



COHESION AND SOLIDARITY IN RURAL AREAS

HOW DO LOCAL ACTORS GET ENGAGED IN EUROPEAN POLICY MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

The publication “Cohesion and solidarity in rural areas - how do local actors get engaged in European policy making” is addressed to policy makers, public officers, experts, civil society representatives, volunteers and citizens who are active (or who would like to become active) at any levels of policy making and democratic participation – from local to European.

The publication was prepared by local and regional public officers, policy makers, academics and NGOs from 13 countries: Slovenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Romania, Montenegro, Serbia, Spain and Latvia, who cooperated as partners within the **European Network for the Cohesion and Solidarity in Rural Areas - ENSURE** in the years 2017-2019. In the course of two years, the ENSURE partners developed transnational actions and local actions regarding a combination of two main subjects of the project: **rural development and European citizenship**. The project was possible thanks to the funding from the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union.

The aim of the ENSURE network was to foster European citizenship and democratic participation by making EU's social and political dynamics more understandable and relevant to citizens living in rural territories.
The project tried to *mainstream* active European citizenship throughout the topics which are rarely linked with it in a direct way, such as the rural development and Common Agricultural Policy. This allowed to reach citizens who are not primarily interested in exploring EU citizenship. In the course of the project they gained a better understanding of it, as well as the motivation to be more active at Union level.



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This publication consists of three distinctive parts: the first one focuses on Local Action Groups as examples of direct local democracy, the second one introduces you into the topic of innovation in agriculture, and then reveals our local approach and perception of the European Common Agricultural. The third part one tackles the key subject matter of the project - Euroscepticism.

We hope that you will find this combination of topics inspiring and helpful when planning your own transnational cooperation projects and transnational networks. Please do not hesitate to contact us in case you had any questions, thoughts or comments.

EUROPE FOR CITIZENS PROGRAMME

The aim of the [Europe for Citizens Programme](#) is to contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity and to encourage the democratic participation of citizens at EU level.

Two supported themes:

1. European remembrance - the EU as a peace project.
2. Democratic engagement and civic participation - getting citizens involved.

Networks of Towns

Networks of Towns belong to the second theme of the programme. Networks of Towns encourage local and regional authorities, supported by NGOs to cooperate with each other on a long term basis to explore particular topics or themes, share resources or interests, gain influence or face common challenges.

General objectives of the Europe for Citizens Programme targeted by the ENSURE project:

- To contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity.
- To foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level.



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Specific aims of the Programme targeted by the ENSURE project:

- Raise awareness of remembrance, common history and values and the Union's aim that is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples by stimulating debate, reflection and development of networks.
- Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making-process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.

The priority of the Programme targeted by the project was the understanding and debating Euroscepticism. The main goal of the project was to increase involvement of citizens from rural areas in the development of solidary Europe.

The Network gave an opportunity to the partners to address issues which are prevalent in rural areas, and which stand in the way of a solidary Europe, such as: Euroscepticism, poor understanding of EU policies, disinformation, nationally-based stereotypes. The project was conceived according to the EU Citizenship Report 2016 and the objectives of Europe for Citizens, namely: the promotion of European citizenship and improving conditions for civic and democratic participation.



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ENSURE PARTNERS

The success of ENSURE lies in the variety of its partners. They represent 13 countries, including Serbia and Montenegro. The Network was coordinated by Razvojno Informacijski Center Slovenska Bistrica from Slovenia: <https://ric-sb.si/>

BULGARIA	Municipality Trudovets
CROATIA	LAG „Central Istria“
CZECH REPUBLIC	Hranicka Rozvojova Agentura
GREECE	University of Thessaly
HUNGARY	Kistarcsai Kulturális Egyesület
ITALY	Associazione Alessandro Bartola
LATVIA	Ligatne Municipality
MONTENEGRO	Municipalitie Kolasin
POLAND	Municipality of Lask
ROMANIA	Alba County Council
SERBIA	Fond „Evropskiposlovi“ Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine
SLOVENIA	Razvojno Informacijski Center Slovenska Bistrica - the Lead Partner
SPAIN	The Federation of Municipalities of Madrid

Meet the partners and their local realities:

DOWNLOAD: <https://www.slideshare.net/GosiaWochowskaPhD/ensure-network-brochure>



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Delegates to the second project Event, Croatia, April 2018.



Partners during the fourth project Event, Madrid and region, Spain, June 2018



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ENSURE INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL EVENTS

There were six international meetings organized within the project for an overall number of 700 citizens from 13 EU countries, representatives of municipalities and regions, Local Action Groups, NGOs, agricultural cooperatives, agrarian universities and schools, of cultural centers and local authorities, students, youths and adults. The events were followed by local activities: debates, lectures, workshops in each of the countries involved.

EVENT 1

Slovenska Bistrica

SLOVENIA

October 2017

Topic: Kick-off Event in Slovenia. Needs, characteristics and commonalities of rural areas across Europe

EVENT 2

Pazin, Porec, Motovun

CROATIA

April 2018

Topic: Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from a new perspective

EVENT 3

Madrid and region

SPAIN

June 2018

Topic: Going local vs. going European? Tools for solidarity locally and in the EU – multilevel approach.

EVENT 4

Pesaro and region

ITALY

October 2018

Topic: Participatory democracy in local development strategies



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EVENT 5**Volos****GREECE****March 2019****Topic: Impacting the young generation****EVENT 6****Slovenska Bistrica and region****SLOVENIA****June 2019****Topic: Evaluation and setting of the ENSuRe Network NGO**

The six international events aimed to prepare partners to organize their own follow up activities in each country which we called: Actions for Solidarity - a series of local activities managed by local facilitators.

The local activities included: workshops, debates, meetings with citizens and policy makers, fairs, lectures, and many more. Their topics covered all aspects of rural development as per local needs combined with rights and obligations of EU citizens, EU Citizenship Reports, volunteering in Europe, narratives of Europe. This allowed to reach another thousands of citizens across Europe.



Local follow up activity of ENSURE in Romania, September 2018



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Photo cover and a poster from the second partner meeting, Croatia, April 2018



Photo cover and a poster from the third partner meeting, Spain, June 2018



INTERNATIONAL PARTNER MEETING

**ENSURE PROJECT – EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
THE COHESION AND SOLIDARITY IN RURAL
AREAS**

host: Associazione Alessandro Bartola

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FUTURE CAP 2021-2027

Conference / Debates / Workshops

Italy

Pesaro
15th-17th October 2018



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Photo cover and a poster from the fourth partner meeting, Italy, October 2018



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6TH INTERNATIONAL PARTNER MEETING

Evaluation and setting up the ENSuRe Network NGO

JUNE 5-7TH 2019, Slovenska Bistrica SLOVENIA

Photo cover and a poster from the sixth partner meeting, Italy, October 2018



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LOCAL ACTION GROUPS – COMPARATIVE STUDY BY ENSURE PARTNERS

By: Tomaz Repnik (Slovenia), Karolina Berousková (Czech Republic), Anna Doliwa (Poland), Roberta Krivičić (Croatia) and Marilena Moga (Romania)

Five ENSURE partners are represent Local Action Groups or support them directly through their activities. Thus the first chapter of the publication is a comparison of the approach to rural development as it is implemented by Local Action Groups in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and in Slovenia. This comparison reveals how the EU policies are implemented at local level in rural communities in a public-private partnership.

1) How are LAGs constituted in your country (type of organisation of a LAG, stakeholders, who can be a lead partner/administrator of a LAG)?

Croatia

In Croatia, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are operating as non-profit organizations representing local partnership between public, private and civil sector as equals based on the LEADER approach. Every LAG is thus an independent legal body with its own internal organizational structure which is usually constituted of the general Assembly of Members, President, Steering Committee, Manager and staff.

The aim of establishing LAGs is to use joint efforts, through the compilation of Local development strategies and implementation of specific joint development projects in order to improve the overall development and raise the competitiveness of the target rural area.



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LAGs are related to rural areas with more than 5,000 and less than 150,000 inhabitants while individual settlements within LAGs cannot have more than 25,000 inhabitants.

The Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, Local Action Groups are non-governmental and non-political organisations, based on the principles of free association, through which cooperation between the public (municipalities), private (entrepreneurs, represented mainly by small companies and private agriculturers) and civil sectors (NGOs and active citizens) has been enabled through education, awareness and the activation of local communities in order to facilitate the development of rural areas in the municipalities. One of LAG's crucial roles is to mediate communication, establish and maintain the network between the representatives of all sectors and active citizens from a given territory.

LAG Hranicko is covering the territory of the municipality of Hranice with approximately 34,000 inhabitants.

Poland

Local Action Groups in Poland are "special" associations with legal personality, registered in the National Court Register. The Voivodeship Marshal exercises supervision over the LAG. In the Local Action Group, apart from the general meeting of members, the board and the internal control body, there is an additional body such as the Council which makes decisions on the selection of operations carried out under Local Development Strategies.

The essence of the LAG's activities is a three-sector partnership: the public sector, the economic sector and the non-governmental sector. It combines self-governments, economic entities, non-governmental organizations and individuals in a joint development action.

The Local Action Group "The Grapia River Valley" encompasses an area of 1,094 km² inhabited by a population of about 82,000 citizens and currently has 87 members. The LAG "The Grapia River Valley" activities span covers the area of 7 rural communes: Buczek, Dłutów, Dobroń, Drużbice, Sędziejowice, Widawa,



Wodzierady and 2 municipal-rural communes: Łask and Zelów, within the administrative borders of the Łódź Voivodeship.

Romania

Local Action Groups are organised as public-private partnerships that bring together all sectors: public (public administration, public services), private (from agricultural, commercial, financial fields or services) and civil society sectors (NGOs and individuals). Both private and NGOs represent at least 51% of the total number of partner members and decision-making levels. LAGs are non-governmental organizations having as a specific goal the development of the area they are constituted in. The development is achieved by implementing the Local Development Strategy, with the direct involvement of local actors.

LAGs are set up in areas having a population between 10,000-100,000 inhabitants, including small towns with no more than 20,000 inhabitants.

In Alba County, situated in central Romania (Transylvania), there are 6 functioning LAGs covering almost all rural areas in the county - 5,749.51 sq. km., with 162,277 inhabitants.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, LAGs are organised as a public-private partnership, in which representatives of 3 sectors are included: the public sector (i.e. schools, municipalities and other public institutions), economic sector (companies and entrepreneurs) and private sector (individuals and societies). Thus, LAG itself is not a legal entity. The lead partner/administrator of LAG is one of the partners, which was appointed by other partnership partners at the LAG Assembly, which is LAG's highest body. LAG »Dobro za nas« (Good for us) includes approx. 40,000 inhabitants and covers the area of the municipalities Makole, Poljčane, Rače-Fram and Slovenska Bistrica (approx. 390 km²).



2) How many LAGs are there in your country?

Croatia

According to data from 2017, there are currently 56 LAGs operating in Croatia, covering a surface area of 52,190.05 km², which makes 92.30% of the total area of Croatia. In the LAG area there are 2,446,567 inhabitants, which makes up 57.10% of the total population of Croatia. The Croatian LAGs comprise 531 units of local self-government (121 cities and 410 municipalities), accounting for 95.50% of the total number of local self-government units in Croatia.

Given the fact that Croatia is a member country of EU since 2013, the current programming period 2007-2013 is the first period in which Croatian LAGs have been implementing their Local development strategies and launching calls for the end users. Prior to that, LAGs in Croatia had been part of the IPARD pre-accession program that Croatia used in the period 2007-2013 as part of the preparations for the use of EU funds.

The Czech Republic

In the programming period 2014-2020, there are 179 LAGs in the Czech Republic, covering 96 % of the Czech population living in rural areas.

Poland

Within the programming period of 2014-2020, 323 LAGs have been selected for the support scheme in Poland. The LEADER programme covers about 94% of the population living in the rural areas and up to 20,000 inhabitants in the cities.

Romania

In the programming period 2014-2020, there are 239 LAGs in Romania with 11,359,703 inhabitants, covering a total surface of about 228,754 sq.km. representing 92% of the eligible LEADER territory.

The implementation of the LEADER Program and the Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Romania started in 2007-2013 period through the National Rural Development Programme. In 2011-2012, the territory was covered by 163 selected LAGs, covering an area of approximately 142,000 sq.km, representing



about 63% of the eligible territory and about 58% of the eligible LEADER population.

Slovenia

In Slovenia there are currently 37 LAGs (total Slovene population is 2,076,000, living in the area of 20,000 km²), covering 100% of the Slovene territory. LAGs were initially formed during the period 2007-2013. In that period, there were 33 LAGs, covering 95% of the Slovene territory.

3) From which European funds can LAGs absorb funds for the implementation of projects?

Croatia

Given the fact that they are only in their first programming period, Croatian LAGs are organized around the mono-fund principle being thus able to absorb funds solely from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EARDF) based on the National Rural Development Programme.

Besides LAGs, there are currently 14 FLAGs in Croatia (Fisheries Local Action Groups) which operate as separate organizations and are using funds from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The Czech Republic

The implementation of the LEADER approach in the Czech Republic started in 2004, in this period 25 LAGS were financed from both the EU LEADER+ and the national budget. In the period 2007-2013 112 LAGs were engaged in Rural Development Programme financed from the EAFRD fund.

In the period 2014-2020 Czech LAGs are multi-funded from EAFRD, ERDF and ESF. 178 LAGs are currently implementing their Strategies of community-led local development, engaging in 5 different operational programmes: Integrated Regional Operational Programme, Rural Development Programme, Operational Programme Employment, OP Environment and OP Science, Innovation and Education.



Poland

The Pilot Leader + Programme appeared in Poland at the end of 2002 among activities implemented under the Sectoral Operational Programme 2004-2006. It aimed to stimulate local initiatives for rural development by building Local Action Groups on the basis of a three-sector partnership. As part of the pilot program, 149 LAGs received support, whose activities covered an area inhabited by nearly 7 million people.

In the next programming period (2007-2013) the LEADER approach was integrated into the mainstream rural development policy and was implemented under Axis 4 of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013. 338 LAGs were granted support in Poland.

The current programming period 2014-2020 involves 323 Local Action Groups. 249 of them are co-financed only by the EAFRD and the state budget. The other LAGs are multi-funded, financed by the state budget and several EU programs: EAFRD, EMFF, ESF and ERDF.

Romania

Romanian LAGs can absorb funds from the European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development (EAFRD) by the National Rural Development Programme.

Similarly, FLAGs (Fishing Local Action Groups) dealing with both the development and full use of the economic potential of fishing areas, benefit from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). There are 22 FLAGs in the territory of Romania.

Slovenia

All Slovene LAGs can absorb funds from 2 European funds: European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development (EAFRD) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In addition, a minor part of LAGs can also absorb funds from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

During the period 2007-2013, LAGs were financed only from the EAFRD.



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4) What sort of projects can be financed by each of the European funds?

Croatia

The Croatian national Rural Development Programme is the basis for Local development strategies that LAGs develop for their local areas. An integral part of the strategies are measures that are in line with those from the National Rural Development Program, somewhat adapted to the specific needs of the local area. From a total of 18 measures included in the national Programme, LAGs were able to include 16 of them in their strategies, even though the number in most cases is significantly smaller.

Projects eligible for financing on a national level can, to an extent, also be financed from LAG funds, if estimated relevant for the development of the local area by LAGs. Those projects are mostly concerned with basic services, village renewals in the rural areas and farms, as well as the business development in terms of agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

The Czech Republic

The wide range of projects can be supported through 5 operational programmes previously mentioned. Projects are divided into infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. Regarding Infrastructure projects, LAG can support the reconstruction of schools, technical classrooms, social housing, community centres, social services facilities, terminal transfers, parking systems, new cycle-routes, elements increasing the transport safety, the construction or equipment of social enterprises, the planting of greenery. Entrepreneurs are supported in various fields – tourist industry, farming, agricultural and food products, small business support. Activities supported by means of non-infrastructure projects could be: social services and social entrepreneurship (i.e. employees' wages), family-friendly activities, employment support activities. Non-infrastructure projects are pre-financed.

Many LAGs in the Czech Republic are implementing a Local Action Plan for the Development of Education with a Ministry of Education as the Managing Authority. The goal of this project is to open the public discussion about the form and



contents of modern preschool, primary and secondary school education. Thanks to the project LAG can financially support a wide range of non-investment activities – open lectures, exchange of best practices in teaching, further education of school teachers, strengthening of personal capacities.

Poland

As part of the above-mentioned multi-funded programs LAGs in Poland may support a wide range of projects, such as soft and investment activities. LAG "The Grobia River Valley" is an association implementing the single-funded Local Development Strategy. The support we provide relates to, among others, the development of entrepreneurship, tourism, culture and recreation, as well as the promotion of the area.

Romania

Projects financed by LAGs should comply with the measures included in each LAG's Local Development Strategy (LDS), established after highly debated animation process in the territory and public consultations. The main types of admitted projects concern investment, services and flat-rate aid. The main goals to be achieved by most LAGs are the following:

- improvement of territory equipment with building facilities, utilities and access infrastructure;
- action supporting social inclusion;
- material and immaterial heritage preservation and promotion;
- development of economic sectors: industrial, agricultural and services.

Considering the particularity of each territory, innovative, multi-sectoral and cross-sectional approaches are encouraged. Other types of atypical projects supporting local development, which are usually not financed by the National Rural Development Programme, are also approved for funding.

In Romania, the Managing Authority for National Rural Development Programme is the General Directorate for Rural Development within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.



Slovenia

Each project, financed by any of the European funds, has to contribute to the goals, determined in the LAGs individual Local development strategy, which is the basic programming document for every LAG.

Every LAG can finance projects, which contribute to the 4 following programming areas:

- jobs creation;
- development of general services;
- environmental protection and nature conservation;
- integration of vulnerable groups.

By the EAFRD and EMFF, all 4 of the above-mentioned programming areas are covered. By the ERDF, only 3 programming areas are eligible - Development of general services is not eligible (the so called »soft projects« are preferred). Another difference is that projects, financed by the EAFRD, can be implemented in all rural areas and in the urban areas with up to 10.000 inhabitants, while ERDF projects can only be implemented in the selected urban areas (rural areas are excluded).

In Slovenia, intermediate body for the EAFRD and EMFF is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, while the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology serves as an intermediate body for the ERDF.

5) In which ways are the funds for the implementation of projects are distributed?

Croatia

At present, LAG Central Istria is implementing the 2014-2020 Local Development Strategy developed under Measure 19 of the National Rural Development Program. An integral part of the Strategy are measures in line with those from the National Rural Development Program. The Financial and Action plans with a time frame also make an integral part of the Strategy and are the basis for launching calls for proposals. The Strategy, as well as the procedure and documentation for every open call, has to be approved by the General Assembly of members or the Steering Committee (depending on the responsibility). They are also in charge of



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assembling the working bodies for project evaluation. Once the projects have been selected, the documentation is being transferred to the Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development, as the public body responsible for the operational implementation of measures becomes responsible of contracting and financing the projects.

The Czech Republic

LAG's public calls are open to all eligible applicants. The call is open at least for a duration of one month. LAG provides free consultations, organizes seminars for applicants and disseminates information about the call and requirements. When a call ends, LAG's employees carry out administrative examination of the submitted projects. The successful applications are then evaluated by the LAG's Selection Committee. The final confirmation and issuing of the project's legal act are done by the Managing Authority, i.e. Ministry in charge of the given operational programme.

Poland

Potential applicants are informed about the calls through the LAG website - www.dolinagrabia.pl and Facebook page, one month prior to the deadline for acceptance of applications. The call lasts from 14 to 30 days.

In order to reach the largest possible group of recipients, we also provide information about the calls during organized trainings, through the local media and websites of our member municipalities.

LAG staff also provides free advisory assistance. After the closure of the call, the applications are verified by the office staff in compliance with the Local Development Strategy, and then a meeting of the LAG Council is held, which assesses the applications, based on the local selection criteria. The next step is submitting the conclusions of our beneficiaries along with the resolutions of the meeting of the LAG Council to the Intermediate Body - the Marshal's Office in Łódź. Employees of the Marshal's Office in Łódź check the applications in terms of formal and substantive issues and construct possible remarks. Beneficiaries have 7 days to make amendments to their applications. After having made the



amendments, the contract is signed for co-financing by representatives of the voivodship board.

Romania

The financial plan included in the Local Development Strategy is an instrument determining priorities regarding measures to be implemented at the local level. The General Assembly of members approves the Local Development Strategy including the financial allocation of measures.

LAGs are launching calls for project selection, for every measure from the Local Development Strategy, that are published on media platforms, on the website or posted within each LAG territory. Projects are submitted by public or private applicants to the LAG office, later evaluated by LAG's staff, according to the evaluation and selection procedure, and a selection report is being issued. The selected projects are submitted to the Agency for Rural Investments Financing (public institution subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which provides technical and financial implementation of the National Rural Development Programme) responsible for contracting and financing.

Slovenia

LAG prepares and publishes the Public Call for financing of the projects, which contribute to the goals determined in the Local Development Strategy. Applicants submit their project proposal, which includes the specification of all activities and costs that will arise during the project implementation.

Selection of the projects is a 2-step process: first, best projects are selected and confirmed by LAG, then, those selected are sent to the final confirmation at the ministry level (depending which ministry covers which fund).



6) Who can apply for the funds and which criteria are preferred for the projects to be included?

Croatia

Every measure included in the Local Development Strategy has its own eligibility criteria which defines the potential applicants. It is necessary for the applicants to be from the LAG area but they do not have to be LAG members. Since, as stated before, Croatian LAGs are using only the EARDF, the applicants are usually farmers. Accordingly, additional points are often assigned to those projects which, in a long term, are making a bigger impact on the development of the agricultural sector, such as those which include young farmers, new employments or energy savings. The exception is the measure focused on the basic services and village renewal in rural areas where the applicants are mostly the local authority units.

The Czech Republic

The list of eligible applicants is published in each call for proposals. The applicants reflect the variety of sectors – municipalities, entrepreneurs, farmers, NGOs. The call is always open to the public. The applicants are not necessarily the members of the LAG partnership.

Selection criteria are set up by the LAG and confirmed by the Ministry. They should give priority to the projects which are very much needed and are useful for the territory, with regard to equal approach to each applicant. Generally, projects with added value, innovative potential and those creating new jobs are seen as a priority.

Poland

A wide group of potential beneficiaries from the LAG area can apply for assistance, depending on the calls for proposals:

- physical entities;
- legal entities (including entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, cultural entities);



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- organizational units without legal personality, to which the law grants legal capacity;
- municipalities.

Detailed information and a selection of applications are published together with the calls for proposals. The calls are open to the residents of the LAG area. Innovative applications aimed at integrating industries and creating new jobs are treated as a priority.

Romania

All financed projects have to be implemented on the territory of LAG financing.

Applicants are not necessarily LAG members. The main beneficiaries are:

- local public administrations for public investments;
- private beneficiaries, authorized for measures regarding economic sectors (agricultural/ non-agricultural);
- NGOs, associations for civil society projects.

Measures related to environmental protection, social inclusion, partnership, minorities and quality schemes established on the basis of national legislation (traditional products, food products produced according to Romanian recipes) are encouraged.

Slovenia

Projects, financed by the EAFRD and EMFF, can be submitted and implemented by legal entities or individuals. Projects, financed by the ERDF, can be submitted and implemented by legal entities only. Applicants are not necessarily members of the LAG partnership.

All the applicants are encouraged to prepare sustainable projects, which will result in creating new jobs. The projects should be implemented in partnerships (possibly combining the partners from all 3 sectors), and the project activities should be held in the area of all 4 municipalities. They should also include vulnerable groups and help preserve the nature.



7) What are the positive experiences, gained by the implementation of rural development through LAGs in the current programming period (2014-2020)?

Croatia

Given the fact that this is the first programming period that Croatian LAGs have been given the opportunity to implement their Local development strategies and transfer funds to the end users in the local area, every experience has been a positive one in terms of gaining new skills and knowledge. The implementation has enabled a better understanding of the needs of the local area. All the knowledge gained first hand will be of immense value while planning new strategies and new periods in order to ensure even more productive and concrete work of LAGs in local communities in the future. In this period LAGs have got the opportunity to become organizations with significant roles in the local community as intermediaries between citizens and available European funds making them more common and accessible for the potential applicants.

The Czech Republic

In the current programming period, LAGs have not only spread their territorial field of activity but also expanded the range of their activities. New funds have brought new topics and agenda, enabling LAGs to work on complex development of the given territory. LAGs can fulfill the goals set up in its Strategy of community-led local development (SCLLD) better, though financial resources allocated in each SCLLD's chapter are limited and cannot solve the given topic completely. Thanks to the new funds and new topics, LAGs have strengthened their positions in the territory, becoming partners for municipalities and NGOs. LAG's managers are invited to be members of special commissions dealing with social issues, certification of local products, etc. Being the holder of the Local Action Plan for the Development of Education project, LAGs have established their intermediary role between local schools and nursery schools. The National network of the LAGs has become the respected partner for the ministries. It seems that state administration is now more aware of the fact that it is possible to reach rural territories and its inhabitants very effectively by the means of LAGs.



Poland

Positive experiences ...? Yes. Considering the large participation of the local community in the performed consultations regarding the preparation of the Local Development Strategy for 2014-2020, we believe that the recognition of LAGs and interest in our activities under the LEADER initiative is much larger than in the previous programming period. It also manifests in a large number of well-prepared and well thought-through applications for co-financing. This is the result of our 10-years work. It was not an easy task, but thanks to the involvement of our partners - representatives of local governments and LAG members, we think that they have been successfully implemented. It is worth looking at the number of completed projects in the previous programming period - 128 for a total amount of over EUR 2,125,000. The projects mainly concern tourism, culture, recreation and promotion of the area. During the projects some playgrounds, sports pitches, outdoor gyms and skate parks were built. We also supported activities in the field of renovation and retrofitting of cultural houses in the countryside. We can also see a significant increase in bottom-up initiatives. Many companies and non-governmental organizations have been established or developed. We also managed to create a new tourist product in the area of the LAG "The Grabi River Valley", which are Quests - unmarked tourist routes that can be walked around and along using leaflets or applications for mobile devices.

In the current programming period, we have 50 agreements signed by our beneficiaries for a total amount of EUR 2,375,000.

In addition, the LAG "The Grabi River Valley" is a member of the Łódź Local Action Group Network, bringing together 17 LAGs from the Łódzkie Voivodeship. As a network, we are a partner of the Polish Network of LAGs and the National Network of Rural Areas.

Romania

In Romania, in the current 2014-2020 programming period, the LAGs have been able to come closer to the specific needs of local development by integrating atypical measures into local development strategies. There has been another



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step made towards increasing the capacity of local development management by the fact that LAGs now have their own guides and implementation procedures. There is also greater flexibility regarding actions and events made in order to increase the visibility of LAGs in the territory and to disseminate the results meaning that the range of eligible expenditures for operation and animation has been diversified.

Another positive experience is that LAGs having water surfaces in their territories could transfer their expertise in implementing LDS towards FLAGs, another structure based on Community-led local development (CLLD) concept.

Slovenia

In case of Slovenia, LAGs represent a valuable source for the development of rural, and to some extent, urban areas. They enable the absorption of funds also for those, who would be unable to apply for other financing options (individuals, small entrepreneurs, societies). Also, many projects can be implemented in the areas, which would otherwise be missed by the other financing measures. Bottom-up approach (following the initiatives, expressed by the local people) also makes a valuable asset. Apart from the previous programming period (2007-2013) when only EAFRD funds were available for the rural development, 2 additional funds were added (ERDF and EMFF).

8) What are the negative experiences/problems identified by LAGs in the current programming period?

Croatia

One of the most common problems identified by LAGs in this first period was the demanding administration and the amount of paperwork that needs to be done in order for LAGs to ensure the Strategy to be approved and implemented and for the citizens to be able to apply to the open calls. Beside that, a lot of difficulties were caused by the delays of the Ministry in charge in providing guidelines for LAGs in order to be able to start announcing calls for proposals. Additionally, taking into account the waiting time and the amount of work that needs to be done while developing and adapting the Local development strategies, the total financial



allocations for LAGs were fairly low. This caused slight discontentment since LAGs were not given the chance to make the desired impact on the field.

The Czech Republic

Unfortunately, new funds have brought extensive administrative burden for both applicants and LAG's managers. Some controls are done repeatedly, firstly by the LAG, secondly by the Managing Authority. As a result, the animation activities are overshadowed by the administration. It is also a challenge for LAG managers to deal with different requirements of each operational programme and the scope of topics. Synergic projects are officially supported, but they are difficult to design because each operational programme has different requirements regarding project activities and target groups. Innovative projects are also seen as a priority but some of them were not supported, because their innovativeness was not in compliance with the official rules.

Poland

Unfortunately, there are also negative sides of the current programming period. They are associated with a large number of administrative activities i.e. the necessity of collecting many documents by the potential beneficiaries as well as filling-in a difficult application form which includes a co-financing and business plan. The cost refund is also a barrier. Many beneficiaries cannot afford to invest their own funds in advance and wait for their reimbursement after completing the investment and submitting the application for payment.

Romania

One of the negative experiences refers to the vast documentation the beneficiaries have to submit in order to apply for funding from LEADER. Another major negative aspect is the frequency of legislative changes in the field, which bring delays and other unwanted effects in LDS implementation.

Also, measures related to internet broadband networks could not be applied, because the authorized services provider had to be stationed in the LAG territory, while most of providers are situated in urban areas.



Slovenia

The major problem, expressed by the applicants, is the bureaucracy (referring to all the invoices, consents and allowances, which the applicants must provide when submitting their project (before it is even known whether their project will be selected or not). Each fund has its own rules, that makes things very complicated not only for applicants but also for the lead partner. Additionally, at the beginning of the programming period, each project application for the EAFRD funds had to include 3 offers for every cost, no matter how high the expenditure was. That has changed eventually. Some improvements were also made to optimize the length of the selection process. Still, the problem of value added tax, which is not eligible, remains.

9) What are the proposals/directions for the future rural development implemented by LAGs?

Croatia

Regarding the future rural development implemented by LAGs, the first step would be to include LAGs in planning their role in the next programming period. This would mean that LAGs would be able to provide first hand insight and ensure the strategy the next programming period would be as effective as possible. Not only LAGs but also stakeholders and representatives of applicants should be actively involved in the process of developing the future Rural development programme on the national and on the LAG level. In order to achieve improvements, difficulties stated in the previous answer should be strongly considered and efforts should be made in order to resolve all of them. This means that the administration processes should be revised and made more user friendly and time frameworks should be more realistic and at the same time less strict. Simultaneously, raising the total allocation intended for LAGs as well as transferring to a multi-fund system should be obligatory.

The Czech Republic

The Czech LAGs consider the existence of one lead-fund in the next programming period not viable, state administration and LAGs propose to make



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use of the existing structures. LAGs are prepared to follow the rules of all European funds, but they suggest unifying the rules of the operational programmes financed from the same European fund. We also suggest implementation of pre-payments for infrastructure projects. LAGs seek to be involved in other operational programmes (OP Transport, OP Science, Innovation and Education and OP Enterprise and Innovations for Competitiveness). Generally, LAG should be the guarantor of the Strategy of community-led local development. The strategy should set up priorities for the comprehensive regional development, engaging all participants in the territory – municipalities, entrepreneurs, companies, NGOs.

Poland

The Polish LAGs believe that bureaucracy should be reduced in order to ensure the continuity of LAGs activities; a lump sum for projects co-financed by the LAGs should be introduced; legal regulations regarding CLLD simplified through a single set of rules - implementation within a national program that would be prepared by one Managing Authority, multi-funded - the need to harmonize funds. Local development strategies should be designed and implemented at the local level in cooperation with partners representing various sectors.

Romania

Regarding the future development of rural areas in Romania, several aspects are considered essential: public investment in improving the quality of life, territory equipment in order to reduce disparities between territories, development of economic sectors (agricultural and non-agricultural), outlining higher valorization of opportunities, resources and local products.

At the same time, more flexibility when drawing up both, eligibility conditions of atypical measures included in LDS, as well as reporting document content, adapted to financing measures, easy to fill in and check, are considered necessary. The financial institutions (banks, guarantee funds) should diversify their credit offers towards EAFRD funded project beneficiaries.



Slovenia

In addition to the above-mentioned value added tax, which could be eligible, pre-payments would make a big difference to applicants (especially to those in the private sector). Everything that could shorten the project selection process would make a positive impact. Also, previous experiences (period 2007-2013) show that it was easier for LAG to be organised and managed as a legal entity (for example society or cooperative) than being organised as a partnership. And finally – the same rules for the projects' application should apply for all European funds, which should be led by a joint intermediate body at the national level.

10) How can LAGs strengthen solidarity and cohesion in rural areas?

Croatia

LAGs have been given an extremely important role in strengthening solidarity and cohesion in rural areas. By offering citizens the chance to get direct and indirect funding from the EU funds, LAGs enable a better understanding of the EU agenda in general and can therefore be perceived as a direct link between the local and European level. LAGs have to be persistent in their everyday efforts to bring together and enable a continuous dialogue between different stakeholders from the rural community in order to make strong local partnerships and at the same time raise awareness about the benefits of developing broader connections at the European level.

The Czech Republic

LAGs are a tool for community-led local development in rural areas, which are generally less structurally developed than urban areas. Thanks to the LAGs, European and national funds can reach the rural territories directly and the most needed measures can be implemented. Social projects financed from the European Social Fund (OP Employment) help identify the vulnerable groups in the regions (often out of reach for the current providers of social services) and implement projects with the aim of inclusion of these groups in the local community and labour market. Factors such as jobs and services affect the extent



to which people want or are able to remain living in rural areas or move to them. Therefore, LAG's requirements for the projects are also connected with the creation of new job opportunities. LAGs animate the territory they function in, identify potential applicants and help them with the project preparation. If it were not for the LAGs, many projects in rural territories wouldn't be realized.

Poland

"Think globally - act locally" - is an idea that has always guided the LEADER programme and the Local Action Groups. The essence of our activities is a three-sector partnership: the public, economic and non-government sectors. We are the basic tool for activating inhabitants of rural areas by building social potential and supporting the implementation of innovative projects based on unique natural values as well as cultural and historical resources. Thanks to LAGs, our areas can develop by creating new opportunities.

Romania

The LEADER programme is not only an opportunity to implement measures, but a way to animate and promote rural development and communities by adapting decisions to their extremely different needs. Community-led rural development within LEADER is the human face of National Rural Development Programme and this is exactly what ensures its future viability and success.

The local development view at each LAG level was built considering the resource valorization for the benefit of the entire territory and so the citizens feel part of LAG partnership. These are strong proofs of territory cohesion and solidarity. Measures encouraging social inclusion, partnership, minorities and vulnerable groups support are some of the ways of improving solidarity in rural areas.

Slovenia

LAGs can contribute on many levels. Firstly, with providing the financial resources for the implementation of projects in rural areas, which would possibly be left without appropriate financing resources, that strengthen the cohesion, not only at national but also at the European level. Secondly, with giving the special emphasis to vulnerable groups (unemployed, children, elderly ...) directly or



indirectly involved in the projects (as project partners or as users of the project results) and emphasizing solidarity.

11) Are there any networks of LAGs in your country?

Croatia

In Croatia, there are several organizations that operate as the network of LAGs. The Rural Development Network is the official coordination network established by the Ministry of Agriculture, which all LAGs, among other organizations, are members of. There are also other organizations – mostly NGOs focused on rural development which unite some LAGs and other organizations with similar objectives.

The Czech Republic

More than 90% of the Czech LAGs are united in the National Network. The network enables LAGs to share their experiences, help each other and it unites LAGs as a professional organisation representing the Czech rural areas. The National Network is the negotiating partner for state authorities and transfers local knowledge and needs over to the national and European level.

Poland

In Poland, LAGs are united in regional networks at the level of each voivodeship. The Lodz Region has a "Łódź Network of Local Action Groups", the founding member of which is the "The Grobia River Valley" LAG.

An initiative to establish a Polish Network of Local Action Groups was created, which is a union of associations that brings together both formal and informal LAG networks from across the country. The Polish LAGs Network — The Federation of Regional LAGs Networks currently unites 270 local action groups i.e. about 80% of all LAGs operating in Poland.

The goal of the Polish Network activities is to build a platform for cooperation and exchange of experience between Local Actions Groups and their regional networks, as well as other organizations and people related to the implementation of the Leader approach and other axes of the Rural Development Programme. It



also shapes the opinions of the Polish LAGs in the national and international arenas.

Romania

Organizations representing LAGs:

- National Federation of LAGs, which includes only LAGs and represents them at the national level,
- Rural National Network, which includes LAGs, but also organizations and public administrations involved in rural development. It promotes the networking and exchange of information on RDP activity at regional, national and EU level.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, there is no official network of LAGs. Instead, most of the LAGs are members of the Slovene Rural Development Society, which operates as an informal representative of LAGs at the national level.



ENSURE was an excellent opportunity for us to find out best practices in a broadly understood development of European rural areas, and to start collaborations on common themes identified in the project. (Team of Alba County Council, Romania)



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We have already realized other international projects and each project is somehow special. This one was REALLY special. What we liked the most was the diversity of the partners. (Team of Hranicka Rozvojova Agentura, Czech Republic)



The ENSURE project has brought me and my colleagues from LAG Central Istria, new experiences, new networks and even some new friendships. It has given us a chance to see beautiful new places and discuss our interests in our field of work. We are convinced that ENSURE project will be the base for many new successful partnerships in the future. (Roberta on behalf of LAG 'Central Istria', Croatia)



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>>> 2. <<<

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN EUROPE

The project addressed issues where they are the most burning – in rural and peripheral areas. This is why its topics focused on heritage, Common Agricultural Policy, food security. The EU Common Agricultural Policy is supposed to serve as one of the factors in favor of the Euroidentity on the local level. On the other hand, this policy causes tensions between citizens, farmers, local and national governments, and it brings up questions of equal treatment and solidarity in Europe. The project deepened reflection on these kind of paradoxes, by attracting citizens to work on rural-specific aspects as factors that are predictive of a strong support/opposition to the European integration. This chapter has been written by academic contributors from the Greek University of Thessaly and the Italian University of Ancona.

I. IF I WERE THE COMMISSIONER FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS...

**Results of the ENSURE survey on the CAP 2021-2027 by prof. Franco
Sotte, University of Ancona, Italy**

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the proposals advanced for its reform for the 2021-2027 programming period have been deeply discussed in all the workshops between the participants of the ENSURE project. During the event organized in Pesaro Italy in October 2018, participants were asked to express their opinion on the main features of the proposal for the future CAP. This was done by preparing and distributing a survey. The survey was first tested between the



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members of the ENSURE project attending the Pesaro event, soon after the same survey was distributed to a broader sample using the mailing list of the Italian review Agriregionieuropa.

The survey was divided in four parts regarding namely: (a) the so called new delivery model, in other words the proposal to move from a centralised system guided by detailed rules to a more decentralised one based on performance evaluation; (b) the future of direct payments; (c) the future of the rural development policy; (d) the proposed budget for the CAP 2021-2027 and the expectations on the following negotiations on the CAP reform. Each part was introduced by a short synthesis of the proposals of the Commission, which opens the following chapters of this report. For each subject of the survey, the respondents were asked to reply to four questions on the scale from 1 (NO) to 5 (YES).

Who replied?

The replies collected were in total 487. Their distribution per sex, age, level of education, and job is summarized in the first 5 following figures. Women have been 30% of the interviewees (Figure 1). The respondents have shown to have an advanced age (close to half of them were in the class between 50 e 65 years (Figure 2), while the young under 35 years of age have been 20% of the respondents. The degree of education has demonstrated to be relatively high (Figure 3), In fact the respondents with a university degree have been more than 75% and those with a PHD or a master's degree have scored 27%. The agricultural specialization has been declared by more than 75% of the respondents (Figure 4). Finally, with reference to their job, were classified 35% as university or research labourers, 23% as representatives of the public administration, 17% farmers and entrepreneurs, 17% as members of farmers lobbies (unions, cooperatives, environmental movements), 13% professionals and others.



I. **Figure 1 – Distribution of respondents to the survey per sex**

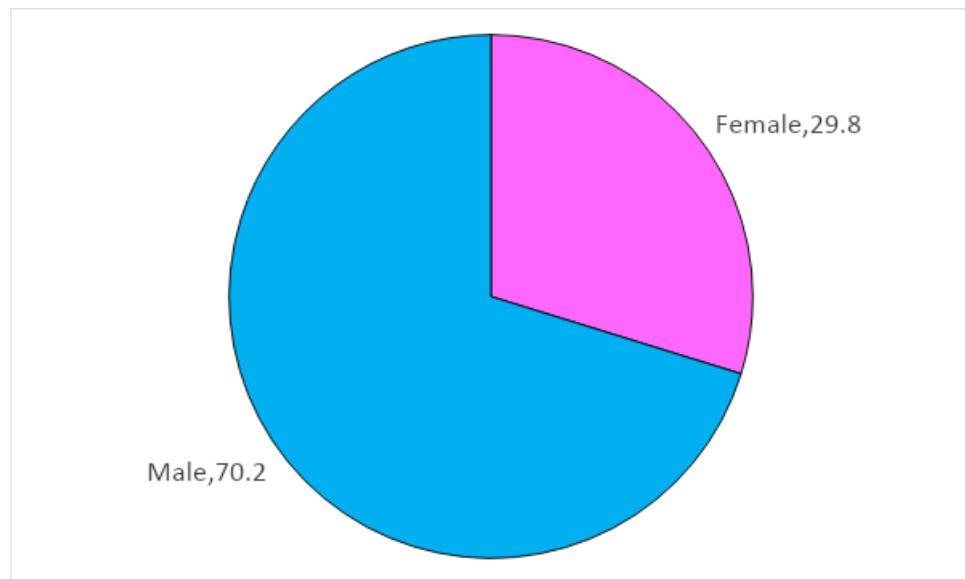
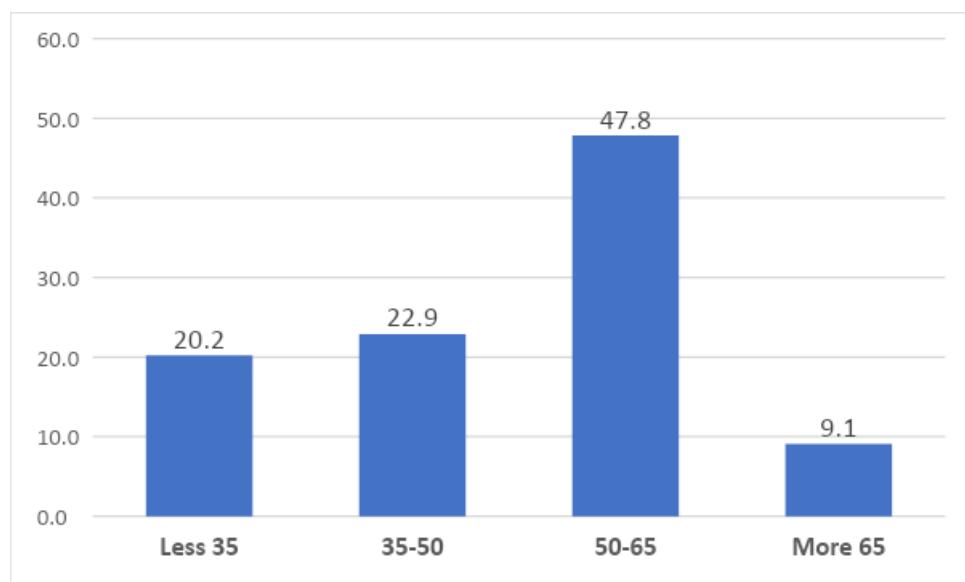


Figure 2 - Distribution of respondents to the survey per age



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Figure 3 – Distribution of respondents to the survey per education level

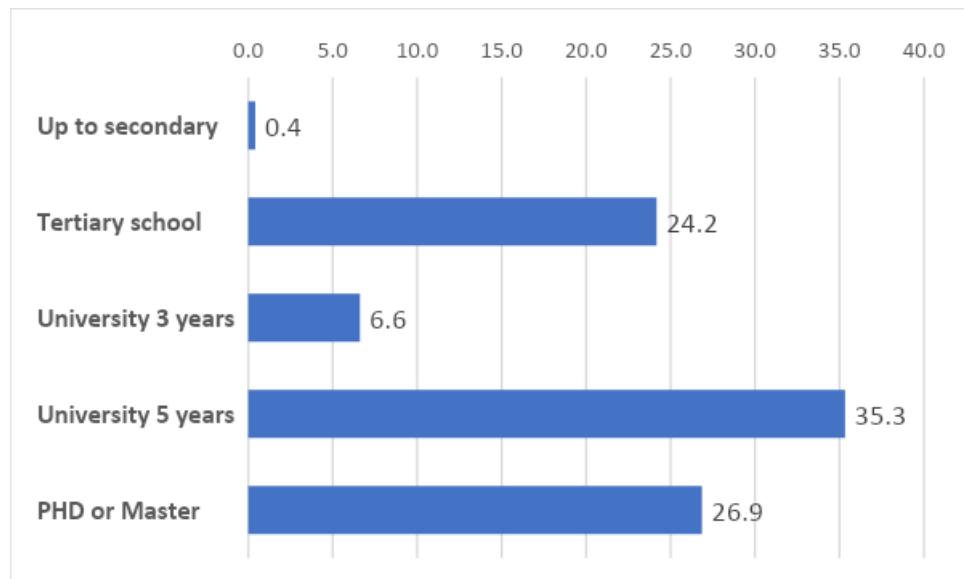
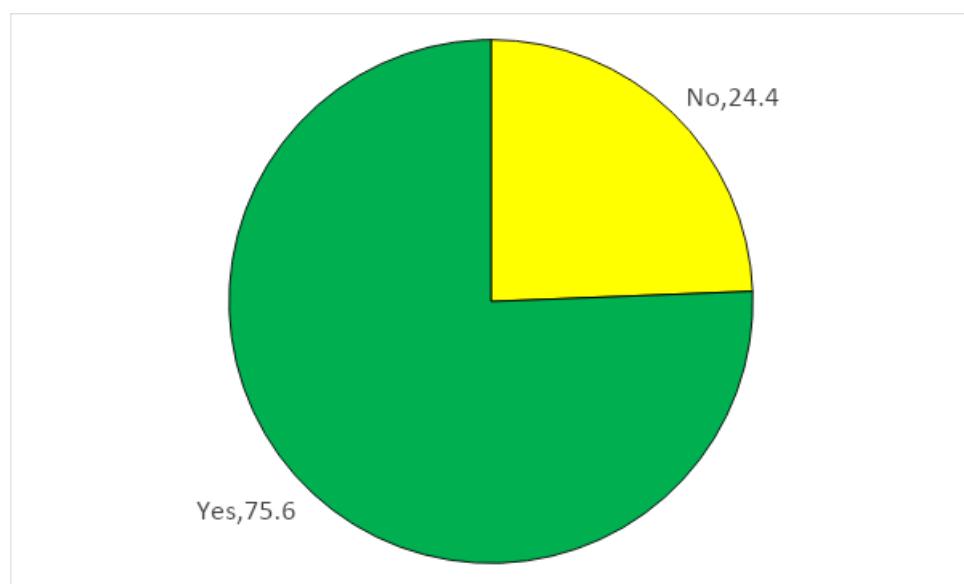


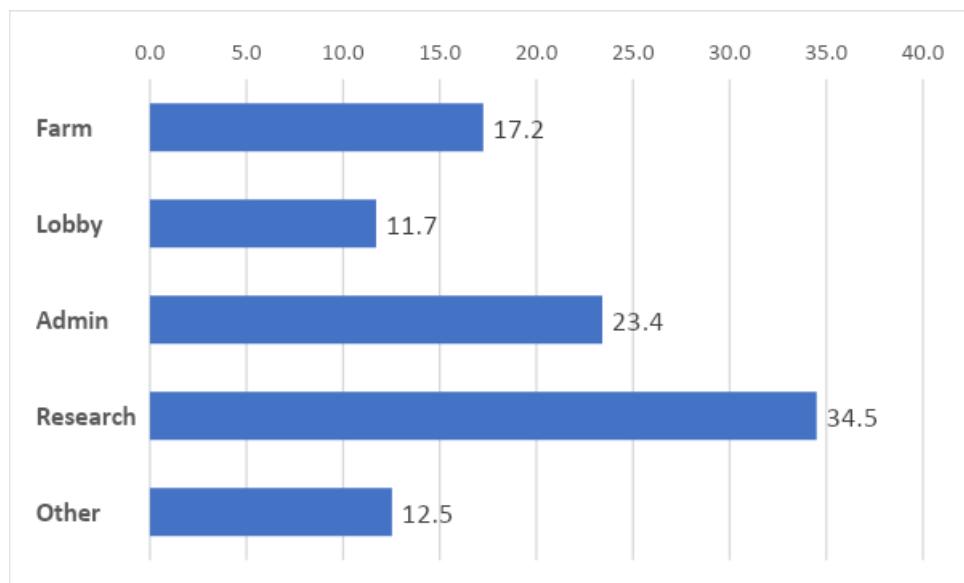
Figure 4 – Distribution of respondents to the survey per education related to agriculture



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Figure 5 – Distribution of respondents to the survey per sector of employment



From a compliance based to a result-oriented CAP

The future CAP is expected to move from an approach based on compliance to rules established in detail in the European Regulations to a result driven approach. For that purpose, a new delivery model is going to be introduced where the European Commission sets the basic policy parameters (objectives of the CAP, broad types of intervention, basic requirements), while Member States bear greater responsibility and are more accountable for how they meet the objectives and achieve agreed targets. In practice a large part of the CAP support will be defined by each Member State. The purpose is to give the MSs a more important role in the definition of the agricultural policy, and to the EU a role of coordination and control. Some CAP analysts argue that this shift of decisions from the EU to MSs will affect the Single Market. Other affirm that it is a step towards a renationalisation of the agricultural policy

The replies reveal a broad worry (especially between farmers) that the Commission as well as member states succeed in coordinating and managing the new delivery model (Figures 6 and 7). Respondents think as well that the envisaged transfer of responsibility to member stated could be a step toward renationalisation of the CAP (Figure 9). Notwithstanding these worries, the overall evaluation of the proposal collects more positive than negative opinions.



Figure 6 - Do you think the EU will be successful in coordinating the new delivery model?

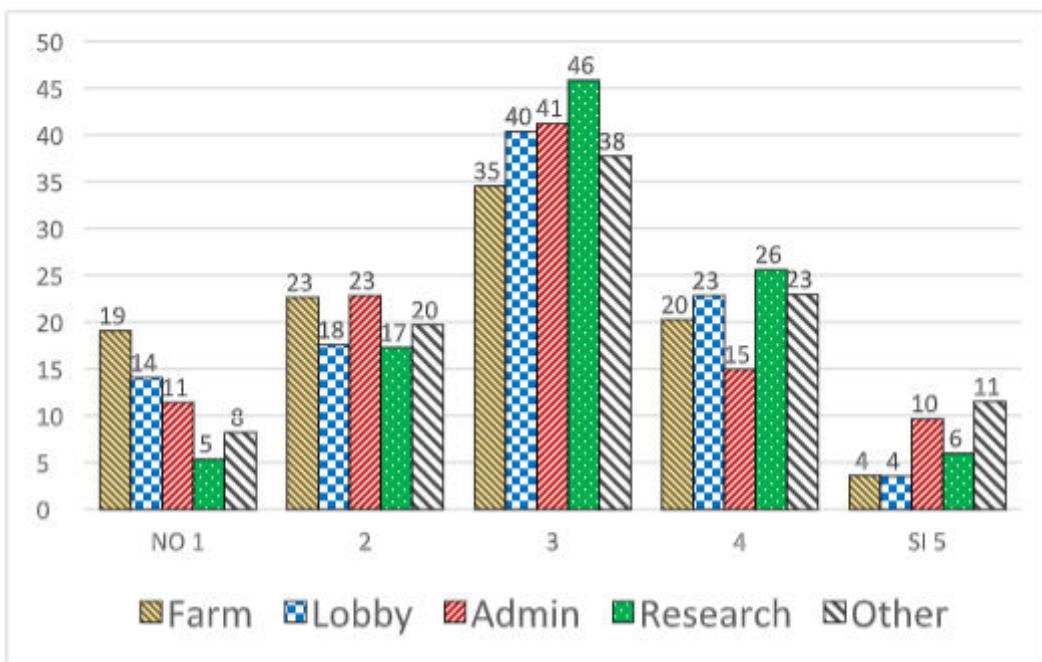
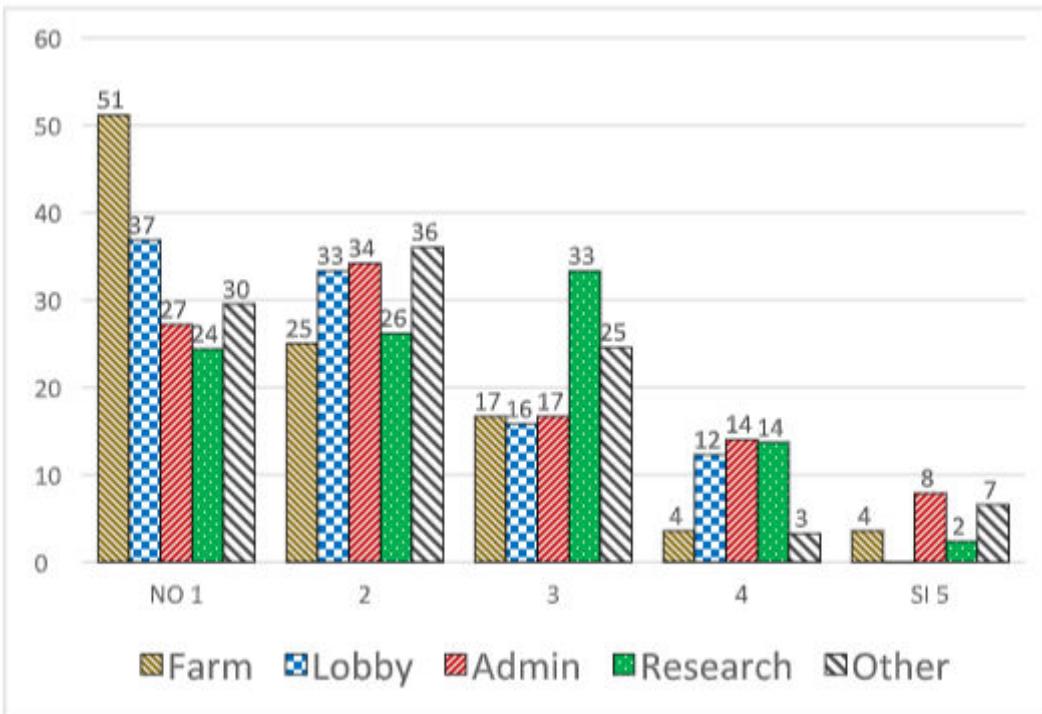


Figure 7 – Do you think your country is prepared to manage such a change of roles and responsibility?



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Figure 8 - Do you think the further transfer of decisions to Member States is a step towards the renationalisation of the agricultural policy?

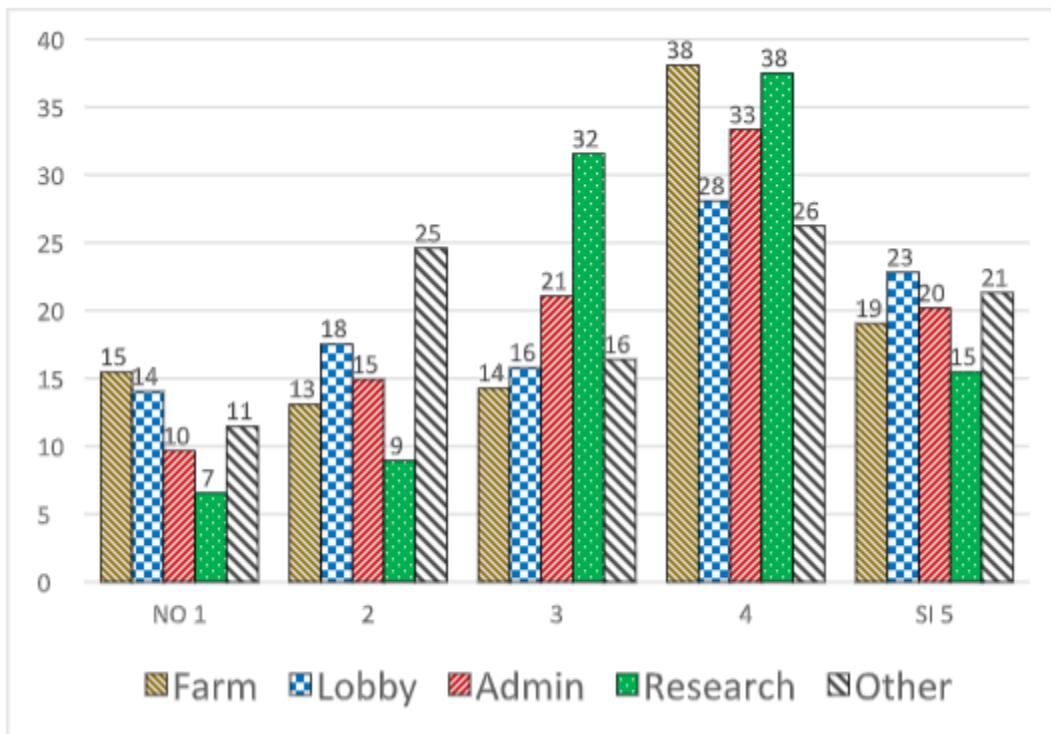
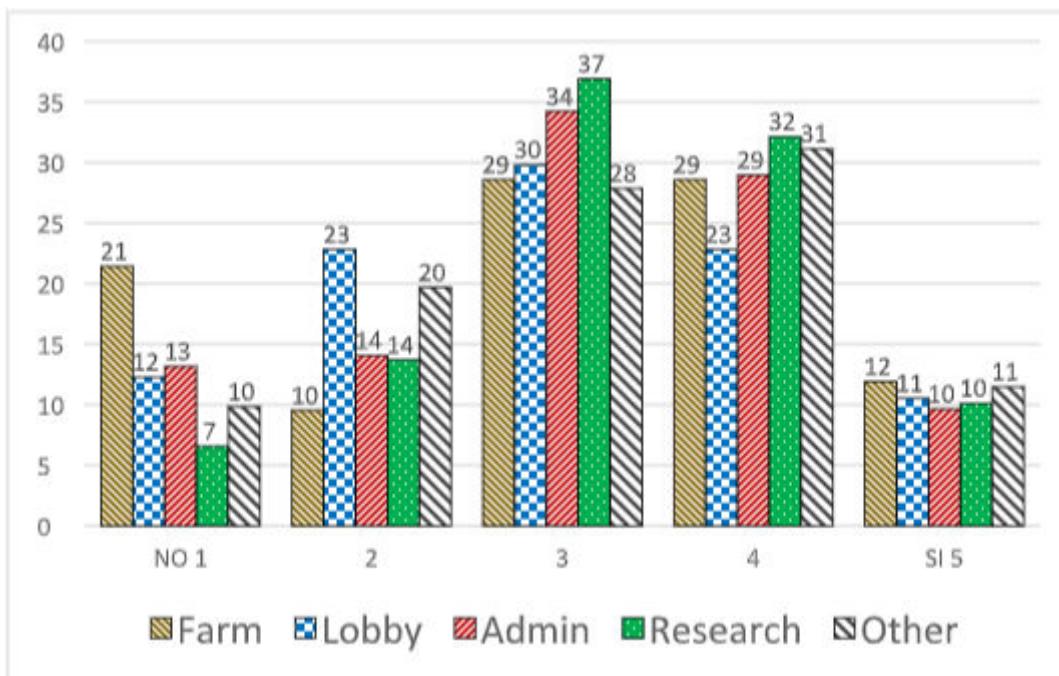


Figure 9 - Do you agree with the proposal of the Commission?



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The future of Direct Payments

A large part of the whole budget of the CAP (70%) is spent for Direct Payments (DPs). The maintenance of this form of support is questioned by large part of the Cap analysts because it is neither well targeted nor tailored. Despite that, a strong support to their maintenance comes from the Agricultural Organisations represented in Brussels. The proposals for the future CAP not only confirm the DPs but also increase to 73% the future part of the CAP budget dedicated to them.

The replies to all the questions concerning direct payments are generally in favour of their maintenance (especially between farmers) to support farmers' income (Figure 10). There is a general agreement on the positive role of Direct payment in supporting sustainability (Figure 11) and innovation and competitiveness (Figure 12). The last question asking if Direct Payments maintenance play a positive role on the future of agriculture, the positive opinion prevails especially among farmers (Figure 13).

Figure 10 - Do you think the maintenance of Direct Payments is necessary to support agricultural income?

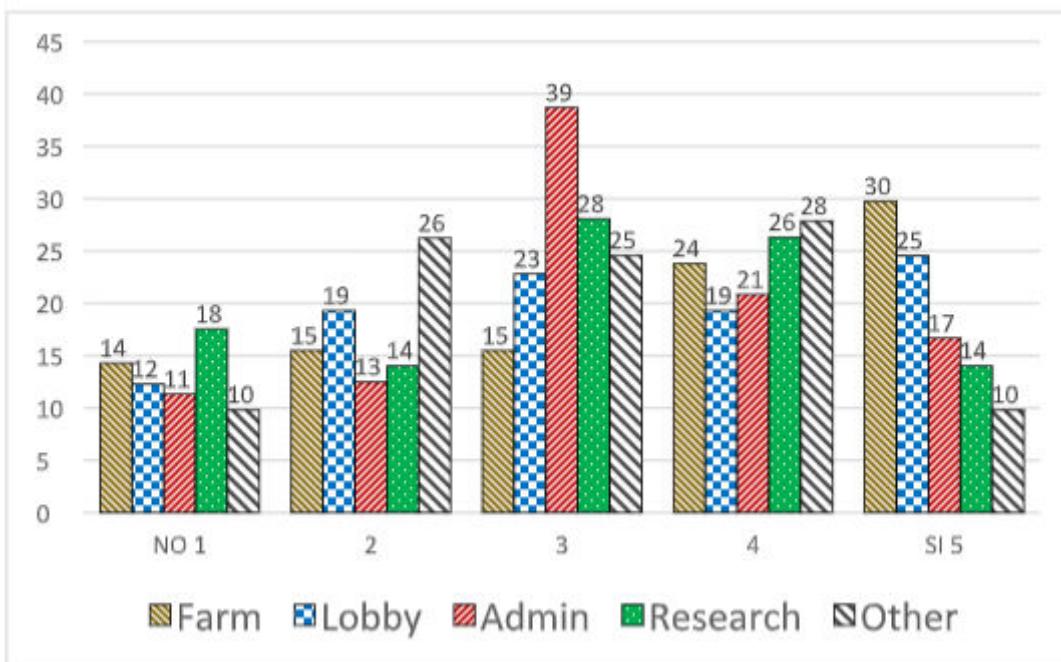


Figure 11 - Do you think the maintenance of Direct Payments is necessary to support environmental sustainability and contrast/adaptation to climate change?

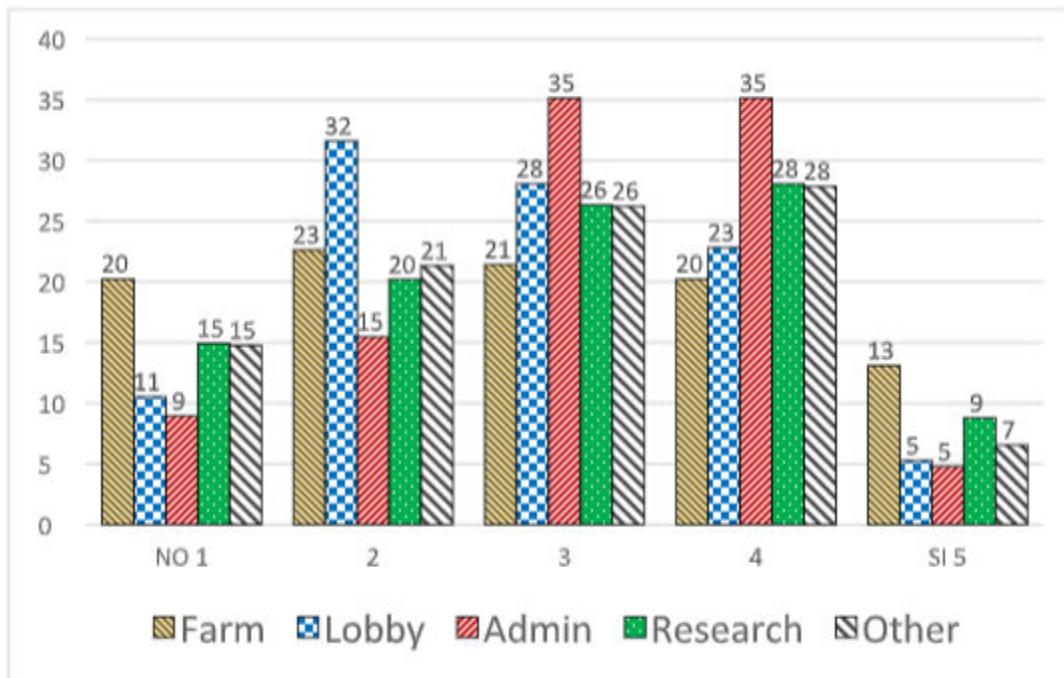


Figure 12 - Do you think Direct Payments have a relevant impact on land price and rents and then on the access to the land of new farmers?

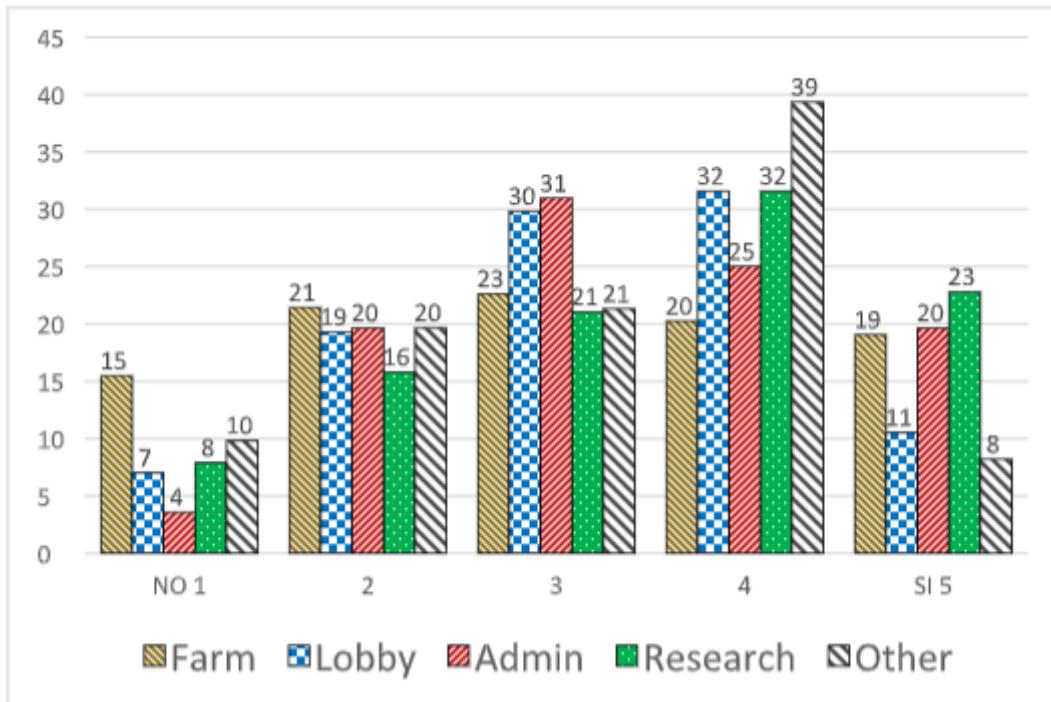
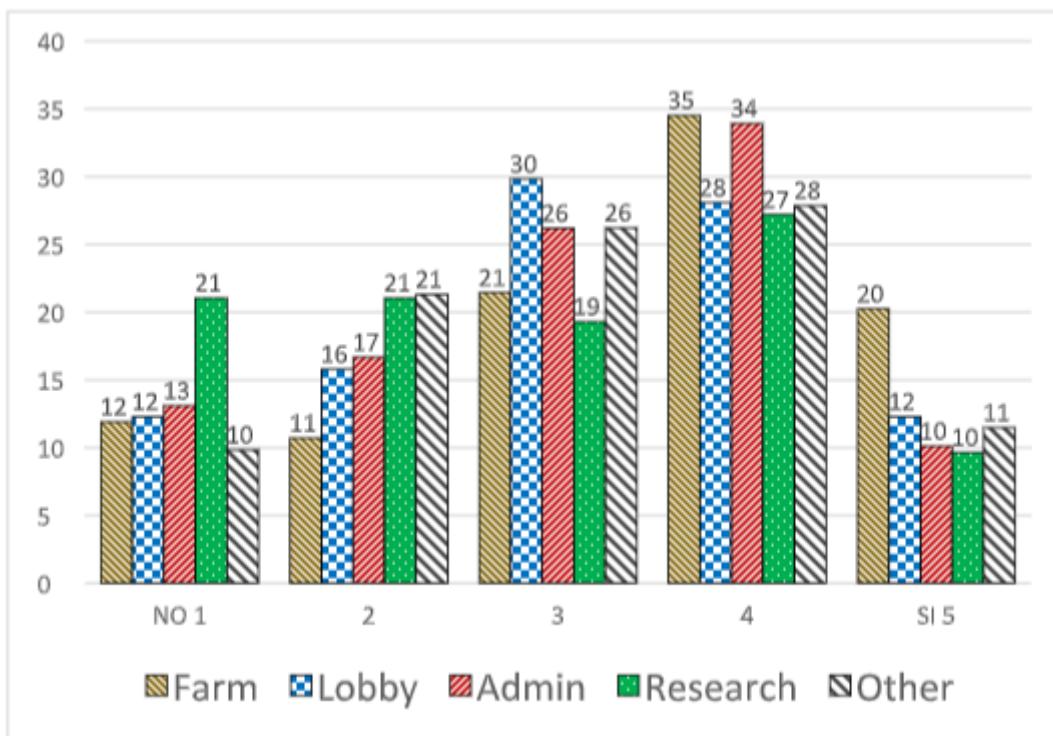


Figure 13 - Do you think Direct Payments play a positive role for the future of European agriculture?



The future of Rural Development Policy

The 2nd Pillar of the CAP is devoted to Rural Development Policy. This policy is managed at National/Regional level through Rural Development Programs to support a broad list of optional measures. It has both sectorial and territorial objectives as it includes structural measures, measures aimed at improving human capital, measures for economic-environmental-territorial sustainability, measure for cooperation and innovation, measures for valorisation of agricultural products.

A negative opinion has been collected on the decision of cutting more the funds dedicated to the 2nd pillar in relationship to the 1st (Figure 14). A positive opinion has been than expressed on the opportunity to move money from the 1st to the 2nd pillar through the so-called flexibility allowed in the proposed regulations (Figure 15). Remarkable support has been given to the environmental measures of the second pillar (Figure 16) and to the measures supporting competitiveness and innovation, even if farmers appear to be reluctant (Figure 17)



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Figure 14 – Do you think that in the distribution of funds between 1st and 2nd pillar is right to cut more on rural development than on direct payments?

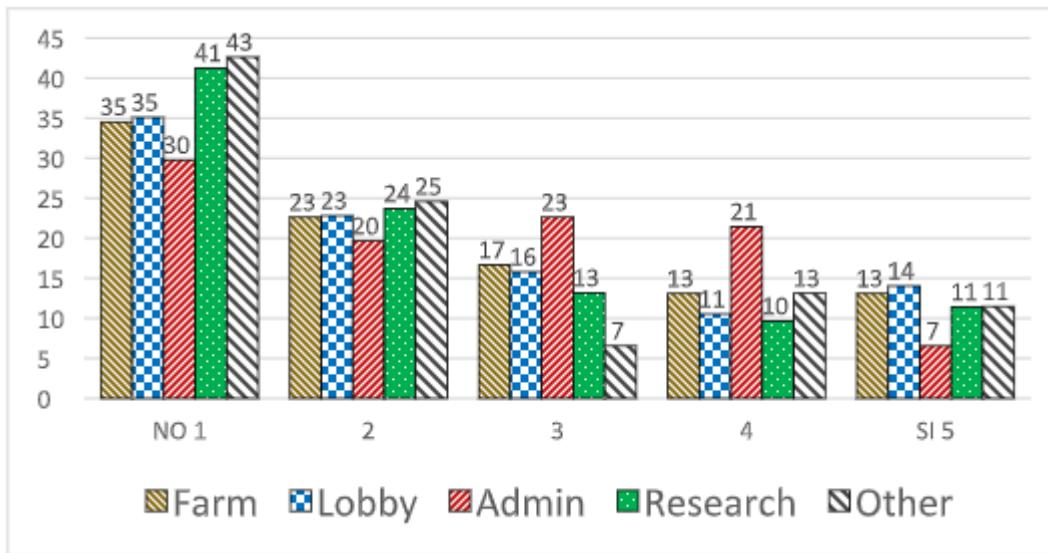


Figure 15 – Would you be in favour in your Country of a shift of funds from 1st to 2nd Pillar?

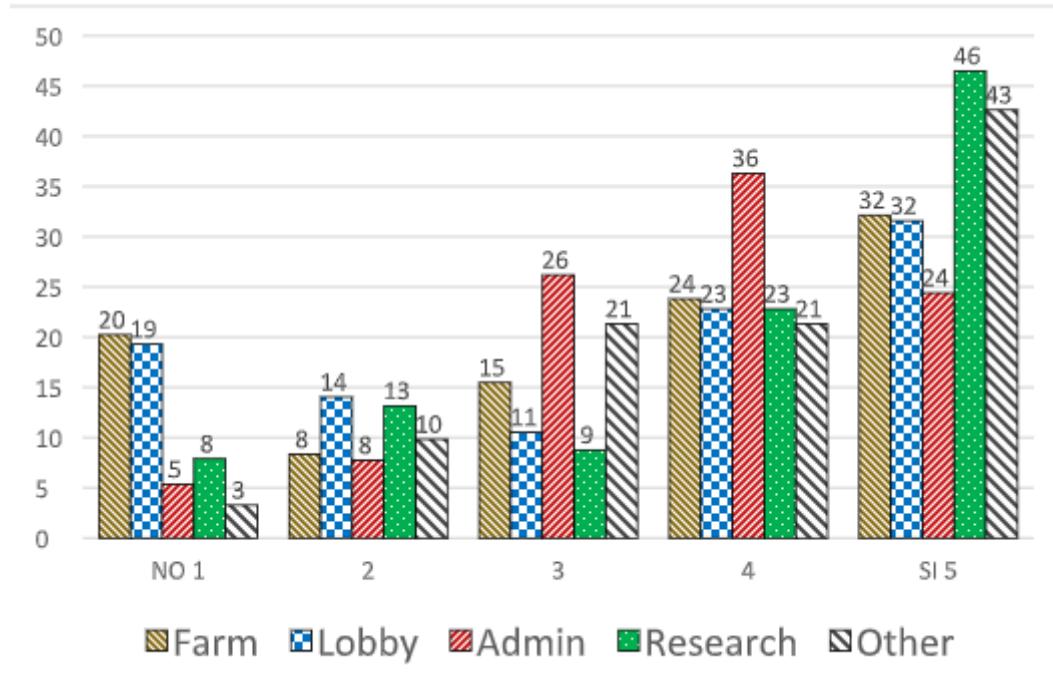


Figure 16 – Do environmental measures in second pillar play an important role for sustainability and climate change?

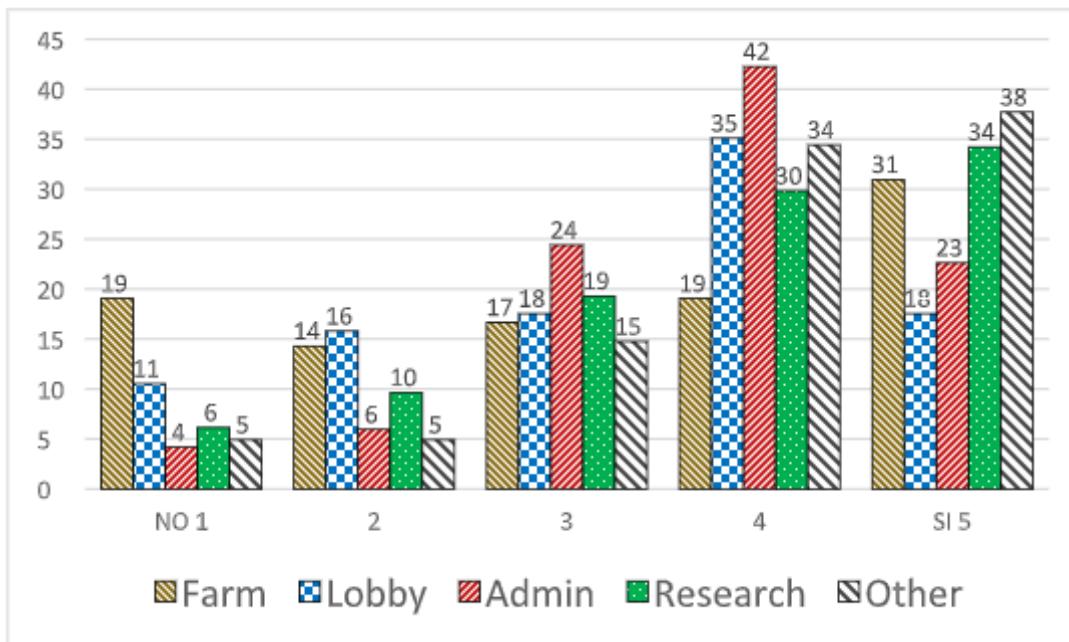
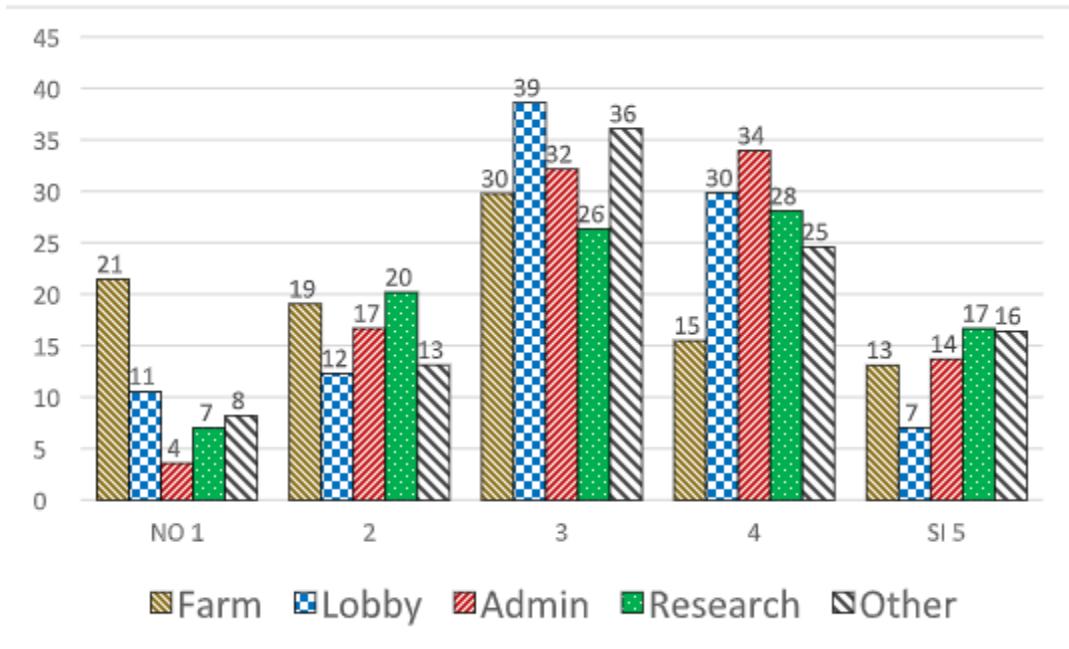


Figure 17 – Are measures for innovation of the second pillar useful to support farms' competitiveness?



The CAP Budget and the future CAP

While the European Commission has proposed that overall budget of the EU is increased for the years 2021-2027 in comparison with the present budget 2014-2020, the European Commission itself has proposed for the future CAP budget a cut in real terms of around 10-15% on the 1st Pillar and around 20-25% on the 2nd Pillar. The final decision on the future budget of the EU is expected for next spring, but in next year both the election of the European Parliament and the renovation of the European Commission could push the EU to postpone the conclusion on the budget and consequently also the future CAP could be postponed.

A general disagreement has been expressed on the Cap budget cut (Figure 18) and in order to overcome this cut both an increase of the national contribution to the EU budget by the member states (Figure 19) and the introduction of co-financement of the 1st pillar (Figure 20) are supported. The last question (Figure 21) suggests that there is still a broad expectation that there is still room for further significant changes to the present version of the proposals (Figure 21)

Figure 18 – Considering the other priorities of the European Union, do you think the cut proposed on the Cap budget is acceptable?

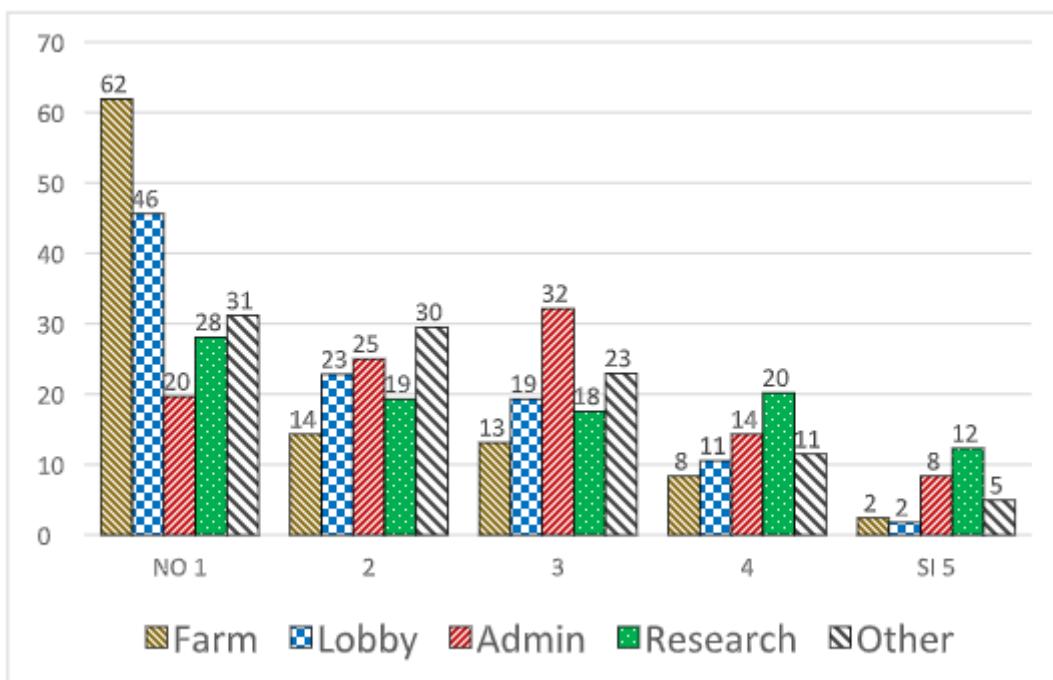


Figure 19 – Would you be in favour of an increase of the contribution of Member states to the EU budget if this were necessary to rise the Cap budget?

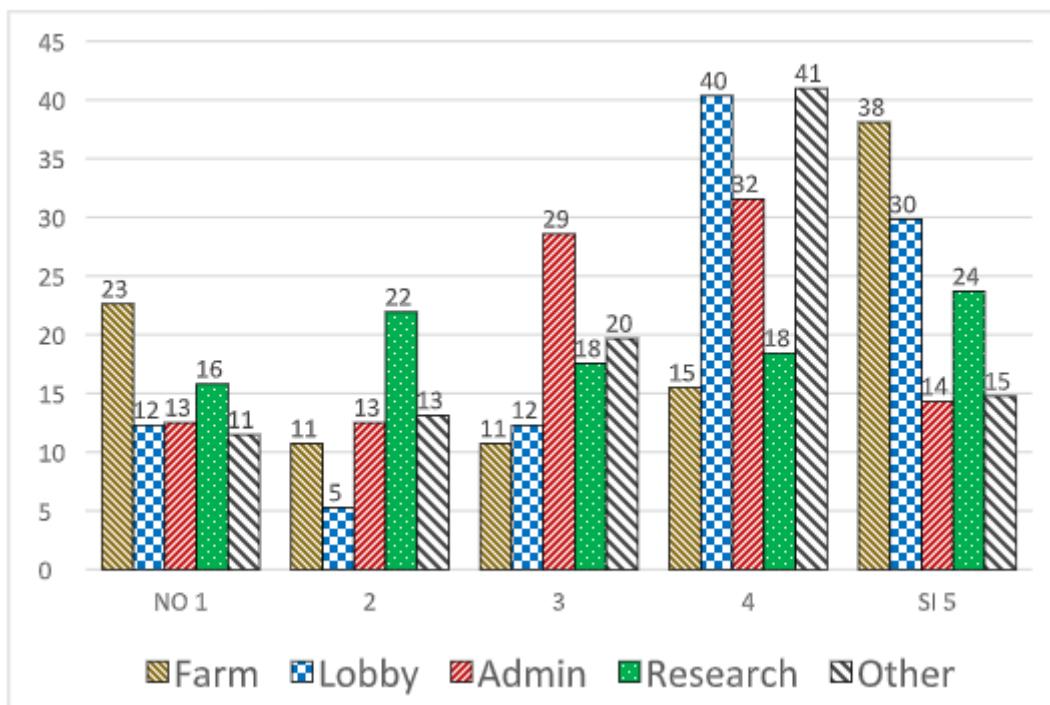


Figure 20 – Will you be in favour of the introduction of cofinancement of the first pillar in this were necessary to increase the Cap budget?

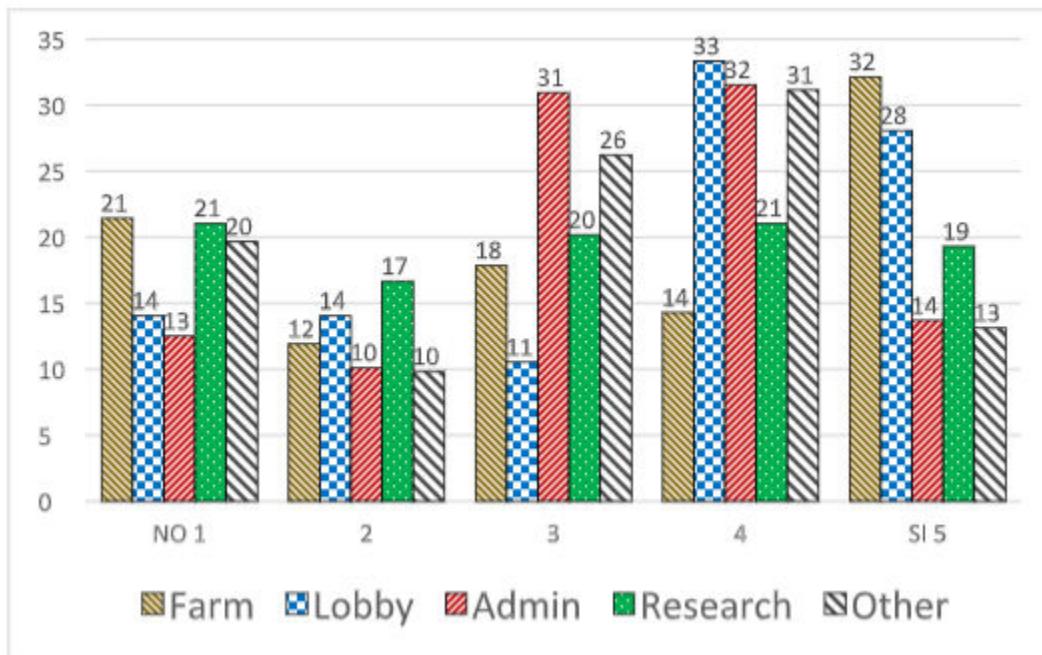
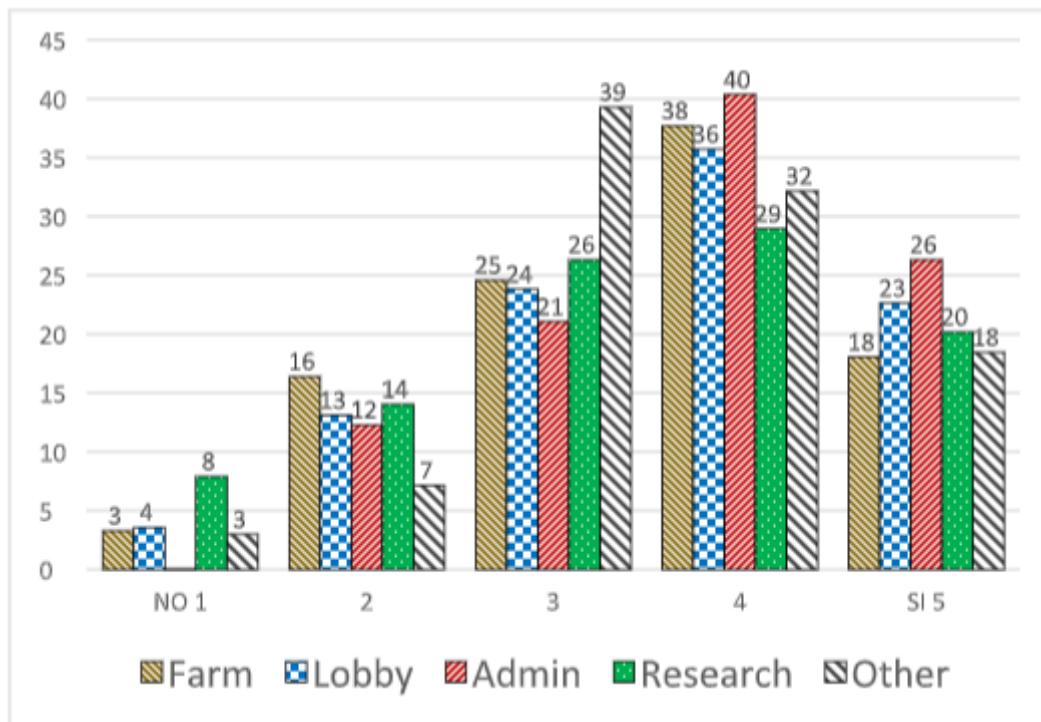


Figure 21 - Do you think there are still possibility to operate significant changes on the present proposal for the future CAP?



Final considerations

The results of a survey are to be handled with care. They represent the opinion of an Italian sample that is not representative of the opinion of analogous respondents from other member states and less and less of the overall population of the European Union. They represent anyway, in this stage of the negotiation of the Cap reform, a very interesting collection of reactions. A good starting point for further discussion among the participants of the ENSURE project, and everyone involved in policy making.



ENSURE has been for my Association a very important opportunity to meet other people involved in rural development, especially those coming from Central-Eastern European Member States. To make the European dream became a reality it is fundamental that we know each other better, as we did thanks to this project. (prof. Franco Sotte, Italy)



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II. THE USE OF INNOVATIONS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

dr. Dimitrios and prof. Nikolaos Katsoulas, University of Thessaly, Greece

The use of innovations in the agricultural sector is a way to widely disseminate the latest and up-to-date technology. Thus, going through this era, new technologies are extensively used at precision agriculture applications, high-end innovative greenhouses and generally sophisticated means that are now included in crop production. This is actually a validation of the criteria of environmental and economic sustainability.

Precision farming became available for use through its technological foundations more than twenty years ago and this sector has constantly been acknowledged and used as it has been advancing through years. The use of precision farming in crop production enables farmers to implement variable rate applications, primarily in using chemicals and provides them with the opportunity to grow crops more economically, while the environmental load is also reduced.

As a matter of fact, the name itself (talking about precision agriculture) is about applying precise and proper amount of inputs like water, fertilizers and pesticides to the crop at the right time, in order to increase the productivity and maximize the yields. Therefore, precision agriculture management practices can significantly reduce the amount of nutrient and other crop inputs used while boosting yields. At the same time, a remarkable saving on water, pesticide and fertilizer costs have been achieved.



Image . Precision Agriculture



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Applying the right amount of chemicals in the right place and at the right time benefits crops, soils and groundwater and consequently the entire crop cycle. Therefore, precision agriculture has become a vital element of sustainable agriculture, since it respects crops, soils and groundwater as well. In the following decades, precision farming will be a reforming tool for agricultural production, the key to increasing its efficiency as well as an abiotic factor able to reduce the extent of environmental pollution. During crop production, yield uncertainty can be reduced and the security of farmers' incomes can be increased if the technological elements are used and combined properly.

When talking about innovative agriculture, we must point out that new technologies have doubtlessly contributed a lot to the greenhouse sector. Many cultivation techniques, such as hydroponic cultivations, aeroponic cultivations and aquaponic cultivations, are markedly easier to be applied and the effort needed for applying these techniques is getting lessened. In fact, most of the procedures carried out at greenhouse facilities that are operating based on previously mentioned cultivation techniques, are nowadays highly automated by using sophisticated equipment, which leads to higher productivity and efficacy as well as lower error rates.



Image . HydroponicsGreenhouse

Hydroponics is a method of soilless cultivation, using other mediums for the plants to grow such as perlite, rockwool or others, and mineral nutrient solutions in a water solvent to feed the plants. The main advantage of soilless cultivation is its physical characteristics and specifically its ability to provide sufficient levels of oxygen and water to the roots of the plants at the same time. The physical properties of porous substrates used at hydroponic cultivations are more suitable than those of soils for the production of most horticultural crops. The formulation of hydroponic solutions is an application of plant nutrition, with nutrient deficiency symptoms mirroring those found in traditional soil-based agriculture, so as the plants can take up essential elements through their roots.



Aquaponics, is an innovative smart and sustainable production system of soilless cultivation, that integrates aquaculture (raising aquatic animals, such as fish, in tanks) with hydroponics. Thus, a typical aquaponics system consists of two main parts, one of which is the aquaculture part for raising aquatic animals and the hydroponics part for growing plants. Frequently, aquaponics systems are grouped into several components or subsystems responsible for the effective removal of solid wastes, for adding bases to neutralize acids or for maintaining water oxygenation.



Image . Aquaponic system

Aquaponics can play a crucial role in the future of environmental and socio-economic sustainability in smart cities and that's because aquaponics systems can be installed almost everywhere and have the potential to urbanize food production. Aquaponics farming plants could be implemented in old neglected industrial buildings with the advantages of re-establishing a sustainable activity without increasing urbanization pressure on land. Aeroponics is a system where roots are continuously or discontinuously kept in an environment saturated with fine drops of nutrient solution. As in hydroponics, this cultivation method requires no substrate and involves growing plants with their roots suspended in a deep air or growth chamber with the roots periodically wetted with a fine mist of atomized nutrients, while the excellent aeration is the main advantage of this method as plants receive the total available amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide to the roots zone, stems and leaves. Moreover, a noticeable advantage of aeroponics over hydroponics is that any species of plants can be grown in a proper aeroponic system because the microenvironment of an aeroponic can be finely controlled.



Image . Aeroponics system



Vertical farming is an indoor agricultural strategy of producing food and medicine in protected environments in vertical stacked layers, vertically inclined surfaces and/or integrated in other structures (as in a skyscraper, a used warehouse or a glasshouse). It is a promising agricultural practice using advanced technology with hydroponics/aeroponics, energy saving artificial light, and automated control system to produce vegetables, fruits and other kinds of crops during the whole year. The modern ideas of vertical farming use indoor farming techniques and controlled-environmental agriculture technology, where all environmental factors can be controlled. These facilities utilize artificial control of light, environmental control and fertigation. In some cases, vertical farms use techniques similar to greenhouses, where natural sunlight can be augmented with artificial lighting and metal reflectors.

In controlled environment agriculture, energy is the predominant factor in production costs, while the 10%-30% of the total production costs refers to the greenhouse industry. In addition to thermal control, lighting is the one of major consumers of energy. Traditionally, lights used in horticulture were high-intensity discharge (HID) lamps. Artificial light sources developed for horticulture are designed so that the spectral output matches solar light to achieve photomorphogenic development to maximize yield, however regularly their other physical properties regulate the applicability of a lighting source in a certain environment. In greenhouses and growth rooms, HID lamps such as metal-halide (MH) are favoured as they provide high fluence and high photosynthetically active radiation (PAR), although they produce substantial amounts of heat which stands as a drawback as it can be detrimental to yield if the canopy is too warm.

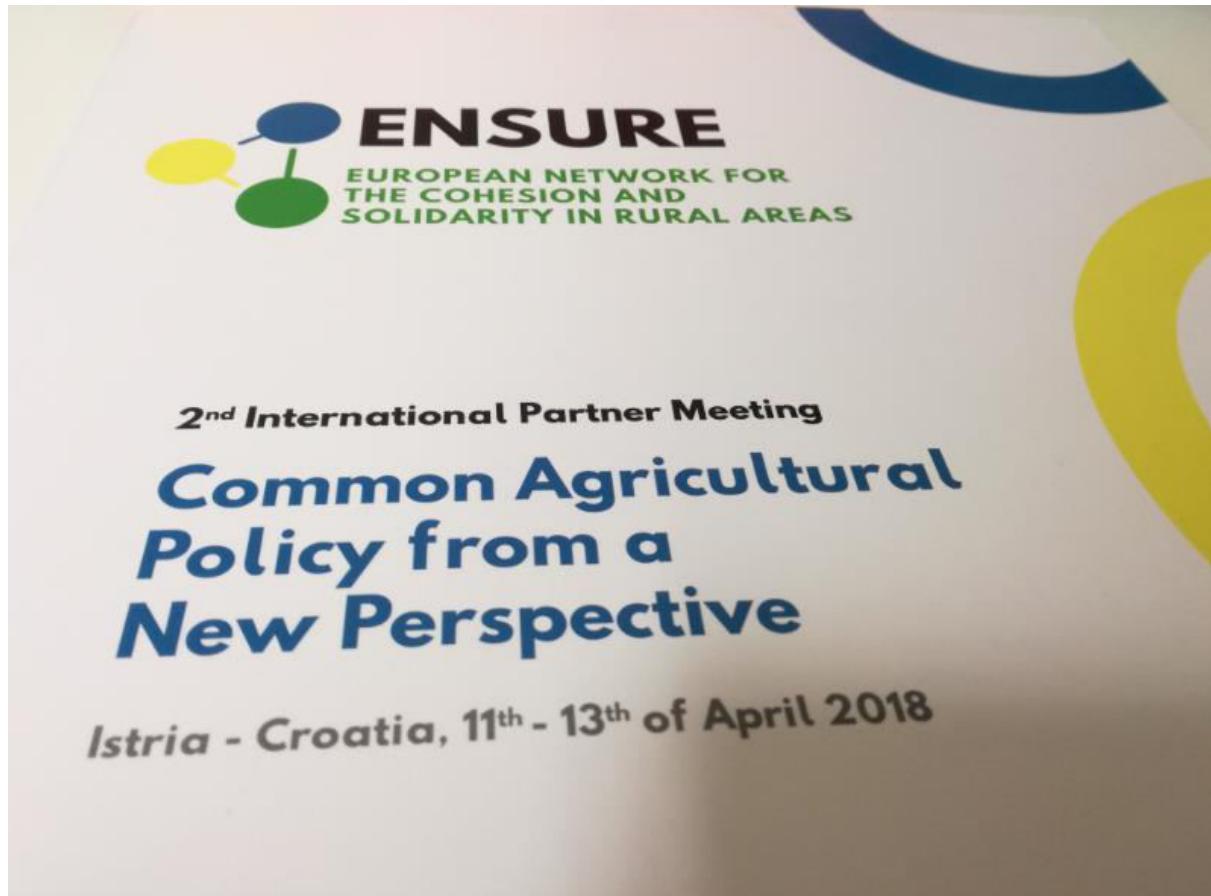
LED (light emitting diode) lights have been proposed as an energy efficient alternative for lighting systems, having a tremendous potential to replace traditionally used horticultural lighting as they prevail over them offering cheap, cool, controllable light sources that can selectively and quantitatively provide different wavelengths with small size, durability and long lifetime.

Technological development in the agricultural sector needs to achieve “sustainable intensification”, which is on the agenda of governments and international organizations. Such development can yield significant productivity gains and can potentially be achieved through relatively simple adjustments to practices, combined with appropriate market incentives and institutional support. Along with the



proper research and equitable development animal welfare can even be improved and farmers are also likely to benefit both economically and in terms of their health. Nevertheless, improvements in productivity can deliver substantial environmental benefits, both relative and absolute.

Watch a movie from the fifth international partner meeting in Volos, Greece in March 2019 on YouTube: https://youtu.be/t3GaL_3Kc94



Cover of the project folder of the second international project Event, Croatia, April 2018



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Photos from a local follow up activity of ENSURE in Romania, September 2018:



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>>> 3. <<<

UNDERSTANDING AND DEBATING EUROSCEPTICISM

Euroscepticism means criticism of the EU and European integration. It can also mean opposition to and total rejection of the EU (anti-EU-ism). Understanding and debating Euroscepticism was one of the strongest objectives of the project. We realized that politicians of all levels need more adequate tools and approach to address it, especially in light of the European Elections 2019. That's why the ENSURE partners together explored the phenomena of Euroscepticism in Europe in general, and in their own local areas.

I. EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP – A TOOL AGAINST EUROSCEPTICISM?

**by Maya Arnaudova (Bulgaria) in co-operation with Ildikó Császár (Hungary),
Inese Okonova (Latvia), Anna Doliwa (Poland) and Jose Barcia (Spain)**

The first part of this chapter is a common contribution from ENSURE partners on how the active European citizenship can become a tool against Euroscepticism.

I. Internal and external reasons of growing Euroscepticism among EU member states

In recent years, as the nationalist and populist ideas are gaining momentum, Euroscepticism has increased at significant levels both within and outside the European Union, among countries such as UK, Turkey, Serbia, Norway and others.

In our opinion, there are different reasons for this tendency. Among those we can divide between those internally and externally created.



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One of the external reasons which tend to deepen internal conflicts in the EU member states is recent migration crises. Inability of European countries to tackle the mass migration from Africa and Asia in an effective way, difficulties to integrate the migrants coming from countries with different cultural and religious background serves as major driving force for spreading of Euroscepticism as the people tend to look to their national governments as potentially more effective.

Major internal factor adding to the disappointment in EU is the notable difference in economic development among EU member states and pressure among less developed EU countries to concentrate on minimizing these differences rather than considering further enlargement. This aspect is contributing to rise of nationalist feelings in EU and creation of “alternative” visions inspired by Brexit.

Especially after the withdrawal vote in the UK in 2016, the problem has turned into a critical one threatening the integrity of Europe. There is a fear that hard Eurosceptic movements will get stronger in the next years leading to the collapse of the European integration process.



ENSURE project brought Europe to the rural Bulgarian Municipality of Trudovets, Botevgrad area. The joint activities and partners meetings deepened citizens' optimism about the development of CAP policies. It provided the forum for discussions among people from 13 EU countries: youth and adults, politicians, public officers, workers in the field of agriculture and farming, teachers and culture activists – they all took part in local and international events and disseminated the ideas of ENSURE. I feel that Europe entered in our homes and motivated us to further get involved at Union level. (Maya Arnaudova, Bulgaria)



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II. Passive and active concept of European citizenship

Formally speaking, EU citizenship is additional to national citizenship. EU grants certain rights to all its citizens who are citizens of all the member states. Among the rights granted by EU are freedom of movement, settlement and employment, as well as political rights to participate in both local and European elections.

Among less known and appreciated rights granted by EU are consular rights giving all the EU citizens opportunity to use help by other EU embassies dealing with difficulties in third party countries.

The EU Citizenship Report of the European Commission presents actions to ensure citizens can fully enjoy their rights when working, travelling, studying or participating in elections. Europeans are more than ever aware of their status as citizens of the Union and the proportion of Europeans wanting to know more about their rights continues to increase. Over 80% of Europeans cherish, in particular, the right to free movement that allows them to live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU (December 2016, Eurobarometer). However, a lack of awareness means EU citizens do not fully exercise their right to vote in European and local elections and many are unaware of the right to consular protection. The 2017 EU Citizenship Report sets out the Commission's priorities in further raising awareness of these rights and making them easier to use in practice.

However to raise awareness about importance of European citizenship and its value it is crucial that we move from passive use of the rights to active participation.

One of the most obvious ways is to encourage people to take part in European Elections (EP elections). Another way is to highlight the different layers of identities EU citizens belong to. The most obvious identity we have is the national identity and national citizenship. But we belong to our local communities and EU as well. The structure of majority of EU projects building on co-operation among regions and local communities contribute to strengthening of both local and super-national identity, and to bringing EU matters closer to EU citizens.



References:

EU Citizenship Report 2017

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/news/20170124_eu_citizenship_report_2017_en.pdf

Charta 2020, A charter of European Public Goods

<https://agoraeupoliticalspace.wordpress.com/charter-2020/>

III. ACTIVE EUROCITIZENSHIP – A TOOL AGAINST EUROSCEPTICISM?

In order to prevent any Brexit domino effect and tackle the root causes of populism and Euroscepticism, we believe that it is crucial to increase the knowledge, awareness and understanding of the importance of EU, European citizenship and cooperation of EU member states, regions and cities at an educational, economics and industrial level. According to us, in order to fight Euroscepticism, we need to broaden the spheres of influence of the European policies at a local level and involve as many residents as possible from all corners of European countries in a dialogue about the future of the EU. It means that adults and youths from European rural areas should meet, find common roots, appreciate cultural traditions of EU countries, exchange opinions about all spheres of life, and unite in common initiatives for agricultural policies and future improvement of the life of every citizen.

The ENSURE project contributed greatly to this idea by organizing six international meetings with the participation of 700 representatives from 13 EU countries, representatives of Local Action Groups, NGOs, Agricultural cooperatives, Agrarian universities and schools, representatives of cultural centres and local authorities, students, youths and adults.

The project was designed for fighting Euroscepticism by raising the awareness about diverse EU policies and the opportunities for cooperation, and active citizenship. However, we still witness the gloom reality where there is a gap between the will declared in political documents, on one hand, and putting that into practice, on the other. Euroscepticism appears where there is a problem of democratic governance and a problem to offer the young generation ways to participate and to experience having the influence on political decisions which affect them.



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In contrast to Euroscepticism, we advocate for active citizenship meaning the opportunity to raise questions, develop standpoints and negotiate them with others.

People need to know how politics at different levels are organized and how democratic decision-making processes operate. It is the role of every community to create conditions for the participation in the decision-making process from an early age to adulthood and offer opportunities for the young and the old to take part in public debate.

As ENSURE partners, we decided to motivate the citizens at all ages to be more active at a local level, for instance by organizing the debate about EU agriculture policies, organized in Croatia during the second partners' meeting. During the same event, we also met local students who presented the results from their Erasmus+ project "The love of the fisherman" that aimed to enhance European cooperation on healthy sea foods.

Further on, a special conference was organized in Spain during the third partners' meeting, we had a workshop highlighting the necessity of bottom-up initiatives called "Turn the bottle upside down" which proposed practical activities for youth exchanges, involvement in voluntary work and European Solidarity Corpse as well as fighting unemployment. There is a need for a joint effort to take citizens' participation out of the corner of a "nice-to-have". In order to contribute to the destruction of the paradigm of passive youth, the partners from Spain, Poland and Bulgaria composed a youth project with the aim of raising awareness about cultural similarities and peculiarities in local rural celebrations in the European Union countries. Bulgarian youths were happy to receive from the Spanish partner as many as 2189 books that were distributed in 2 schools and 2 libraries. Those little steps in cooperation contributed to closer cooperation, and increased active citizenship initiatives at local and European level.

Consequently, in the fourth meeting partners were acquainted with the Italian policies in the sphere of citizens' involvement in European rural agrarian policies that deepened the cooperation between different institutions: schools, universities, NGOs and local authorities. The future of CAP policy was discussed at two conferences where students from the school and the University took part. The practical examples we saw in Italy raised our awareness about the advantages of European cooperation and of being members of the European Union.



Another major topic that was discussed during the fifth partners' meeting in Greece was the democratic development of the EU, the right to express people's opinion and active participation in the decision-making process by taking part in European elections.



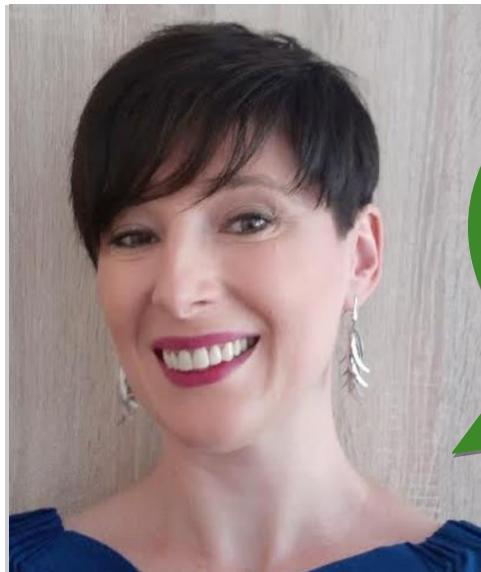
*I am pleased that in connection with the ENSURE project I have learned a lot about the opportunities of rural people in the countries of Europe.
(Ferenc Kereszti, Hungary)*

The ENSURE project has meant for the FMM to be able to offer to our municipalities – especially to the smallest ones, the knowledge about the situation of European public policies in rural areas, knowing what is done in other European countries and interacting with people from other countries. It has also enabled the FMM to participate, through the network, in other initiatives and very enriching European projects for our municipalities. (Jose Barcia, Spain)



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Thanks to the ENSURE project I met exceptional people involved in working for local communities. What is more, the LAG that I represent has signed a cooperation contract with another ENSURE - the Federación de Municipios de Madrid from Spain, and submitted an application for co-financing of a new project 'Quest Will Enable Innovative Sightseeing' (Anna Doliwa Poland)

II. ENSURE analysis of Euroscepticism

As a part of the project, an analysis of the roots of Euroscepticism was conveyed among the project partners. The aim of the analysis was to better understand diverse aspects related to Euroscepticism within the partner group, as well as analyse how much we as policy makers, public officers, activists and academics differ from the general public with regard to our approach to the European agenda and democratic participation.

The survey was designed in reference with:

1. EU Citizenship report 2017 which sets out what the European Commission has done and will do to promote and strengthen EU citizenship.

2. Standard Eurobarometer 88 issued in December 2017:

<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2143>



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Analysis on Euroscepticism ENSURE, 2018

From January to May 2018, partners from 13 countries cooperating in the ENSURE project conducted analysis on their approach to Euroscepticism compared to the general European population... here are the results:

We collected 34 ANSWERS:

9 came from Bulgaria

4 from Romania and Italy

3 from Serbia

2 from Czech Republic, Croatia, Greece, Spain and Slovenia

1 from Hungary, Poland, Montenegro, and Latvia

Analysed aspects:

1. Level of political interest - questions on frequency of discussing local, national and European matters.
2. General attitude towards the Union.
3. Level of trust.
4. General EU's image.
5. Expectations towards the EU.
6. Engagement in promoting EU's priorities and policies.
7. Engagement in promoting European values.



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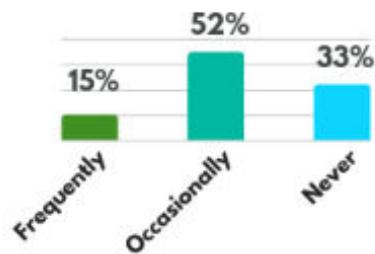
ENSURE
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
THE COHESION AND
SOLIDARITY IN RURAL AREAS

The results of the survey were a basis for discussion among the ENSURE partners. It was interesting to see how much more optimistic about the EU were the answers given by ENSURE partners compared to the general public – provided in the Standard Eurobarometer, 2017. We also revealed a far higher level of engagement in democratic processes which may explain why we were so active within this project which required voluntary actions.

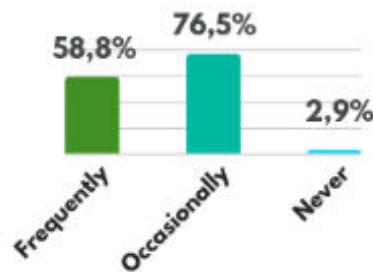
QUESTION

When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about European political matters?

**Standard
Eurobarometer 88,
2017**



**Analysis on
Euroscepticism
ENSURE,
2018**

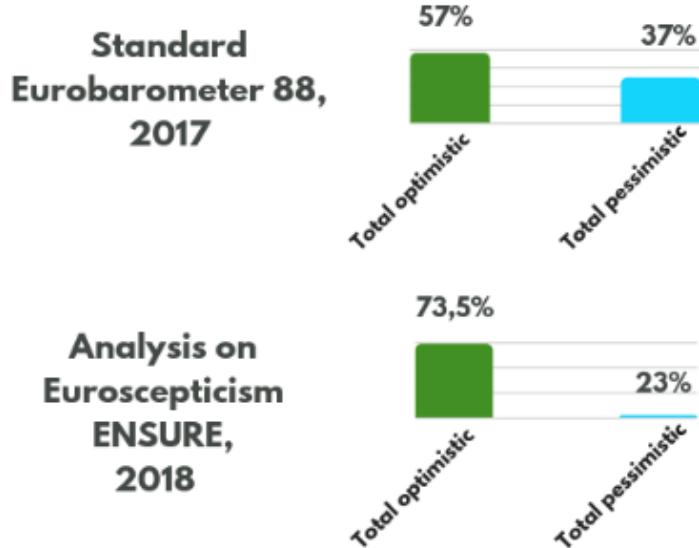


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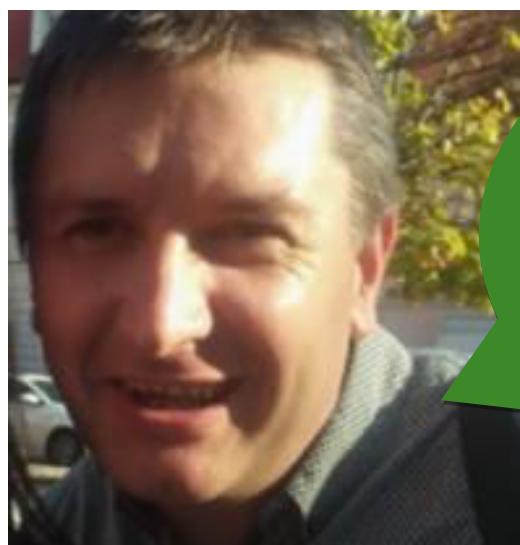


QUESTION

Are you rather optimistic or pessimistic of future of Europe?



FINAL WORD FROM THE COORDINATORS



ENSURE turned out to be the most compelling and engaging Project I have ever worked on! It hasn't only given me the chance to meet a group of wonderful people as the project partners are, but it also gave me the unique opportunity to encounter the diversity of experiences and opinions regarding the same basic question that this project was about: what can rural areas contribute to the EU, and how can the EU enrich people living in rural



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"Networks of Towns allow to apply a bottom-up approach to address current EU agenda. I am happy that ENSURE partners from 13 countries - small and bigger towns and villages, were ready to tackle fundamental questions that Europe nowadays is facing" - Dr. Gosia Wochowska, Project Manager

CONTACT US

For any questions regarding any aspect of the project European Network for Cohesion and Solidarity in Rural Areas (ENSURE), the Europe for Citizens programme, or active citizenship as a democratic practice, please do not hesitate to contact us: malgorzata.wochowska@gmail.com – Gosia Wochowska, ENSURE Project Manager.

ENSURE on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ensurenetwork/>
#ensuresolidarity #EUfunding #Euproject #europeforcitizens

Watch us on YouTube: https://youtu.be/t3GaL_3Kc94

Meet ENSURE partners: <https://www.slideshare.net/GosiaWochowskaPhD/ensure-network-brochure>



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April 2018, Motovun, Croatia, international partners during the second project Event



June 2019, Slovenia, international partners attending the last project Event



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