



# Ruralities

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

## **D5.2 -BLUEPRINT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 'RURALITIES HUBS'**

**Horizon Europe Grant agreement: 101060876**

30/09/2024 by Marko Vincekovic (UNIZG) and Gabor Mester (PEDAL)  
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## ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>KPI</b>	Key performance indicators
<b>SIA</b>	Systemic Innovation Areas
<b>SIMSES</b>	Simplified Socio-ecological Systems
<b>RURALITIES</b>	Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres
<b>WP</b>	Work Package

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

RURALITIES is rooted in the recruitment, preparation, training and coaching of 1.000+ facilitators for a variety of tasks (e.g., trainers, facilitators, role models, hub coordinators, etc.), and who play a significant role in creating the matrix and the platform upon which the learning framework is built, develops and evolves. **RURALITIES** proposes to ideate, implement, futureproof, validate and deliver the aforementioned expertise and learning 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	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
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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
51	AP	ASPI	ASPIRE-IGEN GROUP LIMITED	UK
52	AP	EW	CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND RESEARCH TRUST	UK

## 2 INTRODUCTION

This document, **D5.2 - Blueprint for the Establishment of 'RURALITIES Hubs'**, has been prepared as part of the RURALITIES project, a collaborative initiative co-funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No. 101060876. The project also benefits from the support of UKRI through grant numbers 10051963 (The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership) and 10050988 (Earthwatch Europe) for UK-based participants. These grants enable the inclusion of key UK stakeholders in the project's multi-national framework.

The RURALITIES project aims to address the challenges faced by rural areas by fostering climate-smart, ecosystem-enhancing, and knowledge-driven rural expertise and training centers. Within this framework, Work Package 5 (WP5) plays a crucial role in engaging, connecting, and empowering a broad range of actors within the rural innovation ecosystem. It seeks to address the environmental, economic, social, and societal nexus, referred to as the RURALITIES Nexus (RURNex). WP5's objective is to bridge gaps between stakeholders by creating collaborative platforms that encourage participation across various sectors, from agriculture to education and governance.

A key aspect of WP5's activities is the implementation of engagement strategies within six Simplified Rural Socio-Ecological Systems (SIMSES), which serve as pilot demonstration areas for testing and refining the project's methodologies. These SIMSES areas are diverse in terms of geography, socio-economic conditions, and environmental challenges, making them ideal environments for the development of adaptable, scalable solutions for rural innovation.

### **WP5 Key Objectives:**

WP5 is designed to ensure that rural innovation does not happen in isolation but rather through the inclusive involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the rural context. To achieve this, WP5 focuses on the following key objectives:

- **Cross-sectoral Collaborations:** WP5 actively promotes partnerships between different sectors, including agriculture, tourism, education, technology, governance, and social enterprises, ensuring that innovation efforts are inclusive and multidisciplinary.
- **Social Participation:** Special attention is given to empowering local communities and ensuring that rural stakeholders, including farmers, local businesses, and governmental bodies, are active participants in decision-making processes. This is achieved through participatory models and community engagement frameworks that are integrated into the establishment of the hubs.
- **Inclusive Ecosystems:** WP5 strives to create an inclusive ecosystem that facilitates cooperation between all actors along the rural value chain. This ecosystem will support knowledge transfer, capacity building, and the sharing of good practices.
- **Participatory Resource Allocation:** Another core objective of WP5 is to implement participatory and interactive approaches that help identify sustainable resource allocation strategies. These strategies are designed to be adaptable to the biophysical and socio-economic needs of rural communities, ensuring the long-term sustainability of rural areas.
- **Knowledge Integration and Upscaling:** WP5 also focuses on identifying, organizing, and valorizing key learnings from multiple sources, ensuring that knowledge from the SIMSES demonstration sites can be effectively upscaled and replicated in other rural contexts across Europe and beyond.

### **Role of D5.2 in the RURALITIES Project:**

In light of these objectives, D5.2 aims to define the purpose and scope of the RURALITIES Hubs. These hubs serve as central nodes in the rural innovation ecosystem, designed to engage rural actors, foster collaboration across sectors, and address the specific challenges faced by rural areas.

The hubs represent a combination of material and immaterial resources, networks, and infrastructures that have been developed or enhanced throughout the RURALITIES project. They will serve as platforms for continuous interaction, knowledge exchange, and capacity building among rural stakeholders. In this sense, the hubs are dynamic ecosystems that integrate technological, social, and economic innovation to support the sustainable development of rural areas.

### **Connection to Other Deliverables:**

**As depicted in Figure 1, D5.2** is essentially connected to several other key deliverables within the project, ensuring that the blueprint for the hubs aligns with the broader goals of the RURALITIES initiative. These deliverables include:

- **D4.2, D4.3, D4.8, D4.14:** These deliverables, part of WP4, focus on creating the technological and social infrastructures that support the hubs, including digital platforms, knowledge-sharing networks, and participatory governance models.
- **D5.1:** The first deliverable of WP5, which laid the groundwork for the engagement strategies implemented in SIMSES.
- **D6.1:** This deliverable, provides insights into practical application of the System Thinking methodology.
- **D4.7, D4.15, D6.3, D6.6, D6.7:** These future deliverables will further develop the tools and methodologies necessary for the operationalization of the hubs, with specific attention to sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and innovation diffusion.

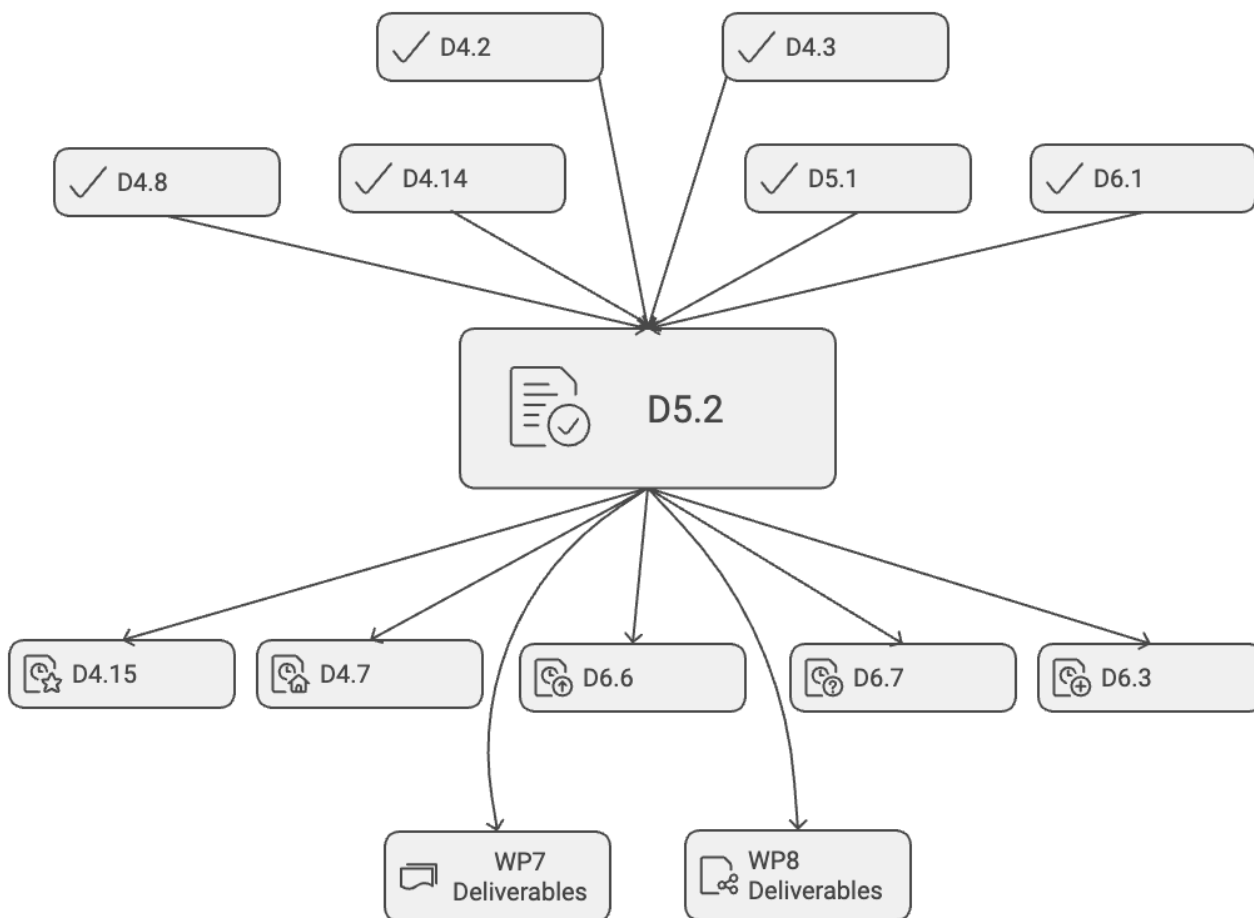


Figure 1 D5.2 links to other deliverables

In addition to the above, D5.2 is closely linked to all deliverables within WP7 and WP8, ensuring that the hubs' establishment and operation are well-coordinated with efforts in project dissemination, communication, and policy influence.

## 2.1 Objectives

The aim of this document is to clearly define the role and purpose of the RURALITIES Hubs in engaging rural actors, fostering collaboration, and addressing common key challenges faced by rural communities. These hubs are envisioned as central nodes within the rural ecosystem, designed to support innovation, enhance knowledge exchange, and promote sustainable practices. By focusing on the specific needs of rural areas, the hubs aim to address pressing challenges such as climate change mitigation, economic empowerment, depopulation, aging and inclusive governance.

To enhance clarity on the envisioned role of the RURALITIES Hubs, we further elaborate on their specific objectives.

### Specific Objectives:

### 1. Engage Rural Actors:

The hubs are intended to act as focal points for the engagement of a diverse range of rural stakeholders, including farmers, local authorities, community organizations, businesses, and academic institutions. By facilitating active participation, the hubs will empower these actors to take ownership of innovation processes and play a central role in shaping the future of their communities. A key objective is to foster strong, locally rooted leadership that can mobilize resources and drive sustainable development.

### 2. Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration:

Another core objective of the hubs is to facilitate collaboration across multiple sectors, including agriculture, education, technology, governance, tourism and social enterprises. These collaborations will help break down silos and create synergies between different disciplines and industries. By fostering such multi-actor, multi-disciplinary cooperation, the hubs will encourage the co-creation of innovative solutions that are responsive to the environmental, economic, and social realities of rural regions.

### 3. Address Rural Challenges:

The hubs will directly address several key challenges in rural areas:

- **Climate Change Mitigation:** By promoting climate-smart practices, such as sustainable agriculture and ecosystem management, the hubs will contribute to rural communities' resilience to climate impacts.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The hubs will serve as platforms for economic innovation, supporting rural entrepreneurship, skills development, and access to resources that enhance economic opportunities.
- **Governance and Social Inclusion:** The hubs will promote participatory governance models, enabling inclusive decision-making processes that ensure all voices in rural communities are heard, especially marginalized groups.

### 4. Provide a Roadmap and Resources for Hub Creation:

This document provides a comprehensive roadmap for the creation of the RURALITIES Hubs. It outlines the step-by-step process needed to establish and operationalize these hubs, including a clear timeline, resource allocation plan, and a calendar of key activities. The document also provides guidance on the human, financial, and technological resources necessary to ensure the hubs are fully functional and capable of achieving their intended impact.

### 5. Clarify Hub Definition, Structure, and Operations for Consortium Partners:

An important objective of this document is to ensure that all partners within the project consortium have a clear and consistent understanding of the definition, structure, and operation of the hubs. This alignment is critical for the successful implementation of the hubs across different regions and contexts.

The document outlines the governance structures, roles, and responsibilities within each hub, ensuring that partners can efficiently collaborate and coordinate their efforts.

## **6. Define Concrete Outcomes and Propose Next Steps:**

This document also aims to define the specific outcomes expected from the hubs. It provides a detailed vision of the results the hubs are intended to achieve, including measurable impacts on rural communities, such as improved access to knowledge, enhanced cross-sector collaboration, and increased economic resilience. In addition, the document proposes actionable next steps to guide the operationalization of the hubs, ensuring that they deliver tangible benefits to the communities they serve.

## **7. Sustainability Beyond the Project:**

A key component of the hubs' design is their long-term sustainability. The document outlines strategies for sustaining the hubs beyond the conclusion of the RURALITIES project. This includes potential funding mechanisms, governance models that ensure ongoing community ownership, and the integration of hubs into local and regional policy frameworks. The objective is to ensure that the hubs continue to function as centers of rural innovation and development, even after project funding ends.

## **8. Support Stakeholders in Expanding Hub Models:**

Finally, the document aims to provide a framework that can support relevant stakeholders—local governments, community organizations, academic institutions, and private sector actors—in scaling up the RURALITIES Hubs model. It offers practical recommendations for how similar organizational units or hubs can be established and sustained in other rural contexts. This will help stakeholders not only replicate the model but also adapt it to their unique local challenges and opportunities.

## **2.2 Structure of the document**

D5.2 presents a structured and systematic approach outlining the development of the RURALITIES Hubs and the underlying considerations. This document is organized into three key sections, each designed to address different aspects of the RURALITIES Hubs and provide a clear, comprehensive understanding of their establishment and operation:

1. **Chapter 1 and 2:** present an initial overview of the context in which this report was crafted, along with its intended objectives.
2. **Chapter 3 RURALITIES Hubs:** Building Elements, Layout and Organization, Roadmap and Timeline
3. **Chapter 4 Website integration:** outlines how the hubs will be integrated into RURALITIES website

## 3 RURALITIES HUBS

### 3.1 Building elements

The RURALITIES Hubs are designed to be an integrated system built upon a solid foundation of both tangible and intangible building blocks. These foundational elements ensure that the hubs can function effectively and sustainably to support rural innovation and community development. This section provides an overview of the resources and components that are either already available or will be developed throughout the project, including both physical assets like training centers and non-physical resources like networks of facilitators. Together, these building blocks will enable the hubs to deliver on their promise of fostering rural innovation, knowledge exchange, and sustainable growth.

#### Tangible Building Elements

The first set of building blocks consists of physical infrastructure and assets that will form the backbone of the hubs' operations. **Training centers**, as critical components, play a key role in providing spaces for knowledge dissemination and skills development. Existing training centers will be leveraged wherever possible, utilizing physical spaces like schools, community centers, or agricultural cooperatives located within the pilot areas of SIMSES partners. These locations are in the process of being identified, and upon completion, they will be formally integrated into the hubs' network. Beyond these existing resources, new training centers will be established through WP8 in strategic rural locations, with a focus on creating flexible spaces for a variety of activities such as digital learning, workshops, and community events. The newly established centers will undergo testing in the pilot areas, after which the concept will be expanded to six pan-European "follower" countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, and Turkey) and 23 African Union-based followers. This phased implementation will ensure the hubs are scalable and adaptable across different regions. The establishment of these RURALITIES training centers is scheduled to commence in M40 of the project.

**The facilities and equipment** provided at these training centers are another crucial aspect of the tangible resources. These centers will be equipped with modern technology, such as computers, internet connectivity, simulation tools, and other educational resources necessary to provide high-quality training and capacity-building services. While many of the equipment needs will be met through the contributions of local partners, additional resources will be procured and deployed to fill any gaps, ensuring that each hub is fully functional and capable of meeting the diverse needs of its stakeholders.

### Tangible building elements of RURALITIES Hubs

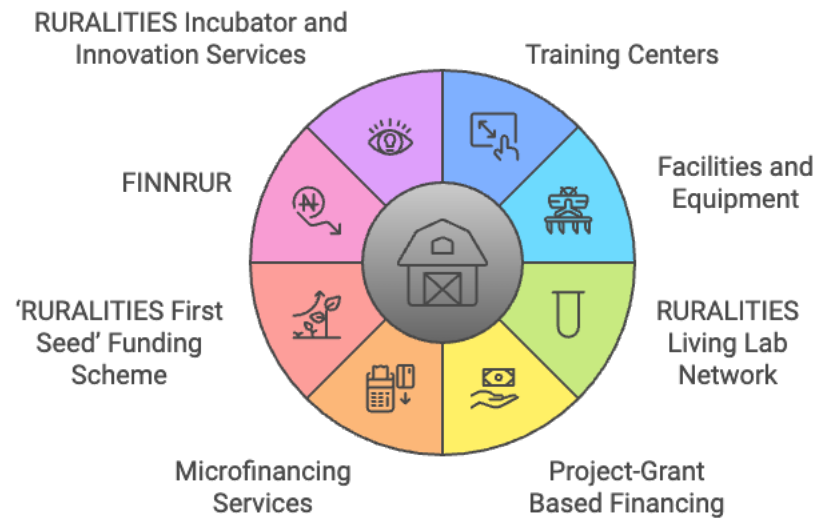


Figure 2 Tangible building elements of RURALITIES Hubs

In addition to the training centers, the **RURALITIES Living Lab Network** provides another set of tangible resources. This network includes community innovation spaces, which are existing buildings in rural areas that will be repurposed to provide a collaborative environment for hands-on learning, prototyping, and idea sharing. Furthermore, agricultural and ecological labs will be established to function as demonstration farms or eco-friendly sites, where sustainable practices can be tested, and rural actors can observe best practices in action. To address the needs of remote or hard-to-reach communities, mobile learning units will be introduced, bringing training and educational resources to areas that may not have access to fixed hubs.

The RURALITIES Living Lab Network is comprised of several specialized labs, each focused on a specific aspect of rural innovation and development. For example, the Italia Cecchi lab fosters community-based rural innovation by encouraging collaboration among local stakeholders. The ASINCAR Food Pilot Plant is dedicated to food technology and innovation, with the aim of promoting sustainable agricultural practices and supporting rural economic growth. CTIC Rural Tech integrates digital tools and technologies in rural areas, while RoRuralia promotes entrepreneurship and explores innovative business models that enhance economic resilience in rural economies. Other labs, like the Living Lab of Circularity, focus on implementing circular economy principles, and Agrotopia is a hub for agricultural innovation aimed at improving sustainability and productivity in farming. The SmartAltopiano lab leverages smart solutions to integrate new tourism models, promoting positive community growth and attracting young people. Each of these labs offers unique insights and contributes to the overarching goal of fostering rural sustainability and innovation.

**Financial resources** are critical to ensuring the sustainability and successful implementation of the RURALITIES Hubs. Various funding mechanisms will be made available to support the participation of rural actors and the creation of new hub activities. One of the key financial supports will be **project-based grants**, which will leverage funding from both European Union (EU) and local government resources. These grants will provide crucial financial backing for rural stakeholders, enabling them to actively engage in hub activities, drive innovation, and establish new initiatives that promote rural development.

In addition to grants, the project also aims to introduce **microfinance services** through the hubs. These services will offer rural entrepreneurs and farmers access to small loans, helping them to develop and expand sustainable enterprises. By providing this financial support, the hubs aim to empower rural actors to invest in new technologies, enhance agricultural productivity, and create resilient business models that contribute to long-term economic growth.

Furthermore, the hubs will play a central role in hosting and promoting various funding schemes developed within the RURALITIES project. Among these initiatives is the '**RURALITIES First Seed**' funding scheme, designed to provide initial financial support for promising rural innovations and startups. This scheme will act as a catalyst for early-stage projects, offering the necessary capital to help them grow and succeed. Additionally, the hubs will promote the **FINNRUR and RURALITIES Incubator and Innovation Services**, which will offer tailored support to rural entrepreneurs, helping them navigate the challenges of business development and providing access to specialized resources and mentorship.

By offering a range of financial resources, from grants to microfinance and seed funding, the hubs will ensure that rural communities have the financial tools necessary to innovate, grow, and thrive. This multi-faceted approach to funding will not only support individual entrepreneurs but also foster a vibrant ecosystem of rural development, enabling sustainable and inclusive economic growth across all participating regions.

## Intangible Building Elements

In addition to physical infrastructure, the success of the hubs relies heavily on intangible building blocks, which include human resources, knowledge networks, and collaborative partnerships. One of the primary intangible assets is the **network of facilitators**, which will be composed of trained individuals who provide guidance and mentorship to rural communities. These facilitators will have expertise across a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, technology, tourism education, and governance, ensuring a holistic approach to rural development. Local leaders from rural communities will also be engaged as champions of the hubs, helping to build trust and ensure broad participation from the community.

The role of **mentors and role models** cannot be understated. The hubs will spotlight successful rural entrepreneurs and innovators, who will serve as mentors to new participants and inspire the next generation of rural leaders. Peer-to-peer networks will also be established, connecting actors from different regions and countries to share best practices and offer mutual support. This exchange of ideas will be further enriched by the inclusion of international experts, who will bring cutting-edge insights on areas such as climate-smart practices and digital transformation, offering new perspectives and solutions to rural challenges.

### Intangible building elements of RURALITIES Hubs

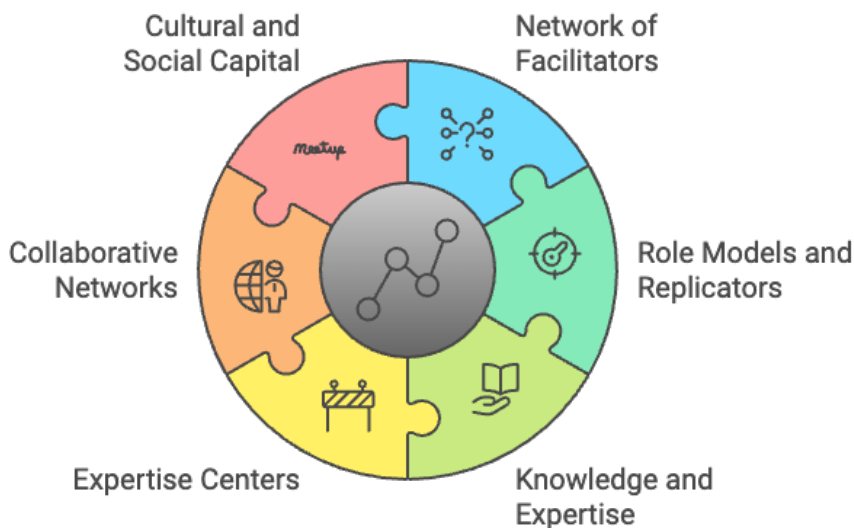


Figure 3 Intangible building elements of RURALITIES Hubs

**Knowledge and expertise** are critical components of the hubs, and a comprehensive knowledge base will be developed to document best practices in sustainable agriculture, resource management, rural entrepreneurship, and community engagement. **Expertise centers, established under WP7**, will serve as focal points for domain-specific knowledge within each SIMSES region and follower countries. These centers will not only provide access to key information but also facilitate the formal transfer of knowledge between hubs, allowing expertise to flow freely across regions and countries involved in the project.

**Collaborative networks** will play an essential role in the operation of the hubs. SIMSES partners, acting as real-life experimental sites, will enable rural actors to test innovations within their specific contexts, ensuring that the solutions developed are practical and scalable. Partnerships between the public and private sectors, including government agencies, private businesses, and NGOs, will provide additional resources, knowledge, and opportunities for collaboration. Cross-regional cooperation between hubs across different countries will facilitate the sharing of successful models and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Finally, the hubs will capitalize on the **cultural and social capital** present within rural communities. Local knowledge, including traditional ecological practices, will be integrated into the hubs to ensure that solutions are contextually relevant and culturally appropriate. The hubs will also promote community empowerment by encouraging rural populations to take ownership of their development processes. By fostering social cohesion through collective problem-solving and shared learning experiences, the hubs will strengthen the fabric of rural communities, enabling them to thrive in the face of modern challenges.

## **Integration of tangible and intangible elements**

The success of the RURALITIES Hubs hinges on the seamless integration of both tangible and intangible resources. For example, the physical training centers and living labs will serve as spaces for delivering training programs led by the network of facilitators, while the technology platforms will support the knowledge transfer and collaboration between hubs. Financial resources, such as project-based grants and microfinance services, will be allocated transparently through blockchain-enabled decision-making processes, ensuring that the hubs remain equitable and inclusive.

Adaptability is also a key consideration. The hubs must be flexible enough to accommodate different regional and socio-economic contexts. This means designing physical spaces and training programs that can be tailored to the unique needs of each rural community, while still aligning with the overall objectives of the RURALITIES project. By building on a solid foundation of both tangible and intangible elements, the hubs will be well-positioned to drive sustainable development in rural areas for years to come.

The following chapter will delve into these considerations and provide detailed answers to these questions.

## **3.2 Organizational Structure and Layout of RURALITIES Hubs**

This section presents a comprehensive plan on how the various components of RURALITIES Hubs will interact, link, and collaborate to drive sustainable rural development. The plan focuses on structured collaboration between tangible and intangible elements of the hubs, ensuring that rural communities benefit from innovations, expertise, and financial resources. The following outlines the key interaction points and operational workflow within the RURALITIES HUBS framework.

### **3.2.1 Interaction Between Components**

#### **Living Labs and Expertise Centers**

The RURALITIES Living Labs and Expertise Centers will work in close collaboration to ensure the seamless transfer of knowledge and innovation. Expertise Centers will focus on specialized research, which will then be tested and refined in the real-world environments provided by the Living Labs. Regular knowledge exchange workshops will be conducted between these components to ensure that theoretical research is grounded in practical application, addressing specific rural challenges. This interaction ensures that innovations are not only developed but are also tailored to the needs of rural communities, thus enhancing their effectiveness in real-world scenarios.

#### **Training Centers and Facilitators**

Training Centers will develop learning programs informed by the innovations and research from both the Living Labs and Expertise Centers. Facilitators (the network as described in D6.3), embedded in the local rural communities, will act as key conduits for transferring knowledge gained in the Training Centers

to the wider community. They will organize workshops, field demonstrations, and mentoring sessions to apply this knowledge in practical, community-based projects. Facilitators will also provide feedback to the Training Centers, ensuring that the training materials are responsive to the evolving needs of the communities. This dynamic interaction will result in continuous capacity-building efforts aimed at empowering rural stakeholders with practical skills and knowledge.

### **Innovation and Incubation platforms with Financial Support**

The Innovation and Incubation platforms will closely collaborate with the microfinancing services and the RURALITIES 'First Seed' funding scheme. This collaboration will create a support system for rural entrepreneurs and innovators emerging from the Living Labs and community initiatives. Entrepreneurs will be provided mentorship, technical guidance, and financial resources to develop and scale their innovations into viable businesses. A structured incubation process will enable innovators to progress through development stages, with access to financial support when key milestones are met. This interaction is designed to create a pipeline from idea generation to commercialization, supporting the growth of rural economies.

## **3.2.2 Connections Between Key Actors**

### **Hub Coordinators and Facilitators**

Hub coordinators will oversee the operational activities of the RURALITIES Hubs, while facilitators will manage on-the-ground implementation within rural communities. Hub coordinators will ensure that facilitators have the necessary resources, tools, and strategic direction to execute their roles effectively. In turn, facilitators will provide regular reports on community engagement and project outcomes, ensuring that hubs remain responsive to local needs. This continuous exchange will facilitate a well-coordinated approach, aligning community initiatives with the broader objectives of the RURALITIES project.

### **Role Models, Replicators, and Local Communities**

Role models and replicators will play a crucial role in the dissemination and scaling of successful rural innovations. Role models will share their experiences and success stories, inspiring rural communities to adopt new innovations. Replicators will work with facilitators to transfer successful models and practices from one community to another, ensuring that the impact of innovations extends beyond their original context. This interaction will promote a culture of learning and replication, maximizing the reach and sustainability of successful rural development initiatives across the network.

### **Collaborative Networks and External Partners**

The collaborative network between local governments, NGOs, educational institutions, and businesses will be essential for providing additional resources, expertise, and support to the RURALITIES Hubs. These partners will participate in multi-stakeholder meetings to contribute resources, share knowledge, and offer feedback. In return, hubs will provide partners with access to innovations, best practices, and opportunities for scaling successful projects. This collaboration will strengthen the hubs' ability to leverage external expertise and funding, thereby enhancing the sustainability of rural development efforts.

## **3.3 Workflow for Rural Development**

### **3.3.1 Identifying Needs and Opportunities**

Facilitators, in collaboration with local communities, will identify key challenges and development opportunities within rural areas. These insights will be shared with Hub Coordinators and Expertise Centers, guiding the development of targeted research and innovation efforts.

### **3.3.2 Designing and Testing Solutions**

Expertise Centers will develop innovative solutions in response to the identified rural needs. These solutions will then be tested in the Living Labs, where they can be refined and adapted based on real-world conditions and feedback from the local communities.

### **3.3.3 Capacity Building and Training**

Training Centers will offer tailored programs to equip facilitators, local stakeholders, and community members with the necessary skills to implement innovations. Facilitators will ensure that this training is applied in practical settings, enabling rural communities to independently adopt and sustain new practices.

### **3.3.4 Incubation and Financial Support**

Local entrepreneurs and innovators will be supported through the Innovation and Incubation Hubs, where they will receive mentorship and access to financial resources. Microfinancing and seed funding will provide the financial backing needed to develop and scale rural business ideas, driving economic growth.

## RURALITIES HUBs Workflow

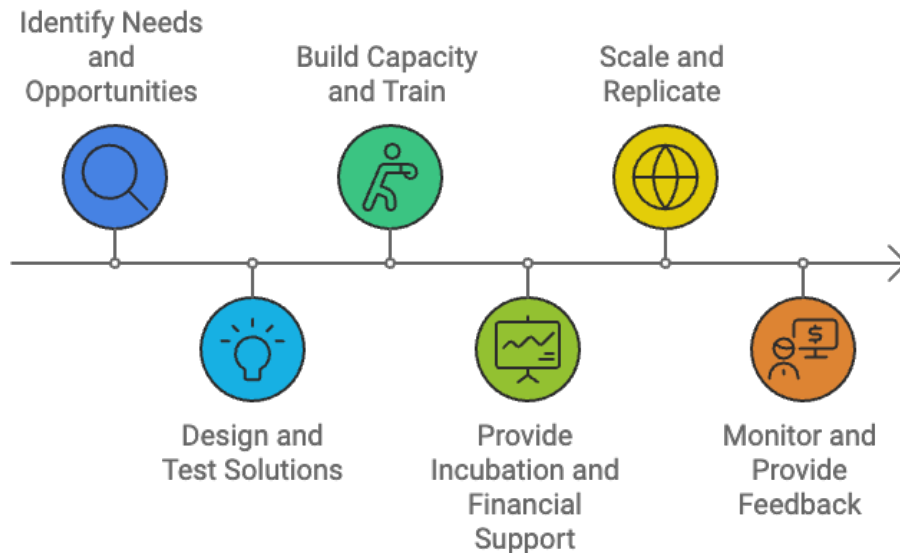


Figure 4 RURALITIES HUBs Workflow

### 3.3.5 Scaling and Replication

Successful innovations and practices will be scaled across the RURALITIES network through the efforts of role models and replicators. These individuals will promote the adoption of successful initiatives in new communities, ensuring that innovations are not confined to specific locations but are replicated in other rural regions.

### 3.3.6 Monitoring and Feedback

Hub Coordinators will oversee all operations, ensuring that projects are aligned with strategic goals and that resources are allocated effectively. Facilitators will provide continuous feedback from the communities, allowing for real-time adjustments and improvements to the hub activities.

This organizational structure and layout provide a structured approach to how the various components of RURALITIES Hubs will interact and work together to drive rural development. By leveraging collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building, the hubs will empower rural communities to innovate, grow, and thrive sustainably.

### 3.4 Roadmap and timeline

This section presents a detailed roadmap and timeline for the establishment and operation of the RURALITIES hubs. It outlines the concrete steps to be taken throughout the upcoming phases of the project, with specific milestones, activities, and deadlines. This structured approach ensures that all stakeholders are aligned, informed, and prepared for the coordinated implementation and rollout of the hubs.

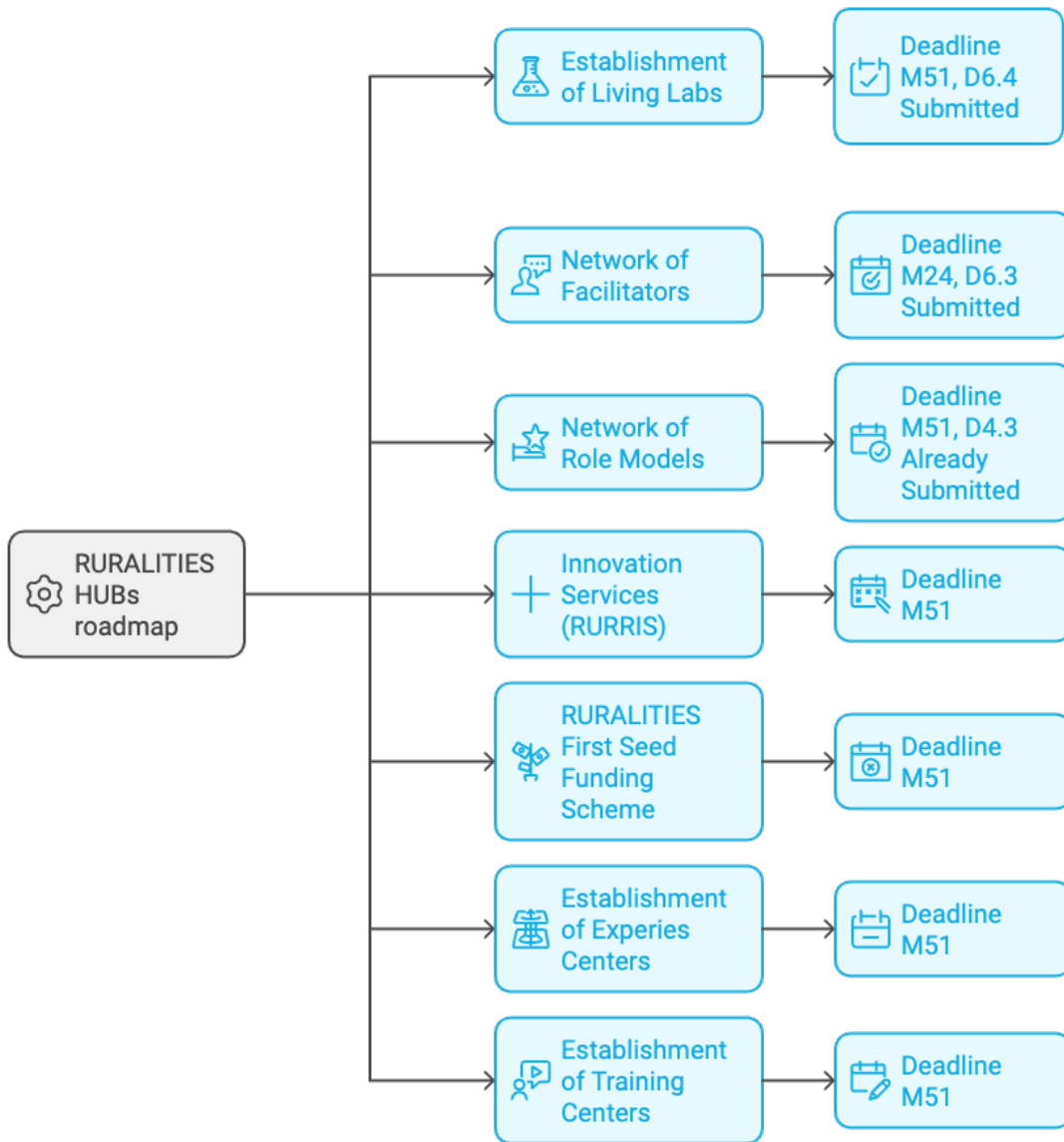


Figure 5 Roadmap for RURALITIES HUBs

ANNEX 1 provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the timeline, activities, and deliverables that guide the establishment and functioning of the RURALITIES hubs. It is intended to keep all stakeholders informed and on track as the project progresses.

## 4 WEBSITE INTEGRATION OF RURALITIES HUBS

Integrating the RURALITIES Hubs into the project website will enhance visibility, improve collaboration, and ensure accessibility for stakeholders and rural communities. Below are several alternatives for how the hubs will be effectively integrated into the website.

### 4.1 Dedicated Hub Section on the Website

Create a dedicated section for the RURALITIES hubs on the main website that allows users to explore and interact with each hub's activities, services, and innovations.

#### Key Features:

An interactive map will be featured on the website, displaying the locations of all hubs across various regions. Users will be able to click on each hub to access detailed information about its projects, key partners, and outcomes. Each hub will have its own individual profile page that offers an overview of its mission, core activities, major projects, and key contacts. These profiles may also include multimedia content such as videos, testimonials, and case studies, providing a rich and engaging user experience. In addition, a section dedicated to news and updates will regularly feature important milestones, success stories, and the latest developments from each hub. This ensures transparency and keeps all stakeholders informed of ongoing progress.

The integration of these elements will centralize all relevant information, allowing users to easily explore and access comprehensive details about the hubs in one place, ultimately increasing their visibility and accessibility.

### 4.2 Integration of a Knowledge-Sharing Platform

Develop an integrated knowledge-sharing platform within the RURALITIES website where hubs can collaborate, share resources, and engage with the broader community.

#### Key Features:

A document repository will be made available where each hub can upload and share reports, case studies, methodologies, and best practices with other hubs and stakeholders. This will facilitate easy access to valuable resources and knowledge exchange. A discussion forum will also be established, providing a platform for open conversations between facilitators, role models, incubators, and rural communities. This space will support collaborative problem-solving, idea-sharing, and feedback, fostering a vibrant community of learning and innovation. Additionally, a calendar of webinars, virtual workshops, and events hosted by the hubs will be featured, allowing users to register and participate in real-time. These interactive sessions will encourage direct engagement with ongoing projects and innovations.

This setup will enhance collaboration and the transfer of knowledge between hubs, promoting community-driven innovation and enabling learning across regions.

### 4.3 Public-Facing Innovation Showcase

Integrate a section on the website that showcases innovations and solutions emerging from each hub. This could be a visually engaging part of the website where users can explore innovations by category (e.g., climate action, rural entrepreneurship, education, etc.).

#### Key Features:

An Innovation Gallery will be featured, displaying key innovations from the hubs with detailed descriptions, photos, and video demonstrations. Each innovation will be linked to the specific hub responsible for its development, allowing for easy navigation and exploration. In-depth case studies and impact stories will also be included, offering detailed insights into how successful innovations were developed, implemented, and the positive impact they have had on local communities. Additionally, a section will be dedicated to showcasing projects that have received seed funding. This will provide updates on their progress and outline future plans for these initiatives.

These features will enhance engagement with the public and stakeholders, creating a platform for showcasing the successful outcomes and innovative achievements of the hubs.

### 4.4 User-Friendly Hub Finder Tool

Develop a "Hub Finder" tool that allows users to find hubs based on specific criteria, such as geographic location, thematic area (e.g., climate change, digitalization, agriculture), or services offered.

#### Key Features:

Users will have the ability to search for hubs using various criteria, such as region, type of innovation, or ongoing projects. This feature allows for easy navigation and tailored exploration based on individual interests or needs. Each hub will also have its own dedicated contact form, enabling entrepreneurs, local governments, NGOs, and other interested parties to reach out directly to the relevant hub for collaboration or support.

This setup simplifies access to hub services and promotes direct communication, fostering stronger connections between the hubs and their potential partners.

### 4.5 Mobile-Friendly Hub Integration

Ensure the integration of hubs is optimized for mobile users, given the increasing importance of mobile access, especially in rural regions. A mobile-friendly interface can make the hubs more accessible to communities that primarily use smartphones for internet access.

#### Key Features:

The website will feature a mobile-responsive design, ensuring that users can seamlessly access the hubs section from their mobile devices without any issues. Users will have the option to subscribe to hub events, updates, or news through push notifications, receiving alerts directly to their smartphones for

real-time engagement. Additionally, all hub-related resources, including documents, webinars, and discussions, will be easily accessible and downloadable on mobile devices, making it convenient for users to stay informed on the go.

This approach guarantees broad accessibility and encourages engagement, especially for rural communities that primarily rely on mobile internet access.

To effectively integrate the RURALITIES hubs into the project website, a combination of these alternatives will be employed based on the project's goals and audience. A dedicated hub section, combined with an interactive knowledge-sharing platform, and an innovation showcase, will foster collaboration, visibility, and impact. Optimizing for mobile users and integrating real-time data tracking will further enhance engagement and accessibility for rural communities.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The RURALITIES project has successfully laid the groundwork for the establishment of hubs that serve as catalysts for rural innovation and sustainable development. These hubs, located across six diverse regions, integrate physical infrastructures such as training centers and Living Labs with intangible assets like knowledge networks and facilitators. By doing so, they foster cross-sectoral collaboration, engage local communities, and address critical challenges such as climate change, economic empowerment, and rural governance.

Through the collaborative efforts of stakeholders, the project has already made significant progress, notably through the identification of role models, replicators and facilitators. Phased approach ensures adaptability and scalability across various regions and contexts, laying a solid foundation for the replication of successful models across Europe and beyond.

As the project moves forward, several key actions will be critical to the continued success and sustainability of the RURALITIES Hubs:

**1. Sustainability and Long-term Impact:** Efforts must be made to ensure the sustainability of the hubs beyond the project's lifecycle. This includes identifying long-term funding mechanisms, fostering strong partnerships with local governments, and embedding the hubs within regional and national policy frameworks.

**2. Scaling and Replication:** To maximize the impact of the RURALITIES Hubs, it is essential to refine strategies for scaling and replicating successful initiatives across different regions. This can be achieved through continued collaboration with role models and replicators, as well as promoting the hubs as centers of excellence for rural innovation.

**3. Capacity Building:** Continued focus on training and capacity building will be essential. This includes the ongoing development of training centers and expertise centers to empower local communities, businesses, and rural entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge needed for sustainable development.

**4. Monitoring and Feedback:** Effective monitoring systems must be established to track the progress and impact of the hubs. Regular feedback from stakeholders, particularly from local communities, will be crucial in making real-time adjustments and ensuring that the hubs meet their objectives.

**5. Digital Integration and Innovation:** Leveraging digital tools, such as IoT, will further enhance the hubs' operations, ensuring transparency, inclusion, and efficiency in managing resources and decision-making processes.

By focusing on these key areas, the RURALITIES Hubs will play a pivotal role in transforming rural areas into centers of innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

# 6 ANNEXES

## Annex 1 – The Roadmap of RURALITIES HUBs

### Roadmap for RURALITIES HUBs

Activity	Current Status	Deadline	Deliverable	Milestone
<b>Setting up Living Labs in Each SIMSES</b>	Ongoing	M51	D6.4	Achieve six fully operational Living Labs by the deadline, supporting the hands-on development and validation of innovative rural solutions.
<b>Network of Facilitators on Innovation</b>	Ongoing	M24	D6.3	Establish a robust network of facilitators driving innovation within RURALITIES hubs, promoting collaboration, and fostering knowledge transfer across rural communities.
<b>Network of Role Models and Replicators</b>	Ongoing	M51	D4.3	Develop and extend a network of role models and replicators, with the identification of 122 potential role models and replicators reported in D4.3.
<b>Innovation and Incubation Services (RURRIS)</b>	Ongoing	M51	N/A	Deliver innovation and incubation services through RURRIS, supporting rural entrepreneurs and fostering innovation across target regions.
<b>RURALITIES First Seed Funding Scheme</b>	Ongoing	M51	N/A	Launch and implement the first seed funding scheme providing financial support to innovative projects and startups from the hubs.
<b>Establishment of Expertise Centers</b>	Ongoing	M51	N/A	Establish expertise centers facilitating hands-on learning and community engagement, providing practical exposure to innovation-driven rural development.
<b>Establishment of Training Centers</b>	Ongoing	M51	N/A	Set up training centers focused on building capacity, disseminating knowledge, and fostering long-term skill development within the rural innovation ecosystem.