engagement where relevant opportunities or needs arise.

By M44, two participation targets had been achieved: the number of social partners engaged at large (DRU, SEA and DPM) and the number of innovative ICT and nature-based start-ups engaged. Most other indicators remained on track or showed further progress. The participation of immigrants will continue to be monitored; however, targeted outreach will be proportionate to the presence and identified needs of immigrant populations in each SIMSES area.

Progress concerning engagement with schools could not yet be fully assessed, as the relevant consolidated analysis had not begun by M44. However, information provided by project partners indicates that some SIMSES had already implemented several activities involving schools.

The progress recorded for each target group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Progress Status on Participation Reach and Their Alignment with the Expected Outcomes (up to M44)

KPI Target	KPI description	EOT	Status by M44	Comments
100.000+	No. of rural people and/or rural communities engaged between EU-AU	EOT1, EOT5	On track	Around 30.000 attendants counting dissemination activities such as radio and newspapers. women participation [1] around [1] Note: While participation records document attendance, gender identity was not systematically collected during registration. Therefore, the reported figures are based on aggregated partner reporting rather than verified self-identification.
10.000+	No. of unorganized rural people engaged	EOT 2, EOT 3, EOT 5	On track	In-person attendants are 3.717
5.000+	No. of young entrepreneurs engaged		On track	944 involved entrepreneurs
2.500+	No. of women engaged		On track	Counted only at some events, a total of 1.185 registrations. The estimate is that this represents a % of the public visiting the events.
1.000+	No. of immigrants engaged		Delayed	Counted 10. Most SIMSES areas did not target immigrant communities
1.500+	No. of participants in Living Labs		On track	Number of attendants in workshops are 848.
100+	No. of social partners at large (DRU, SEA, DPM)		Achieved	Number of social partners 173
30+	No. of state officers engaged		On track	Not directly measured with 2ES monitoring framework, but we have registered 18 events specifically focused on policymaking.
200+	No. of innovative ICT and nature-based start-ups engaged		Achieved	Total number of companies and startups: 207
50+	No. of capacity building events		On track	21 capacity building events
100+	No. of EU-AU funded projects that RURALITIES clusters with	EOT 4, EOT 5	On track	50 projects and 14 engagement activities, considering Task T5.2 repositories.
1000+	Number of schools in rural areas involved in RURALITIES	EOT5	Analysis not	Data analysis of this KPI has not started yet, this will be done for period M44-M60.

	networking activities		started
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Intervention and Service Delivery Protocols

During the reporting period, the Intervention and Service Delivery Protocols (ISDPs) were further developed and consolidated by updating and implementing several project frameworks, plans, monitoring tools and guidance documents. Overall, the ISDPs continued to provide the operational basis for project management, impact monitoring, ethics, communication and dissemination, exploitation, capacity building activities, and project-based learnings.

Program Implementation and Intervention Activities

By M44, all program implementation and intervention activities have begun in line with the planned timeline, with progress varying across activities. Following the same structure as in the previous deliverable, Table 2 updates on the project's core activities, highlighting their status, key outputs delivered, challenges and opportunities, upcoming steps, and the work packages under which the work is being carried out.

Table 2. Implementation of activities and status

Activity 1. Actors of the targeted SIMSES are engaged, connected and empowered via activities and mechanisms.		Status: On Track
Linked Objective:	O1. Engage, connect, empower actors of targeted SIMSES via activities and mechanisms to co-create a more inclusive, holistic, transparent, ecosystem-based and knowledge-based holistic approach.	
Linked WPs	WP4, WP5	
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	- Over 100 social media posts, 121 new followers, and 1,392 organic impressions 1 website news article, 1 newsletter, and 1 set of communication materials produced 15+ events promoted through the project's communication channels - Consistent project messaging, ongoing partner support, and high project visibility across all channels - Strengthened cooperation with EU-funded projects and stakeholders through networking, engagement, knowledge exchange, and dissemination of research and innovation results - The RURNex repository was updated with newly identified projects and collaborations - Links with EU-funded projects, EC, and UN stakeholders were reinforced to enhance project visibility and uptake of project results - Stakeholder identification, mapping, and engagement were coordinated across SIMSES - Monitored stakeholder and facilitator KPIs and efforts to improve representation of diverse stakeholder groups. - Preparatory work for the RURAL Thrive 2050 campaign contributed to the project's broader stakeholder-engagement objectives. Detailed campaign outputs and progress are reported under Activity 6.	
Challenges, Risks and Mitigation Actions	- Coordinating C&D across a large, geographically diverse consortium requires ongoing flexibility to address differences in local timelines, capacities, and cultural contexts while maintaining a unified project identity. - Transitioning C&D leadership (from P3-CETRI to P53-APPO) posed a risk of delays and required rapid familiarisation with previous work and adaptation of strategies to ensure continuity.	

	• Sustaining engagement with a diverse stakeholder community across multiple funding programmes is challenging, especially when aligning collaboration with varying timelines and priorities. • Limited availability of key institutional representatives and uneven partner participation in networking and knowledge exchange can hinder effective collaboration. • Translating research outputs into practical innovations for rural and regional communities remains difficult. • Keeping the repository of initiatives current and ensuring knowledge transfer to all target groups demands continuous coordination and communication. • For stakeholder mapping, challenges stem from the network's scale and diversity, as well as varying stakeholder engagement across countries. Risks include mapping becoming overly quantitative without sufficient active and sustained participation, stakeholder fatigue, and underrepresentation of key groups.
Opportunities	• The C&D framework developed this period provides a strong foundation for increased stakeholder engagement and project visibility across Europe and Africa. • The Rural Thrive 2050 campaign and RURAL Thrive Supporters initiative create new opportunities to connect stakeholders across SIMSES, strengthen collaboration with external projects and organisations, and promote knowledge exchange and uptake of RURALITIES results. • UNIZGAF can further strengthen its connector role between research, innovation, policy, and practice. Participation in cross-project networking events and cooperation with EC and UN services will enhance the visibility of RURNex results and expand opportunities for future collaborations. • Regular updates to the repository and structured expertise exchange among partners improve access to knowledge, reinforce institutional capacities, and support community-led innovation. • The expanding stakeholder and facilitator networks enable stronger cross-SIMSES cooperation, increased participation in capacity-building activities, and wider adoption of system-thinking approaches.
Next Steps	• APODISSI will continue coordinating C&D activities, support partners in local stakeholder engagement, maintain project channels and website, monitor dissemination indicators, and move the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign into implementation (including supporter onboarding, webinars, storytelling, and promotion of results). • UNIZGAF will coordinate and participate in engagement and networking with EU-funded projects and institutional stakeholders, regularly update the repository of past and ongoing initiatives, integrate new research and innovation results into RURNex resources, facilitate knowledge transfer, promote dissemination and valorisation of outcomes, strengthen collaboration with EC and UN through high-level events, and identify long-term cooperation opportunities. • IRI will continue coordinating stakeholder mobilisation, monitor KPIs, fill gaps in the stakeholder repository, strengthen active stakeholder participation, expand the facilitator network, and identify relevant multi-actor facilities.
Comments	No additional comments.
Activity 2. Characterise SIMSES and broader rural landscapes to facilitate knowledge and structure development goals linked to concrete needs, competencies, and solutions.	
Linked Objective:	O2. Characterise SIMSES (specific) and national rural landscapes (general), the pan-European, pan-African Union rural landscape to facilitate knowledge and structure development goals linked to concrete needs, competencies, and solutions.

	NB. Objective O2 anchors this activity in multiscale characterisation across SIMSES, national, pan-European and pan-African Union rural landscapes. It connects territorial needs, competencies and solutions with evidence-led priorities and locally actionable intervention pathways.
Linked WPs	WP5, T5.3 and T5.4
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	- Strengthened knowledge exchange, cooperation, and capacity building within the RURALITIES network. - Coordinated collaboration with European projects and relevant EC initiatives, promoting structured knowledge transfer between partners and external stakeholders. - D5.5 Policy Briefs on pan-EU-AU rural innovation landscape – first version was completed and submitted at M36. <u>Contributions to D5.5 included:</u> - Mapping synergies with Horizon Europe and other EU-funded initiatives; - identifying good practices; and - facilitating cooperation to improve innovation uptake in rural communities (linked to D5.5). - Collected, analysed, and disseminated knowledge resources to support D5.6 and the creation of structured learning pathways and practical solutions tailored to rural stakeholders' needs. - Enhanced institutional competencies and transnational collaboration, promoting expertise exchange and laying the groundwork for future RURALITIES Hubs and sustainable knowledge networks. - These activities supported the connection between knowledge development, concrete rural challenges and innovation opportunities.
Challenges, Risks and Mitigation Actions	<u>Challenges & Risks:</u> - Coordinating collaboration across a large and diverse consortium, aligning contributions from multiple partners, and ensuring timely exchange of information for Deliverables 5.5 and 5.6. - Differences in stakeholder availability, varying levels of engagement with external projects, and scheduling constraints occasionally delayed knowledge-sharing activities and data collection. - Need for continuous communication to identify common approaches for integrating results from different EU initiatives. <u>These challenges were mitigated through:</u> - Regular consortium meetings, online coordination sessions, and shared documentation platforms. - Continuous communication and close collaboration between task leaders and partners to keep activities on schedule and support knowledge transfer for the development of innovative, needs-based solutions for rural communities.
Opportunities	- The completed D5.5 policy briefs provide a timely route for converting territorial evidence into practical recommendations and scalable support instruments. - Cross-comparison between SIMSES can reveal transferable practices, territorial differences and priority needs for future innovation services. - Expanded collaboration with European research and innovation initiatives strengthened the RURALITIES knowledge ecosystem. - New connections with research institutions, rural stakeholders and innovation networks enabled the exchange of best practices and practical solutions for sustainable rural development. - Activities under D5.5 and D5.6 increased opportunities for joint initiatives, enhanced project visibility and improved the transfer of research outcomes into practice.

	- Alignment with RURIS and First Seed can connect identified needs with incubation support, capacity development and pre-seed finance. - Growing stakeholder engagement supports the future establishment of RURALITIES Hubs and promotes long-term cooperation among academia, industry and rural communities. - These opportunities contribute to building sustainable knowledge networks, strengthening institutional capacities, facilitating innovation uptake and increasing the project's impact on rural resilience, education and community development.
Next Steps	- Continue strengthening cooperation with EU projects, EC services, and international stakeholders - Expand knowledge exchange activities - Support the completion and validation of D5.6 - Identify additional collaboration opportunities and organize networking events - Promote the transfer of innovative solutions and best practices to rural communities through the RURALITIES network
Comments	No additional comments.
Activity 3. Generate instruments and mechanisms to assist shortening the RURALITIES innovation cycle	
Linked Objective:	O3. Generate instruments and mechanisms to assist shortening the RURALITIES innovation cycle tackling the RURNex, made available via the RURALITIES resources platform and framed in the 6 objectives of the 'EU Taxonomy Regulation' ¹ .
Linked WPs	WP6
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	- Created a framework for the purpose of identifying, characterising, and tracking rural people's initiatives/projects. - Work in this period mainly focused on developing the upcoming deliverables to meet the contractual obligations.
Challenges & Risks	- The work conducted in WP6, concerning Activity 3, faces delays, due to resource constraints. - Discussions at project coordination level must be taken to determine the feasibility of these activities and whether the mechanisms for shortening the RURALITIES innovation cycle can be delivered by the end of the project.
Opportunities	- Expansion of the RURNex ecosystem through increased participation of Living Labs, regional stakeholders and innovation actors, strengthening knowledge exchange and collaboration. - Greater alignment with EU sustainability policies, enabling to showcase rural innovations contributing to the six objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation. - Increased exploitation potential by developing solutions that can be reused beyond the project lifetime in future rural innovation initiatives.
Next Steps	- Having internal discussions on the direction of the work conducted under this activity to address challenges and minimize risks as much as possible. - Assisting dissemination, stakeholder training and exploitation activities to maximise the uptake and replication of RURALITIES innovation mechanisms beyond the project lifetime.
Comments	No additional comments.
Activity 4.1. Establish the RURALITIES expertise centres on rural innovation in the project SIMSES. Activity 4.2. Strengthen the links and collaboration between rural actors' initiatives and other research and innovation actors.	
Status: Pending	
Status: On track	

¹ Objectives of the UE Taxonomy Regulation: <https://ecobiomanager.com/eu-taxonomy-objectives/>

Linked Objective:	O4. Establish the RURALITIES expertise centres on rural innovation with identified key actors of the rural scene in the project SIMSES. Strengthen links and collaboration between rural actors' initiatives and other research and innovation actors.
Linked WPs	WP5, WP7
Overall Status	RURALITIES Expertise Centres established and operational across SIMSES territories. Collaboration activities among rural actors, research institutions, and innovation stakeholders strengthened through networking, co-creation workshops, policy engagement, and knowledge-sharing actions.
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	- Consolidation and operation of RURALITIES Expertise Centres in SIMSES regions. - Mapping and engagement of key rural innovation actors and stakeholders. - Organisation of networking events, workshops, and capacity-building activities. - Strengthened links between local initiatives, researchers, policymakers, and innovation ecosystems. - Contributions to policy briefs, knowledge exchange activities, and dissemination of best practices across EU and AU regions.
Challenges & Risks	- Maintaining long-term stakeholder engagement and participation. - Differences in institutional capacities and resources across regions. - Coordination challenges among diverse actors and territories. - Ensuring sustainability of collaboration mechanisms beyond project completion. - Limited availability of rural stakeholders due to competing priorities.
Opportunities	- Expansion of cross-regional EU-AU collaboration networks. - Increased uptake of innovative rural solutions and best practices. - Enhanced visibility and impact of SIMSES activities. - Stronger policy influence through stakeholder-driven recommendations. - Creation of lasting innovation ecosystems supporting rural resilience and sustainability.
Next Steps	- Continue strengthening Expertise Centre activities and stakeholder networks. - Facilitate further knowledge exchange and collaborative innovation actions. - Support replication and scaling of successful practices. - Contribute to final policy recommendations and project legacy planning. - Ensure sustainability and post-project continuation of established collaborations.
Comments	Activities have significantly contributed to Objective O4 by reinforcing rural innovation ecosystems, fostering multi-actor collaboration, and supporting knowledge transfer between research, policy, and practice communities.
Activity 5. Establish the RURALITIES Training Centers rooted in a learning framework	
Status: On track	
Linked Objective:	O5. Establish the RURALITIES Training Centers rooted in a learning framework encompassing disciplines/proficiencies in all the work programme outcomes interlinked with the call and the work programme impacts destination.
Linked WPs	WP8
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	- The foundations for establishing the RURALITIES Training Centres were developed. - The common Training Centre framework was advanced, covering: - the identification and selection of potential host organisations; - governance arrangements; - stakeholder involvement; - learning and capacity-building services; and - long-term sustainability.

	- Information on the proposed Training Centres across the SIMSES was collected, consolidated and reviewed, ensuring consistency and alignment with the overall RURALITIES approach. - The development of D8.6, RURALITIES Interdisciplinary Training Centres was initiated. Key elements defined: - The Training Centre concept, establishment process and governance framework; - Links between the Training Centres and other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem; - The role of the Training Centres in facilitating knowledge exchange, strengthening capacity building and valorising RURALITIES results and innovative practices.
Challenges & Risks	- Ensuring that the Training Centres address diverse learning needs across the participating territories. - Effectively connecting relevant facilities, educators and facilitators.
Opportunities	- Establishing a lasting network for rural capacity building and knowledge transfer. - Connecting the Training Centres with RURALITIES Hubs, Expertise Centres and innovation initiatives to support the dissemination and uptake of RURNex-related knowledge and solutions.
Next Steps	- Finalise and validate the Training Centre profiles and the common network framework; - Consolidate the digital database of Training Centres; - Further engage SIMSES partners and relevant local stakeholders in the operationalisation and development of the centres; - Strengthen cooperation and links between the Training Centres and other RURALITIES ecosystem components; - Further develop the Scalability Plan.
Comments	No additional comments.
Activity 6. Create, pilot and validate the implementation of the Transcontinental AU-EU campaign 'Rural Thrive 2050' in all SIMSES	
Status: On Track Testing: Completed	
Linked Objective:	O1. Engage, connect, empower actors of targeted SIMSES via activities and mechanisms to co-create a more inclusive, holistic, transparent, ecosystem-based and knowledge-based holistic approach.
Linked WPs	WP4
Key Outputs in the period M33-M44	A series of preparatory activities established the operational, communication and governance framework required to implement the RURAL Thrive 2050 Campaign from September 2026 onwards. These included: A series of preparatory activities established the operational, communication and governance framework required to implement the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign from September 2026 onwards. These included: - The campaign's pre-launch phase was initiated. - Documentation from the previous campaign pilot, partner feedback and available project outputs was reviewed. - Lessons learned from the review informed the revision of the campaign and the development of a renewed communication and engagement strategy for the current stage of the RURALITIES project. - The revised campaign strategy and implementation plan set out the campaign objectives, key messages, target audiences, thematic priorities, communication channels, implementation approach, monitoring framework and success indicators.

	• Practical implementation guidelines and supporting documentation were prepared to facilitate partner participation and support a coherent campaign across the participating regions. • Local implementation planning was initiated across the consortium. • Relevant activities, potential webinars and success stories were identified. • Contributions to the overall campaign calendar were gathered. • Partners' feedback was incorporated into the campaign strategy and implementation guidelines. • A refreshed visual identity for Rural Thrive 2050 was developed, including updated branding, communication templates and campaign materials. • New campaign webpages were designed and developed for: ◦ the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign; and ◦ the Rural Thrive Supporters initiative. • The Rural Thrive Supporters Open Call was launched, inviting projects, organisations and initiatives from Europe and Africa to collaborate with the campaign through joint communication, dissemination and stakeholder-engagement activities. ◦ The Open Call is being promoted through direct outreach, consortium networks, social media channels and the project website.
Challenges & Risks	• Coordinating campaign activities across a large consortium operating in diverse geographical, cultural and institutional contexts remains challenging. ◦ This is addressed through a common strategic framework combined with flexible local implementation. • Coordinating inputs from all consortium partners during the preparation phase, particularly regarding local activity plans and campaign contributions. ◦ This challenge is expected in a consortium of this size and geographical diversity and is being addressed through continuous bilateral support, regular follow-up and simplified planning tools. • Involving external projects and organisations through the Rural Thrive Supporters initiative increases coordination efforts, but it also considerably expands the campaign's dissemination potential.
Opportunities	• The campaign represents a unique opportunity to showcase the diversity of rural innovation across Europe and Africa by highlighting local experiences, community voices and practical solutions developed within RURALITIES and beyond. • The Rural Thrive Supporters initiative significantly extends the campaign's outreach by creating synergies with external projects and organisations, increasing dissemination opportunities and fostering collaboration beyond the consortium. • In addition, the campaign provides an integrated framework for promoting key RURALITIES outputs, including publications, Living Labs, policy briefs, practice abstracts and training resources, through coordinated storytelling, events, webinars and digital communication activities. This approach is expected to maximise the visibility, uptake and long-term impact of project results.
Next Steps	• Finalise the campaign preparation phase. • Officially launch Rural Thrive 2050. • Onboard the Rural Thrive Supporters. • Publish the campaign webpages. • Organise the campaign launch webinar. • Implement the editorial calendar. • Disseminate relevant RURALITIES outputs. • Coordinate local campaign activities. • Organise webinars and storytelling activities. • Maintain continuous communication through project channels. • Provide tailored implementation support across the consortium.

	• Monitor campaign implementation. • Collect communication indicators and activity reports. • Continue the campaign from September 2026 until the closing activities planned for early 2027. • Present the campaign's achievements and impact during the closing phase. • Evaluate campaign outcomes and assess the campaign's impact
Comments	As the project's main communication and stakeholder engagement initiative during its final implementation phase, Rural Thrive 2050 required a robust strategic, operational and communication framework before its official launch. The framework is expected to: • support coherent implementation across the participating regions; • maximise partner engagement; and • strengthen the dissemination, uptake and exploitation of RURALITIES results.

Compared to the previous reporting period, the period from M33 to M44 is characterised by **the transition from a deployment stage to a mature implementation phase**. Significant advancements were made towards most objectives, and towards Objectives 1, 2, 4.

Progress and Achievement of Deliverables and Milestones

In line with the Grant Agreement (GA), during M33-M44, RURALITIES successfully delivered all planned deliverables by the agreed deadline of M36; no milestones were scheduled for this reporting period.

Table 3 summarises these deliverables, their primary contribution to the project, and their relevance to specific project objective(s) and/or Intervention Service & Delivery Protocols (ISDPs). Some of these deliverables were also listed as project outputs in Table 4. 'RURALITIES Outputs and Key Performance Indicators attained by M44'. Their timely delivery therefore confirms the completion of the corresponding planned outputs and demonstrates compliance with the GA for this reporting period. Collectively, the deliverables contributed to project management, monitoring, ethics, communication, exploitation and project-based learning.

Table 3. Deliverables Due between M33-M44: Contribution to the Project and Relevance to Project Objectives and/or ISDPs

Deliverable	Deliverable's Primary Contribution	Relevance to specific Project Objective(s) and/or ISDPs
D1.2 Data Management Plan – updated version WP1	An updated version of the initial DMP addressing recommendations from RP1.	ISDP: Project Management
D2.4 Technical reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment, version 1	A formative process and impact evaluation of the project that informs decisionmakers to improve project activities to ultimately achieve the desired outputs, outcomes, and impacts.	ISDP: Impact & Project MEL
D3.3 Report on the framework for human participation animal ethics, environment, health and safety, updated version	An updated version of the ethics framework including developments from RP1.	ISDP: Ethics
D4.6 Exploitation of results action plan - initial version	A comprehensive framework for IP right and knowledge management including sustainability plan.	ISDP: Communication
D4.9 Dissemination and Communication Plan - updated version	An updated version of the initial D&C Plan including lessons learnt from the past communication activities.	ISDP: Communication

D4.10 Report on the organisation and implementation of communication and dissemination activities – second version	A comprehensive report on the communication and dissemination activities in RP2	ISDP: Communication
D5.5 Policy Briefs on pan-EU-AU rural innovation landscape – first version	D5.5 supports RURALITIES by translating research into actionable policy recommendations, strengthening EU-AU rural innovation, sustainability, resilience, and evidence-based policymaking.	ISDP: Project-based learnings (Constructive outputs)

Progress Against Planned Outputs (M33-M44)

During M33–M44, several additional outputs were completed or advanced. The systems-thinking handbook and the Citizen Rural Sensing mobile application were completed. The network of facilitators assisting users of WP6 instruments increased from zero at M32 to 105 at M44, exceeding its target of 100. The first policy briefs on the pan-EU–AU rural innovation landscape were also completed.

Progress was recorded across several outputs still under development. The RURNex repository increased from 986 to 1,179 actors, while engagement and networking events increased from six to 13. The database of relevant training centres advanced from 10% to 80%. RURIIS, FINRUR and the First Seed funding scheme were each reported as 80% complete, while engagement with private donors reached a reported completion level of 85%. Preparatory work for the Rural Thrive publications also progressed through the development of a story-gathering template and the identification of potential success stories.

Overall, the results at M44 indicate that the project has established many of the structures, partnerships and tools required to support further delivery. During the final year, efforts should focus on accelerating stakeholder recruitment, completing the expertise and training-centre arrangements, moving from programme and platform development to implementation, expanding demonstration activities, and ensuring progress is consistently documented against the agreed KPIs.

Table 4 presents the detailed targets and cumulative achievements reported at M32 and M44.

Table 4. RURALITIES' Outputs and Key Performance Indicators attained by M44. N/R = not relevant at this project stage

Outputs	Measure / KPI	Unit of measurement	Baseline	Target M60	Attained M32	Attained M44	Notes / comments
The RURALITIES Augmented Knowledge Alliance	No. of RURNex actors identified worldwide	No. of actors in the contact repository	0 (zero)	10.000	986	1179	
	No. of total RURNex accredited facilitators	No. of facilitators in the contact repository	0 (zero)	500+	122	/	Inputs are still pending.
	No. of facilitators who supervise the actor's empowerment at SIMSES scale	No. of facilitators from SIMSES	0 (zero)	100+ (M18)	122	/	Inputs are still pending
		No. of facilitators from all participating countries		1000+ (M60)	122	/	Inputs are still pending.
	D6.3. RURALITIES Network of facilitators on innovation action	No. of facilitators who assist the end-users of WP-6 instruments	0 (zero)	100+	0	105	
	The RURALITIES Observatory of rural innovation is created	The RURALITIES Observatory of rural innovation	0 (zero)	1	0	N/R	
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	The MOU is created	The MOU document	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
The RURALITIES Hub', a platform and a network of multi actor of the RURNex	No. of lighthouses hubs in the participating SIMSES	No. of lighthouses hubs	0 (zero)	6 (1 per SIMSES)	6	6	
	No. of pan-EU based 'followers' in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, and Turkey	No. of pan-EU based 'followers'	0 (zero)	6	6	5	P3- CETRI (Cyprus SIMSES follower has

							been terminated.
	No. of pan-AU based 'followers'	No. of pan-AU based 'followers'	0 (zero)	17	17	17	
'RURALITIES Co-Labs' living labs	No. of 'RURALITIES Co-labs' living labs established	No. of 'RURALITIES Co-labs' living labs	3 (three)	6	8	8	https://www.ruralities-project.eu/living-labs/
'RURALITIES' Co-Labs' living labs network	Actors engaged in the 'Co-Labs' living labs network	No. of rural people participating in the 'Co-Labs' living labs activities	0 (zero)	1500+	205	/	Inputs are still pending.
		No. of civil society organisations (CSO) engaged in the living labs activities	0 (zero)	18 per IC cycle (3 per SIMSES)	18	/	Inputs are still pending.
System-thinking methodology practitioners	Production of a handbook on Systems-thinking for practitioners	D6.1. RURALITIES Handbook on the systems thinking methodology	0 (zero)	1	20%	1	
'Citizen Rural Sensing'	RURALITIES structured evidence to build the project monitoring system is created	D2.2. RURALITIES structured evidence to build the project monitoring system	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
	The 'Citizen Rural Sensing' Mobile app / interface is created	The 'Citizen Rural Sensing' Mobile app / interface	0 (zero)	1	0	1	
RURALITIES Incubator and Innovation Services (RURIIS)	Development of the RURIIS program and handbook	D6.6. 'RURALITIES Incubator and Innovation Services' (RURIIS)	0 (zero)	1	0	80%	

'RURALITIES Funding and Innovation Services' (FINRUR)	FINRUR is demonstrated in each SIMSES	No. of SIMSES in which FINRUR is demonstrated	0 (zero)	6	0	80%	
'RURALITIES First Seed' funding scheme	A private capital funding scheme instrument is created	D6.7. 'RURALITIES' First Seed' funding scheme (handbook)	0 (zero)	1	0	80%	
	Funds raised via private channels and donors to finance AU- based projects.	Amount of funds raised	0 (zero)	Up to 5 million Euros	0	80%	
	Engagements with private donors to invite financing AU-based projects	Repository of invitations and engagements made	0 (zero)	1	0	85%	
	The learning framework is developed	The RURALITIES Commons learning framework	0 (zero)	1	20%	/	Inputs are still pending.
'RURALITIES Commons 2050 Learning Framework' (RURCOM)	No. of RURCOM facilitators available for support of rural people along the project duration	No. of accredited RURCOM facilitators	0 (zero)	To be established	N/R	/	Inputs are still pending.
		No of RURCOM facilitators (total)	0 (zero)	To be established	N/R	/	Inputs are still pending.
	No. of RURCOM capacity building programme trainings / events conducted	No. of RURCOM capacity building programme trainings / events	0 (zero)	50+	17	/	Inputs are still pending.
	No. of RURCOM Training of Trainers programmes developed	No. of RURCOM Training of Trainers programmes	0 (zero)	1	0	/	Inputs are still pending.

RURALITIES expertise centres	No. of RURALITIES expertise centers established	No. of RURALITIES expertise centers	0 (zero)	6	0	0	
	Creation of a digital database of relevant expert centers situated in the SIMSES	D7.2. Network of relevant expert centers situated in the SIMSES (database)	0 (zero)	1	0	0	
	Generate and supervise the empowerment of actors at SIMSES scale towards transition considering multi-scale policy agendas (from local to the SDG).	No. of SIMSES actors empowered by the project (e.g. through access to training, education, networking, etc).	0 (zero)	To be established per IC cycle	N/R	N/R	
	Structured dialogue sessions convened between rural actors, policymakers, and authorities to discuss the refinement and implementation of rural development policies and strategies.	No. of structured dialogues conducted	0 (zero)	Target to be established per IC cycle	3	/	Inputs are still pending.
Practice counselling and guidance to selected innovative initiatives	Provided counseling and support to rural actors promoting innovation activities	Repository of citizen-driven or citizen-led projects that received RURALITIES support (can be included in D7.4.)	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	
	Generated blueprints for Innovation & Demonstration Frameworks (IDF)	Blueprints for Innovation & Demonstration Frameworks – report / document	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	
	Development of RURRI programme and handbook (this is also training material)	D7.3. RURALITIES Responsible Research Innovation Programme' (RURRI)	0 (zero)	1	0	0	

RURALITIES Responsible Research Innovation Programme' (RURRI)	A structured repository of citizen-driven or citizen-led projects	D7.4. Structured Repository of citizen-driven or citizen-led projects	0 (zero)	1	0	0	
	No. of facilitators engaged in the RURRI Programme.	No. of RURRI facilitators	0 (zero)	100+	105	105	
RURALITIES training centres	No. of RURALITIES training centers established	No. of RURALITIES training centers	0 (zero)	6 (1/SIMSES)	0	0	
	Creation of a digital database (network) of relevant training centers situated in the SIMSES	D8.6. RURALITIES Interdisciplinary training centres	0 (zero)	1	10%	80%	
	No. of implemented project-based multi sectors demonstrations	No. of project-based multi sectors demonstrations per SIMSES	0 (zero)	30+ (5 per SIMSES)	0	0	
	A lively interface between actions supporting RURNex community-led innovation funded under EU funding schemes. Documentation of all EU and non-EU funded initiatives that back the RURNex community-led innovation activities, mechanisms & outputs.	A repository of all EU-funded projects whose outcomes were valorised within RURALITIES	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
		A platform that connects EU-funded initiatives supporting the RURNex community-led innovation activities & mechanisms	0 (zero)	1	0	0	

The 'Rural Thrive 2050' AU-EU campaign	The 'RURAL Thrive 2050' campaign is tested at local level in all SIMSES	No. of role models and replicators from SIMSES involved in the campaign	0 (zero)	100 (M18)	105	105	
		No. of individuals participating in the testing		Between 50,000 and 100,000 (M24)	200,000	N/R	
	The 'RURAL Thrive 2050' campaign is launched	No. of events to raise awareness on rural sustainable development	0 (zero)	To be established	N/R	N/R	
		No. of communication & dissemination events on project's results, key learnings, and key findings.	0 (zero)	To be established	N/R	N/R	
RURALITIES publication "Rural Thrive Panorama"	The digital library is launched.	No. of 'Success Story Showcases'	0 (zero)	20+	0	0	Template created for gathering stories.
	The eBook is created	The eBook 'Rural Thrive Panorama'	0 (zero)	1	0	0	
Public Private Partnerships focused on specific identified needs.	Creation of Public Private Partnerships	Repository of Public Private Partnerships created	0 (zero)	1	1	1	

Cooperation with EU projects, EC and UN services	Establishment of synergistic mechanisms with EU projects, EC and UN services	Repository of synergies with EU projects, EC and UN services	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
	(Co-) Organization of engagement & networking events	No. of engagement and networking events (co-) created by RURALITIES	0 (zero)	25+	6	13	
	Liaise all project actors with identified EC & UN services via high-level events.	Repository of promoted high-level events and the established liaisons	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
Characterization of SIMSES (specific) and national rural landscape (general)	Crafting of a community-based scalability plan applicable to all SIMSES	A 'Community-based scalability plan applicable to all SIMSES' report / document	0 (zero)	1	40%	/	Inputs are still pending.
Characterization of the pan-European and pan-African-Union rural landscape	Liaise with all relevant pan-EU actors of the rural scene	Repository of connections with rural pan-EU actors	0 (zero)	1	1	1	
	Production of Policy Briefs on pan-EU-AU rural innovation landscape	D5.5. Policy Briefs on pan-EU-AU rural innovation landscape	0 (zero)	1	N/R	1	
Rural scene education nexus characterization compendium	Characterisation of the rural scene education nexus (EDUNex)	D8.1. Rural scene education nexus characterisation compendium	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	Mapping of available courses and learning within SIMSES areas completed.

Multiactors onsite and online learning catalogue	Creation of a digital 'multiactors onsite and online learning' catalogue	D8.2. 'Multiactors onsite and online learning' catalogue (digital database).	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	Format chosen, results to be amalgamated into suitable template.
RURALITIES learning platform with educational projects and information	Creation of a series of education and training materials structured in sessions and with a format comparable to the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) approach	D8.3. RURALITIES learning platform with educational projects and information	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	
RURALITIES entrepreneurship and mentorship programmes	Creation of 'RURALITIES Steppingstones', a detailed step-by-step guide for (candidate) entrepreneurs.	D8.4. RURALITIES entrepreneurship and mentorship programmes - handbook	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	Draft started.
RURALITIES Scalability Plan and a policy framework compendium for deployment	Generate the learning pathways integration and deployment programme	D8.5. RURALITIES Scalability Plan and a policy framework compendium for deployment	0 (zero)	1	N/R	N/R	Draft started.

2.3.2 RURALITIES Impact: Emerging Outcomes and Value by M44

2.3.2.1 SIMSES-level impact

RURALITIES aims to contribute to increasing intersectoral and interregional collaboration, interdisciplinary research and innovation, regional cooperation synergies with other rural initiatives, and dialogue between policy makers and SIMSES actors. This section assesses progress in these six areas from baseline to M44, first at project level and then by individual SIMSES.

The analysis covers the five SIMSES that provided data: SIMSES 2 - Asiago Plateau (also mentioned in this deliverable as *Vicenza*), Italy; SIMSES 3 - Highlands & Islands, Scotland; SIMSES 4 - Posavje, Slovenia; SIMSES 5 - Asturias, Spain; and SIMSES 6 - Siret-Moldova (also mentioned in this deliverable as *Iași*), Romania. Data from SIMSES 1 - Pesaro-Urbino, Italy, was still pending by the submission of this report, and no assumptions or estimates were made for this SIMSES.

Assessment approach:

The Grant Agreement targets were assessed at project level by comparing the aggregated baseline and M44 values reported by the five SIMSES. The percentage increase was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Percentage increase} = (\text{M44 total} - \text{baseline total}) / \text{baseline total} \times 100.$$

At individual SIMSES level, only absolute changes are reported, to accommodate calculations where the baseline was zero, as percentage change cannot be calculated from zero. Values reported as not applicable were excluded from the relevant calculation, while missing values were not treated as zero.

Project-level results

By M44, positive progress was registered across all six impact areas, with percentage targets being exceeded for each of these areas. The largest absolute increase concerned regional cooperation, with 31 additional cooperations reported. This was followed by 29 intersectoral activities, 22 additional policy dialogues, and 20 additional interregional actions. The strongest relative increase was registered for interregional actions, which rose by 400% compared with the aggregated baseline, while the lowest relative increase (158%) was reported for interdisciplinary and research innovation activities.

Table 5 presents the aggregated results for the five reporting SIMSES and compares the changes recorded by M44 with the targets established in the GA.

Table 5. Project-level change in SIMSES impact indicators from baseline to M44.

Impact indicator	GA target (increase)	Aggregated baseline	M44 results	Absolute increase	% increase	Status
Intersectoral activities conducted at SIMSES level	100%	9	38	+29	322%.	Target exceeded
Interregional actions implemented	50%	5	25	+20	400%	Target exceeded
Interdisciplinary research and innovation activities	100%	12	31	+19	158%	Target exceeded
Regional cooperations in areas surrounding the SIMSES	50%	14	45	+31	221%	Target exceeded

Structured synergies with projects addressing rural challenges	100%	5	20	+15	300%	Target exceeded
Structured dialogues between policymakers and SIMSES actors	100%	7	29	+22	314%	Target exceeded

Note: The interdisciplinary research and innovation calculation excludes SIMSES 2, where this indicator was reported as not applicable. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number (e.g, 322.2222% → 322%),

Results by SIMSES

Progress varied across SIMSES, reflecting differences in their baselines, territorial contexts and areas of activity. The activities across SIMSES should not be compared, as these have their own needs and characteristics, and the activities were conducted in line with their areas of interest.

SIMSES 5 - Asturias, Spain contributed substantially to the overall results and recorded increases across all six indicators. SIMSES 3 - Highlands & Islands, Scotland showed improvements in interregional actions, regional cooperation, and policy dialogue. SIMSES 2 - Asiago Plateau / Vicenza, Italy's strongest increases concerned regional cooperation and intersectoral activities, while SIMSES 4 - Posavje, Slovenia reported their highest increase in intersectoral activities. SIMSES 6 - Siret-Moldova / Iași, Romania reported progress across all six impact areas. Table 6 presents the baseline and M44 results for each SIMSES.

Table 6. Change in impact indicators by SIMSES

SIMSES #	Intersectoral activities	Interregional actions	Research & Innovation	Regional cooperation	Structured synergies	Policy dialogues
2 - Italy	0 → 4 (+4)	0 → 1 (+1)	N/A	1 → 7 (+6)	0 → 2 (+2)	0 → 0 (0)
3 - Scotland	0 → 1 (+1)	0 → 10 (+10)	0 → 4 (+4)	6 → 15 (+9)	1 → 3 (+2)	0 → 7 (+7)
4 - Slovenia	0 → 6 (+6)	0 → 0 (0)	0 → 2 (+2)	0 → 0 (0)	0 → 1 (+1)	0 → 3 (+3)
5 - Spain	9 → 24 (+15)	5 → 13 (+8)	12 → 22 (+10)	7 → 19 (+12)	4 → 11 (+7)	7 → 16 (+9)
6 - Romania	0 → 3 (+3)	0 → 1 (+1)	0 → 3 (+3)	0 → 4 (+4)	0 → 3 (+3)	0 → 3 (+3)
Total	9 → 38 (+29)	5 → 25 (+20)	12 → 31 (+19)	14 → 45 (+31)	5 → 20 (+15)	7 → 29 (+22)

Note: Each cell presents the baseline value, followed by M44 value and absolute change in parentheses.

2.3.3 RURALITIES Leadership: Project Management and Implementation Approach

2.3.3.1 Governance and Structures

By M44, the RURALITIES consortium had 49 partners, following the withdrawal of P3-CETRI (WP4 lead) after the European Commission terminated its participation in the Grant Agreement. Despite this important change in the consortium composition, the project's governance structure remained unchanged (see Table 7). The situation was managed within the existing project structures, with P53-APPO taking over the leadership role of WP4 and ensuring continuity of its activities.

Table 7. Key consortium actors and corresponding role

Actors	Role
Project Management Office and the Project Coordinator	- Strategic and overall leadership - Operational and administrative support to partners - Main liaison with the European Commission.
Work Package leaders and Task leaders	- Coordinate, and implement activities within their work packages, - Guide on-site implementers (SIMSES Lighthouses and followers) in their roles.
SIMSES Lighthouses and followers	- Implement on-site project activities
Half-Double facilitator & M&E expert (WP2 lead) (P12-EQuIP) and the Project Coordinator	- Strategic support at Task- and WP-level, using impact cases (action plans) and other Half Double tools and approaches

2.3.3.2 Application of the Half Double Principles

Project implementation continued to be guided by the Half Double principles, particularly in the project management practices of the PMO and the leaders of WPs 2, 3, 5 and 8. Emphasis was placed on maintaining active ownership, collaborative leadership, and a reflective and adaptive mindset.

Active Ownership

Work package leaders demonstrated active ownership through close coordination with consortium partners, helping to maintain alignment between work packages, stakeholder-engagement activities and evolving project outputs.

A notable example followed the termination of the collaboration with the previous WP4 lead. During the transition, several partners offered temporary support, while the PMO assumed interim leadership of WP4 to maintain continuity. Three partners subsequently put forward their candidacies to lead the work package and presented their proposals to the consortium. The new WP4 lead was then appointed through a consortium vote.

Following its appointment, the new lead assumed responsibility immediately, without waiting for the related Grant Agreement amendment to be finalised. Together, the interim leadership provided by the PMO, the support offered by consortium partners and the prompt engagement of the newly appointed lead helped maintain project progress and supported the timely implementation of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign, without significant delays. Further details on the WP4 work are provided under Activities 1 and 6 in Table 2.

Reflective and Adaptive Mindset

A reflective and adaptive mindset was demonstrated through continued reflection, learning and revision of project activities. Where appropriate, approaches and strategies were adjusted to respond to changes in the operating environment and the circumstances and needs of the target groups, rather than adhering rigidly to the original plans.

This flexibility reflects the project's focus on using available resources effectively, serving the targeted communities and maintaining attention on the intended impacts. While the intended impacts remain unchanged, the approaches used to achieve them may be reviewed and adjusted where necessary.

Changes within the consortium, together with wider societal and political developments, have influenced the context in which project activities are implemented. Although the effects of these external factors are not assessed in this report, their potential influence on how—and to what extent—planned activities can be implemented is acknowledged.

Collaborative Leadership

To support project progress and effective collaboration, regular coordination meetings continued throughout the reporting period. These meetings enabled partners to share progress, provide updates and contribute to decision-making. They supported project-level alignment and continuity, strengthened accountability and promoted active ownership across the consortium.

The structured rhythm of key events established during the first reporting period was maintained at the same frequency during M33–M44, except for the WP1–WP2 calls, which were replaced by meetings held on demand. In addition, weekly WP1–WP4 meetings were introduced to support the coordinated implementation of communication and dissemination activities.

Table 8. Rhythm in Key Events

#	Key Event	Purpose	Target Audience	Frequency
1	Monthly Progress Calls	Provide project updates and ensure alignment at project-level	All Partners (PMO, SEC, ExeCom)	Monthly
2	Bi-weekly SIMSES Calls	Clarify responsibilities, discuss progress, and maintain project momentum	SIMSES representatives, WP leaders, coordinator	Bi-weekly
3	African Union (AU) bi-weekly Calls	Clarify responsibilities, discuss progress, and maintain project momentum	AU partners, WP leaders, coordinator	Bi-weekly
4	WP1-WP4 Calls	Ensure alignment between PMO and C&D practices	WP1 & WP4 leaders and team members	Weekly
5	WP8 Calls	Plan, coordinate & align WP activities with the broader project to optimise resource use, and maximise efficiency & impact	Primary participants: WP8, WP1 Occasionally: other WP/task leaders, as needed	Bi-weekly
6	Project Transnational Meetings	General Assemblies and Project Board Meetings, operated in a hybrid format to provide all partners access to attending these meetings.	All partners	≈ Every 6 months
7	Pulse Checks	Assess and monitor partners' satisfaction with working in the project	All partners	Bi-monthly

The project transnational meetings included the Project Board meeting in Oviedo, Spain (M38) and in Posavje, Slovenia (M43).

3 RURALITIES PROJECT IMPACT SENSING THROUGH CITIZEN SCIENCE

The RURALITIES project applies the MICS (Measuring the Impact of Citizen Science) framework to evaluate its overall impact across five main domains:

- Environment
- Society
- Economy
- Governance
- Science & Technology

It also offers step-by-step guides, support materials, and access to a knowledge base on impact assessment for citizen science initiatives.

This section is structured as follows: Section 3.1 provides a summary of the main contributions established in previous deliverables and elaborates on the targeted aspects for this evaluation period, which are included in this version of the deliverable. Section 3.2 presents the results of the 2nd cycle of project-level impact measurement for the RURALITIES project, carried out using the MICS platform.

3.1 Progress and key opportunities

3.1.1 Summary of progress

During the first thirty-six months of the project, RURALITIES Project Impact Sensing developed and implemented the Citizen Science approach as one of the three methodological pillars of the RURALITIES impact monitoring and evaluation system. Its main contribution was to **introduce a standardized methodology for systematically evaluating the project's impacts from a participatory perspective**, complementing the monitoring mechanisms focused on project implementation and the 2ES indicator system.

The methodology adopted was **based on the MICS (Measuring the Impact of Citizen Science) framework**, a tool developed specifically to evaluate citizen science initiatives using a structured set of indicators that encompass multiple dimensions of impact. The incorporation of this framework provided the project with an internationally recognized methodology for analysing results, and the project's capacity to generate social, scientific, economic, institutional, and governance changes through the active participation of the various stakeholders.

During this initial period, the **MICS framework was adapted to the specific characteristics of RURALITIES**. Since the original questionnaire was designed for citizen science projects in a broad sense, it was necessary to review the existing indicators, select those fully applicable to the project context, and exclude certain questions that were not relevant to the activities carried out. This process allowed us to maintain the methodological coherence of the MICS system while ensuring an evaluation tailored to the objectives and specific characteristics of RURALITIES.

As a result of this adaptation, the first cycle of project impact evaluation was carried out using MICS, establishing the first systematic baseline on the perceived impact achieved during the first thirty-six months of implementation. The **evaluation was conducted using both the rule-based scoring system**

and the machine learning models incorporated into the MICS platform, providing a dual perspective on the project's overall performance.

The results obtained showed a high level of maturity overall. The evaluation revealed that RURALITIES exhibits particularly positive performance in those dimensions related to **knowledge generation, collaboration among stakeholders, networking, and capacity building**. Similarly, the analysis confirmed that the project's collaborative structure, based on Living Labs, SIMSES, and participatory processes, is a differentiating factor that fosters impact beyond traditional scientific results.

The simultaneous use of rule-based evaluation models and machine learning algorithms provided a complementary view of the project's status. While the rule-based system facilitated a transparent interpretation of the degree of compliance with the different indicators, the machine learning model offered a comparative overall assessment against other initiatives analysed using the MICS platform. The **results placed RURALITIES above average** in most of the evaluated dimensions, indicating that the **project had developed a solid foundation for generating impact in the subsequent implementation phases**.

Another particularly relevant aspect was the **identification of automatic recommendations generated by the MICS platform** itself. These recommendations identified areas for improvement to increase the project's future impact, providing specific guidance on stakeholder engagement, documenting impact evidence, enhancing evaluation mechanisms, and strengthening participatory processes. In this way, the evaluation system evolved from a purely descriptive tool into a resource for continuous improvement.

Applying a citizen science approach also helped strengthen the evaluation culture within the consortium. The use of a **structured methodology** fostered collaborative reflection on the results and raised partners' awareness of the need to collect objective impact evidence throughout the project. This approach allowed for the gradual integration of evaluation as a cross-cutting component of the project, rather than simply as an activity associated with producing deliverables.

This initial implementation also validated the **feasibility of using the MICS framework as a periodic monitoring tool**. The experience gained during this first cycle facilitated the identification of improvements in both the data collection process and the interpretation of the results, laying the groundwork for future longitudinal evaluations that will allow for the analysis of the project's impact evolution throughout its duration.

3.2 MICS Impact Report – 2nd Cycle

This report presents the results of the 2nd cycle of project-level impact measurement for the RURALITIES project, carried out using the MICS platform. The report consists of three segments: Rule-based Scores, Recommendations, and Machine Learning-based Scores.

3.2.1 Rules-based scores

These scores are calculated based on a set of rules written to combine a specific set of impact metrics on the same theme into a single indicator. A higher score means the project is carrying out more activities related to the theme of the indicator and is, therefore, more likely to have a higher positive impact in this area. Rule-based scores are only calculated for specific themes. Overall assessments can be found below in the machine-learning-based scoring.

Table 9 – MICS Rule-based scores

Impact Indicators		Impact score (max 42)	Average score (of projects on platform)
Society	Activeness	34	22
	Involvement	29	17
Governance	Policy	33	13
	Sustainable Development Goals	26	16
Economy	Economic productivity	21	13
	Financial sustainability	36	19
Environment	Environmental awareness	42	21
	Environmental footprint	32	13
Science	Scientific productivity	33	18
	Interdisciplinary science	44	21

The strongest result is environmental awareness, with 42/42, indicating that the project places substantial emphasis on raising environmental awareness and measuring changes in participants' environmental attitudes, behaviour and knowledge. Other relatively strong areas are financial sustainability (36/42), activeness (34/42), policy (33/42), scientific productivity (33/42) and environmental footprint (32/42). The project also scores 29/42 for participant involvement, 26/42 for Sustainable Development Goals, and 21/42 for economic productivity.

Compared with the average scores of projects on the MICS platform, RURALITIES scores above the average in all reported indicators. The largest differences are visible in areas such as environmental awareness, environmental footprint, financial sustainability, policy and scientific productivity. This indicates that the project addresses a broad range of impact dimensions, with particularly strong emphasis on environmental, social, policy and sustainability-related aspects.

Compared with the previous assessment period, the current rule-based MICS scores show a largely stable impact profile, with a notable improvement in participant activeness. The Activeness score increased from 26 to 34, suggesting stronger evidence of active participant engagement in the project gathered through the initiation of the Citizen Sensing mechanism. It is also true that the nature of the RURALITIES' work plan includes more engagement activities in the second half of the project implementation. At the same time, the scores for Involvement (29), Policy (33), Sustainable Development Goals (22), Economic Productivity (21), Financial Sustainability (21), Environmental Awareness (40), Environmental Footprint (22), Scientific Productivity (28), and Interdisciplinary Science (44) remained

unchanged. Overall, the results indicate continuity in the project's established areas of impact, while the increase in Activeness provides a clear positive development since the previous assessment and is consistent with the strong participant engagement reflected in the direct citizen-sensing results.

3.2.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are determined by the scores the project received in the previous section. The recommendations are based on citizen-science best practice as defined in the current scientific literature and how other projects have taken action to improve their impact in specific areas.

Table 10 – MICS recommendations based on the 2nd cycle of assessments

Society	Activeness	The activeness of participants within a project is an important aspect of citizen science, and this project has made great efforts to ensure participants are aware they are contributing to a research project, have responsibility in the project, and are satisfied with the process of participation. Great job!
	Involvement	The degree of involvement of participants in a project is an important aspect of citizen science, and includes involving participants in multiple stages of the project, offering them multiple activities to take part in, and offering different levels of involvements depending on individual interests and availability. This project could consider whether there are more stages of the project that participants could be involved in for example by considering co-design or co-evaluation .
Governance	Policy	The project is among the most successful on this platform at influencing policy. Congratulations! To get a score this high, the project must already have a lot of experience interacting with policy. But if the project wants to achieve the top scores for this indicator, it will have to consider and explicitly inform governmental policy at all scales (local, regional, national and global). Additionally, the project needs to be confident it has had an impact on external organisational policy and contributed to the enforcement of existing regulations or policies. It's a lot to ask, so don't be worried if the project is happy as it is, it has already achieved a lot!
Economy	Economic productivity	We know that economic productivity isn't a priority for most citizen-science projects. If you are interested in improving the economic productivity of the project, it might help to fully appraise any potential developments and advances made through the creation of a dedicated IPR plan . This will help reveal any economic potential that might have been overlooked, and support its exploitation.
	Financial sustainability	Well done! The project has a high score due to forward thinking in creating an exploitation plan, planning sustainability activities to prolong the projects' influence and fully appraising any recurring costs and maintenance.
Environment	Environmental awareness	Congratulations! This project goes to great lengths not only to promote environmental awareness and educate participants on environmental challenges, but also to measure improvements in participants' environmental attitudes, behaviour and knowledge.
	Environmental footprint	This indicator considers the project's material footprint , polluting emissions , procurement policy , and pro-environmental actions for participants (such as litter picking). The project's score for this indicator shows that the project has considered some of these elements but to get a higher score the project needs to take measures to improve its environmental footprint in all these areas.
Science	Scientific productivity	Congratulations - in a world of "publish or perish", this project has high scientific productivity. With a large number of publications in high impact-factor journals, the project's research has been well cited, indicating outcomes have been widely shared.

The recommendations are generated from the rule-based scores and are intended to identify possible ways of strengthening the project's impact.

For participant involvement, the assessment suggests involving participants in more stages of the project and providing different opportunities for participation. For policy, the project is described as being among the more successful projects on the platform in terms of influencing policy. For economic productivity, MICS suggests developing an intellectual-property/exploitation plan to identify possible economic opportunities arising from the project. This could be a good input for post-project activities as such things are not the focus nor are they covered by the work plan. The recommendation concerning financial sustainability is positive. The high score is associated with forward planning, including an exploitation plan, sustainability activities intended to extend the project's influence, and consideration of recurring costs and maintenance. Similarly, the environmental-awareness score reflects substantial efforts to educate participants and assess changes in their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. For environmental footprint, MICS identifies room for further development. The assessment considers material footprint, emissions, procurement practices and pro-environmental actions by participants. The

project has addressed some of these elements, but broader action across all of them could improve the score. Finally, the project receives positive feedback on scientific productivity. The report describes it as having a high level of scientific productivity, with publications in high-impact journals and research that has been cited, indicating that scientific outputs have been disseminated beyond the project itself.

3.2.3 Machine Learning Scores

The following scores were calculated using a statistically-driven machine-learning approach, a type of AI that learns to perform a task by analysing patterns in data. This is an experimental approach to citizen-science impact assessment, and the exact reasoning behind the scores is not explainable. The scores represent a best guess of the impact the project is having in each domain. All scores are out of 42.

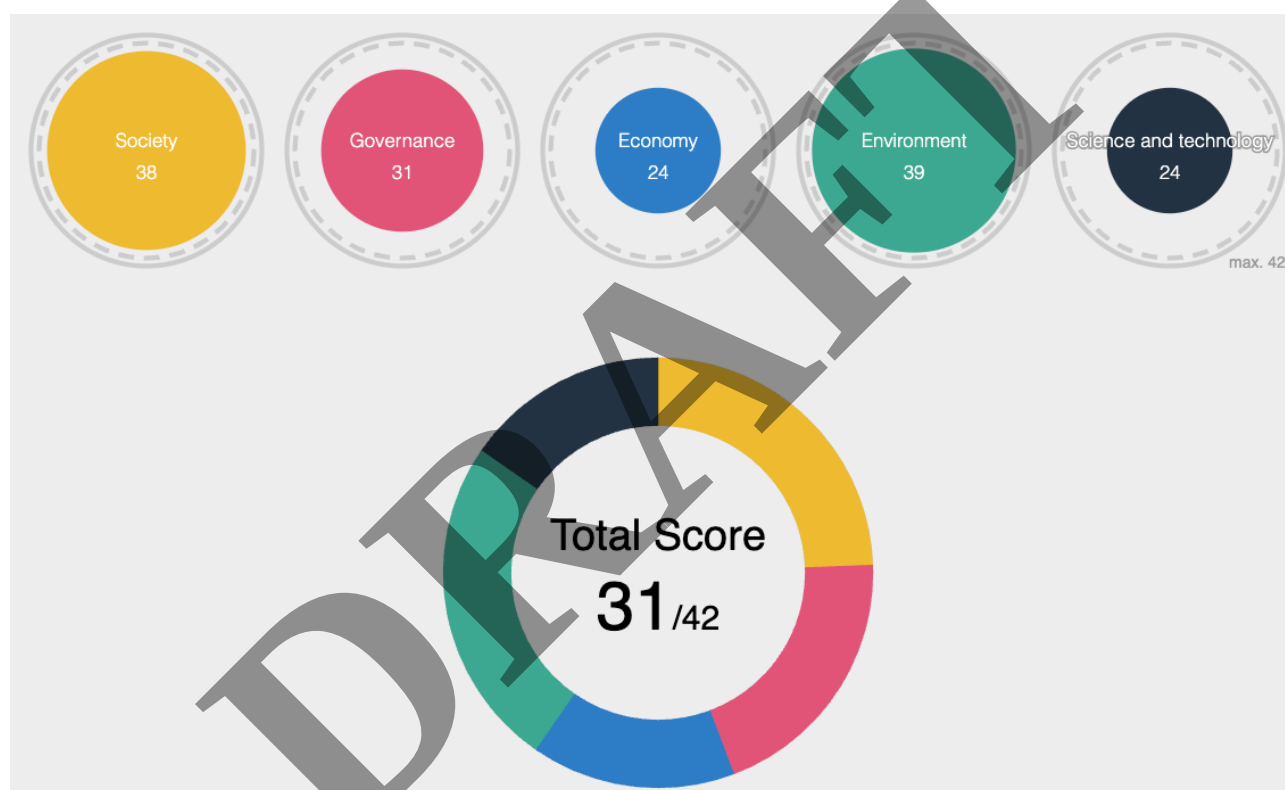


Figure 2: Machine learning scores

The project receives the following scores, with a maximum of 42: Society 38/42, Governance 31/42, Economy 24/42, Environment 39/42, and Science and Technology 24/42. The resulting overall score is 31/42.

3.3 Citizen Sensing Inputs

Citizen Sensing inputs have been included in the project-level assessment and therefore further informed the process. This approach gives RURALITIES' participants an opportunity to report how their involvement has affected their knowledge, skills, behaviour, confidence, engagement and everyday lives. In this sense,

citizen sensing provides a direct perspective on the changes experienced by those participating in the project and complements the broader assessment of project impact. Between the two measuring periods, SIMSES partners were disseminating Citizen Sensing questionnaires (N=48). The last impact assessment due in M60 will include additional inputs boosted by the RuralThrive Campaign. The results and ways that they influenced the project-level MICS assessments are presented below.

Table 11 Citizen Sensing Results

Question	Level	Counts	Percentage
Do you feel that you and other participants share a sense of ownership of RURALITIES' goals and outcomes?	Yes	44	91.7%
	No	3	6.3%
	I am not sure	1	2.1%
Are you satisfied with the overall process of taking part in RURALITIES (e.g., your level of involvement, communication, facilitation)?	Yes	45	93.8%
	No	2	4.2%
	I am not sure	1	2.1%
How closely do the RURALITIES' goals align with your demands?	They match well	36	75.0%
	They do not really match	10	20.8%
	I am not sure	2	4.2%
Are you satisfied with the results the RURALITIES project has produced so far?	Yes	44	91.7%
	No	1	2.1%
	I am not sure	3	6.3%
Have you changed any of your day-to-day habits or routines (e.g., your daily routines, consumption habits, etc.) due to your involvement in RURALITIES?	Yes	29	61.7%
	No	9	19.1%
	I am not sure	9	19.1%
Have you initiated or joined additional activities beyond the original RURALITIES project plan?	Yes	24	51.1%
	No	18	38.3%

Question	Level	Counts	Percentage
	I am not sure	5	10.6%
Have you joined any similar activities outside of the scope of this project as a result of your involvement in RURALITIES?	Yes	26	55.3%
	No	17	36.2%
	I am not sure	4	8.5%
Has your involvement in RURALITIES increased your motivation to continue to engage in the project or similar activities?	Yes	41	89.1%
	No	2	4.3%
	I am not sure	3	6.5%
Has your confidence in your own ability to contribute or solve problems regarding topics covered by RURALITIES increased because of your involvement in this project?	Yes	40	83.3%
	No	4	8.3%
	I am not sure	4	8.3%
Have you learned new information or gained new insights through your involvement in RURALITIES?	Yes	45	93.8%
	No	2	4.2%
	I am not sure	1	2.1%
Have you gained new skills from taking part in RURALITIES (e.g., using an app)?	Yes	38	79.2%
	No	7	14.6%
	I am not sure	3	6.3%
Have you gained new competencies from taking part in RURALITIES (e.g., teamwork, creativity, etc.)?	Yes	40	85.1%
	No	6	12.8%
	I am not sure	1	2.1%
	Yes	24	51.1%

Question	Level	Counts	Percentage
Since joining RURALITIES, have you become more involved in political processes or policy-related activities as a result of your participation in RURALITIES (e.g., interacting with local officials, writing a letter to your local council, etc.)?	No	16	34.0%
	I prefer not to say	7	14.9%
Has your involvement in RURALITIES had a positive effect on your livelihood (e.g., income, employment, etc.)?	Yes	22	46.8%
	No	12	25.5%
	I am not sure	13	27.7%
Have you taken on more responsibility or action to protect or care for the environment because of your involvement in RURALITIES (e.g., reducing waste, volunteering for cleanups, or conserving resources)?	Yes	33	70.2%
	No	9	19.1%
	I am not sure	5	10.6%

The results show a generally positive pattern. Very high proportions of participants reported a sense of shared ownership of RURALITIES' goals and outcomes (91.7%), satisfaction with the overall participation process (93.8%), satisfaction with the results produced so far (91.7%), and the acquisition of new information or insights (93.8%). The results also indicate substantial development of participants' confidence (83.3%), competencies such as teamwork and creativity (85.1%), and practical skills (79.2%). Beyond learning and participation itself, 61.7% reported changes in their day-to-day habits or routines, while 70.2% reported taking greater responsibility or action to protect or care for the environment.

The comparison with the previous assessment shows that of the 15 indicators, 14 either remained positive or moved towards a more clearly confirmed and measured impact, while only one indicator (Q14, concerning livelihood effects) showed a negative movement, changing from a reported positive effect that had not yet been measured to an "I don't know" response. Several questions moved from uncertainty or unmeasured positive effects towards confirmed or measured outcomes. This includes changes relating to participation beyond the original project activities, engagement in similar activities outside RURALITIES, motivation, learning, skills, competencies, policy-related engagement and environmental action. These developments suggest that the impact assessment is becoming increasingly supported by participant-reported evidence rather than relying only on anticipated or unmeasured effects.

Overall, the MICS assessment indicates that RURALITIES demonstrates broad and relatively strong impact across several dimensions, particularly in environmental awareness, social engagement, policy interaction and financial sustainability. The rule-based assessment highlights concrete strengths in the way the project engages participants, addresses environmental issues, supports sustainability and produces scientific outputs. The recommendations mainly point toward deeper participant involvement, broader environmental-footprint measures and greater consideration of economic opportunities.

The machine-learning assessment supports this overall picture, with the highest estimated impact in Environment (39/42) and Society (38/42) and an overall score of 31/42. Taken together, the two approaches suggest that the project's strongest contribution is its combination of social and environmental impact, while there is still potential to strengthen participant involvement, economic dimensions and some aspects of environmental management.

DRAFT

4 RESULTS OF THE 2ES TRILEMMA MULTILAYER INDEX SYSTEM

This Section presents the 2ES (Environment-Economic-Society) Trilemma multilayer index system. The aim of this system is to strengthen the assessment of all experiments in terms of impact on resilience and sustainability of general practices in three dimensions: Environment-Economics-Society (2ES). This is a self-assessment framework to assist setting up the experiment goals, visualize /evaluate their progress throughout the project.

This section is structured as follows: Section 4.1 provides a summary of the main contributions established in previous deliverables and elaborates on the aspects to be improved during the next year, which are included in this version of the deliverable. Section 4.2 presents the progress achieved towards the general objectives of the project during the third assessment period, providing a comparative analysis of SIMSES contributions across quarters 3–4 and quarters 5–6. Section 4.3 examines the concrete contributions of the living lab activities to the Expected Outcome Topics (EOTs) and Expected Impact Destinations (EIDs) defined in the Horizon Europe Work Programme topic. Finally, Section 4.4 introduces the SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle and establishes the methodological framework connecting this three-stage value loop with the detailed SWOT analyses conducted for each pilot territory.

4.1 Progress and key opportunities

4.1.1 Summary of progress

D2.4 focused on the **design, development, and initial implementation of the 2ES Trilemma Multilayer Index System**, conceived as the third methodological pillar of RURALITIES' comprehensive impact monitoring and evaluation system. Its main objective was to provide a self-assessment framework that would allow for the continuous monitoring of the project's activities, simultaneously considering the environmental, economic, and social dimensions, thus offering a multidimensional view of the results obtained in the different pilot territories.

One of the main contributions of this period was the conceptual definition of the 2ES framework and **its integration within the project's overall Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system**. The system was designed to complement the implementation monitoring methodologies (Half-Double) and the citizen science evaluation methodologies (MICS), providing a set of specific indicators aimed at measuring the progress of the activities carried out in the different SIMSES and facilitating evidence-based decision-making.

The methodological development began with an analysis of the project's monitoring needs and the identification of the most relevant dimensions for evaluating progress toward RURALITIES' sustainability goals. As a result, a **multi-layered model was defined that links the operational progress of activities with their contribution to the expected impacts**, allowing for the evaluation of the degree of implementation and of the quality and balance of the results achieved from an environmental, economic, and social perspective.

As part of the design process, a **study was conducted on the consortium's technological preferences to select the most suitable tools to support the monitoring system**. This analysis revealed the partners' level of familiarity with different digital platforms and facilitated the selection of

solutions that combined ease of use, visualization capabilities, and integration possibilities with the other project tools. This phase proved particularly important for ensuring a consistent implementation of the system within a consortium characterized by significant geographical and organizational diversity.

Another significant contribution was the **development of a self-assessment framework designed to facilitate the standardized collection of information by the various partners**. To this end, structured templates were designed to record the progress of activities, describe evidence of implementation, and evaluate the contribution of each action to the overall project objectives. This approach fostered the standardization of the information gathering process and simplified the periodic monitoring of progress across the different Work Packages and SIMSES (Integrated Management and Evaluation System).

The methodology also incorporated a set of structured indicators organized at different levels of analysis. On the one hand, **indicators were defined to monitor progress toward the overall project objectives**. On the other hand, indicators were established to evaluate the level of development of each activity, incorporating qualitative descriptions that facilitate the interpretation of the results and allow for contextualizing the degree of progress achieved in each assessment period.

Furthermore, during this initial period, **the first pilot implementation of the 2ES system was carried out by collecting data corresponding to the first monitoring cycle** (which we decompose in this section as assessment periods 1 and 2 for comparison purposes). The following figure describes the assessment periods established, and the deliverable in which they will be reported.

Assessment period	Data validation: The impact will be calculated quarterly. This is the initial calendar for impact evaluation:		
1st period	April 2025	Impact assessment overview - First quarter	Reported in D2.4 Technical report on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment (M36)
2nd period	July 2025	Impact assessment overview - Second quarter	
3rd period	October 2025	Impact assessment overview - Third quarter	Reported in D2.5 Technical reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment, version 2 (M48)
	January 2026	Impact assessment overview - Fourth quarter	
	April 2026	Impact assessment overview - Fifth quarter	
	July 2026	Impact assessment overview - Sixth quarter	
4th period	October 2026	Impact assessment overview - Seventh quarter	It will be reported in D2.6 Technical reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment, final version (M60)
	January 2027	Impact assessment overview - Eighth quarter	
	April 2027	Impact assessment overview - Ninth quarter	
	July 2027	Impact assessment overview - Tenth quarter	

Figure 3: Established assessment periods and corresponding deliverable

The results obtained validated the methodological framework and verified the feasibility of the data collection process for the various consortium partners. This initial application provided an overview of the project's progress and allowed for the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, both in the definition of indicators and in the data collection procedures.

The initial implementation also allowed for an **analysis of the contribution of the project's various activities to the Expected Outcomes Topics (EOTs) and the expected impacts** defined in the Horizon Europe program. In this way, the 2ES system not only facilitated internal monitoring of project progress but also established a mechanism for linking the results obtained with the strategic objectives set by the European Commission, strengthening the traceability between the activities carried out and the intended impacts.

Another significant contribution of this first version was the **identification of several lessons learned from the system's implementation**. These included the importance of simplifying data collection procedures, improving coordination among those responsible for the different work packages, increasing the frequency of information updates, and providing more detailed guidance to ensure a consistent interpretation of the indicators by all partners. These recommendations form an important basis for the system's evolution during subsequent project phases.

4.2 Progress towards general objectives of the project

This deliverable contains the results of the third assessment period, which occurred between August 2025 and July 2026 (both included).

In this section, we provide a general summary of the results extracted from the impact assessment processes. We provide two tables. The first one considers a summary of SIMSES' contributions within 3rd and 4th quarters (according to the 2ES methodology.) The second table provides a summary of SIMSES' contributions within 5th and 6th quarters.

Annex I displays statistical information on the number and types of contributions.

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Table 12 - 2ES monitoring framework: Summary of progress towards general objectives of the project (3rd and 4th quarter)

SIMSES/ Objectives	Deployment of concrete actions to engage, connect, empower SIMSES actors	Characterize SIMSES rural landscape to facilitate knowledge of concrete needs, competences/ solutions	Generate mechanisms to gather resources to attract investments/opportunities for long-term sustainability	Strengthen links and collaboration between rural actors' initiatives and other research and innovation actors.	Train participants to have adequate knowledge, skills and tools to achieve their full potential to ensure a sustainable growth of rural life quality
1-IT Pesaro Urbino	More regress than progress	Neutral	Neutral	More progress than regress	More progress than regress
	Some more dialogues are set up between SIMSES participants to share knowledge on Montefeltro Living Lab.			SIMSES and LL approach was presented in relation with follower activities with AU partners	Presentation of innovation in rural areas to school children
2-IT Vicenza	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress
	Ongoing involvement of stakeholders through newsletters and capacity building events aimed at informing, educating, and empowering actors on topics related to sustainable tourism, sharing best practices, informative articles, training webinars, etc	Generation of monthly newsletters with more than 110 recipients, with the dissemination of activities in the region related with rural innovation and sustainable tourism (European Startup Village Forum 2025, Ministry of Tourism Mountain Safety initiative, etc)	Some activities indicated potential targets for investment. By improving the capabilities of the rural tourism sector, more attractive conditions are created for investment and long-term economic development.	Participation in the Rural Pact Conference with the Romea Strata, sharing workshops such as the European Startup Village Forum 2025 to connect rural stakeholders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and research and innovation actors. Some activities such as webinars involve Ruralities external organizations such as GAL Montagna Vicentina, Fondazione Homo Viator	Continuous sharing of educational webinars, learning opportunities, and investment opportunities. Some training seminars reported in this period
3-UK Highlands & Islands	Progress	More progress than regress	Neutral	Progress	Neutral
	Research continues and will move to a new cohort in 2026. Coordination and planning discussions. Coordination meetings and research meetings are reported, redeployment strategy is being implemented.	Research continues: Characterizations of redeployment/new locations. WP meetings with discussions about WP links and feedback to inputs.		Recruitment of cohorts for the research for new location. Mock build / New tracker.	
4-SI Posavje	Progress	Progress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress	Progress
	Participatory activities to mobilise and connect rural stakeholders, fostering dialogue and collaboration within the SIMSES ecosystem. For example, thematic workshops and regional events—such as the aquaculture innovation workshop—brought together local actors to exchange ideas and strengthen community engagement.	Identification of rural needs and opportunities through thematic discussions and participatory events addressing local development challenges. E.g. mobility-focused workshops enabled stakeholders to share experiences and highlight key barriers and solutions for rural accessibility.	Promoting awareness of funding opportunities and mechanisms supporting rural innovation and sustainability. E.g. dedicated sessions on Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) calls informed local actors about funding instruments and how to access them.	Participation in local events, connecting with the general public, CLLD approach workshops. International study visits enabled local stakeholders to connect with external initiatives and share good practices.	Some workshop activities - CLLD approach. Capacity building through workshops and knowledge dissemination activities targeting diverse audiences. For example, educational sessions and podcast initiatives helped raise awareness and share knowledge on sustainability and rural innovation topics.

5-ES Asturias	Progress	Progress	More progress than regress	Progress	Progress
	Involve rural actors, students, institutions, authorities and SIMSES ecosystem stakeholders, offering spaces for dialogue, technical visits and immersive experiences. Activities such as the organization of project board meeting, public forums, RuralTech tours, the participation of schools, and media outreach through radio and press. For example, Alimencuentros Forum, where policymakers, industry, students, and citizens connected and learned about technological initiatives directly linked to rural development.	Identification of need in technological perspective (digital infrastructures, IoT, data spaces, smart territory solutions) and a socio-economic one (training, entrepreneurship, rural employment). A representative example is the visit from Universitat de Lleida focused on data spaces, which reinforced the understanding of interoperability needs and appropriate solutions for rural territories. Discussions held during cross-project collaboration meetings	Presenting RuralTech to CDTI representatives or organising high-level meetings such as the project board meeting in Oviedo strengthen mechanisms to attract funding and long-term opportunities. Consultancy services provided feasibility guidance to entrepreneurs seeking to launch new rural enterprises.	Collaboration between rural stakeholders and research and innovation actors through structured coordination activities. For instance, cross-project meetings facilitated cooperation and knowledge exchange between regional innovation initiatives.	Capacity development by defining training structures and supporting entrepreneurial skill development in rural areas. RuralTech Tour with the Mar de Niebla employment and training programme, where participants gained practical skills applicable to technology-driven rural development.
6-RO Iași	Progress	Progress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress
	Participation of the SIMSES in Fairs related to Rural innovation, for example Watermelon Tasting organized by IULS.	Strengthened understanding of Living Lab principles and rural innovation processes. Facilitate knowledge of regional vegetable growers' processes to the general public.	Proposal preparation for next phase of Horizon Calls. RoRuralia will be used as demonstrator for upscaling and replication	Promote local horticultural production, sustainable food systems and community engagement among local farmers, universities, students, representatives of agricultural companies and suppliers.	Some training activities related to food tasting, ensuring that the RURALITIES message remained clear in an informal, public-oriented setting.

Table 13 - 2ES monitoring framework: Summary of progress towards general objectives of the project (5th and 6th quarter)

SIMSES/ Objectives	Deployment of concrete actions to engage, connect, empower SIMSES actors	Characterize SIMSES rural landscape to facilitate knowledge of concrete needs, competences/ solutions	Generate mechanisms to gather resources to attract investments/opportunities for long-term sustainability	Strengthen links and collaboration between rural actors' initiatives and other research and innovation actors.	Train participants to have adequate knowledge, skills and tools to achieve their full potential to ensure a sustainable growth of rural life quality
1-IT Pesaro Urbino	Progress Workshop regarding phenological stages of Safflower cultivation, and other harvesting workshops	Progress Participation in large and well-known events such as Italy AgriShow	Progress Multiple contributions of funding approaches within the Gal area	More progress than regress Facilitate connection between administrators, farmers, entrepreneurs in Montefeltre Hinterland	Neutral
2-IT Vicenza	Progress SIMSES presentation at multiple audiences during the reporting period. The number of online and in-person attendants are relevant. Ongoing involvement of stakeholders through	Progress Dissemination activities to gain knowledge about slow / sustainable tourism, and new skills and opportunities for rural areas.	More progress than regress Some activities indicated potential targets for investment. Presentation of a platform (Skills Lab) dedicated to tourism skills development.	Progress New Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism and Territorial Collaboration. Call for success stories in the SIMSES region. Way to connect with farmers,	Progress Workshops and training seminars on guiding European tourism towards the digital and green transition, inclusion, and stronger collaboration between education and business.

	survey, workshop and newsletters aimed at informing, educating, and empowering actors.			agritourism, tour guides, business owners or local authorities.	
3-UK Highlands & Islands	Progress	More progress than regress	Neutral	Progress	Neutral
	Cohort recruitment in a new location. Data to be collected until the end of June. Rural Thrive Campaign preparation	Progressing T5.3 and T6.4. Location updates provided where requested.		Last trackers released for data collection to triangulate against fixed radar. "Transport and rural futures" dissemination material creation	
4-SI Posavje	Progress	Progress	More progress than regress	Progress	More progress than regress
	Study visits, international promotion of the Ruralities project; workshops with rural actors regarding agricultural and aquacultural practices, zero-waste cosmetics, etc.	Presentation of SIMSES goals for the draft regional spatial plan of the Posavina development region. Identification of rural needs and opportunities in living lab promotion.	Learning and Transfer of Circular Solutions: From Lab to User	Participation in pitch events related to scientific dissemination of rural innovation: Event for NGO Hrast, Tržišče, good practice presentation, promotion. Other workshops participated by Policy Makers (Regional Integrated Transport Strategy of Posavje)	Good practice presentation of connecting with local producers, guided tour of the fruit processing line, and introduction to Ruralities activities. Workshop for elementary school pupils.
5-ES Asturias	Progress	Progress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress
	Rural thrive campaign planning and provision of structure and calendar of activities. Capacity building event in Foro Transfiere, connecting science, business and government to address major challenges in rural innovation	Meeting and exchanging experiences and knowledge among stakeholders. Promote rural life, showcase innovation and highlight the opportunities offered by Asturias' rural areas	Definition of plans to empower the people and businesses shaping its future. Definition of upcoming webinars aligned with the launch of the new regional funding calendar, focusing on how to finance and carry out R&D&I in the rural agri-food sector.	Connecting with companies, institutions, students, and graduates of the University of Oviedo.	Brainstorming sessions and definition of good practices in Foro Transfiere.
6-RO Iași	More progress than regress	More progress than regress	Progress	More progress than regress	More progress than regress
	Rural Thrive Campaign preparation	Characterization of three connected priorities: First, rural innovation and entrepreneurship. Second, the role of young people and emerging entrepreneurs. Third, better dialogue around governance, funding opportunities and cooperation.	RoRuralia Living Lab has been focused on actively seeking funding opportunities. RoRuralia has been used as a demonstrator and lighthouse for the proposal ARfi. Selected for funding in the WIDERA programme.	Definition of local dialogues, brokerage webinars, for rural actors to share experiences. The target audience includes local authorities, entrepreneurs, farmers and producers, schools and students, community organisations and rural development actors.	Plans for nominations of rural stories: share practical experience to train the audience in knowledge and skills.

4.3 Contribution to the Expected Outcomes Topics and Expected Impact Destinations, set out in the Work Programme topic

In this section, we will examine how the contributions reported by the SIMSES following the 2ES Impact Monitoring Framework contribute to the Expected Outcome Topics (EOT) and Expected Impact Destinations (EID) set out in the Work Programme topic. The following table shows the expected outcome/destination, its scale/significance, the estimated contribution of the SIMSES in the third assessment period, which occurred between August 2025 and July 2026 (both included), and details of its implementation.

In this new overview of EOTs and EIDs, we observe an improvement primarily in the indicators EOT-4 > “Enhanced valorisation by rural communities of the results (...), funded under various programmes” and EID-4 > “The sustainable development of coastal areas (...) economic and governance frameworks are enabled.”, compared to the review made in D2.4 for the first reporting period. The “details” column shows the reinforcements made to these indicators to reflect a higher level of contribution

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Table 14 – 2ES monitoring framework's contribution to EOTs and EIDs

EOT - EID	Scale and significance	Level of contribution	Details
EOT-1) > “Enhanced capacity of rural communities and rural people to innovate for change”	Scale (during the project): 100.000+ rural people engaged between EU-AU. Significance: augmented knowledge of rural communities and rural people and causal increased capacity potential to innovate for change.	+++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #1 “Deployment of concrete actions to engage, connect, empower SIMSES actors”. SIMSES presentation at multiple audiences during the reporting period. 100 reported events with an audience (physical + online) of 4958 people / views.
EOT-2 > “Improved skills and knowledge of rural citizens, (...), in all domains of relevance to rural life and economy	Scale (during the project): 10.000+ unorganised rural people, 5.000+ young entrepreneurs, 2.500+ women, 1.000+ immigrants, 200+ innovative ICT and nature-based start-ups engaged in 50+ CBE event by May 2027. Significance: enhanced competences of rural people and its key actors of change.	+++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #5 “Train participants to have adequate knowledge, skills and tools to achieve their full potential to ensure a sustainable growth of rural life quality”. SIMSES demonstrates a strong alignment with the goal by creating meaningful opportunities for collaboration and shared development between rural stakeholders and innovation-driven entities. 100 reported events with an audience (physical + online) of 4958 people / views.
EOT-3 > “Shortening of the innovation cycle in rural communities (...), in particular for women and young people”	Scale (during the project): same as EOT-2. Significance: enhanced innovation capabilities of rural communities and causal improvement of these capacities in the rural scene globally.	++	Partially related to RURALITIES general objective #1 and #5. Many capacity building events (Alpe Adria trade fair (4-SI Posavje), RuralTech – Tunivers Training (5-ES Asturias), WIDERA workshops (6-RO Iași) , etc) realized in this reporting period, powering participants with instruments to improve rural areas, with special attention to women and young people.
EOT-4 > “Enhanced valorisation by rural communities of the results (...), funded under various programmes”	Scale (during the project): 100+ EU-AU funded projects. Significance: adoption of the project results by 1.000+ bodies from all 3 economic sectors (I, II and III).	++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #3 “Generate mechanisms to gather resources to attract investments/opportunities for long-term sustainability”. Some activities indicated solid potential for investment, such as contribution of funding plan within the GAL area (1-IT Pesaro-Urbino), synergies with platform (Skills Lab) dedicated to tourism skills development (2-IT Vicenza), visit of CDTI representatives (5-ES Asturias), and funding obtention of WIDERA programme through ARfi proposal (6-RO Iași) . <u>This is considered a great advance</u> compared to the study presented in D2.4, where the results in this EOT only reached the search for funding opportunities, without obtaining them.
EOT-5 > “Enhanced dialogue and cooperation on rural innovation worldwide, with sharing of learning resources”	Scale (during the project): 100.000+ members and same as EOT-1, 2, 3 and 4. Significance: improved dialogue and exchange of data and experiences	++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #1 and #4 “Strengthen links and collaboration between rural actors’ initiatives and other research and innovation actors.” Activities reflect a strategic effort to bridge rural communities with innovation ecosystems, for example with the call for success stories in the SIMSES 2-IT Vicenza region , as a way to connect with farmers, agritourism, tour guides, business owners or local authorities, or

			the promotion of workshops in 4-SI Posavje related to rural innovation: Zero-waste cosmetics, aquaculture, etc.
EID-1 > "Rural, coastal and urban areas are developed (...) and community-led innovations."	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): increase of 30% compared to EOT-1. Significance: same as EOT-1.	++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #1 "Deployment of concrete actions to engage, connect, empower SIMSES actors". However, this EID particularly focuses on encouraging mid-term transition pathways for transformation of local communities and diversification of farming and seafood systems.
EID-2 > "Rural, coastal and urban communities are empowered (...) women, young people and vulnerable groups."	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): 30% increase compared to EOT-2. Significance: same as EOT-2.	++	Directly related to RURALITIES general objective #5 "Train participants to have adequate knowledge, skills and tools to achieve their full potential to ensure a sustainable growth of rural life quality". For example, the RuralTech Tour with the Mar de Niebla employment and training programme (5-ES Asturias) , where participants gained practical skills applicable to technology-driven rural development.
EID-3 > "Rural communities are equipped with innovative (...) even in the most remote locations like mountains."	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): 30% increase compared to EOT-3. Significance: same as EOT-3.	+	Partially related to RURALITIES general objective #3 (related to investment opportunities) and #5 (rural participant capability building). This EID particularly focuses on mid-term approaches to stimulate the creation of high added-value technology jobs in sustainable farming and agri-food.
EID-4 > "The sustainable development of coastal areas (...) economic and governance frameworks are enabled."	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): 30% increase compared to EOT-1, 2, 3 and 4. Significance: same as EOT-1, 2, 3 and 4.	++	This EID particularly focuses on the mid-term development and improvement of socio-economic value chains of sustainable seafood. Some activities and objectives of SIMSES such as the provision of trackers for live-location updates, or the creation of youth food-related cohorts in 3-UK Highlands & Islands, seminars on Learning and Transfer of Circular Solutions (4-SI Posavje) are related to this goal.
EID-5 > "Tourism, recreational and leisure activity development (...), recreational and leisure activity development."	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): 30% increase compared to EOT-1, 2, 3 and 4. Significance: same as EOT-1, 2, 3 and 4.	++	Transversal to the 5 RURALITIES General Objectives. Many SIMSES provided activities related to "slow tourism" (2-IT Vicenza), sustainable tourism models (4-SI Posavje) and cultural heritage (5-ES Asturias) , among others.
EID-6 > "Urban and peri-urban communities (...), healthier, nutritious and environmental-friendly food"	Scale (first 5 years of exploitation): 30% increase compared to EOT-1 to 5. Significance: same as EOT-1 to 5.	+	Transversal to the 5 RURALITIES General Objectives. This EID particularly focuses on mid-term approaches to enable citizens, especially vulnerable ones, to have physical/economic access to sufficient, affordable, safe and nutritious food, while meeting their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Some SIMSES activities combine biological /nutritional approaches (1-IT Pesaro Urbino) with best practices in sustainable production (5-ES Asturias), and promoting local horticultural production and sustainable food systems (6-RO Iași)

4.4 SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle & SWOT assessment framework

4.4.1 Integrated value cycle

Capturing and monitoring the true impact of rural living labs cannot rely on linear key performance indicators (KPIs) alone. Rural innovation is inherently non-linear, requiring a **systems-thinking approach** that accounts for social dynamics, institutional continuity, applied technical research, and local capacity absorption.

To systematically assess and communicate this multifaceted progress, the **SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle** was established. This model captures how each living lab transforms strategic intent and regional assets into tangible economic, ecological, and societal value.

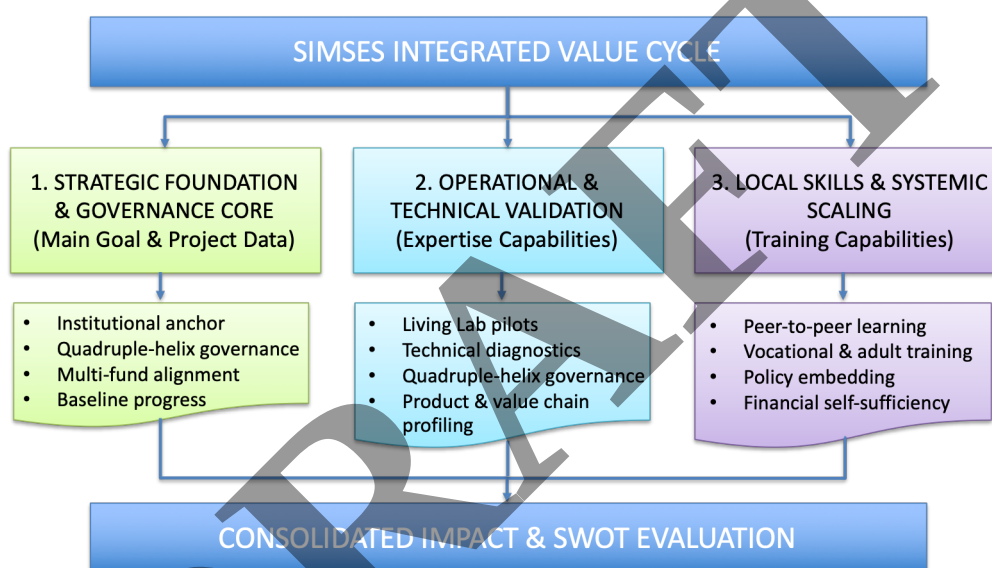


Figure 4: SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle

Traditional project monitoring often creates artificial silos between high-level project goals, technical advisory capabilities, and local educational activities. The Integrated Value Cycle overcomes this fragmentation by aligning **three interdependent pillars of impact**:

1. **Strategic Intent & Governance Trajectory (Main Goal & Evolution)**: Evaluates the living lab's foundational mandate, its multi-actor partnership model (e.g., Local Action Groups, regional transport authorities, universities, sectoral agencies), and its measurable trajectory across the project's monitoring rounds.
2. **Applied Research, Diagnostics & Matchmaking (Expertise Capabilities)**: Assesses the lab's operational capacity to provide specialized, low-overhead advisory services, test emerging technologies, conduct laboratory/field diagnostics, and de-risk supply chain commercialization.
3. **Territorial Capacity Building & Knowledge Transfer (Training Capabilities)**: Examines the mechanisms used to permanently anchor new competencies into the local fabric—bridging formal academic curricula, modular micro-credentials, hands-on Living Lab sandboxes, and community peer-learning.

By treating these three dimensions as a continuous, closed-loop value chain, the cycle illustrates how high-level regional goals directly feed into applied technical pilots, which in turn generate real-time evidence to educate local producers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers.

The SIMSES integrated value cycle acts as a standardized Impact Assessment Summary, mapping each SIMSES against a three-stage maturation continuum:

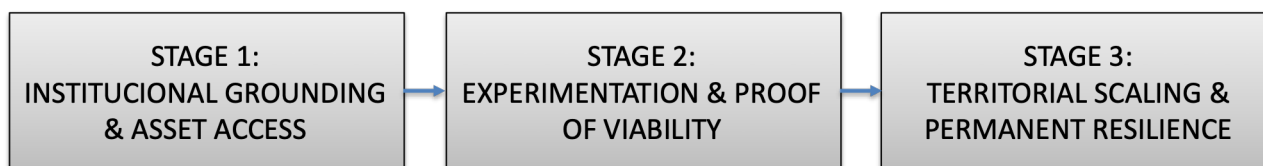


Figure 5: SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle stages

- **Stage 1 (Institutional Grounding):** How the SIMSES leverages existing assets (e.g., university research centres in SIMSES 6, LEADER/FLAG networks in SIMSES 4 and 2, technical institutes in SIMSES 1, or statutory partnerships in SIMSES 3) to operate efficiently without excessive capital expenditure.
- **Stage 2 (Experimentation & Proof of Viability):** How the Living Lab tests innovations under real-world rural conditions (e.g., safflower trial harvests in Pesaro, pre-industrial agri-food pilot plants and IoT Smart Villages in Asturias, or demand-responsive transit modelling in Scotland).
- **Stage 3 (Territorial Scaling & Resilience):** How the proven models transition into long-term operational sustainability (e.g., through CAP eco-schemes, transaction-based self-financing loops, municipal policy integration, or regional LEADER strategies).

Next, this Integrated Value Cycle framework is applied to the SIMSES. To do so, we will use the documentation generated by the SIMSES for the deliverables defined in the following table:

Table 15. Data provision for application of Integrated Value Cycle framework to SIMSES

WP	Deliverable	Title	Lead partner	Collected thematic
WP2	D2.5	Technical reports on the implementation of the project's impact monitoring and assessment, version 2	UPM	Impact assessment indicators
WP4	D4.15	Practice Abstracts – final version	PEDAL	Practices abstracts
WP4	D4.7	RURALITIES publication "Rural Thrive Panorama"	HITP	Success stories
WP7	D7.2	Network of relevant expert centers united with a Memorandum of Understanding [M51] Leader: UNIZG (P9). A digital database of identified and selected expert centers on	UNIZG	Expertise center information
WP8	D8.1	Rural scene education nexus characterisation compendium	HITP	Training center information

WP8	D8.4	RURALITIES entrepreneurship and mentorship programmes	HITP	Training center information
WP8	D8.6	RURALITIES interdisciplinary training centres	IRI	Training center information

The results can be seen in the following figure:

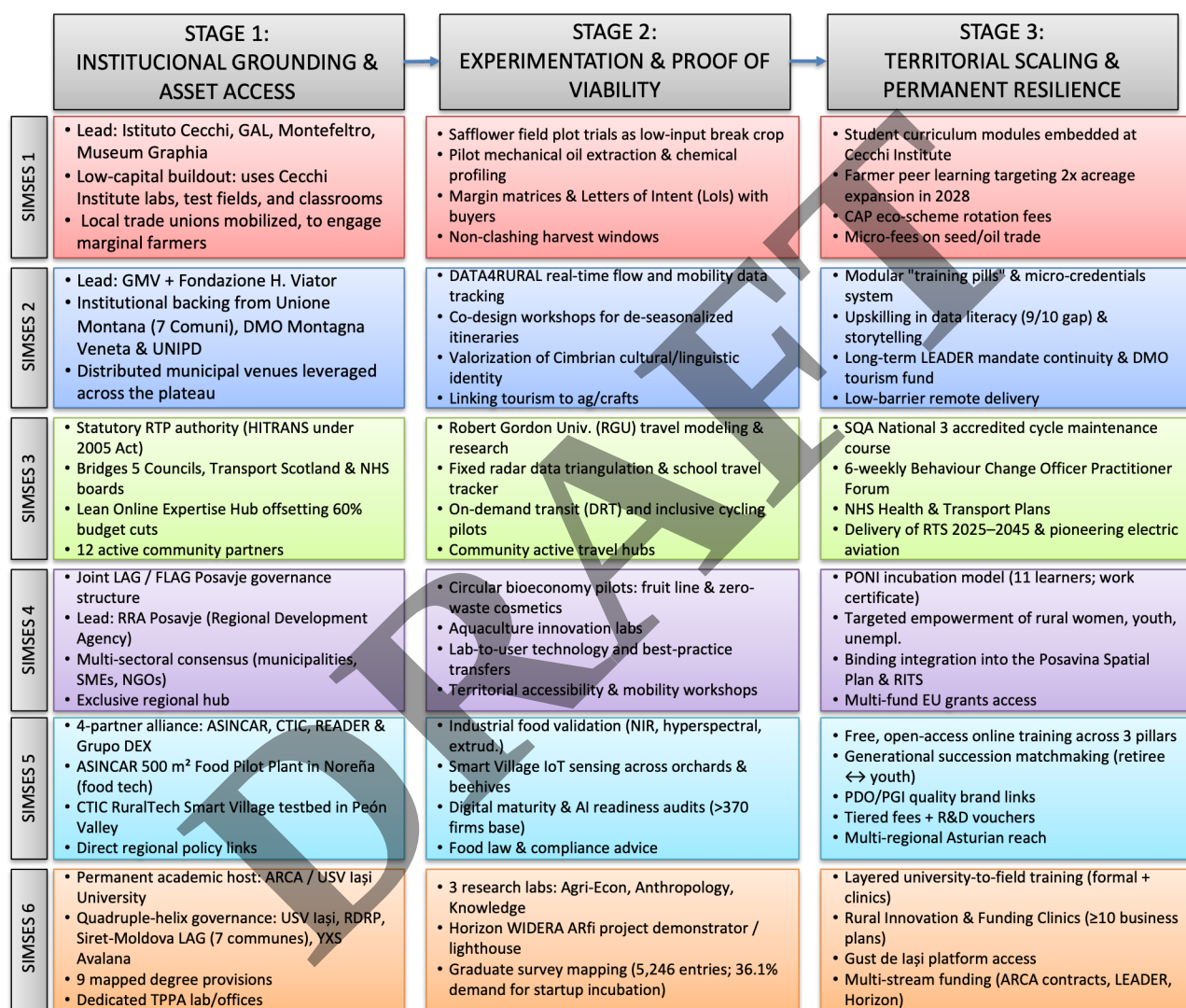


Figure 6: Results for application of Integrated Value Cycle framework to SIMSES

4.4.2 From Integrated Value cycle to SWOT analysis

The Integrated Value Cycle provides the baseline evidence required to conduct a rigorous, contextualized SWOT (**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**) analysis for each SIMSES. The SWOT structure maps directly onto the operational realities of the value loop and offers unique strategic value for the impact assessment of SIMSES by bridging the gap between immediate experiment

performance and long-term, systemic scalability. While standard impact metrics often focus strictly on quantitative outcomes, a SWOT analysis captures the nuanced qualitative realities of innovation pilots.

By mapping internal factors (such as technical robustness and partner cooperation) alongside external elements (such as regulatory barriers, market readiness, and emerging societal trends), it clarifies why certain innovations succeed or stall. This holistic approach highlights bottlenecks and hidden risks and provides opportunities for future exploitation. SWOT analysis for SIMSES considers the following dimensions:

- **Strengths (S):** Internal proficiencies identified within the value cycle, such as specialized quadruple-helix governance, pre-existing physical laboratories/pilot plants, accredited educational frameworks, and solid longitudinal progress.
- **Weaknesses (W):** Operational bottlenecks, including severe revenue funding cuts, part-time staff constraints, reliance on informal communication tools, or dependencies on rigid academic/electoral calendars.
- **Opportunities (O):** External drivers that the value cycle can leverage, such as European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) eco-schemes, post-2027 regional development funds, rising consumer demand for authentic slow tourism, or regional Smart Village strategies.
- **Threats (T):** Exogenous territorial pressures that could disrupt the cycle, including acute rural depopulation, severe demographic aging, digital access divides, complex agri-food compliance standards, and traditional cultural scepticism toward unfamiliar innovations.

The application of SWOT analysis over SIMSES 1 to SIMSES 6 can be seen in Annex 2

4.4.3 Conclusions

Using the Integrated Value Cycle as an analytical lens ensures that each SIMSES is evaluated not as an isolated experiment, but as a dynamic regional innovation engine.

The SWOT structure of Annex 2 provides an evidence-based diagnostic for each individual Living Lab (SIMSES 1 through SIMSES 6), identifying specific operational gaps, strategic differentiators, and concrete pathways to ensure their post-project sustainability within the broader Horizon RURALITIES ecosystem.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

In terms of RURALITIES project implementation and value creation, the evaluation period established by the Action/Change Model and the Half Double Methodology frameworks was the M33–M44 period. This period marked **the transition from a deployment stage to a mature implementation phase**, maintaining the adaptive management approach that has characterized RURALITIES since its inception.

The experience gained during the initial implementation cycles has highlighted the importance of preserving organizational flexibility, allowing for adjustments to activities, tools, and responsibilities based on the emerging needs of the various SIMSES (see Table 21 – Lessons learned and recommendation for next phase, D2.4), always prioritizing value creation over rigid adherence to the initial plan.

The analysis of participation indicators was updated verifying the evolution of the KPIs defined in the MEL (Monitoring Evaluation and Learning) system and assessing whether the corrective actions proposed in the first evaluation have improved those indicators that were lagging or progressing less than expected. The participation of traditionally underrepresented groups was highlighted, as well as the strengthening of collaborations with public administrations, international organizations, and other European projects.

A more detailed evaluation of the initial results was provided, now considering the consolidation of the **RURALITIES training centres**, the RURALITIES Commons 2050 framework, and the initial deployment of the activities in WP7 and WP8, together with the implementation plan of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign. Most intervention activities reported by WP leaders were on track, and pending activities are characterized with a Challenges/Risks/Opportunities/Next Steps analysis to understand limitations and identify realistic next-step implementations. Significant advancements were made towards most objectives, and in particular, Objectives 1, 2, 4.

Finally, value creation analysis shows that **SIMSES contributed substantially to emerging impacts**, in areas such as intersectoral and interregional collaboration, interdisciplinary research and innovation, regional cooperation synergies with other rural initiatives, and dialogue between policy makers and SIMSES actors. This information reflects a good actor positioning for the upcoming transition from an implementation-focused phase to one oriented toward consolidating the project's impact and preparing its legacy.

With regards to the MICS framework, the update for the M36–M48 allowed a comparison of the results obtained with the baseline established during the first evaluation. This longitudinal analysis was fundamental for identifying trends and assessing whether the actions carried out during the project's second period have contributed to strengthening the different dimensions of impact.

In addition to comparing the significance of the categories, Section 3 analysed the **evolution of the scores inside each category**, identifying the dimensions where the project has made the most progress and those that continue to require specific improvement actions. **Special improvements were detected in governance, financial sustainability, and environmental footprint**, proving the consolidation of RURALITIES activities during this evaluation period towards citizen participation, knowledge transfer, influence on public policies, and the strengthening of rural innovation networks.

The next and last impact assessment will incorporate a more detailed analysis of the recommendations generated during the first and second evaluations, assessing the extent to which these recommendations have been implemented by the consortium and their effect on the project's progress. This follow-up allows the evaluation process to become a true cycle of continuous improvement.

In terms of 2ES monitoring, D2.5 has focused on consolidating the 2ES system as a regular project monitoring tool. **The results of the third assessment period** (P3, corresponding to the impact assessment overview for third to sixth quarters, between August 2025 and July 2026, both included) **have been presented and compared with those obtained during the first and second assessment periods** (P1 and P2) to identify trends and analyze the progress made in the environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

The implementation of the 2ES Trilemma during this third assessment period (P3, M36–M48) demonstrated substantial operational maturation and an accelerated execution rhythm across the consortium. As detailed in Section 4.2 and Annex 1, cumulative project activities rose sharply from 133 in Period 2 to 238 in Period 3, while total recorded participation expanded nearly threefold, surpassing 10,300 attendees. Methodologically, the **Living Labs achieved a decisive pivot away from passive dissemination towards participatory and experiential co-creation**. Interactive workshops and collaborative brainstorming sessions increased significantly, driving a corresponding rise in documented process improvements and field-based experiments, most notably within the transport testbeds of the Highlands and Islands and the agricultural trials of Posavje and Pesaro-Urbino.

Strategic alignment with European policy objectives and environmental priorities also advanced considerably. As evaluated in Section 4.3, **high-relevance contributions to the Expected Outcome Topics (EOTs) and Expected Impact Destinations (EIDs) gained measurable momentum**, breaking out of earlier reporting plateaus. This breakthrough was particularly visible in policy-related achievements, led by the Posavje Living Lab's formal integration into regional spatial and transport planning strategies. Environmentally, the SIMSES activities displayed strong territorial specialization: the Scottish Highlands and Islands dedicated their sustainability actions exclusively to decarbonizing rural mobility, while Asturias, Posavje, Pesaro-Urbino, and Iași anchored their contributions in sustainable farming practices, circular bioeconomy initiatives, and natural resource conservation.

In the economic and social dimensions, the data gathered in Annex 1 confirms that **the SIMSES are actively converting experimental concepts into viable, inclusive territorial solutions**. Entrepreneurial mobilization increased by 74%, engaging 944 entrepreneurs project-wide and doubling the number of identified investment targets. This commercial de-risking was bolstered by the initial involvement of angel investors across multiple regions and the structured onboarding of producers into emerging value chains. Concurrently, the social dimension exhibited notable demographic deepening, with women's participation more than doubling to over 1,180 attendees and youth involvement exceeding 1,140 participants through tailored vocational coursework and incubation programs, despite ongoing data-accounting limitations identified in Iași.

Finally, Section 4.4 and Annex 2 operationalized the SIMSES Integrated Value Cycle, establishing an impact assessment framework that structures each living lab's evolution across three sequential stages: Institutional Grounding and Asset Access, Experimentation and Proof of Viability, and Territorial Scaling and Permanent Resilience. **This closed-loop model successfully bridged quantitative activity metrics with the qualitative operational realities of the pilot territories**. In doing so, it provided the empirical baseline for the comprehensive SWOT diagnostics detailed in Annex 2, identifying critical internal bottlenecks—such as revenue funding constraints and part-time staff limits—while charting viable pathways for post-project sustainability through CAP eco-schemes, transaction-based self-financing loops, and multi-fund regional anchoring.

As future work, the final evaluation report should **strengthen the integration of the 2ES system with the other evaluation methodologies** developed in WP2. Combining information from implementation monitoring (Half-Double), citizen science evaluation (MICS), and the multi-layered indicator system will provide a more comprehensive view of project performance, facilitating an

integrated evaluation that links the progress of activities, value creation, and the impacts achieved across 2ES pillars.

DRAFT

6 ANNEXES

6.1 Annex 1 – impact assessment statistical report of activity log (third assessment period, M36-M48)

This report analyses the activities carried out by SIMSES from 1st August 2025 to 31st July 2026, accumulating the impact of results considering also previous values from first and second impact assessments. The periods evaluated through the three impact assessments are referred to in this section as P1, P2, and P3 for the sake of clarity.

We divide the annex into the categories defined in the 2ES monitoring tool: General information about the activity (Type of result, Type of activity, Attendants), Economic dimension (involved entrepreneurs, companies/startups engaged, potential targets for investment), Social dimension, Environment dimension.

As overall comments about the activity dynamics, project activities grew from 70 in P1 to 133 in P2, reaching 238 total activities in P3 (+105 new activities added between August 2025 and September 2026). Regarding the provision of activity evidence, evidence increased from 85 in P2 to 139 in P3 (+54 new pieces of evidence).

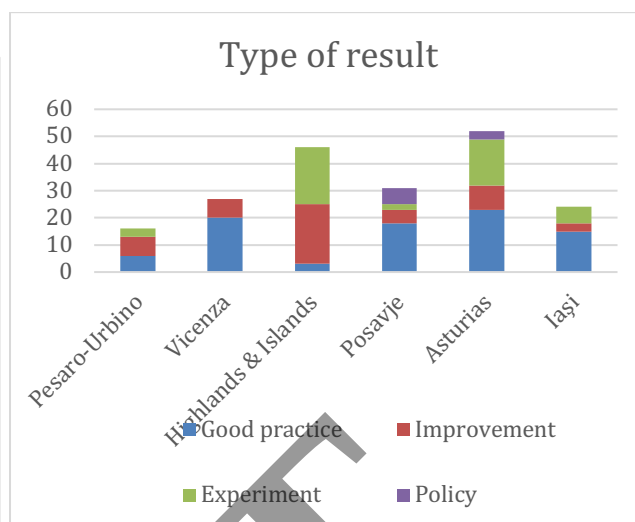
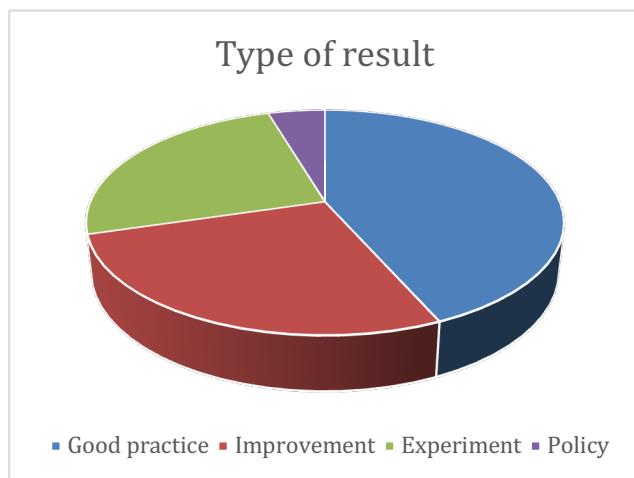
It is worth highlighting the territorial momentum particularising in SIMSES. Highlands & Islands experienced the fastest operational acceleration, surging from 17 to 50 activities (+33). Posavje demonstrated an exponential scaling, leaping from just 6 activities in Period 2 to 32 activities in P3 (+26), accompanied by an increase in evidence from 4 to 28. Asturias and Vicenza maintained their roles as the overall activity leaders, reaching 52 and 66 total activities, respectively.

6.1.1 General information

Regarding general information, we analysed the most statistically relevant information, that is, numerical and qualitative information quantified by level. We excluded other parameters that cannot be analysed statistically, such as names and descriptions of activities, and others that do not contribute significance to the study, such as the partners involved or the specific dates of each activity, as we were already conducting an analysis based on time periods. We will therefore consider the type of result, type of activity, and number of attendants.

6.1.1.1 Type of result

The types of results defined in the framework are *good practice*, *improvement*, *experiment*, and *policy*. The following graphs show the distribution of results across these four types, as well as a cumulative list of activity log events classified by these types and by SIMSES.



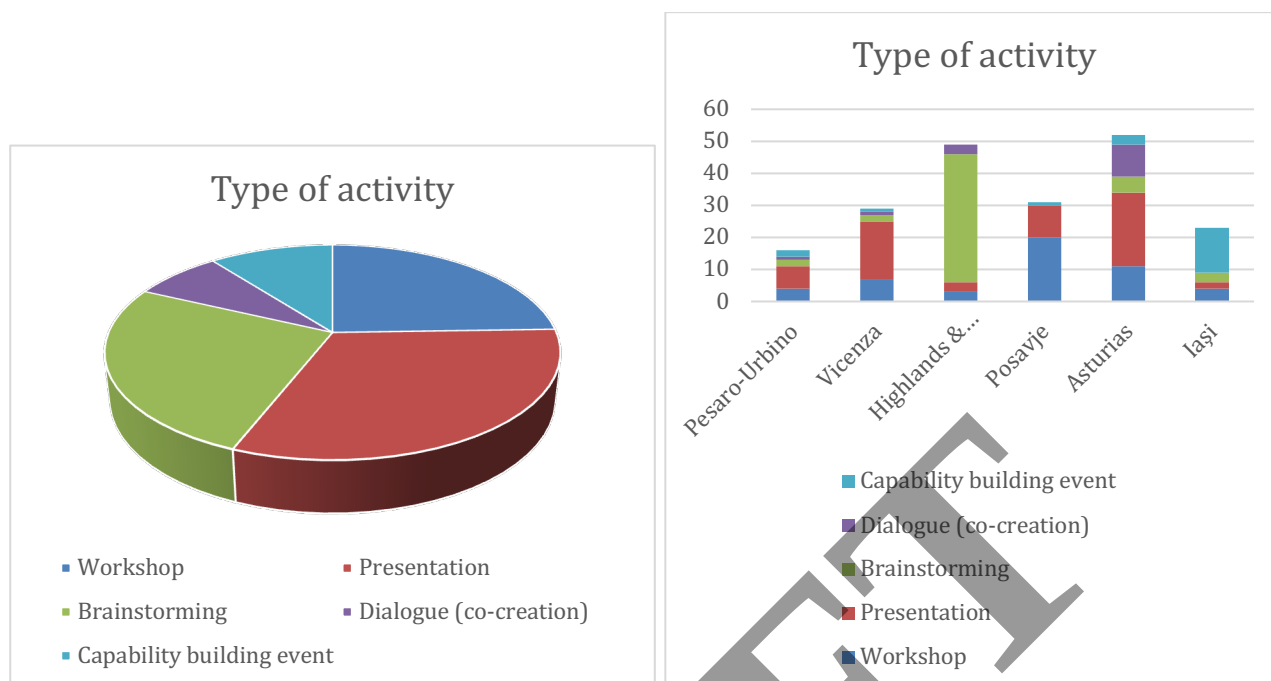
As can be seen in these figures, most contributions made within the framework of SIMSES have been the proposal and replication of good practices and improvements, although there has also been a fair number of experiments. Policy-based results are the ones more difficult to achieve due to the difficulties of frequent participation of public authorities. In the graph on the right, we can see that the two SIMSES with the most activity have been Highlands & Islands and Asturias, where the implementation of experiments has predominated. Highlands & Islands have been focusing mainly on improvements in second period and third periods.

Comparing from previous evaluation, we can detect a shift from exploration to maturation. While Period 1 and Period 2 were heavily dominated by the identification of *Good Practices*, Period 3 marks a transition toward testing, optimization, and institutionalization.

- **Good Practices:** Grew from 31 (P1) → 50 (P2) → 85 (P3) (+35 in P3). Posavje drove much of this growth, jumping from 3 to 18 good practices.
- **Improvements:** More than doubled from 26 in P2 to 53 in P3 (+27). Highlands & Islands saw the largest surge, rising from 8 to 22 improvements, reflecting a strong focus on refining rural transit and active mobility solutions.
- **Experiments:** Doubled from 24 in P2 to 49 in P3 (+25). This was driven primarily by Highlands & Islands (increasing from 5 to 21 experiments) and Pesaro-Urbino (recording its first 3 field experiments with safflower cultivation).
- **Policy:** Stagnant at 4 across both P1 and P2, policy results more than doubled to 9 in P3. Posavje was the primary driver of this breakthrough, contributing 6 of the 9 project-wide policy results through its formal integration into the *Posavina Regional Spatial Plan* and the *Regional Integrated Transport Strategy*.

6.1.1.2 Type of activity

The activities recorded in the activity log have been classified according to their type, including workshops, presentations, brainstorming sessions, dialogue sessions, and capability building. The following graphs show the distribution of activities by type, as well as a cumulative list of activity log events classified by these types and by SIMSES.



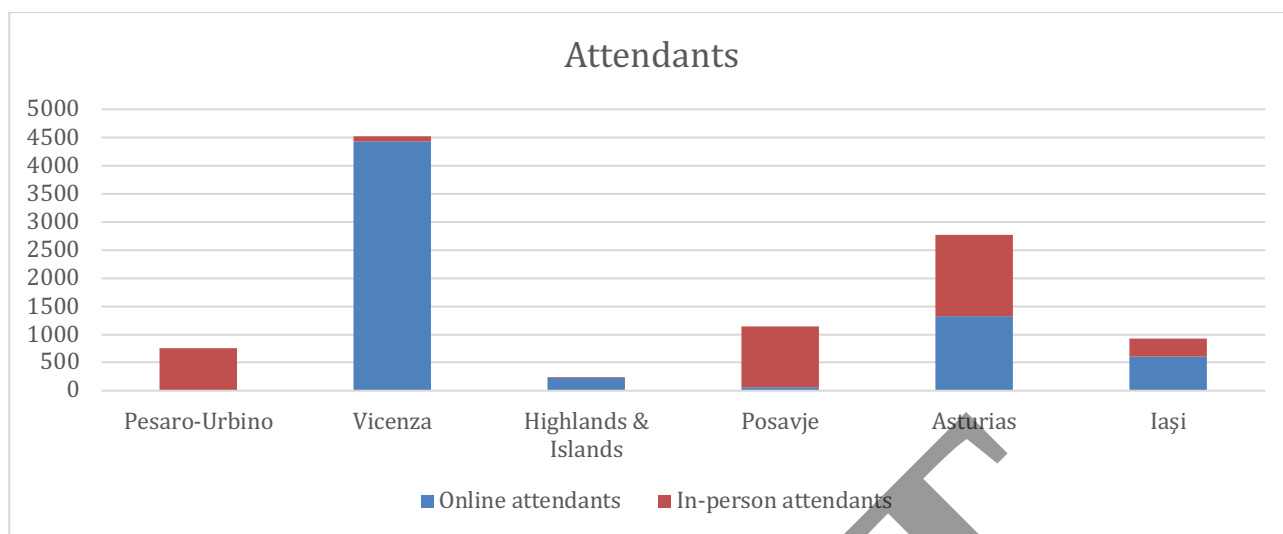
As can be seen in these figures, most contributions (approximately 40%) within the framework of the SIMSES were presentations, highlighting workshops and brainstorming sessions in the second and third places. In the graph on the right, we can see that the two SIMSES with the most activities were Highlands and Islands and Asturias, where brainstorming sessions and presentations predominated respectively.

Comparing to previous periods, in P1 and P2, presentations made up approximately 45–50% of all events. In P3, participatory and applied co-working formats grew substantially:

- **Workshops:** Surged from 10 (P1) → 21 (P2) → 49 (P3) (+28 new workshops). Posavje accounted for the largest individual share, delivering 20 workshops (up from 4 in P2).
- **Brainstorming Sessions:** Jumped from 12 (P1) to 20 (P2), and to 52 in P3 (+32). This growth was heavily concentrated in Highlands & Islands, which logged 40 brainstorming sessions to coordinate community mobility initiatives.
- **Dialogue / Co-creation:** More than doubled from 7 in P2 to 15 in P3, with Asturias leading co-creation efforts (10 total sessions).
- **Presentations:** Increased from 43 in P2 to 63 in P3, showing continued dissemination across all territories.
- **Capability Building Events:** Rose modestly from 17 in P2 to 21 in P3, with Iași maintaining the lead with 14 dedicated events.

6.1.1.3 Attendants

In this section, we collect the number of participants in meetings held, or the number of visitors in the case of a presentation at an event. We divide the number between in-person and online for more detailed analysis.

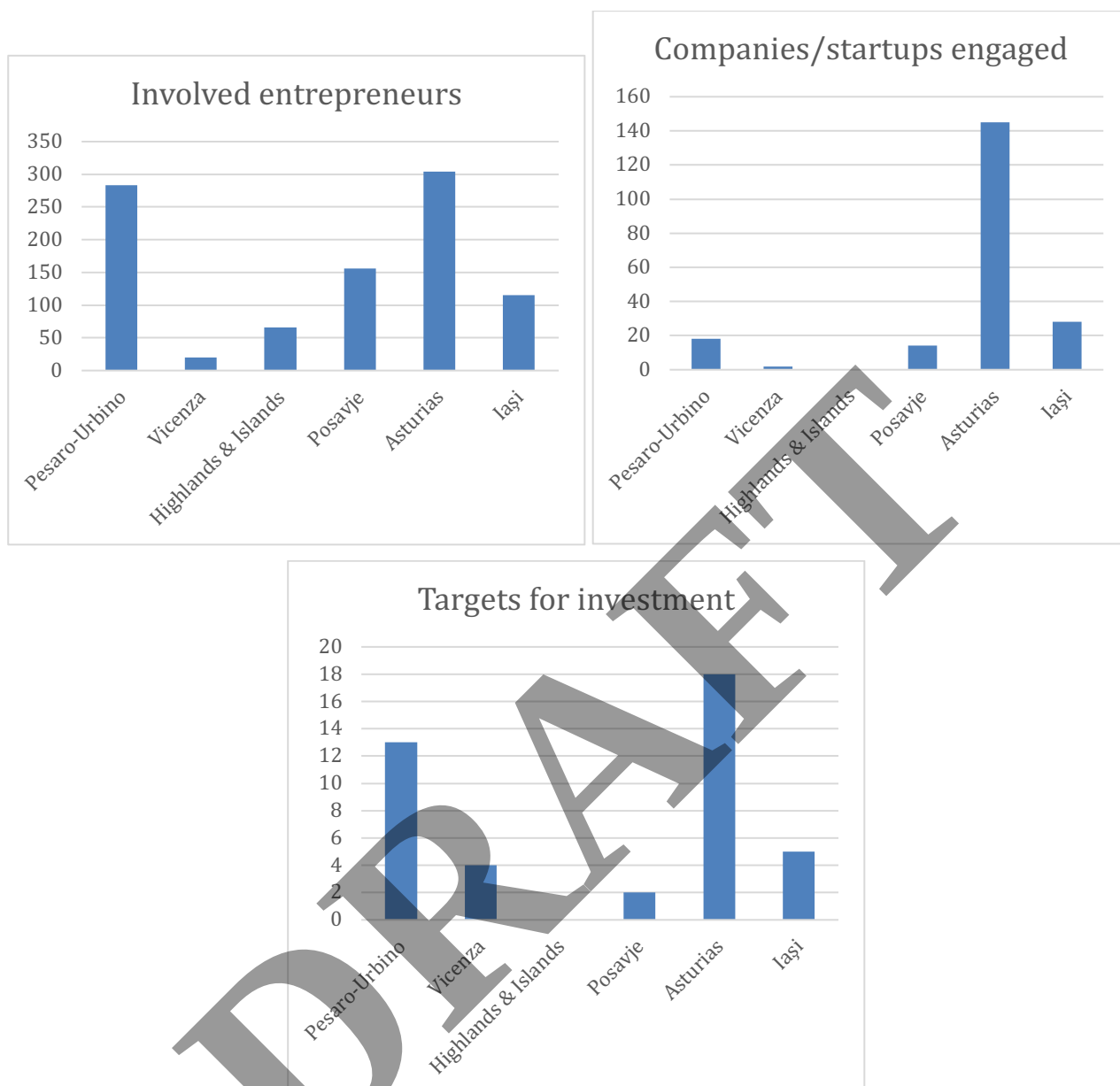


The graph above shows a significant variation in the data. Vicenza is a notable example, where online visitors to social media posts were counted as attendants, which, as can be seen, generated significant impact. It's worth noting that Pesaro-Urbino, Posavje, Asturias, and Iași recorded a significant cumulative number of in-person attendants.

Comparing to previous assessment periods, total recorded attendance nearly tripled in Period 3, rising from 2,607 (P1) → 3,778 (P2) → 10,373 total attendants in Period 3 (+6,595 attendees). In terms of online attendant, Vicenza remained the dominant online contributor, expanding from 1,750 to 4,435 online attendants (largely driven by digital media dissemination). Asturias also showed a dramatic online expansion, jumping from 129 in P2 to 1,319 online attendants in Period 3. In-Person Attendants also rose significantly from 1,365 in P2 to 3,717 in Period 3 (+2,352 in-person participants). Asturias led overall with 1,454 in-person participants (+830), followed by Posavje, which surged from 163 to 1,086 in-person attendees, and Pesaro-Urbino, which rose from 187 to 756 in-person participants.

6.1.2 Economic dimension

In this dimension, we highlight the efforts of participating SIMSES to generate an economic impact through their activities. To this end, we measure the orientation of activities according to the target group, distinguishing between the number of entrepreneurs and companies/startups involved. We also assess whether, in the opinion of those organizing the activity, a situation has arisen that could be profitable through investment or fundraising from public, private, or mixed sources.

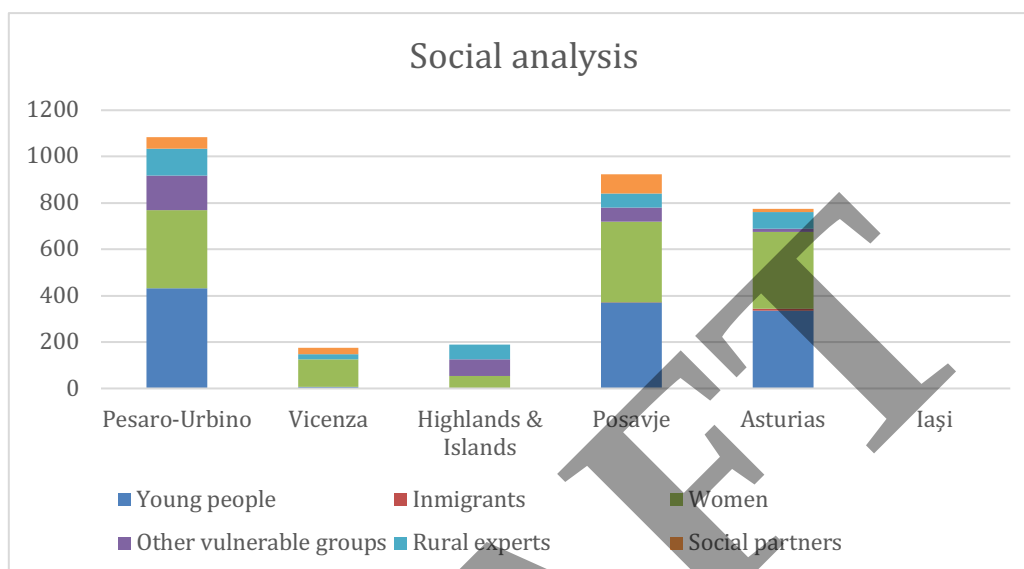


The third assessment demonstrates a clear shift toward concrete commercial mobilization, investor engagement, and enterprise incubation. SIMSES in Pesaro-Urbino, Asturias and Iași have specifically focused some of their activities on engaging entrepreneurs and startups, and numbers in this third assessment period greatly increased. Pesaro-Urbino recorded the most dramatic proportional surge, jumping from 50 in P2 to 283 entrepreneurs in P3 (+233), reflecting the onboarding of local farmers into the safflower supply chain. Asturias continued to engage the largest total volume of entrepreneurs (304, up from 279), while Posavje more than doubled its entrepreneurial outreach through its PONI incubation activities (156, up from 67). Posavje logged 20 angel investors for the first time, joining Pesaro-Urbino (23) and Asturias (17).

Regarding investment targets, almost all SIMSES have noted the funding potential of some of their activities, and potential targets for investment have increased in this third assessment period. They nearly doubled from 23 in P2 to 42 in Period 3. Asturias led with 18 identified targets, followed by Pesaro-Urbino with 13 targets (+8 in P3), demonstrating a growing capacity to turn Living Lab activities into bankable business cases.

6.1.3 Social dimension

The social dimension considers the participation of groups that stand out either because they are considered a minority or vulnerable group (Young people, immigrants, others) or because they reach interesting audiences from the point of view of rural development, such as rural experts or social partners.



As can be seen, Pesaro-Urbino, Posavje and Asturias maintained a clear inclusive approach, primarily targeting women and young people, although also considering other vulnerable and key groups such as Rural Experts. Iași SIMSES did not account for the types of audiences attending its activities and did not provide data on this matter.

Women and young people participation nearly doubled from previous assessment period. A special focus on difficult achievements such as the increase in the number of immigrant engagement (grew from 3 to 10, predominantly in Asturias) and other vulnerable groups, which grew substantially in Pesaro-Urbino (150), Highlands & Islands (73, via inclusive cycling), and Posavje (60).

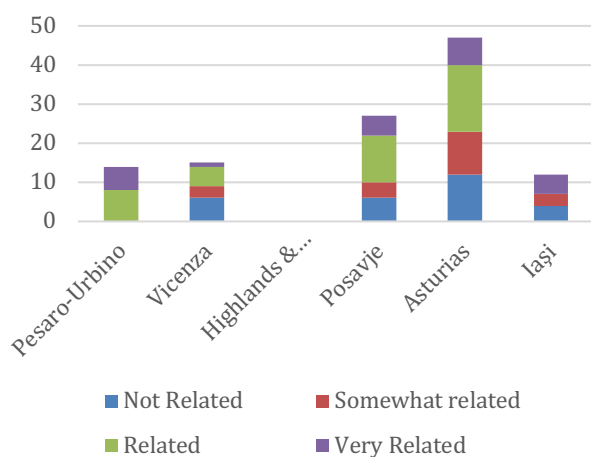
Rural experts engaged more than doubled from 147 in P2 to 335 in Period 3. Also, social partners expanded from 78 in P2 to 173 in Period 3, driven by Posavje (82) and Pesaro-Urbino (49).

6.1.4 Environment dimension

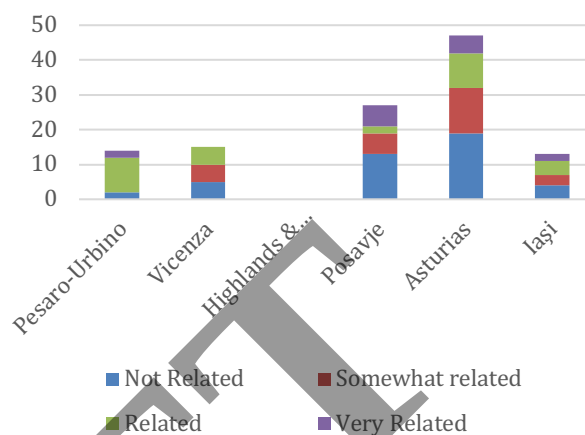
6.1.4.1 Total activities by SIMSES and level of relevance

In this analysis, we consider the contribution of each SIMSES in terms of the number of activities from the activity log, counting only those that have specified some level of contribution to the questions of the environment dimension.

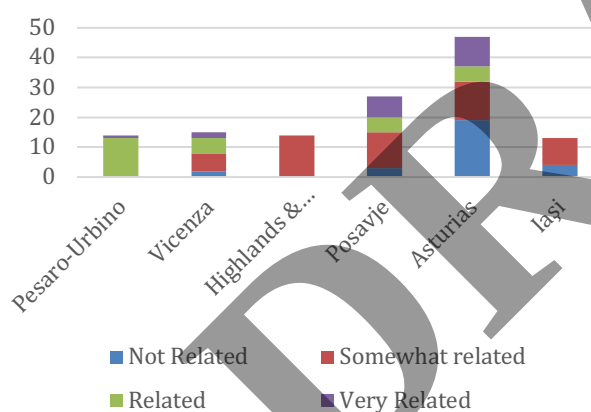
To what degree this activity is related to sustainable farming and agri-food?



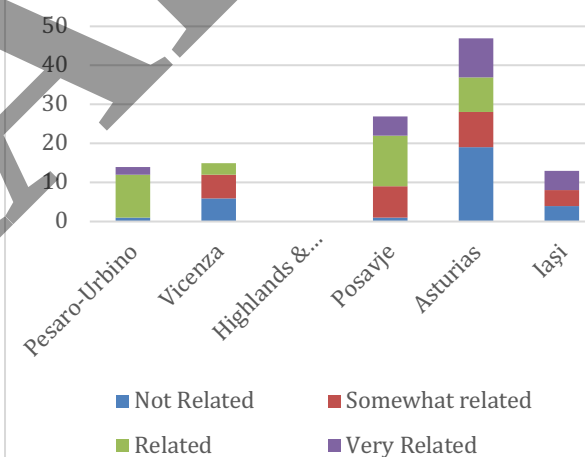
To what degree is related to the creation/improvement of policies?

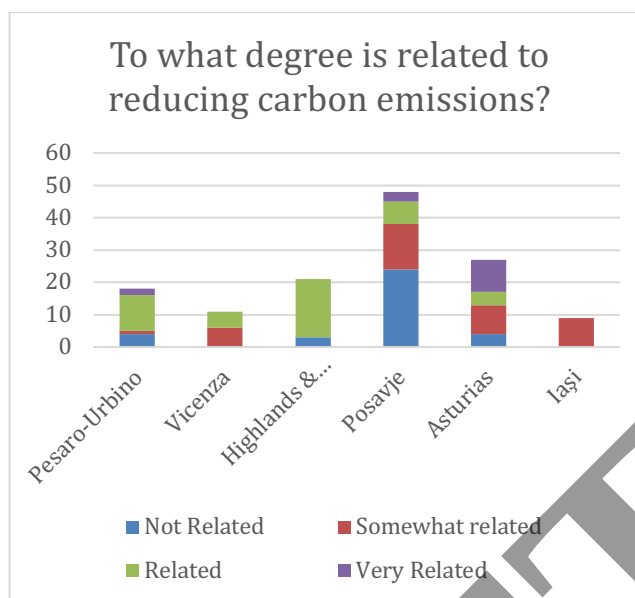


To what degree is related to the preservation of natural spaces?



To what degree is related to enhancing circularity?

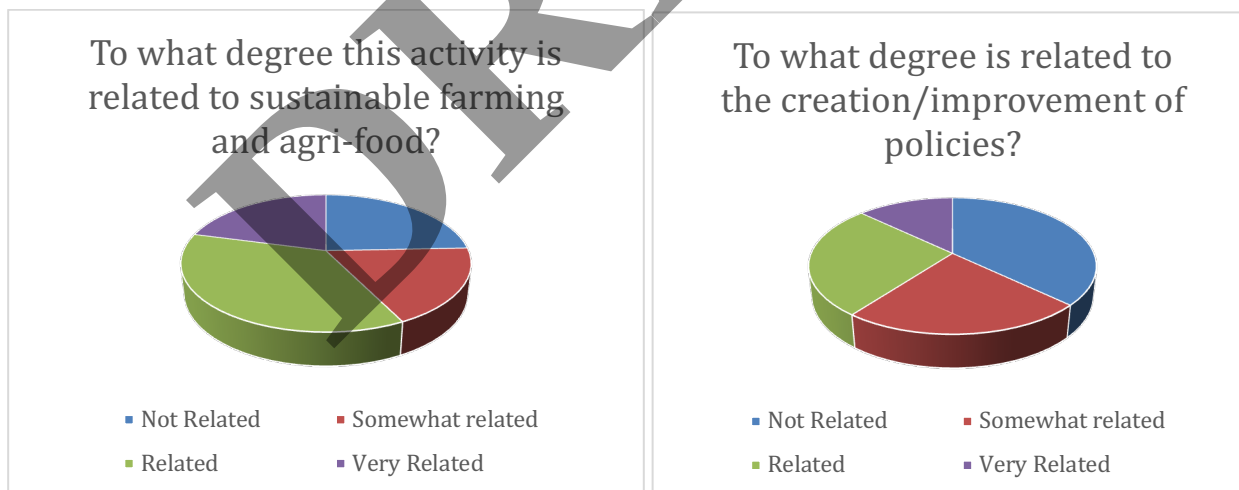




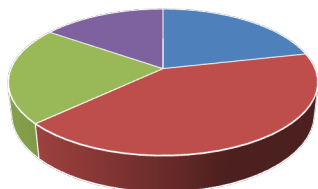
In conclusion, regarding the environment dimension, all SIMSES contributed to most questions. This is especially true for questions related to sustainable farming and circularity, which are the tasks most aligned with SIMSES motivation. UK Highlands & Islands' activities, related to sustainability, focus almost solely on the goal of reducing carbon emissions, giving preservation of natural spaces a minor priority.

6.1.4.2 Activities accumulated by all SIMSES classified by impact on the guiding questions

In this analysis, we consider the total number of activities entered by participants in the activity log, without considering the SIMSES that generated it. The objective is to see, in a more simplified way, the level of relevance of the activities produced with respect to the guiding question.

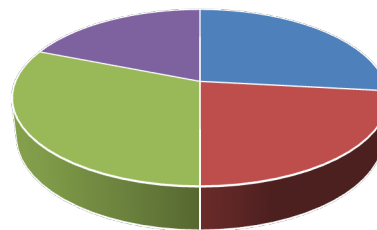


To what degree is related to the preservation of natural spaces?



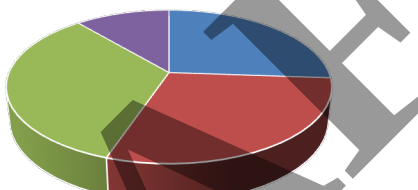
■ Not Related ■ Somewhat related
■ Related ■ Very Related

To what degree is related to enhancing circularity?



■ Not Related ■ Somewhat related
■ Related ■ Very Related

To what degree is related to reducing carbon emissions?



■ Not Related ■ Somewhat related
■ Related ■ Very Related

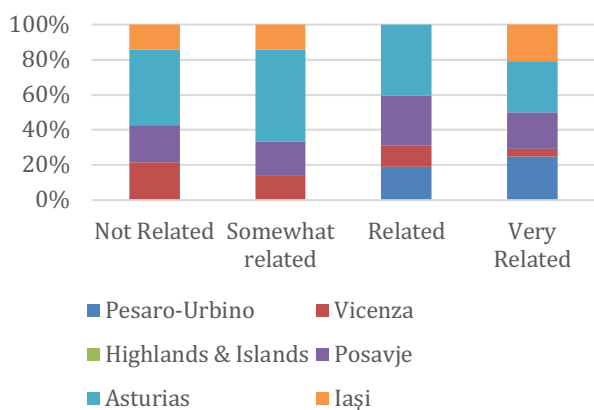
Considering the sum of the very related and related activities, we see that activities that generate an impact on improving sustainable farming or agrifood predominate, followed by those that enhance circularity and reduce carbon emissions. Considering this last guiding question (reduce carbon emissions), Highlands & Islands confirmed its environmental profile: all its sustainability-oriented activities are directed exclusively toward reducing emissions through rural transit, active travel, and DRT (18 Related activities, up from 4 in P2). Other major contributors included Pesaro-Urbino (11 Related, 2 Very Related), Asturias (9 Related, 10 Very Related), and Posavje (7 Related, 3 Very Related).

One challenge maintained from previous assessment periods is providing activities aligned with or contributing to rural-related policies, a particularly challenging sector given the segmentation of policies in the project's participating territories and the difficulty in influencing them. Anyway, High-relevance policy activities grew from 10 (P1) to 21 (P2) and finally, to 46 in Period 3 (31 Related, 15 Very Related). Key Contributors were Posavje (6 Related, 6 Very Related), Asturias (10 Related, 5 Very Related), Pesaro-Urbino (10 Related, 2 Very Related), and Vicenza (5 Related).

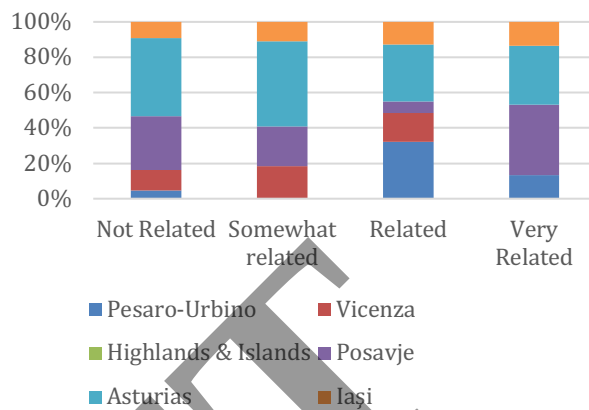
6.1.4.3 Percentage of activities generating impact by SIMSES

In this final analysis, we normalized the number of activities and analyzed the percentage of participation of each SIMSES in the cumulative impact value for each guiding question.

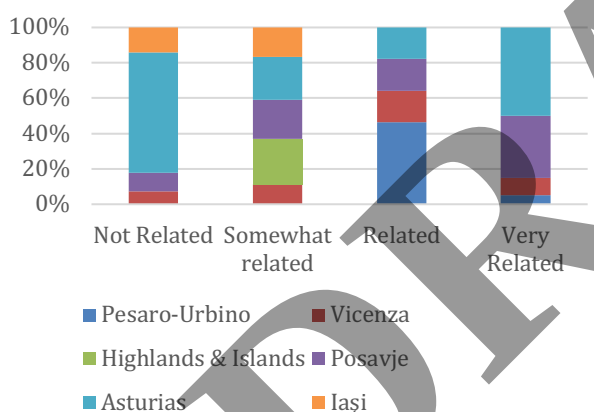
To what degree this activity is related to sustainable farming and agri-food?



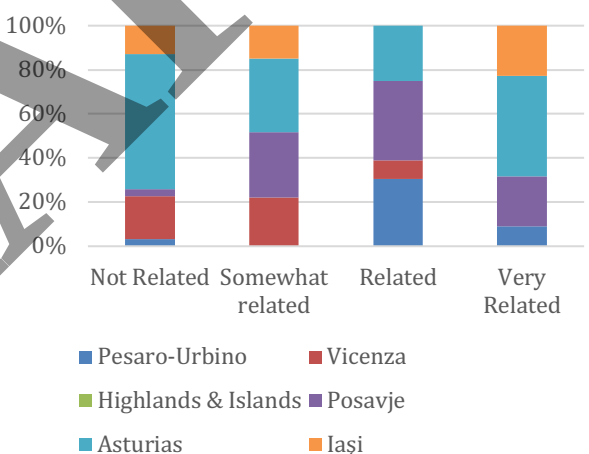
To what degree is related to the creation/improvement of policies?

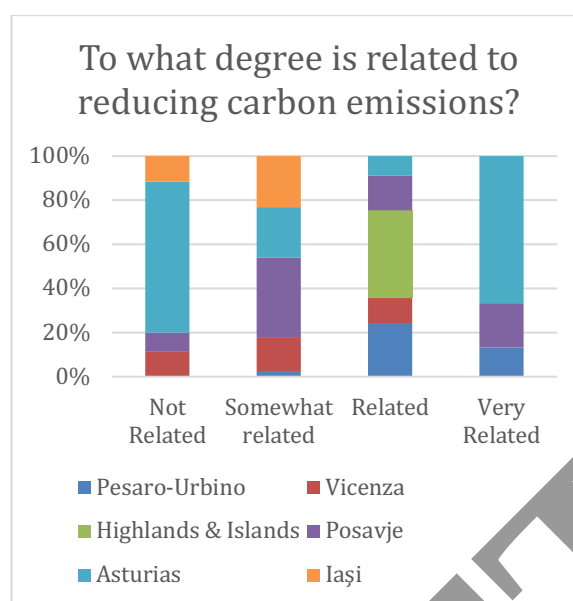


To what degree is related to the preservation of natural spaces?



To what degree is related to enhancing circularity?





In conclusion to this latest analysis for the third assessment period, we see that the SIMSES of Asturias and Posavje provide a greater degree of involvement in sustainable farming and enhancing circularity activities.

In terms of sustainable farming, key contributors were Asturias (17 Related, 7 Very Related), Posavje (12 Related, 5 Very Related), Pesaro-Urbino (8 Related, 6 Very Related), and Iași (5 Very Related). In terms of enhancing circularity, High-relevance circularity activities expanded up to 58 in this P3. Posavje was the project benchmark with 13 Related and 5 Very Related activities (driven by fruit processing and zero-waste pilots), followed by Asturias (9 Related, 10 Very Related) and Pesaro-Urbino (11 Related, 2 Very Related).

6.1.5 Summary of Period 3 strategic milestones

The third assessment period marks a decisive turning point in the evolution of the SIMSES Living Labs, signifying their transition from initial territorial exploration into fully operationalized, mature innovation engines. This phase is characterized above all by a dramatic operational scaling, evidenced by a near-doubling of cumulative activities to 238 and an unprecedented expansion in engagement that saw total attendance surpass 10,000 participants. Rather than relying solely on wide-reaching digital campaigns—which nevertheless achieved substantial visibility in regions like Vicenza and Asturias—this period achieved a profound local grounding, with in-person attendance surging across territories such as Asturias, Posavje, and Pesaro-Urbino, confirming that rural communities are actively taking ownership of the initiative.

Alongside this volumetric growth, the project underwent a significant methodological shift. The early phases, which were primarily focused on passive dissemination and informative presentations, gave way to dynamic, participatory formats. Interactive workshops more than doubled, while collaborative brainstorming and co-creation sessions expanded rapidly across several territories, most notably in the Scottish Highlands and Islands and the Posavje region. This operational shift directly translated into more tangible results: the identification of static good practices was increasingly superseded by concrete process improvements and live field experimentation, demonstrating that the Living Labs are actively testing and refining solutions under real-world rural conditions.

A major milestone of this reporting cycle was the breakthrough achieved in policy integration, which was not significant enough in the previous assessment period. Breaking out of this earlier inertia, the living labs successfully more than doubled their recorded policy contributions. This achievement was led (among others) by the Posavje Living Lab, which established a benchmark for the entire project by embedding participatory evidence and rural mobility priorities directly into statutory governance frameworks, including the Draft Regional Spatial Plan of Posavina and the Regional Integrated Transport Strategy.

The economic dimension also gained substantial traction, moving from theoretical business models to measurable market mobilization and investment readiness. Entrepreneurial participation surged by nearly three-quarters, approaching 1,000 involved entrepreneurs project-wide. This was propelled by significant onboarding breakthroughs, such as Pesaro-Urbino's rapid contracting of local farmers into the emerging safflower value chain and Posavje's intensive business acceleration cohorts. Furthermore, the identification of viable investment targets nearly doubled, while angel investor engagement expanded into new territories, validating the capacity of the Living Labs to de-risk rural ventures and attract capital.

Finally, this operational and economic maturation was anchored in a deepening of social inclusivity and environmental relevance. The third period achieved a major demographic milestone as women's participation more than doubled, surpassing 1,100 attendees, while youth engagement crossed a similar threshold through vocational curriculum integration and targeted rural entrepreneurship programs. Concurrently, environmental actions shifted decisively toward verified high-relevance impact. The living labs demonstrated clear, place-based ecological specialization, ranging from circular food-processing and zero-waste initiatives in Posavje and Asturias, to agro-biodiversity diversification in Pesaro-Urbino, and an exclusive, highly disciplined focus on decarbonizing rural mobility and active transit in the Highlands and Islands.

6.2 Annex 2: Detailed SWOT analysis of RURALITIES SIMSES

6.2.1 SIMSES 1 (Pesaro-Urbino, Italy)

6.2.1.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Governance & Institutional Anchoring:

- **Tripartite Governance with Clear Specialization:** Strong territorial alliance where *Istituto Agrario Antonio Cecchi* leads agronomy and trial fields, *Museum Graphia / La Corte della Miniera* manages processing and downstream commercialization, and *GAL Montefeltro* coordinates territorial data and policy alignment.
- **Measurable Assessment Turnaround:** Overcame early delays to achieve documented progress in the 2nd assessment across actor engagement, landscape characterization, and local funding access.

Infrastructure & Agronomic Alignment:

- **Low Capital Overhead:** Direct access to existing laboratories, conference facilities, and experimental field plots at the Cecchi Institute (while Museum Graphia and La Corte della Miniera provide additional spaces for education, workshops, meetings, communication and experiential activities), without requiring new infrastructure investment.

- **Operational Calendar Compatibility:** Safflower harvesting occurs without overlapping with peak labour/machinery cycles of traditional local crops (durum wheat and alfalfa). Innovation is integrated into existing agricultural practices.

Living Lab & Educational Integration:

- **Institutional Curriculum Integration:** Formal embedding of specialized technical datasheets into the 3rd and 4th-year vocational curricula at Istituto Cecchi to build long-term generational capacity.
- **Integrated Living Lab Sandbox:** Hands-on learning model directly tracking the natural 2027 phenological cycle, turning field trials (sowing, August harvest, September extraction) into live training sessions for students and farmers. The experience can be translated into an educational model capable of being adapted to other rural territories and other value chains.
- **Hybrid, Accessible Delivery:** Combined use of 4 free, mobile-friendly digital workshops and 2 in-person milestone seminars, bypassing travel and financial barriers for rural producers.

6.2.1.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Institutional and Human Capital Limitations:

- **Financial Constraints and Shared Personnel:** The reliance on non-dedicated capital and part-time human resources creates administrative bandwidth issues, potentially leading to coordination challenges during network expansion.
- **Mentorship and Coaching Capacity:** Specialized technical guidance is provided by institutional personnel without additional remuneration, which may impede the scalability of personalized advisory services.

Structural and Value Chain Discontinuities:

- **Lack of Primary Logistics:** The regional absence of an established safflower processing network introduces significant uncertainty concerning extraction protocols, agricultural yields, and biochemical standardization.
- **Execution and Delivery Stagnation:** Progress in knowledge transfer shifted to a stable state in the recent evaluation, indicating difficulties in transitioning from conceptual discussion to practical application. This can be reduced by increasing the number of visible, measurable and time-bound actions.

Digital Infrastructure and Volumetric Constraints:

- **Non-Integrated Communication Systems:** Utilization of rudimentary digital channels like electronic mail or messaging platforms hinders the deployment of a unified pedagogical or data-sharing ecosystem.
- **Insufficient Tonnage for Economic Forecasting:** The restricted scale of pilot cultivation areas complicates the formulation of robust, industrial-grade commercial models for prospective large-scale off-takers. Current experimental phase must shift to model validation, expanded production and commercial value proposition.

6.2.1.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Policy & Project Frameworks:

- **European CAP Eco-Schemes:** Recognition of Safflower as a sustainable renewal crop (*coltura da rinnovo*) facilitates farmer access to green premiums and rotation subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy.

- **Horizon RURALITIES Ecosystem:** Integration within the *Rural Development and Research Platform (RDRP)* enables international benchmarking and the replication of methodological tools.

Market & Value Chain Potential:

- **First-Mover Regional Advantage:** Absence of competing entities grants SIMSES 1 an exclusive leadership position in driving regional crop diversification.
- **Multi-Tier Circular Bioeconomy:** Development of cascading value streams ranging from seed commerce to high-end industrial applications in pharmacology and cosmetics.
- **Self-Sustaining Financial Model:** Implementation of transaction-based micro-contributions ensures long-term viability and independence from external public funding.

Social & Generational Drivers:

- **Generational Renewal:** Cultivating specialized awareness (*coscienza del cartamo*) secures a technically proficient workforce for future rural development.
- **Peer-to-Peer Mobilization (*Passaparola*):** Engaging trade unions (*organizzazioni sindacali*) and pioneer cultivators provides visible proof of economic benefits to local stakeholders. *Museum Graphia* can contribute here by transforming technical experiences into visual, narrative and educational communication, making innovation easier to understand and share.

6.2.1.4 THREATS (T)

Socio-Economic & Territorial Challenges:

- **Demographic Decline & Fiscal Pressure:** Marked by rural depopulation, diminishing returns from traditional grain cultivation, and extreme sensitivity to global commodity market fluctuations.
- **Entrenched Cultural Mindset Barriers:** High levels of local scepticism and the absence of historical precedent for alternative crops induce significant aversion to innovation.

Market & Commercial Hazards:

- **Prerequisite for Financial Guarantees:** Cautious agricultural actors require certified profit security and binding purchase agreements prior to modifying existing land-use strategies.
- **Downstream Off-Take Impediments:** Exploitation potential is contingent upon post-harvest biochemical results; delayed or inadequate data may obstruct procurement agreements with industry partners.

Agronomic & Operational Vulnerabilities:

- **Environmental & Biological Risks:** Threats such as poor germination, extreme weather, or pest pressure on trial sites could damage trust during regional field trials.
- **Harvest-Period Scheduling Conflicts:** Peak agricultural labour demands during late summer months may reduce participation in technical training sessions if not meticulously coordinated. This requires the educational programme to be adapted to the agricultural calendar,

6.2.2 SIMSES 2 (Vicenza, Italy)

6.2.2.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Governance & Multi-Stakeholder Ecosystem:

- **Soft, Facilitative Governance Model:** Managed by GAL Montagna Vicentina (GMV) utilizing its established local authority, in tandem with Fondazione Homo Viator (FHV) which contributes niche cultural and heritage tourism competency.
- **Broad Institutional & Academic Backing:** Formal collaborative ties with the *Unione Montana Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni*, *DMO Montagna Veneta*, University of Padua (UNIPD), *ITS Academy Turismo Veneto*, and various secondary vocational schools including *I.I.S. Rigoni Stern* and *Marzotto-Luzzati*.
- **Consistent Project Progress:** Realized steady implementation *Progress* across the quintet of project goals during evaluation cycles, evidenced by robust actor participation via bulletins and high-level forums.

Thematic Focus & Living Lab Integration:

- **Integrated Slow Tourism & Circular Strategy:** Significant emphasis on addressing seasonal fluctuations, diversifying traveler paths to peripheral hamlets, preserving Cimbrian heritage, and anchoring tourism in regional agrarian supply chains.
- **Data-Driven Training Innovation:** Formulation of modular educational units and certifications informed by empirical territorial metrics from the *DATA4RURAL* Living Lab workstream.
- **Low-Barrier, Distributed Delivery:** Use of a dual-modality approach combining digital seminars and hyper-local clinics scheduled to optimize participation for rural practitioners.

6.2.2.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Operational and Temporal Dependencies:

- **Pedagogical and Institutional Timing Restrictions:** Significant dependence on educational establishments and universities confines stakeholder mobilization to predetermined periods within the scholastic year.
- **Exposure to Institutional and Administrative Transitions:** Strategic continuity and administrative decision-making remain sensitive to the specific political timelines of the seven participating municipalities and the Mountain Union.

Organizational and Human Capital Architecture:

- **Non-Formalized Governance Task Force:** Current management utilizes an ad-hoc unit formed by GMV and FHV, while the official multi-stakeholder board remains in a developmental and exploratory state.
- **Absence of Autonomous Operational Resources:** Implementation relies on the shared use of existing facilities and partner personnel hours, supported by limited financial buffers for pilot logistics.

Technical and Methodological Maturity:

- **Emergent Micro-Credentialing Mechanism:** The specialized accreditation framework is presently in a trial phase, requiring further technical validation and synchronization with territorial surveys before wide-scale deployment.

6.2.2.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Policy & Strategic Project Alignment:

- **LEADER/CLLD Institutional Continuity:** Anchoring the Expertise Centre within the Local Action Group mandate ensures enduring post-project viability via recurring Rural Development Programme funding.
- **Regional Integration & Funding Coherence:** Direct synergy with regional strategies and promotion funds facilitated by *DMO Montagna Veneta* and local municipal planning frameworks.

Collaborative Synergies & Research Networks:

- **Capitalization of Advanced Scientific Initiatives:** Leverages high-level cooperation with *DATA4RURAL*, the *RIMONT* mountain studies by UNIPD, *La Montagna in Città*, and the European *Romea Strata* network.
- **Leveraging European Pedagogical Assets:** Integration of proven training modules and educational resources from the *Skills Lab* platform and the *Train2EUPilgrimage* program.

Territorial Expansion & Market Drivers:

- **Engagement with High-Value Visitor Trends:** Capitalizing on the growing demand for slow, culturally authentic tourism to shift from mass visitation to immersive, high-impact rural experiences.
- **Scalability for European Mountain Contexts:** The modular approach to data literacy and specialized micro-credentials serves as a transferable blueprint for diverse continental Local Action Group territories, also leveraging on the *Romea Strata* network.

6.2.2.4 THREATS (T)

Socio-Economic & Territorial Hazards:

- **High-Intensity Seasonality:** Extreme visitor density during peak periods risking ecological degradation, infrastructural congestion, and community friction.
- **Demographic Instability:** Persistent population decline in highland settlements, compromising local public infrastructure and traditional artisanal livelihoods.
- **Cultural Identity Dilution:** Accelerated and unregulated tourism expansion threatening to commercialize or diminish the plateau's authentic Cimbrian heritage.

Technical and Analytical Deficiencies:

- **Data Literacy Disparity (9/10 priority):** Widespread inability among small tourism operators and municipal staff to collect, interpret, and apply data for evidence-based planning and flow management.
- **Cultural Interpretation Gap (7/10 scale):** Insufficient storytelling capabilities among local practitioners to convert regional assets into structured slow-tourism offerings.

Participation and Engagement Barriers:

- **Operational Time Scarcity:** Heavy daily operational loads of micro-hospitality owners hinder consistent attendance in training programs.
- **Geographic Fragmentation:** Dispersed topography of the Sette Comuni region creating logistical impediments to physical collaboration without robust digital alternatives.

6.2.3 SIMSES 3 (Highlands & Islands, UK)

6.2.3.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Statutory Governance & Regional Mandate:

- **Statutory RTP Authority:** Established under the 2005 Transport (Scotland) Act, HITRANS possesses statutory powers to bridge the boundaries of 5 constituent local authorities (*Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar / Western Isles, Argyll & Bute*) and align regional needs with *Transport Scotland* and national policy.
- **Established Multi-Sectoral Board:** Governance structure combining elected councillors, independent ministerial experts, and professional advisors from regional development agencies (*Highlands and Islands Enterprise*) and NHS health boards.

Ecosystem & Community Delivery Networks:

- **Active Community Network:** Operational delivery anchored in the *People and Place* and *Transport to Employment* programmes, supporting 12 community-led projects (>£560,000 allocated in 2026/27) with trusted grassroots partners (*Fort William Bike Shed, Adventure Oban, Outfit Moray, Argyll Countryside Trust, Volunteering Hebrides*).
- **Institutionalized Peer Learning:** Structured, six-weekly *Behaviour Change Officer Forum* (uniting 9 local authority practitioners) and regional *Making Connections* events facilitating knowledge transfer across remote areas.

Practical Innovation & Inclusive Mobility:

- **Accredited Vocational Training:** Delivery of formal SQA National 3 cycle-maintenance qualifications through Lochaber High School, paired with extensive school programmes (*Active Routes to Schools* reaching >300 pupils; *Bikeability* reaching thousands).
- **Accessible Mobility Solutions:** Tailored initiatives for excluded groups (women, disabled people, jobseekers) via *HI-BIKE Inclusive Cycling Membership* and *Shopmobility Highland*.
- **Data & Digital Pilots:** Deployment of practical tools including the *Go for It* digital school travel tracker, fixed radar data triangulation, and the Fort William wayfinding system.

6.2.3.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Severe Financial & Resource Pressures:

- **60% Revenue Funding Reduction:** A severe 60% cut in 2026/27 revenue funding restricts staff bandwidth, limits discretionary activity, and forces an ultra-lean operating model.
- **Lack of Physical Infrastructure:** Vast geographical scale and capital constraints prevent the establishment of a physical Expertise Centre, restricting operations to an online platform and delaying physical Mobility Hub / Living Lab deployment to late 2027 or beyond.

Stagnant Assessment Indicators:

- **Neutral Resource & Training Progress:** Project assessment ratings for *Gathering Resources / Sustainability* and *Training Participants* remained *Neutral* across both monitoring rounds, reflecting systemic public sector funding limitations.

Public Sector & Operational Constraints:

- **Procedural & Tendering Rigidity:** As a statutory public body, HITRANS is bound by formal procurement legislation, complex tendering, and board approval cycles that can slow implementation agility.

- **Digital Adoption Challenges:** Experience with tools like *Moove Flexi* demonstrated that smaller rural community transport operators struggle with complex digital system configuration and require heavy, ongoing intermediary support.

6.2.3.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Strategic Policy & Investment Frameworks:

- **Regional Transport Strategy (RTS 2025–2045):** Long-term policy roadmap guiding investments in Net Zero transitions, active travel networks, road space reallocation, and uncommercial rural route subsidies.
- **Public Sector Cross-Integration:** Developing joint *Health and Transport Action Plans* with regional NHS boards (including NHS Shetland) to integrate non-emergency healthcare transit and secure multi-agency co-funding.

Academic & Technological Innovation:

- **Applied Research Partnerships:** Collaboration with *Robert Gordon University (RGU)* on journey mapping and demand modelling (reporting in 2026/2027) to provide an evidence base for national funding bids.
- **Next-Generation Mobility Pilots:** Pioneering electric aviation pathways for island connectivity, demand-responsive transport (DRT), and regional EV charging infrastructure rollout via national funds.

EU Transferability & Scale:

- **Replicable Sparsely Populated Models:** High potential to transfer HITRANS' data-driven journey mapping, community bike hub model, and statutory coordination framework to other peripheral, island, and mountainous European regions within Horizon RURALITIES.

6.2.3.4 THREATS (T)

Extreme Geographic & Physical Fragmentation:

- **Vast & Dispersed Landmass:** Covers 50% of Scotland's territory with less than 10% of the population, characterized by circuitous mountain roads, sea crossings, and island barriers that impose high logistical and travel costs.
- **Severe Transport Poverty:** High reliance on private vehicles, escalating island ferry freight/service costs, and the ongoing Cost-of-Living crisis impacting rural household mobility.

Demographic & Service Contraction:

- **Aging Demographics & Labour Shortages:** Rapidly aging rural populations combined with acute shortages of bus drivers, care workers, and community transport volunteers.
- **Declining Commercial Transit:** Continuous contraction of commercial rural bus routes, threatening remote communities with economic and social isolation.

Macroeconomic & Funding Uncertainty:

- **Public Sector Budget Volatility:** Continued austerity and shifting national budget priorities threatening long-term subsidies for lifeline ferry, air, and community transport services.

6.2.4 SIMSES 4 (Posavje, Slovenia)

6.2.4.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Integrated LAG/FLAG Governance & Agency Anchor:

- **Dual LAG/FLAG Institutional Core:** Uniquely combines both Local Action Group (agriculture/rural) and Fisheries Local Action Group (aquaculture/fisheries) mandates, led and coordinated by the *Regional Development Agency of Posavje (RRA Posavje)* with extensive LEADER/CLLD and EU project management experience.
- **Multi-Sectoral Consensus Model:** Broad stakeholder representation across municipalities, economic actors, educational/research bodies, and civil society, supported by thematic working groups (*sustainable fisheries, circular economy, climate adaptation*).
- **Strong Project Assessment Performance:** Steady and balanced progress across both monitoring cycles—notably contributing to the *Draft Regional Spatial Plan of the Posavina Development Region* and the *Regional Integrated Transport Strategy*.

Proven Training Methodology & Practical Demonstrations:

- **Established PONI Methodology:** Implementation of the recognized *PONI Posavje* incubation model, combining structured entrepreneurial education, individual coaching, and the issuance of a lifelong work experience certificate.
- **Applied Living Lab Testbeds:** Direct integration of real-world pilots into learning modules—including guided tours of local fruit processing lines, aquaculture innovation workshops, zero-waste cosmetics, and lab-to-user circular solution transfers.
- **Zero Capital Infrastructure Overhead:** Full utilization of RRA Posavje's existing training rooms, meeting spaces, and digital communication tools.

6.2.4.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Operational & Structural Definition Gaps:

- **Evolving Operational Architecture:** The Expertise Centre's long-term service portfolio, systematic knowledge mapping protocols, and specialized advisory workflows are still being structured and formalized.
- **External Expert Dependency:** While RRA Posavje excels at regional coordination and CLLD project administration, it relies on external providers and ad-hoc mentors for deep technical expertise in specialized niches (e.g., climate adaptation, advanced digital tech).

Scale & Reach Constraints:

- **Constrained Training Cohort Size:** The intensive 2027 PONI training plan is structured around an initial target group of 11 individuals, limiting immediate large-scale quantitative outreach across the region.
- **Digital Access Disparities:** Unequal access to digital infrastructure and varying levels of digital literacy among remote rural actors and traditional producers.

6.2.4.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

First-Mover Institutional Advantage:

- **Exclusive Regional Reference Hub:** Total absence of competing Expertise Centres in the Posavje region, positioning SIMSES 4 as the sole pilot platform for rural innovation and capacity building.

Multi-Fund Policy Alignment & Continuity:

- **Diversified Funding Streams:** Post-project financial viability anchored in recurring LEADER/CLLD programming, Interreg, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, and national rural development grants.
- **Strategic Spatial Policy Embedding:** Direct opportunity to anchor Living Lab priorities into binding territorial planning instruments (Posavina Regional Spatial Plan and Regional Transport Strategies).

Social Inclusion & Economic Diversification:

- **Empowerment of Vulnerable Demographics:** Structured focus on aspiring youth, women entrepreneurs, and unemployed individuals to drive local business creation and combat rural brain drain.
- **Cross-Border & Inter-Territorial Replication:** Capitalizing on international study visits and European network exchanges to import best practices and transfer Posavje's circular bioeconomy models to other EU LAGs.

6.2.4.4 THREATS (T)

Macro-Policy & Funding Uncertainties:

- **Post-2027 EU Policy Shifts:** High structural dependency on public and EU grants creates vulnerability to future adjustments in European Cohesion, CAP, and CLLD funding frameworks.

Territorial & Demographic Decline:

- **Demographic Aging & Outmigration:** Ongoing youth brain drain and aging demographics in rural villages threatening the generational renewal of local agriculture, fisheries, and crafts.

Engagement & Uptake Barriers:

- **Time Poverty & Dispersed Geography:** High daily operational burdens on small farmers, fishers, and micro-SMEs hinder continuous, long-term participation in training and co-creation activities.
- **Innovation Adoption Resistance:** Traditional mindsets and difficulties in converting laboratory-proven circular concepts into commercially viable, everyday farm/business practices.

6.2.5 SIMSES 5 (Asturias, Spain)

6.2.5.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Dual Complementary Living Lab Infrastructure:

- **Pre-Industrial Pilot Plant & Smart Territory Testbed:** Combines **ASINCAR's 500 m² Food Pilot Plant** in Noreña (equipped with hyperspectral imaging, NIR spectroscopy, extruders, automated cheese maturation chambers) with **CTIC RuralTech** in Peón/Villaviciosa (a territorial Smart Village living lab with IoT sensing across farmlands, orchards, and beehives).

Quadripartite Consortium with Specialized Roles:

- **Clear Division of Expertise:** Perfectly differentiated partner roles—**ASINCAR** (agri-food technology, legal/regulatory compliance, product scaling), **CTIC** (digital twins, precision agriculture, IoT/AI

readiness), *READER* (territorial outreach through the Asturian LAG network), and *Grupo DEX* (R&D&I consultancy and EU/national funding proposal engineering).

- **Proven Diagnostic Methodologies:** Integration of CTIC's structured digital maturity and data readiness assessment methodology (tested across >370 companies in the *Gijón Transforma Digital* programme) adapted to rural cooperatives and agri-food SMEs.

Strong Project Execution & Regional Positioning:

- **Consistently High Performance:** Solid trajectory across both monitoring rounds (*Progress and More progress than regress*), with high-level institutional engagements (CDTI, *Foro Transfiere*, *Alimencuentros*, University of Oviedo, and *Mar de Niebla*).
- **Inclusive, Barrier-Free Training Model:** Free-of-charge, open-access training delivered primarily online (webinars, interactive sessions, self-paced modules) to eliminate geographic isolation barriers across dispersed Asturian valleys.

6.2.5.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Geographic & Physical Living Lab Friction:

- **Travel Barriers to Physical Facilities:** The physical concentration of pilot testing facilities in Noreña and Peón creates time and financial travel hurdles for remote rural actors located in peripheral valleys, necessitating a reliance on virtual formats.

Operational Rhythms & Facilitator Dependency:

- **Timeline Mismatch with Rural Paces:** Risk of project milestone schedules conflicting with the operational realities and seasonal agricultural calendars of rural micro-enterprises.
- **Dependency on Local Facilitators:** Smooth outreach and service deployment across diverse parishes rely heavily on external local facilitators and LAG intermediaries.

Accreditation Gaps:

- **Informal Training Recognition:** The Training Centre operates as an applied capacity-building network without offering formal vocational diplomas or **accredited** micro-credential certificates.

6.2.5.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Agri-Food Quality & Bioeconomy Ecosystem Synergy:

- **Anchoring in Regional Quality Brands:** Established connections with key agri-food certification bodies: *PDO Sidra de Asturias*, *PDO Cangas Wine*, *PGI Faba Asturiana*, and the *Alimentos del Paraíso* regional brand.
- **Regional Hub Interconnections:** Synergies with the *Asturias Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs)*, *AsturCirc HUB (Bioeconomy HUB)*, and regional agri-food industrial clusters.

Generational Renewal & Business Succession:

- **Generational Matchmaking:** Targeted actions to bridge the gap between retiring rural retail/farming business owners and aspiring young entrepreneurs/successors to prevent economic desertification.

Hybrid Post-Project Sustainability:

- **Tiered Commercialization Model:** Financial continuity via a mixed model: free basic services (funding scans, initial diagnostics) paired with paid, cost-based specialized packages (R&D proposal writing, technical deployment, regional technology vouchers).

- **Targeting Vulnerable Groups: Broadening** rural capacity building by actively integrating women entrepreneurs, older workers, and people with migrant backgrounds into the rural economy.

6.2.5.4 THREATS (T)

Severe Demographic Decline & Depopulation:

- **Aging Rural Population & Land Abandonment:** Critical loss of young talent, demographic aging, and agricultural land abandonment across inland Asturian parishes threatening long-term rural vitality.

Escalating Regulatory Pressures:

- **Complex Agri-Food Compliance:** Constantly tightening EU and national regulations (sustainable packaging, food waste prevention, product claims, environmental standards) placing severe administrative burdens on small rural producers.

Territorial & Digital Disparities:

- **Rural Digital Divide:** Unequal broadband connectivity and limited baseline digital literacy in remote mountain areas hindering the adoption of advanced IoT, sensorization, and AI tools.
- **Urban Centralization:** Historical concentration of R&D resources, investment, and training institutions in the central urban polygon of Asturias (Oviedo-Gijón-Avilés), alienating peripheral rural areas.

6.2.6 SIMSES 6 (Iași, Romania)

6.2.6.1 STRENGTHS (S)

Academic Core & Permanent Institutional Anchoring:

- **University-Backed RDI Host:** Institutionally anchored in the **Advanced Research Centre for Agribusiness (ARCA)** within the University of Life Sciences 'Ion Ionescu de la Brad' of Iași (USV Iași), providing permanent research infrastructure (TPPA building offices B63, B64, B73 and laboratory B56) without requiring new capital buildouts.
- **Specialized Departmental Structure:** Direct **operational** support from three ARCA departments: *Agribusiness, Economics and Sustainable Development; Marketing and Business Transformation; and Smart Farming.*

Quadruple-Helix Delivery Consortium:

- **Differentiated Partner Roles:** Synergistic governance uniting academic research (ARCA / USV Iași), Living/Policy Lab facilitation and evidence synthesis (*RDRP / RoRuralia*), territorial rural mobilization across 7 communes (*Siret-Moldova Local Action Group*), and private investment/grant engineering (*YXS Avalana*).
- **Proven EU Funding Track Record:** Successfully secured Horizon funding under the **WIDERA programme** (*ARfi project*), positioning RoRuralia as an innovation demonstrator and lighthouse.

Layered Training & Rich Pre-existing Networks:

- **Formal-to-Non-Formal Learning Pathway:** **Uniquely** bridges 9 mapped USV Iași university degree provisions with short, practice-oriented modules, webinars, and field clinics.

- **Capitalization of Active Food Networks:** Directly builds on established community assets—including *Gust de Iași* (>100 producers), *EcoRurIS farmer network*, *Food for Iași Living Lab*, *Cities2030*, and „*Iașul în bucate*".

6.2.6.2 WEAKNESSES (W)

Institutional & Administrative Dependencies:

- **Subordinated Governance Constraints:** ARCA operates as an internal university unit without independent legal personality, meaning operational protocols, budgeting, and external agreements are bound to formal USV Iași administrative board cycles.
- **Coordination & Staff Bandwidth Limits:** High reliance on **academic** staff, faculty researchers, and a part-time operational coordinator who must balance teaching/research loads with Living Lab activities.

Operational Workflow Definition Gaps:

- **Evolving Service Line Integration:** The formal ARCA-SIMSES public service catalogue, unified beneficiary referral matrix, and shared monitoring registers are still in the process of full operational consolidation.
- **Academic-to-Practical Translation Risk:** Potential friction in translating complex scientific agricultural/economic concepts into plain-language, accessible tools for non-academic rural producers.

6.2.6.3 OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Regional "Super Hub" & Policy Lab Mandate:

- **North-East Romania Knowledge Super Hub:** Unique positioning of the *RDRP / RoRuralia* ecosystem to bridge rural hinterlands with urban Iași and shape regional agricultural and food policy.
- **High Latent Entrepreneurial Demand:** Empirical evidence from the USV Iași graduate survey (5,246 responses) reveals that 36.1% of graduates demand incubation/entrepreneurship support, providing a prime talent pool for new rural agribusiness start-ups.

Permanent Multi-Stream Financing Model:

- **Regulated Diversified Revenues:** Long-term economic sustainability guaranteed through ARCA's regulated financing routes: university baseline funds, national/EU grants (*Horizon Europe*, *Interreg*, *Erasmus+*, *LEADER/DR-36*), contract research, and paid third-party training.
- **LEADER & Smart Villages Policy Integration:** Direct alignment with the *Siret-Moldova LAG Local Development Strategy* and the European Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

6.2.6.4 THREATS (T)

Severe Rural-Urban & Territorial Disparities:

- **Deep Socio-Economic Divide:** Persistent economic disparities, fragmented infrastructure, and unequal digital access between the urban university center (Iași) and remote peripheral communes.
- **Limited Rural Capital & Credit Access:** Severe shortage of local private equity and high barriers to conventional bank financing for small-scale farmers and early-stage rural entrepreneurs.

Operational & Seasonal Volatilities:

- **Agricultural Calendar Bottlenecks:** Risk of severe participant absenteeism during peak seasonal farming periods (spring planting and autumn harvest).
- **Beneficiary Referral Drop-off:** Risk of rural actors disengaging after preliminary diagnostic clinics if investment pathways and concrete grant follow-up are not rapidly secured.

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