



Ruralities

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

D4.5 – REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND THE VALIDATION OF THE CAMPAIGN ‘RURAL THRIVE 2050’ TESTING

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30/04/2025 by Gabor Mester (PEDAL)
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	9
1.1	PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION.....	9
1.2	STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT	10
2	CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCES	11
2.1	PROBLEM STATEMENT	11
2.2	OBJECTIVES OF THE RURAL THRIVE 2050 CAMPAIGN – TESTING PHASE.....	11
2.3	TARGET AUDIENCES	12
3.	INTENDED OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES	13
4.	METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	15
4.1	CAMPAIGN TESTING DESIGN AND PREPARATION PROCESS	15
4.2	DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: TRACKING PROGRESS	16
5.	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAMPAIGN	18
5.1	ROLLOUT AND OPERATIONAL APPROACH.....	18
5.2	KEY CHALLENGES	20
5.3	BEST LEARNING PRACTICES	21
5.4	RESULTS - ANALYSIS OF KPI DATA AND ONLINE OUTREACH ACROSS SIMSES SITES.....	22
5.5	CROSS-SIMSES REFLECTIONS AND COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS	27
6.	CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD	29
7.	ANNEXES	31
7.1	ANNEX 1 - LOGO OF RURAL THRIVE CAMPAIGN TESTING	31
7.2	ANNEX 2 - VISUALS, AND TEMPLATES PREPARED FOR RURAL THRIVE CAMPAIGN TESTING	31

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 EU LEVEL GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE OF THE RURAL THRIVE CAMPAIGN TESTING.....	18
FIGURE 2 THE ROADMAP OF RURAL THRIVE CAMPAIGN	19
FIGURE 3 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 1	22
FIGURE 4 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 2	23
FIGURE 5 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 3	24
FIGURE 6 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 4	25
FIGURE 7 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 5	25
FIGURE 8 GEOLOCATION OF SIMSES 6	26

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 INTENDED OUTPUTS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	13
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ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
AU	African Union
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
RURALITIES	Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres
RURNex	Rural Nexus
RT	RURAL THRIVE
SIMSES	Simplified Socio-ecological Systems
WP	Work Package

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 blockchain-based digital platform combining the Internet and wireless technologies, to assist engage, connect and empower actors. This is done via a multi-point approach e.g., multi-actors, multi-disciplines, multi-systems, multi-scale, multi-sectors, and multilevel.

RURALITIES is rooted in the recruitment, preparation, training and coaching of 1.000+ facilitators for a variety of tasks (e.g., trainers, facilitators, role models, hub coordinators, etc.), and who play a significant role in creating the matrix and the platform upon which the learning framework is built, develops and evolves. **RURALITIES** proposes to ideate, implement, futureproof, validate and deliver the expertise and learning centers 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, and 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.

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32	BEN	MUSE	MUSEUM GRAPHIA	IT
33	BEN	CDM	LA CORTE DELLA MINIERA SRL	IT
34	BEN	DEX	DESARROLLO DE ESTRATEGIAS EXTERIORES SA	ES
35	BEN	REDA	ASOCIACION RED ASTURIANA DE DESARROLLO RURAL	ES
36	BEN	GMV	MONTAGNA VICENTINA SOCIETA COOPERATIVA	IT
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49	AP	HITP	THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP	UK
50	AP	ASPI	ASPIRE-IGEN GROUP LIMITED	UK
51	AP	EW	CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND RESEARCH TRUST	UK
52	BEN	APPO	APODISSI LTD	NG

1. INTRODUCTION

The current document, titled **D4.5 – Report on the implementation and the validation of the campaign ‘Rural Thrive 2050’ testing** has been elaborated within the framework of the RURALITIES project which is co-funded by the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme 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.

D4.5, documents the implementation and validation of the "Rural Thrive 2050" campaign under Work Package (WP) 4 of the RURALITIES project. WP4 establishes the Communication, Dissemination, Exploitation, and Synergies (CODES) framework to support a two-way exchange of knowledge through extensive networking with multi-actor groups. The overarching objective of WP4 is to effectively transfer information regarding the aims, progress, and results of RURALITIES to key stakeholders and ensure the uptake and sustainable use of project outputs. Additionally, WP4 focuses on fostering long-lasting synergies and dynamic information exchange mechanisms with relevant networks.

In this context, the "Rural Thrive 2050" campaign was designed and tested to serve as a cornerstone of RURALITIES’ outreach efforts. Through actionable and deployable measures, the campaign aims to: (i) convey accurate information to the broader public discourse around the environmental, economic, social, and societal nexus, showcasing how the project outputs align with wider contexts; and (ii) implement a structured and strategic communication framework to reach and engage diverse audiences. This deliverable reflects the continuous evolution and refinement of dissemination efforts throughout the project's lifecycle.

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

D4.5 presents the evaluation conducted to support the testing phase of the RURAL THRIVE campaign. This evaluation was carried out to gain deeper insights into the rural areas of the six pilot sites SIMSES (Simplified Socio-ecological Systems) and to better understand how local communities respond to communication activities led by consortium partners.

The testing took place directly within the pilot sites, and the findings will be integrated at the consortium level to inform and strengthen the main RURAL THRIVE campaign. The geographical coverage of all six pilot regions at EU level is illustrated in Figure 1.

The evaluation process spanned six months (between November 2024 and April 2025), beginning with planning and discussions and moving through to the implementation of various activities. It was a co-creation effort between the WP4 leaders and the pilot site partners. Activities included workshops, a social media campaign, offline events, and Living Lab initiatives.

The primary intended users of this report and evaluation are the RURALITIES partners, who will leverage the findings to enhance their communication strategies towards their target audiences. Additionally, the methodology and validation process described in this deliverable may serve as a valuable reference for other stakeholders operating in similar contexts and planning to implement communication campaigns in rural areas.

1.2 Structure of the document

This document has been structured into six primary sections, each serving a distinct purpose and containing a unique set of information:

- **Chapter 1; Introduction:** present an initial overview of the context in which this report was crafted.
- **Chapter 2; Campaign Objectives and Target Audiences:** Highlighting the main objectives and characterizing the broad spectrum of target audiences.
- **Chapter 3; Intended Outputs and Outcomes:** describing the expected outputs and outcomes of the validation process.
- **Chapter 4; Methodology:** explains the methodological foundations of the RURAL THRIVE campaign testing.
- **Chapter 5; Implementation of the campaign:** outlines the key challenges encountered, the best practices applied, and the results and outcomes achieved.
- **Chapter 6; Conclusions and Recommendations:** explains how the results and insights gained will inform and guide the implementation of the main RURAL THRIVE campaign moving forward.

2 CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCES

2.1 Problem Statement

Rural areas across Europe and Africa are confronted with persistent challenges in innovation, education, and climate-smart development. These regions often experience limited access to resources, infrastructure, and opportunities, which hinders their capacity to adapt to global transitions. Empowering vulnerable populations, ensuring gender balance, and fostering inclusive rural innovation ecosystems are critical steps toward enhancing rural resilience and promoting sustainable development. The ‘Rural Thrive 2050’ campaign responds to this need by mobilizing local actors, amplifying rural voices, and encouraging participatory engagement across rural communities.

2.2 Objectives of the RURAL Thrive 2050 Campaign – Testing Phase

The Rural Thrive 2050 campaign, during its testing phase, was designed to catalyze sustainable rural development by leveraging innovation, education, and climate-smart initiatives. Recognizing the specific needs and potential of rural territories, the campaign aimed to foster new opportunities for growth while addressing the systemic barriers that limit rural resilience and competitiveness. Central to the campaign was the engagement of facilitators, role models, and rural innovators who served as key multipliers within their local communities. By empowering these actors, the campaign stimulated grassroots innovation, supported peer learning, and strengthened local leadership structures.

Another core objective of the testing phase was to promote the Living Labs and Innovation Hubs established under the RURALITIES project. These structures provided tangible spaces for co-creation, experimentation, and the development of locally relevant solutions. Particular attention was given to ensuring that vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and marginalized rural populations, were actively involved. The campaign emphasized the importance of gender-balanced participation and inclusivity, seeking to create a more equitable environment for innovation and knowledge sharing across all participating regions.

Through these targeted actions, the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing sought not only to validate its strategic approach but also to lay the groundwork for its broader implementation in the next phases, contributing to the long-term vision of thriving, resilient, and inclusive rural communities across Europe and Africa.

2.3 Target Audiences

The RURALITIES project, through the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign, actively engages a broad spectrum of stakeholders across the participating countries, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity, gender balance, and the empowerment of vulnerable populations. The campaign targets rural innovators, community leaders, local governments, and educators who play critical roles in shaping and sustaining rural development. It also seeks to mobilize unorganized rural populations, including EU citizens, households, active citizens, schools, and consumers, recognizing their essential contribution to building resilient rural communities.

Additionally, the campaign aims to reach policy influencers at local, regional, and national levels, ensuring that rural voices are reflected in policymaking processes. Stakeholders involved in rural development activities, including NGOs, cooperatives, and sectoral organizations, constitute another key audience, along with international organizations that are active in climate-smart and ecosystem-based initiatives. Throughout all engagement activities, special focus is placed on women, youth, and marginalized groups, to guarantee equal access, active participation, and representation in the innovation and development processes promoted by RURALITIES.

3. INTENDED OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing phase was designed to generate measurable outcomes across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons. In the **short term (November 2024 – April 2025)**, the campaign aimed to raise awareness and improve understanding among rural civil society and policy influencers about the objectives, functions, and opportunities presented by the RURALITIES Hubs and Networks. It also seeks to strengthen the knowledge base, and skill sets within rural communities, enabling local actors to engage more confidently in innovation-driven initiatives.

In the **medium term (April 2025 – March 2027)**, the campaign aspires to foster stronger engagement among policy influencers, particularly within the SIMSES demonstration areas, encouraging their active support and alignment with the project's goals. Targeted groups — including educators, youth, women, and rural innovators — are expected to engage more meaningfully in structured dialogues, share their experiences, and co-create solutions for rural transformation. This phase also anticipates an increase in the capacity of local stakeholders to drive innovation, supported by improved channels for data exchange, storytelling, and mutual learning.

In the **long term (post project period)**, the campaign aims to lay the foundation for durable, trust-based partnerships that reinforce the ecosystem for rural innovation. Through inclusive participation and policy advocacy, it seeks to deliver sustainable improvements in the social, environmental, and economic conditions of rural areas. Ultimately, the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign aims to contribute to lasting policy and procedural changes that empower rural communities to shape their own futures, aligned with the broader EU 2030 and 2050 agendas for sustainable development.

The intended outputs and KPI's are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Intended Outputs and Key Performance Indicators

Output	Description	Target / KPI
Workshops and Training Sessions	Host virtual and physical workshops across target regions.	2 per SIMSES (12 in total)
Living Lab Demonstrations	Organize local and regional events to showcase real-world demonstrators (SIMSES).	1 per SIMSES (6 in total)
Social Media Campaigns	Promote stories and innovations via social media channels.	8 posts per SIMSES (48 in total)
Local Media exposure	Engage with regional/local media outlets	2 appearances per SIMSES (12 in total)
Physical events and workshops	Organize in-person events / workshops	2 per SIMSES (12 in total)

Social Media and Website	Promote the project/campaign project social channels, websites, and local rural development networks.	No predefined target / exploratory KPI: track reach/impressions
Community Outreach and Engagement	Engage with regional/local leaders in the rural areas involved	1 outreach event per SIMES (6 in total)
Involve Local Authorities / NGOs	Involve local authorities and non-profits to increase reach and engagement.	1 representative per SIMSES (6 in total)
Involve Influencers	Involve influencers etc. to increase reach and engagement	1 influencer per SIMSES (6 in total).

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

4.1 Campaign Testing Design and Preparation Process

The design and preparation of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing phase was a collaborative effort involving multiple WPs, namely WP1, WP2, WP3, WP4, and WP5. Initially, expectations were aligned at the WP level through a series of strategic discussions to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach. Following this alignment, a participatory co-creation process was initiated to develop the campaign’s detailed design.

The monitoring and evaluation framework for the campaign was developed by EQUIP and subsequently refined through active input from the SIMSES leaders. This fine-tuning process was conducted during the SIMSES biweekly meetings, as well as through occasional operational meetings where pilot site leaders, task leaders, and WP leaders engaged to address practical and strategic questions. These frequent exchanges ensured a dynamic and responsive adjustment process, closely aligned with field realities. A detailed assessment on the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing numerical targets will be included in D2.4 – Technical reports on the implementation of the project’s impact monitoring and assessment, version 1 (M36).

Several key considerations guided the design and preparation phase:

Tailored Communication Campaigns for SIMSES Needs: Recognizing the diverse characteristics of the pilot sites, the campaign was carefully tailored to meet the specific needs and contexts of each SIMSES area. Flexibility and local relevance were prioritized in every decision related to communication approaches and engagement strategies.

Alignment with Key Project Communication Channels: The communication methods selected for the campaign were aligned with the broader project-level strategies, ensuring consistency while allowing for site-specific adaptations. Channels and tools were discussed extensively with pilot site partners prior to establishing the communication framework for the testing phase.

Timeline and Implementation Approach: A flexible and context-sensitive timeline was adopted to accommodate the operational realities of each pilot site. SIMSES partners were responsible for selecting the specific geolocations for their events and choosing the engagement strategies best suited to their target audiences. The testing phase was structured within a six-month window, during which each site could determine a one-month period for their campaign activities. This flexibility was crucial to avoid conflicts with major local festivals, agricultural cycles, or other events that could impact participation and visibility.

Through this collaborative and adaptive approach, the campaign testing phase was designed to ensure maximum relevance, inclusivity, and impact, laying a strong foundation for the full-scale implementation of Rural Thrive 2050.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis: Tracking Progress

Progress during the testing phase of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign was systematically monitored using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. This multi-faceted approach enabled effective tracking of outreach efforts, participant engagement, and overall campaign impact, ensuring comprehensive and transparent reporting.

Key monitoring activities included:

- **KPI Monitoring:**

Key performance indicators were tracked through shared tracking sheets, focusing on outputs such as the number of workshops, events, social media posts, and media appearances. SIMSES leaders were responsible for compiling and regularly updating these figures, submitting them to the relevant WP and Task Leaders for review and consolidation.

- **Attendance Records:**

To ensure accurate tracking of engagement, SIMSES representatives collected sign-in sheets and participant lists during all local events and workshops. These records allowed for detailed analysis of participant numbers and the demographic reach across various target groups, with particular attention to women, youth, and marginalized populations.

- **Social Media and Website Analytics:**

Digital engagement was monitored using analytics tools such as Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, and Google Analytics. These tools provided key metrics including reach, impressions, engagement rates, and website traffic, offering real-time insights into the campaign’s online visibility and audience interaction.

- **Media Monitoring:**

Coverage of the campaign in local and regional media outlets was systematically tracked to assess the level of public awareness generated and to evaluate the media visibility of campaign messages and activities.

- **Outreach Logs:**

Detailed records were maintained of outreach activities conducted with local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), influencers, and other key stakeholders. These logs enabled the project team to assess progress against engagement targets and to identify strategic opportunities for strengthening stakeholder involvement.

In addition to monitoring quantitative indicators, qualitative insights were gathered throughout the process to inform strategic planning, refine the communication concept, and adapt engagement approaches. The campaign’s success was closely tied to the active involvement of stakeholders in the co-creation process and the careful selection and deployment of communication channels, tools, and materials tailored to the needs of each SIMSES site.

This robust and integrated monitoring framework not only supported the ongoing management of the testing phase but also laid the groundwork for evidence-based adjustments in preparation for the full-scale implementation of Rural Thrive 2050.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAMPAIGN

5.1 Rollout and Operational Approach

The rollout of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing phase was carefully structured to take place between November 2024 and April 2025, allowing adequate time for flexible implementation across diverse pilot sites while maintaining a coherent project-wide strategy. The campaign was deployed across all SIMSES demonstration areas, ensuring broad geographic and demographic reach, and reflecting the diversity of rural settings targeted by the RURALITIES project.



Figure 1 EU level geographical coverage of the Rural Thrive campaign testing

A comprehensive programme of online and offline activities was developed to suit the varying contexts and needs of the pilot sites. These activities included a wide range of formats such as face-to-face workshops, digital engagement events, field visits, thematic discussions, and local awareness-raising campaigns. The overall design of activities was co-created through close collaboration between task leaders and SIMSES representatives, ensuring that each local campaign was rooted in the real experiences, expectations, and aspirations of rural communities.

The roles and responsibilities of consortium members and local partners were defined and continuously refined through the SIMSES biweekly meetings. These regular exchanges enabled operational alignment, the resolution of emerging challenges, and the adaptation of campaign actions to local conditions. The participatory nature of these meetings empowered pilot site leaders and facilitators to take ownership

of their campaign activities while ensuring coherence with the overall strategic framework of Rural Thrive 2050.

Achieving Rural Thrive 2050

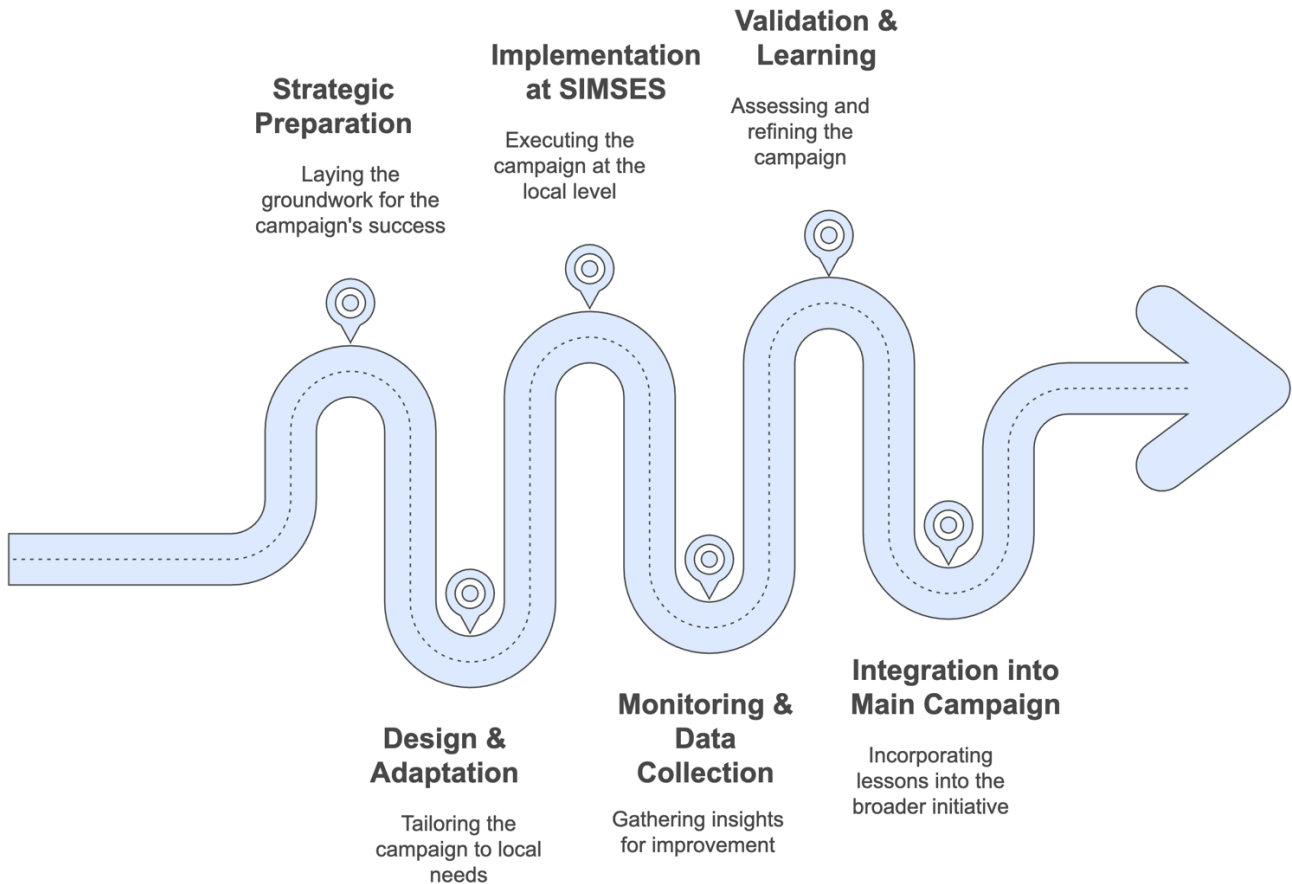


Figure 2 The Roadmap of RURAL THRIVE 2050 Campaign

The visual identity for the campaign was centrally developed by WP4 to ensure consistent and recognizable branding across all pilot sites. A set of ready-to-use materials — including campaign logo (Annex 1), presentation templates, social media post designs (Annex 2) — was prepared and shared with SIMSES partners. These materials prominently featured messages that promoted the EU's strategic goals for rural development and highlighted RURALITIES project achievements. Recognizing the linguistic and cultural diversity of the pilot areas, significant emphasis was placed on the need for local adaptation and translation of all campaign materials. Pilot partners were encouraged to tailor the centrally developed content to better reflect local realities, traditions, and audience preferences.

Throughout the testing period, continuous updates and best practice sharing were promoted among pilot partners. SIMSES biweekly meetings served as a vital platform for reporting progress, exchanging experiences, showcasing effective engagement strategies, and addressing operational challenges. This

iterative learning process strengthened the overall quality and impact of the campaign while fostering a sense of community among participating regions.

By combining centralized strategic support with decentralized, locally driven implementation, the Rural Thrive 2050 testing phase ensured a flexible yet coherent rollout, generating valuable insights that will feed into the next phases of campaign enhancement and scaling.

5.2 Key challenges

Barriers in Audience Identification and Rural Impact Assessment

While the SIMSES 5 campaign testing phase achieved broad outreach, several challenges emerged during implementation. One significant limitation was the difficulty in identifying and quantifying the participation of sensitive or underrepresented profiles, such as immigrants. As most campaign activities were open to the general public, tracking the specific engagement of target groups proved complex.

A further challenge involved assessing the true rural impact of media-related activities. Although newspaper articles and radio programs were selected to target regional and rural audiences, the actual reach and demographic breakdown of their audience remained difficult to determine.

Additionally, the engagement of new rural actors, particularly those located in remote or geographically isolated areas, was limited. This suggests a need for stronger collaboration with local rural associations and community-based networks in future phases, leveraging their established presence and trust to access harder-to-reach groups.

Structural and Platform-Specific Communication Limitations

The SIMSES 3 campaign encountered a combination of institutional and platform-specific challenges. As a public authority, the team was restricted to using a single social media account — X (formerly Twitter) — which has experienced a general decline in user engagement and follower retention, partially due to broader political shifts and user migration. This trend negatively impacted the campaign's online visibility.

Furthermore, delays related to the amendment and tendering processes hindered the team's ability to post more detailed or frequent updates about the campaign. The restrictions imposed during this administrative phase limited how much campaign-related content could be publicly shared.

In terms of infrastructure, the planned Mobility Hub/Living Lab could not be activated during the testing phase, as its development is dependent on an ongoing research process. Consequently, the campaign could not include physical events or site-specific engagement activities in this phase, delaying the visibility of local innovation in rural mobility.

Structural Outreach Gaps and Stereotypical Perceptions

SIMSES 4 highlighted several systemic barriers that constrained the campaign's full potential. Limited digital connectivity in rural areas significantly affected the visibility and reach of campaign messages, underscoring the persistent digital divide across rural territories.

Stakeholder collaboration remained fragmented, with weak coordination among key actors such as farmers, businesses, researchers, and local communities. This lack of structured cooperation impeded the dissemination and scaling of good practices.

In addition, many of the valuable local initiatives and rural success stories already in place suffer from low visibility, and outreach mechanisms remain insufficient. This is further complicated by enduring stereotypes that portray rural areas as passive, underdeveloped, or lacking innovation, which act as barriers to positive engagement and investment.

5.3 Best learning practices

SIMSES 5 – Enhancing Reach Through Inclusive Engagement

The Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing phase in SIMSES 5 demonstrated strong overall success, particularly in terms of the diversity and number of audiences reached. The inclusion of a wide range of locally adapted activities significantly contributed to the impact and visibility of the campaign. However, the impact assessment also identified specific rural groups that remain underrepresented, such as immigrants and actors involved in innovative ICT or nature-based start-ups.

To effectively engage these groups, targeted strategies must be implemented — including direct outreach to associations and local networks, co-creation activities tailored to their specific needs, and awareness of funding opportunities, rural employment pathways, or innovation support. Early engagement, especially through thematic sessions, was shown to be a highly effective approach. In addition, while initial media and social media outreach showed promise, further campaign iterations are needed to quantitatively assess impact over time and determine trends in audience growth and engagement across future phases.

SIMSES 3 – Overcoming Structural Delays to Enable Mobility Innovation

In SIMSES 3, the full implementation of the campaign was delayed due to external factors related to the amendment and tendering processes, which were beyond the control of the local team. As a result, key elements of the campaign, particularly the comprehensive social media plan, could not be launched as initially scheduled. Notably the transport mobility hubs in Inverness and Fort William, which will serve as models for further replication through a mini mobility hub initiative within the HITRANS area. This renewed momentum offers a valuable opportunity to build visibility around rural mobility solutions and their role in sustainable rural development.

SIMSES 4 – Leveraging Local Narratives for Stronger Engagement

SIMSES 4 highlighted the effectiveness of local storytelling and visual content in driving community engagement. Social media content that featured themes such as school activities, food chains, and rural traditions generated particularly high levels of interaction, reinforcing the importance of cultural relevance and place-based communication. The variability in engagement across platforms also underscored the need for channel-specific strategies — suggesting that future campaign iterations should consider tailoring content formats and messaging for different digital audiences. These insights point to a growing understanding of how local identity and targeted content design can amplify the impact of rural campaigns.

5.4 Results - Analysis of KPI Data and Online Outreach Across SIMSES Sites

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign testing phase as implemented across the six SIMSES, pilot sites. It draws upon reported key performance indicators (KPIs), online outreach metrics, and qualitative insights from local activities. The analysis offers a comparative view of each SIMSES site’s contribution to the overall campaign goals, while also identifying implementation gaps, success factors, and implications for future campaign phases.

SIMSES 1 (Pesaro Urbino, Italy) – Education-Driven Innovation and Field-Based Learning



Figure 3 Geolocation of SIMSES 1

SIMSES 1 delivered a strong educational and capacity-building contribution to the campaign. Activities were centered around the implementation of cross-disciplinary learning modules connecting agricultural and beauty schools, and the deployment of on-field experimental Living Labs. These experimental activities involved over 200 students, fostering practical skills development, interdisciplinary cooperation, and experiential learning. This approach exemplifies how youth engagement, vocational training, and experimental practice can align to strengthen rural innovation ecosystems. SIMSES 1 offers a replicable model for education-led engagement and should be further leveraged in the mainstream campaign.

SIMSES 2 (Asiago Plateau, Italy) – Balanced Engagement and Strategic Digital Outreach



Figure 4 Geolocation of SIMSES 2

SIMSES 2 achieved strong results across several dimensions. It reported the engagement of 50 women, 2 ICT and nature-based start-ups, the organization of 2 capacity-building events, and direct outreach to 4 rural schools. In addition, its social media campaign — delivered primarily through Facebook and Instagram — achieved an estimated online reach of 7,799 users. SIMSES 2’s integrated strategy, combining digital visibility with local inclusion and education-sector participation, reflects effective localization of the Rural Thrive 2050 concept. This balanced implementation highlights the value of early stakeholder alignment and multichannel communication.

SIMSES 3 (Highlands and Islands) – Structural Constraints and Limited Outreach



Figure 5 Geolocation of SIMSES 3

Implementation at SIMSES 3 was hindered by delays linked to the amendment and public procurement processes, which significantly constrained local campaign delivery. The site was limited to using only one institutional communication channel (X, formerly Twitter), which has experienced a notable decline in user engagement. Consequently, the campaign achieved a limited online reach of just 247 users. The planned physical activation of the site’s Mobility Hub and Living Lab could not proceed due to pending research activities. This case underscores the importance of administrative readiness and diversified outreach channels, especially when working within public sector constraints.

SIMSES 4 (Lower Sava Region, Slovenia) – Local Narrative Engagement with Structural Gaps

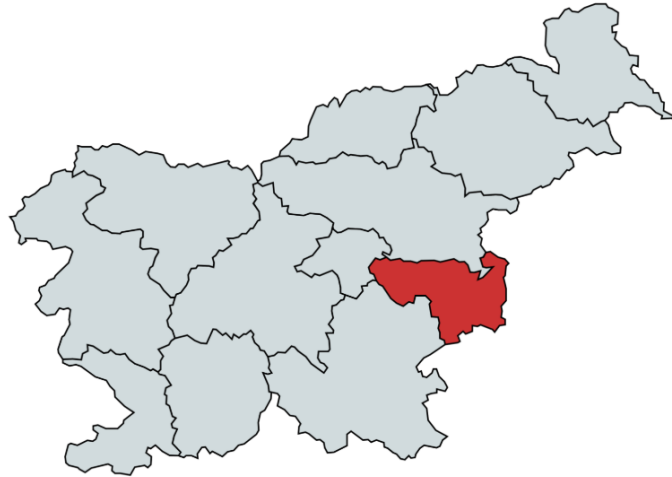


Figure 6 Geolocation of SIMSES 4

SIMSES 4 emphasized cultural and community-based storytelling, with social media content themed around school activities, local food chains, and rural traditions. It reported the engagement of 41 women and outreach to 2 rural schools, while achieving an estimated online reach of 2,978. However, deeper analysis revealed limited digital penetration in rural zones and weak cooperation between key stakeholders (e.g., farmers, businesses, researchers, and community groups). Additionally, the site encountered persistent stereotypes portraying rural areas as passive and underdeveloped — a barrier to visibility and rural empowerment. Addressing these issues will require improved connectivity, multi-actor collaboration, and counter-narrative communication strategies.

SIMSES 5 (Asturias, Spain)– High Performance Through Strategic Media Use



Figure 7 Geolocation of SIMSES 5

SIMSES 5 reported extensive quantitative outcomes of all sites. Key achievements included:

- Engagement of 39 young entrepreneurs
- Engagement of 97 women and 3 immigrants
- Engagement of 6 members of the RURALITIES community
- Involvement of 3 rural schools

A standout feature of SIMSES 5 was its exceptional online and media reach, estimated at 741,144 users, enabled by effective partnerships with local press and radio. This massive reach illustrates how collaboration with traditional media channels — when aligned with local relevance — can significantly enhance campaign visibility and community impact. However, challenges remained in quantifying engagement among specific target groups, particularly immigrants and rural start-ups. Future iterations should prioritize collaboration with local associations to directly reach these underrepresented stakeholders.

SIMSES 6 (Iasi, Romania) – Knowledge Transfer and Strategic Capacity Building

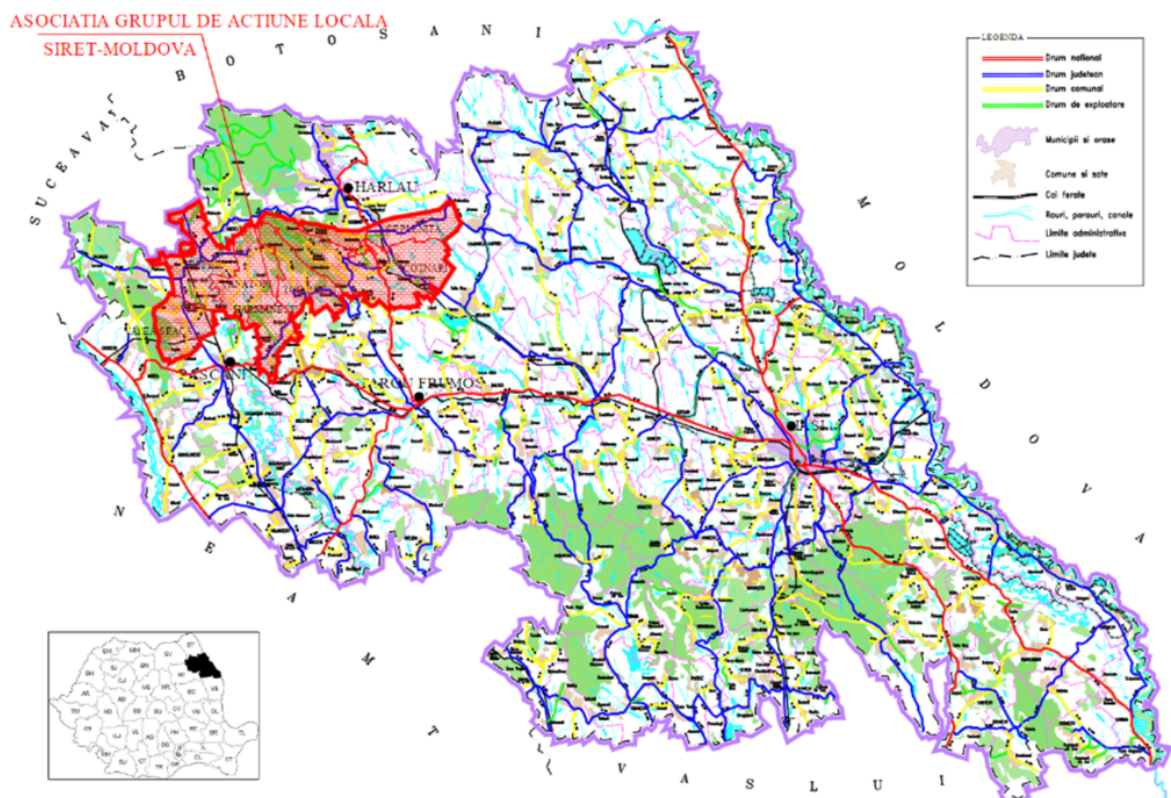


Figure 8 Geolocation of SIMSES 6

Although SIMSES 6 did not report KPI data in the standard format, it contributed significantly to the campaign’s strategic objectives through a series of high-level knowledge dissemination and capacity-building events. Key activities included:

- **ERC Proposals Building – Sustainability Action:** A capability-building event supporting the development of 18 ERC project proposals, including Advanced, Starting, Synergy, and Consolidator Grants.
- **ERC Seminary – Knowledge Transfer Action:** A strategic event reaching over 100 participants, including **16 active stakeholders**, focusing on knowledge transfer and proposal preparation.
- **Gala Turismului Descoperă Nord-Est:** A workshop promoting rural tourism and regional innovation, widely disseminated through RDRP's communication channels.
- **Scientific Publication: “The Evolution of Romanian Organic Agriculture in a Global Context”:** A dissemination action contributing to academic and policy discussions on sustainable agriculture.

These initiatives, delivered by RDRP Romania, reinforced the campaign’s objectives of promoting evidence-based rural innovation and EU-AU cooperation. SIMSES 6 thus played a crucial role in institutional capacity building and cross-sectoral policy outreach with 116 stakeholders.

5.5 Cross-SIMSES Reflections and Comparative Insights

The comparative analysis of campaign implementation across the six SIMSES sites reveals important insights into the diverse ways in which the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign concept has been localized, interpreted, and operationalized. Each SIMSES site approached the testing phase with different thematic emphases, capacities, and contextual realities — and these variances produced a rich spectrum of results, learning experiences, and challenges.

SIMSES 5 stands out for its exceptional performance in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Its outreach efforts — bolstered by strong cooperation with regional media outlets — generated substantial visibility and community-level engagement. Importantly, SIMSES 5 was able to connect innovation-oriented messaging with traditional communication channels, resulting in a rare example of deep rural penetration and broad audience resonance. This site illustrates the added value of leveraging existing local communication ecosystems and demonstrates the impact potential of aligning campaign objectives with trusted platforms and voices.

SIMSES 2 offers a complementary example of success, characterized by its careful balancing of online outreach, gender inclusion, and education-sector engagement. It combined targeted communication strategies with stakeholder inclusivity, demonstrating how social media, if strategically deployed, can effectively reach and activate rural audiences. Its partnership with local schools and innovators also highlights the importance of place-based mobilization and early-stage education partnerships.

SIMSES 1 demonstrated a robust commitment to rural learning innovation. Its cross-disciplinary and experiential education model, involving over 200 students in Living Lab activities, represents a replicable methodology for youth engagement and vocational training that fosters rural resilience. This model reflects the potential of educational institutions as gateways to wider community innovation.

SIMSES 6, meanwhile, played a distinctly strategic role, contributing to research capacity building and institutional knowledge sharing through high-level capability-building events, such as ERC grant writing workshops and dissemination of good practices. Its actions were more aligned with systems-level innovation and knowledge transfer rather than grassroots campaign activities, offering a valuable contribution to the long-term sustainability of RURALITIES’ strategic objectives.

In the case of **SIMSES 3** and **SIMSES 4**, the campaign experience highlighted important contextual lessons that can inform future implementation strategies. SIMSES 3, operating within the structures of public administration, demonstrated strong potential once administrative processes are aligned. Although the site was limited to a single social media platform (X/Twitter), this revealed the importance of exploring diversified communication channels to maximize outreach, particularly in dynamic digital environments. SIMSES 4 brought forward compelling cultural narratives and community-rooted storytelling, reaffirming the value of place-based communication. At the same time, the experience underscored the opportunity to strengthen digital infrastructure and build more integrated, cross-sector partnerships. Together, these sites serve as valuable reminders of the importance of adaptive planning, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and proactive support for digital and institutional readiness in rural outreach efforts.

Together, the SIMSES experiences reflect the complexity of rural innovation campaigning: the necessity of context-specific approaches; the varying degrees of digital readiness; and the strategic importance of building on existing local knowledge, networks, and infrastructures.

6. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The SIMSES testing phase of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign has provided valuable evidence on what works — and what requires strengthening — in terms of rural mobilization, visibility, and stakeholder activation. The results demonstrate that a one-size-fits-all campaign model is neither realistic nor effective in rural contexts. Instead, what emerges is the importance of flexibility, local ownership, and context-driven adaptation.

Based on the findings and lessons drawn from across the pilot sites, the following conclusions and strategic recommendations are proposed to inform the enhancement and upscaling of the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign in the subsequent implementation phase (M25–M45):

1. Adopt a Modular and Context-Sensitive Campaign Design

The heterogeneity of rural territories demands modular approaches that allow for localization of content, messaging, and engagement formats. A shared campaign framework should be combined with customizable templates and adaptable toolkits that reflect local needs and capacities.

2. Enhance Structural Readiness Through Pre-Campaign Capacity Building

Several sites struggled with administrative or procedural delays. Future campaign phases should include a pre-launch capacity-building period focusing on operational planning, procurement readiness, and communication strategy development to ensure timely execution.

3. Invest in Trusted Rural Communication Channels

SIMSES 5 demonstrated the high return on investment of working with local media, radio, and newspapers. Future phases should actively map and partner with rural communication outlets, particularly in areas with low digital engagement, to increase campaign visibility and credibility.

4. Prioritize Engagement of Underrepresented Rural Groups

While progress has been made, the engagement of immigrants, women in tech, and geographically isolated populations remains limited. Dedicated sub-campaigns and partnership models should be developed to reach these groups through tailored messaging and intermediaries such as local associations, schools, or cooperatives.

5. Facilitate Structured Peer Learning Between SIMSES Sites

The biweekly SIMSES meetings have proven valuable for coordination, but more formalized mechanisms for cross-site learning and replication of good practices should be introduced. This could include site exchanges, peer coaching, or a SIMSES knowledge hub. The upcoming Project Board meeting in Spain will host similar activities foreseen in November 2025.

6. Integrate Multi-Level Policy Dialogue

Local actions must be systematically linked to regional, national, and EU-level policy agendas. SIMSES 6 has demonstrated how knowledge-based actions can feed into research and innovation policy. Future campaign activities should therefore be complemented by multi-level policy dialogue formats and advocacy components.

These conclusions and recommendations will serve as a foundation for refining the Rural Thrive 2050 campaign prior to its full launch in 2026. By amplifying local strengths, addressing structural limitations, and aligning campaign content with the lived realities of rural actors, the next phase can scale the visibility and legitimacy of rural innovation across Europe and Africa.

At a practical and operational level, the findings and conclusions from the SIMSES testing phase are already being actively integrated by the SIMSES communication teams. Rather than waiting for the formal launch of the main campaign in 2026, these insights are being translated into day-to-day communication practices, allowing for the early delivery of value and impact. This incremental incorporation of lessons learned ensures a dynamic and responsive approach to campaign development. The main Rural Thrive 2050 campaign will, in turn, be carefully shaped by the cumulative experience and validated outcomes of this testing phase, making it both evidence-based and fit-for-purpose.

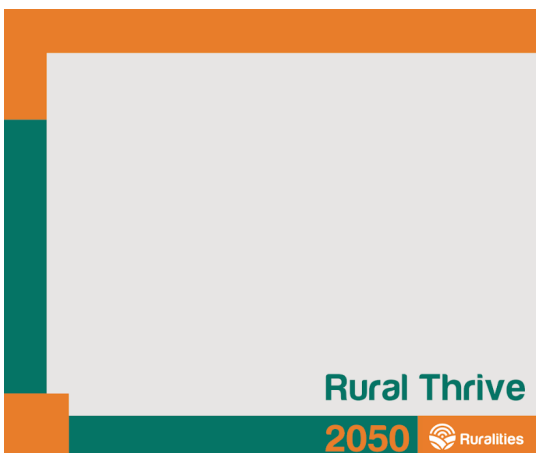
7. ANNEXES

7.1 ANNEX 1 - Logo of Rural Thrive Campaign Testing




7.2 ANNEX 2 - Visuals, and templates prepared for Rural Thrive Campaign Testing

Templates:





Screenshots from the presentations prepared:




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

What is RURALITIES?

RURALITIES is a project that establishes a network of learning hubs, known as 'RURALITIES Hubs.' These hubs are the epicentres of learning and innovation, designed to enhance ecosystems and drive climate action in rural settings. The project uniquely combines various elements:


Ruralities elements

These are real-life testing grounds where ideas are brought to life and tested in actual rural settings.




Innovative Methodologies

At the core of RURALITIES, we embrace new ways of learning and teaching, putting learners first.




Living Labs




Digital Platform

Leveraging the power of the Internet and wireless technologies, we connect people and share knowledge efficiently and effectively.



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.



Innovate UK



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

European Climate Law

Legally enshrines the 2050 climate-neutrality objective and sets the intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

Link: [European Climate Law](#)



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

Shared Goals for 2040

- The ten shared goals of the rural vision are the common aspirations of rural communities and stakeholders on how they wish EU's rural areas to be in 2040.
- These goals include making rural areas attractive spaces, engaging in multi-level and place-based governance, and providing food security and economic opportunities.



Source: [European Commission - Shared Goals](#)



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