



SCALE UP

community-driven
bioeconomy development

WS5 Training Programme Protocol

**Social innovations in rural areas:
Session #1: Driving growth in rural communities via
social innovations – policies, concepts and drivers**

14 May 2024

Session #1: Driving growth in rural communities via social innovations – policies, concepts and drivers.

Session number 1 in the field of Social Innovations in rural areas focused on promoting growth in rural communities through social innovations, policies, concepts, and drivers. The session took place on May 14, 2024, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm CET.

The session began with a welcome and introduction to the project, emphasising the potential of social innovation to drive positive change in rural areas. Michael Fischer from ÓAR delivered a keynote address analysing social innovation within the LEADER framework, highlighting the importance of regional decision-making in effectively addressing local needs. This was followed by Bel Barroso's presentation on bio-inspired social innovations, stressing the importance of community understanding and collaboration in overcoming rural challenges like depopulation and limited access to services.

Barbara Aichinger presented a case study on the "Tischlein deck dich" Food Coop, demonstrating how local initiatives can make fresh, regional food more accessible and promote eco-friendly and healthy lifestyles.

After a brief coffee break, participants engaged in breakout room discussions focused on identifying societal needs and challenges in their regions, discussing desirable policies and initiatives, and brainstorming social innovation projects that could be implemented locally. Each breakout room presented its findings, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and strategies.

The session concluded with a feedback segment, where participants shared their insights and responses to the discussions. Upcoming sessions were announced, including "Collaborative Approaches to Boost Social Innovations" on June 4, 2024, and "Recreating the Food System through Social Innovations" on June 25, 2024. The event wrapped up with a short survey to gather attendees' feedback, ensuring the training program's continuous improvement.

Overall, the session successfully highlighted the transformative potential of social innovation in rural communities, providing valuable knowledge and fostering collaborative discussions among participants.

BREAK-OUT ROOMS

1. What are the main societal needs and challenges in your region to be tackled?

NORTH MACEDONIA

Strumica region faces several critical challenges that require a comprehensive approach. Modernizing agriculture is essential to enhance productivity and sustainability through advanced technologies like precision farming and automated equipment. Additionally, our aging population demands improved healthcare services, social support, and age-friendly infrastructure to ensure their well-being and active participation in society. Promoting value chain development in composting can drive environmental sustainability and economic growth by recycling organic waste and creating jobs within the green economy. Rural development is also crucial, focusing on infrastructure improvements and job creation to revitalize these areas and reduce urban migration. Implementing composting programs in public parks can effectively manage organic waste, lower municipal costs, and foster community engagement in sustainable practices. By addressing these areas, we aim to build a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous region.

SPAIN

The main needs identified in our region are:

- Development of measures to promote social innovation in rural areas
- Equal employment and social opportunities
- Attracting and retaining talent
- Sustainability of resources (water, soil and crops). Development of the bio-economy.
- Education, digitalisation and entrepreneurship.

The main obstacles identified in our region are:

- Lack of territorial cohesion
- Lack of social cohesion
- Depopulation

2. What are current or desirable policies, initiatives or actions that would be needed to answer those needs and challenges?

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SPAIN

The main policies and initiatives required to respond to the needs are:

- Social Innovation projects
- Sectoral Policies on water, soil, and bioeconomy
- Rural entrepreneurship programmes
- Open innovation programmes
- Strong collaboration with city council and social innovation niches.

3. Discuss an example of social innovation project that could be implemented in your region and in the selected value chain?

NORTH MACEDONIA

An exemplary social innovation project for Strumica region's composting value chain could involve the joint gathering of agricultural residues from farmers at a centralized location. This hub would produce and sell local compost, rewarding contributing farmers with a portion of the compost to enhance their soil health. A related initiative could organize local bio-waste for a biogas power plant, converting organic waste into renewable energy. Although it requires significant investment, it would reduce reliance on fossil fuels and create economic opportunities in renewable energy. Scaling up businesses for worm-based compost production, like the successful example in Strumica, is another promising avenue. Expanding this model would increase high-quality compost production and provide additional income for local entrepreneurs. Additionally, fostering collaboration between farmers for mushroom production—where one provides straw and another grows mushrooms—would maximize resource use and diversify income sources. This cooperative approach enhances productivity and profitability, contributing to the agricultural sector's sustainability. Implementing these initiatives would boost environmental sustainability, create new business opportunities, and strengthen community ties, promoting a resilient and prosperous region.

SPAIN

A number of potential social innovation programmes could be applied in our region, including:

- **The LABME 2030 Social Innovation Laboratory** is an example of a social innovation initiative that could be implemented in our region. The objective is to facilitate the creation of plans and projects that have a social and economic impact. The objective is to revitalise Andalusia through social entrepreneurship.
- **FAMP Laboratory for Territorial Innovation and Social Cohesion, in terms of Equal Opportunities.** The objective of this project is to promote the social and economic revitalisation of Andalusia's municipalities by proposing actions to combat depopulation and preserve the region's rural environment.
- **The National Rural Network (NRN)** is a platform whose mission is to promote rural development, made up of the main actors related to the rural environment. The NRN has developed an innovative experience called "Modelos experimentales de olivar adhesionado".
- **RAIA Project:** Support network for rural agricultural innovation in Andalusia- Alentejo-Algarve. The objective is to establish a cross-border network for innovation, with more than 100 individuals participating.

Cross-regional conclusions/learnings

What can we do?

- **Modernise Agriculture:** We can adopt advanced technologies such as precision farming and automated equipment to enhance productivity and sustainability in agricultural practices.
- **Improve Healthcare and Social Services:** Comprehensive healthcare services, social support systems, and age-friendly infrastructure must be developed to address the needs of an ageing population.
- **Promote Environmental Sustainability:** To recycle organic waste, create jobs, and foster environmental sustainability, we must implement value chain development in composting and other green economy initiatives.
- **Boost Rural Development:** Our focus should be on infrastructure improvements, job creation, and social innovation projects to revitalise rural areas, reduce urban migration, and promote equal opportunities.
- **Enhance Education and Digitalization:** Investing in education, digital skills, and entrepreneurship is crucial to attracting and retaining talent and supporting sustainable regional development.

Take home messages

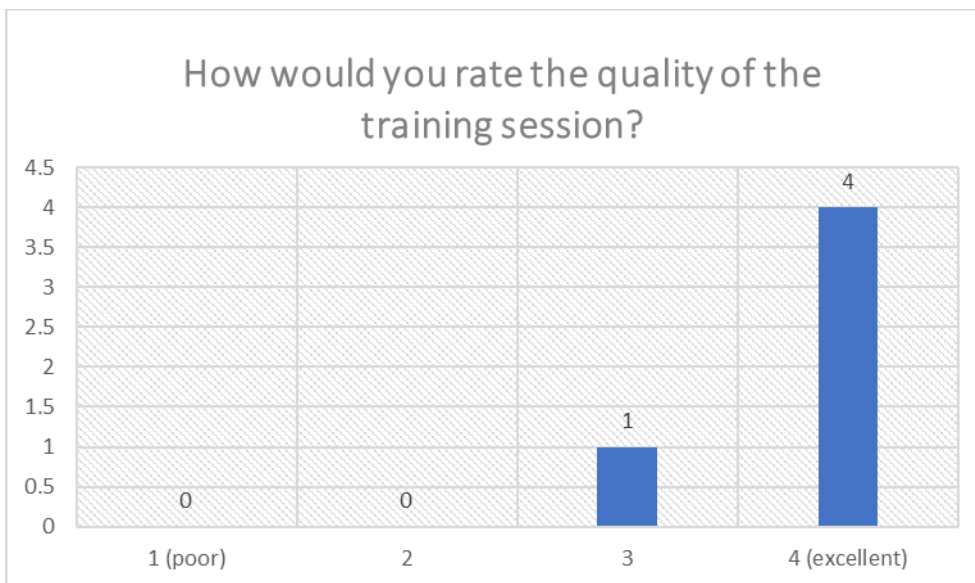
- **Social Innovation:** Addressing rural depopulation and lack of cohesion through projects such as social innovation labs and rural entrepreneurship programs is essential.
- **Environmental Initiatives:** Promoting sustainable resource management and bio-economy practices, such as composting and renewable energy projects, is critical.
- **Collaborative Approaches:** Encourage collaboration between various stakeholders, including local councils, farmers, and entrepreneurs, to create a supportive ecosystem for social and economic revitalisation.
- **Healthcare and Support Systems:** Improving healthcare services and social support infrastructure is necessary to enhance the quality of life for an ageing population.
- **Education and Talent Retention:** Education is critical to regional development. To retain and attract talent, it focuses on providing educational opportunities, digitalisation, and support for entrepreneurship.

Participant feedback

At the end of the training session, the participants were asked to fill in a short survey to evaluate the training session. In the end, 5 participants responded to the survey, of which 2 from Spain and 2 from Poland. Additionally, 1 international participant from Tanzania answered the English survey. This gave the following results:

1.1 Quality

The participants were asked to rate the quality of the training session on a scale from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). 4 out of 5 participants answered this question with a 4, meaning they found the training session to be of excellent quality. Additionally, 1 participant answered this question with a score of 3.

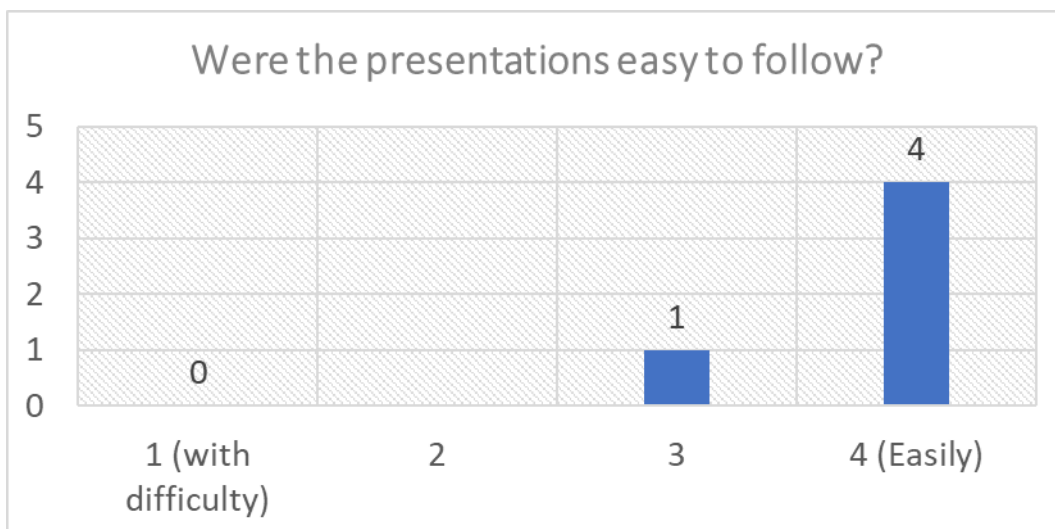


The participants were then asked what went well during the session. The participants answered that they liked the presentations and the practical suggestions to motivate youths with hard skills. Additionally, they mentioned that it was an inspiring group of people.

Next, the participants were asked what could have gone better. This question did not get any responses.

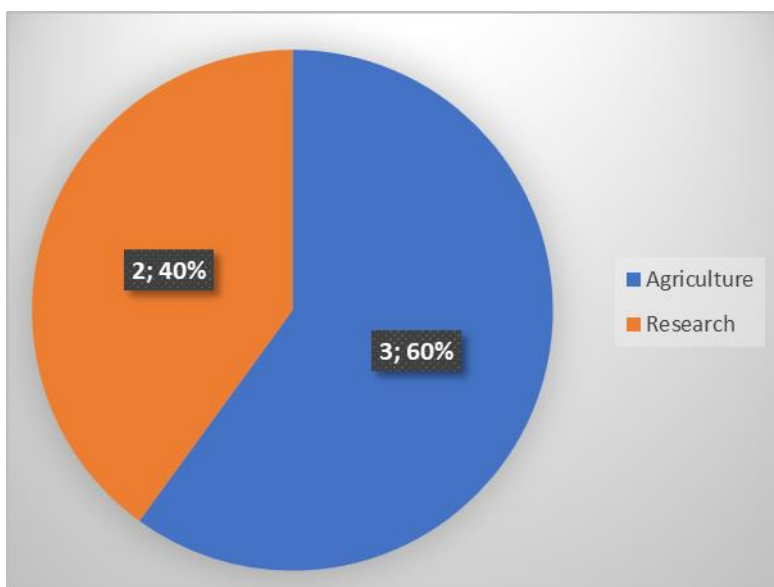
1.2 Understandability

The participants were also asked whether the presentations were easy to follow. They were asked to rate this on a scale from 1 (with difficulty) to 4 (easily). Again, out of the 5 responses, 4 were a score of 4 (easily), and 1 person gave it a score of 3.



1.3 Field of occupation

The survey concluded with an optional question regarding the participant's field of occupation. The participants indicated to be working in agriculture and research.



Participants:

If you wish to get in touch with one of the participants from this session, please contact someone in the SCALE-EP consortium.

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