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

D4.3 - RURALITIES ROLE MODELS, REPLICATORS AND SERIOUS GAME

Horizon Europe Grant agreement: 101060876

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ACRONYMS

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

1 ABSTRACT

The project 'Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres' (RURALITIES) delivers an ecosystem-enhancing and climate action driven expertise and learning framework organized in hubs e.g., the **'RURALITIES'**, comprising a series of innovative methodologies with the learner at its core, supported by a comprehensive network of living labs, and a blockchain-based digital platform combining the Internet and wireless technologies, to assist engage, connect and empower actors. This is done via a multi-point approach e.g., multi-actors, multi-disciplines, multi-systems, multi-scale, multi-sectors, and multilevel.

RURALITIES is rooted in the recruitment, preparation, training and coaching of 1.000+ facilitators for a variety of tasks (e.g., trainers, facilitators, role models, hub coordinators, etc.), and who play a significant role in creating the matrix and the platform upon which the learning framework is built, develops and evolves. **RURALITIES** proposes to ideate, implement, futureproof, validate and deliver the aforementioned expertise and learning centers via real-scale practicing in 6 simplified rural socio-ecological systems (SIMSES) e.g., demonstrators, 2 in Italy, 1 in the United- Kingdom (UK), 1 in Slovenia, 1 in Spain and 1 in Romania. RURALITIES coordinates identified actions of local, and regional authorities in support of rural innovation in regions and economic sectors where rural innovators are not yet engaged in a relevant network.

RURALITIES coordinates identified SIMSES networks promoting rural innovation solutions whilst establishing innovative multipoint 'RURALITIES Hubs' of expertise and training on rural innovation. This is done via coordinating action for the managing authorities and regional bodies influencing regional and national policy instruments in Italy, the UK, Slovenia, Spain and Romania.

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29	BEN	YTED	YOUTHS IN TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT UGANDA LIMITED	UG
30	BEN	CTIC	FUNDACION CTIC CENTRO TECNOLOGICO PARA EL DESARROLLO EN ASTURIAS DE LASTECNOLOGIAS DE LA INFORMACION	ES
31	BEN	FHV	FONDAZIONE HOMO VIATOR - SAN TEBALDO	IT
32	BEN	MOFE	MONTEFELTRO SVILUPPO SCARL	IT
33	BEN	MUSE	MUSEUM GRAPHIA	IT

RURALITIES

34	BEN	CDM	LA CORTE DELLA MINIERA SRL	IT
35	BEN	DEX	DESARROLLO DE ESTRATEGIAS EXTERIORESSA	ES
36	BEN	REDA	ASOCIACION RED ASTURIANA DEDESARROLLO RURAL	ES
37	BEN	GMV	MONTAGNA VICENTINA SOCIETA COOPERATIVA	IT
38	BEN	MARA	MAROC HORIZON D'AVENTURES	MA
39	BEN	UNWI	UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI	MW
40	BEN	NOMA	0KMNOMADS.ORG	GH
41	BEN	UNIM	MAGYAR AGRAR- ES ELETTUDOMANYIEGYETEM	HU
42	BEN	ENIC	ECOLE NATIONALE D'INGENIEURS DECARTHAGE	TN
43	BEN	UASZ	UNIVERSITE ASSANE SECK DE ZIGUINCHOR	SN
44	BEN	CPF	CONFEDERATION PAYSANNE DU FASO	BF
45	BEN	UNAD	UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA	RW
46	BEN	ZLAN	ZAMBIA LAND ALLIANCE	ZM
47	BEN	EVRO	EVROSAD PROIZVODNJA TRGOVINAEVETOVANJE D.O.O. KRSKO	SI
48	BEN	SEVO	TURISTICNO DRUSTVO SENOVO	SI
49	BEN	IISAC	ISTITUTO D'ISTRUZIONE SUPERIORE ACECCHI	IT
50	AP	HITP	THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP	UK
51	AP	ASPI	ASPIRE-IGEN GROUP LIMITED	UK
52	AP	EW	CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND RESEARCHTRUST	UK

2 INTRODUCTION

The current document, titled **D4.3. RURALITIES role models, replicators, and serious game** has been elaborated within the framework of the RURALITIES project which is co-funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101060876. UK participants in Horizon Europe Project RURALITIES are supported by UKRI grant numbers: 10051963 The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership and 10050988 Earthwatch Europe.

Work package (WP) 4 outlines a framework for communication, dissemination, exploitation of project results and synergies to foster two-way exchange through networking with multi actors. The overall objective of WP4 is to achieve the transfer of information about the aims, progress and outcomes of the project and ensure dissemination to and the uptake (exploitation) of project results by key end-users, whilst fostering sustainable synergies and two-way information exchange mechanisms with relevant networks and stakeholders.

Within the strategic framework of WP4, D4.3 is linked to **Task 4.3 - "Gamify RURALITIES," recruit and equip role models and 'replicators'.** This task aims to transform rural communities' perceptions of rural innovation, utilizing a game-based platform for awareness-raising and capacity-building education.

Looking forward, the initiative sets an ambitious goal to expand this network to include more than 1000 role models and replicators—also referred to as 'multipliers'—by the project's conclusion. Their crucial mission is to stimulate the project plan, significantly extending its reach and impact. A particular focus is placed on enhancing the visibility of RURALITIES and facilitating the replication of its successful strategies across broader contexts.

This document is designed to not only record the development and expansion of this influential network but also to illustrate the realization of this key performance indicator (KPI) with quantifiable results and achievements. D4.3 serves as a platform to highlight and describe the role models, replicators, and the serious game within the broader context of the project's objectives and outcomes.

2.1   Objectives

D4.3 presents the establishment of a network comprising over 100 role models and replicators, a critical milestone achieved under Task 4.3 by M18. These individuals play a pivotal role in overseeing and guiding the collective progress of the RURALITIES Augmented Knowledge Alliance for the whole course of the project. Their comprehensive training, the curriculum of which is detailed in D4.2, is foundational to their effectiveness in this role.

Over the initial 18 months of the project, RURALITIES partners have been actively engaged in creating a repository of RURNex actors worldwide through Task 5.1. This approach adopts a multi-actor strategy that involves identifying facilitators who will serve as role models, influencers, and replicators. By March 2024, the aim was to identify 100 facilitators (T4.3) who will then join the co-creation process and contribute to the RURALITIES Augmented Knowledge Alliance. This online platform is envisioned to house a repository of over 10,000 actors within the RURNex network worldwide.

Once engaged, facilitators will be equipped to expand and actively oversee the development of this network throughout the project's lifecycle. Importantly, one of the primary goals of engaging facilitators in this co-creation process is to empower them with the necessary tools to sustain and enhance synergy within the RURALITIES ALLIANCE even after the project concludes.

2.2   Structure of the document

D4.3 presents a structured and systematic approach outlining the development of the network and the underlying considerations. This document has been structured into five primary sections, each serving a distinct purpose and containing a unique set of information:

1. **Chapter 1 and 2**: present an initial overview of the context in which this report was crafted, along with its intended objectives.

2. **Chapter 3 RURALITIES Network of role models and replicators:** focusing on the description of profiles, and on the creation process.

3. **Chapter 4 Engagement strategy:** formulating concrete actions for engaging these multipliers.

4. **Chapter 5 Serious game:** describing the challenges encountered regarding the serious game and proposing new strategise for RURALITIES game-based learning

3 **RURALITIES** NETWORK OF ROLE MODELS AND REPLICATORS

3.1 Profiles

The "RURALITIES Network of Role Models and Replicators" is a fundamental segment of the larger RURALITIES project, playing an essential role in amplifying its outreach. Our goal is to characterize and outline the profiles of the individuals and organizations that form the core of the RURALITIES Community.

Role Models: Catalysts for Positive Change

Within the RURALITIES project, role models are individuals who exemplify inspirational and motivational leadership, steering others with their exemplary conduct, attitudes, and achievements. They stand as vivid examples of the attainable heights through sustainable practices and innovative solutions. Their performances and successes act as a beacon of inspiration and motivation for both facilitators and local communities, showcasing the practicality of adopting project initiatives. The contribution of role models transcends mere motivation; they play a crucial role in offering guidance and mentorship to the disparate rural actors engaged in the project. Through sharing their knowledge and experiences, they assist others in navigating the complexities and opportunities of rural development and sustainability. By representing the highpoint of excellence and ethical behavior in their domains or communities, role models establish lofty benchmarks for achievement. They are the embodiments of success within the RURALITIES project, driving positive shifts in behavior and mindset across rural communities and initiating a wider transformation that propels sustainable development in multiple sides.

Replicators: Champions of Success in Varied Fields

On the other hand, replicators assume a vital role in transposing the successful strategies, models, and innovations crafted within the RURALITIES project to the varied rural landscapes of the participant countries. They are key to ensuring that these innovations cast a wide net, extending well beyond the project's immediate realm. Given with the skill to tailor these successful blueprints to new settings, replicators ensure the applicability and efficacy of these models in tackling the distinctive challenges encountered in different rural environments. They act as the bridge, disseminating best practices and innovations across varied locales and communities, thereby bridging the gap between project achievements and their extensive application. Moreover, replicators enrich the project with valuable insights through feedback on the deployment of replicated models, fostering a cycle of ongoing enhancement and refinement that boosts the initiatives' overall impact. By mirroring successful frameworks, replicators are indispensable in broadcasting the project's vision on a grander scale, optimizing the positive outcomes of our endeavors.

3.2 The creation process

IRI, PEDAL and SIMSES lead partners along with WP leaders successfully established and preliminarily mapped our network in direct alignment with Task 5.1's objectives. To facilitate consistent communication and collaborative efforts among SIMSES partners, we've initiated bi-weekly SIMSES calls,

diligently organized by T5.1 leader IRI and PEDAL as coordinator. These calls serve not only as a platform for maintaining regular contact but also play a crucial role in the structured mapping of actors, which are subsequently cataloged in the Actors Input Repository for in-depth analysis and further engagement strategies.

Adhering to the strict protocols outlined in the D1.1 Data Management Plan and D3.1 – RURALITIES Ethics Appraisal Scheme, we've taken particular steps to ensure full compliance with GDPR regulations and the protection of personal data standards throughout this process. This commitment to ethical standards and data protection is paramount to our project's integrity and the trust of all stakeholders involved.
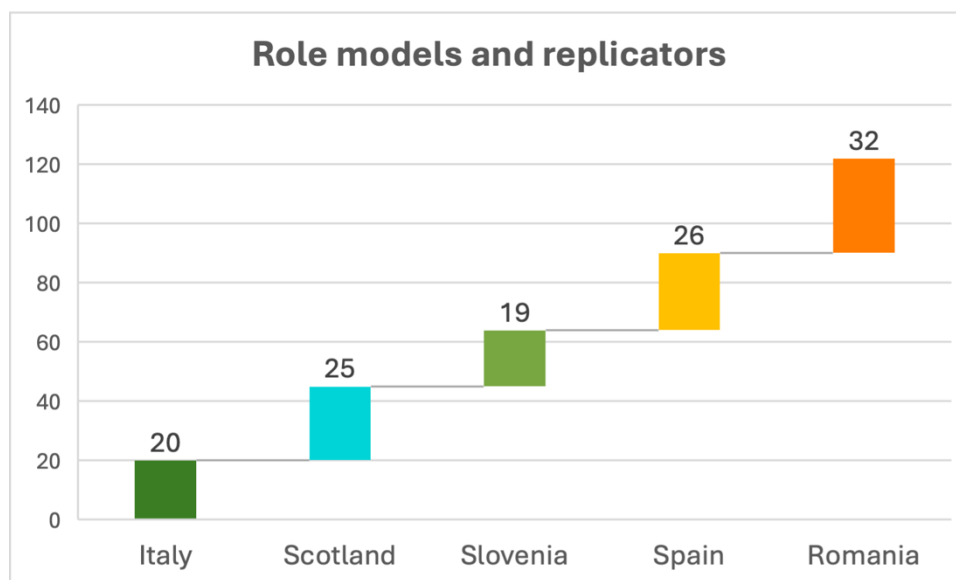

Figure 1 Number of role models and replicators by M18.

During this crucial phase of the project, our concerted efforts and the dedication of SIMSES partners have led to the identification and engagement of 122 role models and replicators. This achievement not only marks a significant milestone for the project but also confidently meets the dedicated Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for M18. There are opportunities to achieve a more geographically balanced distribution of engaged actors across SIMSES partners and enhance our outreach for SIMSES 1 Marche in Italy.

The distribution and reach of these engaged multipliers are comprehensively illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.
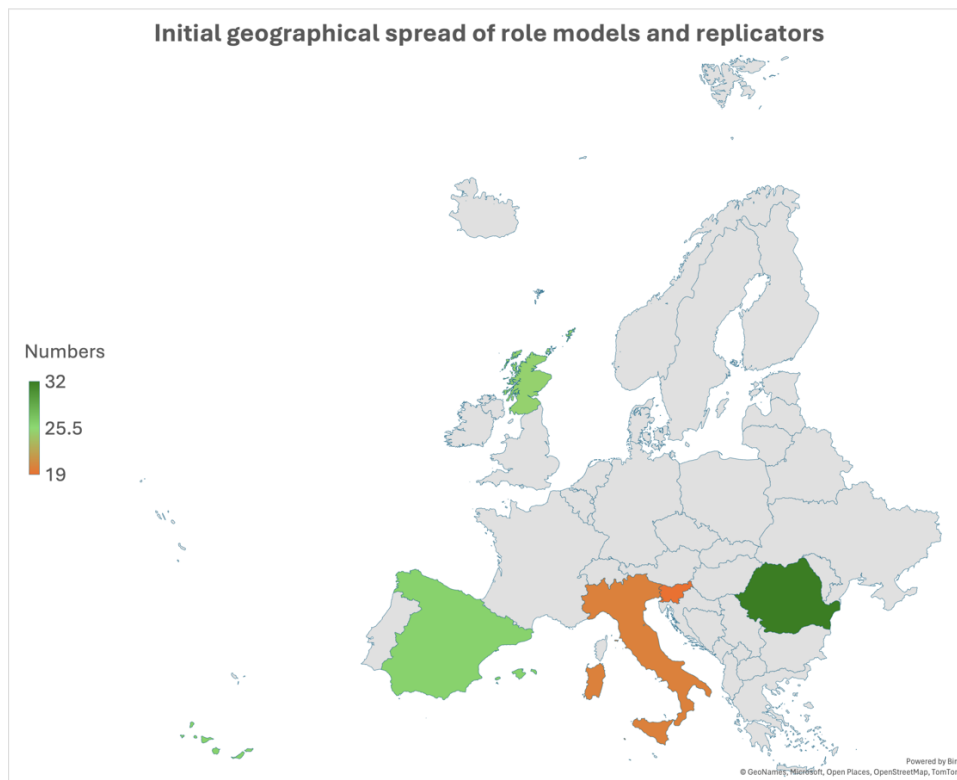
Figure 2 Initial geographical spread of role models and replicators by M18.

SIMSES partners have actively cerated their network through a diverse array of activities, encompassing workshops, events, campaigns, field visits, webinars, and more. These efforts have been carefully designed to foster interaction, share knowledge, and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders. Workshops and webinars served as platforms for in-depth discussions and learning, enabling participants to delve into specific topics and gain valuable insights of the project activities. Events and campaigns were orchestrated to raise awareness and promote the objectives of the project, reaching a broader audience and sparking interest in our initiatives. Field visits provided hands-on experiences and real-world context, allowing participants to witness the application of practices and innovations firsthand. Through these multifaceted engagement strategies, SIMSES partners have not only expanded their network but also enriched the collaborative ecosystem, driving forward the project's goals and fostering sustainable development.

Moving forward, our focus remains on leveraging this robust network of motivated individuals and organizations. Through their continued involvement, we aim to foster a collaborative environment that not only drives the project forward but also contributes significantly to the sustainable development of rural communities at large.

4 ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Strategies for engagement

Stakeholder engagement within the framework of our initiative unfolds across four distinct levels: informing, consulting, involving, and ultimately collaborating with stakeholders. Up to this point, our partners have been diligent in identifying potential stakeholders who could serve as both role models and replicators for the project. The training outlined in D4.2 represents an initial step towards informing these identified role models and replicators about the project's scope and objectives. This initial engagement serves as a foundation for further interaction.

Following the training, the process of soliciting feedback from participants embodies a consultative approach, evaluating their interest in the project and setting the stage for deeper involvement. This progression naturally leads to the involvement stage, where stakeholders begin to take an active role in the project, culminating in a collaborative partnership within the alliance we are building.

Collaboration stands as the cornerstone of our engagement strategy with stakeholders, particularly critical for the success of RURALITIES. At this stage, stakeholders are not only fully engaged and committed to the project but also ready to leverage their networks to amplify our message. Their influence becomes evident as they disseminate their knowledge and expertise, providing invaluable input back into the alliance. Achieving this level of engagement is the ultimate goal of our training efforts.

This structured approach to engagement mirrors the phases and outcomes outlined in our engagement process, specifically designed for engaging stakeholders who, in the context of RURALITIES, are the role models and replicators. Each level of engagement is strategically planned to ensure a seamless transition from merely informing stakeholders to engaging them as active collaborators, thereby enriching the project with their contributions and fostering a dynamic and productive alliance.

4.2 Feedback mechanisms and participant experiences.

Incorporating a concise electronic survey as part of our training approach will significantly enhance the effectiveness of both self-directed training packs and in-person seminars or events. Distributing this survey at the conclusion of the training session ensures that feedback is captured when the experience is still vivid in the participants' minds, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining insightful and relevant responses.

For events conducted in person, providing a physical copy of the survey towards the end of the session can encourage a higher response rate. Additionally, allocating time for an open discussion while participants complete the survey allows training leaders to address any immediate questions or feedback, fostering a more interactive and engaging learning environment.

Suggested Feedback Questions include:

- Your level of satisfaction with the training received.

- Clarity on the project's objectives post-training.

- Understanding of your role within the project following the training.

- Preferences regarding the training format and any suggestions for content addition or removal.

- Confidence in disseminating the training to others.

Collecting data through a mix of open-ended and multiple-choice questions enables a balanced analysis, combining quantitative insights with qualitative feedback to identify areas of improvement.

Following up with participants approximately a week after the training through a simple email can provide an additional layer of support and engagement. This follow-up allows participants to further reflect on the training content, discuss it within their networks, and potentially raise new questions or feedback. Although the response rate to this secondary feedback mechanism may vary, it reinforces the project's commitment to participant support and continuous improvement.

4.3 Impact and Evaluation

Evaluating a project with the longevity and scope of RURALITIES poses unique challenges, especially against prevailing misconceptions that evaluation is both unimportant and overly time-consuming. However, in this context, evaluation is crucial—it not only aids in supporting the learners but also plays a vital role in motivating their continued participation in subsequent phases of the project. Acknowledging their expertise and insights is essential, as their contributions are fundamental to the project's success.

Evaluation Methods

To gather meaningful data for evaluation, we will employ surveys and feedback questionnaires. These tools will be complemented by insights from training leaders who have conducted seminars and workshops. The development of these evaluative questions will involve thorough discussions among partners to ensure they are tailored to the specific needs of each sector and the broader SIMSES context. Prior to distribution, the survey will undergo a pretest to verify its relevance and applicability, allowing for necessary adjustments.

Initial Outcomes and Enhancements for Participants

The initial feedback and survey results will establish a baseline for the project's evaluation framework. Subsequent surveys will be administered at different stages to both new participants and those who have transitioned into new roles, providing a dynamic view of participant engagement and learning outcomes. The response rate, juxtaposed with participant retention, will serve as a quantitative measure of the project's impact. Qualitatively, patterns in feedback will be analyzed to identify areas where the training might need refinement or augmentation, ensuring the content remains relevant and impactful.

This ongoing evaluative process is designed to be inclusive and comprehensive, minimizing bias by examining feedback across various roles, industries, and the SIMSES context. By identifying consistent feedback trends, the project can iteratively refine the training content, ensuring that it evolves in tandem with the project's progression. Such a continuous evaluation not only enhances the current project's efficacy but also identifies potential directions for future initiatives beyond the project's conclusion. This approach underscores the importance of evaluation as a cornerstone for both immediate improvement and long-term strategic planning.

4.4   Next Steps for Role Models and Replicators

Post-Training Responsibilities and Activities

Following the completion of RURALITIES training and their feedback submission, role models and facilitators are expected to re-engage with their networks, initiating a multifaceted process. They should evaluate whether they possess connections that could be instrumental to the project and, if so, mobilize these contacts. Such connections may include local knowledge sources, replicators skilled at adjusting approaches to specific locations or sectors, role models poised to mentor facilitators, and facilitators tasked with managing hubs. As these networks expand, initial learners might also find their roles evolving within the project's framework. It's crucial for these role models and facilitators to not only broaden their networks but also to share the RURALITIES project's insights, potentially even delivering the training they've received to new connections, thus perpetuating the project's reach and impact.

As every participant engages additional connections, a cascading network effect follows, enhancing the project's scope and depth. These growing networks contribute valuable knowledge, resources, and insights, fostering a rich environment of mutual learning and the development of solutions that are both context-specific and globally applicable. Learners act as pivotal connectors, bridging diverse perspectives and facilitating the integration of a broad range of insights into the RURALITIES initiative.

Role models and replicators, armed with newfound skills and knowledge, are encouraged to actively implement these insights within their communities, sharing their expertise to promote the project's goals. Their efforts are instrumental in the enrichment of Living Labs network and the broader Rural Thrive 2050 campaign, creating a dynamic cycle of learning, application, and community engagement.

Support and Follow-Up Strategies

To ensure the sustained engagement and growth of learners within the RURALITIES project, partners are committed to providing comprehensive support throughout the journey. This support can vary from assistance in establishing Living Labs, drawing on the expertise of role models and replicators, to guiding them towards the project's resources. Initial contact by partners serves as a cornerstone for continued engagement, offering learners a sense of familiarity and comfort as they navigate their roles within the project.

Regular communication, such as check-in emails, will be initiated to remind learners of the ongoing support available to them, reinforcing the network of assistance throughout the project's lifespan. Additionally, monitoring communication channels like inboxes and social media groups ensures that inquiries from learners are promptly addressed or directed to the appropriate party for resolution. To streamline responses to common queries, pre-written answers will be developed, optimizing the efficiency of communication and support.

5 SERIOUS GAME

5.1 Challenges and limitations encountered

T4.3 – Gamify RURALITIES, recruit and equip role models and 'replicators' aims to develop a serious game for RURALITIES that will improve rural communities' understanding and engagement with rural innovation through a game-based approach to awareness-raising and educational capacity building. The objective from April 2023 (Month 7) to March 2024 (Month 18) was to digitalize the serious social simulation game created by the RURITAGE project (H2020 ID: 776465), utilizing the Systemic Innovation Areas (SIA) framework. Initially, this responsibility was assigned to ASPI, a partner which unfortunately went under administration by UK authorities as of June 2023 (Month 9). Subsequently, HITRANS and PEDAL stepped in to oversee the task and the associated deliverables' preparation. Despite operational adjustments being made to adhere to the project timeline, formal approval for this change has been pending due to a rejected amendment package. Confirmation of the new task allocation is anticipated following the conclusion of the first reporting period and its related reporting processes.

PEDAL attempted to obtain the most recent updates and preliminary results from the ASPI team without success, leading to the task's reset in July 2023. We received the game through our partner FHV, who had been in contact with partners from the RURITAGE project. An initial analysis was conducted among SIMSES partners to explore the game's digitization possibilities further. Upon reviewing the game's Terms of Use, we identified several restrictions from the Centre for Systems Solutions (the game's developer) that impact its application in RURALITIES that the game:

- cannot be disseminated (distributed) via other websites or other means,
- cannot be modified without permission from the Centre for Systems Solutions

Despite several attempts, we are still awaiting guidance on how the game might be utilized within the RURALITIES project.

5.2 New Strategies for RURALITIES Game-Based Learning

In response to the challenges encountered with the integration and application of the serious game within the RURALITIES project, SIMSES partners and WP leaders have engaged in a comprehensive discussion to explore alternative strategies. These discussions aim to ensure the continuation of the game-based learning component, pivotal for the project's success. As a way forward, several innovative scenarios and enhancements have been proposed:

Focused Integration of RURALITIES Concept: We propose to selectively incorporate specific RURALITIES concepts within a serious game that are closely aligned with the Grant Agreement (GA). This approach involves:
- Narrowing down to one or a few topics intimately connected to the SIMSES area, ensuring the game's content is highly relevant and can be effectively piloted and validated within this context.
- Enriching the game with role players that represent RURALITIES' target groups and possibly extending beyond to include young entrepreneurs, state authorities, and vulnerable populations. This inclusion aims to mirror the diverse stakeholders involved in rural innovation, though it requires verification if such elements are already present within the game.

Localized Piloting and Translation:
- Implementing a pilot of the game in one designated SIMSES area to gather insights and assess the game's impact and relevance to local challenges and opportunities.
- Considering the translation of the game content from English into the national languages of SIMSES areas to enhance accessibility and engagement. This could potentially involve leveraging facilitators proficient in the respective languages to undertake the translation effort.

Expanding Target Audience: Identifying the most impactful target groups for the game's deployment, such as schools, high schools, or vocational training institutions. Engaging with educational establishments could significantly broaden the understanding and application of rural innovation concepts among younger populations and future changemakers.

Training for Trainers: Developing a comprehensive 'Train the Trainer' program to equip educators, facilitators, and partners with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively utilize the game as a teaching and engagement tool. This program would cover not only the game mechanics but also strategies for integrating the game's lessons into broader educational or capacity-building activities.

To operationalize these strategies, we propose the development of an initial action plan that outlines key activities, timelines, and responsible parties for each proposed scenario. Recognizing the dynamic nature of project implementation, this plan will be designed with flexibility, allowing for adjustments based on evolving resources, insights from pilot implementations, and any unforeseen challenges that may arise. This proactive and adaptive approach ensures that the game-based learning component of RURALITIES remains a vibrant and effective tool for engaging and educating diverse audiences on the actualities and opportunities of rural innovation.

6 CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

D4.3 is aimed at showcasing the involvement of role models and replicators in the RURALITIES project, with a significant milestone of engaging 122 individuals marking a crucial foundation for expanding the project's reach. D4.2 complements this by providing theoretical and practical training resources for these individuals. This effort is grounded on the actors' input repository and is supported through collaborative efforts of several partners, along with bi-weekly SIMSES meetings for consistent oversight and progress tracking. Moving forward, a co-creation process will be initiated for the design of the transcontinental AU-EU campaign 'Rural Thrive 2050'. This participative effort will begin testing the concept locally in all of SIMSES's demonstration rural areas from March 2024 (M18) to September 2024 (M24). Subsequently, from October 2024 (M25) to June 2026 (M45), activities will be implemented to refine the campaign, drawing on insights from the testing phase. This preparatory work sets the stage for the anticipated official launch of the pan-European campaign 'Rural Thrive 2050' in September 2026 (M48).

In response to integration and application challenges of the serious game within the RURALITIES project, SIMSES partners and WP leaders have discussed alternative strategies for the continuation of the crucial game-based learning component. Proposals include focusing on specific RURALITIES concepts aligned with the GA, localized piloting, and translation to assess impact and enhance accessibility, expanding the target audience to include educational institutions, developing a 'Train the Trainer' program for effective game use in education, and addressing ethical and legal considerations for game usage. An initial action plan emphasizing flexibility and adaptability will outline activities, timelines, and responsible parties, ensuring the game-based learning remains an effective tool for promoting rural innovation among diverse audiences within RURALITIES project.