



**Summary Report of State of the Art and Practices  
of Rural Community Resilience**

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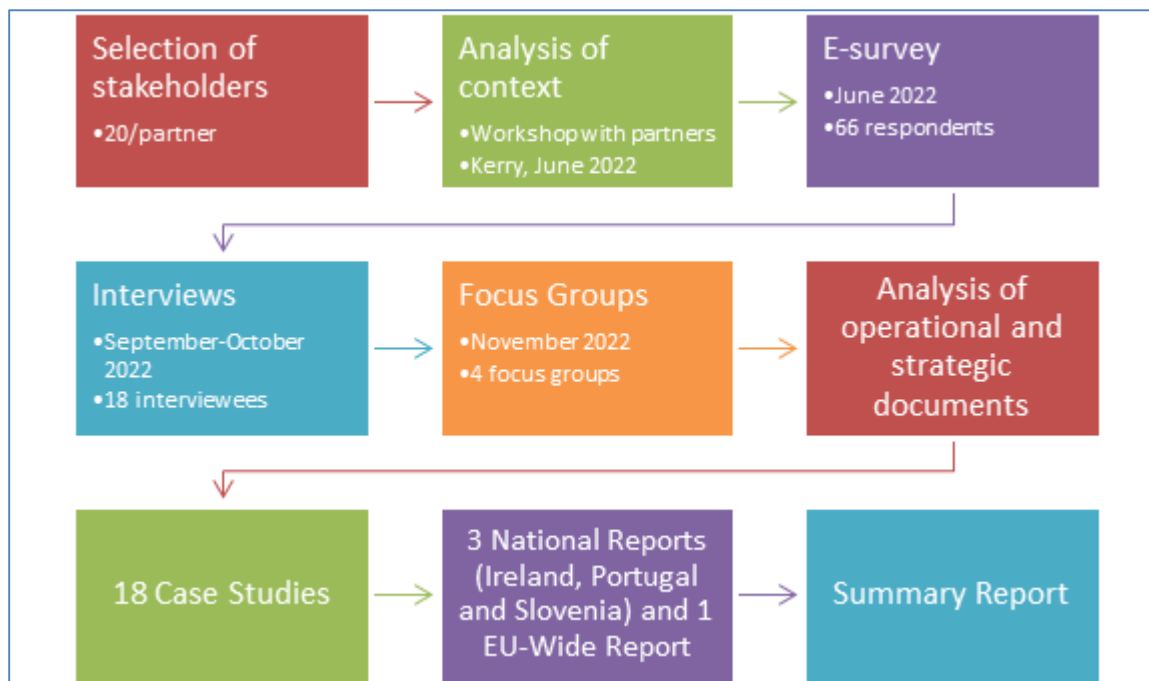
## 1 Resumen Ejecutivo

**REBOUND (Promoviendo la Resiliencia Rural Comunitaria, de sus siglas en inglés)** es un proyecto interterritorial que cuenta con el apoyo de la UE a través de la Alianza para el Conocimiento ERASMUS+ para la educación y la formación profesional. El proyecto persigue un enfoque de investigación-acción para promover la resiliencia de las comunidades rurales. Socios de Irlanda, Portugal, Eslovenia y las Asociaciones europeas AEIDL y LDnet están poniendo en común sus conocimientos e involucrando a una amplia gama de socios interesados en promover este tema. El objetivo principal del proyecto REBOUND es diseñar un programa de formación orientado a los profesionales del desarrollo rural, viable, sólido, fiable y enfocado en las soluciones, que capte los méritos de las comunidades resilientes y permita a las partes interesadas, en un entorno de aprendizaje profesional, evaluar, promover, revisar, ajustar y evaluar los enfoques para la promoción de la resiliencia en diversos tipos de zonas rurales en Europa. Los socios del proyecto están recopilando una amplia base empírica que guiará el desarrollo de un programa internacional de formación y capacitación de nivel 6 sobre la resiliencia de las comunidades rurales.

**El objetivo de este informe** que engloba el conocimiento puntero sobre la promoción de la resiliencia rural y el bienestar comunitario es ofrecer el desglose y análisis de procesos y modelos innovadores relativos a la resiliencia rural en toda Europa. El mismo se puede considerar como una introducción a la temática y sirve de base para el desarrollo de materiales de formación. El codiseño – o también diseño colaborativo – de este trabajo de investigación aplicada se realizó siguiendo los siguientes pasos:

- Selección de un grupo de posibles encuestados (más de 70);
- Taller con los socios para analizar el contexto (principios de junio de 2022);
- En junio de 2022, se realizó una encuesta digital – incluidos representantes de comunidades rurales, grupos de acción local LEADER, funcionarios de desarrollo rural y diversos organismos públicos implicados en el tema – para examinar los retos, las trayectorias y las prácticas más prometedoras para la promoción de resiliencia comunitaria rural (66 encuestados en total);
- Para profundizar en el conocimiento y las prácticas de vanguardia sobre la resiliencia rural y el bienestar comunitario, se realizaron dieciocho entrevistas adicionales (seis en Irlanda, seis en Eslovenia, tres en Portugal y tres en otros Estados miembros de la UE) en septiembre y octubre de 2022;
- En noviembre de 2022, los socios del proyecto organizaron un total de cuatro grupos focales/de discusión para debatir los resultados obtenidos con la metodología hasta aquí presentada y así profundizar y validar el análisis realizado. En ello participaron entre tres y siete profesionales y expertos en resiliencia rural de cada país;
- Además, tuvo lugar un análisis de documentos estratégicos y operativos sobre políticas públicas de promoción de la resiliencia rural comunitaria a escala local, regional y nacional;
- Se identificaron y describieron en total 18 estudios de caso prácticos;
- A partir de todo esto, los socios redactaron informes nacionales y un informe europeo sobre el estado de la cuestión;
- Finalmente, elaboraron el presente Informe ejecutivo, realizado por la Universidad de Liubliana con la participación de todos los socios de REBOUND.

Ilustración 1 - Workflow del output científico número 1 en el proyecto REBOUND



El proyecto REBOUND, financiado por el programa ERASMUS+, **define la resiliencia de las comunidades rurales como** “la capacidad de una comunidad o territorio rural para utilizar enfoques de equilibrio o evolutivos con el fin de responder a perturbaciones socioeconómicas o medioambientales repentinas y tener la capacidad de adaptarse continuamente a los múltiples procesos de cambio que les afectan, al tiempo que refuerzan sus funciones y estructuras esenciales, garantizan una buena gobernanza, así como el mantenimiento de una calidad de vida y un bienestar satisfactorios para sus habitantes y su entorno más inmediato, ya que las comunidades más resilientes suelen estar bien interconectadas / ser más colaborativas”.

**Nuestros actores clave definieron la resiliencia rural por medio de la encuesta como** “la habilidad / capacidad de una comunidad rural / zona rural para adaptarse / para superar los procesos de cambio / desafíos (económicos, ambientales, sociales, etc.).” Dado que la resiliencia rural es una mera construcción conceptual, somos conscientes de que podría haber tantas otras definiciones de la resiliencia rural como usuarios de la misma, pero aun así existe una **diferencia obvia entre la comprensión teórica (más amplia) y la práctica (más estrecha) de la resiliencia de la comunidad rural.**

Como ocurre en todos los campos profesionales, el **desarrollo rural comunitario tiene una terminología particular.** Esta terminología suele reflejar los diversos puntos de vista y las experiencias de los actores clave participantes, incluidos los residentes rurales, los grupos y las asociaciones comunitarias, los agricultores y otros agentes económicos rurales, los académicos, otros investigadores y las administraciones. Así pues, la terminología ha sido moldeada por diversas perspectivas locales e institucionales, e incluye algunos términos técnicos junto con términos vernáculos y cotidianos. Además, la terminología del desarrollo rural se ha visto fuertemente influida por la Unión Europea, en particular

con el despliegue del programa LEADER. En algunos contextos, especialmente en Irlanda, la terminología de la UE ha sido adoptada universalmente por los actores clave sobre el terreno, mientras que, en otros países, los términos y las etiquetas vernáculas preestablecidas tienden a coexistir con los términos técnicos procedentes habitualmente de los programas europeos.

Desde una **perspectiva europea amplia**, las zonas rurales son **cruciales para la supervivencia de Europa** en su conjunto, incluidas las zonas urbanas. Por lo tanto, el coste de no abordar la resiliencia rural puede ser muy alto para toda la sociedad. Los resultados de la encuesta a escala de la UE pusieron de relieve que el contexto del proyecto en el que se suele abordar la resiliencia como tema suele estar relacionado con el logro de un **mayor grado de independencia o prevención** ante los retos de las comunidades rurales, así como con un mayor nivel de **concienciación, compromiso y autoorganización** de los ciudadanos en asuntos colectivos y que reflejan un espíritu comunitario.

Los estudios de caso, la encuesta, las entrevistas y los grupos de discusión también han mostrado claramente la **importancia de un entorno propicio a nivel político como factor clave de la resiliencia rural**. Sin embargo, en la actualidad la resiliencia se aborda de forma deficiente a todos los niveles políticos y del sector público, que habitualmente está muy burocratizado, y es insuficiente para mantener la vitalidad de las comunidades rurales de las que es responsable. A pesar de sus limitaciones, el enfoque LEADER/CLLD es la única política pública de apoyo de la UE que puede apoyar sistemáticamente a las comunidades rurales desarrollar mayor resiliencia. Dentro de las comunidades rurales, los factores como el **capital social, la acción colectiva organizada o el liderazgo**, así como un conjunto de capacidades y competencias, son clave para desarrollar eficazmente la resiliencia. Para lograrlo, la sensibilización, la formación y el **desarrollo de capacidades son fundamentales**. El desarrollo de capacidades abarca más que la educación, implica también la transferencia de experiencia y la capacitación de la comunidad local. Por último, los resultados empíricos muestran que una mayor resiliencia está asociada a la capacidad de las comunidades rurales para articular diferentes soluciones prácticas que creen valor público **de forma holística e integrada**, adaptadas a las necesidades y oportunidades de la zona y **desarrolladas con y por la comunidad**, y no "para" la comunidad.

Las aportaciones recogidas de **Irlanda** – a partir de la encuesta, las entrevistas y los grupos de discusión – **apuntan a los méritos del enfoque CLLD y al valor de la animación y el desarrollo de capacidades**. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil son importantes impulsoras de la resiliencia rural; por lo general, están bien organizadas y en sintonía con la identificación de las necesidades y el potencial locales. La acción colectiva y comunitaria está muy arraigada en Irlanda, y LEADER / CLLD ha desempeñado un papel importante a la hora de permitir que las organizaciones de la sociedad civil desarrollen capacidades, adquieran nuevas competencias y conocimientos, diseñen estrategias y ejecuten proyectos. Además, LEADER / CLLD ha fomentado la colaboración interterritorial y entre actores clave, y la mayoría de los grupos de acción local (GAL) constituyen un foro para la toma de decisiones de forma colaborativa. Además, los GAL han funcionado como agencias de desarrollo y combinan LEADER con otros recursos. De este modo, LEADER / CLLD ha promovido la innovación y ha permitido que tanto localidades concretas como también sectores sean más resilientes.



Sin embargo, en la última década se ha **producido un retroceso del desarrollo local participativo en Irlanda**. LEADER se ha visto obstaculizado por el aumento de la burocracia, y hay una tendencia a verlo como una subvención pública, en lugar de un enfoque que empodera a las comunidades. Los cambios legislativos e institucionales, introducidos en 2014, han dado lugar a una disminución de las características específicas del programa LEADER, en particular el enfoque zonal. La mayoría de los territorios de los GAL se ajustan ahora a geografías administrativas, en lugar de zonas funcionales para el desarrollo, mientras que la colaboración ha sido sustituida por un procedimiento de toma de decisiones más jerárquico. Los representantes de las comunidades señalan que desean que se preste una atención renovada al desarrollo local participativo, en el que los GAL – directores y responsables de desarrollo comunitario y rural – apoyen el desarrollo de abajo a arriba, la planificación zonal y la inclusión social.

En **Portugal**, la aplicación de la resiliencia rural pasa por el desarrollo de proyectos de desarrollo rural en distintos ámbitos, el empoderamiento de las comunidades rurales, la promoción del espíritu empresarial, los modelos de negocio sostenibles e innovadores, la creación de empleo, el reparto de recursos, la promoción y el branding territorial. Sin embargo, el éxodo rural, la falta de formación y el bajo nivel educativo, la falta de voluntad de cambio de la población local, la falta de capital social, de redes comunitarias y la falta de liderazgo comunitario siguen siendo grandes retos que afronta el país luso. Existen algunas **políticas públicas que ayudan a promover la resiliencia rural**, como la agricultura ecológica, los incentivos para el retorno del talento desde el extranjero y programas como el PROVERE (Programa para la Valorización Económica de los Recursos Endógenos); EMER (iniciativa empresarial en zonas rurales), +Coeso (sistema de apoyo al empleo y a la iniciativa empresarial). A nivel nacional existen algunos programas y estrategias que ayudan a promover la resiliencia rural como por ejemplo el Plan Estratégico PAC 2023-2027, Mejora Interior, el enfoque LEADER (LEADER I, II y LEADER y el actual LEADER-CLLD). Como ejemplos reales de resiliencia rural en Portugal están los **grupos de acción local, que han funcionado como agencias de desarrollo local** y combinan LEADER con otros recursos. En el norte de Portugal, el GAL ADRIMAG, desde hace más de 30 años desempeña con éxito el papel de tejer redes en el territorio, apoyando la colaboración y el trabajo en red e implementando diferentes iniciativas y proyectos de desarrollo rural.

La forma en que las comunidades rurales afrontan los retos derivados del cambio **en Eslovenia se entiende principalmente como solidez** y sólo en cierta medida como adaptabilidad y capacidad de transformación. Los encuestados perciben la **falta de compromiso de los ciudadanos locales** como el mayor obstáculo para la resiliencia, aunque consideran necesario que las soluciones vengan de arriba abajo, principalmente en forma de medios financieros disponibles para las necesidades específicas de los lugares rurales. Según nuestras partes interesadas, la resiliencia rural en la práctica se lleva a cabo principalmente a nivel local y subregional. **El enfoque LEADER está ampliamente reconocido como el más adecuado para promover la resiliencia rural**, aunque el propio mecanismo LEADER-CLLD se enfrenta a algunos problemas burocráticos y su alcance financiero es limitado. Los **factores clave reconocidos** para la resiliencia rural son la buena gobernanza, el liderazgo comunitario, el capital social, compartir una visión común, las capacidades y la confianza comunitarias. La resiliencia rural se promueve principalmente mediante cocreación de estrategias de desarrollo local de los grupos de acción local, el desarrollo de una estrategia a largo plazo de uno o varios municipios y una estrategia de desarrollo a largo plazo para toda

la región. Dado que las personas - la sociedad civil (individuos, asociaciones, grupos de acción local, etc.) son los factores clave para la resiliencia rural, esto significa que a pesar de las diferencias significativas entre las comunidades rurales de Eslovenia la resiliencia rural depende principalmente del factor humano.

En resumen, **la investigación revela que el proceso de resiliencia no es algo que se pueda precisar fácilmente, ni es una cuestión la cual pueda ser considerada finita, sino en constante evolución.** A partir de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos procedentes de estudios realizados en Irlanda, Portugal y Eslovenia, así como desde una perspectiva europea, hemos identificado los factores clave y los retos de una comunidad rural más resiliente. En la promoción de la resiliencia rural, los principales factores identificados son: 1) **las actividades de animación y el compromiso con la población local**, la acción a nivel comunitario, su capital social, las redes comunitarias y el liderazgo; 2) el reconocimiento de los constantes cambios que afectan a las comunidades rurales y **el desarrollo continuo de la capacidades locales**, incluida la educación, la sensibilización, el intercambio de experiencias y habilidades; 3) **la existencia de un entorno propicio a nivel político**, que reconozca las especificidades locales y permita la prestación de servicios básicos integrando a las estructuras comunitarias por ejemplo en forma de organizaciones locales que lideren el desarrollo comunitario rural; y 4) **la buena gobernanza** (por ejemplo, tener implementada una estructura participativa y que permita tomar decisiones colectivas) y la propiedad local de los recursos. Los encuestados percibieron **la falta de compromiso de los ciudadanos locales y el predominio de las voces predominantes** como el mayor obstáculo para la resiliencia. Por otra parte, consideran necesario que las soluciones vengan propiciadas también de arriba abajo, es decir, un entorno propicio a nivel político que ponga los medios financieros suficientes a disposición de la comunidad. El enfoque LEADER-CLLD está ampliamente reconocido como el enfoque y programa de desarrollo de la UE que puede apoyar sistemáticamente a las comunidades para que sean más resilientes. En algunos países con una tradición más amplia de LEADER-CLLD, los grupos de acción local también no sólo han trabajado como agencias de desarrollo local apoyándose en los fondos LEADER, sino que han sido capaces de combinarlos con otros recursos y enfoques de desarrollo local participativo.

## 2 Executive Summary

**REBOUND (Fostering Resilience in Rural Communities)** is an inter-territorial project, which is supported by the EU through ERASMUS+ Knowledge Alliance for vocational education and training. The project pursues an action-research approach to promoting rural community resilience. Partners from Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and the EU-wide AEIDL/LDNet Association are pooling their expertise and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in examining this topic. The primary aim of the REBOUND project is to devise a practitioner-oriented, workable, robust, reliable, and solution-focused capacity-building training programme that will capture the merits of resilient communities and enable stakeholders, in a vocational learning environment, to assess, promote, review, tweak and evaluate approaches to resilience promotion across a range of rural area types in Europe. Project partners are compiling an evidence-base that will guide the development of a Level 6 international training and capacity-building programme about rural community resilience.

The **aim of this report** on the *State of the Art and Practices on Rural Community Resilience* is to provide an analysis of innovative processes and patterns pertaining to rural resilience across Europe. It offers an introductory document to inform the development of training materials. The co-design of this research was done following next steps:

- 1) Selection of a group of stakeholders (more than 70);
- 2) Workshops with partners to analyse the context (beginning of June 2022);
- 3) In June 2022, we distributed an online survey among stakeholders in rural community development – including community representatives, LAGs, development officers and public bodies – to examine challenges, trajectories, and best practices with respect to rural community resilience (66 respondents in total);
- 4) For a deeper analysis in respect of state-of the rural resilience and community well-being, we conducted an additional eighteen interviews (six in Ireland, six in Slovenia, three in Portugal and three in other EU member states) in September/October 2022;
- 5) In November 2022, project partners organised in total four focus groups for discussion of the results that had emerged up to then and to gain a deeper analysis in respect of the state-of-the art of rural resilience; three to seven practitioners and experts on rural resilience from each country participated;
- 6) Analysis of strategic, policy and operational documents on rural resilience at local, regional, national level;
- 7) Identification and elaboration of 18 case studies;
- 8) Partners drafted National Reports and a European Report on State of the Art;

- 9) Compilation of Summary Report, undertaken by University of Ljubljana with active participation of all Rebound partners.

Figure 1: Workflow of REBOUND Research output 1.



The **ERASMUS funded REBOUND project defines rural community resilience** as: ‘The capacity of a rural community or territory to utilise equilibrium or evolutionary approaches in order to respond to sudden socio-economic or environmental shocks and have the capacity to continuously adapt to the multiple processes of change affecting them whilst strengthening their essential functions and structures, ensuring good governance, as well as maintaining a satisfactory quality of life and well-being for its inhabitants and rural territory, as resilient communities are generally well networked / cooperative.’

**Our stakeholders defined rural resilience** as: “Rural resilience is ability / capacity to adapt / to overcome process of change / challenges (economic, environmental, social, etc.) in rural community / rural area." Since rural resilience is a conceptual construct, we are aware that, there could be as many articulations of rural resilience as there are its users, but even so there is an obvious **difference between theoretical (broader) and practitioner (narrower) understanding of rural community resilience.**

As is the case in all professional fields, **rural community development has a particular terminology.** This terminology generally reflects the various standpoints and experiences of participating stakeholders, including rural residents, community groups, farmers and other rural

businesses, academics, other researchers, and agencies. Thus, the terminology has been shaped by diverse local and institutional perspectives, and it includes some technical terms alongside vernacular and every-day terms. Moreover, rural development terminology has been strongly influenced by the European Union, particularly with the rollout of LEADER. In some contexts, particularly in Ireland, EU terminology has been universally embraced by stakeholders, while in other context, pre-established vernacular terms and labels tend to co-exist alongside technical and EU terms.

From **European-wide perspective** of stakeholders, rural areas are **crucial for the survival of Europe** as a whole, including urban areas. Thus, the cost of not addressing rural resilience can be very high for the whole society. The survey results, at EU level, highlighted resilience is often related to the achievement of a higher degree of **independence or preparedness**, as well as to a higher level of **awareness, engagement, and self-organising** of citizens in collective affairs and community spirit.

The case studies, survey, interviews and focus groups have also clearly shown the importance of an **enabling environment and policy milieu** as a key factor of rural resilience. However, at present, resilience is inadequately addressed at all policy levels, and the public sector, very often bureaucratised, seems insufficient, in of itself, to maintain rural communities resilient. It is essential that this sector creates an appropriate legal and administrative framework. Despite its limitations, LEADER/CLLD is the only EU-wide policy approach that can systematically support communities to become more resilient. Within rural communities, factors like **social capital, community-level action, or leadership** as well as a set of skills and competences are key to effectively build resilience. To achieve this, awareness raising, training and **capacity-building** are fundamental. Capacity-building covers more than education, it involves a transfer of experience and empowerment of the local community. Finally, the empirical results show that higher resilience is associated with the capacity of rural communities to articulate different solutions that create public value in a **comprehensive and integrated manner, adapted to the needs and opportunities** of the area and developed **with and by the community**, and not »for« the community.

The insights gathered **in Ireland** – from the survey, interviews and focus groups – point to the **merits of the CLLD approach and the value of animation and capacity-building**. Civil society organisations are important drivers of rural community resilience; they are generally well organised and attuned to identifying local needs and potential. Collective, community-based action has been well established in Ireland, and LEADER / CLLD has played an important role in enabling civil society organisations to develop capacity, acquire new skills and know-how, devise strategies and implement projects. Furthermore, LEADER / CLLD has promoted inter-territorial and inter-actor collaboration, and most local action groups (LAGs) provide a forum for

collaborative decision-making. In addition, LAGs have worked as development agencies, and they combine LEADER with other resources. Thus, LEADER / CLLD has promoted innovation and has enabled places and sectors to become more resilient.

Over the past decade, however, there has been a **rowing-back of CLLD in Ireland**. LEADER has become hampered by increased bureaucracy, and there is a tendency to see it as a programme, rather than an empowering approach. Legislative and institutional changes, introduced in 2014, have resulted in a diminution of the LEADER specificities (specific features), particularly the area-based approach. Most LAG territories now conform to administrative geographies, rather than natural areas of development, while partnership has been replaced by a more hierarchical decision-making procedure. Community representatives report that they want to see a renewed focus on CLLD, whereby LAGs – directors and development officers – support bottom-up development, area-based planning, and social inclusion.

In **Portugal**, the application of rural resilience is through development of rural development projects in different fields, including the empowerment of rural communities, promotion of entrepreneurship, sustainable and innovative business models, job creation, resource sharing, promotion and branding of the territory. Nevertheless, a persistent rural exodus, lack of training opportunities and low levels of education, unwillingness to changes from local people, lack of social capital, community networks and a lack of community leadership are big challenges. There are some **policies that are helpful to promote rural resilience** such as organic farming and programmes such as PROVERE (Program for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources); EMER (entrepreneurship in rural areas), +Coeso (support system for employment and entrepreneurship). At a national level, there are some programmes /strategies that help to promote rural resilience such as: CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, Interior Enhancement, LEADER approach (LEADER I, II and LEADER and current CLLD Community-Led Local Development. Real examples of rural resilience in Portugal are **Local Action Groups, that have worked as local development agencies** and they combine LEADER with other resources. In the north of Portugal, LAG ADRIMAG, for more than 30 years successfully plays the role of uniting the territory, supports collaboration and networking, different initiatives/projects and rural development.

How rural communities deal with challenges arising from change in **Slovenia is understood mainly as robustness** and only to some extent as adaptability and transformability. The respondents perceive the **local citizens' lack of engagement** as the biggest barrier to resilience. Yet, they see the **need for solutions to come from the top down**, mainly as financial means available for the specific rural places' needs. According to our stakeholders, the rural resilience in practice is primarily done at local and sub-regional level. The **LEADER approach is widely recognised as the most suitable for enhancing rural resilience**, although mechanism itself LEADER/CLLD is facing some bureaucratic issues and its scope is financially limited. The

recognised **key factors for rural resilience** are good governance, community leadership, social capital, sharing a common vision, community capacity, and trust. Rural resilience is mainly promoted by co-creation of local development strategies of Local Action Groups, developing a long-term strategy of municipality or a group of municipalities and long-term strategy of development of region. Since the people – civil society (individuals, associations, Local Action Groups, etc.) are the key factors for rural resilience, it means that resilience depends mainly on human factor, there are significant differences among rural communities in Slovenia.

To sum up, the **research reveals that the process of resilience-building is not something that can be easily pinned down, nor it is a matter that is ever finished**. Drawing from quantitative and qualitative evidence, from studies based in Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and EU-wide perspective, we identified key factors and challenges of a resilient rural community. In promoting rural resilience, the main factors are: 1) **animation activities and engaging with locals**, community-level action, engendering social capital, fostering community networks and leadership; 2) acknowledging change and **on-going capacity building**, including education, raising awareness, sharing experiences and skills; 3) an **enabling environment and policy context whereby specificity of place** and local service provision with a community structure are enabled and that is an umbrella body and which supports community development in a cluster of communities; and 4) **good governance** (e.g. having a participative structure with decision-making competencies) along with local ownership. The respondents perceive the **local citizens' lack of engagement and the dominance of strong voices** as the biggest barrier to resilience. Yet, they see **need for solutions to come from the top down** - meaning enabling environment at policy level with sufficient financial means. The **LEADER/CLLD** approach is widely recognised, as the EU-wide policy approach, that can systematically support communities to become more resilient. In some countries with longer tradition of LEADER/CLLD, Local Action Groups have also worked as local development agencies, and they combine LEADER with other resources.



### 3 List of Abbreviations

AEIDL	European Association for Information on Local Development
AGA	Arouca Geopark Association
CA	Climate Action
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLLD	Community Locally Lead Development
CRER	Coalition for Racial Equality & Rights
CSO	Central Statistics Office
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries & Aquaculture Fund
EMFF	European Maritime & Fisheries Fund
ERDG	European Regional Development Fund
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural & Investment Fund
EU	European Union
IE	Ireland
LAG	Local Action Group
LDC	Local Development Company
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPF	National Planning Framework
ORF	Our Rural Future
RDP	Regional Development Programme
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
RRP	Recovery & Resilience Plan
PRODER	International Public, Municipal and Non-Governmental Organization Project Support Association
PT	Portugal
SI	Slovenia
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
SV	Smart Villages



## 4 Background

REBOUND (Fostering Resilience in Rural Communities) is an inter-territorial project, which is supported by the EU through ERASMUS+ Knowledge Alliance for vocational education and training. The project pursues an action-research approach to promoting rural community resilience. Partners from Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and the EU-wide AEIDL Association are pooling their expertise and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in examining this topic.

The primary aim of the REBOUND project is to devise a practitioner-oriented, workable, robust, reliable, and solution-focused capacity-building training programme that will capture the merits of resilient communities and enable stakeholders, in a vocational learning environment, to assess, promote, review, tweak and evaluate approaches to resilience promotion across a range of rural area types in Europe. Project partners are compiling an evidence-base that will guide the development of a Level 6 training and capacity - building programme about rural community resilience.

The aim of this report on the *State of the Art and Practices of Rural Community Resilience* is to provide an analysis of innovative processes and patterns pertaining to rural resilience across Europe, and it offers an introductory document to inform the development of training materials. This summary report is based on national reports, using the following methods:

- Quantitative approach towards analysing needs of rural communities to determine what is required to improve their resilience (e-survey);
- Qualitative approach for deeper analysis of rural resilience and community well-being (interviews, and focus groups with rural development experts and practitioners);
- Analysis of strategic and operational documents on rural resilience at local, national and at a European levels; and
- 18 case studies on innovative models of community development.

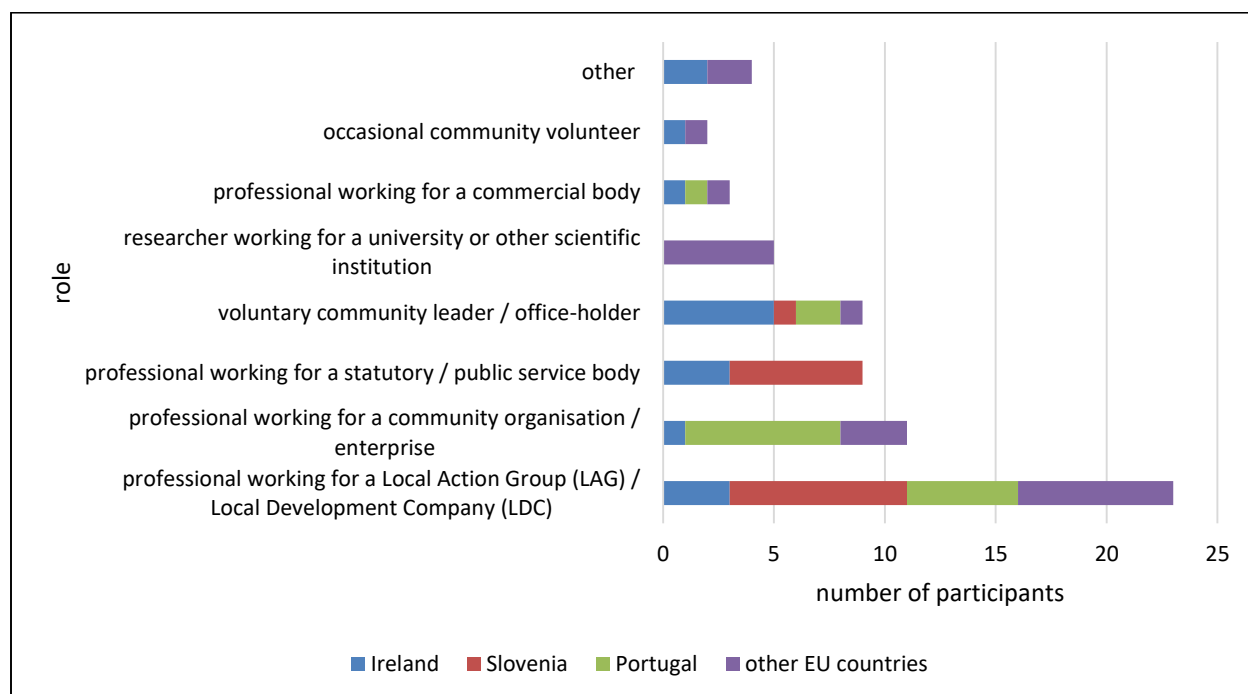
## 5 Quantitative approach towards analysing needs of rural communities to determine what is required to improve their resilience

In June 2022, we completed an online survey of stakeholders – including community representatives, LAGs, development officers and public bodies – to examine challenges, trajectories and best practices with respect to rural community resilience.

### 5.1 Profile of respondents

A total of sixty-six (n=66) stakeholders from sixteen EU member states participated in our survey. As figure 1 below shows, the main stakeholders' occupation is a professional working for a Local Action Group (LAG) or Local Development Company (LDC) (n=23), following by professional working for a community organisation (enterprise) (n=11), voluntary community leader / office-holder (n=9) and professional working for a statutory / public service body (n=9). Five respondents are researchers working for a university or other scientific institution, three respondents are professionals working for a commercial body and two are occasional community volunteers. Other roles, indicated by four respondents, are freelance community consultant and facilitator, HE professor, international consultant M&E of rural policies and a retired professional and community volunteer.

Figure 2: How respondents describe their own roles.



To complement national surveys carried out in Ireland (16 respondents), Portugal (15 respondents) and Slovenia (15 respondents), twenty stakeholders from 13 countries across Europe answered the EU-level survey on “rural community resilience” (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Member states in which respondents are based.

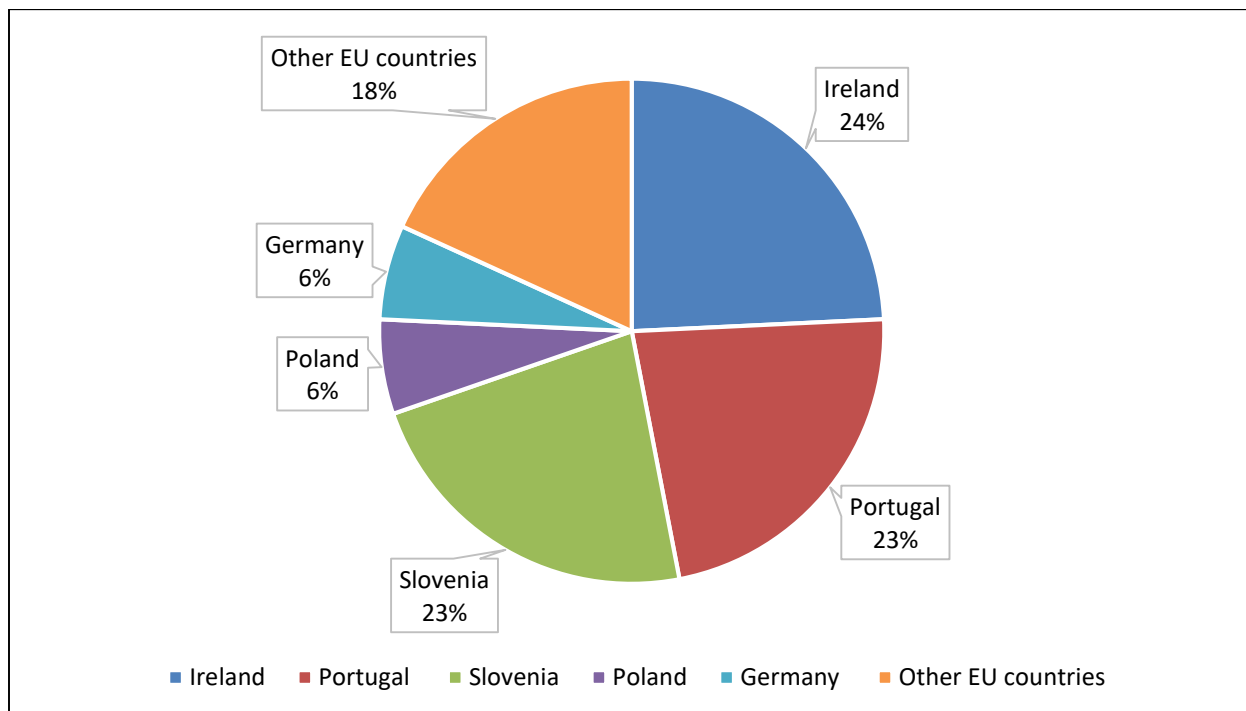
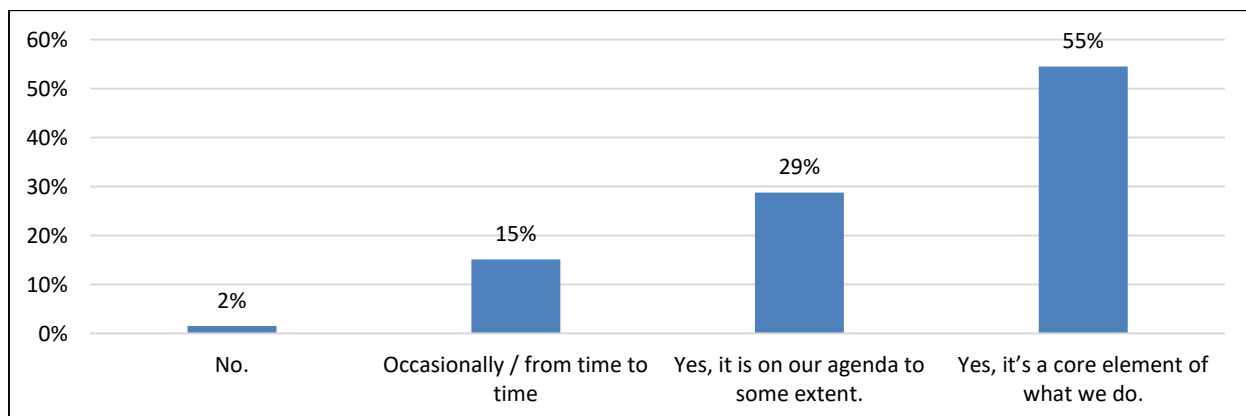


Figure 4: Extent to which rural resilience is on the agendas of groups / organisations.

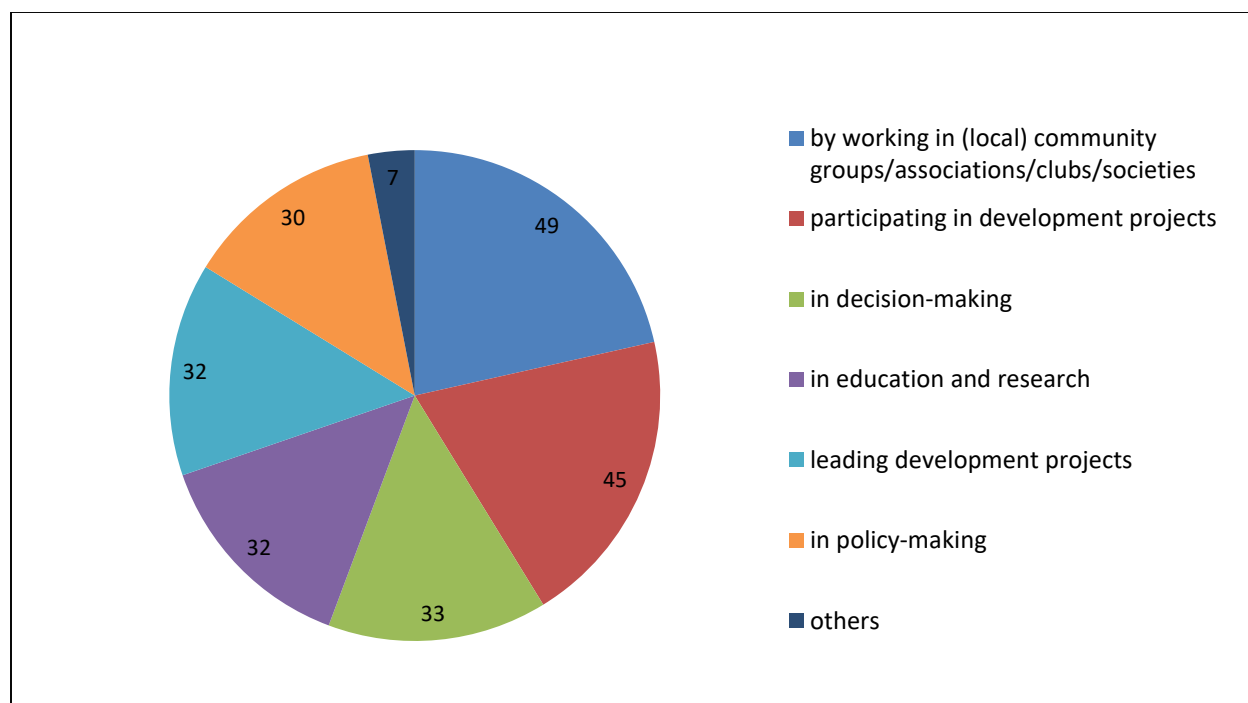


The survey results indicate that rural resilience is on the respondents’ organisation’ and groups’ agendas. As figure 4 shows, a little more than half of stakeholders (55%, n=36) claim that the

issue of ‘rural community resilience’ is a core element of what they do, while among most of the others, rural resilience is on their agenda to some extent (29%, n=19). Approximately one in seven (15%) stakeholders occasionally/from time-to-time work on rural resilience. The issue of ‘rural community resilience’, from his perspective, does not feature in his/her work or voluntary activity for one respondent, although the respondent is working on rural development topics.

The 66 respondents indicated that there are 228 ways in which they (cumulatively) come across the issue of rural resilience in their course of their (voluntary and professional) work. They work in very diverse types of formal and informal activities in rural community, with no prevailing way. A total of forty-nine (n=49) stakeholders came across the issues of rural community resilience by working in (local) community groups/ associations/ clubs and societies. A similar number have already participated in different development project, while a smaller number (n=33) of respondents came across the issues of rural community resilience during their work in decision-making field. An identical number of stakeholders are engaged in rural resilience through education and research and in leading development projects. Policy-making regarding rural resilience occurs for thirty stakeholders. Other ways / channels are: freelance community consultant and facilitator, international consultant M&E of rural policies, retired professional and community volunteer.

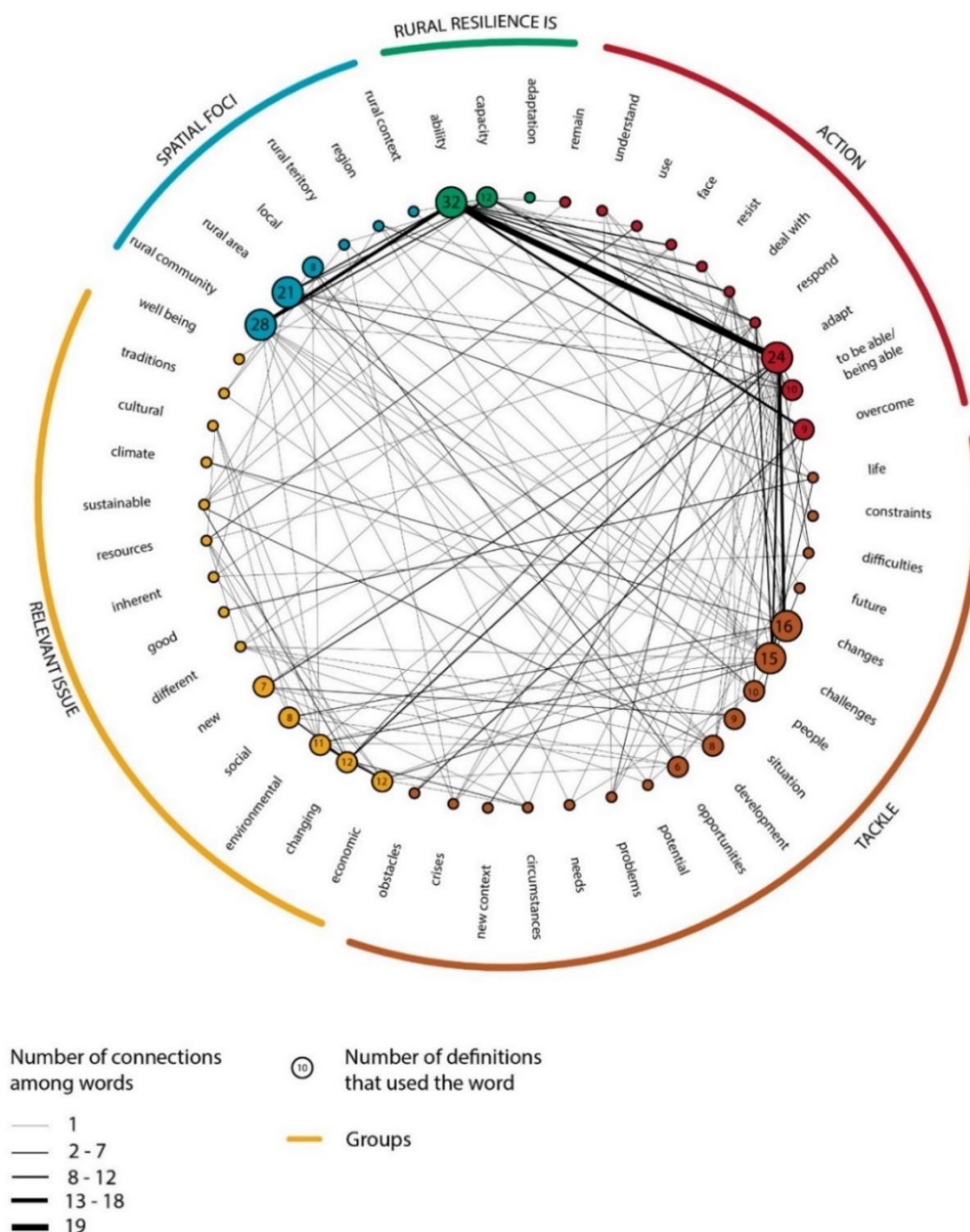
Figure 5: Ways in which respondents come across the issue of rural resilience.



## 5.2 Defining rural resilience

Rural resilience is a variable concept, and there is no consensus in respect of a singular definition. Based on the qualitative text, we analysed the respondents' understanding of the term "rural resilience" (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Defining 'rural resilience.'



Firstly, we counted number of words (having translated them). Secondly, in further analysis, we include only word that are mentioned three times or more. The wide variety of words, used in these definitions (more than 50), indicates how difficult it is to demarcate rural resilience as a concept. Drawing the links between words that appear together in the same definitions shows the great complexity of the term “rural resilience”. Linkages between words can be strong, weak or non-existent. Strong links reveal the words that are most commonly used to define rural resilience. From the strong linkages we can draw four-sided polygon: rural area / rural community – ability / capacity – adapt – changes / challenges. The most commonly used elements in definitions of rural resilience are: ability (n=32), rural community (n=28), adapt (n=24), rural area (n=21), changes (n=16), challenges (n=15) and capacity (n=12). A total of nineteen definitions used vertexes ability and adapt. The connection between these two elements is the strongest.

The concept of the rural resilience becomes even more complicated (complex) given the large number of weak links between the various words used to describe it. These weak links connect words that have appeared together in the same definition only once or twice. However, due to the large number of definitions, these connections are many, especially the weakest ones, where there is only up to five unique connections between words. It also makes clear that not all words are linked to each other.

Apart from individual words, we can also observe “groups” of words. These are words that we have grouped together because they are similar or related. Looking at “groups”, we see a similar pattern; some groups have more connections than others, whereas there are none at all between others. In groups, which relevant issues rural resilience is addressing, there are the most words. The most mentioned elements are: economic, environmental, social, changing and new. These elements supplement the previous most-frequently mentioned elements of ‘rural resilience’ definition.

As illustrated by the most used vertexes and connections, our stakeholders defined rural resilience as: “Rural resilience is ability / capacity to adapt / to overcome process of change / challenges (economic, environmental, social, etc.) in rural community / rural area.” Since rural resilience is a conceptual construct, we are aware that, there could be **as many articulations of rural resilience as there are its users and we proved that with figure 6.**

### 5.3 Rural resilience in practice

Rural resilience features in a large variety of projects, contexts and fields among our survey respondents.

In *Ireland*, the variety and complexity of rural resilience projects are best presented based on the respondents' self-declared descriptions of their own roles. Among those who are voluntary community leaders and office holders, rural resilience tends to feature most prominently in **community planning** – in both thematic plans (e.g. cultural and heritage development) and area-based socio-economic planning. They report having undertaken surveys (and other forms of research) to capture levels of resilience – even if alternate terms were used – as part of the process of identifying assets and capturing local needs. This cohort of respondents also noted the link between social and environmental resilience. Among LAG/LDC representatives, the promotion of rural resilience is associated with advancing **territorial** (area) competitiveness. These stakeholders also mentioned their work with specific cohorts of people and enabling them to be resilient and contribute to the resilience strategies. Public sector stakeholders associate rural resilience with **several inter-locking factors**, including the capacity of the community and voluntary sector, the ability to adapt to climate change, responsiveness to changing local needs and demographic vitality. Their responses convey a sense that the promotion of resilience is medium- to long-term and strategic, rather than being an immediately attainable outcome. Those who responded to the survey in other professional capacities associate rural resilience with community and area-based **planning** and the provision of local-level **services**. The respondent from the higher education sector reported that the language of resilience is not really evident at community level.

*Example 1: Environmental advocacy group BEAG (Ireland)*

*Within the specific context of the locality of which the research was based- the environmental advocacy group BEAG raise local environmental awareness through ongoing stewardship practices, local workshops & events. Consistent opportunities are provided for community involvement through local beach cleans & biodiversity initiatives occurring on a weekly basis. The strong group leadership and established reputation have promoted benefits beyond the environmental realm, producing strong social networks through practices which encourage inclusion and belonging. The focus of this group is, therefore, firstly environmental and secondly social. While other local voluntary groups are responsible for wider cultural initiatives and economic development within the community, these are often quite soloed. A more integrative approach between all community groups would provide a stronger model of rural resilience.*

In *Ireland*, survey respondents were asked to provide an outline or example of good practice in rural community resilience. The following aspects featured with greatest frequency in their responses:

- Bringing life back to communities (especially places that had been in demographic decline);

- Promoting inter-community networking and collaboration (overcoming past rivalries);
- Supporting volunteerism and citizen participation;
- Improving service provision;
- Evidence-based and community-led planning;
- Stakeholder awareness-raising;
- Raising and leveraging funding – enabling projects to happen; and
- Integrated and collaborative (institutionally and sectorally) approaches to development.

*Example 2: Community plan in North Kerry (Ireland)*

*A small, coastal community in North Kerry, which has experienced considerable decline in agriculture, out-migration, loss of services and closure of retail. For decades, the local situation worsened and self confidence in the future of the community was very low. The community council had some ideas but wanted to ensure full community buy-in as well as agency support. The community rallied around the new committee, which enthusiastically engaged professionals to undertake a strategic plan. Upon completion and launch of their strategic plan, this community has secured very impressive supports from the local authority and from other agencies, the community fully supports the plan, project feasibility studies have been completed, various grant funding has been secured, matched by local fund-raising. The committee has taken full advantage of social media and has received excellent support from the diaspora. The committee is actively implementing its strategic plan and has received very good coverage in local and national media. The outcomes of their facilitated strategic planning project has received recognition through the International Facilitation Impact Awards.*

In *Slovenia*, ‘rural community resilience’ features mainly in the fields of **tourism**, and **food production and farming**. Other contexts in which ‘rural community resilience’ is mentioned are: digitalisation and smart villages, social issues, environmental issues (climate change, nature protection., inclusion of vulnerable groups (youth, older people, women etc.), entrepreneurship, and cultural heritage and events (all n=2). Other fields are education and research, energy, mobility, traditional skills and knowledge.

In *Slovenia*, the actors involved in rural resilience are addressing:

- Inter-community networking and collaboration on local and sub-regional level (e.g. LAGs);
- Stakeholders’ awareness-raising and capacity-building among rural people;
- Interdisciplinary approach in preparing different strategies of rural development;
- Social inclusion projects (elderly, youth work in rural areas, etc.);
- Fostering agriculture business and its sustainability;
- Development of tourism in rural areas; and



- Cultural heritage (e.g. food heritage).

*Example 3: Taste Gorenjska (Slovenia)*

*Traditional gastronomy in the Gorenjska region uses the available resources (fields, forests, meadows, water, etc.) to create a varied, healthy, sufficient, tasty and charming local diet, although the natural conditions for agriculture are at first sight are unfavourable for providing locally produced and processed food. Various projects and individual actions were revived, promoted and reintroduced as a part of food tradition that has been forgotten or has almost stop being used, helping to boost both tourism and sustainable agriculture development.*

*Example 4: Goriška Brda hilly region development (Slovenia)*

*Brda (i. e. Goriška Brda hilly region) is an example of sustainable community development. It is an example of the co-existence of local population needs, the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and the wine-growing landscape, which is a key activity and also allows the development of other service activities, mainly tourism.*

*Example 5: Voluntary car-sharing in rural areas (Slovenia)*

The Sopotnik mobility project is a type of voluntary car-sharing. Sopotniki.org is an organisation for intergenerational solidarity operating as a non-profit private body, registered in Slovenia's register of voluntary organisations. The organisation offers free transport to rural elderly, thereby helping them get involved in an active social life. The service seeks to prevent isolation and loneliness among elderly people who leave in remote small villages. Sopotniki.org operates on a basis of volunteer drivers of different ages and occupations. The majority of them are active pensioners who are still able and willing to drive. The cars, fuel and call centre are usually subsidised by the municipalities in which Sopotnik service operates. Another very similar service in Slovenia is Prostofer.si.

In *Portugal*, the respondents highlighted **food production, processing and farming** (e.g. Arouca Agrícola/Geofood, “Casa da Broa”/bread house, the “Festa da Broa”/bread party), with strong connection with **tourism** (e.g. mountain biking, walking trails - where you visit restored mills and sustainability (e.g. climate change), **entrepreneurship** in rural area (e.g. creation of your own

*Example 6: GeoFood project (Portugal)*

*The Arouca Geopark Association (AGA) has been dynamizing and promoting the agricultural sector and the respective food chain through the «Arouca Agrícola» project, strengthening it with the principles of the GEOfood network. The objective: to link food and territory, tourism and health, sustainability, flavour and, in this way, bring consumers closer to nature, local products and their origin and culture.*

job), **community planning in thematic plans** (events, associations), **traditional knowledge, cultural heritage** and events (e.g. Teatro de Montemuro) and social issues (e.g. social isolation of elderly people).

Across other EU member states, the context and foci of projects relating to community resilience (as highlighted by survey respondents) included the prevalence of **social** (n=6) issues as well as **food production** (n=5). Moreover, topics like digitalisation, education and research, energy and public services (all n=2) were named repeatedly.

*Example 8: Neighbourhood Cuisine (Romania)*

*The "Neighbourhood Cuisine" project, initiated by the Saschiz Women's Neighbourhood Association through the Local Action Group (LAG) Dealurile Târnavelor (Tarnavelor Hills), was funded by the EAFRD. It proved to be a visionary project due to its emergency response in the period generated by the Coronavirus pandemic. The demand and number of orders turned out to be far above expectations. The association facilitated cooperation between actors in the field of agricultural production and processing in the LAG territory and enabled them to market agri-food products through the creation of a short supply chain, with its own direct distribution network. Lastly, the project promoted gastronomic and agri-food events when the pandemic allowed.*

*Example 9: Local Economy / Coworking Hub (Latvia)*

A public coworking hub was established and led by civil society and voluntary groups providing a space to collaborate with local artisans enabling new forms of local economy to arise. Rural heritage and knowledge were transmitted and incorporated into modern practices, enabling the rediscovery of traditional artisanship in a new way and for innovative economic fields and markets. This heritage and knowledge are specific to the rural areas in question.

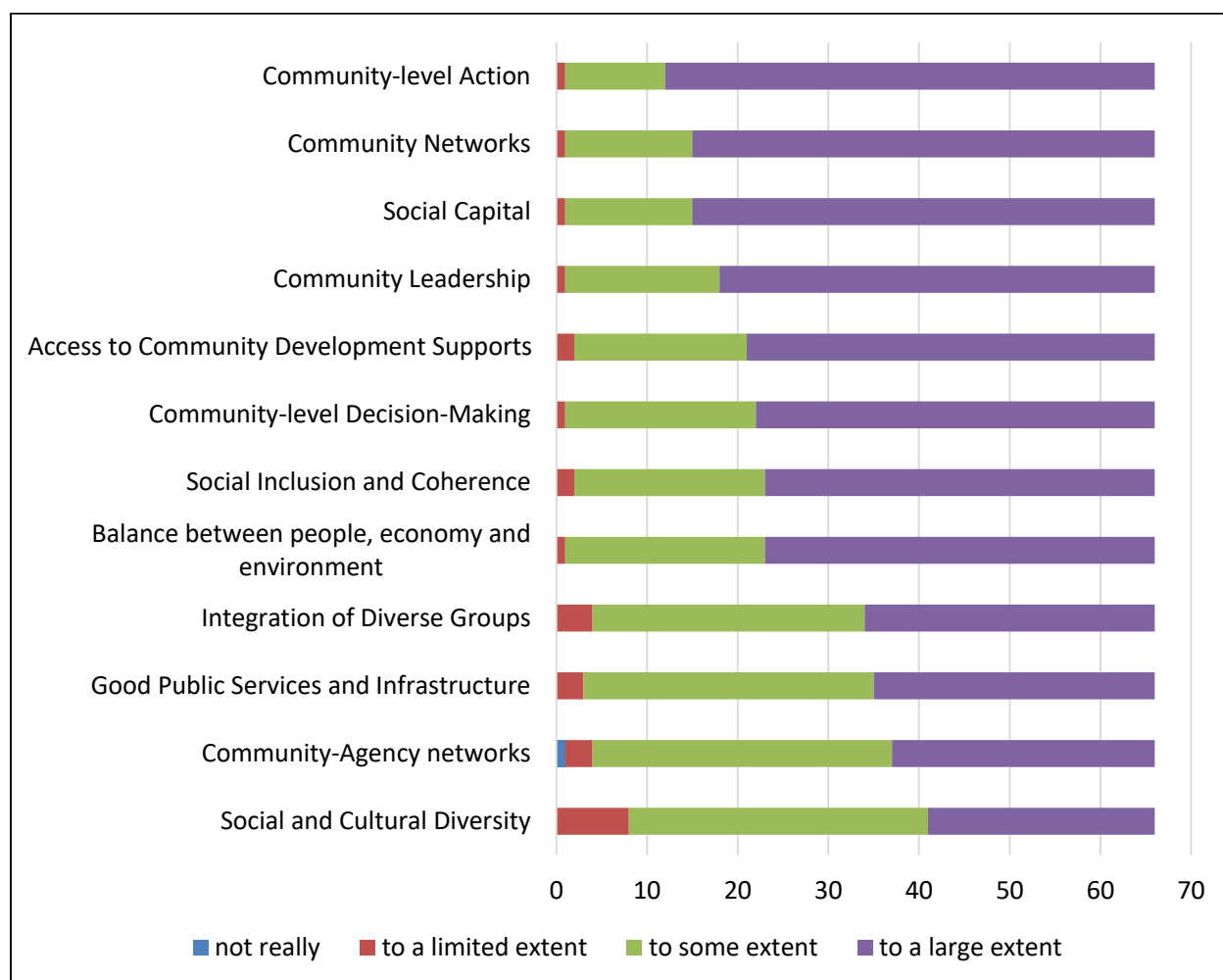
## 5.4 Factors of resilience

Respondents were presented with a list of factors, and they were invited to indicate the extent to which they perceive these factors contribute to rural community resilience and help define the temporal and spatial scales for investigating resilience in practice. The following graph (figure 6) summarises their responses.

The term 'community' and **community-related factors** feature in the factors that respondents most strongly associate with the promotion of rural community resilience: community-level action, community networks and community leadership (more than three quarters of respondents believe that community-related factors contribute 'to a large extent' to rural

community resilience). These are followed by community-level decision-making and access to community development supports. Social capital is also recognised as a highly important factor, as is the attainment of a balance between people, economy and environment. Other highly rated factors are social inclusion and coherence. Good public services and infrastructure, the integration of diverse groups, community-agency networks, and social and cultural diversity, while important, are considered to be of lesser significance in respect of promoting rural community resilience. The results indicate that the lowest emphasis has been on the promotion of diversity – relative to the other factors presented in the questionnaire.

Figure 7: Extent to which respondents perceive given factors contribute to rural community resilience.

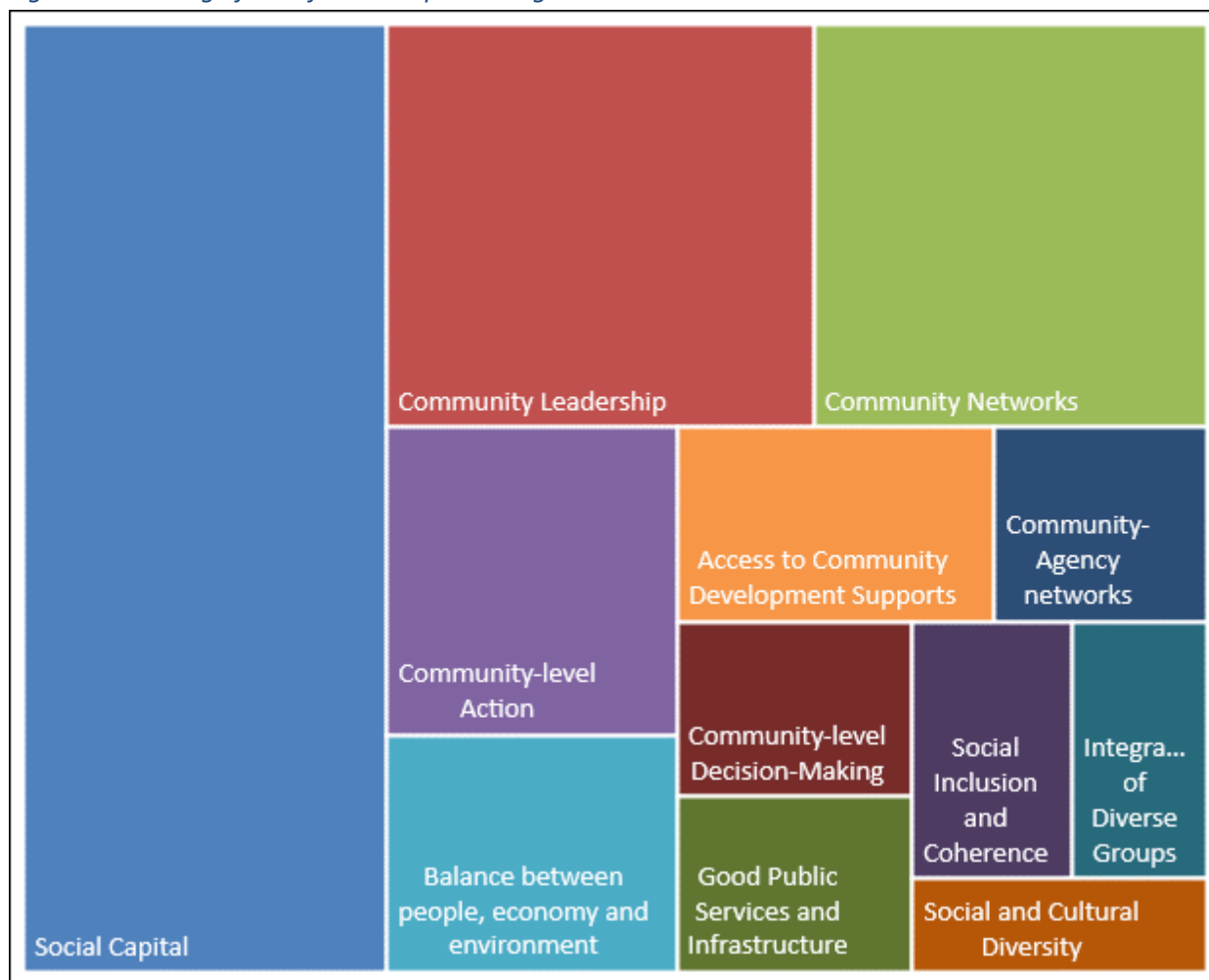


Respondents were also asked to identify which of the factors (listed above) are most significant in promoting rural community resilience. Figure 8 shows the clear consensus among respondents highlighting **social capital as the most significant factor** (n=50). Community networks (n=23) and leadership (n=25) follow as the next most relevant criteria. **Respondents also stated that all these factors are important.** As one noted, “they are all important. There is no one solution or

*one formula. Locally led partnerships are essential, but it's not resilient to be relying on volunteers. Statutory bodies and public service providers need to honour their side of the social contract with citizens.” Another remarked, “they all are important to some degree in our experience, but community leadership and community-level action are where the resilience will come from.”*

**Some differences between countries are noticed.** In Portugal, the balance between people, economy and environment was identified as being the most relevant. This was followed by access to community development supports and good public services and infrastructure. In Slovenia, very similar to responses at EU level, the most significant factors are social capital, community networks and leadership. In Ireland, respondents did not want to prioritise only for one factor since all factors are relevant.

Figure 8: Most significant factors in promoting rural resilience.



## 5.5 Barriers

The survey responses reveal some divergence in respect of the perceived barriers to the attainment of rural community resilience. Respondents reacted to the open question on ‘barriers to build’ rural community resilience indicating different thematic groups.

In Ireland, **community leaders pointed to blockages and shortcomings in public policy, while professionals tended to identify barriers and obstacles at the community level.** Among the barriers most frequently identified by community sector representatives are: 1) centralisation of public services and decision-making; bureaucracy/ paperwork; and policy gaps/ lack of clarity. The following comment is emblematic of their sentiments, “scepticism/ unwillingness to change and adapt to diversity created from top-down approaches to centralised decision-making processes, but equally through a shifting of responsibility from state to the individual/community under the guise of meaningful participation practices”.

Community sector respondents in Ireland also highlighted issues and barriers in respect of young people and the need to enable them to live and work in rural areas. In this regard, they highlighted challenges in getting planning permission to build a family home in the countryside and small villages (due to building regulations and / or lack of wastewater treatment facilities). Some of the professional stakeholders also referenced this challenge, and they noted that the absence of young families in rural communities is having detrimental knock-on impacts on local structures, social capital, services (e.g. schools) and on localities’ capacity to grow and develop organically. They also noted that the lack of young people and new blood in some rural communities is putting undue pressures on a declining pool of volunteers, and this can contribute to burnout, a decline in creativity and innovative capacity and a lack of diversity in community structures. In some areas, the housing market (and the proliferation of second homes, holiday lets and retirement properties) can mitigate against young families settling in rural areas.

Among the LAG/LDC respondents, the barriers that were most frequently cited include the **lack of a coordinated effort or a strategic approach at local level.** These barriers can be associated with apathy, leadership deficits and the absence of supports and resources for community structures. These perspectives are echoed by the freelance community facilitator, who also specifies how the absence of a plan can be a barrier to the promotion of resilience.

Across other member states, the respondents’ reactions to the open question on barriers to build rural community resilience indicating the following five thematic barriers.

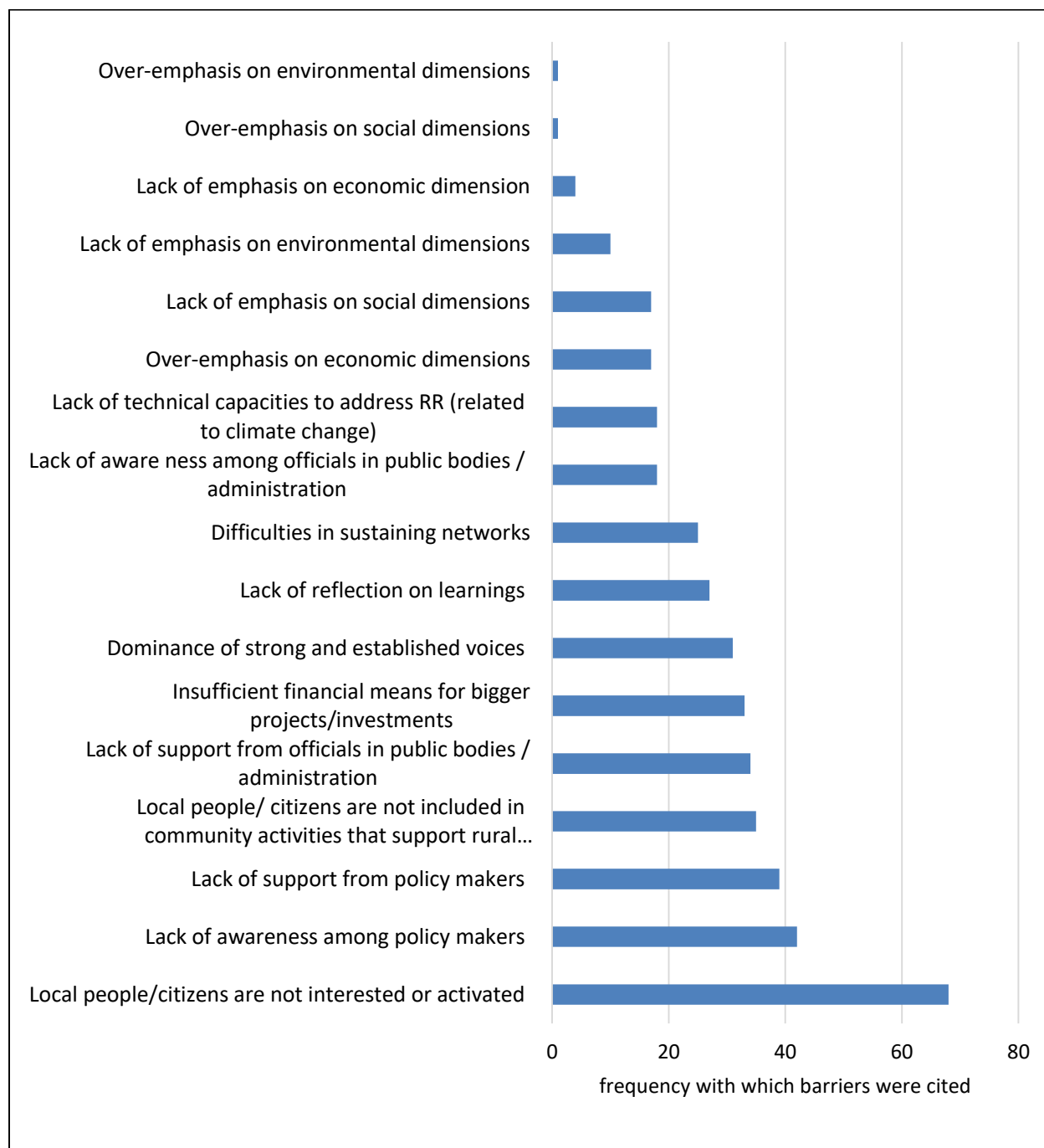
1. **Deficient participation and communication** (n=5): Rural communities with poor participatory approaches, lacking spaces for interaction and participation, insufficient cooperation or a weak sense of belonging tend to be less resilient. A constant flow of

information is necessary among local stakeholders to enable participation and active contributions to village life.

2. **Lack of social capital and community leadership** (n=5): Low social capital, more visible as lack of community networks and weak leadership, is identified as a barrier for building strong rural community resilience. Mistrust among actors and the usurpation of the leadership roles, in the search for, and implementation of solutions are also named.
3. **Negative mind-set or mentality** (n=4): People's and communities' negative attitudes and lack of hope in the future developments act as a strong hindrance to the building of rural community resilience. Old structures or old thinking or beliefs like conservatism and rooted egoism are common inhibiting factors.
4. **Politicians, bureaucracy, and decision making** (n=4): Politicians are criticised for being short-sighted, ignorant of foreseeable transformations and lacking respect for local initiatives and people. Administration and "planners" are seen as excessively bureaucratic and burdened with "*toxic management rituals*".
5. **Others** (n=7): Finally, respondents brought up other topics and barriers. Some factors affecting rural communities are considered to undermine their resilience, such as aging and social isolation. Additionally, the lack of awareness and specific knowledge about threats and the imbalance between the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of communities were named. Resisting, instead of adapting to, change is considered a mistake often made by communities.

Survey respondents were presented with a list of barriers to rural community resilience, and they were asked to identify the five most significant factors (from that list). The figure 9 synthesises their responses.

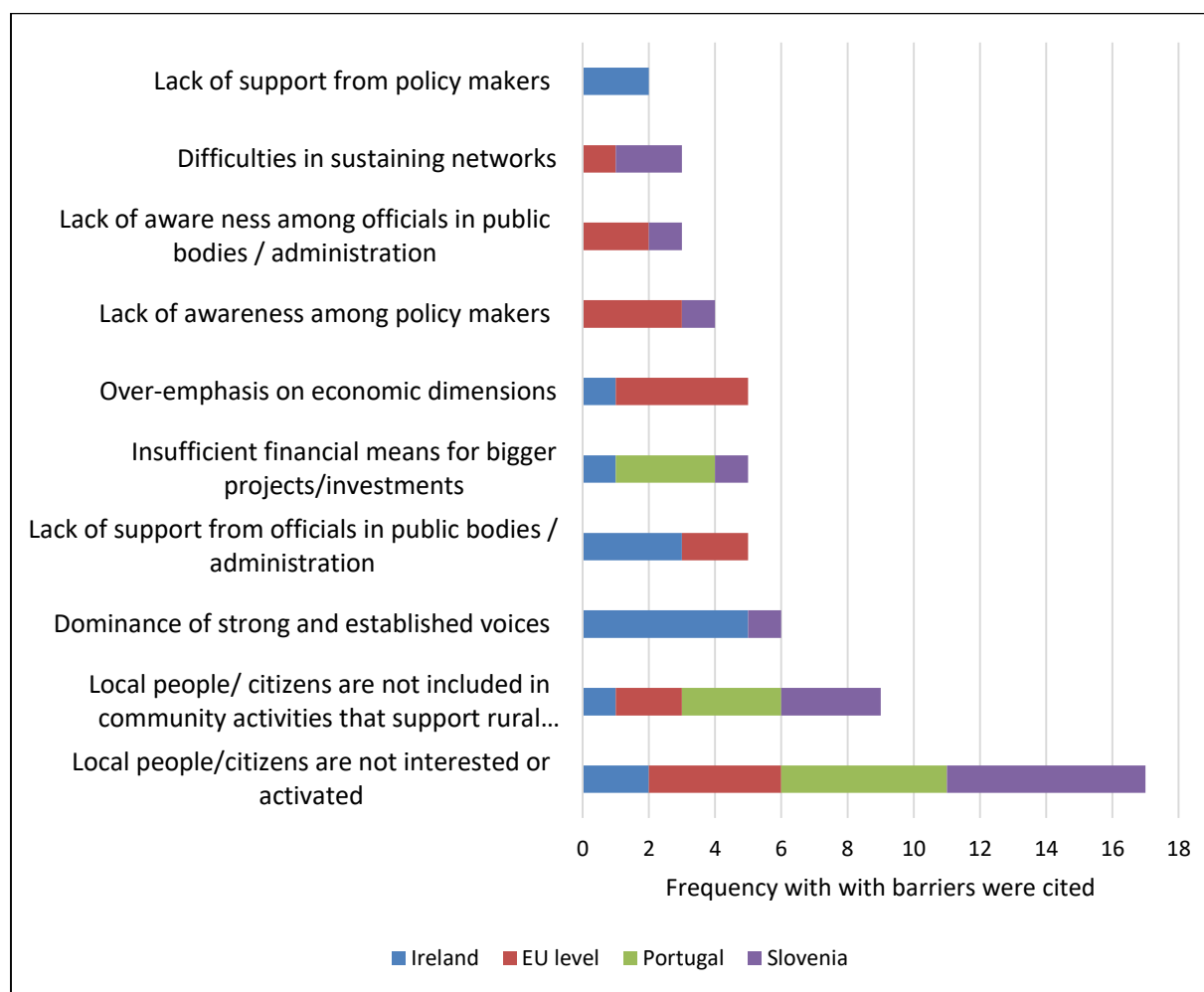
Figure 9: Most significant barriers to rural community resilience, based on a given list factors and the possibility to identify five most significant factors.



The number one barrier or obstacle is local people are not interested or activated. This is followed by lack of awareness and support from policy makers; local people are not included in community activities that support rural community resilience; dominance of strong and

established voices; lack of support from officials in public bodies/ administration; insufficient financial means for bigger projects/investments; and an over-emphasis on economic dimension. Compared to the list of most significant barriers (up to 5), the dominance of strong and established voices is highly rated, especially in Ireland, in other countries it is less identified. In Portugal, respondents also emphasised the lack of financial means for bigger projects/investments. In Slovenia, the activation of people is perceived to be the main barrier along with the long-term sustaining of established networks. Across the other EU member states, the most significant barrier is the over-emphasis on economic dimensions.

Figure 10: 'Number one' barriers to rural community resilience per country.



The survey questionnaire invited respondents to identify what needs to be done to address the particular challenge(s) they identified. The following wordcloud (figure 11) summarises their recommendations; it scales the sizes of words in proportion to the frequency with which they emerged in responses.





*action for such; it seems a lot of money is wasted through grants to advisors etc. on projects and projects then deemed unsuitable. It can appear to the volunteer on the ground that the beneficiaries are not the community but the architects, advisors, engineers who seem to extort money from Government aided projects - the brown envelope is under a different guise.”*

Peripheral and depopulated rural areas in Europe are affected by a whole series of structural deficits and challenges (employment, poverty, education, healthcare etc.), which can only rarely be counteracted by citizen involvement and participation alone. Some respondents pointed out the need for ensuring a balanced allocation of EU funding and policy interventions in these areas. Rural-proofing mechanisms could be part of the solution but need to be implemented at all levels of administration. **Trust** among actors between levels has to be built to successfully implement such an approach. In addition, politicians and intermediary organisations for local, rural and economic development must be part of this multi-level approach. A specific operationalisation of resilience in policy with strong links to implementation practice are a precondition for it to empower communities. If not, resilience runs a clear risk of becoming a hollow concept or catchword.

A stronger culture of debate and dialogue needs to be promoted inside communities themselves. There also needs to be dialogue between communities, between communities and their local authorities and between all of these actors and policymakers at higher levels. This can happen by means of supporting and installing “*transnational, inter-territorial networks*” for cooperation and best practice exchange on the specific topic of building rural community resilience.

This can be undertaken through “*opening up more opportunities for financing projects of small local initiatives and organisations in rural areas from the EU level, not only local or national*”. Social innovation and strengthening the LEADER-CLLD approach “*needs more attention*”. Finally, an important bottleneck to developing more resilient rural communities seems to be the weak support provided by local and regional administrations in which the rural communities are embedded. The respondents mention a lack of “*open-minded and flexible officials in public bodies*”. Awareness and agility to adapt is necessary for effective policy implementation and development support.

Respondents also pointed out **awareness raising**. A change of mind-set can only be achieved by continuous awareness raising and strategic communication. Relating to the issue of “unengaged communities” the respondents suggested investing in general awareness campaigns, e.g. focusing on grassroots initiatives that are already practising more resilient ways of developing the social, economic and ecological dimensions of their communities (e.g. common good, long-term visioning and planning). Development of education and training, such as REBOUND project,

also qualify as valid approaches to raise awareness and enable communities to start building resilience.

Respondents also made concrete suggestions regarding actions that can be undertaken at community level and among agencies / policy makers. The following quotes are indicative in these regards:

- ✓ Conducting regular community consultation and planning projects ensures high levels of local participation and contribution and can also support partnership-building with key stakeholders/ funders etc.;
- ✓ Awareness created through a more holistic understanding of sustainability. Only when you have a strategic overview can you actually make real and sustainable changes;
- ✓ Setting up infrastructure, places where people can meet, spend time together, socialise, develop networks and community values;
- ✓ Meitheal-type initiatives that may unite community members' local communities have more say and a voice in what happens in their communities;
- ✓ Hopefully some social events in which we can push our agenda which is about creating a heart/croí for our community and strive to ensure that everyone plays a part in the function of this particular croí;
- ✓ Sustaining of networks in terms of human capital is inextricably linked to the question of dominance and change. Sustainability in terms of finance is also linked from a point of relevancy;
- ✓ Support communities to identify and measure local need more accurately. The emphasis should be more on responding to local need and less on chasing programmes, schemes and funding;
- ✓ Involvement of local people in development projects at early stages of implementation, involvement in analysis preparation and workshops, etc. Mobilising more people, inviting those who are currently not yet involved in the local community, through various forms of formal and informal networking;
- ✓ Policy makers and funders need to listen to local development organisations and empower and adequately resource the bottom up/community led approach to local development. A new LEADER programme needs adequate financial resources, and the seven leader specificities need to be implemented.
- ✓ Continuous fieldwork and animation.
- ✓ Spotlighting the diversity of rural communities, rural areas and place-based approach.
- ✓ Civic voices need to be heard and their initiatives and organisations require stronger support and funding. One respondent proposed specific "*programmes and approaches to involve locals*" and build rural community resilience.

- ✓ The transformation of the economy to take account of planetary concerns and overcome the classic growth paradigm were also mentioned.

These recommendations coalesce around the promotion of community-led local development, with community leaders embracing and pursuing best practices in terms of citizen engagement / empowerment, good governance and collaborative planning, and with policy makers and agencies being more visionary, supportive and inclusive. All sets of stakeholders need to place greater emphasis on integration and on all dimensions of sustainable development.

## 5.6 Rural resilience addressed in policy-making at different levels

Respondents were asked about how the topic of rural community resilience is being addressed in policymaking at a local, regional, national and European level.

### At the local level

At local level, multiple local community activities and structures address rural community resilience, mainly through different community networking events, support of local products and services, infrastructure investments, and collaboration projects among different stakeholders in various fields/topics. Many respondents note that currently there is an abundance of challenges and crises in processes that rural communities are confronting. Several issues need to be solved in the short-term, which distracts local policy makers from pursuing an integrated and holistic approach. The **weak focus on animation** was also criticised. The capacity of rural communities operating at a local level to attract attention and resources from the higher levels of the multi-level administrative and territorial settings is limited. **A mismatch between local needs and support offered at higher levels** occurs. A key aspect relies on capable and articulated local leadership, which creates awareness at different levels.

The **LEADER approach** is recognised as a key instrument for building rural resilience at the local level. Through this approach, communities can find their own ways to implement their ideas and obtain funding for them. Moreover, some local **municipalities** implement inclusive budget practices where communities can participate with their ideas. The critics on rural resilience at local level are that there is **too much focus on administration and much less on animation of territories**.

The successfulness of the rural resilience, at the local level, depends on **local governance, leadership, people capacity and trust**. Moreover, **volunteers** are crucial: *“Volunteers are doing*

*the lion's share, and while agencies support us, too much is reliant on individual personalities and relationships. We need a more systemic approach to the promotion of resilience.”*

### **At the regional level**

Rural resilience, at regional level, is being **addressed to a limited extent**. Respondents had a predominantly negative assessment of resilience-building in general at the regional level. One remarked, *“it is more a result of obliging EU policies”* than a deliberate approach by regional actors. Intrinsic motivation seems to be lacking.

The LEADER/CLLD methodology and some specific territorial programmes in peripheral areas were also mentioned as a good practice in the context of the regional level. Rural resilience is addressed by Local Action Groups (actually, this is a sub-regional level) and promoted by bodies such as Chambers of Agriculture and Rural Development and by Regional Development Agencies to some extent.

**At the regional level, the primary focus is on programmes and on urban spaces.** Fields of action with a regional scope like climate adaptation or spatial planning play a role in regional development programmes and contribute to rural community resilience to some extent. However, some respondents highlighted that the regional decision-making level is based on and primarily focused on urban development. One respondent answered: *“Urban-rural linkages are shaped by the outflow of the middle class from urban to rural areas”*. Lastly, regional administrative bodies usually tend to *“apply solutions that are designed without taking into account the local population and therefore not adapted to them and without involving the local population in their design and execution”*.

At the regional level, it is even more evident that other challenges are prevailing: *“I do not think that the issue of the resilience of rural communities is in the foreground, more focus is at solving current burning issues.”*

### **At national level**

At national level, rural resilience is being addressed **weakly/poorly or without an integrated approach, with some exceptions**. Several commentators (Forde et al 2016, Navarro et al 2016, O’Donoghue 2014) have argued that community-led and managed local development has been severely undermined, if not eradicated totally, by the constraining cohesion, integration and alignment processes that have taken place in European countries over the past decade or more. In Ireland, this occurred since the collapse of Social Partnership in 2009 and with new legislation prescribing the reform of local government in 2014. This has resulted in a loss of funding and a

loss of autonomy for partnership companies and lack of ownership of projects by local communities. Funding priorities are now decided at a central level and community groups must apply for such funding according to a set of criteria decided elsewhere. Therefore, the space for locally-led participatory planning and therefore resilience building has narrowed considerably (ILDN 2017).

Respondents overwhelmingly evaluate the fostering of rural community resilience at the national policy level as weak, deficient or even non-existent. In some cases, it has a “declarative nature” and allows “*no integrated or synergetic interventions and cooperation among relevant managing authorities for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)*”. This is because “*public administration, particularly on a middle management level does not have to fear any consequences if they do not work or implement national or EU policies. There is a lack of measured milestones and consequences related to achieving planned results.*” Finally, respondents also added that there is a distance between the national and local level, producing a “*lack of sensitivity*” for local conditions and limited possibilities to adapt national policy “*often generating rejection*” of local actors and communities.

In many countries, rural resilience is limited to agricultural economic resilience and locally produced food. Some policies support alternative energy production, addressing climate changes or smart solutions in rural areas: “*At the moment, the focus appears to be on energy and addressing climate change rather than the community.*” In addition, ongoing campaigns and events like the European Rural Parliament or advertising campaigns to promote moving to the countryside were mentioned as good practices promoting resilience.

### **At the EU level**

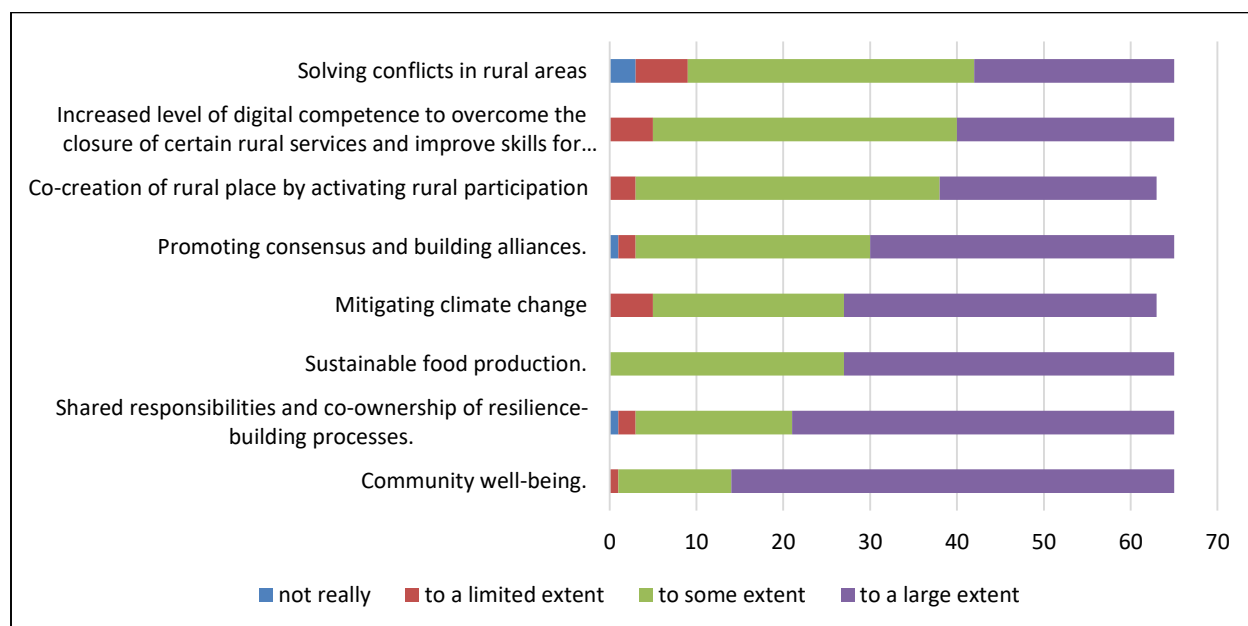
The European Commission has put lots of emphasis on this topic in the last programme period, but there are still many challenges and different understandings at EU/national/local level. Along the same lines as for the national level of policymaking, a majority of the respondents consider that, at the EU level, the promotion of rural community resilience is being insufficiently addressed. Specifically, EU policy guidelines tend to be vague and remain a discursive practice with limited practical implications for rural or regional development: “*The EU has put a lot of emphasis on this in the last period, but often other priorities come in the focus at national level. Also, crises change policies fast.*” The **LEADER programme** was the most mentioned as a European initiative and policy-building agenda with practical implications for building rural community resilience. Among the mentioned examples of policy making at EU level are: LEADER-CLLD, National Strategic Rural Frameworks, Regional and rural development programmes, Natural hazard prevention plans at a regional level, Rural pact and long-term vision for rural areas

and Smart villages. In Portugal, respondents also specifically mentioned the importance of European Social Fund.

## 5.7 Future factors

Respondents were also asked (in a multiple-choice question) to describe what factors would influence the resilience of rural communities in the future. The main results are shown in Figure 12 below.

*Figure 12: The most and least relevant factors in terms of promoting rural community resilience in future.*



According to respondents, the most relevant factor in terms of promoting rural community resilience in future is community well-being. Co-creation of rural place by activating rural participation is perceived to be important only to some extent. It is more important to ensure shared responsibilities and co-ownership of resilience-building process. Important factors for the future are also sustainable food production, mitigating climate change and promoting consensus and building alliances. Less relevant factors are increased level of digital competence to overcome the closure of certain rural services and improve skills for employability and solving conflicts in rural areas.

An open-ended question identified further factors influencing rural community resilience in the future. Building strategic partnerships and networking across the board of topics affecting communities will be relevant, according to respondents. Inclusion and participation of all members of the community in shaping their own development path was also mentioned. Lastly,

becoming more independent of external resources and becoming more self-organised would be relevant.

## 5.8 Measuring rural resilience

Rural resilience is difficult to quantify. Respondents proposed various approaches and indicators to measure rural community resilience. The following summary subdivides them in groups. Moreover, we can divide indicators in three groups: 1) immediate indicator (e.g. numbers), 2) medium indicator: increased accessibility and participation and 3) long-term indicators: effective changes, improvement, resilience.

	Indicators
Demographic	Net migration, young age structure (young people returning/staying in rural areas).
Economic	Share of population at risk of poverty, number of created opportunities for quality 'jobs' in the backyard, number of SMEs in community, commuting distance, Gini coefficient, number of short supply chains, number of activities to promote local products and services, share of cultivated agricultural land, share of internal and external financing of different projects, community activities, etc.
Social	Number of associations, cooperatives, clubs, and other civil society organisations, number of active members, participation of community members in meaningful local roles/occupations, number of new participants every year, level of engagement in community, level of volunteering; level of helpfulness in crises, number of collaboration projects, level of cultural conservation and other approaches for measuring social capital.
Environmental	Availability/production of renewable energy, green jobs, level of environmental protection, air, water pollution, biodiversity indicators,
Governance	Existence of a village/community strategy or action plan, capacity to apply project funding, capacity to build consensus on strategic priorities, capacity to set strategic targets, share of different entities in implemented projects, level of good working relationships with stakeholders, number of innovative projects planned or on-going, number of community facilities, number and diversity of community events.
Other	Happiness and satisfaction index of people in rural areas, number of awards/recognitions.



## 5.9 Education and training

Respondents overwhelmingly evaluated the **role of education and training as being fundamental for the promotion of rural community resilience**. Many have positively experienced how the capacity and knowledge of citizens and stakeholders developed in the context of capacity building, training and education in different thematic contexts: smart villages and digitalisation, innovative agricultural practices, supplementary activities on farm, rural tourism, renewable energy, transformational practices, cooperatives and employment, climate change, heritage, feminism and female empowerment as well as social innovations. It is important to start with educational activities at early stages of school and continue during higher education. One respondent explained: *“My point of view is that resilience is closely linked to the skills that people have and that we acquire, also in the context of lifelong learning.”*

Education and training also help to build social capital among participants, often members of the same community: *“Education is the best way to develop new projects, create community initiatives and create resilience.”* Discussing, learning new and inspiring examples also empowers people and communities who are beneficiaries of such education and training frameworks.

One respondent stressed the importance of educating people about ideals and value concepts such as an *“orientation towards the common good and long-term development, democratic and environmental values as well as social participation (how to organise collectively, how to make collective decisions, how to devise and design collective projects and how to seek resources and implement these collective projects)”*.

Asked specifically about **capacity building and community development**, respondents also confirmed the **relevance of these factors for building stronger and more resilient rural communities**. One person remarked interestingly *“it is a precondition. Disintegrated and unaware communities cannot be resilient”*. Capacity building enables community members and organisations to implement projects effectively, conferring the necessary knowledge and abilities on them. It also *“influences the behaviour of people and empowers them”* reinforcing the aspect of *“self-confidence”*. It also *“helps to build new networks and support development projects”*. Other respondents identify a clear link between community or capacity building and the strengthening of social capital as a main driver for more resilient rural communities. Lastly, capacity building and community development contribute to more self-determination and self-efficacy of communities, allowing them to take over the reins *“of their own future and resilience”*.

## 6 Qualitative approach towards analysing needs of rural communities to determine what is required to improve their resilience

For deeper analysis of state-of the rural resilience and community well-being additional eighteen interviews (six in Ireland, six in Slovenia, three in Portugal and three in other EU member states) were conducted. The main topics discussed in the interviews were: 1) factors of rural resilience (What promotes rural resilience?); 2) challenges and barriers for rural resilience; 3) in-deep description of one good practise and 4) recommendations for REBOUND and for education and training providers.

**In promoting rural resilience**, the main factors are:

- **acknowledging change and on-going capacity building** (e.g. trainings for empowering rural communities on different topics);
- **animation activities and engaging with locals** (e.g. events), with equity of access to services, working on collaboration potential, which is highly based on mutual trust and building common community values, synchronizing visions of rural community development;
- **local service provision with a community structure** that is an umbrella body and which supports community development in a cluster of communities;
- **good governance** (e.g. having a participative structure) along with local ownership.

Rural resilience is mainly promoted by co-creation of Local Development Strategy and/or designing common strategy of development. In respect of defining a resilient rural community we can quote one of the interviewees: *“A flexible, cohesive community where the actors know each other, know their roles and divide the work well among themselves”* - Professional working for a statutory / public service body, 2022.

**Challenges and barriers** for rural resilience:

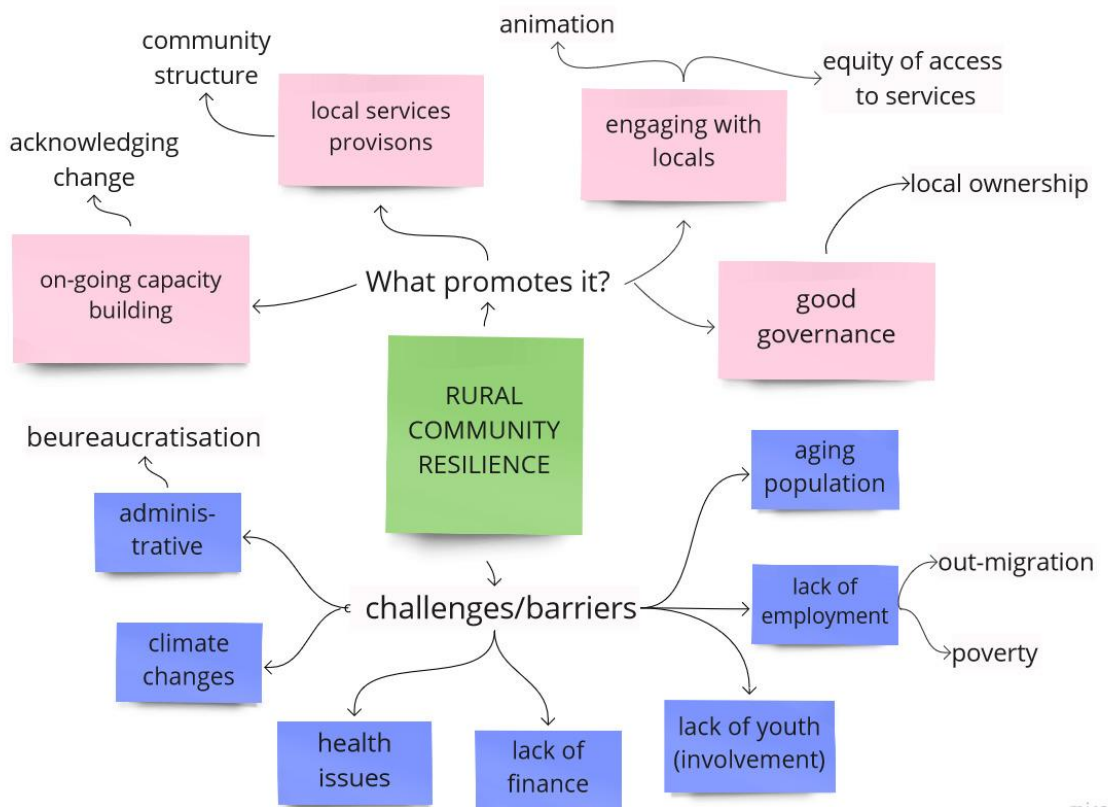
- **Ageing population** and out-migration, resulting in a lack of innovations, under-supply of specific services, lack of agricultural rejuvenation;
- **Lack of employment**, especially lack of well-paid employment for young people resulting in **out-migration**, poverty;
- **Lack of youth (involvement)**, some people being reluctant to let power go, **resistance to changes**, lack of access to professional supports, also strong centralistaion in some countries;
- **Climate changes**, natural hazards and other different environmental pressures;

- **Health issues** (mental health, covid), especially in remote rural areas rural isolation / loneliness;
- **Administrative barriers and bureaucratisation** (e.g. LEADER), and
- **Lack of financial means** for supporting (investments) projects and initiatives in rural areas, **huge reliance on short-term programmes** (being programme driven), a high competition for funds (e. competing for scarce resources between powerful, usually public bodies, and weaker stakeholders – individuals).

### Educations and training recommendations:

- examples of good practices and practice-based learning,
- communication, how to talk to community,
- facilitation and animation skills, stakeholder mapping and engagement,
- marketing and promotion for communities, promoting connected communities,
- outreach programmes for those who are deprived of certain services and rights,
- project management and business skills,
- models of good governance.

Figure 13: Key findings in interviews.



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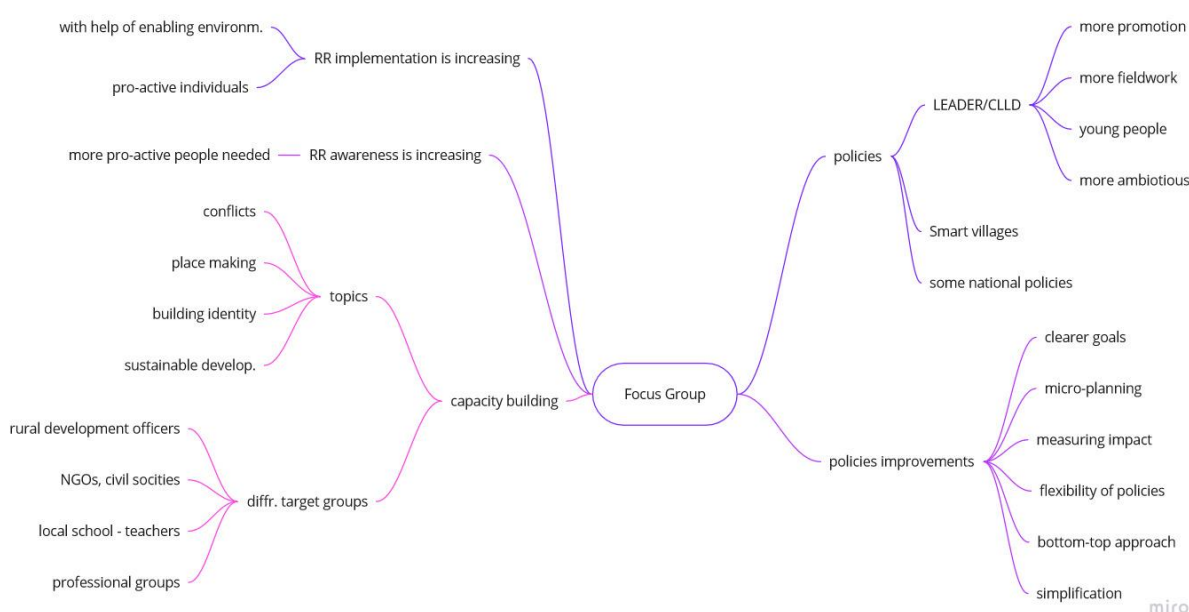
In order to promote discussion of previous results and a deeper analysis of state-of-the art of rural 4 focus groups (each in a single member state) were organised. There topics were discussed:

- 1) Is rural community resilience increasing, decreasing or staying the same?;
- 2) The role of public policy;
- 3) The contribution of education and training.

The awareness about the concept of rural community resilience is increasing, but in the implementation, there are **peaks and troughs**. In Ireland, increasing of rural resilience is evident in respect of cultural resilience, including use of the Irish language, and in respect of community development activities. Declines / decreases are evident in respect of local service provision (especially health). Similar in other countries, there are considerable differences among communities. Some communities have vision / plans, but others do not. Some stakeholders – individuals are very pro-active, whilst others need lots of continuous support of enabling environment.

Stakeholders generally believe that **current policies are not conducive** to rural community resilience enough and are lagging, quoting one participant “Often policies are the most NOT resilient factors on diverse changes that are happening.”. The disadvantage of policies is that they are not place-based, more tailor-made policy for rural communities is needed. On the other hand, policy approaches by themselves are not likely to motivate rural communities to be reflective and innovative. Policy mechanisms for distributing and multiplying good examples and successful approaches are missing. Widely recognised tool for rural resilience is LEADER approach.

Figure 14: Example of focus group findings in Slovenia.



## 7 Analysis of strategic and operational documents on rural resilience at local, national and at a European level

Table 1: Collected examples of instruments and documents on rural resilience at different levels in partner's countries (IR: Ireland, SI: Slovenia, PT: Portugal).

EU	National	Local and regional
LEADER/CLLD	National Planning Framework (IE)	Local Development Companies and Local Development Initiatives with Local Development Strategies (IE)
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	Climate Action (IE)	Local Development Strategy of Local Action Group (PT, SI, IE)
European Regional Development Fund	Our Rural Future (IE)	Local Contracts of Social Development (CLDS) (PT)
European Social Fund	Portugal 2030 Strategy (PT)	Business Creation Support Methodology - Creation of companies in rural areas (CRER) (PT)
European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund	CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (PT, SI)	PROVERE: Program for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources (PT)
Smart Villages	Rural Development Programme 2020, 2023-2027 (PT, SI)	Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas in the Northern Region (EMER-N) (PT)
Long-term vision for EU rural areas: stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous	Interior Enhancement Program (PT)	+CO3SO (PT)
Rural Pact	Recovery and Resilience Plan (SI)	Qualifica Program (PT)
		Long-term Development Programme of Municipality (SI)
		Regional Development Programmes (SI)

## 7.1 EU level

The term “resilience” has only recently made its way into EU rural policies. For example, in the “Rural Inspiration Awards” organised by the European Network for Rural Development, the category of “Resilient Futures” has been present since 2021 – previously projects dealing with resilience were classified under other categories, such as “Rural Revitalisation” (2019) or “Climate Adaptation” (2020)<sup>1</sup>. In the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) adopted in 2013, the term “resilience” or “resilient” is used only in the context of climate resilience, and mainly in connection with forestry production. Even in the next generation of EU funding, the RDR adopted in 2021 talks mainly about “resilient agriculture” or “resilient farms”. However, in the Action Plan developed in 2021 to implement the Long Term Vision of EU Rural Areas, one of the four building blocks is called “Resilient Rural Areas” and it covers activities aiming to make rural areas “more resilient to climate change, natural hazards and economic crises”<sup>2</sup>.

In spite of this relatively recent emergence of the concept in EU policies, a considerable range of policy instruments can support activities and initiatives to build up community resilience in EU rural areas. Instruments and some initiatives will be discussed in the following sections.

### 7.1.1 LEADER/CLLD

LEADER/CLLD is recognised as **the most important funding source** for rural resilience. LEADER (from the French “Liaison entre actions de développement de l’économie rurale”, i.e. “Links between activities for the development of rural areas”), introduced on a pilot basis as a “Community Initiative” financed directly by the European Commission in 1991, and since 2000 it was included in national or regional Rural Development Programmes financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). It was designed to address the lack of success of „mainstream” regional policies, which did not manage to close the gap between poorer areas and regions, very often rural, and their richer neighbours. The LEADER approach capitalises on the endogenous potential of rural areas and communities, which are able to generate innovation and growth when given the freedom to decide what they want to do in their area and how they would do it. The initial phase of LEADER as a Community Initiative (1991-1999) has led to the establishment of certain principles which must be met in order for local development in rural

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/rural-inspiration-awards/rural-inspiration-awards-2022-the-future-is-youth\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/rural-inspiration-awards/rural-inspiration-awards-2022-the-future-is-youth_en)

<sup>2</sup> [https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan\\_en](https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan_en)

areas to be successful. These are sometimes called the „seven principles” or „seven features” of LEADER and include:

- The bottom-up approach: the local community initiates the development activities in its area and takes key decisions such as the preparation of the local strategy or the selection and implementation of projects;
- The area-based approach: it is the local community that defines the area which they want to develop, and the public funding is directed to this area as a whole, and not to individual sectors of the economy;
- The partnership approach: local actors (from the public, private and NGO sectors) work together and jointly decide what is needed for their area, without any of them dominating the others; such partnerships are called Local Action Groups (LAGs);
- Multi-sectoral integration: the activities supported by LEADER have to be interrelated and form a coherent whole, capitalising on linkages between sectors to achieve synergies and potential multiplier effects;
- Innovation: local actors are encouraged to seek new solutions to the local challenges; this refers not only to the projects supported, but also to innovative methods of community involvement and animation;
- Decentralisation of decision-making: this was considered one of the key success factors of LEADER, by moving away from decisions being taken at the level of national or regional Managing Authorities and giving the full power to the local level;
- Networking and cooperation: it is important that local actors do not feel they are isolated with their problems but are in contact with other areas across the EU who face similar challenges and with whom they can jointly explore possible solutions; this involves exchanges and learning from each other (networking) as well as implementing joint projects (cooperation)<sup>3</sup>.

The LEADER approach was generally recognised as an effective method of local development in rural areas, and evaluation results showed its high capacity to involve local actors and strengthen local economies<sup>4</sup>. From the year 2000 LEADER has been applied to all kinds of rural areas across the EU, and since 2007 it has become mandatory for all Rural Development Programmes. Thus,

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<sup>3</sup> In a number of recent publications, the last two features, networking and cooperation, are presented as two separate principles, while the principle of „decentralised decision-making” sometimes disappears. This reflects, unfortunately, to some extent the reality of LEADER implementation across the EU, where with successive editions of the approach the autonomy of the local actors was often reduced due to administrative considerations.

<sup>4</sup> See for example the [Ex-post evaluation of the Community Initiative LEADER II](#) (2003)

in all Member States and regions which use EAFRD funding, the Managing Authorities must allocate at least 5% of the rural development budget to LEADER. There are member states where 100% of rural areas are covered by LAGs (e.g. Slovenia).

One of the key characteristics of LEADER is the fact that once the local development strategy has been approved, the local partnership receives a budget (from EAFRD, ERDF or EMFF with national co-financing) and can support individual projects, implemented by public or private actors (or by the LAG itself). The selection of projects takes place at the level of the local partnership. Beneficiaries receive advice and guidance from the LAG on how to prepare project applications, and also during the implementation and reporting phase. Very often projects supported by LEADER are quite small and are implemented by beneficiaries that do not typically apply for mainstream EU funding schemes.

Following the successful application of territorial approaches to rural development, since 2007 the same method can also be applied to coastal areas and can be financed with the European Fisheries Fund (now called the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, EMFAF). Since 2014 the range of EU Funds where CLLD could be implemented has been extended to cover also the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and, since 2021, also the Just Transition Fund (JTF). In these Funds, the approach is no longer called LEADER (since this acronym is specifically linked with “rural economies”), but “Community-Led Local Development” (CLLD). Since 2014 it is also **possible to finance one local strategy with several EU Funds**. The application of **CLLD in EAFRD is mandatory** and managing authorities have to allocate at least 5% of total rural development budget to LEADER. In other funds CLLD is not mandatory and Managing Authorities can decide if they want to use this approach or not, and under which fund. In programming period 2014-2020, LEADER/CLLD in Portugal is funded by all four European structural and investment funds, in Slovenia by three funds: EAFRD, ERDF and EMFAF and in Portugal by two funds: EAFRD and EMFF.

*Table 2: European structural and investment funds in LEADER/CLLD by partner’s countries in programming period 2014-2020.*

European structural and investment funds	Slovenia	Portugal	Ireland
EAFRD	✓	✓	✓
EMFF	✓	✓	✓
ESF		✓	
ERDF	✓	✓	



In the 2014-2020 period, there were 2830 LAGs in rural areas of EU, of which 2206 were funded exclusively by the EAFRD and the remaining 624 were multifunded<sup>5</sup>. At the time of writing (December 2022), the selection of LAGs for rural development programmes for 2021-2027 has not started yet in most member states.

### 7.1.2 Other instruments of the EU funds

While LEADER/CLLD is generally recognised as the most important funding source for rural resilience, there are also other measures/priorities of EU funds which can be used to support rural communities in becoming more resilient. The **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** envisages support for such activities as, for example: 1) investments in broadband and flood protection infrastructure, 2) diversifying farmers' incomes into non-agricultural activities, 3) support to producer organisations, producer groups and cooperation for innovative solutions along the food value chain, 4) information, knowledge sharing and advisory services, especially targeting the protection of nature, environment and climate, including environmental education and awareness actions and the development of rural businesses and communities.

**Resources of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) can be used occasionally** by rural communities to finance, for example, infrastructural investments, business development, or support to facilitate employment of vulnerable groups.

However, the availability of these funding sources for rural communities depends on decisions of national and regional authorities for whom rural development is seldom considered a priority. The main target of EAFRD funding remains support to agricultural producers and their organisations, while ERDF and ESF funding is very often concentrated in big cities and on large-scale projects, for efficiency reasons or as a result of political power play. Thus, rural communities often struggle to find funding sources that would be adapted to their needs. This is reflected in many responses of the stakeholder survey presented above.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on: <https://ldnet.eu/implementing-cohesion-policy-funds-through-multi-fund-clld/>

### 7.1.3 Other frameworks, initiatives and strategies

#### Smart Villages initiative

Smart Villages in the EU started from high-level policy discussions. Following an initiative by some members of the European Parliament, three European Commissioners (for Agriculture, Regional Policy, and Mobility and Transport) launched the “EU Action for Smart Villages” in 2017. However, many rural communities have applied innovative solutions to specific challenges they were facing for a long time, long before the term “Smart Village” became popular.

According to a working definition developed in 2019,

*“Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities. They rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular by mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas. The initiation and the implementation of Smart Village strategies may build on existing initiatives and can be funded by a variety of public and private sources”<sup>6</sup>.*

This long definition shows that it is not easy to see if a given village can be classified as “Smart” or not. The use of digital tools – which is essential in the concept of “smart cities” – is not a decisive factor, although many Smart Villages rely on them. Among the topics often addressed by smart villages are the following: 1) digitisation of rural areas; 2) innovation in rural services, 3) renewable energy, 4) environmental sustainability, 5) urban-rural linkages, 6) asset-based value chains (agricultural and/or non-agricultural).<sup>7</sup>

In practice, Smart Villages are different from other rural policy tools mentioned in this report in that they **don’t have a budget** associated with them: it is up to managing authorities at national or regional level to find an appropriate funding mechanism for such initiatives. Many member states are planning to use LEADER/CLLD to support Smart Villages. For example, in Poland, LEADER LAGs can provide small grants (a little over EUR 1.000) to villages in their area interested in developing a Smart Village action plan. Later, projects contributing to these action plans will be able to apply for LEADER funding and will be prioritised in the selection process.

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<sup>6</sup> See: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en)

<sup>7</sup> Source: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg\\_smart-villages\\_scoping-paper\\_draft.pdf](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg_smart-villages_scoping-paper_draft.pdf)

## Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas

Following a public consultation launched in September 2020, in 2022, the European Commission presented an action plan for sustainable, cohesive and integrated rural development, where the term of resilience is clearly emphasised. It identifies four areas of action in EU, with the following objectives: 1) Stronger: empowering rural communities with access to services and social innovation; 2) Connected: improving connectivity in terms of transport and digital access; 3) Resilient: conservation of natural resources and ecological agriculture, against climate change; 4) Prosperous: diversifying economic activities and adding value to agriculture, agri-food activities and agritourism.

### Rural Pact

The Rural Pact is a framework for cooperation. It promotes cooperation between European, national, regional and local governments, civil society organisations, businesses, academics and citizens to a rural vision. The objectives are: 1) amplifying rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda; 2) structuring and enabling networking, collaboration and mutual learning; 3) encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitments to act for the vision. It contributes to achieving the shared goals of the Communication outlining the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas.

## 7.2 National level

The use of the term “resilience” in national policies is **modest** and usually used in the context of climate resilience (e.g. Climate Action in Ireland) and farming resilience (often initiated by CAP). Recently, the term resilience has made way to most of national policies within national recovery and resilience plans after COVID-19 epidemic, initiated by European Commission and prepared by each country.

In Ireland, it was developed the framework of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025. Transfer of the term ‘resilience’ in national policies seems slightly faster in Portugal (comparing to Slovenia and Ireland), and it is used in strategic documents Portugal 2030 to “ensure greater resilience and cohesion, social and territorial in Portugal” and in the Rural Development Programme - within one of the four major areas of interventions called “local development and resilience”.

Despite the fact that use of the term “resilience” in national policies is modest and often initiated by frameworks at EU level, considerable range of operational documents and strategies at

national level can support activities and initiatives to build up rural community resilience. Addressed fields of rural resilience in strategic and operational documents on national level are:

- promoting even regional development (e.g. National Planning Framework in Ireland; Regional Development Programmes in Slovenia, Interior Enhancement Programme in Portugal);
- sustainability of agriculture and development of innovative farming practices (e.g. national CAP strategic plans);
- climate changes (e.g. Climate Action in Ireland);
- business, employment and social inclusion (e.g. Portugal 2030 Strategy); and
- rural development (Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 in Ireland, Rural Development Programme in Slovenia and Portugal).

Specific documents per country are described in the following section.

### 7.2.1 Ireland

#### **National Planning Framework**

Ireland's National Planning Framework (NPF) represents an over-arching policy for planning and development over a twenty-year period (to 2040). During this period, it is anticipated that Ireland's population will increase by approximately one million, and the NPF provides for the spatial distribution of that population along with the associated infrastructure and services. The NPF acknowledges the need for more balanced regional development in Ireland, and it notes the importance of having counterbalances to the growth of the Greater Dublin Area. Ireland's second-tier cities (Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) are charged with absorbing at least half the anticipated population increase between 2020 and 2040. The NPF also places significant emphasis on cross-border cooperation with Northern Ireland, including investing in infrastructure in the Border Region – which is predominantly a rural region. The NPF is a very significant policy document, and Ireland's national development plan (NDP) has been aligned with it. Thus, public policy is characterised by a high degree of coherence between spatial and sectoral objectives, as NDP investments have to be in line with NPF objectives.

The NPF's commitment to **promoting regional development** and to arresting the exponential growth of Dublin, at the expense of other regions, offer opportunities for rural communities. The NPF's strategic objectives and priorities are influenced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), and they include compact growth (including consolidating rural towns and villages), enhancing regional accessibility and improving public transport. The NPF provides for investment in Ireland's heritage and water infrastructure as well as the conservation

of environmental resources. The NPF envisages investing in soft infrastructure and human capital, including life-long education, childcare and health services. It contains a dedicated chapter and set of commitments in respect of rural economic and community development and ‘rural development’ is a named investment priority.

The National Planning Framework is a legal document; it has legislative status, and it makes statutory provision for the formulation of three regional spatial and economic strategies (RSESs). These have been formulated by Ireland’s three regional assemblies – the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly, the Southern Regional Assembly and Northern and Western Regional Assembly. The RSESs outline how the NPF will be delivered at regional level, and they present demographic targets, strategic priorities and spatial planning considerations that are binding on all local authorities. Thus, county development plans are, as they are being formulated, aligning with their relevant RSES. Each RSES notes the assets and potential of their constituent local authority and sub-county areas, and they envisage several inter-county collaborations and transboundary initiatives.

Since the coming on stream of the NPF (2018) and the RSES (2020), the Irish Government has put in place a corresponding investment framework. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund provides for investment in rural territories; it is administered by the Ministry for Rural and Community Development – with most projects being pre-selected or put forward by county councils. As a result, there have been several notable investments in environmental and infrastructural works in rural towns and villages. The Ministry has operated a dedicated funding programme for community centres, and it is supporting the rollout of ICT infrastructure in rural communities. Rural stakeholders can also apply for funds under the NPF’s climate action and disruptive technologies funds.

### **Climate Action**

Ireland’s Climate Action Strategy comprises five strands as follows: tackling climate breakdown; a national climate policy; adapting to climate breakdown; EU and international climate action; and climate science. The National Climate Policy establishes the national objective of achieving a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. It includes significant carbon-reduction targets – to 80% of 1990 levels, and it makes specific provisions in respect of the rural economy. Consequently, there is considerable public debate about sustainable food production, including the possible culling of the national herd – to reduce methane levels. Rural communities are also being affected by the transition to a zero-carbon society, and they are currently adapting to restrictions on the harvesting and sale of turf. At the same time, opportunities are emerging, as rural communities benefit from improved bus services (to discourage car use) and the retrofitting / insulation of community buildings.

### **Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025**

Our Rural Future represents the Irish Government's blueprint for a post-COVID-19 recovery and development of rural Ireland in the period 2021-2025.

### 7.2.2 Portugal

#### **Portugal 2030 Strategy**

The Portugal 2030 Strategy is a programme-based on strategic axes, with a view to advancing the country's economic and social development over the next decade, embodying the vision of recovering the economy and protecting employment, while making the next decade a period of recovery and convergence of Portugal with the EU to ensure greater resilience and cohesion - social and territorial.

It represents a strategic reference for the various policy instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) and the next Multi-Year Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, in order to adequately respond to the global challenges ahead. This strategy is structured around four thematic agendas central to the development of the economy, society and territory of Portugal by 2030: 1) People first: a better demographic balance, greater inclusion, less inequality; 2) Digitalization, innovation and qualifications as engines of development, 3) Climate transition and resource sustainability; 4) An externally competitive and internally cohesive country.

#### **CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027**

An active management of the whole territory, based on an innovative and sustainable agricultural and forestry production, is the vision that summarizes the national strategy included in the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (PEPAC) for the period 2023-2027. The resilience of the soil resource with agricultural, forestry and agroforestry use throughout the territory is a necessary condition to achieve the objectives of the CAP in Portugal.

#### **Rural Development Programme 2020**

The RDP 2020 is the financial instrument that, through the EAFRD, supports the agroforestry sector and rural development in mainland Portugal, complementing the other instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy, Cohesion Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, framed in Portugal 2020. The guiding principles of the RDP 2020 are the sustainable growth of agroforestry activities throughout the country, through measures, actions and operations integrated into four major areas of intervention: 1) innovation and knowledge; 2) competitiveness and production organization; 3) environment, efficiency in the use of resources and climate; 4) local development and resilience.

## Interior Enhancement Program

Territorial cohesion policy, with regard to valuing the interior, is based on correcting territorial asymmetries, by attracting investment to the interior, diversifying and qualifying the productive fabric associated with stimulating entrepreneurial and business capacity, taking advantage of the endogenous potential, the promotion of the settlement of people in the interior territories and the affirmation of cross-border territories. The four areas of intervention are: 1) Valuing the Endogenous Resources and Entrepreneurial Capacity of the Interior, 2) Promoting Cross-border Cooperation for the Internationalization of Goods and Services, 3) Attracting Investment and Settling People in the Countryside, 4) Making the Interior Territories more Competitive.

### 7.2.3 Slovenia

At the national level, in 2021, the government adopted the national **Recovery and Resilience Plan** (RRP) which serves as the basis for drawing on the funding available under the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF). This is the largest financial mechanism under the EU's Recovery and Resilience Package Next Generation EU under which Slovenia is also eligible to funding under the React-EU initiative, the Just Transition Fund and Rural Development. In its RRP Slovenia has identified development areas and the related reforms and investments that will help mitigate the negative economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic and prepare the country for the challenges related to green and digital transition. Slovenia's RRP envisages utilisation of EUR 1.8 billion in grants and a good EUR 666 million in loans (Recovery and Resilience Plan..., 2022).

Slovenia's RRP development areas and components are green transition (renewable energy, sustainable renovation of buildings, clean and safe environment, sustainable mobility, circular economy), digital transformation (of the economy and public sector), smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (RDI, raising productivity, labour market, sustainable development for tourism, including cultural heritage, enhancing competencies, effective public institutions), healthcare and social security, including long-term care and social housing (Recovery and Resilience Plan..., 2022).

## 7.3 Local/regional level

At local and sub-regional level in Europe, the widely recognised tool for enhancing rural resilience is LEADER/CLLD. Local communities are organised as Local Action Groups, Local Development Companies or Local Development Initiatives. Other mentioned frameworks at local and regional

level are: Long-term Development Programme of Municipalities (Slovenia) and Regional Development Programmes (Slovenia). In Portugal, also European Social Fund is playing crucial role in rural community resilience within different programmes at local and regional level.

### 7.3.1 Ireland

#### **Local Development Companies and Local Development Initiatives**

There are forty-nine local development companies (LDCs) currently operational in Ireland. They are tasked with building inclusive, vibrant communities and also with offering and providing better life chances for people in each county / sub-region of Ireland.

The LDCs are tasked with assisting communities and disadvantaged persons or groups with personal development and well-being initiatives. They also tackle social exclusion in their areas of operation. They provide employment training and placement for unemployed people or people wishing to re-enter the workplace. The LDCs are extremely skilled and experienced in developing and advising on local enterprise and social enterprise. More recently the LDCs have been involved in tackling areas related to the natural environment and in taking action to mitigate the effects of climate change. All of this work is conducted using the principles and methodologies associated with a community development approach.

LDCs are not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations. Their ethos is bottom-up, led by local needs and opportunities, taking a holistic view of the individuals they serve and the community. In general, their modes of working and services are integrated; this means that employment supports, enterprise grants, social inclusion, training, well-being and environmental supports are all available through an LDC. According to the ILDN (Irish Local Development Network), the LDCs operate 150 different programmes throughout Ireland. For example, the SICAP or Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, delivered by the LDCs has a budget of €40 million. It ran from 2018 to the end of 2022.

The LEADER Programme is one of the key interventions of *Our Rural Future*, the Irish Government's Policy for rural development. The programme is delivered by twenty-nine local action groups (LAGs) across the country, which for the most part comprise the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) as the LAG, with the local authority as financial partner and the local development company (LDC) as implementing partner. In previous LEADER programmes, the LDC was the LAG responsible for the delivery of the programme in their respective area. A transitional LEADER programme came into effect on 1st April 2021. A total of €70 million has been allocated from the programme to support rural communities and private enterprises over 2021 and 2022.



### 7.3.2 Portugal

#### **Local Development Strategies – LAG ADRIMAG**

The strategic instrument undertaken by the LAG is the LEADER/CLLD approach. LAG ADRIMAG has great experience implementing the different LEADER programmes since the beginning: LEADER I, LEADER II, LEADER+, PRODER and currently CLLD. Community-Based Local Development (CLLD) is a territorial approach, through which local development strategies (LDS) are implemented, designed by Local Action Groups (LAGs) with a close connection to the social, economic and institutional fabric of each territory, aimed at the development, diversification and competitiveness of the economy and the improvement of the living conditions of populations.

Since this is a strategy for a vast territory of potential, but with a set of weaknesses that need to be mitigated or eliminated, and taking into account the bottom-up intervention model used in the design of the strategy, ADRIMAG intends to be more involved in its implementation possible not only from the municipalities, but from all local agents, public and private actors.

ADRIMAG has defined a set of priorities: 1) Research; innovation and technological development; 2) Promotion of economic competitiveness; 3) Dynamization and profitability of the agricultural and forestry sectors; 4) Sustainable tourism development; 5) Conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage; 6) Fostering human capital; 7) Promotion of social inclusion and employment and 8) Cooperation and animation of the territory.

#### **Local Contracts of Social Development (CLDS)**

The CLDS programme aims to promote the social inclusion of population cohorts that are most likely to experience social fragility or exclusion in a given territory. The programme mobilises integrated actions among various agents and locally available resources, constituting itself as an instrument to combat social exclusion strongly marked by a proximity intervention carried out in partnership, in order to realise the following: 1) increase the levels of social cohesion of the municipalities that are the object of intervention, promoting changes in their socio-territorial situation; 2) focus intervention on population groups that in each territory show more significant weaknesses, promoting change in the situation of people taking into account their vulnerability factors; 3) strengthen the pooling of efforts between the public and private sectors in the promotion and execution of projects through the mobilization of local actors from different backgrounds; 4) strengthen the connection between the interventions to be developed and the different existing planning instruments of a municipal dimension.

### **Business Creation Support Methodology - Creation of companies in rural areas (CRER)**

The CRER Methodology is an integrated methodology for monitoring the entrepreneur's project, which is divided into three phases: 1) information and awareness of entrepreneurship and business creation; 2) maturation and finalization of business creation projects; 3) accompaniment in the elaboration of business plans; 4) testing and experimentation of business ideas.

### **PROVERE: Program for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources**

PROVERE is a territorially-based economic enhancement strategy aimed specifically at low-density spaces. It aims to foster their competitiveness through the promotion of innovative economic-based activities based on the enhancement of endogenous resources, which tend to be inimitable in the territory.

As an intervention model, it is based on a paradigm that aims to: bolster the initiatives of private agents; promote a model of self-governance and, furthermore, an intervention logic centered on training agents and valuing resources. Important projects resulting from the implementation of this programme, managed by LAG ADRIMAG, are the Paiva Walkaways and the 516 Suspended Bridge in the municipality of Arouca, which has contributed enormously for the development of the sustainable tourism.

### **Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas in the Northern Region (EMER-N)**

The EMER-N project, constitutes an instrument/tool to leverage supports for micro and small businesses. The project has been adapted to the constraints and particularities of the rural environment, with the aim of creating a positive and conducive environment for the emergence and growth of companies and employment in the northern region of the country. It is based on: 1) methodologies aimed at problem-solving and monitoring; 2) mentoring / facilitator with relevant competence and experiences, with a good knowledge of the territory and institutional network, 3) recourse to competences installed in the territory, 4) access to specialist advices from researchers at higher education institutions, 5) Institutional network to support entrepreneurs.

### **+CO3SO**

+CO3SO is a set of transversal and multisectoral programmes dedicated to companies, entities of the social economy and entities of the scientific and technological system. It aims to create conditions for the social and economic development of the territories, with the promotion of high-quality employment, innovation and technology transfer.

### **Qualifica Program**

The Qualifica Program is aimed at adults with incomplete education. It offers training courses and aims to improve the qualification levels of adults, contributing to the skills' progression of the participants and the improvement of individuals' employability.

### 7.3.3 Slovenia

#### **Long-term Development Programmes of Municipalities**

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia protects the autonomy of local self-government and states that the Slovene people exercise such authority and functions through self-governing units (municipalities and regions). A municipality may comprise a single settlement or a number of settlements, the inhabitants of which are bound together by common needs and interests. Slovenia's administrative structure currently is comprised of 212 municipalities, twelve of which are urban municipalities.

Municipalities prepare **Long-term Municipal Development Programmes**. *The Long-term Development Programme of Šentjur Municipality 2021-2030* does not mention rural resilience, but it talks about “polycentric development with efficient infrastructure, sustainable rural development and preservation of natural and cultural heritage”. The main points of the programme include bringing about a sustainable and green municipality, with support for economic development and good connectivity on all levels. Resilience is most prominent in people-related goals, such as continued education, the inclusion of all target groups and the offer of “quality programmes, which result in active participation of citizens, strengthens the community, creates new initiatives and raises the living quality” (Dolgoročni razvojni program občine Šentjur, 2021).

#### **Local Development Strategies of Local Action Groups**

At the sub-regional level, the relevant strategic and operational instrument is **LEADER/CLLD**. The Slovenian experience of implementing the LEADER/CLLD approach and programme is the result of a long-term development process and policy, with the 15 years of experience (from the early 1990s to the period before accession to the European Union) having provided a good basis for an effective transition to full implementation in the 2007–2013 programming period. LEADER/CLLD covers the Slovenian territory in its entirety, which is the result of the systematic work of actors and stakeholders at local, regional and national levels. The LEADER/CLLD approach and programme are a prominent example of multi-level governance: the formation of 33 (2000–2013) and 37 (2014–2020) Local Action Groups has created new development structures and new knowledge centres at sub-regional level. They bring together established and new actors, who actively approach and participate in the implementation of activities to promote local development. The key to this is the preparation of a local development strategy, which serves as the foundation document for implementation of LEADER/CLLD at the local level (Potočnik Slavič et al, 2022).

An analysis of completed projects 2007-2020 shows that quality of life, marketing, tourism, the inclusion of vulnerable groups and intergenerational cooperation have dominated. From a content perspective, when it comes to the implementation of the LEADER/CLLD programme in Slovenia, there is a clear lack of projects dealing with environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. In terms of sustainable development, more attention has been paid to social and economic development, which probably reflects the priorities defined within local development strategies. Considering the development characteristics of Slovenian rural areas, we conclude that both the LEADER approach and the LEADER/CLLD programme have made a significant contribution to improving the quality of life in problem border areas over the past fifteen years (Potočnik Slavič et al, 2022).

An analysis of the Strategy of Local Development for the Local Action Group “From Pohorje to Bohor” 2007-2021 (the new Strategy is being prepared at this time), reveals that it does not talk about rural resilience directly, but talks about creating opportunities for all target groups to take advantage of opportunities available in the rural areas. The main measure in this respect is providing training and education for relevant skills and knowledge tailored to different target groups (SLR LAS Od Pohorja do Bohorja, 2021).

### **Regional Development Programmes**

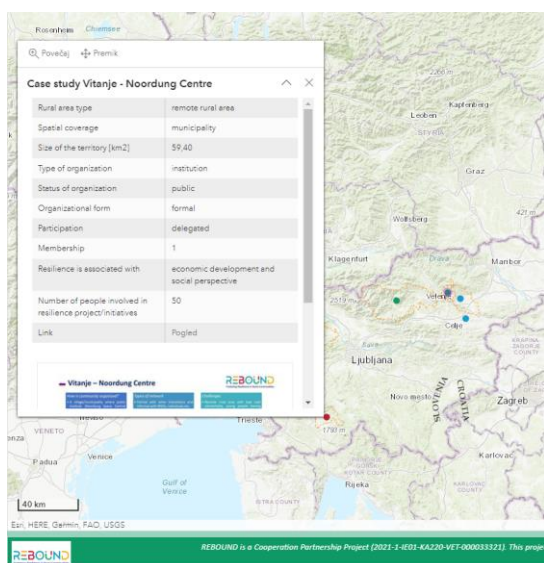
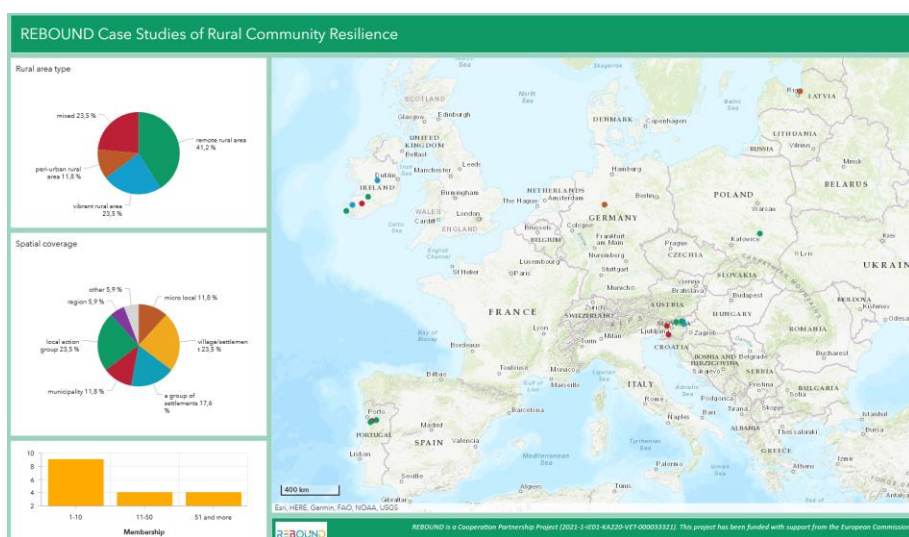
There are twelve development regions in Slovenia, each with a regional development agency - performing general development tasks in the region and drawing up, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the **regional development programmes**.

Similar to local and sub-regional level, term rural resilience is not mentioned, but, for example, the *Regional development programme of Savinjska Region 2021-2027* talks about “being responsive to environmental trends” and “providing sustainable, resilient and diversified economic development”. Moreover, there is a lot of emphasis on stimulation of education and training with inclusion of all target groups, strengthening research and innovation capabilities, developing farms, stimulating local self-sufficiency and preservation of vital rural areas (Regionalni razvojni program Savinjske regije, 2022).

## 8 Case studies on innovative models of community enterprise development

18 case studies on innovative models of community enterprise development were identified across Europe. The cases studies are described in the following section. REBOUND project partners also have developed an interactive case studies collector and viewer available on: <https://uni-lj.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/3462127a4745438a878bb3ebdcba4418> . The case study of rural communities resilience collector is a good teaching material and will be added at REBOUND webpage for further dissemination of good practices of rural community resilience.

Figure 15: REBOUND case studies interactive online collector.



### Vitanje – Noordung Centre

#### How is community organised?

- A village/municipality where public institute (Noordung Space Centre) connects various stakeholders.

#### Types of network

- Formal with other institutions and informal with NGOs, individuals etc.

#### Challenges

- Remote rural area with bad road connectivity, young people leaving this area, lack of cooperation between people.

#### Does community have a plan?

- Plan is to use Noordung Space Centre as the main driver for development of tourism and other products and services.

#### Activities for transformative resilience

- Adding value to existing local products and services, training locals on how to connect place with their products (e.g. wood), how to use remoteness as positive, getting people together to discuss their problems and ideas openly.

#### Most relevant actors

- Municipality, Noordung Space Centre, Tourist Information Center Vitanje, Tourism Association Vitanje, Association of Rural Women Lipa.
- Collective leadership.

#### Indicators of rural resilience

- Number of workshops for capacity building for farmers and other target groups.

#### Pace of transformative change

- Process is slow and gradual.

#### Obstacles for resilience

- Local population is not active, they are insecure and often do not recognize the motives/ needs of other people in the area.

## 8.1 Portugal

### Case study 1: LAG ADRIMAG

#### CONTEXT

ADRMAG – Association for the Integrated Development of the Serras de Montemuro, Arada and Gralheira is a Local Action Group, formed on the 27th of August 1991. It covers seven municipalities: Arouca, Castelo de Paiva, Cinfães, Castro Daire, Sever do Vouga, São Pedro do Sul e Vale de Cambra. The LAG territory is located in the interior, 60km from the City of Oporto. LAG ADRMAG is based on a formal public-private partnership, under the legal form of a non-profit association, composed by 45 members, private and public. The Board is formed by representatives from the municipalities.

Figure 16: Intervention territory of LAG ADRMAG (source: ADRMAG).



#### INTERVENTION TERRITORY:

- 7 municipalities
- 2 regions – North and Center
- 2 districts – Aveiro e Viseu
- 80 parishes
- 168.860 hectares
- 115.666 Inhabitants (Census 2021)

#### GEOGRAPHIC AREA:

- Montemuro and Gralheira Mountains
- Douro and Vouga River Bassins

#### CLASSIFIED AREAS:

- 2000 Natura Network Sites
- Freita and Arada Mountains
- Montemuro Mountains
- Paiva River
- Vouga River

UNESCO GEOPARKS - Arouca Geopark

ECST - EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM - Magic Mountains Territory

## *APPROACH*

Its mission is to contribute to the integrated development of the Montemuro, Arada and Gralheira mountains by: 1) the management and implementation of EU and national programmes and 2) the promotion and development of initiatives and projects of interest to the region. ADRIMAG develops its activities across four main domains to foster local development:

### 1.1 LEADER APPROACH - CLLD and Cooperation EAFRD

ADRIMAG has been the local managing authority of LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER Plus - follow up and management of the projects supported by this community initiative. ADRIMAG was the local managing authority for LEADER Approach (PRODER) on 2007/2013, in the region and was the local managing authority for CLLD – Magic Mountains 2020- involving more than 250 economic, cultural, social agents, and local authorities.

### 2. Initiatives and Projects Management

#### 2.1 Magic Mountains Brand

#### 2.2 PROVERE - Program for the Economic Enhancement of Endogenous Resources

#### 2.3 SIAC – Collective Actions

#### 2.4 CRER Methodology

#### 2.5 +COESO

### 3. Education and Training

#### 3.1 Qualification Center for adults

#### 3.2 Professional Training for adults

#### 3.3 Erasmus+

### 4. Social Action

#### 4.1 Six Local Contract for Social Development

The local development strategy aims to create a dynamic region that is entrepreneurial and innovative and with high quality of life, focused on the endogenous resources, promoting tourism and environmental preservation. At the same time, the strategy pays attention to the cohesion and social well-being of its inhabitants and to promoting resilience within the communities. Major projects such as the Arouca Geopark, the Paiva Walkways, the 516 Suspended bridge were born in LAG ADRIMAG and were realised with its support through the different sources of funding.

### *GOOD PRACTICE* - Magic Mountains Brand

The project began with the need to create an identity brand for a region that would bring together the best that this region has and promote it. Magic Mountains is the tourist brand attributed to the territory framed by the Montemuro, Arada and Gralheira mountains and Arouca Geopark, which covers the municipalities of Arouca, Castelo de Paiva, Castro Daire, Cinfães, São

Pedro do Sul, Sever do Vouga and Vale de Cambra. It is an emerging destination in the tourist market, having recently been awarded the "European Charter for Sustainable Tourism". The stakeholders involved in the project are ADRIMAG, the municipalities, the entrepreneurs, the different actors and the local forces. In terms of funding, this project doesn't have its own funding channel; it depends on occasional European and national funding. This brand includes tourist and gastronomic projects, routes and paths, rural, handcrafted, social and training projects that have access to their own funding channels and have been implemented over the last twenty years.

This project was successful because it is place based, and it builds on and complements other projects developed over time, including the creation of attraction points and interest in the tourist area, gastronomic area, handicrafts and thematic routes, thereby contributing to the circular economy.



It is important to note that the decisions are made ADRIMAG Board meetings; in partnership meetings with the various institutional partners and in meetings with local actors. Nevertheless, the main lesson learnt, through the implementation of this project, is that we could already be in a more evolved resilience process if it weren't for the lack of unity between most partners and local actors. The project lessons also point to the need to create community assemblies. For more information, please see: [www.montanhasmagicas.pt](http://www.montanhasmagicas.pt)

### *REFLECTION*

ADRIMAG has 30 years of experience in managing local development policy instruments. This association has brought together, over these years, a set of public and private partners, who have worked in, and promoted, the territory, interacting with each other, fostering innovation, promoting resilience, thinking strategically and executing relevant actions, at multiple levels. ADRIMAG has assumed the role of uniting the territory, for more than 30 years, vertically and horizontally - furthering mutual and close cooperation with the seven municipalities and its associates, thereby enabling actors to define and implement successive local development strategies- strategies that aim to benefit local agents and the population. However, networking and cooperation necessarily have to go beyond the administrative limits of the territory, and, in this sense, the cooperation projects already developed and to be developed within the scope of various community programmes, between ADRIMAG and local, regional, national entities and international institutions, are of the utmost importance in the pursuit of specific actions and projects for economic, social and cultural development. In addition to ADRIMAG's important role in boosting cooperation, encouraging the territory and developing networking, it is also worth mentioning the high number of local institutions with an important role in maintaining dynamic cultural, sporting and recreational communities, as well as the multi-sectoral character and the wide experience of networking. The greatest difficulties in terms of partnerships can be seen,



essentially, in the lack of awareness that some local entities still show, and in the lack of financial, technological resources and technical structure to work in partnership. Nevertheless, in this context, the deficiencies in terms of qualification of services and information systems of local institutions are being addressed.

## Case Study 2: ERVITAL

### CONTEXT



ERVITAL is private enterprise formed by three partners. It was formed in 1997 and located in a very remote rural area, in the small village of Mezio with 400 inhabitants, in the very heart of the Montemuro Mountain, in the municipality of Castro Daire. There are currently eight employees at ERVITAL. The enterprise ERVITAL emerged from the initiative of an agrarian engineer, Joaquim Morgado, a resident of Mezio.

### APPROACH

It is a company that produces, transforms and sells aromatic and medicinal plants, using organic production modes. At the same time, it provides consulting and training services in the areas of organic agriculture, aromatic and medicinal plants and creation/restoration of green spaces and low-maintenance gardens.

The organic infusions and condiments produced at ERVITAL are based on the unique ecological and environmental conditions, provided by a mountain ecosystem - Montemuro Mountain - Natura 2000 Network - with high biodiversity and on using the techniques and processes advocated by organic farming. The production fields are located at an altitude of around 1000 meters - surrounded by native vegetation and with no cultivated areas less than 1 km away.

*Figure 17: Production of aromatic and medicinal plants in remote rural area in Portugal (Credits: company Ervital).*



The fact that are located in the mountains, the soil, combined with specific weather conditions, make it highly conducive for the organic production of aromatic and medicinal plants. It is a very successful project, because the promoters were pioneers in the type of culture and planting methods. The activity of collecting plants in nature, not being a generalizable practice for many species, can represent an increase in income for populations in mountain regions, as is the case, without jeopardizing the survival and maintenance of native species. Over the years, ERVITAL has developed actions with the population of the Montemuro Region to promote the responsible practice of collecting some species such as gorse, heather or broom. In these cases, in addition to not putting the species at risk of extinction, it represents a practice that contributes to minimizing the risk of fires.

The company has evolved gradually and sustainably, contributing to the development of the region and the improvement of the lives of its people, mainly through the use and enhancement of its natural resources. What makes them different and appealing, is the fact that they work in order to enhance the quality of products and services, respect the customers, respect the nature, thinking of the next generations. It markets its own brand and in different types of packaging, more than 100 types of infusions and condiments. Their work contributed for the resilience of the village and the territory itself through organic agriculture, which also improved self-sufficiency.

ERVITAL's products are obtained in accordance with the regulation for the organic production, that is, without the use of any synthetic chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators and additives), favouring the use of resources obtained on the farm itself, namely crop residues, farmyard manure and mainly agricultural compost, as well as cultural techniques and practices that allow maintaining and /or improving soil productivity, balanced nourishing crops and controlling their enemies (pests, diseases).

*Figure 18: They produce and sell their products (Credits: company Ervital).*



The decisions within this enterprise are made collective (partners and employees) since they have a collaborative and participative model. They had the support of the municipality and of ADRIMAG, so they could expand the plantations and acquire equipment for the treatment of the plants, but the initial investment was private.

### REFLECTION

Despite the success of the enterprise, the manager Joaquim Morgado, claims that much more could be done in terms of resilience in their territory and in terms of enhancement of the quality life of the local inhabitants. He points out that the policy makers could give more support by simplifying the processes and by providing more financial incentives. He points to the lack of support of political institutions. He also thinks that education and training could contribute to the resilience of the rural community, in that they can minimise dependence on external factors, consequently increasing their autonomy, including, for example, in terms of food. There is also a need for technical training of population in local food production, which would contribute to them adopting more environmentally sustainable production methods - selecting regional crops and varieties - and would make them more autonomous and resilient. Nevertheless, Joaquim Morgado points out also that it is important to change the mindset of the village inhabitants, to value the territory, and to promote entrepreneurship and innovative businesses - taking advantage of the endogenous resources. An exemplar is that of a community garden, with native species that are more resistant to climate change. This would potentially be an important first step in order to change minds and promote resilience. It is also important to acknowledge that community leadership must be coherent and responsive.

### Case Study 3 - Traços D'Outroira

#### CONTEXT

*Figure 19: Traços D'Outroira Turismo Rural. (Credits: Traços D'Outroira ).*



*Traços d'Outroira - Turismo Rural* is a formal private enterprise, located on the west side of Freita Mountain, in the small village of Trebilhadouro, in Vale de Cambra municipality, at an altitude of 625m. Its strategic position allows a privileged view of the surrounding territory, namely the Aveiro Estuary and the Atlantic.

In 2011, Trebilhadouro was classified as a "Village of Portugal", putting it on a platform with a set of villages with whom it shares historical and patrimonial interest. It is a small village, that lost several inhabitants (due to rural depopulation). Structurally, the

village's buildings have been constructed along a central path that crosses the entire village and a small stream. The houses are constructed from granite stone, with masonry and wood.

### APPROACH

From the efforts of the municipality, the owners of the buildings and the support of ADRIMAG, the *Association Trebilhadouro* was born. The objective was to recover/renew/restore the village and bring people back to the village. *Association Trebilhadouro* played a fundamental role in the restoration and rejuvenation processes, and they have kept people motivated, thereby showing great resilience.

*Figure 20: Traços d'Outrora (Credits: Traços d'Outrora).*



Traços d'Outrora takes part of Trebilhadouro's Association, and they represent one of the owners that participated in this initiative. Their approach was based on the original construction principle, both in material and design terms, without losing their identity or magic. Furthermore, they earned the IHUR award - 2015, given by the *Institute of Housing and Urban Renewal* - the oldest national award in the construction and real estate sector in Portugal.

### REFLECTION

Within the rural community there are several challenges such as the exodus of large numbers of young people to the cities in search of employment, training, education, cultural opportunities and other stimuli not found in their rural areas. The lack of training, low education and resistance to change by the majority of the ageing population residing in the rural community are also obstacles. Therefore, it is important to find the internal strengths of the rural community draws on community identity and makes it unique- their habits, values and know-how. This relies on the population that stays and that insists on preserving that same identity. This kind of resilience benefits from the sterling work of institutions, whose role is to work directly with the population, and which must be carried out in breaking down resistances and in raising awareness of their value and potential. Furthermore, it is very important to harness the goodwill and capacity of individuals willing to develop and disseminate innovative and quality ideas and projects, with a local identity and to animate the development of local entities and organizations willing to develop, together with rural communities, a new way of being, more resilient, more participative,

more enriching, more entrepreneurial and capable of adapting to current demands, but always having as a background the values that made it so authentic and diverse.

The training plays an important role in changing minds and promote resilience in population. A training programme should address the useful and necessary areas to provide the individual belonging to the community with tools that allow him to become resilient and that he is a disseminator of that same resilience, even if he does not develop a project or an idea, such as contact with good practices, communications skills, entrepreneurship and leadership.

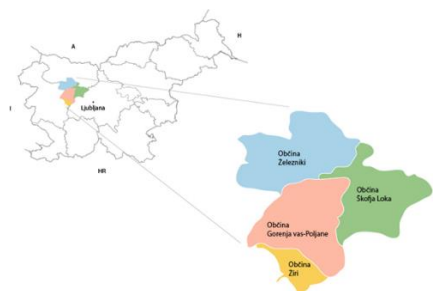
## 8.2 Slovenia

### Case study 1: Škofja Loka Hills region

#### CONTEXT

Škofja Loka Hills region, geographically consisting of two valleys: Poljanska Sora River Valley and Selška Sora River Valley, it is divided in four municipalities: Škofja Loka (145 km<sup>2</sup>, 22,919 inhabitants), Železniki (164 km<sup>2</sup>, 6709 inhabitants), Gorenja vas - Poljane (153.3 km<sup>2</sup>, 7541 inhabitants) and Žiri (49 km<sup>2</sup>, 4871 inhabitants), which were created in 1995 from the former bigger municipality of Škofja Loka. Today, they collectively constitute the Administrative Unit of Škofja Loka (Population by age..., 2018). Both the administrative and internal social connection (Regional Development Agency, LAG, Associations, Church organization) shows to the geographical cohesion of this region, with a recognized common identity. It is a vibrant rural area; it includes peri-urban areas (municipality of Škofja Loka) and with some areas with the geographical characteristics of dispersed settlements systems (steep slopes and hills). It has a thriving agricultural landscape (predominantly mountain farming) with locally produced and processed food, active economic activities (especially in Škofja Loka), and it has strong regional economic cycles (e.g. local food cooperative Loka) thus favouring its demographic structure.

Figure 21: Four municipalities cooperate in LAG loškega pogorja (Source: RA Sora, 2021).



## APPROACH

Škofja Loka Hills region has a recognised common identity, and it is a local community with a long and successful tradition of implementing measures for rural development. As a result, a collaborative network has developed between actors and stakeholders, e.g. public institutions (municipalities, primary schools, public university), private sector (farmers, entrepreneurs, cooperative and NGOs), also new actors are becoming involved (social entrepreneurs, youth organizations). Local Action Group loško pogorje covers all four municipalities (512,2 km<sup>2</sup>, 42.000 inhabitants) and is led by Regional Development Agency with a seat in Škofja Loka. The LAG has financial resources available for the purpose of promoting the rural resilience.

## GOOD PRACTICE

Figure 22: Lesni feniks/ Wooden Phoenix. Photo: D. Kacin, 2022.



The circular wood economy in LAG Loško Pogorje called “Lesni feniks” (eng. Wooden Phoenix), is funded by LEADER/CLLD. The goal of the Lesni feniks project is to carry out a pilot project on the use of wood residues and waste wood from which new products will emerge- urban wooden elements that will serve local people for use and to raise awareness among the local population through the implementation of a range of activities. A significant added value of the project is the establishment of cooperation between the economic actors, educational institutions and the local community. The implementation of the project is expected to increase the awareness among the local population, and the implementation of the pilot project will help to develop curricula for the education of woodworkers, enhance cooperation between the economic sector and the educational institution and enable experiential adoption of the concept of reuse of wood. »Lesni feniks« is a collaboration of four project partners: Municipality of Žiri, local company RA Sora, Lokatur cooperative and Škofja Loka Secondary Woodworking School, and it is an example of a project that grew out of the needs of the stakeholders who got together and wrote a project that presented solutions to their problems or the needs they have in their work or carrying out their activities. The project was submitted to a public competition for the most inspiring European projects, and it was selected in finals, which means that even external observers recognized it. It was also recognised as a good practise by the *Journal Finance* and the *Eco Fund*. For more information about the project, please see: <http://www.lesnifeniks.si/>

## REFLECTION

From a substantive point of view, it is possible to recognize that LEADER projects between two programme periods (2007-2013, 2014-2020) are upgraded and linked in content, which significantly contributes to the longevity of structures (e.g. associations and institutions that include in LEADER/CLLD projects) and vibrancy of project results.

## Case study 2: Upper Savinja valley

### CONTEXT

Upper Savinja Valley is a geographically unified, remote area with geographical characteristics of dispersed settlements, with a varied landscape that is emblematic of Alpine and pre-Alpine Slovenia. Upper Savinja Valley is administratively divided into seven municipalities, and it is completely covered by the administrative unit of Mozirje (508 km<sup>2</sup>), where 16,600 inhabitants live (2018). On average, the Upper Savinjska Valley is rather sparsely populated (32.3 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>), in the eastern and southern parts slightly larger settlements (Mozirje, Nazarje, Gornji Grad) were formed, connected to larger densely populated areas (Celje, Velenje, Maribor, Kamnik, Ljubljana). Most researchers describe the Upper Savinja region as "problematic" in the sense that it exhibits less intensive and less specific economic development, and it experiences remoteness from development hotspots due to natural features and threats (floods, landslides).

### APPROACH

*Figure 23: LAG Upper Savinja and Šaleška valley network 10 municipalities.*



In the programme period 2014-2020, the LAG Upper Savinja and Šaleška valleys was formed by merging two neighbouring local action groups. From a territorial point of view, LAG covers almost 737 km<sup>2</sup>, has 60.000 inhabitants and includes 10 municipalities with a rich tradition of implementing measures in the field of rural development. LAG Upper Savinja and Šaleška valleys is led by local rural development Institut Savinja and is the core institution of rural

development in this region.

## GOOD PRACTICE

Project “Eko gajbico, prosim!” is LEADER/CLLD cooperation operation between five Slovenian and three Bulgarian LAGs. It follows the goals of the “Farm to Fork” Strategy for the development of a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system. Through the cooperation operation, local markets will be empowered to offer a greater range of local food to the local population, while at the same time enabling the expansion of food supplies. Investments in organic farms in production and processing, also in cultural heritage, and investments in cooperatives for the establishment of short supply chains will also contribute to the expansion of the offer. A joint analysis of the state of organic farming and the supply of organic food in the Savinja statistical region and participating foreign LAGs will be prepared, as well as a catalogue of the supply of organic food in the same area. Trainings, open days on farms, evaluations will be held, and a common promotional ecological basket will also be established. The operation brings together



33 partners from all three sectors, of which more than 30% are representatives of organic farming. Five Slovenian LAGs are involved in the operation along with three LAGs from Bulgaria.

*Figure 24: Project “Eko gajbico, prosim!”*

*Source: LAG.*

## REFLECTION

The high level of local belonging, attachment to the home environment and knowledge of the advantages and qualities of the home region are indicated by the answers to the question of ‘what are residents proud of in their settlement or the wider region’. The population and municipalities of the Upper Savinja Valley are aware of the natural features, the exceptional and well-preserved natural environment (Klemenčič, Lampič, Potočnik Slavič, 2008). Both residents and administrative bodies (municipalities) see the greatest potential by far for the development of the area as being in sustainable tourism, as the Upper Savinja Valley is a recognizable boutique tourist destination. All other activities are related to it: agriculture (production, processing), retail and other services.

In recent years, the economic importance of agriculture has declined, but significantly less than elsewhere in Slovenia. Due to the large proportion of forest, farm sizes are above average for Slovenian conditions. The current economic direction of the farms indicates traditional mixed agricultural production (production of meat, milk, wood), which in the past was less and less intensive compared to the rest of Slovenia, which is why in the last decade it has relatively easily transitioned to "environmentally friendly farming" and organic farming. The mixed production



structure represents a good starting point for the intensification of regional economic circles and indicates the possibilities of specialization (recognizable high-quality products). Similar to other regions in Slovenia, the challenge is a rejuvenation of farms.

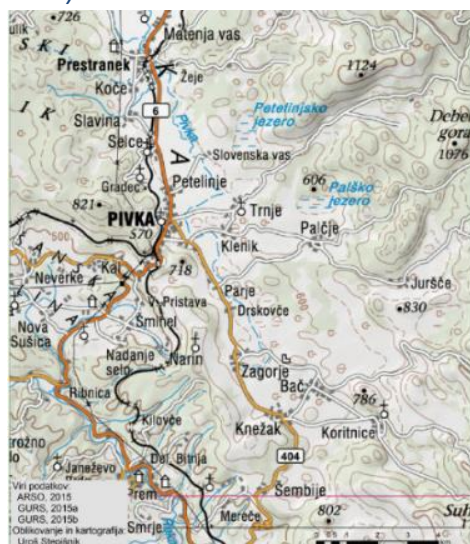
Services are underdeveloped (high-value service activities are especially lacking), while the secondary sector has a significant and relatively constant share of the economic profile. Larger companies are located in Nazarje and Ljubno, which is an important employment centre with some old (woodworking, textile) and more modern (production of small household appliances for a wider area) industrial branches. It is logical that there is a greater concentration of small businesses in Mozirje, as it the centre of gravity of the entire valley; there are also quite a few self-employed people there. In Upper Savinja Valley, we can talk about local economic circles, which is partly related to the location and the specific base of endogenous resources; it connects smaller companies and are in most cases informal or not institutionalized.

### Case study 3: Pivka Nature Park

#### CONTEXT

The Seasonal Lakes of Pivka Nature Park covers 140 km<sup>2</sup> and more than half of the Municipality of Pivka. The park is located in the middle of Pivka basin and includes a lake protection area, which includes three spatially separated sections of the two largest intermittent lakes (Palško Lake and Petelinjsko Lake) and a group of five intermittent lakes. The area is renowned for its large range of biodiversity. There are three levels of protection regimes in the area of the Pivka Nature Park. The first refers to the settlements within the park and its area of influence (total population of Pivka Nature park is approx. 1500 inhabitants in eight villages, central place/municipality seat in buffer zone has 2.220 inhabitants). The general protection regime that applies to the entire park area (except for villages within the park) is slightly stricter and prohibits activities that would have a negative impact on the state of plant and animal species. The protection regime in the protection area of the lakes is the strictest.

*Figure 25: Map of Upper Pivka basin with seasonal lakes (Source: Stepišnik, 2017).*



#### APPROACH

The park was funded in 2014 by Pivka Municipality. The border of the park on the north, east and south sides runs along the border of the Pivka Municipality. The western border follows the

border of the Natura 2000 nature conservation network. The protection regime is delegated by legal Ordinance on the establishment of the Seasonal Lakes of Pivka Nature Park. The municipal police service and the competent inspectors monitors the Ordinance's implementation in accordance with the regulations. Nature conservation rangers and trained volunteer rangers provide direct supervision in the park, primarily by pointing out and tackling inappropriate behaviour. The park is managed by Pivka Tourism Public Institute. The operation of the park is financed by Municipality of Pivka and with applications for different EU funds (LIFE Programme, INTERREG Programme, European Regional Development Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development LEADER/CLLD, ...).

### GOOD PRACTICE

In the main, the well-preserved nature in this area is dependent on farms. In 2019, a Working Group for Sustainable Agriculture in Pivka Nature Park was established. Its goal is to provide education and support for farmers - aiming implementation of nature protection measures by local farmers. They formed a group of seven members who regularly meet: five farmers, representative of the park, representative of agricultural advisory service and occasionally invited guests from relevant national institutions in the field of nature protection and agriculture. They prepare an annual plan of different educational activities, meetings, discussions, etc. The idea is that they are co-creators of nature protection decisions and vibrant farming activities in the park. The members talk, listen and understand each other and find solutions. The rural community has representatives on this working group via farmers, and at the same time, they usually include fifteen additional farmers in the educational activities, who are contractual farmers in the Park. The total number of farmers in park is thirty-five, and they are invited to different activities.

*Figure 26: In Pivka Nature Park, regularly meets Working Group for Sustainable Agriculture (Source: Pivška Presihajoča jezera, 2022).*



## *REFLECTION*

Pivka Nature Park is an example of locally initiated environment protection park, established by Municipality of Pivka. Nature protection is not a core activity of municipalities in Slovenia and is usually coordinated at national level. In the case of Pivka, local people, including the mayor, believed that it is also their responsibility, and, according to their mandates, they established and now operate a park. The operation of the park is financially supported by municipality budget and/or diverse European funding. The actors strive for the continuity of animation and educational activities. The establishment of Working Group for Sustainable farming is a good practice of co-creating and co-implementing nature protections measure. They would like to establish working groups also for some other topics/target groups in park. The idea came from Škocjan Caves Nature Park in Slovenia, where five working groups operate (for tourism, agriculture, local providers of services, nature conservation).

## **Case study 4: Vitanje Municipality**

### *CONTEXT*

Vitanje is a rural municipality in Savinjska region and is one of the smaller municipalities in Slovenia. It has a population of around 2.350 inhabitants and covers an area of approx. 6.500 ha, consisting mainly of hilly landscape on the slopes of the Western Pohorje and the extension of the Karavanke Mountains. The area is quite remote, but it is successful in ensuring the sustainable use of its resources. The main driving force is a well-connected community, which is willing to cooperate on all levels (Municipality – institutions – locals). Other main advantages of the area are:

- well-preserved environment with natural resources (wood, water);
- Center of Space Technologies Herman Potočnik Noordung; and
- close to tourist centres Rogla (ski resort) and Terme Zreče (spa resort).

### *APPROACH*

In the local community, the development of a Space Centre project, which aims to connect culture, modern technologies, visionary and advanced conceptions and ideas, dates back to 2005. In 2006, a Memorial Room opened, in Vitanje, in memory of the pioneer of space flights and technologies in honour of Herman Potočnik Noordung. The reason for the installation of the memorial room and then the Centre for Space Technology in Vitanje derives from the family roots of Potočnik's mother, who was from Vitanje. In 2009, the construction of the building started with the project "Integrated revitalization of the Vitanje Cultural Centre into the Cultural Center

of European Space Technologies”, with 85 % of the funds acquired from the European Community and 15 % of the total eligible expenditures from the Ministry of Culture. In accordance with the project of the Integrated Revitalization of the Cultural Centre Vitanje, the Municipality of Vitanje uses the facility as its cultural home, with its the special feature which is the Centre for Space Technologies Herman Potočnik Noordung, which independently develops the contents and manages the facility. From the opening in 2012 until the end of 2013, the private institute Ksevt – the Cultural Centre for European Space Technologies - operated in the facility, later renamed the Planit Institute. Since 2014, Ksevt has been taken over by the municipality of Vitanje, which reformed it as a public municipal institution. Over time, this has proven to be an excessive financial and management burden for such a small municipality, and on the basis of the efforts and recognition that the mission of the institution is of greater national importance, the Republic of Slovenia decided to enter into co-funding through the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. With the Law on the Establishment, the municipal public institute was transformed into a state-owned public institute and at the end of 2017, it was renamed the Public Space Center of Space Technologies Herman Potočnik Noordung (Center Noordung, 2022).

#### *GOOD PRACTICE*

Vitanje is a small rural community, and until the Space Centre Noordung opened in 2012, it was not on the tourist maps. People didn't visit Vitanje. Center Noordung, has, from the very beginning, been successfully dealing with the niche field of culture development in space, the promotion and monitoring of space technologies and findings, and international connections and representation of Slovenia as a country with its own space identity and history. As the second pillar in tourism development – in 2020, they opened Tourist Information Centre, situated in Center Noordung. The third pillar constitutes research and applicative projects funded mainly by European Commission, mostly with the aim of developing social innovation and supporting the social economy ecosystem.

#### *REFLECTION*

The mix of international cooperation and opportunities (Center Noordung), proximity of strong tourism centres and willingness of people to cooperate are the main driving force of sustainable development in Vitanje. The centre point connecting all the stakeholders is the people working at the Center Noordung, who organize workshops about various topics for locals, to teach them how to benefit from the resources available in this area, and they find synergies between stakeholders and their projects for the benefit of everyone.

Figure 27: Village Vitanje (Source: RAKO, 2022).



### Case study 5: Ponikva Village

#### CONTEXT

Ponikva is a village in municipality Šentjur in Savinjska Region. It has a population of around 500 inhabitants. It is rich heritage and a vibrant community of well-connected people. The main strengths / assets of the village are:

- cultural heritage (birth place of the blessed Anton Martin Slomšek, geographer Blaž Kocen);
- natural heritage (habitat of protected European Pasqueflower); and
- well-developed infrastructure.

Figure 28: Village Ponikva (Source: RAKO, 2022).



## APPROACH

Local community is organised in the form of the Tourism and Improvement Association of village Ponikva. Among themselves, they elect a president. With volunteer work, they take care of the neatness of the village and organization of different events in Ponikva.

## GOOD PRACTISE



The Tourism and Improvement Association of Ponikva Village is an community organisation, and it promotes voluntary-based work. They promote rural resilience through promoting the tourist potential of the village, promoting place, tidiness, organising different events with local suppliers and vendors, among other local stakeholders. The biggest traditional event is St Martin's Day. They also organise and award prizes for tidiness of village, farms and houses and organise educational activities to educate people and raise culture awareness. In Vitanje, they have a habitat of protected European Pasqueflower, which has to be maintained.

In the past, they had different contractors for doing it, but now they have found a solution together with a local farmer who was willing to invest a little time and do the work. Together they applied to the LAG for LEADER/CLLD funding, where part of the funding was obtained for the purchase of machinery (tractor, scythe, milling machine). At the same time, the purchased equipment can also be used to clear overgrowth elsewhere on areas within the local community and the municipality, or on private areas where people are unable to cut it themselves.

*Figure 29: Protected European Pasqueflower (Source: TIC Šentjur, 2022).*

## REFLECTION

The main strength of Ponikva is the community which is very active and connected. The key to this is to include everyone, from the community council to organizations (school, kindergarten etc.), companies and individuals. A number of associations where people do various community related things is the glue that holds the community together. This would probably not be possible in a larger town, but here it is working great.

## Case study 6: Rogla-Pohorje Destination

### CONTEXT

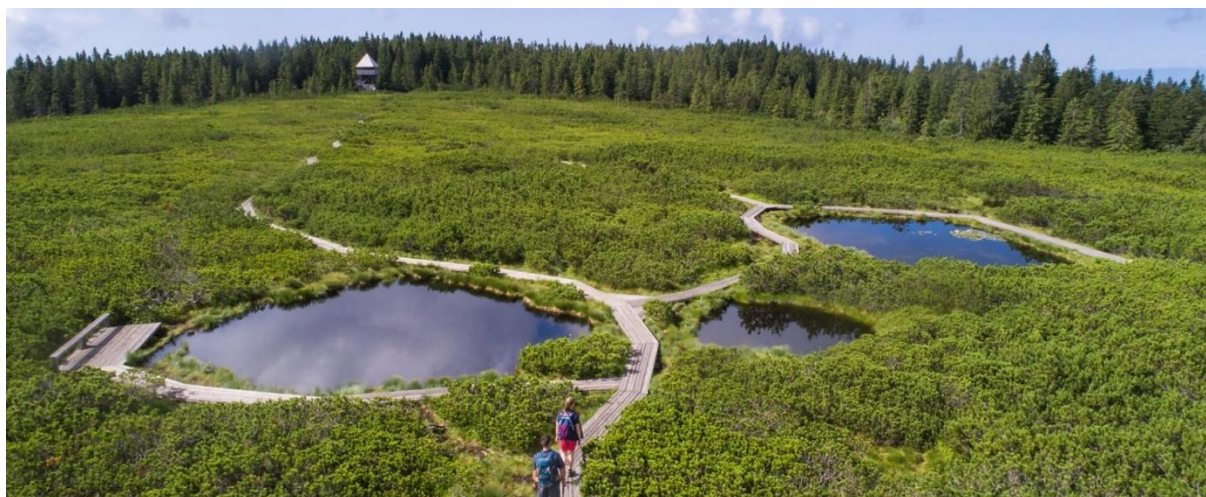
Rogla-Pohorje is an area connecting four municipalities (Oplotnica, Slovenske Konjice, Vitanje, Zreče), which cooperate mostly in terms of tourism development. The area includes major tourism attractions, well preserved environment and also businesses. The main advantages of the area are:

- major tourism attractions (ski resort Rogla, thermal centre Zreče, old town Slovenske Konjice etc.);
- well-developed supporting tourism services; and
- well-preserved environment.

### APPROACH

LTO Rogla – Zreče, GIZ is a local tourist organization for the promotion of tourism at the level of the municipality of Zreče and also at the level of the Tourist Destination Rogla-Pohorje. The role of the local tourism organization is to connect tourism service providers, the public sector, tourist associations and other tourism-related actors and encourages and coordinates their activities in the fields of: development projects, design, promotion and marketing of a comprehensive tourist offer, coordination and organization of events, maintenance and construction of public tourist infrastructure. It was initiated by Municipality Zreče.

*Figure 30: Lovrenc Lakes Pohorje (Source: RAKO, 2022).*



### GOOD PRACTISE

A recent successful project is a collective brand *Tastes of Rogla* (“Okusi Rogle”). The *Tastes of Rogla* brand has involved local producers and processors, the local community through the LTO

and the businesses (Unitur). The promoters held several workshops for food producers/processors, artisans, food preparation and serving for catering establishments to offer local food in a modern way to guests. It was supported by LEDAER/CLLD. The project has been a success, as it is now in its fifth year, and it is going from strength to strength. The *Tastes of Rogla* is now part of a nationwide story called “Izorno slovensko”/Originally Slovene. The idea came from a good practice in Bela Krajina. The initiative has been transferred to other rural locations: in Podčetrtek, they will launch similar story in 2023, and Lower Savinja Destination, where the municipalities in that area studied them as a good practise for finding their solution. A few smaller destinations have also taken their lead (e.g. Jeruzalem).

### *REFLECTION*

The area is connected mostly through joint tourism brand Rogla-Pohorje, which includes all types of tourism services and products available in the area. There is a growing amount of people making and selling their own products and services with higher added value. There are two main reasons for this growth. One of the reasons is systematic education of people about the importance of branding and presenting their quality products in an attractive manner and the other one is facilitating communication between all the stakeholders for them to understand each other and see where they can complement each other.

## 8.3 Ireland

### **Case Study 1: Community Planning in Milltown, County Kerry (Ireland)**

#### *CONTEXT*

Milltown is a large village / small town, with a population of about 800 people. It is located in the centre of County Kerry – about 20km from the county’s main urban centres (Tralee and Killarney). Over the past twenty years, Milltown has experienced population growth, and it is the fastest-growing settlement in the county. Milltown’s population growth is associated with commuting to employment in Kerry’s main urban centres and with the relative affordability of housing in the town / village. While the community can be described as ‘resilient’ in demographic terms (it has a young and vibrant population), it faces resilience challenges in respect of infrastructure, amenities and social capital, as the provision of services and facilities has not kept pace with the increase in population.



## APPROACH

Milltown Community and Chamber Alliance is an umbrella organisation for community and voluntary organisations in the locality. It seeks to coordinate and support community-led local development, and it liaises, on behalf of the community, with external bodies – including the statutory sector and local authority (Kerry County Council).

*Figure 31: Media coverage of the participatory process in Milltown.*



The Chamber Alliance has promoted an evidence-based and inclusive approach to place-making. It has commissioned longitudinal profiling of locality, and in 2019 and 2020, it worked with Kerry County Council in the formulation of a local area plan (as part of the statutory planning process). The Milltown-specific element local area plan was informed by extensive research and widespread stakeholder consultations. Due to public health guidelines, public gatherings were not permitted, during 2020, and the

consultations (including community meetings) had to take place online (using Zoom). As part of the research to inform the local area plan, over 300 members of the community completed a questionnaire that included the Place Standard (a planning tool widely used in rural Scotland) and invited them to put forward recommendations and proposals. The various proposals were put to a public vote (held online) and they fed into a submission to Kerry County Council (the planning authority).

## OUTPUTS

The community's submission shaped the county council's local area plan to a considerable extent, although there is a difference of opinion, between most local citizens and the planning authority, regarding the construction of a by-pass road. In spring 2022, the Irish Government awarded Kerry County Council a grant of €100k to prepare a master plan for Milltown – building on the submission and the local area plan that had been formulated in 2020.

## REFLECTIONS

This case study illustrates the possibilities of using online and blended methodologies to engage citizens in place-making. It also underscores the merits of pursuing an evidence-based approach, including undertaking survey work. The Chamber Alliance engaged facilitators to guide the consultations and to reach out to statutory bodies – thus bringing objectivity and specialised skillsets to bear on the process. The case study points to the importance of ongoing dialogue

between the community and the local authority, although it also demonstrates that nurturing and maintaining good working relationships require on-going dialogue and give-and-take on all sides.

## **Case Study 2: Comhchoiste Ghaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh**

### *CONTEXT*

The South Kerry Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) is located in a peripheral (mainly coastal) rural area that is one of the most scenic in Europe. Small-scale farming and tourism are the mainstays of the local economy. The area has suffered from several decades of population decline and out-migration. In order to address the area's structural weaknesses and to foster resilience, local community and voluntary groups came together, in 1992, to form a unitary structure – Comhchoiste Ghaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh.

### *APPROACH*

Over the past thirty-years, the Comhchoiste has acted as an umbrella and support organisation for local groups. It has spearheaded the development and provision of social and educational services, organised cultural events and lobbied for investment in the locality.

In governance terms, the Comhchoiste comprises representatives from each Gaeltacht community (geographically based) and selected organisations (thematically), and it has dedicated sub-groups that relate to its core functions (e.g. culture). The Comhchoiste liaises, on behalf of the Gaeltacht, with Údarás na Gaeltachta – the statutory authority for Gaeltacht areas.

### *OUTPUTS*

In 2018, the Comhchoiste formulated an Irish language plan, and this has leveraged government support for the recruitment of a language planning officer and the convening of actions to promote every-day use of the Irish language.

Evidenced-based planning, led by the Comhchoiste, bought about the establishment of Tascfhórsa Uíbh Ráthaigh – a multi-agency partnership, chaired by Údarás na Gaeltachta, that is currently implementing an area-based, multi-annual strategic plan that strives to promote resilience – through leveraging statutory sector investments in improving local services, supporting enterprises and providing opportunities for entrepreneurship, social interaction and life-long learning.



## REFLECTIONS

Comhchoiste Gaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh has strengthened and galvanised community development in Gaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh, and it has leveraged considerable resources – directly for language planning and social service provision and indirectly through Tascfhórsa Uíbh Ráthaigh. It represents an organisation that has combined the promotion of cultural resilience with broader socio-economic resilience, and it demonstrates what can be achieved using bottom-up approaches.

At present (Q4 2022 – Q1 2023) Comhchoiste Gaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh is compiling a five-year strategic plan for the locality, and it is engaging with communities and with statutory sector representatives.

## Case Study 3: LEADER in County Kerry

### CONTEXT

The LEADER approach to rural development has been pursued in County Kerry since 1991 (LEADER I). At present, there are three LEADER local action groups (LAGs): South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP), North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD) and IRD Duhallow. Each LAG is community led, and in each case, the board of directors comprises

representatives of the community, economic (farmers, trade unions and employers) and statutory sectors – thereby promoting partnership governance.

### APPROACH

Up to 2014, the LAGs pursued an approach that was largely in line with the LEADER specificities (seven principles). Since then, however, a local economic and community development committee (LCDC) under the aegis of Kerry County Council has assumed oversight of LEADER, including the approval of funding to third-party projects. While the LCDC structure has provided a vehicle for the coordination and consolidation of development efforts e.g. in response to catering for the needs of refugees from Ukraine, the three LAGs (officially known as local development companies - LDCs) have decided (in Q4 2022) to revert to being autonomous local action groups – in line with the LEADER specificities.



The three LDCs/LAGs pursue an integrated approach to territorial development, whereby LEADER is one tool / mechanism which they use – along with various social inclusion, ecological and labour-market activation initiatives (e.g. Kerry Social Farming). Thus, the LDCs have been giving effect to the smart village approach, as advocated by the European Commission.

Figure 32: SKDP has developed an innovative approach to social farming that is expanding to other LEADER areas.



## *OUTPUTS*

While each LDC/LAG publishes its own figures in respect of jobs created and sustained and the deliverables associated with project investments, one of their main outputs has been the capacity-building of local actors (community and enterprise) to identify needs and opportunities and to devise corresponding strategic actions.

## *REFLECTIONS*

The LEADER methodology represents a useful toolkit in the promotion of rural community resilience. While much of the public discourse about LEADER refers to capital investments in projects, the experience in Kerry and elsewhere points to the importance of animation and capacity-building actions in engendering resilience. While the LEADER approach is highly regarded (as documented in successive reviews), it has, unfortunately, been delimited by a considerable bureaucratic burden that is not evident in other programmes and supports which rural communities can access – albeit on a competitive basis and mainly through making applications to central government ministries.

### **Case Study 4: Ferbane, Co. Offaly**

#### *CONTEXT*

Ferbane is a small town in County Offaly, Ireland. In 2016, the population of the town was 1191, compared with 1165 in 2011 (CSO 2016). The name of the town is said to come from the white bog cotton which grows in the surrounding Bog of Allen. Ferbane's location in the peatlands, characteristic of so much of the Irish midlands, has been pivotal in the town's development over the years and Ireland's first milled-peat fired power station was commissioned by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) at Ferbane in 1957. The station ceased operations in December 2001, due to technological change in the energy industry, increased regulation, and a decrease in market demand.

#### *APPROACH*

In 2000, the Ferbane community, together with a number of state agencies became concerned at the stagnation and decline of the population of the town and its immediate hinterland, the reduction in employment associated with the local peatlands and power station and the restricted nature of other forms of economic activity in the area. In order to respond to these issues, it was decided that a plan should be prepared for the area and through that process to identify and implement several development initiatives. From this, the team at Tipperary Institute was commissioned to develop an Integrated Area Plan (IAP) for Ferbane.



Figure 33: Ferbane Tidy Towns Map.



The IAP undoubtedly had a significant impact on local development outcomes and resilience building in Ferbane in the areas of enterprise, tourism, housing, recreation and social development. Local development structures were strengthened, and local initiative stimulated. This was particularly evident in the area of enterprise development. During the height of the recession, in 2010, the Ferbane Business and Development Group developed a new strategy centring around the development of a food campus at the Cowpark Enterprise Centre. The group demonstrated their openness by again seeking new forms of economic activity. The profile of the

campus as a social enterprise and as a 'clean-green' business is closely aligned to European and National policies. The economic shape of the town remained relatively intact, with the survival of most small to medium sized businesses and the ability of the Cowpark Social Enterprise to continue and re-imagine itself as a food campus, retaining the support of the local community and the state agencies in this transformative endeavour.

Figure 34: Ferbane Business & Technology Park and Pride of Place Award.



Strong social capital built a strong community that could go on to adapt to challenges as they emerged and created a virtuous cycle of development. In resilience terms, significant levels of

social capital also existed, and was further developed, as local people developed the skills and experience needed in order to leverage resources from the State.

### *REFLECTIONS*

The research concludes that collaborative planning can stimulate pathways towards achieving transformative resilience. However, resilience cannot be achieved without a sympathetic policy and political environment. While the concept of resilience-building through collaborative planning was accepted in principle by elected representatives and state agencies in this case, it cannot be said to have succeeded in significantly changing planning systems and practices, such that many structural and institutional barriers remain.

## **Case Study 5: Lough Gur Visitor Centre**

### *CONTEXT*

The hinterland of Lough Gur has approximately 264 people. It is located about 20km from Limerick city. It has a unique archaeological landscape spanning 6,000 years, featuring sites that represent every major period of human occupation in Ireland from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Early Christian, Medieval, Early Modern and Modern eras. It was awarded the green heritage flag, of which there are only 11 in Ireland, as well as their second green flag and a pride of place award in the tourism category.

### *APPROACH*

Lough Gur visitor centre employs 14 staff and is now run by Lough Gur Development. This is a non-profit community organisation that was founded in 1969 and officially inaugurated in 1993 to promote, preserve and protect the history, archaeology, folklore and environment of the surrounding area.

The company structure includes a voluntary chairperson and board members. They are supported by a manager and a team of staff. The group operate Lough Gur Heritage Centre, Honey Fitz Theatre, festivals & events. Local volunteers also help. Lough Gur Visitor Centre was initially managed by Shannon Heritage for 30 years on a season basis until Lough Gur Development took over the lease of Lough Gur Visitor Centre from Shannon Heritage in 2011. Limerick Council lease the Visitor Centre building to Lough Gur Development and are also the owners with responsibility for the surrounding grounds. The Visitor Centre now opens 7 days per week, 363 days per year.

The objective of Lough Gur Development is to promote, preserve and protect the rich culture and heritage of Lough Gur for local and international visitors in association with organisations with

direct responsibility for the area. Including Limerick City & County Council, Office of Public Works and the National Monuments Service and National Parks and Wildlife.

*Figure 35: Lough Gur archaeological landscape.*



### *OUTPUTS*

In excess of 25-30 thousand visitors a year to the visitor centre. Recently opened a playground. Lough Gur is located within the Ballyhoura region and is part of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands region and Munster Vales and is also an accredited Discover Primary Science and Maths Centre through Science Foundation Ireland. It also has the Lough Gur Development newsletter every month.

### *REFLECTIONS*

Getting volunteers is a huge challenge as well as trying to run the organisation in a professional way so people take ownership and accountability. There is also the challenge of trying to build very strong stakeholder and policymaker relationships. Other challenges include governance and safety and recruitment of staff/volunteers, especially getting younger people interested. There are also issues regarding declining numbers in the local school and lack of child care facilities in the locality.

There are also strengths including a passion and a desire locally for Lough Gur to be treated sustainably. Also the inclusion on the board of those who have moved into the area. Five of the seven on the board are not originally from the area. They are also from a professional background which adds to the skillset of the board. From a tourism point of view, the beauty and history of the place is a major strength.



## **Case Study 6: Glenroe – Ballyorgan, Co Limerick**

### *CONTEXT*

The community of Glenroe-Ballyorgan is situated within the Ballyhoura Hills in South-East Limerick. The nearest urban settlement is Kilfinane. According to the 2016 Census of Population there were 630 (339 males and 291 females) people living in the community. Since 2011, the community has recorded a significant reduction (-33) in population size. The most prominent types of agricultural activity in this catchment area include: dairy and beef. The study area cannot be considered a High Nature Value landscape. A comparison of maps from the 1840s and present-day aerial photographs, show that the available habitat for wildlife has decreased over the last two centuries. Field boundaries have been removed from farmlands. In this context, the remaining field boundaries are particularly important as a habitat for wildlife.

## **8.4 Other EU examples**

### **Case study 1: Carnikava – Riga Gulf Coast (Latvia)**

#### *CONTEXT*

The village of Carnikava used to have the status of municipality, which it lost as a result of administrative reforms. This has resulted in many inhabitants feeling disappointed or left behind, and the level of civic activity has dropped down significantly.

#### *APPROACH*

The initiative aimed to bring back activity to an area which lost its status as centre of municipal authorities. It started with creating an information platform to disseminate information about local businesses and other local activities. Before this initiative, local businesses were operating mainly at private homes and only those in the know were buying the goods/services, but for example newcomers didn't know about them. The initiative to make a change was based on a group of local activists and, initially, a dedicated person funded by the local fisheries LAG.

#### *GOOD PRACTICES*

An active group of people emerged which initiate many new activities in the area and have a reputation of good organisers (so they can also take up external requests, e.g., to organise a study visit or a trip in a touristic boat). The LAG is preparing its new strategy and organising the process

of “prioritising” local needs, based on formal or informal community associations in each village (a kind of “localised citizens’ budget”). From a study visit to Italy the inspiration was brought concerning community energy, which might be implemented at a later stage.

*Figure 36: Activities in Carnikava, photo by Āris Ādlers.*



### *REFLECTIONS*

A strong community is one that can organise its life by itself, can survive external crises maintaining the local economy running sufficiently for the community to survive and have development on a small scale. Rural communities are used to relying on their own initiative.

Sometimes quite simple activities can make a big difference by creating trust and enthusiasm among the rural people, who can see their ideas taken seriously. Access to information and an open mind is essential. People need to have their own ideas what needs to be done, it is sometimes easier with young people or newcomers. Support at policy making level is crucial, including accessible and flexible funding sources.

### **Case study 2: Świętokrzyskie region in central Poland (Poland)**

#### *CONTEXT*

The mayor of Baćkowice has long ago foreseen that his area can be threatened with depopulation, so has been consistently taking initiatives to prevent this. The decline of the local textile industry has left many local women unemployed.

## APPROACH

The municipality has made land available for business investment and obtained funding from ERDF to build a business incubator. The mayor encouraged a textile entrepreneur who found a niche market (producing uniforms for military or health services) to establish his production in the incubator. As public transport had disappeared and women from the surrounding villages had no means to get to work, the mayor negotiated with the bus company of the nearby city to move its offices to Baćkowice and pay lower costs and taxes. In return, the bus company opened a connection enabling women to get to the textile plant. Over 100 women, many of them aged 50+ and/or from migrant communities, found employment there.

## GOOD PRACTICES

Other initiatives in the area: 1) further development of the business incubator with municipal funding, with new companies setting up (e.g. a dentistry cabinet from Warsaw, which improves access to health services for the local population); 2) small grants from the municipality to local NGOs and to informal groups, including advance payments to help overcome lack of cash; 3) the creation of local associations to take over public schools at risk of closure and convert them to community schools, and getting one of the best schoolmasters in the region to settle down in Baćkowice, thus ensuring high quality education in the local secondary school; 4) a new home for the elderly – not only with day care, but also with the possibility to stay and get 24 hours care; 5) the local LEADER LAG putting in place different activities stimulating community initiative and facilitating access to funding to small scale beneficiaries.

*Figure 37: Different activities led by people (Photo courtesy: Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Wsi Świętokrzyskiej).*



## REFLECTIONS

The public system, including social support – very often highly bureaucratised – is not sufficient to maintain rural communities alive; it is up to the people themselves, while the public sector can only create a good framework. Institutionalisation of NGOs is not the answer; a multiple network

of linkages is important, as well as the involvement of educated, open-minded, forward-thinking people.

### **Case study 3: Villages of Flegessen, Hasperde and Klein Süntel (Central Lower Saxony, Germany)**

#### *CONTEXT*

Around 2010 the villages of Flegessen, Hasperde and Klein Süntel (FHKS) in Lower Saxony (Germany) had gathered some experience in the village renewal programme, financed by the Land of Lower Saxony. The programme was supposed to initiate citizen participation in the villages and rural areas in the area of Hameln and Bad Münder and start projects that would renovate the looks and infrastructure in rural areas.

#### *APPROACH*

Unfortunately, this whole process lacked creativity and power, so some villagers were quite frustrated. In addition, the local authority announced that the primary school would be closing, which provided an initial spark for a powerful village movement. A “core group” got together and decided that they could not waste the potential of community participation and started gathering ideas of how to this more sustainably over time and with more creative approaches. Then they registered the association, Ideenwerkstatt Dorfzukunft e.V., and organised the first “Ideas-Workshop” in 2012. As a result, they started creating “project groups” with their own key-person responsible to report back and coordinate with the core group.

#### *GOOD PRACTICES*

Since then, community participation has been catalysed into diverse initiatives and projects in all kinds of areas (education, food, mobility, housing, enterprises ...). The association is mainly supported by voluntary work. Also, they have been able to access different small funding programmes from the cultural and community sector at a regional and federal level. Key persons see themselves as facilitating the process and enabling others to endeavour and get into a more commercial area, like for example a food-coop, a cohousing project or the academy for change. These small enterprises work successfully in market economy context.

Figure 38: Dorfladen (photo: Katarina Bauer).



### *REFLECTIONS*

The process of building resilience in the villages of Flegessen, Hasperde and Klein Süntel teaches how to build collective capacity starting from a small core-group and spreading responsibilities among more people in the community. The need to articulate collective power through a series of organisations with and without legal entity and with different degrees of professionalisation is also instructive. Stronger self-organisation, a participative needs assessment as well as sensitive governance and new very specific services and infrastructure as tangible results for higher resilience in the community are key aspects to reflect upon.

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