



ardent



entrepreneurship education
for rural development

Needs Analysis Report
Economic and Social Challenges
of the Rural Communities

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1. Introduction

This publication has been produced under the project supported by Erasmus+ entitled ARDENT-Advancing Rural Development through Entrepreneurship Education for Adults (2019-1-DE02-KA204-006491). It is produced in the form of a Needs Analysis, in which we present the societal and economic needs and challenges of a given region or community identified at the « rural consultation event ». The report gives an insight on the rural consultation events that took place in each of the Partner countries and lists the challenges identified by topic headline.

In the frame of our Erasmus+ project ARDENT, the results of the rural consultation event will help the partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to plan the content and approach of further project outputs, namely the Rural Entrepreneurship Community-based Learning Pack (CBL Program). The Rural Entrepreneurship CBL Program, will be customized in accordance with the topics that arose during the rural consultation events. The identified challenges are fixed in this needs analysis report which was produced based on the outcome of the rural consultation events. During the CBL teaching program, adult learners/ students develop and implement entrepreneurial projects targeting at an improvement of the identified themes presented in this document.

The report gives, firstly, an overview of all Rural Consultation Events held in all Partner locations in 2020. This part provides insight on how the events were planned, organized and conducted. It gives information on the rural council members backgrounds and their contribution to the meeting. The next chapter elaborates on the outcome of the rural consultation events. It gives an overview of the economic and social challenges in the rural communities and suggestions made by the Rural Council members on the solutions that would guide the student entrepreneurial projects, as well as potential topics for the community workshops to be offered during the national launches. The needs analysis report is part of the second intellectual output of the ARDENT project, besides the rural consultation roadmap. Furthermore, the ARDENT consortium has developed a set of other valuable materials that likewise contribute to entrepreneurship education for adults.

2. The Rural Consultation Events

Taking the roadmap as guideline, the partner HEIs of the ARDENT project have successfully planned and implemented the rural consultation events in their respective regions and analysed the findings which are going to be exploited during the next steps. All partners have conducted the rural consultation events, some virtually and some physically, depending on the prevailing circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A summary of each partner's event dedicated and tailored to their respective region is presented below.

Münsterland, Germany:

The Münster University of Applied Sciences (MUAS) organised their rural consultation event in October 2020 under the headline: Münsterland region: Covid-19 Challenges for the regional development. The workshop event was hosted by the Science-to-Business Marketing Research Center of Münster University of Applied Sciences in an attractive venue in the port of Münster (Hafenkäserei Münster). The preparations for the event had to be carefully coordinated in accordance with current Covid-19 regulations to ensure the safety and health of all participants. These preparations confronted the team with some challenges, as it was the first time that an external event during the pandemic had been organized in a non-digital way and with the involvement of group work.

Representatives of associated partners, such as TAFH Münster, HEI representatives, entrepreneurs, regional experts for business development or entrepreneurship as well as residents from Münsterland were invited to join the workshop, serving as a broad target group who could make valuable contributions from different perspectives.

The event started with a brief introduction from Prof. Thorsten Kliewe, managing director of the S2BMRC, who emphasized the importance of the entrepreneurial spirit in supporting Münsterland and its economic development. Subsequently, Iulia Stroila, ARDENT project coordinator and research associate at S2BMRC, and Ana Gathmann, ARDENT project assistant, explained the goal and the course of the workshop - defining the economic and societal challenges of rural areas in the Münsterland region - and the further use of the workshop results as a basis for the adult education program "Rural Entrepreneurship Accelerator". Participants were split into three separate working groups of 3-4 persons each. After a short individual brainstorming session about current drivers and barriers in the region Münsterland, the groups moved on to lively discussions. Once all group members contributed their ideas on economic and social challenges, the groups had to prioritize them according to their relevance to the region. The following part of the group work involved the identification of specific aspects related to the chosen challenge. For example, such aspects involved advantages in mastering the challenge, potential barriers, or stakeholders involved, among others. These aspects were mainly derived from the "Societal Innovation Canvas" model (taken of the roadmap), which served as a template to support and guide the structure of the creative process. In a final pitching session, the groups discussed the group work results and shared their identified challenges. A total of six challenge areas were identified as crucial that need to be addressed to build a culture of vibrant entrepreneurship in the Münsterland region and to reboot the rural economy.

The discussions revealed that the willingness to set up a company is lower in rural Münsterland than in densely populated regions. This is also due to the current labour market situation. Although there are very few start-ups in Münsterland, the probability of success is slightly above the state average. Successful start-ups like Münsterlander Bauernbox or Güllemarkt24 are a real evidence that in Münsterland lays entrepreneurial potential and rural entrepreneurship should be further encouraged. The development of rural entrepreneurship is vital because, in recent years, rural areas have faced various challenges and the percentage of rural unemployment and of population migrating to urban areas has increased considerably. Currently, the crisis around the Covid-19 pandemic leads to further difficulties, making it harder for entrepreneurs to survive in the uncertain, risky, turbulent, and ambiguous world of today.

The following challenges were identified for the Münsterland region:

- Entrepreneurial education needs to be better promoted within the region where "classic" images of entrepreneurship need to be challenged;
- bureaucracy is shifting innovation in the region;
- identification of competencies for the future under the new "normal";
- unprecedented lockdown measures have resulted in collapses of SMEs;
- SMEs in the region depend more than ever on an enabling business environment, including support for access to finance, information, and market;
- different attitudes exist within rural and urban entrepreneurs.

Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:

The rural consultation event for the region of Saxony-Anhalt was scheduled for the 1st October, hosted by the Anhalt University of Applied Sciences in Bernburg (HS Anhalt). The event was organized by Univations GmbH, together with the Kompetenzzentrum Soziale Innovation Sachsen-Anhalt (KomZ) bringing together 13 experts from relevant stakeholders and bodies in a Rural Council format. Despite the difficult pandemic situation, the overall impression and acceptance of the event was very good. The participants were discussing in a very constructive atmosphere and were very enthusiastic providing input and ideas to the given topics.

The preparation process was more difficult as usual, given the special circumstances and the fact that the event was planned to be held in person at the HS Anhalt. Health security measures had to be strictly followed and the development of the pandemic situation was monitored day by day. The event was prepared with support of KomZ and HS Anhalt. Three different workshops with two different topics each were conducted to identify the challenges for the rural regions of southern Saxony-Anhalt. The participants came from several relevant areas and could all bring in their expertise, respectively. Among them were representatives from ARDENT associated partners, such as the KomZ, the start-up centre of HS Anhalt, teaching staff, project managers with background in mobility and logistics, a local Development and Business Development Corporation and from different directorates of the regional public authority were invited to join into the event and exchange valuable knowledge and ideas. After a brief introduction to the project and an update on its status, Univations' CEO Mr. Daniel Worch explained the aim of the day - defining economic and social challenges of the rural areas in southern Saxony-Anhalt. Subsequently, the group was split into three separate workshops to cover as many

topics as possible and thereby exploit the available time in the most efficient manner. Each workshop has had their own predefined topics and headline to which the respective group found economic and social challenges. The participants were free to propose other challenges as well. In total 6 priority needs were identified:

The first workshop dealt with the topic of mobility, infrastructure, and the use of hydrogen in this context. Mobility and a good infrastructure are prerequisites for the attractiveness and future viability of a region as a residential and business location. With a lack of good accessibility of the centres, young families do not want to move to the region, and companies looking for skilled workers remain absent as well. Climate protection is an example of the changing conditions that will influence our mobility of tomorrow. Another one is an ageing society that is increasing the demand for infrastructures that accommodate the needs of the elderly.

The second workshop was dedicated to the topics of education and digitization, which have become relevant especially in the current pandemic situation. The region of Anhalt-Bitterfeld shows a high proportion of school dropouts, above the national level. Educational provision has become a challenge that is intensified by the dynamics of the demographic change such as outward migration, a decreasing number of pupils and an aging population. Lifelong learning possibilities, knowledge transfer, digital education and (individual) support, cultural education, and solutions for cases where face-to-face teaching is not possible are required. The opportunities of digitization for rural areas were discussed in this format as well, being the possibility of networking, proximity, local anchoring, dynamics, independence, and overall taking new paths.

Workshop number three dealt with the ageing and declining population especially in rural areas and the deteriorating density of medical care in these regions. The demographic development and the flight of young people to the cities, causing the depopulation of rural areas, is a double-edged sword. It poses problems and entirely new challenges for rural regions. A growing elderly community demands increasingly for access to medical care. An issue to be tackled not only in Saxony-Anhalt's rural regions but nationwide.

All the workshops had lots of potential for a vast number of underlying challenges. Therefore, the discussions in the workshops went on lively and it turned out that discovering one problem was often just the tip of an iceberg revealing others. The groups presented their results to the other Rural Council members afterwards. Feedback was quite positive, and it became clear that several stakeholders need to work together, and that innovative minds are required to find sustaining solutions to overcome some of the raised issues.

The economy of Saxony-Anhalt can be described as structurally rather weak. No matter which indicators of economic performance are considered, Saxony-Anhalt always ends up rather in the lower part of the rankings. In a national comparison it is third last in unemployment with a rate around 8 percent. The picture is even bleaker for the GDP, the most important economic indicator. Saxony-Anhalt ranks second to last in the federal comparison.

The difficult economic situation in the post-reunification period led to an almost unprecedented exodus. While almost three million people were still living in Saxony-Anhalt at the end of 1989, today there are about 700,000 fewer. Especially the younger ones left the state (especially the well skilled ones), which has led to unfavourable demographic and labour supply effects in current times.

Małopolska, Poland:

The Cracow University of Economics organized an online meeting on 19th November 2020 with 16 participants. The meeting was very successful which may be explained by the vivid discussions on the topics raised. Ahead of the “needs analysis” meeting, a research questionnaire was sent to the participants to get their opinion on the initially indicated challenges. Furthermore, the floor was open to the proposal of other challenges that could be described as accompanying the everyday rural life.

The meeting was hosted in the facilities of the Cracow University of Economics. The preparation of the event has been followed by email messaging as well as phone calls for the purpose of participation confirmation. Usage was made of virtual “breakout rooms” to allow for individual brainstorming on the different challenges. The contact details of the target group, such as representatives of business, NGOs, public administration units and universities (agricultural), were kept and maintained in an ARDENT database. This represents the quadruple helix of the region, but from the rural perspective. After welcoming the participants and arranging the necessary formal “electronic signatures” the group was divided into two discussion panels. Each of them had a moderator and one person in charge of taking minutes to not miss any important points raised during the brainstorming. The main challenges were identified ahead of the meeting based on the responses to the questionnaire that was circulated. Four main topics were chosen from all answers received. The participants are all rural experts which was the basis for their nominations as rural council members.

During the rural consultation event the following challenges of rural areas in Małopolska region were discussed:

- Commercialization and promotion of local products and services provided by social organizations and households – the challenge of which the direct causes are lack of interest in local products, egotism and mental barriers, lack of adequate interest and demand for local products and their insufficient or inadequate promotion, lack of stable logistic systems for sale of manufactured products, problems resulting from the pandemic, mainly related to limiting economic and social activity, health risks and psychological and sociological factors;
- Low level of knowledge about financing opportunities and lack of ability to raise funds – resulting from insufficient development of material and financial infrastructure, systemic risk related to financing of specific projects, challenges related primarily to the reduction of socio-economic and financial activity due to pandemic situation;
- Building attitudes of local economic patriotism – the challenge related to lack of knowledge of the benefits of purchasing local products and services for the local community and economy, no habits to buy local products/services;
- Stimulating local community activity and promoting cooperative attitudes - despite rather common belief in the sense and effectiveness of undertaking cooperation in various spheres of social and economic life, in practice, social activity and readiness to undertake actions for the common good are still relatively rare. Very often there is a lack of local leaders who have the ability to integrate the local community around a common goal.

The rural consultation event at the Cracow University of Economics revealed legal and social needs to be overcome. As for the legal actions the authorities on mostly local and regional level could be those addressing parties for making changes to support local communities. As the common opinion in both groups taking part in the workshop the local development is a domain of the local leaders, the people who most commonly get engaged in the social life and know best the habits of social adults but also young adults. They create the social wealth of the regions by their passions and the locally tailored activities. Simply their perception of the local needs and requirements is the barometer of the regional needs. Therefore, the legal actions should take into consideration the opinions of local leaders and these actions should start and be promoted by local and regional public administration authorities.

Especially regional rural areas in Poland are confronted with financial issues. The financial resources should be re-allocated to support local micro entrepreneurs and not just local businesses but also social organizations which offer local products and services that not enough well promoted and offered.

Slavonian Counties, Croatia:

The University of Osijek used the outcome of two rural council meetings to identify challenges of their region. The first rural council meeting took place in June 2020 and was part of a kick-off project meeting with 18 participants. The idea was to introduce members of the council, present the project and give them overall information to think about the project and project activities. After the presentation of the rural areas' development and agricultural production in Osijek-Baranja County, participants highlighted problems and challenges that they came across whilst working in the rural areas. The Croatian team focused their efforts on 5 Slavonian counties. Slavonia is at the east of Croatia, area between borders with Hungary, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and between three main and largest Croatian rivers: Donau, Drava and Sava. This part of Croatia is traditionally oriented towards agriculture. It was also heavily devastated during the Homeland war (1991-1995). Since all the b factories were destroyed, many people moved away (in other parts of Croatia - usually Zagreb and Istria - or other countries, predominantly Austria and Germany). This part of Croatia is divided in 5 counties: Virovitica-Podravina County, Požega-Slavonia County, Brod-Posavina County, Osijek-Baranja County and Vukovar-Srijem County. These counties, with the size of 12.486 km², is predominantly focused on food industry, agriculture, and processing industry.

The presentation of the ARDENT project attracted a lot of interest from the local community, including the local government. The location of the meeting was carefully chosen since we had to consider the suggested measures imposed by the Civil protectorate due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a matter of fact, the Croatian Civil protectorate decided on very strict measures and – similar to other EU countries – for total lockdown on 19th March 2020. The Croatian team started to plan for both options, the kick-off meeting to be held in person and via zoom platform. **At that time, the planning had two major objectives – to attract target groups and to stick with the project timeline.** The kick-off meeting was announced on all local media – TV, radio, and newspapers. The local TV (Slavonska televizija - STV) covered the event (<https://youtu.be/Tm-I4d0FCBY>).

Faculty of Economics in Osijek is actively involved in management of EU projects since 2002, and the kick-off meeting was not its first attempt to organize an event of that kind. However, the organization

of this event having in mind all the measures in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, was a new experience. To secure everyone's health during the meeting, the recommended distance between participants was ensured, tables and chairs were disinfected, and the body temperature of all participants was checked prior to the meeting. Some possible members of the Rural Council, that could not attend the meeting but were interested in joining the project, were contacted afterwards, and made aware of the meeting's outcome. All members of the Council received minutes from the meeting with the open invitation for our next meeting. Participants in the kick-off meeting were local entrepreneurs, directors of local companies (e.g., green market in Osijek), directors of business support organizations, directors and project coordinators from local development agencies, projects coordinators from LAGs, professor from the Faculty of the Agrobio-technical Sciences in Osijek and Faculty of Economics in Osijek and representatives from the local government. To increase the project's visibility, representatives from the local media (agricultural portal – AGROKLUB) were also invited in the Rural Council. Invited were as well entrepreneurs who made an impact in connecting local agricultural producers. SEG (solidarity eco group) is the projects that is perceived as the best practice example, together with the project and non-profit organization – Bio Q.

The situation in agricultural production was presented to the participants by Silva Wendling (Head of the Agricultural department in Osijek – Baranja County), who was the selected keynote speaker. During the meeting, participants brainstormed on the rural area problems, which were used for the creation of a SWOT analysis of the 5 Slavonian counties. The participants were split in 4 groups according to the challenges that were identified as major ones. The project team took care of taking notes and navigated the discussion in the groups. After the team discussion, the participants discussed major challenges and suggested solutions. All solutions were tailored according to the Croatian problems and challenges. The Triple-Helix principle (cooperation between University, government, and business sector) was included.

During the meeting, participants brainstormed on all problems they have encountered in their everyday work with people from rural areas. Problems relate to the lack of the strategic approach to rural areas and agricultural production. There are a lot of projects that are already implemented, or about to be implemented, but all these initiatives are fragmented and there is no connection between them. Through the EU projects with Hungary (cross-border cooperation) Osijek-Baranja county gets bicycle routes that connect Osijek and Mohacz, but there are no bicycle routes that connect Slavonian counties. All projects and activities should be implemented together to brand this region as one, with recognizable products and services.

The second rural council meeting was organized on 1st October 2020, again according to the measures from Croatian Civil Protectorate to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. There were 15 participants, members of the rural council meeting present at the meeting. After dividing the group in 4 teams, the participants continued to work on the identified challenges, the respective main problems, possible solutions and main obstacles. The participants also presented the best practice examples from their environment and concluded that best examples should be a teaser for attracting participants to the education part of the project.

The meeting started with the short recap of the first meeting. Participants, members of the Council presented their examples of best practice: ekotrznica.hr (SEG Osijek, online market) and www.lokalno2go.hr (online market) by LAG Slavonska ravnica. After presentations, participants

brainstormed on the rural area problems, following-up on the ones that were already agreed upon during the first meeting. Participants emphasized the following problems/weaknesses: Shortage of knowledge, complicated regulatory framework, too much administrative work, agriculture is not attractive to young people, Lost identity, subsidies are not connected with the incomes, green agriculture, we do not have centres for smart agriculture production. The participants pointed out strengths: resources and people. The participants underlined the following opportunities: We are not using all the possibilities that we have as EU member, focus on young entrepreneurs, Join the “forces” through Triple-Helix model, focus on the good practice example, circular economy, revivification of the rural areas, forming centres for education in agriculture, joining in agro-clusters, food production. In the 5 Slavonian counties, the following treats were recognized: Still no accepted strategy for agricultural production, big and small agricultural family farms do not have the same problems, and they demand different approaches, importing lobby in Croatia is too strong, some cultures are exported before the crops are ripe.

Alto Minho region, Portugal:

The Alto Minho is a markedly rural territory, with more remote areas largely depopulated, to the detriment of urban areas, which concentrate more than 75% of the population in only one-third of the territory. The Alto Minho is an ageing region concerning the country and the northern region, as a result of the general ageing of the population in all the municipalities, and also of the difficulties of population renovation (the two youngest age groups, up to the age of 24, assuming modest proportions in the total population). Also, the population of Alto Minho has low levels of school education. The educational background of active people in the Alto Minho suggests a less qualified labour force in the national context and with wage levels below the national average, which raises constraints to a what raises difficulties to a specialization in productive terms, to the region’s competitiveness. The entrepreneurial spirit of the Alto Minho is less intense when compared to regional (North region), and national indicators. Although entrepreneurial initiatives are, in general, well succeed, business ideas that arise in the region require more incentive measures and continued support. In general, Alto Minho is a region where productive sectors (agriculture, industry, and construction) are more representative.

Currently, the crisis around the Covid-19 pandemic leads to further difficulties, making it harder for entrepreneurs to survive in the uncertain, risky, turbulent, and ambiguous world of today. On the other hand, and although the pandemic may have left several sectors in a bad situation, in summer 2020, tourism had "excellent" results, without compensating for the losses felt in this difficult year. In the whole interior North, the season was marked by the high demand, with many accommodation units fully booked, in a search for quite for family holidays, far from crowds.

On the 27th of November 2020, the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IPVC) hosted the rural consultation event. The event was held online due to the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic in Portugal and the measures and restrictions adopted to contain its expansion. The online format facilitated stakeholders’ participation, as many are from remote areas and feel more comfortable as they limit personal contacts in general during the pandemic, even if some were attending the meeting from their workplace.

The Rural Council, which is mainly composed of regional government organizations, education and training institutions, and local development associations, was invited by email to join the event and exchange their valuable experience, knowledge, and ideas. In total, about 18 organizations were invited.

A Padlet was created to collect the participants' ideas. The Padlet (www.Padlet.com) is a web app that allows users to post notes on a digital wall and which encourages stakeholders' participation. The meeting was recorded for documentation purposes, but also for the potential promotion of the project.

The event started with the presentation of the participants, objectives, and planned activities in the ARDENT project, as well as recently concluded projects in the area of entrepreneurship promoted by IPVC, as some of the participants did not attend the kick-off meeting. Goretti Silva who presented the project, also explained the goal and the course of the meeting - defining the economic and societal challenges of rural areas in the Alto Minho region - and the further use of the meeting results as a basis for the adult education program "Rural Entrepreneurship Accelerator". Subsequently, the design of the "rural entrepreneurship accelerator training" - training course was presented by Alexandra Borges: target group and its profile/guidelines, number of participants, time frame and the methodology to be proposed by IPVC, which includes general training modules (common to all trainees) and specific training modules (according to the needs of each project). Goretti Silva then presented the following challenges which were identified based on the contacts / interviews conducted to do the state of the art and the Kick-off meeting. These are as follow:

- reduced numbers of inhabitants in the rural areas,
- an ageing population,
- excessive bureaucracy,
- accessibility and access to services,
- young people are not motivated,
- keeping people engaged and interested in rural development,
- policymakers need to engage in the solving of the remote villages' problems.

Some of these challenges are generic and common to the Alto Minho region and other rural areas (such as reduced numbers of inhabitants in the rural areas and an ageing population).

The IPVC team requested support from participants in identifying societal and economic challenges, specific to the region. Participants were encouraged to scribble their ideas through Padlet. Participants received a link from the IPVC Team and registered their thoughts and notes on a digital wall. The participants identified specific challenges and aspects such as opportunities, potential barriers, and stakeholders involved, among others. These aspects were mainly derived from the "Societal Innovation Canvas" model, which served as a template to support and guide the structure of the creative process.

During the rural consultation event, the following challenges were identified for the Alto Minho region:

- Distribution of local products,
- Return of population to the territory,
- Enhancing quality/diversify local products,
- Business Opportunities,

- Development of a local/regional economic model.

The participants were interested and had interesting and pertinent interventions, as well as expressed wishes of collaboration among all.

The Director of the Employment Centre of Viana do Castelo (which covers Viana do Castelo, Caminha and Ponte de Lima municipalities), José Matos, has shown willingness to promote the training course to registered unemployed people and eventually to trainees in entrepreneurship. He also suggested the IPVC team to send the information to the Director of the Employment Centre of Alto Minho, Benvinda Gonzalez, who could not attend the event, since the area of coverage of this Centre (Arcos de Valdevez and Valença municipalities) is fundamental in terms of potential stakeholders. Finally, he launched the idea that the IPVC and the Employment Centres can articulate training moments together.

Teresa Pouzada (ATA Coordinator) is convinced that we can have a successful project, rejuvenating the villages by attracting young people. However, she warned that many young people, who never lived in a village, go to villages with a dream and thinking that it is an easy way of living, but quickly return to the city. The "filhos da terra - children of the land", who know and have a connection with rural areas, are the ones who have been successful in returning to villages and ensuring business continuity. Thus, she suggested that it would be interesting if the IPVC could identify some young people would be interested in developing projects in their place of origin, either through new business, or continuing their own family's business.

Bernardino Ramires (entrepreneur) suggested that the IPVC team tried to understand lessons learnt from other similar projects/programs. He also suggested that the location of the training program should take rural entrepreneurs' accessibility into account. Many people with potential interest may be from remote areas.

Sónia Almeida (ADERE Peneda Gerês) suggested looking for potential people interested in "Qualifica" Centres and Professional Schools. And Ricardo Lemos (CEVAL) suggested the producers (adhering to "100% Alto Minho" brand) as potential interested parties.

3. Social and Economic Challenges Identified

This section presents in total 22 challenges identified in all regions summarized under the headlines that cover different sub-challenges. Some of the challenges identified in different regions were comparable and are therefore listed under the same headline. The challenges show a clear impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the regional economies and present the difficulties countries have to cope with at this time. Due to the pandemic new challenges have occurred and already existing ones have worsened.

1. Education

For the region of **Münsterland, Germany:**

Entrepreneurial education

Entrepreneurial education needs should be better promoted within the region where "classic" images of entrepreneurship need to be challenged.

The main problems identified:

- Schools have too rigid curriculum that is not adapted to current needs
- Economic connections are not considered / taught
- Entrepreneurship is seen as 'evil' in schools
- Teachers are not so socialized, but rather "leftist" trained

The basic problems are risk avoidance and egalitarianism, which is harmful. There are too many rules, regulations, laws and conditions and a lack of the "right" mindset, therefore people should be encouraged to gain it. Everything is developed by oneself, there is no trust in the experience of others, all mistakes are made.

Opportunities:

- Examples of good practice and lessons learnt can be found in the Netherlands.

This challenge aims to establish start-up coaches at schools and not only social workers! As respective stakeholders the start-up scene, impact hub or network associations were identified.

For the **5 Slavonian Counties, Croatia:**

Education and planning

The University of Osijek identified that small agricultural producers and service providers do see education and planning the quantities of their producers among their tasks. The importance of

planning, education and the motivation of especially younger owners of small agricultural farms on regular education events needs to be stressed.

The main problems identified:

- low interest and motivation
- People think that the only way to succeed is to “know the right person” instead of strengthening their own skills and knowledge.
- the provision of education is not coordinated (there are periods where different organizations and institutions provide the same sort of education, while there are periods when no one is providing neither information or education on certain topics (e.g. how to do business during the crisis))

Opportunities:

- raising the level of knowledge, especially among younger people in rural areas, but also the skills of planning activities among small agricultural producers which can, eventually, lead toward their clustering in production.

Obstacle:

- the potentially long duration of the project.

Stakeholders are ministries, local government, universities, small agriculture family farms.

For the 5 Slavonian Counties, Croatia:

Education on markets and selling prices

Members of the Rural Council pointed out that producers usually have problems setting the selling prices for their products. Education about the market, selling prices, but also on the quality in production and services is required.

The main problems identified:

- Financial literacy is generally low among entrepreneurs in Croatia, but especially in rural areas.
- Basic problem is low interest in education, especially when focused on finance.

Opportunities:

- Through education about market and selling prices, but also generally about costs and revenues, financial literacy can be raised
- raising financial literacy among small agricultural producers

Education could help small agricultural producers to better understand market, supply and demand, and to calculate the prices for their products and services with the stakeholders being ministries, local government, universities, small agriculture family farms.

For Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:

Digital education in addition to school or individual tutoring

A decreasing number of pupils nationwide on one hand and a decline of education quality and quantity is a major problem for the next generation not only but also in rural areas. The region of Anhalt-Bitterfeld shows a high proportion of school leavers without a diploma in 2008 - 14.2 % and 2018 still 13.2 %, which is higher than the country average of 11.5 percent. Digital education will be key to individually support school children and to increase education supply during lock-down times when school visits are not possible. Educational provision is a challenge that is intensified by the dynamics of demographic change such as outward migration and an ageing population.

Another problem under the subject of education is the lack of advanced training for staff members at work. Many smaller companies located in the rural regions of Saxony-Anhalt are missing education possibilities for employees (no HR departments in smaller companies). Education possibilities for adults in job need to be increased in order to improve career possibilities and satisfaction level of staff.

Main problems identified:

- full syllabi,
- shortage of teachers in all areas,
- high percentage of school dropouts especially in rural areas,
- long commuting ways to school,
- loss of education,
- missing learning progress surveys
- there is no market for education,
- business model is not visible,
- students have insufficient technical equipment.

Opportunities:

- to cover for missing education at school or during disrupted education periods (such as Covid-19)
- individual support,
- support in home schooling

Obstacles:

- Lacking technical equipment at home
- missing market pressure
- missing HR departments or managers in charge of education and training

This challenge aims to increase the number of students who finish school with a diploma, to maybe integrate elderly, retired people who might have been teachers or worked in the pedagogic area before times. Lifelong learning would be another aim of the challenge. Stakeholders are HS Anhalt, pupils,

parents, retirees, teachers and state school offices as well as companies, Kreisvolksschulen and HR departments.

2. Digitization

For the region of **Münsterland, Germany**:

Competences of the future: How do we become better prepared for the future?

The topic was triggered by the problems the region is faced with in the current situation, such as and the uncertainty in times of crisis and the lack of strategies at hand for the novel situation caused by the pandemic, which is currently approached rather experimentally. The Corona pandemic has hit the economy and society very hard and unprecedentedly, lockdown measures have resulted in collapses of SMEs. That is a sad reality, not only experienced in this region.

In this turn digital competences become even more important, there is no plan b, or a risk diversification. Chances must be used as SMEs in the region depend more than ever on an enabling business environment.

The main problems identified:

- the Lockdown (due to Covid-19)
- Consequence: analogue products no longer usable

Opportunities:

- Digitalization strategies of the (federal) state
- Universities
- Futurologists
- Authors (e.g., Schätzing)

The challenge's aims are to create something new, accelerate the change processes and to learn continuous change processes. Obstacles identified are the lack of willingness / ability to continuously grow and learn and the lack of resources.

For the region of **Alto Minho, Portugal**:

The return of the population to the territory – teleworking and co-working

This challenge is related to the new business opportunities that might arise in rural areas, because of the pandemics. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, many companies practice teleworking. Therefore, they do not need large office spaces in the cities, which are often associated with high rents.

On the other hand, some workers might prefer not to work from home as they lack privacy or are too confined to urban landscapes. Rural settings are thus an alternative solution, offering healthier and cheaper solutions for this problem. The demand for rural spaces for teleworking during the pandemic increased exponentially.

The basic problem is “How to take advantage of the increased demand for rural places for teleworking?” The opportunity is that such spaces already exist in cities and now the challenge aims at creating a rural co-working space. The challenge’s main obstacle is an aged population. Stakeholders are entrepreneurs and development agents, who can be facilitators in the creation of spaces.

3. Regulatory conditions

For the region of **Münsterland, Germany:**

Bureaucracy and Regulations

The problem is determined in the mindset - different attitudes exist within rural and urban entrepreneurs as well as the regulatory institutions.

The main problems identified:

- Landscape of pubs and bars is “dying” (as government imposed closing due to Covid-19)
- Innovative strength diminishes
- Error culture
- Succession problem
- Legitimation for an idea

Opportunities:

- respective ministries
- Münsterland e.v.
- Strong key persons
- Chamber of crafts
- Communal project networks

The challenge aims to find solutions for a “warm welcome”, synergy effects, process optimization, agility, to be proactive and become pioneers which should ensure the future viability / sustainability of the region. Obstacles to this challenge are the regulatory restrictions / complexity, scepticism and the Rural areas associated with “stable smell” and “clique”. Stakeholders in this context are politics, municipality / administration as well as residents.

For the region of **Alto Minho, Portugal:**

Businesses opportunities

This challenge is related to the negative impact of pandemics on rural businesses.

The main problems identified:

- Cafes, restaurants, and taverns from rural areas (villages) are losing customers, despite the good results achieved over the summer.

- Confinement situation and lockdown are affecting businesses to a great extent, and owners do not know how if they will be able to recover, and how to overcome the crisis.

The basic problem is **“How to restore customers confidence on cafes, restaurants, and taverns?”**

Opportunities:

- can be the funds / governmental schemes for helping companies recovering from the crisis.
- The GR50 – Peneda-Gerês Long Distance Path (“Grande Rota”) is one of the transversal elements in the Alto Minho region that can contribute to aggregate the rural areas, with a common interest. The Ways of St. James (“Caminhos de Santiago”) already do. Along these two routes, small/micro businesses may appear/reinforce their activity.

Obstacles:

- the owners’ lack of knowledge/perception
- the lack of customers / tourists because of confinement rules.

Stakeholders are private businesses.

4. Appreciation and distribution of local products

For the region of **Małopolska, Poland:**

Commercialization and promotion of local products and services provided by social organizations and households.

This challenge, identified by the Rural Council in Poland, is actually an overarching one covering several headlines such as education, structural problems, and bureaucracy. The local producers are in possession of products and services specific for the local or regional perspective. Due to their weak competitive position they are not able to reach the sufficient market share to develop the operational activities and to expand the impacted area.

The main problems identified:

- Lack of educational infrastructure, or knowledge of its existence or specific ways of functioning of educational institutions in specific areas.
- Mentalities expressed in the lack of sufficient involvement of residents and producers of specific regions in issues related to raising funding. This is particularly true for residents.
- Lack of interest in local products.
- Egotism and mental barriers (e.g. shopping habits in supermarkets).
- Lack of adequate interest and desire for local products and their insufficient or inadequate promotion.
- Lack of stable logistic systems for sale of manufactured products.

Challenges resulting from the pandemic, mainly related to limiting economic and social activity, health risks and psychological and sociological factors.

These problems arise from legislative barriers consisting in the lack of clear legal regulations on the promotion and distribution of local products and an informal cooperation due to lack of clear formal and legal regulations.

There are:

- Cooperation barriers causing lack or instability of producer-consumer.
- supply chains/networks and lack of developed cooperation schemes/ models,
- lack of willingness to cooperate, mental barriers, lack of producer and producer-consumer systems.
- Limited opportunities to sell local products related to producer-consumer problems.
- Low social capital (low confidence) among producers (farmers) and consumers.
- Lack of coherent development vision.
- Individualism.

Obstacles:

- Supply chain is too long.
- Barriers related to production scale.
- Bad consumer experience with dishonesty of suppliers.
- Migration of population causing certain habits (e.g. buying close to home).
- Lack of a common vision for the development of a broadly understood market for local products,
- lack of solutions in this area.
- Mental barriers - creating "ways" to overcome them - a certain system of social recognition
- Over-bureaucratization.

The aims are to establish efficient, flexible, stable and transparent supply chains/systems and systems linking producers and consumers. Another aim is formalizing forms of cooperation by popularizing the functioning of social organizations aimed at promoting the sale of local products and finally, creating incentive systems involving local leaders. Relevant stakeholders are Local authorities, farmers, producer groups, local social leaders (mainly from the public relations side).

For the region of **Małopolska, Poland:**

General situation: The regions can be perceived as the providers of excellent products. This situation though described as stable may change significantly in the nearest future due to several obstacles and threats that can be observed and gain importance. Their nature is not just economic but similarly social. It seems the social factor is becoming more and more important and this might be helpful in terms of creating of local patriotism in changing mindset of customers, which happens but not to the expected and required extent. Rural entrepreneurship might be the excellent solution if only such treatment could have the influence on changing the mindset. This does not exclusively refer to the customer behaviour and local and regional authorities' willingness to increase the change of support into the rural direction. This also refers to young generation of possible entrepreneurs who is willing to recognize their regions as the attractive place to work and develop.

Local economic patriotism means making conscious economic decisions, considering the positive impact of these choices on the local community. Economic decisions are understood as not only purchasing products but also using local services.

As a place of production and service provision, rural areas offer a wide range of different types of local products, including food products and local crafts, as well as services provided by local entities (businesses, farmers, small craftsmen). The offer of rural areas also includes tourist services which represent a special potential of the region. In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to supporting local production and local services, which should lead to economic revival of rural areas, while preserving the specificity of the village and protecting its cultural and natural heritage. The main goal should be to shorten the distance (chain) between the producer or service provider and the final customer, which involves building short supply chains. In this context it is important to create a system in which consumers are provided not only with a local product/service but also with information encouraging them to buy them. The real challenge, therefore, is not only to provide places where these products and services can be purchased but also to develop effective marketing systems to promote local products and services.

The main problems identified:

- The problem of shaping the foundations of local economic patriotism among consumers is complex. The following problems arise here:
- Level of wealth - quite often the prices of local products and services are higher than those of similar products and services of a mass (industrial) nature
- Lack of knowledge of places where local products are offered or lack of such places. Most purchases are made in chain stores (supermarkets, discount stores), where local products are only marginally included in the offer. Often local stores also show little interest in the offer of local producers.
- lack of markings on products indicating their local character, lack of markings in stores - e.g. separate spaces/shelves with local products
- local products/services cannot be purchased regularly - they are offered e.g. once a week at local markets or only seasonally.
- manufacturers preferring to sell wholesale, distributing their offer mainly outside the local market
- Feedback - lack of knowledge of the benefits to the local community of supporting local manufacturers and service providers by buying their products/services transforms into low demand for them, which discourages manufacturers from actively seeking sales opportunities in the local market

Opportunities:

- concentration of activities activating producers and other links in the distribution chain on a narrow/selected group of entities - activities addressed to a wide range of entities (e.g. producers, stores) usually do not bring the expected results
- greater involvement of local government (e.g., providing premises, organizational, technical and financial assistance)
- launching sales in nearby cities, where the market is more absorbent
- using ready-made patterns of EU countries - e.g. French experience - stores created and operated by producers with the support of local authorities

- support for local institutions (e.g. Local Action Groups - LGDs) and the possibility of public financing of activities in this respect (e.g. for assistance to producers, information and promotion activities addressed to consumers)

Obstacles:

- commercial infrastructure – lack of small outlets (local stores replaced by chains)
- finances - generally a lower level of customer wealth in rural areas
- low level of cooperation between local entities (e.g. hotel or catering facilities often do not use the offer of local producers or small sellers, local stores are not interested in including local products in their offer)
- lack of sufficient support from local authorities
- mental barriers - customers prefer to have convenient shopping (the effect is that they buy in stores)

The challenge aims at creating an information and promotion systems that provide customers with knowledge of why it is worth buying local products and services - awareness of the benefits for the customer and the local economic system and networking - support for initiatives involving joint actions by producers or service providers, creation of groups offering local products/services (e.g., groups of restaurants offering local culinary products). Furthermore, it aims at creating local sales points offering only local products on a regular basis (every day, throughout the year).

Stakeholders involved are consumers, local producers and service providers, local organisations (e.g., LGDs), local authorities.

For the region of **Alto Minho, Portugal:**

Distribution of local products

Local producers experience difficulties in selling their products. There is a need for interconnection in short chains of producers with local restaurants, taverns and commerce.

The main problems identified:

- producers have no access to the market,
- products are not sold at weekly markets/surplus products,
- small dimension of producers:
 - o high production costs,
 - o no bargaining power with large supermarkets,
- producers' lack of knowledge about distribution,
- producers' low level of instruction,
- non-qualified products.

There are farmers and traditional producers with product orientation but without marketing skills. They try to sell the product as much and as fast as possible, instead of creating a value proposition; lack of interconnectedness between producers (networks and associations).

Basic Problem is **“How to create an effective distribution chain for small producers?”**.

Opportunities:

- Municipalities can support local producers by creating spaces for product distribution - small open spaces, attractive, accessible - so, the producers can sell directly to the consumer, Producers with a common image,
- Opportunity to enhance local products,
- Creating a common marketing image for producers,
- Qualification of local products,
- Increased demand for organic food,
- Increased adoption of healthy behaviours and consumption.

The aim is the creation of conditions for the distribution of local products, with stakeholders being municipalities and private businesses.

For the region of **Alto Minho, Portugal:**

Enhancing quality / diversify local products

This challenge relates to the enhancing and diversification of the local products. One of the suggestions was the production of aromatic herbs, considering the identification of native species of Peneda-Gerês National Park.

The main problems identified:

- Local products improvement of quality / development of new products,
- Need to create an effective marketing strategy for small producers,
- Existing products are of low quality, there is a lack of perception about the products and a lack of cooperation between producers and consumers,
- New product developments: Tourism businesses and other services may lack customers given the present times constraining framework and lots of people are / will be unemployed and families lack their income; To take advantage of their rural setting / yards / family farms.

The basic problem is **“How to create an effective marketing strategy for small producers?”**

Opportunities:

- raise awareness in restaurants and local commerce to acquire local products
- raise awareness in schools, IPSS and municipalities to purchase local products
- Use of local products in school canteens

Good practices are for example the "Almoce e Jante Connosco - Have lunch and dinner with us", an initiative promoted by the "Villages of Portugal" that invited the population to make a meal at the home of the inhabitants of the villages; Slow Food or the “100% Alto Minho” brand.

Obstacles to this challenge:

- Bureaucracy and Legal requirements,
- Distribution of local products (as identified in another challenge),
- Lack of perception about the existing products by restaurants/F&B providers,
- The restaurants/taverns/cafés had to close. Currently, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there is a need to create conditions so that the remaining ones stay open or open again,

- Depopulation of rural areas,
- There is not enough production to meet the demand (e.g. tarrestre bean, which is highly advertised, as well as cachena meat),
- Decrease in production,
- Aged population.

The aims are providing rural experiences (agricultural activities, gastronomic...) as well as strategies for joint promotion and the valorisation of local products both locally and through a distribution chain. Respective stakeholders would be ADRIL, ADRIMINHO, ATAHCA and local councils.

For the region of **the 5 Slavonian counties, Croatia:**

“Lost identity” of this part of Croatia

The Slavonian region in Yugoslavia was recognized as granary of Yugoslavia. On Slavonian and fields of Vojvodina region (now part of Republic of Serbia) crops were produced for Yugoslavian needs. By visiting this part of Europe, you get a chance to experience a region where Croatian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman heritage meet. This part of Croatia is best known for the spacious and fertile fields, big rivers and marshlands, forests, old cities, wine production and joyful people with rich traditions. Despite all that, people in this part of Croatia often feel neglected and forgotten, when strategies and regulations are developed. Through branding of the Slavonian counties as one region, the branding of products and services from this region, there could be more opportunities for entrepreneurial activities, and this could help in keeping people in rural areas of this region.

The main problems identified:

- agricultural production is still missing development strategies – crops are being planned and produced according to the state subsidies.
- There is no division on vegetable and crops production
- no irrigation systems
- no branding of Slavonian products

Opportunities:

- the creation of an identity of the Slavonian region.
- offer diversity in products, services and experience
- create new opportunities to start small companies

The aim would be an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of Slavonian counties, branding this part of Croatia together (not separately). The stakeholders are ministries, local government, universities and small agriculture family farms.

For the region of **the 5 Slavonian counties, Croatia:**

Definition of strategic goals

To cluster all problems connected with the rural areas, the prevailing opinion is that all family farms should first develop their strategic goals, which should happen in connection with the overall strategic

goals of rural areas and regional development. This can help branding the Slavonian region, but also in returning the lost identity of this part of Croatia. Strategic goals should be reached on a national level, but also on the level of every region and farm. Education should help people in understanding the role of strategic decisions but also in developing strategic decision for their farms (products, services). Strategic goals are the first step, after which other identified challenges follow.

The main problems identified:

- without a strategic way of thinking and planning of production and service provision there is no possibility to offer quality and quantity according to the demand on the market.

A strategy for agricultural production should give a framework, but on a regional level or even in territories that LAGs cover, there should be discussion, agreement and joint planning for offering products and services on the market. Agricultural producers stressed the fact that production and revenues are not in connection with the subsidies that should foster and strengthen local production.

Opportunities:

- the development and branding of Slavonian region as a region where you can enjoy, relax, try good food and wines.

Obstacles:

- the long-term duration of the project (often people lose interest in the project that develop in a long run and do not show results immediately)
- lobbying on the national level for the interests of Slavonian region.

Aims are the positioning of the Slavonian region on the rural tourism map and as a place with production of good, healthy and ecological products. Stakeholders are ministries, local government, universities, LAGs, small agriculture family farms.

5. Funding

For the region of **Małopolska, Poland:**

Low level of knowledge about financing opportunities and lack of ability to raise funds.

The local actors (stakeholders) can be characterized as enthusiasts about the interactions and raising new ideas in their local regions. Thanks to those people very interesting initiatives take place. However, the over-formalized relations which are effects of so called technologization as well as the run for success and other success-oriented actions cause the mindset changes. The perception of fundraising could therefore be redirected for the realization of the interesting ideas and to support the developmental activities of those enthusiasts.

The main problems identified:

- Enabling the sale of regional products and its use as an alternative source of incomes for the local community through the appropriate use of local resources and social potential.
- Insufficient level of education in financing business activities or lack of awareness of the existence of centers that provide such information.

- Lack of financial resources.
- Low level of knowledge and insufficient education on the possibilities and specific funding schemes for projects concerning the sale of organic products by rural producers.
- Lack of knowledge about the existence of social economy support centers.

Opportunities:

- Systems of social recognition and support for active people (in financial form, but also by inviting them to participate in national and international study visits.)
- Use of good but also bad practices.
- Providing mechanisms that do not force producers to subsidize their operations, as this would fulfil an anti-motivation function.
- To apply a comprehensive approach in this area (no element, even the smallest one, can be neglected). Thanks to this, positive synergy effects may appear.

Obstacles:

- Lack of joint initiatives because of insufficient social ties between residents and producers and within these groups. This is primarily due to a lack of direct feedback, which has been largely replaced by remote contacts. The scale of the problem was increased by the pandemic. (Joint action is the key to success!).
- Insufficient motivation mechanisms.
- Obstacles to the inefficient functioning of public administration and its lack of involvement in local problems. What does this result from?
- Insufficient use of enthusiasts (entrepreneurial people).
- Mental barriers.

The aim of this challenge is the creation of financial support mechanisms/systems for local product distribution activities. Furthermore, the creation of incentive mechanisms for local social leaders/leaders, whose activity can be translated into other new producers and sellers of these products (obtaining spill-over effect in this area).

Stakeholders that are addressed by the challenge are representatives of primarily mid-level local authorities, managers in tax and control offices (e.g. SANEPID, tax police, etc.), LGD (Local Activity Groups) organizations and Heads of community leaders, as well as the people for whom they work.

6. Stimulating local community activity and promoting cooperative attitudes

For the region of **Małopolska, Poland:**

Local cooperation

Despite rather common belief in the sense and effectiveness of undertaking cooperation in various spheres of social and economic life, in practice, social activity and readiness to undertake actions for

the common good are still relatively rare. Very often there is a lack of local leaders who can integrate the local community around a common goal.

The main problems identified:

- Lack of local leaders initiating changes around important problems for the local community and motivating to undertake joint actions
- Inappropriate education system for children and young people that promotes individual actions, does not sufficiently develop skills for cooperation and attitudes towards the common good

The low level of social activity and low involvement in common projects though caused by many reasons are primarily an issue of:

- insufficient number of social organizations operating locally
- mentality (widespread indifference to problems affecting the local community)
- lifestyle (not enough time, fast pace of life, excessive workload),
- lack of knowledge, idea, and belief in the effectiveness of joint action
- some people are more concerned about solving their own private problems than about social activity.

Opportunities:

- promoting participatory model for the implementation of initiatives and projects - involving many different communities (residents, local authorities, entrepreneurs, etc.) in each project to jointly overcome financial, organizational and other types of barriers
- promoting good national and international practices in the field of social activity and cooperation - good experience of one initiative encourages to undertake more
- Focusing rather on quality and not quantity of initiatives
- focusing first on the problems directly affecting a given local community (e.g. creating social organizations solving problems in each village)
- creation of a hierarchical structure of social organizations in each commune, district - a higher-level unit coordinates the activities of lower-level units, motivates for further, including supra-local initiatives

Obstacles:

- Lack of incentives from local governments and industry organisations to undertake joint actions
- the blurring of social needs and expectations with the objectives and capabilities of local authorities
- Financial obstacles - lack of resources to undertake joint initiatives
- Technical and organizational obstacles (e.g. lack of premises to operate, lack of knowledge and skills to implement these activities)
- basing social activities on a very limited group of people (successive initiatives carried out by the same people all the time, low effectiveness of involving other people in the activities)
- Reluctance to undertake actions on a larger scale (e.g. outside of one's own village)

This challenge aims at the education of children and young people shaping social attitudes, focused on cooperation, increasing the awareness and involvement of local authorities in order to better utilize the

potential of residents and local social organizations - creating conditions for the functioning of the organization, supporting the activities undertaken (financial, organizational, technical, etc.) and creating social organizations operating locally. Stakeholders are Local residents, organisations (e.g. LGDs), entrepreneurs and authorities, educational institutions.

7. Rural depopulation and demographic change

For the region of **the 5 Slavonian counties, Croatia:**

Depopulation

Young people do not see their future in rural areas, especially not in agriculture. The opinion prevails that one cannot be successful and happy in rural areas. Through education, one of our tasks should be keeping young people in rural areas and help them in shaping the future they desire. This is the only way to keep the villages alive and further develop rural tourism in the area. Young people need education, support, network, but also infrastructure that follows the needs on young families (e.g. kindergartens, primary schools, etc.). To keep young people in rural areas, it is necessary to secure higher quality of life, but also stress out examples of young people that succeeded in developing their career while staying in rural areas.

The main problems identified:

- the state often forgets the needs of the people in rural areas.
- Quality of life is lower (kindergartens, primary schools, cinemas, etc. are missing).
- Older people usually advise younger to move in the cities where they have access to all these institutions and where they have better infrastructure.
- Small agricultural family farms are not connected and there is not strategy that could help them in networking or planning future activities.

This challenge could be tackled by carefully planning smaller tasks and a strategy for agricultural production on national level. The quality of life could be significantly higher if EU funds were used strategically.

The basic problem is described as raising quality of life in rural areas. Keeping younger people in rural areas, transfer small agriculture family farms on younger generation, connect all small farms and develop joint access to the market are the opportunities that this challenge creates.

Obstacle:

- this constitutes a long-term project (often people lose interest in the project that develop in a long run and do not show results immediately). This is not the problem that could be solved on the project level, some national strategies and policies are needed.

The aims would be to educate young people in project management and new venture creation in agriculture industry, connect small farms with more visible organization, promote and lobby for their interests, to faster access the market. The stakeholders being ministries, local government, universities, or small agriculture family farms as stakeholders.

For Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:

Aging society/demographic change - Prevent constructional decay in villages whilst enforcing generational knowledge transfer

Saxony-Anhalt, and especially its rural regions are particularly affected by the demographic change. In 2030 more than 33 % of the population in Saxony-Anhalt will be over 65 years old. 11.7 % of working 65 to 70-year-olds bring up the rear in the national comparison. More people leave the rural regions compared to the number moving in (especially among the 18-30 aged). Among 18 - 30-years-old: more women than men. The district of Anhalt-Bitterfeld is forecasted to lose a total of 14 % of its inhabitants by 2030 (basis: 2014). This fact contributes heavily to the rural depopulation in Saxony-Anhalt. Villages are threatened by decay and therefore, become less and less attractive for the younger generations to live in. This problem needs to be tackled on many ends but one point to approach the issue would be the establishment of a generational tandem to be used to exchange knowledge and thus increase craftsman skills of younger generation and at the same time use the skills of the elderly to restore decayed village centers.

Main problems identified:

- many villages decay and remain unrestored
- lacking value and appreciation of craft work,
- traditional craftsmanship is forgotten,
- loss of competences,
- low public appreciation of craftsmanship but demand is higher than available craftsman.

“What kind of platform or forum could be used to bring generations for this purpose together?”

Opportunities:

- restoration of squares and buildings,
- transfer and spread of craftsmanship skills,
- re-integration of retired craftsmen,
- cost-effective knowledge transfer

Obstacles:

- incentives,
- how to bring generations together,
- willingness to learn from each other,
- increase responsibility and the idea of valuing the maintenance of buildings and infrastructure

The challenge aims at building a generation tandem, value exchange, recognition of life achievement, strengthening of community life with stakeholders being local authorities, rural population and retired craftsmen.

For Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:

Mobility, Infrastructure - Matching offer and demand for public transportation in rural areas

Another aspect to keep rural areas lively and attractive is a sufficiently functioning mobility infrastructure. It contributes to ensure the sustainability of a region as a residential and business location. If connections to the centers are bad or insufficient, young families, in particular, do not want to move to rural areas, and companies fail looking for skilled workers. Connection between rural areas and cities or centers requires improvement towards efficiency, operating hours, and frequency. Commuting to work or school takes customers more time than it could due to bad coordination of public transport operating times, which leads many people to use the car. On the other hand, there is often empty runs during day times when rush hour is over.

Climate protection is an example of changing conditions that will influence our mobility of tomorrow. The aging society increases the demand for an infrastructure that is suitable for the elderly. Sustainability and a responsible behaviour toward the environment, when it comes to public transport, should be considered in this context as well.

Matching demand and offer in public transport (e.g. by programming an app) should contribute to improve mobility in rural areas and increase efficiency as an environmental aspect.

Main problems identified:

- Busses and trains take long routes and are often running either packed or empty.
- Lack of offer vs. demand match of public transport operations in rural areas.
- Many people tend to take their personal car to commute as it allows for more flexibility.
- This causes traffic and air pollution.
- A functioning and efficient connectivity to centers is very important for population and companies located in rural regions.

Opportunities:

- Increased attractiveness of rural areas,
- Contribution to the environment if people use public transport instead of their cars.

Obstacles:

- Figure out offer and demand and intervene on either side.

The aim of this challenge is to develop an application or a software or find any other suitable way to support matching demand and offer, individualizing public transport. Stakeholders would be the Public community, HS Anhalt, public transport users and providers.

For Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:

Medical care in rural areas - Establish a social space of interaction as a forum to keep elderly fit and healthy in rural areas

There is a foreseeable increase in the number of very old people which means an increasing number of people in need of care. That creates a growing need for medical care, with a declining population on the other hand and thus fewer available medical staff like doctors and nurses. A tremendous effort when it comes to care at home for relatives is required and will become necessary. As this problem cannot be tackled in the short run, a plan on how to keep the elderly fit is needed. This accounts especially for the rural regions as the density of doctors' cabinets is much lower than in cities.

To support the elderly in staying fit and postpone the age of care requirement, the creation of communities that undertake social events like hiking, sports classes, meeting points to get elderly together might help. This could create some relieve on the waiting rooms of doctors' cabinets (which is btw. often used as a social gathering point for older people).

Main problems identified:

- lack of medical care for the rural population that is comprehensive, tailored to their needs and close to their homes
- elderly often lack social interaction
- acceptance

Opportunities:

- keep seniority fit and less dependent on medical staff

Obstacles:

- lack of funding
- finding volunteers to organize and lead such groups

The aim of this challenge is to achieve some relief of the medical sector, keep older generation fit and integrated with stakeholders being elderly people, social workers, and medical staff.

8. Efficient Triple-Helix cooperation

For the region of **the 5 Slavonian counties, Croatia:**

All activities and projects are fragmented and part of different initiatives, without having in mind overall goals. All stakeholders should work together to create solutions that will be in the best interest of everyone. All activities and calls for proposals on national and regional level should be programmed according to the strategic goals. Strategic goals should be created by all stakeholders (business sector, academia and government).

The main problems identified:

- although rural development is financed through different EU projects, results are not visible enough, and often not sustainable.
- without strategies on national level, it is not possible for ministries to plan and prepare calls for proposal that will lead to visible benefits fostering rural development.
- the basic problem identified in this context is that activities focused on rural development are not connected and not coordinated, often do not tackle do most pressing problems.

Opportunities:

- Coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders can help in more efficient use of all financial sources and better results.

Obstacle:

- this constitutes a long-term project (often people lose interest in the project that develop in a long run and do not show results immediately).

The aim is the development of rural areas and solving the most pressing problems permanently, with ministries, local government, universities and small agriculture family farms as stakeholders.

9. Create autonomous regions and reduce environmental impact

For **Saxony-Anhalt, Germany:**

Create a Zero-Emission-City

Independence of rural regions and the environmental impact of energy usage becomes of greater importance. Hydrogen use and especially the usage of green hydrogen can lead to an increase in added value. Using regeneratively produced hydrogen as fuel for vehicles or for stationary power or heat generation using gas turbines and fuel cells, CO₂ savings leads to a substantial increase of the added value and therefore, can be a great opportunity for the region, especially for the rural areas.

Main problems identified:

- the use of hydrogen is very expensive
- wind energy feed-in into hydrogen - data are missing
- structural change
- importance of environmental impact

Opportunities:

- one step towards sustainability,
- face the structural change,
- room for research and academic works

Obstacles:

- feed-in gas where it can be used
- missing research on this topic

The aim of this challenge could be to program a microgrid, to create an autonomous city by using hydrogen and increase academic research in this area. Stakeholders are municipal suppliers, local energy suppliers, HS Anhalt, administration, Fraunhofer, Siemens, Chemical Parc Bitterfeld-Wolfen.



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