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Ruralities

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

# RURALITIES INTERDISCIPLINARY TRAINING CENTRES

## D8.6

## WP8 – TRAINING: pioneering multi-points learning framework

DRAFT

**Horizon Europe Grant agreement: 101060876**

30/September/2026 by Milica Dolasevic (IRI)
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# 1 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 organized 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 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 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 support 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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| Number | Role | Short name | Legal name | Country |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | COO | PEDAL | PEDAL CONSULTING SRO | SK |
| 2 | BEN | RDRP | ASOCIATIA RURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PLATFORM | RO |
| 4 | BEN | ASIN | ASOCIACION DE INVESTIGACION DE INDUSTRIAS CARNICAS DEL PRINCIPADO DE ASTURIAS | ES |
| 5 | BEN | NIC | KEMIJSKI INSTITUT | SI |
| 6 | BEN | UPM | UNIVERSIDAD POLITECNICA DE MADRID | ES |
| 7 | BEN | IRI | INSTITUT ZA RAZVOJ I INOVACIJE - IRI | RS |
| 8 | BEN | PART | PARTICULA GROUP DRUSTVO S OGRANICENOM ODGOVORNOSCU ZA ISTRAZIVANJE RAZVOJ I PROIZVODNJU | HR |
| 9 | BEN | UNIZG | SVEUCILISTE U ZAGREBU AGRONOMSKI FAKULTET | HR |
| 10 | BEN | ACTS | AFRICAN CENTRE FOR TECHNOLOGY STUDIES | KE |
| 11 | BEN | CITT | CENTRO DE INVESTIGACAO E TRANSFERENCIA DE TECNOLOGIA PARA DESENVOLVIMENTO COMUNITARIO | MZ |
| 12 | BEN | EQUIP | EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR QUALITY AND PATIENT SAFETY IN GENERAL PRACTICE/ FAMILY MEDICINE | DK |
| 13 | BEN | MUNI | MUGLA SITKI KOCMAN UNIVERSITY | TR |
| 14 | BEN | MARIN | MARIN BIYOTEKNOLOJI URUNLERI VE GIDA SANAYI TICARET LIMITED SIRKETI | TR |
| 15 | BEN | ULB | UNIVERSITE LIBRE DE BRUXELLES | BE |
| 16 | BEN | INAG | INAGRO, PROVINCIAAL EXTERN VERZELFSTANDIGD AGENTSCHAP IN PRIVAATRECHTELIJKE VORM VZW | BE |
| 17 | BEN | AASTMT | ARAB ACADEMY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND MARITIME TRANSPORT | EG |
| 18 | BEN | RRAP | REGIONALNA RAZVOJNA AGENCIJA POSAVJE | SI |
| 19 | BEN | YXSAV | YXS AVALANA SRL | RO |
| 20 | BEN | UNIVI | UNIVERSITATEA PENTRU STIINTELE VIETII "ION IONESCU DE LA BRAD" DIN IASI | RO |
| 21 | BEN | SIRET | ASOCIATIA GRUPUL DE ACTIUNE LOCALA SIRET-MOLDOVA | RO |
| 22 | BEN | SUA | Sokoine University of Agriculture | TZ |
| 23 | BEN | UNINO | UNIVERSITE DE NOUAKCHOTT AL AASRIYA | MR |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | BEN | IFAYA | INSTITUT FACULTAIRE DES SCIENCESAGRONOMIQUES (IFA) DE YANGAMBI | CD |
| 25 | BEN | ACD | ALTERNATIVE COMMUNAUTAIRE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE (ACDD) | CI |
| 27 | BEN | AMVO | ALMANAR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION | SD |
| 28 | BEN | CDD | COMMUNICATION POUR UN DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE C.D.D. | TG |
| 29 | BEN | YTED | YOUTHS IN TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT UGANDA LIMITED | UG |
| 30 | BEN | CTIC | FUNDACION CTIC CENTRO TECNOLOGICO PARA EL DESARROLLO EN ASTURIAS DE LAS TECNOLOGIAS DE LA INFORMACION | ES |
| 31 | BEN | FHV | FONDAZIONE HOMO VIATOR - SAN TEBALDO | IT |
| 32 | BEN | MOFE | MONTEFELTRO SVILUPPO SCARL | IT |
| 33 | BEN | MUSE | MUSEUM GRAPHIA | IT |
| 34 | BEN | CDM | LA CORTE DELLA MINIERA SRL | IT |
| 35 | BEN | DEX | DESARROLLO DE ESTRATEGIAS EXTERIORES SA | ES |
| 36 | BEN | REDA | ASOCIACION RED ASTURIANA DE DESARROLLO RURAL | ES |
| 37 | BEN | GMV | MONTAGNA VICENTINA SOCIETA COOPERATIVA | IT |
| 38 | BEN | MARA | MAROC HORIZON D'AVENTURES | MA |
| 39 | BEN | UNWI | UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI | MW |
| 40 | BEN | NOMA | 0KMNOMADS.ORG | GH |
| 41 | BEN | UNIM | MAGYAR AGRAR- ES ELETTUDOMANYI EGYETEM | HU |
| 42 | BEN | ENIC | ECOLE NATIONALE D'INGENIEURS DE CARTHAGE | TN |
| 43 | BEN | UASZ | UNIVERSITE ASSANE SECK DE ZIGUINCHOR | SN |
| 44 | BEN | CPF | CONFEDERATION PAYSANNE DU FASO | BF |
| 45 | BEN | UNAD | UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA | RW |
| 46 | BEN | ZLAN | ZAMBIA LAND ALLIANCE | ZM |
| 47 | BEN | EVRO | EVROSAD PROIZVODNJA TRGOVINA EVETOVANJE D.O.O. KRSKO | SI |
| 48 | BEN | SEVO | TURISTICNO DRUSTVO SENOVO | SI |
| 49 | BEN | IISAC | ISTITUTO D'ISTRUZIONE SUPERIORE A CECCHI | IT |
| 50 | AP | HITP | THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP | UK |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 52 | AP | EW | CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND RESEARCH TRUST | UK |
| 53 | BEN | APO | APPODISSI LTD | NG |

# ACRONYMS

| Acronym | Description |
|---|---|
| **EIP-AGRI** | European Innovation Partnership on Agriculture |
| **EC** | European Commission |
| **SIMSES** | Simplified Socio-ecological Systems |
| **WP** | Work Package |

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# 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RURALITIES project aims to strengthen the resilience, sustainability, and innovation capacity of rural territories by fostering integrated rural innovation ecosystems. Recognising that human capital is a critical driver of rural transformation, the project has established a Network of Training Centres to support lifelong learning, skills development, knowledge exchange, and capacity building across participating regions.

The Network of Training Centres serves as a dedicated mechanism for empowering rural stakeholders, including farmers, entrepreneurs, public authorities, civil society organisations, educators, and community members. Through tailored training programmes, mentoring, coaching, peer-learning activities, and access to educational resources, the centres contribute to enhancing the competences required to address current and future rural challenges.

This deliverable documents the establishment, governance, operation, and sustainability of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres. It presents the methodology used to identify and develop the centres, describes their role within the broader RURALITIES ecosystem, and highlights the services and activities implemented to support local stakeholders. The report also examines the governance structures adopted across different territories and the mechanisms used to facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder engagement.

Attention is given to the contribution of the Training Centres to innovation processes, community empowerment, and territorial development. By responding to locally identified needs and building on the outcomes of stakeholder consultations, Living Lab activities, and ecosystem analyses, the centres provide targeted learning opportunities that strengthen local capacities and support sustainable rural development.

The deliverable further explores strategies for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Training Centres beyond the duration of the project. These strategies include stakeholder ownership, institutional integration, diversified funding approaches, and the development of collaborative networks capable of maintaining and expanding training activities in the future.

Overall, the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres represents an important legacy of the project, providing a scalable and adaptable model for strengthening skills, fostering innovation, and supporting resilient rural communities across Europe and beyond.

The contractual submission deadline for this deliverable is December 2026. However, following the recommendations and requests received during the previous project review, the consortium has made a significant effort to advance the preparation of this deliverable and submit it ahead of the original schedule.

The purpose of this early submission is to provide the European Commission and the project reviewers with an opportunity to assess the approach, structure, and progress achieved to date and to provide feedback during the forthcoming review. Such feedback will be valuable for guiding the further development, consolidation, and long-term sustainability of the RURALITIES Training Centres during the remaining implementation period.

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Consequently, this deliverable should be understood as reflecting the status of development at the time of its early submission. The Network of Expertise/Training Centres and their related activities will continue to evolve towards the original December 2026 deadline and throughout the remaining lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

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# 3 INTRODUCTION

## 3.1 Background

The RURALITIES project seeks to strengthen the resilience, sustainability, and innovation capacity of rural territories through the development of integrated rural innovation ecosystems. Within this framework, capacity building and lifelong learning play a fundamental role in enabling rural stakeholders to adapt to emerging challenges, seize new opportunities, and actively contribute to sustainable territorial development.

Rural areas across Europe and beyond are experiencing significant economic, environmental, technological, and social transformations. These changes are generating increasing demands for new skills, knowledge, and competences among rural communities, entrepreneurs, farmers, public authorities, civil society organisations, and other local actors. At the same time, many rural regions continue to face barriers related to access to education, training opportunities, innovation support services, and professional development resources.

To address these challenges, RURALITIES has established a Network of Training Centres that serves as a dedicated mechanism for promoting learning, skills development, knowledge exchange, and capacity building across participating territories. The Training Centres constitute a key component of the broader RURALITIES ecosystem and contribute to strengthening the human capital required for sustainable rural transformation.

The centres support the project's ambition to empower rural actors by providing accessible learning opportunities, facilitating the acquisition of new competences, promoting innovation-oriented mindsets, and supporting the development of practical skills needed to address local and regional challenges. Through a combination of training activities, mentoring, coaching, peer learning, and educational resources, the Training Centres contribute to building more capable, adaptive, and resilient rural communities.

The development of the Training Centres builds upon previous project activities, including stakeholder mapping, needs assessments, Living Lab activities, innovation ecosystem analyses, and consultations conducted across the various RURALITIES territories. These activities provided valuable insights into existing skills gaps, learning needs, and capacity-building priorities, which informed the design and operation of the centres.

The objective of this deliverable is to document the establishment, operation, governance, and future sustainability of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres.

The report presents the methodology used to identify and establish the Training Centres, the governance arrangements adopted in different territories, and the learning and capacity-building services developed to support rural stakeholders. It also provides an overview of the individual Training Centres established within the participating territories and describes how they contribute to the broader objectives of the RURALITIES project.

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The deliverable further explores the mechanisms through which the Training Centres facilitate knowledge exchange, skills development, stakeholder engagement, and lifelong learning. Attention is given to their role in supporting innovation processes, strengthening local capacities, and enhancing the ability of rural actors to participate in and benefit from rural transformation processes.

In addition, the report examines the sustainability strategies developed for the Training Centres, including governance approaches, stakeholder ownership, institutional embedding, funding opportunities, and future development pathways. These elements are essential to ensure that the centres continue operating and delivering value beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

Ultimately, the deliverable aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the Training Centre model developed within RURALITIES and to demonstrate its contribution to creating stronger, more resilient, and innovation-oriented rural territories.

## 3.2 Objectives

Deliverable D8.6 is a key output under Task 8.4 (T8.4) – Establish RURALITIES Training Centres, which aims to establish interdisciplinary expertise training centres comprising a network of facilities, educators, facilitators, and digital learning opportunities for rural stakeholders.

The objective of D8.6 is to define and document the RURALITIES Training Centre model and to present the Training Centres identified and established across the participating SIMSES. The deliverable describes the common framework, key characteristics, functions, stakeholder involvement, governance arrangements, and connections of the Training Centres with the wider RURALITIES ecosystem.

D8.6 also provides the basis for the further deployment and scaling of the RURALITIES Training Centre model. In particular, the core elements of the Training Centre model identified through this deliverable will inform the RURALITIES Scalability Plan (D8.5), which will examine how the model can be replicated and adapted at local, regional, national, Pan-European, and international levels.

The deliverable therefore distinguishes between the core elements that define the RURALITIES Training Centre model and additional elements that can be adapted, expanded, or introduced according to the specific needs and capacities of different territories. This distinction supports the development of a scalable model that maintains a common RURALITIES identity while allowing for place-based adaptation.

Furthermore, D8.6 documents the digital database of Training Centres, providing structured information on their characteristics, capacities, stakeholder involvement, training functions, and links to the wider RURALITIES ecosystem. The database contributes to the visibility and networking of the centres and provides an evidence base for their future development and deployment.

Finally, the deliverable explores how Training Centres can contribute to the valorisation and exchange of knowledge, practices, and outcomes generated through RURALITIES and related projects, including relevant initiatives identified through other project activities. In this way, the Training Centres are positioned as interfaces between knowledge generation, capacity building, innovation, and practical application in rural territories.

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## 3.3 Memorandum of Understanding

The establishment and operation of the RURALITIES Training Centres are supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (Annex 1), which provides a common framework for cooperation between RURALITIES project partners, SIMSES actors, and external facilitators. The MoU aims to align the different actors involved in RURALITIES around a shared vision and to support the co-creation, operation, and long-term development of the RURALITIES Hubs and their network of Expertise and Training Centres.

The MoU provides a framework for voluntary collaboration and knowledge exchange. It is not legally binding and does not create financial obligations for the participating parties (project partners, facilitators, role models and other engaged actors). Cooperation is primarily based on in-kind contributions, including expertise, human capital, access to infrastructure, knowledge, and data. The parties may collaborate through joint training activities, workshops and meetings, research and innovation activities, co-creation of project outputs, knowledge exchange, multi-actor engagement, and communication and dissemination of RURALITIES results. Where a specific activity involves financial or legal commitments, the parties are expected to conclude a separate written agreement defining the relevant terms and responsibilities.

Within the Training Centre context, the MoU establishes complementary roles for the different actors. SIMSES leaders provide infrastructural, logistical, and organisational support, while other RURALITIES partners contribute through project-level coordination, technical support, networking, and support for communication, dissemination, exploitation, ethics, and data management.

The MoU also supports the continued cooperation and sustainability of the Training Centres beyond individual project activities. It remains in place for the duration of the RURALITIES project, while the document also foresees the possibility of continued mutual activities beyond the project lifecycle where the parties wish to maintain their cooperation. Participation by external facilitators is based on an adhesion process through their engagement in RURALITIES activities and familiarisation with the MoU, rather than requiring a traditional signing procedure.

Overall, the MoU provides the collaborative and governance framework through which the RURALITIES Training Centres can operate as part of a wider network, facilitating knowledge exchange, stakeholder engagement, joint learning activities, and the continued valorisation and dissemination of RURALITIES results.

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# 4. CONCEPT OF THE RURALITIES TRAINING CENTRES

## 4.1 Definition, Purpose and Target Groups

The Training Centres serve as accessible learning hubs that connect knowledge providers and learners within rural territories. They facilitate the exchange of knowledge from research, policy, practice, and innovation into practical learning opportunities that can be directly applied by rural stakeholders. By combining formal and informal learning approaches, the centres contribute to lifelong learning and promote the continuous development of rural human capital.

Unlike traditional educational institutions, RURALITIES Training Centres are strongly embedded within their local contexts and are designed to respond to the specific needs and priorities identified within each territory. Their activities are therefore shaped by local stakeholder needs, territorial challenges, and development opportunities while remaining aligned with the broader objectives of the RURALITIES project.

The centres support a wide range of beneficiaries, including farmers, entrepreneurs, SMEs, public authorities, educators, civil society organisations, young people, women, researchers, and local communities. Through tailored learning opportunities and capacity-building activities, they contribute to strengthening the ability of these actors to participate in innovation processes and support sustainable rural transformation.

The RURALITIES Training Centres are designed to serve a diverse range of stakeholder groups operating within rural territories. Recognising that different actors face different challenges and learning needs, the centres aim to provide flexible and inclusive learning opportunities tailored to specific audiences.

One important target group consists of farmers, producers, and agricultural organisations seeking to improve production practices, sustainability performance, innovation adoption, and business resilience. Training activities may address topics such as sustainable agriculture, digital technologies, climate adaptation, diversification strategies, and value chain development.

Entrepreneurs, start-ups, SMEs, and business support organisations represent another key target group. The centres support these actors through training activities focused on innovation management, entrepreneurship, business development, funding opportunities, marketing, digitalisation, and sustainable business models.

Public authorities and policymakers may benefit from training related to rural development planning, participatory governance, stakeholder engagement, policy implementation, and innovation support mechanisms. Strengthening the capacities of public institutions contributes to creating more supportive environments for rural innovation and development.

Educational institutions, trainers, researchers, and knowledge providers also play an important role within the Training Centre ecosystem. The centres facilitate cooperation among these actors and support the development and dissemination of educational content and learning resources tailored to rural contexts.

Special attention is given to young people, women, and other groups that may face barriers to participation in education, employment, and innovation processes. Through targeted activities, the

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Training Centres contribute to increasing inclusiveness and promoting equal opportunities within rural communities.

Civil society organisations, community groups, local action groups, and social enterprises are likewise important beneficiaries. Capacity-building activities targeting these actors can strengthen community leadership, social innovation, participatory governance, and local development initiatives.

By engaging a broad range of stakeholders, the Training Centres contribute to creating inclusive learning ecosystems capable of supporting innovation, cooperation, and sustainable rural transformation.

The primary purpose of the RURALITIES Training Centres is to strengthen the capacity of rural stakeholders by providing accessible and relevant learning opportunities that support innovation, resilience, and sustainable development.

The Training Centres contribute to bridging existing skills gaps and addressing emerging competence needs within rural territories. They provide opportunities for stakeholders to acquire new knowledge, develop practical skills, improve professional capacities, and adapt to changing economic, environmental, technological, and social conditions.

**More specifically, the Training Centres pursue the following objectives:**

- Strengthen rural skills and competences relevant to local development priorities;
- Promote lifelong learning and continuous professional development;
- Support innovation adoption and innovation-oriented mindsets;
- Enhance entrepreneurship and business development capacities;
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between research, practice, policy, and education;
- Improve the employability and adaptability of rural populations;
- Support community empowerment and social innovation;
- Contribute to the resilience and sustainability of rural territories.

By addressing these objectives, the Training Centres contribute to creating stronger and more capable rural communities that are better equipped to respond to future challenges and opportunities.

## 4.2 Position within the RURALITIES Ecosystem

The RURALITIES ecosystem has been designed as an interconnected network of complementary structures and actors that collectively support knowledge generation, innovation development, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and the replication of successful practices. Rather than operating independently, the various components of the ecosystem collaborate to create synergies and maximise the impact of project activities within participating territories.

Within this ecosystem, the Training Centres play a distinct role by transforming knowledge, expertise, and innovation outcomes into practical learning opportunities and capacity-building activities. They act as bridges between knowledge generation and knowledge application, ensuring that rural stakeholders have access to the competences needed to benefit from innovation processes and contribute to local development.

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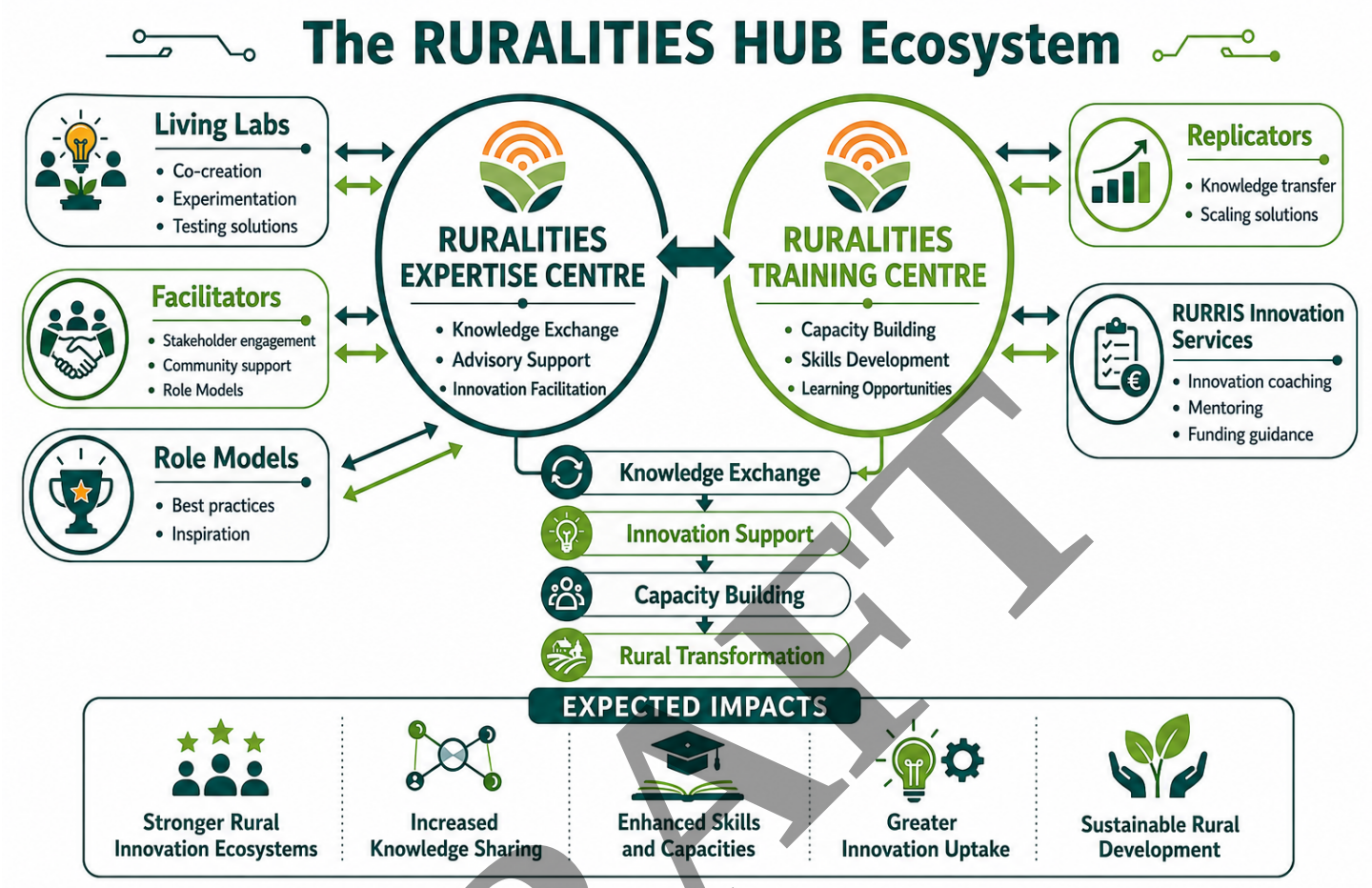



*Figure 1 The RURALITIES HUB Ecosystem*

The Training Centres are closely connected to the other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem, including Living Labs, Expertise Centres, Facilitators, Role Models, Replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services. Together, these elements create an integrated support framework that addresses the diverse needs of rural actors throughout the innovation cycle. Living Labs serve as collaborative environments where stakeholders co-create, test, validate, and refine innovative solutions in real-life settings. They provide opportunities for experimentation, stakeholder engagement, and practical problem-solving within rural territories. The Training Centres support Living Lab activities by providing learning opportunities that strengthen stakeholders' ability to participate effectively in co-creation and innovation processes. Training activities may focus on innovation methodologies, facilitation techniques, entrepreneurship, sustainability practices, digital skills, and other competences relevant to Living Lab activities. At the same time, Living Labs generate valuable experiences, knowledge, and practical insights that can be integrated into training programmes and educational materials. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship whereby learning activities support experimentation, while experimentation enriches learning content.

The relationship between Training Centres and Expertise Centres is particularly important within the RURALITIES ecosystem. While Expertise Centres focus on knowledge brokerage, advisory support, networking, and innovation facilitation, Training Centres concentrate on the development of skills and competences among rural stakeholders.

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Expertise Centres help identify relevant knowledge, good practices, experts, and innovation opportunities, whereas Training Centres translate this knowledge into structured learning experiences. Together, they ensure that knowledge generated through research, policy, and innovation activities can be effectively transferred and applied within rural territories. This complementary relationship strengthens both components and contributes to the creation of a comprehensive support system for rural innovation and development.

Facilitators play a key role in mobilising stakeholders, supporting participation, and fostering collaboration within rural communities. They act as connectors between local actors and help create the conditions necessary for effective engagement and collective action. Training Centres contribute to strengthening facilitator capacities by providing dedicated training and learning opportunities related to stakeholder engagement, communication, participatory approaches, innovation support, and community development. Facilitators may also support the promotion and implementation of training activities by helping identify learning needs and encouraging participation among local stakeholders. The collaboration between Training Centres and Facilitators enhances outreach, improves stakeholder engagement, and strengthens the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives.

Role Models and Replicators represent important mechanisms for promoting inspiration, learning, and the transfer of successful practices across territories. Role Models showcase examples of successful initiatives, innovative approaches, and effective solutions, while Replicators support the adaptation and transfer of these practices to new contexts.

Training Centres utilise examples provided by Role Models and Replicators as practical learning resources that enrich educational activities and provide real-life illustrations of successful innovation processes. Case studies, success stories, peer-learning activities, and study visits can all draw upon the experiences of Role Models and Replicators. Through this collaboration, Training Centres help accelerate the diffusion of innovation and support the wider adoption of successful rural development practices.

RURRIS Innovation Services provide targeted support mechanisms designed to assist rural stakeholders in developing, implementing, and scaling innovative solutions. These services may include innovation coaching, mentoring, advisory support, networking, and innovation management assistance.

The Training Centres complement these services by strengthening the knowledge and skills required to effectively utilise innovation support opportunities. Training activities can prepare stakeholders to engage more effectively with innovation services, develop stronger project ideas, improve entrepreneurial capacities, and enhance innovation management capabilities. Conversely, experiences and lessons generated through RURRIS Innovation Services can inform the design of future training programmes and help ensure that learning activities remain relevant to stakeholder needs.

The unique contribution of the Training Centres lies in their ability to transform knowledge into skills, information into competences, and innovation opportunities into practical capacities. By supporting lifelong learning and capacity building, the centres help ensure that rural stakeholders possess the necessary capabilities to actively engage with innovation processes and contribute to sustainable territorial development.

Through their integration with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, Facilitators, Role Models, Replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services, the Training Centres strengthen the overall effectiveness of the RURALITIES ecosystem. They contribute to building stronger human capital, fostering innovation readiness, and creating more resilient and adaptive rural communities.

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As a result, the Training Centres play a critical role in ensuring that the knowledge, innovations, and opportunities generated within the RURALITIES project can be effectively understood, adopted, and applied by rural stakeholders both during and beyond the lifetime of the project.

## 4.3 Establishment Process

The establishment of the RURALITIES Training Centres represents a strategic effort to create sustainable, locally embedded learning and capacity-building structures within the innovation ecosystems of the participating SIMSES. These Training Centres are conceived as key enablers of rural transformation, supporting stakeholders through the provision of targeted knowledge, skills development opportunities, lifelong learning pathways, and innovation-oriented training services.

Beyond their immediate educational function, the Training Centres are intended to act as hubs for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and co-creation, linking local actors with broader regional, national, and European innovation networks. By fostering continuous learning and strengthening local capacities, they contribute to enhancing the resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability of rural territories.

The establishment process follows a common framework developed within RURALITIES, ensuring coherence across the project while allowing sufficient flexibility to accommodate the specific characteristics, needs, governance structures, and socio-economic contexts of each territory. This dual approach ensures that Training Centres are both aligned with project objectives and deeply rooted in local realities. The framework promotes stakeholder-driven development, encourages institutional ownership, and supports the long-term viability of the Training Centres beyond the lifetime of the project.

### 4.3.1 Identification

The identification of potential Training Centres was guided by a structured and participatory process combining territorial analysis, stakeholder engagement, and the assessment of existing educational capacities within each SIMSES. This approach ensured that the selected Training Centres are relevant, feasible, and capable of addressing the specific needs of rural communities.

**Stakeholder Consultations**

Stakeholder consultations played a central role in identifying organisations and institutions with the capacity, expertise, and motivation to contribute to the implementation of Training Centres. These consultations were designed to ensure inclusiveness and to capture a wide range of perspectives from actors involved in rural development and innovation.

The consultations involved representatives of the following actors:

- Educational institutions;
- Universities and research organisations;
- Rural development agencies;
- Local and regional authorities;
- Farmers and agricultural organisations;
- Civil society organisations;
- Innovation support actors;
- Living Lab participants and facilitators.

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Through workshops, meetings, and interactive sessions, stakeholders provided valuable insights into local learning needs, existing capacities, and potential synergies. This participatory approach also helped build early ownership and foster collaboration among actors who are expected to play a role in the future operation of the Training Centres.

**Needs Assessments**

The Training Centre concept builds upon comprehensive needs assessments conducted throughout the project, particularly within the activities implemented under WP5 and WP6. These assessments provided a detailed understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities.

Key aspects identified include:

- Existing skills gaps across different sectors;
- Priority areas for capacity building and knowledge development;
- Specific training needs of rural populations, including farmers, entrepreneurs, and local authorities;
- Opportunities for fostering entrepreneurship, innovation, and diversification of rural economies;
- Requirements related to digitalisation, sustainability, and climate adaptation.

By integrating these findings, the Training Centres are designed to respond directly to identified needs, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in supporting local development objectives.

**Mapping Exercises**

A comprehensive mapping exercise was undertaken to identify existing organisations, infrastructures, and initiatives that could contribute to or support the implementation of the Training Centres. This exercise aimed to build on existing strengths and avoid duplication of efforts.

The mapping focused on:

- Educational and training providers;
- Vocational education and training institutions;
- Community learning centres;
- Agricultural advisory and extension services;
- Innovation and entrepreneurship support organisations;
- Existing capacity-building and knowledge exchange initiatives.

The results of the mapping exercise provided a clear overview of available resources and potential partners, facilitating informed decision-making regarding the selection of host organisations and the design of Training Centre activities.

**Existing Educational Infrastructures**

Attention was given to existing educational infrastructures and organisations already operating within the territories. Leveraging these existing structures allows for more efficient use of resources, reduces the need for new investments, and strengthens local ownership.

Building upon established institutions also enhances credibility, facilitates stakeholder engagement, and increases the likelihood of long-term sustainability. Where possible, the Training Centres are integrated

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into or closely linked with these existing infrastructures, ensuring continuity and coherence with ongoing educational and development initiatives.

**SIMSES Consultations**

The proposed Training Centre models were further discussed and refined through consultations with the SIMSES partnerships. These consultations ensured that the Training Centres are aligned with territorial priorities, stakeholder expectations, and local governance frameworks.

Through this iterative process, potential host organisations were validated, and the scope, structure, and focus of the Training Centres were adjusted to better reflect local contexts. This step also reinforced collaboration among partners and ensured that the Training Centres are embedded within the broader SIMSES strategies.

### 4.3.2 Selection Criteria

To ensure consistency across the project while respecting local specificities, a common set of selection criteria was developed. These criteria provide a transparent and structured basis for identifying suitable host organisations and ensuring the quality and sustainability of the Training Centres.

**Existing Educational Capacity**

Potential host organisations are expected to demonstrate proven experience in education, training, capacity building, or knowledge exchange. They should possess the necessary organisational, technical, and human resources to effectively manage and deliver Training Centre activities.

**Accessibility**

Training Centres should be accessible to a wide range of rural stakeholders, including those in remote or underserved areas. This includes ensuring physical accessibility where relevant, as well as offering digital learning formats to reach broader audiences. Inclusiveness and equal access are key considerations.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

Preference is given to organisations with strong connections to local stakeholders and demonstrated experience in multi-actor collaboration. The ability to engage diverse groups and facilitate participatory processes is essential for ensuring the relevance and impact of Training Centre activities.

**Long-Term Commitment**

Candidate organisations should demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting Training Centre activities beyond the duration of the project. This includes willingness to invest time, resources, and strategic effort into the continued development and operation of the Training Centres.

**Alignment with Local Priorities**

Training Centres must address identified territorial challenges and opportunities, contributing to local development strategies and policy objectives. Alignment with broader goals related to rural innovation, sustainability, and resilience is essential.

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**Sustainability Potential**

The selected organisations should demonstrate the capacity to secure future funding, establish partnerships, and integrate Training Centre activities into existing institutional frameworks. This ensures that the Training Centres can continue operating and evolving after the end of the project.

### 4.3.3 Establishment Criteria

The establishment of the Training Centres follows a structured, stepwise approach that combines institutional anchoring, stakeholder participation, and the development of tailored services. This process ensures that each Training Centre is both operationally viable and responsive to local needs.

**Host Identification**

Each SIMSES identifies an organisation or consortium of organisations capable of hosting and coordinating the Training Centre. The host organisation serves as the main operational anchor, providing infrastructure, administrative support, and coordination capacity.

**Governance Design**

A governance structure is established to define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. The governance model promotes transparency, inclusiveness, and collaboration, ensuring that relevant stakeholders are involved in strategic and operational decisions. This may include the establishment of advisory boards, steering committees, or stakeholder groups that contribute to the ongoing development of the Training Centre.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement continues throughout the establishment process to ensure that the Training Centres remain responsive to evolving needs. Engagement activities may include consultations, workshops, co-creation sessions, and collaborative planning exercises. This continuous involvement fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders and strengthens the integration of the Training Centres within the local ecosystem.

**Service Planning**

Each Training Centre develops an initial portfolio of services tailored to the specific needs and priorities of its territory. These services are designed to support capacity building, knowledge exchange, and innovation.

**Potential services include:**

- Capacity-building programmes targeting specific sectors or groups;
- Training courses and workshops on technical, managerial, and digital skills;
- Mentoring and coaching for entrepreneurs and innovators;
- Knowledge exchange events and networking activities;
- Digital learning opportunities, including online courses and webinars;
- Innovation support services, such as incubation and advisory activities;
- Learning activities linked to Living Labs and participatory innovation processes.

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The service portfolio is expected to evolve over time, adapting to emerging needs and opportunities.

**Validation Process**

Before becoming fully operational, each Training Centre undergoes a validation process involving local stakeholders and project partners. This process ensures that the proposed model is relevant, feasible, and aligned with both local and project-level objectives.

The validation focuses on:

- The adequacy of the governance structure;
- The relevance and quality of the proposed services;
- The feasibility of implementation;
- The sustainability and scalability potential.

Following validation, the Training Centres are formally established and integrated into the wider RURALITIES ecosystem. The validated Training Centres will play a key role in supporting knowledge exchange, strengthening rural capacities, fostering innovation, and facilitating long-term rural transformation. By acting as dynamic learning hubs, they contribute to building more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable rural communities.

### 4.3.4 Governance Framework

The governance framework of the RURALITIES Training Centres has been designed to ensure effective management, stakeholder participation, transparency, and long-term sustainability. While each Training Centre operates within a unique territorial context, a common governance approach has been adopted across the project to ensure coherence while allowing sufficient flexibility for local adaptation.

The governance model is based on the principle that Training Centres should function as collaborative and stakeholder-driven structures embedded within local rural innovation ecosystems. Their operation relies on the active involvement of educational institutions, public authorities, research organisations, businesses, civil society organisations, and local communities. This multi-actor approach helps ensure that the activities and services provided by the Training Centres remain relevant to local needs and contribute to broader rural development objectives.

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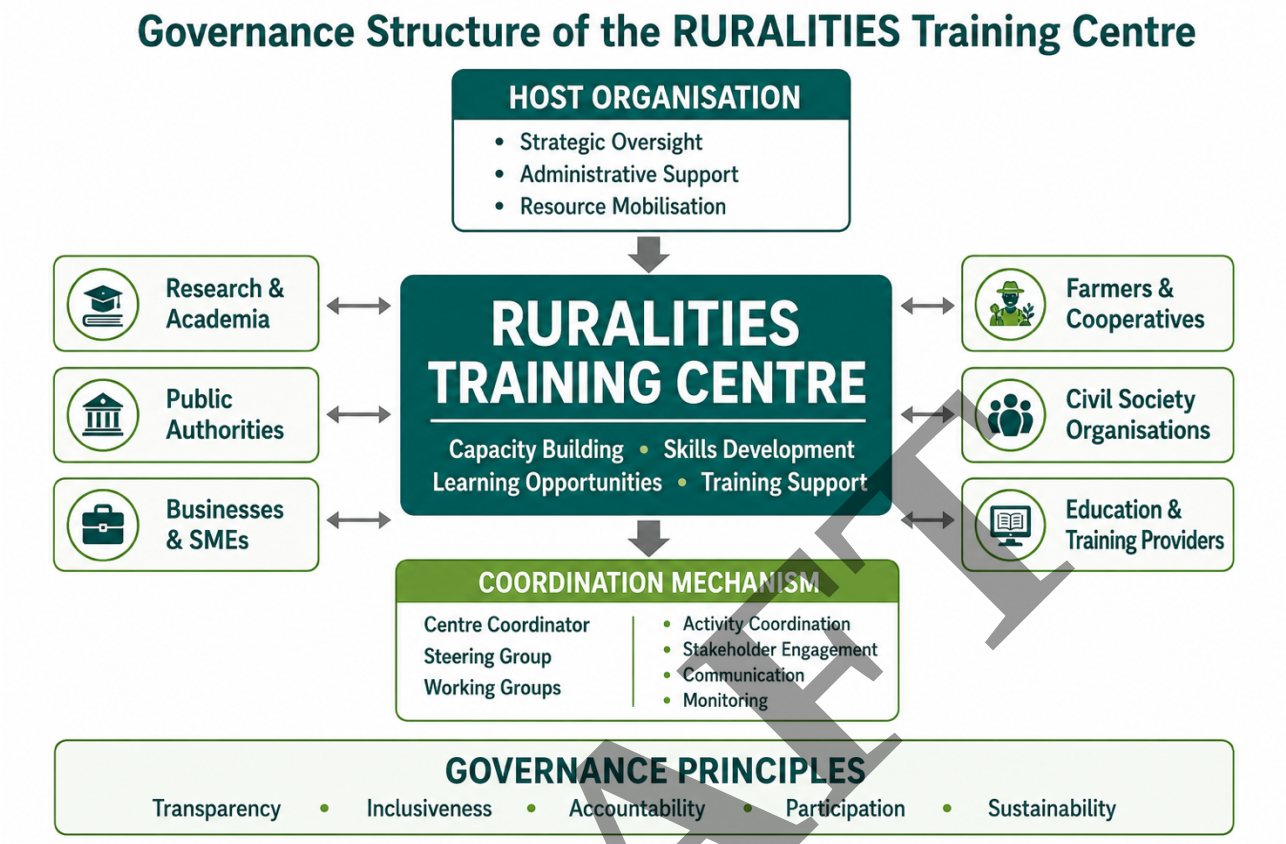



*Figure 2 Governance structure of RURALITIES Training Centre*

At the core of each Training Centre is a host organisation responsible for providing the institutional foundation necessary for its operation. Depending on the territorial context, the host may be a university, vocational training institution, research organisation, rural development agency, local authority, or another organisation with appropriate expertise and capacity. The host organisation provides administrative and operational support, facilitates stakeholder engagement, and contributes to the long-term continuity of the Training Centre.

The day-to-day operation of the Training Centre is coordinated through an appropriate management and coordination mechanism. This function is responsible for planning and implementing activities, coordinating partnerships, managing communication with stakeholders, organising learning and capacity-building initiatives, and monitoring progress. The coordination function also plays an important role in identifying emerging learning needs and adapting services to evolving territorial priorities.

Stakeholder participation represents a fundamental element of the governance framework. The Training Centres are expected to maintain regular dialogue with relevant stakeholders to ensure that their activities reflect local priorities and respond to the needs of rural communities. Stakeholder involvement may take various forms, including consultations, advisory groups, workshops, collaborative planning exercises, and participation in decision-making processes. Through these mechanisms, stakeholders contribute to shaping the strategic direction of the Training Centres and provide valuable feedback on their activities and services.

The governance framework also promotes strong connections with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Training Centres are expected to collaborate closely with Living Labs, Expertise Centres,

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facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services. These interactions facilitate knowledge exchange, strengthen synergies between learning and innovation activities, and support the development of integrated solutions to rural challenges. Through these collaborations, the Training Centres contribute to the creation of a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem that supports rural innovation, capacity building, and sustainable development.

Transparency and accountability are central principles of the governance approach. Clear roles and responsibilities are established for the organisations and individuals involved in the operation of each Training Centre, while decision-making processes are designed to be inclusive and participatory. Regular communication, stakeholder engagement, and performance monitoring contribute to maintaining trust among partners and ensuring continuous improvement.

Long-term sustainability is also an important consideration within the governance framework. The Training Centres are encouraged to progressively integrate their activities within existing institutional structures and regional development initiatives. By strengthening partnerships, building stakeholder ownership, and securing diverse sources of support, the Training Centres can enhance their resilience and continue delivering value beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

Overall, the governance framework provides the foundation for the effective operation of the RURALITIES Training Centres. By combining institutional support, stakeholder participation, collaborative decision-making, and strong links with the wider RURALITIES ecosystem, the governance model aims to ensure that the Training Centres remain relevant, responsive, and sustainable contributors to rural innovation and capacity building.

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## 4.4. Services and Support Portfolio

The RURALITIES Training Centres provide a comprehensive portfolio of learning, capacity-building, and support services designed to strengthen the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of rural stakeholders. These services contribute to the overall objective of empowering rural communities, organisations, and individuals to actively participate in innovation processes and sustainable territorial development.

The service portfolio has been designed to respond to the diverse needs of rural territories while maintaining flexibility to accommodate local priorities and emerging challenges. As a result, the specific services offered by individual Training Centres may vary depending on their thematic focus, target groups, available resources, and territorial context. Nevertheless, all Training Centres share a common commitment to supporting lifelong learning, fostering innovation, and enhancing the resilience of rural communities.

The services provided by the Training Centres are closely aligned with the broader objectives of the RURALITIES project and complement the activities of other ecosystem components, including Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services. Through these connections, the Training Centres contribute to creating integrated learning environments that combine education, innovation, stakeholder engagement, and practical application.

The service portfolio encompasses a wide range of educational and support activities. These include structured training programmes, workshops, seminars, mentoring and coaching services, peer-learning initiatives, knowledge exchange activities, digital learning opportunities, and access to educational

resources. Together, these services provide stakeholders with opportunities to acquire new competences, strengthen existing skills, and access relevant knowledge and expertise.

Emphasis is placed on practical and application-oriented learning approaches. The Training Centres seek to ensure that learning activities are closely connected to real-world challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities. This includes the use of case studies, demonstration activities, study visits, collaborative projects, Living Lab experiences, and interactions with practitioners and experts. Such approaches help bridge the gap between theory and practice and increase the relevance and effectiveness of capacity-building activities.

The Training Centres also play an important role in supporting the development of innovation-related competences. Through specialised training and support services, stakeholders are encouraged to strengthen their abilities in areas such as entrepreneurship, project development, digital transformation, sustainability, climate adaptation, community development, and innovation management. These competences are increasingly important for addressing the complex challenges affecting rural territories and for creating new opportunities for growth and development.

In addition to formal training activities, the Training Centres facilitate informal learning and networking opportunities that promote collaboration among stakeholders. By bringing together individuals and organisations from different sectors and backgrounds, the centres support the exchange of experiences, foster mutual learning, and encourage the development of new partnerships and initiatives.

The following sections describe the main categories of services delivered through the RURALITIES Training Centres, including training services, mentoring and coaching activities, learning resources, and lifelong learning opportunities. Together, these services form a comprehensive support portfolio that contributes to strengthening rural capacities and supporting sustainable rural transformation.

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### 4.4.1 Training Services

Training services constitute the core activity of the RURALITIES Training Centres and represent the primary mechanism through which knowledge, skills, and competences are transferred to rural stakeholders. The centres are designed to provide accessible, relevant, and practical learning opportunities that address the specific needs of rural communities while supporting broader territorial development objectives.

The training portfolio may include workshops, seminars, short courses, masterclasses, demonstration activities, practical training sessions, and thematic learning programmes. These activities are designed to support stakeholders in acquiring new competences and strengthening their ability to respond to economic, environmental, technological, and social challenges affecting rural territories.

Training topics are adapted to local priorities and may cover areas such as sustainable agriculture, digital transformation, entrepreneurship, innovation management, climate adaptation, circular economy, community development, social innovation, leadership, governance, and rural business development. Attention is given to practical learning approaches that enable participants to apply acquired knowledge directly within their professional and community contexts.

The Training Centres also seek to promote inclusive participation by offering learning opportunities tailored to different target groups, including farmers, entrepreneurs, public authorities, educators, researchers, youth, women, civil society organisations, and local communities. Through flexible delivery

formats and stakeholder-centred methodologies, the centres contribute to strengthening rural capacities and fostering a culture of continuous learning.

### 4.4.2 Mentoring and Coaching Services

In addition to formal training activities, the RURALITIES Training Centres provide mentoring and coaching services aimed at supporting individual and organisational development. These services complement traditional learning approaches by offering personalised guidance and practical support tailored to the needs of specific stakeholders.

Mentoring activities facilitate the transfer of experience and expertise between practitioners, experts, role models, and learners. Through structured mentoring relationships, participants can benefit from advice, knowledge sharing, professional guidance, and practical insights derived from real-world experiences. Such interactions support confidence building, problem-solving, and the development of innovation-oriented mindsets.

Coaching services focus on helping stakeholders identify objectives, overcome challenges, and strengthen specific competences relevant to their personal or professional development. Coaching may support entrepreneurs seeking to develop new business ideas, farmers exploring innovative practices, community leaders implementing local initiatives, or organisations aiming to strengthen their strategic capacities.

The mentoring and coaching services are particularly valuable in supporting innovation uptake, entrepreneurship development, leadership skills, and community empowerment. By providing targeted support, the Training Centres contribute to accelerating learning processes and enhancing the practical application of knowledge and skills.

### 4.4.3 Learning Resources and Knowledge Services

The RURALITIES Training Centres play an important role in collecting, organising, developing, and disseminating educational resources that support learning and capacity-building activities. These resources contribute to ensuring that stakeholders have access to relevant, reliable, and practical information that can support decision-making and innovation processes.

Learning resources may include training materials, educational modules, presentations, guidelines, manuals, toolkits, case studies, practice abstracts, policy briefs, videos, webinars, and digital learning content. The resources are developed using knowledge generated through project activities as well as external expertise, research findings, and examples of good practice.

Knowledge services also facilitate access to information relevant to rural development, innovation, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and capacity building. Through curated repositories and learning platforms, stakeholders can access educational materials and practical resources tailored to their needs and interests.

The Training Centres further contribute to knowledge exchange by translating complex research findings and innovation outcomes into accessible learning formats. This function helps bridge the gap between knowledge generation and practical application, ensuring that rural stakeholders can effectively utilise available expertise and information.

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### 4.4.4 Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Lifelong learning represents a fundamental principle underpinning the operation of the RURALITIES Training Centres. Recognising that rural stakeholders face continuously evolving challenges and opportunities, the centres promote learning as an ongoing process that extends beyond formal education and training.

The Training Centres seek to create flexible learning pathways that support individuals throughout different stages of their personal and professional development. Learning opportunities are designed to accommodate diverse educational backgrounds, levels of experience, and learning objectives, enabling stakeholders to engage in capacity-building activities according to their specific needs.

Lifelong learning activities may include recurring training programmes, thematic learning pathways, peer-learning initiatives, community learning events, professional development opportunities, and self-directed learning resources. These activities encourage continuous skills development and support stakeholders in adapting to changing economic, technological, environmental, and social conditions.

Emphasis is placed on fostering learning cultures within rural communities. By promoting curiosity, experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, the Training Centres contribute to strengthening local capacities and increasing the resilience of rural territories.

### 4.4.5 Digital Learning and Online Capacity Building

Digital learning represents an increasingly important component of the Training Centre service portfolio. The use of digital technologies enables Training Centres to extend their reach, improve accessibility, and provide learning opportunities to stakeholders regardless of geographical location.

Digital learning services may include online courses, webinars, virtual workshops, digital resource libraries, video tutorials, online mentoring sessions, and blended learning programmes combining physical and virtual participation. These approaches increase flexibility and enable participants to access learning opportunities at their own pace and according to their availability.

The use of digital platforms also supports collaboration and knowledge exchange between Training Centres operating in different territories. Shared learning resources, online communities of practice, and virtual learning environments facilitate continuous interaction and enable stakeholders to benefit from expertise and experiences beyond their local contexts.

By incorporating digital learning approaches into their service portfolios, the Training Centres contribute to reducing geographical barriers, promoting inclusiveness, and strengthening digital competences among rural stakeholders.

### 4.4.6 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support

The RURALITIES Training Centres contribute to strengthening innovation capacities and entrepreneurial mindsets within rural territories. Through dedicated learning and support activities, they help stakeholders identify opportunities, develop ideas, and acquire the competences necessary to transform innovative concepts into practical solutions.

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Innovation and entrepreneurship support services may include training on business development, innovation management, project design, funding opportunities, marketing, digital tools, sustainability strategies, and leadership skills. Participants are encouraged to explore new approaches, test ideas, and develop innovative responses to local challenges.

The Training Centres work closely with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services to ensure that innovation-related learning activities are connected to practical implementation opportunities. This integrated approach enables stakeholders not only to acquire knowledge but also to access the support mechanisms necessary for developing and implementing innovative initiatives.

By strengthening entrepreneurial and innovation capacities, the Training Centres contribute to job creation, economic diversification, social innovation, and the overall resilience of rural communities. These services support the broader objective of fostering dynamic rural innovation ecosystems capable of responding to future challenges and opportunities.

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# 5. Overview of the RURALITIES Training Centres

The RURALITIES Training Centres represent the territorial implementation of the project's capacity-building and lifelong learning ambitions. While all Training Centres share a common objective of strengthening rural skills, knowledge, and innovation capacities, each centre reflects the specific characteristics, priorities, opportunities, and challenges of its respective territory.

The Training Centres have been developed following a place-based approach that recognises the diversity of rural contexts across the RURALITIES territories. Consequently, the centres differ in terms of their thematic focus, governance arrangements, target audiences, available infrastructures, and service portfolios. This flexibility enables each Training Centre to respond effectively to local needs while contributing to the common objectives of the RURALITIES project.

The profiles presented in this chapter provide an overview of the Training Centres established within the participating SIMSES. The profiles illustrate how local stakeholders, organisations, and institutions have adapted the Training Centre concept to their territorial realities and development priorities. Together, they demonstrate the versatility of the RURALITIES approach and the potential of Training Centres to support learning, innovation, and sustainable rural development in different socio-economic and geographical contexts.

Each Training Centre profile includes information on the territorial context, host organisation, governance arrangements, thematic focus areas, target groups, planned learning activities, and long-term sustainability considerations. Attention is given to the role of each Training Centre within the local innovation ecosystem and its contribution to broader territorial development objectives.

Although the specific focus areas vary between territories, the Training Centres collectively address a range of topics relevant to contemporary rural development. These include sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurship, digital transformation, climate resilience, circular economy approaches, community development, social innovation, cultural heritage, tourism, and skills for the green transition. Through these thematic areas, the centres contribute to strengthening both individual capacities and the overall resilience of rural communities.

The Training Centres also serve as important connectors within the wider RURALITIES ecosystem. Through their collaboration with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services, they facilitate the exchange of knowledge and innovation into practical learning opportunities. This integrated approach helps ensure that stakeholders not only access new knowledge but also develop the competences necessary to apply it effectively within their local contexts.

The following sections present the individual profiles of the Training Centres established within the RURALITIES territories. While each centre has its own unique characteristics and priorities, together they form a collaborative network of learning and capacity-building structures that contribute to the project's long-term vision of fostering resilient, innovative, and sustainable rural communities.

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## 5.1 SIMSES 1 Training Centre Profile

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | TBC |
| **Hosting organisation** | Istituto Antonio Cecchi di Pesaro |
| **Website** | https://www.iiscecchi.edu.it/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | mikyps69@gmail.com |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

- Lead Hosting Organisation: The Istituto Antonio Cecchi di Pesaro serves as the primary host, utilizing its established facilities which are fully sufficient and equipped to handle all development, capacity-building, and implementation activities of the center.
- Organizational Framework and Roles: The training center's operations are designed around three core pillars to serve the entire value chain:
    - *Producer Management:* Coordinating training and knowledge transfer directly with agricultural producers.
    - *Processing and Commercialization:* Delivering educational support focused on product processing phases and downstream market placement.
    - *Data Dissemination and Consultation:* Managing data collection and technical outreach, establishing the center as a specialized advisory hub for all actors across the production and distribution chain.
- Involved Education and Training Partners: The center leverages a large, immediate audience by integrating project-specific lessons directly into the curriculum for its own student body, alongside hosting dedicated educational visits and training sessions for students from external schools.
- Existing Networks and Alliances: The center activates the institute's extensive secondary school network to ensure broad regional outreach among youth. Crucially, the initiative builds upon a strong, pre-existing collaboration with local agricultural trade unions (*organizzazioni sindacali locali*), transforming these established institutional relationships into a key driver for the training framework's operational success.

### 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

- Territorial Context and Authority: The foundational strength of this initiative relies on the deeply rooted individual expertise of the local partners. Having operated within the region for years, these actors serve as trusted benchmarks for professional training, technical dissemination, and the local distribution of agricultural development funds.
- Top Territorial Skills Gaps and Training Needs:

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- *Overcoming Novel Crop Scepticism:* Addressing a widespread lack of trust toward an unfamiliar product. This barrier can only be dismantled by training farmers on the economic and income-generating stability the crop provides.
- *Early-Stage Value Chain Commercialization:* Managing product development and marketing capacities during the initial phases. Small initial harvest volumes make it challenging to draft large-scale, commercially attractive business plans for processing industries.

- Main Sectors and Stakeholders Affected: The capacity building directly targets individual farmers, agricultural cooperatives and consortia, oil extraction facilities, processing SMEs, and the downstream end-use industries identified by technical analysis.
- Existing Barriers to Education and Knowledge Transfer: Cultural mindset blocks represent the primary barrier. Safflower is completely absent from the local agricultural tradition as a product for human or animal consumption. Overcoming the fundamental question of *"what will this crop actually be used for?"* is critical to securing local adoption.
- How the Training Centre Resolves These Challenges: Operating under a zero-budget profile, the center will train a strategic pioneer cohort of local farmers. By dedicating a portion of their fields to safflower, these producers create highly visible, peer-to-peer demonstration plots. This allows neighbouring farmers to directly witness the crop's cultivation techniques, real-world handling, and clear economic advantages.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

- Main Target Groups and Beneficiaries:
  - *Students and Rural Youth:* Positioned within the immediate school environment to cultivate a long-term "safflower awareness" (*coscienza del cartamo*) that will drive regional agricultural growth in the coming years.
  - *Local Farmers and Primary Producers:* Directly integrated into the learning framework to receive practical agronomic guidance and evaluate the crop's economic viability.
  - *Processors and Supply Chain SMEs:* Transformation and distribution actors who require alignment on the technical specifications and quality standards of the raw material.
- Current Challenges and Training Needs:
  - The primary challenge is the absolute need to build foundational regional awareness and technical knowledge regarding this completely new crop.
  - Specific training priorities will be dynamically driven by the laboratory analysis of the experimental plot scheduled for September. This scientific baseline will determine the final commercial destination of the harvest, which will in turn shape the specialized modules for specific safflower varieties and their intended industrial end-uses.
- Expected Level of Engagement and Participation:

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- *Active Student Living Labs:* Students will participate directly in practical Living Lab sessions, learning and documenting all essential phases of the safflower cultivation cycle.
- *Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer:* The educational materials and field observations compiled during the student Living Labs will be directly shared with local farmers, serving as low-cost, highly practical cultivation guides.
- *Industrial Testimonials:* Downstream processors and industrial end-users will actively participate in the capacity-building process as real-world testimonials. Their direct involvement will demonstrate the concrete economic purpose and long-term viability of the value chain to both students and prospective growers.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

- Field-Based Demonstration Activities: The training center maximizes the use of the physical experimental plot at the Istituto Antonio Cecchi. During the pivotal August harvest and September oil extraction phases, the fields and processing spaces serve as an open-air classroom for hands-on, practical learning.
- Peer-to-Peer Learning and Field Days: To accommodate part-time staff limits, the educational approach relies heavily on direct peer exchange. Early adopting pioneer farmers and agronomy students interact directly on-site, sharing practical cultivation techniques, machinery adjustments, and field observations.
- Hybrid Workshops and Industrial Seminars: The center transforms its technical milestones—specifically the post-harvest and chemical analysis evaluation sessions—into interactive, zero-overhead educational workshops. Downstream industrial buyers participate as real-world testimonials, explaining exact market requirements and quality standards directly to the growers.
- Low-Cost Digital Micro-Learning: Practical data and observations compiled during the student Living Labs are repackaged into short, easily digestible digital guides and micro-modules. These are distributed via existing email networks and local agricultural trade union channels, bypassing the need for expensive online learning platforms.
- Curriculum Integration and Certification: For youth, training is seamlessly embedded into the existing vocational school curriculum at the Cecchi Institute. For adult farmers, simple digital certificates of participation are issued directly by the host institution at zero extra cost, validating their capacity to meet supply chain standards.
- Rural Accessibility Considerations: Training actions are either localized at the well-known regional agricultural institute or delivered digitally. This allows busy rural producers to access crucial value chain insights without disrupting their traditional harvest schedules or incurring unnecessary travel expenses.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

- The Experimental Plot as a Practical Sandbox: The training activities are structurally embedded within the physical Living Lab framework established at the Istituto Cecchi. The experimental safflower plot serves as the primary testing ground where real-world agricultural experimentation and capacity building happen simultaneously, rather than in isolation.

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- Active Learner Participation in Pilots: Students and local farmers do not just receive passive instruction; they are directly integrated into live operational milestones. During the August harvest and September oil extraction phases, learners participate in field demonstrations and co-creation activities. They work alongside technical experts to observe crop performance, monitor machinery adjustments, and document the workflow, gaining immediate, hands-on experience with the new value chain.

- Integrating Lessons Learned into Educational Content: The training content is dynamically driven by the actual outcomes of the Living Lab's seasonal cycle. For example, the chemical data and product profiling resulting from the September laboratory analysis are immediately translated into clear, simplified learning modules. Furthermore, the operational insights, field logs, and practical observations compiled by agronomy students during their Living Lab sessions are repackaged into highly practical, low-cost cultivation guides for local farmers.

- Synergy with RURALITIES and Expertise Centre Structures: The Training Centre operates in a continuous feedback loop with the RURALITIES Expertise Centre governance team. While the Expertise Centre partners manage the technical and strategic tasks—CeRSAI handling agronomics, Museum Graphia directing commercial viability, and GAL Montefeltro managing territorial data—the Training Centre transforms this live operational data into actionable knowledge. This tight collaboration ensures that regional training remains perfectly aligned with real-time value chain developments and market needs.

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**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

**1. Strategic Priorities for 2027**

- Validating Experimentation into Common Practice: The primary educational priority is translating live agronomic data from the experimental plots into practical training that convinces sceptical local farmers that safflower can be seamlessly adopted as a standard, reliable crop system within their traditional crop rotations.

- Fostering "Safflower Awareness" in Schools: The center will embed specific safflower cultivation modules directly into the vocational curriculum at the Istituto Antonio Cecchi. By engaging the student body early on, the project aims to seed a permanent agricultural tradition and long-term knowledge base within the region.

- Activating the Joint Training Loop: Operational priorities focus on linking the three core target groups to build the value chain from the ground up:

    - *Students* actively document the physical Living Lab parameters.

    - *Farmers* receive this peer-reviewed knowledge to manage risk and secure stable income alternative paths.

    - *Processors and Industrial Stakeholders* participate as technical benchmarks, aligning training modules with exact industrial quality standards and market end-uses.

- Strengthening RURALITIES & SIMSES Objectives: Operating on a zero-budget profile, the training center acts as a lean knowledge broker, building local capacity and driving rural resilience by connecting primary production directly with real-world bio-industrial demands.

### *2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

*Table 2 SIMSES1 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activity / service | Tentative timeline | Responsible organisation(s) | Main target learners | Expected outputs/results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Online technical workshops on safflower cultivation, requirements, economics and crop performance | Q1–Q4 2027 | GAL Montefeltro, CeRSAI, Istituto Antonio Cecchi | Local farmers, agricultural consortia, vocational students | Four online technical workshops delivered; improved technical knowledge and accessibility for rural participants |
| Field demonstration and practical learning sessions | Q2–Q3 2027 | Istituto Antonio Cecchi, CeRSAI | Farmers, vocational students, primary producers | Two field demonstration sessions; practical knowledge on crop establishment, growth, protection and harvesting |
| Continuous technical mentoring and coaching | Throughout 2027 | CeRSAI | Early adopting farmers and primary producers | Continuous guidance on crop scheduling, weed control, herbicide application and pest management |
| Living Lab practical learning during harvest | Q3 2027 | Istituto Antonio Cecchi and project partners | Students, farmers, processing partners | Hands-on participation in mechanical harvesting and documentation of crop performance |
| Processing demonstration and technical seminar | Q3 2027 | Museum Graphia / La Corte della Miniera, Istituto Antonio Cecchi | Farmers, students, processing SMEs and industrial stakeholders | Demonstration of oil extraction and dissemination of laboratory results and commercial applications |
| Curriculum integration and digital learning resources | Throughout 2027 | Istituto Antonio Cecchi, GAL Montefeltro | 3rd and 4th-year vocational students, farmers | Safflower technical datasheets integrated into school curricula; practical cultivation guides developed and disseminated |
| Community peer-learning and awareness activities | Q4 2027 | GAL Montefeltro, local agricultural trade unions | Wider farming community and | Increased awareness and trust; peer-to-peer dissemination and |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | commercial stakeholders | recruitment of farmers for the following cultivation cycle |

**3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy**

- Target Learner Groups: The strategy specifically focuses on 3rd and 4th-year vocational agronomy students, local marginal-land farmers, and regional agricultural processing technicians.

- Recruitment and Engagement Methods: Students are directly enrolled through their core institutional coursework. To engage the wider farming community, the center leverages the established networks of local agricultural trade unions (*organizzazioni sindacali*) through targeted SMS and email outreach, intentionally fostering trusted peer-to-peer word-of-mouth (*passaparola*).

- Accessibility and Inclusion Measures: All theoretical and operational workshops are hosted entirely online via free, mobile-friendly digital platforms to eliminate travel times and costs for remote rural producers. All physical training actions are centralized at the well-known, highly accessible facilities of the Istituto Cecchi with zero participation fees.

- Community Co-Creation and Practical Learning: Local producers and industrial end-users participate as active co-creators during the pivotal August harvest and September oil extraction phases. Working side-by-side with students in the Living Lab, they directly evaluate raw crop yields and certified chemical profiling data, collectively transforming the experimental plot into a practical, shared baseline for the region's new value chain.

**4. Resource and Capacity Needs**

- Human Resources and Trainers: Training and workshop instructions are delivered exclusively by experts from the core Horizon Europe project partner organizations. The Istituto Cecchi is responsible for managing field operations and converting them into practical didactic activities. La Corte della Miniera / Museum Graphia handles instruction regarding commercialization and product processing systems, while GAL Montefeltro is entrusted with the widespread dissemination of all developed educational materials.

- Infrastructure and Digital Tools: The center requires no new capital investments, fully utilizing the existing classrooms, laboratories, and experimental fields at the Istituto Cecchi. Digital training and webinars are delivered via free, mobile-friendly virtual platforms to ensure zero-cost accessibility for remote rural participants.

- Financial and Operational Support: Allocated Horizon Europe funding is fully sufficient to support the initial setup of the 2027 learning framework. Operational stability depends on a precise financial control system that grows in parallel with the multi-functional development of the supply chain.

- Implementation Barriers and Risks: The main risk is that rapid growth within the expanding stakeholder network could overwhelm internal control mechanisms, straining communication and coordination loops between the distinct participating entities

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**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

- Skills Development and Direct Local Benefits: The capacity-building framework will successfully equip vocational students and local primary producers with certified, specialized agronomic and technical processing skills. By replacing initial cultural scepticism with practical, hands-on experience, the local farming community gains the direct capability to handle safflower as a standard, reliable crop alternative.

- Doubling Cultivation Areas and Volumes: Driven by the training center's targeted workshops, field days, and continuous coaching networks throughout 2027, internal forecasts indicate that these joint educational efforts will result in a doubling of both cultivation surface areas and overall raw production volumes within the territory for the subsequent season.

- Economic Viability as the Cornerstone: This planned production scaling is fundamentally tied to the rigorous technical verification system of the final outputs—specifically the high-margin safflower oil and its processing by-products. Proving the economic viability and concrete financial returns of the value chain serves as the absolute cornerstone for its commercial development, market integration, and long-term success.

- Rural Innovation and Long-Term Scalability: By generating a low-overhead, self-sustaining loop where agronomy students co-create practical cultivation knowledge alongside active local growers, the center establishes a permanent regional tradition. The successful translation of raw laboratory data into scalable farming guidelines provides a highly replicable capacity-building blueprint for other rural territories aiming to diversify agricultural income and boost territorial economic resilience.

***6. Planned Milestones for 2027***

*Table 3 SIMSES1 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative period | Key milestone / implementation phase |
|---|---|
| January–March 2027 | Complete safflower technical datasheets and integrate them into 3rd and 4th-year vocational programmes; enrol the first cohort of pioneer producers; deliver Online Workshops 1 and 2 |
| April–June 2027 | Launch student-led Living Lab tracking; deliver Field Demonstration Session 1; activate continuous expert mentoring |
| July–August 2027 | Deliver Field Demonstration Session 2 and Online Workshop 3; conduct mechanical harvest as a practical learning activity; deliver Seminar 1 on crop yields and initial economic value |
| September 2027 | Conduct the oil-extraction pilot and laboratory chemical profiling; deliver Seminar 2 on product properties and commercial applications |
| October–December 2027 | Publish and distribute practical cultivation guides; deliver Online Workshop 4; collect feedback and activate the peer-learning framework supporting preparation for the 2028 cultivation cycle |

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## 5.2 SIMSES 2 Training Centre Profile

*Table 4 SIMSES2 Training Centre Contact information*

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | SmartAltopiano |
| **Hosting organisation** | LAG Montagna Vicentina |
| **Website** | https://www.montagnavicentina.com/smartaltopiano/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | progettazione@montagnavicentina.com |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

GAL Montagna Vicentina (GMV) hosts the Training Centre for SIMSES 2 – Altopiano dei Sette Comuni. FHV and GMV coordinate activities and act as the main interface between education partners and local learners, building on the same soft-governance approach adopted for the Expertise Centre.

The Training Centre involves a wide network of education and training partners:

- Marzotto-Luzzati Higher Institute, Guido Piovene Higher Institute, ITET Aulo Ceccato Higher Institute and Mario Rigoni Stern Higher Institute provide secondary-education links and access to students;
- University of Padua and University Ca' Foscari in Venice contribute academic and research input;
- ITS Academy offers higher vocational-technical training.

In addition to the above-mentioned partners, the center will be able to leverage the expertise of the extensive Romea Strata network, which includes universities as well as numerous experts in the identified key field. Furthermore, several consolidated results from other initiatives led by FHV include training modules that can be made available to the local territory (such as Train2EUPilgrimage, DATA4Rural and SmartWAYS).

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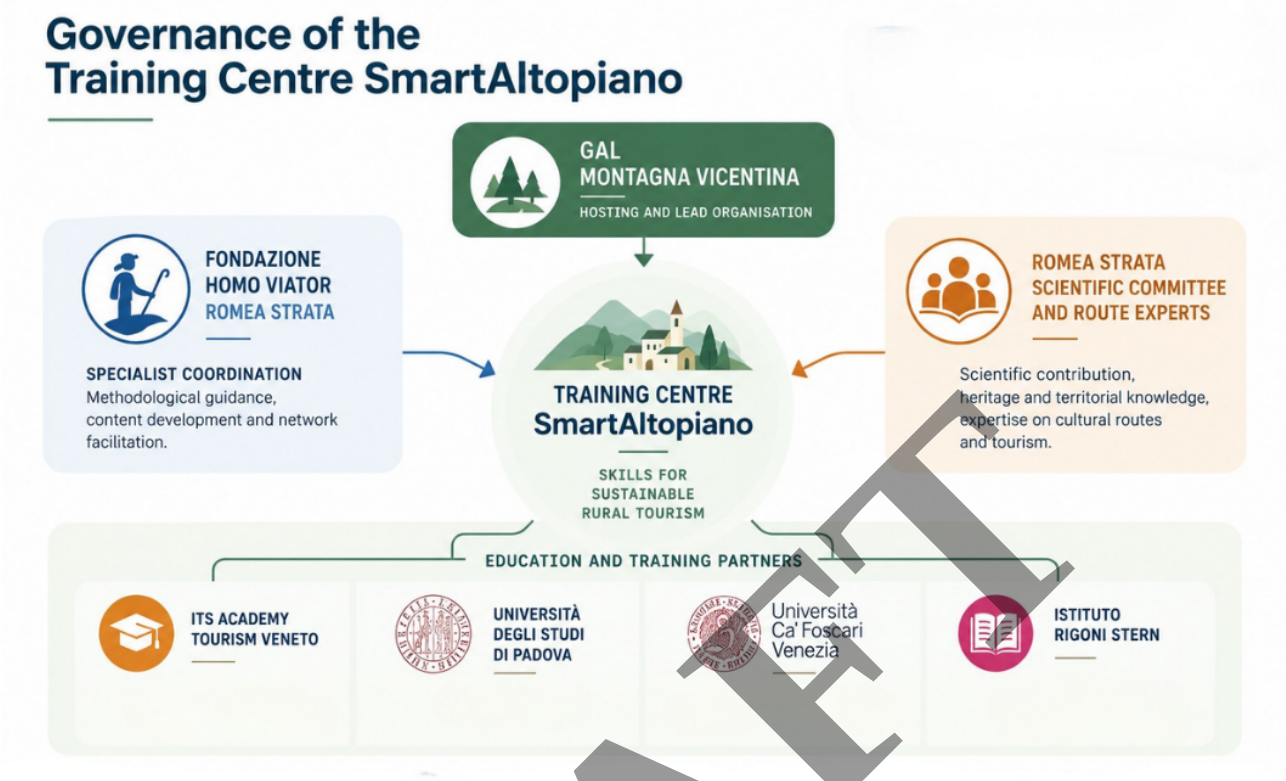



*Figure 3 Governance structure of the SIMSES2 Training Centre*

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## 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

Two priority skills gaps have been identified within the SIMSES 2 territory and formally logged as Unique Challenges under WP8.

Challenge 1 – Specific cultural skills for tourism professionals

*(rated 7/10 for size, 9/10 for importance)*

Highlights a critical gap among local operators, many of whom lack structured expertise in interpreting, packaging, and communicating the plateau's rich cultural and natural heritage. This includes its unique Cimbrian identity, which requires nuanced narrative framing. Elevating these capabilities is essential to shifting the local tourism model toward high-value, slow, and sustainable tourism, moving away from low-impact, short-stay mass visits.

Challenge 2 – Data literacy for tourism professionals and public administration in rural areas

*(rated 9/10 for both size and importance)*

This capability gap significantly constrains evidence-based decision-making across both the private sector and local public administration. Without structured data literacy, businesses struggle to optimize their offerings, while municipal authorities face challenges in managing seasonal flows, allocating resources effectively, and designing long-term sustainable tourism strategies.

These gaps mainly affect small and micro tourism businesses, which typically lack in-house training resources, and municipal/public-administration staff, who are expected to plan and implement tourism

development but often lack dedicated data-analysis capacity. Existing barriers to training include the dispersed, mountainous geography of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, limited time availability of small entrepreneurs, and the school-calendar dependency described for the Expertise Centre.

The Training Centre aims to address these gaps through targeted, practical training formats (see below) designed to fit around participants' limited availability, delivered in partnership with schools, ITS Academy and the University of Padua, and increasingly linked to the DATA4Rural curriculum strand to ground data-literacy training in real, local datasets.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

The Training Centre's primary target groups encompass small and micro rural entrepreneurs—with a particular focus on the tourism, hospitality, and local service sectors—alongside public administration staff and civil servants operating within the municipalities of the Sette Comuni and Unione Montana.

Small and micro business owners face the ongoing challenge of balancing demanding daily operations with the time required for professional development. Consequently, their learning needs lean heavily toward practical, highly actionable skills and immediately applicable tools, rather than purely theoretical instruction. On the other hand, local civil servants face the distinct challenge of translating complex national and regional data, policies, and planning frameworks into meaningful, context-specific tourism and territorial strategies—a task often hindered by a lack of dedicated technical staff and specialized internal resources.

To address these constraints, both target groups are expected to engage at a moderate, incremental level. Rather than traditional, long-form academic courses, the training offer will rely on short, modular, and flexible formats—such as targeted webinars, practical toolkits, and interactive participatory workshops. This tailored structure directly respects the limited time availability of local stakeholders while accounting for the geographically dispersed nature of the rural territory.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

The Training Centre favours realistic, low-barrier formats: webinars and online workshops, allowing participants to join remotely without travelling across the plateau, and participatory design workshops, bringing entrepreneurs, public officials and, where relevant, students together to work on concrete local challenges rather than abstract content.

No formal certification mechanism is currently in place; the possibility of linking training modules to a micro-credential system is being explored (see integration with DATA4Rural below), which would also provide a lightweight recognition mechanism for participants. Contents will be arranged and shaped according to the findings of a survey that has been circulated among stakeholders during 2026.

Accessibility for rural participants is supported by the remote/webinar format, which reduces travel time across the dispersed municipalities of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, complemented by in-person workshops scheduled to minimise disruption to small entrepreneurs' working hours. The workshops will be held in different locations within the pilot areas allowing even remote villages to host at least one initiative.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

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The Training Centre is strategically designed to establish strong, operational synergies with the DATA4RURAL initiative. A primary opportunity within this framework is the provision of "training pills"—short, flexible, and modular learning units organized around a recognized micro-credentials system—directly linked to the data-literacy and use cases-based training of DATA4Rural. This structural interconnection ensures that educational content is deeply rooted in real-time, locally relevant datasets (such as actual tourism flows, mobility trends, and seasonality patterns), moving away from abstract or generic external case studies.

This hands-on integration significantly reinforces the applied, experiential nature of the training programs. Furthermore, a continuous feedback loop will be established: valuable insights, methodologies, and lessons learned from Living Lab pilot actions will regularly update and enrich the training curricula, keeping them fully aligned with the territory's evolving innovation landscape.

Finally, collaboration between the Training Centre and other key RURALITIES structures is actively driven by the shared GMV/FHV coordination team, which concurrently supports the Expertise Centre. This dual governance model guarantees strong strategic alignment across strategic priorities—namely slow tourism development, de-seasonalization strategies, and digital data literacy. Crucially, it enables key educational and academic partners (including secondary schools, ITS Academies, and the University of Padua) to contribute seamlessly to both formal training delivery and Living Lab experimentation.

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*Figure 4 Headquarter of LAG Montagna Vicentina – Credit Asiago.it*

**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

In 2027, the primary objective of the Training Centre is to successfully design and deliver its first structured cycle of targeted webinars and interactive, participatory workshops. This inaugural offer

directly addresses two critical, pre-identified capability gaps within the local territory: cultural interpretation skills tailored for tourism and hospitality professionals, and practical data literacy designed for both private operators and public administration staff.

A central priority throughout this phase is establishing a seamless, operational connection with the DATA4Rural initiative. This includes testing and refining the "training pills" format—short, flexible, micro-credentialed learning units—to ensure that capacity building is directly informed by local, real-time territorial data rather than abstract concepts.

By embedding this micro-credentials framework into the broader training ecosystem, the Centre aims to make professional education an integral, formally recognized component of the SIMSES 2 capacity-building framework. Ultimately, this integrated approach ensures that training activities contribute directly, measurably, and sustainably to the overarching goals of the RURALITIES project.

## 2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services

*Table 5 SIMSES2 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activities | Tentative timeline | Responsible | Target groups | Expected outputs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Webinar series: interpreting and communicating local cultural heritage | Q1–Q2-Q3 2027 | GMV, FHV, ITS Academy | Small tourism entrepreneurs | Improved storytelling/heritage-interpretation skills |
| Participatory workshops: data literacy for tourism planning | Q2 2027 | FHV, DATA4Rural | Civil servants, tourism operators | Improved use of tourism/territorial data in planning |
| Pilot "pills of training" linked to DATA4Rural | Q3 2027 | DATA4Rural team | Entrepreneurs, civil servants, students | First micro-credential modules tested |
| Field visit / practical learning session on Living Lab pilot site | Q3 2027 | GMV, FHV | Entrepreneurs, students | Direct exposure to Living Lab practice |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluation and feedback collection | Q4 2027 | FHV | All learner groups | Feedback report; input for 2028 planning |

**3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy**

During 2027 the Training Centre will target small and micro rural entrepreneurs and municipal civil servants across the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni. Participant recruitment will draw on GMV's and FHV's existing relationships with local businesses and the Unione Montana, complemented by promotion through the partner schools and ITS Academy. Accessibility and inclusion will be supported through the webinar format (reducing travel needs across the dispersed plateau) and by scheduling in-person workshops outside peak business hours. Local communities and end-users will be invited to contribute to co-creation activities, particularly where training links to Living Lab pilot sites, ensuring training content remains grounded in real local needs rather than generic curricula.

**4. Resource and Capacity Needs**

Successfully delivering the 2027 training programme relies on the coordinated deployment of expert trainers and facilitators from GMV, FHV, and key education partners, including the University of Padua, ITS Academy, and local partner schools. In parallel, specialized technical expertise is required to build, test, and deploy the micro-credentials pilot system in direct alignment with DATA4Rural 's data-literacy framework.

From an infrastructure perspective, execution depends on both digital and physical assets: reliable webinar and e-learning platforms for remote participation, alongside accessible, well-equipped local venues for in-person workshops, leveraged through the Unione Montana municipal network. Targeted financial and organizational support will be crucial to cover expert trainer hours, offset workshop logistics, and fund the technical development of the micro-credential framework.

The primary operational risks align closely with those identified for the Expertise Centre:

- Academic Calendar Constraints: Alignment with school and university calendars may restrict the availability of educational partners.
- Participant Time Limitations: The high daily operational load of micro and small business owners poses a challenge to consistent attendance and long-term continuity.

To mitigate these risks, training activities will be offered through flexible, short, and modular sessions, ensuring high engagement without disrupting business or academic cycles.

**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

The training activities scheduled for 2027 are designed to deliver tangible, long-term impacts for both the private and public sectors across the Altopiano territory.

For local entrepreneurs , the program will build advanced cultural-interpretation and storytelling capabilities, enabling them to package and promote the region's unique heritage. This directly fosters a more distinctive, high-value slow-tourism offer that moves away from short-stay mass tourism. For local

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civil servants and public administration staff, the training will build practical data literacy, improving their capacity to gather, analyse, and apply local tourism and territorial data directly into municipal planning and policy formulation.

At a structural level, piloting the DATA4Rural -linked "pills of training" and micro-credentials framework will establish a flexible, low-barrier educational model. Designed to be lightweight and highly adaptable, this format can be easily scaled to address emerging local needs or transferred to other Local Action Group (LAG) territories facing similar rural development challenges.

Over the long term, these combined outcomes will lay the groundwork for a more resilient local economy: driving sustainable entrepreneurship, enabling evidence-based public decision-making, and solidifying a permanent ecosystem that integrates vocational training, academic research, and Living Lab experimentation across the region.

### 6. Planned Milestones for 2027

*Table 6 SIMSES2 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative period | Key milestone / implementation phase |
|---|---|
| Q1 2027 | Finalise and disseminate the annual training calendar; launch the first webinar series on cultural-heritage interpretation |
| Q1–Q2 2027 | Develop training materials addressing identified territorial skills gaps |
| Q2 2027 | Deliver the first participatory workshop on data literacy for tourism planning |
| Q3 2027 | Pilot the DATA4RURAL-linked "pills of training" / micro-credential module |
| Q3 2027 | Deliver a Living Lab integration activity / practical field visit |
| Q4 2027 | Complete evaluation and feedback collection and prepare sustainability and continuation planning |

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## 5.3 SIMSES 3 Training Centre Profile

*Table 7 SIMSES3 Training Centre Contact information*

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | People & Place programme, Behaviour Change Officer forum and Making Connections Network |
| **Hosting organisation** | HITRANS |
| **Website** | https://hitrans.org.uk/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | katy.beasley@hitrans.org.uk |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

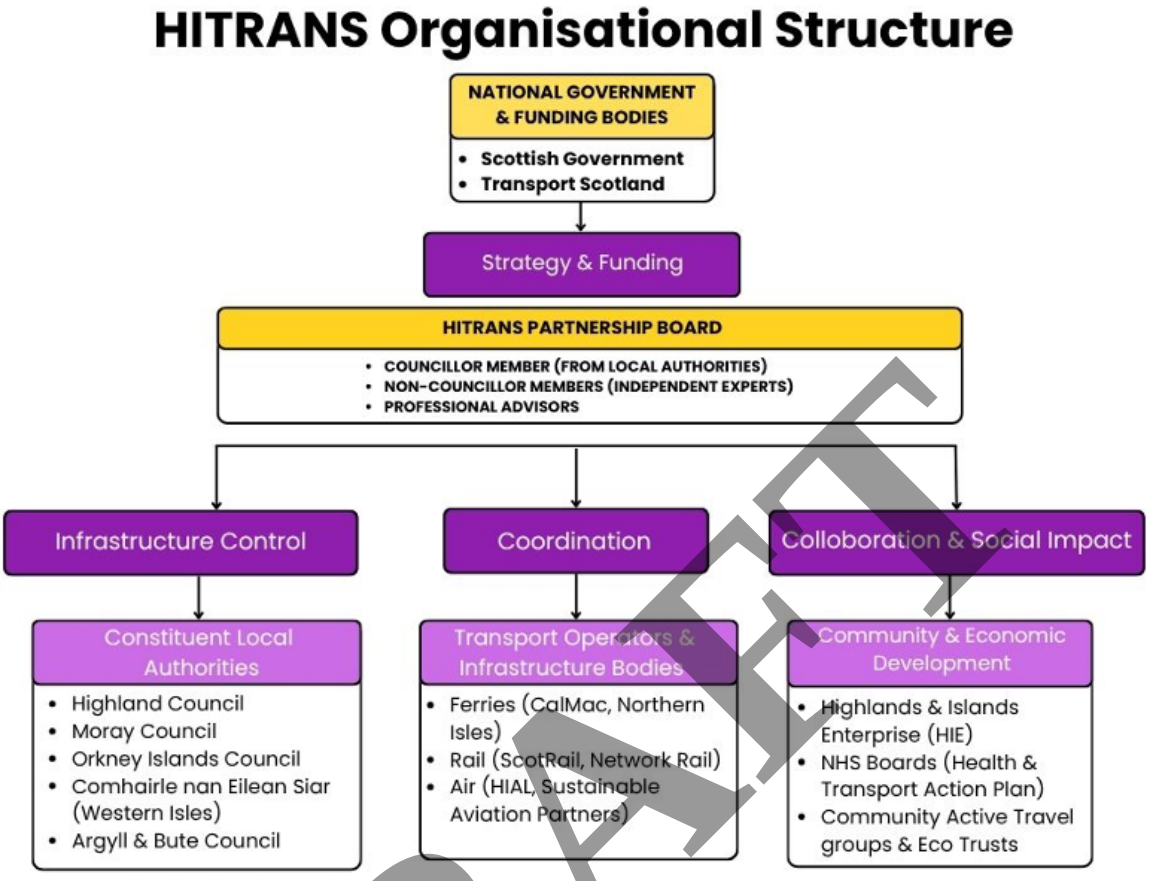
HITRANS is the lead regional organisation coordinating the RURALITIES activity in the Highlands and Islands SIMSES, providing the strategic framework, programme coordination, funding oversight and connections between public bodies, communities, transport providers and specialist delivery organisations. HITRANS' People and Place Programme, supported by Transport Scotland, provides a wider delivery ecosystem through which locally led capacity building, practical innovation and knowledge sharing are developed and tested.

Delivery is supported by a network of local delivery partners and community organisations across Highland, Moray, the Western Isles, Argyll and Bute and other island communities. These organisations bring local knowledge, trusted relationships and practical expertise in cycling, walking, accessibility, behaviour change, employability and community development. Examples include Adventure Oban, Argyll Countryside Trust, Fort William Bike Shed/Lochaber Environmental Group, Outfit Moray and Volunteering Hebrides.

The Training Centre approach is further strengthened through education and skills partnerships. These include Lochaber High School, which supports delivery of an SQA National 3 qualification in cycle maintenance, as well as schools across the region involved in Bikeability, cycling skills, maintenance and active-travel programmes. Specialist partners such as Shopmobility Highland and Spinal Injuries Scotland contribute expertise in inclusive mobility and accessibility.

HITRANS also facilitates practitioner learning networks, including the Behaviour Change Officer forum and regional learning and networking events such as Making Connections. These provide an established mechanism for sharing experience, developing skills and transferring learning between rural and island communities. Both events created opportunities to exchange and learn from rural experiences resulting in a programme being re-established and gaps and capacity being addressed.

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**2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs**

The Highlands and Islands SIMSES identifies several interconnected skills and capacity gaps that the Training Centre could help address. These needs reflect the specific challenges of remote, rural and island communities, including dispersed populations, long travel distances, limited public transport and smaller organisations with constrained resources.

1. Technical and practical mobility skills. There is a continuing need for cycle maintenance, repair, refurbishment, adaptive cycling and practical active-travel skills. Projects such as Fort William Bike Shed demonstrate demand for mechanic training, volunteer development and formal qualifications, while organisations such as Argyll Countryside Trust and SPIN Project use bicycle refurbishment as a route into skills development.

2. Digital and technology adoption skills. Smaller rural and community transport operators can lack the capacity to configure, operate and manage new digital systems. Experience with Moove Flexi showed that technology adoption requires support with system configuration, training and ongoing management, not simply access to the technology. HITRANS developed guidance for prospective operators.

3. Behaviour-change, active-travel and journey-planning expertise. Local authorities, schools, workplaces and community organisations require skills to develop effective walking, cycling, travel-planning and

behaviour-change programmes. The Behaviour Change Officer Forum demonstrates the value of peer learning and sharing practical approaches across the region.

4. Inclusive and accessible mobility skills. There is a need for greater understanding of how mobility services, equipment and infrastructure can be adapted for people with disabilities, reduced confidence or other barriers to participation. The HI-BIKE Inclusive Cycling Membership demonstrates the importance of combining specialist knowledge with mainstream transport assets which in this case were adapted to serve people who would otherwise be excluded.

5. Organisational and community delivery capacity. Smaller local organisations often need support in project development, volunteer management, partnership working, funding, monitoring and scaling successful projects and ideas. This is particularly important where funding reductions increase pressure on existing capacity.

The main groups affected are community organisations, local authorities, transport operators, schools, workplaces, volunteers and specialist inclusion organisations. Geographic dispersion, limited organisational capacity, resource constraints and difficulties accessing training are significant barriers. The Training Centre could respond through practical, locally delivered training; peer-learning networks; mentoring; shared resources and guidance; accredited skills programmes; and mechanisms for transferring successful approaches between communities. This would build not only individual skills, but the organisational capacity needed to sustain rural innovation.

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**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

The Training Centre will primarily support community organisations, Local Authorities, transport providers, schools and educators, volunteers and residents, with particular attention to people and organisations working in remote, rural and island communities.

Community and voluntary organisations are a key target group. These organisations often have strong local knowledge and community trust but limited staffing, technical expertise and resources. Their needs include project development, cycle maintenance, volunteer management, inclusive mobility, behaviour change, journey planning, funding and monitoring. The 2026/27 programme demonstrates significant demand, with more than £560,000 supporting 12 community-based projects across the SIMSES area.

Young people and schools are another important beneficiary group. Training needs include cycling and road safety, Bikeability, maintenance, route planning and developing confidence for independent travel. Programmes such as Active Routes to Schools have already engaged more than 300 pupils, while wider school activity reaches thousands of primary pupils.

Public authorities, transport operators and practitioners require skills in behaviour change, sustainable mobility planning, digital systems, accessibility and partnership working. The Behaviour Change Officer forum, involving 9 local officers, demonstrates existing interest in structured peer learning and knowledge exchange.

Volunteers and residents, including people experiencing financial, physical or practical barriers to mobility, will benefit through practical skills, confidence building, inclusive cycling and access to equipment. Women, disabled people, jobseekers and other potentially excluded groups can be specifically supported through targeted activities such as Embark and HI-BIKE Inclusive Cycling Membership.

Engagement is expected to range from short practical training sessions and workshops to mentoring, peer-learning networks and longer-term community projects. This enables the Training Centre to serve both individual learners and organisations seeking to build sustainable local capacity.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

The Training Centre will use a practical, flexible and place-based learning approach, reflecting the dispersed geography and different needs of rural, remote and island communities. Training will combine formal learning with hands-on demonstration and peer knowledge exchange.

Planned formats will include practical workshops, skills sessions, demonstrations, peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and coaching, field visits and networking events. Topics could include cycle maintenance and refurbishment, inclusive cycling, active-travel planning, behaviour change, journey planning, digital mobility systems, volunteer development and community project delivery. Existing activities such as Dr Bike sessions, mechanic training, route mapping and community-led master planning provide a strong foundation for this approach.

Peer learning and knowledge exchange will be particularly important. The existing six-weekly Behaviour Change Officer forum and the Making Connections learning and networking event demonstrate an established model for bringing practitioners together to share experience, identify solutions and transfer approaches between communities. The Training Centre can build on these networks through regular workshops, webinars, shared guidance and resources.

Where appropriate, learning can lead to recognised qualifications or certificates. The existing delivery of an SQA National 3 qualification in cycle maintenance through Lochaber High School provides a practical model for linking community-based learning with formal accreditation.

Accessibility will be central to delivery. Training should be offered locally and across the SIMSES territory, rather than requiring participants to travel long distances to a single centre. A combination of face-to-face sessions, online learning and digital resources can reduce travel barriers. Mobile or community-based training can reach smaller and island communities. Training should also accommodate different abilities and confidence levels, reflecting the inclusive approach already demonstrated through HI-BIKE and the Embark Community Activities project.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

The Training Centre builds the connections and network that facilitates the next steps towards further Living Labs.

Firstly, these networks are a direct connection to the communities where the research can be conducted next and the cohorts recruited to undertake the journey-mapping. The networks provide the local knowledge and inputs for best locations of further Mobility Hubs in HITRANS case as their form of Living Labs. Engaging with communities at the start of this process builds the relationship further and offers a sense of belonging and ownership in the Hubs and the subsequent uptake of use of the Hubs' offerings.

HITRANS is in a unique position as an RTP to then help find funding sources and facilitate the provision of the Hubs by providing practical evidence about gaps in the transport network through this local research.

HITRANS brings practical innovation to other areas as was the case with:

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- The new Fort William Walking and Cycling Wayfinding System and its colour-coded approach with physical signage being complemented by a digital journey planner.
- HITRANS' own digital school travel-tracking scheme Go for It which is a lower cost alternative to a previous tracker and that also will gather data across the region.
- HITRANS experience provides a useful lesson that innovation adoption in rural areas requires intermediary support and capacity building as well as the technology.

HITRANS will contribute practical evidence particularly around community-led innovation, inclusive sustainable mobility, rural capacity building, demand-responsive transport, shared e-mobility and the importance of peer-to-peer learning between rural communities.

Network > guidance > funding streams > research evidence > capital funding > Mobility Hub(s) and solutions

**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

In 2027, the Training Centre will focus on strengthening the regional learning network and building the capacity of organisations and practitioners to deliver locally appropriate rural mobility solutions. A key priority will be to consolidate and expand the six-weekly Behaviour Change Officer Forum, established in 2025 and bringing together 9 local officers from across the HITRANS region. The forum will provide a practical mechanism for peer learning, sharing tools and experience, identifying common skills gaps and coordinating responses to challenges such as Bikeability provision, road safety and workplace active travel.

The Training Centre will also build on the Making Connections learning and networking model, using workshops, practitioner exchanges and demonstration activities to share learning on areas such as 20 mph implementation, active travel, cycle training and behaviour change.

Priority target groups will include local authorities, community organisations, transport practitioners, schools and training providers, with particular emphasis on smaller organisations that may have limited resources and capacity.

Given the significant 60% reduction in revenue funding in 2026/27, the Training Centre will prioritise low-cost, collaborative and scalable learning approaches, making maximum use of existing networks and delivery partners. Its role within the RURALITIES SIMSES ecosystem will be to connect actors, capture practical learning and transfer successful rural solutions between communities, strengthening local capacity despite financial constraints.

**2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services**

A central feature of the Training Centre in 2027 will be HITRANS' investment in locally led organisations that understand their communities and the barriers affecting mobility in rural and island settings. Building on the 2026/27 People and Place and Transport to Employment programmes, learning activities will use the existing network of 12 community-based projects across Highland, Moray, the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute as practical learning environments.

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*Table 8 SIMSES3 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activity / service | Tentative timeline | Responsible organisations | Main target learners | Expected outputs/results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Practical workshops and seminars** on cycle maintenance, active travel, journey planning, behaviour change and accessibility | Throughout 2027 | HITRANS with local delivery partners | Community organisations, practitioners, schools, volunteers | Improved practical and project-delivery skills; shared tools and approaches |
| **Peer-learning and practitioner forums** | Six-weekly throughout 2027 | HITRANS / Behaviour Change Officer forum | Local authority and transport practitioners | Continued knowledge exchange; identification and joint resolution of skills gaps |
| **Demonstration activities and site visits** | Linked to projects | HITRANS and Local Delivery Partners | Practitioners, community organisations, educators | Transfer of practical learning from projects such as bike hubs, wayfinding and inclusive cycling |
| **Community-based practical training** | Throughout 2027 | Local delivery partners | Volunteers, residents, young people and community groups | Cycle maintenance, cycling confidence, route planning and volunteer skills |
| **Online learning** | As required throughout 2027 | HITRANS and partners | Practitioners unable to attend regional events | Wider access to learning and reduced travel requirements |
| **Mentoring and coaching** | Throughout 2027 | HITRANS / experienced delivery partners | Smaller community | Increased organisational capacity and |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | organisations and emerging projects | confidence in project delivery |
| **Certification / accredited learning** | Throughout 2027 where appropriate | HITRANS, schools and training partners | Learners developing technical skills | Progression towards recognised qualifications, building on the existing SQA National 3 cycle-maintenance model |
| **Awareness and community learning events** | Annual and project-based | HITRANS and local delivery partners | Residents, schools, workplaces and community groups | Increased awareness, participation and uptake of sustainable and inclusive mobility |

Together, these activities will create a regional learning network, enabling practical experience from the 12 community projects to be captured, shared and adapted across the wider Highlands and Islands SIMSES area.

**3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy**

During 2027, learner engagement will focus on young people, volunteers, community organisations, local practitioners, schools, workplaces and residents**,** with particular attention to people experiencing financial, physical, geographic or confidence barriers to sustainable mobility. The existing network of local delivery partners will provide the main route for reaching these groups across Argyll and Bute, Highland and Lochaber, while enabling learning to be delivered in locally trusted settings.

Participant recruitment and engagement will be primarily community-based, using established relationships with schools, community organisations, workplaces and Local Authorities. Activities will include practical cycle-maintenance and repair sessions, Bikeability and cycling training, guided walks and rides, route mapping, active-travel planning, volunteering and one-to-one confidence-building. Existing engagement provides a strong foundation, including Adventure Oban's programme reaching around 3,000 pupils and Fort William Bike Shed's established volunteer and community training activity.

Accessibility and inclusion will be embedded through local delivery, small-group and one-to-one support, adapted cycles, affordable or refurbished equipment and activities designed around different abilities and confidence levels**.** The HI-BIKE Inclusive Cycling Membership and community cycle-hub model provide established examples.

Local communities and end-users will actively contribute through pupil-led route mapping, community-led active travel masterplans, feedback on local barriers, volunteering, practical refurbishment and participation in walking and cycling activities**.** This ensures that training responds to locally identified

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needs and that learners are not simply recipients but active contributors to the development and testing of rural mobility solutions.

**4. Resource and Capacity Needs**

The Training Centre can build on the existing HITRANS network of local delivery partners, community organisations, schools and specialist providers, reducing the need for a new standalone training infrastructure. Human resources will include HITRANS programme and behaviour-change staff, experienced community practitioners, cycle-maintenance trainers, active travel and accessibility specialists and trained volunteers. The existing Behaviour Change Officer forum provides an established pool for peer learning and knowledge exchange.

Delivery will require access to community cycle hubs, schools, workshops, cycle libraries, adapted cycles, maintenance equipment and local training facilities, alongside digital tools for journey planning, school travel tracking, online learning and communication. Existing assets such as the Fort William Bike Shed, HI-BIKE platform and local community facilities provide a strong foundation. Shared delivery through the People and Place Programme and Transport to Employment funding offers an efficient approach.

The main implementation risk is the 60% reduction in revenue funding, which limits staff capacity and non-essential activity. Other barriers include long travel distances, dispersed communities, limited capacity within small organisations and difficulties accessing training. These risks can be mitigated through local delivery, peer learning, blended/online provision, use of existing facilities and coordination through HITRANS' regional network.

**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

The Training Centre is expected to strengthen the skills, confidence and organisational capacity of learners and local organisations across the Highlands and Islands. This enables communities to develop and deliver mobility solutions that are better suited to local circumstances.

For learners, expected benefits include improved practical skills in cycle maintenance, active travel, route planning, inclusive cycling and behaviour change, alongside increased confidence to participate in sustainable transport activities. Volunteers and community organisations will gain experience in project delivery, partnership working and community engagement. The existing Fort William Bike Shed model, including volunteer refurbishment activity and the SQA National 3 cycle-maintenance qualification, provides a strong basis for continued skills development.

Knowledge transfer will be supported through the Behaviour Change Officer forum, practical workshops, demonstration projects and peer-learning activities, facilitating the experience from one community to be shared and adapted elsewhere. This will strengthen regional networks and reduce duplication by enabling organisations to learn from established approaches.

The activities will also contribute to employability and local economic resilience by developing practical vocational skills, volunteer experience and pathways into employment, particularly through cycle-mechanic training, refurbishment and community transport activities. Improved access to sustainable and inclusive mobility will additionally support participation in employment, education and community life.

Longer term, the approach has strong potential for continuation and replication because it builds on existing organisations, facilities and networks rather than creating a standalone system. Successful

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approaches such as inclusive cycling, community bike hubs, active travel planning and forums can be documented, shared and adapted across other rural and island communities, supporting the wider RURALITIES objective of transferring practical innovation.

### 6. Planned Milestones for 2027

The 2027 Training Centre programme will build progressively on the established HITRANS People and Place Programme, local delivery partner network and Behaviour Change Officer forum, rather than requiring a separate start-up phase.

*Table 9 SIMSES3 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative timing | Key milestone / implementation phase |
|---|---|
| **Q1 2027** | Confirm the annual Training Centre programme, priority skills needs and participating organisations. Identify opportunities to use local delivery partners as learning sites. |
| **Q1–Q2 2027** | Develop and agree practical training materials, guidance and shared learning resources, drawing on existing projects in cycle maintenance, active travel, accessibility, behaviour change and journey planning. |
| **Q1–Q4 2027** | Continue the six-weekly Behaviour Change Officer Forum as the core regional peer-learning mechanism, with participants sharing experience, identifying skills gaps and developing joint solutions. |
| **Q2–Q3 2027** | Deliver practical workshops, community training, demonstrations and peer-learning activities through existing projects across Highland, Moray, Argyll and Bute and the Western Isles. |
| **Throughout 2027** | Integrate learning from Living Lab/SIMSES activities, including community bike hubs, inclusive cycling, active-travel planning, wayfinding and school travel initiatives, ensuring practical innovations are captured and shared. |
| **Q4 2027** | Collect learner and partner feedback, document case studies and assess changes in skills, confidence, participation and organisational capacity. |
| **Q4 2027** | Review outcomes and agree a continuation and scaling strategy, identifying successful training approaches that can be maintained through existing networks and replicated in other rural and island communities. |

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The programme will remain flexible so that training can respond to emerging needs and the resource constraints created by reduced revenue funding. The programme will also need to be within the current regional transport strategy and delivery plan.

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## 5.4 SIMSES 4 Training Centre Profile

*Table 10 SIMSES4 Training Centre Contact information*

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | PONI Posavje |
| **Hosting organisation** | RDA Posavje |
| **Website** | https://www.rra-posavje.si/projekti/projekt-podjetno-nad-izzive-v-posavski-regiji-poni-posavje<br>https://www.facebook.com/rraposavje/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | agencija@rra-posavje.si |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

The PONI Posavje Training Centre will be coordinated and hosted by RRA Posavje. PONI Posavje provides a structured support environment for individuals who are developing entrepreneurial ideas by strengthening their knowledge, skills and competences needed to enter entrepreneurship.

RRA Posavje will be responsible for the overall coordination, management of training activities, stakeholder engagement, mentoring processes and connection of participants with relevant regional support services. The Training Centre will build on the established PONI methodology, which combines entrepreneurial education, individual mentoring, practical learning, networking and support for the development of business ideas.

The Training Centre will involve a wide range of education and training partners, including entrepreneurship support organisations, business mentors, experts from different sectors, educational institutions, local and regional public bodies and other organisations contributing specialised knowledge. Depending on training needs, external experts will provide expertise in areas such as business development, digitalisation, sustainability, marketing, finance, project development and innovation.

The Centre will benefit from existing collaborations and networks established through PONI Posavje, RRA Posavje partnerships, cooperation with municipalities, regional stakeholders, entrepreneurship support networks and knowledge providers. These partnerships will enable the Training Centre to provide practical, locally relevant learning opportunities and strengthen entrepreneurial capacities within rural communities.

Through this network-based approach, the PONI Posavje Training Centre will serve as a platform for developing skills, supporting entrepreneurship and empowering rural actors to transform ideas into sustainable initiatives.

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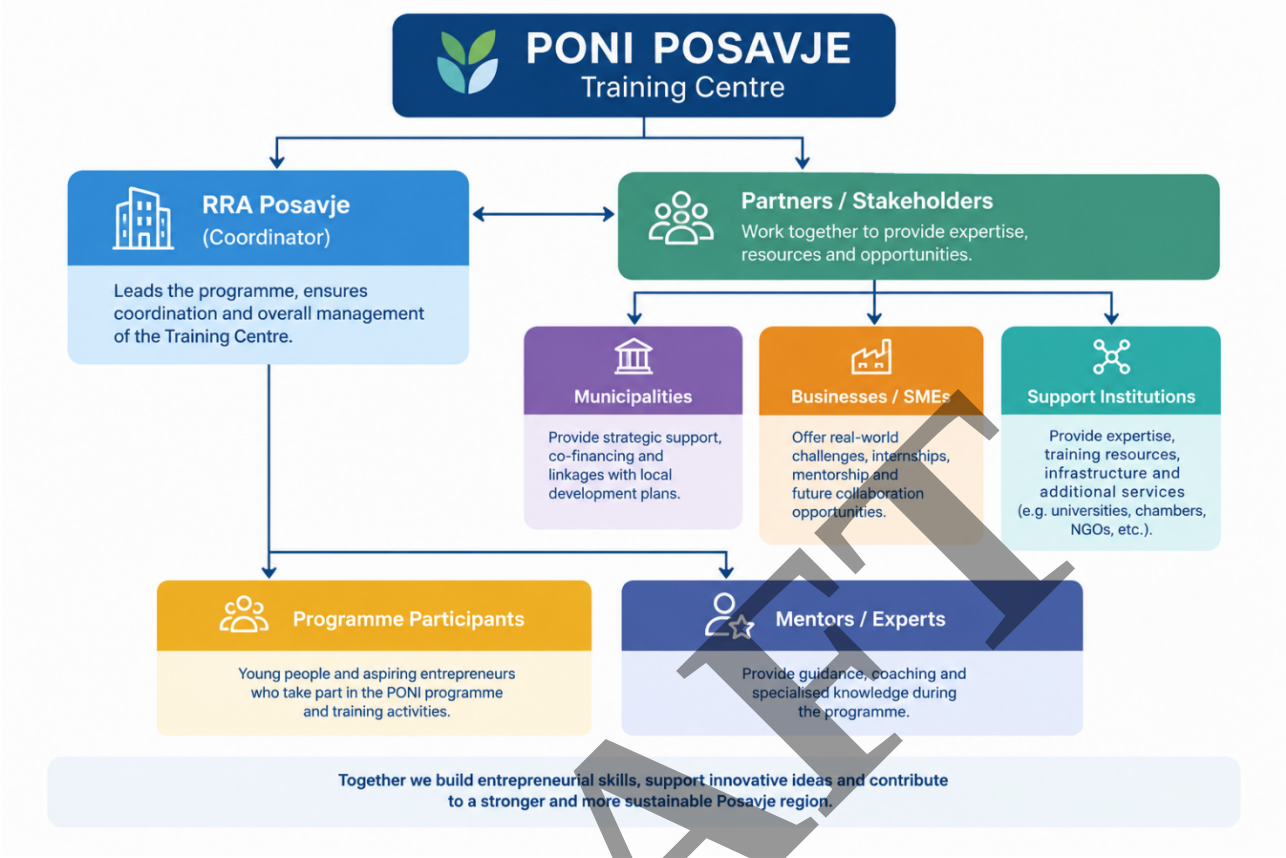



*Figure 5 Governances structure of the SIMSES4 Training Centre*

## 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

The Training Centre aims to address several key skills gaps and capacity needs identified across the Posavje region, particularly in rural areas where access to specialized training and entrepreneurial support is often limited.

The main training priorities include entrepreneurship and business development, digital competence, green and circular economy skills, innovation and project development, and climate adaptation and sustainable resource management. These competencies are essential for strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of rural communities, supporting economic diversification and enabling local actors to respond to environmental and socio-economic challenges.

The primary target groups include aspiring young people, women, unemployed individuals. Many of these stakeholders require practical knowledge to develop sustainable business models, access new markets, adopt digital solutions, prepare project proposals and implement innovative ideas. Secondary target groups represent existing entrepreneurs, SMEs, local communities and public sector representatives involved in rural development.

Existing barriers include limited access to specialized training opportunities in rural areas, fragmented knowledge transfer, insufficient connections between education, business support and local development initiatives, and a lack of tailored training that responds to the specific needs of rural communities. Many stakeholders also face challenges in transforming ideas into viable projects or businesses and in accessing professional mentoring and networking opportunities.

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The Training Centre will address these challenges through practice-oriented training programs, mentoring, peer learning, workshops, networking activities and individual support. By combining entrepreneurial education with sustainability, innovation and rural development topics, the Centre will strengthen local capacities, encourage lifelong learning and help rural stakeholders develop the skills needed to create resilient businesses, innovative community initiatives and sustainable local development projects.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

The Training Centre will target a diverse range of learners and stakeholders who play a key role in the sustainable development of rural areas in the Posavje region. The primary target groups include aspiring young people, women, unemployed individuals. Secondary target groups represent existing entrepreneurs, SMEs, local communities and public sector representatives involved in rural development. These groups face common challenges such as limited access to specialized training, entrepreneurial support, digital skills, innovation knowledge, sustainable business practices and networking opportunities. Many also require support in developing viable business models, accessing funding opportunities, integrating sustainability into their activities and adapting to changing economic, environmental and technological conditions.

The Training Centre will offer practical, learner-centered activities tailored to different target groups, combining entrepreneurship education with skills related to digitalization, innovation, sustainability, project development and community-led rural development. Training programs will be complemented by mentoring, peer learning, expert advice and networking opportunities that encourage collaboration across sectors.

A high level of stakeholder engagement is expected through open calls, targeted outreach, cooperation organizations and existing regional networks. The Centre will promote continuous participation by providing flexible learning opportunities, encouraging knowledge exchange and supporting participants beyond formal training through mentoring and follow-up activities. This approach will help build long-term capacities, strengthen local entrepreneurship and contribute to a more resilient and innovative rural ecosystem in the Posavje region.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

The Training Centre will deliver flexible, practice-oriented learning opportunities that respond to the needs of rural entrepreneurs, communities and other local stakeholders. Training activities will combine theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience, enabling participants to apply newly acquired skills directly in their professional or entrepreneurial activities. The main learning formats will include interactive workshops, seminars, mentoring and coaching, peer-to-peer learning, thematic seminars, networking events and practical group work. Where appropriate, training will be complemented by field visits, demonstration activities and study visits showcasing successful rural development, entrepreneurship and sustainability initiatives. Blended learning approaches will be used whenever suitable, combining in-person sessions with online learning resources to increase flexibility and accessibility.

The Training Centre will primarily rely on experienced trainers, business mentors, external experts and regional practitioners who can provide practical knowledge and real-life examples. Learning activities will encourage collaboration, problem-solving and exchange of experiences among participants from different sectors.

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Participants of PONI training course will receive life-long certificate of work experience, and the emphasis will remain on developing practical competences, entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning.

To ensure accessibility for rural participants, training activities will be organised at easily accessible locations across the Posavje region and supported by online participation whenever possible. Flexible scheduling, local delivery and close cooperation with municipalities and regional partners will help reduce barriers to participation and ensure that learning opportunities are available to a broad range of rural stakeholders.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

The Training Centre will adopt a practice-oriented learning approach by closely linking training activities with the experimentation, collaboration and innovation processes taking place within the RURALITIES framework. Rather than relying solely on classroom-based learning, participants will be encouraged to learn through real-life challenges, collaborative problem-solving and the exchange of experiences with local stakeholders.

Training activities will be connected to Living Lab actions by incorporating practical case studies, co-creation workshops, stakeholder consultations and demonstration activities based on local development challenges. Whenever possible, learners will have the opportunity to participate in pilot activities, test innovative approaches, contribute ideas and receive feedback from experts and other participants. This will enable participants to better understand how innovation processes can be applied in real rural settings.

Knowledge generated through Living Lab activities, local innovation practices and lessons learned from regional and international experiences will be continuously integrated into training content. This will ensure that learning materials remain relevant, practical and responsive to the evolving needs of rural communities and entrepreneurs.

The Training Centre will work closely with the Expertise Centre, which will provide access to thematic expertise, knowledge resources and regional stakeholder networks. The Training Centre will translate this knowledge into practical learning programmes, while feedback from training participants will help identify emerging skills needs and inform future knowledge development. Cooperation with Living Lab facilitators, experts, mentors and other RURALITIES partners will further strengthen knowledge transfer, innovation uptake and collaborative learning across the project.

This integrated approach will create a continuous cycle in which knowledge is generated through experimentation, transformed into learning opportunities and applied by rural stakeholders to support sustainable local development.

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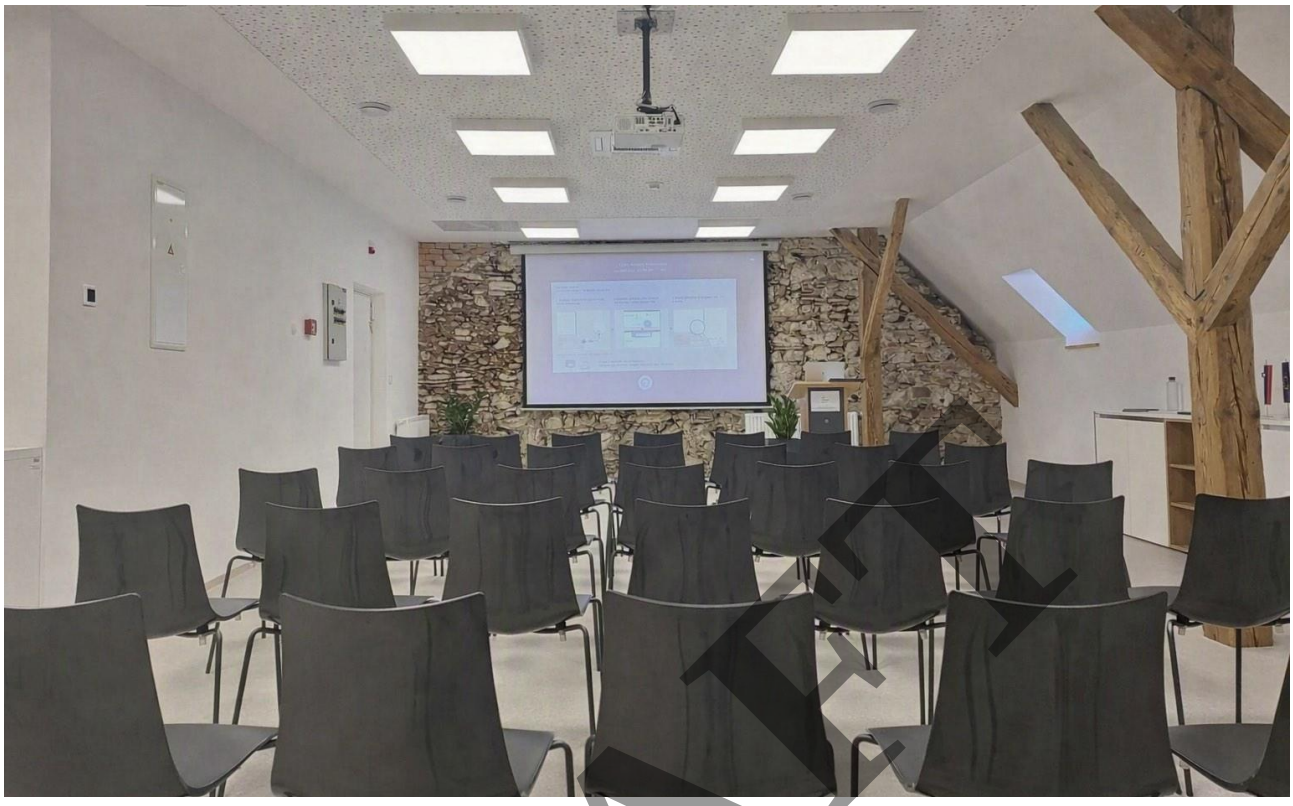


*Figure 6 SIMSES4 Training Centre facility – Photo credit: RDA Posavje*

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**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

During 2027, the Training Centre will focus on strengthening entrepreneurial, innovation and sustainability-related competences among rural stakeholders in the Posavje region. A group of 11 individuals will be formed. The participants will receive practical, accessible and demand-driven learning opportunities that support sustainable rural development, economic diversification and community resilience.

Priority training areas will include entrepreneurship and business development, digital skills, innovation management, project development, green and circular economy, climate adaptation and sustainable use of local resources. These activities will primarily target aspiring and existing entrepreneurs, young people and women, reflecting the key capacity needs identified within the regional rural ecosystem.

The Training Centre will contribute to the objectives of RURALITIES by improving local capacities, giving opportunities for new entrepreneurs and businesses in Posavje, enhancing entrepreneurship development, promoting lifelong learning and facilitating the transfer of knowledge into practice. Through close cooperation with the Expertise Centre, Living Lab activities and regional stakeholders, it will support the development of practical skills needed to implement innovative solutions and strengthen community-led rural development.

As part of the local rural innovation ecosystem, the Training Centre will act as a regional capacity-building platform, connecting knowledge providers, mentors, entrepreneurs and local stakeholders while fostering collaboration, innovation and sustainable territorial development.

**2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services**

*Table 11 SIMSES4 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activity | Tentative timeline | Responsible organisation(s) | Main target learners | Expected outputs/results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Entrepreneurship workshops and seminars** (business modelling, entrepreneurial skills, finance, marketing, project development, sustainability) | Q1-Q2 | RRA Posavje / PONI Posavje, external trainers and mentors | Aspiring entrepreneurs, SMEs, start-ups, rural entrepreneurs, young people, women entrepreneurs | Improved entrepreneurial competences, development of business ideas, increased capacity to establish and manage sustainable initiatives |
| **Blended learning programmes** combining in-person sessions and digital learning materials | Q1-Q2 | RRA Posavje / PONI Posavje with knowledge providers and thematic experts | Aspiring entrepreneurs, SMEs, start-ups, rural entrepreneurs, young people, women entrepreneurs | Increased accessibility of training, flexible learning opportunities and improved digital learning competences |
| **Mentoring and coaching activities** for business ideas and rural initiatives | Q1-Q2 | PONI Posavje mentors, business experts and sector specialists | Aspiring entrepreneurs, SMEs, start-ups, rural entrepreneurs, young people, women entrepreneurs | Individual support, improved project/business concepts, stronger readiness for implementation |
| **Peer-learning activities and networking events** | Q1-Q2 | RRA Posavje / PONI Posavje, LAG/FLAG Posavje partners and regional stakeholders | Entrepreneurs, rural actors, community organisations | Exchange of experiences, creation of new partnerships and strengthening of local networks |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Demonstration activities and practical learning sessions, field and study visits** | Q1-Q2 | RRA Posavje / PONI Posavje, local businesses, LAG/FLAG Posavje partners | Entrepreneurs, farmers, SMEs, local communities | Increased understanding of practical solutions, transfer of good practices and promotion of innovation |
| **Awareness-raising and community learning events** | Q2 | RRA Posavje / PONI Posavje in cooperation with municipalities and regional partners | Citizens, local communities, rural organisations, municipalities, potential entrepreneurs | Increased awareness of entrepreneurship, innovation opportunities and sustainable rural development approaches |

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### 3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy

During 2027, the Training Centre will target a diverse range of learners and stakeholders, including aspiring and existing entrepreneurs, SMEs and start-ups, rural youth, women entrepreneurs, farmers, fishers and aquaculture stakeholders, NGOs, community organisations, local authorities and other rural development actors.

Participant recruitment will be based on the established networks of RRA Posavje, PONI Posavje, LAG/FLAG Posavje, municipalities, local organisations, entrepreneurship support networks and regional partners. Engagement activities will include targeted communication, open calls, information events, stakeholder meetings and direct outreach to groups with identified capacity-building needs.

Accessibility and inclusion will be supported through flexible training formats, including in-person workshops and blended learning opportunities. Activities will be organised at accessible locations within the region, with attention to the needs of participants from rural and remote areas. The Training Centre will promote equal opportunities for participation, with particular attention to groups that may face barriers in accessing training and entrepreneurial support.

Local communities and end-users will be actively involved through co-creation workshops, peer-learning activities, practical exercises, Living Lab-related activities and feedback sessions. Participants will not only receive knowledge but will also contribute their experiences, identify local challenges and help shape practical solutions. This participatory approach will ensure that training activities remain relevant, locally grounded and responsive to the needs of the Posavje rural ecosystem.

### 4. Resource and Capacity Needs

The successful implementation of the PONI Posavje Training Centre requires qualified human resources, including programme coordinators, trainers, business mentors, facilitators and thematic experts with knowledge in entrepreneurship, innovation, digitalisation, sustainability, project development and rural

development. External experts and practitioners will be engaged according to specific training needs and the priorities identified within the SIMSES territory.

The Training Centre will use existing infrastructure and facilities available through RRA Posavje, PONI Posavje and regional partners, including training rooms, meeting facilities, communication tools and digital platforms for blended learning, webinars and knowledge exchange. Additional digital resources may be required to support accessible and flexible learning formats.

Operational and financial support will be needed for coordination, organisation of training activities, engagement of trainers and mentors, communication with participants, development of learning materials and networking activities. Long-term sustainability will depend on integration with existing regional support structures and future funding opportunities.

Potential implementation barriers include limited availability of participants due to time constraints, unequal access to digital tools among rural stakeholders, maintaining continuous stakeholder engagement and securing sufficient resources for long-term delivery. These risks will be addressed through flexible training formats, targeted outreach, strong partnerships and coordination with existing regional networks.

**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

During 2027, the Training Centre is expected to strengthen the skills, confidence and capacities of rural stakeholders by providing practical learning opportunities, mentoring and access to relevant expertise. Learners will benefit from improved entrepreneurial, digital, innovation and sustainability-related competences, enabling them to develop new ideas, improve existing activities and respond more effectively to economic, environmental and social challenges.

The Training Centre will contribute to knowledge transfer by connecting entrepreneurs, local communities, mentors, experts, educational providers and development organizations. Through workshops, coaching, peer-learning activities and practical learning opportunities, participants will gain applicable knowledge and build networks that support cooperation and innovation.

Expected short-term impacts include increased entrepreneurial activity, improved readiness of individuals to establish or develop businesses, stronger cooperation among rural actors and greater uptake of sustainable practices. The Centre will support local innovation by helping participants transform ideas into viable initiatives, encouraging cross-sector collaboration and promoting solutions adapted to the specific needs and resources of the Posavje region. The Training Centre will also contribute to rural resilience by strengthening local capacities for diversification, digital transformation, sustainable resource use and community-led development.

In the long term, the training model and partnerships developed through PONI Posavje Training Centre can continue beyond the RURALITIES project through integration into existing regional support structures, future projects and cooperation networks. The approach has potential for replication in other rural territories seeking to strengthen entrepreneurship, lifelong learning and innovation capacities.

**6. Planned Milestones for 2027**

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*Table 12 SIMSES4 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Period | Key milestones and implementation phases |
|---|---|
| **Q4 2026-Q1 2027 – Preparation and operational planning** | • Definition of the annual training plan, priority topics and target learner groups.<br>• Identification and engagement of trainers, mentors, thematic experts and supporting partners.<br>• Preparation and adaptation of training materials, learning formats and communication activities. |
| **Q1–Q2 2027 – Launch of training activities** | • Official launch of Training Centre activities within the PONI Posavje framework.<br>• Recruitment and enrolment of first learner groups through regional networks and targeted outreach.<br>• Implementation of initial entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainability-related workshops. |
| **Q1–Q2 2027 – Delivery of learning programmes and stakeholder engagement** | • Delivery of workshops, mentoring sessions, webinars, blended-learning activities and peer-learning initiatives.<br>• Organisation of networking activities connecting learners with entrepreneurs, experts, local organisations and other rural stakeholders.<br>• Integration of practical examples and Living Lab-related challenges into training content where relevant. |
| **Q1–Q2 2027 – Practical learning and innovation activities** | • Implementation of demonstration activities, field visits and practical learning sessions with regional stakeholders.<br>• Support for learners in developing and testing entrepreneurial ideas, sustainable solutions or community initiatives.<br>• Collection of feedback from participants and stakeholders to improve future training activities. |
| **Q3 2027 – Evaluation and sustainability planning** | • Evaluation of training outcomes, participant satisfaction and knowledge-transfer impacts.<br>• Documentation of results, good practices and lessons learned.<br>• Development of a continuation strategy for maintaining Training Centre activities beyond the RURALITIES project through existing regional structures, partnerships and future funding opportunities. |

Key expected milestone: By Q3 2027, the PONI Posavje Training Centre will have an operational training model, engaged learner groups, established cooperation mechanisms and a clear pathway for continued delivery of capacity-building activities within the Posavje rural innovation ecosystem.

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## 5.5 SIMSES 5 Training Centre Profile

*Table 13 SIMSES5 Training Centre Contact information*

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | ASTURAGRO ACADEMY |
| **Hosting organisation** | ASINCAR |
| **Website** | Members LinkedIn:<br>https://www.linkedin.com/company/asincar/posts/<br>https://www.linkedin.com/company/fundacion-ctic/posts/<br>https://www.linkedin.com/company/grupo-dex/posts/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | cristinavb@asincar.com |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

The Training Centre will be coordinated and hosted by ASINCAR, which will act as the lead organisation responsible for the overall management, planning, and coordination of training activities. ASINCAR has extensive expertise in the agri-food sector and will deliver specialised training focused on regulatory and administrative requirements, legislative updates, compliance obligations, and practical sustainability measures for rural businesses and agri-food stakeholders.

As a core training partner, CTIC will contribute its extensive expertise in digital technologies and smart farming solutions. Its training activities will focus on ICT applications in agriculture, sensor-based technologies, precision farming techniques, and automated livestock monitoring systems, supporting the digital transition of rural enterprises. Training will also cover digital twin technologies, connectivity solutions, and the practical use of digital tools to improve productivity and sustainability in rural businesses.

Grupo DEX will provide training related to funding opportunities, financial frameworks, project preparation, proposal development, administrative documentation, and reporting requirements. Through its experience as a consultancy organisation, Grupo DEX will strengthen the capacity of beneficiaries to access and manage regional, national, and European funding instruments.

In addition to the core members of the Training Centre, READER will act as an associated stakeholder and dissemination facilitator. Although it is not a formal member of the Training Centre, READER possesses extensive knowledge of rural communities and maintains strong connections with local stakeholders. Its primary role will be to promote training activities, support outreach efforts, and facilitate participation through its established rural ecosystem and networks.

The Training Centre builds upon existing cooperation among the participating organisations, combining complementary expertise in agri-food development, digital innovation, funding mechanisms, and rural engagement to provide an integrated and accessible training offer for rural stakeholders.

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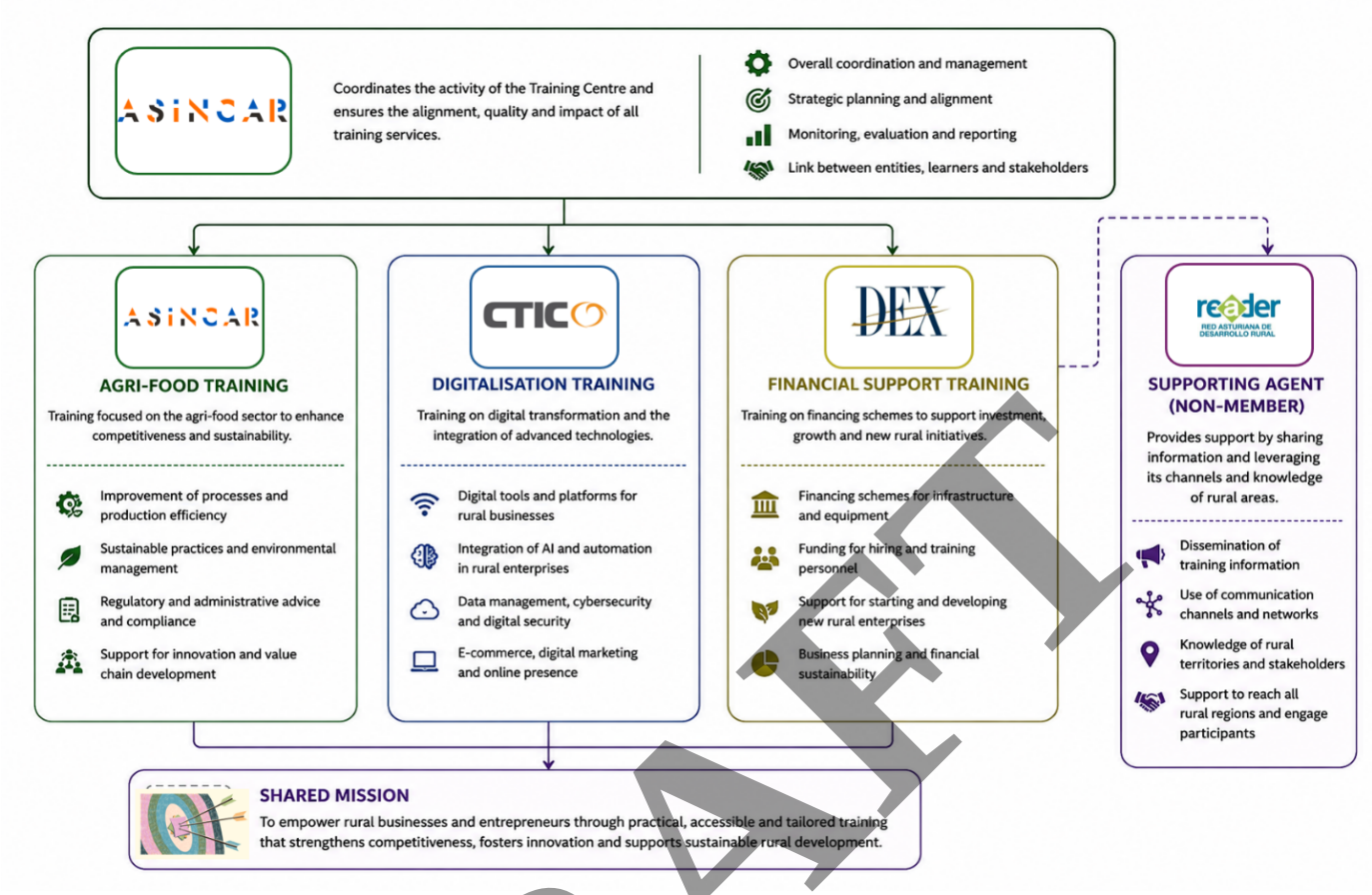



*Figure 7 Governance structure of the SIMSES5 Training Centre*

## 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

The Training Centre will address key capacity gaps identified across the SIMSES5 territory within the same thematic areas covered by the Expertise Centre: agri-food development, digitalisation, and competitiveness and generational renewal. These themes represent some of the most pressing challenges affecting rural businesses, entrepreneurs, farmers, cooperatives, and other stakeholders operating in rural areas.

A major training need concerns the continuous adaptation to regulatory and legislative changes affecting the agri-food sector. Rural businesses often struggle to keep pace with evolving requirements related to packaging policies, sustainable materials, product claims, ingredient regulations, labelling obligations, food waste prevention, and waste management practices. Limited access to specialised guidance increases the risk of non-compliance and reduces the capacity of businesses to anticipate regulatory changes.

A second skills gap relates to the adoption and integration of digital technologies and ICT tools. Many organisations require support to understand and implement solutions such as artificial intelligence, sensor-based systems, precision agriculture technologies, digital monitoring tools, and automated livestock management systems. Strengthening digital skills is essential to improve productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness in rural areas.

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The territory also faces challenges associated with knowledge transfer and generational renewal. The lack of mechanisms to transfer expertise from experienced professionals to younger generations creates difficulties in ensuring business continuity and attracting new talent to the rural economy.

In addition, stakeholders frequently lack knowledge of available funding opportunities and financial support mechanisms, including funding frameworks, application procedures, project preparation, eligibility requirements, and reporting obligations.

One of the main barriers identified is the limited availability of specialised training programmes tailored to the specific needs of rural territories. Existing training opportunities are often concentrated in urban centres, making participation difficult for rural stakeholders due to distance, time constraints, and limited local critical mass able to access and absorb specialised knowledge.

To address these challenges, the Training Centre will develop a flexible and accessible training programme based primarily on online delivery formats, ensuring broad participation from rural organisations and entrepreneurs. The programme will include two dedicated training sessions for each thematic area, providing practical knowledge, expert guidance, and capacity-building opportunities that directly respond to the needs of rural stakeholders across the SIMSES5 territory.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

The Training Centre will adopt an inclusive and open approach, with all training activities offered free of charge and accessible to any stakeholder interested in participating. This approach reflects the demographic characteristics of rural areas, where access to specialised capacity-building opportunities is often limited and where broad participation is essential to maximise knowledge transfer and territorial impact.

The primary target groups will be rural SMEs and start-ups, rural entrepreneurs, and individuals involved in the agri-food sector and rural economy. Attention will be given to vulnerable and underrepresented groups, including women entrepreneurs, older individuals, and people with migrant backgrounds, who often face additional barriers to accessing specialised training and professional development opportunities.

These target groups face several challenges, including difficulties in keeping pace with regulatory changes affecting the agri-food sector, limited knowledge of digital technologies and innovation tools, barriers to accessing funding opportunities, and insufficient mechanisms for knowledge transfer and generational renewal. Many rural stakeholders also have restricted access to specialised training programmes due to geographical isolation and the concentration of educational opportunities in urban areas.

The Training Centre will address these needs through practical and accessible training sessions focused on agri-food development, digitalisation and competitiveness, and generational renewal. By delivering activities in an online format, the Training Centre will reduce geographical barriers and facilitate participation from stakeholders across the territory.

A high level of engagement is expected, supported by the dissemination efforts of local and regional networks and organisations connected to the rural ecosystem. The open-access format will encourage participation from both established and emerging rural actors, fostering a wider culture of continuous learning, innovation, and knowledge exchange throughout the SIMSES territory.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

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The Training Centre will deliver its activities through a series of online workshops and seminars focused on the key thematic areas described. These formats have been selected to provide practical, focused, and accessible learning opportunities that directly address the needs of rural stakeholders while ensuring broad territorial coverage.

Training sessions will be organised and delivered by the participating organisations according to their areas of expertise. The sessions will be hosted through the videoconferencing platforms available to the Training Centre partners, enabling flexible participation regardless of geographical location. The organisational approach will combine expert presentations, practical examples, case studies, and interactive discussions to facilitate knowledge exchange and encourage active participation among attendees.

The Training Centre is not intended to function as a formal educational institution and therefore no official certification or accreditation programme is currently planned. However, all training activities will be designed with a strong practical orientation, ensuring that participants acquire knowledge, tools, and methodologies that can be directly applied within their organisations, businesses, or professional activities. The objective is to support the immediate uptake of new practices and enhance the capacity of rural stakeholders to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

The Training Centre will be closely linked to the two Living Labs operating within the SIMSES5 territory, ensuring that training activities are grounded in real-life experimentation and practical innovation experiences. The territory hosts an agri-food pilot plant Living Lab (ASINCAR) and a digitalisation Living Lab (CTIC facilities in Peón) integrated within a rural environment, both of which will serve as valuable sources of knowledge, case studies, and practical learning materials.

The agri-food pilot plant Living Lab provides a space for testing and validating new products, processes, technologies, and sustainability approach relevant to rural businesses. Training materials developed under the Training Centre will draw directly from the pilot activities and experiences generated within this Living Lab. Participants will be exposed to practical examples, implementation challenges, lessons learned, and successful solutions identified during experimentation activities. These real-life cases will be transformed into accessible and highly visual learning resources, enhancing the practical value and applicability of the training sessions.

Similarly, the digitalisation Living Lab will contribute examples and experiences related to the adoption of digital technologies in rural settings. Demonstrations involving ICT tools, artificial intelligence applications, sensor technologies, automated monitoring systems, and digital management solutions will be incorporated into the training content, allowing participants to better understand how innovation can be applied within their own organisations and businesses.

To maximise accessibility and participation across all rural regions involved in the project, training activities will primarily be delivered online through workshops and seminars. This approach reduces geographical barriers and enables stakeholders from different territories to participate collectively. However, where appropriate, the Training Centre may organise one or two face-to-face sessions within one of the Living Labs. These sessions would be targeted primarily at stakeholders from nearby rural areas and would take the form of piloting demonstrations, allowing participants to directly observe technologies, processes, and innovations being tested in real operational environments.

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The Training Centre will also maintain strong collaboration with other RURALITIES structures, particularly the Expertise Centre, which will provide specialised knowledge and technical expertise that can be translated into training content. Together, these structures will strengthen knowledge transfer, facilitate the uptake of innovation, and support capacity building throughout the SIMSES5 territory.

This section includes different visual resources of the SIMSES5 Training Centre living lab facilities, as well as some pictures of previous training activities developed within the entities involved in the training centres.



*Figure 8 ASINCAR Living lab facilities, agrifood pilot pant*

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*Figure 9 ASINCAR images of training performed in the pilot plant (living lab), online and hybrid using the classroom that are available at its facilities*




*Figure 10 CTIC RuralTech Living Lab facilities: images of the HYDRA demonstrator, showcasing the Living Lab's renewable energy demonstration infrastructure*

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*Figure 11 CTIC RuralTech Living Lab facilities: images of the Climate Simulator, one of the technological demonstrators available within the Living Lab for testing and validating solutions under controlled environmental conditions*

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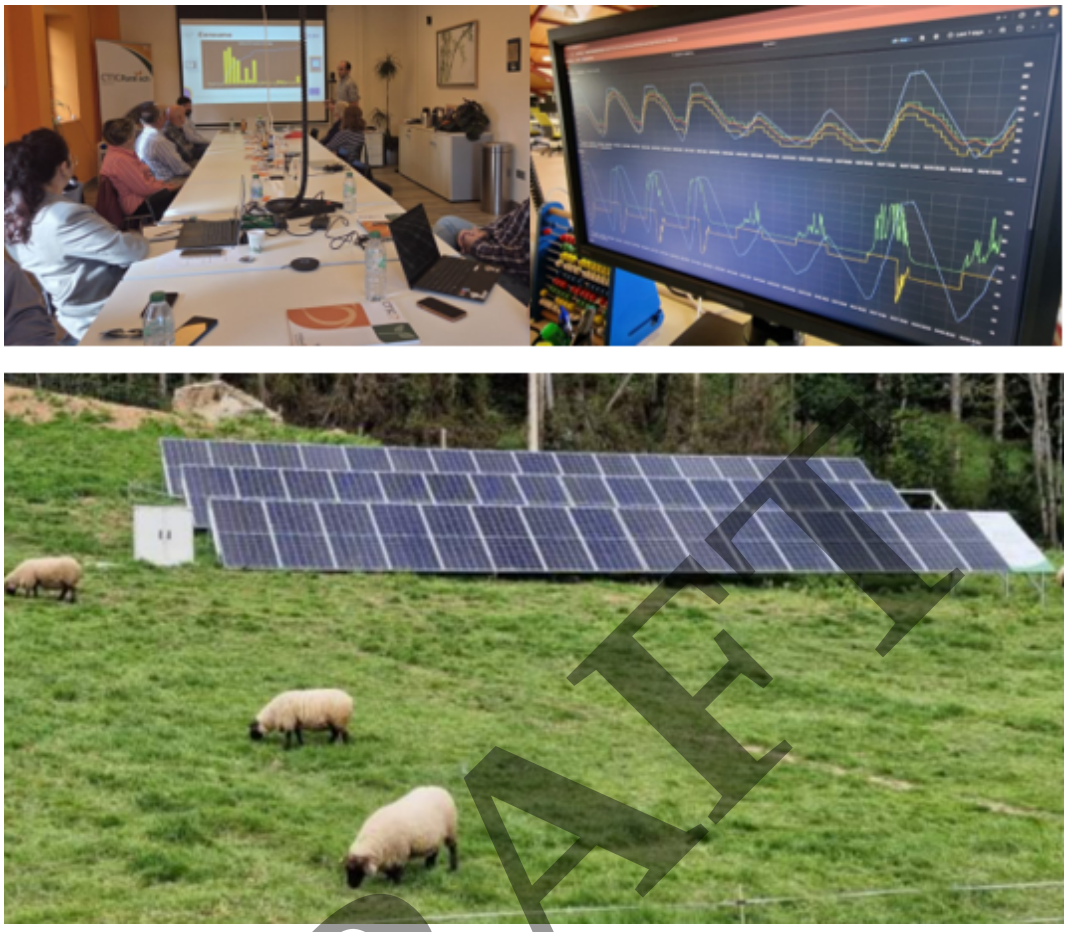


*Figure 12 CTIC RuralTech Living Lab facilities: the Local Energy Community demonstrator, showcasing collaborative renewable energy generation, management, and consumption in rural environments*

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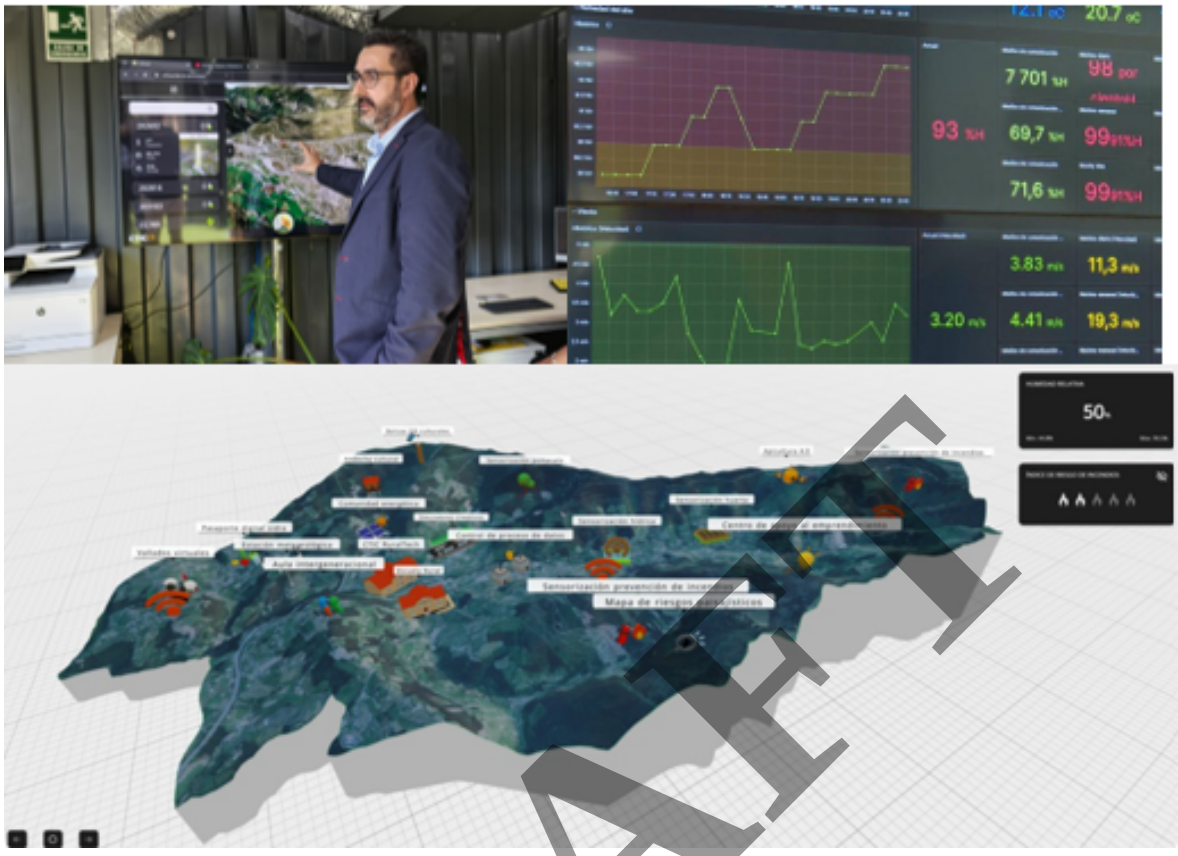



*Figure 13 CTIC RuralTech Living Lab facilities: the Territorial Intelligence System, supporting data-driven territorial planning by integrating environmental, socio-economic, and local knowledge*

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**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

**1. Strategic Priorities for 2027**

The main objective of the Training Centre in 2027 is to empower rural businesses and entrepreneurs to strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of their economic models. To achieve this, the Centre will deliver tailored training programmes addressing the specific needs of rural stakeholders across three key thematic areas: agrifood, digitalisation, and generational renewal and competitiveness. These priority areas, together with the implementation phases of the Training Centre, are fully aligned with the Expertise activities, ensuring a coherent and integrated capacity-building approach.

The Training Centre shares the overarching objective of reinforcing the rural economic fabric as a driver of sustainable development, talent retention and attraction, job creation, and the long-term vitality of rural regions. Strong and competitive local businesses are essential to preventing rural depopulation, as the lack of employment opportunities remains one of the main causes of rural exodus. By equipping rural entrepreneurs and businesses with practical skills and targeted knowledge, the Training Centre will directly contribute to the objectives of RURALITIES and to the SIMSES capacity-building framework, while strengthening its role as a key actor within the local rural innovation ecosystem.

**2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services**

The implementation of the Training Centre activities will follow a three-phase approach to ensure the effective design, delivery, and evaluation of the training programme.

The first phase, running from September to November 2026, will focus on the preparation of the Training Centre. During this period, the training portfolio and implementation model will be defined, with a preference for online delivery to maximise accessibility and participation across rural territories. Training materials and learning resources will be developed, and a communication and promotion campaign will be launched to engage potential participants and relevant stakeholders. The programme will include at least two tailored training courses for each of the three thematic areas: Agrifood, Digitalisation, and Generational Renewal and Competitiveness.

The second phase, from December 2026 to July 2027, will consist of the operational implementation of the Training Centre. During this period, the planned courses will be delivered through a combination of webinars, interactive workshops, practical case studies, and mentoring and peer-learning activities. The training will target rural entrepreneurs, SMEs, farmers, and other rural stakeholders, equipping them with practical knowledge and skills to improve the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of their businesses.

Finally, the third phase, from July to September 2027, will focus on monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Training Centre. The assessment will analyse both quantitative and qualitative indicators, including the number of participants, representation of different rural and underrepresented regions, completion rates, participant satisfaction, and the overall contribution of the training activities to capacity building. The results of this evaluation will provide evidence of the Training Centre's effectiveness and will support the continuous improvement of future training programmes.

*Table 14 SIMSES5 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Key thematic area | Responsible organization | Training model | Target group | Sub thematic |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agrifood | ASINCAR | Online lessons | Rural SMEs, entrepreneurs, farmers, young professionals, and other rural stakeholders | Legal and administrative changes for agrifood business<br><br>Sustainable models for agrifood industries. |
| Digitalisation | CTIC | Online interactive workshop | Rural SMEs, cooperatives, SATs, agri-food businesses, rural entrepreneurs, and other rural | Training activities will address key topics related to the digital transformation of rural |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | stakeholders across Asturias. Open and free of charge, prioritising organisations with limited prior access to specialised digital support. | organisations, including digital innovation, data governance and artificial intelligence, smart farming technologies, cybersecurity, interoperability, and data sharing. |
| | CTIC | Self-paced training content | Rural SMEs, cooperatives, SATs, agri-food businesses, rural entrepreneurs, and other rural stakeholders across Asturias. Open and free of charge, prioritising organisations with limited prior access to specialised digital support. | Self-paced training content will provide foundational and practical knowledge on digital transformation, including digital maturity assessment, business process digitalisation, data management and governance, business intelligence, artificial intelligence, process automation, cybersecurity, digital communication, and digital business opportunities. |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Generational renewal and competitiveness | Grupo DEX | Online lessons | Rural SMEs, entrepreneurs, cooperatives, family businesses and successors | Funding opportunities and cooperation projects to strengthen the competitiveness of rural businesses.<br><br>Funding and support instruments for generational renewal and business continuity in rural areas: European, national and regional instruments. |

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**3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy**

The primary target learners of the Training Centre in 2027 will be rural businesses and entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on SMEs, start-ups, family businesses, and individuals seeking to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of their economic activities. The training programme will also be open to other relevant rural stakeholders interested in developing new skills and fostering innovation within their territories.

Participant recruitment and engagement will be supported through a dedicated communication campaign implemented across the communication channels of all organisations participating in the Training Centre. Each partner has an established network of rural stakeholders, enabling the dissemination of training opportunities to a broad and diverse audience. In addition, READER will play a key role in reaching participants across different rural regions thanks to its strong connections with local territories and stakeholder networks. This partner will also provide support throughout the implementation of the Training Centre to maximise participation and territorial coverage.

Accessibility and inclusion will be promoted by prioritising online delivery, allowing participants from geographically dispersed and remote rural areas to access the training without travel barriers. Furthermore, the training approach will encourage active participation by incorporating practical examples, interactive sessions, and opportunities for learners to share their experiences and challenges. This co-creation process will ensure that the learning activities remain closely aligned with the real needs of rural businesses and entrepreneurs while fostering knowledge exchange among participants.

### 4. Resource and Capacity Needs

The implementation of the Training Centre will rely on the combined resources and expertise of the three partner organisations involved in its delivery (ASINCAR, CTIC and Grupo DEX). Human resources will primarily consist of trainers and technical staff from these organisations, all of whom have proven experience in the thematic areas covered by the training programme, including agrifood, digitalisation, and generational renewal and competitiveness. These experts will be responsible for designing the learning content, delivering the courses, and providing mentoring and technical support to participants.

The Training Centre will make use of the partners' existing digital infrastructure and online collaboration tools, including platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Drive, enabling efficient delivery of training activities and broad participation from rural territories. Personnel costs associated with the preparation and implementation of the training activities will be covered through the resources allocated within the project.

One of the main implementation challenges is the integration of Living Labs (LLs) into the training programme. While practical learning experiences within the Living Labs provide significant added value, they require participants to travel, representing both an additional financial cost and a time commitment. Consequently, participants located in regions farther from the Living Labs may face greater barriers to participation, making fully face-to-face activities less accessible. For this reason, the Training Centre will prioritise online delivery whenever possible, while seeking an appropriate balance between accessibility and the benefits of hands-on learning experiences.

### 5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact

The Training Centre activities planned for 2027 are expected to generate tangible benefits for both individual learners and the wider rural community. The primary benefit for participants will be access to a free, tailored training programme specifically designed to address the real needs and challenges faced by rural businesses and entrepreneurs in the region. By providing practical knowledge and up-to-date skills in key thematic areas, the programme will enable participants to strengthen the competitiveness of their businesses, improve decision-making, and adopt more innovative and resilient business models capable of responding to emerging economic, technological, and social challenges.

Beyond the direct benefits for learners, the Training Centre will contribute to reinforcing the rural economic fabric by supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable business development. More competitive and resilient rural enterprises are expected to generate positive effects on local employment, business continuity, and the attractiveness of rural areas, ultimately contributing to stronger and more sustainable rural communities.

Knowledge transfer will be promoted through practical learning activities, peer exchange, and the dissemination of good practices, enabling participants to apply newly acquired competences directly within their organisations and local ecosystems. These outcomes are expected to strengthen the innovation capacity of rural territories while supporting the broader objectives of RURALITIES.

Following the completion of this first training cycle, a comprehensive impact assessment will be carried out to evaluate participation, learning outcomes, and territorial reach. The findings will be used to refine the training methodology and identify emerging skills needs, providing the basis for the development of new training programmes in different formats and ensuring the long-term continuity, scalability, and replication of the Training Centre model.

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## 6. Planned Milestones for 2027

The SIMSES5 Training Centre is already developed and established with the organizational structure indicated above.

*Table 15 SIMSES5 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative period | Implementation phase | Key activities / milestones |
|---|---|---|
| Sep 2026 – Nov 2026 | Phase 1: Training Design & Preparation | Define the Training Centre implementation model (primarily online); design the training portfolio; develop learning materials and digital resources; launch the communication and promotion campaign; prepare at least 2 training courses for each thematic area: Agrifood – ASINCAR; Digitalisation – CTIC; Generational Renewal & Competitiveness – Grupo DEX. |
| Dec 2026 – Jul 2027 | Phase 2: Training Delivery | Deliver the planned training courses; conduct webinars and interactive workshops; organise mentoring and peer-learning activities; provide practical case studies and applied learning; engage rural businesses, entrepreneurs and SMEs across rural regions. |
| Jul 2027 – Sep 2027 | Phase 3: Monitoring & Impact Assessment | Evaluate participation and training performance; analyse the number of participants, rural regions represented, participation from underrepresented areas, completion rates and participant satisfaction; prepare an internal impact assessment report; identify improvements and priorities for future training programmes. |

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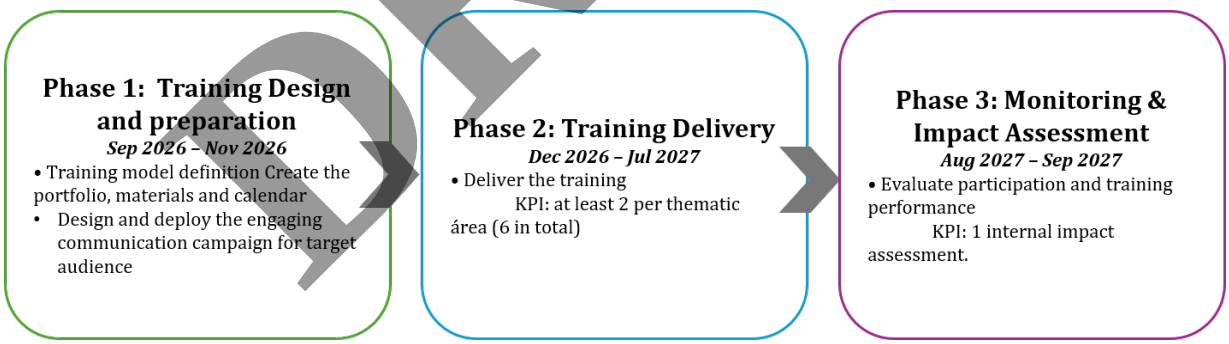



*Figure 14 Training Centre implementation phases and KPIs during RURALITIES implementation period*

## 5.6 SIMSES 6 Training Centre Profile

*Table 16 SIMSES6 Training Centre Contact information*

| Contact information | |
|---|---|
| **Name of the Training Centre** | ARCA |
| **Hosting organisation** | USV Iași |
| **Website** | https://iuls.ro/ |
| **General contact e-mail** | sebastianbruma1978@gmail.com |

### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

- The SIMSES 6 Training Centre will be hosted within ARCA at USV Iași. This is consistent with ARCA's regulated mandate to organise seminars, courses, conferences, knowledge-transfer events, internships and qualification, initiation, improvement and specialisation training in agriculture, economics, marketing, environment and rural development. Delivery will combine formal university learning with short, accessible activities for rural actors and will use both ARCA/USV facilities and territorial venues.
- The delivery framework has four complementary roles:
    - ARCA / USV Iași: institutional and academic host; curriculum and trainer coordination; scientific quality; research, laboratory and teaching facilities; student engagement; and links with the three ARCA departments.
    - RDRP / RoRuralia: learner-needs analysis, Living Lab facilitation, knowledge translation, communication, monitoring and conversion of pilot experience into reusable learning resources.
    - Siret–Moldova LAG: learner recruitment and territorial access; YXS Avalana: practical modules on finance, business planning, project development and investment readiness.
- Education and training partners include USV Iași faculties and master's programmes, local schools and vocational actors, LAG advisers, experienced producers, business consultants and relevant external experts from the RURALITIES network.
- The Centre builds on nine mapped USV Iași learning provisions covering sustainable economy, rural economic analysis, rural investment policies, agricultural finance, organic horticulture, conservation agriculture, sustainable project management, marketing and sensory evaluation of agri-food products, complemented by ARCA's research and transfer mandate.
- RDRP has already tested complementary Training Centre formats. In 2025, the food-education project combined school workshops, farm visits, a teacher webinar and a printed guide; GUST+ combined stakeholder research, civic forums, digital participation and policy reporting; and the AFCN heritage project used community inventorying, specialist training, cultural mapping and digital knowledge transfer.
- Earlier formats documented in the RDRP portfolio include digital engagement with 107 producers through Gust de Iași, farmer visits and co-creation through EcoRurIS, short-chain cooperation, and practical learning on certification, branding, marketing and financing through Recipe's Flavour 3D.

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**2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs**

- Regional evidence confirms the need to connect education, employment and entrepreneurship. The USV Iași graduate dataset supplied for SIMSES 6 contains 5,246 responses, including 4,573 from the North-East Region. Within this regional group, 59.7% were employed; 57.1% of employed respondents worked in the field of their studies; and 36.1% indicated interest in an incubator or entrepreneurial-support pathway. These figures are used as complementary regional evidence and not as a substitute for territorial consultations in the LAG area.

- Priority capacity gaps, to be validated with Siret–Moldova learners, are:

    - Sustainable and smart farming: soil and water management, organic and conservation practices, resource efficiency, digital agriculture, biodiversity and climate adaptation.

    - Employment, finance and entrepreneurship: career orientation, business modelling, funding-source selection, basic financial analysis, credit and grants, project design and investment readiness.

- Market and value-chain development: product quality, differentiation, marketing, short supply chains, local processing, rural tourism and service innovation.

- Digital, collaborative and governance skills: simple digital tools, online market access, stakeholder cooperation, participatory planning, LEADER and Living Lab methods.

- The Training Centre will address these gaps through a layered pathway: mapped formal courses, short thematic modules, workshops, field and laboratory demonstrations, internships, mentoring and referral to the Expertise Centre for specialist support.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

- Main learner and beneficiary groups are:

    - Farmers, producer groups, cooperatives and local processors seeking practical technical and business skills.

    - University students, pupils, rural youth and early-stage entrepreneurs exploring rural careers and enterprise.

    - Women entrepreneurs, rural SMEs, tourism and service providers needing finance, marketing and network access.

- Municipal staff, GAL actors, advisers, NGOs and community leaders involved in participatory rural development.

    - Teachers, trainers, facilitators and experts who can reuse or adapt the learning materials in other communities.

    - Learners need short and practice-oriented content, concrete local examples, clear information on entry requirements and costs, and opportunities to continue from awareness sessions to mentoring or formal study.

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- Participation will combine open-access introductory activities with targeted cohorts for clinics, demonstrations and mentoring.
    - Students and rural actors will contribute cases, questions, field observations and business ideas, not only receive lectures.
    - Peer-to-peer exchange will involve experienced farmers, entrepreneurs and local project beneficiaries as practice voices.
    - Public, academic and market actors will help validate whether the content matches real territorial, regulatory and commercial needs.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

- Formal learning: nine mapped USV Iași bachelor's and master's provisions form the academic backbone, while ARCA provides the institutional link with applied research, business needs and technology transfer.
- Short blended modules: 60–120-minute sessions combining concise theory, a local case, a practical exercise and signposting to further support.
- Territorial workshops and field visits: sessions in ARCA / USV Iași facilities or in the LAG area, focused on real production, business, heritage, tourism and community-development challenges.
- Online micro-learning: short guides, recorded explanations, templates and curated links distributed through partner websites, mailing lists and social media.
- Mentoring and clinics: small-group or one-to-one support on finance, project concepts, market orientation, smart farming and sustainable rural business models; participation certificates for non-formal actions where appropriate.
- Accessibility: hybrid delivery, Romanian-language materials, plain-language summaries, low or no participation fees and scheduling compatible with agricultural work.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

- Training will be directly linked to RoRuralia Living Lab activities. Learner needs will be gathered during stakeholder consultations, workshops, surveys and rural innovation clinics.
- Learners will participate in real cases: mapping a local value chain, reviewing a business or project idea, analysing a sustainability challenge, collecting community feedback or testing a communication tool.
- Lessons from pilots will be converted into short case studies, checklists, presentation materials and updated course content. Feedback will be recorded and used to revise subsequent sessions.
- The Expertise Centre and Training Centre will function as coordinated ARCA service lines. Expertise services will validate technical needs and provide referrals; the Training Centre will translate knowledge into usable learning, while RDRP/RoRuralia maintains the feedback loop with rural users and Living Lab processes.

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Visual evidence for the Training Centre will combine ARCA's regulation, organigram and facility information with the mapped USV Iași courses, RoRuralia workshop materials and future 2027 learning activities.

Available and planned materials include:

- ARCA institutional evidence: the Regulation of Organisation and Functioning, the ARCA organigram and USV Iași facility information (https://www.iuls.ro).
- WP8 course inventory covering nine live USV Iași learning provisions relevant to SIMSES 6.
- RURALITIES Conference in Iași and stakeholder-engagement photographs: https://roruralia.rdrp.org/ruralities-conference-iasi-may-2024/
- RoRuralia and SIMSES workshops at Siret–Moldova LAG: https://roruralia.rdrp.org/news/
- Screenshots and learning materials from RoRuralia, RDRP and future hybrid sessions.
- Planned 2027 visual set: ARCA facilities and departmental teams, trainers and learners, field or laboratory demonstrations, workshop materials, feedback visuals and learning-pathway diagrams.

Each item should include:

- Title, date, location, activity description and target learner group.
- Photographer/owner credit and consent or institutional permission status.
- Confirmation from the owning organisation before photographs are reused externally.

Preferred formats: original JPEG/PNG photographs, editable PPT learning visuals and final PDF handouts.

High-resolution horizontal images and uncluttered photographs of active learning should be prioritised.

**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

1. Strategic Priorities for 2027

- Turn the existing USV Iași course portfolio and ARCA transfer mandate into a visible pathway from open introductory sessions to formal study, mentoring, internships and expert referral.
- Deliver practical learning around sustainable agriculture, rural finance, project development, market access and collaborative governance, using real SIMSES 6 cases.
- Activate a joint training loop:
    - ARCA / USV Iași provides validated academic and technical content, facilities, researchers, trainers and student engagement.
    - RDRP/RoRuralia and the GAL identify needs, recruit learners, facilitate co-creation and document results.

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- YXS Avalana turns funding and investment topics into practical exercises and clinic-based support.

- The Centre will support RURALITIES objectives by combining formal, non-formal and informal learning and by connecting training outcomes to Expertise Centre services and Living Lab experimentation.

***2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services***

*Table 17 SIMSES6 Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| ***Activity / service*** | ***Tentative timeline*** | ***Responsible organisation(s)*** | ***Main target learners*** | ***Expected outputs/results*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Youth, skills and learning pathway launch | January–March 2027 | ARCA / USV Iași, RDRP/RoRuralia | Students, rural youth, schools, young entrepreneurs, trainers | Knowledge-transfer session; rural-business idea pitch; publication of the nine-course SIMSES6 learning map |
| Sustainable agriculture workshop | April–June 2027 | ARCA / USV Iași, RDRP/RoRuralia | Farmers, producers, rural SMEs, women entrepreneurs, advisers | Practical learning on climate-smart and sustainable agri-food practices |
| Funding and project-development clinic | April–June 2027 | YXS Avalana, Siret–Moldova LAG, RDRP | Rural SMEs, entrepreneurs, farmers, project developers | Practical support on grants, credit, project development and investment readiness |
| Value-chain and market-access demonstrations | July–September 2027 | ARCA / USV Iași and territorial partners | Producers, processors, tourism actors, students, local entrepreneurs | Two field/laboratory/territorial demonstrations and one applied session on marketing, quality and value-chain cooperation |
| Collaborative rural development and governance workshop | October–December 2027 | ARCA / USV Iași, RDRP/RoRuralia, LAG | Municipalities, LAG actors, NGOs, community leaders, trainers | Improved understanding of LEADER, collaborative governance and multi-actor project design |
| Mentoring and learner support | Throughout 2027 | ARCA / USV Iași, RDRP/RoRuralia, YXS Avalana | Farmers, entrepreneurs, project teams, students, community initiatives | Support to at least ten rural ideas/beneficiaries; referral and mentoring pathway maintained |
| Digital micro-learning and reusable resources | Throughout 2027 | RDRP/RoRuralia and partners | All learner groups | Case notes, templates, recordings, guidance and accessible digital resource list |

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### 3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy

- Priority learners are farmers and rural entrepreneurs with limited access to specialised training, students and young people considering rural careers, women entrepreneurs, and public or community actors responsible for local development.
- Recruitment will use LAG animation channels, municipal contacts, USV Iași academic networks, RoRuralia and RDRP communication, producer networks and direct referrals from the Expertise Centre.
- Inclusion measures include Romanian-language and plain-language materials, hybrid access, no-cost introductory sessions, transparent entry requirements, accessible venues and deliberate outreach to youth and women.
- Participants will work on real local cases, submit questions before sessions, complete short practical exercises and provide structured feedback. Selected participants will receive follow-up mentoring.

### 4. Resource and Capacity Needs

- Human resources: an ARCA / USV Iași academic lead, a part-time training coordinator, departmental researchers and lecturers, Living Lab facilitators, LAG mobilisers, business and finance mentors and administrative support.
- Infrastructure: ARCA offices B63, B64 and B73 and laboratory B56, other USV Iași teaching and demonstration spaces, LAG meeting venues, videoconference and survey tools and RoRuralia/RDRP communication platforms.
- Financial support is needed for coordination, travel, trainer time, materials, digital production and mentoring. Existing facilities reduce start-up costs, while the ARCA Regulation allows revenue from training contracts, research and consultancy services, events, sponsorships and external projects.
- Risks are low attendance during agricultural peak periods, content that is too academic, digital-access differences and weak follow-up. Mitigation includes seasonal scheduling, practice-oriented formats, hybrid access, small cohorts and named referral owners.

### 5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact

- Learners will gain practical capacity in sustainable and smart production, rural economic analysis, employment and entrepreneurship, funding, project design, marketing, value chains and collaborative governance.
- The Centre will make USV Iași learning and ARCA applied-research capacity more visible to the rural ecosystem and create shorter entry points for people unable to access a full degree programme.
- The connection with clinics and mentoring will improve the likelihood that learning is applied to real farms, enterprises, public initiatives and community projects.

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- The long-term impact will be a repeatable ARCA-based regional learning pathway, stronger cooperation between USV Iași and the LAG territory and a reusable model combining a university RDI centre, LAG, Living Lab and business-support partner.

### *6. Planned Milestones for 2027*

The 2027 roadmap combines course visibility, short learning actions, practical demonstrations, mentoring and evaluation.

*Table 18 SIMSES6 Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative period | Milestone / implementation phase | Key milestones |
|---|---|---|
| **January–March 2027** | Learning Pathway Launch and Youth Engagement | Publish the SIMSES6 map of nine USV Iași learning provisions and the ARCA–SIMSES non-formal training offer. Deliver the knowledge-transfer session with students and young rural actors. Complete the final Rural Thrive local showcase and collect learner/stakeholder feedback. |
| **April–June 2027** | Sustainable Agriculture, Finance and Project Skills | Deliver one sustainable agriculture/agri-food workshop and one finance/project-development clinic. Enrol the first mentoring cohort and document at least five supported ideas or referrals. Issue the first reusable guide or template package through RoRuralia. |
| **July–September 2027** | Value Chains, Market Access and Demonstration | Deliver two practical demonstration or field-based sessions. Deliver one applied session on marketing, quality or short value chains. Complete a mid-year review against participation and learner-feedback targets. |
| **October–December 2027** | Governance, Replication and Continued Mentoring | Deliver one collaborative-governance/LEADER learning action. Complete mentoring follow-up for at least ten ideas or beneficiaries. Publish reusable case notes and the final annual learning summary. |
| **December 2027** | Evaluation and 2028 Scale Strategy | Verify attendance, target-group balance, learner feedback and referrals. Identify the modules and partnerships that will continue in 2028. Approve the 2028 calendar and an initial post-project sustainability and funding pathway. |

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## 5.7 SIMSES Follower Training Centre Profiles

The SIMSES followers provide a complementary setting for exploring the transfer and adaptation of the RURALITIES Training Centre approach beyond the original SIMSES contexts. Existing local organisations, stakeholder networks, expertise and learning capacities provide a basis for the uptake and further application of relevant RURALITIES knowledge and capacity-building activities.

At the current stage of project implementation, the operationalisation of two Training Centres is underway, and their profiles are presented in the following subsections. These represent the first Training Centres emerging from the wider replication and uptake process involving more than 20 SIMSES Followers across the RURALITIES project.

The SIMSES Followers are engaged in different replication and uptake pathways, reflecting their specific territorial needs, available capacities and areas of interest. Consequently, the establishment of Training Centres represents one possible pathway through which RURALITIES approaches and knowledge can be further embedded and sustained in follower territories.

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### 5.7.1. YITEDEV SIMSES Follower Training Centre

#### 1. Hosting Organisation and Education Partners

Youths in Technology & Development Uganda (YITEDEV) will host and coordinate the Training Centre through the one-acre Climate-Smart Agricultural Model Farm at Kulubi, Ntenjeru Sub-County, Mukono District, with learning and replication links to the Ssi-Bukunja pilot area in Buikwe District. YITEDEV will coordinate learner mobilisation, training schedules, demonstration plots, digital follow-up, documentation, monitoring and links with the RURALITIES Living Lab and Expertise Centre.

The Mukono District Production Department and local agricultural extension personnel will support technical guidance, farmer mobilisation, alignment with district priorities and post-training follow-up. Planned education and technical partners include the National Agricultural Research Organisation and Mukono ZARDI for agronomic expertise and research links; Makerere University's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Soil Science Laboratory for specialist input and soil-related learning; and the Uganda National Meteorological Authority for climate information and weather-service training. Community organisations, women and youth farmer groups, Mukono NGO Forum, Goshen Foundation, model farmers and relevant private-sector actors will support outreach, peer learning and practical demonstrations.

During 2027, YITEDEV will formalise practical working arrangements with these partners, identify guest trainers and establish a referral pathway for specialised services such as soil testing, climate information and agribusiness support.

#### 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

The SIMSES territory is dominated by smallholder and mixed farming systems that are increasingly affected by erratic rainfall, prolonged dry periods, flooding in low-lying areas, declining soil fertility and limited access to irrigation, extension services, finance and timely climate information. The Training Centre will address five linked capacity gaps:

• Climate-smart production and soil-water management: limited practical knowledge of mulching, intercropping, crop rotation, composting, soil conservation, rainwater harvesting and small-scale irrigation.

• Digital agriculture and climate information: low confidence in using phones, weather information, simple digital tools and social media to guide production decisions, access advice and create locally relevant farming content.

• Pest and disease management: limited ability to identify crop problems early, apply safe organic control options and use precision or advisory tools appropriately.

• Post-harvest management, circular economy and value addition: insufficient skills in drying, storage, handling, processing and reuse of agricultural waste as compost, animal feed or biofertiliser.

• Entrepreneurship and farm business management: weak production planning, recordkeeping, costing, market analysis, cooperative action and development of income-generating services around seedlings, vegetables, training and value-added products.

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Knowledge transfer is constrained by the distance to training institutions, limited extension coverage, the cost of transport and inputs, competing farm and household responsibilities, differences in literacy and digital access, and fragmented training that is not linked to the farming calendar. The Training Centre will respond through local on-farm demonstrations, short seasonal modules, peer facilitators, low-data digital learning, local-language explanations, mentoring and repeated practice on the model farm.

### 3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups

The primary beneficiaries will be smallholder farmers and producers from Kulubi, Ntenjeru and surrounding communities in Mukono District, together with selected learners and partner groups from Ssi-Bukunja in Buikwe District. Priority will be given to rural youth, women farmers and women entrepreneurs because they are central to household food production, vegetable farming, small livestock, processing and local trade, yet often have less access to land, finance, technology and formal training.

Other learner groups will include agro-pastoral and mixed-farming households, farmer groups and cooperatives, rural SMEs and start-ups, community-based organisations, local NGOs, district agricultural extension workers, lower-local-government actors, educators, facilitators and technical service providers. Their needs include practical climate adaptation skills, reliable production information, digital confidence, post-harvest and business skills, and stronger links to extension, markets and specialist services.

Learners will participate through organised cohorts, open demonstration days, peer-learning groups, mentoring and practical assignments on their own farms. Selected host farmers and community facilitators will take a deeper role in co-designing demonstrations, recording observations, sharing indigenous practices and supporting replication. Participation will be structured to accommodate seasonal workloads and to promote meaningful involvement of women, youth and learners with limited digital access.

### 4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods

Training will be delivered mainly through practical, farm-based learning at the one-acre model farm. Core formats will include short workshops, seasonal demonstrations, field visits, farmer field days, peer-to-peer exchange, mentoring, coaching and train-the-trainer sessions for extension workers and community facilitators. Demonstrations will cover land partitioning, short-cycle crops, nursery and seedling production, composting, agroforestry, water management, small-scale solar-powered irrigation, pest and disease management, harvesting, storage and farm business planning.

A blended approach will combine face-to-face training with simple mobile learning. Low-data WhatsApp or social-media content, short videos, voice notes, photo guides and printable job aids will reinforce key practices and allow farmers to create and share local content. Webinars may be used selectively for trainers, public authorities and technical partners, while rural learners will receive downloadable or offline materials where connectivity is limited.

The initial mechanism will be competency-based participation records and certificates of participation linked to practical tasks rather than a formal qualification. YITEDEV will explore micro-credentials with suitable education partners once the curriculum and assessment approach are validated. Accessibility measures will include local delivery sites, short modules, local-language explanation, visual demonstration, flexible scheduling, inclusive recruitment and advance coordination of transport or group travel where feasible.

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### 5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation

The Training Centre will function as the learning arm of the YITEDEV Living Lab. Training modules will be directly linked to practical experimentation on the one-acre model farm and, where appropriate, participating farmers' fields. Rather than teaching practices only in a classroom, learners will help design, test, observe and refine low-risk climate-smart options suited to flat and lowland farming conditions.

Demonstration plots will allow learners to compare practices such as mulching, intercropping, crop rotation, compost and organic manure application, water-conserving irrigation, nursery management, indigenous and fruit-tree integration, and low-cost pest-management approaches. Participants will contribute indigenous knowledge, select locally relevant crops and indicators, document labour and input requirements, observe crop performance and discuss whether a practice is affordable and replicable. Simple records, photographs and farmer feedback will be used to convert the results into locally relevant training materials and digital content.

The Living Lab will generate practical evidence; the Training Centre will translate that evidence into skills, learning modules and peer exchange; and the Expertise Centre and technical partners will support quality assurance and specialist guidance. RURALITIES facilitators will connect learners, trainers, innovation services and community actors, while YITEDEV will coordinate learning cycles that move from needs assessment to demonstration, reflection, adaptation and replication. Lessons from Kulubi will be shared with the Ssi-Bukunja pilot and other relevant RURALITIES structures, while useful tools from other projects or Living Labs can be tested locally before wider adoption.

### Visual Documentation and Supporting Materials

The following existing and planned visual materials will support reporting, learning and dissemination. All future photographs will be accompanied by a short caption, date, location, photographer or owner, and documented consent from identifiable participants.

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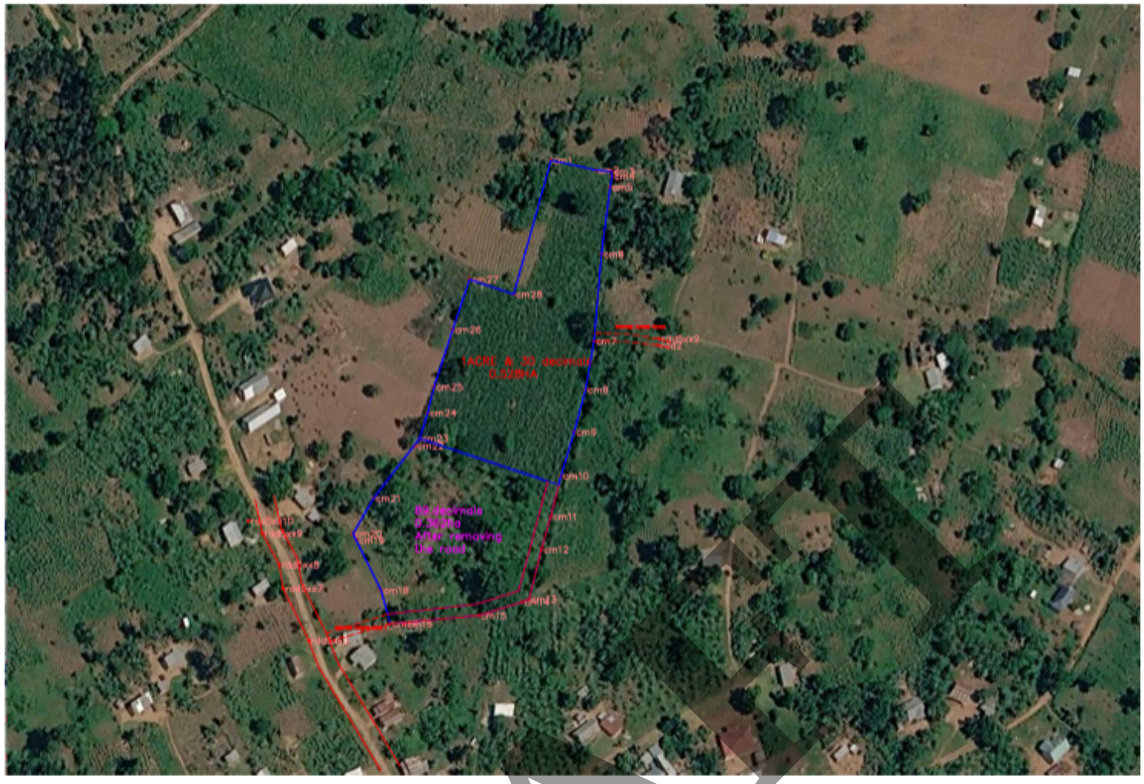


*Figure 15 Aerial map of the acquired and mapped one-acre model-farm site at Kulubi, Ntenjeru Sub-County, Mukono District. Source/credit: YITEDEV project planning documentation*

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• Baseline site photographs: horizontal images of the land before development, boundary points, access routes, water-source options and planned land partitions.

• Training and demonstration photographs: workshops, farmer field days, soil and water management, composting, nursery or greenhouse work, irrigation, agroforestry, harvesting and post-harvest activities.

• People and partnership photographs: trainers, facilitators, learner groups, extension workers, district representatives and technical partners, subject to informed consent.

• Digital learning evidence: screenshots of approved WhatsApp learning groups, local farmer content, short learning videos, digital guides and climate-information demonstrations, with personal data removed where necessary.

• Learning visuals: a simple curriculum pathway, model-farm layout, demonstration protocols, participant journey and summary infographics showing lessons and emerging results.

Dissemination and rights status:

The existing aerial/map image should be externally disseminated only after YITEDEV confirms its source attribution and usage rights. For 2027 activities, YITEDEV will obtain participant consent and confirm consortium use for reporting and dissemination before materials are shared.

**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

**1. Strategic Priorities for 2027**

The main priority for 2027 is to operationalise the Kulubi one-acre model farm as an accessible Training Centre that links practical learning, Living Lab experimentation and rural enterprise development. YITEDEV will establish a core curriculum around climate-smart soil and water management, short-cycle crop production, nursery and seedling enterprises, agroforestry, climate information, digital agriculture, post-harvest management and farm business skills. The Centre will prioritise smallholder farmers, rural youth, women entrepreneurs, facilitators and extension personnel from Mukono and the linked Buikwe pilot area.

The Training Centre will contribute to RURALITIES by translating tested innovations and indigenous knowledge into usable learning modules, strengthening local facilitators and creating a practical pathway for replication on household farms. Within the local innovation ecosystem, it will serve as a demonstration, referral and peer-learning point connecting communities with district extension, research institutions, universities, climate services and relevant market or enterprise actors.

**2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services**

*Table 19 YITEDEV SIMSES Follower Training Centre Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activity and delivery method | Tentative timeline and lead | Main target learners | Expected outputs/results |
|---|---|---|---|
| Curriculum co-design, trainer orientation and baseline skills assessment | Q1 2027 \| YITEDEV with district extension and technical partners | Facilitators, extension workers, selected farmer representatives | Core modular curriculum, learner-selection criteria, baseline tools, trainer roster and seasonal delivery plan. |
| Model-farm set-up and practical soil-water management | Q1–Q2 \| YITEDEV, host farmer/land manager, district extension | Initial farmer cohorts, rural youth and women farmers | Land partitions and demonstration plots; practical sessions on compost, organic manure, mulching, water harvesting and small-scale solar irrigation. |
| Climate-smart crop production and pest/disease management | Q2–Q3 \| YITEDEV, NARO/Mukono ZARDI and extension personnel | Smallholder farmers, youth producers and farmer groups | Demonstrations on short-cycle vegetables and legumes, crop rotation, intercropping, early problem identification and safe control practices. |

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| Digital agriculture and climate-information learning | Q2–Q3 \| YITEDEV, UNMA and invited digital trainers | Farmers, youth, facilitators, extension workers and SMEs | Practical use of weather information, simple phone-based records, low-data learning content and farmer-created local social-media content. |
| Agroforestry, nursery management and circular practices | Q2–Q3 \| YITEDEV with NARO, Makerere specialists and local practitioners | Farmers, women groups, youth and community organisations | Tree and seedling demonstrations, nursery-business learning, composting and productive reuse of agricultural residues. |
| Post-harvest handling, value addition and agribusiness | Q3 \| YITEDEV with district, NGO and private-sector resource persons | Women entrepreneurs, youth, farmer groups, SMEs and start-ups | Sessions on drying, storage, handling, basic processing, costing, recordkeeping, market planning and feasible farm-enterprise models. |
| Farmer field days, peer exchange and mentoring | Q2–Q4 \| YITEDEV, facilitators, extension workers and host farmers | Wider local community, public actors and project partners | Open demonstrations, peer-learning visits, farm-level assignments, mentoring records and documented learner feedback. |
| Evaluation, learning synthesis and sustainability planning | Q4 \| YITEDEV with RURALITIES structures and local partners | Learner representatives, trainers, authorities and partners | End-line review, learning brief, updated modules, replication priorities, partner commitments and a costed continuation plan. |

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### 3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy

During 2027, YITEDEV will target smallholder farmers, rural youth, women farmers and entrepreneurs, farmer groups, SMEs, community organisations, extension personnel, facilitators and relevant local authorities. Recruitment will be undertaken with village and parish leaders, district extension staff, farmer and women's groups, local NGOs and existing community networks. Calls for participation will use community meetings, direct mobilisation, phone contact and low-data social-media channels.

Selection will prioritise people who can attend practical sessions, test learning on their farms and share knowledge with others. Inclusion measures will include transparent criteria, deliberate participation of women and youth, local-language explanation, accessible training locations, flexible timing around farming and care responsibilities, short modules and offline materials for participants with limited connectivity. Local communities will participate in identifying problems, selecting demonstration

practices, contributing indigenous knowledge, monitoring plots, discussing affordability and adapting training content. Host farmers and community facilitators will support follow-up, while learner feedback will be collected after each module and used to revise subsequent sessions.

**4. Resource and Capacity Needs**

The Centre will require a YITEDEV coordinator, community facilitators, district extension staff and specialist trainers in agronomy, soil and water management, irrigation, agroforestry, climate information, digital agriculture, post-harvest management, entrepreneurship and monitoring. Infrastructure needs include the secured one-acre site, demonstration plots, a simple sheltered learning space, nursery or greenhouse facilities, composting units, a reliable water source, solar-powered pumping and basic irrigation equipment, storage, farm tools, protective equipment and learning materials. Digital needs include smartphones or tablets for demonstrations, a projector where feasible, internet access and low-data content-production tools.

Operational financing will be needed for site preparation, inputs, trainer time, participant mobilisation, transport coordination, communication, documentation, equipment maintenance and monitoring. Key risks include weather variability, water constraints, delayed funds or inputs, low attendance during peak farming periods, limited digital access and weak partner follow-through. Mitigation will include seasonal scheduling, phased procurement, local demonstrations, offline materials, clear partner responsibilities and regular implementation reviews.

**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

By the end of 2027, participating learners are expected to demonstrate practical competence in climate-smart production, soil and water conservation, composting, crop diversification, nursery management, climate-informed decision-making, pest and disease management, post-harvest handling and farm business planning. Farmers, youth and women entrepreneurs should be better able to select low-risk practices suited to small plots and identify feasible income opportunities from vegetables, seedlings, value addition and related services.

The Kulubi model farm is expected to function as a local demonstration and peer-learning point supported by trained facilitators, extension personnel and host farmers. Learning materials, local digital content and Living Lab feedback will support wider knowledge transfer and adaptation in Ssi-Bukunja. Progress will be monitored through participation, demonstrated competencies, adoption of agroecological practices, model-farm elements established on learner farms, production changes and emerging income pathways. Continuation will be pursued through district and technical partnerships, repeat training, peer-facilitator networks and feasible income from produce, seedlings, training or services. Scaling will depend on affordability, farmer demand and documented 2027 results.

**6. Planned Milestones for 2027**

*Table 20 YITEDEV SIMSES Follower Training Centre Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Indicative period | Milestone/phase | Key evidence or output |
|---|---|---|

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|---|---|---|
| January–February 2027 | Inception and partner mobilisation | Confirm site and partner roles; update stakeholder map; conduct learner and trainer needs assessment; agree implementation calendar. |
| March–April 2027 | Curriculum and Training Centre preparation | Complete core modules and practical job aids; orient trainers; prepare land partitions, learning space and initial demonstration infrastructure. |
| May–June 2027 | Launch and first learner cohorts | Enrol initial cohorts; deliver introductory climate-smart agriculture, soil-water management and digital/climate-information modules. |
| July–September 2027 | Expanded Living Lab-linked delivery | Run crop, irrigation, agroforestry, nursery, pest-management, peer-learning and farm mentoring activities; document observations and adaptations. |
| October–November 2027 | Post-harvest, enterprise and evaluation phase | Deliver value-addition and farm-business modules; collect end-line learner feedback and competence evidence; prepare learning synthesis. |
| December 2027 | Sustainability and replication planning | Agree continuation arrangements, partner contributions and priority replication actions for Mukono, Ssi-Bukunja and the next implementation period. |

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**Planning Assumptions Requiring Confirmation**

• Formal participation and specific contributions of proposed education and technical partners will be confirmed through 2027 working arrangements.

• Cohort sizes, budgets, trainer availability and the final sequence of seasonal modules will be set after the baseline needs assessment and resource confirmation.

• Any formal certification or micro-credential arrangement will require agreement with an accredited education or training partner.

• External use of photographs, maps and screenshots will depend on verified ownership, attribution and participant consent.

## 5.7.2. UGENYA TVC SIMSES Follower Training Centre

### 1. Hosting Organization and Education Partners

The lead Rural Training Centre is Ugenya Technical and Vocational College (Ugenya TVC), a registered public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institution located approximately 2 km from Sega Town. This is within Siaya County in Kenya's Lake Victoria Basin. The institution is strategically positioned to serve rural communities across the county and has established itself as a centre for technical skills development and innovation.

Ugenya TVC maintains strong partnerships with key regulatory and accreditation bodies, including the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), the Kenya Association of Technical Training Institutions (KATTI), the Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC), the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS), the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). These collaborations ensure that the institution delivers quality, accredited, and industry-responsive training.

Committed to its mission of providing quality technical and vocational training while promoting research and innovation for sustainable development, Ugenya TVC plays a pivotal role in preparing skilled graduates who contribute to industrial transformation and local economic development. The institution offers training across several departments, including Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Agriculture and Food Science Technology, Building and Civil Engineering, Information and Computing, Beauty and Cosmetology, and Business and Liberal Studies.

As the lead coordinator of the Rural Training Centre, Ugenya TVC will work closely with partner institutions across Siaya County to create an inclusive and community-oriented training ecosystem. These partners include Siaya National Polytechnic, which brings extensive expertise in technology and technical education; Ugenya Youth Polytechnic, which will play a key role in engaging rural youth through vocational skills and entrepreneurship; and Sega Primary School, which will help introduce younger learners to sustainable rural development practices and environmental stewardship from an early age.

### 2. Territorial Skills Gaps and Capacity Needs

The needs assessment undertaken within Siaya County identified several critical knowledge, competence, and training gaps that continue to limit sustainable rural development and livelihood diversification. While agriculture remains the dominant livelihood, communities increasingly recognize the need for modern technical skills and entrepreneurship to improve incomes and resilience.

The first major gap is the limited knowledge of sustainable agriculture and climate-smart farming practices. Farmers continue to rely on traditional production systems but lack the skills to improve productivity, adapt to climate variability, and access modern technologies. The second gap relates to technical and vocational skills, particularly in agribusiness, value addition, digital technologies, renewable energy, construction, hospitality, and entrepreneurship, which are increasingly demanded by young people seeking employment and self-employment opportunities. The third gap is business development and market access, where farmers, youth, and small enterprises lack knowledge on financial literacy, business planning, market linkages, and accessing government and private-sector support programmes. Finally, communities identified weak communication, networking, and stakeholder engagement skills, limiting their ability to access information, funding opportunities, and institutional support.

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These gaps disproportionately affect smallholder farmers, youth, women, persons with disabilities, low-income households, and micro and small enterprises, all of whom face barriers to productive employment and sustainable livelihoods. Existing barriers include inadequate access to quality training, financial constraints, limited awareness of available opportunities, insufficient practical learning facilities, lack of post-training mentorship, and exclusion of some groups due to age, distance, or disability.

The proposed Rural Training Centre will address these challenges by providing accessible, community-based, and practice-oriented training tailored to local needs. Through partnerships with TVET institutions, local government, community organizations, and industry, the Centre will deliver hands-on technical training, entrepreneurship development, climate-smart agriculture, digital and green skills, mentorship, innovation support, and stronger market linkages. By combining formal training with continuous coaching and community engagement, the Centre will strengthen local capacities, promote inclusive participation, preserve valuable indigenous knowledge, and enhance the resilience and sustainability of rural livelihoods across Siaya County.

**3. Target Learners and Beneficiary Groups**

The Rural Training Centre will adopt an inclusive, community-centred approach that responds to the diverse learning needs of the SIMSES territory. The Centre will primarily serve youth, smallholder farmers, women, community members, the elderly, local entrepreneurs, and technical trainers, ensuring that no group is left behind in the transition towards sustainable rural development. This approach is informed by both community consultations and institutional stakeholder engagements, which identified the need for practical, locally relevant, and accessible training programmes.
Youth will form the largest beneficiary group and will receive training in digital skills, innovation, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence applications, and technical vocational skills to improve their employability, support business creation, and enable them to participate in the growing digital economy. The proposed digital learning hub at Ugenya TVC will further strengthen these opportunities.

Smallholder farmers and rural community members will be equipped with sustainable farming practices, climate-smart agriculture, agricultural engineering, value addition, agribusiness management, and market access skills. These interventions will improve productivity, strengthen resilience to climate change, and promote sustainable livelihoods while enhancing food security.
Women and local entrepreneurs will benefit from entrepreneurship development, financial literacy, business incubation, and market linkage programmes that transform technical skills into viable income-generating enterprises while promoting inclusive economic participation.

The elderly and custodians of indigenous knowledge will play an important role in preserving traditional agricultural practices, local culture, and community knowledge. The Training Centre will facilitate intergenerational learning by creating opportunities for experienced community members to share indigenous knowledge alongside modern innovations, ensuring that valuable local practices are preserved while supporting sustainable rural development.

**4. Planned Learning Formats and Delivery Methods**

The Rural Training Centre will adopt flexible, inclusive, and practice-oriented training formats that reflect the preferences and realities of communities within the SIMSES territory. Findings from both the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) indicate that learners strongly prefer hands-on, community-based learning supported by demonstrations, mentorship, and continuous follow-up rather than classroom-based instruction alone.
The primary delivery model will be face-to-face practical training hosted at Ugenya Technical and

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Vocational College and partner institutions across Siaya County. Training will combine classroom instruction with field demonstrations, agricultural demonstration plots, innovation workshops, and community-based practical exercises. This approach will enable learners to immediately apply new knowledge and skills to real-life challenges.

To improve accessibility, the Training Centre will also organize mobile outreach training within villages and sub-wards, reducing travel costs and ensuring that women, farmers, the elderly, and persons with disabilities can participate. Community learning sessions will be delivered in English, Kiswahili, and dholuo where appropriate to accommodate learners with different educational backgrounds. Recognizing the growing demand for digital competencies, the Centre will gradually introduce blended learning, combining physical training with digital learning resources and online short courses through the Tujitume digital learning hub at Ugenya TVC. However, virtual learning will complement rather than replace practical training due to existing infrastructure and connectivity limitations. Finally, all training programmes will incorporate mentorship, coaching, peer learning, and post-training support, including business incubation, entrepreneurship guidance, market linkages, and follow-up visits. Experienced local practitioners, successful entrepreneurs, extension officers, and TVET trainers will serve as mentors, ensuring that learning remains locally relevant and translates into sustainable livelihoods and long-term community impact.

**5. Integration with Living Lab Experimentation**

While the Living Lab is still in its development phase, the Ugenya TVC training centre is designed to complement its objectives by building the knowledge, skills, and innovation capacity required for community-led experimentation and sustainable rural transformation.

Training activities will be directly linked to Living Lab actions by combining classroom learning with practical field experiences. Learners will participate in demonstration activities, pilot projects, problem-solving workshops, and community co-creation sessions where they will apply newly acquired knowledge to real challenges facing rural communities. Priority areas will include climate-smart agriculture, digital technologies, entrepreneurship, sustainable livelihoods, and local innovation, reflecting the needs identified by both community members and institutional stakeholders.

The Living Lab will provide opportunities for students, farmers, women, youth, local entrepreneurs, and community organizations to jointly design, test, and refine innovative solutions before wider adoption. Practical learning will include agricultural demonstration plots, prototype development, digital innovation activities, entrepreneurship challenges, and peer learning led by experienced practitioners and successful local innovators. This responds to the strong community preference for hands-on learning supported by practical demonstrations and continuous mentorship.

Local knowledge will form an integral part of the training curriculum. Indigenous farming practices, successful community initiatives, and lessons learned from local practitioners will be documented and combined with scientific knowledge and modern technologies. This approach ensures that innovation remains locally relevant while preserving valuable traditional knowledge that community members identified as being at risk of disappearing.

The Training Centre will also collaborate closely with other RURALITIES structures, including the Rural Experts, facilitators, local government, TVET institutions, community-based organizations, extension services, and innovation support partners. These collaborations will strengthen knowledge exchange, mentorship, technical support, and innovation services, creating an integrated ecosystem where training,

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experimentation, and community development reinforce one another to accelerate sustainable rural transformation across Siaya County.

**Visual Documentation and Supporting Materials**

Confirmation of Consent for Use of Visual Materials:

This confirms that all photographs and other visual materials included in this report were captured with the informed consent of the individuals featured. All participants provided written consent authorizing the RURALITIES Consortium to use these visuals for project documentation, dissemination, communication, reporting, and other related non-commercial purposes, in accordance with the project's ethical guidelines and applicable data protection requirements.

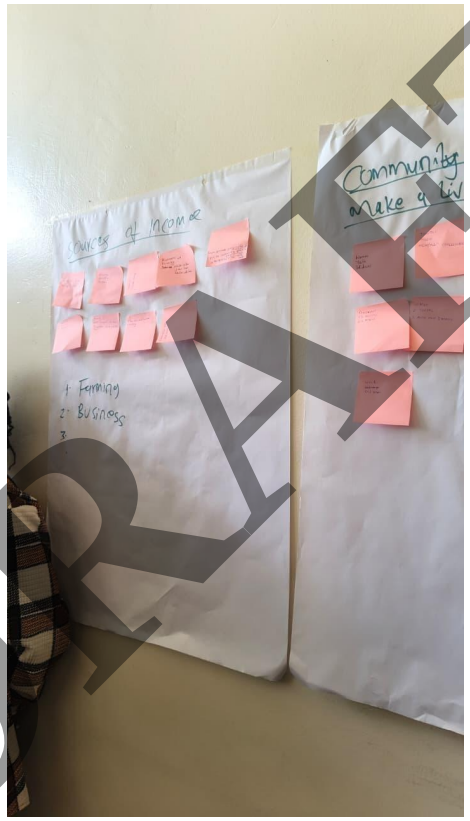



*Figure 16 Community members identifying and prioritizing key challenges affecting rural livelihoods during the Community Needs Assessment exercise*

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*Figure 17 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with youths in Siaya County to identify key community needs and development priorities*



*Figure 18 The Principal of Ugenya TVC, who oversees the institution's academic, administrative, and development programmes*

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*Figure 19 Ugenya TVC Administration Block*




*Figure 20 Department of Building and Civil Engineering at Ugenya TVC*

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*Figure 21 Trainers at Ugenya TVC*



*Figure 22 Newly constructed kitchen for the Food and Beverage Department, designed to strengthen practical training and improve learning outcomes*

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*Figure 23 School Farm*



*Figure 24 A standard Classroom at Ugenya TVC*

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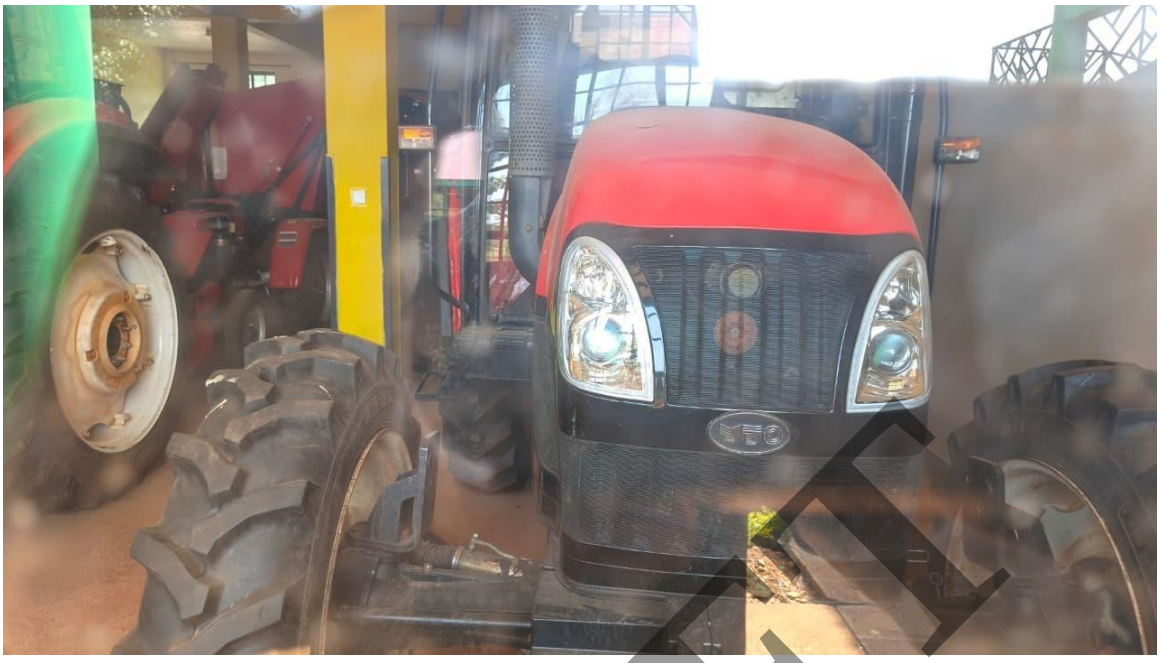


*Figure 25 Farm tractor at Ugenya TVC used for practical training in agricultural mechanization and skills development*

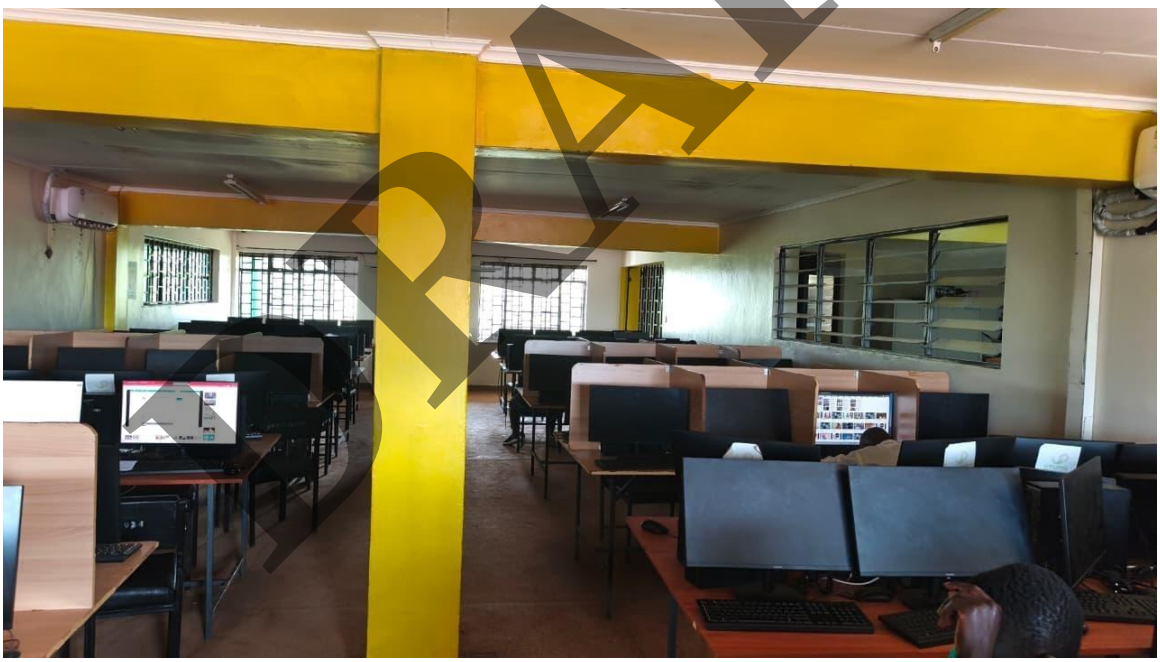


*Figure 26 ICT laboratory with a capacity of 100 computers, supporting digital learning and ICT skills development*

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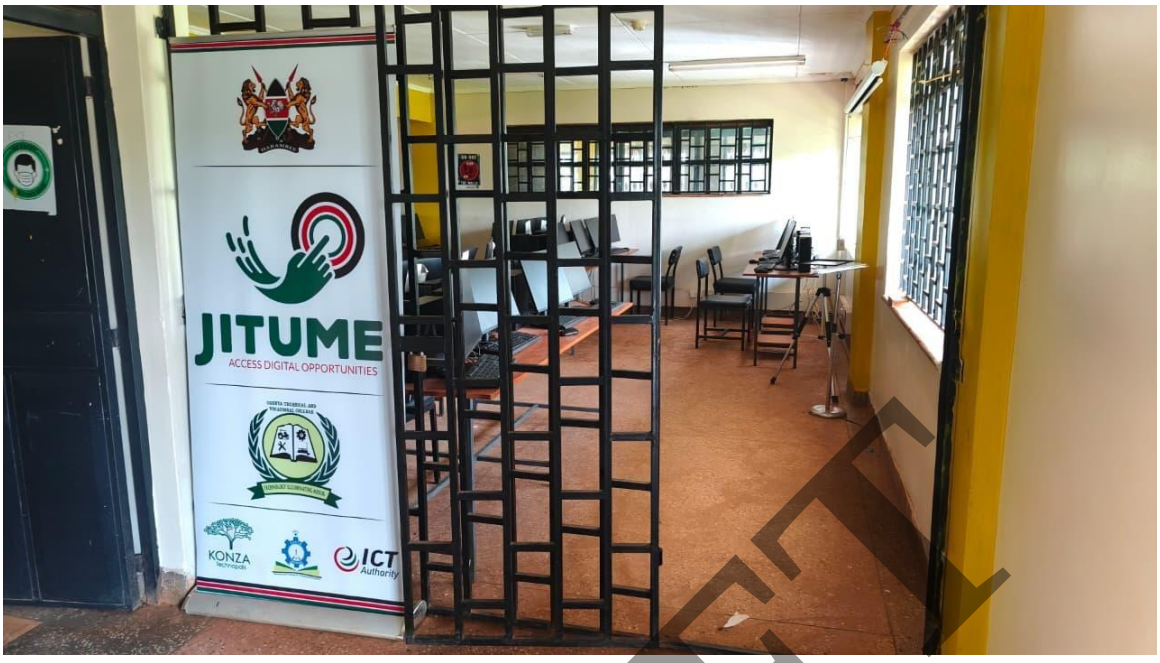



*Figure 27 Jitume ICT Lab sponsored by the Government of Kenya*

**Operational Plan for 2027 – Training Centre**

In 2027, Ugenya TVC will focus on strengthening local capacities through practical, inclusive, and innovation-driven learning that responds to the needs of communities within the SIMSES territory. Its educational priorities will include developing digital skills, climate-smart agriculture, entrepreneurship, sustainable rural enterprises, and technical and vocational competencies, particularly for youth, farmers, women, and local entrepreneurs.

Ugenya TVC will address key territorial skills gaps in sustainable agriculture, digital literacy, agribusiness, innovation, market access, and business development while promoting green and circular economy practices. These interventions will support improved livelihoods, climate resilience, and employment opportunities across the region.

The Training Centre will contribute to the RURALITIES objectives by strengthening community capacity, supporting the establishment of the SIMSES Living Lab, promoting knowledge exchange, and fostering collaboration among education institutions, local government, community organizations, and the private sector. As a key actor within the rural innovation ecosystem, the Centre will serve as a hub for lifelong learning, co-creation, skills development, and community-led innovation, enabling local stakeholders to design and implement sustainable solutions that contribute to resilient and inclusive rural development.

**2. Planned Training Activities and Learning Services**

*Table 21 UGENYA TVC SIMSES Follower Training Centre Planned Training Activities and Learning Services*

| Activity | Responsible Organizations | Target Learners | Expected Outputs/Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Workshops on climate-smart agriculture, entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and sustainable livelihoods.** | ACTS, Ugenya TVC, Siaya County Government | Farmer, Youth, Women, Entrepreneurs, Extension officers | At least 3 workshops delivered; 150 participants trained; increased knowledge and skills. |
| **Blended Learning Programmes combining in-person and virtual learning** | ACTS, Ugenya TVC | TVET students, youth, community trainers | Flexible access to technical and digital skills training; increased learner participation. |
| **Online Training Sessions and Webinars** | ACTS, RURALITIES experts, Partner institutions | Youth, students, practitioners, Extension officers | Knowledge exchange with national and international experts; strengthened digital competencies. |
| **Demonstration Activities and Innovation Showcases** | Ugenya TVC Living Lab partners, Local innovators | Farmers, students, community members | Demonstration plots, innovation prototypes, and practical solutions tested under local conditions. |
| **Field Visits and Practical Learning to farms, enterprises, innovation hubs, and community projects** | Ugenya TVC, Siaya National Polytechnic, County Departments | Students, farmers, youth groups | Enhanced experiential learning and exposure to successful rural innovations. |
| **Mentoring and Coaching Programmes** | ACTS, TVET lecturers, Industry Experts, Local Entrepreneurs | Youth, start-ups, women-led enterprises, students | Improved entrepreneurship, business development, and technical competencies through continuous support. |
| **Peer-Learning and Community Exchange Forums** | Living Lab facilitators, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), TVET partners | Farmers, youth groups, women groups, local innovators | Increased knowledge sharing, collaboration, and adoption of best practices across communities. |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Short Courses and Micro-Credential/Certification Programmes** | Ugenya TVC, TVETA, ACTS | Youth, community members, extension workers | Accredited short courses in digital skills, climate-smart agriculture, entrepreneurship, and technical skills, improving employability and lifelong learning. |
| **Community Awareness and Learning Events including innovation fairs and sustainability campaigns** | ACTS, Ugenya TVC, Living Lab, Siaya County Government | General public, schools, farmers, youth, women | Increased awareness of sustainable rural development, improved community participation, and stronger engagement with RURALITIES activities. |

**3. Learner Engagement and Participation Strategy**

In 2027, the Ugenya TVC will target TVET students, youth, smallholder farmers, women, local entrepreneurs, trainers, and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and the elderly. Special emphasis will be placed on empowering young people with digital and innovation skills while strengthening farmers' capacities in climate-smart agriculture, agribusiness, and sustainable rural livelihoods.

Participant recruitment will be undertaken through partner TVET institutions, local administration, farmer groups, community organizations, youth and women associations, social media platforms, local radio stations, and community forums. Existing RURALITIES networks and local champions will also support outreach and mobilization to ensure broad participation.

To promote accessibility and inclusion, training will be delivered in community venues and partner institutions using a combination of practical demonstrations, classroom sessions, and blended learning. Dholuo, Kiswahili, and English will be used where appropriate, while training schedules and venues will consider the needs of women, person with disabilities, and remote communities.

Local communities will actively participate in co-creation through the emerging SIMSES Living Lab, demonstration plots, innovation challenges, field visits, and participatory workshops. Farmers, students, local innovators, and community leaders will jointly test solutions, share indigenous knowledge, and evaluate innovations, ensuring that training remains practical, locally relevant, and responsive to community priorities.

**4. Resource and Capacity Needs**

Ugenya TVC leadership emphasized that the most critical need is the deployment of dedicated external trainers and facilitators, as the current teaching staff have limited capacity to support additional community-based training activities. The Centre will therefore require a network of student champions, local mobilisers, and technical experts in agriculture, ICT, entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation who are based within or familiar with the local community.

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A major opportunity exists through the Government-supported Jitume ICT Laboratory, which houses 100 computers that are currently underutilized. This facility could be utilized as a digital learning and innovation hub supporting blended learning, online training, and digital entrepreneurship. To maximize its potential, the project should support an ICT officer dedicated to managing the facility and coordinating digital learning activities.

Community consultations also revealed that distance to training venues, limited incentives, and weak post-training support have discouraged participation in previous programmes. Furthermore, past group-based demonstration projects often collapsed due to poor ownership. The Training Centre should therefore promote individual and household demonstration farms and enterprises, supported by strong mentorship and market linkages, to encourage practical learning and long-term sustainability.

Finally, adequate financial investment will be essential to operationalize the Centre. Resources are needed to develop additional training modules, recruit and support trainers, establish demonstration farms, provide participant incentives, and strengthen coordination across partner institutions.

**5. Expected Outcomes and Capacity-Building Impact**

The Rural Training Centre is expected to generate significant social, economic, and environmental benefits for learners and communities across the SIMSES territory. By providing practical, community-centred training, the Centre will equip youth, farmers, women, entrepreneurs, persons with disabilities, and the elderly with the knowledge and skills required to improve livelihoods and strengthen community resilience. The Centre will promote lifelong learning by ensuring that both modern technologies and indigenous knowledge are valued, creating an inclusive environment where every generation contributes to rural transformation.

We envision strengthened skills in climate-smart agriculture, digital technologies, innovation, agribusiness, and sustainable rural enterprises. Practical demonstrations, mentorship, and field-based learning will improve knowledge transfer and encourage learners to apply new skills within their own farms, businesses, and communities. Emphasis will be placed on encouraging young people to embrace agriculture as an attractive and profitable career pathway. Over time, this will support the transition from subsistence farming to commercially oriented, market-driven agriculture, improving productivity, household incomes, and food security.

The Training Centre will also contribute to local innovation by fostering entrepreneurship, promoting practical technical skills, and strengthening links between training, industry, and local markets. As more community members gain employable and entrepreneurial skills, the Centre is expected to reduce unemployment, economic inactivity, poverty, and associated social challenges such as theft while increasing self-reliance and economic independence. Communities will be empowered to create local enterprises, adopt sustainable technologies, and generate employment opportunities that benefit future generations.

The sustainability of the Training Centre will be anchored on continuous monitoring and documenting of learner outcomes and livelihood improvements to demonstrate impact and attract new partners. Training programmes will be regularly updated to match local market needs, including climate-smart agriculture, digital financial services, and agro-processing. A graduate association will promote mentorship and modest member contributions, while partnerships with agribusinesses will support market-led training. Sustainability will also be enhanced through alignment with national TVET programmes, affordable course fees (with subsidies for vulnerable groups), and sale of products developed during training managed by graduates.

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## 6. Planned Milestones for 2027

*Table 22 UGENYA TVC SIMSES Follower Training Centre Planned Milestones for 2027*

| Phase | Timelines | Key Milestones | Expected Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1: Establishment and Preparation | January – February 2027 | Establish the Training Centre governance structure, recruit trainers and community facilitators, develop training curricula and learning materials, strengthen partnerships with the Living Lab, TVET institutions, county government, and community organizations, and prepare demonstration sites. | Operational Training Centre with governance structures in place, training materials developed, trainers recruited, partnerships formalized, and implementation plan finalized. |
| Phase 2: Training Delivery and Living Lab Implementation | March – August 2027 | Officially launch the Training Centre, enroll the first learner cohorts, deliver workshops, blended learning programmes, webinars, field demonstrations, mentoring and coaching sessions, and integrate learners into Living Lab activities through demonstration farms, innovation pilots, co-creation workshops, and field visits. | Training programmes fully operational, learners equipped with practical skills, Living Lab activities established, and community participation strengthened through hands-on innovation and experimentation. |
| Phase 3: Consolidation, Evaluation and Sustainability | September – October 2027 | Entrepreneurship coaching, peer-learning forums, collect monitoring and evaluation data, document lessons learned, review training curricula, and develop the sustainability and continuation strategy. | Progress report completed, learner outcomes documented, curricula refined, best practices captured, and a sustainability roadmap developed to guide future implementation and scaling of the Rural Training Centre. |

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# 6. Network of Training Centres

The RURALITIES Network of Training Centres represents a collaborative framework designed to strengthen learning, capacity building, and knowledge exchange across participating territories. While each Training Centre operates within its own local context and addresses specific territorial needs, the centres are connected through a common vision of supporting sustainable rural development through education, skills development, and lifelong learning.

The network provides a mechanism for fostering collaboration among Training Centres, enabling the exchange of experiences, learning methodologies, educational resources, and good practices. By working together, the centres can benefit from shared knowledge, avoid duplication of efforts, and create synergies that enhance the quality and impact of their activities.

The Network of Training Centres contributes to the broader objectives of the RURALITIES project by supporting the development of human capital and strengthening the capacities of rural stakeholders. Through collaborative learning approaches, peer-to-peer exchanges, and joint capacity-building initiatives, the network facilitates the exchange of knowledge and skills across territories and promotes the adoption of innovative practices.

A key strength of the network lies in its diversity. The participating Training Centres operate in different geographical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts and address a variety of thematic areas relevant to rural development. This diversity creates opportunities for mutual learning and enables stakeholders to benefit from a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

The network also serves as a platform for cooperation between Training Centres and other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Through their interaction with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services, the Training Centres contribute to the creation of integrated learning environments that combine education, innovation, experimentation, and stakeholder engagement.

Beyond supporting project implementation, the Network of Training Centres aims to establish lasting relationships among participating organisations and territories. By strengthening collaboration and fostering a culture of continuous learning, the network contributes to the long-term sustainability of capacity-building efforts and supports the creation of resilient and adaptive rural communities.

The following sections describe the architecture of the network, the cooperation mechanisms established among the Training Centres, and the knowledge exchange processes that support collaboration and learning across the RURALITIES territories.

## 6.1 Network Architecture

The RURALITIES Network of Training Centres is designed as a collaborative and interconnected structure that brings together training and capacity-building initiatives across the participating territories. The network provides a framework for cooperation, knowledge sharing, and mutual learning while allowing each Training Centre to maintain its territorial identity and respond to local needs and priorities.

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The architecture of the network is based on the principle of distributed collaboration. Rather than operating through a centralised structure, the network consists of multiple Training Centres embedded within their respective territories and connected through common objectives, shared methodologies, and collaborative activities. This approach enables the network to benefit from the diversity of experiences, expertise, and thematic focus areas represented across the participating SIMSES.

Each Training Centre functions as a local learning hub responsible for delivering training and capacity-building activities tailored to its territorial context. At the same time, the centres contribute to the wider network by sharing educational resources, learning materials, methodologies, tools, and experiences with other participating territories. This dual role strengthens both local impact and transnational collaboration.

The network architecture supports horizontal cooperation among Training Centres, facilitating direct exchanges between territories and encouraging peer-to-peer learning. Through these interactions, centres can learn from one another's experiences, adapt successful approaches to their own contexts, and jointly develop solutions to common challenges. The exchange of good practices and lessons learned contributes to the continuous improvement of training activities and enhances the overall quality of capacity-building services delivered within the project.

The Network of Training Centres is also closely integrated with the broader RURALITIES ecosystem. Strong links are maintained with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services. These connections ensure that learning activities remain aligned with innovation processes, stakeholder needs, and territorial development priorities. They also facilitate the flow of knowledge between different components of the ecosystem, creating opportunities for collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Digital collaboration tools and communication platforms further strengthen the network architecture by enabling regular interaction between Training Centres regardless of geographical location. These tools support the sharing of resources, organisation of joint activities, delivery of online learning opportunities, and dissemination of project results.

The network architecture has been designed not only to support project implementation but also to provide a foundation for long-term cooperation beyond the lifetime of RURALITIES. By establishing relationships among organisations, trainers, experts, and stakeholders across territories, the network contributes to creating a sustainable community of practice dedicated to rural learning, innovation, and capacity building.

Ultimately, the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres serves as a mechanism for connecting local learning initiatives with broader European knowledge and innovation ecosystems. Through collaborative action and shared learning, the network strengthens the capacity of rural actors to address current and future challenges and contributes to the development of more resilient, innovative, and sustainable rural communities.

## 6.2 Cooperation Mechanisms

Effective cooperation between the RURALITIES Training Centres is essential for maximising the impact of capacity-building activities and creating a strong network of learning and knowledge exchange across participating territories. To support collaboration, the project promotes a range of cooperation

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mechanisms that facilitate interaction among Training Centres, encourage mutual learning, and strengthen connections between stakeholders operating in different rural contexts.

The cooperation framework is based on the principle that each Training Centre contributes unique experiences, expertise, and educational approaches that can provide value to other territories. By creating opportunities for regular interaction, the network enables Training Centres to exchange ideas, discuss challenges, share solutions, and jointly develop innovative approaches to rural learning and capacity building.

Regular meetings constitute one of the primary cooperation mechanisms within the network. These meetings provide opportunities for Training Centre representatives to discuss progress, present activities, identify common challenges, and coordinate future actions. Depending on the needs of the network, meetings may be organised in physical, virtual, or hybrid formats, ensuring broad participation and continuous communication.

Workshops and thematic seminars represent another important mechanism for cooperation. These activities allow Training Centres to explore specific topics of common interest, exchange experiences, and present innovative educational methodologies and training approaches. Workshops may focus on thematic areas such as sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship, digitalisation, climate resilience, community development, social innovation, or other priorities identified by the participating territories.

Peer-learning activities play a central role in strengthening collaboration across the network. Through peer exchanges, study visits, mentoring relationships, and practical demonstrations, Training Centres can learn directly from one another's experiences and identify opportunities for adapting successful practices to their own contexts. These activities promote mutual learning while fostering trust and long-term relationships among network members.

Digital collaboration platforms further support cooperation by enabling continuous communication and resource sharing between Training Centres. Such platforms facilitate the exchange of learning materials, training resources, good practices, educational methodologies, and project outputs. They also provide opportunities for organising online events, webinars, and collaborative learning activities involving stakeholders from multiple territories.

Joint development of educational resources represents another valuable cooperation mechanism. Training Centres may collaborate on the creation of training materials, toolkits, learning modules, case studies, and practical guidance documents that can be adapted and used across different territories. This collaborative approach increases efficiency, promotes consistency, and enhances the quality of educational content available within the network.

The cooperation mechanisms also extend beyond the Training Centres themselves and encourage collaboration with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Joint activities with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services create additional opportunities for integrating learning with innovation, experimentation, and stakeholder engagement activities.

Through these various cooperation mechanisms, the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres functions as a dynamic community of practice that supports continuous learning, strengthens institutional capacities, and promotes the exchange of knowledge across territories. By fostering collaboration and mutual support, the network contributes to the development of stronger, more resilient, and innovation-oriented rural communities both during and beyond the lifetime of the project.

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## 6.3 Knowledge Exchange Processes

Knowledge exchange represents one of the core functions of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres. The network has been designed not only as a collection of individual training structures but also as a collaborative learning environment that facilitates the exchange of knowledge, experiences, methodologies, and good practices across participating territories. Through these interactions, the Training Centres contribute to building a stronger and more interconnected rural learning ecosystem capable of supporting innovation, resilience, and sustainable development.

The knowledge exchange processes implemented within the network promote continuous interaction among trainers, experts, practitioners, researchers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and rural communities. By connecting diverse stakeholder groups, the Training Centres facilitate the flow of knowledge between different sectors, disciplines, and territorial contexts, ensuring that valuable experiences and lessons learned can be shared and adapted across regions.

A key objective of these processes is to transform existing knowledge into practical learning opportunities that can be applied by rural stakeholders. This includes translating research findings, policy developments, innovative practices, and local experiences into accessible educational resources, training materials, workshops, and learning activities. In doing so, the Training Centres help bridge the gap between knowledge generation and practical implementation.

Knowledge exchange within the network takes place through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms. These include training sessions, workshops, webinars, thematic seminars, study visits, peer-learning activities, mentoring programmes, and collaborative learning events. Such activities create opportunities for stakeholders to share experiences, discuss common challenges, explore innovative solutions, and learn from successful practices implemented in other territories.

The network also promotes the development and sharing of educational resources, including training modules, learning materials, practical guidelines, toolkits, case studies, practice abstracts, and digital content. The exchange of these resources contributes to improving the quality and consistency of learning activities while reducing duplication of effort among participating Training Centres.

Digital technologies play an important role in supporting knowledge exchange processes. Online platforms, virtual learning environments, webinars, and collaborative digital tools enable continuous communication and interaction among Training Centres regardless of geographical distance. These tools increase accessibility, facilitate the dissemination of resources, and create additional opportunities for cross-territorial learning and cooperation.

Emphasis is placed on peer-to-peer learning approaches. By enabling direct exchanges between practitioners, communities, educators, and stakeholders from different territories, the Training Centres create opportunities for experiential learning and the transfer of practical knowledge. These interactions often provide valuable insights into how solutions can be adapted and implemented in different local contexts.

The knowledge exchange processes are further strengthened through collaboration with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Living Labs contribute practical experiences and innovation outcomes that can be integrated into training activities, while Expertise Centres provide access to specialised knowledge and expert support. Facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation

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Services also contribute valuable experiences and resources that enrich learning opportunities and support capacity-building efforts.

Through these knowledge exchange and learning processes, the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres contributes to the creation of a vibrant community of practice that extends beyond individual territories. By promoting continuous learning, collaboration, and the sharing of experiences, the network strengthens the capacity of rural stakeholders to address challenges, seize opportunities, and actively contribute to sustainable rural transformation.

## 6.4 Joint Learning and Capacity-Building Activities

A key objective of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres is to foster collaboration through the development and implementation of joint learning and capacity-building activities. By working collectively, the Training Centres can leverage the diversity of expertise, experiences, and educational approaches available across the participating territories, creating added value for learners and stakeholders throughout the network.

Joint learning activities provide opportunities for participants to engage with experiences and practices beyond their local contexts. They facilitate the exchange of knowledge across territories, promote mutual learning, and encourage the adaptation and transfer of innovative approaches to different rural environments. Such activities contribute to strengthening both individual capacities and the collective knowledge base of the RURALITIES community.

The network supports a broad range of collaborative learning formats. These may include joint workshops, thematic seminars, webinars, online learning sessions, peer-learning exchanges, study visits, summer schools, mentoring programmes, and cross-territorial training initiatives. These activities allow participants to interact with experts and practitioners from different regions and gain exposure to diverse perspectives on rural development and innovation.

Emphasis is placed on experiential and practice-oriented learning approaches. Through study visits, demonstration activities, Living Lab exchanges, and interactions with role models and replicators, participants can observe successful practices in real-world settings and gain practical insights into their implementation. These experiences support the exchange of knowledge from theory to practice and enhance the applicability of learning outcomes.

Joint activities also provide opportunities for the collaborative development of educational content and learning resources. Training Centres may work together to prepare learning modules, case studies, toolkits, guidelines, and other materials that can be adapted and used across multiple territories. This collaborative approach improves efficiency, promotes consistency, and strengthens the quality of learning resources available within the network.

Digital learning formats further expand the reach and accessibility of joint activities. Online platforms, webinars, virtual workshops, and blended learning approaches enable participation regardless of geographical location and support continuous interaction among learners and trainers. These formats are particularly valuable for reaching stakeholders in remote rural areas and for facilitating cross-border knowledge exchange.

The implementation of joint learning and capacity-building activities also strengthens cooperation with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Collaboration with Living Labs, Expertise Centres,

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facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services ensures that learning activities remain closely connected to innovation processes, practical applications, and stakeholder needs. This integrated approach enhances the relevance and impact of capacity-building efforts.

Through these collaborative activities, the Network of Training Centres contributes to the creation of a vibrant learning community that extends beyond individual territories. By promoting cooperation, peer learning, and the sharing of experiences, the network strengthens the ability of rural stakeholders to address emerging challenges, adopt innovative solutions, and contribute to sustainable rural transformation.

In the longer term, these joint learning activities are expected to support the development of enduring relationships among participating organisations and stakeholders, creating a foundation for continued collaboration and knowledge exchange beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

## 6.5 Future Development of the Network

The RURALITIES Network of Training Centres has been conceived not only as a project-based collaboration mechanism but also as a foundation for long-term cooperation in the field of rural learning, capacity building, and knowledge exchange. While the initial establishment of the network is supported by the RURALITIES project, its long-term value lies in its ability to evolve into a sustainable community of practice that continues to support rural stakeholders beyond the project's lifetime.

As the Training Centres mature and expand their activities, the network is expected to strengthen cooperation among participating organisations and facilitate the development of new learning opportunities, partnerships, and collaborative initiatives. Continued interaction between the centres will enable the sharing of emerging practices, educational methodologies, and innovative approaches to rural development, ensuring that learning activities remain relevant and responsive to changing territorial needs.

Future development efforts will focus on expanding the range and quality of services offered through the network. This may include the development of new training programmes, thematic learning pathways, digital learning resources, certification opportunities, mentoring schemes, and specialised capacity-building activities addressing emerging challenges such as digital transformation, climate resilience, circular economy, social innovation, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

The network is also expected to strengthen its role in facilitating cross-territorial and international cooperation. Building on the relationships established through RURALITIES, the Training Centres may engage in future collaborative projects, joint educational initiatives, knowledge exchange programmes, and strategic partnerships with organisations operating at regional, national, European, and international levels. Such cooperation can enhance the visibility of the network, attract new stakeholders, and create additional opportunities for resource mobilisation.

Digitalisation will play an increasingly important role in the future development of the network. The continued use of digital learning platforms, online collaboration tools, virtual learning environments, and shared resource repositories can increase accessibility, support wider participation, and facilitate continuous interaction among stakeholders regardless of geographical location. These tools will help strengthen the network's resilience and enable the delivery of flexible and inclusive learning opportunities.

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An important priority for the future will be the integration of the Training Centres into existing regional and national education, innovation, and rural development ecosystems. Strengthening institutional partnerships and aligning activities with relevant policies and development strategies can improve long-term sustainability and increase the contribution of the Training Centres to territorial development objectives.

The future development of the network will also benefit from closer integration with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. Enhanced collaboration with Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services can create new opportunities for linking learning activities with innovation processes, practical experimentation, and stakeholder engagement initiatives.

Ultimately, the long-term vision of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres is to establish a sustainable and collaborative learning ecosystem that continues to support rural communities, organisations, and innovators well beyond the duration of the project. By promoting continuous learning, cooperation, and knowledge exchange, the network can contribute to building more resilient, innovative, and sustainable rural territories capable of responding effectively to future challenges and opportunities.

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# 7. Sustainability and Long-Term Operation

## 7.1 Sustainability Strategy

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the RURALITIES Training Centres is essential for maximising the impact and legacy of the project. From their inception, the centres have been designed as structures capable of continuing their activities beyond the duration of project funding, providing ongoing support for knowledge exchange, innovation, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration within rural territories.

The sustainability strategy is based on four interconnected pillars: institutional embedding, stakeholder ownership, diversified funding, and integration within existing regional development ecosystems.

Institutional embedding aims to ensure that each Training Centres is anchored within an organisation or network capable of supporting its long-term operation. By building upon existing institutions and governance structures, the centres can benefit from established resources, expertise, stakeholder relationships, and operational capacities. This approach reduces the risk of discontinuation following the completion of project activities and increases the likelihood of long-term stability.

Stakeholder ownership represents another critical component of sustainability. The Training Centres have been developed through a participatory process involving local and regional stakeholders from academia, public authorities, businesses, civil society organisations, and local communities. Their active involvement in the design, governance, and operation of the centres fosters commitment, strengthens relevance to local needs, and encourages continued participation beyond the project lifetime.

Financial sustainability will be supported through the exploration of diversified funding opportunities. Potential sources may include regional and national development programmes, European funding instruments, public-private partnerships, service-based activities, membership contributions, and participation in future research and innovation projects. A diversified funding approach reduces dependency on a single source of support and strengthens the resilience of the centres over time.

The long-term viability of the Training Centres will also depend on their integration with existing regional innovation and development structures. By aligning their activities with regional strategies, rural development initiatives, educational programmes, and innovation support ecosystems, the centres can strengthen their relevance and create opportunities for long-term collaboration with key institutions and stakeholders.

Ultimately, the sustainability of the RURALITIES Training Centres will depend on their ability to continuously deliver value to rural stakeholders, respond to emerging challenges, and maintain strong partnerships within their territories. Through a combination of institutional commitment, stakeholder engagement, resource mobilisation, and strategic integration, the centres are expected to evolve into sustainable structures supporting rural innovation and development well beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

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## 7.2 Funding Opportunities

The long-term sustainability of the RURALITIES Training Centres will depend on their ability to secure adequate resources and establish diversified funding mechanisms capable of supporting their continued operation and development. While the centres have been initiated through the RURALITIES project, their future success will require a combination of financial, institutional, and partnership-based support.




*Figure 28 Funding opportunities for RURALITIES Training Centres*

Potential funding opportunities may originate from a variety of sources at European, national, regional, and local levels. European funding programmes, including future Horizon Europe initiatives, Interreg programmes, Erasmus+, LIFE, and other innovation and rural development instruments, may provide opportunities to support collaborative projects, capacity-building activities, knowledge exchange initiatives, and innovation services. Participation in future European projects can also contribute to maintaining international networks and expanding the reach of the Training Centres.

At national and regional levels, the centres may benefit from rural development programmes, regional innovation strategies, smart specialisation initiatives, capacity-building schemes, and other public funding mechanisms that support innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and territorial development. Close alignment with regional priorities and development strategies can increase access to these funding opportunities and strengthen institutional support.

Public-private partnerships may represent another valuable source of support. Collaboration with businesses, industry associations, financial institutions, and innovation support organisations can create opportunities for joint initiatives, sponsorship arrangements, service provision, and knowledge-sharing

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activities. Such partnerships can also strengthen the practical relevance of the centres and enhance their connections with local and regional innovation ecosystems.

Additional sustainability opportunities may emerge through service-based activities and membership models. Depending on the territorial context and governance arrangements, Training Centres may offer specialised advisory services, training programmes, networking activities, innovation support services, or consultancy activities that generate revenue while continuing to provide value to stakeholders. Membership schemes or voluntary contributions from participating organisations may also support specific activities and operational costs.

The diversification of funding sources is considered a key principle of the sustainability strategy. Relying on a single funding mechanism may expose the centres to financial risks and limit their long-term resilience. By combining multiple funding streams and resource mobilisation approaches, the Training Centres can strengthen their financial stability, increase their adaptability to changing circumstances, and ensure the continued delivery of services and support to rural stakeholders.

Ultimately, the most sustainable centres are expected to combine external funding opportunities with strong institutional commitment, strategic partnerships, and locally embedded support mechanisms. Such a balanced approach will provide the foundation for long-term operation and continued contribution to rural innovation and sustainable territorial development.

## 7.3 Future Development Roadmap

Long-term sustainability is a fundamental principle underpinning the establishment of the RURALITIES Training Centres. From the outset, the centres have been conceived not as temporary project structures, but as long-lasting mechanisms capable of continuing to support rural innovation, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

The sustainability strategy is based on the principle of institutional embedding, whereby each Training Centre is anchored within an existing organisation or territorial structure capable of providing long-term operational support. By integrating the centres into established institutions, networks, or development initiatives, the project seeks to ensure continuity of activities, retention of expertise, and ongoing engagement with local stakeholders after project funding ends.

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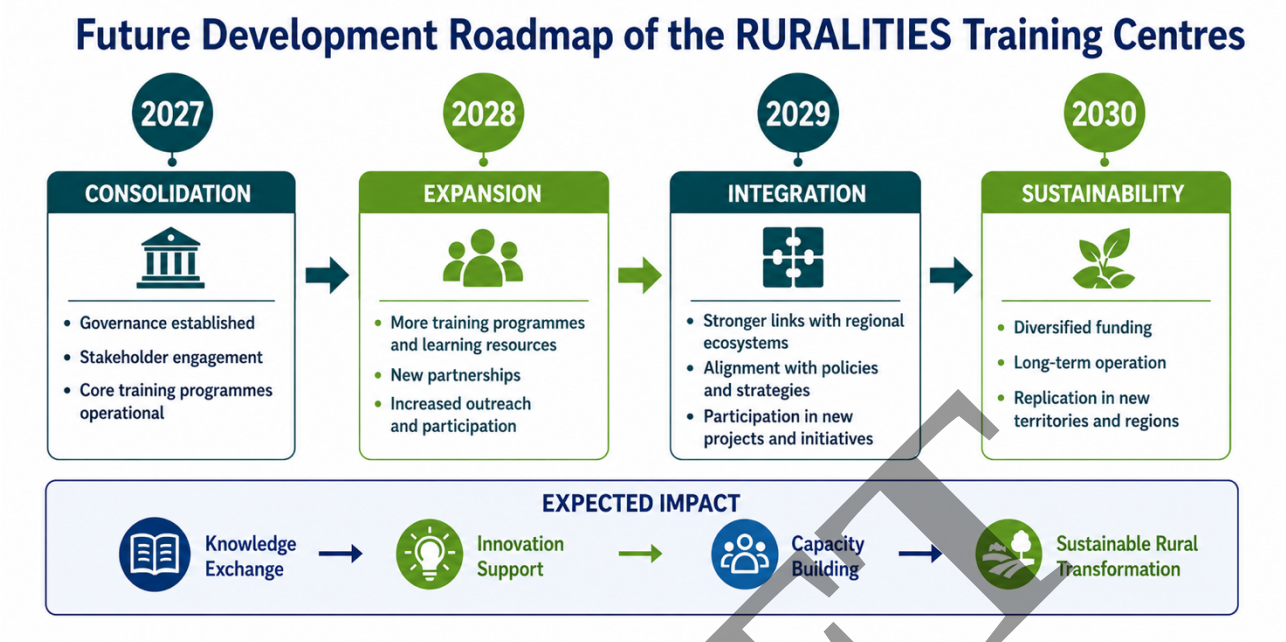



*Figure 29 Future Development Roadmap of the RURALITIES Training Centres*

Stakeholder ownership represents another key pillar of sustainability. The Training Centres are developed through participatory processes involving public authorities, research organisations, businesses, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and local communities. This collaborative approach encourages stakeholders to actively contribute to the development and operation of the centres, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for their future success. Strong stakeholder engagement increases the likelihood that the centres will remain relevant, supported, and utilised over time.

Financial sustainability is supported through the exploration of diversified funding sources and resource mobilisation opportunities. While the centres may initially benefit from project resources and partner contributions, their long-term operation is expected to rely on a combination of regional, national, and European funding opportunities, public-private partnerships, service-based activities, membership contributions, and participation in future research and innovation projects. Diversifying funding sources reduces dependency on a single mechanism and increases the resilience of the centres over time.

The sustainability strategy also emphasises integration with existing regional and local development frameworks. By aligning their activities with regional innovation strategies, rural development programmes, community initiatives, and policy priorities, the Training Centres can strengthen their relevance and create opportunities for long-term cooperation with public authorities and development organisations. Such alignment facilitates access to resources, strengthens institutional support, and contributes to the broader impact of the centres within their territories.

Collaboration within the wider RURALITIES ecosystem further contributes to sustainability. Through continued interaction with Living Labs, Training Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and innovation support services, the Training Centres can maintain dynamic networks, access new knowledge and opportunities, and continue delivering value to stakeholders. The networked nature of the ecosystem helps ensure that expertise and resources remain available even after the formal completion of project activities.

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Ultimately, the sustainability of the RURALITIES Training Centres will depend on their ability to continuously respond to local needs, deliver valuable services, maintain stakeholder engagement, and secure the resources necessary for ongoing operation. By combining institutional commitment, stakeholder ownership, diversified funding approaches, and strong territorial integration, the centres are expected to evolve into sustainable structures that continue supporting rural innovation and development well beyond the duration of the RURALITIES project.

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# 8. Challenges and Lessons Learned

The establishment of the RURALITIES Training Centres across diverse territorial, institutional, and socio-economic contexts provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with developing sustainable rural innovation support structures. While the implementation process differed across territories, several common themes emerged that can inform future initiatives aimed at strengthening rural innovation ecosystems.

One of the primary challenges encountered was stakeholder mobilisation and engagement. Bringing together a diverse range of actors, including public authorities, research organisations, businesses, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and local communities, required significant effort and continuous communication. In some territories, stakeholders had limited previous experience of participating in collaborative innovation processes, requiring additional facilitation and trust-building activities. Maintaining long-term engagement also proved challenging, particularly when stakeholders faced competing priorities or limited resources.

A key lesson learned during the development of the RURALITIES Training Centres concerns the limited human-resource capacity of rural municipalities. Municipal administrations are often involved simultaneously in numerous local, regional, national and EU-level initiatives, while operating with relatively small teams and limited staff availability. This capacity constraint needed to be carefully considered when involving municipalities in the needs assessment and Training Centre design processes. Excessive or repetitive requests for participation could create stakeholder fatigue, potentially leading to reduced engagement or disengagement from project activities. This experience highlights the importance of balancing meaningful co-creation with the actual capacities of rural public authorities when designing long-term training and support structures.

The design of appropriate governance structures represented another important challenge. Each territory possessed different institutional arrangements, levels of organisational capacity, and stakeholder expectations. As a result, governance models needed to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate local realities while ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making. Finding the right balance between formal governance arrangements and practical operational flexibility required continuous dialogue and adaptation throughout the establishment process.

Resource availability and long-term sustainability considerations also emerged as key challenges. Although many organisations recognised the value of the Training Centre concept, ensuring adequate human, financial, and organisational resources for long-term operation required careful planning and commitment from host organisations and stakeholders. Identifying realistic sustainability pathways beyond project funding became an important aspect of the establishment process.

Coordination across multiple actors and sectors presented additional complexity. The Training Centres are designed as multi-actor structures involving organisations with different objectives, priorities, and working cultures. Facilitating effective collaboration, managing expectations, and maintaining alignment among stakeholders required strong coordination mechanisms and ongoing communication efforts. These experiences highlighted the importance of dedicated coordination capacity and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Despite these challenges, the implementation process generated several important lessons. One of the most significant findings was the value of participatory and bottom-up approaches. The Training Centres

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proved to be most effective when stakeholders were actively involved in their design, governance, and operation. Early engagement and co-creation helped strengthen stakeholder ownership, increase relevance to local needs, and build long-term commitment to the centres.

Another important lesson relates to the importance of building upon existing structures and networks whenever possible. In many territories, integrating the Training Centre concept within existing organisations or initiatives proved more effective than creating entirely new structures. This approach facilitated stakeholder acceptance, reduced administrative burdens, avoided overlaps, and strengthened sustainability prospects.

The implementation process also demonstrated the importance of flexibility. Given the diversity of territorial contexts across the RURALITIES regions, a single governance or operational model would not have been appropriate. Allowing centres to adapt their structures, services, and activities to local circumstances contributed significantly to their relevance and effectiveness.

Finally, the experiences gathered throughout the project highlighted the critical role of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and networking in supporting rural innovation. The interaction between Training Centres, Living Labs, Expertise Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and innovation support services demonstrated the added value of an integrated ecosystem approach capable of addressing complex rural challenges through collective action.

The lessons learned from the establishment and operation of the RURALITIES Training Centres provide valuable guidance for future initiatives seeking to strengthen rural innovation ecosystems. They also create a strong foundation for the future scaling, adaptation, and replication of the Training Centre model both within and beyond the RURALITIES project.

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# 9. DIGITAL DATABASE OF TRAINING CENTRES

A digital database of the RURALITIES Training Centres will be established as a dedicated section of the RURALITIES project website (https://www.ruralities-project.eu/). The project website serves as a central digital reference point for RURALITIES, bringing together information on the project's objectives, activities, territories, results, resources and key components of the RURALITIES ecosystem. The integration of the Training Centres into this environment will further complement the project's digital presence by providing a dedicated space for presenting the network of Training Centres and facilitating access to relevant information for project stakeholders and wider target groups.

The digital database will primarily serve as the online representation of the RURALITIES Training Centre network, providing a structured and accessible overview of the Training Centres identified and established across the SIMSES territories. It will enable interested stakeholders to identify the individual centres, gain an understanding of their territorial and thematic orientation, explore their role in supporting learning and capacity building, and obtain relevant information on their activities and connections with the wider RURALITIES ecosystem.

The information presented through the digital database will build on the common framework developed within D8.6 – RURALITIES Interdisciplinary Training Centres and on the information collected throughout the process of identifying, defining and establishing the Training Centres. The database may include relevant information on the centres' profiles, territorial context, participating organisations and stakeholders, thematic areas, target groups, learning and capacity-building activities, available expertise and resources, governance and cooperation arrangements, links with other RURALITIES components, as well as other information considered relevant as the Training Centre network develops. The exact scope, structure and level of detail of the information presented online will be further refined during the implementation phase, considering the development of the Training Centres and the wider RURALITIES digital environment.

At the time of submission of D8.6 – RURALITIES Interdisciplinary Training Centres, the dedicated Training Centres section of the RURALITIES website has not yet been technically implemented. As the submission of D8.6 has been brought forward compared with the originally foreseen timeline, following the request of the project reviewers, the technical development and website integration will take place as a subsequent implementation step after the submission of this deliverable.

The precise technical configuration of the digital database and its connection with other digital components developed within RURALITIES will therefore be further defined as these elements progress and become increasingly integrated. This approach will support coherence with the overall RURALITIES digital environment, facilitate complementarity between the different digital components of the project and help avoid the development of overlapping or disconnected solutions.

Accordingly, D8.6 – RURALITIES Interdisciplinary Training Centres establishes the conceptual basis and initial information framework for the digital database, while its technical implementation and integration into the RURALITIES project website constitute a subsequent step in the operationalisation, visibility and longer-term accessibility of the RURALITIES Training Centre network.

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# 10. DATA MANAGEMENT

The data included in the RURALITIES Training Centres database were collected through an internal Master Template developed for the purpose of gathering standardised information from the participating SIMSES leaders for deliverables and tasks. The template was used to collect the key information required to identify, describe, and document the Training Centres established within the participating territories.

SIMSES leaders were responsible for providing the relevant information for their respective territories, based on consultations and information available within their SIMSES partnerships. The collected information includes the characteristics, institutional setting, activities, stakeholder involvement, capacities, and other relevant features of the Training Centres, as defined in the Master Template.

Following the collection of the information, the data were reviewed and consolidated by IRI for inclusion in the RURALITIES Training Centres database. Where clarification or additional information is required, IRI may consult the respective SIMSES leaders to validate or complete the data.

The database is intended to provide a structured and publicly accessible overview of the RURALITIES Training Centres and their main characteristics. The information presented in the database is therefore limited to information relevant to describing the Training Centres and their role within the RURALITIES ecosystem.

## 10.1 Data Updates and Maintenance

The information contained in the database will be updated as needed, in cooperation with the respective SIMSES leaders. Updates may be introduced where there are relevant changes to the Training Centre's profile, activities, stakeholder involvement, available services, contact or organisational information, or other elements included in the database.

SIMSES leaders will therefore serve as the primary point of contact for validating significant changes concerning their respective Training Centres, while IRI will coordinate the consolidation and updating of the information in the database.

The frequency of updates will depend on the availability of new or changed information and the continued operation and development of the Training Centres.

## 10.2 Data Protection and Privacy

The database is designed primarily to contain organisational and descriptive information about Training Centres, rather than personal or sensitive information. Data collection and publication will follow the principles of data minimisation and purpose limitation, ensuring that only information necessary for the identification and description of the Training Centres is included.

Where contact or other information relating to identifiable individuals is provided, its inclusion and publication will be handled in accordance with applicable General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

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requirements and the project's data protection procedures governed by D1.4 Data Management Plan – updated version.

The information collected through the Master Template will be used for the purposes of documenting the RURALITIES Training Centres, supporting their visibility and networking, and informing the further deployment and scalability of the Training Centre model.

## 10.3 Data Validation and Quality Assurance

To ensure consistency and reliability, the information submitted by SIMSES leaders is reviewed and consolidated before being included in the database. Where inconsistencies, missing information, or the need for clarification are identified, IRI will liaise with the relevant SIMSES leader to validate or update the information.

This process ensures that the database provides a consistent representation of the Training Centres across the different SIMSES while allowing for differences in their local contexts and organisational arrangements.

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# 11. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The establishment of the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres represents a significant achievement in the development of sustainable rural innovation ecosystems. Through the creation of knowledge brokerage and innovation support structures embedded within local and regional contexts, the project has laid the foundations for stronger collaboration, enhanced knowledge exchange, and improved access to expertise for rural stakeholders.

The Training Centres have demonstrated their potential to act as connecting points between research, innovation, education, policy, and practice. By bringing together diverse stakeholder groups and facilitating cooperation across sectors, the centres contribute to creating more inclusive, resilient, and innovation-oriented rural communities. Their close integration with other components of the RURALITIES ecosystem, including Living Labs, Training Centres, facilitators, role models, replicators, and RURRIS Innovation Services, has further strengthened their capacity to support rural transformation processes.

The experiences gathered during the establishment and operation of the centres highlight the importance of place-based approaches that reflect local needs and territorial realities. At the same time, they demonstrate the value of multi-actor collaboration, stakeholder ownership, flexible governance arrangements, and continuous knowledge exchange as key success factors for sustainable rural innovation support structures.

Looking ahead, the continued development of the RURALITIES Training Centres should focus on consolidating and expanding the network established through the project. Strengthening cooperation between centres, increasing cross-territorial learning opportunities, and fostering joint initiatives will further enhance the collective capacity of the network and maximise its long-term impact.

Future efforts should also focus on broadening the range of services offered by the Training Centres in response to evolving stakeholder needs and emerging rural challenges. Attention should be given to areas such as digital transformation, climate resilience, circular economy, social innovation, rural entrepreneurship, and community-led development.

Ensuring long-term sustainability will remain a priority. The centres should continue exploring diversified funding opportunities, strengthening institutional partnerships, and embedding their activities within regional and national development frameworks. Building strong links with public authorities, educational institutions, innovation support organisations, and rural development actors will be essential for maintaining relevance and securing long-term operational support.

The Training Centres also provide a strong foundation for future replication and scaling activities. The governance models, cooperation mechanisms, service portfolios, and lessons learned generated through RURALITIES can inform the development of similar structures in other territories and contribute to wider European and international efforts aimed at strengthening rural innovation ecosystems.

Ultimately, the RURALITIES Network of Training Centres is expected to remain an important legacy of the project, providing lasting support for knowledge exchange, innovation, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration. By continuing to evolve and adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities, the centres can play a key role in supporting sustainable, resilient, and prosperous rural communities well beyond the lifetime of the RURALITIES project.

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It should be noted that the contractual submission deadline for this deliverable is December 2026. Following recommendations from the previous project review, the consortium advanced its preparation to enable the progress achieved to be assessed during the forthcoming review. The feedback received will support the further consolidation of the RURALITIES Training Centres, their services, network cooperation, and sustainability during the remaining project period.

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# 12. Annex 1 – Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

# RURALITIES Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

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## Background / Preamble

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, comprising a series of innovative methodologies with the learner at its core, supported by a comprehensive network of living labs, and an online interface combining the Internet and wireless technologies, to assist engage, connect and empower actors. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is developed as a part of the RURALITIES project. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program under grant agreement no 101060876. UK participants in Horizon Europe Project RURALITIES are supported by UKRI grant numbers: 10051963, The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership and 10050988 Earthwatch Europe.

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. They will all be convened by a shared vision and responsibility via this MoU to inclusively participate in co-creation processes.

Furthermore, RURALITIES establishes expertise and training centres via real-scale practising 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. These centres that focus on expert advice on rural development and centres that focus on training services on rural development will also be convened with the MoU

RURALITIES coordinates identified actions of local, regional authorities in support 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 Romania.

### Expected Outcomes:

**EOT-1 > Enhanced capacity of rural communities and rural people to innovate for change**

Empower rural people via co-creation, knowledge sharing, and Open Science to foster local innovation, fair trade, and sustainable resource management.

**EOT-2 > Improved skills and knowledge of rural citizens, in all domains of relevance to rural life and economy**

Deliver capacity-building events to equip rural citizens, especially youth and women, with skills in sustainable business, agroecology, and nature-based solutions.

**EOT-3 > Shortening of the innovation cycle in rural communities, for women and young people**

Accelerate the adoption of eco-friendly and digital innovations by providing tools and support, particularly for women and young entrepreneurs.

**EOT-4 > Enhanced valorisation by rural communities of the result, funded under various programmes**

Cluster with other EU/AU projects to share best practices and ensure project results are widely adopted.

**EOT-5 > Enhanced dialogue and cooperation on rural innovation worldwide, with sharing of learning resources**

Establish a permanent international network for rural innovation, facilitating policy dialogue and fundraising.

## Aims and scope / Purpose

Essentially, RURALITIES is about empowering rural areas through knowledge and expertise. This MoU establishes a collaborative framework to define the partnership between the signatory parties within the RURALITIES project and beyond. The primary purpose is to align all diverse

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rural actors, project partners and RURALITIES facilitators towards the co-creation with a focus on the RURALITIES Hubs, and the network of expertise and training centres for rural innovation located in the project SIMSES.

This MoU directly serves the core objectives of RURALITIES by:

- **Aligning the efforts within the RURALITIES Alliance:** Aligning the dynamic community of actors into a structured, long-term knowledge alliance, contributing to the project's goal of engaging, connecting, and empowering 10,000+ RURNex actors and 1,000+ facilitators.
- **Establishing Expertise and Training Centres:** Providing the cohesive framework to establish and maintain the RURALITIES Hubs with functioning Expertise and Training Centres.
- **Accelerating Rural Innovation:** Creating a pathway for implementing the 'RURALITIES FAST-TRACK' Innovation Management Programme and supporting citizen-led projects to shorten the innovation cycle within rural communities.

**Expected Outcomes facilitated by this MoU include:**

- A fully constituted and recognised RURALITIES Alliance.
- The establishment of six operational RURALITIES Hubs with expertise and training centres within SIMSES.
- The collaborative development and deployment of the 'RURALITIES Commons 2050 Learning Framework' (RURCOM).
- A shared repository of actionable knowledge, tools, and demonstrator projects accessible via the RURALITIES platform.

By adhering to this MoU, the parties commit to a shared vision of creating resilient, inclusive, and climate-smart rural communities, enabling them to contribute effectively to the RURALITIES project goals.

# Terms and conditions

The MoU is made between:

> Partners, which are officially part of the RURALITIES project, and are convened by the RURALITIES Grant Agreement;
>
> And
>
> Facilitators as external participants who express interest in contributing to the project's goals and activities and are engaged by the RURALITIES partners and the expert and training centres established in the respective simplified rural socioecological systems (SIMSES).

(each a **"Party"** and together the **"Parties"**).

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1. The Parties believe that mutual benefit can be derived from the exchange of ideas, co-creation, collaborative workshops, and other forms of collaboration, which increase the impact of the RURALITIES project within SIMSES. The Parties see advantages in the development of strong links and relationships and agree in principle to enter into discussions to establish ties of cooperation for the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and academic, educational, cultural, practical and personal exchange.
2. This MoU is not legally binding, and the Parties acknowledge that this MoU does not place them under any obligation to enter into any subsequent agreement or arrangement. This MoU is designed to assist and inform the Parties' ongoing discussions and co-creation efforts, and neither Party strives for this MoU to give rise to any binding commitment or legal obligation. The Parties agree that each shall bear their own costs for any work under this MoU.
3. Parties foresee the following opportunities for collaboration:

- Working together to develop and conduct collaborative training activities, supported by the RURALITIES international network of Living Labs.
- Participating in questionnaires, interviews and other activities that advance research and innovation;
- Participating in (and co-organising) meetings and workshops;
- Co-creating or providing feedback on project outputs;
- Acting as a conduit for knowledge exchange between the project and policy makers, research organisations, civil society organisations, SMEs and other rural actors identified through the RURALITIES Multi-Actor Repository;
- Contributing to collaborative activities such as the multi-actor mapping and engagement;
- Communicate and disseminate RURALITIES results, also after the project is concluded. Initiatives to support the adoption of rural innovations in partner countries, Collaborative organisation of activities and events to maximise the impact of RURALITIES, as well as direct and indirect benefits, are included in this collaboration area. In addition, materials, including pamphlets, films, and social media campaigns, may be created to increase outreach;
- Other mutually identified opportunities for collaboration that contribute to RURALITIES goals and expected outcomes.

4. In case the Parties want to start a collaborative activity which will involve financial and legal commitments, then in accordance with good legal practice the Parties agree to enter into a separate written agreement for that specific activity which will include all material legal, administrative and financial terms including funding and the responsibilities and obligations which are to be undertaken by each Party which are to be mutually agreed and signed by the Parties prior to the commencement of the activity.
5. Each Party undertakes to reveal to the other such dealings with other institutions or any material fact that may be reasonably expected to impinge on the development of the collaborative relationship established under this MoU.

The MoU will continue to exist also after the project life cycle has come to an end, if the partners want to continue the mutual activities.

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# Partner roles and responsibilities

The following roles are complementary and interdependent.

**SIMSES leaders**

**Role:** Local support for RURALITIES activities within SIMSES.

**Responsibilities:** Lead the local implementation of RURALITIES activities, including but not limited to engagement and alignment of local multi-actor networks, hosting RURALITIES Living Labs (Co-Labs), organising co-creation activities, equipping and supporting the facilitators.

**Other Project Partners**

**Role:** To ensure the efficient overall support and management of the project activities by aligning the project-level work with the SIMSES level implementation and coordinating cross-cutting and networking activities.

**Responsibilities:** Key responsibilities include, but are not limited to, providing overall project, work package and task coordination, implementing the impact monitoring framework, ensuring ethical compliance and data management (FAIR principles), and leading the communication, dissemination, and exploitation activities.

**Facilitators**

**Role:** RURALITIES Facilitators are the agents of change and the key link between the project's strategic framework and the implementation of activities in SIMSES rural communities.

**Responsibilities:** Key responsibilities include, but are not limited to, actively engaging diverse rural actors with special attention to vulnerable groups, organising and moderating local workshops, field demonstrations, and co-creation sessions within the Living Labs, exchanging knowledge and innovations between the Expertise and Training Centers and the wider community, delivering training and mentorship based on the 'RURALITIES Commons 2050 Learning Framework', translating complex concepts into practical, locally-applicable skills, act as a two-way communication bridge, providing critical feedback from the community to the Training Centers and Hub Coordinators to ensure the project remain responsive to evolving local needs.

By fulfilling these roles and responsibilities, each partner commits to a collaborative effort aimed at building a resilient, empowered, and self-sustaining network for rural innovation, fully aligned with the shared RURALITIES vision.

# Areas of cooperation

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The parties convened by this MoU commit to a strategic, multi-level collaboration to achieve the RURALITIES project's objectives and ensure the long-term sustainability of its outcomes. This cooperation is structured around the SIMSES Systemic Innovation Areas (SIAs).

The partners will work together to advance SIMSES SIAs including sustainable agricultural practices (e.g., regenerative agriculture, sustainable mechanisation, etc.), slow sustainable cultural tourism and heritage and hospitality tourism (e.g., fighting over-tourism, protecting communities' identity, etc.), sustainable transport (e.g., reducing the number of car journeys, connecting rural communities with sustainable transport, etc.), Environmental protection (e.g., short supply chains, climate resilience, etc.), sustainable practices in the agri-food sector (e.g., Revaluation of agriculture and animal breeding waste through circular economy strategies, Connecting agrarian industry with cutting-edge technology for a more sustainable food chain, etc.), and Sustainable Food Value Chains (e.g., Urban-Rural Networking, Agri-Economy, etc.).

*Communication and dissemination*

# Intellectual property

The management of intellectual property is governed by a clear and structured framework detailed in the deliverable D1.3 - Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights Management (Kiper) Guidelines and Briefs, which is publicly available. The core principle is that ownership of foreground IP (new results) belongs to the partner(s) who generate it, while background IP (pre-existing knowledge) remains with the original owner. All parties grant each other royalty-free access to this IP for implementing project activities and agree to fair and reasonable conditions for access rights needed to exploit their own results.

The project employs a systematic approach to IP management, using a dedicated IPR Matrix to identify and track all assets. An Exploitation Manager oversees this process, guiding decisions on protection, such as through patents or copyrights, and mediating any potential conflicts. The collective goal is to ensure that project results are effectively protected and exploited to sustain the RURALITIES hubs and their mission beyond the project's lifespan.

# Costs / Financial contributions

This MoU does not create any financial obligation or require direct monetary contributions from the parties. The primary contributions under this agreement are in-kind, encompassing the provision of expertise, human resources, access to infrastructure, and the sharing of knowledge and data, as detailed in the "Partner Roles and Responsibilities" and "Areas of Cooperation" sections.

To maximise impact and resource efficiency, the parties strongly encourage the strategic alignment and cross-linking of activities. This involves identifying and leveraging synergies between existing or future projects and activities undertaken by any party, where such activities demonstrably contribute to the objectives of RURALITIES. The resources dedicated to these

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synergistic actions are recognised as a valuable in-kind contribution to the collective goals outlined in this MoU.

# Confidentiality

The parties acknowledge that collaboration under this MoU may involve the presence of confidential information.

The Parties agree and undertake to keep confidential at all times any information or data that may be exchanged, acquired, disclosed, or shared in connection with any activity conducted pursuant to this MoU except where such information is already in the public domain or is required to be disclosed by any applicable law or regulations, or where the extent of such disclosure is authorised in writing by the other. Neither Party shall use the information of the other Party except to the extent required to enable the performance of this MoU.

All parties commit to handling confidential information in accordance with the data management and cybersecurity framework established in the RURALITIES project, particularly as outlined in the Data Management Plan (D1.4 Data Management Plan – Updated Version).

# Entry into force, amendment, and termination

This MoU enters into force upon its publication on the RURALITIES platform and shall remain effective for the duration of the RURALITIES project, until 30 September 2027.

Any party may propose amendments to this MoU. Proposed amendments shall be submitted in writing to the Project Coordinator (PEDAL Consulting). Amendments will only become effective upon the given consent of RURALITIES partners, ensuring alignment with the project's Grant Agreement and Consortium Agreement.

Any party not convened by the RURALITIES GA may choose to withdraw from this MoU. Termination or withdrawal shall not affect the rights and obligations accrued prior to such termination, particularly concerning Intellectual Property and Confidentiality, which shall survive in accordance with their respective terms.

## Annex I - Adhesions to the memorandum of understanding

Adherence is designed to be a streamlined, accessible process that respects the voluntary and contributory nature of the partnership.

Parties express their commitment to the principles and objectives of this MoU through a process of active engagement and declaration, supported by the co-creation activities, rather than a traditional signing procedure. Therefore, facilitators will be considered as aligned with and convened by the MoU by proceeding to participate in RURALITIES activities after they have been familiarised with the MoU. Parties will be thoroughly familiarised and engaged with this

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MoU through organised events, workshops, presentations, etc., in one or more ways outlined below.

- Communication, dissemination, and community engagement activities
- Training, coaching, and knowledge exchange activities
- RURALITIES Living labs' activities
- Other co-creation activities

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