

SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

SHERPA Conference Highlights:

Co-creating rural futures

31 January - 1 February 2023



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Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors (SHERPA) is a four-year project (2019-2023) with 17 partners funded by the Horizon 2020 programme. It aims to gather knowledge that contributes to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to EU rural areas, by creating a science-society-policy interface, which provides a hub for knowledge and policy. Find out more on our website:

www.rural-interfaces.eu

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Carla LOSTRANGIO
AEIDL,
Work Package Leader
on communication,
dissemination and
stakeholder
engagement

Foreword

SHERPA stands for Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors, and as such, the project has been running numerous Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) across Europe since its beginning in 2019; 41 at national, regional, and local levels, and 1 at European level. These platforms, understood as rural interfaces, bring together representatives from science, society and policy. Throughout the project, the rural interfaces are co-creating knowledge and shared experiences, actively contributing to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and consolidate their own knowledge, exchanges, and recommendations for policy and research in the MAP Discussion and Position Papers.

During the SHERPA third Annual Conference (31 January- 1 February 2023), the project reflected on its achievements from the past year, as well as its contributions to policies and the specific topics that the MAPs focused on in 2022: the social dimension of rural areas, digitalisation in rural areas, climate change and land use in rural areas, and resilient and sustainable value chains in rural areas.

Furthermore, keeping in mind that the project will be ending in September 2023, the participants to the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023 also took the time to reflect on the future of SHERPA MAPs by looking into the following questions: what is the added value and key ingredients of the MAPs? Which aspects will help to preserve the MAPs in the future? What governance and financing models should be adopted to continue the MAPs over time?

This report contains a summary of the discussions held during the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023 and its key outputs.



Click on this icon when you see it to find online resources as presentations or websites.





DAY 1
31 January 2023

Introduction to the 2023 SHERPA Conference

Serafin Pazos Vidal, Senior Policy Expert at the European Association for Innovation in Local Development welcomed participants, both in-presence and online, and opened the conference as moderator of the first day. He recognised that the third SHERPA Annual Conference was the first in-person conference organised by the project due to COVID-restrictions, and thanked the host of the conference **Thierry Dupeuble**, Director of Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier. As a practitioner, rural policy analyst and scholar, Mr Dupeuble recalled that rural attractiveness has been the subject of reflection for a long time, yet there is still much to be done. Mr Dupeuble welcomed the work done by SHERPA and its MAPs, who have helped to further advance the rural discussion by presenting concrete recommendations.



Alexia ROUBY



**DG AGRI, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION**

Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas - Where are we now and how can SHERPA continue to contribute to it?

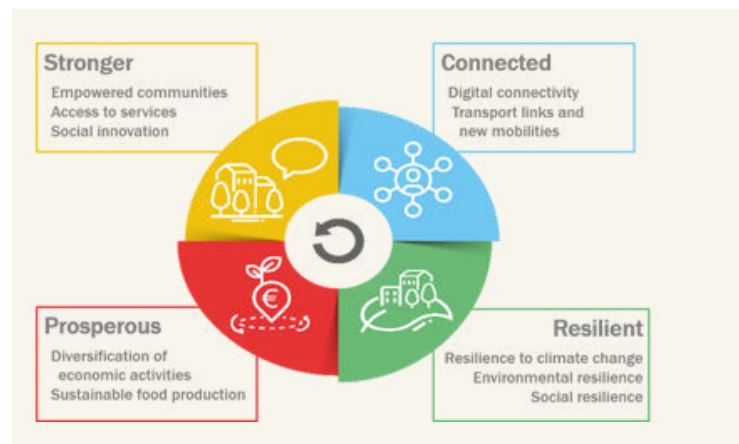
Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator at the European Commission in DG AGRI, presented the ongoing implementation of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and on how SHERPA can continue contributing to it. Launched in June 2021, the EU Rural Vision aims to achieve ten shared goals that summarise aspirations for **stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas** by 2040. There are two main avenues to achieve these goals: the Rural Action Plan (actions from European Commission) and the Rural Pact (cooperation between all actors).

Since the last SHERPA Annual Conference in January 2022, the European Commission has progressed with the implementation of the action plan's 30 actions to enhance rural areas in Europe (24 thematic actions and 6 cross-cutting actions). Among the thematic actions, a few leading examples are: the Rural Revitalisation Platform (to be launched by spring), specific Horizon Europe's calls for grants targeted to rural areas, the SMARTA 3 project to support rural mobility, and the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub project to provide assistance in the set-up of rural energy communities.

The European Commission has recently launched the European Rural Observatory, an online portal that gathers statistics, indicators and analyses related to EU rural areas. Furthermore, the Commission is currently working on other cross-cutting actions, ranging from collaborating with Eurostat to produce data at a more granular level and develop specific publications targeted to rural areas, to developing the concept of functional rural areas, as well as rural proofing legislation and creating an EU funding toolkit for rural areas (a first version is expected in September 2023).

In addition, Ms Rouby announced that the Rural Pact Support Office has been launched. This Office will help deliver the Rural Pact, launched in June 2022 with the aim to amplify rural voices; encourage networking, collaboration and mutual learning; and encourage people and

organisations to act for rural areas. Public authorities, civil society, businesses, academic research and innovation bodies, and individuals are encouraged to contribute to this Pact. Two events, one on 3 and 4 May in Uppsala (Sweden) under the Swedish presidency of the EU Council and one on 28 September in Spain as part of the Spanish Presidency, will contribute to advancing the Rural Pact, alongside other networking events organised by the Rural Pact Support Office.



Ms Rouby underlined the usefulness of the SHERPA Discussion and Position Papers for providing analytical and consultation work to the European Commission. She invited SHERPA and its MAPs to further contribute to the Rural Action Plan and Rural Pact, feeding both with reflections and evidence, suggesting actions, and actively participating for more vibrant rural areas.

To conclude, Ms Rouby announced that the European Commission's **upcoming milestones for rural areas** include stock taking on programming of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy and on the implementation of the Rural Action Plan (mid-2023), listing indicators to track progress towards the shared goals, and preparing a public report on how to enhance support for rural areas (early 2024).



Olivier CHARTIER
Project Coordinator
ECORYS

Taking stock of SHERPA's work in 2022



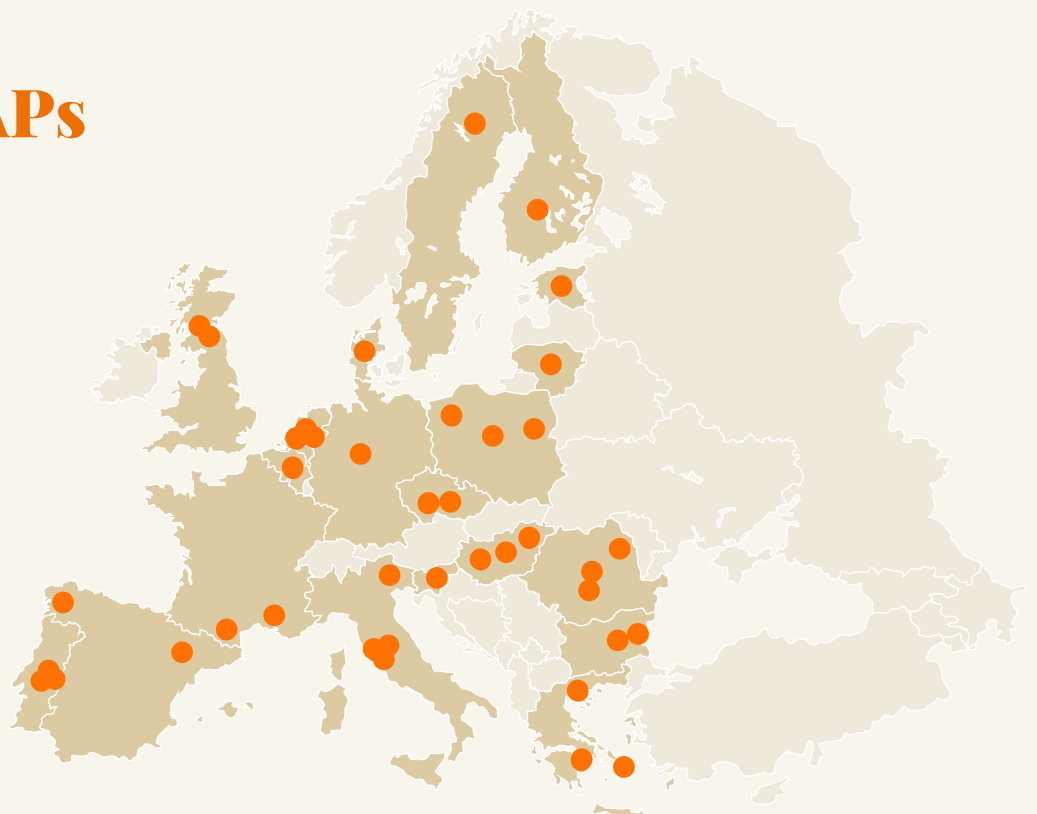
Olivier Chartier, Director at Ecorys and SHERPA coordinator, acknowledged SHERPA partners are what makes this project unique and easy to implement. He reminded participants that the "raison d'être" of the project is the necessity to better use research knowledge, and the need to empower key actors for public policy development. Since 2019, SHERPA involved more than **630 people** from over 17 countries, engaged in 125 meetings and established **41 national, regional, and local MAPs**, as well as one at European level. Over the last three and half years, the 41 SHERPA MAPs have deliberated on **8 topics** relevant for rural areas.

Furthermore, Mr Chartier underlined that SHERPA gathered information and results from approximately 800 rural projects in its **Repository**, and developed a **cartographic map** of multi-actor groups that are part of SHERPA and other European projects. In 2022, SHERPA's work focused on **4 thematic areas** (social dimension, digitalisation, climate change and land use, resilient and sustainable value chains) and translating the input from the MAPs into recommendations for policy and research.

Mr Chartier shared that SHERPA's last activities before its end in September 2023 are thematic work on multi-level governance, the preparation of final recommendations for policy makers and researchers, and its **Final Conference in Brussels** (1-2 June 2023). He added that SHERPA is reflecting on how to sustain Science-Society-Policy interfaces, the mechanism that makes the **41 SHERPA MAPs** unique and shown to be effective.

“What makes this project very easy is having a great team and receiving contribution from all project partners”

SHERPA MAPs



SHERPA'S contribution to local policy

Testimonies from the Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée MAP

Situated at the French-Spanish border, the Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée region stretches from the Pyrenees mountains to the French coast and includes 58 municipalities with approximately 108 000 residents. Nathalie Regond Planas, mayor of a small municipality at the French and Spanish border and president of Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée, presented their involvement and commitment in the SHERPA project as one of the two French MAPs.

The MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée capitalised on participation to the LEADER 2014-2020 programming, and included various members of this: five researchers, five decision makers and six civil society representatives. Since its beginning, this MAP focused on the "Mar i Munt" Territorial Food Project, an initiative to relocate food and recreate a food ecosystem to eat well and be accessible to all. Within this framework, SHERPA provided a methodology and a structure to deepen the discussion and transpose it into a MAP Position Paper, "Towards resilient and resilient value chains", which includes concrete recommendations for policy and research. For instance, the MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée calls for having the Food Territorial Project recognised at European level through a 5% earmarking in the rural development programmes, and asked to reward territories implementing such a system. The MAP Position Paper allowed them to highlight several relevant points, said Ms Regond Planas. She added that the new 2023-2027 LEADER programme largely inspired the work done in SHERPA to drive ecological transition on a regional level.



Nathalie RÉGOND
PLANAS
Mayor and president of
Pays Pyrénées
Méditerranée (France)



Testimonies from the French multi-actor platform in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Christelle Caso, facilitator at the Regional Rural network of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur illustrated her experience with MAP PACA Sud in France. Already being a network of rural development actors, they saw an opportunity with SHERPA to work on the future of rural areas, contribute to better rural policies, and capitalise on their former work. It was revealed to be a well-conducted experience that relied on a diversity of rural actors and provided a good framework for operational proposals, also thanks to the support of CIHEAM Montpellier. Ms Caso underlined that their participation in the SHERPA MAP allowed for strengthening linkages with the Local Action Groups and involve territorial leaders into the discussion of the future of rural areas, including the formulation of the SRADDET - the regional scheme for the management, sustainable development and equality of territories.

"We have learnt different lessons from this experience that drive different perspectives for the post-SHERPA period", said Ms Caso, from better involving rural researchers, to considering several ruralities and making proposals for the future of rural policies at different governing levels. Above all, the project contributed to the preparation of the LEADER 2023-2027 program and to the construction of public policies, including SRADDET.



Christelle CASO
Regional Rural network of
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur



"SHERPA is an opportunity for the Regional Rural Network to work on the future of rural areas together with new actors"



SHERPA's views on co-creating rural futures

Stronger rural areas: focus on social dimension of rural areas



Majda
ČERNIČ ISTENIČ
University of Ljubljana



“The Eurobarometer 2020 revealed rural areas are important for the future of EU and one of the main objective of rural policy is to maintain a vibrant rural areas”, said Majda Černič Istenič, from the University of Ljubljana and [MAP Svarun](#) (Slovenia), and lead author of the [SHERPA Discussion and Position Paper](#) on social dimension of rural areas as well as main facilitator of this breakout room.

In line with this, she added that the European Commission has proposed a number of actions to make rural areas stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous, and the European Parliament has recognised the need for dedicated funding for those activities and importance of policy tools (i.e. rural proofing mechanism).

Yet, the experiences of the SHERPA MAPs on this topic show that rural areas are losing their sociability and face exclusion, poverty of life, and low engagement said Prof. Černič Istenič. She listed [SHERPA's main recommendations](#) at local, national, and European level, such as creating friendly public spaces, developing caregiving services, promoting the role of the Local Action Groups, and strengthening the social pillar in the CAP.

Beatriz Guimarey Fernandez, from University of Santiago de Compostela and facilitator of the MAP Galicia (Spain), confirmed this trend and said that social relationships are deteriorating in rural Galicia, and drivers such as sport, cultural activities or neighbourhood forums could help to counter it and build relationships. Similarly, Konstantin Mihhejev, from Estonian Agricultural Research Center and member of MAP Estonia, emphasised the need to develop rural leaders as well as to foster or facilitate access to funding for them. He added that, in the case of Estonia, it is almost impossible to get a loan for renting in rural areas, and banks do not invest in rural areas because they do not see their potential. Empowering the rural dimension is a key issue, especially in post-COVID when many people have relocated to rural areas.

The discussion among the participants focused mainly on how European policies, programs, and policies could strengthen the social dimension of rural areas. It was said that the European Union should ensure that laws are **rural-sensitive** and have a positive impact on social issues related to rural territories. In this sense, the **territoriality principle** should be embedded in EU rural policy, and the CLLD/LEADER approach was mentioned as very impactful in its ability to strengthen communities and society in general, and to develop innovation. Regarding both the national and regional level, participants suggested to address the **coordination of sectoral policies** and funding for rural areas in terms of separating agricultural and rural issues, promoting a more centralised and synchronised approach to rural social issues, and **tax exemptions** for missing services in rural areas. At the local level, it was proposed to increase the participation of local people (especially those who do not have time) through the training of local leaders and motivators as well as the use of innovative technological solutions, and to continuously monitor what is happening on the ground.



Beatriz GUIMAREY
FERNANDEZ
University of Santiago
de Compostela



Konstantin MIHHEJEV
Estonian Agricultural
Research Center



Connected rural areas: focus on digitalisation in rural areas



Sabrina ARCURI
University of Pisa



Facilitated by Sabrina Arcuri, from the University of Pisa, [MAP Montagna Toscana](#), [MAP Casentino](#), and [MAP Tuscany](#), and lead author of both the [SHERPA Discussion and Position Papers](#) on digitalisation in rural areas, this breakout room reviewed the SHERPA MAPs recommendations on this topic and gathered further feedback from participants. As presented by Ms Arcuri, digital is high on the European agenda, as well as national political agendas, as exemplified by the National Digital Agencies. In addition, other policies – such as on democratic participation or services - have a digital impact. The analysis of the MAP Position Papers showed that digitalisation can contribute to quality of the rural environment and stronger social capital in rural areas, yet governance remains a key issue. In addition, Ms Arcuri presented some of the recommendations developed by the MAPs on digitalisation, including leaving no one behind, investing in basic digital infrastructure with a larger contribution of public administration, scaling out local and regional best practices via exchange, allowing public data sharing, co-designing digital adaptation strategies with local actors, and providing technical assistance via competence centres.

Åsa Händel, from the [MAP Norbotten](#) (Sweden), added that their discussion on the topic highlighted in particular the need to promote an universal access to the broadband, as this is not always the case in Member States where the market approach is predominant. Further, she recommended to make digitalisation place-based and create more flexible funding systems to drive digital investments. Balint Csaba, [MAP AKIS](#) (Hungary) highlighted that, in his own experience, digitalisation relies on too many strategies and funds at European level, yet no approach specifically targets the agrifood sector. A better monitoring system is needed as well, considering that not all users are high- end users.

Participants agreed that the Member States should develop targeted models to allow digitalisation everywhere, also where the market does not step in when it is considered unprofitable. In addition, it emerged that the role of European actors is very relevant, in particular when it comes to funds for promoting connectivity to urban areas, dynamising operational groups, developing skills, supporting cross-country learning in social inclusion of the hardest-to-reach groups, and best practices. Furthermore, as borders should not be a hindrance in this matter, more cross-border solutions, “digital functional areas”, and less legal barriers should be a goal as part of harmonised EU legislation on the topic. Some participants found that digitalisation should rather be a matter for national policies than European ones in order to avoid the risk of creating a one-size-fits-all approach that would be unable to tackle the great diversity of European Member States in terms of digitalisation. To this sense, horizontal measures and bottom-up approaches should be used equally. In addition, the topic on agri-food digitalisation was underlined, in particular with respect to the need of provisioning services for precision farming.

By the end of the discussion, participants agreed on three main recommendations for the digitalisation of rural areas. Firstly, ensuring that digitalisation processes are needs-driven and digital tools depend on digital needs across all levels was identified. Then it was agreed that minimum local digital services should be guaranteed and that special attention should be put on ensuring inclusion. Finally, digital should be cross-cutting and embedded in all sectoral policies and, for instance, “digital rural proofing” could be suggested as some sectoral legislation actually actively hinder digitalisation.



Åsa HÄNDEL
MAP Norbotten, Sweden



Csaba BÁLINT
Monitor of the MAP AKIS,
Hungary





More resilient rural areas that foster well-being: focus on climate change and land use



David MILLER
James Hutton Institute



David Miller, James Hutton Institute, [MAP Scotland](#), [MAP Dee Catchment](#) and lead author of the [SHERPA Discussion and Position Paper](#) on climate change and land use, facilitated this session, with contributions from Reinhold Stauß, monitor of [MAP Schleswig-Holstein](#) in Germany, and Jorieke Potters, monitor of the [MAP South East Drenthe](#) and [MAP P10 network](#) in The Netherlands. Mr Miller said that SHERPA's recommendations to address climate change and land use in rural areas should cover a broad variety of sectoral interventions, including spatial planning, investment in renewable energy, and in natural capital such as peatland restoration, water management and woodland expansion.

Mr Stauß emphasised that climate change requires more imaginative thinking. He highlighted that whereas processes and progress in technical innovation are well-developed, whereas social innovation is further behind. Rural regions, he stressed, need more trust-based networks where people can innovate with respect to climate change. Mrs Potters agreed that addressing the climate emergency requires an integrated approach, and placing greater trust in people. For example, members of the Dutch MAPs asked for greater levels of flexibility when it comes to defining methods to achieving climate goals and empowering them to create their own solutions.

Participants stressed the need for urgency for action and the “need to act now”. A need for improving the understanding of elected representatives in regard to climate change was also identified, aiming to inform the decisions made that tackle regulatory barriers to mitigation and adaptation. Some participants expressed concern that climate change has been central to many debates but that “nothing has changed” or that there have been only “very small successes”. Some participants noted that awareness and motivation do not always lead to actions by individuals, as exemplified by choices of modes of transport. Mechanisms were reported as required to scale out and up in regard to approaches for tackling climate change, and asking how the contributions of some types of land use and users can be more effective.

Participants observed that rural areas need tailored policies to initiate ecological and social transitions, and not to overly rely on changes in the behaviours of individuals. For example, collective changes in rural mobility requires better infrastructures and rural mobility services.

Looking at solutions, it was agreed that policies and regulations can be improved and validated through collective decision-making and consulting with citizens and stakeholder groups. Amongst means of raising awareness of good practices and exemplars of tackling climate change which were identified by participants were interactive formats (e.g. calls, visits, excursions, citizen observations) and cooperation between local actors.

To conclude, participants agreed on the need for developing indicators, targets, and objective data to monitor and measure progress, and for identifying new economic paradigms that go beyond economic growth and embrace a holistic approach.



Reinhold STAUB
Thünen-Institut



Jorieke POTTERS
Wageningen University



Prosperous rural areas: focus on sustainable and resilient value chains



Estelle MIDLER
Institute for European
Environmental Policy



To frame the discussion, Estelle Midler from the Institute for European Environmental Policy presented [SHERPA MAPs recommendations](#) for more sustainable and resilient value chains, as emerged from the review of the [SHERPA MAPs' Position Papers](#). Among these, she insisted on the need to facilitate education and training to address the real needs of farmers; provide financial support for rural areas, and having more flexible funding criteria; increase the resilience of producers by avoiding short-term funding; decrease bureaucratic burdens by streamlining administrative procedures; and communicating sustainability and its benefits to farmers and consumers.

Monica Tudor, from the European Rural Development Network and involved in the three SHERPA MAPs in Romania ([Arges](#), [Iasi](#) and [Transylvania](#)), presented the specific situation in her country and related recommendations for different target groups. Starting with consumers and producers, she underlined that Romania needs to build a market for sustainable products. They often do not understand what the benefits of sustainable products are and therefore they do not value it on the market. Then, Ms Tudor advised involving farmers in the knowledge innovation related to sustainable value chains, as well as the need to build trust between different policy levels and sectors as an intermediary step to build cooperation.

Géraldine Caprani, representative of [MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée](#) (France), explained that in their context, the Territorial Food Project ended up being a smart tool for supporting agricultural and food transition in rural areas. Yet, to keep moving in this direction, there is a need to connect producers with other stakeholders, and develop a special fund for supporting cross-border cooperation in agri-food matters.

The main discussion point in this breakout session was the definition of the “sustainable” and “resilient” concepts. Participants agreed that farmers and consumers do not understand these concepts, so it is necessary to communicate the benefits of sustainable and resilient products and value chains. They also agreed that CAP Strategic Plans should have a key role to make value chains more sustainable and resilient. As such, at European level, participants agreed that the CAP funds should be used to upskill farmers and other rural operators, as well as to promote knowledge exchange. Further, the CAP should provide incentives and support to shift towards sustainable support systems and the impact of such changes on environment, sustainability and resilience should be carefully analysed and assessed.

At national level, participants suggested promoting sustainability through large communication campaigns, ensuring fair prices for sustainable products, and funding cross-countries exchanges. Participants also agreed that it is crucial to increase capacity at regional level to act, hence supporting bottom-up solutions, knowledge exchanges, providing more funds to local action groups, empowering local people, promoting the development of short circuits, and decreasing bureaucratic burden from the EU or national areas for CAP Pillar II funds.

To conclude, participants agreed that the need to develop a systemic approach goes beyond agriculture and targets other actors in food systems beyond farmers.



Monica TUDOR
ERDN



Géraldine CAPRANI
MAP Pays Pyrénées
Méditerranée





DAY 2
1 February 2023

Panel discussion with representatives from science, society and policy

Moderated by Elodie Salle (ECORYS)



Dominique BARJOLLE
ETH Zurich
Science



Samuel FÉRET
CIHEAM Montpellier
Policy



Alexia ROUBY
DG AGRI, European
Commission
Policy



Tom JONES
European Rural
Community Alliance
Society

Elodie Salle, Principal Consultant at Ecorys and co-coordinator of SHERPA welcomed participants to the second day of the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023, and started the panel discussion by inviting the four panel members to reflect on the added value of science-society-policy interfaces for rural policies. The panel members agreed that one of the main added values of Science-Society-Policy interfaces (i.e. the MAPs) was the capability of bringing together different perspectives. “We see big gaps in terms of understanding policies and tools, and how to interpret policies at a local level”, said **Dominique Barjolle**, Senior Lecturer and Researcher at the Universities of Lausanne and Zurich and member of the European MAP in SHERPA. She stated that “SHERPA helped to move from a patchwork to puzzling together these perspectives”, as well as to build trust across stakeholders and so contribute to a systemic approach for rural development.

Samuel Féret, Associate Expert at CIHEAM Montpellier, Mayor of Arzal municipality (France), monitor of MAP PACA Sud and MAP Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée, and SHERPA partner, added that the project started at a troubling time with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the geography of discontent with the yellow jackets in France. Through foresight exercises, SHERPA helped rural actors to imagine desirable futures and how to make rural areas liveable, especially under a new climate regime. He welcomed the European Commission’s initiatives such as the Rural Pact and Rural Action Plan, but pointed out that these were still widely unknown by the vast majority of rural mayors.

In this framework, Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator at the European Commission in DG AGRI and member of the European MAP in SHERPA, said that the methodology created

by the SHERPA project to organise Science-Society-Policy interfaces provides a good and practical model that can be inspirational for engagement processes in the Rural Pact. She also congratulated SHERPA for providing evaluable inputs, enriched by local contributions, and taking steps to sustain the Science-Society-Policy interfaces beyond the duration of the project. Ms Rouby also suggested to address SHERPA's forthcoming recommendations to various types of actors and multiple levels of governance, and to retain illustrations of rural diversity in the overall recommendations which will be useful for the European Commission's public report due in 2024.

The intervention of Tom Jones, President of the European Rural Community Alliance and member of the European MAP in SHERPA, further highlighted how crucial it is to co-design, co-create, and co-engage with people on the ground. In particular, he said that civil society has a big responsibility to provide proper feedback along this process, and that "we all need to have a sense of ownership on rural policies, as they define our collective future". Mr Jones also emphasised attention for marginalised groups, small business, social economy actors, and youth, who should not be excluded in this process of defining rural futures.

Following the interventions of the panel members, the discussion turned to the topic of democracy. Mr Féret suggested for the European Commission "to look into new governance mechanisms to trigger participation and co-

creation in rural areas and beyond", while some attendees said that emerging ideas such as participatory budgeting and redirecting gas and electricity companies' to people's benefits can bring new perspectives to the democratisation of financial resources.

The panel members were asked to reflect on the composition of SHERPA MAPs and learnt lessons. They suggested SHERPA partners to consider the elements of "proportionality" (what is the best ratio between representative of science, society, and policy in rural interfaces), "representativeness" (to what extent MAP members' opinions are representative of surrounding rural groups), and "transferability" (how knowledge of the MAP is communicated to academia and to local actors).

Before concluding the panel, Elodie Salle invited the panel members to give some suggestions for the last months of SHERPA activities and the future of the project. Ms Barjolle insisted on the need to communicate more on a local-to-national level about SHERPA's outcomes and impacts, as well as to raise awareness on success stories to inspire people.

Other panellists suggested a two-way dialogue between SHERPA and the European Commission; on one side, insisting on the ways and tools used by the European Union to get closer to rural areas, and on the other side, ensuring that SHERPA's recommendations are handed to the European institutions for future policies and initiatives.



Long-Term sustainability of the SHERPA Multi-Actor Platforms

Leneisja Jungsberg, Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio presented the results of a survey that SHERPA ran to investigate the likelihood of MAPs to keep running after the end of the project. Shared among the SHERPA MAPs, the survey received 199 responses. The results showed that more than **70% of respondents believe that the MAPs should continue after SHERPA** and a similar percentage would be interested to keep participating in these MAPs.

The three main factors that maintained respondents' interest in the MAPs are "engagement in a dialogue with science, society and policy", "gaining new knowledge and ideas on rural trends and dynamics", and "building networks", while the results of the survey also showed that the most important function of the MAPs to be preserved is their contribution to the policy-making process with new ideas and knowledge.

The survey showed that the key ingredients to ensure the sustainability of the MAPs are understood to be the definition of clear objectives and a well-defined topic to focus discussions. In addition, respondents emphasised the importance of funding in order to pay for the work done by MAP facilitators and monitors to cover the coordination activities and related costs (e.g. catering, materials). However, funding was not seen as necessary for MAP members, as their participation is mainly motivation-driven. In addition, the results of the survey showed that most MAPs recognise the science-society-policy interface model as a **unique selling point** of the MAP model that should be preserved.

To conclude, Ms Jungsberg presented various recommendations for the sustainability of SHERPA MAPs, such as selecting a strategic focus to feed into policy cycles (at regional, national, EU level), and considering how MAPs could be integrated into existing rural networks or projects such as the Horizon Europe projects Premium EU or GRANULAR.



Leneisja JUNGSEBERG
Nordregio



A background image showing several hands of different skin tones holding together several light-colored wooden puzzle pieces, symbolizing collaboration and teamwork.

Multi-Actor Platforms: How to sustain them post-SHERPA?

Added value of the Multi-Actor Platforms



Bárbara SORIANO
CEIGRAM

Facilitated by Bárbara Soriano, [MAP Aragon](#) (Spain), and Paweł Chmieliński, [MAP Zielone Sądziejstwo](#) (Poland), this breakout session reflected on the added value of SHERPA MAPs. Participants agreed that MAPs can support in explaining what “Brussels” and its policies do for rural areas, and help creating links between the different policy levels. Another key added value identified was the ability of MAPs to create an open environment for debate and be able to bring policy makers to the same level as citizens, creating a space where to interact and discuss outside the formal approach. According to participants, this added value contributes to empower local communities, boost participation of citizens in local policy-making, and build new skills. It was said that researchers in particular can get inspired by MAP findings for their own investigations, as well as get information and validate results from the ground, and identify gaps for future research.

Participants agreed that the added value of Science-Society-Policy interfaces is demonstrated by concrete impacts. For instance, MAPs can use their outputs to influence policy making at national level, as well as at European level, and they help to compare existing solutions in different European countries.



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For the future, participants convened that MAPs should not select specific topics to focus on, but adopt a more systemic approach by analysing the region the MAP represents, such as its challenges and interdependencies. Within this framework, **green and just transitions** and their consequences for regional territories were mentioned as particularly relevant for future MAP’ discussions.

To conclude, the discussion focused on actions that could be undertaken by the MAPs themselves to make the above-mentioned added values sustainable. A **Rural Pact in each Member State** was suggested, as well as the creation of national MAPs that would ensure the uptaking of recommendations in the respective countries. Also, participants recommended to create a tool to measure and assess MAPs’ contribution to policy making processes as a way to demonstrate its impacts.

Key ingredients to sustain the Multi-Actor Platforms

This breakout session was held in parallel in Montpellier, facilitated by Erato Lazarou, [MAP South Aegean](#) (Greece) and Carla Lostrangio, European Association for Innovation in Local Development, and online with the facilitation of Stefano Targetti, [MAP Emilia-Romagna](#) (Italy). From the two parallel discussions, participants generally agreed on four main key ingredients needed to sustain the MAPs: funds as a compensation system for MAP coordination and expenses related to the implementation; motivated people, in particular high-level decision makers, local leaders, and young people; a system to trace and measure the impact of MAPs discussions in policy making as people need tangible results; the integration of the MAPs into existing networks, such as advisory networks, or link with other professionals. A few MAP representatives also emphasised the difficulty to keep MAP members motivated over time or involve certain categories, such as farmers or people with lower levels of education. This is either because the topics of discussion do not always match with local needs, or because MAP members do not see how their discussions link to concrete results.

In addition, participants agreed on the importance of evidence-based approaches as a key ingredient for the future of the MAPs. One participant stated that “reflecting on actual data helps people to weigh ideas and back them with a more complete understanding”. Others added that science is a way to create a common ground to kick-off the discussion in a MAP (especially due the diversity of actors), as well as the fact that it guides the discussions creates legitimacy in the context of each MAP. It was said that an important aspect to be addressed by MAPs in the future is to identify relevant data, promote a better level of granularity in such data, and make sure these data are accessible.

Looking towards the near future, participants recommended SHERPA to share success stories and report on what worked out as well as its results and impacts; to promote networking opportunities; and to advocate at national and European level on the added value of the MAPs. Furthermore, it was agreed that to maintain the key ingredients, MAPs should find ways to keep researchers and policy makers involved, communicate about MAPs’ results (especially by translating them in the local language), advocate for funds, and ensure that each MAPs has a clear planning so that members understand what is required from them.



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Governance and membership of the Multi-Actor Platforms



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Governance and membership models for the future of the MAPs were discussed in a third breakout session facilitated by Emil Erjavec, MAP SVARUN (Slovenia), Živilė Gedminaitė-Raudonė and Rita Lankauskienė, MAP CBioLit (Lithuania). As emerged from the survey, most MAPs aim to continue after the project's end but for this to happen, participants agreed that the governing model of the MAPs should ensure a shared and collective form of leadership. Leadership, participants agreed, does not need to be political, but effective and rely on motivated people with the relevant expertise, who could also come from civil society or academia.

In addition, participants agreed that MAPs should be open to newcomers, with particular attention to integrating people with the right competences and balancing expertise, different ages, and the hardest-to-reach groups. On the contrary, they also agreed that a balance between science, society and policy was not a priority for the MAPs governance model, though all groups should be represented.

From the discussion, it emerged that it was considered important for each MAP to tailor how to meet (online, offline) and how often based on the MAPs needs. Yet, it was underlined that meetings should be clearly defined, focused on the policy impacts, and aligned with the topics within relevant policy agendas and cycles. In this framework, some participants said that an important role should be taken by MAPs acting at a national level.

To sustain the governance of the MAPs, participants recommended that each MAP should develop an action plan to clearly define the focus of the MAP, the duration, the membership type, and the leadership of the group. Furthermore, it was said that the activities described in a MAP action plan could focus on preparing recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU Cohesion Policy at multiple levels of the policy's implementation.





Business model and financing the Multi-Actor Platforms

Katarzyna Gizińska, [MAP Bieszczady](#) (Poland) and Pedros Santos, [MAP Southwest Alentejo](#) (Portugal) led a breakout session that reflected on the possible business and financing models for the future of MAPs. Participants agreed on the need to guarantee resources in order to keep MAPs running, though it was pointed out that economic resources should not be the only resources available. In particular, it was agreed that **key resources** should include: a properly formalised structure with governance and facilitation, trained facilitators and open/flexible membership, and an infrastructure, such as a platform to hold online meetings or a repository for key outputs.

When it came to economic resources to finance the MAP's activities after SHERPA has ended, different channels were suggested. Public funding, for instance from the CAP and/or EIP, was mentioned as an option, as well as vouchers at national/regional level. Other channels entailed a levy on infrastructure projects (e.g. large scale renewable energy), crowdfunding, or philanthropic contributions. Another suggestion was to look into opportunities for MAPs to become a flagship initiative of the [Rural Action Plan](#).

In addition, participants agreed that existing partnerships or initiatives that could financially support the MAPs are national and/or thematic forums, Managing Authorities, the EU Rural Parliament, and other Horizon Europe projects, such as [GRANULAR](#).

Finally, participants in the breakout room agreed that - at the moment- it is too early to guarantee financial viability for all the MAPs but some steps could be taken to provide a general viability of this mechanism. For instance, selecting a suitable MAP agenda, ensuring knowledge and experience sharing, and helping existing MAPs to set up new MAPs.



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CONSULAI



Concluding remarks

Peter MIDMORE

**Professor of Economics,
Aberystwyth University**

Peter Midmore, Professor at Aberystwyth University, presented his concluding remarks to the SHERPA Annual Conference 2023, bringing a “fresh perspective”, before focusing on the final months of the project.

In particular, Prof. Midmore underlined that what makes SHERPA unique with respect to other projects is its ability to prove a new approach centred on deliberation as a way to tailor rural policies and provide innovative solutions. He added that he would be keen to see **deliberation** applied to a full range of rural topics.

Prof. Midmore also highlighted that “**co-creation must be a continuous process to be meaningful**”. In this regard, he

invited attendees to consider how to move from co-creation of policy recommendations to policy implementation in such a way that does not make deliberative processes too long, nor reduce their ability to be innovative and timely.

To conclude, Prof. Midmore drew attention to **two recommendations**. Firstly, he emphasised the need to make sure that MAPs are representative and advocate not just for their own rural localities but for all rural areas. Secondly, he stressed the importance to keep in mind that rural trends depend on dynamic spatial and constantly evolving processes: they are the outputs of complex socio-environmental and economic changes and MAPs are relevant to deeply analyse all these levels of complexity.





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