

Strategic Policy Directions for the future of rural innovation



RURACTIVE

RURACTIVE Forum

4th meeting

30 June 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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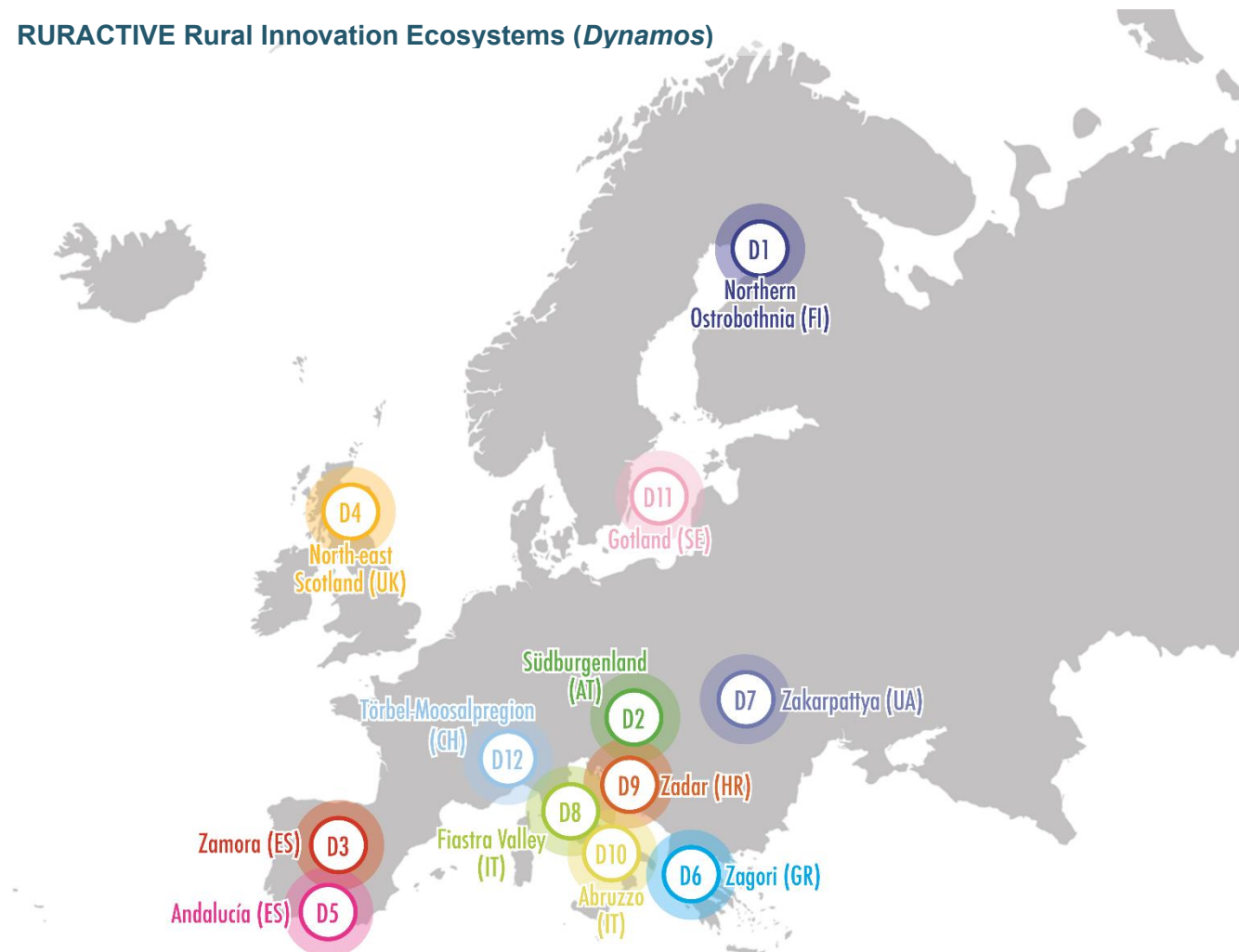
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and Innovation

This document presents the **Strategic Policy Directions (SPDs) for rural innovation policy**, to be **reviewed and validated during the 4th RURACTIVE Forum** (30 June 2026). Following validation, they will inform RURACTIVE Policy Recommendations and Guidance (D7.5), to be published in August 2026. The SPDs **consolidate evidence generated throughout the RURACTIVE project** and are **intended to support ongoing discussions on the post-2027 EU policy framework** and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, bringing forward territorial, implementation-based insights from rural areas across Europe.

Background

RURACTIVE is a **Horizon Europe project supporting rural innovation and territorial resilience across Europe** through a place-based, co-creation approach. It brings together a network of Multi-Actor **Rural Innovation Ecosystems (Dynamos)** to experiment with and scale solutions addressing key rural development challenges, while strengthening the link between local action and EU-level policy design. The project is structured around six **Rural Development Drivers (RDDs)**: sustainable agri-food systems and ecosystem management; nature-based and cultural tourism; culture and cultural innovation; sustainable multimodal mobility; energy transition and climate neutrality; and local services, health and wellbeing. Its work is guided by three cross-cutting priorities: social justice and inclusion, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

RURACTIVE Rural Innovation Ecosystems (*Dynamos*)



The SPDs are **based on a structured and traceable process** beginning with the co-development of proto-policy recommendations during the *3rd RURACTIVE Forum* (April 2026), **grounded in evidence from the project**, such

as the policy brief *Analysis of EU policies around rural innovation* and the *Dynamos' Local Action Plans*. These inputs were refined through consistency **checks against RURACTIVE cross-cutting priorities** and benchmarked **with relevant Horizon Europe and Horizon 2020 policy outputs**. They were then validated through a dedicated exercise, where the Dynamos confirmed broad support and focused their feedback primarily on implementation and feasibility rather than policy direction. The recommendations were subsequently reformulated into policy-ready inputs and **complemented by additional evidence from the “Right to Stay” consultation** led by AEIDL and UNIBO (submitted on 11th June 2026). These steps ensured full traceability from territorial input to policy formulation, resulting in 79 inputs structured into the Strategic Policy Directions presented below.

In total, **79 inputs** (51 from the Forum process and 28 from the consultation work) were **synthesised into Strategic Policy Directions** through a **clustering approach based on functional coherence, systemic alignment** with the Right to Stay perspective -emphasising integrated territorial systems and focusing on outcomes such as accessibility, wellbeing and territorial resilience-, and **usability for policy decision-making**, while maintaining full traceability to the original territorial evidence.

How to read this document

The SPDs are presented next as thematic policy clusters structured around the six Rural Development Drivers (RDDs), with an additional cross-cutting governance dimension. Each SPD translates territorial evidence into policy-oriented directions for discussion and prioritisation during the *4th RURACTIVE Forum*. The structure reflects both sectoral policy domains and system-wide governance conditions.

Strategic policy directions

The Strategic Policy Directions are organised into six thematic areas aligned with the RDDs.

Sustainable multimodal mobility

Shift towards accessibility-based rural mobility systems. Reorient EU and national mobility policies from infrastructure provision to access-based frameworks ensuring effective, affordable and measurable access to essential services (e.g. 30-minute thresholds), as a core condition for territorial cohesion and the Right to Stay.

Enable diversified, inclusive and low-carbon mobility solutions. Promote integrated rural mobility systems combining demand-responsive transport, shared mobility, carpooling and active modes, explicitly addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and improving access to employment and training opportunities.

Strengthen governance, funding and monitoring frameworks for rural mobility. Enable operational funding (Public Service Obligations -PSO-, Demand Responsive Transport -DRT-), deploy rural-sensitive indicators, and establish public governance frameworks for MaaS, aligned with territorial impact assessment and Right to Stay principles.

Culture and cultural innovation

Establish culture as a cross-cutting pillar of territorial cohesion and wellbeing. Mainstream culture across EU policy domains (social, health, innovation, education), including its integration into social prescribing approaches and wellbeing-oriented frameworks.

Strengthen rural cultural ecosystems through stable funding and governance. Introduce multi-annual funding models, reduce territorial disparities in access to cultural funding, and reinforce local cultural actors, including community-led and youth initiatives.

Operationalise cultural value through participatory and outcome-based frameworks. Develop participatory evaluation tools and indicators capturing social cohesion, identity, intergenerational exchange and territorial resilience, supported by heritage and landscape observatories.

Sustainable agri-food systems and ecosystem management

Transition towards integrated territorial socio-ecological food systems. Reform CAP and related frameworks to embed production within broader territorial systems linking environmental sustainability, economic viability and social inclusion, aligned with the Nature Restoration Law.

Scale ecosystem-based incentives and recognise farmers as ecosystem stewards. Expand result-based payments and reposition farmers as key actors in maintaining ecosystem services, including biodiversity, soil health and climate resilience.

Improve land governance, generational renewal and knowledge systems. Develop land access instruments (e.g. land trusts), remove barriers for youth and women, and strengthen advisory systems (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems -AKIS-) embedding ecological literacy and digitalisation.

Energy transition and climate neutrality

Ensure fair territorial distribution of benefits from the energy transition. Establish mandatory benefit-sharing and co-ownership mechanisms to ensure rural areas act as co-beneficiaries, avoiding extractive dynamics.

Strengthen community energy and local governance capacities. Support community-led energy models, local facilitation structures and full-cycle funding (including early-stage phases), enhancing participation and capacity in weaker territories.

Integrate energy transition within broader territorial resilience strategies. Align renewable deployment with climate adaptation, biodiversity restoration and rural development strategies, supported by rural-proof grid planning and accessibility considerations.

Nature-based and cultural tourism

Strengthen integrated and place-based tourism governance systems. Reinforce Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and local coordination structures to manage tourism as a multi-dimensional territorial system linked to environment, culture and economy.

Enable sustainable and regenerative tourism models. Shift from growth-oriented to regenerative approaches, incorporating environmental carrying capacity, ecosystem pressure monitoring and long-term territorial resilience.

Improve enabling conditions for local tourism ecosystems. Simplify administrative and funding frameworks, strengthen SME capacity-building, and support data-driven governance and local branding strategies.

Local services, health and wellbeing

Ensure access-based, integrated and place-based service provision. Develop multi-sectoral service systems ensuring accessibility, affordability and usability, supported by measurable thresholds and aligned with the Right to Stay framework.

Strengthen adaptive service delivery models and digital inclusion. Scale multi-service centres, mobile and community-based services, combined with inclusive and user-centred digitalisation and capacity-building.

Develop rural housing and care systems as structural pillars of territorial cohesion. Introduce integrated housing strategies (affordability, vacancy mobilisation) and structured care systems (elderly care, childcare), addressing gender equality and demographic stability.

Embed demographic resilience and governance capacity in service systems. Address cumulative service decline through integrated demographic strategies, strengthened local governance, and hybrid service provision models involving public, private and community actors.

Cross-cutting governance and policy frameworks (system-level enablers)

These directions are not sector-specific but provide enabling conditions required to implement and scale the RDD-specific Strategic Policy Directions.

Introduce a “Right to Stay test” in EU policy design and implementation. Systematically assess whether policies enhance or undermine territorial liveability, access to services and equal opportunities.

Institutionalise territorial impact assessments and “do no harm to cohesion” principle. Ensure all policies are evaluated for cumulative territorial impacts across sectors.

Promote integrated territorial governance and Rural Innovation Ecosystems (RIEs). Strengthen intermediary structures, multi-level governance and stakeholder participation to bridge EU policy and local implementation.

Additional reading

Alonso-Roldán, M., Sinerma, J. & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2026) RURACTIVE Forum – Third meeting report https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third%20meeting_report.pdf

De Luca, C., Selva, C., Von Den Heyden, T., Fuentemilla, S., Bertolaso, J., & de Souza Goncalves, L. (2025). Local Action Plans (Deliverable D4.2). Horizon Europe project RURACTIVE – Empowering rural communities to act for change (Grant Agreement No. 101084377), European Commission.

Pazos-Vidal, S & Sinerma, J. (2025) EU’s next long-term budget (MFF) – implementing EU funding with Member States and regions - RURACTIVE Project submission https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14520-EUs-next-long-term-budget-MFF-implementing-EU-funding-with-Member-States-and-regions/F33102250_en

RURACTIVE Forum - Third meeting Background documents

- *Sustainable agrifood systems and ecosystem management.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Agrifood%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf
- *Culture and cultural innovation.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Culture%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf
- *Energy transition and climate neutrality.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Energy_transition%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf
- *Sustainable multimodal mobility.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Multimodal_mobility%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf
- *Local services, health and wellbeing.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Services%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf
- *Nature-based and cultural tourism.* https://ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-third-meeting/_background-documents/RURACTIVE_Forum_third_meeting_Tourism%E2%80%93Background_document.pdf

RURACTIVE Right to Stay consultation submission. https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/18032-Right-to-Stay-Strategy-Your-Region-Your-Future/F33476391_en

RURACTIVE Project. Local Action Plans <https://www.ruractive.eu/resources/publication>

- *Dynamo Northern Ostrobothnia Local Action Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D1%20Northern%20Ostrobothnia%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo Südburgerland Local Action Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D2%20Suedburgenland%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo Zamora Local Action Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D3%20Zamora%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo North-East Scotland Local Action Plan*
https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/standalone_D4-LAP.pdf

- *Dynamo* *Andalucía* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D5%20Andalucia%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo* *Zagori* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D6%20Zagori%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo* *Zakarpattya* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D7%20Zakarpattya%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo* *Fiastra* *Valley* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/standalone_D8_BF%20LAP.pdf
- *Dynamo* *Abruzzo* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
<https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/D10%20Abruzzo%20LAP.pdf>
- *Dynamo* *Gotland* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/standalone_D11-LAP.pdf
- *Dynamo* *Törbel* *Local* *Action* *Plan*
https://www.ruractive.eu/user/pages/04.resources/01.publication/standalone_D12-LAP.pdf

Sinerma, J., & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025). Analysis of EU policies around rural innovation, RURACTIVE Policy Brief. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15227863>

Sinerma, J. & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025) RURACTIVE Forum – First meeting report. [RURACTIVE_Forum_Launch_report.pdf](#)

Sinerma, J. & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025) RURACTIVE Forum – Second meeting report. https://www.ruractive.eu/forum/ruractive-forum-second-meeting/_presentation/RURACTIVE_Forum_second%20meeting_report.pdf